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TEMATSKI SKLOP / THEMATIC SECTION

Avantgarda in konec sveta

The Avant-Garde and the End of the World

Uredila / Edited by: Kristina Pranjić, Lev Kreft

Kristina Pranjić, Lev Kreft: **Predgovor / Introduction**

Sanja Bojanić: **Avant-Garde and Meaning-Making**

Emilija Vučićević: **The Image of *Angelus Novus* in the Poetry Book *Ictus* by Bojan Vasić**

Joseph Grim Feinberg: **The Art of the People and the Czech Avant-Garde**

Ivana Peruško: **The Explosive Nature and Apocalypse of the Russian Avant-Garde**

Antonio Milovina: **The “Revival in Flames” in A. N. Tolstoy’s *Aelita***

RAZPRAVE / ARTICLES

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Mateja Curk: **Pripovedi Gorana Vojnovića in Widad Tamimi**

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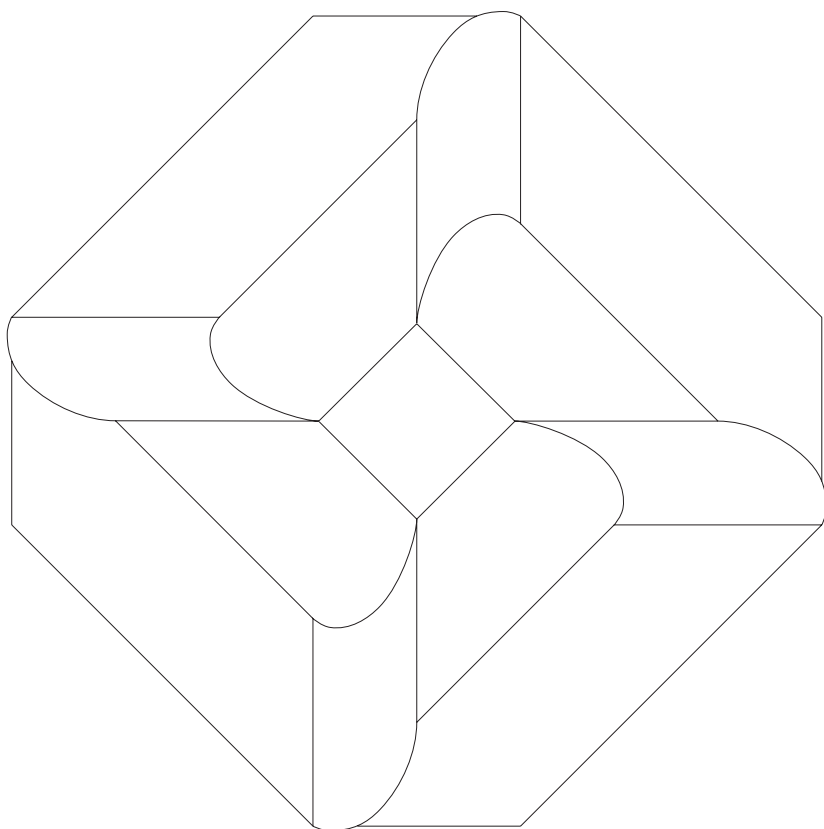
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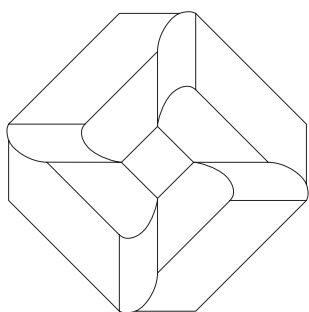


Tematski sklop / *Thematic section*

Avantgarda in konec sveta

The Avant-Garde and the End of the World

Uredila / *Edited by*: Kristina Pranjić, Lev Kreft



Avantgarda in konec sveta (predgovor)

Kristina Pranjić, Lev Kreft

Sodobni razmisleki o družbi, zgodovini in umetnosti so zaznamovani z vprašanjem konca sveta. Naša percepcija tega »konca« je prežeta s podobami propada in izgube, a hkrati tudi z vizijo apokalipse kot kulturne, svetovne in civilizacijske preobrazbe. Mednarodna znanstvena konferenca z umetniškim programom »Avantgarda in konec sveta« se je osredotočila na dvojni pomen tega konca – kot razkroja in kot začetka novega. Namreč, le človek ima svet in prav človek je ustvaril možnosti za njegov konec. Zanimalo nas je, kako vanj posega in utegne v neposredni prihodnosti posegati zgodovinska ali sodobna avantgarda – estetska in politična.

Koncept »avantgarde« smo obravnavali kot nezaključen projekt, ki spodbuja kritično refleksijo in ponuja alternativo obstoječemu redu. Čeprav se zdi, da danes ta pojem izgublja pomen, ostaja eden od ključnih označevalcev eksperimentalne in intermedialne umetnosti, ki presega razkol med umetnostjo in življenjem. Avantgarda se upira destrukciji človeka in narave (kapitalizmu in imperializmu) ter ponuja progresivne družbene vizije in radikalno emancipacijo od teže normativnega jezika, vedenja, dela in ustvarjanja. S tem smo se približali izvirnemu pomenu apokaliptične eshatologije: ne le oznanjenje, ampak tudi razkritje podob prihodnosti, ki jih vsebuje že zdajšnji svet.

Prispevki v tem sklopu osvetljujejo različne vidike avantgardnih praks, ki tematizirajo, predstavljajo ali celo izzivajo podobo konca. Njihova skupna točka je refleksija prehoda med preteklostjo in prihodnostjo – obravnavani primeri redko prelamljajo s preteklostjo, ampak skušajo vzpostaviti nove povezave in reinterpretacije. Avantgarda tako ne deluje kot popolna diskontinuiteta, temveč kot transformativna praksa, ki gradi na pretekli zapuščini in odpira nove možnosti umetniškega ustvarjanja ter družbenih sprememb. Prikazuje se kot ambivalenten fenomen – ne le kot revolucionarna umetniška praksa, temveč tudi kot prostor refleksije o zgodovinskih prelomnicah in prihodnjih možnostih.

Sanja Bojanić v prispevku »Konci in kontinuitete: avantgarda in oblikovanje pomena« razmišlja o avantgardi kot umetniški formi, ki skozi namerno destabilizacijo pomena razkriva globlje plasti zaznavanja

in interpretacije. Na podlagi primerov, kot so Godardevi filmi, Goldsmithov *UbuWeb* in Rothkova umetniška formula, analizira mehanizme razgradnje in rekonstrukcije pomena. S tem odpira vprašanja o vlogi umetnosti v dobi digitalnih arhivov in umetne inteligence ter izziva ustaljene intelektualne tradicije, ki klasično knjižno znanje obravnavajo kot osrednje mesto teorije in vednosti. Njeno delo poudarja začasnost, fragmentarnost in prepletenost različnih umetniških in arhivskih praks, ki omogočajo nove načine zaznavanja, ustvarjanja in oblikovanja pomenov.

Emilija Vučićević v članku »Podoba *Angelus Novus* v pesniški zbirki *Ictus* Bojana Vasića« analizira, kako Vasić prek Kleejeve podobe *Angelus Novus* in kompozicije pesniške zbirke vzpostavlja dialog z Benjaminovo filozofijo zgodovine. Kot ključni element se pokaže motiv vlaka, ki v Benjaminovi misli simbolizira iluzijo napredka. Pri Vasiću pa se drveči tok zgodovine ustavi z likom Matije Gubca – figuro, ki prekine linearno branje zgodovine in tako po Benjaminovem zgledu ustvarja možnost mesijanskega časa.

Joseph Grim Feinberg v prispevku »Doba svobodnih žonglerjev: umetnost ljudstva in češka avantgarda« raziskuje specifične primere češke avantgarde, ki so se posvečali ljudski umetnosti in iskanjem novega kolektivnega izraza. Analizira poetizem in prispevke Karla Teigeja in Vítězslava Nezvala ter pokaže, kako so avantgardisti iskali modele za prihodnost v marginaliziranih kulturnih praksah. Tovrstni primeri zavračajo idejo o poeziji kot vzvišeni, od ljudstva ločeni dejavnosti in razkrivajo, kako avantgarda postane del vsakdanje, žive realnosti.

Ivana Peruško v prispevku »Eksplzivna narava in apokalipsa ruske avantgarde: futurizem proti boljševizmu« obravnava napetosti med avantgardnimi umetniki in boljševiško oblastjo. Naslanja se na semiotiko kulture Jurija Lotmana in razlikovanje med dvema modeloma kulturne preobrazbe: evolucijskim, ki nadaljuje prejšnje strukture, in revolucionarnim, ki z njimi radikalno pretrga. Prikaže, kako so se ruski futuristi v želji po popolni preobrazbi sveta sami znašli pred lastnim koncem, saj so njihovi radikalni estetski eksperimenti trčili ob trdo politično realnost Sovjetske zveze. Paradoksalno se je pod geslom novega vrnil stari red – socialistični realizem, ki je v arhitekturi na primer oživil monumentalne klasicistične oblike.

Antonio Milovina se v analizi »Zaton Atlantide in vzpon Vzhoda: 'preporod v plamenih' v romanu *Aelita* A. N. Tolstoja« osredotoča na literarno reprezentacijo konca civilizacije v sovjetski znanstveni fantastiki. Tolstojeva *Aelita* ni le roman o potovanju na Mars, temveč tudi alegorija o propadu in preobrazbi Zahoda ter o domnevni revitalizacijski

vlogi Vzhoda. Milovina njegovo delo postavlja v kontekst ideoloških tokov tistega časa, obenem pa aktualizira svoja spoznanja z vidika sodobnih interpretacij teh idej – od Spenglerjeve teorije zahodne dekadence do geopolitičnih napetosti med Vzhodom in Zahodom ter transhumanističnih vizij prihodnosti na Marsu.

Vsi prispevki v tem sklopu avantgardo obravnavajo kot večplasten pojav – kot zgodovinsko umetniško gibanje, estetski in družbeni eksperiment ter strategijo soočanja s krizami sodobnega sveta. Različni primeri in analize razkrivajo, da avantgardna tradicija ni bila usmerjena zgolj v prihodnost in revolucijo, temveč predvsem v estetsko in etično prakso ustvarjanja boljšega sveta.

The Avant-Garde and the End of the World (An Introduction)

Kristina Pranjić, Lev Kreft

Contemporary reflections on society, history and art are marked by the question of the end of the world. Our perception of this “end” is permeated with images of decay and loss but also with a vision of the apocalypse as a cultural, global and civilizational transformation. The international scientific conference, accompanied by an artistic program, “The Avant-Garde and the End of the World” focused on the dual meaning of this end—both as a dissolution and as the beginning of something new. Namely, only humans have a world, and it is precisely humans who have created the possibility for its end. We were interested in how the historical or contemporary avant-garde—both aesthetic and political—intervenes in it and may intervene in the near future.

We have considered the concept of the “avant-garde” as an unfinished project that encourages critical reflection and offers an alternative to the existing order. Although this term seems to be losing its significance today, it remains one of the key signifiers of experimental and intermedial art, which transcends the divide between art and life. The avant-garde resists the destruction of human and nature (capitalism and imperialism) and offers progressive social visions and radical emancipation from the weight of normative language, behavior, labor and creation. In this way, we have come closer to the original meaning of apocalyptic eschatology: not only the announcement of the end but also the revelation of images of the future that are already contained in the present world.

The contributions in this thematic section highlight various aspects of avant-garde practices that thematize, represent, or even challenge the image of the end. Their common thread is a reflection of the transition between past and future—the cases discussed rarely break entirely with the past but rather seek to establish new connections and reinterpretations. The avant-garde therefore does not function as a complete discontinuity but as a transformative practice that builds upon historical legacies while opening up new possibilities for artistic creation and social change. It appears as an ambivalent phenomenon—not only as a revolutionary artistic practice but also as a space for reflection on historical turning points and future possibilities.

In her article “Endings and Continuities: Avant-Garde and Meaning-Making,” Sanja Bojanić examines the avant-garde as an art form that reveals deeper layers of perception and interpretation through the deliberate destabilization of meaning. Drawing on examples such as Godard’s films, Goldsmith’s *UbuWeb* and Rothko’s artistic formula, she analyzes the mechanisms of meaning’s decomposition and reconstruction. In doing so, she raises questions about the role of art in the age of digital archives and artificial intelligence, challenging established intellectual traditions that treat classical book knowledge as the central place of theory and understanding. Her work emphasizes the temporality, fragmentation and intertwining of various artistic and archival practices that enable new ways of perceiving, creating and shaping meaning.

Emilija Vučićević, in the article “The Image of *Angelus Novus* in the Poetry Book *Ictus* by Bojan Vasić,” analyzes how Vasić, through Klee’s *Angelus Novus* and the composition of his poetry collection, establishes a dialogue with Benjamin’s philosophy of history. A key element is the motif of the train, which in Benjamin’s thought symbolizes the illusion of progress. In Vasić’s work, however, the rushing flow of history is halted by the figure of Matija Gubec—a character that disrupts the linear reading of history and, following Benjamin’s model, creates the possibility of messianic time.

Joseph Grim Feinberg, in “The Age of Free Jongleurs: The Art of the People and the Czech Avant-Garde,” examines the specific cases of the Czech avant-garde, particularly its engagement with folk art and the search for a new collective expression. Analyzing Poetism and the contributions of Karel Teige and Vítězslav Nezval, he reveals how avant-garde artists sought models for the future in marginalized cultural practices. These examples reject the notion of poetry as an elitist and detached activity from the people, instead demonstrating how the avant-garde integrates itself into everyday lived reality.

In “The Explosive Nature and Apocalypse of Russian Avant-Garde: Futurism vs. Bolshevism,” Ivana Peruško explores the tensions between avant-garde artists and the Bolshevik regime. She draws on Yuri Lotman’s semiotics of culture and the distinction between two models of cultural transformation: evolutionary, which builds upon previous structures, and revolutionary, which radically disrupts them. She shows how the Russian Futurists, in their desire to completely transform the world, ultimately confronted their own demise. Their radical aesthetic experiments clashed with the harsh political realities of the Soviet Union. Paradoxically, under the banner of the new, the old order

re-emerged—socialist realism, which, for example, revived monumental classicist forms in architecture.

In “The Decline of Atlantis and the Rise of the East: The ‘Revival in Flames’ in A. N. Tolstoy’s *Aelita*,” Antonio Milovina focuses on the literary representation of the end of civilization in Soviet science fiction. Tolstoy’s *Aelita* is not merely a novel about a journey to Mars but also an allegory about the decline and transformation of the West and the supposed revitalizing role of the East. Milovina situates his work within the context of the ideological currents of that time while also updating his insights through the lens of contemporary interpretations of these ideas—from Spengler’s theory of Western decadence to geopolitical tensions between East and West and transhumanist visions of the future on Mars.

All contributions in this series treat the avant-garde as a multilayered phenomenon—as a historical artistic movement, an aesthetic and social experiment, and a strategy for addressing the crises of the contemporary world. The diverse examples and analyses presented here reveal that the avant-garde tradition was not directed solely toward the future and revolution but, above all, toward the aesthetic and ethical practice of creating a better world.

Endings and Continuities: Avant-Garde and Meaning-Making

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This article thematizes avant-garde's meaning-making and temporal disruption, emphasizing their role in reconfiguring cultural narratives. Case studies include UbuWeb, Kenneth Goldsmith's radical digital archive, democratizing access to avant-garde works, and Jean-Luc Godard's Two or Three Things I Know About Her, a cinematic intervention destabilizing meaning through fragmented narratives. The analysis incorporates Mark Rothko's artistic formula, which underscores the tragic, sensual, and ephemeral dimensions of meaning-making, and Antonin Artaud's assertion of madness as a legitimate worldview challenging societal norms. By engaging with the materiality of media, from text and images to virtual and AI realities, the paper examines how avant-garde practices end and continue, fostering new modalities of perception and creation. Ultimately, it argues for archives and art as active agents of transformation.

Keywords: contemporary art / avant-garde / cultural narrative / meaning-making / Rothko, Mark / Goldsmith, Kenneth / *UbuWeb* / Godard, Jean-Luc

“Why all these signs around us that make me
doubt language and submerge me in meanings ...”

Jean-Luc Godard



Figure 1: Jean-Luc Godard, Direction and Counter-direction.

Meaning and its contradictions

Temporality is central to avant-garde movements, driving their ability to disrupt and transform. The avant-garde's focus on time—rejecting the past, emphasizing urgency in the present, and envisioning the future—creates a dynamic force for cultural and societal change. This argument supports Henri de Saint-Simon's assertion, where he first uses the term avant-garde: "It is we, artists, who will serve you as an avant-garde: the power of the arts is indeed the most immediate and the fastest" (Saint-Simon 345), establishing the foundation for the avant-garde's temporal action. Actually, Saint-Simon's emphasis on the immediacy and fastest power of the arts encapsulates the avant-garde's method: speed is not merely a tactic but a principle of operation. Rapidity ensures that the avant-garde does not dwell on prolonged critique but acts decisively to maximize impact and operates on two levels. First is the speed of creation, where traditional processes are bypassed in favor of immediacy of engagement. Second is the speed of reception, where shock, provocation, and contiguity disrupt audience expectations, prompting a rapid re-evaluation of norms. The avant-garde does not merely move swiftly; it redefines the experience of time itself. It uses military terminology solely to represent the advancement of the sudden action. Collapsing the past, present, and future into singular gestures thus challenges linearity and compels society to confront temporality as a construct. Haste in the avant-garde transcends mere physical speed; it operates conceptually, embedding immediacy within its actions' symbolic and intellectual gestures. The power of vanguard acts lies in their capacity to create instant ruptures in thought, perception, and action, leveraging temporal disruption to reimagine reality. These acts, indeed, embody the fast and the transformative—they are swift, decisive catalysts for change.

This text does not engage in the polarized debate over whether contemporary art primarily seeks to appease audiences through commercial appeal or if it functions as an exclusive, refined pursuit meant for a select few. Such a division, while prevalent, does not encapsulate the complexities of avant-garde meaning-making, which operates beyond mere marketability or elite legitimacy. Instead, I focus on the temporalities of the avant-garde and how its disruptions and continuities shape the conditions of meaning. The avant-garde is fundamentally a movement through time—rejecting historical fixity, confronting the present urgently, and envisioning futures that may never materialize. This dynamic is central to its interventions, ensuring that it exists not

merely as an aesthetic category but as an active force within cultural discourse. Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) remains essential for understanding the avant-garde's role within cultural narratives. His critique of grand narratives as outdated and his argument that modernity's universal frameworks have been supplanted by fragmented, localized narratives were key in expressing a postmodern condition that resists singular meaning. Yet, over time, what was once seen as a liberation from overarching systems has given way to a renewed desire for structure.

In contrast to Lyotard's moment, contemporary discourse is witnessing the resurgence of grand narratives, manifesting in political, technological, and artistic realms. Whether through reactionary ideologies, AI-driven knowledge systems, or renewed theoretical totalities, the cultural landscape suggests that fragmentation alone is no longer a sufficient paradigm. The avant-garde, which once thrived on disrupting fixed meanings, now operates in an era where meaning is being actively reconstructed on a grand scale. And, despite this shift, what remains "unchanged" is the avant-garde's paradoxical position: it critiques exclusion while often perpetuating it. Its interventions, though radical in form, remain restricted to a narrow circle—a self-contained sphere where innovation and transgression are primarily self-referential. This insularity does not diminish its impact but reveals an inherent tension: the avant-garde exists both as an engine of disruption and an exclusive domain of discourse. Its gestures, whether rooted in the sexual, the narcissistic, or the grotesque, frequently resemble the surreal excesses of Hieronymus Bosch's earthly pleasures—a universe of indulgence that serves its own logic. This is not a flaw but a defining feature of avant-garde practice: its "selfishness" ensures its resistance to mass assimilation while simultaneously rendering it detached from broader cultural participation. The avant-garde is caught in its contradiction—both as a force of radical meaning-making and an enclave of selective intervention.

Today, one of the most significant challenges is copyright infringement, not only daring legal contexts of artistic works but explicitly addressing the complexity of new (and already old) media in the era of AI. Furthermore, I argue that selfishness is essential to any avant-garde, which must resist easy comprehension, acceptance, or comfort. By its very nature, the avant-garde also confronts the normative structures of meaning-making, presenting itself as an unbearable rupture in established cultural and artistic codes. This disruption can be compared to an inverted interpretation of Humpty Dumpty in *Alice*

in Wonderland: rather than controlling meaning through arbitrary authority, the avant-garde fragments meaning, resists resolution, and paradoxically generates meaning-making. It confronts the medium's materiality—whether text, image, sound, moving pictures, virtual reality, or AI reality—exposing their constructed nature and the tensions between them. By engaging these layers and their intersections, the avant-garde does not simply reinterpret meaning but shifts it entirely, subverting our understanding of creation and perception. Lest we forget, Marshall McLuhan's *Laws of Media* (1988) highlights how media do not simply transmit content but actively shape perception, altering how meaning is constructed and experienced. His concept of the "medium as the message" remains fundamental when considering how avant-garde practices engage with evolving technological landscapes. In the digital era, this perspective finds renewed relevance as media increasingly "dictate modes of thought, engagement, and creative production," blurring boundaries between form and content. Building upon this, Wendy Chun's *Updating to Remain the Same* (2016) explores how digital media's materiality and temporality not only shape identity but also create habitual structures, embedding users into repetitive cycles of engagement. Chun's work critically examines how digital systems encode behavior, conditioning perception, and reinforcing patterns that dictate meaning-making within algorithmic environments. Expanding this discussion, Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* (2001) investigates how new media challenge modernist fragmentation, revealing the avant-garde's role in reconfiguring meaning through computational, networked, and database-driven forms. His analysis of new media aesthetics situates avant-garde strategies within digital infrastructures, where meaning is no longer constructed through singular artistic ruptures but through fluid, dynamic recombinations, disrupting and reshaping perception in an era of mediated reality.

Endings and continuities directly related to the avant-garde, which are the focus of this paper, help to create meaning in the specific context of new media. The still image from Jean-Luc Godard's film *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1967) illustrates through which figures they emerge. What did Godard do, and what was the nature of his intervention in the meaning-making processes?

Before answering this question, there are two dots or queries that should be connected:

1. One is about making meaning out of language, referencing Jean-Luc Godard's intervention to return to reality (or conquer reality) and matching the medium's materiality to reality.

2. The other is in digital archives. My case study is *UbuWeb*, founded in 1996 by poet and conceptual artist Kenneth Goldsmith, as a non-commercial platform that provides otherwise difficult-to-find resources. Its content spans various artistic movements, focusing on twentieth-century avant-garde traditions and the contemporary experimental scene, mainly in the Western world. In 2024, *UbuWeb* ceased to accept new work and is available only for browsing.

Godard, Goldsmith and ... Rothko

Both Godard and Goldsmith should serve as guiding points for reclaiming the realm of the imaginary and revitalizing the meaning-making process that Mark Rothko encapsulates in his artistic formula. That said, let us proceed thoughtfully, one step at a time.

1.

Godard and the concept of “meaning out of language,” alongside the return to reality, represent the first step toward exploring the potential of Goldsmith’s “flipped archives”¹ to aid in this restoration. In his cinematic leap into the twenty-second century, *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* serves as both a film essay and an experimental machine, colliding the meanings of words and objects with overwhelming speed. The director’s knack for weaving a complex web of metaphors,

¹ Kenneth Goldsmith’s “flipped archives” concept refers to a radical archiving approach that subverts traditional institutional models. It prioritizes accessibility, subjectivity, and disruption over conventional preservation and categorization. Unlike official archives that follow strict curatorial and legal frameworks, flipped archives challenge ownership, intellectual property, and established notions of artistic legitimacy. In *Duchamp Is My Lawyer* (2020), Goldsmith articulates how these archives flip expectations by resisting hierarchy, rejecting institutional oversight, and embracing incompleteness and bias. Key characteristics of flipped archives include:

1. Unrestricted Access: They operate outside institutional control, making content widely available without monetization.

2. Subjective Curation: Archival choices are based on personal or collective artistic relevance rather than academic or commercial standards.

3. Legal and Ethical Ambiguity: They challenge traditional copyright frameworks, existing in a gray zone of cultural dissemination.

4. Temporal Disruption: They resist the finality of traditional archiving, keeping content in flux.

paradoxes, and digressions positions Godard to confront the dominance of senselessness. His intervention goes beyond mere critique; it acts as an active disruption, illustrating how art can function as an experience-inducing medium rather than a simple tool for passive consumption. The shattering of meaning in daily life stems from the industrialization of the image, and the tools we use to interpret our experiences—words, signs, and symbols—often fall short, serving as barriers instead of bridges to authentic lived reality. Through his fragmented style, Godard offers endings and continuities that support a continuous process of questioning. At the film's core is the story of a Parisian housewife who turns to prostitution to provide for her family (depicting socio-economic reality). However, this narrative is secondary to Godard's broader concerns with consumer-driven life and the commodification of our experiences. The film's fractured structure reflects industrialized images and their alienation of individuals from reality. The director's juxtaposition, voiceover, and abrupt editing compel viewers to actively engage with the material, challenging passive viewing habits and prompting reflection on constructing meaning. His redefinition of cinematic language emerges from the camera and editing process, with the final cut as his grammar. For Godard, editing transcends mere technicality; it becomes a creative act that generates meaning through the intentional arrangement and interplay of images, motion pictures, and sounds. In his hands, the cut transforms into a gesture, a moment of sense and countersense that demands interpretation. These interruptions unveil to the viewer the instability of meaning and the ideological frameworks supporting visual and verbal communication. They are revelatory.

2.

For those unfamiliar with *UbuWeb*, this Web platform hosts a vast collection of avant-garde materials, including films, poetry, visual art, and audio recordings from movements such as Dada, Fluxus, Surrealism, and other radical art forms throughout the twentieth century. It features artists like John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, William S. Burroughs, Yoko Ono, Vito Acconci, and many others. One of its defining aspects is its open-access model. All materials are free, based on the philosophy that these seminal cultural works should be accessible to the public without commercial or institutional barriers. The archive presents content in various formats, including experimental films,

video art, and other moving-image media. It highlights works by Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, and Derek Jarman. Additionally, it contains avant-garde sound art, experimental music, spoken word, and poetry performances by La Monte Young and Amiri Baraka. There are also experimental literary works, manifestos, and poetry from Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett, and Allen Ginsberg. *UbuWeb* has been praised for democratizing access to avant-garde materials through open-source policies. However, its open-access nature has raised copyright questions, as some materials may be shared without formal permission. This is not unique to *UbuWeb*, as piracy practices are closely linked to nearly any avant-garde movement that establishes a new paradigm. Goldsmith has described *UbuWeb* as operating in a grey area, emphasizing the site's cultural mission over strict legal frameworks. To highlight selfishness, as I mentioned earlier, *UbuWeb* is regarded as a living continuation of avant-garde principles, both in its distribution methods and its radical stance on intellectual property and institutional critique. Goldsmith underscored *UbuWeb*'s role in repurposing media to resonate with the avant-garde's ethos of challenging ownership and conventional art structures.

Although *UbuWeb* is publicly accessible, the public has no say about what goes or doesn't go on the site. We don't take unsolicited submissions; we post work erratically and sporadically, never according to a schedule. And the works that we choose are there because we want them to be there, not because they fulfill any curriculums, quotas, or canons. While we want to expose people to wonderful and underappreciated works of art (and, of course, provide new perspectives on tired notions of the avant-garde), everything on the site is there primarily because it's meaningful to us, for reasons we don't feel the need to explain. And since we don't take any money, we don't have to answer to anybody regarding the content we host on the site. Is that approach biased? Yes. Is it incomplete? Yes. Is it imperfect? Yes. Is it the way we want to do it? Yes. All the way. (Goldsmith 31)

Godard's still from the film and Goldsmith's quote stare impatiently and cheekily at the fragmentation of certain aspects of reality that they believe should be preserved. The approach of *UbuWeb*, as articulated above, resonates strongly with Godard's philosophy and methodology in filmmaking. Both prioritize autonomy, subjectivity, and a deliberate resistance to external pressures or conventions. *UbuWeb*'s curatorial stance—where selections are driven by personal meaning rather than adherence to institutional frameworks or societal expectations—mirrors Godard's defiance of traditional cinematic norms and his

commitment to creating art that reflects his vision rather than catering to audience expectations or market demands. Just as *UbuWeb* rejects the notion of fulfilling curriculums, quotas, or canons, Godard refuses to adhere to narrative coherence, mainstream aesthetics, or commercial viability. Both operate in spaces that are inherently biased, incomplete, and imperfect, yet this very subjectivity becomes a strength. Godard and *UbuWeb* share an ethos of embracing imperfection and incompleteness. This vanguard resistance to hegemonic structures of meaning is also inscribed in their endings and continuities. They are both ready to embrace not only bare disruption. Still, I am uncertain whether nihilism (see Brown)—the era we find ourselves in nowadays, in which *UbuWeb* is no longer active specifically because it can't accept or store new material—can ignite everything given and flip it into an avalanche that restores meaning.

Should we restore that sense (direction) of meaning? Should it follow a countersense or its contradiction? In these flipped archives, those archived materials open the gates, allowing meaning—any sense—to enter. So, what tools are nowadays used to restore meaning? Language, Motion Picture, Image, Sound, AI and LLMs, Deepfake, Open Cloud, what else? Presence or Madness? Whose concept of reality is absolutely legitimate? Maybe Antonin Artaud's assertion that "all individual acts are anti-social" resonates deeply with the avant-garde's temporalities and radical approach to meaning-making. By defending the legitimacy of perspectives deemed mad, Artaud challenged dominant narratives in his own way:

All individual acts are anti-social. Mad people, above all, are individual victims of social dictatorship. In the name of individuality, which specifically belongs to humans, we demand the liberation of these people convicted of sensibility. For we tell you, no laws are powerful enough to lock up all humans who think and act. Without stressing the perfectly inspired nature of the manifestations of certain mad persons, in so far as we are capable of appreciating them, we simply affirm that their concept of reality is absolutely legitimate, as are all the acts resulting from it. (Artaud 32)

Ultimately, Artaud's call for the liberation of those marginalized for their sensibility strongly resonates with Godard's and *UbuWeb*'s rejection of normative structures. These practices remind us that meaning is not fixed but is constantly destabilized and reshaped, a process at the heart of the avant-garde's enduring legacy. For the sake of another premise reflecting on the meaning out of language, here is one anecdote. On May 3, 2024, I heard Julia Kristeva on France

Culture radio commenting somewhat retroactively: “I believe the Western world and its sovereignty should be preserved by safeguarding the book.” By “the book,” Kristeva refers to the analytical tools of theory inherited from the structuralist and post-structuralist periods, particularly from the French *Tel Quel* avant-garde, which, above all, valued *Lettres* (the joy of reading and writing, the thrill of theory or so-called French Theory, very much embedded in the language—exactly where Godard did not find reality). Kristeva critiques the Global South and the colonial forces of the Global South that confine *Tel Quel* avant-garde within the concept that Dick Higgins, in his manner, labelled as masculine: “avant-garde ... as advance troops coming before the main body, white and homogeneous” (qtd. in Goldsmith 10). Kristeva remains entrenched in the twentieth century. As much as the joy of *Lettres* can be cathartic, it always harbors masculinity, the illusion of purity and sincerity. In fact, her 2024 reflection on preserving the book provides a counterpoint to the very avant-garde ethos, illustrating an attachment to language as the locus of meaning. A homogeneity that Godard and *UbuWeb* disrupt by embracing imperfection, fragmentation, and plurality actually asserts that reality lies beyond the constructs of language, thus aligning with Artaud’s anti-social claims. Together, Artaud, Godard, Goldsmith, and Rothko challenge Kristeva’s retrospective valorization of theoretical purity, advocating instead for an avant-garde practice that repositions it as a necessary force for cultural and intellectual renewal in an increasingly fractured world. Naivety and purity go hand in hand with ignorance of the end, sensuality, tension, irony, and *Tyche*. These are Rothko’s words in his 1958 address to Pratt students, which are presented in Figure 2, a facsimile of his notes:

- The recipe of a work of art—its ingredients—how to make it—the formula.
1. There must be a clear preoccupation with death—intimations of mortality... Tragic art, romantic art, etc. deals with the knowledge of death.
 2. Sensuality. Our basis of being concrete about the world. It is a lustful relationship to things that exist.
 3. Tension. Either conflict or curbed desire.
 4. Irony. This is a modern ingredient—the self-effacement and examination by which a man for an instant can go on to something else.
 5. Wit and play... For the human element.
 6. The ephemeral and chance... For the human element.
 7. Hope. 10% to make the tragic concept more endurable.

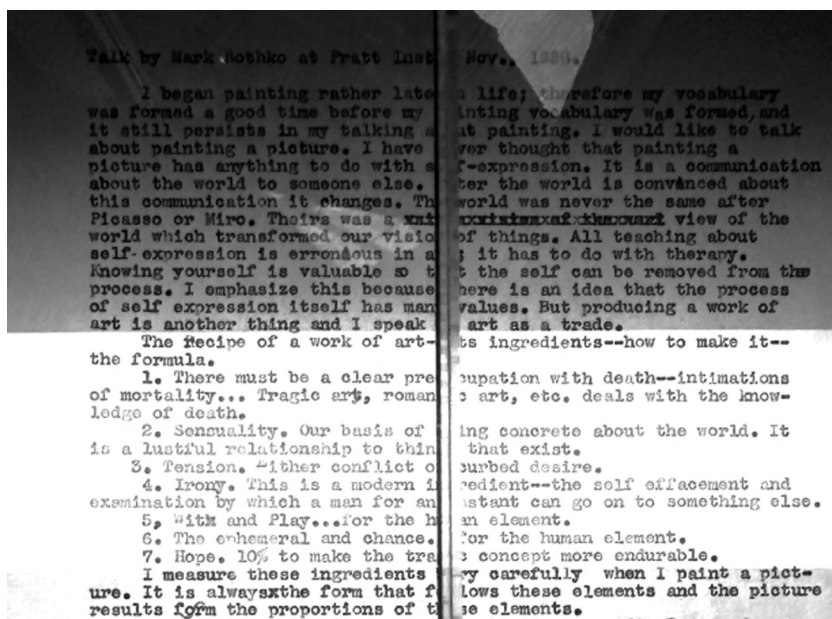


Figure 2: Mark Rothko, Pratt Lecture 1958, Art Formula (facsimile).

“There is more power in telling little than in telling all,” Rothko commented on developing his art formula above. This recipe was more of a pick of an iceberg, adequate for a particular period of Rothko’s belonging to his times when it was necessary to recover from pre- and during-war nihilism after Auschwitz, Nagasaki, and Hiroshima, after decolonial liberation wars and destructions. And what could be read here is that besides a formula for creating art, there is another one for being involved in avant-garde art as a *modus vivendi*. This is why I bring Rothko: through parallel development of meaning in creating art, archives are also a piece of creation or a creative process. As an act of amassing and gathering various pieces in *UbuWeb* through the backdoor, avant-garde archives were not only on the verge of becoming just another form of hoarding. What makes a difference is the process of providing meaning to this specific form of collecting. You take Marcel Duchamp as your lawyer in the context of Goldsmith’s flipped archives and engage with Duchamp’s radical redefinition of authorship, artistic legitimacy, and institutional critique, or you adhere to conventional legal and curatorial structures, prioritizing intellectual property rights and institutional control over cultural material. In this sense, an

archive—whatever is archived—is infused with the knowledge of its end, sensuality, tension, irony, and the fleeting chance of never being utilized for future creations. Considering an interactive relationship, it became clear that this interactivity should forge connections between ideas and actions, words and images, sounds and visuals, interiors and exteriors, all within this form of the *outré-tombe*, present in the past and poised to deactivate meaning in the future. Rothko and Godard, with their understanding of the ending, belong together as much as *UbuWeb*, which is not active but there, with knowledge of the end, sexuality, narcissism, sensuality, tension, and irony. With his art formula, Rothko is, therefore, here to save us from the dissolution of meaning, too. Because, between image and image, there are two regimes: fear of the image and the image of fear, which are the same conceptions of power founded on appropriating the reality and the sensible.

Let us situate this very moment and fragmented atrocities that any vanguard cannot reason. Palestine: fear of the image. Palestine: the image of fear.

What should bring us to our senses? Whose sensibility? Whose loses? This governance by images organizes the visible, which provokes adherence through the submission of the gaze. There is an eruption of distorted meaning. With this daily and constantly renewed cult of visibilities, we are addicted to the visible for eyes that have become blind to the invisible.

Invisible to the bustling crowds at the main entrance on Fifty-Third Street, it's desolate except for the occasional noisy school group or quiet academic researcher entering and exiting. There're no admission fees or snaking queues, only a lonely intern sitting at a desk. If you sign in and take the elevator to the top floor, you'll find the MoMA Library. It was there in the late 1970s that a librarian named Clive Phillpot created a policy unlike any other in the history of the museum. Without asking permission, he decreed that anybody could mail anything to the MoMA Library, and it would be accepted and become part of the official collection. There was no limit to what could be sent, nor were there specifications of size, medium, or provenance. No judgments were made about quality either. The artist could be world famous or completely unknown—it made no difference. (Goldsmith 1)

The key lies in rising above conformity. Questioning something does not mean that you consider everything that came before obsolete. Nothing is obsolete.

Even with the world in an emergency state, then, where we may want every scholarly hand on deck, it is essential to have a moat between academic and political life. This moat is vital to protecting reflection, imagination, and accountability in knowledge production and dissemination. It is essential to protecting an understanding and practice of facticity against indifference to it generated by nihilism but faithful to the complexity of knowledge formation. (Brown 99)

It also lies in the fragility of all seven elements Rothko mentions, particularly the seventh one, which should be a first-aid cure against nihilism. The meaning is fragile and prone to damage by handling. Various components in its making and variable layers may react and age differently. They end and continue acting and reacting differently. None of the mentioned engaged avant-gardists chose not to polish their discourses, which would have destroyed the subtle effects of their endings and continuities in meaning-making processes.

Conclusion

In the guise of conclusion, the avant-garde, as demonstrated by Godard, Rothko, *UbuWeb*, and Artaud, thrives on the deliberate act of destabilizing meaning to reveal deeper layers of sensibility and perception. Fragmented cinematic grammar resists the industrialization of images, inviting audiences to question the visible and engage with the ruptures between words and objects. Painter's formula for art similarly emphasizes tension, sensuality, and irony as tools to counter the nihilism of his time. At the same time, *UbuWeb* exemplifies a flipped archive where meaning emerges from subjective, imperfect curation. The assertion that "all individual acts are anti-social" underscores the avant-garde's rejection of imposed norms, highlighting the legitimacy of fragmented and "mad" perspectives. These examples show how art and archives can transform into active agents of meaning-making by embracing imperfection, temporality, and discontinuity. This framework contrasts with the call for safeguarding the book as a locus of theoretical purity, exposing the limitations of fixed intellectual traditions. Instead, the avant-garde is an evolving practice that bridges ideas, media, and sensibilities. Disrupting hegemonic structures of perception not only resists conformity but also enables new forms of understanding. The enduring relevance of the avant-garde lies between endings and continuities: a radical and essential act of cultural reimagination.

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Konci in kontinuitete: avantgarda in oblikovanje pomena

Ključne besede: sodobna umetnost / avantgarda / kulturni narativ / oblikovanje pomena / Rothko, Mark / Goldsmith, Kenneth / *UbuWeb* / Godard, Jean-Luc

Članek tematizira oblikovanje pomena in časovne prekinitve v avantgardi, pri čemer poudarja vlogo teh procesov pri preoblikovanju kulturnih narativov. Študije primerov vključujejo *UbuWeb*, radikalni digitalni arhiv Kennetha Goldsmitha, ki demokratizira dostop do avantgardnih del, ter film *Dve ali tri stvari, ki jih vem o njej* Jeana-Luca Godarda, kinematografsko intervencijo, ki destabilizira pomen s fragmentiranimi narativi. Analiza vključuje umetniško formulo Marka Rothka, ki poudarja tragične, čutne in efemerne dimenzije ustvarjanja pomena, ter Antonina Artauda in njegovo uveljavljanje norosti kot legitimnega pogleda na svet, ki izziva družbene norme.

Z raziskovanjem materialnosti medijev – od besedil in podob do virtualnih resničnosti in resničnosti umetne inteligence – članek preučuje, kako se avantgardne prakse končujejo in nadaljujejo ter omogočajo nove modalitete percepcije in ustvarjanja. Prispevek zagovarja arhive in umetnost kot aktivne agense za transformacijo.

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The Image of *Angelus Novus* in the Poetry Book *Ictus* by Bojan Vasić

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In 2012, as part of the group gathered around the Caché samizdat edition (Tamara Šuškić, Goran Korunović, Vladimir Tabašević, Uroš Kotlajić), contemporary Serbian poet Bojan Vasić published his poetry book Ictus. At the center of this book is a reproduction of the watercolor Angelus Novus, painted by Paul Klee in 1920, which Walter Benjamin possessed, but also interpreted in multiple texts, providing its most famous description in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” This article demonstrates how the image of Angelus Novus is incorporated into the poetry book Ictus, and how, through the figure of the angel, the text communicates with Benjamin’s “Theses.” Based on the interpretation of the paratextual elements of the book (cover page, typography and the meaning of the title, epigraphs, etc.), as well as its composition around the painting and, finally, the different layers of meaning within the text itself, the article explores how Vasić poetically reinterprets Benjamin’s understanding of history and critique of progress.

Keywords: Serbian poetry / samizdat / *Caché* / Vasić, Bojan / Benjamin, Walter: *Theses on Philosophy of History* / *Angelus Novus*

Bojan Vasić published his first poetry collection, *Srča*, in 2009, as the winner of the Mladi Dis literary competition for young authors (Stojnić, “Kadrovi” 196). For the same collection, he subsequently received the Matičev Šal award (Andonovska, “Vasićev angelus” 55). Following this initial success, he collaborated with four other poets—Tamara Šuškić, Vladimir Tabašević, Uroš Kotlajić, and Goran Korunović—forming a collective around the *Caché* samizdat edition.¹ While the group was

¹ The group of poets associated with the *Caché* edition was formed in 2011 (Savić Ostojić 9; Čakarević, “Bez sigurnog mjesta”) and remained active until 2014. Their activities included live performances where they took turns reading aloud without a moderator, creating a collective act in which the audience could not distinguish who was reading whose poetry. Similarly, they self-published a group almanac featuring unsigned texts—essays and poetry—as well as samizdat publications, which could be obtained for free at live reading events (Čakarević, “Bez sigurnog mjesta”).

active, he wrote four poetry books: *Tomato* (2011), *Ictus* (2012), *13* (2013), and *Detroit* (2014). Since the dissolution of the group around *Caché* in 2014, he has published four poetry collections for different commercial publishing houses: *Volfram* (2017, Kontrast), *Toplo bilje* (2019, KCNS), *Udaljavanje* (2022 Arhipelag), and *Noć od ružinog drveta* (2024, Treći Trg), as well as two novels: *Vlastelinstva* (2022, Treći Trg) and *Tamna: Crne kćeri* (2024, Blum). For his poetry collection *Toplo bilje*, Vasić received both the Miroslav Antić and Vasko Popa awards, effectively becoming a laureate of nearly all major poetry awards in Serbia. In our paper, we will focus on the book *Ictus*, published as part of the *Caché* samizdat edition during Bojan Vasić's involvement with the group.

Ictus was released in 2012, a year that several literary critics (Savić Ostojić 9; Milinković and Stojnić 4; Andonovska, "Uzgred rečeno" 423; Lazić 9–11) have identified as pivotal for the final consolidation of a new generation of young poets, often referred to as "new poetry."² In critical texts that explored the formation of this generation—often published in the journal *Agon* (ed. Bojan Savić Ostojić), as well as in the prefaces of several anthologies of "new poetry" (*Restart*, *Van, tu: free*, *Prostori i figure*)—attention is drawn to the poor state of publishing, particularly in the context of the (non)publication of poetry, and to the publishing industry that fails to meet the needs of a large number of diffuse poetic voices. For instance, during this period, critics and poets wrote about the "exceptionally difficult social conditions of financial, cultural, and, more precisely, publishing crisis" (Milinković and Stojnić 6), with emphasis placed on the "limited range of the publishing market" (Savić Ostojić 8) and the so-called "major crisis" in publishing (Stojnić, "Nova srpska poezija" 307).

The publishing system can be illustrated as such: young poets most often publish their first books through "annual editions and competitive festivals dedicated to authors without a published book"

² The term "new poetry" refers to the generation of "poets born after 1975" (Lazić 9), i.e., "born in the mid-seventies and younger" (Stojnić, "Prostori" 9), or, as Andonovska stated: "They represent the demographic generation of the eighties, which appeared on the literary scene after 2000" (Andonovska, "Uzgred rečeno" 420). In 2012, the "transformation from *younger* to *new* Serbian poetry" (Milinković 2) had fully taken shape, and the term became widely used, e.g., as the subtitle of the anthology *Prostori i figure: izbor iz nove srpske poezije* (*Spaces and Figures: A Selection of New Serbian Poetry*), as well as the title of a series of poetry readings organized in DKSG, called "Nova poezija" ("New Poetry"), which had later resulted in another generational anthology *Restart: panorama nove poezije u Srbiji* (*Restart: A Panorama of New Poetry in Serbia*).

(Stojnić, “Nova srpska poezija” 306), with the most significant competitions being Mladi Dis, Prvenac in SKC, and Prva knjiga Matice srpske. Additionally, poetry is also published by smaller publishers and journals, such as Treći Trg, *Povelja* in Kraljevo, and others (Stojnić, “Nova srpska poezija” 307; Andonovska, “Uzgred rečeno” 423–424; Savić Ostojić). After the first collection had been published through these competitions, the “publishing crisis” became more evident, as many authors struggled to publish their second book and “failed to remain present through continuous writing and publishing” (Stojnić, “Nova srpska poezija” 307). The lack of opportunities was followed by the feeling that the few publishing houses that chose to publish poetry served “merely as a legal platform” which, “apart from that legal framework and the CIP cataloguing, offered the author almost nothing” (Savić Ostojić 15).

On the other hand, one of the defining characteristics of this generation of poets is that it was “predominantly comprised of individuals with philological backgrounds, who were also engaged as critics, editors, translators, young researchers, or program organizers” (Andonovska, “Uzgred rečeno” 421–422). These various professional roles also explain the institutional support the poets initially secured. Additionally, both the poets and critics of this generation were equipped with theoretical knowledge, which they applied not only in writings (both poetic and critical) but also in analyzing the context. For instance, when reading about the contemporary state of publishing, some of the critics refer to Bourdieu’s concepts of symbolic capital, and the literary field (Bourdieu 141–166, 216, 232). This is evident in Bojan Savić Ostojić’s assertion that “the consensus of certain authorities who possess symbolic capital, typically within a jury, with a privileged status within the literary field, is the only way a poetry book can attain a certain level of prestige” (Savić Ostojić 8). Similarly, Goran Lazić notes: “The negligible amount of symbolic and even less economic capital still in circulation within the field of contemporary poetry in Serbia remains firmly controlled by the older and middle generations” (Lazić 27). In this sense, poets and editors associated with “new poetry” were aware of the current state of affairs in the contemporary “publishing crisis,” and responded to it by establishing their own events and platforms, effectively creating a subfield within the broader literary field. In Bourdieusian terms: the emergence of “new poetry” brought about changes in the field, driven by “newcomers” (or the youngest members of the field), who initially possessed little to no specific capital, and whose identity was defined by their distinctiveness (Bourdieu 149–150).

However, the group around the *Caché* edition challenged it even more, and decided to cease participating in the reproduction of existing conditions of production (Althusser 232), signifying their choice of the position of the avant-garde—a stance that, as Bourdieu defines it, is characterized by negation and opposition to dominant positions within the field (Bourdieu 215–241). Their decision to independently create and print their books was not only an intervention in the market and production conditions—since their books were not catalogued in libraries, sold in bookstores, or protected by copyright—but also a space for exploring the boundaries of the book as a poetic medium (see Čakarević, “Sve samlji”). This approach enabled greater freedom for the experiments with poetic language, extending it to the paratextual level, which they actively utilized. This is evident in *Ictus*—a poetry book composed around Paul Klee’s painting *Angelus Novus*, through which it enters into a continuous dialogue with Walter Benjamin and his “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

In this article, we will analyze how Klee’s painting is integrated into Vasić’s poetry book: the ways it shapes the book’s composition, while influencing the reception and (non-linear) reading of the text. Finally, we’ll look into how Vasić’s poetic thought, interwoven throughout the verses, positions itself in relation to Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” to which *Angelus* guides us.

Poetic crossover: The composition of *Ictus* around the painting *Angelus Novus*

As previously suggested, the poets around *Caché* edition utilized the book format to extend the semantic layers of the text to the paratextual level—for example, through interventions on book covers, use of visual elements within the book, or by experimenting with the material properties of the book as an object. This allowed them the freedom to intervene in a space that—in commercial publishing—is typically reserved for the publisher’s policies or the design framework of a series/edition in which the book is published. For example, one member of the group, Uroš Kotlajić, progressively deconstructed the book format in his three works published in the samizdat edition, to the extent that his third book in *Caché* lacks both a title and cover page (see Kotlajić, untitled book). On the other hand, Vasić’s approach is somewhat different, showing a tendency toward carefully envisioned book composition, where all elements of the composition and paratext are aligned

with the sensibility and tendencies of the text itself (Andonovska, “Vasićev angelus” 55–56). In this sense, *Ictus* may represent the culmination of thoughtfulness in the composition of a poetry book in Vasić’s oeuvre—and perhaps even more broadly within the context of contemporary Serbian literature—which is why we will refer to it as the starting point of our approach to the book.

On the red cover of Vasić’s book, the word *Ictus* is printed in black and, as Biljana Andonovska suggests, arranged in the shape of a cross—already indicating the layers of meaning within the book (Andonovska, “Vasićev angelus” 58), while also visually introducing the Benjaminian tension between Marxist and Talmudic (Handelman 348; Beiner 424). According to Andonovska, the term *ictus* evokes three possible meanings: first, it can refer to “the versification concept of *rhythmic stress*”; second, in Latin, it denotes “a *physical blow*”; and finally, in the way it is written in the shape of a cross, it can also signify “the Ancient Greek word for fish, which *represents Christ*” (Andonovska, “Vasićev angelus” 58; our emphasis).

First, we agree with Andonovska that it is unlikely Vasić intended to activate the meaning of *ictus* as a rhythmic stress, given that the text is written in free verse and does not particularly rely on rhythm in the traditional versification sense (Andonovska, “Vasićev angelus” 58). The primary meaning of *ictus* in Latin—a blow—is supported, as Andonovska claims, through the “anarcho-leftist nodes of Vasić’s poetic world,” which could be interpreted as a blow to the “social, capital body of the (bourgeois) state” (58). However, the “blow” in the title could also signify the intervention made by the *Angelus* painting itself, which disturbs the linear flow of the book. This directly connects with Benjamin’s critique of the linear flow of history, which we’ll address in the following passages. The third possibility, which Andonovska appears to favor and which is motivated by the word’s arrangement in the shape of a cross, is probable but should still be approached with caution. Specifically, the Greek word *ichthys* would be transcribed into Serbian as *ihtis* or *ihtus*, which is not the term found in the title. However, it should be considered that Vasić may have intended to preserve an allusion to this concept through a calligraphic intervention, as well as the resemblance in pronunciation between the two terms. This, along with the color of the cover, alludes to the Benjaminian “synthesis of (Jewish) mysticism and (historical) materialism” (59).

The poetry book *Ictus* has two cycles: “Soneti iz oseke” (“Sonnets from the Ebb Tide”) and “Bele barikade” (“White Barricades”), which

surround the reproduction of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*. The painting is placed on a double-page spread between the two cycles and positioned horizontally, so the angel's gaze is directed toward the first cycle. The first cycle represents a reversed crown of sonnets, i.e., a crown in a mirror, which, if we read the book linearly, begins with its end—with the fifteenth, master sonnet. The crown of sonnets progressively unravels toward the first sonnet, followed by the page with the cycle's epigraphs—quotes from Benjamin's Thesis VI and Osip Mandelstam's poem "Vek" ("Century")—and the title. All of them are positioned in the middle of the book, at the angel's feet (Andonovska, "Vasičev angelus" 59–60).

Behind the angel's back we find the title of the second cycle, "Bele barikade," accompanied by two epigraphs. Similarly, another quote from Benjamin's "Theses"—this time the first one—as well as Alexander Blok's verse. In reference to Blok's famous poem "The Twelve," "Bele barikade" itself is a poem consisting of twelve parts, which progresses linearly toward the end of the book. Andonovska notes that this intervention directs the reader "simultaneously *to the left*, toward the beginning of the book as the end of its first cycle ("Soneti iz oseke"), and *to the right*, in accordance with the usual, progressive reading direction, toward the end of the book ("Bele barikade")" (Andonovska, "Vasičev angelus" 59). As she argues, in this way, the book has at least three beginnings and at least two endings: it can be read from cover to cover, from the middle onwards in both directions, or also cycle by cycle in any order. Andonovska further suggests that placing the angel in the middle of the book, but in a horizontal position, replicates the image of the cross from the cover page, interrupting the process of linear reading (horizontally), as the potential reader has to turn the book to properly observe the angel (vertically). In other words, in order to look the angel in the eyes, reading must be interrupted. The function of the angel is undoubtedly to disrupt the traditional approach to literary text—it certainly functions as "a commentary on the nature of time, history, and progress" (59)—but it is also necessary to consider the direction in which the angel's gaze is directed (to the left, i.e., the first cycle) and to interpret it directly within the context of Benjamin's Thesis IX.

Angle of the angel

Paul Klee's small watercolor *Angelus Novus*,³ which Walter Benjamin purchased from the artist in 1921 for a sum of 1,000 German marks (Dunn 1; Werckmeister 244),⁴ became a recurring motif in Benjamin's writings. It appears in his work as early as the 1920s, when he initially planned to found a journal named *Angelus Novus* (Handelman 345; Werckmeister 244). In his 1931 essay on Karl Kraus, Benjamin connected *Angelus Novus* to a Jewish tradition and conceptualization of angels brought into existence to momentarily praise God before vanishing, emphasizing its representation of transience (Werckmeister 244). His reflections on the angel deepened during his years of exile. On the island of Ibiza in 1933, he wrote "Agesilaus Santander," an autobiographical essay in which the angel seems to mirror Benjamin's own state of displacement and vulnerability, embodying the tensions of his existence as a refugee from Nazi Germany (Handelman 346; Werckmeister 245). Finally, in 1940, Benjamin wrote the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," his final major work before his death at the Franco-Spanish border later that year (Beiner 431; Handelman 348). The most famous description of the angel of history is presented in the Thesis IX:

A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin 259–260)

³ The painting of the "new angel" is part of Klee's broader exploration of angelic figures, with *Angelus Novus* being one of fifty images of angels he painted, many of them produced in the final years of his life, coinciding with Benjamin's last years as well (Chrostowska 50). Visually, Klee's *Angelus Novus* stands out in its stylistic tension, suspended in a space that balances between early comic caricature and modernist abstraction, with disorienting features like askew eyes and asymmetrical ears (Dunn 1).

⁴ Allen Dunn writes that Benjamin acquired the painting shortly after its completion in 1920, while Otto Karl Werckmeister contends that the purchase occurred in 1921, which is more likely to be the case.

In the ninth thesis, Benjamin's angel of history is portrayed as being blown backward into the future, while gazing at the past—described as a catastrophe rather than a series of events—and unable to act or redeem, as the storm from paradise forces the angel in the opposite direction (Handelman 346). This storm is interpreted as a violent force symbolizing the destructive aspects of revolution (Mosès and Wiskind 24).

The gaze of the angel in *Ictus* is directed toward the first cycle, "Soneti iz oseke," which represents the past, while the future, depicted as a storm pulling the angel's back, is represented by the second cycle, "Bele barikade." This temporality is further supported by the quotes that function as epigraphs for both cycles. For example, a quote from Mandelstam's poem "Century" refers to the broken backbone of the previous, twentieth century: "The buds continue to swell, / the green leaves of crops will splash. / Hey, my terrible, splendid century, / your spine's now thoroughly smashed." Meanwhile, the second cycle begins with Blok's line "Ja hoću ono što će biti" ("I want that which will be"), which is a statement directed towards the future.

Since Benjamin critiques the historicist view of the past as a linear progression, arguing instead that the past should be understood through moments that disrupt this continuity (Beiner 428; Mosès and Wiskind 14), Vasić's choice to use the crown of sonnets—a linear and rigid poetic form—in order to articulate the past raises questions. Firstly, Vasić decided to keep the precise structure of the crown of sonnets, avoiding any experiments, unlike other poets around *Caché* edition, who also returned to sonnet form around the same time.⁵ In *Ictus*, each sonnet is constructed "following the model of the Petrarchan/Italian sonnet, consisting of two quatrains and two tercets" (Andonovska, "Vasićev angelus" 59), though Vasić does not preserve rhyme. In this sense, the crown of sonnets, as a linear form structured through the direct linking of verses and culminating in the master sonnet, appears to conflict with Benjamin's attitude towards the progress and continuance of the historical process. On the other hand, this crown of sonnets is reversed, and in this inversion, reading the book from its cover makes the reader run into "one single catastrophe" (Benjamin 259), which could be understood as the master sonnet, composed of all the first or the last lines of the preceding (in this case following) fourteen poems. In that sense, through the remaining sonnets, its dispersed verses are visually and rhythmically echoing

⁵ For example, Uroš Kotlajić played with the cult of form preserved in sonnet by progressively deconstructing it in his cycle "Soneti o rupama" (see Kotlajić, *Soneti*).

Benjamin's metaphor of relentless ruin, of wreckages. As Andonovska observes, "In contrast to the tide of the standard sonnet crown, ... Vasić constructs an inverse structure of retreating *sonnets from the ebb*" (Andonovska, "Vasićev angelus" 60). Furthermore, by upsetting the direction of the classical literary form, as well as by quoting Mandelstam's poem "Century" at the beginning of the cycle (middle of the book), it appears that Vasić crosses over Benjamin's thoughts on history with his own poetic re-conceptualization of the history of literature, specifically twentieth-century literature.

This claim can be supported by the subtle signals within the verses of the cycle "Soneti iz oseke," where Vasić—through intertextual dialogue—establishes a dynamic relationship between the present, i.e., his verses, and the past, i.e., twentieth century South Slavic literature. For example, Vasić directly incorporates allusions to titles of novels, such as in the verses "Hiperborejci / sa svojom savešću niniva" (Sonnet XI, "Jonin lament u dirizablu"), where he refers to the novel *Kod Hiperborejaca* by Miloš Crnjanski, or in the verses "naš koren bivšeg vida // još spava po idejama," in which he incorporates the syntagma "koren vida," which is also the title of Aleksandar Vučo's novel. In other cases, Vasić initiates a direct dialogue with specific poems that he seeks to recover from literary history. This is present in his poetic reinterpretation of Branko Miljković's poem "More, pre nego usnim" in the Sonnet IX ("More, pošto se probudim"), or in the way he reimagines Vasko Popa's poem "Mala kutija" in the Sonnet VI ("Crna kutija"), particularly through the verses "Izađi mala kutijo / iz sebe, ali ostani / unutra, / i uđi i izađi." Through such a relationship, as Benjamin suggested, the present can reactivate and restore certain overlooked or suppressed elements (Beiner 424; Mosès and Wiskind 14, 19), or in this case overlooked poetics that are central to Vasić's poetry. One year after writing *Ictus*, in the second, essayistic part of his book *I3*, Vasić writes:

It seems, however, that we were not mistaken—the century of manifestos is indeed far behind us. Yet, it is still worth reflecting on that passing today, gathering all our seismographic notes in order to decipher, with the greatest possible precision, the meaning of some new tremor. It is true not only that poetry reflects its epoch but also that it makes use of its *doxa*, its brightness or rage, and moves forward, finding in that very mass of unresolved, perplexing contradictions its driving force. But this is a movement that would be limited if it necessarily led "forward." (34)

After rethinking "the century of manifestos," Vasić reflects upon the direction towards which (contemporary) poetry is headed, recognizing

that merely moving “forward” is not enough. A similar critique of the narrative of progress that pulls the angel’s back (Handelman 348) unfolds in the second cycle of *Ictus*, “Bele barikade.”

In terms of composition, the second cycle “flows’ in the expected direction” (Andonovska, “Vasičev angelus” 61), from the middle toward the end of the book, with the twelve parts of the poem marked by Arabic numerals arranged in the usual order. While the poem relentlessly progresses in a formal sense, within the text itself, there is a nuanced interaction with Benjamin’s “Theses.” Specifically, the poem follows several lyrical characters—Etjen, Berni, Viktor, Markus, Nikolaj, Gubec—who are initially situated in a train, which carries the narration through eastern landscapes, such as the Baltics, Moscow, Novosibirsk, China, Basra, Kronstadt, etc.⁶ It is in the metaphor of the train that the connection to Benjamin’s “Theses,” and by extension, Marx, is revealed.

As shown earlier, Benjamin rejects the notion that history follows a straightforward or predictable trajectory, instead arguing that the idea of progress is an ideological construct shaped by technical advancements and falsely applied to humanity as a whole (Mosès and Wiskind 19–20). He specifically found inappropriate “the political use of the idea of progress by the forces of the left in their struggle against fascism and Nazism, first in Weimar Germany and later, after 1933, in the Western democracies” (19). Furthermore, Benjamin critically engages with Marx by referring to the locomotive metaphor in the sketches and notes to the “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (Richter 529). In these notes, he challenges Karl Marx’s statement that “revolutions are the locomotive of world history,” suggesting instead that revolutions should be seen as humanity’s attempt to “activate the emergency brake,” to stop the catastrophic course of history (Richter 529; Löwy 3; Lap Nguyen 350). The train, following its predetermined tracks, does not represent a controlled or beneficial ride toward a better future, i.e., classless society; instead, it leads toward catastrophe—unless interrupted (Löwy 3). So, the Benjaminian historian—or, in the case of *Ictus*, the Benjaminian poet—does not embrace the train’s direction but seeks to halt its movement, troubled by the unacknowledged wreckage left behind (Beiner 430). In this way, Benjamin moves beyond Marx’s framework, integrating a messianic sense of rupture rather than dialectical advancement (Zdravković 51).

⁶ Regardless of the recurrence of these characters, the lyrical subject shifts from “I” to “us,” also being a passenger on that train.

The emergency brake appears early in Vasić's poem, in the very first part:

He barely managed to jump in.

Gubec.

That name sparks like a brake
Within the throat of our heavy,
metal train. (our trans.)⁷

Matija Gubec is a historical figure—a revolutionary and leader of the Peasant's Uprising in Croatia (see Štefanec)—who, throughout the twentieth century, became a symbol of resistance, particularly within the context of the National Liberation Movement. Additionally, Gubec appears as a fictional character, for example, in the novel *Seljačka buna* written by Avgust Šenoa, but also in Vasić's work, in the poetry collection *Srča*, where he sometimes appears as the lyrical subject (Stojnić, "Kadrovi" 197). In *Ictus*, Gubec (as a lyrical character, but also as a motif) has two important functions. At first, Gubec represents the force that stops the train, disrupting linear progress and opening the possibility for messianic time (Benjamin 266; Caygill 216; Hamacher 67). As Werner Hamacher argues, the Messiah arrives only through a distortion of time and experience (Hamacher 67), and Gubec's intervention (and *Gubec as the intervention*) enacts precisely such a rupture. The second function attributed to Gubec is that of the Messiah himself. For example, Gubec disappears and reappears several times throughout the second cycle, and he is the only character closely tied to the lyrical subject: "Gubec je negde van grada," "privlačim nesmotrena tela, / i sam pomalo Gubec," "Čekamo ga, nervozni," "Dve senke / na užetu, Gubec i ja, / spuštene u čist i vašljiv, / ničiji a naš svet." Unlike Blok's poem, in which the figure of Jesus appears at the very end, the twelfth part of the cycle "Bele barikade" ends with the appearance of the Messiah—who emerges from within the lyrical subject: "Minuti i breze i sati, zavezani kopovi, / led u predvodnici kapilara, / opet minuti, i minuti, sad / pod mojom njegova koža, / pod mojim njegove oči." In this sense, as with Benjamin, weak messianic power that suddenly appears is not an active force but the lingering presence of unrealized past possibilities—the "missed possible" that calls for correction (Hamacher 41–42), which

⁷ The original: "Jedva je uspeo da uskoči. // Gubec. // To ime varniči kao kočnica / U grlu našeg teškog, / limenog voza."

Vasić especially addresses in the first cycle. His lyrical subject is thus entrusted with such power by past generations, and he recognizes and realizes it in the present. Finally, as Lana Zdravković writes, Benjamin's idea of weak messianic power, which she argues is rooted in the figure of Saint Paul,⁸ does not imply that a new Messiah is needed to lead us to abundance, but rather suggests that messianic power resides within us—or, in the case of *Ictus*, within the lyrical subject.

An introduction from the ebb

In conclusion, we must return to the initial question: What is the function of the reproduction of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* in Bojan Vasić's poetry book *Ictus*?

As we have demonstrated, *Angelus Novus* plays its most significant role in the very composition of Vasić's book. By placing the image horizontally at the center, so that the angel's gaze is directed toward the first cycle of poems, Vasić suggests which part of the collection relates to the past and which to the future—a distinction revealed through Benjamin's description of the angel of history in his "Theses." Secondly, the image itself disrupts the linear reading of the book, engaging with Benjamin's imperative against a linear conception of history and directing the reader's gaze toward multiple possible beginnings of the text. Such an intervention opens the possibility for the emergence of messianic time—not for the lyrical subject or the author to step out of the linear time, but for the reader who directly engages with the book. However, within the text itself, messianic time is not mediated through the figure of the angel, but through the revolutionary figure—Gubec—who emerges within the lyrical subject at the end of the book.

Finally, as Zdravković suggests, constructing a possible mode of persistence requires finding ways to break free from economic logic: "It

⁸ Even though Saint Paul has been an inspirational figure for thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben (*The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*), Jacob Taubes (*The Political Theology of Paul*), Alain Badiou (*Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalisms*) and Slavoj Žižek (*The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*), to whom Zdravković also refers to in her paper (50), Brian Britt argues that starting from Agamben, a straight line driven from Paul to Benjamin should be reread: "Agamben's claim to discovering a one-to-one correspondence between Paul's text and Benjamin's oversimplifies the broad, complex strands of biblical tradition. ... Benjamin's messianism was mediated through his engagement with the works of Erich Gutkind, Bloch, Buber, and Scholem and was therefore a distinctly modern category" (Britt 282).

is crucial to find ways to construct life beyond the commodity-market logic, where everything is left to the individual's personal free choice within an endless array of possibilities" (Zdravković 55). As we showed at the beginning of this paper, through Vasić's engagement with the group around *Caché* samizdat edition, *Ictus* steps outside the prevailing conditions of literary production at the time. However, as noted in book 13, Vasić is aware that "one can continuously revolutionize the means of literary production while still remaining within bourgeois positions" (50). For this reason, he directly confronts the core issue on which both Marx and Benjamin agree (Lap Nguyen 350): the need to enact "radical changes in both content and form" (Vasić, 13 66) to transform the very institutional frameworks of artistic production. He attempts to do so by creating a rupture, a poetic "strait gate through which the Messiah might enter" (Benjamin 266).

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Podoba *Angelus Novus* v pesniški zbirki *Ictus* Bojana Vasića

Ključne besede: srbska poezija / samizdat / *Caché* / Vasić, Bojan / Benjamin, Walter: *Zgodovinsko-filozofske teze* / *Angelus Novus*

Leta 2012 je v okviru skupine, zbrane okoli samozaložniške edicije *Caché* (Tamara Šuškić, Goran Korunović, Vladimir Tabašević, Uroš Kotlajić), sodobni srbski pesnik Bojan Vasić objavil svojo pesniško knjigo *Ictus*. V središču te knjige je reprodukcija akvarela *Angelus Novus*, ki ga je leta 1920 naslikal Paul Klee. Slika je bila v lasti Walterja Benjamina, ki jo je večkrat interpretiral v svojih besedilih, pri čemer je njena najbolj znana interpretacija podana v njegovih »Zgodovinsko-filozofskih tezah«. Pričujoči članek analizira, na kakšen način je podoba *Angelus Novus* vključena v pesniško zbirko *Ictus* in kako skozi lik angela besedilo komunicira z Benjaminovimi tezami. Na podlagi interpretacije paratekstualnih elementov zbirke (naslovnica, tipografija in pomen naslova, epigrafi itd.), njene kompozicije okoli slike ter različnih pomenov, ki se vzpostavljajo v samem besedilu, razprava pokaže, kako Vasić pesniško reinterpreтира Benjaminovo razumevanje zgodovine in kritiko napredka.

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The Age of Free Jongleurs: The Art of the People and the Czech Avant-Garde

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This article explores the Czech interwar avant-garde's interest in folklore and popular culture. Like most of its international counterparts, the Czech avant-garde was convinced that institutions like art and literature had outlived their historical validity. It also had little use for bourgeois conceptions of "the nation" and "the people," so often seen as the basis of folklore. But it engaged intensely with the cultural legacy of marginalized classes and with the possibility of new ways of expressing the cultural attitudes of the masses, both in the current moment of heightened social struggle, and in a vision of a future society where class differentiation would be abolished alongside the differentiation between specialist artists and non-specialist audiences or consumers. The search for a new art of the people found expression, most notably, in poet Vítězslav Nezval's demonstrative vitalization of low genres; in artist and theorist Karel Teige's championing of the circus and urban street culture, which he saw as elements of a "new folk art"; and in literary critic Bedřich Václavek's attempt to trace the circulation of modern poetry and songs that entered the shared repertoire of emerging classes. This complex interplay of new and old, I argue, offers a model for the prefiguration of a new world that still might survive the end of this one.

Keywords: Czech literature / avant-garde / folklore / popular culture / proletarian culture / poetism / Teige, Karel / Nezval, Vítězslav / Václavek, Bedřich

1.

Painters paint no longer for art, but for people [*pro člověka*]. Not excellent and splendid works as ends in themselves, but poems of a new, free, communal life. Perhaps, they believe, they will again be folk artists [*lidovými umělci*]. (Teige, "Nové umění" 177)

June 1921. The Czech avant-garde is still in its infancy. The now-legendary association of radical artists Devětsil had been founded only

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eight months earlier. Karel Teige, who would become the group's most active theorist and organizer, is only 20 years old. The young artists have been given the chance to edit a special issue of the left-wing cultural review *Červen*, published by the famed anarchist-turned-Communist poet Stanislav Kostka Neumann. It was now their chance to present themselves to the public, to lay out their revolutionary call for a clean break with past styles and forms, in the name of a new "proletarian poetry." Karel Teige's contribution to the issue: an article about folklore titled "The New Art and Folk Creativity" ("Nové umění a lidová tvorba").

We are that band of street urchins,
athletes, poets, and whores in one formation ...

In a workers' bar, to rifles' shooting music,
we'll stammer out our lines ... (Nezval 29)

Three years later, Vítězslav Nezval puts out a poetry collection that becomes the foundational document of a new phase of the Czech avant-garde. Just as the young group was growing tired of "the tumult of proletarian poetry," Nezval published *Pantomima*, and, as Teige later reflected, "his generation found its orientation" (Teige, "Manifest" 325). What was so remarkable about the new collection of poetry? For Teige, it was all a "magical fairy tale" (325).

When literary work finds itself in trouble, ... it turns to the folk reservoir of verbal art. (Václavek 280–281)

1940. In all practical senses, the Czech avant-garde is dead. After its feverish activity in the early 1920s, it had slowed down for a time, before experiencing a remarkable reawakening in the mid-1930s, when Nezval and Teige declared their adherence to surrealism. Then, in March 1938, Nezval broke with the rest of the Surrealist Group, declaring it dissolved. Six months later, the Munich Accords dissolved Czechoslovakia. By 1939, all the Czech lands were occupied by Nazi Germany, and the former avant-gardists lay low. Bedřich Václavek, a longtime collaborator of Teige's and avant-garde literary critic, who continued to respect the avant-garde legacy even after turning to socialist realism, devoted the rest of his intellectual life to the study of folk tradition. At the beginning, middle, and end of the interwar Czech avant-garde lies folklore.

Why should I read so much into these scattered lines, these mentions here and there of "folk" and "the folk," English words I have been

invoking as translations of the Czech *lidový* and *lid*? The same words, after all, could also be translated as “popular” and “the people,” and is it really so surprising that the avant-garde was interested in the people, since it everywhere supported socialist or populist movements and decried the old elites, preferring the inspiration of low, popular culture? Why should I consider such forward-looking vernacularism in the same breath as old-fashioned folklore? And even if Teige and Václavěk flirted with traditional folklore in 1920 and 1940, why should I speak of folklore in the intervening years, when the avant-garde devoted its attention to urban street culture and popular entertainment?

Because: when we separate the notions of folk and folklore from the notions of people and popular culture, we dig a conceptual chasm between two bodies of thought and political-aesthetic practice that have historically been closely interrelated. When the avant-garde addressed the problem of the people in art, it addressed the same problem as folklorists and folklorizing artists, even while offering new answers.

The search for new sources and new forms of folklore was the interwar Czech avant-garde’s contribution to the perennial modern pursuit of an art for the people and by the people. They believed they found what they were looking for on the margins of society, in the culture of the outcast and the ignored.

2.

There is a widespread understanding that folklore represents the past while the avant-garde represents the future, and that, for this reason, the avant-garde must be opposed to folklore. But this understanding overlooks just how much the two phenomena were entangled with one another.

Those who pay close attention have long noted the avant-garde’s interest in aesthetic expression shared by the non-expert masses. Some have written on the close relationship between the avant-garde and modernist popular culture or “vernacular modernism” (Hansen; Lacey). Others have noted the connections between avant-garde expression and traditional folklore, though usually they have focused on cases other than the paradigmatic interwar avant-garde (Ulehla; Dian; Middleton; Montero). Boris Groys, in his exaggerated takedown of the Russian avant-garde, observed that Malevich and Khlebnikov were inspired by the simplicity of folk art and vernacular language when they set out to radically reduce aesthetic form (Groys 18). But rarely have observers closely analyzed how much the historic avant-garde

looked to folk forms as models of horizontal semiotic circulation and collective creation.

It is tempting to accept at face value the avant-garde's own dramatic calls for absolute novelty, its frustrations with the prevailing culture of both masses and elites. Such polemic simplifications, however, conceal complexity. First, because the avant-garde did *not* wholly reject the past or the popular culture of its day; and second, because folklore as a concept is not limited to the past. The avant-garde was not a revolt against the entirety of the past, but against a part of the past that persisted in the present. And in order to attack that antiquated part of the present, it championed other parts of the past alongside disregarded parts of the present, in order to make an alternative future. In doing this, the avant-garde sometimes criticized the culture of the people, but it did so primarily to the extent that the masses accepted what was offered to them by the old elites.

The avant-garde did differ from other artistic tendencies in its approach to the people. It did not uncritically embrace the folklore that others had championed as a way of inscribing new work into the culture of the nation; nor did it present its own work as "excellent and splendid" work (Teige, "Nové umění" 177) that could elevate the people. The avant-garde was a vanguard in the sense that it set out to find a new relationship to the people, provoking and inviting the people to express culture in new ways.

By posing the question of the *folkness* of the avant-garde, I pose the question of how the work of the avant-garde articulated past and future, people and vanguard, recipient and creator, consumption and production, in art and life. When the avant-garde called for abolishing or liquidating Art, it did so in order to revive other art forms that did not need to be liquidated, because they had never claimed for themselves the lofty title of Art. When the Czech avant-garde sought an art of the proletariat, which would be a "new folk art" (Teige, "Nové umění proletářské" 272), or when it composed poetry inspired by circus and vaudeville, or when it imagined "ragtime on the barricades," or when it collected folk songs of the urban masses, it was trying to approach the people obliquely, working out its simultaneous connection with and disconnection from the collective subjects and objects of social transformation. If it did not approach the people directly, as other folklorizing tendencies had done and would later do, this was because the revolutionary processes favored by the avant-garde would also change the people or enable the people to change themselves. Even if the old world was ending, the new world would again be old. It would be old in new ways.

The Czech avant-garde sought to achieve these goals in three ways. (1) It introduced into its creative work the principle of popularity or folkness (in Czech, the term used is *lidovost*), attempting to address the people in ways that differed radically from the folklorizing approaches of earlier high art. (2) It looked beyond its own creative work, in order to find allies and sources of inspiration among non-expert creators. (3) It conceptualized and experimented with new forms of aesthetic expression that could enable the people to collectively mobilize their imagination.

3. The avant-gardist as popular entertainer

The Czech avant-garde began as a movement for proletarian culture. Like the Soviet Proletkult movement that inspired it, it made known its class-based understanding of aesthetic expression and its commitment to a radically transformed modernity. It was rather less enthusiastic than its Soviet counterpart, however, about the actually existing industrial society that had produced the revolutionary working class. As the collectively signed founding statement of Devětsil stated in 1920, “It was a fateful mistake to suppose that the art of machines could really be the art of a worker who is imprisoned and beaten down by monstrous machines, to think that workers could be captivated by art that sings praises to automobiles in which they will never ride and to airplanes in which they will never fly” (U. S. Devětsil 82). More than the conditions of the proletariat, what the young avant-gardists hoped to express was the consciousness of a proletariat that protested against industrial civilization. The “proletarian” aesthetic, for them, was not a complement to the factory, but a counterpoint to it—the imagination struggling to liberate itself from a repressive society and from exploitative working conditions.

Perhaps because of this approach, the Czech avant-garde initially appeared less interested in formal experimentation than many avant-gardes. Teige was far more interested in the principle of imaginative fancy that was already present in the everyday life of workers when they weren’t working, and which artists and poets could express in their work. Painters connected to the movement, like Otakar Mrkvička, developed a kind of proletarian primitivism, which depicted working-class life as both simple and exotic, exuding a *joie de vivre* that waited to be unleashed from the oppressive conditions that contained it.

Another approach was presented, meanwhile, by Jaroslav Seifert, the later Nobel Prize winner, and by Jiří Wolker, who was then the most prominent representative of Czech “proletarian poetry.” In contrast

to the imaginative joy celebrated by Teige and the primitivist painters, they emphasized working-class suffering. While Seifert employed largely modernist free verse to explore proletarian subjectivity in his first book, *City in Tears* (*Město v slzách*, 1921), Wolker took inspiration from folk ballads (and their reinterpretation in the work of Karel Jaromír Erben), repurposing the narrative genre to recount the small and great tragedies of working-class life. In Wolker's famous "Ballad of the Stoker's Eyes" ("Balada o očích topičových," 1933), a boiler attendant comes home blinded from his work before the fire. His wife cries, "Why did you make love / to that cursed dame / that mistress made of iron / of shovel and of flame?" (Wolker, *Těžká hodina* 54). The folk ballad's classic plot of love and betrayal is transposed onto the class struggle, the worker having been seduced by the machines that will destroy him. Wolker's diction, meanwhile, is simple, his meter and rhyme scheme relatively regular, in a form meant to be accessible to working-class readers (Vlašín 15). In a theoretical essay, Wolker admitted that great art demands something of the celebratory and exceptional (he used the word *nedělní*, meaning "Sunday" but also, literally, "non-working," the opposite of "everyday" or "workaday"), but this is not enough: "It is in the gray acts of daily life that the artist finds the divine spark" (Wolker, "Umění všední" 219). Although artists should be "builders of a new beauty" in the new world built by the proletariat (Wolker, "Proletářské umění" 224), this beauty should express the totality of workers' collective experience, including the dull suffering that will not be ended by pure and sublime art, but only by struggle.

Throughout this period, Devětsil sought to ensure that its activities be "as popular as possible, accessible to everyone," as it declared in its founding statement (U. S. Devětsil 82). The group even invited "revolutionary workers" to support its activities by becoming dues-paying members, in exchange for which they would receive discounts as well as "an artistic bonus worth in itself more than the cost of membership" (82). I have found no evidence on whether any workers took them up on this offer, but Seifert and Wolker were widely read, reaching many living-room bookshelves. Their attempt to give aesthetic expression to the proletariat captured the imagination of the middle-classes much as earlier artists had succeeded in winning the middle class's affection for peasant folklore. But Teige, for his part, had other designs for the notion of proletarian culture, which was to be more than artists' imaginative expression of proletarian consciousness, but an entirely new kind of folk art, to which I will return below. First, I will discuss the next phase of avant-garde attempts to make their own work popular.

It is well known that the Czech avant-garde soon moved on from proletarian culture. Wolker, who remained devoted to proletarian poetry and broke with Devětsil around 1922 (Vlašín 14), died of tuberculosis in 1924, the same year that Teige declared it was poetry's role to capture not the "six days of work" but "the seventh day of the soul" (Teige, "Poetismus" 556), which was likely, at least in part, a polemical reference to Wolker's defense of the "workaday" (*všední*) against the "Sunday" (*nedělní*) in poetry. While Teige's notion of proletarian culture had encompassed both labor and leisure, the two dimensions of modern life would now be separated, as he placed the hard daily work of building a new world under the rubric of "constructivism," while he conceptualized the "leisurely, jocular, fantastical" art of living after work (556) as something different, called "poetism." Both categories of activity were necessary to the revolutionary movement and to the avant-garde, but they were not to be confused.

Gone from Teige's conceptual apparatus was the emphasis on unmediated collectivism in poetic creation, and gone was the immediate identification of this collective with the proletariat. Teige's collaborators largely replaced the somber, emotional, and formally more traditionalist proletarian poetry with joyous and playful formal experimentation. But the newly "poetist" avant-garde did not retreat from society into the individuality of poets. When poets ceased to appear as unmediated mouthpieces of the proletariat, they began to appear as mediators between artists and a broader social collective.

It was the poet's role to be a popular entertainer, taking up the lowest and most overlooked genres. Nezval's *Pantomima* would contain a "broadside ballad," an alphabet with childish rhymes for each letter, and of course a script for a pantomime. Seifert's 1925 book *On the Radio Waves* (*Na vlnách TŠF*), clearly influenced by Nezval, set out to capture the excitement of waterfronts, shop windows, imported fruits, cafes, busy streets—cheerful impressions of the city that, four years earlier, had shown him nothing but tears. The city itself appears in this book as a site for poetism, which Teige now called "the art of wasting time" and whose aim was "to make life into a grand amusement park" (Teige, "Poetismus" 557). The theatrical section of Devětsil, which began calling itself the Liberated Theater (*Osvobozené divadlo*), drew heavily on the methods of circus and music hall, soon performing wildly popular variety shows and writing songs that are so well known today they can be considered a part of modern Czech folklore.

The avant-garde is best remembered for its commitment to the free development of artistic-poetic impulses, but it was equally committed

to making its work enjoyable for the public. The Czech avant-garde in particular sought to accomplish this by inscribing itself in the existing tradition of popular entertainment. As Nezval suggested with his image of poets as street urchins marching in step with athletes and whores, this meant not only making their own work popular, but also seeking out the broader crowd of people who created, together, the experience of modern life.

4. A vanguard that follows the people

Even when they called their people “the proletariat,” their idea of the proletariat was hardly limited to the “idealized proletarians, barricades, and red flags” that Teige later denounced as inadequate objects of poetry (Teige, “Manifest” 326). In fact, Teige’s early writings on proletarian culture are marked by the same kind of colorful, life-loving, and proudly unpretentious urban elements that he would later champion under the banner of poetism. In one of his first articles, from February 1921, Teige would write of a new “biocentrism” that supplants the anthropocentrism of earlier art, drawing on the “love of life” found in “folk art, children’s drawings, and folk songs [*národní písně*]” (Teige, “Novým směrem” 95). The proletarian quality of the new art lay not in its connection to hard labor but in its primordial quality, its ability to draw on natural forces that bourgeois society, with its artificial sophistication, had concealed.

Folk art, in this conception of modernity, only gained in relevance. In the June 1921 essay with which I opened this article, Teige begins with a polemic against folk art as it is most stereotypically known, but he goes on to argue for the importance of folk art of a different kind. “Folk art?” he asks.

Ah, yes, our national costumes, which we say the whole world should envy. ... What a pasture for the eyes when national and Slavic banners wave. ... Even the great master Mucha sweetens his inexhaustible and unartistic lemonade with motifs of embroidered ornamentation! ... This is where fashion and our patriotic, wholly anti-artistic fever has gotten us! This truly peculiar mania has made many people disgusted by the adornments of our folk clothing. And no wonder. (Teige, “Nové umění” 175)

Teige has little use for this old-fashioned appropriation of folk motifs. But he turns his attention to another folk culture that is “still alive” (Teige, “Nové umění” 176). This is the urban and peri-urban folk art

of “vulgar ditties and anecdotes told in the streets” (176), of signs hung in front of stores, of ordinary furniture and amateur photography, all of which had been vividly described in a recent book by the modernist painter Josef Čapek, *The Humblest Art* (*Nejskromnější umění*, 1920). This was art that belonged neither to the village nor the nation, as Teige would write later, but to “the entire repertoire of life on the globe” (Teige, “Umění dnes” 377). This reflection on folk art then opened the path to a programmatic statement on the “new art,” which would be “revolutionary, proletarian, folk” (377).

While Čapek conceptualized this “humble,” unspiritual art as a mediator between people and the materiality of things, Teige situated contemporary folk art between the past and the future. He identified the current moment as “a critical interregnum between tendencies and styles,” when “primal and folk creativity” could “reinforce new work” (Teige, “Nové umění” 176) and prefigure a new “age of style” when there would be “no separation between the so-called great ruling art and the forgotten, second-class, and conditional art of the people” (177). In the meantime, before that age arrived, it was important to identify the sources of creative energy that pointed to it, and the people who wielded that energy.

In the fall of 1922, Teige published, for the first time, a text wholly devoted to “The New Proletarian Art” (as the title read). He later described the text as a “revision of the program of ‘proletarian art’” (Teige, “Manifest” 325), and it did present a vision very different from that of Lunacharsky and Bogdanov in the Soviet Union or Stanislav Kostka Neumann in Prague. But the text was consistent with Teige’s own writing that had preceded it: he sought the sources of new proletarian art in already-existing forms of proletarian expression experienced by workers. “If cubo-futurist art was derived from the machine of a defective civilization,” Teige wrote, “we want to derive proletarian art from the human being, to look for it in the people [*lid*] and the crowd [*dav*]” (Teige, “Nové umění proletářské” 268). Proletarian art could therefore take inspiration from great writers but also from stories printed in popular almanacs and from dime novels sold by wandering book peddlers (269). Proletarian art could draw on the tradition of political art, like songs from the revolutionary barricades, broadside caricatures, and political cartoons, but more important were the daily sources of workers’ entertainment, like Westerns, sentimental novels, Chaplin films, amateur theater, *jongleurs* in variety theater, traveling singers, popular festivals, and Sunday football matches (271). “Love these works,” he urged his readers, “without prejudice” (272). And here

we can see that what speakers of English may be inclined to understand as distinct concepts, the “folkness” of old folklore and the “popularity” of modern popular culture, exist in Teige’s framework as a single concept, *lidovost*, which denotes the people’s historically changing share in aesthetic expression, from peasants’ songs through the latest popular theatrical revues. Sometimes this folkness indicated active participation in aesthetic creativity; at other times, it indicated a kind of popular reception that, implicitly, meant the works expressed the consciousness of those who appreciated them.

When Teige turned to poetism, he no longer directly invoked the aesthetic demands of the proletariat as a defining factor in avant-garde art, but his sources of inspiration remained the same. Now the *jongleur* became a paradigm of art “as natural, delightful, and accessible as sport, love, wine, and all delicacies,” as Teige welcomed an age of “clowns, dancers, acrobats, sailors, and tourists,” a “harlequinade of feelings and imaginings,” an “eccentric carnival and grand amusement show” (Teige, “Manifest” 326).

When he wrote a two-part collection of essays from 1928 and 1930, situating poetism in the history of art, Teige titled the project *On Humor, Clowns, and Dadaists* (*O humoru clownech a dadaistech*). In it, popular entertainment like circus and music hall receives as much attention as literary and artistic movements; the Czech avant-garde is presented as just one part of “a magical theater of variety [*divadlo rozmanitosti*]” that encompasses the world (Teige, *Svět* 50). One noteworthy element of these theatrical forms, for Teige, was their lack of strict separation between artists and the recipients of art, as “modern directors want to have the spectator at the center of the theatrical event”; music hall was especially exemplary for “consciously and deliberately utilizing the cooperation of the audience” (65).

In addition to actual circus and theater, Teige described the wondrous dimension of everyday life that makes the whole world so amusing a stage—one “where we could not remain passive spectators” and where, when we leave at the end of the show, “we can at least say on the road to the underworld: we had a good laugh” (Teige, *Svět* 22). In a long list of examples of poetism in life, which Teige presents as facts drawn from various published and oral sources (35–46), a folklorist can clearly recognize the marks of exaggerated tales told by friends of friends. In other words, Teige had become a collector of urban legends.

Teige, however, never devoted himself methodically to the study of folklore. He never became an expert in the urban lore and popular art that he embraced, the way he was an expert in the history of art that he

largely rejected. In his essays, he often retraced the history of painting, in order to offer a coherent narrative of its development and ultimate crisis; when approaching folk and popular culture, he drew from it haphazardly, applying a method of montage, piecing together striking juxtapositions of what captured his attention. But his longtime collaborator in Devětsil, Bedřich Václavek, was committed to the systematic study of folk expression.

Although there is no dearth of avant-gardists around the world who took an interest in folklore, Václavek was rare in having studied it as a scholar. In 1923, just as the Czech avant-garde was maturing, Václavek defended a doctoral dissertation on secular Czech “folklorized” (*zlidovělé*) songs. Studying under literary scholars as well as the prominent folklorist Čeněk Zíbrt, Václavek was interested in the phenomenon of newly authored songs that are so widely sung they “become folklore” (*zlidovějí*). Although many socialist writers and artists took inspiration from folklore after the rise of socialist realism in the mid-1930s, and although Václavek’s first major publication on the topic did not come out until 1938, this was hardly a new interest for him then. His long engagement as an avant-garde literary critic and theorist slowed his academic work, to which he did not return in a sustained manner until after the avant-garde had broken up. But in many ways, he was carrying out a research program that Teige, in his essays and manifestoes, had proposed. Václavek sought to demonstrate, through rigorous study of text circulation, that folklore did not die when peasant society gave way to industrialization, but instead took new forms in the urban spaces inhabited by workers and the bourgeoisie (see Feinberg).

But even as Václavek, Teige, and Nezval looked for allies and inspiration in the present, they continually gestured to something that still belonged to the future.

5. A “new art” made by all

It was not enough to make work that the people could enjoy, or to enjoy work made by the people; it was necessary that both artists and audiences actively take part in new aesthetic practices.

In the period of proletarian culture, what the avant-gardists imagined was a “new style” that would replace the constant succession of schools and “isms” as the liquidation of art led to something like a unified civilizational aesthetic. Bourgeois society had separated “the

so-called great ruling art” from “the forgotten, second-class ... art of the people,” but Teige wrote that “a true age of style is coming, an age such as last appeared in the Gothic, when there existed a single, unified trunk of art” (Teige, “Nové umění” 177) and there was “no difference between the ruling art and the undercurrent of primal production” (Teige, “Nové umění proletářské” 272). Or as Wolker wrote, “proletarian art will be but the vanguard of a great epoch of the lifestyle of social fellowship” (Wolker, “Proletářské umění” 224). In the short run, proletarian art would be tendentious and partial, competing with the art of other classes, but in the long run it would become the ruling art. Then, when proletarian rule gave way to a classless society, what had been proletarian art would “disperse in all directions out from the narrow limits of class, growing into new cathedrals of socialist culture” (224). This, for Teige, was what made proletarian art different from older folk art: this “new folk art” would not copy the styles of ruling-class art, but would become the ruling art of its age, gaining “the strength that built the Gothic cathedrals” (Teige, “Nové umění proletářské” 272).

In this idealization of the Gothic, one hears an echo of John Ruskin’s writing on the nature of Gothic in *The Stones of Venice* (1851–1853). Ruskin too had hoped to restore the lost unity of an architectural project that depended not on refined artists striving for perfect reproduction of ideal forms, but on numerous worker-artisans, each of whom left his unique mark on the final work precisely because he worked imperfectly. But whereas Ruskin and his followers like William Morris had tried to revive this form of creative labor by establishing collaborative artistic workshops and calling for more creativity in the labor process, Teige explicitly rejected their methods. “Ruskin and Morris wanted to ennoble life and craft with art,” Teige wrote, “but today, instead, it’s a matter of innervating art with the concreteness of contemporary life” (Teige, “Nové umění proletářské” 260). This critique is not well elaborated, but the implication is that Ruskin and Morris still placed faith in Art, when in reality Art was the problem. Life could not be redeemed by giving it more of this Art, which had grown old in its isolation from life. Rather, in a society-wide movement that transformed life itself, the expressive potential of the people could be liberated from the strictures of Art, producing the modern equivalent of the Gothic cathedral. This vision might remind us of Groys’s notion of the “total work of art” that, in his view, would enable the avant-garde to transform society like a great dictatorial demiurge. The key difference, nonetheless, is that avant-garde artists are wholly absent from Teige and Wolker’s early vision of a unified creative society.

Before the deeper theoretical consequences of these formulations could be worked out, Wolker died and Teige abandoned the idea of a new unity under the banner of a proletarian culture on the way to becoming classless culture. Now, under the influence of Soviet constructivism and Czech functionalism, Teige criticized Ruskin from a new angle: against Ruskin's condemnation of the division of labor—"It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided," Ruskin wrote, "but the men" (Ruskin 18)—Teige insisted that the "practical" (*užitné*) arts would adopt industrial organization. And against Ruskin's embrace of imperfection, the practical arts would embrace straight lines, simplicity, and technologies of perfect replication. But Teige's most influential contribution to the theory of the avant-garde was not in the realm of constructivism itself; it was in the relationship between constructivism and the poetism that would retain a place beside it. In the *poetic* arts (which could be verbal or visual), the imagination would roam free.

Teige, in this period, seems to abandon the humanist dream of those who imagined all labor becoming creative work. He counts instead on hard work, aided by technological innovation, economic progress, and revolutionary politics, to create a built environment conducive to the poetic imagination, and to allow more and more free time for workers to pursue their creative impulses. The practical and poetic dimensions, which had been united in the vision of a post-proletarian Gothic, would now be distinctly separated as a constructivist-poetist duality. As Teige writes in his book on humor in popular culture, *The World That Laughs* (*Svět, který se směje*, 1928), "In cities built by constructivists, let there be a marvelous poetist magic-city," a city within a city, the outer city solid and practical, the inner city imaginative, built on the model of the circus (89). The people are now a two-sided artist, at once the practical builder of the world and its freewheeling poet-decorator.

Yet Teige is ambivalent on the relationship between constructivism and poetism. The two forces are presented sometimes as separate and complementary (after six days of construction, there is one day of poetry, neither one infringing on the time of the other); at other times, they appear in tension. The tension is productive, but it also seems to leave Teige uneasy. In 1930, he seems to contradict the complementary polarity he laid out earlier, writing that poetism will "overcome the antagonism between poem and world," leading toward "a new synthesis of ... construction and poem" (Teige, "Báseň" 498). He champions the "purification" of poetry, the poetic impulse freed from the strictures of literary genre and from the demands of serving a class of patrons. But even this autonomy of "pure poetry" is, in itself, a crucial

part of social life. At this point, however, Teige has no concept of a force that could mediate between these two basic tendencies of modern liberation, poetry, and construction.

After 1934, when Teige followed Nezval in declaring himself a surrealist (after displaying a growing interest in surrealism since 1929), he no longer wrote of the polarity of constructivism and poetism. It would seem that surrealist principles made the strict polarity unnecessary, now that Breton had incorporated Marxism into surrealism. While Teige continued to champion constructivism in architecture, the general construction of society no longer appeared divided into separate processes of practical work and poetic play; it could now appear as history, in which the objective and subjective dimensions interacted dialectically (see Kreft 224–225). People make history with their hands and imagination, with consciousness and the unconscious, under conditions of constraint and in rebellion against constraint.

In Teige's most fully elaborated theoretical work of this period, *The Marketplace of Art* (*Jarmark umění*) from 1936, Teige returns to the question of folklore. At first, his position appears diametrically opposed to his earlier championing of the people's urban culture: "In the past," he writes, "the peasant was the creator and bearer of folk art. Today, the proletariat is a popular stratum that doesn't produce and cannot create original and refined folk art" (52). The capitalist art market has taken from the proletariat the means of artistic production, offering back to it only a "pseudo-art and sub-art" (53). Despite this (and despite never working out a thoroughgoing theory of "pseudo-art," or kitsch or bad taste; see Stefański), Teige maintains a fundamental anti-elitism alongside his occasional expressions of dismay at the art consumed by the people. Earlier, in 1928, he had written: "Here, amidst unbelievable petty bourgeois and popular non-taste, lustful brutality, raucous profanity, intense obscenity, ... we can find elements of a new, unknown poem, *a reservoir of still untapped forces*" (Teige, *Svět* 85). In *The Marketplace of Art*, he still hopes to drink from this reservoir, where taste and non-taste seem to mingle: "The people, when they are torn away from the stupor that is a contagion of bourgeois and petit bourgeois culture, have a much higher aesthetic sensitivity than the bourgeoisie, which is a class that is fundamentally un-aesthetic" (61). The people are not wholly contained within the "stupor" that has infected them; they are capable of appreciating and, as Teige later insists, of creating high-quality aesthetic work. But how to "tear them away" from the contagion of bourgeois and petit bourgeois culture?

At this point, Teige invokes "Lautréamont's prophecy that 'poetry will be made by all, not one.'" As he explains, "Poetry made by everyone

will also be heard by everyone, it will be within the reach of everyone, it will be for each and all: not only that, it will also be a fusion of the creator with the spectator" (Teige, *Marketplace* 63). Even if this moment is displaced to the future, Teige finds it "at least in traces" in the present, especially in the methods of surrealism, which "de-emphasize the notion of the professional author and the significance of special talent" and allow "armless Raphaels" to paint, developing "a general, non-professional creativity and poeticness" that can be put "in the hands of everybody, without training or specialization" (63). Once again, Teige puts forth a vision in which the end of (bourgeois) Art means the dispersion of creativity throughout social life.

Teige no longer calls this future aesthetic practice a new "folk art" as he had done in the early 1920s. But a close reading reveals that his new position is close to the old. He begins by describing what sounds very much like folk art: "On the extreme edge of the avant-garde, embryonic elements of a future art of the people are emerging" (Teige, *Marketplace* 64). Then he corrects himself: this "art of the people" is better called "non-specialist creativity," because "'folk art' will then only be an archaeological term" (64). Folk art as such is a thing of the past, but this is not because the principles of popular expression are disappearing; rather, since art itself "will no longer exist in its current forms," so too will "the folk" (*lid*) cease to exist as a separate sphere of society (64). Whether all artists will become folk artists, as Teige mused in 1921, or none will be, it makes little difference: in a classless society, art will be made by all of society the same way folk art was made by all of its denigrated and forgotten community. Until that day comes when art and poetry will be made by all, the overlooked creators should earn the attention of those who want to transform art and life; they have formed a "republic of unregistered individuals" (69) that cannot be identified with any specialized group or any single class, but subverts the social and aesthetic hierarchies that have excluded it from power and prestige. This "republic" has a history: it can be identified in the waves of creators left out of the history of great Art. And it can expand: into a "community that could not come into being in the space of the present," but "will come into being in time" (71).

It is in this context that Teige invokes the tradition of "revolutionary romanticism," represented by the more radical and more forgotten figures of romanticism and, later, by the *poètes maudits*. Because they have been excluded from the heights of Art, they have been able to develop their poetry freely, poetically, against the demands of the art market and capitalist ideology. In the same way, the "armless Raphaels" who bear the legacy of folk art are rescued from bourgeois culture by

the fact that they have been excluded from it, much as Rancière's "people" can redeem the *polis* because they are excluded from it (Rancière, *Disagreement*). Teige, like Rancière, begins from the premise that the people can create, that even the overworked proletariat has the freedom of night to write (Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*) or, for Teige, to enjoy all the sensuality of life. This is a first principle, not a last principle. The fate of the creating people remains open, in a society that is always changing.

6.

Many hold up the avant-garde as a movement of individualist artistic freedom against the imposed collectivity and folklorism of later socialist realism. Others, like Groys in *The Total Art of Stalinism*, criticize the avant-garde precisely for its collectivism—expressed in an authoritarian impulse to make the artist a general creator of social sensibilities. For Groys, the avant-garde's interest in the people can be explained by its will to transform the ordinary aspects of people's everyday life. With its cult of creation, the avant-garde appropriated for itself the role of the creator. Groys seems to assume one can only be a creator or the people, and never a bit of both.

My reading of the avant-garde, by contrast, suggests that it, like every art form, was shaped by a specific articulation of creator and public. And I propose the notion of "the folk" as a placeholder for that articulation. Rather than understanding "the folk" as a specific content, defined by predefined characteristics, we can understand it is a term that points to this relationship—between creator and public, between the artist and society—and which compels us to ask how an individual creator can represent anything collective at all.

There is no reason to deny that the avant-garde exhibited tendencies to elitism and authoritarianism. But it also exhibited democratic tendencies that cannot be reduced to the desire for individual artistic freedom. We see this not only in the most overtly collectivist activities, which often involved exclusive collectives of experienced artists (even if they developed methods that could be used by anyone). We also see this democratic tendency in the impulse to tear down the boundaries of art. The avant-garde artist was not so much a demiurgic creator, the sole creator of a new world, as an articulator among various creating subjects. In some ways, their role was like that of the psychoanalyst: they sought methods to draw out the popular imagination that society

had repressed. The notion of “new folk art” could serve as a referent for this moment of articulation, an attempt to give expression to an emerging social subject that was larger than any collective of artist-individuals.

The avant-garde was characterized by this contradiction between the desire to lead the people in a radical social-aesthetic transformation and the desire to follow the people as they took social-aesthetic creation into their own hands. Often, when the people were attracted by conservative culture, the avant-garde seemed to find itself too far ahead of the people; at other times, when the avant-garde found itself entranced by the allure of high art and expert poetics, it seemed, in its own terms, to fall behind the people that were more open to unpretentious cultural forms. But this was a process that did not end at one extreme or the other.

The avant-garde has been too often reduced to a moment in the supposedly inexorable forward development of the history of art, which textbooks show moving from innovation to innovation, from artist to artist, from “ism” to “ism.” Behind the constant innovation lay attempts to inscribe new work in alternative histories; behind the individual artists stood the people with whom the artist sought connection; behind the “isms” was concealed a succession of differing articulations between artists and the people whose aesthetic experience the artists hoped to influence and to express.

Folklore, too, has been too often reduced in the popular imagination to one or another style of peasant expression, usually associated with a paradigmatic national figure in a given national context. But the fundamental idea of folklore, the idea that aesthetic expression can be connected not only to individual artists or authors, but can also be connected to a collective figure with representational claims, which Anglophone political tradition calls “the people” and Anglophone aesthetic tradition calls “the folk,” and which Czech tradition calls simply *lid*—this idea is far suppler, more open to contestation and innovation, than is typically supposed. The avant-garde’s attachment to folklore, manifested in its experiments with disaggregating aesthetic practice from the institutions of Art and reconnecting art to one or another form of the people, shows folklore as an element of rapidly transforming modernity.

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Doba svobodnih žonglerjev: umetnost ljudstva in češka avantgarda

Ključne besede: češka književnost / avantgarda / folklor / popularna kultura / proletarska kultura / poetizem / Teige, Karel / Nezval, Vítězslav / Václavek, Bedřich

Razprava raziskuje zanimanje češke medvojne avantgarde za folkloro in popularno kulturo. Tako kot večina njenih mednarodnih sopotnikov je bila češka avantgarda prepričana, da so institucije, kot sta umetnost in literatura, izgubile svojo zgodovinsko veljavo, podobno kot kapitalistična družba in buržoazne predstave o »naciji« in »ljudstvu«. Hkrati se je intenzivno in dolgotrajno ukvarjala s kulturno dediščino marginaliziranih slojev družbe ter z možnostjo novih načinov izražanja kulturnih stališč množic – tako v tedanjem času zaostrenih družbenih bojov kot tudi v viziji prihodnje družbe, v kateri bi bilo odpravljeno tako razslojevanje na razrede kot tudi ločnica med umetniki-specialisti in nespecializiranim občinstvom oziroma potrošniki. Iskanje nove umetnosti ljudstva se je izrazilo predvsem v demonstrativnem oživljanju nizkih žanrov

pesnika Vítězslava Nezvala, pri predstavljanju cirkusa in ulične urbane kulture kot elementov »nove ljudske umetnosti« umetnika in teoretika Karla Teigeja ter v prizadevanju literarnega kritika Bedřicha Václavka, da bi sledil kroženju moderne poezije in pesmi, ki so postale del skupnega repertoarja nastajajočih razredov. Ta kompleksna prepletenost novega in starega, kot pokažem v prispevku, ponuja model za prefiguracijo novega sveta, ki bi lahko preživel tudi po koncu tega.

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The Explosive Nature and Apocalypse of the Russian Avant-Garde: Futurism vs. Bolshevism

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This article aims to examine the factors contributing to the “explosive” (in accordance with Juri Lotman’s theory) but the brief flourishing of the avant-garde in Russian culture. Furthermore, it seeks to demonstrate that the apocalyptic vision of old Russia encompassed not only societal transformation but also the demise of avant-garde poetics in post-revolutionary Russia. Paradoxically, while the early Soviet avant-garde presented itself as a revolutionary political and aesthetic movement, Bolsheviks maintained a dismissive attitude towards Futurists and the LEF group. In Literature and Revolution Leon Trotsky asserted that futurism is no less a product of the poetic past. This disconnect suggests divergent interpretations of “revolution” and “revolutionary” between Bolsheviks and Futurists. Boris Groys emphasizes that the October Revolution was more traditional than avant-garde aesthetics, positioning the avant-garde as counter-revolutionary art.

Keywords: Russian literature / October Revolution / post-revolutionary culture / avant-garde / futurism / Bolshevism / Lotman, Juri

Introduction

“The Russian people are a people of the end, and not of the intervening historical process, whereas humanistic culture does belong to the intervening historical process. ... The unexpected is always to be expected from them,” wrote the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev in his book *The Russian Idea* (*Russkaia ideia*) from 1946 (129, 1). He mentioned that Oswald Spengler was right to refer to Russia as an apocalyptic revolt against antiquity, against the perfect form and culture, and claimed that Russian people are directed “towards an end, ... towards the other world, and the finality of things” (14). That can be seen in the painting *Terror Antiquus* (1908) by Russian painter Leon Bakst, who

depicts the destruction of an ancient city and its inhabitants, the end of Atlantis. But Bakst's painting is both concrete and abstract and can be interpreted as an expression of the apocalyptic nature of the modern age.



Figure 1: Leon Bakst, *Terror Antiquus* (1908).

It was the Great October Socialist Revolution in 1917 that finally marked the end of the Russian imperial age, i.e., the destruction of everything that had gone before. As Andrei Sinyavsky explains in his book *Soviet Civilization: A Cultural History* (*Osnovy sovetskoi tsivilizatsii*, 2002), the Bolshevik Revolution marked the end of history. Even though the Russian Revolution overturned centuries of devastating feudalism, Sinyavsky compares the peculiar nature of the revolution to the apocalypse—the old order had to be destroyed and a brave new world, a new civilization, a new man had to be born: “The revolution’s watchword was ‘everything anew’” (7). He also points out that violence was almost sanctified: “The orchestrators of this drama—leaders and hangmen—acquire the traits of high priests. ... From here it is only a stone’s throw to the deification of the revolutionary dictator who has seized supreme power and applies violence. The very idea of violence and power can imbue communism and the revolution with a sacred, even mystical aura” (7).

Shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution, in the article “Spirits of the Russian Revolution” (“Dukhi russkoi revoliutsii,” 1918), Berdyaev asserts the same: “A terrible catastrophe has happened with Russia. It has fallen into a dark abyss” (1). According to Berdyaev, Russian revolutionaries were extremely radical: “The Russian revolutionaries wanted a worldwide turnabout, in which would be burnt away all the old world with its evil and darkness with its sanctities and values, and upon the ash-heap would be substituted a new and graceful life for all the people and for all peoples. ... The Russians however—are apocalyptic or nihilist, apocalyptic at the positive pole and nihilist at the negative polarity” (9, 6). In the works of many artists, the Bolshevik Revolution was compared to natural cataclysms, both among its opponents and advocates; in the poetry and prose created at that time, it was most often described as a flood, an earthquake, a strong wind, or fire, etc. In this article, I will try to explain (1) the apocalyptic discourse of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian avant-garde, which considered itself the leader of revolutionary literature and art, and (2) the apocalypse of the avant-garde that advocated, in the years after the Revolution, the death of old aesthetics.

According to Juri Lotman, “Russian culture realizes itself in the categories of explosion” (Lotman, *Culture* 173). What does that mean? It means that historical processes are unpredictable, and these unpredictable processes Lotman calls “explosions.” In the book *Culture and Explosion* (*Kultura i vzryv*, 1992), he contrasts explosive and gradual processes in history. While predictability is the distinctive feature of gradual processes, the explosion represents an interruption to time, a suspension of time, a reduction, a “zero of time.” I found that similar to Kazimir Malevich’s “zero of form,” his reduction to basic forms:

I have transformed myself *in the zero of form* and have fished myself out of the *rubbishy slough of academic art*. I have destroyed the ring of the horizon and got out of the circle of objects, the horizon ring that has imprisoned the artist and the forms of nature. This accursed ring, by continually revealing novelty after novelty, leads the artist away from the *aim of destruction*. (Malevich 118)

At the base of the Bolshevik revolution, just like the Russian avant-garde, lies the idea of zero time and an obsession with the future. Sinyavsky pointed out that it was as if history had ended, and a new heaven and a new earth began. It was the apocalypse without God.

The explosion makes the impossible possible. In the space of the explosion emerges a “cluster of unpredictable possibilities” (Lotman, *Culture* 135). The fall of the tsarist empire in Russia can be seen as what

Lotman calls an “explosion.” For Lotman, the explosion had the following connotations: restlessness, irreversibility, destruction. The explosion can be understood as a small apocalypse, which is why Lotman tried to metaphorically transfer it to cultural dynamics by identifying it with destruction. In accordance with Lotman’s view, the binary model belongs to Russia—Tsarist as well as Soviet Russia were binary structures. In binary historical structures, an explosion embraces the whole of social reality, while in the ternary system, which is typical of Western cultures,¹ an explosion does not lead to the total demolition of the existing order. In the binary model of development, every explosion drifts toward a complete destruction of the former because it is perceived as a new radical utopia. An old structure must be demolished in order to build in its ruins a brave new world. The October Revolution conceived itself in terms of the “unconditional destruction of existing developments and the apocalyptic generation of the new” (173), which was to be understood as a final and conclusive achievement.

Spitting out the past

Nevertheless, it is wrong to associate the explosion and the apocalypse with disaster only because every apocalypse is both negative and positive—it can be a possible source of change and novelty. In analyzing the historical process, Lotman emphasized the dialogue between the explosive and the gradual processes. In their article “The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture” (“Rol’ dual’nykh modelei

¹ According to Lotman, a ternary system is a combination of explosive and gradual processes, but unlike the binary social structures, explosions rarely penetrate all culture layers. Ternary models preserve some values from the past and that is why western European culture retained immutability in the process of change (Lotman even emphasized that immutability became a form of change): “In ternary social structures even the most powerful and deep explosions are not sufficient to encompass the entirety of the complex richness of social layers. The core structure can survive an explosion so powerful and catastrophic that its echo can be heard through all the levels of culture” (Lotman, *Culture* 166). Lotman provides a few examples of ternary structures, like the Napoleonic and Roman Empire: “Thus, for example, we see how the fall of the Napoleonic Empire, accompanied by real explosion in the spheres of politics, government, and culture in its widest sense, did not affect property on lands sold off during the revolution. ... It is also possible to point out that the Roman structure of municipal authority persisted despite numerous barbarian invasions and, whilst it has been transformed almost to the point of non-recognition, has, nevertheless, preserved its continuous succession to the present day” (172–173).

v dinamike russkoi kul'tury," 1977), Lotman and Boris Uspensky claimed that in Russian culture novelty does not arise as a result of development, but thanks to the eschatological change of everything. According to them, there are two models of building something new in Russian culture. One model of creating the "new" is by preserving the deep structure of the old culture, but in a modified form. The other model of forming the "new" is by making a radical change in the structure of the old culture or a break with preceding cultural codes. The new can be born if the old is turned upside down. However, Lotman and Uspensky emphasized a surprising paradox, suggesting that this mechanism, as a matter of fact, perpetually regenerates the old: "The 'new ways' not only incorporated the 'old ways' in a complex way, but also served as generator of the 'old ways' while subjectively considering itself as the complete opposite" (12). For example, the new Christian culture in Russia, which constituted itself as the negation of the old pagan culture, paradoxically functioned in practice as a powerful means for preserving the latter (as a sort of anti-culture).

The same mechanism was repeated in post-revolutionary Russia, which presented itself as a brave new and free world, liberated from despotic rule. At the end of the 1920s, a surprising paradox occurred—the past was still lying secretly under the banner of novelty. It seems to me that in a dualistic system, such as the Russian one, it is impossible to eliminate the ghosts of the past. Lotman suggests that the only way to overcome the past for Russia is by transitioning from dualistic to ternary models of the West. Those first ten post-revolutionary years, i.e., the entire cultural paradigm of the 1920s, were named Culture 1 by the architectural historian Vladimir Paperny, who examines the evolution of architecture in Soviet Russia, comparing two conflicting trends—Culture 1 and Culture 2. Culture 1 corresponds to a destructive, revolutionary tendency and lines up with the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s, while Culture 2 covers a more monumental, neoclassical tendency that lines up with socialist realism and Stalinist culture. Paperny applies 14 binary oppositions to describe not only the history of early Soviet architecture, but Soviet culture in general (including literature, visual art, and film). The avant-garde culture is best described by the following categories: it is the culture of the end, the culture of demolition, movement, verticality, and collectivity. Culture 1 of the 1920s carries within itself a certain duality because it is obsessed with the idea of creating something completely new and different that is conceived as a counterpoint to the old. Nevertheless, the revolutionary Culture 1 is much more a destructive than a creative culture, because

its main task is to destroy the old world to its very foundations. Only after it succeeds in doing so, the revolutionary culture can construct a new one on its ruins.

Sinyavsky, who served in Soviet prison camps following his trial in 1966 for publishing his work in the West, claims that Bolshevik culture was so radical in denying the past that almost everything that belonged to the old Russian culture was threatened or destroyed. The purpose was very clear—to make a New Soviet Man and a New Soviet society. It is not difficult to see that the same can be said about the Russian avant-garde movement and its attempt to create a new type of art and a new type of literature. While the Bolshevik Revolution wanted to wipe the old tsarist empire off the map, the Russian avant-garde wanted to wipe the old classical literature off the map. Russian futurism fully embraced the radicalism of the October Revolution. They are oriented towards the future, but for that it is necessary to abolish the past. Anna Lawton emphasized that in their manifestos, Russian futurists “declared hatred for the past, their iconoclastic fury, their debasement of Art, their rejection of Beauty” (Lawton 18). In the manifesto *Go to Hell! (Idite k chertu!)* from 1912, the futurists pointed out the absurdity of the classical literary heritage: “The appearance of the New poetry affected the decrepit practitioners of petty Russian literature who are still creeping along as might a white marble statue of Pushkin dancing the tango” (Burluk et al., *Go* 85). Therefore, they conclude: “Today we spit out the past that was stuck to our teeth” (86).

This will culminate in the manifesto *Slap in the Face of Public Taste (Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu)* published in the revolutionary 1917: “The past is too tight. The Academy and Pushkin are less intelligible than hieroglyphics. Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity” (Burluk et al., *Slap* 51). Velimir Khlebnikov—the most inventive, utopian, and radical poet of the Russian avant-garde—in his first book *Teacher and Student: A Conversation (Uchitel' i uchenik. Razgovor, 1912)*,² offered a mathematical calculation that predicted the cataclysm of the Russian Empire in the year 1917:

² This was the first edition of Khlebnikov's book, produced by the author at his own expense in May 1912, in a tiny run of 200 copies. The title page was illustrated by David Burluk, and even his drawing *The Dead Moon (Dokhlaiia luna)* can be perceived as destructive, as was the political manifesto *Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna!* written by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1911 against the immobility of classical culture and heritage.

Teacher: And what else have you discovered?

Student: You see, I keep thinking about the action of the future on the past. But given the weight of ancient books that keeps pressing down on humanity, is it even possible to conceive such matters? No, mortal, cast your eyes peacefully downward! Whatever happened to the great destroyers of books? Their waves are as shaky a footing as the dry land of ignorance!

Teacher: Anything else?

Student: Anything else? Yes! You see, what I wanted was to read the writing traced by destiny on the scroll of human affairs. ... I have discovered that in general a time period Z separates similar events: $Z = (365 + 48y)x$, where y can have a positive or negative value. ... The conquest of Egypt in 1250 corresponds to the fall of the kingdom of Pergamum in 133. The Polovtsians overran the Russian steppe in 1093, 1383 years after the fall of Samnium in 290. And in 534 the kingdom of the Vandals was subjugated. Should we not therefore expect some state to fall in 1917? (280–281, 284)

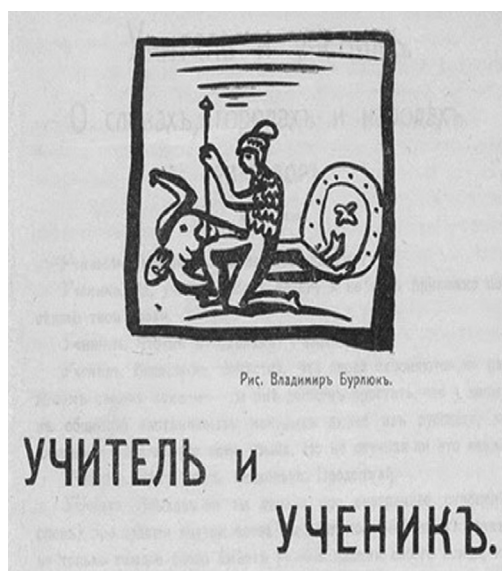


Figure 2: Khlebnikov's *Teacher and Student: A Conversation* (illustrated by David Burliuk).

Culture 1, which dominated after the October Revolution, is a mobile, future-oriented, and anti-hierarchic culture and therefore not a long-term paradigm. It is a culture of movement, collectivism, spreading, and running around, a dynamic culture of vagrancy and discontent, and as such it cannot offer the kind of stability that will be advocated by monolithic and totalitarian Culture 2, a past-oriented and hierarchic

culture of immobility and enclosure. Culture 1 hardly distinguishes a person from the crowd. The subject of every action (in literature, film, painting, or theatre) is a collective in constant motion. “WE fall, we rise ... together with the rhythm of movements—slowed and accelerated, running from us, past us, toward us, in a circle, or straight line, or ellipse, to the right and left, with plus and minus signs; movements bend, straighten, divide, break apart, multiply, shooting noiselessly through space. ... WE greet the ordered fantasy of movement,” writes Dziga Vertov in *We: Variant of a Manifesto* (*My. Variant manifesta*) from 1922 (9).

Paperny describes the post-revolutionary culture as a horizontal culture, i.e., a relatively free paradigm without firm borders (in opposition to a vertical Culture 2). For my study of post-revolutionary avant-garde poetics, the dominant characteristic of Paperny’s Culture 1 is its future-oriented nature; it is a culture of the new, of a beginning that replaces the traditional, conservative, classic, and old, but also the sentimental, spiritual, esoteric, and mystical (everything that was immanent in Russian modernism of the Silver Age). According to Lotman and Uspensky, the dominant principle in the development of Russian culture is the opposition of the old and the new in favor of the new. At the basis of the October Revolution and the avant-garde movement lies the same concept, the same opposition. Moreover, the post-revolutionary period, when the Soviet avant-garde took shape, was an example of critical but vital periods that Lotman was referring to in the book *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* (*Nepredskazuemye mekhanizmy kultury*, 2010): “These are critical periods when one has reached the end of old paths while new paths have yet to be determined. These are periods of choice and freedom—and simultaneously—of doubt and uncertainty. In such times, a clearly formulated question or even a profoundly experienced doubt turns out to be more productive than customary answers reiterating customary truths” (37).

The new, paraphrasing Lotman and Uspensky, was considered valuable, while the old (i.e., everything that was not avant-garde) was considered unnecessary and to be destroyed. In this way, both Russian classics and Russian non-avant-garde art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became a kind of anti-culture for the avant-garde (especially for Russian futurists). In my opinion, Sergei Eisenstein’s avant-garde *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosec “Potëmkin,”* 1925) embodies almost all the dominant elements of Culture 1: it shows the apocalypse of the old world and Eisenstein’s aggressive and dynamic montage of attractions turns into ecstasy and violence and enables a very

emotional ideological perception. The main protagonist is not an individual but the masses. *Battleship Potemkin*, a reenactment of the 1905 revolution against the Tsar, is structured as a chronicle, which means that it is not based on a traditional plot, but on a chronicle, that had to achieve the effect of drama. In this early phase, montage is equated to a revolutionary method of filmmaking that seeks to educate the struggling masses. The scene that resembles Eisenstein's avant-garde rhythmic montage is the Odessa Steps scene, in which the soldiers massacre civilians. This dramatized and hyperbolic scene shows the dynamic use of montage. Not only did Eisenstein's use of montage and quick edits modernize a medium that was static and slow before him, but he became trusted by the early Soviet state to craft movies that had to fit into Soviet propaganda. However, Eisenstein's future work failed to resonate under the rule of Stalin, who diminished Eisenstein's voice as a revolutionary filmmaker. Eisenstein's revolutionary aesthetic did not fit the rigid narrative of the 1930s.

The common ground of the Russian avant-garde styles was their revolutionary artistic and political character. What brought futurism and revolutionary utopia together was not the idea of art as a pure form and aesthetics (as advocated by the futurists at the beginning), but the energy of action and renewal. After the Revolution, that energy became social engagement, industrialization, electrification, and so on. Aesthetics, in other words, were replaced by propaganda and utilitarianism. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Osip Brik published a radical manifesto *The Artist and the Commune* (*Khudozhnik i kommuna*, 1919), in which he announced the death of bourgeois aesthetics and literary elitism. Brik calls them privileged parasites, who are not needed in the new age:

Their bourgeois art will perish. Artists who only know how to "create" and "serve beauty somewhere out there" will perish. ... The artist creates. For bourgeois society, this was enough. It was created by a small group of people, the rest were creatures. The title of creator gave the right to a privileged position. In the Commune everyone creates. To create, to be amateur, is the duty of every communard. The Commune does not require professional creators. (26)

A slap in the face of avant-garde taste

The post-revolutionary avant-garde calls for the birth of a completely new type of art and artist (not only in literature)—a faithful servant of the common good, intoxicated by revolutionary utilitarianism, a literary worker. The Bolsheviks advocated the same kind of social

utilitarianism, on which individual survival depended. The New Man is to some extent comparable to the New Artist, more precisely the New Writer as propagated by Mayakovsky and Brik: "Only working people will find a place in it. If artists do not want to share the fate of parasitic elements, they must prove their right to exist. The artist's work must be accurately defined and registered in the lists of the municipal labor exchange" (Brik 25). Vladimir Mayakovsky, the leading poet of the Russian Revolution, continued to deny classical heritage after the Revolution, as he did in the *Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, while supporting futurism as the only literary trend consonant with the times of the revolution. At the very end of the poem dedicated to Lenin ("Vladimir Ilich Lenin," 1924), he sang about the Revolution: "Long live the Revolution with speedy victory, / the greatest and justest of all the wars / ever fought in history!" (250). In the poem "150,000,000," he manifested Russia's new national culture and he apocalyptically calls for a complete upheaval. He is determined to kill the old. Such emotional discourse, full of ecstatic feelings—from enthusiasm to anger and despair—does not fit the rationalist discourse, characteristic of both the proletarian and constructivist culture of the 1920s.

Sinyavsky points out that Lenin and Trotsky sacrificed futurism, but that is not entirely true, because avant-garde was not to their taste. They never appreciated it. Although Mayakovsky was wholeheartedly for the Bolsheviks and tried to translate both the apocalyptic spirit and ideology of the Revolution into his poetry, Lenin's literary taste was quite classical. Russian classical literature was deeply rooted in Lenin, and the work of the revolutionary avant-garde was not to his taste. Evgeny Naumov also asserts that Lenin never understood Mayakovsky's poetry and confirmed Lenin's hostile attitude towards Mayakovsky's poetry and personality: "I remember," wrote the artist I. K. Parkhomenko, 'that when I ... mentioned one noisy poet of our days, Lenin said that he was raised by Nekrasov's poetry, and that he doesn't understand such noisy poets'" (Naumov 206). He reacted to Mayakovsky's "Our March" and "150,000,000" with hostility, calling the poem stupid and pretentious, although Mayakovsky was a vigorous spokesman for the October Revolution. Naumov emphasized that Lenin's distaste for futurism and Mayakovsky's poetry never changed, although he softened his stances about Mayakovsky.

The same aversion to futurism and Mayakovsky was shared by Leon Trotsky, who in *Literature and Revolution* (*Literatura i revoliutsia*, 1923) asserted that "Mayakovsky's works have no peak; they are not disciplined internally. The parts refuse to obey the whole. Each part

tries to be separate. It develops its own dynamics, without considering the welfare of the whole. That is why it is without entity or dynamics” (131). He accused them of being excessive, childish, and artistically weak. For Trotsky, futurism was not a truly revolutionary school but just a stylization. The Russian futurist poets, as he pointed out, caught the rhythm of the Revolution. However, instead of going to the factories as regular workers, they made a lot of noise in cafes and they threatened vaguely with their fists. Trotsky also pointed out that futurism is a product of the poetic past, of bourgeois Bohemia:

In the advance guard of literature, Futurism is no less a product of the poetic past than any other literary school of the present day. To say that Futurism has freed art of its thousand-year-old bonds of bourgeoisdom is to estimate thousands of years very cheaply. The call of the Futurists to break with the past, to do away with Pushkin, to liquidate tradition, etc., has meaning only insofar as it is addressed to the old literary caste, to the closed circle of the intelligentsia. In other words, it has meaning only as long as the Futurists are busy cutting the cord which binds them to the priests of bourgeois literary tradition. (115)

Indeed, the avant-garde should be interpreted as radical modernism, as Mark Lipovecky emphasized, which in no way can pretend to be mass art. The revolutionary Russian avant-garde, for Boris Groys, ended in 1917. For him, the only revolutionary avant-garde aesthetic was the pre-October artistic practice of the 1910s, which fought against the status quo and social and political structures, but not the post-October practice of the 1920s, which lost its criticism. Vladimir Mayakovsky’s poetics is the best example of that statement, which explains Lenin’s gradual acceptance of Mayakovsky. According to Umberto Eco, the avant-garde destroyed itself. After the apocalyptic birth of the new, as Lotman defines explosive processes in culture, the avant-garde asserts itself as communist literature. In other words, the Russian avant-garde, after 1917, was guilty of “operating on the same territory as the state,” as Groys already pointed out, but it did not succeed (Groys 35). The apocalyptic Culture 1, including avant-garde movements, was rejected at the end of the 1920s. Moreover, it was destroyed by the same mechanism which helped its rise in the first place. The explosive avant-garde path was replaced by a long-lasting, predictable, and past-oriented path—to use Lotman’s words.

Conclusion

This process can also be described using the Apollonian–Dionysian opposition popularized by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, 1872). While the Apollonian is associated with order, reason, measure, and structure, Dionysus was the Greek god of wine, revelry, and unbridled passion—the Earth-bound ecstasies. According to Nietzsche, the Dionysian impulse is best understood through an analogy to intoxication. Drunkenness is suggested as the pure Dionysian state. The Apollonian is rational, orderly, and critical, while the Dionysian is sensual, intoxicated, and chthonic. Nietzsche proceeded from the premise that in the Greek pantheon, the gods Apollo and Dionysus are opposite symbolic types of the heavenly and earthly principles. If the first is a sense of proportion, self-restraint, and freedom from wild impulses, then the second is excess, the violation of any measure, and the immeasurable. If sculpture is the most Apollonian art because of its pure form, music is the pure Dionysian art form. According to Walter F. Otto, Dionysus was connected to death too: “[H]e was known also as the raving god whose presence makes man mad and incites him to savagery and even to lust for blood. ... Dionysus was the god of the most blessed ecstasy and the most enraptured love. But he was also the persecuted god, the suffering and dying god, and all whom he loved, all who attended him, had to share his tragic fate” (Otto 49). Dionysus is connected with suffering and death, but also with violence. Like all revolutions (political or artistic), he comes violently, in an alarming manner, with the most urgent immediacy, and that is why his arrival inspires madness, ecstasy, and terror. He arrives to break the chains, to refresh, to renew, and so does the October Revolution and the Russian Soviet avant-garde. But drunkenness is not a long-lasting state.

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Eksplzivna narava in apokalipsa ruske avantgarde: futurizem proti boljševizmu

Ključne besede: ruska književnost / avantgarda / oktohrska revolucija / postrevolucionarna kultura / futurizem / boljševizem / Lotman, Jurij

Namen članka je preučiti dejavnike, ki so prispevali k »eksplzivnemu« (v skladu s teorijo Jurija Lotmana), a kratkotrajnemu razcvetu avantgarde v ruski kulturi. Poleg tega je cilj pokazati, da apokaliptična vizija stare Rusije ni vsebovala le družbene preobrazbe, temveč tudi propad avantgardne poetike v postrevolucionarni Rusiji. Paradoksalno je, da se je zgodnja sovjetska avantgarda predstavljala kot revolucionarno politično in umetniško gibanje, medtem ko so boljševiki do futuristov in skupine LEF zavzeli odklonilno stališče. Lev Trocki je v delu *Literatura in revolucija* trdil, da je futurizem produkt pesniške preteklosti. Ta razkorak nakazuje različne interpretacije pojmov »revolucija« in »revolucionarno« med boljševiki in futuristi. Boris Groys poudarja, da je bila oktohrska revolucija bolj tradicionalna kot avantgardna estetika, pri čemer označi avantgardo kot kontrarevolucionarno umetnost.

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The Decline of Atlantis and the Rise of the East: The “Revival in Flames” in A. N. Tolstoy’s *Aelita*

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*Before the official adoption of socialist realism, Soviet science fiction was characterized by a greater degree of flexibility. Therefore, its authors experimented with various thought-provoking cultural concepts. Such can be said about A. N. Tolstoy’s novel *Aelita*, initially published in 1923 with the subtitle *The Decline of Mars*. The novel undoubtedly belongs to the very top of the Soviet SF canon, although it achieved such fame only after the author redacted it to fit the official literary dogma. Tolstoy’s multi-layered modernist work concealed commentary on the contemporary socio-political situation in Europe and Russia—“a non-political apologetics of Russia,” as E. Tolstaya writes. The ideological background of the novel revolves around the ideas of the “Skifstvo” and “Smenovekhovstvo” movements. The idea of new “hot blood” from the East, from newly-formed Soviet Russia, meant to revive the declining Western civilization, is embodied both in the novel’s mystical and occult story about the revival of “softened” Martian civilization, and in typical SF-adventure plot where Soviet space travelers try to revitalize the dying planet—in the crucible of the Martian workers’ revolution. The goal of this article is to put the novel’s narrative pattern of “civilization’s apocalyptic revival” in the context of recurring mythologemes and ideologemes of European and Russian culture, but also in the context of Tolstoy’s own personal and literary journey.*

Keywords: Russian literature / science fiction / Tolstoy, Alexey Nikolayevich: *Aelita* / Smenovekhovstvo / Skifstvo / Atlantis / Mars / Western civilization / Soviet civilization

Introduction

Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy’s novel *Aelita*, first published in Moscow “thick” literary magazine *Krasnaya Nov* (1922–23), with the subtitle *The Decline of Mars*, is, according to Darko Suvin, “the first universally accepted masterpiece of Soviet science fiction” (Suvin 17). More

than that, over time, in a period when the genre's position in relation to "revolutionary literary principles" was still unclear, *Aelita* secured a firm spot in the Soviet science fiction canon, but only after Tolstoy redacted the initial version to fit the official literary dogma in 1937. Precisely because of that intervention, the novel started to be referred to as "science fiction for children and youth" by both literary critics and readers. That is why I will focus on the first version of the novel, which Hadil Halil considers a "philosophical and ideological panorama of the era from a certain angle" (Halil 55),¹ comparing it to other important works of the same period, such as Joyce's *Ulysses* (1920) and Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924). Halil emphasizes the complex structure and "intellectual spirit" of those works that appeared in "times of crisis for the West" (45). The initial subtitle of Tolstoy's novel, *The Decline of Mars*, points out precisely to such civilizational crisis, and is derived from the famous two-volume work by Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (1918, 1922). The novel thus enters into a polemic with Spengler's theory of civilization collapse. However, that is just one way the novel can fit in the "end of the world" paradigm. The novel itself is, at the same time, a landmark work that presents a turning point—a Change of Landmarks (Smena Vekh)—in Tolstoy's personal and literary life. It can thus be interpreted as the death of the old Tolstoy and the birth of the new one. By analyzing the novel itself, along with the author's other significant writings from the same period, I will try to reconstruct his "reckoning with the past" and shaping of his new literary image—an official one. This was a process which unfolded on the background of a broader process of "death of the old and birth of the new, Soviet Russia."

Change of Landmarks

At the end of 1921, Tolstoy wrote to his wife Natalya Krandievskaya: "I'm burning everything behind me—I need to be reborn" (Krandievskaja-Tolstaja 193). This dramatic sentence can symbolically be considered the beginning of Tolstoy's own "revival in flames," his own existential and creative transformation. The world he was leaving behind—Paris, then home to most of the Russian anti-Bolshevik intelligentsia—kept Tolstoy on the social periphery. He lacked prosperity, comfort, and appreciation. He again turned his head towards the East, where he came

¹ All the translations from Russian to English are mine.

from in 1919, escaping the Russian Civil War. In his novel *Aelita*, a melancholic and idealistic engineer Los is building a spaceship primarily for personal reasons—to escape from Earth to Mars:

It’s not right for me to be the first to fly to Mars. It’s not I who should penetrate the mysteries of the heavens. What will I find there? The horror within myself. My reason burns like a smoky flame over the blackest of abysses, where the body of love lies prostrate. The earth is poisoned by hatred and drenched in blood. There’s not long to wait until even reason is shaken—the only restraints on the monster. ... I am not a gifted designer, a new conquistador, not a bold man, not a daredevil: I am a coward, a fugitive, I am driven by hopeless despair. (Tolstoi 41)

After meeting the Martians, they fly him and his soldier companion, Gusev, across their land. The idyllic land of Azora opens up before their eyes:

The aircraft rose slightly. Moist sweet air blew against their faces and sounded in their ears. Azora spread out before them as a broad, shining plain. Divided by broad canals, covered with orange clumps of vegetation and bright yellow plains, Azora—the name means “Happiness”—seemed like those miniature springtime meadows which we saw in our dreams in our distant childhood. ... A marvelous land was Azora. (68–69)

However, not long after that, upon returning from the Martian capital, Los falls into despair:

“Yes, yes, yes,” said Los, “I am no longer on the earth. The earth has remained behind. Icy wastes, endless space. So far to go! I am in a new world. Well, certainly, but I am dead. That I know. My soul is still there. ... This is neither life nor death. My brain is alive, my body is alive. But I am cast out. This is it, this is it—hell.” (76)

After escaping war-ridden Russia, Tolstoy, for a moment, found himself in heaven in the beautiful land of Azora, that is—in Paris. However, that feeling did not last for long. Deprived of everything he got used to as a promising writer, deprived of the warmth of his homeland, he slowly faded out. The world around him, the Western civilization, looked like the land of the dead—like hell. Something had to be done.

In 1921, Berlin became a new center of Russian typography. That is where Tolstoy moved from Paris and found almost everything he had wished for, albeit in a very controversial manner. The beginning of his “revival” was marked by the establishment of the Soviet-financed Berlin newspaper *Nakanune* (*On the Eve*) in March 1922. The newspaper,

although it was primarily meant for businessmen, “actively conducted pro-Soviet propaganda, contributed to the disintegration of the white emigration, and defended the interests of the Soviet Republic in the international arena” (Škarenkov 73). The newspaper’s fortnightly “Literary Supplement” redactor was no other than Tolstoy, who by that time became close to the Russian émigré political movement *Smenovekhovstvo* (Change of Landmarks). Supporters of the movement (*Smenovekhovtsy*) abandoned their former conservative stances in favor of emerging Bolshevik authority, which, for them at the time, presented the only force capable of reviving the collapsing Russian great state:

Before asking to become “allies” of the Bolsheviks, almost all these people tried their luck in the camp of the White Guard counterrevolution. The defeat of the “White movement” and disappointment in it led them to an ideological crisis, which ended in a “change of landmarks.” They saw that there was no other choice and were forced to place all their hopes for the revival of Russia’s former might on the Bolsheviks. Life forced them to believe that only new forces emerging from the revolution could solve this problem. (Škarenkov 65)

At the beginning of 1920, while still in Paris, Tolstoy already showed signs of sympathy for this new Russian “fate.” In a letter to his old friend Aleksandr Yaschenko, he writes that he realized “something grandiose is happening—Russia is becoming formidable and strong again.” In the end, he adds: “But the only good thing is that now we have all already passed the time of pure destruction ... and we are entering a destructive-creative period of history. We will live to see the creative one” (qtd. in Flejšman et al. 106). We often encounter this kind of mystical thought in Tolstoy’s writings of this period, and most researchers agree that *Aelita* represents a sort of apotheosis of his mystical vision of “Changing Landmarks.” The space theme also fitted well with *Smenovekhovstvo*, as Elena Tolstaya points out:

The plot: a flight to Mars carried out from Soviet Russia would allow him to carry out (by the original idea of *Smenovekhovstvo* as a non-political movement) a non-political apologetics of Russia; a country with such a height of utopian dreams deserved a new, more serious attitude. This is how *Aelita*, his main Berlin project, was born. (Tolstaja, “Berlinskaja lazur”)

Smenovekhovtsy did not shy away from mysticism and utopian dreams either. As Leonid Shkarenkov puts it: “Discussions about the special mission of Russia, its providential role, mystical ideas about the Russian revolution, and commitment to the ‘historical idea of great

power’ brought the right-wing Smenovekhovtsy closer to the ideologists of Eurasianism—a new émigré religious and philosophical movement” (Škarenkov 66).

Eurasianism developed on the fundamentals of Skiftstvo (Scythianism), a Russian philosophical and political movement built around a mystical perception of the October Revolution, in which they saw the manifestation of a cleansing “Eastern” element and the beginning of the spiritual transformation of humanity. In Smenovekhovstvo circles, these ideas fell on particularly fertile ground and thus mixed with National Bolshevik ideology. Tolstaya writes that “[w]hile still in Berlin, Tolstoy became one of the main exponents of the National Bolshevik idea, embodying—sometimes in beautiful prose, as in *Aelita*—many of the ‘Scythian’ and ‘Eurasian’ sentiments that rejected European civilization” (Tolstaja, *Dëgot’* 437).² Mikhail Agursky in his *Ideology of National Bolshevism* also points out that “profound mysticism of Tolstoy himself” served as the “spiritual basis of his National Bolshevism” (Agurskij 90). The main question here is how were these mystical sentiments reflected in *Aelita*? Agursky sums up the novel’s “hidden meaning” very well:

[Tolstoy] transfers the plot to Mars, although everything he writes about it points out that it symbolizes the West, while Earth symbolizes Russia. Engineer Los (Tolstoy) flees to Mars in despair (he emigrates from Soviet Russia to the West). A typical Scythian, former Red Army soldier Gusev accompanies him. Los finds Mars-West in a state of decline, wrapped in a feeling of impending doom. The leader of the Martians, Tuskub (Spengler), tells the Martians: “[W]e will not save civilization, we will not even postpone its destruction, but we will give the world an opportunity to die calmly and with dignity” (120). Tuskub’s opponent, Gor (a Western communist), believes that Mars (the West) can be saved by Earth (Russia). For him, “men from the earth” (Russians) are “a healthy, young race ... with hot blood” (121). However, Tolstoy does not believe in Western communists. He believes that they, too, lack the will to live. ... He attributes the following words to the dying Gor: “Oh,

² Tolstoy thus represents a sort of focal point through which different movements I mention here, precisely National Bolshevism, Smenovekhovstvo, and Skiftstvo, shed their “curative” rays of light on uncertain Russian fate after the October Revolution. Like Nikolai Ustryalov, one of the pioneers of National Bolshevism and main ideologists of Smenovekhovstvo, Tolstoy tried to practically contribute to the revival of collapsed Russian state, i.e., through his editorial work in *Nakanune*, which at the same time meant that he took part in realization of political program with the same goal, supporting the Bolsheviks. The third hypostasis of this revival, and the one which opposed *the West* the most, was the spiritual and mystical one—Skiftstvo. Tolstoy, as a writer, was not immune to it, which is best evidenced by his connection with Andrei Bely, one of the main literary proponents of the movement (see Tolstaja, “Berlinskaja lazur”).

we missed our time, ... we should have loved life passionately and mercifully" (152). However, only Russians can love life like that. Scythian Gusev thinks only of annexing Mars to the RSFSR. (90)

Death and rebirth

To examine the complex structure of Tolstoy's novel more closely, we should look at two longer chapters in the middle of the novel, "Aelita's First" and "Second Narrative," which represent its ideological and polemic core. In them, Aelita tells Los and Gusev the story of her planet's legendary history. The whole story openly alludes to the aforementioned Spengler's theories, which, with their pessimism and fatalism, contested the prevailing progressivism of nineteenth-century Western society. Halil sums up Spengler's cyclical model of history—a "life cycle of civilizations"—in the following way:³

[T]he constructive, cultural, and creative process is replaced by a civilizational, decadent one; science is useless and destructive; culture is religious, civilization is irreligious; the post-civilizational future will be the beginning of a new prehistory, a movement from scratch. There is no single humanity, no single history, no progress, there is only a mournful cycle from culture to civilization, from life to death. (Halil 75)

One of the most controversial parts of Spengler's teaching is the theory that civilizations are completely isolated, each possessing its own unique, unchanging "soul." Aelita's "narratives" present the history of Mars precisely as a history of civilizational blending, and Los' and Gusev's journey to Mars is also evidence of a possible contact between civilizations. The same can be said about Tolstoy's variation of the myth about Atlantis. Tolstaya points out that Tolstoy "made the legend of the death of Atlantis, supposedly the ancestral home of the Martian elite, the intermediary part of the comparison between the modern West and the dying Mars" (Tolstaja, "Berlinskaja lazur"). The most obvious connection of the given story with the ideological and political context of the time, concretely with Scythianism and Eurasianism, is the fragment about a "storm from the east" that "advanced over Atlantis":

³ In *The Decline of the West*, Spengler presents a cyclical view of world history based on biological analogies. He argues that cultures are similar to organic entities that follow predictable life cycles (childhood, youth, maturity, and aging). All cultures thereby inevitably end in a final phase called "civilization," which represents both their most artificial state and their death.

On the high plains of Eastern Asia lived the powerful tribe of the Uchkurs, yellow-skinned and slant-eyed. ... The Uchkurs were sullen, truculent, and mad. (Tolstoi 107)

The Atlantians, effete and beautiful to see, were attired in gold with multi-colored feathers. The Uchkurs’ cavalry annihilated them. ... The war began. Its outcome was foregone: the Atlantians only wished to defend their overflowing wealth, while the nomads were possessed of a sacred greed and belief in their promised heritage. (109)

And so began the third and highest wave of civilization in Atlantis. Into the blood of numerous tribes—black, red, olive, and white—poured the dreamy, restless, intoxicated blood of the Asiatic nomads, star-worshippers, the descendants of Su Khutam Lu, the possessed. (110)

At the end of Aelita’s story about Atlantis, as in the myth, the civilization came to its catastrophic ending, sinking to the bottom of the sea. The “end of the world” came after a final clash between “Blacks” and “Whites,” two forces that arose from conflicting views of humanity’s “original sin”:

The original sin was that existence—the life of earth and its creatures—was comprehended as something which arose in the reason of man. Knowing the world, man knew only himself. Man was the essence, while the world was the fruit of his reason, his will, his dream, his ravings. Existence was only the consciousness of man, the Real, the I.

Such a conception of existence must lead to a situation where every man would assert that he is the only real, essential, authentic I, and that the rest of the world, and men, are his idea. The consequence was inevitable: a struggle for the real I, for the private personality, and the extermination of mankind as the product of one man’s dream—and contempt and loathing for existence as an evil apparition. (112)

The “Blacks” remained loyal to abstract “reason,” “wisdom,” and “knowledge.” They are the ones who eventually used it to destroy Atlantis and escape from Earth to Mars, where they violently planted their rotten seed into Martian civilization. However, “Whites” taught the following:

A sun’s ray falls on the earth, perishes, and is resurrected as the fruit of the earth—this is the fundamental law of life. The movement of the earth’s reason is the same—descent, sacrificial destruction, and resurrection in the flesh. The original sin—the isolation of Reason—may be destroyed by descent into sin, Reason must fall into flesh and pass through the living gates of death. These

gates are sex. The fall of Reason must be consummated through the power of Eros. (112–113)

The conflict between “Blacks” and “Whites” might lead the reader to see a connection with Russian civil war in it. Tolstoy’s departure from direct ideological and political allusions, however, might be seen through an interesting lens of its relation to two novels that “set the tradition for left-wing Russian science fiction” (Suvín 9)—*Red Star* (*Krasnaja zvezda*, 1908) and *Engineer Menni* (*Inženier Menni*, 1913) by Aleksandr Bogdanov. Both set on Mars, they portray the Martian society as an advanced, utopian one. Bogdanov, however, makes it a “red” utopia,⁴ while Tolstoy’s protagonists abandon the initial revolutionary dreams and leave the planet to die. We might even postulate that making the Earth a “Red Star,” instead of faraway, abstract Mars, reflects the shift from early “utopian dreams” of Russian science fiction to its later, more “down to earth” stage—a process in some way also reflected in literary fate of both authors, as Bogdanov’s novels “fell into disgrace and oblivion at the end of the 1920s when the author became *persona non grata* because of his role in the Proletkult organization and his proximity to Nikolai Bukharin” (Schwartz 418).

Conceptions embodied in the novel’s “Blacks” and “Whites” can also be put in the context of Tolstoy’s inner struggles and his “death and rebirth” in the early 1920s. Tolstaya thus writes that “[i]n *Aelita* the hypertrophy of reason and ancient culture is contrasted with the pressure of chaotic living life, but here the dead reason acts as a guardian, and the disastrous forces of life as the desired destroyer of the old world, promising rebirth” (Tolstaja, *Dëgot*’ 437). In her later book, she adds that “Tolstoy’s main idea in *Aelita* is the sterility of pure knowledge or spirit, the need for its descent into the flesh,” which in turn represents a “polemic with the fanatical rejection of everything that is not pure spirituality in the ideological work and life attitudes of Andrei Bely” (Tolstaja, “Berlinskaja lazur”).

Andrei Bely, a Russian symbolist poet, played a substantial role in Tolstoy’s existential and creative transformation and can be thought of as a representative of the “old world” that Tolstoy left behind, the one marked by literary experiments, cosmopolitanism, and “spirit.” Nevertheless, Tolstaya points out that “[d]espite his personal disagreement with Bely, his concept of Russia as the highest spiritual ascent in the midst of desperate poverty and devastation was ... one of the

⁴ It’s interesting that the Earth is the one called a “Red Star” in *Aelita* (Tolstoi 59, 93, 101, 165).

ideological impulses embodied in *Aelita*” (Tolstaja, “Berlinskaja lazur”). The fight between the spiritual and material (corporal, living life) already raged during Tolstoy’s *Smenovekhovstvo* period in Berlin, and one episode with Bely describes it perfectly. At the gathering of Russian emigrants organized in honor of Vladimir Nabokov in Berlin’s House of Arts, Tolstoy and Bely clashed over the movement’s influence on Russian emigrants:

“For God’s sake,” [Bely] said, shrugging his shoulders and gesticulating, “earlier they bared their teeth at us on the white fronts, they were going to shoot me, and now, when marauders are starting to adapt in Russia, they are singing praises! One of two things [will happen]: either the spirit will triumph, or matter; and here they want to take three-quarters of the matter, a quarter of the spirit, and create some kind of Homunculus in a retort ...”

“Boris Nikolayevich,” A. N. Tolstoy reassured him in a good-natured bass voice, “what does spirit have to do with it, when people are dying of hunger? Wagons with bread must be sent to the Samara province, and you [tell us]: ‘Spirit!’” (qtd. in Tolstaja, “Berlinskaja lazur”)

The whole episode was described and published in the newspaper *Nakanune* on 3 April 1922. Not long after that, on 14 April, Tolstoy published his famous “Open Letter to N. V. Tchaikovsky” (“Otkrytoe pis’mo N. V. Čajkovskomu”), the leader of Russian émigré anti-Bolshevik circles. The letter “had an extraordinary impact” (Tolstaja, *Dëgot’* 476), especially since it was published on Easter Day, thus creating another associative string connected with the author’s “death” and “rebirth.” In it, Tolstoy brings forth arguments in defense of the *Smenovekhovstvo* movement and calls for accepting the only true Russian government—the Bolsheviks. He ends his letter with the following paragraph:

As for the desired political life in Russia, I can say absolutely nothing about it: what is better for my homeland—a constituent assembly, a king, or something else? I am sure of only one thing, that the form of state power in Russia must now, after four years of revolution, grow from the Earth, from the very roots, be created by empirical, practical means. And in this, in the practical choice, both the wisdom of the people and their aspirations must be expressed. However, to begin again by applying to the gaping Russian wounds an abstract idea, nurtured in offices, is impossible. There has been too much blood, experiments, and vivisection. (Tolstoj 50)

We can again notice the dichotomy between practical and abstract. The letter can thus be considered a source of what Tolstaya calls “Tolstoy’s underlying myth,” the one which fully unveils itself in the novel:

“‘[T]he weight of life,’ the thirst for life—earth, matter, nature, concreteness, personality—are divine. On the contrary, the idea, spirit, hypertrophied mind, logical abstraction, syllogism, mechanical civilization—are agents of Satan” (Tolstaja, “Berlinskaja lazur”). However, this “myth” can be seen through the lens of another pair of characters in the novel, which in turn sheds new light on Tolstoy’s transformation as a writer and intellectual.

A thinker and a man of action

When queen Aelita asks Los, “Why did you leave the earth?” he answers with a reiteration of his previously mentioned thoughts: “The woman I loved died. ... Life for me became unbearable. I was alone, alone with myself. I had no strength to battle with despair and no desire to live. It takes courage to live on earth because everything is poisoned with hate. I’m a runaway and a coward” (Tolstoi 85).

Los, a melancholic engineer and dreamer, once again repents and realizes that the only way to love and happiness is through suffering. He has to abandon the “wise thoughts,” the ones that are deeply embedded in Aelita’s mind, in Martian, or should we say—Western civilization: “Longing in the blood, clouded reason, an unnecessary return to the old, old past. Longing in the blood—return to the gorges, to the flocks, to rear creatures so they can die, to bury them—then once more—longing, and a mother’s pains. Stupid, blind perpetuation of life” (Tolstoi 98).

Halil points out that “[i]t has been noted more than once that the ancient type of double hero is used in *Aelita*, and that heroes complement each other according to a principle that is also deeply traditional: contemplation and action” (Halil 92). Unsurprisingly, Halil and earlier researchers had Los and Gusev in mind. While Los is a great mind prone to melancholy and individualism, which are to some degree connected with “original sins” of Atlantic “Blacks,” current Martians and, of course, the West, Gusev is enthusiastic, active and unburdened by “big thoughts.” Halil adds that Gusev’s “ability to reflect the world in oneself simply, soundly and crudely, even in a reduced material way, is somehow connected with the integrity and happiness of a person” (94–95). Los confirms this:

Los leaped from the craft and crawled into the hatch next to the snoring Gusev. He felt better. This simple man had not betrayed his homeland, he had only flown over hill and dale to this seventh heaven where his only concern

was what he could seize to take home to Masha. He slept calmly, his conscience clear. (Tolstoi 62)

By introducing the motif of betrayal, Tolstoy once again underlines the repentant nature of the novel. That is why Los himself, as the plot advances, shows increasing sympathy towards Gusev—“an image of the Russian revolution” and a hero through which Tolstoy “conceptualizes Bolshevism” (Halil 99–100). A fragment from the beginning of the chapter “Los is Left Alone,” in my opinion, perfectly sums up the novel’s “Change of Landmarks” tone:

“It’s revolution, Mstislav Sergeevich. The whole city has been turned upside down. It’s wonderful!”

Gusev was standing in the library. In his usually sleepy eyes flickered bright and happy sparks. His nose was up, his mustache bristling. He thrust his hands deep into his belt.

“I have everything packed in the airship, food, and weapons. I got one of their guns. Get ready, throw away that book, and let’s go.” (Tolstoi 123–124)

“Throwing away the book and going,” acting, is exactly what new times and new world demanded from the Russian intellectual elite. Their guiding star was a Gusev-like character—a “real hero of his time” (qtd. in Baranov 104), as Dmitry Furmanov, author of one of the most famous Soviet novels *Chapaev* (1923), wrote in his review of *Aelita*. Korney Chukovsky, a writer and literary critic, sums up this new literary type perfectly:

And yet, *Aelita* is a superb work because it serves as a pedestal for Gusev. You don’t notice the plot or the other characters, you see only this monumental, enormous figure, blocking the entire horizon. Gusev is an image of the broadest generalizations brought to the dimensions of a national type. If a foreigner wants to understand what kind of people made our revolution, he should first of all be given this book. (Čukovskij 566)

On the other hand, Vsevolod Revich, a literary and film critic and the author of one of the most comprehensive works about Soviet science fiction *The Crossroads of Utopias* (*Perekrëstok utopij*, 1998), offers a completely opposite view. For him, “Gusev is a lumpen, a marginal.” “The revolution won thanks to the support of the Gusevs,” he adds, comparing Gusev to Bulgakov’s Sharikov from his famous anti-Bolshevik satire *Heart of the Dog* (*Sobache serdtse*, 1925): “In a certain sense, Gusev is also a new man, a homunculus of the revolution. The reactions of the Gusevs are predetermined and completely predictable, ... the reactions

of people brainwashed by class terminology.” Revič writes about Tolstoy primarily in a negative tone, calling him “an opportunist who quite consciously supported the crimes of the Stalinist regime.” He also agrees that *Aelita* represents his literary turning point, “the transition from pre-revolutionary Tolstoy to Soviet Tolstoy” (Revič).

Ian Christie, in his analysis of Iakov Protazanov’s very loose film adaptation of *Aelita* (1924), which he calls “more a critique than an adaptation” (Christie 82), comes to the conclusion that it “anticipated the direction of the novelist’s more serious and personal work, culminating in the third volume of *The Road to Calvary* [*Khozhdenie po mukam*, 1922–1941]” (91). In other words, the movie, whose plot is set primarily in Moscow, in the present time of “building a new society,” is a direct negation of everything experimental and “out of the box” that the novel itself offered. Although it is usually remembered for its incredible constructivist Martian sets by Isaac Rabinovich and Martian costumes by Aleksandra Ekster, which at the time sparked controversies (84), the movie, on the conceptual and content level, departed from everything that avant-garde art wanted to achieve within the emerging Soviet culture. The movie’s ending, as Andrew Horton sums it up, makes that perfectly clear: “Los rejects his bourgeois and individualistic personal project of building a spacecraft and decisively realizes he has to engage with social duty. Tearing the plans from their secret hiding place and thrusting them into the fire, he announces to Natasha, ‘We have different work to do’” (Horton 169).



Figure 1: Scene from the movie *Aelita*, “Enough fantasizing. Another real job awaits us all.”

Aelita—an incredibly layered and complex novel, disguised in the schematic and seductive dress of science fiction—can indeed be read as a metacommentary of Tolstoy’s “death and rebirth,” a paradigmatic individual fate shaped by the death of the old world and the birth of the new one. In the novel, the old world is represented by Atlantis, Mars, or “the West,” a civilization supposedly “dying” because of its “original sin”—relying on abstract thought, individualism, and “spirit.” However, *Aelita* was actually Tolstoy’s last breath of fresh air, the last goodbye to this old world of individual freedom. The old world he will soon crush, together with the whole pyramid of Soviet society—from the most ordinary citizen to Stalin himself—was the world of initial revolutionary dreams, of experimental enthusiasm of Russian avant-garde, of building a new world from the ashes of the old one. The new world will be a world of “Gusevs,” of crude corporality, of agency, and of building. However, it will not be built on ashes of the “old world,” but on ashes of each passing day, and each man and woman passed away in the struggle for a “bright future.” Tolstoy returned from the old world to this new one, as Los returned from Mars to Earth, but he probably knew that his love for his homeland would bring him suffering, inner suffering, because he knowingly gave up “the book” in order to help rebuild its former power, this time as an “empire of collective agency”:

Los worked at an industrial installation where he was constructing a universal power plant of the Martian type. It was assumed that his plant would revolutionize all the principles of Mechanics and solve all the problems of the world’s economic system.

Los worked incessantly without sparing himself, although he had little confidence in solving the tragedy of universal happiness, no matter what kind of machines could be invented. (Tolstoi 173)

Martian dreams

Slavoj Žižek writes that “[p]erhaps the most elementary hermeneutic test of the greatness of a work of art is its ability to survive being torn from its original context. In the case of truly great art, each epoch reinvents and rediscovers it” (Žižek 152). *Aelita*, in my opinion, is one such work.

Challenges that the contemporary Western world faces may be conceptualized through the novel’s underlying contrast, the one between abstract, logocentric, and individualistic thought, and the chaotic forces of “living life.” “First-world” countries, the ones which mainly belong

to the “Western world,” are faced with a sharp drop in birth rate, a consequence of highly-developed societies’ focus on more abstract ways of contributing to society than “descent into sin”—giving birth to a new human, a new body. Spenglerian motifs of Western civilization’s “decadent phase,” which precedes its downfall, are once again tickling the imagination of people who see the inevitable establishment of so-called New World Order, the one built on the ashes of the “Western empire.”

Thus, the new world is often imagined with its center somewhere in the East, mainly in China. China’s mentality and culture are a mystery for Westerners even today, which contributes to the creation of many fears about its possible influence on Western “way of life.” Russia, of course, also fits well in this contemporary “new hot blood from the East” scenario, more so as it represents a continuation of its messianic national mythology. This is only underscored by current military conflicts raging on the East–West line.

What is also incredibly similar to *Aelita*’s plot is a resurgence of “Martian dreams,” a sudden emergence of powerful private space industry entities, which even formed their own “ideology,” revolving around calls for multi-planetary humanity and “escaping the inevitable extinction on Earth.” The main target of these commercial space projects is once again—Mars.

Can the current “real-world scenario” be thought of as a reversal of *Aelita*’s hidden meaning? Is Earth now “the West” (it indeed is dominated by Western civilization), and Mars humanity’s new hope, a place that requires “building from scratch”—constructing the whole physical fundament of society, just like in 1920s Soviet Russia? Can this new “struggle” mean what returning from emigration meant for Tolstoy—putting away “the book,” logocentric and “spiritual” foundations of Western civilization in favor of “the body,” pure acting and “Eastern” collectivism, all in the name of the greater goal—a new society, a new humanity, its survival?

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Zaton Atlantide in vzpon Vzhoda: »preporod v plamenih« v romanu *Aelita* A. N. Tolstoja

Ključne besede: ruska književnost / znanstvena fantastika / Tolstoj, Aleksej Nikolajevič: *Aelita* / smenovehovstvo / skitstvo / Atlantida / Mars / zahodna civilizacija / sovjetska civilizacija

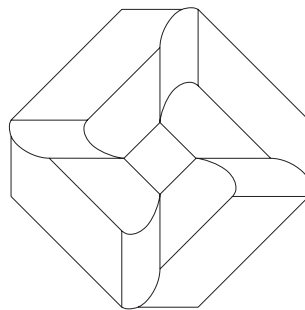
Pred razmahom socialističnega realizma je znanstvena fantastika v Sovjetski zvezi veljala za fleksibilen žanr, njeni predstavniki pa so eksperimentirali z različnimi kulturnimi koncepti, ki so spodbujali k razmisleku. To velja tudi za roman *Aelita* A. N. Tolstoja, ki je s podnaslovom *Zaton Marsa* prvič izšel leta 1923. Roman nedvomno sodi v sam vrh kanona sovjetske znanstvene fantastike, čeprav je zaslovel šele potem, ko ga je avtor priredil tako, da je ustrežal uradni literarni doktrini. V Tolstojevem večplastnem modernističnem delu se skriva komentar tedanje družbeno-politične situacije v Evropi in Rusiji – »nepolitična apologija Rusije«, kot je zapisala E. Tolstaja. Roman se v ideološkem smislu opira na ideje »skitstva« in »smenovehovstva«. Ideja nove »vroče krvi« z Vzhoda, iz novoustanovljene sovjetske Rusije, ki naj bi obudila propadajočo zahodno civilizacijo, se v romanu kaže tako skozi mistično in okultno pripoved o preporodu »zmehčane« marsovske civilizacije kot tudi skozi tipično znanstvenofantastično pustolovsko pripoved, v kateri sovjetski vesoljski popotniki poskušajo oživiti umirajoči planet – v žaru marsovske delavske revolucije. Cilj članka je umestiti narativni vzorec romana, ki temelji na »apokaliptičnem preporodu civilizacije«, v kontekst ponavljajočih se mitologemov in ideologemov evropske in ruske kulture, pa tudi v kontekst Tolstojevе osebnе in literarne poti.

1.01 Izvirni znanstveni članek / Original scientific article

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Razprave / *Articles*



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Po krajšem terminološkem premisleku o življenjepisju kot krovnem terminu za področje akademskega raziskovanja življenjskih zgodb v članku analiziram pet neliterarnih, v knjižni obliki in v slovenščini dostopnih življenjepisov Borisa Pahorja, slovenskega pisatelja z italijanskim državljanstvom. Njegova življenjska pot je postala predmet biografskega raziskovanja zlasti v zadnjih desetletjih, ko se je povečalo zanimanje za njegovo delo v Sloveniji in tujini. Poleg splošnega strukturnega in vsebinskega orisa posameznih biografij se v članku ukvarjam zlasti z vprašanji, koliko so ta dela konstruirana v kontekstu razumevanja položaja slovenske manjšine v Italiji, koliko gre v njih za samospoznavanje oziroma za razumevanje Drugega, kakšna je avtorska funkcija v njih in kakšne so njihove temeljne značilnosti z vidika življenjepisnih žanrov. Pri tem opisujem njihovo žanrsko hibridnost in ugotavljam, da je, z dvema izjemama, avtorska funkcija v njih dialogizirana, biografirani subjekt pa izmuzljiv in fluiden, čeprav dosleden v uveljavljanju svoje nacionalne identitete.

Ključne besede: življenjepisje / biografija / avtobiografija / Pahor, Boris / slovenska manjšina v Italiji / Zen, Alice / Orlić, Mila / Battocletti, Cristina / Rojc, Tatjana / Omerza, Igor

Uvod

Razmislek o Pahorjevih življenjepisih je mogoče vpeljati z ugotovitvijo, ki je danes tako v akademskem diskurzu kot zunaj njega skorajda obče mesto, in sicer, da je naša doba med drugim doba življenjskih zgodb. Srečati jih je mogoče v različnih oblikah in formatih ter v vseh medijih. Najdemo jih v potopisju in znanstvenih člankih, televizijskih oddajah in blogih, na družabnih omrežjih in v umetniških instalacijah, pa tudi na mnogih raziskovalnih področjih, kjer se celo zdi, da so samorefleksija, življenjepisje in pripovedovanje lastne življenjske zgodbe postali standardna orodja za sporočanje in posredovanje informacij. Poleg tega je naš čas tudi doba prič in pričevanj, saj so poročila iz prve roke, osebne izkušnje, življenjske menjave in razvoj osebnosti visoko ovrednoteni, cenjeni skoraj bolj od distanciranega reflektiranja. Seveda se zastavlja

vprašanje, kako se akademska stroka, v našem primeru literarna veda, sooča z vsem tem pripovedovanjem o življenjih.

Globalno gledano se je vzporedno s pravkar opisanim stanjem in hkrati kot odgovor nanj razvilo življenjepisje (termin je prevedenka angleškega *life writing*, v nemščini je v rabi izraz *Lebensbeschreibung*). Izraz *life writing* je na anglofonem področju, ki kljub svetovnemu razmahu tovrstnega pisanja trenutno še vedno нареkuje tempo raziskav, sicer začel nastopati povezano, torej kot dvodelna sintagma, že v sedemnajstem stoletju, bolj kontinuirano pa je v rabi od osemnajstega stoletja naprej; takrat je bil njegov pomen omejen na to, kar so pozneje poimenovali »biografija«. Podobno je tudi v slovenščini, saj je v SSKJ izraz »življenjepisje« definiran kot »popisovanje življenja kake osebe«, kar lahko označuje tudi biografijo, na spletu pa se, če v iskalnik vtipkamo to besedo, lahko prepričamo, da je pojem »življenjepisje« v rabi najmanj od srede devetnajstega stoletja naprej (našla sem ga npr. v *Drobtinica*h v pomenu množice biografij). Toda šele nekako od osemdesetih let dvajsetega stoletja je »življenjepisje« (*life writing*) v akademskih krogih začelo postajati priljubljeno poimenovanje za hitro razvijajoče se področje, ki proučuje in ustvarja najrazličnejše vrste in oblike izdelkov. Kot pojasnjuje Margaretta Jolly v uredniškem uvodu v svoje prelomno delo *Encyclopedia of Life Writing. Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, je ob soočenju z vso to množico vrst in oblik ugotovila, da mora v enciklopedijo zajeti ne le literarna dela, biografije oziroma življenjepise, avtobiografije, pisma in dnevnike, ampak »da je primerno pod ta krovni termin uvrstiti tudi življenjske zgodbe onstran zapisane oblike ter vključiti še pričevanje, artefakte, reminiscenco, osebno pripoved, vizualne umetnosti, fotografijo, film, ustno zgodovino in tako dalje« (xi). S svojo koncepcijo življenjepisja je torej opustila razcep med tekstno in netekstno zasnovanimi življenjskimi zgodbami, podobno kot je življenjepisje v svojem razvoju opustilo ločnico med refleksijo in ustvarjanjem, med teorijo in prakso.

Kot poroča Meg Jensen v uvodu v knjigo *Life Writing. The Spirit of the Age and the State of the Art*, ki jo je souredila z Jane Jordan, so nekatere univerze v Veliki Britaniji od devetdesetih let dalje na podlagi povečanega zanimanja za študij tega področja zaposlile pisatelje, režiserje, dramatik in druge kreativne praktike (npr. oglaševalce, novinarje, pesalce itd.) na oddelkih za humanistiko (xxvii–xxviii). Njihova prisotnost je še povečala zanimanje tako za analizo kot za ustvarjanje netekstnih ali neverbalnih življenjskih pripovedi. Ta val je spodbudil tudi zanimanje gospodarstva in industrije za praktično uporabnost življenjskih zgodb (npr. v oglaševanju) in dobil vladno financiranje, ki naj bi utrdilo

povezave in pospešilo transfer znanja med akademskimi institucijami in industrijo ter omogočilo večjo zaposljivost diplomantov. Raziskovalci in praktiki življenjskih pripovedi so se tako skupaj znašli pod pritiskom, da produktivno sodelujejo na doslej še neznanem terenu. Tako so npr. na Kingston University ustanovili Centre for Life Narratives (CLN). Podoben center, kjer med drugimi deluje tudi Margaretta Jolly, je Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research pri Univerzi v Sussexu; omeniti je mogoče še centra na King's Collegeu in v Oxfordu (Oxford Centre for Life Writing, OCLW). Center za preučevanje življenjepisa je tudi v Mainzu. Značilno je, da je raziskovalna težnja, ki je literarnoteoretsko in praktično orientirana, pod vplivom kulturnih študijev in pristopov, fokusiranih na identiteto, lingvistiko, spominske študije in tudi postkolonialne študije, močno zasenčila bolj historio-grafsko orientirano obravnavanje biografij. Termin »življenjepisje«, ki je v zgornjem smislu v slovenski literarni vedi bolj ali manj novota, torej označuje posebno več- in meddisciplinarno področje, ki se ukvarja z refleksijo in tudi ustvarjanjem življenjskih pripovedi (*life narratives*).

Na Slovenskem imamo pravzaprav spoštovanja vredno izročilo biografije, ki nam je npr. v desetletjih vztrajnega dela prav pod okriljem literarne stroke izdelala npr. *Slovenski biografski leksikon* (SBL) in *Primorski slovenski biografski leksikon* (PSBL), to prizadevanje pa se nadaljuje še danes s projektom *Novi slovenski biografski leksikon* (NSBL), ki izhaja knjižno pri ZRC SAZU. Toda primerljive vladne radodarnosti pri financiranju preučevanja tako široko razumljenega področja, kot jo izpričujejo npr. Britanci, se najbrž ni mogoče nadejati. Sicer pa ima tudi objavlanje in preučevanje pisem naših kulturnikov, literarnih ustvarjalcev in drugih zaslužnih Slovenk in Slovencev že dolgo trajno izročilo. A praktično ustvarjanje življenjskih pripovedi in kreativno pisanje na akademski ravni poučevanja je, kolikor vem, še bolj v povojih, morda je še najbolj prisotno na filoloških oddelkih. Kljub temu pa so bili nekateri koraki k zgoraj opisani platformi življenjepisja in interdisciplinarnemu obravnavanju področja življenjskih pripovedi v zadnjem času vendarle narejeni. V mislih imam avtobiografiji posvečeno tematsko številko revije *Jezik in slovtvo* iz leta 2008 (št. 3–4), ki jo je uredil Andrej Leben, in monografski zbornik *Avtobiografski diskurz. Teorija in praksa avtobiografije v literarni vedi, humanistiki in družboslovju* (2011), ki sva ga souredila Alenka Koron in Andrej Leben. V zborniku področje biografij sicer ni pokrito, ker sva si zaman prizadevala pritegniti k sodelovanju kakega kompetentnega poznavalca ali poznavalko biografij, literarnih in neliterarnih. Kljub temu so v njem zastopane stroke, ki so pri nas doslej že kaj prispevale na področju življenjskih pripovedi, kot so poleg

literarne vede še filozofija, klasična filologija, etnologija, folkloristika, zgodovina, socialno delo, ženske študije, migracijske študije, vsaj s po enim poglavjem. V tem delu je za življenjepisje vpeljan pojem »avtobiografski diskurz«. S tem terminom sva z Lebnom skušala zajeti tako pluralnost teoretskih in praktičnih raziskovalnih pristopov kot žanrsko in medijsko raznovrstnost avtobiografskega gradiva ter tako vključiti vse, kar zajemajo opisni izrazi, kot so »avtobiografsko pisanje«, »avtobiografski zapis«, »pisava«, »avtobiografsko dejanje« in »avtobiografska praksa«, ter vse tekstne vrste od poezije, refleksij, meditacij in izpovedi do spominov, dnevniških zapisov in pričevanj, pa tudi nenehno naraščajoče število novih žanrov, ki jih je mogoče združiti pod oznako življenjskih pripovedi. Vse doslej obstoječe, tradicijsko posredovano izrazje je sicer seveda še vedno potrebno in uporabno kot pripomoček za označevanje in opisovanje konkretnega gradiva.

Neliterarne javne in knjižne biografije oziroma avto/biografije Borisa Pahorja

In zdaj korak bliže k naslovnemu predmetu tega prispevka oziroma najprej k ustvarjalcu, ki ga v osrednjem slovenskem prostoru nekoliko bolje spoznavamo šele v našem tisočletju po zaslugi ponatisov in novih objav njegovih lastnih del in številnih metaliterarnih publikacij. Naj omenim samo nekatere vidnejše objave: *Poetika slovenstva. Družbeni in literarni opus Borisa Pahorja* (2011, uredila Barbara Pregelj in Krištof Jacek Kozak), *Pahoriana 2013. Prispevki z znanstvenega srečanja ob stoletnici Borisa Pahorja* (2014, uredil Zdravko Duša), *Sončna ura. Pisemska korespondenca Borisa Pahorja in Marije Žagar (1961–1996)* (2010, uredila Urška Perenič) in »Trst, to je tam, kjer je Boris Pahor« (2024, uredila Urška Perenič in Igor Grdina).

Boris Pahor (1913–2022), slovenski pisatelj z italijanskim državljanstvom, je dočakal skoraj sto devet let in se je še v visoki starosti z živahno ostrino svojega duha kritično odzival na aktualne razmere v slovenski in širši družbi in kulturi. Čeprav je bil dvojezičen, je svoje kratkoprozne tekste in romane z avtobiografsko podlago ter knjige dnevniških zapisov, esejev in pisem (vseh skupaj je več kot trideset) praktično brez izjeme – osrednja je v italijanščini izdano delo o Srečku Kosovelu – napisal v slovenščini. V italijanščino in številne druge evropske jezike ter esperanto so jih prevajali drugi. S temi prevodi se je mednarodna odmevnost Pahorjevih del močno povečala ter je danes za slovenskega avtorja nadvse razveseljiva. Mednarodni uspeh

pa ni prišel čez noč, ampak počasi in šele na jesen pisateljevega življenja (gl. npr. Pregelj in Kozak; Koron). Nanj in na v bistvu zapoznelo kanonizacijo Pahorjevih del v sistemu slovenske literarne kulture je vplivala vrsta subjektivnih in objektivnih, ideoloških in družbeno-zgodovinskih okoliščin, ki so krojile njegovo življenjsko zgodbo v burnem dvajsetem stoletju.

Naj na kratko povzamem nekatere glavne črte v Pahorjevi življenjski zgodbi. Po osnovnem šolanju in semenišču v Kopru se je izobraževal še na semenišču v Gorici, vendar je po dveh letih proti volji staršev izstopil iz njega. Leta 1940 je bil vpoklican v italijansko vojsko in je odpotoval v Libijo, kjer je dopisno opravil državno maturo. Pozneje je ob Gardskem jezeru delal kot prevajalec v taborišču za častnike jugoslovanske vojske in vmes študiral na univerzi v Padovi. Po kapitulaciji Italije leta 1943 se je vrnil v Trst in se tam pridružil Osvobodilni fronti. Bil je izdan in v začetku leta 1944 so ga aretirali domobranci. Interniran je bil v taboriščih Dachau, Natzweiler-Struthof, Dora-Mittelbau, Harzungen in Bergen-Belsen, kjer so ga ob koncu vojne skupaj s sojetniki osvobodili zavezniki. Več kot leto in pol se je nato zdravil zaradi tuberkuloze v francoskem zdravilišču Villiers-sur-Marne v bližini Pariza. Konec leta 1946 se je vrnil v Trst in naslednje leto doštudiral italijanistiko. Sprva se je preživiljal s pisateljskimi honorarji, a si je po poroki s Slovenko Radoslavo Premrl poiskal stalno zaposlitev kot profesor. Učil je na višjih srednjih šolah v Trstu do upokojitve leta 1975 in vmes pisal ter urejal oziroma sourejal literarne revije *Sidra*, *Tokovi* in *Zaliv*. Pisateljevanju je ostal zvest do visoke starosti.

Zgornji življenjepis se precej razlikuje od leksikonskega članka o pisateljevem življenju in delu, ki ga je leta 1985 napisal Martin Jevnikar za *Primorski slovenski biografski leksikon* in ga najdemo tudi na spletu. Je namreč brez podatkov o Pahorjevem pisateljskem in drugem delovanju ter brez navedbe virov, napisan na podlagi več drugih biografij, objavljenih knjižno ali na spletu. Predstavlja bolj ali manj znana dejstva in je samo ena od številnih možnih neliterarnih različic tako imenovanih javnih biografij, ki lahko nastanejo na podlagi vijugavih meandrov Pahorjeve življenjske zgodbe. Predelana v avtobiografski diskurz je ta življenjska zgodba, katere glavne teme so vseskozi antifašizem, slovenska nacionalna identiteta, ljubezen, izkušnja koncentracijskih taborišč in odpor do jugoslovanskega realsocialističnega totalitarizma, tako ali tako našla svoj avtentični izraz že v njegovi literaturi in esejistiki. Toda z visoko avtorjevo starostjo se je v tretjem tisočletju močno povečalo zanimanje biografov zanj. Doslej je izšlo že pet bolj ali manj zajetnih, knjižno objavljenih neliterarnih biografij o Borisu Pahorju, in tem delom, ki so vsa

dostopna v slovenščini in se uvrščajo v območje življenjepisa v zgoraj predstavljenem širokem pomenu, nameravam v svojem prispevku posvetiti posebno pozornost. V analizi teh petih publikacij me bo zanimalo, v kolikšni meri so bile konstruirane z mislijo na premoščanje raznovrstnih vrzeli v poznavanju etnične manjšine, njene zgodovine in kulture s strani večinske skupnosti. Zanimalo me bo še, koliko gre v njih za samospoznavanje ali razumevanje Drugega ter kakšna je v njih avtorska funkcija, pa tudi če so to bolj popularne avto/biografije ali pa jih morda kaže razlagati bolj socio-politično, kot medij kolektivnega spomina.

Prva knjiga *Boris Pahor. Biografia per immagini / Biografija v slikah* (2006) je dosledno dvojezična in večdelna ter po strukturi in žanrsko še najbližja intermedialni biografiji. Kot je v uvodu zapisala njena tržaška avtorica Alice Zen, je pobuda za delo prišla od Ivanke Hergold, ki ji je knjiga tudi posvečena. Predstavitveni uvod o pisatelju in njegovem delu je napisal Miran Košuta, sledita pa mu zbirka heterogenih zapisov, pričevanj in refleksij enaindvajsetih znanih osebnosti iz slovenske, slovenske manjšinske in italijanske kulture (med njimi so npr. Evgen Bavčar, Manlio Cecovini, Elvio Guagnini, Drago Jančar, Miran Košuta, Claudio Magris, Alojz Rebula, Tatjana Rojc, Patrizia Vascotto, Marta Verginella in drugi, vsi uvrščeni po abecednem zaporedju) ter Pahorjeva biografija v slikah. Fotografije so delo različnih avtorjev, urejene so večinoma kronološko in se številčno zgostijo proti novejšim časom. So bolj ali manj obsežno komentirane, včasih tudi s krajšim odlomkom iz pisateljevih del ali odlomkom iz intervjuja Alojza Rebule z njim. Delno se nanašajo na pisateljevo zasebno sfero, prevladujejo pa javna plat njegovega življenja in delovanja, stiki z vidnimi osebnostmi in pomembni javni dogodki. Temu glavnemu delu sledita še dvojezična biografija piscev zapisov in dvojezična, slikovno opremljena bibliografija Pahorjevih del v slovenščini in prevodih.

Delo *Trikrat ne. Spomini svobodnega človeka* (2011) je podpisal Boris Pahor v sodelovanju z Milo Orlič, kakor je navedeno na ovitku in na naslovnici. V italijanskem izvirniku *Tre volte no. Memorie di un uomo libero*, ki je izšel dve leti pred slovenskim prevodom, je ovitek podoben, na naslovnici pa je kot avtor naveden samo pisatelj. V pribesedilju je Pahor knjigo posvetil svoji ženi Radoslavi. Žanrsko je knjiga označena kot spomini, strukturirana pa je kot intervju in vsako poglavje je posebej naslovljeno in podnaslovljeno. Pred intervjujem stoji na začetku knjige kot prvo poglavje krajši Pahorjev publicistični tekst, ki kritično polemizira s selektivnim italijanskim spominjanjem na grozote fojb in pobojev v Italiji brez poznavanja fašizma in njegovih zločinov nad Slovenci. Poglavja v petdelnem intervjuju kronološko sledijo glavnim

postajam pisateljevega življenja in jih občasno ilustrirajo z odlomki iz njegovih literarnih besedil, ki jih Pahor včasih še sam komentira in razlaga. V poglavju »Vrnitev v življenje« s podnaslovom »Ljubezen, kultura in prva poveljna leta« je npr. besedilo strukturirano takole:

Glavni junak mojega romana *Spopad s pomladjo* podoživlja moje izkustvo deportiranca, ki začne zopet verjeti v življenje s pomočjo mladega dekleta, ki sprejme vez, čeprav je stanje mogoče primerjati z razbitino, ki jo morje naplavi po brodolomu.

Samo ljubezen nas lahko reši notranjega poloma. Ostajajo nam seveda sence spomina, ki se zdaj umaknejo, zdaj napadejo, vendar se ljubezni posreči, da se vzdigne nad njimi kot lok svetlobe in kdaj tudi kot vir ustvarjalnosti.

(Iz romana *Spopad s pomladjo*)

Od takrat je bila ljubezen v središču mojega emotivnega in intelektualnega sveta. S pomočjo ljubezni sem spoznal vlogo in razumel tudi pomen telesa. Ne mislim samo na biološki aspekt, marveč na spoštovanje telesnosti in na občutek groze pred kakršnim koli načinom iznakaženosti. Zaradi tega v romanu *Zibelka sveta* pride do globokega razumevanja med bivšim deportirancem in dekletom, ki ga je oče posiljeval. (Pahor in Orlič, *Trikrat ne* 8)

V diskurz pisateljevih odgovorov so poleg citatov iz Pahorjevih del vloženi tudi navedki iz del drugih avtorjev, npr. Umberta Saba, Srečka Kosovela, Edvarda Kocbeka, slednjega predvsem v zadnjem poglavju, naslovljenem »Neuvrščeni pisatelj« in podnaslovljenem »Tretji ne«. Knjiga v prevodu ne vsebuje fotografskega gradiva, medtem ko ima v izvirniku nekje na sredini osem strani fotografskega gradiva iz pisateljevega življenja, pač pa imata obe različici na koncu dodano spremno besedo hrvaške zgodovinarke Mile Orlič, soavtorice intervjuja. Besedilo je zelo diskretno do intimnih platí Pahorjevega življenja in več pozornosti posveča Pahorjevemu nacionalnemu in političnemu angažmaju. Ta dva sta bistveno zaznamovana z njegovo življenjsko usodo in pripadnostjo zatiranemu narodu, pa vendar pisatelj uteleša intelektualca ob etnični in državni meji in spregovarja v svojih literarnih delih in ostalem pisanju mnogo širšemu občinstvu kot zgolj svoji, torej slovenski nacionalni skupnosti. Kot pričevalec o grozljivih izkušnjah totalitarizmov dvajsetega stoletja, ki je izrekel trikrat ne – fašizmu, nacizmu in jugoslovanskemu komunizmu –, Pahor opravlja pomembno vlogo transmisije, prenosa spomina med različnimi generacijami in kulturami. Med tistimi, ki so popisovali življenje v nacističnih koncentracijskih taboriščih, pa je poseben v tem, da je osvetlil izkušnjo tako imenovanih rdečih trikotnikov, to je političnih zapornikov, meni Orlič (116).

Delo kot celota se zdi z žanrskega vidika nekakšen hibrid. Čeprav je strukturirano kot intervju in v pribesedilju označeno kot spomini, bi bilo spričo dialoške avtorske funkcije zanj mogoče uporabiti tudi termin »avto/biografija«, upoštevajoč, da gre za termin, ki naglašava podobnosti obeh žanrov, avtobiografije in biografije, saj se ti še najbolj razlikujeta glede na pozicijo govorca oziroma pisca: avtobiografija je retrospektivna pripoved osebe o lastnem življenju, biografija pripoved o življenju neke (največkrat historično overjene, preverljive) osebe, govori ali piše pa jo nekdo drug oziroma tretja oseba, kot to definira nemški literarnovedni priročnik (Holdenried 37). Termin »avto/biografija« je v življenjepise vpeljala sociologinja Liz Stanley (1992), da bi naglasila vpletenost raziskovalca življenja neke osebe v nastajanje življenjepisa oziroma v nastalo delo. Z njim je nekako v duhu časa spodbijala upravičenost delitve na jaz in drugi ter javno in zasebno, saj je avto/biografski jaz družbeno umeščeni situacijski jaz. V jazu je vedno soudeležen drugi in tudi samozavedanje vedno vključuje interakcijo z drugim, ki ima sicer lahko različne podobe, lahko je posplošeni drugi, posameznik ali skupina. Poleg tega mnoge avtobiografije zapisujejo tudi biografije drugih ljudi; biografija drugega oziroma drugih vpliva na jazovo oziroma avtorjevo avtobiografijo, zasebna oblika pisanja pa pogosto eksplicitno naslavlja javnost.

Tretja knjiga o Pahorju *Nikogaršnji sin. Avtobiografija brez meja* (2023) je v pribesedilju avtorsko in žanrsko najbolj intrigantna, prav gotovo zaradi knjigotrških namer italijanske založbe, ki je izvirnik *Figlio di nessuno. Un'autobiografia senza frontiere* prvič objavila leta 2012. Na ovitku je v obeh izdajah, slovenski in italijanski, z velikimi črkami naveden kot prvi avtor Boris Pahor, vendar je dodano soavtorstvo: »s« Cristino Battocletti. Njeno ime na ovitku je v izvirniku izpisano z enako velikimi črkami, česar prevod ni ohranil in so črke manjše, podnaslov pa označuje delo kot *Avtobiografijo brez meja*, kar lahko beremo dvopomensko, kot vabilo k nekoliko voajerističnemu branju ali pa branju za vse, ki jih zanima manjšinski pisatelj onkraj preprek, ki jih postavljajo npr. državne, jezikovne ali kulturne meje. Uvodno natisnjeno povabilo bralcem v italijanskem izvirniku pojasnjuje naslov: fašistična Italija je Slovence četrto stoletja zaničljivo obravnavala kot nikogaršnje sinove, poleg tega pa bralcem res obeta spomine in iskren avtoportret ter pripoved tako o intelektualnih strasteh kot telesnih ljubezenskih razmerjih avtorja. V kratki uvodni predstavitvi pisatelja italijanskim bralcem je delo spet označeno za njegovo prvo avtobiografijo. Knjiga je tokrat posvečena spominu žrtev fašizma, nacizma in komunizma in ne njegovi ženi Radoslavi, kot je bilo običajno, dokler je še živela.

Homodiegetska oziroma avtodiegetska pripoved pisatelja dejansko ne kaže na biografski projekt novinarko Cristine Battocletti, saj se je ta kot *ghost writer*, vsaj navzven se tako zdi, umaknila na spremne strani na konec knjige, kamor so uvrščene tudi od avtorja komentirane fotografije, ki pa so večinoma znane že iz prejšnjih dveh obravnavanih del. Toda povedano velja za prvo izdajo italijanskega izvirnika. Drugo, posthumno izdajo, po kateri je nastal tudi slovenski prevod, je Battocletti dopolnila: pod naslovom »Barviti svet« je dodala nekaj krajših uvodnih poglavij, v katerih pisatelj spet v prvi slovnični osebi spregovarja o temah, ki so bile zanj bistvenega, tako rekoč življenjskega pomena. Prevodu je dodan še predgovor s pojasnili o genezi publikacije in njenih vsebinah in slogu izpod peresa pisateljevega sina Adrijana Pahorja. Podatki o sestavi knjige delno že sami na sebi opozarjajo, da je zaradi vključitve »Barvitega sveta« na začetek dela kronološko zaporedje življenjskih postaj zamenjalo svobodnejše gibanje po časovni osi. »Avtobiografija brez meja« nato uvaja v pisateljevo osebno zgodbo, otroštvo in potem v historična pričevanja o slovenski kulturni prisotnosti v Trstu, s katero je skrajno grobo obračunaval fašizem. Dogodki iz avtorjevega življenja potekajo nato spet kronološko, v sedmem poglavju z naslovom »Vrnitev v Trst« pa iz povojnega časa seže nazaj v medvojno obdobje obsežna analepsa o prvi pravi ljubezni, razmerju s poročeno žensko prav v času, ko je bil njen mož v zaporu; to razmerje je prekinila Pahorjeva internacija. V tem in v naslednjem poglavju, kjer je popisani zakon z Radoslavo in obdobje pisateljevanja, je govor tudi o drugih njegovih zvezah z ženskami, ki jih ostale biografije ne omenjajo, in o izven zakonskem sinu, prolepe pa osvetljujejo konce teh zvez. Predzadnje poglavje se iz intimne sfere spet vrne k političnim temam in Pahorjevemu angažmaju za Kocbekovo javno razkritje povojnega poboja več kot 10.000 domobrancev v Sloveniji, ki je imelo izredno neprijetne posledice za oba pisatelja. Zadnje poglavje je zapisano kot testament mladim, da fašistični zločini nad Slovenci in drugimi Slovani ne bi bili pozabljeni in da bi vse manjšinske jezikovne skupnosti v Italiji in drugod v Evropi dočakale zaščito, ki jim pripada po evropski zakonodaji. Odlomkov iz Pahorjevih literarnih besedil v tem delu ne najdemo.

V dodatek je Battocletti umestila poglavje, namenjeno italijanskim bralcem, v katerem spregovarja o Pahorjevem literarnem obzorju in oriše njegovo pot do mednarodnega uspeha, in še »Prolog prijateljstva«, kjer med drugim piše o svojem prvem zasebnem srečanju s Pahorjem in hvaležnosti, da ji je pisatelj kot prvi omogočil vpogled v svojo intimo. Tako kot že iz predgovora pisateljevega sina Adrijana je tudi iz dodatka mogoče videti, da soavtorica k »projektu«, kot imenuje skupno knjigo,

ni prispevala le sorazmerno popularno intoniranega biografskega sklepa, za katerega so značilni sintetiziranje, intimiziranje, personaliziranje (zvajanje na osebno raven), anekdotiziranje itn. (gl. Porombka), ampak da je bistveno vplivala tudi na naracijo avto/biografije. Po drugi strani pa ima delo s svojimi etičnimi in pedagoškimi poudarki celo nekatere poteze kolektivne avto/biografije (gl. Gallus), saj osvetljuje usodo cele družbene skupnosti, slovenske manjšine, ukleščene v zgodovinska dogajanja.

Avtorica naslednje knjige z naslovom *Tako sem živel. Stoletje Borisa Pahorja* (2013) je literarna znanstvenica Tatjana Rojc, tudi sama pripadnica slovenske manjšine v Trstu.¹ V predgovoru Rojc sporoča, da je delo nastalo na podlagi radijskih pogovorov s pisateljem, ki jih je nadgradila, dodala odlomke iz njegovih del ter priskrbela fotografije in obsežno dokumentarno gradivo. Omeni pa tudi zgradbo dela, v katerem se izmenjujeta običajni in modri tisk. V običajnem se po njenem mnenju izrisuje Pahorjev portret, avtodiegetski diskurz pa dopolnjujejo modro tiskani odlomki iz njegovih literarnih del. Pri tem je moteče, da nekateri odlomki iz Pahorjevih del nimajo sklica, podatka, od kod so vzeti. Običajni tisk pa je, kot lahko ugotovimo, avtoričin heterodiegetski diskurz, ki tokrat meri predvsem na slovenskega bralca in tako rekoč predstavlja Pahorja in njegov tržaški kontekst širši slovenski javnosti. Funkcije avtoričinega diskurza so različne; med drugim vzdržuje kontinuiteto pripovedi, čustveno komentira povedano in včasih preide tudi v avtodiegetski diskurz, napoveduje izbrane odlomke in jih tolmači ter včasih prekinja linearno napredujočo pripoved s svobodnejšimi skoki pripovednega časa. Odlomek z začetka knjige, ki sicer obravnava Pahorjevo otroštvo ob viharju prve svetovne vojne, se npr. glasi:

[Črni tisk:] Kako se Pahor spominja svoje mame?

[Modri tisk:] Ker se nisem poročil cerkveno, je bilo to zanje zelo hudo. Ko je bila v bolnišnici, nismo niti sumili, da je to tako hudo, in nam je dr. Mašerova, ki jo je obiskala, povedala, da je dobila pljučnico čez noč po operaciji in je nenadoma umrla. Ko je bila bolna, je namreč pričakovala, da bom to uredil, da jo bom zadovoljil s cerkveno poroko, kakor je želela, jaz pa nisem mogel lagati, ker sem vedel, da ne bom mogel držati besede, tako da me je neprijazno gledala tisti dan, ko sem šel proč od nje. Pozneje sem se večkrat spomnil na to in stvari nisem znal sprejeti nekoliko bolj preprosto in priznam, da mi je žal, da je imela vtis o sinu, ki je bil drugačen od tega, kar si je ona želela.

¹ Italijanski prevod knjige je naslovljen *Così ho vissuto. Biografia di un secolo*, kot avtorja pa sta navedena oba, Rojc in Pahor, slednji celo na prvem mestu.

[Črni tisk:] Umrla je leta 1956. Ležala je v mrliški vežici na ulici Pietà. Pokopana je v družinski grobnici na pokopališču pri Sv. Ani. Za mrtvaškim vozom sta šla drug ob drugem Boris in njegov oče, presenetljivo podobna drug drugemu. In na velikem dvojnem vencu, na vencu iz nageljev in kal, je bil trak z napisom: *Dragi ženi. Dragi mami.* Spletle so ga rožnarice na Rusem mostu. (Rojc 43)

Podobno še en odlomek iz poglavja »Vagabond«, ki govori o pisateljevih študijskih letih, prav tako sopostavlja različne časovne ravni:

[Črni tisk:] Po maturi na koprskem semenišču se je Pahor odločil, da bo nadaljeval študij teologije v Gorici. Tudi tu je bil stik z mestom zelo skromen. Stavba, znana kot Sedejevo semenišče, kjer je bil goriški konvikt, je danes sedež tržaške univerze. Stoji na vrhu griča, da se vidi daleč naokoli. Prav ob nekdanjem mejnem prehodu. Vendar ta Pahorjeva odrezanost od meščanske srenje je izvirala že iz njegovih tržaških let in se je v Kopru in Gorici samo še stopnjevala, saj sam pripoveduje:

[Modri tisk:] Nobenih stikov z meščani nisem imel, tudi ker nas je naša mama vzgajala v skladu z Marijino družbo, da smo bili vezani na to življenje, ki, poudarjam, ni bilo samo versko, ampak tudi družabno, saj smo hodili tudi na božje poti, ki pa so bile bolj izlet kakor božja pot. Potem se je življenje nadaljevalo v zavodih v Kopru in Gorici, tako da sem bil ločen od pravega mestnega življenja, dokler nisem izstopil. Ko sem spoznal mlade, ki so živeli v mestu ali pa tudi zunaj njega, sem dve leti preživel drugače. Z Nevenko Vugovo, recimo, ki je bila iz Koprive na Krasu, tako kot Milko Matičetov, in je bila univerzitetna študentka, vpisana na literaturo v Padovi kakor jaz. Dobivali smo se v Trstu ali pa smo šli zvečer skupaj v Koprivo. Igrala je na harmoniko in smo imeli kulturno-harmonikarski sestanek. In tako so se na Krasu rodile naše *Brinjevke*, pri čemer je pomagal Šček. To je bila zelo lepa revija, napisana na roko, napisal jo je Matičetov. Tiskana je bila na kamen, to se pravi litotisk. Pri meni se je potem rodila druga revija, prav zaradi teh srečanj. Tako smo, lahko rečemo kvalitetno, reševali to ubogo slovenstvo. (74)

Toda v modri tisk so vpleteni tudi odlomki iz del drugih avtorjev in zgodovinskih osebnosti. Tako se torej pisatelj portret kontekstualizira. Knjiga očitno niha med znanstveno in literarizirano biografijo. Dobre štiri petine dela brez posebnega intimiziranja osvetljujejo avtorjeva mlajša leta do poroke z Radoslavo. V razkrivanju pisateljevega zasebnega življenja so precej bolj diskretne od pisateljeve avto/biografije z Battocletti. Šele zadnja štiri poglavja so posvečena javnemu političnemu in kulturnemu delovanju, pisateljevanju, urejanju revij, delovanju v UFCE (Union Fédéraliste des Communautés Ethniques Européennes, Zvezno združenje evropskih narodnih skupnosti), stikom s Kocbekom

in razkritju povojnih pobojev ter pripovedi o Pahorjevem mednarodnem pisateljskem uspehu, ki je vzvratno spodbudil tudi širše priznanje v Sloveniji. Fotografskega gradiva je največ doslej; razporejeno je v tekst ali ob njem in na kratko komentirano. Podobno kot *Trikrat ne* je tudi to delo – ob katerem je izšla še publikacija *Edvard Kocbek. Pričevalec našega časa*, ki vsebuje ponatis tiste številke *Zaliva*, v kateri je med drugimi Pahorjevimi spisi in razpravo Alojza Rebule o Kocbekovi *Listini* izšel tudi šestindvajset strani dolg intervju s Kocbekom o pobjih domobrancev, zaradi katerega sta bila oba pisca šikanirana s strani jugoslovanskih oblasti – svojevrsten žanrski hibrid. Količina modrega tiska s pisateljevimi avtodiegetskimi odlomki iz lastnih del proti koncu močno narašča in omogoča, da ob njem pomislimo na soavtorstvo in avto/biografijo.

Po nizu štirih knjig, ki so vse nastale v sodelovanju z ženskami, kar ni zanemarljiv podatek, in so dostopne tudi v italijanščini, zadnjo z naslovom *Boris Pahor. V žrelu Udbe* (2017) podpisuje Igor Omerza. Knjiga se močno razlikuje od vseh prejšnjih, saj zajema le izsek iz Pahorjeve življenjske poti in ne citira iz pisateljevih literarnih in drugih besedil, a je s svojimi več kot šeststo stranmi vendarle obsežnejša od vsake med njimi. Njena specifičnost je tokrat socio-politično priostrena zgodovinska osvetlitev, ki je daleč od intimiziranja, personaliziranja, psihologiziranja in singulariziranja Pahorjeve osebnosti in njegove vloge v izbranem historičnem obdobju; ponazarja jo že podnaslov *V žrelu Udbe*, Omerza pa jo razkriva v vseh petih delih knjige. Ti so strukturirani kronološko. S citati arhivskih virov nekdanj tajnih poročil, analiz in ocen politične policije med letoma 1952 in 1989, ki jih Omerza zelo ekstenzivno navaja in občasno nekoliko komentira, vključeni pa so tudi s fotografijami, posredujejo sliko tajnih političnih policijskih sledenj pisatelja in nekaterih njegovih sodelavcev in prijateljev v slovenskih kulturnopolitičnih krogih tostran in onstran državnih meja. Osrednji del besedila je namenjen tajnemu policijskemu spremljanju Pahorjevih in Kocbekovih priprav na znani intervju, v katerem se je Kocbek javno kritično opredelil do povojnih izvensodnih pobojev domobrancev, in prikazu posledic tega intervjuja. Prva dva dela osvetljuje predvsem politično ozračje in razmere okrog Pahorjevega dela za *Zaliv* ter zaplete ob njegovi esejistični knjigi *Odisej ob jamboru*, zadnja dva pa še dogajanja ob študijskih dnevih v Dragi v drugi polovici sedemdesetih in v osemdesetih letih, ko se je Pahor povezoval s krogom sodelavcev *Nove revije* in Demosom, koalicijo strank, ki je 1990 zmagala na volitvah. Tudi Omerzovo delo je žanrsko svojevrsten hibrid, in sicer bi lahko rekli, da hibrid med individualno biografijo in širšo družbeno biografijo

skupin, ki so sooblikovale slovensko kulturno-politično pokrajino polpreteklega obdobja, katere del smo še danes.

Sklep

Obravnavani življenjepisi se med seboj nasploh precej razlikujejo. Medtem ko so prvi štirje transnacionalne tvorbe, konstruirane na ozadju premoščanja vrzeli v poznavanju etnične manjšine, njene zgodovine in kulture s strani večinske skupnosti, bodisi italijanske, kot v primeru prvih treh knjig, bodisi slovenske, kot v zadnji, gre pri Omerzi za kolektivnobiografske nastavke raziskave širše vloge kulturnih in političnih elit v realsocialističnem obdobju slovenske zgodovine.

Medtem ko gre v prvih štirih delih za precej heterogen diskurz in bolj kot za avto/biografsko samospoznavanje za afirmacijo, emancipacijo sebe kot drugega in razumevanje etnične manjšine v kulturnem sistemu večinske narodnosti, je za Omerzov diskurz značilna poudarjena »protiudbovska« politično-ideološka pristranost avtorja. Z izjemo knjige Alice Zen, ki je pretežno intermedialna in slikovna, so torej naslednje tri obravnavane knjige svojevrstni hibridi med avtobiografijo in biografijo ter nihajo med populariziranjem pisca in vpisovanjem v kolektivni spomin, Omerzova pa je hibrid individualne biografije z nastavki širše družbenopolitično in kulturnozgodovinske biografije Slovencev. Avtorska funkcija je – z izjemama intermedialne biografije in Omerzove knjige – dialogizirana, biografirani subjekt pa očitno izmuzljiv in fluiden, čeprav dosleden v uveljavljanju svoje nacionalne identitete.

Za konec si lahko zastavimo vprašanje, če lahko pričakujemo, da bo nastal še kakšen življenjepis Borisa Pahorja. To se zdi povsem verjetno, saj je videti, da njegova kanonizacija še nikakor ni zaključena. Poleg tega se je smiselno vprašati še, če imajo biografije, avtobiografije ali avto/biografije neskončno možnosti. Toda to je že vprašanje za bolj teoretsko in filozofsko razmišljanje, ki bi v razpravo med drugim pritegnilo probleme referenčnosti, pripovednosti in fikcionalnosti življenjskih zgodb, in ostaja zaenkrat odprto za diskusijo.

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The Biographies of Boris Pahor

Keywords: life writing / biography / autobiography / Pahor, Boris / Slovenian minority in Italy / Zen, Alice / Orlić, Mila / Battocletti, Cristina / Rojc, Tatjana / Omerza, Igor

After a brief terminological reflection on biography as a generic term for the field of academic research on life narratives, in this article I analyze five non-literary biographies of Boris Pahor, a Slovenian writer with Italian citizenship, which are available in book form and in Slovenian. His life has become the subject of biographical research, especially in recent decades, when interest in his work has increased in Slovenia and abroad. In addition to the general structure and content of biographies, I am primarily concerned with the questions of the extent to which these works are constructed in the context of understanding the position of the Slovenian minority in Italy, the extent to which they are about self-knowledge or understanding the Other, what function the author has in them and what their fundamental characteristics are from the perspective of biographical genres. In doing so, I describe their genre hybridity and note that the function of the author in them is dialogical—with two exceptions—and that the biographical subject is elusive and fluid, although it consistently asserts its national identity.

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Življenje med kulturami in jeziki: pripovedi Gorana Vojnovića in Widad Tamimi

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Prispevek raziskuje literarne pripovedi sodobnih avtorjev, ki pišejo o večkulturnosti v evropskem prostoru in so družbeno kritični. Zanimajo nas predvsem tiste pripovedi, ki učinkujejo avtentično in prinašajo kritičen odziv na stereotipe o Drugem in Drugačnem, kot so prisotni v javnem diskurzu. Zgodbe o življenju med več kulturami in jeziki med drugim pripovedujeta Goran Vojnović in Widad Tamimi. Goran Vojnović v svojem prvencu Čefurji raus! pripoveduje o življenju potomcev priseljencev v Sloveniji, v delu Jugoslavija, moja dežela pa o spominu na razpad nekdanje Jugoslavije. Pisateljica palestinsko-judovskega rodu Widad Tamimi pa v Vrtnicah vetra pripoveduje zgodbo o nekdanjem izgnanstvu svoje judovske družine v času fašizma v Italiji ter izgnanstvu palestinske družine, ki pa je pred vojno zbežala v Jordanijo. Ob primerih avtorjev, kot je Feridun Zaimoğlu, poskušamo življenjske zgodbe protagonistov izbranih proznih del umestiti v širši nadnacionalni kontekst literarnega ustvarjanja. Namen prispevka je opazovati spreminjanje percepcije literature, ki je danes ni mogoče fiksirati z nacionalno, religiozno, jezikovno ali kulturno pripadnostjo, ampak gre za transnacionalni sistem, v katerem ustvarjajo avtorji najrazličnejših kultur in jezikov. To se kaže tudi v avtentičnosti literarnega jezika, ki je postal množica jezikovnih idiomov in kulturnih ozadij.

Ključne besede: sodobna književnost / »drugi« / večjezičnost / večkulturnost / avtentičnost / Vojnović, Goran / Tamini, Widad

Literatura in ustvarjanje »drugega« v sodobnem evropskem prostoru

V prispevku so analizirane literarne pripovedi sodobnih avtorjev, ki pišejo o večkulturnosti med nami in s svojim subtilnim občutkom kritično motrijo preteklost in sedanost. Gre za izrazito heterogeno skupino avtorjev, ki je ni mogoče zamejiti le na avtorje, ki živijo na zgodovinsko dvojezičnih območjih etničnih manjšin, in avtorje, ki so se priselili iz drugih kultur ali so potomci migrantov. Vključuje namreč vse, ki pišejo

o življenju različnih kultur in jezikov v sodobnem evropskem prostoru. Med njimi so tudi večjezični avtorji, ki imajo izkušnjo migracije ali so potomci priseljencev in pišejo o izkušnjah življenja v večkulturnem evropskem prostoru: Widad Tamimi, Yoko Tawada, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Rafik Schami, Feridun Zaimoğlu, Terézia Mora, Melinda Nadj Abonji, Anna Kim, Olga Grjasnowa, Dimitré Dinev, Julia Rabinowich idr. Ti ustvarjalci se sami pogosto istovetijo z manjšino in v javni diskurz prinašajo zgodbe o ljudeh in njihovih življenjskih izkustvih. Čeprav v literarnem pisanju posredujejo spomine in izkušnje iz življenja med jeziki in kulturami, pa se izogibajo pojmom »integracija« in »identiteta«, saj ju razumejo kot konstrukt, ki je pogosto rabljen v političnem kontekstu (Nadj Abonji 14).

Med avtorji, ki se v današnjem evropskem prostoru identificirajo z manjšino in pišejo v jeziku večinskega naroda, podrobneje obravnavamo roman *Le rose del vento* (2016), ki je izvorno napisan v italijanskem jeziku in v prevodu nosi naslov *Vrtnice vetra* (2018). Avtorica pripovedi o življenju svojih prednikov, Widad Tamimi, je hči migrantov iz Palestine in Izraela, rojena je bila v Milanu, zadnjih nekaj let pa s svojo družino živi v Ljubljani. Kompleksno zgodbo o preteklosti, svojem očetu in razpadli družini, s tem pa tudi o razpadu ideje o enakosti in solidarnosti med južnoslovanskimi narodi in veroizpovedmi na ozemlju nekdanje Jugoslavije v slovenskem jeziku pripoveduje tudi protagonist drugega romana Gorana Vojnovića, *Jugoslavija, moja dežela* (2012). Zgodbi Widad Tamimi in Gorana Vojnovića sta napisani v standardnem jeziku, v katerega so le v manjši meri vključeni citati v drugem jezikovnem idiomu. V tem se omenjena teksta razlikujeta od tistega dela sodobnega literarnega ustvarjanja, kjer glas govorcev dvojezične sodobne migrantske skupnosti sestavlja več jezikov. Enega najbolj avtentičnih primerov literarne upodobitve dvojezičnega potomca priseljencev predstavlja Vojnovičev prozni prvenec *Čefurji raus!* (2008).¹ Bistvena značilnost izbire jezika v tem delu je alternacija kodov, kar pomeni, da se v nestandardnih govoricah literarnih oseb pojavlja več jezikov nekdanje jugoslovanske države.² Večjezične prakse, ki jih v literarnih pripovedih sodobnih avtorjev zasledimo v širšem evropskem prostoru, spominjajo na in dokumentirajo obstoj mnoštva svetov na prostoru sodobne Evrope, hkrati pa v središče raziskovanja postavljajo pojem večjezično-

¹ Poleg proznega prvenca je tematika večjezičnosti značilna tudi za Vojnovičeva romana *Figa* (2016) in *Đorđić se vraća* (2021).

² Pojavne oblike alternacije kodov so podrobneje analizirane v mojem doktorskem delu *Govorice družbenih okolij v sodobni slovenski prozi* (Curk). Pričujoči prispevek ne povzema nobenega dela disertacije.

sti. Večjezična pripoved »čefurja« iz Vojnovićevega dela *Čefurji raus!* je del širšega konteksta pisanja sodobnih literarnih pripovedi v več jezikih, o čemer pričajo besedila več pisateljev druge generacije priseljencev v Nemčiji, med njimi tudi Feriduna Zaimoğluja, ki je v enem od literarnih del ubesedil večjezično pripoved turškega priseljenca mlajše generacije, slabšalno poimenovanega »kanake«.

V sodobnih literarnih pripovedih so izbire jezika, kot kažejo primeri, ki nastajajo v širšem evropskem prostoru, raznolike. Vsem, vključno s podrobneje analiziranimi pripovedmi Gorana Vojnovića in Widad Tamimi, pa je skupno, da jih bistveno zaznamuje izkušnja večjezičnosti. To se kaže tako v izbiri jezika kot v življenjskih zgodbah posameznikov in družbenem okolju, ki ga kritično reflektirajo. Kaj za pisanje pomeni izkušnja večjezičnosti, posebej natančno razlaga tudi ena od pisateljic. Za Melindo Nadj Abonji, ki se je iz nekdane Jugoslavije kot otrok preselila v Švico, »odraščati večjezično pomeni negotovost, vendar tudi bogastvo«, saj kot pisateljica večjezični jezik ne le uporablja, ampak ga tudi izumlja in ob tem ugotavlja: »[Pisatelji z izkušnjo večjezičnosti] pogosteje postavljajo pod vprašaj večjezični jezik, izhajajo iz tega, da je jezik tudi minsko polje. Vendar sem proti združevanju, zavračam pojem 'migrantska literatura', ker je pomembno ob paralelah dojeti tudi razlike« (Nadj Abonji 14).

Izbira jezika in drugi implicitni elementi, ki jih je pri branju literarnega teksta treba priklicati v spomin na podlagi sklepanja, simbolizirajo kulturne vzorce in družbene procese, v katere so vpete zgodbe literarnih subjektov (Juvan, *Intertekstualnost* 237–238). »O tem, kaj je aktualno in kaj ne, kaj je mogoče reči in o čem še ni oz. o čem ni več mogoče govoriti«, v družbeno-jezikovni situaciji odločajo ideologije in njihovi kolektivni jeziki ali sociolekti (Zima 9). Družbene govorice ali sociolekti in kulturno izročilo pa imajo v literarnem diskurzu specifično funkcijo, saj v njem ponotranjajo, reflektirajo resničnost, ki je v literaturi predstavljena s perspektive individualne izkušnje (Juvan, *Intertekstualnost* 238–239). Družbeno okolje in zasebno življenje se v literarnem diskurzu povezuje, in sicer je literarni diskurz način, kako povedati zgodbo o »zgodovini posameznika« (Grøndahl 132). Zgodbe v izbranih delih Widad Tamimi in Gorana Vojnovića pripovedujejo o tem, kako med jeziki in kulturami živeti s samim sabo in drugimi. Ob primeru različnih izraznih možnosti literarnega pisanja analiziramo, kako se v množstvu jezikov in kultur oblikuje širša družbena zavest in vodilne ideje, pa tudi odpira nov odnos med jezikom posameznega govorca in narodno skupnostjo.

Da se odnos govorca do izbire jezika v literaturi spreminja, ugotavlja že Andrej Leben, ki pri slovenskih literarnih ustvarjalkah in ustvarjalcih

na avstrijskem Koroškem opaža razmah dvojezičnih pisav po letu 2010. Izbira literarnega jezika pri mlajših avtoricah in avtorjih, kot pojasnjuje Leben, pogosto ni več primarno povezana z izvorom, kulturno zavestjo ali manjšinsko pripadnostjo, temveč je odvisna od življenjskega okolja, družbenih mrež, individualne poetike, pa tudi od osebnega občutka za jezik in ocene lastnih jezikovnih zmožnosti (Leben 283). V primerjavi z Lebnovo analizo položaja slovenščine in slovenske manjšine v Avstriji, kjer Leben odločilno vlogo pri izbiri jezika pripiše političnim spremembam in spremenjenemu položaju slovenščine v Avstriji, nas zanima, kako izbira jezika v prozi Widad Tamimi in Gorana Vojnovića spreminja percepcijo jezika literature. Več študij se v novejšem obdobju ukvarja s kriteriji, po katerih definirati »slovensko literaturo« (Köstler in Leben; Koron in Leben; Leben in Kohl), ki je v novejšem obdobju vse bolj prepoznana tudi kot večjezična in večkulturna. Modelov, ki poskušajo razložiti, kaj obsega slovenska literatura, je več, a nobeden od njih ni enoznačen ali dokončen. Nacionalna etnojezikovna paradigma je v raziskavi Andreja Lebna in Felixa Oliverja Kohla označena kot nasilna do literature, ki je, kot pravita avtorja, »v številnih pogledih večjezična in transkulturna«:

Bolj ko neka družba skrbi za pluralne razmere na področju literature, tem večja je verjetnost, da bo literarno življenje splošno sprejeto in zaznavano v njegovi raznolikosti. Na takšni podlagi bo slovenska literatura dejansko lahko postala tudi samoumevna oznaka literature vseh, ki živijo v Sloveniji, kar bo koristilo tudi slovensko pišočin zunaj Slovenije. (Leben in Kohl 273)

Izpostavljenost večjezičnosti kot temeljnemu elementu sodobne definicije literature je posledica dolge tradicije vztrajanja pri etničnih in nacionalnih kategorijah, preko katerih se regulirajo odnosi med večinsko in manjšinskimi skupnostmi (272). Tudi v prihodnje ni verjetno, da bi nacionalna paradigma in dominantnost jezika večinskega naroda izgubili veljavo in diskurzivno premoč (273); ključno pa je, kako se v študijah in pri bralcih nasploh dojema prisotnost večjezičnosti v literaturi. Ustvarjanje številnih obrazov večjezičnosti v sodobni literaturi je mogoče interpretirati kot poskus preseganja ideje o enojezičnosti kot prevladujoče paradigme v moderni nacionalni državi, ki se je v Evropi pojavila v poznem osemnajstem stoletju in je zagovarjala idejo o ločevanju ljudi na podlagi jezika, narodne pripadnosti in državnih meja. Ta ideja je zabrisala vpogled v dejansko razširjenost večjezičnih praks; Yasemin Yildiz opaža, da je raznolikost kot vrednota vse bolj pod pritiskom ideje o homogenem evropskem prostoru, zaradi česar je raziskovanje položaja jezikovnih manjšin in stikanja več jezikov še

toliko bolj pomembno. Na podlagi raziskovanja evropskega literarnega sistema raziskovalka oblikuje sodoben metodološki pristop v raziskovanju diskurza, v katerem enojezičnost in večjezičnost soobstajata in sta opredeljeni prek medsebojnih napetosti – imenuje ga »paradigma postmonolingvizma« (Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue* 4). Paradigma večjezičnosti odpira nov pogled na odnos med jezikom govorca in narodno skupnostjo, ki ga v naslednjih razdelkih interpretiramo ob primeru izbranih proznih del, ki jih na ravni jezika in literarnih zgodb bistveno zaznamuje izkušnja večjezičnosti.

Metodološki pristop k analizi jezika literature

Skozi zgodbe in govorice literarnih del sodobnih avtorjev, ki pripovedujejo o večkulturni družbi, poskušamo pokazati, kako se spreminja percepcija literature, ki je danes ni več mogoče fiksirati zgolj z nacionalnostjo, religiozno in kulturno pripadnostjo itd., temveč je tudi njena govorica postala množica trenj jezikov in kulturnih ozadij. Literarni sistem se danes interpretira kot kraj, kjer živijo in delajo avtorice in avtorji vseh generacij najrazličnejših kultur in jezikov; zdi se, da je literaturo mogoče razumeti zgolj kot prehajanje, kot migracijo in napotnost: od tam, od koder se piše, tja, kamor je namenjena, in nekam drugam, kamor pride (Košir). Da so dimenzije ideološkega, kulturnega in imaginarnega prostora tako odprte in nedefinirane, je po mnenju Nikosa Themelisa posledica tega, da se družbeni, ekonomski in kulturni procesi dandanes dogajajo na transnacionalni ali transregionalni ravni. Prostor in čas, v katerem nastaja sodobna literatura, so v zadnjih desetletjih temeljito preoblikovali razvoj komunikacijskih tehnologij, množični mediji, informacijska revolucija in množične migracije. Če so identiteto evropskega prostora tradicionalno opredeljevali kultura, zgodovina in jezik, pa je ta prostor danes prežet z ideologijo globaliziranega, multipolarnega, nestabilnega sveta in v njem prevladujoče tržne ideologije (Themelis 286). V tem času splošne globalizacije, računalniških tehnologij in trgovinskih centrov je v različnih vrstah diskurzov pogost pojav popularizacija, ki jo v prispevku opazujemo z vidika zanjo značilnega razširjanja stereotipov o »drugem«.

Podoba idealnega »drugega« je bila ustvarjena v dolgi evropski zgodovini in se danes pojavlja kot »modni« diskurz o unikatnih, eksotičnih družbenih, jezikovnih in drugih fenomenih (Themelis 286). V času ekspanzije množičnih migracij in večjega zanimanja za razpravljanje

o življenju migrantov stereotipne predstave o »čefurju«, »kanaku«,³ »fureštu«⁴ ali kako drugače imenovanem »drugem« pogosto razširjajo zahodni mediji. Pri preučevanju percepcije »drugega« je pomemben premik pomenila študija Edwarda Saida *Orientalizem* (1978), ki analizira reprezentacije Orienta v zahodni literaturi, slikarstvu in glasbi. V njej je Said ugotovil, da zahodni svet (Evropa, ZDA) obravnava države in narode na Bližnjem vzhodu skozi »objektiv«, ki izkrivlja dejansko realnost teh krajev in ljudi. Ustvarjanje idealnega »drugega« za Evropo je tako že za Saida v nasprotju z dejstvi zgodovine, odraža interese imperializma in je ideološko motivirana praksa (Said; Said in Jhally). Na percepcijo »drugega«, kot jo vse od obdobjev evropskega osvajanja drugih prostorov in kultur ustvarja Zahod, se odzivajo pisatelji, ki so kritični do širjenja stereotipnih vzorcev namesto avtentičnega pisanja o sodobnih družbenih fenomenih. V njihovih pripovedih je vloga »drugega« dodeljena prišleku, ki živi v evropskem prostoru, ima izkušnjo bivanja med kulturami in svojo zgodbo pripoveduje v več jezikih (npr. Vojnović in Zaimoglu) ali pa jo zaznamuje tako, da izbere jezik večinskega naroda (Grjasnowa npr. piše v nemškem jeziku, Tamimi pa je tudi delo *Il caffè delle donne* iz leta 2014 napisala v italijanskem jeziku).

Zgodbe, ki pripovedujejo o osebnih življenjskih izkušnjah, nastajajo znotraj polja literature, ki jo bistveno določajo fiktivnost, domišljijaskost in estetska funkcija. V posebnem literarnem diskurzu se med literarnimi pripovedmi in resničnostjo ter med protagonistom in avtorjem vzpostavlja specifično razmerje (Skubic, *Obrazi* 105–129). Metodološki pristop, s katerim je mogoče pojasniti specifičnost razmerja med protagonistom in avtorjem literarnega dela, je v svojih teoretskih razpravah razvijal Mihail M. Bahtin. V knjigi *Estetika in humanistične vede* (1999) Bahtin razlaga, da se v primeru, ko se protagonistova življenjska zgodba v večji meri sklada z avtorjevo in ima avtobiografske elemente, upošteva odmik od neposrednega razmerja avtorja do protagonista. Tudi v pripovedih, v katerih je protagonist avtobiografski, »avtor doživlja junakovo življenje v popolnoma drugačnih vrednostnih kategorijah, kot doživlja svoje lastno življenje – avtor osmišlja junakovo življenje v docela drugačnem vrednostnem kontekstu«; »postati mora *drugi* v

³ *Kanake* je rasistična oznaka za migrante in njihove potomce, ki živijo v Nemčiji, t. i. gastarbajterje (Gürsel).

⁴ »Furešti so bili prišleki. Ko sem bil otrok, so se v Istro priselili pripadniki vseh narodov tedanje Jugoslavije, ki so zapolnili demografsko praznino po izselitvi italijanskega prebivalstva po drugi svetovni vojni, natančneje po letu 1947. Istra je bila del Hrvaške, toda vzdevek *furešti* so dobili celo Hrvati, ki so prišli iz drugih delov republike, torej so tudi oni spadali med *druge*« (Velikić 250).

razmerju do samega sebe, pogledati mora nase z očmi drugega» (Bahtin 24). Tak pristop k razmerju med avtorjem in resničnostjo na eni strani ter literaturo na drugi opisuje tudi eden od sodobnih avtorjev, ki je literarni tekst označil kot »mozaik faktov in fikcij«, v katerem so resnični dogodki lahko podlaga za leposlovni opis, »ampak že samo uokvirjanje v romanu jih naredi za fikcijo« (Skubic, »Ključno pa je« 527–528).

Poleg opisane metodologije specifičnega razmerja med resničnim in literarnim je v raziskavi treba upoštevati specifične značilnosti oblik večjezičnosti v proznih delih, ki znotraj literarnega sistema stopajo v odnos z vsemi ostalimi literaturami. Teoretski pristop, ki raziskuje, kako se znotraj literarnega sistema vzpostavlja kanon tekstov, avtorjev, idej in predstav, je razvil Marko Juvan v teoriji intertekstualnosti oziroma medbesedilnosti. Teorija zagovarja stališče, da prek komunikacije literature z drugo literaturo in z drugimi diskurzi (politiko, religijo) kanon literarnih tekstov postaja medij kulturnega spomina (Juvan, *Intertekstualnost* 241). »Zaradi nanašanja na govorjene, zapisane ali natisnjene svetove literature ni več upravičeno imeti samo za mimezis zunajliterarne resničnosti« (240). S svojo zmožnostjo za posnemanje teoretskega, tehničnega, praktičnega in zgodovinskega diskurza literatura povzema in – z izmišljenimi liki, zgodbami, motivi, ki so mimezis tistega, kar se je zgodilo ali bi se lahko zgodilo – predstavlja, preizkuša in ponazarja njihove problematike. Z individualizacijo in ponazoritvijo splošnejših problemov prek zgodb, likov in perspektiv fikcije se literarni diskurz kot simulaker približa življenjskemu izkustvu, doživljanju in spominu posameznikov. Zato literatura kot medij kulturnega spomina modelira tudi ideje, čustva, doživetja, zaznave in strukture delovanja individualnega spomina (Juvan, »Kulturni spomin« 389).

Jezik Vojnovičevega prvenca *Čefurji raus!* v širšem kontekstu jezika »drugega«

Vojnovičev prozni prvenec je eden najbolj izrazitih poskusov rabe sociolektov v slovenski literaturi in je v prispevek vključen kot primer avtentične upodobitve literarnega govorca, ki v slovenskem jezikovnem okolju govori »drugačen« jezik, saj v njem preklaplja med slovenskim in srbohrvaškim idiomom. Ker v oblikah alternacije med kodoma ni mogoče najti predvidljivega vzorca okoliščin, v katerih se kodni preklomp v njegovi govorici pojavi, se je na določeni točki analize protagonistove govorice smiselno odmakniti od razčlenjevanja oblik alternacije kodov in poskušati to govorico razumeti v širšem nadnacionalnem

diskurzu ustvarjanja v več jezikovnih kodih in v družbenem kontekstu, ki ga na različne načine zaznamuje ideja večjezičnosti. Da bi se odmaknili od političnih in ideološko obremenjenih pomenov večjezičnosti, v prispevku opazujemo perspektivo pisateljev, ki tako kot Goran Vojnović v evropskem prostoru ustvarjajo iz izkušnje življenja med več jeziki in kulturami. V nekaterih literarnih delih je prisotna raba več jezikov, druga so v veliki meri napisana (ali prevedena) v standardni jezik. Vsem pa je skupna kritičnost do dominantnih diskurzov svojega časa in v njih razširjene ideje o »drugem«. V pisanju o življenju migrantske skupnosti v ljubljanskem predmestju Fužine Goran Vojnović v delu *Čefurji raus!* (2008) zaznava nespornost in pretiravanja, zavrača predsodke in reflektira krizo identitete sodobnega človeka. Opis vsakdana potomcev priseljencev iz nekdanje Jugoslavije v literarni govorici protagonista Marka Đorđića zaznamuje izbira jezikovnih prvin, s katero pisatelj ustvarja vtis prisotnosti v okolju in skupnosti, ki jo določa položaj na družbenem obrobju in življenje med več jezikovnimi kodi. Kritični, provokativni, včasih tudi žaljivi izrazi, ter sleng, ki je izrazito ustni in namerno nepravilen, družbo opisujejo kot izrazito razdeljeno na *mainstream* in obrobje. Na različnih jezikovnih ravneh se v Markovi pripovedi pojavlja alternacija med slovenskim in srbohrvaškim jezikovnim kodom, ki ima prav tako simbole, ob rabi disfemizmov pa tudi provokativen pomen:

V vsakem od teh milijon fletov lahko v vsakem trenutku počī i gotovo. Vsi so zjebani, nervozni, nesrečni, slabo plačani, vsi so u govniḡa do guše, kot bi rekel Radovan. In vsakemu od milijon Fužinčanov lahko pukne film. Ni zadovoljnih in srečnih Fužinčanov, ker če bi bili srečni in zadovoljni, ne bi živelī na Fužinah. To je dejstvo. Ker ni enega človeka na svetu, ki je kot dete sanjal o tem, da bo živel v predmestju Ljubljane, na dvanajstem štuku, v dvoīnḡosobnem stanovanju, s petčlansko famīlījo in pogledom na sosednji blok. (Vojnović, *Čefurji* 144)

V jeziku, ki učinkuje avtentično, protagonist Vojnovićevega teksta pripoveduje zgodbe potomcev priseljencev, ki skozi literaturo razmišljajo o svojem odnosu do jezikov in kultur nekdanje Jugoslavije, od koder so se v Slovenijo priselili njihovi starši. V zgodbah potomcev priseljencev, ki jih v tekstu pripoveduje Marko Đorđić, se predvsem na eni strani pokaže propad ideje o bratstvu in enotnosti, enakosti, solidarnosti in zaveznīstvu med južnoslovanskimi narodi na ozemlju nekdanje Jugoslavije, na drugi strani pa se izrisuje jezikovna in kulturna raznolikost slovenskega prostora, ki nikakor ni etnično, kulturno in jezikovno homogen. Pripovedovanje zgodb o kulturni heterogenosti sodobne družbe, pisanje v več jezikovnih kodih in težnja po avtentičnem

približevanju sodobnim govoricam pa ni specifična le za Vojnovičevo pisanje, ampak že uvodoma naštetih primeri avtorjev in avtoric kažejo, da gre za značilnosti, ki so prisotne v širšem kontekstu sodobnega literarnega ustvarjanja.

Med širokim naborom sodobnih avtorjev naj v prispevku poleg Vojnovića izpostavimo pisatelja, ki se je star eno leto s starši preselil iz Turčije v Nemčijo in pri pisanju v nemškem jezikovnem okolju ustvarja literarne govorice turških priseljencev. Feridun Zaimoğlu trdi, da je jezik romana *Kanak Sprak. 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (1995)⁵ osnovan na govoru mlajšega moškega, ki ga je intervjuval (Yildiz, »Critically 'Kanak'« 320). V delu, ki je nastalo več kot desetletje pred Vojnovičevim, se pisatelj iz druge generacije turških priseljencev sprašuje, kako se kot »kanake« (nemška slabšalnica za Turke) živi v Nemčiji. Obrobni družbeni položaj priseljencev in njihovih potomcev v nemški družbi poleg prvega ponazarja tudi drugi roman *Abschaum (Izmeček)* iz leta 1997,⁶ v katerem se Zaimoğlu giblje na družbenem obrobju, ponekod že tudi v njenem podzemlju: »V knjigi spoznavamo torej tiste družbene sloje, v katere navadno nimamo nobenega vpogleda ali pa le zamegljenega, nejasnega« (Šerc 173). Čeprav v njem lahko najdemo nekaj konfliktnih okoliščin, ki dokazujejo, da med Nemci in Turki (tujci) ne gre za sožitje, avtentične literarne podobe v delu presegajo raven poročanja o nemški družbi in velemestih. Težnji po avtentičnem, realističnem upodabljanju družbenega obrobja sledi tudi jezik – prevladuje pogovorni jezik Hamburga in njegove okolice, kamor se umešča literarno dogajanje. *Izmeček* je zgodba Ertana Onguna, ki je, kot beremo v epilogu dela, pisatelja prosil, naj jo zapiše: »Dajem ti čisto snov [Stoff, »(literarna) snov«]. Si moj diler. Prodaj to stvarco« (Zaimoğlu, *Abschaum* 173). Tako Feridun Zaimoğlu kot tudi Goran Vojnović pripovedujeta o položaju posameznika, ki se na podlagi jezika in kulture staršev opredeljuje kot pripadnik manjšinske skupnosti. Tej je v večinsko nemškem oziroma slovenskem jezikovnem okolju dodeljen obrobni družbeni položaj, kar je med drugim razvidno iz protagonistove pripovedi in slabšalno rabljenih poimenovanj, kot sta »čefur« oziroma »kanake«. Podobno kot v ustvarjanju Feriduna Zaimoğluga v nemškem prostoru tudi v prozi Gorana Vojnovića nestandardni idiomi različnih jezikov v govoricah potomcev priseljencev iz republik nekdanje Jugoslavije simbolizirajo napetosti med idejo o jezikovno homogeni

⁵ Roman *Kanak Sprak* ni preveden v slovenski jezik. V prostem prevodu bi se slovenski naslov lahko glasil *Jezik kanakov. 24 zgrešenih tonov z roba družbe*.

⁶ Odlomke romana *Izmeček* je v slovenski jezik prevedel Slavo Šerc in jih leta 2000 objavil v reviji *Literatura*.

slovenski nacionalni državi in dejansko prisotnostjo večjezičnih praks v tem kulturno raznolikem prostoru: »Nimamo mi pa Slovenci šans. [...] Lahko se mi kao družimo pa štekamo pa neki izigravamo kolege pa to, samo ne moremo se pa zares poštekati. Tako bratski. Nimamo istih stvari v krvi pa gotovo. Mi smo čefurji in oni so Slovenci in to je to. Jebiga« (Vojnović, *Čefurji* 67).

Družinske zgodbe in spomini v delih *Jugoslavija, moja dežela* in *Vrtnice vetra*

Poleg tekstov, v katerih je protagonistova zgodba o »drugem« skladna z izbiro jezikovnih kodov, nadalje analiziramo primer Vojnovičevega romana, ki ga protagonist v veliki meri pripoveduje v standardnem slovenskem jeziku, in roman Widad Tamimi, ki je v izvirniku napisan v italijanskem jeziku. Gre za teksta, pri katerih je v ospredju vsebina protagonistove pripovedi o iskanju lastnega jaza. Bistveno vlogo imajo spomin in povezave s kulturnimi prizorišči minulih obdobj. Pisateljevanje predstavlja spominsko obujanje in novo interpretacijo te dediščine, pri čemer je za literarno izročilo, ki je shranjeno v kulturnem spominu, specifična »literarna imaginacija« (Juvan, *Intertekstualnost* 67). Diskurz pogojuje tudi posameznikove izbire jezika, saj jezik po Juvanovi razlagi obstaja in deluje prek diskurzov kot družbena vez, ki prek simbolov pogojuje in izmenjuje izkušnje, znanja, čustva in občutja (Juvan, »Kulturni spomin« 384). Izbira jezika v zgodbah iz vsakdanjega življenja torej ni le sredstvo sporazumevanja, ampak jezik predstavlja kulturni simbol, katerega pomen se kaže skozi delovanje in vedenje ljudi, ki govorijo določen jezik (Olenik 24). Z izbiro jezika so med drugim povezani posameznikovi osebni spomini, o katerih pripovedujeta prvoosebna odrasla protagonista del *Jugoslavija, moja dežela* in *Vrtnice vetra*.

Čeprav so literarizirane, zgodbe pripovedujejo o osebnih izkušnjah življenja v večkulturnih okoljih in prav tako kot Vojnovičev prozni prvenec tudi te zgodbe dajejo vtis življenjskosti in pristnosti, ki pa ga ustvarjajo na drugačen način. Realni zgodovinski dogodki in družbene okoliščine v Sloveniji in v Jugoslaviji v roman *Jugoslavija, moja dežela* vstopajo prek individualnega spomina prvoosebnega pripovedovalca Vladana Borojevića. V njegovi pripovedi se bralcu razkrivajo travme in strahovi mladega človeka, ki poskuša svojo zaznamovanost z jugoslovansko preteklostjo predelati in najti svoj lastni jaz v sodobni postjugoslovanski stvarnosti (Olenik 26). Podobno doživlja pisanje tudi Widad Tamimi, ki je pojasnila, da je brskanje po preteklosti

materine in očetove družine zanj pomenilo, da je lahko bolj zavestno začela oblikovati svojo prihodnost: »[Raziskovanje preteklosti je bilo zame] pomembno, da sem lahko razumela, kdo sem, kaj delam in kaj bi rada v življenju počela« (cit. v Maličev 261). Življenje otroka je po Mauriceu Halbwachsu močno odvisno od družbe, prek katere prihaja v stik z bolj ali manj oddaljeno preteklostjo. Preteklost je okvir, v katerem so zajeti otrokovi spomini, na katere se kot odrasel opre in se, ne da bi se tega zavedal, bolj reflektirano približuje življenju svoje družine (Halbwachs 63).

Zgodbo po svetu razseljenih posameznikov iz palestinske in judovske družine bistveno zaznamujejo avtobiografski elementi, saj je Tamimi potomka družin, katerih zgodovinsko dediščino zapisuje. Pisanje o življenjskih izkušnjah družine, ki živi med več kulturami, daje avtentičen vpogled v »drugega« in »drugačnega«, v družbenopolitične konflikte in dileme o posameznikovi identiteti. Pisateljeva izkušnja »drugega« je zlasti zaradi občutka izobčenosti že bila prepoznana kot jedro ustvarjalnega procesa. V njem z manjšino poistoveteni avtor poskuša vzpostaviti »drugega«, velikokrat problematizira nesporazume, pretiravanja, prepričanja o ogroženosti in predsodkih, ki izvirajo iz nevednosti ali celo ravnodušnosti (Velikić 251). Sodobne pisave zavzemajo kritično stališče do percepcij »drugega« in z izkušnjo »drugega« v literarni diskurz prinašajo spoznanje, da so različnosti zgolj vzorci naših možnosti, t. i. drugi pa je »le naša projekcija. Zmeraj smo to mi – in naš drugi je zgrajen iz predsodkov, zablod in stereotipov« (243). Kot je v enem od intervjujev povedala italijansko pišoča pisateljica, ki zadnja leta živi in ustvarja v Sloveniji, je roman *Vrtnice vetra* eden od poskusov prenašanja sporočila miru. V njem se protagonistka romana spominja svoje matere, ki je v njenem otroštvu naredila samomor, in tako začne zgodbo o iskanju družinske dediščine, v kateri ves čas išče sledi matere: »O njej je hotela izvedeti čim več, morda zato, da bi ugotovila, kakšni so bili videti svet in ljudje skozi njene oči« (Maličev 260). Pred avtorico se je tako izpisovala pripoved, do katere ni bilo preprosto vzpostaviti razdalje, saj jo je pripeljala k trenutku materine smrti, a je skozi soočenje s preteklimi in sedanjimi bolečinami lahko osvobodila sebe (261).

Podobno kot odkrivanje življenjskih zgodb prednikov od protagonistke romana *Vrtnice vetra* zahteva, da izstopi iz znanega sveta, je tudi odkrivanje zamolčane družinske zgodbe iz časa vojne na Balkanu v romanu *Jugoslavija, moja dežela* polno dvomov in zahtevnih samorefleksij. Idejo za roman je Goran Vojnović črpal iz resnične zgodbe oficirskih otrok, s katerimi se je do svojega enajstega leta vsako poletje družil v Pulju, potem pa so nekega dne »izginili«. Podobno kot se je leta

1991 z besedo »prekomanda« (»premestitev«) končalo idilično življenje družine Borojević, ki se ga protagonist zgodbe Vladan Borojević spominja kot srečnega in brezskrbnega otroštva, kjer je občutil pripadnost družini, vrstnikom, domu. Tega občutka pripadnosti ne občuti več od trenutka, ko je družina poleti 1991 zapustila dom v Pulju in se je del njegove identitete porušil (Olenik 22). V spominih na dogodke iz otroštva, na starše in sorodnike iz Novega Sada ter slovenske stare starše pripoveduje o pomanjkanju občutka pripadnosti, občutju praznine in izgubljenosti zaradi nezmožnosti interakcije s skupnostjo. Ta občutja lahko v primeru Vladanove družine povezujemo z vprašanjem narodne identitete, ki po Anthonyju Smithu pomeni identificiranje posameznikov z dediščino in njenimi kulturnimi prvinami (Smith 30). Ker Vladan ne ve, zakaj z očetom nima več stika, saj mu mati prikriva, da je oče vojni zločinec, hkrati pa se sama sina izogiba, saj v njem vidi svojega moža, Vladan kot otrok v svoji družini ne zmore zgraditi temeljev lastne identitete in se tudi kot odrasel povsod počuti kot tujec (Olenik 22). Temna družinska skrivnost se začne razkrivati sedemnajst let pozneje, ko protagonist romana v spletni iskalnik vpiše očetovo ime in nepričakovano odkrije, da njegov oče ni padel v vojni, in to ga požene na pot po Balkanu, da bi našel pobeglega očeta.

Na potovanju po Balkanu Vladan Borojević odkriva zgodbo svojega očeta Nedeljka, Srba, oficirja nekdanje Jugoslovanske ljudske armade, danes vojnega zločinca na begu pred oblastmi, ki je sina Vladana in ženo, Ljubljankanko Dušo, nenapovedano zapustil v začetku devetdesetih let in od takrat v otroških očeh obveljal za mrtvega. To je tesnobno potovanje, na katerem se Vladan sooča s svojimi spomini iz otroštva, življenjskimi travmami, strahovi in ponovno išče svojo identiteto. Zgodba družine Borojević skozi spomine na otroštvo in pripovedovalčevo sedanjost prikazuje podobe Balkana nekoč in danes ter pripoveduje o tragičnih usodah ljudi, ki živijo z izkušnjo vojne. Iskanje družinske dediščine, vojna in druge izkušnje prednikov, ki jih ubesedita obravnavani zgodbi Gorana Vojnovića in Widad Tamimi, imajo tudi skupno lastnost, in sicer gre v obeh delih za pripoved o spominih na dogodke, ki so protagonista v življenju zaznamovali: »Živeti. O tem sem spraševala dedka in o tem mi je govoril. O življenju družine, ki je moja, a je nisem spoznala in sem jo morala rekonstruirati« (Tamimi, *Vrtnice* 113).

Protagonistka romana *Vrtnice vetra* se najprej retrospektivno osredotoči na pretese dvajsetega stoletja, drugo svetovno vojno in izraelsko-palestinski konflikt, ki sta temeljno spremenila tok zgodovine in usodno vplivala na življenjske poti njenih prednikov, pri čemer se kolektivna družbena izkušnja izrazi in zapisuje skozi majhne, posamezne zasebne

zgodbe (Koprivnikar). Pri obujanju spominov protagonistka uporablja besede, ideje, podatke, ki jih je dobila od drugih, in tako ustvarja živo vez med generacijami, ki živijo skupaj: s komunikacijo med babicami, materami in hčerkami, očeti in sinovi ter sorodstveno nepovezanimi sodobnimi rodovi krožijo skupne predstave, občutja, načini življenja (Juvan, »Kulturni spomin« 385). Na ozadju zgodovinskih pretresov je večji del romana namenjen rekonstrukciji spominov dveh družin iz sicer različnih prostorov, ki pa imata obe izkušnjo izgnanstva (Koprivnikar).

Družinska dediščina, iz katere avtorica črpa pripovedne elemente za roman, je posebna in združuje očetovo palestinsko in materino judovsko družinsko zgodovino. Po materini strani je bil ded Widad Tamimi Jud, ki je zaradi rasnih zakonov zapustil Trst, njen oče pa je leta 1967 moral zapustiti Hebron, ki so ga takrat okupirali Izraelci (Tamimi, »Konflikt«). »Izkušnja življenja med dvema ali več kulturami, begunstvo v vseh svojih oblikah in iskanje identitete je osrednje zanimanje pisateljice, saj ne samo zapolnjuje njeno osebno življenje, pač pa tudi literarno ustvarjanje« (Koprivnikar). To, da je hotela poznati zgodovino svoje družine, za pisateljico ni bila odločitev, temveč potreba:

Postala sem skrinja krhkih zakladov, med spomini in bolečinami, veselji in zamerami, hrepenenji in strahovi mojih družin. Kakor centrifuga so me vsrkala vprašanja, odmevi groze v tišini. Čutila sem, da sem sama, [...] po prahu kopljem, odkar sem bila deklica, in iščem točke, kjer se neločljivo spletata zasebna zgodovina in Zgodovina sveta. (Tamimi, *Vrtnice* 9, 116)

Zasebni spomini, o katerih pripoveduje protagonistka dela *Vrtnice vetra*, nastajajo v vsakdanji interakciji z drugimi in se sklicujejo na širši družbeni okvir, ki ga teorija imenuje »kolektivni spomin«. Tako kot tradicija in kulturni spomin je tudi kolektivni spomin povezan z že omenjeno teorijo medbesedilnosti, del katere je tudi večšina spominjanja. Po Halbwachsu kolektivni spomin ne označuje razreda, naroda ali duha časa, ampak je »proizvod govorne in simbolne interakcije, ki jo ponotranjijo posamezniki. Kolektivni spomin sicer črpa iz tega, da je njegov nosilec skupek ljudi, vendar se kljub temu spominjajo posamezniki kot člani skupine [...]; sleherni individualni spomin [je] en pogled na kolektivni spomin« (Halbwachs 52). Tako je tudi Widad Tamimi, kot pravi sama, v odkrivanju in pisanju o zasebnih spominih svoje družine našla način, kako se soočati z družbenopolitičnimi temami, ki so prvenstveno kolektivne. V enem od intervjujev se avtorica sklicuje na prepričanje, da je z zgodbami romanov mogoče vstopiti v življenje drugih in odživeti izkušnjo, ki je sicer nikdar ne bi. Pisanje tako za avtorico, ki je študirala pravo in mednarodne odnose, preden je

postala pisateljica, ni samo ustvarjalna in umetniška dejavnost, ampak je predvsem politično udejstvovanje (Tamimi, »To, da hočeš«).

Dedek je bil ateist, čisto pravi. In vendar je bil Jud, ponosen, da je Jud, Jud do zadnjega diha. »To, da smo Judje, smo začutili tistega dne, ko smo doumeli, da se moramo kot taki braniti,« mi je rekel. »Še dan prej smo bili Italijani, govorili smo veliko jezikov, bili smo otroci ali odrasli, funkcionarji ali podjetniki, iredentisti, ateisti ali agnostiki, bankirji, študentje, očetje, sinovi, matere ali pianistke. Potem smo postali Judje, v nas so uperili prst, in to je o nas povedalo nekaj, kar ni imelo opraviti z religijo.« Judovstvo ni religiozna zadeva, to ne more več biti. [...] Judovstvo je postalo večplasten pojav, kakor val preplavlja generacije otrok, rojenih drugje, v naročju mešanih zakonov, na sledi neizbežnega razkroja. (Tamimi, *Vrtnice* 115–116)

V družinski zgodbi protagonistke se na zasebni ravni kaže izkušnja zgodovinskega trenutka, ko so vsakdanje življenje močno določali medetnični odnosi med obrobniimi, manjšinskimi in večinskimi skupnostmi, ki v primeru izbranega citata izhajajo iz verske in etnične opredelitve manjšinske skupnosti v fašistični Italiji. Do ideologij in njihove moči prepričevanja ljudi je protagonistka na več mestih kritična. Tak primer je prepričanje o etnično, kulturno in jezikovno homogeni družbi, o katerem v zgodbi beremo, da to prepričanje v resničnem življenju skozi celotno zgodovino sproža konflikte in nemir, pa tudi osebne travme. Kot lahko beremo v spodnjih citatih, to velja tako za družino protagonistinega očeta iz Hebrona kot tudi za njenega pradedka Ottocarja Weissa, ki se je želel iz Švice vrniti nazaj v Trst, kjer pa sta takrat vladali cerkvena in fašistična ideologija:

Odkrila sem, da so mojega pradedka po materini strani iskali Angleži, ker je sodeloval v odporniškem gibanju proti britanski okupaciji. Zato je dal hitro omožiti svoje hčere in pobegnil v Egipt. Moj dedek je prišel k tustu, saj je iskal delo, in se, tako so pravili, dolgo ni mogel vrniti v Palestino, ker so mu ukradli dokumente. Nikoli mi ni bilo jasno, ali si je v vseh teh letih ustvaril drugo družino, katere sledi so se izgubile (očka je bežno nakazal to možnost), ali pa je sodeloval v odporu in je to ogrožalo njegovo vrnitev, ker je bil tudi on med iskanimi osebami. (102)

Ko je [Ottocar Weiss] prispel na glavno postajo v Milanu, je preveril, s katerega perona mora nadaljevati potovanje, potem pa se je usedel v kavarno, da bi počakal na svoj vlak. Na mizici je nekdo pustil časopis. [...] Zapisan na široko in z razločnimi črkami, sredi dvojne strani, se je naslov glasil: *Weiss, le kdo je ta žid in seksualni manijak?* V tistih letih sta Cerkev in fašistični režim našla skupno točko v nasprotovanju psihiatrični stroki. [...] Cerkev je ščitila spodobnost, medtem ko je fašizmu prišlo prav, da je v tej novi veji medicine delovalo veliko Judov. (106–107)

Zaključek

Izbor podrobneje obravnavanih proznih del dokazuje, da je v sodobnem literarnem diskurzu prisotna težnja po avtentičnem in življenjskem prikazovanju večkulturnih družbenih okolij. V literaturi opažena težnja je način kritičnega odzivanja na stereotipne podobe »drugega« v populariziranih javnih diskurzih, ki so pod vplivom globalne tržne ideologije na družbo, politiko in kulturo. Vpliv te ideologije se kaže kot razvrednotenje vrednot in načel evropske misli zadnjih stoletij, vsiljevanje poenostavljenih dilem v okoliščinah, ko postajajo problemi vse bolj zapleteni (Themelis 286). Tudi literati, med katerimi smo bolj poglobljeno obravnavali dela Gorana Vojnovića in Widad Tamimi, so do populariziranih diskurzov in množice iluzij, ki jih ti ustvarjajo, kritični in literarizirajo življenjske situacije posameznikov, ki se vsakodnevno gibljejo med številnimi tržnimi ekonomijami sodobnega sveta.

V zgodbah o protagonistovih intimnih izkušnjah bralec spremlja, kako se oblikuje protagonistov lastni jaz, hkrati pa lahko sam podoživlja dogodke iz preteklosti in lažje ozavešča situacije iz sedanje družbene resničnosti. Poleg avtentičnosti jezika in življenjskosti zgodb literaturo, ki nastaja v današnjih pogojih, zaznamuje tudi to, da nastaja v evropskem prostoru, ki je simbolični, ideološki in kulturni prostor preseganja meja naroda ali regije. V tej vlogi prozna dela *Vrtnice vetra*, *Čefurji raus!* in *Jugoslavija, moja dežela* učinkujejo kot kulturni medij, prek katerega se predelujejo kolektivne izkušnje iz preteklosti in razkrivajo stereotipna prepričanja o »drugem«. Literarni teksti so, kot se metaforično izrazi že Juvan, »posode kulturnega spomina« – z izbiro snovi, oblikovanostjo in vsebino teksti postanejo dokumenti nekdanjih dogodkov, so sledi dožemanja in pojmovanja sveta, pa tudi jezikovnega in zgodovinskega položaja posameznika (Juvan, »Kulturni spomin« 389).

V prispevku omenjeni avtorji in avtorice, njihove osebne zgodbe in literarne pripovedi o življenjskih zgodbah, ki nastajajo v sodobnem času, so kulturno in jezikovno izrazito heterogeni in ne zdržijo zamejevanja znotraj pojmov »slovenska literatura« ali »migrantska literatura«. Prvi pojem omejuje za evropski prostor tradicionalno značilna ideja o nacionalni državi, ki znotraj svojih meja združuje en narod, en jezik in eno kulturo. Drugi pojem pa prav to idejo enojezičnosti nacionalne države ruši, a je po mnenju samih avtorjev tudi ta preozek (Nadj Abonji 14). Migrantska izkušnja je namreč le ena od zgodb med številnimi drugimi, ki vsaka na svoj način razkrivajo plasti zgodovinske dediščine in iščejo svoj jaz v večglasju sedanje družbe. Z opredelitvami se poskuša poenostaviti razumevanje dogajanja v družbi; v resnici pa je ključno

pozorno opazovanje spreminjanja okolja, ljudi in tudi jezikov, da bi – tako kot poskusijo literati in filozofi – uvideli svoje bitje v večglasju kultur in njihovih jezikov, onkraj kulta nacionalne države:

Vsaka regija je mesto križanja več kultur, naša identiteta pa bo natanko takšna: kot mozaik, sestavljena iz delcev, izmed katerih je vsak potreben za splošno popolnost te identitete. Ne bomo je podedovali, ampak ustvarili. Čeprav bo imel vsak izmed nas svoj prvi jezik, bo večjezičnost postala norma. In prepričan sem, da bodo prav pisatelji postali pionirji tega sveta prihodnosti. (Venclova 344)

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Life Between Cultures and Languages: The Stories of Goran Vojnović and Widad Tamimi

Keywords: contemporary literature / the »Other« / multilingualism / multiculturalism / authenticity / Vojnović, Goran / Tamimi, Widad

This article explores literary narratives by contemporary authors who write about multiculturalism in the European space and are socially critical. We are particularly interested in those narratives that have an authentic impact and bring a critical response to the stereotypes of the Other as they are present in public discourse. Goran Vojnović and Widad Tamimi, among others, tell stories of life between several cultures and languages. In his debut book *Southern Scum, Go Home!* Goran Vojnović tells the story about the lives of descendants of immigrants in Slovenia, and in *Yugoslavia, My Fatherland* about the memory of the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. In *Roses of the Wind*, Widad Tamimi, a writer of Palestinian-Jewish origin, tells the story of her Jewish family's former exile during fascism in Italy and the exile of a Palestinian family who fled to Jordan because of war. Taking the examples of authors such as Feridun Zaimoğlu, the life stories of the protagonists of the selected prose works are placed in a broader transnational context of literary creation. The aim of the paper is to observe the changing perception of literature, which today cannot be fixed by national, religious, linguistic or cultural belonging, but is a transnational system in which authors from a wide variety of cultures and languages work. This is also reflected in the authenticity of literary language, which has become a multitude of linguistic idioms and cultural backgrounds.

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Echoes of Translation in Svetlana Alexievich's Narrative

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This paper explores the presence of translation in the work of Svetlana Alexievich, the Belarusian journalist and 2015 Nobel laureate in Literature. Amid the ongoing debate about whether her books should be categorized as fiction or non-fiction, we propose an alternative perspective on her cycle Voices from Utopia, suggesting it can be viewed as a translation of Soviet history. By applying recent translation studies theories that broaden the definition of translation beyond mere interlingual transfer, we can observe how translation operates at various levels within her texts. This process involves not only the witnesses interviewed by the writer but also extends to the readers. Specifically, through a process of (self-) translation, the interviewees describe their lived experiences, and their voices become a polyphonic chorus that offers fresh insights on the history of the USSR. Alexievich translates these oral testimonies into written documents, which then undergo multiple retranslations due to the continuous changes in narratives, in which both her audience and the author herself are immersed. These translations and retranslations ensure the afterlife of original accounts and shape the way that the readers translate history by immersing themselves in a plurality of its versions. Seeing Alexievich's historical oeuvre as a continuous flow of translations that engage everyone—from the witnesses to the readers—opens up new ways to interpret her cycle.

Keywords: Belarusian literature / Alexievich, Svetlana / documentary prose / Soviet history / autobiographical testimonies / translation / retranslation

Introduction

After the Belarusian journalist and writer Svetlana Alexievich won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2015,¹ academic circles have been engaged in ongoing debates about the literary classification of her polyphonic cycle *Voices from Utopia*, permeated by the traumatic memories of Soviet citizens.² While some scholars view her narratives as fiction, citing the frequent rewrites that the author incorporates into her works, others argue that they should be considered non-fiction and are useful for studying historical events such as World War II, the Soviet-Afghan War, the Chernobyl disaster, and the fall of the USSR. Currently, numerous studies focus on detailed comparative analyses of Alexievich's texts, aiming to determine the extent of her interventions and, based on this, to classify the literary genre she employs. The issue of genre attribution is further complicated by the writer's refusal to release the original tape recordings of her interviews with (former) Soviet citizens—witnesses to the grim chapters of USSR history—leaving scholars to speculate about their contents.

In light of the controversy surrounding the fiction versus non-fiction nature of her narrative, it is worth recalling Bella Brodzki's observation: "By reading genre through the lens of translation, ... all our methods of literary classification are subject to critical review and are reinvigorated as a result" (Brodzki 13). Indeed, applying this translational approach to Alexievich's writings can uncover a whole new range of interpretations of *Voices from Utopia*.

This paper aims to thoroughly explore Svetlana Alexievich's work from the perspective of translation studies. Moving beyond the traditional fiction/non-fiction dichotomy and drawing on recent translation theories that view translation as a ubiquitous phenomenon, we will demonstrate how her book series can be re-evaluated through a translational lens to reveal new readings.

Thus, after examining some of the numerous research articles on the genre of the Nobel laureate's oeuvre and reflecting on the ubiquity of

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² The cycle consists of five books: *The Unwomanly Face of War* (*У войны не женское лицо*), published in 1984; *Last Witnesses* (*Последние свидетели*), published in 1985; *Zinky Boys* (*Цинковые мальчики*), published in 1990; *Voices from Chernobyl* (*Чернобыльская молитва*), published in 1997; and *Secondhand Time* (*Время секонд хэндо*), published in 2013.

translation, we will conduct a translation studies analysis of her literary legacy. We will illustrate how the often-invisible translational work manifests in her texts on multiple levels, emerging in various creative and interpretative practices related to her work. Ultimately, we will peel back the layers of her narrative to unveil the diverse aspects of translation presence, embodied by the witnesses, the readers, and the author herself.

Exploring the genre of Alexievich's oeuvre

"In her [Alexievich's] books she uses interviews to create a collage of a wide range of voices. With her 'documentary novels,' Svetlana Alexievich, who is a journalist, moves in the boundary between reporting and fiction" (Nobel Prize Outreach). With these words, featured on the official Nobel Prize website, the Swedish Academy defines the literary genre of the award-winning author, highlighting the documentary aspect of her work. It is worth noting that this text has become a reference for researchers writing about Alexievich. The primary difference between their approaches lies in how they define and explain the boundary between journalism and fiction in the Belarusian writer's narrative.

Examining academic research reveals a range of proposed definitions for Alexievich's works. These include terms such as "documentary prose" (Brintlinger 197), "documentary novel" (Jones 234), "literary journalism" (Nurczynski 87), "testimonial literature" (Lugarić Vukas 19), "fictional testimony" (González González 147), or "collective testimony" (Marchesini 313). Some of these publications explicitly state their authors' stances on the (non-)fictional elements within Alexievich's work, either supporting or challenging its (non-)fictional dimension.

The historical accuracy of Alexievich's narratives has been the subject of critique from many scholars. For instance, G. Ackerman and F. Lemarchand strongly criticize how she manages her sources. According to them, she distorts testimonies for artistic purposes, rewriting them to present emotionally charged portrayals in her prose. Consequently, they contend that Alexievich's oeuvre should be classified as literature rather than journalism (Ackerman and Lemarchand). A. Karpusheva also concludes that "Svetlana Alexievich's prose is a work of literature rather than oral history or journalism" (Karpusheva 22). Meanwhile, S. Pinkham argues that the author alters facts by changing the ages and names of characters, as well as making substantial modifications to

some narratives. As a result, the writer herself diminishes the historical value of her work, something she is aware of (Pinkham).

H. Myers identifies “additions and deletions, as well as rewording and rephrasing; [a]nother common change involves moving a word or phrase from one place to another, or, less common, moving a monologue from one chapter to another” (Myers 304). Similarly, I. Hniadzko points out some inconsistencies: alterations in content, changes in names and ages, added paragraphs, etc. As she concludes, Alexievich’s works are “fiction based on non-fictional events and, to some extent, on authentic oral histories” (Hniadzko 207).

While it is essential to recognize the intricate nature of Alexievich’s “novels in voices,” categorizing them within a specific genre becomes even more challenging when we grapple with the ambiguous boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. Drawing a line between these two categories is increasingly difficult, as the distinction between fictional and non-fictional elements in literature appears to be highly relative and influenced by specific contexts. Given this complexity, we propose to approach *Voices from Utopia* from a different perspective, exploring the cycle through the lens of translation in its broadest sense.

The ubiquity of translation

Before delving into Alexievich’s literary legacy, it is important to explain why the concept of translation is a fitting framework for examining her writings. According to recent translation theories, translation today is far more than just the process of transferring text between languages; it is an all-encompassing ubiquitous phenomenon (Blumczynski), invariably present in our daily activities. Thanks to the insights of scholars such as S. Nergaard and S. Arduini, we recognize that translation “is a universal and characteristic aspect of our contemporary world ... [that] must be understood as a transformative representation across cultures and individuals” (Nergaard and Arduini 12).

As M. C. Á. Vidal Claramonte observes, at every moment, through every action we take, whether consciously or unconsciously, we are engaged in translation (Vidal Claramonte, *Traducción* 20). Translation “encompasses the fundamental human processes of becoming, being, change, and cognition” (Bassnett and Johnston 186). It is our means of connecting with both external realities and our inner experiences. Each day, we translate our thoughts; in essence, translation allows us to maintain dialogues with ourselves and with others (Bassnett 1). In a

sense, this expanded notion of translation is rooted in the idea of interpretation, as each new interpretation gives rise to a new translation—one that complements the original, as Borges illustrated in “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*” (Borges 444–450).

Understanding translation in its broadest sense—beyond mere interlingual transfer—reveals its presence in previously unimagined realms, such as history and memory. Recent theories that advocate for an epistemological convergence between translation studies and historiography suggest that history itself is a translation of the past (Alonzi; Vidal Claramonte, *La traducción* and “Translating”), one of many possible translations, always reflecting the voice of its historian-translator. Likewise, memory is permeated by translatable processes that enable us to articulate and preserve our recollections, safeguarding them from oblivion (Brodzki).

Given this context, Alexievich's cycle emerges as a defining translation of the Soviet era. It represents one of numerous efforts to translate Soviet history, offering a personal and nuanced view of events that contrasts sharply with the official translations, produced by the government. Crafted from “bottom-up” polyphonic narratives, it involves not only the author and her witnesses but also the readers, who all play a role in translating the history of the USSR.

Testimonies in *Voices from Utopia* as (self-)translations

To identify the practice of translation within Alexievich's texts, we need to first examine the function of the interviewees in her work and explain why they can be regarded as translators, and even self-translators. According to new translation theory, translation is a vital mechanism for memory (Brodzki) and plays a key role in shaping the personal narratives individuals present about their lives. Through this translatable process, the interviewees bring the past into the present, articulating their memories and traumas. These narratives can be seen as translations of their experiences.

While the act of translation may be painful for Alexievich's confidants, it is also significant, as it transforms the hidden into the visible, preserves memory from being forgotten (Brodzki), from its imminent death, and, in Walter Benjamin's terms, ensures its “afterlife,”³ an

³ Benjamin's “afterlife” concept is complex and warrants detailed research (see Robinson). In this paper, we adopt Brodzki's interpretation of this concept as the preservation of memory from being forgotten through an act of translation.

ongoing life of the source “text.” These translations of personal histories are imperfect, fragmented, and constantly influenced by prevailing narratives. They provide alternative perspectives to official historiography and bring private experiences into the public sphere. Given the ever-changing nature of memory, these translations are never static or definitive; they both reveal and conceal, selectively highlighting certain details and silencing others. The witness-translators shape their accounts based on their audience and the peculiarities of the time in which they testify. In different circumstances, their translations of reality would likely shift in focus.

Having endured the horrors of the twentieth century, these once-silenced subalterns choose to share their experiences with Alexievich, or, in other words, to translate them. These translations not only allow the writer to craft a new version of the past but also provide therapeutic benefits for the witnesses (LaCapra; Stoicea). By verbalizing their trauma, they diminish the overwhelming power and toxicity of their traumatic memories.

Finally, the complex process of testifying can be examined through the lens of self-translation, which involves narrating one’s life experiences (Baxter 222). In order to better understand this term, K. Bennett encourages us to distinguish between “translation *by* the self (originally written in another language) and translation *of* the self” (Bennett 7). The idea of self-translation as a translation of the self refers to the act of introspection, revisiting the past to perceive oneself as the Other, and translating that identity into the present. In essence, the Nobel laureate’s mosaic of individual testimonies reveals a multitude of subaltern voices practicing self-translation, conveying their painful experiences. And this polyphonic chorus is orchestrated by a singular translator, Svetlana Alexievich.

Svetlana Alexievich and the art of translation

The writer’s role as a translator is evident in multiple aspects. First, it is essential to recognize that her books do not present the original testimonies but rather her own translations of them from oral to written form (Nurczynski). This process inevitably results in the loss of some original details while simultaneously infusing the text with new meanings and interpretations that Alexievich introduces through her intralinguistic translation. At the same time, the author occasionally performs interlinguistic translations into Russian, given that some of her

sources speak Belarusian or Ukrainian (Marchesini 318). Furthermore, her periodic parenthetical notes on her interlocutor's behavior—such as “crying,” “laughing,” or “falling silent”—resemble translator's notes, inserting her own voice into the narrative.

In essence, Alexievich's work represents a translation of reality—the history of the subalterns that would not have come to light without her involvement. Treating memories as if they were relics, the author performs an act of *translatio*, transferring the witnesses' memories to others. In her translational work, she seeks to capture the viewpoint of the subaltern, or *homo sovieticus*, and examines the world through a postcolonial perspective. It is for this reason that S. A. Oushakine characterizes her as a “postcolonial writer” (Oushakine 10).

Like any translator, Alexievich inhabits a metaphorical boundary between two worlds: that of her interlocutors and her own. Through her approach to the Other, whom she does not always fully understand, the author strives to communicate the lived experiences she has collected. She is a historian par excellence, and as such also reveals her role as a translator (Alonzi; Vidal Claramonte, *La traducción*), since “[history is] a narrative, a text that translates reality, and ... the author of the historical text is the translator ... of the events that took place” (Vidal Claramonte, “Translating” 69–70). By mediating between the past and the present, she embodies the temporal dimension of the translational process. This way, the writer creates a connection between the witness and the reader.

Furthermore, we should not overlook her background in journalism and her extensive media career. Alexievich belongs to a profession deeply intertwined with ongoing translation processes, as noted by scholars such as E. Bielsa and S. Bassnett. In this context, it is useful to reference Ryszard Kapuściński, a journalist and writer who operated in a genre comparable to Alexievich's. Known for his literary journalism, he stated that “translator” was the most fitting description of his work (Kapuściński 21).

Although it is expected that Alexievich's writings reflect a supposed fidelity to the original testimonies—or, in other words, maintain a direct equivalence to what the witnesses expressed—research in translation studies reveals that this expectation is unrealistic and unattainable. In the context of historical texts, the “original” is lost to us, making it necessary to engage with the past through its various versions, which embody its own set of interpretations. Within these interpretations, the author should keep fidelity to her own understanding of the original voices. Since translation is an inherently interpretive act, Alexievich manipulates the collected material much like any translator would.

In her work, as in that of any translator, the audience plays an important role. It is crucial to consider for whom Alexievich is translating and who constitutes the audience ready to engage with stories of trauma and pain. For instance, translating historical events for a Soviet citizen from the 1980s is quite different from translating for contemporary readers who have grown up in the post-Soviet era. Additionally, the perspective shifts depending on whether the audience is European or American—who might have limited knowledge of Soviet realities—versus residents of former Eastern bloc countries like Hungary or Poland, who may have collective memories of traumatic events related to the USSR.

On the other hand, regardless of differing viewpoints, we believe that Alexievich's translator's voice is present in her work. Much like in translated texts, the notion of the writer's supposed invisibility is outdated, as her influence is apparent in every sentence and punctuation mark. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that the Belarusian journalist does not craft her narratives in a vacuum: her translations are acts of ideological positioning that also involve various collaborators, such as editors, proofreaders, and readers.

Beyond providing therapeutic effects for the witnesses (LaCapra; Stoicea), the translations undertaken by the author also serve as a means of healing her own trauma. The events she describes in her books are deeply intertwined with her personal traumatic experiences. As Alexievich recounts, she lost both her maternal grandfather and paternal grandmother during World War II, and eleven other relatives were burned alive (Alexievich, *U vojny* 7–8). While covering the Soviet-Afghan War as a journalist, she faced unimaginable horrors and distress, even fainting at the sight of human remains after an explosion (Alexievich, *Cinkovye mal'čiki* 25). She expressed that, given what she had witnessed, she would never visit a military museum again (26).

The Chernobyl disaster had a great impact across much of Belarus, including the region where the writer's family resided. Since the catastrophe, there has been an increase in cancer cases. According to the author, her mother lost her vision due to the fallout from the nuclear accident (Alexievich, "Moja edinstvennaja žizn"). The collapse of the USSR also represents a personal trauma for Alexievich, as the young writer's manuscripts reveal a loyalty to communist principles. Furthermore, it is worth noting that in many of her writings, the Nobel laureate reflects on the nearness of death. In this regard, it is particularly poignant that her sister died of cancer at just 35 years old (Naumčik 126).

Drawing from memory studies theories, the Belarusian journalist assumes the role of a secondary witness (Laub) and sometimes even a

primary witness, as she directly experiences and recounts certain historical events. By translating others' recollections into narrative form and providing an ethically engaged interpretation, her role as a secondary witness resembles that of a translator (Deane-Cox). Additionally, her work on World War II can be related to the concept of postmemory (Hirsch), which involves the transmission of trauma across generations, influenced by the experiences of her grandparents and parents who lived through the war. To heal this intergenerational emotional scar, she turns to the accounts of war survivors to construct a narrative that encompasses both their traumatic memories and her own.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that Alexievich's books depict World War II, the Soviet-Afghan conflict, the Chernobyl disaster, and the pre-dissolution image of the USSR as *lieux de mémoire*, following P. Nora's concept. Through her work, the writer seeks to reframe these events, offering a new historical perspective that aims to deepen our understanding and challenge prevailing interpretations of these phenomena. By leveraging the testimonies of the subalterns, she, as a secondary witness, endeavors to undermine the mythic narratives promoted by official history concerning Soviet *lieux de mémoire*.

Through a polyphony of voices, the author unravels a multifaceted trauma endured by her former compatriots. This polyphony itself represents the act of translation—complex, fragmented, and fluid—that provides the reader with diverse perspectives on the past. In this translational process, the writer seeks to transcend rigid historical facts, using emotions as her primary tool for translation. She emphasizes “experiences of the soul,”⁴ believing that these emotional dimensions hold the true essence of traumatic events (Alexievich, “Nas učat”). Her goal is to capture and convey the feelings and experiences of others, preserving their lived realities (Alexievich, “Žizn”). In this effort, she relies on her informants to share the sensations and emotions associated with the physical experiences of significant events.

The role of Alexievich's retranslations

Given the dynamic nature of translation, Alexievich continues translating the experiences she has collected even after her books are published. This results in retranslations, which are rewritings of her initial translation of reality. Through this continuous process of retranslation—an

⁴ All translations from Russian into English included in this paper are by the author.

endeavor that naturally brings about changes—she ensures that the “afterlife,” in the Benjaminian sense, of the original work is preserved.

According to the author, “we ... are dealing with shadows, with versions. ... The document itself does not exist. We are writing the history of our soul, the history of how we change, of how we move” (Alexievich, “Žizn”). Her “originals”—or “documents,” as she calls them—are not static or definitive texts. Each new reading and retranslation imbue them with new meanings, enhancing their depth. The testimonies she collects undergo modifications over time: “[T]hey are not set in stone, nor are they permanent, they are continuously revised” (Alexievich, “Nas učit”). Additionally, the witnesses sometimes agree to modify their statements years after their first interviews with her; by changing certain details, they construct new realities. In the words of the Nobel laureate, “[d]ocuments are living creatures—they change as we change” (Alexievich, “Nobel Lecture”). As long as the person is alive, they remember and add information.

The author admits that she is in a constant state of movement (Alexievich, “Žizn”), which is reflected in her work. “My books are the current truth of my present understanding of the world,” she states (qtd. in Tolokolnikova). Consequently, both her initial translations and later retranslations are profoundly shaped by her *habitus* and personal experiences.

Although Alexievich frequently makes ongoing adjustments to her work, the most substantial rewriting took place in the early twenty-first century. There are two key reasons behind this. First, her books on World War II, *The Unwomanly Face of War* and *Last Witnesses*, needed a comprehensive overhaul—their content required significant changes—for their reissue internationally. Originally published in 1984 and 1985, respectively, both texts were seen as outdated and had undergone heavy censorship at the time. Second, following the perestroika and the subsequent period of transformation, former Soviets experienced a newfound sense of freedom, leading to a reassessment of their history. Alexievich wanted to reflect this shift in her writing, capturing the essence of this historical transition in her narrative.

In addition to the reasons previously discussed, Alexievich may have had other important motivations for retranslating her works. We believe that her immigration to Europe significantly influenced not only her approach to contemporary reality but also her historical perspective. In various interviews, the Nobel laureate has praised Europeans, particularly noting their treatment of immigrants. For instance, she was moved by a barefoot march in Italy in support of refugees, which led her to

comment: "Yes, this is Europe, before which [post-Soviets] must stand in awe and reflect: why are we so savage?" (Alexievich and Sokurov). Her several years of residence in European countries undoubtedly shaped her worldview, allowing her to explore the subtleties of cultures distinct from the Soviet context and enabling her to distance herself from the traumatic legacy of the USSR to view it with a fresh perspective.

When analyzing Alexievich's retranslations, it is essential to take into account her direct experiences with the Soviet-Afghan war, the Chernobyl disaster, and the eventual collapse of the USSR. As a witness to the fall of the Soviet Empire and the disintegration of communist ideology, she gained a profound perspective that fundamentally altered her approach to revisiting and reinterpreting the testimonies she had collected over the decades. Her experiences in Afghanistan and her presence at Chernobyl influenced her subsequent writing and rewritings. Witnessing the harsh realities of war, observing human bodies shattered, understanding the fragility of humans as biological beings, and confronting the diminished value of life—these experiences collectively transformed her view of her earlier work.

It is likely that her own traumatic experiences influenced the course of her retranslations. In an interview, the author reflects on this, stating: "Now I would write a different book about the war, delving more into human nature, into darkness, into the subconscious. I would be very interested in ... the biological human being" (Alexievich, "Moja edinstvennaja žizn"). She further clarifies her focus in the latest edition of *Zinky Boys*, noting her interest in "the body, the human body, as a link between nature and history, between the animal and language. All physical details are important" (Alexievich, *Cinkovye mal'čiki* 25).

In her retranslations, Alexievich places a stronger emphasis on reinforcing the anti-war message, aiming to generate a visceral repulsion toward the idea of war, even among those in the military: "I want to write a book about war that induces nausea, that makes even the mere thought of war disgusting. That it would seem absurd. That it would make the generals themselves vomit" (Alexievich, *U vojny* 17). To achieve this, she relies on the emotional dimension of the testimonies. By highlighting the emotions and traumas of her subjects, Alexievich seeks to (re)translate history in a way that deeply resonates with readers and moves them. In this sense, some researchers aptly place *Voices from Utopia* within the context of the so-called "emotional turn" (see Karpusheva).

The majority of the revisions are made by the author in her early works on World War II. While the initial editions of these books presented an

anti-war message interlaced with emotional elements, they also carried patriotic overtones. The patriotic sentiments from the 1980s, as seen in *The Unwomanly Face of War* and *Last Witnesses*, gradually lost their emotional resonance over the years due to changes in the post-Soviet political landscape and the growth of the readership. To maintain a strong emotional impact, Alexievich had to update her approach, offering a fresh perspective on the testimonies and placing greater emphasis on the brutal realities of war and the profound traumas it causes.

The writer's *habitus*—a set of dispositions that shape and organize her approach to viewing the world, behaving in it, interpreting her surroundings, and interacting with prevailing narratives (see Bourdieu 87–109)—is essential for understanding *Voices from Utopia*. Alexievich's translations and retranslations emerge as provisional visions of the past, embedded in a process of recontextualization. The author operates in accordance with the prevailing ideology and dominant poetic of each rewriting period (Lefevre). In other words, what inspires her—and her readers—in the 1980s may seem outdated twenty years later.

Interpretive readings: the reader as translator

In her translations, the writer aims not only to reflect on her own understanding and present her current version of the past but also to tailor her historical perspective to resonate with her audience. This reader-centered approach aligns with current principles in translation studies. After delving into the recollected testimonies, readers assume the role of secondary witnesses (Laub), engaging with and comprehending the painful and traumatic experiences described. Consequently, readers become translators themselves, crafting their own interpretations of the past based on Alexievich's oeuvre and other sources. Thus, the process of translation comes full circle: after the author transitions the testimonies from the private to the public sphere, readers translate these messages and return them to the private realm through their personal understanding.

Just as Alexievich's narrative and the writer herself are in a state of constant motion, so too are her readers. Their interpretations of history shift over time. With her growing international acclaim, her audience has expanded and diversified well beyond the post-Soviet realm. To keep her readers engaged, Alexievich persists in using her main translation tool—emotions—but she sometimes adjusts her approach. Specifically, she aims to replace patriotic passages from her first books with poignant scenes that reveal the profound trauma endured by the

Soviet people. As is common in literature addressing traumatic experiences, the impact of the message needs to be convincing, and its effectiveness is paramount (Hron xvii).

The emotional depth and powerful impact of Alexievich's narrative are widely acknowledged by readers. For example, Sophie Benech, a French translator of some of her works, observes that the Nobel laureate's stories convey profound suffering, which the translator also feels during the translation process (Benech). Similarly, the director of a Belarusian theatrical adaptation of *Secondhand Time* notes that the emotional weight of the text was so intense that it led some actresses to weep during rehearsals (Naumčik 410). Furthermore, Xavi Ayén, a Spanish journalist who interviewed Alexievich in 2015, remarks that "[r]eaders of her books need to take breaks; sometimes they have to put them aside to catch their breath or to cry, because the intensity of the pain and the emotion they evoke makes it hard to continue reading" (Alexievich, "Putin").

By harnessing extreme emotional intensity, the author seeks to cultivate a critical awareness in her readers and create an anti-war message potent enough to provoke even the military. Her objective is to prevent the repetition of historical traumas by translating painful memories of the past, engaging the reader emotionally, and revitalizing the original text. In this manner, Alexievich aims to preserve marginalized memories, hoping that her translations will not only stir profound emotions but also evolve into transformative emotional experiences.

Conclusions

The concept of translation acts as a central theme throughout Alexievich's work, appearing in multiple layers of the text. In her cycle *Voices from Utopia*, historical witnesses, guided by the Belarusian author, translate their memories and emotions from the past to share their experiences of trauma. Through their interviews, they not only shape their version of events but also translate their lived experiences into narrative form, engaging in a process of self-translation.

The writer orchestrates this process as a masterful translator, who, after collecting the data, translates oral testimonies into literary works. Following the initial publication, she continually revisits and retranslates the texts due to shifts in the surrounding metanarratives and changes in her own *habitus*. Emotion is her primary tool: she frames the translation of Soviet history as an emotional experience. As readers engage with the

accounts provided by Alexievich's interlocutors, they too become part of this emotional journey. This immersive process, filled with poignant messages, influences their understanding of the past, encourages them to see history through a dramatic lens, and invites them to translate historical events in innovative ways.

Interpreting Alexievich's work as an emotional translation of historical events sheds light on the reasons behind her revisions. As a translator, she cannot produce a perfect equivalent of the original but must stay faithful to her own rendition of the past, making her ongoing retranslations a logical response to changing contexts. Just as translations evolve to suit new environments, her reinterpretations of historical narratives are shaped by the contemporary times and the audiences they reach. Emotions bridge the gap from the witness to the reader; Alexievich's priority is to keep her audience emotionally engaged, ensuring that the original's impact endures.

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Odmevi prevoda v pripovedih Svetlane Aleksijevič

Ključne besede: beloruska književnost / Aleksijevič, Svetlana / dokumentarna proza / sovjetska zgodovina / avtobiografska pričevanja / prevod / ponovni prevod

Razprava raziskuje prisotnost prevoda v delu Svetlane Aleksijevič, beloruske novinarki in Nobelove nagrajenke za književnost (2015). Sredi razpravljanja o tem, ali je treba njene knjige kategorizirati kot leposlovje ali neleposlovje, predlagamo alternativni pogled na njen cikel *Glasovi iz utopije*, ki ga je mogoče razumeti tudi kot prevod sovjetske zgodovine. Z uporabo sodobnih teorij prevajanja, ki širijo definicijo prevoda onkraj zgolj medjezikovnega prenosa, lahko opazimo, kako prevod v njenih besedilih deluje na različnih ravneh. Ta proces ne vključuje samo prič, s katerimi se pogovarja pisateljica, ampak se razširi tudi na bralce. Natančneje, intervjuvanci s procesom (samo)prevajanja opisujejo svoje preživete izkušnje, njihovi glasovi pa postanejo polifoni zbor, ki ponuja sveže vpoglede v zgodovino ZSSR. Aleksijevič ta ustna pričevanja prevaja v pisne dokumente, ki so nato podvrženi večkratnim ponovnim prevodom zaradi nenehnih sprememb v pripovedih, v katere sta potopljena tako avtoričino občinstvo kot avtorica sama. Ti prevodi in ponovni prevodi pričevanjem zagotavljajo posmrtno življenje in vplivajo na to, kako bralci prevajajo zgodovino in se potopijo v množico njenih različic. Razumevanje zgodovinskega opusa Svetlane Aleksijevič kot nenehnega toka prevodov, ki pritegnejo vse, od prič do bralcev, odpira nove možnosti za interpretacijo njenega cikla.

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A Comparative Feminist Reading of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

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This article comparatively explores Margaret Atwood's Surfacing and Han Kang's The Vegetarian, examining the subordinate status shared by women and animals, male-controlled medical science and camera technology, and women's mythical metamorphosis. Both fictional worlds, as lived by the heroines, are decidedly patriarchal: the I-heroine in Surfacing undergoes violence in a coerced abortion while Yeong-hye in The Vegetarian is force-fed meat by her authoritative father. Both narrative arcs are shaped by the heroines' realization of their share in violence: the I-heroine realizes her consent to the abortion and Yeong-hye holds herself accountable for eating the meat of a dog killed by her father. The two heroines are met with different endings—the I-heroine chooses to be pregnant again and Yeong-hye renounces her life by avoiding eating—because of the former's conviction about survival and life and the latter's conception of eating as killing. Read together, the two novels explore the legitimacy of claims of innocence, the limits of care, and possibilities of transcending victimhood in mutually illuminating ways. Meanwhile, the novels provide insights into the non-closure prevalent in women's fiction and the feminist meaning of women's spiritual quest novels.

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Surfacing by Margaret Atwood and *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang, the 2024 Nobel Prize laureate, although situated in different cultures and times, are united by deep ecological concerns: exploitation of women and animals, the pervasiveness of male-controlled technology, as well as the heroines' metamorphoses into animal or plant. Taken together, the novels offer differing ecological visions through female trans-corporality and women's metamorphosis into animals or plants, providing new pathways to break the human-animal-plant hierarchical boundaries and to live outside anthropocentric and phallogocentric frames.

Surfacing, published in 1972, is the second novel by Margaret Atwood, depicting a woman (henceforth referred to as the I-heroine) who goes back to her hometown in Quebec with her boyfriend Joe and another couple, Anna and David, in search of her missing father. As they venture into the Canadian wilderness, the I-heroine tries to make sense of the love affair she had with her high school teacher who coerced her into abortion. Coming out of this traumatic event wounded, she becomes emotionally closed off. In the short excursion from the Ontario city, she comes to the realization that she cannot remain a victim; she initiates sexual intercourse with Joe and becomes pregnant again. In a mythical encounter with nature, she turns into a plant-animal. Then, she sees her mother who is feeding jays and turns into a jay herself.

More than thirty years later, in 2007, South Korean writer Han Kang published *The Vegetarian*, a rework of her earlier short story, "The Fruit of My Woman" (1997), in which the woman protagonist actually turns into a plant. *The Vegetarian* describes the victimhood of Yeong-hye, the second daughter in her family and the wife of Mr. Cheong, within the meat-eating patriarchy. Troubled by a recurring grotesque dream, she decides not to eat meat and is met with emphatic disapproval from her family. Later, at a housewarming party at her elder sister In-hye's, her father slaps her and force-feeds her meat. Yeong-hye then slits her wrist in an attempt to kill herself. Eventually, she is committed to a psychiatric ward by In-hye due to her alarmingly deteriorating health condition. Suffering from combined anorexia nervosa and schizophrenia, she becomes delusional and seeks to transform into a plant.

Nevertheless, the two novels contain important differences that cannot be ignored. The first one is of course contextual: while *Surfacing* is embedded in Canadian patriarchy in the 1970s, emphasizing the violence underlying man-woman romantic relationships, *The Vegetarian* is staged in Confucianism-based contemporary South Korea, highlighting father-daughter conflict and taking the violence in man-woman relationships as a derivative of the former. The parental figures in both novels are also drastically different from each other. Whereas Yeong-hye's father is domineering and authoritative, and her mother an accomplice in the violent acts her father commits, the parents of the I-heroine are her source of spiritual support. Therefore, while the I-heroine moves toward her lost parents, Yeong-hye moves away from her parents. In addition, while the I-heroine resists the debilitating forces of patriarchy by transcending victimhood, Yeong-hye makes successive renunciations—giving up eating meat, severing human contacts, and eventually

refusing to eat. In this sense, the two heroines meet two disparate destinies: the former becomes pregnant and embraces new life, whereas the latter lives a suicidal plant-like life. Finally, while the I-heroine regards animal-killing as key to survival and shows gratitude for animals' sacrifices, Yeong-hye rejects killing of any sort as valid.

Viewing *Surfacing* and *The Vegetarian* as alike in their portrayals of women's moral dilemma and psychological awakening illuminates and augments key aspects of each work. To borrow the words of Tiffany Tsao, "when we focus on the features that the two works have in common, the differences we discover about those features—ones that previously meant little in a sea of innumerable differences—gain new significance" (Tsao 97). Taken further, the differences that we observe in these similarities explain in insightful ways the moral decisions of the two heroines, thereby leading to dramatically different ways of living of the two heroines, shaping the closure of the narratives in definitive ways. Analyzing these differences helps us answer crucial cultural questions: To what extent and in what ways is animal-killing permitted by one author and rejected by another? What do the fictional animal-becoming and plant-becoming of the heroines suggest about the ravages that patriarchal violence entails and about new modes of existence?

Ruptured connections amid patriarchal violence

Significantly, both fictional worlds are riddled with rigid hierarchical and dualist ideologies, a world that comes to separate women/men, nature/culture, and animals/humans. The relationship between I-heroine with her brother is critical to understanding this world ruled by divisive ideology. Memories about her brother are inserted intermittently through the narrative. When she washes vegetables in the lake, she notices a leech, and recalls

the good kind with red dots on the back, undulating along like a streamer held at one end and shaken. The bad kind is mottled grey and yellow. It was my brother who made up these moral distinctions, at some point he became obsessed with them, he must have picked them up from the war. There had to be a good kind and a bad kind of everything. (Atwood, *Surfacing* 38)

The moral distinction between the good and the bad is categorical, admitting no amendments nor any variations between them. Her brother has a laboratory in which he catches the slower animals, including snakes and frogs, and puts them in jars and tin cans. As he sometimes

forgets to feed them, they starve to death. I-heroine would let go of the smaller animals, which infuriates her brother. And when their mother is not watching, he throws the leeches into the campfire.

Similarly, the logic of domination reigns in the world portrayed in *The Vegetarian*, which finds its fullest expression in the conflict arising from the contrasting social practices of meat-eating and vegetarianism. The first novella is narrated from the perspective of Mr. Cheong, Yeong-hye's husband, followed by that of Yeong-hye's brother-in-law and then In-hye. Two families—Yeong-hye's and In-hye's—occupy the center of the narrative. From Mr. Cheong's perspective, his wife is defined by passivity, "completely unremarkable in every way" (Han, *Vegetarian* 11). Yeong-hye takes care of everything in the household and never complains, even if he comes back home late. She demands nothing of him but has to answer to everything he demands. The patriarchal structure of the family is replicated in the clear-cut division of public and private spheres as occupied by husband and wife separately. Therefore, when Yeong-hye refuses to prepare meat for him and throws it away, he is startled by her defiance. Soon, Yeong-hye finds herself repelled by the smell of meat. At the same time, she avoids sex with her husband. To satisfy his sexual desire and to assert his masculinity and dominion, he forces sex on her. He describes her as "a 'comfort woman' dragged in against her will" and himself as "the Japanese soldier demanding her services" (38). Despite Yeong-hye's resistance, she cannot stop spousal rape. At this point, the intimacy that a marriage should provide erodes completely into violence and indifference, severing the marital connection.

Occurrences of explicit violence also shape the narrative arc of the two novels. Whereas for the I-heroine, it is the "forced" abortion, in *The Vegetarian*, it is the father's dog-killing and force-feeding, and Mr. Cheong's spousal rape. When I-heroine finds herself pregnant, her lover, a married man, persuades her to have an abortion against her own will. However, we should pay special heed to the different power relations present in both novels. Whereas the father-daughter relationship is central to *The Vegetarian*, the heterosexual relationship takes center stage in *Surfacing*. The subjugation of Yeong-hye in relation to her father, especially manifested in the many beatings, is replicated in her subjection in her marriage. The fact that fathers still hold an immense sway over the conduct of children even after the latter get married is very culture-specific to East Asian countries shaped by Confucian filial piety. As Alix Beeston rightly asserts, "Yeong-hye is scripted into submission, silence, and invisibility by the Confucian

‘Three Rules of Obedience’ and ‘Seven Vices,’ teachings that are reformulated within the anti-colonial nationalism of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Korean society” (Beeston 687). Additionally, filial piety, a cardinal principle of Confucianism which organizes inter-generational relationships in the family, is a shared tradition in South Korea, Japan, and China. Yeong-hye’s father is culturally supported in beating and force-feeding her, a malevolent act recast as benevolence mediated through filial piety.¹

The violence inflicted upon Yeong-hye is enacted through the sexual act of actual and symbolic penetration, which once again attests to the secondary sexual position that she occupies. Mr. Cheung recalls the force-feeding: “My father-in-law mashed the pork to a pulp on my wife’s lips as she struggled in agony. ... Though In-hye sprang at him and held him by the waist, in the instant that the force of the slap had knocked my wife’s mouth open he’d managed to jam the pork in” (Han, *Vegetarian* 47–48). The force-feeding, her father opening her mouth and thrusting the pork in, resembles the act of male penetration. The fact that her brother helps their father to put the pork into Yeong-hye’s mouth indicates that any man could assert himself upon the woman. Parallel to force-feeding is spousal rape. Mr. Cheong has forced sex with Yeong-hye, penetrating her and violating her body. To him, it is not spousal rape but simply a way of demanding a service, like a Japanese soldier would to a Korean comfort woman. This metaphor is illuminating, as Mr. Cheong equates himself with a colonizer and invader. As the novel suggests, patriarchal power resides first and foremost in the father figure, who endorses all forms of relational violence from men to women. In *Surfacing*, however, the father is loving while her former male lover and male friends are manipulative and invasive. Male domination is most explicit in man-woman heterosexual relationships rather than in the father-daughter relationship. This is also true between Anna and David, the married couple. Therefore, heterosexual relationships among peers structure the major conflict in *Surfacing*, while violence within the father-daughter relationship is the primal condition that defines Yeong-hye’s and In-hye’s victimhood.

¹ It should be noted that Han Kang, in an interview with Bethanne Patrick, mentions that *The Vegetarian* is not a singular indictment of Korean patriarchy but also about the possibility and impossibility of innocence (Han, “Han Kang”).

The gendering of medical knowledge and visual technology

In both novels, medical knowledge and visual technology carry the distinctive signature of masculinity, products and extensions born of the dualist and hierarchical patriarchal culture. Both novels portray female characters susceptible to the voyeurism and invasion of technology and medical knowledge. Both novels give considerable weight to a single electronic gadget: the camera. In the narratives, it is a man who possesses and uses the camera and the woman is the object of the camera eye, a substitute for the male gaze. In *The Vegetarian*, Yeong-hye's brother-in-law films the process of him painting flowers on her naked body:

He took the camera off the tripod and began to film her close up. He zoomed in on the details of each flower, and made a long collage of the curve of her neck, her disheveled hair, her two hands resting on the sheet, seeming tense, and the buttock with the Mongolian mark. Once he'd finally captured her whole body on the tape, he switched off the camcorder. (Han, *Vegetarian* 92)

This brief paragraph establishes Yeong-hye as an object and Yeong-hye's brother-in-law as the one who is able to use the machine and direct the scene. On another occasion, he sets his camcorder to film a man named J interacting with Yeong-hye when both are naked, but J soon finds it repelling and gives up. Eventually, he substitutes the role of J and has sex with Yeong-hye. He films the whole process and makes his intention explicit: "The image he'd wanted to capture on film had to be one that could be repeated over and over, forbidden either to end or to come to a climax" (121). In controlling the camera narrative, he controls the meaning and form of the memory this tape holds, entitling it "Mongolian Mark 1—Flowers of Night and Flowers of Day." Moreover, he wants the film to be capable of inexhaustible value for endless use. He thinks aloud, "I want to swallow you, have you melt into me and flow through my veins" (121). Here, the edibility of Yeong-hye is replayed through a male desire to consume her body both in flesh and in images.

In *Surfacing*, David threatens to throw Anna into a lake if she does not undress herself for the shooting of *Random Samples*, a short film that David is recording. Despite Joe's mild interference and Anna's resistance, David puts Anna upside down over his shoulder and demands Joe to shoot. When Anna resists, David says that it is token resistance and Anna is an exhibitionist at heart. Notably, David perceives Anna as an exhibitionist when she is not. Instead, this "exhibitionist" role is socially constructed in a patriarchal culture. As Laura Mulvey argues:

“The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 837).

If in Yeong-hye's case, she still has some agency in the filming process because she consents to be filmed and she wants her body to be painted with flowers, then in Anna's case, she is made to display herself in front of the camera, a role she plays but despises. Then, “Joe swiveled the camera and trained it on them [Anna and David] like a bazooka or a strange instrument of torture and pressed the button, lever, sinister whirr” (Atwood, *Surfacing* 135–136). Like Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, David and Joe are savvy with visual technologies, free to use these machines toward their own will. Marge Piercy notices that it is typical for Atwood to portray a man who is “laden with expensive gadgets that give him a sense of power” (Piercy 41). The camera is one such gadget.² In both novels, the male character exercises his power on both the representational and symbolic level—he at once has authority to control/distort visual reality and to name and control its meaning, whereas it is the women who signify and bear this meaning. As Laura Mulvey argues, “the paradox of phallocentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world” (Mulvey 833).

Likewise, medical knowledge subjects women to its power and authority. In *Surfacing*, Atwood is suspicious of the power and the morality of medical science. This distrust is initially displayed through I-heroine's mother. Her mother was hospitalized before she died. I-heroine tells us:

I went to see her in the hospital, where she allowed herself to be taken only when she could no longer walk. ... She hated hospitals and doctors; she must have been afraid they would experiment on her, keep her alive as long as they could with tubes and needles even though it was what they call terminal, in the head it always is; and in fact that's what they did. (Atwood, *Surfacing* 21–22)

The heroine despises unnecessary killing as much as her mother hates the artificial prolongation of life, both framed as arbitrary intervention in life. I-heroine mentions earlier in the story that she does not want to have another child because

² For instance, in Atwood's first novel *The Edible Woman* (1969), the male protagonist Peter tries to take a picture of the heroine Marian at a party against her will.

they shut you into a hospital, they shave the hair off you and tie your hands down and they don't let you see, they don't want you to understand, they want you to believe it's their power, not yours. They stick needles into you so that you won't hear anything, you might as well be a dead pig, your legs are up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or sniggering practicing on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar. After that they fill your veins up with red plastic, I saw it running down through the tube. I won't let them do that to me ever again. (80)

The uneven power that defines the doctor-patient relationship is noteworthy. The doctors control medical knowledge inaccessible to the patient. The I-heroine later describes the hand of the clinician who performs an abortion on her as criminal. She shows her antipathy toward medical professionals and institutions due to their interference with life, whether it is the prolongation of life, the ushering-in of life, or the termination of life.

Both sisters in *The Vegetarian* have received medical treatment. Yeong-hye is committed to a psychiatric ward after she is diagnosed with anorexia nervosa and schizophrenia. Yeong-hye's condition becomes alarming because she has not eaten for four days in a row. The doctor suspects that she has not taken her medication: "When the nurse then forced her tongue up and used a flashlight to look inside, the tablets were still there" (Han, *Vegetarian* 158). Yeong-hye is often seen with the drip needle inserted into the back of her hand:

In-hye checks for burst veins and finds them everywhere; on both hands, the soles of both feet, even her elbows. The only means of providing Yeong-hye with proteins and glucose is the IV, but now there are no undamaged veins left where a needle could be put in. The only other way would be to link the IV to one of the arteries that run over Yeong-hye's shoulders. (157)

As per description, it seems that Yeong-hye's body is not cared for but violated, perforated by needle holes. Her body becomes a site on which medicine wages a war between life and death, as well as normality and abnormality. Till now, her subjective agency has been voided. Gone with her agency is her sexuality. In-hye narrates: "She hasn't had her period for a long time now, and now that her weight has dropped below thirty kilos, of course there's nothing left of her breasts. She lies there looking like a freakish overgrown child, devoid of any secondarysexual characteristics" (156). Deprived of agency and sexuality, she becomes an asexualized body only, "a bare life" in Agamben's terms.

It seems that Han Kang is critical about medicine as a highly-enclosed institution which deals with life as it pleases, with whatever technology it deems necessary. The contingent use of medical technology is only a choice between two evils.

In addition, the gendered nature of medical knowledge is fairly noticeable. Both sisters have only been examined by male doctors. In-hye describes Yeong-hye's male doctor as follows: "The doctor, who is in his late thirties, has a healthy, robust physique. The set of his jaw and his manner of walking speak of a certain self-confidence; he sits behind the desk and stares over it at her, his brow furrowed" (Han, *Vegetarian* 145). On the contrary, Yeong-hye is delusional and weak. Joori Joyce Lee observes the difference between the doctor as a detached interpreter of Yeong-hye's condition and In-hye as a sympathetic reader "who tries to understand the depth of her sister's trauma yet oscillates between understanding and ignorance" (J. J. Lee 331). Once, In-hye finds herself bleeding from her vagina for almost a month, intermittently. She decides to have a medical examination: "The middled-aged male doctor then pushed a cold abdominal scope deep into her vagina and removed a tongue-like polyp that had been stuck to the vaginal wall. Her body flinched away from the sharp pain" (Han, *Vegetarian* 167). The doctor as well as the medical technology he uses are represented as indifferent and invasive. Both novels question the power of the medical institution, accusing it of failure to take care of life properly. They further implicate the care ethic in social relations and medical institution. Seul Lee, for instance, analyzes the conflicting care ethics in *The Vegetarian*, suggesting that "the act of caring entails the violation of others, which may not be perceptible to those people who are accustomed to existing within the violent normativity that structures the order of things according to power" (S. Lee 70).

Female trans-corporeality and women's spiritual quest novels³

While Yeong-hye and the I-heroine are both supported by powerful bonding to a maternal figure, they also come to connect with a larger world—nature itself—through mythical metamorphosis. Nancy Díaz argues that "metamorphosis as literary event transcends plot, however, and informs all levels of meaning in the narrative" and that "it is in-

³ Spiritual quest novels are novels that dramatize women's inner world and stage women's spiritual growth which does not translate into real action in political and social life. Examples are Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), and, more recently, Barbara Kingsolver's *Unsheltered* (2018).

volved in value systems and also may be relevant to anthropological, ethical, social, and psychological, as well as existential, concerns” (Díaz 4). Significantly, the fictional metamorphosis portrayed in both novels resonates with the concept of trans-corporeality developed by Stacy Alaimo. She argues that “trans-corporeality contests the master subject of Western humanist individualism, who imagines himself as transcendent, disembodied and removed from the world he surveys,” and it “discourages fantasies of transcendence and imperviousness that render environmentalism merely an elective and external enterprise” (Alaimo 435–437). In other words, trans-corporeality insists on the relatedness and connectedness of human body to non-human bodies and encourages a radical rethinking of one’s being as unraveled in time and space. In this way, trans-corporeality bridges the divisiveness between humans and the world, overcomes humans’ false sense of separation, and restores care and connection.

Yeong-hye’s connection to nature is primarily achieved through her refusal to eat meat, which constitutes a kind of killing for her. Mediated by a worsening psychiatric condition, she imagines herself to be a tree, absorbing sunshine and becoming part of nature. Adhy Kim traces Yeong-hye’s plant-becoming to a vegetal turn in the Korean poet Yi Sang’s poem “Untitled: Relating to Bone Fragments,”⁴ the last line of which reads: “I have come to believe that humans are plants” (qtd. in Kim 438). This indistinction between humans and plants reveals the insight that humans are inseparable from the nature that they are part of. Moreover, moving away from an anthropocentrism built on hierarchies and dualisms, this awareness no longer foregrounds the human and backgrounds nature, instead encouraging pluralism and multicentrism that come to define humans and the world around them.

Critics have not neglected the gendered nature of Yeong-hye’s transformation. Magdalena Zolkos argues that Yeong-hye’s vegetal metamorphosis, a phantasmic one, draws out “the cultural association between the world of plants and non-violence” and that “the transformation into a gendered vegetal being metaphorizes an ‘escape-impulse’ that captures the irreducible desire to overcome, move beyond, or step over one’s physical or social limits” (Zolkos 104). It should be noted that for Yeong-hye, it is not the “escaping from” but the “escaping into” a world of plants that defines her resistance to meat-eating and insistence on non-killing. Instead of the human world, she integrates herself

⁴ Yi Sang (original name Kim Hae-Gyeong) was a notable Korean poet and writer living under Japanese occupation. His works are considered modernist and avant-garde. He is famous for *The Wings* and *Crow’s Eye View*.

into nature, sustaining an other-than-human existence. Han Kang says that in “Yeong-hye’s extreme attempt to turn her back on violence by casting off her own human body and transforming into a plant lies a deep despair and doubt about humanity” (Han, “Interview”). Yeong-hye tells In-hye that trees are brothers and sisters and that she dreams of becoming one of them, existing in a world shaped not by patriarchal violence but by arboreal sisterhood and brotherhood. As Rose Casey notes, the scenes of arboreal-becoming “register the vertical depth of rootedness as well as its lateral expansion, affirming both the temporal and geographical ongoingness of plant life” (Casey 347). Yeong-hye’s radical claim of kinship with plants also brings to mind what Karen Houle calls a “radically collective achievement”; she argues that plant-becoming crosses faculties, bodies, phyla, and the organic and the inorganic, which “opens up thinking about relations as transient alliances rather than strategies” (Houle 112).

Carol Christ, dealing with I-heroine (also applicable to Yeong-hye), writes that “spiritual insight surfaces through attention to the body” and that “the achievement of authentic selfhood and power depends on understanding one’s grounding in nature and natural energies” (Christ 330). In the end, I-heroine transforms into a plant-animal: “Through the trees the sun glances; the swamp around me smolders, energy of decay turning to growth, green fire. I remember the heron; by now it will be insects, frogs, fish, other herons. My body also changes, the creature in me, plant-animal, sends out filaments in me; I ferry it secure between death and life, I multiply” (Atwood, *Surfacing* 168). Remarkably, it is after her metamorphosis that she mythically encounters her mother, who is feeding jays and who turns into a jay herself, and her father who is now a wolf. She becomes reassured of her parents’ legacy and gift to her: “To prefer life, I owe them that” (188). Her metamorphosis is represented as a process that involves a renunciation of the human form for the sake of a transfluidity that denies the rigidity of being, defies the separation of human from its surroundings, and places the human in space and time. Practically, it renews life energies and encourages growth.

Although both plots are rooted in female trans-corporeality, the ending of the two heroines’ metamorphosis differ in the sense that I-heroine continues her life whereas Yeong-hye’s life, as a human or as a human-turned-plant, is on the verge of self-annihilation. I suggest that the two different closures are pertinent to the heroines’ perceptions of killing and therefore of life itself. To begin with, killing in any form and at any level is abhorred by Yeong-hye. In order not to kill, she must not eat. To not eat, she will surely die. However, in this way, she kills

herself, an act which is as affirmative as punitive. Here, the contradiction underlying Yeong-hye's idea reveals itself: to not kill, she must see herself wither away. I-heroine, however, endorses nonviolence but at the same time sustains the notion that killing is inevitable for the sake of survival, meaning that killing is context-sensitive, and only unnecessary and gratuitous killing should be prohibited. Besides, humans should show gratitude to animals which die for humans' survival. As I-heroine remarks:

Whether it died willingly, consented, whether Christ died willingly, anything that suffers and dies instead of us is Christ; if they didn't kill birds and fish they would have killed us. The animals die that we may live, they are substitute people, hunters in the fall killing the deer, that is Christ also. And we eat them, out of cans or otherwise; we are eaters of death, dead Christ-flesh resurrecting inside us, granting us life. Canned Spam, canned Jesus, even the plants must be Christ. (Atwood, *Surfacing* 140)

This paragraph is essential for understanding I-heroine's notion of killing and survival. Animals are eaten for the sake of survival of other lives. To the heroine, the will to survive is understandable in each living being and killing becomes need-based. Certain acts of killing should be tolerated so long as it is a means to survive. Her viewpoint about killing reminds us of "contextual moral veganism," which Greta Gaard explains as an important component of critical ecofeminism: "Contextual moral veganism is capable of acknowledging the sentience of plants and other ecological beings, and in diverse contexts, placing humans in the food chain as both eater and eaten, pointing to context-specific moral directions that strive to produce the least suffering and greatest care for all involved" (Gaard 38). In fact, Margaret Atwood believes that survival is foundational to the belief systems of Canadians. She argues that "the central symbol for Canada—and this is based on numerous instances of its occurrence in both English and French Canadian literature—is undoubtedly Survival, *la Survivance*" (Atwood, *Survival* 32). Precisely because survival is crucial, I-heroine cannot let herself die, and an essential component of transcending her victimhood is to survive her victimhood. Since her "crime" lies in not allowing her fetus to live (survive), she must conceive again, this time allowing the fetus to grow together with herself.

However, critics may not praise the compromised ending of *Surfacing*, leaving I-heroine's feminist role undefined. Marge Piercy doubts if the protagonist can translate her rhetoric of refusing to be a victim into action (Piercy 43). Arnold and Cathy Davidson suspect

that I-heroine would settle for less when she returns to Ontario City (Davidson and Davidson 38). Judith Plaskow points out that “the woman whose quest in cosmos does not find social expression leaves political power in the hands of men who will act according to their own understanding of reality” (Plaskow 337). Similarly, *The Vegetarian* ends on a tragic tone, suggesting the imminent death of the character. Moreover, Yeong-hye resists mainly through renunciation, a kind of power that belongs to the province of the powerless, which results often in defeating behaviors and harm to oneself. Han Kang admits that “the gesture of refusal also holds within itself an attempt to recover—narrowly, with great difficulty—dignity through a self-destructive action” (Han, “Interview”). Additionally, both heroines effect rebirth through a metamorphosis actualized through a dissociation from human identity and the real world, relying on inexplicable mythical forces. What accounts for the prevalence of novels on women’s spiritual quests and mythical metamorphosis aside from female corporeality’s close association with nature? Why does women’s fiction often end ambivalently in renunciation and resistance?

Carol Christ has notably interpreted *Surfacing* as a novel of women’s spiritual quest, different from novels of social quest. She distinguishes the two kinds of novels as follows: “The social quest is a search for self in which the protagonist begins in alienation and seeks integration into a human community where he or she can develop more fully,” while in spiritual quests, “increased self-knowledge is not translated into new social roles for women” (Christ 317). Spiritual quest novels of women portray a heroine who starts a journey directed to the interior. Due to an irreversible wound caused by a traumatizing event and everyday violence, she looks inward in search of a dormant power that needs to be activated and a self-identity that demands redefinition to renew a severed connection either to the self or to the other. Aided often by strong female relationships and mythical powers that are sometimes unaccounted for, she is then awakened to new truth about her self, which subsequently changes her relation to her self and the other.⁵

The repetitiveness and circularity of the two novels are characteristic of novels that center on women’s spiritual quest. Marianne Hirsch,

⁵ Annis Pratt’s formulation of “rebirth novels” is similar to spiritual quest novels. She outlines the narrative structure of rebirth novels into seven phases: splitting off from the world of the ego, the green world guide or token helps the hero cross the threshold, confrontation with parental figures, the green world lover, the shadow, the final decent to the nadir, and the ascent and re-entry into society as known (Pratt 142–146).

in her study on the spiritual *Bildung* of female characters in the nineteenth-century novel, asserts that “the plot of inner development traces a discontinuous, circular path which, rather than moving forward, culminates in a return to origins, thereby distinguishing itself from the traditional plot outlines of the *Bildungsroman*” (Hirsch 26). Coral Ann Howells comments that *Surfacing* follows the arc of a circle in which the heroine leaves human society to heal the split in her own psyche in the wilderness and then leaves the wilderness to return to society (Howells 25). Likewise, Jennifer Murray argues that the quest structure of *Surfacing* requires “a journey towards self-knowledge, involving a return to origins” (Murray 2). These insights into the circularity of women’s spiritual development illuminate the gendered distinction of spiritual quest and social quest novels. That is, novels that constrain themselves to inner development predominantly portray a heroine, whereas social development was originally the realm of male characters. In typical women’s quest narratives, a heroine’s development and assertion of self is often one involving a spiritual or inward journey as opposed to a social or outward journey. While internal routes can lead to political change to some extent, the fact that heroines’ quests are often directed inward instead of pointing outward raises questions about how much women are denied access to or are punitively discouraged from embarking on outer (material, political, geographical) journeys of either individual self-expression or collective feminist expression.

Lacking social power, the heroine can only direct her quest inward and start a change at the individual level. This is best seen in Yeong-hye’s tactic, one that combines renunciation with resistance. What is particular about Yeong-hye’s resistance is paradoxically her non-resistance. She resists by not resisting. This survival tactic culminates when her brother-in-law sees her naked in her apartment. Interestingly, he comments that Yeong-hye was “armored by the power of her own renunciation” (Han, *Vegetarian* 94). In other words, since she resists nothing and renounces everything, she has nothing left to be consumed by others. Agamben argues that a clothed man observing a nude woman indicates the “somasochistic ritual of power” (Agamben 55). However, through Yeong-hye’s non-resistance and utter renunciation, she evokes a being that cannot be violated. Her brother-in-law tells us: “This was the body of a beautiful young woman, conventionally an object of desire, and yet it was a body from which all desire had been eliminated. But this was nothing so crass as carnal desire, not for her—rather, or so it seemed, what she had renounced was the very life that her body represented” (Han, *Vegetarian* 92). If she has already given

up everything, nothing in her can make her an object of exploitation, not even the gaze of her brother-in-law. Yeong-hye's renunciation is radical and its consequence suicidal. She recalls the paradoxical agency of powerless women who end their lives to stake a charge against patriarchy. In her renunciation of life, she affirms herself and simultaneously excludes herself from human society. Defense via non-resistance finds its expression in and can be explained by *Surfacing* as well. In the immediate aftermath of David's videotaping naked Anna, I-heroine remarks in similar terms: "The machine is gradual, it takes a little of you at a time, it leaves the shell. It was all right as long as they stuck to dead things, the dead can defend themselves, to be half dead is worse" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 165–166). Nothing and no one can hurt the dead just as nothing can hurt Yeong-hye because she has nothing that can be targeted.

Why are both heroines' quests achieved only via a phantasmic metamorphosis, a total or semi-dissolution of the human body? Why is it such a poignant account that women must cease to be human or become man in order to survive? If the I-heroine cannot turn into a plant-animal and if Yeong-hye does not become a plant, what are their alternatives, if there are any? Generally, metamorphosis allows a character to accomplish things that were formerly beyond reach when in human form. I argue that metamorphosis of women in spiritual quest novels, while affirming the transfluidity of the female body with nature, also indicates some measure of renunciation and withdrawal. In this aspect, the metamorphosis of Daphne, a minor figure in Greek mythology, is revealing. Infatuated with Daphne, Apollo chases her against her volition to the river. She transforms into a laurel tree to escape Apollo's ardor. In her analysis of Marie Darrieussecq's *Truismes*, in which the female protagonist turns into a sow, Jeannette Gaudet points out that "the literary trope of metamorphosis explicitly illustrates the radical re-organization of the female body by the sociosymbolic structures in which it is enmeshed" (Gaudet 183). However, the metamorphosis of the two heroines in question is slightly different: the transformation is a self-willed re-organization of the female body to escape the hierarchical sociosymbolic structures in which they are perpetually displaced and marginalized. While misogynistic structures of patriarchy are forces that deform the body in *Truismes*, mythic encounters with nature fuel the transformation of the two heroines.

Annis Pratt develops an archetypal and contextual approach to *Surfacing*, arguing that "when a woman author wants her character to enact possibilities unsuitable to these realms [the subconscious and

conscious realms], she cannot choose material from them but must delve into unconscious materials necessarily alien to her mesocosm or social matrix”, and that the world of the unconscious may contain puzzling, bizarre, and even “crazy” images, symbols, and archetypal narratives (Pratt 141–142). Therefore, “the tearing apart of narrative structure, tacked-on denouements, and sense of irresolution” abound in so much of women’s fiction (142). Pratt convincingly points out that the re-entry of the fully transformed woman into society is problematic, because her role is necessarily “secondary” and “auxiliary” in society, and this is the reason why “so many women’s rebirth novels are, at best, open-ended, the heroine’s precise plan in society being left to guesswork on the part of the reader” (145). The confrontation with truth about one’s past can lead to the heroine’s disintegration, like that of Yeong-hye, or a transformation, as is the case with I-heroine, which leaves a sense of irresolution.

Although transformations in both novels are self-desired, they point to different endings and purposes, respectively. In other terms, Yeong-hye’s metamorphosis stems from an antipathy for the human world and her human identity; therefore, she hopes to turn into a plant, running away from her sexuality and predisposition for violence. Meanwhile, the metamorphosis of I-heroine ends in a hybrid plant-animal body, keeping its maternal and reproductive functions. Therefore, while the boundary between the self and the other is crossed in *The Vegetarian*, the self and the other are united in *Surfacing*. At another level, while the metamorphosis logically means the death of the human body for Yeong-hye, I-heroine survives the metamorphosis, which actually affords her a sort of freedom previously unattained.

The two novels are marked by the social withdrawal of both heroines. While Yeong-hye gives up the human world to integrate herself into nature, I-heroine, whose abortion cuts her off from herself and the rest of the world, does not fully resolve her antipathy for human society in the end. Marge Piercy assumes that in *Surfacing*, the heroine does not have a name until the end of the novel because she has not earned one (Piercy 44). While a name indicates a proper place in human society, her namelessness might also testify to her discomfort in and incompatibility with the human world. Like Yeong-hye, who tells In-hye that all trees in the world are sisters and brothers, I-heroine gains a connection to nature. To the extent that the dichotomies of private/social, personal/political, nature/culture, and inner/outer are maintained, the social quest will always be favored at the expense of the spiritual quest. The same dichotomous logic is used to justify male

dominance and superiority. However, critics' general insistence on the social quest belies a lack of full understanding of the heroines' situation and historical limitations, and devalues their efforts in the interior realm. Granted, to say that inner quests of the heroines are admirable is not to say that those inner journeys are sufficient to effect change on the collective and social level. It would be a mistake to say inner transformations are tantamount to material forms of change. However, to the extent that all social actions are begotten by an inner awakening for change, the spiritual quest novels about women are as feminist as any narratives that have their heroines gain substantial power in the end. After all, a journey outward must have a beginning, and a beginning for women—as Virginia Woolf envisions—starts with, simply and humbly, a little room of one's own.

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Primerjalno feministično branje romanov *Na površje* Margaret Atwood in *Vegetarijanka* Han Kang

Ključne besede: kanadska književnost / korejska književnost / Atwood, Margaret: *Na površje* / Han, Kang: *Vegetarijanka* / ženski liki / literarna metamorfoza / mesojedstvo

Razprava primerjalno obravnava romana *Na površje* Margaret Atwood in *Vegetarijanka* Han Kang, pri čemer raziskuje podrejeni položaj žensk in živali, medicinsko znanost in vizualno tehnologijo pod nadzorom moških ter mitično preobrazbo žensk. Fikcijska svetova, v katerih živita glavni junakinji romanov, sta dosledno patriarhalna: prvoosebna junakinja v romanu *Na površje* prestane prisilni splav, medtem ko junakinjo *Vegetarijanke* Yeong-hye avtoritarni oče prisilno hrani z mesom. Oba pripovedna loka oblikuje junakinjino spoznanje o njeni lastni vlogi v nasilju: prvoosebna junakinja sprevidi, da je proti svoji volji pristala na splav, Yeong-hye pa se čuti odgovorno, ker je jedla meso psa, ki ga je ubil njen oče. Njuni zgodbi se različno razpleteta – prvoosebna junakinja se odloči, da bo znova zanosila, medtem ko se Yeong-hye odreče svojemu življenju in neha jesti –, saj prva junakinja sledi svojim prepričanjem glede življenja in preživetja, druga pa stališču, da je prehranjevanje ubijanje. Primerjana romana raziskujeta legitimnost trditev o nedolžnosti, meje skrbi in možnosti preseganja vloge žrtve ter se medsebojno dopolnjujeta, pri čemer lahko prek njiju dobimo vpogled tudi v vprašanje nezaključenosti, ki prevladuje v ženski literaturi, in v feministično sporočilo ženskih romanov o duhovnem iskanju.

1.01 Izvirni znanstveni članek / Original scientific article

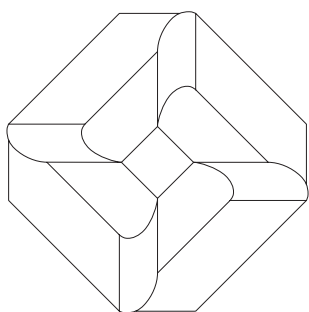
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Recenziji / *Reviews*



Emancipacija avantgarde in misli o njej

Kristina Pranjić: *Jugoslovanska avantgarda in metropolitanska dada*.
Ljubljana: Sophia, 2024. 256 str., 17 ilustracij.

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Januarja 1985 je pozornost strokovne javnosti vzbudila interdisciplinarna diskusija Društva za primerjalno književnost »Znanstveno preučevanje avantgard: problemi in teme«, ki jo je koncipiral Janko Kos in formuliral teme za razpravo. Poleg Kosa so se je udeležili Tomaž Brejc, Darko Dolinar, Milček Komelj, Evald Koren, Alenka Koron, Borut Loparnik, Peter Krečič, Neda Pagon Brglez, Boris Paternu, Andrej Rijavec, Majda Stanovnik, Jola Škulj in Igor Zabel. Za objavo v *Primerjalni književnosti* jeseni istega leta je diskusijo na podlagi magnetogramov uredil Darko Dolinar in k sklopu dodal še prispevek Lada Kralja »Zadrega s pojmom avantgarda«.

Kot je zapisalo takratno uredništvo (glavni in odgovorni urednik je bil Dolinar), je bila mdr. v diskusiji »[s]plošna evropska problematika [...] soočena s konkretnimi razmerami na Slovenskem in tako je [bilo] odprto vprašanje o avantgardi pri nas. Naposled je [bil] nakazan problem vrednotenja in odnos humanističnih ved na Slovenskem do pojava avantgarde« (Dolinar 1). Diskusija je bila polemična in je izpostavila problematiko vrednotenja avantgard – predvsem komparativne poglede nanjo, problematiko klasifikacije organizacijske in prezentacijske forme avantgard, različne historične obravnave avantgarde, sociološki aspekt avantgard in njeno razmerje z ideologijo.

V svojem zapisu je Kralj ugotovil, da »[z]adrega nastanejo, kadar pojem avantgarda skuša spodriniti utrjeno literarnozgodovinsko terminologijo, kadar torej hoče nadomestiti enega ali vse od petih pomembnejših pojmov, ki označujejo literarne pojave v desetih in dvajsetih letih tega stoletja: ekspresionizem, futurizem, nadrealizem, dadaizem in konstruktivizem« (Kralj 26). Kos je v diskusiji opozoril, da je Marcel Duchamp »pisal Hansu Richterju [...] o tem, kakšen je bil njegov pravi namen z *ready-mades*. Seveda je iz tistega očitno, da mu je šlo za avantgardno dejanje, ne pa za izgotovitev objekta, ki naj ima izključno estetsko funkcijo. Ampak s tem, da je tak objekt postavljen v muzej, se za nas spremeni v preparirano umetnostno stvaritev« (Dolinar 23–24). Poleg tega je Alenka Koron poudarila, da

je bila umetnost (poleg morale, politike, religije itd.) le eden od »terenov« avantgardnega delovanja in destruiranja, in čeprav jo je avantgarda ukinjala kot zastarelo buržoazno formo in jo skušala presegati v sami življenjski praksi, zaradi česar lahko govorimo o avantgardni »umetnosti« samo s pridržki, pa zaradi tega, kar je bilo prej povedano, mesta in vloge avantgarde ravno v umetnosti ni mogoče spregledati. (Dolinar 24)

Verjetno pa bi lahko kot povzetek zadreg razumeli kar Zabelovo izjavo z diskusije:

Z opredelitvijo avantgarde kot nečesa nadmodernističnega se postavi vprašanje, ali je literarna zgodovina kot taka sploh sposobna obravnavati objekt (tekst), ki je del avantgardističnega početja, adekvatno njegovi avantgardističnosti, torej glede na njegove specifično avantgardne dimenzije. Kakor hitro se tak objekt obravnava zgolj kot umetnostni predmet enega umetnostnega toka, je dimenzija avantgardnosti zgubljena. (Dolinar 23)

Skoraj polnih štirideset let kasneje, v času intenzivnega razmaha raziskovanja avantgard, nekatere izmed zadreg, izpostavljenih v diskusiji, ostajajo, druge se pojavljajo kot razrešene, vznikajo pa nove. Slovenska literarna veda danes vidno prispeva k znanstvenemu mišljenju umetnostnih avantgard. Tudi Kristina Pranjić, izredna profesorica na Univerzi v Novi Gorici, v knjigi *Jugoslovanska avantgarda in metropolitanska dada*, ki je izšla novembra 2024, uvod posveti metodološkim vprašanjem. Pranjićeva se je v svojem dosedanjem raziskovalnem delu osredotočala na raziskovanje umetnostne avantgarde z ozirom na alternativne epistemologije in je z Vadimom Rudnevim, profesorjem na Filozofski fakulteti Moskovske državne univerze in učencem Jurija Lotmana, v Rusiji objavila že dve knjigi, ki se ukvarjata s semiologijo, knjiga o dadaizmu pa je njena prva samostojna in njena prva v Sloveniji.

Pranjićeva vzpostavlja geografsko širšo perspektivo na avantgardo od tiste, ki smo se je spomnili na začetku recenzije. Njena perspektiva je prav tako interdisciplinarna: že v uvodu se sklicuje na več kot osemdeset raziskovalk in raziskovalcev ter njihove ugotovitve s področij različnih ved, ko razgrinja svoj namen, ki ni le

decentralizirati, temveč tudi pluralizirati avantgardo in prikazati procese kritične in kreativne apropiacije avantgardnih konceptov in strategij ter značilnosti izvirnih umetniških praks jugoslovanskih avantgardistov, obravnavati pa moramo tudi kompleksnost omrežja njihovih povezav in oblik sodelovanja tako v kontekstu vzhodno- in srednjeevropske avantgarde kot širše evropske avantgarde in radikalnih praks. (Pranjić 3)

Temu namenu v nadaljevanju knjige disciplinirano sledi, spet na podlagi lastnega obširnega raziskovanja avantgardnih praks v Zagrebu, Beogradu, Osijeku, Vinkovcih, Novem Sadu, Subotici, Ljubljani, Gorici in Trstu. Pri tem ji ni bilo žal truda, da verodostojnost raziskovalnih dognanj preveri neposredno s preučevanjem virov v knjižnicah, muzejih in arhivih v Beogradu, Hannovru, Ljubljani, Parizu, Pragi in Zagrebu ter na Dunaju, pa tudi v sekundarnih evidencah, kot je npr. podatkovna baza Državnega arhiva praške policijske uprave (Pranjić 65).

Poseben interes Pranjićeve velja t. i. malim in obrobim literaturam ter umetnosti, ki ni del univerzalnega evropskega kanona. Prav ta zavzetost je značilnost in odlika knjige. Ena izmed raziskovalnih premis Pranjićeve je, da je treba avantgardo razumeti kot nezaključen projekt prestrukturiranja in predruženja sveta in da posamezne avantgardne prakse glede na lastne specifične kulturne, ekonomske in tehnološke razmere, v katerih delujejo, ponujajo samosvoje koncepte, neodvisne od metropolitanskih središč. V knjigi je kot poglavitna snov objavljena razvejana raziskava o soodvisnosti dadaizma, tj. umetniške dejavnosti, ki jo je prakticiral predvsem Dragan Aleksić (1901–1958), in drugih sočasnih avantgardnih gibanj ter pojavov na jugoslovanskih tleh, s posebno skrbjo pa je analiziran način, na katerega so nanj vplivala evropska avantgardna gibanja, mdr. dadaizem v Švici. Pranjićeva pokaže, da ne gre za enostavne prenose, pač pa bolj za predelan idejni in slogovni vpliv, mestoma celo »zgolj« za navdih. Zanimive so bile rabe izraza »dada« v različnih pristopih avantgardistov samih – nekateri so ga uporabljali tehnično, drugi konceptualno, tretji ideološko, bil pa je tudi zmerljivka ali odlikovalka na ozadju konfliktnosti in tekmovalnosti med avantgardisti. Kot tak je očitno brž pridobil dinamično kulturno vlogo na jugoslovanskih tleh. Pranjićeva sicer problematizira sintagmiziranje nacionalnih avantgard, ker da je avantgarda načeloma v nasprotju z ideologijo nacionalne umetnosti (Pranjić 60–61).

Zaključek Pranjićeve glede jugoslovanske avantgarde v obdobju med obema vojnama je takle:

Ena od pomembnih značilnosti je potencial avantgarde za ustvarjanje skupnosti enako mislečih in mobilizacijo predvsem delavskih gibanj, saj to spremeni pogled na pojav avantgarde kot reakcije na avtonomijo umetnosti v meščanski družbi [na tem mestu se Pranjićeva sklicuje na Petra Bürgerja], ki v tem delu Evrope takrat skoraj ni obstajala. To je tudi razlog, da lahko v zahodni in srednji Evropi opazimo pogosto prisotnost zmesi nihilističnega in razdiralnega dadaizma, ki se bori proti prevladi Zahoda in zahodne umetnosti in njene epistemologije, ter angažiranega konstruktivizma, ki poudarja gradnjo družbene revolucije. (Pranjić 7)

Avtorica med razgrinjanjem snovi opiše dejstva, pomembna za zgodovino avantgarde v Sloveniji. Omeni prezrto vlogo Thee Černigoj (roj. Dorotea ali Dorothea Roter) v Tržaški konstruktivistični skupini in za ustvarjanje Avgusta Černigoja, s katerim se je poročila. Černigoj je svojo prvo konstruktivistično razstavo leta 1924 v Ljubljani pripravil po načelih dadaizma. 3. marca 1927 pa je pisal Ljubomiru Miciću v Pariz, da »smo mi Barbari mnogo bolj podkovani in umetniško nadarjeni kakor vsa italijanska in germanska komercialna prostitucija« (cit. v Pranjić 125). Pranjićeva poda podrobno sintezo avantgardističnih načel v Černigojevem *Tržaškem konstruktivističnem ambientu* in ga prepozna kot vektor, ki se nenehno obnavlja in redefinira. Pove, da sta Ferdo Delak in Černigoj z revijo *Tank* poskrbela za kontinuiteto izdajanja publikacij jugoslovanskih avantgardistov po prepovedi *Zenita*, pa tudi na sledi Aleksičevega *Dada Tanka*. Podobno je storil Delak sam, in sicer z gledališko revijo *Novi oder* in istoimenskim gledališčem, s katerima je poskusil ubrati posebno pot internacionalizacije. Pranjićeva izpostavi radikalnost Antona Podbevška, ki je pričakoval, da bo avantgarda mednarodno družbo in v njej umetnost anarhistično organizirala po načelih sodelovanja in recipročnosti, da bi se zoperstavila darvinizmu, ki ga je videl kot kardinalno načelo sveta. Kot pomembno za vsejugoslovansko povezanost avantgarde Pranjićeva opozori, da se je z omenjenimi in drugimi avantgardisti iz Slovenije redno neposredno srečeval predvsem avantgardist Branko Ve Poljanski, ki se je iz Zagreba začasno preselil v Ljubljano in tu mdr. ustanovil svoj časopis *Svetokret: list za ekspediciju na severni pol čovekovog duha* ter v njem obravnaval novomeško pomlad. V reviji *Maska* je polemiziral s Franom Albrehtom o avantgardnem gledališču in gledališki kritiki v Sloveniji. Sčasoma je začel od avantgardistov v Sloveniji terjati dosledno programsko konsistentnost, kar je med drugimi zavrnil Srečko Kosovel. Medtem se je Aleksić zavzemal za nelogičnost in paradoksalnost umetnosti, ki zagotavljata gibljivost in plastičnost duha.

Avantgarda na slovenskih tleh vendarle ni v ospredju znanstvenega narativa Pranjićeve, čeprav ji posveča tudi sklepno poglavje »Transverzala Ljubljana–Trst«. Struktura knjige (polemični uvod in poglavja o temah zgodovine jugoslovanskega dadaizma, nihilistične utemeljenosti jugoslovanskega dadaizma, alternativnih zgodb modernosti ter revijalne in razstavne dejavnosti avantgardistov na območju Jugoslavije) bralca prepričljivo vodi od enega do drugega spleta sobivanja in družabnosti umetnikov v več krajih Evrope (zelo podrobno obravnava Prago), ki so tako oblikovali svoj avantgardni nazor bodisi v neposrednem soočenju z že živo avantgardno umetnostjo bodisi v razpravah, ki so jim jo posredno

približale. Tisto, kar so razumeli kot avantgardno umetnost, niso nujno posnemali, pač pa so tisto, kar so dojeli kot avantgardno misel, uporabili za utemeljevanje lastne ustvarjalnosti.

Literarnozgodovinsko težišče knjige so pojavi, ki jih lahko imenujemo »jugoslovanska avantgarda«, še posebej tisti, za katere je značilno razmišljanje o lastni praksi kot o dadaistični in o povezavah z dadaističnimi v drugih geografskih okoljih. Pranjičeva namreč uvidi, da »se je Aleksić s svojim delom odzival na širši družbenopolitični kontekst tistega časa, zlasti na politično združitev Kraljevine Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev, ter z uporabo pojma 'Jugoslavija' poudarjal lokalno in pluralistično naravo svojega dadaističnega gibanja« (Pranjić 97). Literarnozgodovinska razprava se v knjigi zaokroži s pomočjo kontekstualizacij, ki konstruirajo tezo o neupravičenosti doslejšnje teoretske partikularizacije jugoslovanskega dadaizma. Pranjičeva dokazuje, da je Aleksićev dadaizem, za katerega je sam skoval izraz »Yougo-Dade«, leta 1921 pa v Pragi zapisal njegov manifest, celostno formiran tok, ki bi ga stroka morala bolj pogosto obravnavati kot integralni del bistvenih umetnostnoavantgardnih pojavov.

Bogat nabor podatkov in interpretacij v knjigi ponuja veliko več, kot bi pričakovali od triletnega raziskovanja (2019–2021), na katerem slonijo. Pritegne tudi jezik, v katerem je napisana knjiga: po vsebini je poglobljeno strokoven, pa vendar po značaju publicistično živopisen, pri čemer ni strokovna sporočilnost prav nič razredčena ali zmehčana. Nekateri viri so v slovenskem književnem prostoru slikovno objavljeni prvič, npr. pismo Poljanskega Jaroslavu Seifertu z dne 22. februarja 1922, ki ga je v Literarnem arhivu Muzeja češke književnosti izpod prahu pozabe potegnili prav Pranjičeva.

Največjo težo obravnavane knjige nosijo raziskovalni sklepi, oblikovani tako na podlagi dognanj Pranjičeve kot njenega branja teorije avantgard, ki se zlijejo v izvirno študijo raziskovanja avantgardnih praks danes: da so aktualne družbene napetosti in geopolitična trenja v Evropi veliko breme za transkulturne in transnacionalne ter interdisciplinarne geste umetnostne avantgarde, ki so zato dandanes redke, kar pa pomeni, da je sprotno raziskovanje sočasnih avantgardnih umetniških dejanj toliko bolj pomembno (Pranjić 209); da avantgardna umetnost lahko opozori na mikrodogodke in s provokacijo vsega obstoječega razkrije obstoječo krizo in jo naredi prisotno (96); da so nelinearnost, nehierarhičnost in naključnost izjemnega pomena za avantgardno umetnost, nenadni vzniki novih žarišč in razpustitve obstoječih smeri razvoja pa določujoča lastnost njenega mreženja, zato je ustrezno misliti avantgardo kot vmesni prostor, mejo ali kraj nenehne izmenjave (16); da je

mobilnost umetnikov v tradiciji avantgardnih praks na ravni umetniške stvaritve in kot taka zagotavlja transferje med kulturnimi obrobji mimo dominacije centra (19, 32); da je mogoče jugoslovansko avantgardo teoretsko zblížati s postkolonialnimi na primeru »barbarogenij vs. kani-bal latinskoameriške avantgarde«, ki oba izražata kritiko marginalizacije kot odziv na dolgoletno nacionalno, ekonomsko in kulturno potlačenost (150–152); da je potrebno postaviti v ospredje literarne in drugih ved preučevanje ustvarjalnosti in domišljije, saj je družbena vloga umetnosti uveljavljanje njene moči, da odkrije, pokaže in opiše, kako moramo predrugčiti družbeni imaginarij, da bi lahko odgovorili na različne limite obstoječe logike sveta, pri čemer se izkazuje, da avantgarde prispevajo k avtonomiji, solidarnosti in okoljsko vzdržnemu načinu življenja s svojim pozitivnim razumevanjem nemoči in opuščanjem (v nekaterih primerih tudi vsakršnega) napredka (39, 42); da razume Balkan in barbarstvo kot oznaki za pluralizem in nadnacionalno, njuno vzajemnost pa v primeru jugoslovanske avantgarde kot literarno strategijo, ki je omogočala kulturno in individualno imaginacijo, ker je vplivala na oblikovanje besed in podob v političnih procesih (153).

Več bralcev bo zagotovo našlo dodatne dobrodošle poudarke, kakor so to storili že avtorica spremne besede Tania Ørum ter recenzenta knjige Irina Subotić in Lev Kreft.

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Kritika umetnostnega trga češkega avantgardista Karla Teigeja

Karel Teige: *Semenj umetnosti*. Prev. Nives Vidrih. Ljubljana: Sophia, 2023. 280 str.

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Karel Teige velja za eno ključnih osebnosti srednjeevropske in mednarodne avantgarde v obdobju med obema vojnama. Gre za osrednjega predstavnika češkoslovaške umetniške in intelektualne scene v dvajsetih in tridesetih letih dvajsetega stoletja, ki je v svojem delu združeval umetnost, arhitekturo, oblikovanje, teorijo in politiko. Sodeloval je pri ustanovitvi avantgardne skupine *Devětsil* (1920), ki je postala najpomembnejša platforma za širjenje novih estetskih idej v prvi polovici dvajsetega stoletja. Leta 1929 je postal sekretar Leve fronte intelektualcev in kulturnih delavcev, leta 1930 je soustanovil Združenje socialističnih arhitektov, leta 1934 pa se je pridružil praški nadrealistični skupini. Sodeloval je pri ustvarjanju revij, kot so *Disk*, *Pásmo*, *ReD* (*Revue Devětsil*), *Stavba*, *MSA* in *Doba*. Poleg številnih ustvarjalnih in teoretičnih dejavnosti je bil tudi v vlogi kulturnega posrednika, ki je povezoval češkoslovaško umetniško sceno z umetniškimi tokovi v Parizu, Berlinu in Moskvi. Zelo dobro je bil seznanjen tudi z umetniškim dogajanjem na našem območju v takratni Kraljevini SHS. V arhivih Muzeja češke literature v Pragi je v Teigejevi zapuščini med drugim shranjenih šestindvajset številk revije *Zenit*, ki je izhajala v Zagrebu in Beogradu, in prva številka ljubljanske revije *Tank*. O sodelovanju čeških in jugoslovanskih avantgardistov pričajo mnoge objave v *Zenitu* ter ohranjena korespondenca zenitistov Ljubomirja Micića, Branka Ve Poljanskega in Ivana Golla s češkimi umetniki, kot so Teige, Jaroslav Seifert, Artuš Černík, Arne Laurin (Arnošt Lustig) in Zdeněk Kalista.

Razprava Karla Teigeja *Semenj umetnosti* je kot kratka knjiga pod naslovom *Jarmark umění* prvotno izšla leta 1936 v češčini. Gre za delo na področju estetike, ki raziskuje odnos med umetnostjo, družbo, politiko in človeško emancipacijo. Slovenski prevod Teigejeve razprave je

obogaten z več spremnimi besedili o Teigejevem delu in tako pomeni edinstveno sintezo za spoznavanja z enim od najpomembnejših umetnikov in teoretikov zgodovinske avantgarde v slovenskem jeziku. Poleg obsežne spremne študije Leva Krefta, ki predstavlja nadgradnjo njegovega dela *Karel Teige na drugi obali* (1996) ter pronicljivo in celovito umešča Teigeja v kontekst češke in evropske estetske in politične avantgarde, pa tudi širših družbenopolitičnih okoliščin in trenj tistega časa, knjiga vsebuje tudi tri krajša besedila, objavljena ob angleški izdaji *The Marketplace of Art* (2022): uvodnik »Rekonstrukcija Teigejevega *Semnja umetnosti*« Sezgina Boynika in Josepha Grima Feinberga ter esaja »O Karlu Teigeju« Dava Beecha in »Karel Teige: prefiguracija, anticipacije in ukinitev forme« Jane Ndiaye Beránkove.

Karel Teige v svoji argumentirani kritiki razgalja mehanizme, zaradi katerih umetnost izgublja svojo avtonomijo in se podreja ekonomskim ter ideološkim pritiskom. Njegova naloga je predstaviti zakonitosti umetnostnega trga, tesno povezanega s kapitalističnimi institucijami in buržoazno kulturo. Teige zato opravi marksistično kritiko pogojev umetnika in umetnosti pod kapitalizmom, pri čemer izpostavi delovanje umetnostnega trga na osnovi povezav med umetniki, bogatimi mecenami in prekupčevalci ter osrednjih kapitalističnih procesov komercializacije umetnosti, špekulacij, propagande, podkupovanja in nedemokratskih oblik distribucije. Ne bo presenetilo, da se pri tem sklicuje predvsem na dela Marxa, Engelsa in Lenina.

Umetniško delo, ki bi moralo biti po Teigeju razumljeno kot »dar«, postane v kapitalizmu razvrednoteno tržno blago, »neškodljiv nevtraliziran produkt« (Teige, *Semenj umetnosti* 72), ki je šel skozi proces nadzorovanega in rigidnega ocenjevanja ter vrednotenja, namenjenega razširitvi in dvigu prodaje na umetnostnem trgu. Vzvodi, s pomočjo katerih sodobni umetniški svet oblikuje in vzdržuje svoje vrednote, so po Teigeju tudi vsakovrstne akademske nagrade, odprtja razstav in uradne razstave (50). S tem se preprečuje pluralizacija umetnosti oziroma utrjuje obstoj pluralnih in nekonformističnih izrazov kot obrobni praks, ki postanejo predmet zasmehovanja in jeze buržoazne kulture. Uradna umetnost je izrazito naravnana k podpiranju določenega sloga in izraza. Po Teigeju poznamo dve vrsti tovrstne umetnosti: »komorno umetnost«, ki predstavlja komercialno umetnost na umetnostnem trgu in je namenjena dekoraciji in zasebnemu čustvovanju, ter »akademska umetnost«, ki je monumentalna, javna umetnost, namenjena propagandi, reprezentaciji in utrjevanju nacionalističnega izraza, morale, domoljubja, vojske itd., predvsem prek zgodovinskih slik, npr. bitk (80).

Začetek kulturnega zloma je Teige našel v buržoazni kulturi Zahodne Evrope – v svoji analizi se osredotoči predvsem na Pariz, kjer »je nastala monstrozna veletrgovina s slikami«, ki preprečuje razvoj oblik avantgardne umetnosti. Za slednjo so po njegovem mnenju potrebni entuziasti-amaterji in oblike sodelovanja na podlagi netržnih sil v mednarodnem omrežju avantgarde, kar prispeva k pluralnosti, hibridnosti in eklektični estetiki teh umetniških gibanj onkraj središča geopolitične karte umetnosti: »Ta tip trgovca in založnika, ki tvega svojo eksistenco in želi biti sobojevnik in sodelavec avantgardne umetnosti, ki vidi v svojem delu predvsem kulturno poslanstvo in nikakor ne sredstva, kako obogateti, je danes mogoč skoraj samo v državah, kjer se trgovina z umetnostjo ni razvila v večjih razsežnosti (npr. v Pragi)« (Teige, *Semenj umetnosti* 58).

Semenj umetnosti je Teige napisal v obdobju, ko so se avantgardni umetniki znašli v političnem primežu: po eni strani so se soočali z vzponom konservativnih in reakcionarnih sil desnice, po drugi strani pa z vse večjim razkolom med avantgardnimi umetniki in komunistično partijo na levi. Kot zapiše Lev Kreft: »Črna luknja leve fronte je bila torej v umetniški avantgardi in njeno izključevanje je bilo skupno fašizmu, nacizmu in komunizmu« (Kreft, »Karel Teige« 219). Teigejeva knjiga je nastala kot odgovor na to dvojno grožnjo sodobni umetnosti v tistem času – kot kritika umetnosti, ki je podlegla fašističnim in stalinističnim tokovom, ter kot opozorilo, da lahko umetnost v rokah buržoaznih struktur postane le »neumetnost« ali »prazen in pompoznen akademizem in sentimentalni kič« (Teige, *Semenj umetnosti* 87). Ta pa prek nedemokratskih oblik distribucije in vrednotenja vzpostavi primerne pogoje za razvoj desničarske politike in fašizma: »Ta ljudski kič [...], ki želi ljudstvo obdržati v verski, nacionalistični, militaristični ali moralni hipnozi ter okrepiti konservativne prvine v ljudski in pogosto tudi proletarski psihoideologiji« (83).

Za Teigeja je umetnost poklicana, da ob boku političnih in družbenih gibanj oblikuje novo realnost in zasnuje možnost za potencial skupnosti, pa četudi bodo ta dela morala biti ustvarjena paralelno, »v izolaciji od meščanskega sveta« (Teige, *Semenj umetnosti* 91). Takšno umetnost je iskal v etični drži avantgarde, ki je prevzela solidarnostne prakse in egalitarne tendence družbenih gibanj, ter njen začetek našel v uporniški in revolucionarni »črni romantiki« t. i. preklelih pesnikov (78). Posebno vrednost vidi v ustvarjanju, ki bo »postalo samo sebi namen« (85) in ga bodo deležni vsi kot svojevrstne nove ljudske umetnosti, kjer se umetnost popolnoma predrugači, razširi z metodami laičnega in neprofesionalnega ustvarjanja ter zlije z vsakodnevno prakso.

Teige najde primer tovrstne umetnosti v nadrealizmu, ki »reducira pojem avtorja profesionalca in pomen specialne nadarjenosti«, pri čemer njegovi predstavniki »s tem, ko dovolijo slikati tudi 'raffaelom brez rok', razvijajo splošno laično ustvarjalnost in pesniškost in dajejo poezijo na razpolago vsem, ki so brez šolanja in specializacije zmožni lirizma« (Teige, *Semenj umetnosti* 85). Kot pomembne izpostavlja tehnike avtomatskega pisanja, izdelovanje kolaža, frotaža, fotomontaže in grafik ter igre, kot je *Cadavre exquis*, ki temeljijo na naključju in odkritju ter nakazujejo možnost samosvoje smeri razvoja umetnosti pa tudi družbenega razvoja, ki se oddaljuje od ekonomskega determinizma.

Takšne umetniške prakse nudijo način odpora do tistega, kar je konvencionalno in domačijsko ter se oblikuje po logiki kapitalizma. Za Teigeja je nova umetnost lahko samo onkraj trga in je povezana z novo poetiko, nova poetika pa je v temelju prepletena z novo čutnostjo in erotiko. Večja svoboda sveta pomeni tudi bolj poetičen svet. In takšen svet Teige propagira prek zasnove poetizma, ki mu je leta 1924 posvetil tudi manifest. Poetizem za Teigeja ni umetniški slog, temveč način življenja. Presega meje tradicionalne literature in umetnosti, razkraja obstoječe forme, stile in definicije umetnosti ter zavrača resnobo akademizma in muzejske estetike. V okviru skupine *Devětsil* se poetizem razvije kot upor proti romantični estetiki in tradicionalizmu, išče nove forme izražanja, se zavzema za intermedialne oblike med literaturo, vizualno umetnostjo in popularno kulturo ter slavi čisto poezijo, improvizacijo, eksperimentiranje, nove tehnologije, sodobne zvoke in ples. Ne gre za umetnost profesionalnih umetnikov, ki se zapira v ozke kroge in postaja tržno blago ter predmet akademskih in poslovnih špekulacij, temveč za umetnost kot splošno človeško potrebo. Poetizem je po Teigeju zasnovan na konstruktivistični umetnosti in materializmu, ki sta človeku dala namenskost in praktičnost. Poetizem uteleša »umetnost sedmega dne« – nedeljskega popoldneva –, umetnost vesele konvivialnosti, ki je brez strogo določenega cilja ali lastne filozofije, a je polna ekscentrizma, imaginacije in kolektivne lepote življenja.

Poetizem, pravi Kreft, zagovarja osvoboditev čutnosti kot dediščino, »ki jo kaže obvarovati in ki nam jo ponuja avantgarda«:

Da je ljudstvo treba naučiti uživanja, je bil že *credo* dadaistov, da pa je poezija posledično visoka šola in visoka pesem novega osvobojenega človeka, je poetistični nazor. Pot v visoko ustvarjalno družbo pelje skozi obnovo avtentične čutnosti, in ko je izpolnjeno spričevalo erotike, se lahko nastajajoči novi človek vpiše na fakulteto poezije, kjer se uči igre z ognjem življenja in se nauči iger z lastnimi zmožnostmi uživanja življenja. (Kreft, »Karel Teige« 213)

Ali kot zapiše Teige v zadnjem delu *Semnja umetnosti*: »Želja po osvoboditvi pesmi, sanj, domišljije in ljubezni mora biti prav tako udeležena pri rekonstrukciji zgodovine« (93).

Čeprav je bilo besedilo napisano v tridesetih letih dvajsetega stoletja, so Teigejeve ugotovitve izredno aktualne – danes, ko kapitalistični interesi, neoliberalne politike in elite pogosto krojijo umetniški diskurz in celotno kulturo, ki se instrumentalizira v sredstva propagande ali investicijsko blago, so Teigejevi izsledki še vedno izjemno pomembni. Njegova analiza nam hkrati ponuja tudi način za razumevanje, kako si umetnost lahko izbori lastno svobodo oziroma ohrani svojo avtentičnost in emancipacijski potencial.

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Kazalka, ki sledi citatu ali povzetku, v okroglih oklepajih prinaša avtorjev priimek in številko citirane ali povzete strani: (Juvan 42). Kadar avtorja citata navedemo že v sobesedilu, v oklepaju na koncu citata zapišemo samo številko citirane ali povzete strani (42). Če v članku navajamo več enot istega avtorja, vsako enoto po citatu oziroma povzetku v kazalki označimo s skrajšanim naslovom: (Juvan, *Literary* 42).

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– monografije:

Juvan, Marko. *Literary Studies in Reconstruction. An Introduction to Literature*. Peter Lang, 2011.

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– članek v spletni reviji:

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