

# ACTA NEOPHILOLOGICA

43. 1-2 (2010)

Ljubljana

MIRKO JURAK

W. SHAKESPEARE AND SLOVENE DRAMATISTS (II): J. JURČIČ, F. LEVSTIK, I. CANKAR,  
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**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND SLOVENE DRAMATISTS (II):  
J. JURČIČ, F. LEVSTIK, I. CANKAR, O. ŽUPANČIČ, B. KREFT  
(THE MAKERS OF MYTHS)**

*Mirko Jurak*

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of William Shakespeare on Slovene playwrights in the period between 1876, which marks the appearance of Jurčič – Levstik's *Tugomer*, and the 1930s, when Oton Župančič published his tragedy *Veronika Deseniška* (Veronika of Desenice, 1924) and, a few years later, Bratko Kreft his history, *Celjski grofje* (The Counts of Celje, 1932). Together with Cankar's works all of the plays discussed in this study deal with one of the well-known Slovene myths.

In the previous number of *Acta Neophilologica* I published my study on the first Slovene tragedy *Miss Jenny Love*, which was published in Augsburg in 1780.<sup>1</sup> The Romantic period, which followed this publication, was in Slovenia and elsewhere in Europe mainly characterized by the appearance of poetry, with a few exceptions of plays which were primarily intended for reading and not for the stage (Closet Drama). Let me mention here that in the Romantic period some of the finest Slovene poetry was written by France Prešeren (1800-1849), and although some of his friends suggested he should also attempt to write a play, his closest achievement to drama was his epic poem *Krst pri Savici* (Baptism at the Savica River, 1836), which is also often considered by literary historians as a predecessor of later Slovene dramatic literature.

Although many Slovene authors who wrote their works in the nineteenth century knew Shakespeare's plays, they still found it easier to express themselves in prose. The first Slovene novel is Josip Jurčič's *Deseti brat* (The Tenth Brother), which was published in 1866, ten years earlier than his play *Tugomer* (Tugomer). However, Jurčič's tragedy *Tugomer* was artistically very much improved by the adaptation made by Fran Levstik, whose text has been since considered as the "true" version of this play. Further editions and adaptations of this play definitely prove that several Slovene authors have found the subject-matter of this play worthy of new interpretations.

By the end of the nineteenth century the list of Slovene translators of Shakespeare's plays (most of them chose only some acts or scenes) was quite long. But it was only in 1899, when Ivan Cankar's translation of *Hamlet* appeared on stage of the Slovene National Theatre

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<sup>1</sup> My sincere thanks are due for their help to the librarians of the Slavic Department of Languages and Literatures and to the librarians of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana; to the staff of the Slovene Theatre Museum, Ljubljana, and to Dr Jason Blake, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

in Ljubljana, that a real master of the Slovene language approached one of Shakespeare's plays. Cankar became enthusiastic about Shakespeare's work and this is best seen also in Shakespeare's influence on three plays written by Cankar: *Kralj na Betajnovi* (The King of Betajnova, 1901), *Pohujšanje v dolini Šentflorjanski* (Scandal in the Valley of Saint Florian, 1907) and *Lepa Vida* (Beautiful Vida, 1911). The same kind of "enchantment" caught Oton Župančič, a Slovene poet, translator and dramatist, who had translated by 1924, when his *Veronika Deseniška* (Veronika of Desenice) appeared, several plays written by Shakespeare. A large number of echoes of Shakespeare's plays can be found in Župančič's play, not to mention the Bard's influence on Župančič's verse and style. Such influence can also be traced in Kreft's play.

Many Slovene literary historians and critics mention in their studies Shakespeare's influence on Slovene dramatists but their reports are mainly seminal and rather generalizing. Therefore the purpose of this study is to provide a deeper analytical insight into this topic.

**Key words:** William Shakespeare, his influence on Slovene dramatists (1867-1932): Josip Jurčič, Fran Levstik, Ivan Cankar, Oton Župančič, Bratko Kreft.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In my article on William Shakespeare and Anton Tomaž Linhart's *Miss Jenny Love*, published in 2009 in *Acta Neophilologica*,<sup>2</sup> I presented Shakespeare's influence on the first Slovene tragedy which was written by Linhart in 1780, and published in the same year.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of numerous examples from this play I came to the conclusion that Shakespeare's influence on Linhart was much more important than had been previously believed. Although plays which I shall deal with in my present article have been discussed by a number of Slovene literary historians, the role of Shakespeare's influence on Slovene dramatists has often been neglected or rather generalized, made on personal impressions of critics than on the actual textual evidence from Shakespeare's plays.

After Linhart, and until the 1820s, there was no Slovene artist or critic who would call the attention of our readers to the Bard. But with the beginning of the Romantic period the situation changed quite rapidly and since then there was hardly a Slovene author or critic who would not mention William Shakespeare and his work, either in his own writing, or in his articles, letters, or diaries. In the Romantic period the predominant literary genre in Slovene literature was – like in a number of other European literatures – poetry. With the advancement of realism, the short story and the historical novel, in the second half

<sup>2</sup> Jurak (2009, 3-43). – I have included in my text brief summaries of plays which I discuss in my study in order to provide the basic reference for non-Slovene readers.

– Unless otherwise stated the translations from Slovene into English and vice versa were made by the author of this article. Some titles of Slovene literary works have appeared in English in various versions; in such cases I accepted one of them (or, in a few cases, coined a new English title).

<sup>3</sup> Anton Tomaž Linhart (1756-1795), dramatist, historian, poet. His first play *Miss Jenny Love* was written in German and published in Augsburg, Germany in 1780. It was first performed in Slovene on 20 October 1967 at the Slovene National Theatre (SNT) in Ljubljana. Linhart's fame rests on his comedies: *Županova Micka* (Molly, the Mayor's Daughter, performed in 1789 by the SNT) and on *Ta veseli dan ali Matiček se ženi* (This Happy day, or Matiček Gets Married, which was printed together with his first comedy in 1790 but, due to the censorship in the Hapsburg monarchy, not performed until 1848.). My analysis of Linhart's play *Miss Jenny Love* and particularly of Shakespeare's influence on Linhart can be found in the above mentioned study.

of the nineteenth century these genres acquired a much greater popularity than dramatic art. Although the greatest Slovene poet, France Prešeren (1800-1849), mentions Romeo and Juliet in his poem “Nova pisarija” (A new kind of writing), he did not translate into Slovene, for example, any of Shakespeare’s sonnets or scenes from his plays, though he did translate into Slovene the first 233 lines of Byron’s little known poetic tale “Parisina”. In the 1820s Prešeren was advised by his friends to write “a Romantic tragedy from Carniola”, but his love for poetry prevailed and he did not feel ready to write a play on a historical subject (Paternu 1976, 1977). Even though echoes of Shakespeare’s dramatic style may be noticed in Prešeren’s epic poem “Krst pri Savici” (Baptism at the Savica River) – particularly in Prešeren’s use of comparisons and metaphors (Koblar 1965: 144-5) – Prešeren never took to drama. His friend Matija Čop had an excellent library including a number of books written by English authors, e.g. by Thomas Moore, John Milton, Oliver Goldsmith, Lord Byron etc. as well as thirteen plays (!) written by Shakespeare. One of the reasons why Prešeren did not accept this challenge may also be that he had to worry about earning money before he finally obtained a solicitor’s position (after all, poems take less time to be written than plays). As he was one of Čop’s closest friends there is no doubt that Prešeren had easy access to the Bard’s work. We should also remember that this was the period when European artists greatly admired the work and ideas embodied in the poems of Lord Byron, John Keats and P. B. Shelley. Although some English literary historians believe that in the first half of the nineteenth century “Byron’s poetry was greeted with an enthusiasm which his genius alone did not deserve” and that “poetry written by Wordsworth constitutes the most important literary phenomenon of the time” (Jack 1963: 2), the fact remains that at that time most European artists and intellectuals interested in literature primarily admired poems written by English Romantic poets. I believe that this was also mainly due to their passionate struggle for democratic ideals, for a free individual as well as for the freedom and independence of nations. If we accept this conclusion we may more easily understand not only the development of Slovene but also of European drama of the nineteenth century. In 1848 the leading Slovene political programme became the newly-established United Slovenia, a programme which was in many ways very much like similar programmes of other central European countries in which nations were not yet free and independent.

The first Slovene translations of individual scenes from Shakespeare’s plays began to appear in various journal and periodicals in the 1850s. Some years later Slovene critics also began to publish their own essays on Shakespeare and towards the end of the nineteenth century their number constantly increased (Moravec 1974: 341-71). At this time several Slovene critics and artists also expressed their wish that all of Shakespeare’s plays be translated into Slovene, but this was a difficult task, which could only be realized one hundred years later. Shakespeare’s first play to be performed by the Slovene Dramatic Society (established in Ljubljana in 1867) was *Othello*, which was staged on March 3, 1896. *Hamlet*, which in the first half of the twentieth century became Shakespeare’s most popular play in Slovenia and was often referred to as “our folk play”, was first produced in Slovene three years later, on December 27, 1899, by the Drama of the Slovene National Theatre of Ljubljana (abr. as the SNG Drama).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The information regarding the programme of Slovene theatres since 1867 is available in *Repertoar slovenskih gledališč, 1867–1967* (A Repertoire of Slovenian Theatres, 1867–1967, published by the Slovenski

It should be mentioned though that since the sixteenth century citizens of Ljubljana had many opportunities to see plays performed mainly by German and Austrian travelling theatre companies. Several companies also performed plays written by Shakespeare, or, as was common until the beginning of the nineteenth century also elsewhere in Europe, they performed adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. Productions prepared by students of the Jesuit College in Ljubljana reach back to the seventeenth century when these students also performed an adaptation of *King Lear*. Their activities were important for Slovene population, because "the Jesuits also used the vernacular, Slovene language, besides Latin and German".<sup>5</sup> Many Slovene students who studied in Vienna during the past few centuries saw Shakespeare's plays performed there. These intellectuals often brought back to Slovenia his plays printed either in English or in other European languages. They also wrote about them in their letters to their friends across Europe, and reported about them in their articles and essays published in Slovenia and abroad.

## II. THE THREE VERSIONS OF TUGOMER

– JOSIP JURČIČ: *Tugomer* (Ms. writ. in 1875; publ. in 1960).<sup>6</sup>

– JOSIP JURČIČ and FRAN LEVSTIK: *Tugomer* (writ. and publ. in 1876. In this edition only Jurčič was mentioned as the author of the play although nowadays Slovene literary historians believe that this revised version of Jurčič's play is mainly Levstik's work.) The play was first performed on 6 Feb. 1919 by the SNG Drama in Ljubljana; still with Josip Jurčič mentioned as the only author.

– FRAN LEVSTIK and BRATKO KREFT: *Tugomer* (Levstik's version adapted by Kreft.) It was first performed on 25 Oct. 1947 by SNG Drama in Ljubljana; publ. in 1967).

The reason why the first classical Slovene tragedy was written in several versions is the result of the artistic problems with which the first author of *Tugomer*,

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gledališki muzej, Ljubljana, 1967). Subsequent bibliographical compilations were published at first every five years as *Dokumenti slovenskega gledališkega muzeja* (Documents of the Slovene Theatre Museum) and, since 1993, annually under the title *Slovenski gledališki letopis* (Slovene Theatre Annual).

<sup>5</sup> Grošelj 2004: 61-71.

<sup>6</sup> Josip Jurčič (1844-1881), novelist, dramatist, journalist. Writer of historical novels, admirer of Walter Scott. He wrote the first (prose) version of *Tugomer* (MS) in 1875, but this edition was published only in 1960.

– Fran Levstik (1831-1878), poet, novelist, dramatist, critic, journalist. With his essay *Potovanje iz Litije do Čateža* (The Journey from Litija to Čatež, 1858) he influenced Josip Jurčič's views on literature. He completely revised Jurčič's version of *Tugomer*, although the play was first published in 1876 only under Jurčič's name.

– Bratko Kreft (1905-1996), novelist, dramatist, theatre director, literary historian. His best known histories are *Celjski grofje* (The Counts of Celje, 1932) and *Velika puntarija* (The Great Rebellion, 1937). He adapted Levstik's version of *Tugomer* for the stage, trying to follow in it the structure of Shakespeare's histories, several of which he produced at the SNG Drama in Ljubljana.



Josip Jurčič, was faced. He began to write *Tugomer* in trochaic verse, but his friend and his literary mentor Fran Levstik advised him to use iambic pentameters, which would suit the tragedy better. But Jurčič obviously could not realize this idea without help and so he wrote the first version of *Tugomer* in prose (it appeared in print only in 1960). Levstik offered Jurčič his help and the first printed version (based on Levstik's adaptation in iambic verse) was published already in 1876, but with only Jurčič's name mentioned as its author. Slovene literary historians (e.g. Anton Slodnjak, Mirko Rupel, France Koblar etc.) agree that this version of *Tugomer* was basically Levstik's work.

Due to the censorship of the Hapsburg regime, the play was not allowed to be performed in Slovene theatres until 1919, when Slovenia became a part of Yugoslavia. Kreft's version of Levstik's text, which was performed after the Second World War, was intended to make the play theatrically more vivid and structurally more in accordance with Shakespeare's histories and great tragedies.

The main source for Jurčič's version of *Tugomer* was a description about the fighting between the Franks and the Wends in the tenth century. It is presented in Ludwig Giesebrecht's book *Wendische Geschichten aus den Jahren 780 bis 1182* (The History of the Wends from 780 to 1182, publ. in Berlin in 1843). This short account (*ibid.* I, 142) was used by Jurčič as a parallel between the germanization of the Wends (the Slavic people occupying the region between the Elbe and Oder rivers in the eastern part of Germany) with the contemporary pressure of the Austrian empire on the Slovenes in the second half of the nineteenth century. Giesebrecht's historical account is quoted by Mirko Rupel in Jurčič's collected works (ZD IX, 1960: 270-71). In the German legend and in the first (Jurčič's) prose version of *Tugomer*, the hero is presented as a traitor who betrays his people because he is obsessed by his erotic feelings for Zorislava, the widow of the former Slovene duke Čeligoj. When Tugomer's treason and his murder of Čeligoj become known, Zorislava kills him. In Levstik's version Tugomer is presented as an idealist, who trusts the Franks and who is also himself betrayed by his "friends". Whereas Jurčič's version is centred on the weaknesses of Tugomer's character Levstik stressed in his version the drama of ideas: a naive leader, who wishes to stop the wars between the Franks and the Slavs, unwillingly betrays his people.

Josip Jurčič knew Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1587) from which Shakespeare took plots for his historical plays. When Jurčič was in Vienna (1865-1867) he studied Shakespeare and his plays<sup>7</sup> upon the advice of his friend and his literary mentor Fran Levstik and it was then when he began to think about writing a historical play. He wished to show in it how the discord among the Slavic people and the ambitiousness of their leaders bring disaster to the whole nation. It is obvious that Jurčič was enthusiastic about Shakespeare's work, for in Jurčič's best known novel, *Deseti brat* (The Tenth Brother, 1866), the narrator exclaims: "Oh, thou, great Shakespeare, the man of wisdom and knowledge". He adds that Shakespeare could not have thought, even in his dreams, that three hundred years later a person from Illyria

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<sup>7</sup> Jurčič mentions in his notes a study written by G. G. Gervinius, *Shakespeare I, II* (Leipzig 1848, 1850).  
- His notes are kept at the National and University Library in Ljubljana.



would reach his highness.<sup>8</sup> Jurčič was an important Slovene journalist and in his articles he appealed to young writers to learn how to write by reading works written by great masters, among whom he explicitly mentions Shakespeare.<sup>9</sup>

We can also find references to Shakespeare's plays in Levstik's articles. So, for example, in one of his early works Levstik paraphrased Hamlet's words on the purpose of playing: "The poet's work should be the mirror of his time, it should be the cornerstone of national life, otherwise it is of no value, it is like a building built on a spider's web".<sup>10</sup> In the same essay Levstik stresses the need to establish a Slovene theatre which would not present only stories dealing with lives of peasants but also other subjects. He stresses in this essay that historical plays should be written in such a manner which did not demand "the knowledge ... of particular historical sources".<sup>11</sup> This suggestion can be linked with Aristotle's statement in his *Poetics* (ch. 9), according to which the making of the poet is "not to speak of incidents which have come to be, but rather of incidents which might come to be ... for making speaks more of universals while history speaks more of particulars" (Aristotle 17). Levstik also made a clear distinction between the ethical and the aesthetic components of a play: he states that even "a great criminal, like Shakespeare's Richard III, who is physically a handicapped person, is nevertheless a beautiful aesthetic character, aesthetic, but not moral" (Levstik 1955: 389). Levstik stresses Shakespeare's artistic greatness particularly if it is compared with the knowledge (writing) of a historian; a view about his talent which had been so well expressed before in John Dryden's evaluation of Shakespeare.<sup>12</sup> We may conclude that in the second half of the nineteenth century William Shakespeare was considered by Slovene artists and critics as one of the most important European artists of all times and that his influence on Slovene writers was considered as most positive.

An important Slovene critic and writer in the second half of the nineteenth century was also Josip Stritar. He was not enthusiastic when the provincial assembly of Carniola issued in 1870 an award for an original Slovene historical drama; he suggested that the competition should be open to all dramatic genres, because even among Shakespeare's plays his historical works (on English national history) are not placed among his most important works.<sup>13</sup> Stritar advocates the aesthetic autonomy of the arts, and he adds that if such a limitation as prescribed by the Slovene provincial assembly were imposed on Shakespeare then even "this great man" could not receive such an award although he wrote such plays as *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*. Stritar also mentions Shakespeare as a great author as compared with Byron, Prešeren, Dante,

<sup>8</sup> Jurčič's reference is to the Illyrians, an ancient people, who lived in the country along the eastern part of the Adriatic Sea, which became in 168 A.D. a Roman province (Illiricum). During Napoleon's reign (1809-1813) the Illyrian provinces, which were set up by Napoleon, included parts of Carniola and Carinthia (i.e. of present day Slovenia) and their capital was Ljubljana. This is why Jurčič refers here to the reader, Manica ("a person from Illyria"), who reads Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. (Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night*; *Or, What You Will* is also set in Illyria.)

<sup>9</sup> Štefan Barbarič, *Josip Jurčič*. Znameniti Slovenci. Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1986: 119.

<sup>10</sup> Fran Levstik, "Potovanje iz Litije do Čateža" (The Journey from Litija to Čatež"), *ZD IV*, 1954: 27.

<sup>11</sup> Qtd. by Mirko Rupel in *Jurčič ZD IX*, 1960: 267. – *Zbrano delo* = *Collected Works*, abbr. as *ZD*.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle 17. – Dryden's evaluation of Shakespeare is also quoted in Jurak 2009: 12.

<sup>13</sup> Josip Stritar (1836-1923), poet, writer, critic. He was one of the editors of the magazine *Zvon* for which he wrote a number of critical essays. He advocated "the freedom of the arts", their autonomy, in his "conversations" and in his "critical letters" in his review *Zvon* (e.g. on 15 March 1870).

Goethe, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Calderon, Molière etc.<sup>14</sup> which undoubtedly shows his great admiration of the Bard.

Slovene literary historian France Koblar surmises that Jurčič was stimulated to write *Tugomer* by the above mentioned competition (Koblar 1972: 90). Several minor Slovene dramatists also wrote plays on a historical subject during the final decades of the nineteenth century, for example, Ivan Robida wrote the historical play *Erazem Tattenbach* and Anton Medved *Viljem Ostrovrhar*.<sup>15</sup> The writer's decision to write about historical figures was probably the result of the increased awareness of Slovene national consciousness in this period.

In the twentieth century Shakespeare's plays were often directed in the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana by Bratko Kreft. He also edited for publication the new Levstik's version of *Tugomer*, in which he mainly preserved Levstik's text, and he directed this version of *Tugomer* in the SNG Drama in Ljubljana in 1947. He also wrote a preface to this publication and he stressed in it that Levstik's play reflects Shakespeare's humanistic ideas as well as political, national and ethical ideals expressed by Lessing and Schiller.<sup>16</sup>

Dušan Moravec summarizes in his study on Shakespeare in Slovenia views expressed by Slovene literary historians and critics by saying that they see Shakespeare's influence on *Tugomer* in its verse, form and structure (1974: 346). He points out that already in 1932 Anton Slodnjak observed how Levstik had taken away from Jurčič's version all the Romantic, erotic connotations, and at the same time made the play sound more archaic by his acceptance of Shakespeare's dramatic technique. Moravec also mentions Koblar's afterword published in the Levstik and Kreft's edition in which Koblar states that even in Jurčič's first version some elements containing "Shakespeare's horror and picturesqueness" may be seen. As I have already pointed out above Slovene literary historians agree that the first published version of Jurčič's *Tugomer*, which is written in blank verse, is basically Levstik's work. Koblar also stresses in his essay that ideas which were relevant for Slovene history in the nineteenth century, i.e. the question of national independence and the unity of the Slovenes, became the core of this tragedy. Matjaž Kmecl states in his recently published study on Josip Jurčič that there are two versions of *Tugomer*, the romantic and the classicist version; the first one written by Josip Jurčič, which presents the tragedy of the hero's character, and the second one by Fran Levstik, which presents national – psychological aspects of this play. (Kmecl 2009: 122-125) This can be a solution to the dispute regarding the "true" authorship of this play.

Several Slovene literary historians (e.g. Mirko Rupel, France Koblar etc.) also mention that in Jurčič's and in Levstik's versions of *Tugomer* the influence of Shakespeare's histories and tragedies can be seen. Janko Kos suggests that Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* presents the most direct pattern for Levstik's *Tugomer*, although he admits that "there is a considerable difference between the two heroes" (2001:193-94), because

<sup>14</sup> Josip Stritar (ZD VI, 1955: 16, 18, 141). He compares Shakespeare to Aeschylus, Dante, Calderon etc. in whose works "the truth is discovered in the most beautiful image" when poetry and philosophy, beauty and truth form a unique union. He calls these authors "poets and prophets." (*ibid.* 60).

<sup>15</sup> Ivan Robida (1871-1941) and Anton Medved (1869-1910) are rather minor literary figures. France Koblar (1972: 150-163) compares Robida's hero with Shakespeare's Iago, and he finds in *Ostrovrhar* several motifs which could be linked with Shakespeare's plays.

<sup>16</sup> Fran Levstik, Bratko Kreft. *Tugomer* (1967: 22-3).

Levstik's hero is "indebted to the pre-Romantic classical tragedy", and particularly to Schiller, what Bratko Kreft had also mentioned (see above). According to Kos the Roman leader Coriolanus is a mentally unstable hero who betrays his people because of his egotism and his aristocratic nature. However, one should not forget that Coriolanus finally reaffirms his love for Rome, though he pays for his betrayal of the Romans and his support of the Volscians with his life. Kos does not see Levstik's Tugomer as an extremely proud character (like Coriolanus), although he also sees in Levstik's character his good sides and his noble nature. Further on, Kos finds parallels between Coriolanus and Tugomer with regard to their attitudes to their mothers and to their wives, as well as to their compatriots (the Romans and the Slavs), and to their opponents (i.e. to the Volscians and to the Franks). But he points out that Tugomer's relationship to his people is different from that of Coriolanus, because Tugomer never transgresses the border line between himself and his people.

The interpretation provided by Janko Kos places *Coriolanus* as the major, the most important Shakespeare's play to have influenced Levstik's *Tugomer*. But if we analyse and compare both plays in detail we see that there are also a number of important differences between both plays and that *Coriolanus* is not likely to be the only major influence on (different versions) of *Tugomer* and that this influence has been over-estimated. First of all, Coriolanus and Tugomer come from a completely different political, historical and social background: Coriolanus is a victorious Roman leader who has won several battles against the Volscians and their general Aufidius, but because his dignity is questioned by his Roman opponents he reacts with pride and stubbornness; he leaves Rome and joins his opponents, the Volscians. Coriolanus does not attack Rome because his mother Volumnia asks him not "to tread on thy country's ruin, / And bear the palm for having bravely shed / Thy wife and children's blood" (*Cor.* 5.3.16-18).

On the other side *Tugomer* is in a completely different position: in Jurčič's text he is in love with *Zorislava* and hopes to marry her. In this version she is a domineering, ambitious woman, almost like *Lady Macbeth*. Therefore when Zorislava learns that Tugomer had killed her husband, she stabs him (5.9). In Levstik's poetic version (5.8) as well as in Levstik-Kreft's version (5.3), Tugomer never intends to subdue his own people and he dies in the embrace of his loving wife Zorislava. Besides, Slovene playwrights do not present Tugomer as a man who is so completely overcome with his ambition as Coriolanus, but his main desire is to help his own country to become independent so that the Slavs could live in peace and therefore he wishes to settle the political and the military tensions between the Franks and the Slavs. Tugomer leads a "just war" by protecting his people and their land and not a war to defeat and govern another nation.<sup>17</sup> Although in Levstik's version Gripo, who is a German settler among the Slavs, tells Tugomer that he will be offered the crown – which really happens – Tugomer rejects the offer; he is not like Shakespeare's rulers, for example like *Richard III* or *Julius Caesar*, whose rejection of the crown is only seeming and they actually wish to wear the crown. Tugomer is the military leader who fights for the liberty of his people, and not for his own fame. In Levstik – Kreft's version Gripo's suggestion that

<sup>17</sup> See the interpretation regarding the treatment of war in Shakespeare's plays in the study published by Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare and the Just War Tradition* (Farnham, Surrey, Ashgate Publ. Co., 2010).

Tugomer should accept the crown is made in order to bring discord among the Slavs (2.2). However, Tugomer is naive and he believes at first that a Slavic king would actually bring his people the “benefit and blessing” even if he is selected by the Franks. But he is mistaken what is proven by the duke of the Franks, Geron, who expresses his hope that his offer to crown Tugomer will create in Tugomer a craving for fame (2.5) and force him to become dependent on the Franks. But when Tugomer realizes that this offer is really a trap, he tells Geron that he will never buy “the vassal’s crown” with the bloodshed of his own people (3.6). In Levstik – Krefts’s version Tugomer admits to his friend Bojan that if he had ever thought about the royal sceptre the only reason was that in his view his leadership would be more firm and would bring freedom to his people (Levstik – Kreft 1967: 164). In this version Tugomer finally entrusts the dukedom to another tribal leader, Mestislav, and appeals to him to raise all the Slavs against their enemy (*ibid.* 171). Mestislav sees Tugomer as an honest, proud Slavic warrior and he tells other Slavic military leaders that “Tugomer was the bravest of them all in their battle against the Franks”. In Act 5, Scene 3, just before his death, Tugomer tells his son to be “a man made of steel, when he has to defend the honour of his nation, its rights and its language” (*ibid.* 188). These thoughts and actions link the text in the final Levstik – Kreft’s version much more to Shakespeare’s early chronicle plays than to his late tragedies.

Coriolanus wishes to diminish his excessive ambitiousness and so he tries to excuse his joining the Volscians by his “fight / Against my cank’red country” (4.5.93-4). Tugomer also implicitly accepts faults which are obvious in his people (e.g. their lack of unity), but he hopes that his efforts to make peace with the Franks will be successful and that the Slavic people would thus become equal to the Franks. When Levstik’s Tugomer is mortally wounded and he sees that he was betrayed by the Franks he tells his people “to defend vigorously the honour of their country, the rights of its people and their language” (5.8). The difference between the fate of the Romans in *Coriolanus* and the fate of the Slavs in *Tugomer* is also important: whereas the Romans are (already) a free nation, the Slavs still have to fight in order to gain their freedom. In Levstik’s eyes the fate of the Slavs in his play and the historical reality with which the Slovenes were faced in the nineteenth century, is the same: their future is rather uncertain and therefore they should neither naively mislead themselves as regards the relations between them and the Franks nor should they allow to be misled by their enemies (*Levstik ZD V*; 1955: 209). Coriolanus pays for his tragic opposition to his own people with his death (his former and his real enemies, the Volscians, kill him), whereas Tugomer is killed in his fight with the Franks. The playwright shows that Tugomer was naive and trustworthy enough to have brought his best men to his enemies’ camp, where the Slavic leaders with the exception of Tugomer – were killed. But when Tugomer sees how he had been betrayed by the Franks he starts to fight with the Franks and dies a hero. In *Tugomer* (Act 5) both ordinary Slavic soldiers as well as their military leaders and even the Franks praise Tugomer’s decisive role in this battle, which can be compared in its meaning and importance with the battle between King Henry the Fifth and the French. King Henry tells his cousin Westmoreland and his soldiers that he is “not covetous for gold”, but that he wishes to defend his honour and his country and he invites the English soldiers to fight with him:

This day is called the feast of Crispian;  
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,  
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is named  
And rouse him at the name of Crispian. (*King Henry V*, 4.3.40-44)

He tells his soldiers that they will always remember this day, they will be proud of the scars which they got in this battle and they will also be always remembered. They who remain alive will be his "brothers", and those who are not present will feel cursed for not having been there. Tugomer also tells his friend Bojan that what he always had in mind was the welfare of his country and not his own profit (*Levstik ZD V* 1955: 185).

In *Levstik – Kreft's version Tugomer appeals to his soldiers to fight bravely for their country* in a very similar way to that we find in *Shakespeare's King Henry V*. The similarity between the patriotic struggle of English soldiers against the French in Shakespeare's historical play and the battle fought by Tugomer's soldiers against the Franks does not appear to be incidental and we may justly surmise that both authors, Jurčič and Levstik, may have had in mind the scene from this play written by Shakespeare when they wrote about the fighting between the Slavs and the Franks.

Tugomer's political programme is clear: the Slavs should endeavour to establish peace with the Franks but in order to achieve this they should first be united. This, however, does not happen. In Shakespeare's histories justice finally wins, the legal order is established again and the power of the people is vested in a character who can claim legal rights for his rule. In *Coriolanus* the Romans remain free, whereas in *Tugomer* the future of the Slavs remains uncertain although Levstik views it with optimism. We can conclude that even though there are certain thematic parallels between *Coriolanus* and *Tugomer* both plays differ in a number of significant aspects and that therefore *Coriolanus* cannot present the main parallel between Shakespeare's plays and Levstik's *Tugomer*. Both authors, Jurčič and Levstik, must have either read some of Shakespeare's histories, for example *King Henry V*, or they were at least informed about their plots from sources about English literature they had known.

There are also some other parallels between Shakespeare's plays and Levstik's *Tugomer* that have not been fully discussed yet. Among structural parallels between Shakespeare's plays and this play Slovene critics most often mention the introductory scenes in which less important characters appear first. These characters function as the Chorus, which presents the voice of common people. Whereas Jurčič uses in his version of the play two minor characters, in Levstik's version such "chorus" scenes include at least three characters (e.g. three old men in 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 4.2), or a whole group of people (e.g. the citizens of Branibor: 1.5, 1.6, 4.1, 4.5), or even all the characters who represent public opinion and are present on the stage (e.g. a group of senior citizens in 2.6; etc.). Such Chorus scenes involving several or a group of people remind us of similar scenes in Shakespeare's histories, e.g. in King Henry V, in Coriolanus and in Hamlet.

The elements of superstition should also be mentioned as a similarity between Shakespeare's plays and *Tugomer*. The Slavic pagan priest Zovolj, who is almost completely blind, foretells the future war between the Franks and the Slavs. He is like the Soothsayer in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1.2, 3.1). In the final scene of Levstik's *Tugomer* (5.10) Zovolj, for instance, announces the revenge of the Slavs on the Franks and the future freedom of the Slavs. The dramatists' presentation of aggressive and



treacherous Franks and Tugomer's appeal to the Slavs to be brave and to defend the honour of their nation and their language (5, 3) was most likely the main reason why the play could not be produced in Slovenia during Hapsburg rule. On the other hand, patriotic ideas expressed by English kings and other warriors in Shakespeare's histories were not questioned in the Hapsburg Empire and were accepted as a fact.

In both versions of *Tugomer* obvious omens indicate the tragic future of the Slavic people. So, for example, in the introductory scene of *Tugomer* the three old men mention the signs which prophesy the future battles and which are seen in nature, as e.g. the cranes unexpectedly flying towards the south; the ravens which suddenly appear everywhere; the red sky at night; the fiery horse-riders seen by ordinary men on the clouds (1.3). In *Julius Caesar* Casca tells Cicero that he is moved because "all the sway of earth / Shakes like a thing unfirm" (1.3.3-4); or, that he walked "through a tempest dropping fire" (1.3.10), and that "the bird of night did sit / Even at noon-day upon the market-place, / Hooting and shrieking." (1.3.26-28) Similarity between Shakespeare's and Levstik's imagery is obvious. There are also a number of similar cases which are known from superstitions spread by folk tradition. For example, Tugomer's grandmother Vrza is subject to hallucinations (like lady Macbeth or like Volumnia in Coriolanus); she sees at her bedside the bloody hands of her son's murderer (2. 11.,12); at the end of the battle a black cat crosses her path and Vrza hears the shrieking voices of ravens (5.3). Before his death Tugomer hears the voices of the dead Slavic soldiers whom he had delivered to the Franks (5.3), just as Shakespeare's heroes are troubled by the voices of people whom they had killed (e.g. in *Julius Caesar*, 4.3; 5.5, in *Richard III*, 5.3, in *Macbeth* 3.4). Further on, in the battle between Tugomer and Gripo (a Frank who used to live among the Slavs and wished to marry Tugomer's sister Grozdana) Tugomer kills Gripo's horse so that Gripo cannot escape and then he conquers Gripo in the duel (just as Richard's horse is killed first and then Richard is slain by the Earl of Richmond, 5.4, 5.5). Geron, the duke of the Franks, tells his soldiers that Tugomer had cut off Gripo's head (5.9) and that he put it on a pole, just like Macduff did after he had slain Macbeth (5.9). Such obvious similarities between scenes in Shakespeare's plays and Levstik's *Tugomer* clearly indicate that Slovene authors were under the impact of Shakespeare's dramatic solutions.

Tugomer delivers his final speech before his death in the presence of his wife Zorislava and his friend Bojan (5.3). The subject of his speech is very much like Hamlet's final message: people should learn the truth about the past of their ancestors. Tugomer's speech is longer than Hamlet's monologue because he also presents in it his political programme. He appeals to the Slavs that they should be obdurate and inexorable when their honour, their rights and their language are in question; they should not delude themselves about the reality, and they should not allow themselves to be cheated by their enemies but they should fight for their rights to the last drop of their blood. But, in order to be free, the Slavs should "no longer be mad", they should not fight among themselves, but they should unite. This kind of appeal was also delivered by Henry, the Earl of Richmond (afterwards King Henry VII), who demands from his fellow-men in King Richard III, they should no longer "shed the brother's blood" (5.5.24), but they should unite (just like York and Lancaster, the white and the red rose). When the battle ends Richmond asks Lord Stanley: "What men of name are slain on either side?"

Stanley tells him the names of leaders killed on both sides, and then Richmond gives an order: "Inter their bodies as becomes their births. / Proclaim a pardon to the soldiers fled / That in submission will return to us: ... We will unite the white rose and the red." (5.5.12-19). Richmond is not like Richard III, for whom "Conscience is but a word that cowards use" (5.3.309), and therefore the peace and unity which Richmond brings to the English will have a lasting effect. As I have indicated above, the scene which refers to the historical tensions between the Slavs and the Franks in *Tugomer* was most probably one of the main reasons why at the time when Slovenia was a part of the Hapsburg Empire the authorities did not allow the play to be performed. It should be noted though that Levstik presented Geron, the duke of the Franks, as a military leader who shows respect to the dead on both sides. The portrayal of Geron in the final scene in *Tugomer* reminds us of Fortinbras in *Hamlet*, who also orders that "the soldier's music and the rite of war / [should] Speak loudly for him" (5.2).

Coriolanus and Tugomer have almost identical attitudes to the mob: they despise it, because they know that it reacts spontaneously and emotionally, without thinking and without taking into consideration the rational reasons which have brought about a certain situation. Tugomer is definitely a more naive character than Coriolanus. He hopes that he can turn the mob from its own animosity to the perspective positive for the whole nation, to fight for their freedom. Although Kos mentions in connection with possible Shakespeare influence primarily *Coriolanus*, both Jurčič and Levstik must have also known other Shakespeare's heroes with a similar attitude to the mob, particularly Julius Caesar and Richard III. Shakespeare's multi-layered language as well as his presentation of characters provides such an abundance of examples that it is sometimes difficult to establish the primary or the most relevant possible source of a comparison. However, in some cases such parallels may also be the result of similar human attitudes to certain situations and problems and/or common linguistic practice in both languages; they may simply reveal the general human experience as it was expressed by means of language in a given historical period.

In Jurčič's prose version *Tugomer* is in love with Zorislava. She is the widow of the former Slavic leader Čeligoj, whom Tugomer had murdered in order to win her for himself. Tugomer, Zorislava, and the murdered Čeligoj thus form a triangle which resembles king Claudius, Queen Gertrude and her dead husband (Old Hamlet) in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Although Jurčič's Tugomer's is tortured by his conscience (like Claudius), Tugomer does not admit his crime to Zorislava, because he wants to marry her (and neither does Claudius for the same reason). However, Zorislava rejects his proposal, because she does not love him enough and she does not respect him as much she had respected her former husband. She is also shown as a much more honest and devoted female figure than Gertrude. Kmecl suggests in his study mentioned above (Kmecl 2009: 126) that Jurčič's portrayal of Tugomer is close to that of Othello: his eroticism prevails over everything else and his increased ambivalence of love and hatred pushes him and everybody who is close to him to destruction. As attractive as this suggestion might be, we should not forget that there are also many dissimilarities between both heroes. Othello is a noble warrior whereas Zorislava accuses Tugomer of not being brave enough to oppose the Franks, and she therefore does not respect him (this is not the case with Desdemona). Besides, Desdemona loves Othello; Zorislava in



Jurčič's Tugomer does not love her suitor; he is eventually shown as a character who is morally unworthy of Zorislava, for he is the murderer of her husband. So Kmecl's parallel between Othello and Jurčič's Tugomer is only valid in one aspect, but not as regards complete personalities of both heroes. Therefore we may try to find some other, more plausible comparisons between Shakespeare's and Jurčič-(Levstik's) hero, or admit that Jurčič's hero is a one-sided portrayal of a villain. In Levstik's and in Levstik-Kreft's version of this play Tugomer is not a murderer: he is happily married to Zorislava and he meets his wife on the battlefield when he is mortally wounded. He explains to her that the slanderers did not tell her the whole truth about his life and his actions, and that he did not betray his soldiers intentionally. In these versions Tugomer – like Hamlet – hopes that his death will be a warning to the world: Tugomer dies reconciled with Zorislava in her embrace (5.3), and he asks her and his friend Bojan to tell his people about his misfortune (his tragic error) and about his political will. The parallel between the final scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with dying Hamlet, and Horatio as the chorus, and Jurčič-Levstik's *Tugomer*, is obvious.

Jurčič also includes in the play a pair of young lovers (Neklon and Grozdana) whose dialogue before their separation (2.10) is a shortened pastiche of the dialogue between *Romeo and Juliet after their nuptial night* (*Rom.* 3.5). Parallels can also be drawn between the Slavic warrior *Spitignev* and *King Richard III*, both in their physical appearance (they are both hunch-backed) as well as regards their cruel nature. Spitignev – like some of Shakespeare's heroes – does not hesitate to use poison for his revenge (he poisons the girl who had refused to love him). His maxim in life is obviously the same as that of Richard III, who explains his evil nature by saying: "And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover / To entertain these fair well-spoken days, / I am determined to prove a villain / And hate the idle pleasures of these days. / Plots have I laid ..." (*Richard III*, 1.1.28-32). Spitignev is also a person who constantly plots against others, and in this respect he is very much like Iago in *Othello*. But his fate is not the same: Iago is wounded (and not killed) by Othello; Spitignev commits suicide. His Frankish counterpart is Gripo, a German settler among the Slovenes, a traitor. In Levstik's text Gripo also embodies the cunningness of Iago combined with the viciousness of Edmund in *King Lear*.

If we compare Jurčič's original text of *Tugomer* with Levstik's adaptation we see that Levstik's version presents the world in new, rich artistic dimensions. Although Shakespeare's influence is seen in both plays, Levstik's character portrayal is deeper than that of Jurčič, whose prose version seems like a rough plot for a later play, which was developed into a poetic tragedy by Levstik. The characters in *Tugomer* are presented by Levstik in a much more sophisticated manner, as true individuals, embodying both positive and negative features. The hero, Tugomer, is not obsessed either by sensuality, or lust for power and money, he is an idealist who had made a tragic error and who eventually realizes his tragic mistake. Shakespeare's influence on Levstik's creativity of individual characters as well as his presentation of both ethnic groups, the Franks and the Slovenes, is definitely more ethically balanced than that presented in by Jurčič in the first version of the play and therefore it achieves a higher aesthetic level. Therefore it is also closer to Shakespeare's heroes as well as to the whole concept of Shakespeare's world than the first prose version by Jurčič. Kreft's adaptation of Levstik's text includes references to Shakespeare's work which we find in Levstik's version, but with his rear-

rangement of various passages and scenes, both Levstik's and Levstik – Kreft's version of *Tugomer* definitely link this play with a number of Shakespeare's histories (e.g. *King Richard III*, *King Henry V*) and with his great tragedies, for example, with *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* – and not primarily with *Coriolanus*. Levstik's and Levstik – Kreft's version of *Tugomer* show an important independence from any of the particular Shakespeare plays quoted above, especially if they are compared with Jurčič's prose version. Therefore these versions are also more dramatically persuasive and show a higher level of verisimilitude. *Tugomer* is the first Slovene tragedy written on the basis of classical and Renaissance type of tragedies and it therefore surpasses Linhart's *Miss Jenny Love*, which shows the limitations of the neo-classical domestic tragedy. Slovene dramatic art, particularly tragedy, definitely reached European standards with Levstik's *Tugomer*. Although quite a few parallels between Shakespeare's plays and Levstik's *Tugomer* can be found Shakespeare's influence was in no way damaging, but just the opposite. It shows that the Slovene dramatists of the second half of the nineteenth century did not create their plays on a direct influence of foreign masters (besides Shakespeare also Goethe and Schiller are also often mentioned as possible influences); they consciously limited themselves to myths connected with the Slavic history. Their characters are no doubt portrayals linked with some major characters in Shakespeare's plays, but they are impregnated with different emotions, moral qualities and other details which Slovene playwrights found relevant for the entire composition of their plays.

### III. IVAN CANKAR

#### *Kralj na Betajnovi* (1901; The King of Betajnova)

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century Ivan Cankar (1876-1918) acquired one of the most important positions in Slovene literature as poet, short story writer, novelist and dramatist, essayist. He was the leading literary figure of the “*Slovene modern*” movement (*Slovenska moderna*), which is similar to the European *fin de siècle* movement. It is viewed as a period of transition in social and moral values and it excelled in poetry typical of the European decadence. Cankar represents this literary movement together with three other Slovene poets: Josip Murn Aleksandrov, Dragotin Kette and Oton Župančič.<sup>18</sup> But Cankar's fame is equally distributed among

<sup>18</sup> Josip Murn Aleksandrov (1879-1901) was an excellent lyrical poet who treated in his poems motifs of man's loneliness, alienation, melancholic feelings. He longed for happiness and he expressed in his poems his premonition of an early death. Both Murn and Kette lived before their death in the “*cukrarna*” (sugar-refinery) poor house in Ljubljana.

- Dragotin Kette (1876-1899) was also Cankar's intimate friend, who often presents in his lyrical poetry a division between sensual and spiritual love.

- Oton Župančič (1878-1949) was in his early artistic period a typical representative of the decadence in his poetry, whereas in his works written after 1900 his optimism and vitality prevail. He was the manager and the artistic director of the Slovene National Theatre (Drama) in Ljubljana and one of the best Slovene translators in the first half of the twentieth century. He translated into Slovene a number of plays written by Shakespeare and other European dramatists, in which his poetic gift sometimes even surpasses the poetic imagination of the original. He also wrote several dramatic works, among which *Veronika Deseniška* is his artistically most successful play (this will be discussed later).

all three literary genres, and his plays represent a new quality in Slovene drama, a firm basis of all subsequent Slovene plays written in the twentieth century.

Ivan Cankar was born at Vrhnika, a small town some twenty kilometres west of Ljubljana. At the time of his birth Vrhnika belonged to the province of Carniola, then a part of the Hapsburg Empire. Cankar's father was an unsuccessful craftsman so that his mother had to provide for a large family by herself. Cankar was well aware of this fact and his mother became an idol whom he portrayed in a number of his stories and novellas. In 1896 he finished his secondary schooling in Ljubljana and went to Vienna to study engineering. But he soon realized that his vocation was to be a writer and he started to earn his bread by writing poems and short stories. At first he was impressed by the idea of the Nietzschean superman, but he soon rejected this philosophy and began to express his admiration for the Emersonian belief in an individual, in man's spiritual values, in his sense of duty to God and to one's self. In his works Cankar rejected the faults of institutional religion and the Church and his target soon became the philistine, morally corrupt individual he could see among his fellow-men. He also rebelled against Hapsburg rule, which humiliated and oppressed the non-German ethnic population of its Empire, and therefore in many of his works Cankar presents the authoritarian rule and ruthless individuals from a sharp, ironic or satirical perspective. His heroes often stand in opposition to society, but they are often not strong enough to exert a real influence on the moral norms of society and existing economic conditions. Nevertheless the final outcome of the battle between oppressive society and progressive minds of his literary individuals is sometimes seen from the optimistic point of view, although evil still wins in many of his works.

Cankar spent almost eleven years in Vienna before he returned to Ljubljana. He knew Shakespeare's poetry and wrote about it to his friend Ana Lušinova already on 2 August 1898. He states in this letter that Shakespeare's poetry is "unreachable" and that Shakespeare is his "most beloved poet" (*Cankar ZD IV*: 395). In the same letter he also suggests that nobody has spoken yet about his love "in such heavenly verse", and he compares his own love experience "on a soft, tender night" with Romeo's feelings when he came to woe Juliet (2.2). In 1899 Cankar was asked to revise Dragotin Šauperl's Slovene translation of *Hamlet*, which he gladly did. In a letter to the general manager of the Slovene National Theatre Fran Milčinski he stated that he would rather translate into Slovene three plays by Shakespeare than one act of a play written by Heinrich Kleist, which he was then also translating.<sup>19</sup> The premiere took place on 28 Dec. 1899 at the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana, and in the theatre-bill only Ivan Cankar is mentioned as the translator. Dušan Moravec reports in his survey on Shakespeare's plays in Slovenia (1974: 376-77) that the play was adapted for the stage and that several scenes were omitted. However, the production was a great success and other Slovene translations of Shakespeare's plays followed soon. Cankar also translated Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and the translation was published in 1904, but it was only first performed by the Slovene theatre company in Trieste / Trst, in 1914.

From the point of view of this essay it is particularly relevant how Shakespeare influenced Ivan Cankar's work. Although many Slovene critics have mentioned that the

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<sup>19</sup> *Pisma Ivana Cankarja I* (1948: 296).

mouse-trap scene in *Hamlet* provided for Cankar the dramatic pattern for a very similar scene in his play *Kralj na Betajnovi* (1902), little has been said about other possible Shakespeare influences on Cankar. Among criticism related to Cankar's work in more recent Slovene studies Irena Avsenik Nabergoj also deals with possible Shakespeare influence on Cankar's poetry and prose.<sup>20</sup> But before the presentation of this topic let me mention briefly the plot of Cankar's *Kralj na Betajnovi* so that parallels between Shakespeare's plays and Cankar's play may be more obvious.

In Cankar's three-act play *Kralj na Betajnovi* the protagonist is Jožef Kantor, a man who made his way from poverty to become the most wealthy man in a small town named Betajnova, where other people and he himself calls himself "a king". Kantor achieved this position through morally doubtful means and some people of this small town even suspect that in order to gain wealth he even murdered his own cousin. When the young bohemian student Maks Krnec rather unexpectedly returns to Betajnova from his studies abroad, he realizes that in the meantime Kantor has promised his daughter Francka, Maks's beloved, to another rich man from Betajnova, her suitor Franc Bernot: It seems at first that Maks and Francka will be nevertheless reunited, but when Kantor learns about this he strongly opposes this idea. Not long ago Kantor also forced Maks's father into bankruptcy. Maks despises Kantor and he suspects him of criminal deeds. Therefore he hypnotizes Kantor who starts to re-enact the murder of his cousin on Maks's father: Maks succeeds in this "mouse-trap scene", Kantor grips Maks's father by the throat, but when Maks interrupts this scene and accuses Kantor of being a murderer, he denies the accusation.

Kantor realizes that it is best for him and for his plans with Francka if he could bribe Maks to leave the town. But Maks is not willing to accept Kantor's proposal and he tries to persuade both Francka and Nina, the fourteen-year-old daughter of the murdered Kantor's cousin, to leave Betajnova. However, Maks does not succeed although Francka still seems to love him. In the meantime Kantor decides to kill Maks with Bernot's rifle, which Bernot had forgotten in Kantor's pub. Immediately after the murder Kantor admits his guilt to his friends, the parish priest and to the city judge, but they pretend not to believe him and persuade him to accuse Bernot of Maks's murder, supposedly because Bernot was jealous of Maks, and as a proof Bernot's rifle is used. The Priest and the Judge represent "the pillars of society" in Betajnova and for them Kantor is too rich a prey to be found guilty. Instead, Bernot is taken to prison. Francka and her naive and terrified mother stay with Kantor, who sends Nina to the monastery because she knows too much (she had heard the shrieks of her dying father). Kantor remains "a king in Betajnova", and he tries to exculpate himself from his crimes by saying that "in order to achieve something for himself, for his parish, for his nation, one cannot be merciful,

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<sup>20</sup> Irena Avsenik Nabergoj, *Ljubezen in krivda Ivana Cankarja* (Ljubljana: MK, 2005: 48, 183, 221, 245, 250, 253, 298, 316, 521). She finds Cankar's source of inspiration for his short stories in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Richard II*, and for Cankar's poems in several Shakespeare's sonnets. In her article published in the review *Jezik in slovstvo* 53.2 (Mar.- April) 2008: 33-47, she compares violence in Cankar's *Kralj na Betajnovi* with violence in *Hamlet*. This is also the main theme discussed in I. Nabergoj's reader for the final exam in Slovene secondary schools (*Dramatika na maturi*. Nova Gorica: Založba Univerza v Novi Gorici, 2008: 37-59). – Let me mention here that Cankar was pleased with his work as a translator, which he mentions also in several other letters he wrote e.g. to his brother Karl, to his friend Oton Župančič etc. (Moravec 1974: 397).

but in order to reach the throne one must walk in blood up to his knees.” (*Cankar ZD IV*: 66). Parallels between Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Cankar’s *Kralj na Betajnovi* are especially noticeable in the first act of Cankar’s play, particularly in the mouse-trap scene and partly also in some minor features in Acts 2 and 3.

The first literary historian to mention the parallels between *Hamlet* and Cankar’s play was the Italian scholar Bartolomeo Calvi, who also wrote in 1929 the introduction to the Italian translation of Cankar’s play.<sup>21</sup> His main points regarding the connection between Shakespeare and Cankar are the following: Calvi accepts the view that Cankar did not wish to celebrate in the play the Nietzschean superman, personified by the protagonist, wealthy and powerful Kantor. This topic has been also treated by several Slovene critics (e.g. France Koblar, Matevž Kos etc.),<sup>22</sup> and their solutions regarding Nietzsche’s influence differ. Calvi questions Maks’s use of hypnosis wondering why Maks did not use the knowledge he gained about Kantor later, as his evidence to prove Kantor’s crime. According to Calvi Maks “forgets” his father’s disappropriation, which he could also use against Kantor. Calvi finds a parallel between Shakespeare’s Gertrude in *Hamlet* and Cankar’s presentation of good-hearted and simple-minded Ana, Kantor’s wife. These comparisons are acceptable, but Calvi’s parallel between Maks’s father and Horatio (1929/1930: 113) is not very plausible. Horatio’s relationship with Hamlet is much deeper, it is more strongly present than Maks’s relationship with his father and it is therefore also much more dramatically important. Horatio is dealt with in *Hamlet* as the hero’s trustworthy friend, a real confidant, whereas Maks’s father Krnec plays in Cankar’s *The Kings of Betajnova* a minor role. Finally, Calvi’s aesthetic evaluation of Cankar’s play is relatively high although he does not place it as high as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* or Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts* (a much more appropriate thematic comparison would be with Ibsen’s *Pillars of Society*, 1877). Because of Cankar’s use of the mouse-trap scene, Calvi mentions Cankar’s play as a kind of predecessor of Luigi Pirandello’s intellectual approach to the presentation of life in art, and he mentions Pirandello’s play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921).<sup>23</sup> This comparison between Cankar’s and Pirandello’s play – as flattering as Calvi may have meant it to be – is not very persuasive either because the two plays differ in their themes, plots and structures and the use of “the play within a play” is hardly sufficient grounds for such a comparison. However, in spite of some objections to Calvi’s interpretation of Cankar’s play, we should mention that he was the first critic to observe possible parallels between Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Cankar’s play.

France Koblar, one of the first Slovene literary critics especially interested in drama, enumerates in his survey of Slovene drama (1973) some other parallels between *Hamlet* and Cankar’s play. Both *Hamlet* and Maks were studying abroad before they returned home after some crucial events had transpired there. Both major female figures, Ophelia and Francka, were supposed to marry their beloved (Hamlet / Maks),

<sup>21</sup> Bartolomeo Calvi, *Il re di Betainova* (Torino: Societa Editrice Internazionale, 1929). His essay appeared also in Slovene translation in the review *Modra ptica* (1, 1929/30: 444-47, 67-70, 88-92, 113-117).

<sup>22</sup> Several critics, e.g. Dušan Moravec (1969: 294), France Koblar (1973: 54), find in Cankar’s play a combination of Shakespeare’s revenge motif and the Nietzschean philosophy of the superman. On the other hand, Matevž Kos states that Kantor is more like a caricature than a candidate for the role of Nietzschean superman (Matevž Kos, *Poskusi z Nietzschejem*. Ljubljana: SM, 2003: 175).

<sup>23</sup> Calvi 1928: 88.

but in both cases their fathers intervened so that the marriage was prevented. Koblar also concludes that in both plays evil wins (1973: 53). This point is only “technically” correct, because Hamlet dies prophesying “the election lights / On Fortinbras” (5.2.53-54) and he justly believes that law and order will be restored in Denmark, whereas in Cankar’s play evil definitely wins in Betajnova. Another historian of Slovene drama, Dušan Moravec, defines in his notes to Cankar’s play Maks as “a dreamer”, “a genius of a vagabond”, who is “honest and clever” (ZD IV: 294). These attributes may well refer to Hamlet too (with the exception of being a vagabond). Moravec also finds the moral corruption of the Judge in Cankar’s play as too exaggerated (Cankar ZD IV: 294); we may also agree with this view because both characters, the Priest and the Judge are in Cankar’s play drawn more like caricatures and not like other realistic portrayals of people in Betajnova.

Among more recent interpreters of Cankar’s play Janko Kos appropriately points out that Maks only wishes to rouse Kantor’s conscience, i.e. Maks’s vengeance is only ethical, whereas Hamlet’s revenge is also physical. Hamlet’s doubts about his “moral duty” to avenge the death of his father are not present in Maks’s personality, which is “autonomous and ideal” (Kos 2001: 263). Thus Cankar “departs” from Shakespeare: Claudius is guilty on several levels (emotional, social, religious, moral), whereas Kantor’s guilt is only the product of his quest for power.

In her study on Cankar the Slovene critic Irena Avsenik Nabergoj also mentions Cankar’s use of “the mouse-trap scene” in his play *Kralj na Betajnovi*. Besides, she makes a persuasive suggestion about Cankar’s female roles: the author always searches for the image of a perfect woman, but he must eventually recognize that his “idol” is just an ordinary human being (2005: 698), and Cankar’s Francka definitely does not surpass such a character (the same is true of Ophelia). Nabergoj’s point that the “conflict” between Maks and Bernot can be compared with that between Hamlet and Laertes is partly valid, because the rivalry between these male characters is in Cankar’s play only briefly indicated. The relationship between Hamlet and Laertes is much more complex and more deeply developed whereas Bernot is (if compared with Laertes) a rather flat character. Nabergoj’s assertion that Shakespeare included in his tragedies also comic scenes is correct, but it would be hard to find comic elements which are “depicted concurrently” in Cankar’s play (2005: 219), as she suggests, and which would relate to Shakespeare’s style.

However, in addition to the above mentioned parallels between Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Cankar’s *Kralj na Betajnovi* we can also notice some other examples, which have not been mentioned yet. Kantor’s antagonist, Maks Krnec, tells Francka that he was not badly hurt when her father caused the bankruptcy of his father’s property; but he states that he is angry because Kantor uses his power to tread upon human beings (10). Maks adds that the whole surrounding of Betajnova smells of “bad dreams” (12); this image, which is olfactory, is similar to the conclusion made by Marcelus, namely when he says, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark” (*Hamlet* 1.4.90). Both images denote the social, the ethical as well as the mental situation of these settings. Although Maks does not see “the ghost of Kantor’s cousin” who would tell him that he was murdered, he says that he sees this truth “written on people’s faces”, or, as his father suggests, he must have heard the rumour, which is spread in Betajnova “by women” (29),



this is that Kantor had possibly murdered his cousin. Although Maks is certain that he is right in his suspicion Maks “cannot strike back”. He blames his “impotence” on his father, who had created him “so small, such a weakling” (30). We may hear in Maks’s complaint Hamlet’s words: “O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt ...”, in the monologue in which Hamlet also states that he is not “like Hercules” (1.2.129-153), and that “so poor a man as Hamlet is” feels morally obliged to set things right (1.5.184-89). When Maks meditates about the situation in Betajnova he tells Francka that he does not feel well; he anticipates that something bad, something evil is going to happen (28-9). It is possible that Maks’s thoughts refer to his intention to commit suicide, the thought which also crosses Hamlet’s mind on the above mentioned occasion (1.2.131-32). Maks tells Francka that his life has ended and that the dead have no right for love (42), but Francka does not understand him and at that moment she still hopes that she would leave Betajnova together with Maks and start a new life in town. But both young lovers, Ophelia and Francka, ultimately function in the same way, they both obey their father’s will and are at least partly guilty for the deaths of their beloved.

After Kantor re-enacts the murder of his cousin and Maks rouses his conscience, Kantor knows that his “dreams” were real and that his sins cannot be forgiven (“erased”, 32). Kantor’s speech is a brief version of the interior monologue spoken by Claudius in Hamlet (3.3.35-72) in which Claudius admits that God cannot forgive him, because he is not willing to part with his gain, i.e. to admit his guilt, to separate from Gertrude and to give up his power. Just as Claudius is sure that he wants to get rid of Hamlet, Kantor’s reply to Francka is that he is going to be “healthy and well when Maks –”. Kantor does not finish the sentence, but, judging by his question, which follows, “Whose rifle is this?” (34), we can surmise that his full answer would be: “– when Maks is dead”. Claudius decides that he must get rid of Hamlet and he sends him to England, and when Kantor realizes that Maks does not wish to leave Betajnova of his own free will, or to accept bribes, he decides to get rid of Maks and to kill him at the first opportunity.

Even though Kantor is mainly modelled on the image of Claudius we can also discover some links between Kantor’s character and that of Macbeth. Although Kantor – like Macbeth – knows that his “False face must hide what the false heart doth know” (*Macbeth* 1.7.27), he has his weak moments, too. For example, Kantor is not as “strong” and “straightforward” in his evil doings as Macbeth, and besides, his criminal nature is almost discovered by the priest and the judge after Maks’s murder. If “the pillars of society” in Betajnova had not been so morally corrupt Kantor would have been imprisoned and convicted. He is also a living proof of Macbeth’s statement that “blood will have blood” and that he is “in blood stepp’d” (3.4.122; 126-27). Although Maks tries to remind Kantor that his “kingdom is stolen” and that his “slaves” (Kantor’s workers whom Maks had tried to show reality, and who will, as Maks believes, one day raise against Kantor), “the king” is not afraid of his threat, he behaves like Macbeth before the final duel with Macduff; he is ready to fight and even to die. On the other hand Cankar allows evil to win and Kantor promises to his young sons that he will raise them in such a way that they will become like him.

Maks neither has the energy nor the power to end Kantor’s rule. He admits that he felt like an alien when he lived abroad, but he is now an alien also in his native land.



On the other hand Kantor is willing to sacrifice everything for his “kingdom”, even his daughter’s love, and although people in Betajnova, including the members of Kantor’s family, know what kind of a man he is and are terrified of him, when he proposes the toast, all the inhabitants of Betajnova drink to his health. The untying of the knot in Cankar’s play *Kralj na Betajnovi* is completely different from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: Cankar’s characters annihilate any possibility of catharsis and turn the events in the play into a grotesque version of reality. In *Hamlet* the festivity takes place at the beginning of the play, when the crime Claudius had committed is not yet known, in Cankar’s play the rejoicing takes place after Kantor had murdered his cousin and Maks. In Cankar’s play the tragic events culminate in “a happy ending”, because the society is so completely corrupted that the final “merry-go-round” fills us with terror.

By the beginning of the twentieth century – when Cankar wrote this play – three hundred years had passed since Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* was written. Although Cankar used in *Kralj na Betajnovi* several motifs, incidents and characters which resemble Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and to some extent also *Macbeth*, Cankar’s vision of the world, his view of ethical norms, and of man’s moral principles is totally different from Shakespeare’s norms, it is much more bleak and it does not offer any positive hope for man’s future. Does this mean that in Cankar’s view man’s behaviour and his ethical standards have been so much degraded during the past few hundred years? Can we assume that Kantor’s immoral, liberal, capitalist, economic, political and social power completely dominate the modern world?

## IVAN CANKAR

### *Pohujšanje v dolini Šentflorjanski* (1907, Scandal in the Valley of St. Florian)

In Ivan Cankar’s later work parallels between Shakespeare’s plays and his plays are not as numerous as in *Kralj na Betajnovi*. Cankar’s farce *Pohujšanje v dolini Šentflorjanski* was published in October 1907. Its premiere took place two months later, on 21 December 1907, at the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana.<sup>24</sup> It is worth remembering in this connection that Cankar had translated *Hamlet* into Slovene in 1899. Even before this date, already in 1896, he had mentioned *Romeo and Juliet* in the first poem belonging to the cycle “Helena”, and also in one of his letters in which he compared their love with his own feelings for a young lady.<sup>25</sup> His second translation of Shakespeare’s plays was this play, *Romeo and Juliet*, which was published in Slovene in 1904 (but staged only in 1914). These facts are relevant for the understanding of allusions made by Cankar in this poetic play *Pohujšanje v dolini Šentflorjanski*. Its main themes are the hypocrisy of the small-town folk in his native country and, on a symbolic level, the ignorance of the public to the artist’s work.

The plot of this play deals with the unexpected arrival of an artist and a vagabond, Peter, to St. Florian Valley. He is accompanied by a beautiful young woman,

<sup>24</sup> The play was translated into English by Anthony J. Klančar under the title *Scandal in the Valley of St. Florian* and performed at the “Slovenski narodni dom” in Cleveland on 18 March 1934.

<sup>25</sup> Cankar *ZD IV* (1968): 395.

Jacinta, and their servant, called Konkordat, who is actually the Devil himself. Peter had promised all the souls of this valley to Konkordat for services rendered. At night Peter visits the Mayor and tells him that he is the foundling, his bastard son, whom the villagers had forced to leave the valley some twenty-five years before. As compensation Peter now claims from the Mayor one hundred forints, and later he claims the same amount from each villager who comes to see him and Jacinta in a shabby house at the end of the village where they live. He accuses them – one after the other – of being his unacknowledged father. The men obviously feel guilty of their immorality and they are all asked to kiss the leg of beautiful Jacinta. Cankar shows how their moral norms have not changed because they gladly do what Peter commands them to perform. The Devil thus discovers that all the villagers (and their wives) are sinners and hypocrites and that Peter had played a trick on him and on the villagers. Nevertheless they are so overwhelmed by Peter and Jacinta that they provide a beautiful castle for them. Peter arranges a festivity there for all the villagers and he asks Jacinta to dance for them. In the meantime a poor, young boy appears at the castle, and he tells Peter that he is the real foundling and that Peter is looked for by the police; Peter decides to leave the castle together with Jacinta in a hurry. He promises her that their voyage will be “full of joy and pleasure” and they will thus also deceive the law. Peter advises the young man to be harsh with the villagers, who wish to forget the whole episode as quickly as possible and begin to sing a religious hymn about St. Aloysius, the patron of young, innocent people. They pretend that nothing had happened and that they are as virtuous as ever. However, Peter and Jacinta have definitely discovered their immorality, their hypocritical image.

In one of his letters Cankar demanded from the theatre manager that “Jacinta should be very beautiful [as] otherwise the play was not to be staged at all” (*Cankar ZD* 1968: 351). Janko Kos suggests in his comparative history of Slovene literature that Cankar may have had in mind Jacinta’s performance of Salomé’s dance of the seven veils in Oscar Wilde’s play bearing the same title. Several Slovene literary historians (e.g. F. Koblar, D. Moravec, J. Kos etc.) also briefly mention in their works that Cankar admired the poetic beauty of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare’s influence is particularly noticeable in Act 2, Scene 1 of *Pohujšanje v dolini Šentflorjanski*, which can be compared with the initial dialogue between Romeo and Juliet (2. 2). Cankar uses here endecasyllabo, a typically Petrarchan form of verse, which is also typical of Slovene love poetry. Besides, a number of parallels can be found between both plays, e.g. Jacinta tells Peter that the candle light is not necessary, because there is moonlight and “the light” in their hearts; they feel to be in heaven although they have not emptied yet their chalice of love; Jacinta hopes to receive gifts of “velvet, silk and brocade ... together with gold and precious stones”, etc. These epithets and images are very similar to those mentioned in *Romeo and Juliet* and in some of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Both Juliet and Jacinta ask their lovers whether they still love them, when they have to leave their happy haven (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.90; *Pohujšanje v dolini Šentflorjanski* 2.1, 88). They both complain that the night was too short, and both men, Romeo and Peter, are aware that they are obliged to leave: Romeo must leave Verona if he does not wish to disobey the order of the Prince and to stay alive, and Peter knows that the police are after him and that therefore they should immediately leave St. Florian’s valley. Cankar’s

Peter is a more complex character than Romeo: he is not only a lover, but he is also an artist, or at least he used to be until he lost all his “hopes, his longing and his inspiration”. Therefore his call to go on the road again may be an unspoken promise that his artistic creation will be revived again.

Cankar had explained on several occasions that he would not have written this satire had he not loved his country so much (ZD 1968: 340-346). He also points out that Jacinta's role was to show “the artist's more beautiful and higher level of life, the symbol of his art” (*ibid.*), which Cankar had felt that it had not been appreciated enough. Konkordat, the Devil, offers Peter and Jacinta material riches, which are as dubious as the supposedly “innocent souls” of the villagers. Konkordat's role of Mephistopheles is to ruin the souls of the inhabitants of St. Florian valley, but Cankar turns his attempt into a satiric picture of contemporary society, which is already so morally corrupt that the Devil is needed no longer to do his job.<sup>26</sup> In this passage we may discern several elements of the syntactical pattern used in Hamlet's monologue before his final duel with Laertes (“If it be now, ‘tis not to come – if it be not to come”, *Hamlet* 5.2.216-220). Cankar knew it well because he translated *Hamlet*; he used it here to create the uncertainty about the success of Konkordat's mission. This compound sentence based on conditional clauses is rhetorically very noticeable and effective in both plays.

Cankar's play also includes a number of symbolic references: Peter represents an artist, who is in love with life and the arts; Jacinta stands for the arts; the “villagers”, represent the public which does not understand and does not appreciate the artist's vision to create beauty. Here we can see a possible comparison with Shakespeare's symbolism in *The Tempest*: Prospero and Peter are artists, “magicians”, Miranda and Jacinta are their art, Caliban is Konkordat, the sailors are the inhabitants of the St. Florian Valley, uncultured, rough companions, the public. There is no direct evidence that Cankar knew *The Tempest* and therefore these parallels regarding the symbolism in both plays may simply reflect similar perception of life and the arts of both playwrights. However, the other examples cited above are definitely the result of Cankar's first-hand knowledge of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

## IVAN CANKAR

*Lepa Vida* (1911, Beautiful Vida)

*Hrepenje* (w. in 1906; Yearnings, a fragment, first publ. in 1968)

*Hamlet iz cukrarne* (w. in 1909; Hamlet from the ‘Sugar-refinery’ Poor-house, publ. in 1969)

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<sup>26</sup> Cankar degraded the role of Mephistopheles in comparison with his role either in the medieval legend or as shown by Christopher Marlowe in his play *Dr. Faustus* or by Goethe in *Faust*.

*Lepa Vida* (2001, *Hrepenenje – Hamlet iz Cukrarne*. – (Beautiful Vida, Yearnings, Hamlet from the ‘Sugar-refinery’ Poor-house. Scenes were selected and arranged by Mile Korun)

Cankar’s play about a beautiful young girl, called Vida, is the result of his previously written dramatic fragments (Yearnings, Hamlet from the ‘Sugar-refinery’ Poor-house) and his play, *Lepa Vida* (Beautiful Vida). He treats in them the theme of man’s longing (for the meaning of life, for beauty, happiness, death etc.). The scene of the first and the third act of *Lepa Vida* is set at the poor-house in Ljubljana, and the second act takes place at Lake Bled. In the poor-house two of Cankar’s best friends, the poets Josip Murn and Dragotin Kette, lived and died so that the play although based on a myth also has the author’s personal background.<sup>27</sup> Cankar’s play *Lepa Vida* was first produced on 27 January 1912 at the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana. It is a poetic play in which metaphoric language prevails and therefore it is not surprising that it is one of the least frequently performed plays written by Cankar. Almost ninety years after its premiere a new version was prepared by Mile Korun, who is one of the leading Slovene theatre directors of the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> His version of *Lepa Vida* is a compilation of all three texts, and it is structured in such a way that there is a clear distinction between the reality and the dream-scenes in which Cankar’s characters live.

The motif about beautiful Vida has appeared in Slovene literature as an archetypal pattern in several variants, and from the beginning of the nineteenth century onward it has inspired some fifty Slovene authors who have dealt with it in their literary works (in poems, prose works and in plays).<sup>29</sup> Slovene literary historian Anton Slodnjak (1968: 14) believed that this motif was even related to motifs treated in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The central figure of this myth is a young woman (most frequently a mother), who has a small sick child and who is married to an old husband. She longs for a new, a different, more beautiful life. In several variants of this motif the

<sup>27</sup> Among Cankar’s dramatic fragments there is also a short episode called “Niobe”. Cankar first mentioned it immediately after he had translated *Hamlet*. This may indicate that Shakespeare’s mentioning of Niobe in *Hamlet* (1.2.149) was the immediate reason why Cankar chose this title for a possible play. Like Niobe, who is in Greek mythology the daughter of Tantalus and who has lost her children, Cankar’s portrait of a Mother (as a character) in this scene is found in the same situation. But the theme of this episode is only connected with *Lepa Vida* through its motif of man’s departure from home and consequently with mother’s sorrow, which is also present in *Lepa Vida*. The plot of Cankar’s unfinished play is similar to a short play *Riders to the Sea*, written by the Irish playwright John Millington Synge (1871-1909). Synge’s play was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1904. Towards the end of the nineteenth century many Slovenes (like many Irish people) left their homes and went to America which was probably also Cankar’s main reason for his interest in this theme.

<sup>28</sup> Cankar’s complete text of *Lepa Vida* was published in the collected edition of his work (ZD V, 1969: 67-110), where also both fragments were printed (“Hrepenenje”, ZD IV, 1968: 125-138, and “Hamlet iz cukrarne”, ZD V, 1969: 118-131). Korun’s version was printed in the theatre-bill of Mestno gledališče ljubljansko (The Municipal Theatre of Ljubljana), 4 (2001-2002), published at the premiere on 15. Dec. 2001: 1-48. Although Cankar changed names of several characters in his fragments and in his play, they are easily recognizable because of their noticeable personal features.

<sup>29</sup> Jože Pogačnik enumerates different versions of this myth which have been published by 1988 (Pogačnik 1988: 8-9) and Denis Poniž mentions also other, later versions (Poniž 2006).

story is based on the life of a beautiful young woman, who is washing the baby's diapers on the shore of the Adriatic Sea. She is enticed (in some versions forced) by a black sailor to board the ship.<sup>30</sup> Then she is taken to Spain to serve there as a wet nurse to the Queen's child. What at first seems to Vida as a kind of adventure (even if in the eyes of local people she is sometimes regarded as a morally degraded person) turns out to be a sorrowful experience, which is presented differently by various authors. According to one version Vida is employed at the Spanish court as a wet nurse and she lives there a happy life; according to another version she is not happy in the foreign land and she misses there her child and her country. The final part of some of these ballads also has two contrasting endings: according to one version Vida returns to her native land, or, according to another, she remains abroad. Boris Paternu suggests that Cankar was most probably inspired to write his play by a ballad written on this theme of a folk song by the Slovene poet France Prešeren. In his poem "Od lepe Vide" (About the beautiful Vida) the black sailor was asked by the Queen of Spain to bring Vida to the Spanish court.<sup>31</sup> But once Vida is on the open sea she regrets her decision and when she serves at the Court she is not happy although the Queen is nice to her; she looks through the window and cries every day when she thinks about her sick child and her old husband whom she had deserted and thus betrayed. The motif for her "escape", which is according to views expressed by Boris Paternu, is not so much erotic and social as it is in some other versions of this ballad.<sup>32</sup>

In Cankar's version of this archetypal motif the figure of the beautiful Vida is used both as a dramatic character as well as a symbol representing man's desire for something unattainable, something what may often seem to be within man's reach but what always finally escapes him.<sup>33</sup> The setting of the play in Ljubljana is an old five-storey building, a sugar refinery which was built in 1830 on the outskirts of the city ("cukrarna" is a Slovene slang word derived from the German word "Zucker", i.e. "sugar"). The building was later used as a barracks and then, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was turned into a poor-house in which also many students and bohemian artists lived. This five-storey building (which still exists but which is now empty) has dark corridors, the walls are covered with moss, and it is generally in a very poor condition. Two of Cankar's best friends, Slovene poets Dragotin Kette and Josip Murn, lived there for a number of years and also died there at the prime of their lives (see note 17). Cankar refers to this building as "a huge morgue". Its inhabitants wish to leave the building but they do not have enough will and energy to do so. The situation in which these lodgers are is hopeless and when they see a beautiful young girl, Vida, who also lives in this poor-house with her mother, they are extremely happy. The central theme of the play is the expectation of a group of lodgers hoping that Vida, who has gone out one evening

<sup>30</sup> In the nineteenth century the region west of Trieste / Trst was still settled mainly by Slovenes. In histories of Slovene folklore it is mentioned that Vida came from the hinterland of Trieste / Trst, i.e. between Nabrežina (Ital. "Aurisina") and Devin ("Duino"). The region then belonged to the Hapsburg Empire and since 1919 it belongs to Italy.

<sup>31</sup> *France Prešeren ZD 2* (1966: 131-34).

<sup>32</sup> Boris Paternu *I* (1976): 141-45.

<sup>33</sup> The symbolism of "beautiful Vida" has been interpreted in many diverse, even paradoxical ways (e. g. as the symbol of love/death, beauty, art, new life, nation's collective memory etc.). See: Pogačnik (1988) and Poniž (2006).

with a rich suitor, is going to come back to the poor-house, to bring to their life again “new light”, new hope. But only a fifteen year old student really believes that Vida is going to come back and he hopes that one day he and Vida will leave the poor-house together and start a new life in a nicer world.

Many Slovene literary historians and critics have written interpretations on *Lepa Vida* and they interpret the play from various perspectives, but with very few exceptions they do not deal at all with possible influences Shakespeare had on Ivan Cankar when he was writing this play,<sup>34</sup> with parallels between Shakespeare’s plays and Cankar’s play. In his notes to the play Dušan Moravec points out that this connection can already be seen in the title of one of the earlier fragments, which bears the title of *Hamlet*. Cankar’s hero, *Vehovec*, is such an indecisive person like *Hamlet*, who wavers between life as “the prison” and his desire for new life. The very name, “Vehovec”, is in Slovene a variant of “vehavec”, which is a synonym for a hesitant, indecisive person (SSKJ 1994: 1498). When in the fragment *Hamlet from the Sugar-refinery* Vehovec admits to Schweiger that now he has no moral restraint as regards his dealing with women (*Vida* is meant here) the latter tries to console Vehovec by telling him that other men have also cheated “girls” but that they continued their lives as if nothing had happened (*Cankar ZD V* 1969: 124). Likewise, Hamlet does not wish to stop his activities in connection with his father’s death, even if he hurts *Ophelia* (“Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins remembered.” 3.1.89-90); or, when he denies he had given her presents and Ophelia claims that he had given her “remembrances of yours” (*ibid.* 3.1.93) and that he had spoken “sweet” words to her. Hamlet – even though he may be touched by Ophelia’s words – wishes to continue his search for the murderer and responds to her plea with a grotesque laughter. Neither “hero” is willing to admit to the women to whom they made certain promises that this was so. But in some crucial moments, when death is near, they could easily use the rhetoric Hamlet uses in his dispute with Laertes at Ophelia’s grave, or when Hamlet (or Vehovec) was asked, “What wilt thou do for her?” they would both proclaim their love by saying: “I’ll do’t.” (5.1.265; 271)

Cankar’s spiritual symbolism offers many possibilities for diverse readings, and the waiting of his characters at the poor-house is very much like waiting of *Didi and Gogo* in Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot* (1954), or even like passive characters in Chekhov’s plays. One of the main characters in Cankar’s play, the poet Štefan Poljanec, says to another lodger of the poor-house, a young student Damjan: “Don’t worry, Damjan, don’t worry! We shall wait until she comes!” Another lodger, Peter Novljan, tries to console them all: “We shall wait until the end” (*ZD IV*, 1968: 126). Waiting is the essence of the lives of these men, although some of them “had a glimpse” that Vida may never return and that they will remain prisoners of “this morgue” (*ZD V*, 1969: 129). They call the sugar-refinery “the prison”, because it is like a limbo from which these men cannot escape. Their situation is similar to Hamlet’s experience of Elsinore, after the death of his father, when he tells his former fellow-students Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that “Denmark’s a prison” (2.2.245). In Cankar’s play the lodgers feel

<sup>34</sup> Among well-known Slovene literary historians who have written books and essays on Cankar are Ivan Grafenauer, Lojz Kraigher, Božo Vodusek, Josip Vidmar, France Koblar, Dušan Pirjevec, France Bernik, Taras Kermauner, Janko Kos, Jože Pogačnik, Denis Poniž etc. Among authors who have discussed Cankar’s debt to Shakespeare are Dušan Moravec (1964) and Irena Avsenik Nabergoj (2005).



pity for themselves, and they know that they cannot change their lives, that they will not leave the poor-house and that they have become its victims. One of the lodgers tells his companions that when Vida comes back they will hear three knocks on the wall. But they are also aware that according to the folk legends the knocks may also indicate “the coming of death”. Such a knock was apparently heard by one of the lodgers when Cankar’s friend Murn had died in the poor-house. The knock is an element of superstition, which – according to ancient myths – announces the soul’s departure from this world. Shakespeare uses it in *Macbeth* when the knock is heard by the Porter (2.3) and then it is discovered that King Duncan and his two soldiers were killed during the night. In “A Game of Chess”, in the second canto of T. S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land*, the symbolic meaning of the knock is the bartender’s knock at closing time in British pubs, which is also thematically closely connected with different kinds of death mentioned in Eliot’s poem.

Among references to Shakespeare’s plays, which are noticeable in *Lepa Vida* and which have not been discussed yet, is also a short passage related to Hamlet’s meditation about man’s qualities. Hamlet delivers this speech after he had realized that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not his true friends but that they were asked to come to Elsinore by the King and the Queen to inform them about his health, or rather about his “real plans”. Hamlet says: “What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god”; but then he expresses his disappointment with man’s nature with his remark, “...and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me, no, nor woman neither...” (2.2.307-313). In *Lepa Vida* Cankar’s drunk, sensual, nihilistic Mrva makes the following remark about man: “O, friends, what a coward is man! And what a liar he is...” (Cankar – Korun 2001-2002: 83). Shakespeare’s hero still sees both extremes of man’s nature, whereas Cankar’s comment on man’s nature is only negative.

Cankar’s characters are not always certain whether they live “real life” or “the life of illusion”. They see their life as “a stupid and funny comedy” (*ibid.* 82), and they are aware that there is no meaning in their waiting, which is only their waiting for death. This reference to the stupidity, and the absurdity of life reminds us of a short monologue spoken by Macbeth after his wife had committed suicide. He says: “... all our yesterdays have lighted fools / The way to dusty death”, and that life is like “a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing” (5.5.22-28). Such a nihilistic view, which presents man’s existence as meaningless, can also be found in diverse statements made by Cankar’s characters, although they still occasionally foster hopes about a different kind of life, on that they would like to live. Only Vida’s mother stoically accepts the death of one of the lodgers, the poet Poljanec, and she thinks that he has taken “the most beautiful road” (*ibid.* 100). This is also the way with which Hamlet accepts his death. The virtual world in which Cankar’s characters live cannot be bridged with their desires, because the only reality which awaits them is death. Like Hamlet at the beginning of the play, these men are also afraid to act, but they are also afraid of dying, they are cowards who are afraid to commit suicide. Hamlet also expresses his fear of death (1.2.129-132), and so does Mrva, one of the characters who is a person more “down to earth” (Cankar – Korun 2001-2002: 82).



Hamlet's doubt and his indecisiveness are also present in Cankar's characters, but they never reach that stage in Hamlet's life when he takes action into his hands regardless how morally dubious his actions may be (e.g. Hamlet's change begins with his killing of Polonius). Therefore Cankar's characters are doomed to failure, their dreams cannot come true. Cankar's play *Lepa Vida* offers a number of images and syntactical patterns which link it with Shakespeare's metaphorical world. For example, before Vida's return to the poor-house Poljanec compares man's aspirations with a leaf, which was blown by the wind into "a brook under the willow tree" and which the wind aimlessly takes from one side to another side of the pool, but which represents only "man's longing after a long, long sleep" (Cankar – Korun 2001-2002: 78). The scene and the metaphor of this passage remind us of Ophelia's death: "There is a willow grows askant the brook, / That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream" (*Hamlet* 4.7.165-166). Poljanec and his companion Mrva, who are both fatally ill, also mention in the play several times that "the light ... will be extinguished", thus referring also to the coming of death. Shakespeare uses this image in *Othello* (5.2.7), when the hero is about to smother his wife. The image of "a brief candle" symbolizes the brevity of man's life, and Macbeth also refers to it before his death. (5.5.23)

When Vida returns to the poor-house after she had spent the evening with a rich proprietor, she admits to the lodgers that she has betrayed them. Cankar indicates her "fall" with the description of her new, glittering and at the same time cheap dress, its low neckline, and with flowers in Vida's hair. When Vida sees the scornful faces of her companions at the poor-house she realizes what she has done to them, just as Gertrude is forced by Hamlet to see the culpability in her relationship with Claudius (3.4). Vida, who is admired by this group of men in the poor-house as "a princess" or like "a queen", becomes – due to her escapade – "the most seeming virtuous queen" (1.5.46), as the Ghost of Hamlet's father refers to Gertrude, who had betrayed him with his brother Claudius. In *Lepa Vida* only young, inexperienced Dioniz, remains steadfastly on Vida's side. Vida tells the lodgers that "the other world, the paradise", is not her real home but that her home is "the way". She seems to express here the author's voice, his persuasion that the final aim of man's life is not to reach his goal, but to continue his travels along the road of life.

One of the obstacles which Cankar's characters face in their travelling through life is "the language" they use. So, for example, one of the characters, Milena, realizes that she had betrayed her friend Franc when she persuaded him to see things, which were not real, and when she made him say lies. Cankar uses such ironic remarks about the use of language which remind us of the comment used by Hamlet when he makes fun of Polonius and his persuasion that he can discover Hamlet's thoughts. When Polonius asks Hamlet: "What do you read, my lord?", he gets an enigmatic answer, "Words, words, words" (2.2.191-192). Hamlet makes Polonius even a bigger fool when he tricks him to admit that the shape of a cloud is "almost in the shape of a camel", that it is "like a weasel", "Or, like a whale." (3.2.379-384). Milena admits that during her "enchantment" with Franc, they had made each other say things, which were only the product of their imagination (e.g. "the fool moon" became "the sun", "the barn" was described as "a castle" etc. Cankar – Korun 2001: 31); people see what they wish to see. One of the main problems of Cankar's characters is that they cannot distinguish

between the reality and their dreams. Milena believes that her Franc, who had spent the evening with Vida, only dreamt about Vida, but Franc, on the other hand, admits that he and Milena have cheated each other. Cankar's characters in *Lepa Vida* see themselves as prisoners, but even if they accept their own dreams as the reality, they eventually realize that they have only cheated themselves. Poljanec, the poet, describes a young man's vision of life as "a miraculous flower", which leads him through the difficulties of life to his dreams (Cankar - Korun 2001-2002: 95). Cankar's characters mostly live in a virtual world, from which they cannot escape, just as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have no possibility to change their lives after they had decided to obtain their goal by killing. Cankar's characters are also enchanted by the prospects of death, they long after heavenly nirvana. The director of the new version of the play, Mile Korun, had even intended some realistic scenes (e.g. Nina's dialogue with Dolinar) to be shown as a pantomime (*ibid.* 70) what would definitely remind the spectators of "the dumb show" in *Hamlet* (3.2), in which the King's poisoning is shown. The duality of characters living either in reality or in dreams was polemically introduced by Korun through the juxtaposition of characters, their feelings, their thoughts. Although Shakespeare's influence upon Cankar is in this play less direct than in the previous two plays discussed in my article, the very features of character of Cankar's irresolute, hesitant dreamers, as well as some selected thematic parallels mentioned above, show that Cankar was in this play still inspired by the Bard's artistic genius, particularly by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which Cankar translated into Slovene in 1899.

#### IV. OTON ŽUPANČIČ: VERONIKA DESENIŠKA (VERONIKA OF DESENICE)

One of the most important Slovene lyrical poets in the first half of the twentieth century was Oton Župančič (1878-1949). Like many other Slovene intellectuals he also studied in Vienna and then he also stayed for a short period of time in Paris. After his return to Ljubljana in 1910 for the rest of his life he remained mainly connected with the Slovene National Theatre, at first as a dramaturg, as its artistic director and then also as the general manager. His first collection of poems appeared already when he was only 21 years old, in 1899, but his interest in drama can be seen from his first short poetic discourse "Vile" (Fairies) which he wrote as a secondary school student and which he published in the magazine for children, *Vrtec*, in 1895, under the pen-name Smiljan Smiljanič.<sup>35</sup> This sketch consists of 67 lines and it is written in the form of a rhymed dialogue between three fairies and the choir. The verse is rich in alliteration and imagery and it is thematically linked with fairies from Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and a round dance ("kolo"), the country dance which is known in Slovenia in its south-eastern region in Bela Krajina, where Župančič was born. The poet presents fairies dancing in a ring and singing about the good or evil deeds they perform to men. Župančič includes in this sketch a number of images which appear in

<sup>35</sup> *Vrtec* (1895: 145), rpt. in *Oton Župančič, ZD* (1972:235-237). Joža Mahnič has written several publications on Oton Župančič's life, which are listed below in which he also mentions Shakespeare's influence on Župančič's work.

Shakespeare's comedy mentioned above, such as "spotted snakes", or about people who are "marvellous hairy about the face", people with "an ass's head", or people whom "they frighten out of their wits, if they are evil. On the other hand fairies "bring light to people who are lost", they "make them happy by their chanting, and lull people to sweet dreams"; or, who make them "fearless of beasts, lions, bears", if they are good. This poetic scene ends with the disappearance of fairies. Even though we find these images in Shakespeare's comedy, some of them are also known from Slovene folklore. Župančič's poetic gift is noticeable in this sketch for its composition, rhymes and rhythmical pattern of his verse. Shakespeare's inspiration about fairies is neatly woven in this short dramatic scene.

Although Župančič mainly wrote poetry during the following decades, his love of drama, which he successfully combined with his profession, can be primarily seen in his numerous translations not only of works from English literature but also from dramatic treasury of other European countries. Already in 1931 Tesnière noticed regarding Župančič's literary creativity how closely and mutually influential were his functions as a translator and poet.<sup>36</sup> But the critic also noticed that the beauty of Župančič's poetry sometimes diminishes its dramatic value. By 1924, when his most important dramatic work *Veronika Deseniška* appeared in print (it was also performed by the Slovene National Theatre and the premiere took place on 1 December 1924), Župančič had already translated several plays written by Shakespeare as well as plays written by Calderon de la Barca, John Galsworthy, George Bernard Shaw and some other less known dramatists. As a president of three Yugoslav PEN centres he took part at the PEN congress in Oslo and then he spent some weeks in London. At the School of Slavonic Studies he gave a lecture on "Shakespeare in Slovenia", and he also met John Galsworthy there. Župančič's countryman, Janko Lavrin, who was a lecturer of Russian language and literature at Nottingham University, accompanied Župančič to Stratford-on-Avon where Župančič paid tribute to Shakespeare, to this "great genius". In his interview for the Slovene daily *Jutro* (16 April 1927: 17), Župančič made his well-known statement that "*Hamlet* is considered by the Slovenes as our best and most beloved popular play."

By 1924 Župančič had translated several plays written by Shakespeare and therefore it is not surprising that one can find several parallels between Shakespeare's plays and direct echoes of his plays in his tragedy *Veronika Deseniška*. The Shakespeare plays translated by Župančič by that time are: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*. Almost immediately after the production of *Veronika Deseniška* there appeared his translations of *Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will* and of *The Winter's Tale*. Therefore it is not surprising that Shakespeare's impact on Župančič's play may be found primarily in these works and not so much, for example, in other works written by Shakespeare or in Župančič's later translations of Shakespeare (*The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Coriolanus*). Some of his translations of Shakespeare's plays also remained in a manuscript form (*Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*), although they were performed by the Slovene National Theatre in the 1930s. Oton Župančič was, no doubt, the most important Slovene translator of Shakespeare's plays in the first half of

<sup>36</sup> Tesnière writes: "En matière d'invention verbale, le traducteur a frayé la voie au po te. Et le po te a parfait l'oeuvre du traducteur" (1931: 357).

the twentieth century. His work was followed after WWII by another poet, Matej Bor, who also prepared the first complete edition of Shakespeare's plays in Slovene language (in a few plays Janko Moder revised the original translation). A new attempt to bring the translations of the Bard into modern, colloquial Slovene was made by Milan Jesih, who has by now newly translated one third of Shakespeare's plays. It should be stressed though that a number of attempts to translate individual plays written by Shakespeare, either only as individual act or scenes or as complete works, date back to the nineteenth century. Dušan Moravec's study (1964: 333-497) still represents the basic source for all further research into this topic.

In addition to *Veronika Deseniška* Oton Župančič wrote several other plays and dramatic fragments but none of them either achieves the artistic quality of this play or is relevant for the topic of this paper. Župančič treats in *Veronika Deseniška* the love story between Friderik II, the son of Count Herman II, who is one of the main figures in the history of the Counts of Celje. They were originally the noblemen of a small provincial diet Sovnek and they reached their historical, political and social peak under the rule of Herman II (1385-1434). Herman's son Friderik was married to Jelisava Frankopanska, of a family which were once Croatian vassals of the Venetian Republic and later of the Hungarian Kings. Friderik's relationship with his wife was rather unhappy, and he is said to have had many love adventures before he met Veronika from Desenice.<sup>37</sup> She was a beautiful young woman coming from a relatively poor Croatian family living in Desenice, not far from Krško. She was a lady-in waiting to Friderik's wife, Countess at Krško, who (according to some sources) committed suicide or was killed by Friderik (according to other sources). Friderik II secretly married Veronika, but when he wished to make her the Countess of Celje, his father strongly opposed that their union become publicly known, because he wished his son to marry into a rich family so that the Counts of Celje would expand their property and their power to the neighbouring lands. Thus Veronika was in his way and he decided to get rid of her either by legal means or by force despite the fact that she was having his son's child. Although Friderik was in love with Veronika his father carried out his plan: he put Veronika in jail and told the Jew Bonaventura to poison her. In Župančič's version of this story Veronika dies of suffering and starvation, although historical facts indicate that she was actually murdered by one of Count Herman's men. Herman II also put his son Friderik to prison, but eventually their relationship was restored. However, the family had no progeny and the Counts of Celje died out in 1456.

There are two main views about the historical role of the Counts of Celje, which was the most important feudal family in the Middle-Ages on the territory where Slovenes are settled. According to the first, the Counts of Celje were raised to the position of the Counts of Celje in 1341. They began to spread their influence towards the East under the rule of Count Herman II, who was followed by his son Friderik; having no progeny, the family died out in 1456. According to this theory they were not really interested in the Slovenes as a nation; however, at the beginning of the fifteenth century they represented a powerful opposition to the Hapsburg family. Some other historians, though, believe that this family had strong Slavic roots and that it might have joined South Slavic nations

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<sup>37</sup> In Croatian "Desinić", a village in Croatian Zagorje, northwest of Zagreb (close to Slovenia).

in one kingdom had the family survived. Some historians believe that this idea is rather exaggerated and even if the family had survived they would not have been interested in the creation of the Slavic kingdom.<sup>38</sup> In a recently published book by the Slovene historians Peter Štih and Vasko Simoniti (2009: 128), the authors assert that the Slovenes began to link the Counts of Celje with the Slovenes on the basis of their own political wishes and their needs. Later on, in the second half of the nineteenth century this idea suited the Slovene national programme called “Zedinjena Slovenija” (United Slovenia) and that at the beginning of the twentieth century there arose the idea that if this family had not died out it could have united the nations which created Yugoslavia in 1918. It seems that Oton Župančič was in favour of this idea. Nevertheless it should also be noted that he said a number of times how he was not so much interested in the historical importance of the Counts of Celje, but that his primary interest lay in Veronika’s personal fate, in her tragic guilt, and “in the birth of the Slovene soul”. Another Slovene dramatist, Bratko Kreft, who also treated this subject in his play *Celjski grofje* (The Counts of Celje, written and first performed in 1932), opposes both in his play as well as in his introductory essay the idea that this noble family supported Slavic national union.<sup>39</sup> Kreft sees the Counts of Celje as supporters of the decaying feudal system, whose main wish was to acquire new lands and more worldly power, as a family which was not favourably inclined towards South-Slavic national tendencies.<sup>40</sup> The English poet, essayist and playwright T. S. Eliot might have commented upon this question in the following lines: “... History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors / And issues, deceives us by vanities. ... Gives too late / What’s not believed in, or is still believed, / In memory only, reconsidered passion” (“Gerontion”, ll. 34-36, 39-41). Regardless of the above mentioned differences of opinion of historians about the national consciousness of the Counts of Celje, the three stars which appear in the coat-of-arms of the Counts of Celje, are now included in the coat-of-arms of the Republic of Slovenia.

It is likely that these differences about the historical importance of the Counts of Celje have provided an interesting topic after the creation of Yugoslavia in December 1918, and that this subject-matter has intrigued a number of historians as well as a number of writers of Slovene, Austrian and Croatian background to write historical and literary works about it.<sup>41</sup> As I have already mentioned, Oton Župančič stressed in his articles and in his diaries that his aim was not to present in his play the exact historical data but that he was interested in the awakening of the Slovene national spirit and in the tragedy of both heroines, Jelisava Frankopanska and Veronika of Desence. He telescoped the action of the play in the year 1422 (such shortenings of the time span are also usual

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Milko Kos, *Zgodovina Slovencev od naselitve do reformacije* (1935).

<sup>39</sup> Bratko Kreft, *Celjski grofje*, Introd. (1979: 22-33).- Kreft’s essay was first published in 1932.

<sup>40</sup> Kreft 1979, Introduction, 5-33.

<sup>41</sup> Some of the most important authors and/or titles of works which were used by Župančič are: Eberhard Winecke (1886), *Die Cillier Chronik* (1883), Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1685), Hieronymus Megiser (1612), Janez Vajkard Valvasor (1685-89), Ignac Orožen (1854), Franz Krones (1871) and Andreas Gubo (1909). Dates in brackets indicate the year when their work was published. See also: Joža Mahnič, in *Oton Župančič ZD* (1971: 309). Among authors who treated the history of the Counts of Celje are, e.g. Johann von Kalchberg, Ferdo Kočevar, Ivan Detela, Josip Jurčič, Anton Turkuš, Josipina Urbančič Turnograjska, Marica Gregorčič, Josip Evgen Tomić, Anton Novačan, and Anton Aškerc (a poem). The history of the Counts of Celje was also written as a libretto for the operas by Slovene composers Benjamin Ipavec and Josip Švara.

in Shakespeare's histories and tragedies). The play's message is that for the Counts of Celje the search for worldly power was more important than love. Act 1 takes place at Veronika's home at Desenice, Acts 2-4 happen at Krško, at Friderik's castle, and Act V at Gornje Celje, at Count Herman's castle, where Veronika and Friderik are imprisoned. In this historical tragedy Župančič does not stick to the unity of time and place (but neither did Shakespeare in a number of his plays), so that the unity of action is the only one among classical conventions, which is observed in *Veronika Deseniška*.

Even before Župančič's play appeared on the stage of the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana on 1 Dec. 1924, the play was published in summer of this year so that critical views had begun to appear since July. Some of the critics were slightly disappointed with the play and they offered various reasons for their negative reactions, such as that Župančič does not treat contemporary spiritual problems but a historical theme (Miran Jarc); that the play is composed of fragments; that it is full of bathos and its characters are not strong personalities (Stano Kosovel); that the ambitions of the Counts of Celje do not represent the best contrast to Veronika's feelings; that neither Veronika nor Friderik's character is consistent and that the religious imagery is too present (Josip Vidmar). France Koblar saw the play's fault in its abstract presentation of the conflict and in its immoral ethical foundation but also praised some of its features. Ivo Sever criticised the author's verbosity and the weak structure of the play. Some of these points actually appear in several reviews and are presented here in a rather simplified manner. All the critics praised Župančič's poetic gift and they also cited many positive sides thus somewhat minimizing their critical remarks. The negative views were also strongly rejected by some critics, particularly by Fran Albreht, who at first cited his positive views about the play, but who later admitted that *Veronika Deseniška* was "basically a closet play", i.e. intended for reading.<sup>42</sup> Although some of these views were rather harsh, the main points about Župančič's predominance of poetic elements over the functionally dramatic language are, no doubt, valid and Župančič obviously admitted the value of some of the criticism by his adaptation of the text for the performance.

Among late responses to the play was Jakob Kelemina's scholarly study in which the author tried to give a balanced view of the artistic value of the play even though he had to repeat some of the negative opinions expressed by other critics (Kelemina 1926). He praises Župančič's choice of the subject-matter but he admits that the history of the Counts of Celje is only partly "real" Slovene history. He states that *Veronika Deseniška* is written in the manner of the historical tragedy and he deems it natural that Župančič

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<sup>42</sup> Among English authors whose plays are considered as "closet plays" (intended only for reading) and have been very rarely performed are works by Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender and Louis MacNeice. Although there are many fine lyrical passages in their plays the plays lack the action required to be successfully staged.

The list of Slovene critics is too long to be quoted here in full; besides, these critics hardly mention in their articles Shakespeare's influence on Župančič. One of the critics, Ivo Sever, even wrote a 79 page critique in which he suggests omissions of the text and rearrangements of scenes in this play. He also compares one of Župančič's characters, the Jew Bonaventura, with Christopher Marlowe's hero in *The Jew of Malta*, and calls him "an opposition to Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*". The play was translated into Serbian, Croatian, Czech, Slovak and German language and several articles also appeared on it in different European countries.



modelled his play on Shakespeare, as a play with “diversified action”, i.e. without having the unity of time and place, and with its mixture of tragic and comic features. Kelemina finds Župančič’s symbolism rather “difficult” and points out that Slovene critics had thus far neglected Veronika’s moral guilt, which is also the cause of her personal tragedy. On the other hand, Jelisava is not guilty at all, and Kelemina compares her fate with that of Cordelia, Desdemona or Ophelia, “whose only guilt is their very existence”, and which he defines simply as their “existential guilt” (*ibid.* 501). Kelemina believes that the only real heroic character is Friderik’s father, Herman, whose cold, unemotional nature is also the result of Herman’s tense relationship with his son. Kelemina praises Župančič’s endeavour to present in his play “the national soul”, but this author’s ambition is too much tied to religious imagery. Likewise, he does not approve of the dramatist’s “loose connection between acts”, and he also mentions Župančič’s “godlike verbosity” (507), which is, unfortunately enough, not always dramatically functional.

More or less the same view was held by Lucien Tesnière who mentions that Župančič’s “*tyrades lyrique*” slow down the action of his play. According to him *Veronika Deseniška* is written in the tradition, which is very close to Sophocles and the Greek tragedy, whereas in its form and its lyrical expression it can be compared with Shakespeare’s plays (1931: 238), and he researched particularly similarities in imagery between Oton Župančič and Maurice Maeterlick, Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Walt Whitman.

One of the main Slovene literary scholars in the twentieth century, Anton Slodnjak, also points out that the playwright uses in this work his “witty and brilliant style”, but he also regrets that Župančič got entangled in Shakespeare’s dramatic technique, a point which he repeated a number of times in his histories of Slovene literature (1934: 398; 1938: 15, etc.). A long list of critics who have discussed Župančič’s play could be supplemented by a number of other well-known names of Slovene critics who also wrote about the play during the following decades (e.g. Fran Mesesnel, Janko Glazer, Božidar Borko, Ludvik Mrzel, Juš Kozak, France Vodnik, Vladimir Kralj), but again, they mainly reported about *Veronika Deseniška* from the same or very similar points of view to those indicated above and did not take in their perspective possible Shakespearean influence.

Among contemporary critics of Župančič’s poetry is also France Bernik, whose study analyzed Župančič’s style in his early poetry (1979: 149-163). There he asserts that Župančič became well acquainted with contemporary French symbolism and decadence during his stay in Paris. As we can see some of the elements typical of these literary movements (particularly the metaphoric, poetic language) may also be found in Župančič’s play. Several critics have mentioned Župančič’s excellent use of blank verse, which Janko Kos links with Shakespeare’s versification in *Romeo and Juliet* (2001: 269), whereas he attributes the slow rhythm of scenes with Goethe’s and Schiller’s practice.

Župančič’s statement that he wished to present in *Veronika Deseniška* the spiritual drama of its heroes (and of the Slovene nation) and that the history only forms its background leads us to his interpretations of Shakespeare’s plays which he was translating in the mid-1920s, at the time when he was writing his own play. He mentions in his diary, in his notes and in the theatre programme the following plays written by Shakespeare which he then admired. They are: *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*. Al-



though Župančič's discussions about these plays are short, the main "message" which he saw in these plays is nevertheless clear:

The heroes are driven by their passions with an unlimited force (as in his tragedies, M.J.), and *the abyss* towards which they speed is no less terrifying; mankind would destroy itself had it been fated to outlive the final point of this side of its spirituality. But its recognition, its repentance and its penitence lead mankind to purification and to a higher spiritual sphere, in which miracle, grace and harmony are just as firm truths as the truth of passion, sin and destruction are on a lower level.

(Župančič ZD VIII: 103)

In his appreciation of *The Winter's Tale* Župančič stresses that the hero's inner suffering in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *The Timon of Athens* could not lead him any further, so that Shakespeare started to look for a solution which he found in his "belief in man and some secret higher power, which lead our ways, to the vision of reconciliation, purification and harmony" (*ibid.* 104). These are also themes which are relevant for *Veronika Deseniška*; with one significant change, however: whereas the above mentioned Shakespeare's plays end optimistically, because they are romances, in Župančič's play such an outcome could only be expected in the future due to fact that it is a historic tragedy dealing with the past. Some of the basic ontological concepts which are mentioned here by Župančič are, as we shall see later, characteristic of his heroes.

There are two groups of minor characters present in *Veronika Deseniška*. The first group form the characters who appear only in Act One, when Veronika is still living at home: Veronika's father ("Deseniški gospod", i.e. the Master of Desenice), her aunt Sida, the servant Katica, and the old Neighbour, who proclaims himself as Veronika's suitor. Župančič portrays Veronika's father in a similar manner as Shakespeare portrayed in his histories some of his characters from lower social strata, e.g. in some ways like Sir John Falstaff. He is humorous, witty, brags about his drinking together with the old Count Herman, and behaves in a rather haughty manner. But his expression of thanks to his sister Sida's for bringing up Veronika nevertheless sounds too formal, too bombastic; he says: "with one word: thanks for everything" ("z eno besedo: hvala ti na vsem"; 56).<sup>43</sup> This sounds very much like Claudius' formal manner of speaking (*Hamlet* 1.2.16) and Župančič may have phrased it in this manner under Shakespeare's influence (Župančič translated Claudius' remark to his councillors in *Hamlet* "for all, our thanks" (1.2.16) as "Hvala vam za vse" 289). Veronika's father behaves in a patronizing way towards the Neighbour, teasing him that there is no hurry for him to get married ("Par dni še počakaj, da boš mlajši", 55-6; Wait a few more days, you'll be younger), although he had mentioned in passing that the Neighbour had been Veronika's god-father (51). He also mocks him that he is a "slivar", which was a pejorative term for Croatian popula-

<sup>43</sup> Numbers in brackets refer to numbers of pages in *Oton Župančič, Zbrano delo VI*, (Collected Works, Ljubljana: DZS, 1972) in which *Veronika Deseniška* is reprinted (pp. 45-223). References to Shakespeare's plays are to acts, scenes and lines as published by John Dover Wilson *The Works of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: At the UP, first paperback edition, 1968). Slovene translations of Shakespeare's plays are taken from *William Shakespeare. Zbrane gledališke igre I, II, III* (Collected plays). Ljubljana, DZS, 1978), edited by Matej Bor and dedicated to Oton Župančič on the one-hundred's anniversary of his birth.

tion in the Zagorje region. In Act V, when Herman wishes to prevent Friderik's union with Veronika, he insults her by suggesting that she would miss "rodne slive" (180), "her native plums", i.e. her village, her old environment. The theatre audience becomes acquainted with Veronika's social background but the only important dramatic character among them is Veronika's father, but neither he nor other minor characters appear later on in the play. Therefore – as a number of Slovene critics have suggested – this act could be easily omitted or some characters should be reintroduced in the play later on.

Veronika's aunt Sida is modelled on Juliet's Nurse in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in a number of aspects: as regards her function in the play, her behaviour and her use of language. Sida is a warm-hearted person, she has brought Veronika up and she thinks – like the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* – that she has to plan Veronika's future. Sida even uses the same kind of imagery as the Nurse: she calls Veronika a "dove" whom she will look after until "the right falcon comes to take her" ("ko pride pravi sokol po golobico", 50). Sida's language is elevated and it often surprises the reader with its poetic beauty; for example, when she tells the maid Katika how Veronika looked like in her sleep:

Metulji-sanje  
so vztrepetavali ji na očeh,  
obotavlja se zleteti z njih. (47-8)

(Butterflies-dreams / were (still) twittering on her eye-lids / hesitating to fly away.)

The Nurse finds Juliet "the prettiest babe that e'er I nursed" (1.3.61), and like Juliet Veronika was also breast-fed by Sida (57). Sida calls Veronika "rahel cvet" (a tender blossom, 54) and "nebogljence" (a fragile child, 56) and the Nurse laments over Juliet's fate "What, lamb! What, lady-bird" (1.3.3). Sida has knitted a coat which Veronika will present as a gift to her mistress. Veronika's father observes that Sida also knitted three stars on a grey surface, which appear in the coat of arms of the Counts of Celje and Sida tells him that she wishes to bring Veronika under these stars. He also notices that the cloth Sida used is like a spider's web ("pajčevinasta tkanina", 60). This image has a double connotation: the coat is made of fine tissue which befits a lady of high social rank, and at the same time it foretells Veronika's future, she will be caught in the family relations of the Counts of Celje like "an insect".

The Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* lives long enough to see Juliet "dead" after Juliet had taken the sleeping potion ("Why, lamb! why lady", 4.5.2), and neither the Nurse nor Sida can protect her protégée from the fatal consequence; however, the Nurse's role is much more complex and as regards the heroine's tragedy more regrettable. But if we take all the minor characters in Act One in *Veronika Deseniška* into consideration we see that they are dramatically rather unimportant. If Veronika's father had appeared later on in the play he could represent (together with his daughter) a social contrast and a counterpart to the powerful family of the Counts from Celje.

The second group of minor characters are the two knights (Jošt Soteški and Ivan Sevnčan) and Nerad, the steward at the Krško castle. Although they appear at first to be Friderik's companions and friends, they know that the real power lies in Herman's hands; Jošt, who among them was emotionally closest to Friderik, is even commanded

by Herman to become Veronika and Friderik's gaoler. As far as their social role is concerned they belong to the hero's friendly "advisors", but after the climax when the old Count Herman brings the situation under his control they no longer crack jokes about Friderik's love as they did before (when e.g. Jošt ironically asks Friderik if now that he is in love he is going to "the desert" and would therefore not be going to pursue his enemies any longer, 72-3). Nerad tells his companions that Friderik is always in such a hurry to go and see Veronika and that "he would complain he was riding a snail" (77). Friderik's companions also use a pet-name for him and call him "Bedrik" (74-5 etc.; this may be a pun referring to Friderik's "silly" behaviour, or to Veronika's legs, to her thighs; "bedro" is "thigh" in Slovene)<sup>44</sup>. Jošt makes fun of Herman's view that Veronika is an angel, a god-like creature: "Svet, na kolena! Kdor nje ne časti, / je nejeverniki in očitni grešnik" (74; The world, down on your knees! A man who does not worship her / is an infidel or an obvious sinner). But Friderik's men know, as Jošt says, that Friderik's father Herman will soon learn about Friderik's affair, because Herman is like "god's-eye", seemingly looking nowhere, but seeing everything ("On ti je božje oko: / uprto kot nikamor, vidi vse.", 78). Jošt admits to Friderik that he serves both "the sun" and "the moon", but he does this regarding the "heavenly constellation" (103), i.e. that he obeys both Count Herman and Friderik, just as Falstaff and his companions try to obey their master. When the knight Jošt is told by Count Herman to be Friderik's gaoler he wishes to make a remark but Count Herman stops him and Jošt then apologizes to Friderik that he will not be performing a friend's job ("to služba ni prijateljska", 198); but Friderik tells him he should do what he must do. Friderik's "companions" do not have the wisdom of the Fool in *King Lear* and do not make such witty remarks; when they ridicule Friderik and when they make fun of him they are more like Sir John Falstaff, Gadshill, and Bardolph in the First Part of King Henry IV.

Although Friderik tries to oppose his father, when Count Herman tells him not to make his marriage with Veronika publicly known, Friderik still insists that they are married. But he is a weak character and therefore less tragic than his wife Jelisava or Veronika. He breaks down under his father's domination and functions more like a grown-up Romeo than like one of Shakespeare's great heroes. But he does realize that Veronika now represents to him the highest value in life and that he had not done enough to rescue their love. Therefore he is left at the end of the play with inner emptiness, in despair, knowing that he will never be the same and that he had lost his integrity. "A tu mene je brezna v sebi strah." (235, And here / now – I am afraid of the abyss in me.).<sup>45</sup> Although Friderik's love for Veronika can be compared here with Othello's love for Desdemona (before Othello starts to doubt her honesty and sincerity), Herman's short monologue at the end of the play easily persuades the reader that Herman is right and that Friderik will eventually give up his position and that time will heal their quarrel (223). Herman's wish always to have the last word, and particularly his cruel behav-

<sup>44</sup> In Jurčič's version of *Veronika Deseniška* Veronika and count Herman call Friderik "Fric" (1960: 93-7), which is not the case in Župančič, most probably because this is also in Slovene a pejorative form used for a German soldier (SSKJ 1994: 225).

<sup>45</sup> Župančič uses here the word "brezno" (the abyss), which he also used in his notes and observation about the growing despair of Shakespeare's heroes in his great tragedies (*Župančič ZD VIII*: 103-104).

jour to Veronika, can be best compared with the behaviour of some of Shakespeare's heroines, particularly by their obsession with power and evil, as for example, by Lady Macbeth and by Goneril and Regan in *King Lear*. However, Herman does use Othello's type of sharp, biting language and his rhetoric when he wishes to subdue Veronika. When Friderik tells his father that Veronika is his legal wife, Herman calls her "a whore from Desenice" ("Vlačuga z Desenic", 192), just as Othello refers to Desdemona ("I took you for that cunning whore of Venice / That married with Othello", 4.2.90-91). Or, Count Herman accuses Veronika that she is "a moth who has enchanted you all, / a whore preparing intrigues against the Counts of Celje ("Ta veščica vas je vse očarala, / vlačuga, ki se plete za Celjani." (192; in Slovene "veščica" is a euphemism for "whore, prostitute"). Count Herman also wishes to persuade an old public Judge ("Pravdač") that Veronika had bewitched Friderik's heart and mind, and if this is so he could imprison her "justly" ("spoznati mora, da je otrovala / sinu srce in um s čarobami", 202). This kind of accusation of witchcraft is also made by Desdemona's father Brabantio against Othello ("Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her", 1.2.63). But when the old lawyer tells Herman that he has not found any evil power in Veronika and that Friderik was only "charmed by her youth, beauty and kindness" ("Čaroba njena je le očarljivost / mladosti in lepote in miline", 206), and that their only sin is their "mighty love" ("Ljubezni silni pala sta v oblast, / to jima je ves greh", *ibid.*), Count Herman proves with his unjust act (i.e. by sending Veronika and Friderik to prison) that he considers himself to be above the law, that he is really an immoral tyrant. When the Judge warns Count Herman that "power without justice is tyranny" ("in sila brez pravice je nasilje", 208), Herman immediately sends the Judge away, because "he knows what he wishes to know" (*ibid.*) The whole scene with the old judge who had been summoned to the "court" to hear and to decide Veronika's fate, is built on Shakespeare's scene of the Court of Justice in *The Merchant of Venice* (4.1), with one major distinction which is based on the nature of Župančič's play: Veronika and Friderik are unjustly sentenced, whereas Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, dressed as a doctor of civil law, cleverly denies Shylock his "right" to cut off a pound of Antonio's flesh. When she tries to persuade Shylock to be merciful she says:

The quality of mercy is not strained,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed:  
It blesses him that gives, and him that takes,  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes  
The thronéd monarch better than his crown. (4.1.181-86)

But Župančič wrote his play as "a tragedy" whereas *The Merchant of Venice* is entitled as "The most excellent Historie", and modern critics usually refer to it as Shakespeare's "High (Early) Romantic Comedy". We can compare Count Herman's behaviour with that of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* who does not accept Apollo's verdict that his wife Hermione is chaste; he says:

There is no truth at all i'th'oracle:  
The session shall proceed; this is mere falsehood. (3.2.139.40),

And Count Herman:

Nič, proč. Naprej. – Torej po pravdi ne.  
Ne pred sodnike ... Vendar mora biti. (209),

(No, away. Continue. – Then: not according to justice. / Not by judges. .. But it must be so.)

Župančič supports Friderik's argument about his love for Veronika by Friderik's double negations, which he uses when he wishes to persuade her that he did not "betray" her with his wife Jelisava. He calls God as a witness and his inexorable demand that love is based on man's sacrifice, on the offering of lovers' hearts as a proof of their love (cf. Gen. 22, when Abraham is blessed by God after he had offered his son Isaac to him). Friderik says:

Je preveč ljubiti greh, Veronika? ...  
/Srce/ je bilo samó še žgavni dar  
pred nespravlјivim, neizprosnim bogom,  
ki ne živi, če ne gorijo srca  
pod njim v plamenih žarkih? (145)

And Veronika answers Friderik with rhetorical questions about the future, in which there is a clear division between the existence of the world and her fate: the world will go on, but she is going to be damned and excommunicated both from physical and heavenly, spiritual life:

Bo jutri dan? Bo sonce? O – vse bo:  
dan, sonce, svet, ljudje po svojih poslih...(146)  
Le jaz prokleta in izobčena  
iz smrti in življenja in vseh poslov  
tega in onega svetá ...Kam bi? (146)

This passage is one of many examples in this play in which the dramatist uses alliteration and consonance (e.g. the repetition of "s" in sonce, svet, po svojih poslih etc.). These are not very common metrical figures in Slovene, but when translating Shakespeare's plays Župančič must have observed how frequently and how effectively they appeared in English. Župančič is known for his rich use of rhymes, although Slovene critics have not stressed yet enough his numerous examples of alliteration and assonance which can also be found in his poetry as well as in his play.

As a proof of his love for Veronika Friderik offers her a bodkin to kill him if she does not believe that he really loves her and the baby she is bearing:

Primi, potisni!  
Glej; tukaj bije, zate in zanj, za drobno  
čebelico – in vaju je izdalo .... (147)

There is a similar situation in *King Richard III* when the Duke of Gloucester (later King Richard III), who killed Lady Anne's husband (!) tries to prove "his love" for her by offering her his sword:

And let the soul forth that adareth thee,  
I lay it naked to the deadly stroke,  
And humbly beg the death upon my knee. (1.2.176-78)

Both ladies find themselves in a difficult situation: should they trust men who proclaim their love for them or should they follow their instinct and reject their proposals. Although Anne in *King Richard III* does not trust Gloucester and she tells him that “though I wish thy death, I will not be thy executioner” (1.2.184-85), but she nevertheless allows herself to be persuaded by Richard’s cunning talking and she accepts his ring. Veronika makes a few short contradictory statements about her feelings for Friderik, but she admits her paradoxical situations: she loves him (she uses her pet name “Inko” for Friderik) and she hates him too:

Prokleta sem, pogubljena: ljubim te.  
In te sovražim, veš, sovražim strašno.  
In vsa sem tvoja – Inko, Inko moj ... (147)

Župančič knew Shakespeare’s presentation of Othello’s doubt about his love for Desdemona,<sup>46</sup> his love-hatred relationship, in which Othello says that without Desdemona’s love his life would be meaningless; Friderik’s conclusion is the same.

Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul  
But I do love thee; and when I love thee not  
Chaos is come again. (*Othello* 3.3.91-3)

In *The Winter’s Tale* Leontes, King of Sicilia, suspects that his wife Hermione has betrayed him with King of Bohemia, Polixenes, and he tries to persuade Camillo, one of his lords, that then there is no meaning in life for him because she had supposedly betrayed Leontes. He “quarrels” with Camillo:

Is this nothing?  
Why then the world, and all that’s in’t, is nothing,  
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,  
My wife is nothing, not nothing else have these nothings,  
If this be nothing. (1.2.292-96)

Iago uses as his argument for Desdemona’s infidelity a number of events and situations which cannot be objectively proved and a “fact” which is not true (“She did deceive her father, marrying you”, 3.3.208), because Desdemona married Othello out of true love. Veronika sees as a possible proof against Friderik in the fact that he had “deceived” his wife Jelisava when he made love to her. Before her death, Desdemona sings a ballad which her mother’s maid Barbara used to sing after her lover had left her, because she has a premonition of her demise. (4.3) Veronika prays in her poetic monologues to God for help (214-216, 220-221) just as Desdemona denies her guilt and hopes to be saved by God (4.2, 5.2). Desdemona tells Emilia, “A guiltless death I die”, when she is asked by

<sup>46</sup> *Othello* was the first play written by Shakespeare to be translated into Slovene by M. Malovrh and performed at the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana on 1 March 1896. Oton Župančič prepared another translation of this play in 1920. It was published in 1923 and first staged at the SNT on 7 March 1925 a year after he had written *Veronika Deseniška*.



Emilia who had committed the crime she wishes to exculpate Othello and answers her, “Nobody. I myself” (5.2.24-26). Similarly, Veronika asks Bonaventura to tell Friderik that she has also taken upon herself everything, / all that night, her own and his part / on her soul, “.. povej mu, da sem vzela nase vse – / vso tisto noč, veš, svoj in njégov del / na svojo dušo”. (220) Both heroines are on a morally higher level than Othello and Friderik. The similarity between the acts of both lovers, of both scenes, is obvious. Veronika’s admission of her guilt links her with moral solutions of Shakespeare’s heroes in his romances, which Župančič admired so much in the early thirties.

The portrait of Jew Bonaventura is in a number of ways like that of Shylock in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, although his role in the plot of *Veronika Deseniška* is much more limited. He serves his masters, Friderik, Jelisava and Herman without any moral prejudice. He brings poison to Jelisava which is not like the sleeping potion which Friar Lawrence provides for Juliet (4.1); poison is only used in Shakespeare’s plays by evil characters (e.g. lady Macbeth kills herself; Goneril poisons Regan in *King Lear*). Herman demands that Bonaventura should poison Veronika, and when Veronika asks him why he came to her cell he tells her that he wishes “either his or her death” when the candle light will be extinguished (217-18). But he does not tell her that actually there is no choice for Veronika because Herman had promised Bonaventura freedom for poisoning Veronika, and death to him if she did not die (213). Bonaventura tells Veronika that he has not yet murdered anybody, and Veronika’s quick and sudden death brings him a relief: Herman allows him to leave freely (222). Župančič does not create in the Jew Bonaventura a one-sided, completely negative picture but endows him with some goodness too (e.g. he laments over Veronika’s death, comparing it to “the destruction of God’s temple”, *ibid.*). In this way the behaviour and the emotions of an individual, Bonaventura, become more important and individualized than his Jewish race.

Župančič creates in Herman a double personality who preaches one thing but believes in something else. When Herman writes a letter presenting donations to various monasteries he tells Friderik that our worldly matters, if compared with eternity, are only dust and air that is blown away by the wind (“posvetnost naša / je proti večnosti le prah in puh, / ki veter ga raznese in razstelje”, 97) and what really counts in life are the acts of “Christian charity”. But when Friderik esteems Veronika’s love more than the property of the Counts of Celje, Herman’s response is built on an image how the eagle builds its nest high up in the mountains, (“Orel si plete gnezdo na visokem”, 190). This statement can be paralleled with the observation made by King Henry VI (2.1.8), in the second part of his trilogy, when he says, “Yea, man and birds are fain of climbing high”, which was translated by Župančič as “Človek in ptič prav vse stremi navzgor”. Herman’s dream to place the family of the Counts of Celje higher and higher on the social scale by means of a “proper” marriage of his son Friderik is ruined when Friderik insists that his marriage with Veronika is legal. But Herman does not give up his ambition to win this game to acquire new lands with Friderik’s help. Some of Shakespeare’s kings are just as ambitious as Herman, however, an even more plausible parallel can be made with one of Shakespeare’s heroines, especially with Lady Macbeth, who is prepared to sacrifice everything in order to fulfil her dreams for power even if her life is built on crime.

## V. BRATKO KREFT: *CELJSKI GROFJE* (THE COUNTS OF CELJE, 1932)

The essence of Bratko Kreft's attitude to the ethnic, national and political position of the noble family of the Counts of Celje has already been indicated in the preceding section in connection with the historical role of this family as it was seen in a number of historical treatises written by Slovene and other historians and in the poetic version in Oton Župančič's *Veronika Deseniška*. In his version Kreft concentrated on the judicial process about this tragic heroine and its social implications. Although the majority of influences of Shakespeare's plays on Kreft's drama are not direct, the impact of his history of King Henry VI can be easily noticed in its construction, its selection of themes and presentation of characters. Kreft's play was first produced by the Slovene National Theatre (Drama) in Ljubljana on 17 September 1932. Due to its straightforward discourse and its tight dramatic structure the play was favourably received by Slovene critics (e.g. Boris Zihlerl, Josip Vidmar, France Koblar etc.) and also by the public.

The action of Kreft's play spans during two days in 1428, when Veronika Deseniška is tried as a witch at the castle of Celje, set free by the court and murdered by the order of Count Herman immediately after the trial. Although her guilt as a witch is not proved, Count Herman, the eldest and the most influential member of the family, decides that Veronika must disappear so that his son, Friderik, can be pardoned of the murder of his wife, Elizabeta Frankopanska. By getting rid of Veronika, Friderik's marriage with her will no longer influence his future and the possibility of his new marriage in the nobility. But the Judge who is to defend Veronika is persuaded that Veronika is innocent and he does not succumb to Count Herman's pressure and wins the trial. Nevertheless Herman also orders his imprisonment and the Judge, who may have been Herman's bastard son, commits suicide. In spite of Herman's endeavours to preserve the power of the family it is obvious that their power is vanishing.

In his notes to the play Kreft points out that at the beginning of the fifteenth century a number of important historical events had occurred in Europe. In Bohemia – which was then, together with Hungary, a part of Austro-Hungarian Empire – a reformist social, religious and national movement was led by Jan Hus, who was burned as a heretic in 1415. England was in a war with France where Joan of Arc compelled the English to lift the siege of Orleans in 1429; there was religious and social unrest in central Europe etc. Kreft obviously sees in this framework the historical development in Styria, which was also a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and where the Counts of Celje attempted to acquire new territory, both in Hungary as well as in the Slavic (Croatian and Bosnian) lands. Shakespeare presented such social unrest particularly in his history King Henry VI, where rebels like Jack Cades opposed the King, but were also cruelly suppressed. Kreft sees the social and historical position of Count Herman as the defender of the old feudal order who will, as he tells the Judge, “.. use all his wisdom, power and property to suppress [the rebels, M.J.] so that your serfdom is a warning to your descendants ...” (Kreft 1979: 85). A growing opposition to the Counts of Celje is also represented in this play by the Citizens of Celje (merchants, tradesmen, bakers, priests, armourers etc.) who are not (yet) united although many of them see injustices done by the nobility and – at least half-heartedly, because they are still afraid of the nobility – support the Judge and his defence of justice. This group of citizens plays an important role in this tragic

history, but their voice is becoming louder and it is heard more often than the voice of citizens (or rebels) in Shakespeare's *King Henry VI* so that antagonisms between feudal lords and the rising bourgeoisie are more visible. Like their historical protagonists in fifteenth century Europe, they attack the attempts of the Church to acquire more property, and they demand its return to "evangelical poverty". They mostly disapprove of Queen Barbara's flirting with the Duke Eneas Silvius Piccolomini whose role as a plaintiff in Veronika's trial is completely partial and dishonest.<sup>47</sup>

Kreft's presentation of some characters, particularly of Veronika and Friderik, differs from Župančič's portrayal: in Kreft's play Veronika is a much more witty, energetic and eloquent character than her counterpart in *Veronika Deseniška*, and like Desdemona she also accepts Friderik's guilt. Veronika also fell in love with Friderik because of his courage (like Desdemona) and also because she admired his reputation as a womanizer. She is prepared to suffer the consequences of the trial rather than betray her love. The trial scene in Kreft's play does not echo only the trial scene in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* but also the trial scene in G. B. Shaw's play *Saint Joan* (1924). It was translated by Oton Župančič, produced by the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana and directed by Bratko Kreft (!). Its premiere was on 27 Sept. 1933, a year after the production of Kreft's play. In his Introduction to *Celjski grofje* (The Counts of Celje) Kreft mentions the role of Joan of Arc; if we take into consideration the structure of both trial scenes, the time of the production of *Saint Joan* and Kreft's role in it we can agree with Slovene literary historians that also the influence of Shaw's play is obvious.

The central characters in Kreft's play are Veronika, old Count Herman and Veronika's defendant the old Judge, who is Herman's mighty antagonist and whose personal integrity can never be questioned. This is also seen in his decision to commit suicide rather than be Herman's prisoner. He is an excellent parallel to Portia and to her rational defence of Antonio in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (4.1). The Judge also expresses the author's views and his ideas which announce a new social and political order.

The sensuality of Queen Barbara, Friderik's daughter, who is married to the King of Hungary, can be compared with that of Goneril and Regan in Shakespeare's *King Lear*; what matters to her is her sensual enjoyment, her desire for constant sexual variety, which she does not find immoral. She denies life after death, and she expresses her atheistic persuasion by saying, "There is nothing after death." (Kreft 1979: 90) Similar views are expressed by Macbeth after King Duncan's murder, when he states: "There's nothing serious in mortality: / All is but toys .." (2.3.92-3); or, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, / And then is heard no more ..." (5.5.94-6). The lack of Christian belief and moral codes is – in some of Kreft's heroes – in agreement with their apprehension of the meaninglessness of life as it is declared by the protagonist in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

<sup>47</sup> Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405-1464); lawyer, poet, historian, secretary to various religious dignitaries, cardinal, in 1458 elected as Pope Pius II. In his histories he mentions the Counts of Celje, beautiful and lascivious Friderik's daughter Barbara, to whom he attributes atheistic belief (together with her father Friderik and his son Ulrik). Both dramatists, Oton Župančič and Bratko Kreft, were familiar with Piccolomini's work. (See: Joža Mahnič in O. Župančič's *Zbrano delo VI* (1972): 308-309; and Bratko Kreft, Introduction to *Celjski grofje* (1979): 28-29.). – Piccolomini led in his youth a dissipated life, but in 1444 he turned to Christianity. – In 1462 he founded the bishopric of Ljubljana.

In Kreft's *Celjski grofje* (The Counts of Celje) a more down-to-earth picture is provided by the author than in Župančič's *Veronika Deseniška* (Veronika of Desenice); however, in Župančič's play the characters receive a more subtle and a more universal dimension. Kreft is closer to Shakespeare as regards the composition of the play and its direct message, whereas on the other hand, Župančič's rich poetic language diminishes the scope of the subject-matter of his play but at the same time provides the play with greater aesthetic beauty. Although both Župančič and Kreft tried to follow the path provided by Shakespeare in his plays, paradoxically enough, their "strong points" lead them away from their Master.

## VI. CONCLUSION

One of the main results of this research is the fact that Slovene dramatists writing in the second half of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century were much more familiar with Shakespeare's plays than was surmised until now. This is evident from some direct "borrowings" of scenes, characters, motifs, and figurative language as well as from many allusions and parallels which can be found between Shakespeare's plays and plays which I have discussed here.

Josip Jurčič and Fran Levstik were both great admirers of Shakespeare's work, which can also be seen in their versions of *Tugomer*. In Jurčič's version the echoes of *Hamlet* and *Othello* are particularly noticeable, whereas in Levstik's version similarities between Shakespeare's heroes are also quite numerous (e.g. in *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Richard III*, *King Henry IV*, *Romeo and Juliet*) but these influences are much more artistically and philosophically interwoven in Levstik's text than those in Jurčič's version. This evidence also shows that neither Jurčič nor Levstik modelled their hero only on Coriolanus but that they combined various motifs, construction of scenes and their protagonist on a wider scale of sources from Shakespeare's plays.

In Cankar's play *Kralj na Betajnovi* (The King of Betajnova) the most easily recognized influence is "the mouse-trap" scene from *Hamlet* as well as his portrayal of several main characters (Kantor, Maks Krnec and his father, Francka, Ana), whose characters are very similar to major characters in *Hamlet*. The episodes in Act One in Cankar's play particularly show Cankar's debt to Shakespeare, and Maks's character is obviously based on Shakespeare's hero, on Hamlet. The parallels between Shakespeare's plays and Cankar's farce *Pohujšanje v dolini Šentflorjanski* (Scandal in the Valley of St. Florian) are mainly in love scenes, which remind us of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* and also with symbolism of *The Tempest*, although the symbolic features may only be incidental. The third play written by Cankar (together with its fragments) discussed here is *Lepa Vida* (Beautiful Vida), for which Cankar found the inspiration in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In this case there are not only similarities in character presentation which link both play, but especially the authors' philosophy as it is shown in these plays. Mile Korun's adaptation of Cankar's texts, his rearrangement of individual passages, represents his contribution to its dramatic qualities, although Cankar's poetic text shows even more clearly than Župančič's tragedy the shortcomings of the extensive use of poetry in dramatic art.

Oton Župančič was well acquainted with Shakespeare's plays as a translator, theatre director and theatre manager. He valued Shakespeare's plays extremely highly, not only his 'great tragedies' but also his histories and his late romances (*Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*), in which he found ethical values missing in 'the story' of his own play, *Veronika Deseniška*, such as "reconciliation, purification and harmony". But in his play even positive solutions, which we find in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, become negative. The world of *Veronika Deseniška* is dominated by catastrophes similar to the ones appearing in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *King Richard III* and therefore echoes from these plays are noticed in Župančič's play too. Even though there are numerous parallels between these plays and Župančič's tragedy, his poetic imagination results in this tragedy in great artistic beauty which, unfortunately, prevails over the dramatic tension of his play. Compared with Župančič's play Kreft's *Celjski grofje* is a realistic problem play, in which we do not find the poetic beauty of Župančič, but therefore Kreft's play is more likely to be accessible to broader public and its plot can be more easily followed than in a "poetic play". Kreft was definitely more impressed by Shakespeare's histories than by his other plays.

In Shakespeare's tragedies evil characters do not win, and although many innocent people are also killed there is always at least some hope left in his plays that the future will bring about a better world. On the other hand, Slovene tragedies, which I have discussed here, do not have an optimistic ending. Such bleak conclusions were probably mainly the result of the historical, political and social situation at the time when these plays were written. Nations which domineered over the Slovenes during the past centuries were not particularly in favour of Slovene liberation and independence, which can be seen in various kinds of political and social oppression and in this particular field, in drama, in the theatre censorship. Since 1991, when Slovenia became an independent state our fate is mainly our own responsibility, and a number of weaknesses which these artists have shown in their plays, are still as acute as they were one hundred and fifty years ago. But Slovene artists still hold the mirror up to nature and therefore these plays should also be performed more often in spite of their shortcomings. The comparison between Shakespeare's plays and Slovene plays discussed in this paper shows that although Slovene authors used Slovene myths in their plays they tried to make them universal. Although they "borrowed" various thematic or theatrical details from Shakespeare's plays they were conscious that their works should primarily appeal to their own people. Slovene dramatists justly admired this great author and his plays and in many cases they successfully adapted both Shakespeare's vision of social and political life and his aesthetic treatment of different fables and histories to their own cultural situation. Inspiration they got from Shakespeare was thus often successfully transformed into new works of art.

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## SLOVENE CRITICS ON SINCLAIR LEWIS'S NOVELS

Vanja Avsenak

**Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to present the reception of Sinclair Lewis's novels by Slovene critics. Initially, the article focuses on the life and work of Sinclair Lewis, giving special emphasis to social influences that made the author a representative figure in the literary and social world. Thus his works are nowadays to be understood primarily as fiction, but on the other hand also as sociological documents of a social and political situation of the period between the two world wars. Generally, the effect they produce is one of a critical discussion of the nation of the United States. When speaking of the social relevance that Lewis's novels have, it is obvious that his works are the portrayals of Americans and their deficiencies. At the time of their publication Lewis's novels received unfavourable criticism on account of his overly open pro-European attitude and Slovene critics of the period before World War II emphasise this in much detail. It was precisely this anti-American propaganda in the novels themselves and sincerity on the part of the novelist that won the European critics as well as the readers when it came to appreciating his works. However, Lewis's view of the Americans, as presented throughout his works, only enhanced his literary credibility as a modern writer. That is why the articles by Slovene critics that appeared after the Second World War, and even more significantly after Lewis's death, almost minutely reflect a more favourable attitude to Sinclair Lewis, which was also the case with foreign literary criticism of the post-war period. Critics still discuss the qualities and flaws of Lewis's novels, but being more lenient they no longer profess that the novels lack in artistic value. They remain, however, primarily relevant as social documents of the pre- and post-war era, which fully presented the American middle-class mentality in America and elsewhere. For this reason, the Nobel Prize for Literature awarded to Sinclair Lewis in 1930 seems duly justified. It signifies appreciation and respect that the American and European readers as well as critics used to have and still have for Sinclair Lewis. Therefore, it is no surprise that his novels are being translated in several foreign languages even in modern times.

**Key words:** Lewis's novels, literary criticism, social realism, portrayal of American society, middle-class mentality

Sinclair Lewis is a largely analysed figure who (during his lifetime) managed to focus his works on the events of his own life, which is why we can assume that the majority of his best acclaimed novels reflect the author's own identity, pervasively a result of his social commitment and his own personal beliefs. It was precisely his radical views that made him *persona non grata* in the social and literary

sphere. Social environment is, however, a major influence over an individual, but it is the spiritual strength of each individual that shows whether a person is going to submit entirely to the norms of society or take on a more active role within his / her environment.

Lewis achieved the biggest acclaim from his readers and critics when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930. He was the first in the line of American authors to be awarded this honourable prize. Lewis's reputation of a social realist was mostly due to his most fruitful years from 1920 to 1930, which was the time that saw the publication of his major novels – *Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922), *Arrowsmith* (1925), *Elmer Gantry* (1927) and *Dodsworth* (1929). His popularity, however, was noted outside the United States as well, which was proved with numerous translations of Lewis's novels into many European languages. As Hutchisson (1996: 204) states, by 1930 eleven out of thirteen novels were translated into Russian, German and Polish, seven into Hungarian, Danish, Norwegian and Czech, six into French, four into Dutch, two into Spanish and one (*Babbitt*) into Italian and Hebrew. Lewis's satirical and at times even controversial novels offered the Europeans a new perception of Americans, while Americans tended to perceive themselves quite differently as well (*ibid.* 209). Lewis, thus, successfully outlined the virtues and flaws of the American society – its unique American-ness of the Midwest. Opposed to this he presented the benefits and drawbacks of the European mentality, mainly shown through different behavioural patterns of the immigrant society.

Social relevance of Lewis's novels is justified by different layers of symbolism in the given social milieu. An individual symbolically embedded in his environment is a pervasively naturalistic feature. Lewis himself admitted that he had followed the steps of Balzac, Zola and Dickens, but his naturalism was less severe than theirs had been and much more lenient. As stated before, the Nobel Prize awarded to Sinclair Lewis brought him proper acclaim, but at the same time it also signified the beginning of the end of his collaboration with the publishing house Harcourt, Brace and Co. and his chief editor Alfred Harcourt. Lewis reproached Harcourt for not taking commercial advantage of his Nobel Prize. Unfortunately, one reason for his breaking ties with Harcourt lay also in the fact that a third of the profit from the sold novels abroad went to the publisher directly, while Lewis had yet to pay ten percent of his earnings to foreign agents in England and elsewhere for the promotion of his novels abroad. Yet, it is commonly believed that Lewis's relation with Harcourt was the most productive one, since he never later repeated his success with any of his other publishers.

Many of the hundreds of letters that Lewis wrote to Harcourt during this ten-year period were Lewis's way of asking Harcourt to confirm that he was on the right track, that his next novel would be even better than the previous one; Harcourt did this faithfully and cheerfully. Lewis might not have been as productive as he was without Harcourt's constant encouragement. And he never received the kind of personal attention from the publishers of his later novels that he had from Alfred Harcourt. Although several of Lewis's later works (published first with Doubleday, Doran and then with Random House) were best-sellers, the period of Lewis's greatest success was exactly coequal with his association with Harcourt. (Hutchisson 1996: 207-208)

As for his literary role Sinclair Lewis, he was first and foremost a realist, but a different kind from Zola, Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens and Mark Twain. He was a symbolic realist who observed the inner reality of his characters within the boundaries of their society, which was a recognisable feature of the great Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Ibsen and Proust. In this respect Lewis could also be described as belonging to the school of psychological realism. The individual, however, mainly developed as a product of his / her environment, which is why psychological realism came to be recognised as social realism after World War II. What a social realist did was take an individual and mould him / her within the society (s)he belonged to. Psychologically the writer focused on the individual, while socially he analysed the impact of society on the individual. Modern realists thus differed significantly from the classical realists of the nineteenth century. They relied on the social premises of socialism and even communism, but emphasised the psychological and social influence of the environment on the individual within his / her society.

There is much to be said about the reception of Lewis's work and its popularity among the Slovene critics and readers. Mirko Jurak in his commentary to the Slovene translation of *Main Street* (*Glavna cesta*, 1998) by Janko Moder, describes *Glavna cesta* as a novel of provincial intolerance (601). With this work, according to Jurak, Lewis attempted to destroy the illusion that small towns and villages were places of rural idyll. As Jurak claims, »je želel Lewis razbliniti iluzijo, ki je dolgo vladala, namreč, da je majhno ameriško mesto sinonim za paradiž, v katerem se vsakdo počuti svobodnega in si vsi prebivalci prizadevajo za skupno dobro« (601-602) [Lewis aimed to blow the illusion that a small American town was, as generally believed, inherently a paradise, within which everyone felt free and attempted to reach the common idea of being true and good to oneself and others]. Lewis deliberately exposed the social ills, applied them to the American environment and singled out the individual. As Jurak says, Lewis trusted the individual, but not the social system (594), which is applaudable, but slightly paradoxical, since it is true, that each social system essentially depends on the willingness and strength of each individual. *Main Street* thus personifies the small-town mentality as well as that of the American nation itself. Furthermore, Jurak ascertains that Lewis more often than not faced intolerance on the part of the critics, since he openly attacked middle-class superiority, provincial submission, conformism in principles and hypocrisy in the institution of the Church. According to Jurak these are all the problems and dilemmas of the Americans trying to surpass the limitations of the society and become truly awakened (Jurak 2001: 43). Due to Lewis's honesty in his radical liberal beliefs the nickname *Red* was attached to him during his university years and remained his red badge of courage for the rest of his life. His socio-political views, however, influenced Lewis to become one of the advocates of the periodical called *Die Sammlung*, founded by Klaus Mann, André Gide, Aldous Huxley and Heinrich Mann. Soon after the publication of the magazine, Lewis received a telegram from his previously liberal German publisher, beseeching him to break the ties with the Mann family or else he would stop publishing his novels in Germany. Lewis responded by saying that he thought his works in Germany were popular on account of their literary value alone and thus refused to see how his political views interfered with his art. More about the publication of this magazine and Lewis's support of it can be read in *Modra ptica* (1934/1935: 47).

The year when the first critical appraisals and reviews began to be published in Slovenia was 1930, which was also the year of the Nobel Prize awarded to Lewis. Lewis's first novel to be translated into Slovene was *Arrowsmith* (1933). Two years earlier the novel had been translated into Serbo-Croatian, which was like Slovene one of the main languages of Yugoslavia. The literary review was at that time written by Mirko Javornik and published by *Modra ptica*. For the Slovene readers there are two articles even more important. Lojze Golobič in his article entitled "Sinclair Lewis: Arrowsmith" published in *Slovenec* (6/9/1933) describes Lewis's novel as extremely powerful and humanly deep, particularly due to Lewis's fight against the doctors – money hunters (4). He firmly attacked doctors who persisted in their jobs purely for the sake of money and reputation. Another critic who speaks about *Arrowsmith* is Filip Kalan. His essay entitled "Amerika in Lewisov dr. Arrowsmith" [America and Lewis's Dr. Arrowsmith] emphasises that doctors apt to succeed are those who can associate themselves with little people. A doctor's sensitivity to the suffering of others is at least as vital as his medical knowledge. Finally, there is an article by Josip Vidmar "Refleksije – O velikem tekstu" [Reflections – On the Big Text], published in *Sodobnost* 1938 (61-63), in which Vidmar compares Lewis's *Arrowsmith* with Thomas Mann's *Zauberberg* [The Magical Mountain]. Both novels take place within the medical environment, the difference being that *Arrowsmith* analyses the personality of a doctor dedicated to the bacteriological research focused on getting the vaccine for a plague, while Mann's novel speaks about the patient suffering from tuberculosis.

There are two articles written by Victor F. Calverton and translated by Griša Koritnik that appeared in *Ljubljanski zvon* in 1932. The first article entitled "Emancipacija ameriškega slovstva" [The Emancipation of the American Literature] focuses on the status Sinclair Lewis has achieved. Calverton described Lewis as the most truly American of all American writers. His works are permeated by one hundred percent genuine Americans like Babbitt and typically American cities like Zenith. Even the style is purely American (299). And it was this pervasively American approach that rendered Lewis his Nobel Prize. The other article by Calverton, also translated by Griša Koritnik, entitled "Ameriški fenomen" [The American Phenomenon] clarifies what it is that makes Babbitt the most persuasive character in Lewis's fiction. Namely, Lewis himself could be designated as a true Babbitt in his own ideas (347). It is precisely this credibility that was critical when it came to how the Europeans saw and perceived the Americans. Vilko Ivanuša in *Svoboda* (1932) relates Babbitt to Don Quixote and labels him Don Quixote of the modern era. The novel is an imaginative portrayal of the American bourgeois society, or as Mirko Javornik puts it, the novel is "spreten in značilen prerez in železno jedro amerikanstva in njegove kulture, katere nosilec in najvažnejši predstavlja[li] je malo buržujstvo v statičnosti in povprečnosti svojih stremeljenj, potreb, zahtev, idealov o življenju in o vsem" (Javornik 1932: 78) [a creative and typical portrayal as well as a core text about the American culture, whose major representative is *petit bourgeoisie* with its average static desires, needs, demands and ideals about life and such]. There is one other translation by Griša Koritnik published in 1932 in *Ljubljanski zvon*. The article entitled "Sinclair Lewis" written by Ludwig Lewisohn reproaches the readers for not staying loyal to the author of *Main Street* after he was awarded the Nobel Prize. According to Lewisohn, it was precisely due to the American criticism of America itself that Europe

established its own sense of superiority. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Americans considered Lewis's Nobel Prize as a false representation of their own national character. Many American critics found the reason for the award confusing, since as Silvester Škerl in his article "Sinclair Lewis dobil Nobelovo nagrado" [Sinclair Lewis has received the Nobel Prize] (*Slovenec*, 7/11/1930: 6) states the reason for it being awarded to Lewis lies less in the artistic value of Lewis's novels than in their social relevance.

In his Nobel speech Lewis described his homeland as a country of immense contrasts. He said that America was definitely the land of skyscrapers and fast cars, but most certainly not a country for an artist to establish himself on any level (*Slovenski narod* 1930: 4). On Lewis's fiftieth birthday there was an article published by *Jutro* (1935, issue 34), in which Lewis was denoted as one of the sharpest and most successful critics of the American public and private life (5). *Književnost* (1933) published a report about Lewis's novel *Ann Vickers* translated into Serbo-Croatian by Stana Oblak in 1933. It is labelled as a novel about a middle-class intellectual struggling for the freedom of women (187). The novel is outlined as Lewis's most courageous one and it is the translation by Stana Oblak that is believed to be superb as well.

After World War II there were more articles published in Slovene journals about the novels of Sinclair Lewis. Critical appraisals that appear after the Second World War are published in *Mladinska revija*, *Novi svet*, *Vprašanja naših dni*, *Beseda*, *Knjiga*, *Knjižna polica*, *Socialistična misel*, *Naši razgledi*, *Ljudska pravica*, *Delavska enotnost*, *Nova obzorja*, *Slovenski poročevalec*, *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, *Primorski dnevnik*, *Večer* and *Vestnik mariborskega okrožja*.

In his review of *Kingsblood Royal* published in *Beseda* (1951/1952) Vasja Ocvirk displays the American society as rigidly black and white. He considers blacks to be the good people who are suppressed, while the whites are recognised as solely evil and blood-seeking. Lewis managed to show a typical example of black America regardless of where an individual lived (466). France Filipič wrote an article entitled "Podoba rasne diskriminacije" [The Portrayal of Racial Discrimination] for *Vestnik mariborskega okrožja*, in which he describes Neil Kingsblood's struggle as a fight to be humanely acknowledged. His is more than just a fight against racial distinction, his is also a fight against violence and fascism. On 14<sup>th</sup> June 1952 there is another article entitled "Lewisov roman Kraljevski Kingsblood" [Lewis's Novel *Kingsblood Royal*] published in *Naši razgledi*. The author, Dušan Pirjevec, speaks about the prejudice regarding the inferiority of the black population, as firmly engraved in the mind of an average American, thus visibly reflecting traditional American mentality. The novel is written in a satirical tone, sometimes bordering on grotesque, while the tragic elements are being lost. *Kingsblood Royal* is mentioned also by Janez Gradišnik in his article in *Novi svet* (1951). Gradišnik believes this novel to be the last one still worth the reputation of Lewis's former major ones. He also thinks that with this novel Lewis has made an important contribution towards the equality of people of all colours and races. Moreover, the author's portrayal of racial conflicts seems at times even more dire than in reality.

However, there is another socially relevant novel – *It Can't Happen Here*. Branko Rudolf in his article "Ob smrti Sinclairja Lewisa" [On the Death of Sinclair Lewis] published on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1951 in *Ljudska pravica* states that if the Americans were to transform certain kinds of administration, they would easily get fascism instead of



solid democracy. As the title of the novel itself suggests, the systems of democracy and fascism are not that far apart. *Mladinska revija* (1950/1951) published another article entitled "Ob smrti Sinclairja Lewisa" [On the Death of Sinclair Lewis], in which Vasja Ocvirk remembers Lewis and his major works. He describes *Main Street* as a caricature of a small country town (439). *Main Street*, according to Ocvirk, designates American provincialism; he even denotes small-town mentality as being reflective of 'Main Street'. Similarly, 'babbitt' has come to represent an entrepreneur, a small businessman, "ki ga plehko buržoazno življenje neprestano krivi in končno izkrivi" (440) [constantly corrupted by the bourgeois ways of life]. Lewis, according to Ocvirk, was a true humanist who truly knew his characters, since he lived as one of them. That is why he was frequently intolerant of their flaws, but never unjust. There is an essay entitled "Ameriška literatura in Sinclair Lewis" [The American Literature and Sinclair Lewis], which was published in 1951 in *Novi svet*. Its author, Bogomil Fatur, states that Lewis in *Main Street* presents Carol Kennicott in a similar way to Gustav Flaubert's presentation of his protagonist in *Madame Bovary*. Her role of a doctor's wife seems to function only on the outside, while within herself Carol fights for spiritual autonomy. There is, however, a contrast between the two novels as to the method of description. Lewis made use of precise report-like realism, which is useful when it comes to giving a minute description. His character portrayals are realistic photographs of people in a small town. Flaubert, on the other hand, provided emotionally realised portraits of the main protagonists, which give his work better credibility (660). In *Babbitt* the main character, George Babbitt, is a representative of bourgeois ideas since he himself represents a model for an average middle-class hero (657). Herbert Grün believes that Babbitt is all the more convincing since he himself survives the process of standardization. Moreover, Zenith is at least as real as Proust's Combray. Both towns are said to be imaginary milieus, yet they both appear very realistic. Dušan Željeznov, however, in his article "Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt" published on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1953 in *Slovenski poročevalec*, claims that Babbitt's tragic self is mostly due to his child-like behaviour, his lack of maturity. Despite his several attempts to rise above the mediocrity of his everyday life, he basically remains immature.

The most artistically accomplished novel by Sinclair Lewis is *Arrowsmith*. It is stylistically best developed and structurally supported by De Kruif's contributions. There are certain autobiographical elements in the novel that should not be overlooked. James M. Hutchisson speaks of them in his article entitled "Sinclair Lewis, Paul De Kruif, and the Composition of *Arrowsmith*" (1992). He mentions how De Kruif, who helped Lewis with bacteriological and medical terms, met his wife Rhea Barbarin during his internship in the hospital, which poses a similarity as to how Martin met Leora for the first time. De Kruif's contribution to the making of the novel is thus equivalent to Lewis's. Lewis deliberately separates Martin from the society, at the same time, however, making it possible for him to reach and fully realise his ambitions, which is more than any other major protagonist of Lewis's other novels manages to accomplish (Hutchisson 1996: 123). As Fatur (1951) believes, Lewis managed to produce a remarkable intellectual epic (659). Fatur's conclusive statement thus remains that Lewis very precisely dissects the small-town bourgeoisie, which seems to be disintegrating and dying.

In *Naši razgledi* in 1952 (issue 1) there is a short report entitled "Sinclair Lewis: Iskalec boga" [Sinclair Lewis: The Godseeker] which relates to Lewis's novel of the

same name. As in *Kingsblood Royal* the central idea here is once again a fight for independence, although it now takes place within an Indian community. In *Naši razgledi* (1952) there is a literary review of *Elmer Gantry* by Ivan Skušek. He speaks of the novel as a vital account of the corruption within the institution of the Church. At the same time it appears to be a call for a better social system in which the humanity would be immune to social disintegration, even towards the fanaticism in religion within the American church (23). *Beseda* 1951/1952 offers a report by Vasja Ocvirk entitled "Pogled na ameriško zgubljeno generacijo" [The View of the American Lost Generation] (78-82). The common ground for the young radical writers, widely known as the Lost Generation, is general dissatisfaction with their homeland, its social and political ideas. These writers lived abroad for a certain period of time, but they generally returned to their country sooner or later. The older group of writers, represented by Theodore Dreiser, Henry Louis Mencken and Sinclair Lewis, expressed their dissatisfaction and tried applying it to the entire American society per se. As for the Nobel Prize, Ocvirk fully justifies it being given to Lewis himself, since Europe at that time recognised the influential role that the United States had internationally.

Finally, the importance of friendship between Sinclair Lewis and Louis Adamic should be emphasised. At one of the literary meetings Adamic was introduced to Sinclair Lewis. Lewis knew Adamic's work and congratulated him on his novel *Dynamite* (1931), which had recently been published. On this occasion Lewis invited Adamic to help him collect the documentary material for the proletarian novel he was going to write. Adamic was later invited by Lewis to spend a weekend at his cottage in Vermont. Adamic accepted the invitation gladly and visited Lewis in Vermont. During his stay in Vermont, Adamic wrote to his wife Stella and said: "Perhaps more than anyone else, he personifies, encloses, contains America, many of her virtues, her dynamic qualities, her spontaneity, and many of her faults" (Adamic 1938: 100). Adamic and Lewis carried on correspondence between 24<sup>th</sup> September and 4<sup>th</sup> October 1931. In one of his letters Lewis let Adamic know he had changed his mind and had decided to write the novel in America rather than in Vienna, as it was originally planned. Later, however, Adamic learned from a mutual friend, Ben Stolberg, that Lewis had once again changed his mind and decided not to write the novel at all. His friendship with Lewis is minutely described in Adamic's work *My America* (1938). In this work Adamic asks himself what made Lewis give up his idea of producing the great proletarian novel he had been considering for the past two years. Adamic suggests that the red liberal issue might have been the reason for Lewis's decision. Another cause for it might have been the fact that as a Nobel Prize author he was not willing to lose his readers even over an issue he felt so strongly about. It remains questionable if Lewis's second wife Dorothy Thompson might have had something to do with her husband's decision to start working on a feminist novel *Ann Vickers* instead. Furthermore, in *My America* Adamic makes a comparison between Lewis's novel *Arrowsmith* and the novel *Weeds* by Edith Sumner Kelley. He sees the similarity between the two protagonists, Kelley's Judy and Lewis's Leora (*ibid.* 96). Adamic personally met Miss Kelley and she told him that she was an old friend of Lewis's and thus served as a model for his portrayal of Leora. All in all, in his critical study Adamic writes about his own views regarding Lewis's novels. He believes *Main Street* and *Babbitt* to be fully reflective of the social situation in the United States,

while he is not particularly fond of *Ann Vickers* and even less of *It Can't Happen Here*, which he sees as only a vague reflection of his true beliefs. Despite his utmost respect for Lewis, Adamic feels himself to be more liberally engaged than Lewis, although Lewis's radical views were visibly expressed, also in Mencken's literary periodical *The American Mercury*. On a literary scale, however, Adamic believes Lewis to be at least as crucial as Oton Župančič and Ivan Cankar were for Slovene literature, even though the two countries can hardly be compared, either geographically or ideologically.

More about the correspondence between Lewis and Adamic can be read in *Izbrana pisma Louisa Adamiča* (1981, translated by Jerneja Petrič), where one also comes across the fact that Lewis supported Adamic when he applied for the Guggenheim's scholarship, which he received and used for a visit of his native Yugoslavia (Slovenia). When Lewis visited Austria in 1932, he contacted Adamic about visiting Yugoslavia, but the meeting between the two of them never took place. In his letter to Lewis on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1932 Adamic regretted not meeting Lewis as they had planned. In the same letter he also asked Lewis about the scheduled time of publishing *Ann Vickers*. Adamic said that one Slovene publisher showed a keen interest in the English edition of the book since he intended to publish its Slovene translation the next year. In the scope of social criticism Adamic's article entitled "Križa ameriškega individualizma" [The Crisis of American Individualism] and published in *Ljubljanski zvon* (1932) must not be overlooked. He openly attacks individualism deriving from the capitalist democracy that enabled only the minority of people to climb up the social ladder and succeed economically. This kind of success is in Lewis's novels achieved only in the character of genuinely *good* Martin Arrowsmith and in the figure of pervasively *evil* Elmer Gantry. Further on, Adamic claims that both Lewis and Dreiser were expecting individualism to be replaced by collectivism. However, Adamic only briefly mentions the economic and political reasons that led to the general national apathy. Still, he does mention Lewis, yet entirely ignores Steinbeck and Hemingway. His presentation of social literary criticism is thus less than complete. However, his study presents some scientists and publicists as well, including Ludwig Lewisohn and his literary study on Sinclair Lewis. Lewisohn primarily focuses on Lewis's sudden fall in popularity. From the European point of view an American author is as appreciated as his works reflect the anti-American stance. That is why, as Jerneja Petrič points out, it was generally believed in the United States that Lewis's Nobel Prize for Literature reflected a certain kind of anachronism and that there were authors such as Mark Twain and Henry James who had deserved the award much more.

There is much to be said about the literary value of Lewis's works. Sinclair Lewis is a realist, but his realism is not the classical realism of the nineteenth century, but psychological and social realism of the modern era. Many critics believe Lewis's protagonists to be too one-dimensional. However, it is precisely the psychological limitations that make them even more human. In contrast to classical realists, such as Balzac and Zola, Lewis's realism is often rigid and limited. No one can claim, though, that he pays no attention to different layers of reality, but his protagonists, with the exception of Elmer Gantry and Martin Arrowsmith, show no sign of being fully emotionally realised. Thus Lewis's novels seem to have become realistic photographs, though not fully realised portraits of individuals per se. Many critics therefore value Lewis's works primarily

for their social input, but much less so for their artistic value, which they nevertheless possess. It is also true that there has been a change in the domain of critical appraisals. Former critical antipathy has lately been replaced by true enthusiasm. At the time of the publication of his novels Lewis's literary position used to be unfavourable. Americans believed that he was openly pro-European, whereas it was for the very same reason that European readers found his narratives genuinely sincere. It is precisely this authenticity that finally won Lewis the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930.

The Slovene translations, however, have shown that the social dilemmas in Lewis's novels seem to have surpassed the boundaries of the exclusive American milieu and have become universal issues. The reason for immense critical interest in Lewis's novels lies primarily in the European political situation at the time, which seems to have influenced the American mentality as well. Lewis warns about the fascist mentality in the American society, potentially caused by the dichotomy between sheer liberalism on the one hand and utmost conservatism on the other. It is precisely due to the radical ideas discussed in his novels that Lewis's works reflect the proletarian consciousness, which entered the American mentality in the 1920s and 1930s. The struggle for working-class uniformity was not that distinctive at that time in Slovenia, but it became a growing issue a few decades later (in the mid-fifties), particularly as a result of the post-war apathy, which led to the growth of communism and socialism. Thus it is more than reasonable why Lewis's socially engaged novels keep to be translated, published as well as critically discussed in different languages even in modern times.

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## HIGH OR POPULAR LITERATURE? – JOHN UPDIKE’S RABBIT SERIES

*Jerneja Petrič*

### Abstract

The article addresses the issue of the ambivalent relationship between high and popular literature. Relying on the criteria proposed by Ken Gelder, the author seeks to prove those artistic qualities of John Updike’s Rabbit sequence that ensure his position among America’s best writers of high literature.

**Key words:** high literature, popular literature, John Updike, Rabbit series, formal artistry

In the minds of numerous readers and literary critics the term popular fiction has a negative undertone vis-à-vis its big brother, high or literary fiction. It is often pushed aside as hardly worthy of attention. Ken Gelder uses a picturesque simile to illustrate the overall perception of popular literature by comparing opera to soap opera, the former aiming for educated audiences, the latter intended to entertain the less sophisticated masses (13). The conflict between high and popular literature has been going on for quite some time; Gelder points out Henry James, who in *The Art of Fiction* defended high literature against the intrusion of popular art then represented by Robert Louis Stevenson’s novels (16). Ezra Pound’s verdict was downright spiteful: “Artists are the antennae of the race, but the bullet-headed many will never learn to trust their great artists” (qtd. in Gelder 23). Nevertheless, critical tolerance toward “the underclass of literary production usually known as pulp” (C. Bloom 5) has been on the rise as well. In the introduction to his book *Cult Fiction: Popular Reading and Pulp Theory*, Clive Bloom warns against “the overemphasis placed upon canonic texts” (3) whereas Michael Korda, while referring to the most successful category of popular writing – the bestseller – seems to be opting for a middle road, saying that “a snobbish or elitist attitude toward the bestseller is as unjustified as a slavish devotion to it” (x). In the meantime, popular literature has found its place in the curricula of well-known universities as an aspect of modern culture no one can overlook anymore, e.g. Trinity College in Dublin.

Another term for popular literature is genre literature, which includes science fiction, western, crime novel, detective novel, romance etc. Whereas Gelder claims the field of popular literature “isn’t given any clear sort of definition” (4), the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* provides the following one:



Popular literature includes those writings intended for the masses and those that find favor with large audiences. It can be distinguished from artistic literature in that it is designed primarily to entertain. Popular literature, unlike high literature, generally does not seek a high degree of formal beauty or subtlety and is not intended to endure. (Popular Literature)

Slovene literary critics agree with the above statement. Kmecl speaks of popular literature as the kind intended for less sophisticated readers or listeners, the ones not so well read and esthetically less demanding than educated readers (Kmecl 1976: 318). Hladnik prefers the term *trivial literature*, defining it as esthetically and functionally lesser mass literature (Hladnik 1983: 6).

Even so, the above definitions are rather vague; after all, Updike said in his 1999 book of essays and reviews *More Matter*, “Well, what about the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, its row of soldiers in leather uniform, that alphabetical universe of *negotiable* truths (my emphasis), of facts I can *use*?” (qtd. in De Bellis, n.p.) – which means that Gelder is basically right. What is it then that distinguishes high literature from popular art? On page 19 of his book, Gelder parallels the two forms of art proposing the following criteria to define high literature: it is cerebral, restrained or discreet, doesn’t need a story or a plot, is characterized by formal artistry and is therefore elitist. According to Korda, it doesn’t sell well either (xiii). As regards the plot, we may add that literary novels, the plotted ones, have much more complex plots than popular literature. The latter, according to Gelder, is sensuous, exaggerated and excessive; it needs a plot, it is exciting and shows a lack of formal artistry. In short, unlike high fiction, it is democratic (19). Korda adds that it sells extremely well (xiii).

When reading a literary novel, the reader gets more involved than in the case of reading a popular novel, he/she may identify with the characters and ponder their problems and ideas otherwise present in the novel. Reading a popular novel is a much more casual activity. Characters in high literature tend to be psychologically rounded individuals (there are exceptions to the rule), whereas in popular novels, according to R.L. Stevenson, they are “developed only in so far as they service the story” (qtd. in Gelder 23).

In his 1975 novel *Ragtime*, E.L. Doctorow demonstrated the blurred lines between high and popular art. The popular artists in the above novel – Harry Houdini, Evelyn Nesbit, Tateh – Baron Ashkenazy and Coalhouse Walker – embody different aspects of American art with popular roots. They are popular artists who are profoundly affecting the American audiences at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Can nowadays high and popular art in America be separated at all? Haven’t some very popular 20<sup>th</sup> century novels such as Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* or John Kennedy Toole’s *A Confederacy of Dunces* become canonized in the course of time? Is John Updike a representative of high literature, or popular art, or both?

When the first Rabbit novel, *Rabbit, Run*, appeared in 1960, Updike did not make everybody happy. Unlike Malcolm Bradbury, whose review in *The Times* praised “that special polish, that brilliance”, Angus Wilson was more skeptical: “It is sexy, in bad taste, violent and basically cynical. And good luck to it” (*Observer*).<sup>1</sup> What he probably

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<sup>1</sup> Printed on the back cover of the 1995 Penguin edition. See Works Cited..

meant by that was that the Puritanical America was not ready yet for some very explicit sexual scenes in the novel. However, as each new decade brought another Rabbit novel, the popularity of the protagonist increased and with it the readiness of the critics to recognize the Rabbit series as a major literary achievement.

In 1991 Updike published *Odd Jobs: Essays and Criticism*. In the first part of the book titled “Fairly Personal”, Updike expresses his views on popular culture, which seem to echo those of Doctorow. “He thinks that popular culture cannot be fully distinguished from high art in literature, but high art detached from popular culture would be sterile” (De Bellis 314). Updike’s life had indeed been intertwined with popular art: after a year of study at Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Arts in the U.K. in 1954-55, it became his ambition to find work as a cartoonist. His novels, not just the Rabbit sequence, are interspersed with references to popular art. During his first attempt to run away from his irresponsible wife and infant son in *Rabbit, Run*, the protagonist Harry-Rabbit drives aimlessly through the night listening to the popular music on his radio and when he later becomes involved with the part-time prostitute Ruth, they often go to the movies together watching the popular films of the period. De Bellis highlights Updike’s pedantic precision regarding the titles of the songs that were part of the aforementioned trip south, songs with pertinent titles like “The Man Who Ran Away” and “Secret Love” (344). De Bellis particularly underlines the ones that “punctuate his (i.e. Rabbit’s) need for freedom, e.g. “Turn Me Loose”” (Ibid.). In *Rabbit Redux* both the protagonist and his father work as typesetters for the Brewer *Vat*. In the time of Vietnam war and the historic space mission of Apollo 11, the newspapers and television have become indispensable. The TV set is the central object in Rabbit’s living room as it provides him with the excitement his life has been sadly missing ever since his glorious basketball days. Following the invitation of a black co-worker, Rabbit goes to Jimbo’s Friendly Lounge, gets high on marijuana and listens to Babe playing blues, Broadway songs and The Beatles’ music (*Rabbit Redux* 123 -124 ). Skeeter, the black Vietnam veteran, who later on enters Rabbit’s life, “likes Rabbit to read to him from *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*” (Ibid. 277). In *Rabbit Is Rich* Harry, while riding home in his car, ponders his affair with Ruth Leonard of twenty years ago. The car radio plays music of which Harry is consciously aware – disco music, the Bee Gees’ hit “Stayin’ Alive”, and especially “the Queen of Disco” Donna Summer’s meaningful song, “Sittin’ here eatin’ my heart out waitin’/ Waitin’ for some lover to call” (36 ). Jumbo size advertisements along the road make Rabbit think of popular actors John Travolta, Barbra Streisand, Omar Sharif, Ryan O’Neal and Diane Keaton (33, 35-36). In *Rabbit at Rest*, waiting at the airport for Nelson and his family to fly in, Harry lets his mind wander and he aptly remembers “Roy Orbison who always wore black and black sunglasses and sang “Pretty Woman”” (8) thus hinting at the two major topics in his rapidly aging life – love and death. Harry has become addicted to *Consumers Digest* and soap operas. While incapacitated after heart trouble he and his granddaughter Judy watch the popular shows on the TV together – from *Jeopardy!* and *Simon and Simon* to reruns of *The Cosby Show* and *Cheers* and *The Unsolved Mysteries* (336). Names of popular actors and moderators such as Angela Lansbury and Robert Stack turn up (339). On July Fourth, Harry marches in a Mt. Judge parade. As he makes his way down the well-known route, the sounds of drums, bagpipes and pop

tunes reverberate through his throbbing head (367); he pushes on all the while taking in “the gaps of ‘American Patrol’” and “Yesterday”(370). After the fatal slip-up with his own daughter-in-law, Harry escapes to Florida where he kills time by watching TV, mostly shows like *Roseanne* and *Cosby* (468).

The mere fact that popular culture figures so prominently in the life of our protagonist and other characters of course does not mean that the novels as such should be classified as popular literature. So let us test Gelder’s determinants. First of all, high literature is supposed to be cerebral, in other words not simple but difficult. It is elitist in the sense that it aims at a relatively small but well-educated and widely read audience. Updike’s five Rabbit pieces certainly don’t require any kind of extreme mental effort. For the most part the Rabbit stories begin with one or two precipitating incidents, a minor version or versions of the novel’s main conflict. *Rabbit, Run* opens with the 26-year-old protagonist, an ex-basketball star playing basketball in an alley with some kids only to return home shortly afterwards to his pregnant wife who is drunk and totally unhappy. This foreshadows the protagonist’s obsessive search for something that could fill the void in his life now that the days of basketball bliss are over, the search that almost destroys his marriage. In *Rabbit Redux* the reader first meets the elder Angstrom and his son going for a drink after work. The father cautiously brings up a delicate issue, the widely rumored infidelity of Rabbit’s wife Janice. The rumors are confirmed after Janice’s confession to her husband and the couple embarks upon a rocky journey that will take them through months of separation, the burning of their house and the death of a young woman. *Rabbit Is Rich* is somewhat an exception in that its initial scene only partly foreshadows the novel’s main conflict. It begins with a friendly conversation between Harry, now the co-owner of Springer Motors, and his one-time rival Charlie Stavros in the company office that is “hung with framed old clippings and team portraits (...) from his (i.e. Rabbit’s) days as a basketball hero twenty years ago” (4). Harry is serene, growing overweight and pensive. He dislikes the present and idolizes the past. The two men discuss past events and present-day gasoline crisis. The arrival of a young couple rings a buried bell: the girl looks like Ruth, Harry’s mistress of long ago. He wonders if the red-haired girl might be his illegitimate daughter. Running out of gas literally and metaphorically – Harry is beginning to feel the pressure of aging – represents one of the novel’s major themes. So does the confrontation with the past, although the embodiment of Harry’s love affair with Ruth will have to wait until after Harry’s death. *Rabbit at Rest* takes place ten years later. Its introductory pages are interspersed with images of old age, death and decay. Harry, now in his mid fifties, is badly overweight with a pending heart problem. “He has spells of feeling short of breath and mysteriously full in the chest, full of some pressing essence” (7). He smells death everywhere, even the landing airplane about to discharge his son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren looks like slowly descending death to him. This precipitating incident prophesies the novel’s central themes of death and infidelity. “Rabbit at Rest” is a long short story, a novella. As such, it begins in medias res, with the unexpected intrusion of Annabelle Byer, Ruth and Harry’s illegitimate daughter, on the lives of Janice, now remarried Harrison, and Nelson. The initial scene portraying Janice’s stunned denial introduces the theme of Annabelle’s painful integration in the family through Nelson’s unwavering support.

The Rabbit novels and a novella are neither cerebral nor restrained. On the contrary, Updike rather mischievously takes pleasure in challenging the respectability of his readers. His Rabbit novels and the novella have traditional plots. Following the precipitating incident tension rises as the characters become entangled in further occurrences until the climax is reached followed by the unraveling of the plot and a resolution in the form of an open ending. The latter was a specialty of Updike's series leaving the creator of Rabbit a possibility to proceed with the saga every ten years. Each novel has a protagonist and an antagonist; beginning with *Rabbit, Run*, they are as follows: Rabbit – Janice; Rabbit – Janice; Rabbit – Nelson; Rabbit – Nelson. The role distribution in the last Rabbit text is not so obvious; the protagonist is undoubtedly Nelson, the role of the antagonist, however, appears to be divided between Janice and Nelson's stepfather Ronnie Harrison.

According to Gelder, another important criterion to distinguish between a literary and a popular novel is the degree of formal artistry incorporated in a text. The less there is, the more likely the text will be a popular one. How about the Rabbit saga? On the surface, Updike's texts do not appear artistic. A not-too-observant reader may easily get carried away by the profane language used by the narrator especially in parts dealing with sexual matters. A close study of Updike's language, however, discloses a completely different picture. I have selected examples to illustrate the above thesis from the four novels and the final novella.

*Boys are playing basketball around a telephone pole with a blackboard bolted to it. Legs, shouts. The scrape and snap of Keds on loose alley pebbles seems to catapult their voices high into the moist March air blue above the wires. (Rabbit, Run 3)*

The opening sentences of *Rabbit, Run* testify to Updike's high artistry. His selection of words is clearly premeditated. Italicized letters indicate his use of alliteration or assonance, underlined ones specify his use of sibilance. The arrangement of sounds is done in such a way as to create an auditory image – to mimic the sounds of shuffling feet on the ground, the spontaneous cries of players and the bouncing of the ball. The above is underscored by the use of an ellipsis – “Legs, shouts” – as well as a synecdoche (“Keds”).

Though her wild heart bathes the universe in red, no spark kindles in the space between her arms; for all of her pouring prayers she doesn't feel the faintest tremor of an answer in the darkness against her. Her sense of the third person with them widens enormously, and she knows, knows, while knocks sound at the door, that the worst thing that has ever happened to any woman in the world has happened to her. (265)

The above scene represents the first novel's major climax: Janice has accidentally drowned the baby Rebecca. The first sentence is a metaphor that stands for Janice's endless fear; it is magnified by the use of a synecdoche (“wild heart”) and a personification (“the wild heart bathes the universe”). The second metaphor – “no spark kindles in the space between her arms” – denotes the absence of any vital sign from the baby she is holding in her trembling arms. “The darkness against her” is

a figure of speech showing her panic and absence of hope; “the third person” she instinctively senses represents God. The power of metaphorical language is underscored by the studied display of alliteration, word repetition (italicized in the text) and sibilance (underlined).

Men emerge *pale* from the little *printing plant* at four sharp, ghosts for an instant, blinking, until the *outdoor light* overcomes the look of constant *indoor light* clinging to them. In winter, Pine Street at this hour is *dark, darkness* presses down early from the mountain that hangs above the stagnant *city* of Brewer, but now in summer the granite curbs starred with mica and the row houses differentiated by speckled bastard sidings and the hopeful small porches with their jigsaw brackets and gray milk-bottle boxes and the sooty ginkgo trees and the baking curbside cars wince beneath a *brilliance* like a frozen explosion. (*Rabbit Redux* 3)

The second Rabbit novel begins with a lyric descriptive passage of an ordinary setting, the immediate surroundings of the printing plant that gives work to Rabbit and his father. Updike evokes the physical sensations the laborers experience upon release from the artificially lit building at four o’clock in the afternoon. In a metaphor he likens them to ghosts unused to daylight. The long second sentence juxtaposes two aspects of the same street, one in winter and another in summer. The opposition of “dark, darkness” and “brilliance” is reinforced by the use of personification in the former and simile in the latter. Darkness is personified as pressing down and the mountain “hangs above” an equally personified “stagnant” city of Brewer. The summer section of the sentence consists of five clauses or complex nouns linked in a polysyndeton by means of the connective “and”; in combination with cacophony (“granite curbs”, “speckled bastard sidings”, “jigsaw brackets”, “milk-bottle boxes”, “sooty ginkgo trees”, “baking curbside cars”, “frozen explosion”), and fortified by personification (“hopeful small porches”, “cars wince”), alliteration, assonance and sibilance, the passage brings to mind desolation and hopelessness.

Running out of *gas*, Rabbit Angstrom thinks as he stands behind the summer-dusty windows of the Springer Motors display room watching the *traffic* go by on Route 111, *traffic* somehow thin and scared compared to what it used to be. (*Rabbit Is Rich* 3)

A door down below slams, not on the *side* of the house he can see. The voice *sounds* a high note we use in speaking to pets. Rabbit retreats behind an apple sapling too small to *hide* him. In his avidity to see, to draw closer to that mysterious branch of his past that has *flourished* without him, and where *lost* energy and *lost* meaning still *flow*, he has *betrayed* his *big* body, made it a target. (113)

*Rabbit Is Rich* opens with a meaningful sentence that hides both literal and symbolic meaning. Carter-era America is running out of gasoline but also of its vital force, stamina. The same goes for Rabbit. By means of repetition, alliteration and sibilance,

Updike created a powerful visual (summer-dusty) and auditory image suggestive of the swishing sound that passing cars make on a highway.

The second excerpt discloses Rabbit on his spying mission in the vicinity of Galilee, Pennsylvania in an attempt to catch a glimpse of Ruth or his illegitimate daughter. In his agitation, Rabbit's sensitivity is heightened, he is fearful that someone might see him. Alliteration is used to underscore the key words, assonance gives the passage a certain degree of musical quality, and sibilance highlights the anxiety of the moment.

The terminal when it shows up at last is a long low white building like a bigger version of the sunstruck clinics – dental, chiropractic, arthritic, cardial, legal, legal-medical – that line the boulevards of this state dedicated to the old. You park at a lot only a few steps away from the door of sliding brown glass: the whole state babies you. Inside, upstairs, where the planes are met, the spaces are long and low and lined in tasteful felt gray like that cocky stewardess' cap and filled with the kind of music you become aware of only when the elevator stops or when the dentist stops drilling. (*Rabbit at Rest* 4)

The excerpt from the introductory chapter of the fourth Rabbit novel displays Updike's mastery in the use of simile: the terminal is like one of the many clinics for the old, the upstairs hall is lined in the same kind of cloth as the stewardess's cap, the airport music is like elevator music or the kind played in a dentist's office. The alliteration, a repetition of the wailing "l" sound in words "at last", "long", "low" emphasizes the melancholic thoughts and feelings of the aging and ailing protagonist. The clinics are personified as being "sunstruck" – and presented in a cacophonic sequence without any conjunction – an asyndeton. As in previous examples, Updike makes abundant use of alliteration, assonance, word repetition and sibilance all of which highlights the gloomy atmosphere.

Janice Harrison goes to the front door when the old bell scrapes the silence. Decades of rust have all but destroyed its voice, the thing will die entirely some day, the clapper freezing or the wires shorting out or whatever they do. ("Rabbit Remembered", *Licks of Love* 177)

Nelson's deep-socketed, distrustful eyes dart back and forth as he listens. Listening is part of what he does for a living, and he lets them talk while he fishes a Coors from the refrigerator. (219)

Annabelle looks around, afloat in this family simmer. Her own family, in her recollection, took life from her brothers as they grew and brought back pieces of the world – games played, skills mastered, sayings and songs – but her mother was an overweight recluse and Frank stingy with words, running his buses to bring in cash, like all farmers feeling left behind and exploited. (290)

The excerpts are from "Rabbit Remembered"; the first one is from the very beginning, where the stunned reader meets Janice remarried to late Rabbit's arch enemy.



Although the narrator does not use the words “old” and “old age”, this is precisely what his meticulously selected vocabulary, reinforced with alliteration, assonance and the repetition of “or,” wants to put across. Updike also uses personification (the old bell being very old will die in the near future) to bridge the gap between *Rabbit at Rest* where Rabbit dies and the present story where Rabbit’s ghost still hovers about. One wonders if maybe the phrase “will die entirely” alludes to the possibility of Rabbit’s ghost being expelled one day, of it being put to rest for all times. The second excerpt shows Rabbit’s son Nelson as he is being told about his half-sister’s existence. There is something unpleasant about him; instead of saying it in so many words, Updike uses a sequence of harsh sounding words (“deep-socketed, distrustful eyes dart”) reinforcing the effect with alliteration, word repetition and the repeated use of “r” sound. The last example shows Annabelle’s failed attempt at integration in the family at Thanksgiving. The metaphor – “afloat in this family simmer” – points to the fact that she has not been included yet. The narrator goes on using conventional metaphors – brothers “brought back pieces of the world” and step-father was “stingy with words” – stressing the key words by means of alliteration, assonance and relying on the reader’s perception of repeated successive “r”.

As a poet Updike was sensitive to the relationship between written word and sound. De Bellis names the reasons why Updike’s poetry failed to reach wide readership as well as critical attention – namely his extraordinary production of prose, his initial adherence to light verse to be followed by deeper, philosophical poems only later on and his preference for the traditional poetic forms that were considered anachronistic (339). We should bear in mind, however, that the world he observed with the poet’s eye was the same observed by Updike the novelist and short story writer. “To Updike, the impulses for poetry and fiction are similar (...) the wellsprings of poetry and fiction are very much the same,” confirms De Bellis (337). He quotes Sylvia Plath (*Conversations with Updike*) who claimed the poet’s chief impulse was to create “something live that surfaces out of language [that] brings a formal element without which nothing happens, nothing is *made*” (qtd. in De Bellis 337). Updike’s poetry has not been given the kind of consideration it deserves. Consequently, the lyrical quality of his prose has not been given appropriate attention either.

In the introduction to *Picked-Up Pieces*, his 1975 collection of prose, Updike said, “Try to understand what the author wished to do (...) Give enough direct quotation (...) of the book’s prose so the reviewer’s reader can form his own impression (...)”. I hope the above quotations from the Rabbit series prove my case, namely that Updike’s lyrical prose surpasses the quality of so-called “pleasure books”. Updike’s Rabbit sequence is not elitist and it does not meet most of the criteria for high literature as proposed by Gelder. Should it therefore be considered popular literature? By no means. I believe we need to adapt the criteria to modern times. The Rabbit series treats important universal themes, this being one of the basic criteria to define high art that should be taken in consideration. A very high degree of formal artistry is what makes literature unnecessarily elitist. High literature or not, most readers still read novels to enjoy them and not to exercise their cerebral skills. Updike’s capacity for observation of the tiniest detail of modern life rendered in beautiful artistic language, his well-drawn and credible characters, his well-made and not-too-complex plots, his experimentation with the film

techniques are just some of the qualities that have placed this unsurpassed chronicler of the 20<sup>th</sup> century America among its greatest writers.

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## THE BLENDING OF FACT AND FICTION IN THREE AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY (CRIME) NARRATIVES

*Leonora Flis*

### Abstract

The article focuses on narratives that can best be classified as documentary novels. Such narratives can frequently depict deviant crimes. The selected texts are taken from three different decades, as the study intends to determine if/how the perception of crime and, consequently, its depiction in verbal narratives change through time, and moreover, to examine the attitudes of different writers towards facts (empirical reality) that they depict. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965), Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* (1979), and John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil: A Savannah Story* (1994) are all instances of crime narratives that blur and thus problematize the (often thin) line between fact and fiction, and, as a result, raise issues that concern genre theory. These texts embody characteristics of journalistic, historical, (auto)biographical, and fictional accounts, and continually oscillate on the scale of factuality or fictionality.

**Key words:** crime novel; factuality; fictionality; documentary novel; literary journalism

### THEORETICAL OUTLOOK – THE DOCUMENTARY (NONFICTION) CRIME NOVEL

In the United States, strong affinity towards nonfiction narratives, in particular towards true crime stories, has been documented since the 1960s. In his *New York Times* article “Murder, They Wrote” Richard Levine notes that since Truman Capote published *In Cold Blood*<sup>1</sup> in 1965, nonfiction books on killings have proliferated: “There has been a steady stream of best-selling nonfiction books about murder. With much ‘postmodern’ fiction eschewing the plot-centered pleasures of the traditional novel in favor of more self-absorbed concerns, real-life murder books have stepped in to fill a void” (1986: 90). Moreover, writers of murder narratives (not only American) generally agree that notable storytelling possibilities of real-life murders have ignited their initial interest in the genre. Many of those writers also confess that it was their reading of *In Cold Blood*, a story of a brutal murder of a wealthy Kansas farmer Herbert Clutter, his wife and two

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<sup>1</sup> The book was translated into Slovene already in 1967 by Maila Golob; the Slovene title reads *Hladnokrvno*.

of their children, that first showed them how techniques of fiction could be used to tell true stories about real people.

The term “nonfiction novel” was not given wide recognition (in fact, it hardly existed within the canon of literary terms), until Capote confidently bestowed this classification on his work *In Cold Blood*. The 135,000-word story first ran in parts in four consecutive issues of *The New Yorker*, beginning with September 25, 1965 issue. When Random House published it in the book form as *In Cold Blood*, it signified the arrival of a new form called the nonfiction novel.<sup>2</sup> Another term, describing the same literary phenomenon/genre, has gradually made its way into literary studies’ terminology database – the documentary novel.<sup>3</sup>

Documentary crime novels should not be equated with crime fiction that has no reference to real-life events. They differ from historical accounts as well, namely, in their application of novelistic techniques and clearly noticeable aesthetic emplotment (structuring) of the depicted events. However, we should certainly not overlook the resemblance between documentary novels and texts that are classified as literary journalism. Let us recall that initially literary journalism<sup>4</sup> was termed New Journalism<sup>5</sup> and New Journal-

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<sup>2</sup> Capote went to great lengths when he was “preparing the ground” for his novel. His diligence is truly hard to match and many writers of nonfiction novels do not pay as much attention to the tiniest of details as Capote did. The composing of *In Cold Blood* was in progress between November 1959 and April 1965. During that time, Capote’s energies were almost exclusively devoted to the investigating of the murder of the Clutter family from Kansas. He collected enough notes to fill a small room, and then carefully sifted through them. His research amounted to about six thousand pages of interviews, including extensive testimony from the killers themselves. It took an immense, devastating emotional toll on the author. In one of the interviews, after the book’s publication, Capote said the following: “If I had know what that book was going to cost in every conceivable way, emotionally, I never would have started it, and I really mean that” (Reed 1981: 31; originally taken from the article/interview “Literary Horizons—The Story of an American Tragedy,” *Saturday Review*, 22 Jan 1966: 37).

<sup>3</sup> There are many terminological inconsistencies when it comes to the phenomenon of the nonfiction or documentary novel. Some scholars prefer the term *faction*. Alex Haley came up with this term for his work *Roots* (1976). He called the book *faction*, denoting a fusion of fact and fiction. Some point to close resemblance between the nonfiction novel and historiographic metafiction (e.g. Linda Hutcheon, who sees as the main point of congruence between the two narratives their inclination towards metafictionality and provisionality). In Latin America, the term *testimonio* novel appeared, for example. Finally, there are studies which simply see the documentary novel as an example of a historical narrative. Nancy Pedri in her dissertation *Factual Matters: Visual Evidence in Documentary Fiction* (2001) puts an equation between New Journalism, literary journalism, and the documentary novel (57). Moreover, John Hellmann (*Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction*, 1981), sees the new type of journalistic writing as “an important response to the dislocations of the contemporary American experience” (ix), and believes that the terms nonfiction novel and New Journalism can be used synonymously, as they denote one and the same phenomenon. Slovenian scholar and journalist Sonja Merljak Zdovc in her dissertation on Tom Wolfe and New Journalism understands the nonfiction novel as a subcategory of literary journalism. She divides the latter into narrative journalism and nonfiction novels. She points out the difference between texts that are published like journalism articles in magazines and newspapers and texts published in a book form. Both is literary journalism, but the texts differ in terms of length and the writers’ research methodology (Merljak Zdovc 2004: 9).

<sup>4</sup> Literary journalism is a term that is broader in regard to its temporal aspect, if compared to the term New Journalism. It denotes the same journalistic-literary phenomenon, but it is not limited solely to the texts created in the 1960s and the early 1970s in the United States.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Wolfe, whose name is normally used in reference to New Journalism’s birth, reports the following in the anthology *The New Journalism* (1973), which he co-edited with E.W. Johnson: “In the early 1960s, a curious notion, just hot enough to inflame the ego, had begun to intrude into the tiny confines of the feature statusphere. It was in the nature of a discovery. This discovery, modest at first, humble in fact, deferential,

ism has the same re-emergence point<sup>6</sup> as the documentary novel – the 1960s. In addition to temporal synchronicity, the method of using truth-claims and mixing them with the subjective, interpretative approach represents a significant point of congruence between literary journalism and the documentary novel. Nevertheless, while the documentary novel allows fluctuation between imagination and documentary data, literary journalism claims to stay strictly within the reign of truth. Another noteworthy characteristic of a documentary crime narrative is also the fact that the reader usually knows some of the facts in advance. Normally, these facts are limited to the information that is available to the public through the mass media. Kenneth Reed calls this characteristic a kind of “dramatic irony where the reader is mostly aware of the crime and the perpetrators” (1981: 113). (This can well happen with literary journalism as well, as there may be, due to writing strategies that differ from conventional journalism, a substantial lag between the publication of literary journalism articles and other – immediate – reports in the media on a specific event.)

Documentary novelists are inclined to treat historical data as working material without being burdened with the presupposition of its fixed, unchangeable, or ultimate nature. Such awareness of the representational nature of history, of its dependence on the ways of fiction is not only a characteristic of novelistic writings but also of literary journalism. However, as previously observed, a literary journalist is, at least in theory, dedicated to presenting the truth. He should not succumb to inventing, but selection and interpretation (emplotment) undoubtedly still take place. As John Scaggs notes, “no telling or repetition of history is pure fact, free of individual perception, interpretation, or selection” (2005: 123). In fact, a historical record in itself is a discursive entity, offering “a re-presented, thoroughly selective account of what actually happened” (Cobley 2003: 30).

Like a (literary) journalist, a documentary novelist depends on documentary data, but simultaneously, he possesses greater narrative freedom and has the ability to manipulate the facts and thus gain control over the shock and the scandal his writing depicts; he can more freely shape the formlessness and the ambiguities of the past and the present in accordance with his own desires. In *Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction Over the Edge*, Daniel W. Lehman states that “nonfiction can produce both a disquieting effect *and* a promise of formal control that releases that anxiety” (1997: 121). Nonetheless, the documentary novel is a narrative in which the documents or the truth-claims

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you might say, was that it just might be possible to write journalism that would ... read like a novel. *Like* a novel, if you get the picture. This was the sincerest form of homage to the Novel and to those greats, the novelist, of course” (9). Furthermore, Wolfe explained that he had no idea who had coined the term new journalism, or even when it was coined. He writes: “Seymour Krim tells me that he first heard it used in 1965 when he was editor of *Nugget* and Pete Hamill called him and said he wanted to write an article called ‘the New Journalism’ about people like Jimmy Breslin and Gay Talese. It was late in 1966 when you first started hearing people talk about ‘the New Journalism’ in conversation, as best as I can remember. I don’t know for sure. [...] To tell the truth, I’ve never even liked the term. Any movement, group, party, program, philosophy or theory that goes under a name with ‘New’ in it is just beginning for trouble. [...] New journalism was no movement. There were no manifestos, clubs, salons, cliques; not even a saloon where the faithful gathered. At the time, one was aware only that all of a sudden there was some sort of artistic excitement in journalism, and that was a new thing in itself” (23).

<sup>6</sup> The stories that combine facts and imagination are hardly a new phenomenon, and have a considerable past in the history of Anglo-American literature – Defoe, Dickens, Twain, and later, Dreiser, Dos Passos, Doctorow, and Styron could well fit this profile.



that it introduces retain an undeniable connection to extratextual reality, and hence the narrative requires its readers to adopt a set of reading conventions that differ from those used in reading fictional texts. In her dissertation *Factual Matters: Visual Evidence in Documentary Fiction*, Nancy Pedri observes that “documentary fiction asks readers repeatedly to shift referential criteria from the internal coherence of the fictional text to the external correspondence with the factual world; in this way, its truth-claims are asserted” (2001: 5).

Novelization or subjectivization of literary journalism as well as journalization or objectivization of the novel can both be interpreted as essential characteristics of the sort of narrative evolution that Mikhail Bakhtin talks about when discussing the fluid and indeterminable nature of the novel. In *Dialogic Imagination* he notes that from the very beginning the novel occupied the zone of “direct contact with inconclusive present-day reality” (1981: 39). Personal experience and free creative imagination lie at its core. Bakhtin views the novel as a literary form that is completely free, non-canonical, and constantly changing and finding new expressive means. John Hartsock in *A History of American Literary Journalism* (2000) therefore talks of the “Bakhtian novel,” as a narrative form that stands in opposition to the traditional canonical novel. Bakhtin, in a way, transported Einstein and his relativity theory into the literary realm and thus aestheticized relativity. “By directing relativity into the aesthetic, Bakhtin ushered the literary universe into the twentieth century” (Stone 416).

As pointed out, the documentary novel has a fluctuating nature. It oscillates between life-writing on the one hand (memoirs, auto-biographical texts, travel narratives, historical texts, as well as journalism), and fiction narratives on the other hand (texts ranging from realistic to postmodernistic). It is a dual (bi-referential) narrative; it is, as Mas’ud Zavarzadeh puts it in *The Mythopoeic Reality: Postwar American Nonfiction Novel*, an enactment of a “yes-and-no situation” (1976: 227). As opposed to the modernist poetics, which does not support oscillation between life and art, or the existence of the fictional and the factual within the same work (such vacillation is regarded as a sign of lack of artistic control), the postmodern approach allows the existence of two fields of reference within one single text, namely, the internal world of the narrative, “which enjoys the aesthetic control of the verbal arts in general,” and the external reality with its experiential aspect, “which possesses the authority of reality” (Zavarzadeh 1976: 77). I believe that appreciating truth-claims and narrative strategies used in documentary fiction, requires a line of reasoning and a way of reading that is not restricted to either fictional or nonfictional generic contract. A special contractual relationship between the writer and the reader regarding the narrative’s truthfulness or lack of it needs to be established.

## ON THE PRACTICAL SIDE

In Capote’s (*In Cold Blood*), Mailer’s (*The Executioner’s Song*<sup>7</sup>), and Berendt’s (*Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*<sup>8</sup>) narratives – which all revolve around crime/

<sup>7</sup> The book was translated into Slovene by Ana Padovan in 1982; the Slovene title is *Krvnikova pesem*.

<sup>8</sup> The novel has not been translated into Slovene yet.

murder – we observe specific constitutive domains that we associate with fiction (e.g. domains of characters, events, points of view and time). However, the large quantity of truth-claims in their accounts obliges the reader to interpret the position of these narrative hybrids (or fictions) vis-à-vis alternative (real) world constructions. Their texts openly lay claims to the actual world. There is a difference, though, between Capote, on the one hand, and Mailer and Berendt, on the other. While Mailer and Berendt admitted the presence of the fictional component in their narratives, Capote maintained his claim of having recreated the Kansas murders with complete accuracy. Yet all three texts display a fuzzy or transitory line between the fictional and the nonfictional. It often happens that readers (for simple reasons of convenience, such as stacking books at a library or in one's own home, for instance) draw the divides themselves, and thus (seemingly) avoid narrative ambiguity. In order to shun such forced classification, we can simply view a particular hybrid narrative as an instance of syncretic discourse that is marked by constant (generic) oscillation and accept it as such.

Postmodern documentary novelists (and usually their readers as well) know that there is no final truth, no definitive answer, hence they do not assume that they can give (or get) one. Generally, both the narrator and the reader are aware of the unreliability of the verbal traces of empirical reality in the narrative. They are aware of the fact (explained in great detail in Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, 1983-85, for example) that the activity of producing a verbal representation of some part of the past in a text is always rhetorical, and therefore interpretative. This is the principal philosophy or strategy of narrating in *The Executioner's Song* (1979) as well as in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1994). Faithful representations of factual evidence are always coupled with assertions that attest to the prominent role of subjectivity in organizing, understanding, and imposing meaning on them. Nancy Pedri explicates: "The joining of the nonfictional with the fictional highlights not only their differences, but also their collaboration in the attainment of truth – a truth that is necessarily factual and poetic" (2001: 48, 49).

In the Afterword to *The Executioner's Song*, Mailer made it clear that he had tried his best to give a factual account of the selected events, but, at the same time, he also stated that he had told the story of the killer Gary Gilmore<sup>9</sup> as though it were a novel. He tried to tell the story as accurately as he could, but "that does not mean it has come any closer to the truth than the recollections of the witnesses" (*The Executioner's Song*, 1051). In a live online interview for Bill Thompson's show *EyeOnBooks*,<sup>10</sup> John Berendt stressed that in *Midnight* he had assumed certain story-telling liberties, used pseudonyms, and changed the timing of the events a bit, which, as he admitted, caused some confusion, especially because of a note on the cover of the book classifying *Midnight* as a work of nonfiction. He, like Mailer, did not attempt to compose a completely accurate picture of the Savannah events, for Berendt is well aware that we only learn about the

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<sup>9</sup> Gary Gilmore robbed and murdered Max Jensen, a Sinclair gas station employee in Orem, Utah on July 19, 1976. The next evening, he robbed and murdered Bennie Bushnell, a motel manager in Provo. Gilmore was the first man to be executed after the U. S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976. He refused all appeals to which he was legally entitled.

<sup>10</sup> Listen to Bill Thompson's interview, Bill Thompson's Eye on Books, 2006. 3 May 2008 <<http://www.eyenbooks.com/ibphp?ISBN=1594200580>>.

past thorough textualized remains, and they in themselves are incomplete, fragmentary and, in many cases, deeply subjective (diaries, memoirs, letters, ...).

With his journalistic reports as well as longer narratives, Mailer gained a reputation for being a lucid critic of the national scene and a prophetic national commentator. In *The Executioner's Song*, he showed that he could be such an observer without the personal references that characterize most of his earlier nonfiction (including the Pulitzer Prize winning book *The Armies of the Night*, 1968). Moreover, he was convinced that there is no history without nuance.<sup>11</sup> The concern for nuance and the rejection of fact underlie Mailer's "engaged reportage, a literary form closer to the novel than traditional journalism" (Merrill 1992: 84). It was the novel that Mailer considered as genre *par excellence*, and he more or less consistently insisted on the pre-eminence of his novelistic mission. He argued at every opportunity that his longer nonfiction accounts should not be confused with factual journalism.<sup>12</sup>

Mailer had a notable tendency to sneak into his stories, to become a literary character, a part of the narrative (narrated) world. However, in his book on Gary Gilmore's murders, he sets himself aside; not by putting up a mask, but by feeling his way into the minds of his characters. In an interview in 1981, Mailer stated that he was not as interesting to himself as he used to be and that was supposedly one of the reasons why he omitted his immediate presence from the narratives (Dickstein 2002: 160). What is more, to write about Gilmore in Mailer's usual style would have risked the accusation of inflating Gilmore rhetorically; the nature of the story required a faster narrative movement than many of Mailer's earlier books. Mailer felt very humble in the face of his mysterious materials and did not think he had "the right to generalize" (Merrill 1992: 157). In other words, in *The Executioner's Song* Mailer as the author disappeared, so that the book could appear.

John Berendt's documentary novel is a first person narrative that has clear lyrical undertones and at times displays characteristics of gothic novels. Parts of *Midnight* can read like a true crime story, other times, Berendt's book – which is a collection of crazy people, cranks, and eccentrics – is reminiscent of a travelogue. Berendt's account, which became especially popular after the release of the movie in 1997 with the same title (directed by Clint Eastwood), would best be described as postmodern kind of *bricolage*, a syncretic narrative with frequent chapter breaks and a series of plots with many digressions. This true-crime tale that ignores traditional genre conventions is a

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<sup>11</sup> In *Miami and the Siege of Chicago: An Informal History of the Republican and Democratic Conventions of 1968* (1968), Mailer quotes a *New York Times* article on a demonstration (confrontation between white Republican delegates and black demonstrators in the Miami Beach's Fontainebleau Hotel) that he too was supposed to report about but he missed it, because he was in a restaurant. The *Times* report briefly mentioned "two white girls dressed in red and blue tights" who sang 'When Ronnie Reagan comes marching in'. But they couldn't interrupt the black protesters. Their leader shouted: "I may be black, but I am somebody. I may be poor, but I am somebody." Mailer regrets the fact that he missed the protests, but he also poses certain questions about the *NY Times* report: "Were the Reagan girls livid or triumphant? Were the Negro demonstrators dignified or raucous or self-satisfied?" He could not find those answers in the *Times* report and so he states: "It was a good story but the *Times* was not ready to encourage its reporters in the thought that there is no history without nuance" (see Frank Rich's article "How to Cover an Election," *The New York Review of Books*, 2008. 5 Oct 2009 <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/21411>>).

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed account on Mailer's view on the novel, see J. Michael Lennon's introductory study in the book *Critical Essays on Norman Mailer* (1986).

saga of an antiques dealer Jim Williams, who in 1981 shot his lover Danny Hansford in the historic Mercer House in Savannah. The murder as well as William's own (somewhat mysterious) death have been obsessing the Savannahians ever since. In Berendt's narrative, Jim Williams's life and death become a biography, a detective story, and a courtroom drama; fact and fiction effectively blend into multimodal faction.

Capote, on the other hand, still appeared to believe in the absolutist picture of the totalising reality at a time when the notions of fragmentation and decentralisation were flooding the practical and theoretical aspects of narrative discourse. For many critics *In Cold Blood* has presented the aesthetic and moral problems inherent in the task of representing empirical reality on the page. Reading Capote's own comments on what he wished to achieve in *In Cold Blood* in light of Derrida's shift away from linguistic stability (by declaring the connections between language and reality as arbitrary)<sup>13</sup>, makes the writer look almost reactionary. The key problematic aspect of *In Cold Blood* seems to be Capote's somewhat presumptuous claim that he had written a *totally* accurate account of events. Mailer never claimed that, nor has Berendt. In essence, Capote was striving for truth but facts got in the way.

By way of documentation and insertion of verifiable facts (names of persons, cities, hotels, etc.), Capote (in the vein of literary journalism) authenticates his narrative. Yet his account constantly displays the (bi-referential) tension between the factual and the fictional. Capote managed to capture the ambiguous (sometimes fiction-like) dimensions of the Kansas (Holcomb) reality well, especially loopholes in the legal system that concern capital punishment. Through dialogues, letters and testimonies, medical and legal documents that Capote diligently recounts, his narrative shows how equivocal judgements of truth and morality can be, how dependent truth is on a personal, subjectivized vision of reality, and how close to fiction it can be at times. In addition, even though Capote tried hard not to appear in the narrative, we can feel his somewhat biased stance on the Kansas tragedy. Capote places most of his attention on Perry Smith and structures his narrative around him. The writer's relationship with Perry was a rather personal one. Capote's lifelong friend, writer Harper Lee, explained that "every time Truman looked at Perry he saw his own childhood of disaffection and rejection" (De Bellis 1979: 534). That particularly influenced the story and caused the occurrence of mimetic lapses; the most serious discrepancies in the book are in one way or another connected with Perry Smith. A troubling deviation from the truth is for instance Capote's claim how Smith's last words were "I apologize," although none of the other reporters, editors, or wire-service representatives were able to confirm this claim.

Here are Smith's last words, as recorded in *In Cold Blood*:

I think it's a helluva thing to take a life in this manner. I don't believe in capital punishment, morally or legally. Maybe I had something to contribute, something. [...] It would be meaningless to apologize for what I did. Even inappropriate. But I do. I apologize (406).

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<sup>13</sup> Derrida sees language as a fluid system dependent upon internal self-reference. The linguistic instability that he refers to in fact extends to him challenging general theology – he suggests that the universe of meanings is not governed by an organizing force (logos) but rather by critical uncertainty and instability of meaning. See also Hugh Rayment-Pickard's *Impossible God: Derrida's Theology*, 2003.

The reader cannot or should not avoid noting such deviations from strictly factual mimesis (which the author claimed to have applied in full). Capote also changed certain personal names (this, however, could possibly be justified with ethical as well as legal concerns), and, even more importantly, there is the concluding cathartic graveyard scene that in reality never happened (the book's ending has frequently been described as somewhat cheap and sentimental).<sup>14</sup>

Zavarzadeh states that narrative omniscience in nonfiction novels is not such as one would normally find in works of fiction. The "documentary omniscience" is limited, or "empirical," in Zavarzadeh's terms (1976: 77). This denotes knowledge gained through research, and therefore it somewhat differs from the scope (nature) of the information the fiction novelist works with. However, Capote with his narrative stance sometimes transgresses the borders of the documentary novel, for he occasionally behaves like a know-it-all, God-like omniscient narrator in a traditional (realistic) fictional narrative. Even though Capote's tone tries to stay even and the *New Yorker*-ish detachment is certainly present, the writer could not distance himself entirely from the narrative. It seems erroneous to claim, as Jorge Luis Borges did, that *In Cold Blood* is "composed with an almost inhuman objectivity" (Zavarzadeh: 42). As much as Capote's omniscient narrator wants to stay out of the narrative and predominantly rely on research and factual data, he fails at times, because of the author's strong need to aestheticise, to reach a desired conclusion (a cathartic end).

Mailer in *The Executioner's Song*, on the other hand, achieved his (documentary) (semi)omniscience through the third-person narrative stance. Mailer managed to adopt a style of writing that was different from the usual insertion of his large ego into his tales. He kept his ego out of the story when writing about the psychotic Gary Gilmore, in order to go for the "great weight, mystery, and dignity of fact," as he explained (Beard 1985: 144). The result is an elaborate collage of scenes; it seems nothing at all is left out (nothing that actually happened, that is). Mailer did not come across the story until after it was over, and with the exception of his own interviews with surviving relatives and friends of Gary Gilmore, he was personally not involved in the Gilmore case. He does not pick only one character and follow him or her around for the duration of the book, as is customary for a typical figural narrative perspective.<sup>15</sup> Instead, Mailer constantly

<sup>14</sup> Many critics, literary scholars, as well as (amateur) readers have agreed that part four (last section) of Capote's book lacks the suspense of the other chapters because it is weighted down with too many details on the justice system and extraneous stories of other prisoners and their crimes. Furthermore, the concluding pages, like an old-fashioned novel, provide closure with information about various marriages, births, deaths, and other changes in the lives of all who played a part in the story. As proof of Capote's "condensation" of events, or rather, his emplotment of the narrative, Merrill lists the following features of the text: the regular alternation of sections dealing with the killers and their victims-to-be, the authorial comments, whereby Capote points up the impending catastrophe (Mr. Clutter heads home for the day's work "unaware that it would be his last"), the almost-complete suppression of Capote's role in the later events, and the relative brevity of his narrative, "which condenses 8000 pages of material into a book one-third the length of *The Executioner's Song*" (1992: 156). A different perspective is offered by John Hartsock – he interprets *In Cold Blood* as literary journalism. He makes a brief note on the invented scenes (which he does recognize as problematic): "Such are the temptations of a gorgeously affirmed subjectivity that slips into its own invention, and undoubtedly this will continue to be a problem that periodically surfaces in narrative literary journalism" (2000: 198).

<sup>15</sup> We talk about figural perspective when the story is told through the eyes of a third-person internal focaliser. The most typical examples of this narrative perspective are Franz Kafka's and Henry James's

shifts his perspective from one character to another, reports everything that a specific character sees and experiences, thus providing an elaborate picture of the given reality, composed of a multitude of individual views and visions.

The story is told by unidentified narrators who express their perspectives through a large cast of characters. The narrators “range freely in time and space, and knit several plot strands into a tremendous social tapestry” (Lennon 1986: 16). The real, the documentary for Mailer is precisely the hundreds of subjective accounts from which to build the story. Unlike Capote, Mailer does not construct *the* interpretation of events; instead, he offers what is made to *seem* like all the facts (limited omniscience), i.e., all the versions or interpretations of the events he describes.

Furthermore, by presenting each event from the point of view of a participant, the writer ensures that the texture of each episode resembles that of a novel. Mailer himself called the book a novel, because he was convinced it reads like one and he was right. He was working with a massive accumulation of second-hand information which can only be as accurate as the statements of the people who reported it, as Mailer himself expressed.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Mailer was convinced that absolute truth cannot be conveyed through any medium, as it does not exist. In a lecture at the University of Texas in Austin in 2006 he stated that “one cannot arrive at the truth; what one can arrive at is the semblance of the truth.” “The core of my belief is that the style you use when writing a book, the mode you use when writing a book, makes it fiction or nonfiction.”<sup>17</sup>

A similar view on portraying reality can be found in John Berendt’s book. Before Berendt embarked on his journey to and through Savannah to compose *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, he had already had 25 years’ experience as a journalist, including editing *New York Magazine* and writing a column for *Esquire*. According to the author’s own words, he wanted to write a true story that reads like fiction. However, in an interview with Michael Sims in August 1997, Berendt defined *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* as a work of nonfiction: “It’s a nonfiction novel. It’s got elements of travel, true crime, novel, all those things. Bookstores would have been sorely pressed to figure out where to put it. But fortunately they can put it on the bestseller shelves for now.”<sup>18</sup>

Berendt wanted to give his story a momentum; the book needed to have a rhythm of action, a distinct development arch. As an involved narrator, Berendt wanted to create pictures in the reader’s mind that are constantly changing, developing, moving. The author skillfully interweaves an entertaining first-person account of life in this isolated remnant of the Old South with the unpredictable twists and turns of a landmark murder case. The book, which clearly displays the author’s “storytelling liberties,” reads like a novel and the readers have many times wondered where the truth ends and fiction begins. In terms of genre, the best way to describe *Midnight* would be to label it a generically fluid narrative. Even though the narrative draws on traditional themes found

texts; we can observe the same practice in *The Executioner’s Song*, but Mailer’s narrative is unique in its usage of multiple focalisers.

<sup>16</sup> See *The Executioner’s Song*, 1051.

<sup>17</sup> See Alex Au, “Novelist Mailer Says Truth Hard to Portray,” *The Daily Texan Online* 13 Nov 2006. 1 Oct 2009. <<http://www.dailytexanonline.com/2.4489/novelist-mailer-says-truth-hard-to-portray-1.963464>>.

<sup>18</sup> See Michael Sims, “We Check in With John Berendt,” *BookPage.com* Aug 1997. 29 Jan 2007 <<http://www.bookpage.com/9708bp/firstperson1.html>>.



in William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, William Styron, and Alice Walker (namely, grotesque characters, gothic settings, North/South clashes, emblematic southern heroes and belles, racial ambiguities, etc.), it provides a typical postmodern generic hybridity: it joins together travel narrative, tourist brochure, detective fiction, (auto)biography, and a courtroom drama.

This is how Berendt expresses his intentions at the end of the second chapter titled "Destination Unknown":

An idea was beginning to take shape in my mind, a variation of my city-hopping weekends. I would make Savannah my second home. [...] I would inquire, observe and poke around wherever my curiosity led me or wherever I was invited. I would presume nothing. I would take notes (37).

Berendt's narrator often engages in self-reflexive questioning of documentation available to him and expects the reader to do the same. He is aware of the unreliability or instability of facts. However, the writer still needs to assure the reader that, despite the presence of different points of view and the element of subjective interpretation, he tries to describe the story as accurately as possible (Berendt does that by using court records, letters, and statements of witnesses, for example). Pedri observes that "only when the acknowledgements of multiple interpretations are accompanied by a faithful depiction of the document is there the creation of an aesthetic space where the reader is encouraged to take on the challenging role of interpreter" (2001: 64). For only in this manner "the interpretative acts of the narrator who passes judgment on the document's historical validity actually secure its referential frame for the reader" (Pedri 2001: 65).

Lastly, we need to point out the importance of plotting or emplotment (as a structural principle) in documentary crime novels. Intentional plotting is undoubtedly an apparent characteristic of documentary novels. The acts of selection and emplotment (i.e., the synthesizing of heterogeneous experiences into an intelligible whole), give a nonfiction text an aesthetic dimension. Closure, which is definitely an indispensable part of the narrative plot, probably represents one of the more problematic components of the documentary novel's design. As we have observed, Capote's novel surely transcended the conventions of journalism, since the writing has a structure which is a result of an aesthetic conception. A similar tendency is found in Mailer and in Berendt. Yet none of the selected books should be viewed as conventional fiction narratives, be they murder mystery novels, crime novels, or conspiracy tales.

When analyzing Capote's narrative, we observe that he applied a narrative technique or strategy that is supportive of the randomness of events that the book emphasizes. Capote focuses on the mysterious, elusive nature of the Holcomb murders and their consequences, yet, at the same time, the author tries to impose some sort of order on the puzzling reality. John Hollowell in "*In Cold Blood: The Search for Meaningful Design*" (1997) explores in detail the design of the book, which is, in his opinion, drawn to a large degree from detective Dewey's verbal world, because it strategically offers an explanatory framework for understanding the murders.<sup>19</sup> Dewey acts as the central intelligence, guiding the reader's integration of plot elements. "Dewey's role is

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<sup>19</sup> John Hollowell's essay was published in *Arizona Quarterly*, Autumn 1997: 97-115.

critical,” states Hollowell, “since his motives and desires allow readers to identify with the eventual capture and punishment of the suspects” (2). The scenes of the reconstruction of the murder, the confession, the trial, and of the execution (as mysterious and baffling as they look at times) are carefully constructed and divided in four major sections. Moreover, Capote inserts a redemptive ending and that imposes additional (and artificial) order on the narrative.

*The Executioner's Song* is a truly massive and macabre chronicle of life and death of Utah murderer Gary Gilmore. Mailer carefully edited and structured his text, but, as opposed to *In Cold Blood*, *The Executioner's Song* does not give any real closure or comprehensive conclusion about Gilmore's motives or drive behind his destructive force. The book is divided in two large sections (each subdivided into seven parts): Book One – Western voices, and Book Two – Eastern Voices. Together they make up a narrative comprised of forty-four chapters (each titled). The two sections are symmetrical in terms of structure and also of approximately the same length. The first book focuses on Gilmore's life after his release from prison,<sup>20</sup> his relationship with Nicole Baker, and the two murders he committed. The second part details the publicizing of the story and Gilmore's execution. Gilmore's psychosis and personal agonies described in Book One are echoed in (equally agonizing) public spectacle in Book Two. Mailer utilizes Gilmore to express his paranoid view of history as a system and to point to a frequently distressing and frustrating relation between private and public life in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike Capote, Mailer does not strive to console or fool the reader with a cathartic ending. In fact, the book ends with the description of a resigned Gilmore's mother, Bessy, who is ready to die herself: “If they want to shoot me, I have the same kind of guts Gary has” (1049). Mailer wants to stress that certain things or events in life, such as death and crime, for instance, are many times incomprehensible. Even the neat structure of the narrative that offers exceptionally detailed descriptions of all the major players in the story, as well as of the trial and its aftermath cannot completely unmask Gilmore and explain the numerous contradictions in him and the real motives behind his crimes. The reader is the one who is supposed to form his/ her own opinion on Gilmore and “judge” him accordingly.

As for John Berendt, he does not follow the actual sequence of events as diligently and in such detail as Mailer does, but he does, nevertheless, structure his narrative into a more or less cohesive whole. Berendt admits that he partly changed temporal ordering, because he wanted to make the story more dramatic. He aestheticizes, novelizes his account of the Savannah murder and he does not want to give a final or definitive resolution regarding the real motive behind Danny Hansford's murder. Moreover, he deliberately gives the death of Jim Williams an air of mystery. *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* more closely than the other two accounts resembles a (postmodern) mystery crime story.

In theory, the documentary novelist is not supposed to change or modify the plot in order to convey his own private vision through it. Zavarzadeh, for instance, is of the

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<sup>20</sup> Gary Gilmore spent eighteen out of twenty-two years between ages thirteen and thirty-five in prison for various offences and violations.

<sup>21</sup> For further reading on different dimensions of Gilmore's role in *The Executioner's Song*, see Patrick O'Donnel's book *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative*, 2000: 115.

opinion that we can only talk about a “plot” in the nonfiction novel if we choose “to describe the unfolding events of our own human lives as a cosmic ‘plot,’ designed to bring out some metaphysical meaning” (1976: 80). Practical examples, however, reveal elaborate, many times very intimately conditioned emplotment moves (selection and interpretation), propelled by the authors themselves and not only by some universal order of events in human lives. This is something that would not be acceptable in journalistic writings and clearly points to the difference between literary journalism and documentary novelism (especially the kind with an accentuated postmodernistic base).

In postmodern times, the rejection of the concepts of consistency, logocentrism, and determinable meaning denotes a move away from excessively constraining rational and aesthetic systems, whether of classical realism or modernism. What we have noticed in all the narratives discussed is that the subjectivity of the interpretative act in a way clashes with the neutrality and objectivity normally associated with factual narration and historical research. However, many contemporary (postmodern) historians as well as literary scholars agree that history and historiography are many times more a form of art than a strictly factual discourse. Moreover, postmodern documentary (true-crime) narratives normally do not aspire to be determinable in their presentation of reality; the authors question certainties about the self, the mind, and the ambient world. The detective-centered (moral and intellectual) authority is usually lost as well. Especially Mailer and Berendt write along those lines. If compared to Capote, they seem to be less selective, more inclined to amass the cases they describe than to shape them toward a single conclusion. What is more, they do not introduce a detective (or some other authoritative figure) who would guide the reader and be the source of unquestionable truths about the crimes. Capote, on the other hand, attempts to give his text a cathartic ending and his detective Dewey plays a crucial part in bringing the narrative to that point. The more we move into the postmodern, the more the superior or definitive explanatory framework in the narratives fades away. Such discourses openly raise questions about the nature of reality and the limits of knowledge. The final reasoning on the crimes and the motives behind them thus seems to be left to the reader.

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## FEAST OF FOOLS: THE CARNIVALESQUE IN JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE'S *A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES*

Julija Potrč

### Abstract

Despite the fact that the action in John Kennedy Toole's novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* has often been compared to a carnival, there is little that the main character, Ignatius Reilly, has in common with those participating in a true medieval carnival as described by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*. Ignatius tries to assert his superiority over others both with his speech and behavior, violating the principal rule of carnivalesque equality, and is aggressively opposed to sexuality, which was a deeply positive concept in the carnival culture, symbolizing fertility, growth, and new birth. A great source of humor in the novel is the difference between the highly educated speech used by Ignatius and the vernacular spoken by other characters. This difference was successfully transposed into Slovene by translator Nuša Rozman, who managed to capture the differences between social classes by using various degrees of colloquialisms and slang expressions, while opting to nevertheless transcribe the characters' speech in a way that is grammatically correct; a practice that has long been present in both original and translated Slovene literature, which highlights the fact that despite an increase in the number of works written in the vernacular over the past years, a universal standard on how to transcribe spoken Slovene has yet to be established.

**Key words:** Carnival, folk humor, carnivalesque laughter, New Orleans vernacular, literary translation

Unknown until 1980, when his comic masterpiece *A Confederacy of Dunces* was published after waiting for a publisher for over a decade and a half, John Kennedy Toole (1937-1969) attained recognition by being posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize the year following the novel's publication, and is now recognized as the author of one of America's "most widely read southern novels" (Haddox 2005: 168). Due to his premature death by suicide at the age of thirty-one, Toole never wrote anything after having completed his most celebrated work. In fact, he wrote his only other novel, *The Neon Bible*, at the age of sixteen and considered it too juvenile for publication during his lifetime, although the work was eventually published following the success of *Confederacy*, and even made into a feature film. However, it is the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, borrowing its title from a quotation by Jonathan Swift in his *Thoughts on Various Subjects, Moral and Diverting*, which has attracted most attention from



both readers and critics, and which, according to Nevils, had 1.5 million copies in print by 2001 (214).

Set in New Orleans, the novel follows the adventures of one Ignatius Reilly, a misfit and slob of colossal proportions, who at the age of thirty is forced by his alcohol-prone mother to leave the sanctuary of his room for the first time. Ignatius is a true anti-hero who would prefer to be scribbling a denouncement of the modern world and praising the orderliness of the Middle Ages to finding a job and assuming an active role in the society he has been so busily condemning—which is exactly what he is forced to do following his mother's car accident and the ensuing law suit. Unequipped as he is with the social skills required to function normally in everyday situations, Ignatius is whisked from one disaster to another and finds himself in situations which are at the same time both hilarious and sad. While taking up a series of low-paid jobs, first as a clerical worker in a disreputable pants factory and finally as a street vendor selling hot dogs, he crosses paths with an impressively wide array of characters of all ages, social positions, and professions, who together form a rich collage of life in New Orleans in the 1960s.

The very fact that the novel is set in New Orleans, a city widely known for its Mardi Gras celebrations, combined with the humorous tone of the book, the bizarre mishaps and misadventures of the main character, and the general tendency of the characters to be clad in costumes, naturally brings to mind the carnival as an appropriate term embodying the spirit of the work. Such descriptions of the plot as “a carnival of modern life” epitomized by “a krewe of Mardi Gras dunces” are therefore quite common when discussing the novel, both in academic and more general circles<sup>1</sup> (Simon 1994: 99). Critics are correct to stress the predominately carnivalesque aspect of this work, but, as we shall see, the world of Ignatius Reilly is only similar to a carnival on the surface; at its core it remains fundamentally different from the true carnival culture of the Middle Ages.

In his seminal work *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the concepts of folk humor, carnival culture, and grotesque realism by drawing heavily on François Rabelais' sixteenth-century tales of two giants, Gargantua and Pantagruel. In fact he goes as far as to call Rabelais' novel “the most festive work in world literature” (275). Rabelais was still very much in touch with the spirit of the carnival as an event implying freedom and festivity, in line with the long-standing carnival tradition in the area of Southern France where the writer lived, and his work therefore represents “perhaps the purest form of carnivalesque literature” (Horton 1999: 56). If the sixteenth century was truly “the summit in the history of laughter”, as Bakhtin claims, it becomes necessary to evaluate the carnivalesque in Toole's work against the yardstick of the medieval carnival, complete with its festive activities, the concept of universal laughter, and the language of the marketplace (101).

According to Bakhtin, the carnival “celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order” (10). The strict hierarchical organiza-

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<sup>1</sup> See Julian Gough's essay “Divine Comedy,” published in the May 2007 issue of the magazine *Prospect*, and Walker Percy's foreword to John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980; repr., London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995), v-vii, where the terms “*commedia*” and “gargantuan /.../ tragicomedy” are used to typify the work.

tion of society in the Middle Ages meant that people were well aware of the social caste they belonged to and the strict rules governing such that they had to conform to. Throughout most of the year they lived in fear of authority and were weighed down by constant prohibitions and limitations. In order for such a system to remain sustainable, there had to be certain periods in the year when the barriers of social class were let down and free laughter reigned—these periods were feasts and the carnival. It was almost as if people in the Middle Ages had two separate lives: normal life and carnival life, and as if two aspects of the world existed side by side in their minds, that of seriousness and of laughter (Bakhtin 1984: 96).

In *Confederacy*, the normal existential mode of the main character is idleness, a state completely devoid of any rules and prohibitions and one in which he feels comfortable. Ironically, Ignatius sees the Middle Ages as a period when western man enjoyed “order, tranquility, unity and oneness with its True God” and blames the moral degradation (as he sees it) of the modern world on the loss of these ideals (Toole 1995: 25). The very order for which Ignatius longs is one in which he is unable to function, as even such a relatively simple task as finding a low-paid job and keeping it proves too much of a challenge. Having been forced by his mother to leave the confines of his room, Ignatius is thrust into the unsuspecting world and left with no other option but to join the carnival of life around him.

Owing to his uncouth appearance, his haughty and often abusive attitude to those around him, and his sophisticated speech, Ignatius is soon labeled a madman. Darlene, an employee at a strip club, the Night of Joy, is quick to point out that Ignatius looks like “a big crazyman” (20). Jones, the black, underpaid porter at the same night club, characterizes Ignatius as “one-hunner-percen freak” and adds that he “sound like a crazy white mother” when talking to one of his friends who works at Levy Pants, where Ignatius is getting ready to spark a revolution (115). A similar reaction is heard from a group of ladies exhibiting their still life paintings, which Ignatius, dressed in his hot dog vendor regalia, mercilessly criticizes: “He’s mad. He’s so common. So coarse” (210). Similarly as the clowns and fools of the Middle Ages, who were not just actors playing their parts on the stage, but retained their role at all times and wherever they went, Ignatius also seems to trigger the same reaction wherever he goes; but unlike the clowns who provoked laughter, Ignatius only provokes scorn and contempt. The society does not embrace him, but views him as an unwanted element, one which is causing trouble and needs to be eliminated.

The greatest problem for Ignatius and the reason why others find it difficult, if not outright impossible, to accept him, is the fact that he perceives himself to be superior to others, and in doing so violates the fundamental principle of carnivalesque equality. In fact, nothing could be further from the true spirit of the medieval carnival. According to Bakhtin, whoever is addressing the crowd during a carnival “is one with the crowd; he does not present himself as its opponent, nor does he teach, accuse or intimidate it” (167). Ignatius does all of these things. When talking to the ladies exhibiting their paintings, he first accuses them of knowing nothing of art: “You women had better stop giving teas and brunches and settle down to the business of learning how to draw,” and then tries to impress on them that they “need a course in botany. And perhaps geometry, too” (210). He frequently takes on a hostile and aggressive attitude, as he does

with Myrna Minkoff, his old college acquaintance, whom he characterizes as “a loud, offensive maiden from the Bronx” and in every letter sent by her claims to find “some reference to the sleaziness of [her] personal life” (107, 157). Mockery in Toole’s work is not universal, it is derisive and expresses contempt. In medieval folk culture, praise was ironic and ambivalent, it was always on the brink of abuse and vice versa, so much so that it “was impossible to draw the line between them” (Bakhtin 1984: 165). There is nothing ambivalent in Ignatius’ abusive remarks; they are meant to establish his superiority and show others how inferior they are.

The humor of the work therefore does not stem from the characters’ awareness of their position in the world and from their ability to accept this position and adopt a carefree attitude towards it, as was the case with those participating in a medieval carnival. According to Bakhtin, carnivalesque laughter was “directed at the whole world, at history, at all societies, at ideology” (84). Further on, the culture of folk humor embraced all people and belonged to everybody; laughter was irresistible and could not be confined. In fact, the laughter of the carnival was so powerful that it completely overcame the fear instilled by the authoritarian figures; it was a true “victory of laughter over fear” (Bakhtin 1984: 90). This is far removed from the many embarrassing situations in which Ignatius either insults or criticizes others, situations that do not bring a smile to his face, and much less to the faces of his interlocutors. Indeed, instead of reveling in his adventures, Ignatius tries at every step to establish his authority and superiority. The only party able to laugh is the reader, who is acutely aware of the breach between the image of himself that Ignatius maintains, that of an intellectually superior human being who is perpetually right, and the way in which he is perceived by everyone else—an arrogant and pitiful lunatic.

The many inconsistencies between what Ignatius proclaims to be his ideals and his actual words and actions are quite striking, and also a superb source of humor. McNeil goes so far as to claim that Ignatius “epitomizes the very perversions against which he rages” (35). While he proclaims himself to be “the avenging sword of taste and decency”, Ignatius is actually the one who walks around dressed like “a performer of some sort”, in his green cap, lumber jacket, and suede boots, and his personal hygiene standards are so low that he receives a complaint from the Board of Health a few days after assuming a job as a hot dog vendor (Toole 1995: 213, 17). Moreover, while raging against the perversions and excesses of the modern age and advocating medieval asceticism, he obviously does not see it unfit to wolf down boxes of wine cakes and guzzle enormous quantities of Dr. Nut, his favorite drink. The same holds true for his moral standards: as Ruppensburg noted, Ignatius is exactly the opposite of the moral superiority he preaches (119). His motives are usually selfish and he can only think about how a certain action is going to affect him without considering other people—on a whim, he writes an offensive letter to a business associate of Levy Pants, which results in a law suit and jeopardizes the existence of the company and the jobs of its employees. In short, Ignatius behaves like a spoiled child.

However, it is difficult to perceive Ignatius in an entirely negative light. Despite often behaving in an arrogant and obnoxious manner, there is something about him which also makes him pitiful. With all his education, including a Master’s degree, Ignatius is still living with his mother in a small, run-down house in a suburb of New Orleans at

the age of thirty. He obviously does not have any friends, with the exception of Myrna Minkoff, and even she remains absent until the very end of the novel, when she appears in a *deus ex machina* fashion and whisks her college friend away to New York. Ignatius' superiority is merely a defense mechanism, the only way he knows how to cope with reality and to maintain a relatively respectable self-image. After all, he is convinced that it cannot be his fault that the world fails to recognize his brilliance and that, as a result, he is unable to find suitable employment. It is the fault of everyone else, of the dunces who are in a confederacy against him.

At least part of Ignatius' problem seems to be that he is over-educated, a fact which feeds his feelings of superiority and alienates him from the people around him. This is well noted by George, a truant teenager running shady errands for the proprietress of the Night of Joy, in describing Ignatius: "You could tell by the way that he talked, though, that he had gone to school a long time. That was probably what was wrong with him. George had been wise enough to get out of school as soon as possible. He didn't want to end up like that guy" (243-244). The same idea is also expressed by Mr. Robichaux, the elderly suitor of Mrs. Reilly: "Maybe your boy went to school too long" (175). In the Middle Ages, the representatives of institutions such as the church or the university system embodied authority and absolute truths. They took themselves very seriously and refused to laugh, considering all those who opposed them to be enemies of the eternal truth. Of course, this attitude is completely out of keeping with the carnivalesque spirit of equality and relativity. The main message of the carnival is that there are no eternal and divine truths, that the old order must always die to make way for a new, better order. However, these officials "do not see themselves in the mirror of time, do not perceive their own origin, limitations and end" (Bakhtin 1984: 213). Ignatius is just such a defender of scholastic truths, insisting that everyone should treat him with due reverence simply based on the fact that he personifies the old, established traditions exemplified by the university, and in doing so fails to see his own transience and the transience of the truths he is defending. By not being able to laugh at himself, he actually becomes the dunce he accuses everyone else of being.

Relativity was an especially important aspect of the carnival. For a brief time the differences between superiors and inferiors were eliminated and all hierarchies were cancelled, all classes and ages were equal. Bakhtin further points out that the very essence of the carnival was not "in the subjective awareness but in the collective consciousness of [the people's] eternity, of their earthly, historic immortality as a people" (250). An individual's fate was unimportant, it was the people or the crowd as a whole that mattered. When a person embraces the fact that he is just a minute element in the constant cycle of rebirth and regeneration, his own life is put into perspective and he becomes aware that he can take himself lightly, because ultimately an individual does not matter, it is the people collectively who matter. Ignatius is incapable of perceiving himself in this way. His everyday worries and frustrations occupy him so much that he is unable to see beyond them, unable to comprehend the laughable minuteness of his own existence and the relative unimportance of his life. The only relativity he does grasp is that of the upwards and downwards cycles of his own fate. True to his medievalist background, Ignatius believes "that a blind goddess spins us on a wheel" and that "our luck comes in cycles" (27). Upon finding out that he would have to get a job to pay off

the law suit following his mother's car accident, he reflects: "Oh, what low joke was Fortuna playing on him now? Arrest, accident, job. Where would this dreadful cycle ever end?" (42). Despite acknowledging that he is for the present moment caught in a bad cycle which will sooner or later pass and be replaced by a good cycle, Ignatius is incapable of recognizing the relative insignificance of the events which befall him in the spirit of folk culture and humor.

The carnivalesque relativity and ambivalence are also reflected on other levels. Much like praise has always been ambivalent and on the brink of abuse, so a genius has always been on the brink of becoming a fool. Indeed, there is a thin line between genius and insanity. Ignatius is so well educated that he considers himself to be a genius, while other people consider him mad. Bakhtin explains that one of the basic elements of folk culture was the reversal of hierarchic roles—at a carnival the jester was proclaimed king and "a clownish abbot, bishop, or archbishop was elected" (81). The reversal of roles is in fact an example of degradation, but degradation in this case does not mean something negative; on the contrary, it is a chance for rebirth, for a new beginning. The participants at a medieval carnival were aware that in order for something new to be born, something old must die. The decrowning of a king was therefore a joyous event, and even the person who was degraded or dethroned had no other option but to laugh along, embracing the universal spirit of regeneration. Ignatius, of course, fails to see this ambivalence and stubbornly persists in his role of a learned scholar, he refuses to cast his scholarly gown aside and become a part of the crowd. Until the very end, Ignatius takes himself and his role in life seriously.

Degradation also refers to the bodily level and should be taken quite literally, according to Bakhtin. It means coming down to earth; and earth is the element which swallows up and gives birth at the same time. But to degrade also means to deal with the lower stratum of the body, relating to acts of defecation, copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. The destructive principle is closely followed by the regenerative one (21). The carnivalesque body is always exaggerated. The same seems to hold true for Ignatius. His body is not only physically exaggerated because of his obesity; there is also a great deal of talk about various bodily functions because of his preoccupation with his body. Ignatius explains his health problems to anyone who will listen, including his employer at Paradise Vendors, Mr. Clyde. "My digestive system has almost ceased functioning altogether. Some tissue has perhaps grown over my pyloric valve, sealing it forever," he tells him (181). Ignatius exaggerates any health problem just to convince his listener of his suffering. When walking down the street he complains to his mother, "Will you please slow down a bit? I think I'm having a heart murmur." (7) However, in this case the body is presented as a single, self-sufficient entity and whatever happens within it concerns it alone; it is not the grotesque body of the carnival, which is "cosmic and universal", constantly being renewed and never finished (Bakhtin 1984: 318). For the grotesque body, disease and death represented a chance for a new birth, but in the case of Ignatius this universal and positive aspect is lost—his health problems only pose a threat and danger.

Ignatius does not think only about his health, he also constantly thinks about food. One of the first scenes of the book features Mrs. Reilly buying cakes for her son at a department store. And when working as a hot dog vendor some years later,

he manages to consume most of the products himself, which ultimately leads to his weight increasing even more and, of course, the dissatisfaction of his employer. Bakhtin stresses that feasting was part of every folk carnival and that it was included in all comic scenes. However, folk feasting in the Middle Ages was “a banquet for all the world in which all take part”, it was not confined to the house or to private rooms, but instead happened in a public place such as the marketplace (302). Moreover, feasting was a joyful and triumphant event, it was an occasion where man “triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself” (Bakhtin 1984: 281). There is nothing particularly joyful and triumphant in the way Ignatius devours two dozen jelly doughnuts, such that the cake box looks “as if it had been subjected to unusual abuse during someone’s attempt to take all of the doughnuts at once” (Toole 1995: 35). Ignatius’ bingeing sessions have nothing in common with the universal and merry character of medieval feasts; in fact, there is something infinitely sad about them, as Ignatius gorges on food in a futile attempt to overcome his loneliness, sadness, and sexual frustration.

Excessive eating also causes him to display other bodily actions such as belching and emitting gas. One such incident takes place when Ignatius offers hot dogs to ladies exhibiting their artworks and manages to belch violently during the uncomfortable silence that follows. When it suits him, Ignatius claims in a medieval spirit that the body with all its smells and sounds is something completely natural, responding to his mother when she is appalled by the smell of his room: “Well, what do you expect? The human body, when confined, produces certain odors which we tend to forget in this age of deodorants and other perversions” (41). Even Bakhtin tells us that images of food and drink are closely related to those of the grotesque body and procreation (279). However, this is yet another inconsistency between Ignatius’ words and deeds—in reality he is terrified of any physical contact and nothing scares him more than sexuality. This is completely out of keeping with the sexual role of the body in carnival culture, where sexuality represents fertility, growth, and new birth. During the carnival, the sexual aspects of the body must not be hidden and concealed but rather emphasized and honored. Ignatius cannot even stand the thought of touching another person, much less engaging in sex. When his mother informs him that her elbow has to be massaged because of her arthritis, Ignatius replies, “I hope you don’t want me to do that. You know how I feel about touching other people” (9). Later Mrs. Reilly suggests that her son should settle down with Myrna and have a baby or two, and Ignatius tells her, “Do I believe that such obscenity and filth is coming from the lips of my own mother?” (46). In failing to embrace sexuality, Ignatius fails to appreciate the very cornerstone of folk culture: regeneration, new birth, and growth.

Finally, we have to discuss perhaps the single greatest source of humor in *Confederacy*: the language spoken by the different characters. Toole was a master of reproducing local speech with all its colloquialisms and registers, ranging from the lingo of the black porter Jones, to the New Orleans dialect represented by Mrs. Reilly and her friend Santa Battaglia. In sharp contrast to them all is the academic and highly stylized speech of Ignatius. His manner of speaking is so grandiose that others often have a hard time understanding him. When organizing a protest rally at the Levy Pants factory, the black workers do not quite follow Ignatius’ address:



“Friends! /.../ At last the day is ours. I hope that you have all remembered to bring your engines of war.” From the group around the cutting table there issued neither confirmation nor denial. “I mean the sticks and chains and clubs and so forth.” Giggling in chorus, the workers waved some fence posts, broomsticks, bicycle chains, and bricks. “My God! You have really assembled a rather formidable and diffuse armory.” (118)

By maintaining a formal distance with his educated manner of speech, Ignatius once again asserts his superiority and places himself above his interlocutors. Such an attitude goes against the type of communication established during the period of the carnival, which was based on familiarity and permitted two people who had established friendly relations to address each other informally, and use abuses and mockery affectionately (Bakhtin 1984: 16). There is nothing affectionate about the abuses Ignatius unleashes on those around him; on the contrary, he does his best to not become friendly and familiar with others.

The many different variations of New Orleans vernacular as spoken by the characters from different social backgrounds undoubtedly prove to be one of the greatest challenges also for translators. The Slovene translation of Toole’s novel was published in 2007, twenty-seven years after *Confederacy* was first published in the USA, and joins a long list of translations of the novel into other languages<sup>2</sup>. It seems almost impossible to capture all the intricate nuances of the New Orleans dialect spoken by the characters from different ethnic groups (for example the black porter Jones and the Latino waitress selling drinks during the last episode in the Night of Joy) and from different social classes (the speech of upper-middle class Levys differs from the speech of lower-middle class whites, such as Patrolman Mancuso and Santa Battaglia). For historic reasons and due to Slovenia’s relatively mono-ethnic situation, it is hard to transpose the dialects spoken by ethnic groups and social classes in New Orleans into Slovene. Of course, different dialects could be used, but it would seem inappropriate to assign the various characters different Slovene dialects, for example the dialect of the Gorenjska, Primorska, and Štajerska regions, not only because *Confederacy* has a strong local character and all the people in it come from one city, but also because such a decision would leave readers wondering what characters from different regions of Slovenia were doing in New Orleans in the 1960s. There is also the problem of translating Ignatius’ academic diction, because in Slovene, despite the many foreignisms that normally permeate academic and scientific papers, the distinction between general written language and the language used by scholars and scientists is not as pronounced as in English, where numerous words of Latin origin can be effectively used to create the effect of scholarly discourse.

Translator Nuša Rozman solved these challenges well and introduced several effective solutions. She chose the neutral, written language as the basis of the translation (the characters do not speak any particular Slovene dialect), and sprinkled it with colloquial and informal expressions to an appropriate degree, depending on the speaker. For example, Mrs. Reilly and her friend Santa Battaglia, representatives of

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<sup>2</sup> See the biography written by Nevils, René Pol, and Deborah George Hardy *Ignatius Rising: The Life of John Kennedy Toole* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2001), which states that translation rights have been sold in twenty countries.

the lower-middle class of whites, speak a relatively neutral language in which indices such as short infinitive forms and spoken words are used every now and then to point to the unofficial character of their speech. On the other hand, the language of Jones, the black porter, includes more slang words, curse words, and expressions that could be characterized as ‘low colloquial’, emphasizing the fact that he comes from a lower social class. However, in keeping with an established tradition in Slovene translated literature<sup>3</sup>, Jones’ speech (for all its slang expressions and colloquial nature) is still written in a way that is grammatically correct—that is, the spelling is correct and the words are not contracted to reflect how characters from a lower social class truly speak, as is the case in Toole’s novel. Here is an example of Santa Battaglia’s speech in the original and in Slovene translation:

“Don’t be ashamed, babe. It ain’t your fault you’ve got a brat on your hands,” Santa grunted. “What you need is a man in that house, girl, to set that boy straight. I’m gonna find that nice old man ast about you.” (150)

“Nič naj ti ne bo nerodno, mila moja. Saj nisi sama kriva, če imaš razvajenega otročeta na skrbi. Ti rabiš moškega pri bajti, punca, da bo spravil v red tega poba. Našla bom tistega prijetnega starega gospoda, ki je spraševal zate.” (231)

Alongside the established contractions used to transcribe spoken English, such as ‘ain’t’ and ‘gonna’, Toole also uses omissions (“nice old man [who] ast about you”) and introduces new contractions (‘ast’ instead of ‘asked’) in order to remain as true to the characters’ vernacular as possible. While the Slovene translator opted for a perfectly valid and effective solution by using selected jocular and colloquial expressions (‘otročče’ and ‘pob’ for ‘brat’ and ‘boy’, respectively, and the word ‘bajta’, a colloquial expression for ‘house’) to reflect the overall tone of the text, the other option would be to attempt transcribing contracted forms, for example ‘nč’ for ‘nič’ and ‘maš’ for ‘imaš’, or forms that would otherwise reflect the vernacular used (‘sej’ for ‘saj’, ‘spravu u red’ for ‘spravil v red’, etc.) This becomes even more critical in Jones’ speech:

“Since we cuttin off the orphan chariddy and we not extendin it to the porter help, maybe we oughta give a little to a po, strugglin gal gotta hustle on commission. Hey!” (147)

“Če smo že nehali dajat vbogajme sirotam, ne da bi na ta račun malo pomagali čistilcu, bi mogoče lahko kaj padlo ubogi puncu na začetku kariere, ki mora gurat za procenete, mater duš!” (226)

As can be seen from the above quotation, Jones’ speech is very colloquial indeed. There is a marked difference in register between the original and the Slovene translation, with the former abounding in colloquial expressions, contracted words and omissions—almost every word is transcribed to reflect the actual vernacular of the black porter—and the latter predominately using standard literary language with some colloquial expres-

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the translation of William Faulkner’s short story “That Evening Sun” (*Beseda*, 1952/53), in which the black southern dialect of the character Nancy was translated into neutral, grammatically correct Slovene with occasional colloquial expressions.

sions ('gurat' for 'hustle' and 'mater duš!', an exclamation used to substitute 'Hey!'). Unlike with Santa Battaglia, where the vernacular is not as pronounced, translation of Jones' speech would benefit from using selected contracted words.

More radical attempts to transcribe real spoken language in original Slovene literature have appeared more frequently during the last decade or so<sup>4</sup>, but translators still seem to be hesitant about transcribing the vernacular in a way that would reflect the actual speech. In order to contrast the speech of such characters as Jones and Battaglia with the highly educated language spoken by Ignatius, Nuša Rozman has used literary expressions and foreignisms, but the difference between the general language of the narration and Ignatius' stylized speech is not as pronounced as it is in the English original, which is mainly due to the previously mentioned characteristics of written Slovene. Nevertheless, the translation captures the different registers, and, most importantly, retains the humor originating from the language used in the original text.

Ljubljana, Slovenia

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<sup>4</sup> See the novel *Fužinski bluz* by Andrej Skubic (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2001) and, most recently, the best-seller *Čefurji raus!* by Goran Vojnović (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2008).

## GENERATION X IN SLOVENIA(N)

*Romi Češčut*

### Abstract

Addressing themes of family, interpersonal relationships, historicity, jobs, religion, and apocalypse Generation X narrative includes works by young American writers in the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century. The search for one's identity in urban landscape is heavily influenced by mass media, pop culture and consumerism. Slovenian press and professional literature provided only scarce response to Generation X fiction which is also influenced by the ambiguity of the term Generation X and the essence of its culture and literature, which is also true for American literary criticism. The paper aims to explore the reception of novels by Douglas Coupland, Bret Easton Ellis, and Jay McInerney and their analyses with emphasis on narrative, themes of consumerism and mass media, characters, and style of writing.

**Key words:** Generation X, American generations, brat-pack, Douglas Coupland, Bret Easton Ellis, Jay McInerney

### I. GENERATION X FICTION

Generation X literature was mainly produced by the younger generation of American authors in the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century. The sole term 'Generation X', though itself ambiguous in essence and meaning, became widely used after the release of the first novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (1991) by Canadian writer Douglas Coupland. It is an account of three people that move to a Californian desert suburb to escape consumerism and pop culture, and tell each other stories to make their lives meaningful. The same year, the first film by a young American director, Richard Linklater, *Slacker*, with similarities to Coupland's novel introduced jobless young people that rejected the norms and rules imposed by society. As soon as media found the third phenomenon – a new kind of music, 'grunge', that expressed contemplation, looked for extremes and meaning of life beyond one's striving for success and profit, a stereotype about Generation X was born. Thus, Generation X became synonymous with a group of young people and later on with a whole demographic group born approximately between 1960 and 1980 in the USA.

So far, literary criticism has not provided adequate criteria for placing authors and works into the Generation X fiction. With the exception of Douglas Coupland, there has been partial agreement on the essence of Generation X as a term, demographic group, its literary characteristics and list of authors. My criteria for selecting Generation X authors and characteristics are based on the following critical thought: firstly, Eric Liu in the editorial to the first anthology on Generation X *Next: Young American Writers on the New Generation* (1994) believes that Generation X authors have the same and unique worldview, they are a “postboomer” generation, and know and understand media (Liu viii)<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, according to David Foster Wallace the “Conspicuously Young writers” share “the new and singular environment in and about which [they] try to write fiction” (Wallace 3) which is more important than the same age group<sup>2</sup>. Douglas Rushkoff, editor of the next anthology *The GenX Reader* (1994) stresses self-reference, self-reflexiveness and ironic distance of the works<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, James Annesley in *Blank Fictions* (1998) thinks the group does not represent a literary movement but a spirit of age reflecting an “atomized nihilistic worldview” (Annesley 3) with themes of sexuality, violence, media and consumerism (Annesley 1-2)<sup>4</sup>. Kenneth Millard in *Contemporary American Fiction* (2000) states that Generation X works “are self-consciously aware of their own status as market commodities, to be merchandised, advertised, promoted, packaged, and shifted as so many units of ‘product’”<sup>5</sup> (Millard 146). They display “the new freedoms and perils of American corporate enterprise and the sometimes violent personal alienation that can accompany it” (Ibid.) and the depthlessness of the American society in the twentieth century, its satire and its crisis of values. Next, Daniel Grassian in *Hybrid Fictions: American Literature and Generation X* (2003) defines Generation X narratives as ‘hybrid fictions’ which describe the empty lives of the young white Americans in urban parts of the USA and express a critique on the effects of popular culture on them<sup>6</sup>. Finally, the doctoral thesis *Ameriško literarno gibanje avant-pop* (2002) by Mojca Krevel, states that growing up in the 80s, adulthood in the 90s, subversion and characters’ distance to mass media (Krevel 83) are important features of avant-pop which I believe can also be ascribed to Generation X<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Liu’s anthology includes essays by the following authors: Jenny Lyn Bader, Stephen Beachy, Paula Kamen, Ian Williams, Naomi Wolf, Paul Beatty, Cathy Young, David Greenberger, Ted Klein, Karen Lehrman, Lalo Lopez, Robin Pogrebin, and Elisabeth Wurtzel.

<sup>2</sup> In his 1988 essay “Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young” Wallace mentions Ellis, McInerney, Janowitz, Leavitt, Simpson, and Minot.

<sup>3</sup> Rushkoff’s anthology incorporates fragments of works by Douglas Coupland, Walter Kirn, Bruce Craven, Darius James, and Marc Laidlaw and Rudy Rucker.

<sup>4</sup> Annesley classifies works by authors Donna Tart, Susanna Moore, Douglas Coupland, Sapphire, Katherine Texier, Mark Leyner, Ray Shell, and Evelyn Lau as ‘blank fiction’ and its authors as successors of the literary ‘bratpack’. Its main representatives are Bret Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney, whose works from the 80s of the twentieth century thematize discontent, decadence, brutality, violence, sexual experimentation and drug abuse of young Americans.

<sup>5</sup> The characteristics refer to Kathy Acker’s *In Memoriam to Identity*, Douglas Coupland’s *Microserfs*, Douglas Rushkoff’s *Media Virus*, and Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho*.

<sup>6</sup> Grassian’s idea of ‘hybrid fictions’ refers to works by David Foster Wallace, Richard Powers, Neal Stephenson, William Vollman, Douglas Coupland, Sherman Alexie, Michael Serros, and Dave Eggers (Grassian 12).

<sup>7</sup> Mark Amerika, avant-pop artist and its founder, considers two of the aforementioned authors Mark Leyner and William Vollmann to be avant-pop authors (Krevel 27, 28). Larry McCaffery in his avant-pop

My research was focused on Coupland's novels *Generation X*, *Shampoo Planet* (1993), *Life After God* (1995), *Miss Wyoming* (2001), *All Families Are Psychotic* (2002), *Hey Nostradamus!* (2004) and essay collection *Polaroids from the Dead* (1997), Ellis's novels *Less Than Zero* (1986) and *American Psycho* (1991), McInerney's *Bright Lights*, *Big City* (1984) and *Story of My Life* (1989), Hornburg's *Bongwater* (1995) and *Downers Grove* (1999), and Gomez's novel *Our Noise* (1995). Generation X narrative displays poorly developed characters without moral values, alienated, aimless and indifferent jobless white young people who oppose the norms and expectations of the society. Besides taking place in natural environments (forest, primeval forest and desert) the novels are set in urban (metropolitan) areas in the USA in the present day. Driven by the search for one's own identity and meaning in the American society at the end of the twentieth century, which is marked by consumerism; and mass media; and culture and history that became commodities, they address the themes of family, interpersonal relationships, jobs, religion, historicity and apocalypse. The theme of family displays an extended family, bringing together partners and children from different marriages, in which children miss their parents' love and education. As a result, they resort to media and pop culture and later on either become media savvy, their victim or enemy. Aiming at escaping the influence of the omnipresent media and consumerism some characters move back to nature or mythological places, yet their attempts fail in the end. Being brought up without religion, many discover a need to believe in something and consequently find their own source of belief in nature, self, friends or mistake it for consumerist activities. Religion helps characters overcome personal distress caused not only by poor interpersonal relationships but also lack of jobs. Most opt for a 'McJob', "a low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low-benefit, no-future job in the service sector" (Coupland 1991: 6), as they have no other possibility or want to flee from responsibility. Living for the present, suffering from 'information overload' and with experience mediated through mass culture and media, the characters do not address history as an important issue. It is reduced to a commodity and connected with one's search for his or her own roots, or to a thematic park. Lastly, drugs, present in private and public life and easily attainable, together with death, illnesses, and disasters give the narratives an apocalyptic character.

Predominantly composed in prose in form of a novel, Generation X fiction is fragmented and loose in structure, and written mainly in the first person singular in the present tense. Coupland's early works (*Generation X*, *Shampoo Planet* and *Life After God*) are unconventional for their use of hypertext. The author has created a system of footnotes in the form of illustrations, comics, comments and catchwords that break the narrative and distract the reader. Yet, this way a frame or context for the text is created which is as equally important as the text itself. Generation X narratives are rich with

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anthology *After Yesterday's Crash* (1995) places 'bratpack' authors and 'slackers' into the youngest generation of avant-pop (Ibid. 81). Leyner's *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*, *Et Tu Baby*, and *Tooth Imprints on a Corn Dog*, Coupland's *Generation X*, *Shampoo Planet*, *Microserfs*, and *Girlfriend in a Comma*, Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*, *Great Expectations*, *Don Quixote*, *Empire of the Senseless*, *Pussycat*, *King of the Pyrates*, and *In Memoriam to Identity*, Darius James's *Negrophobia*, David Foster Wallace's *The Broom of the System* are classified as avant-pop. DeLillo's *White Noise* and *Mao II*, Ellis's *American Psycho* and newer short stories by Marc Laidlaw, authors William T. Vollman and Lynne Tillman are also included into avant-pop fiction by Krevell (Ibid. 39).



quotes and metaphors referring to music, film, media events and cult authors and literary works which indicates that these narratives, popular culture and media became inter-related. The most recurrent trope is metonymy which exemplifies the use of products of mass consumption and their names, and brand names to create the environment, situations and characters, and to give the novels a geographical and historical frame. The language consists of internal jokes, quotes, comparisons, phrases and neologisms from popular culture. Ellis's *Less Than Zero* and *American Psycho* stand out due to accurate and objective descriptions of the events. What is more, the conversations in the first novel resemble the flow of images in an MTV video, while in the latter; Bate-man's voice oscillates from reviews, yellow press articles, movie jargon, and political addresses to commercial brochures and catalogues.

## II. GENERATION X IN SLOVENIA(N)

### 1. Critical thought on Generation X group and narrative

In Slovenia there is no correlate to the demographic group born between 1960 and 1980 in the USA and the Western world. The first to mention the term "Generation X" was Ženja Leiler in *Delo*, 1995, referring to an international group of young film directors. Nataša Velikonja in her article "Korporativne generacije" in *Primorska srečanja* in 1996 states that Generation X denotes an American post yuppie generation which has been trying to find out some basic values in life since the beginning of the 90s (Velikonja 738). Set against authorities, more tolerant and not oriented in career progress, its members are under the influence of the media – thus corporations, such as MTV or CNN, which feed them with fast, unargued and disconnected images. Their culture consists in collecting, recycling and modifying music, art and fashion from the previous decades rather than creating their own. Velikonja's article ends with a belief that Generation X has reached an end (Ibid. 737-738). Bojan Musil and Boštjan Sirnik in "Generacija X. In memoriam generaciji, ki je nikoli ni bilo" from *Sobotna priloga Dela*, 1999, assert that Generation X got its name from the title of the first novel *Generation X* by Coupland in 1991. The same year, the first film by Richard Linklater, *Slacker*, and *Nevermind*, an album by the Seattle grunge music group Nirvana were released. Even though the neologism 'Generation X' appeared quickly and no one knew exactly what it meant at the time, the authors believe it describes young and cynical young people who are resigned to their fate. These frustrated young 'slackers' have their own fashion, listen to alternative music and still live at home with their parents since they are unable to find a proper job (Musil and Sirnik 37). Further on, the authors describe the evolution of the term 'Generation X' - stemming from the work *Class* by Paul Fussell and later on encompassing a group of young people, a brand name and a myth misused by economy, marketers and politicians. However, the death of Nirvana's singer Kurt Cobain and Coupland's declaration on CNN that Generation X does not exist but is rather a metaphor for a worldview, which was supported by his article in *Details* magazine, announced that Generation X was coming to its end. The authors conclude that this illusive social phenomenon represents a worldview that reflects a spirit of time. It resembles a collec-

tion of different and opposing values and points of view which derive from subjective opinions by authors themselves or stereotypes by critics. “[Generacija X predstavlja] postmodernistični kolaž različnih, celo nasprotujočih si stališč, vrednot, življenjskih stilov ... saj gre za subjektivno naravnana prepričanja oz. stereotipe raziskovalcev ali zagnanih pripadnikov, ki so skušali ta konstrukt braniti” (Ibid.).

Dragica Sušnik in her 2002 article “Generacija Y. Trezni in odgovorni, romantični in ljubeči” which was published in *Glamur* magazine believes Generation X is a generation and describes it from the sociological point of view and compares it with generation Y. Being conformists, skeptical about politics and not inclined to revolutions as their predecessors ‘baby boomers’ were, the Generation X members do not live for their jobs and tend to change them. Most opt for “McWork” (“Mcdelo”), i.e. safe but badly paid jobs (Sušnik 39) and thus their employers characterize them as lazy and incapable of long term concentration. Exposed to sensory overload from mass media, they feel that they have experienced everything, and have difficulties in finding the right partner. Due to financial insecurity and comfort they still live with their parents. Living in a society marked by unemployment, crime, ecologic catastrophes and aids, they are cynical, apathetic, and pessimistic about the future. Sušnik also describes how the term “Generation X” evolved, and concludes that Generation X was a myth and a marketing construction that offered identification to millions of young people (Ibid.). The article “Mladina v sodobni družbi”, 2006, by Danica Šaponja discusses the last four generations in Slovenia focusing on generation Y. She believes Generation X is synonymous with a demographic group whose members are children of parents who put their career and economic welfare before family and individual life. At this time, according to Šaponja, women became independent, family relationships changed which resulted in numerous divorces. Growing up, Generation X saw the media becoming more powerful, witnessed the increase of violence in schools and on television, homelessness, and finally ecologic awareness. Having replaced their missing parental education with peer education, they strictly divide private life from work, where they are flexible and frequently self-employed. Generation X members do not accept traditional values such as loyalty and collective duty which originated from historical ideologies, but values that are close to an individual and his or her experience (Ibid. 11). Their children, generation Y, are postponing the period of adulthood and seeking financial and emotional support of their parents. The values of social and material security, friendship and interpersonal relationships, personal development, the quality of everyday life and an unpolluted environment are appreciated by both generations.

## 2. Critical thought on Generation X authors and works

Most critical thought relates to works by Bret Easton Ellis, less to Douglas Coupland's or McInerney's works. After examining criticism on Coupland and his work I will proceed with Ellis and his novels *Less Than Zero* and *American Psycho*.

Jure Stojan in his article “Douglas Coupland: Miss Wyoming. Ljubezenska pri-goda” in *Večer*, 2001, describes Coupland as a cult writer next to Kerouac, Burroughs, Vidal, Ellis, and Houellebecq. Capturing the spirit of time in his works and perceiving

movements in society and predicting trends, he caught the attention of a younger public. Although his works have weak plot and structure, Stojan believes Coupland did an excellent job in describing a generation which grew up in the 80s and found itself on the job market in the 90s of the twentieth century. The author praises Coupland's style as being readable and full of witty remarks and comments, yet his writing is attractive and interesting only on the surface. The long awaited and much advertised novel *Miss Wyoming*, which differs from his cult works *Generation X*; *Shampoo Planet*; and *Microserfs*, is according to Stojan not successful as it is based on coincidences and flat characters. It could be considered a satire on the contemporary society or a parody of lower literature genres. Coupland often analyzes past actions which influence the present plot and as a result, the structure of the novel is complicated. Finally, according to the author, the novel is serious, sincere, and includes a witty observation of its time and "sledí Couplandove mojstrske površinskosti" ("traces of Coupland's masterly superficiality") (Stojan 11). Urša Primožič in her 2004 seminar paper "Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*: Tales for an Accelerated Culture" provides Coupland's biography and bibliography, the origin, use and meanings of the term 'generation X' (Primožič 6), and the contents of the novel. She believes it to be different from the previous generational novels as it offers only stories and no answers. The end of the novel is open; we do not learn if the characters were able to fulfill their dreams in the desert. Moreover, the main characters tell each other stories, which have a therapeutic effect in expressing their feelings and comments of the consumerist society. For example, "Texlacoma story" could be a parable of the characters' inability or lack of will to fall in love and have a relationship (Ibid 21). Then, Andy shares the story about Edward only with the reader and not with Claire or Dag. Edward who is the narrator's alter ego has not been in love yet but wants to have a relationship, this is also true for Andy. Following the description of the main characters, Primožič focuses on form and language. The first person narrator of the story, Andy, "commenting on life via stories and descriptions [...] does not judge or make conclusions" (Ibid. 15); this is left to the reader. The novel is composed of three parts and "all chapters in the book carry meaningful titles that comment on the content of the chapter" (Ibid.) which forces the reader to read and understand the novel on multiple levels thus creating a hypertext. Numerous neologisms, comics, illustrations and bumper stickers in the form of footnotes carry the same meaning as the text and in this way they represent a hypertext which is a mixture of the narrator's and Coupland's voice. Some footnote neologisms appear in the text itself, others are only defined or exemplified by similar phenomena in the text. To understand their irony, sarcasm or black humor the reader's knowledge of pop culture and mass media is required. Providing examples and motifs from the novel, Primožič believes the main themes of the novel are escape from society and striving for love and a relationship. Further on, she asserts the novel to be avant-pop as its content is oriented against mass media and consumerism. Telling each other stories, the characters communicate through stories – "via something unreal, via a simulation" (Ibid. 23). The term *Generation X* is itself a simulacrum in real life - a copy without an original. Namely, a book title became a name for a group of people (Ibid.). Another characteristic of avant-pop and this novel is a new understanding of literature. The division between what is real or what is fiction is disappearing, and consequently everything that helps create reality is acceptable. Moreover, texts which include hyper-

texts cannot be read in a linear fashion, but on multiple nonlinear levels. As a result, the reader's role is increased – by choosing the level he creates the text, while the author's role is diminished – he has to provide component parts for the text (Ibid. 24). Primožič states that art in postmodern age bases on recycling and that the borders between high and low culture are blurred. Not only does history appear in the form of fantasies about past images from pop culture, and retro styles, but the characters have also lost a sense for the past as they live in a permanent present. The author concludes that the novel *Generation X* is timeless since it captures “the feelings of America's middle class generation of Reagan, planned parenthood, TV, and low economy” (Ibid. 26).

The first to write about Ellis's novel *Less Than Zero* was its translator Jure Potokar in the afterword to the novel, “Ledeni hlad blešččega vele mesta” (1989). He classifies the novel among new American prose, and does not ascribe it much artistic value. After the release it sold well and got good reviews as it addressed (rich) young people and its content and plot were not complicated. Potokar also mentions that Ellis did a course in creative writing and his first novel was compared to Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) which is also a generational novel. Due to its cultural specifics, involving status symbols, expensive clothes, exclusive clubs and drugs, the novel can be difficult to understand for both average Americans and Slovenians (Potokar 1989: 144). Described with cold objectivity characters without emotions fail to communicate with each other; take drugs; indulge in sex and prostitution; and are surrounded by mass media. Even though past events prove that the main character once had some values and emotions and is critical of his friends' nihilism, he does not act and leaves Los Angeles for the East Coast to continue studying at the end. Finally, the author believes the city with its empty citizens who are unable to communicate with each other, to be a metaphor for solitude. Aleš Debenjak in his comment on the dust jacket of the book (1989) also states the novel's success, translations into many languages, and compares it with Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. Yet, while Salinger's novel is warm and positive and features juvenile opposition to society, Ellis's novel consists of descriptions of recurrent parties, drug use, prostitution and sex. Its structure resembles television videos, and the rhythm of changing video clips. Young people, who are not socially engaged have access to everything, yet are not able to fulfill themselves (Debenjak 1989: unpaginated). The novel with a simple structure is composed of simple sentences, “Hemingway sentences” (Ibid.). The characters exchange short replicas, their discourse is full of fillers, monosyllabic words and quotes from films, music and magazines which results in the inability to express one's feelings, experience and psychological states (Ibid.). According to an anonymous review in *Knjiga* magazine, 1989, authors of prose bestsellers are usually old and experienced, which is not true for Ellis, who was 18 when his novel was released. The author summarizes Potokar's and Debenjak's findings on the novel in terms of content, structure and the reasons for success. Andrej Blatnik in his 1989 article “Ledeno branje za vroče dni” (*Teleks*), thinks Ellis belongs to the ‘new lost generation’ (Blatnik 36). He compares the novel to Salinger's generational *Catcher in the Rye*, but the cold tone of the novel reminds him of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). *Less Than Zero* has been much read due to its simple structure and clear contents and as it is adapted to a contemporary reader who does not read complicated literature. According to Blatnik, its structure resembles the infinite exchange of video clips and soap

operas, and its excellence is that it “govori o ničemer” “speaks of nothing” (Ibid.) In his opinion, this generation of young American authors owe their good style of writing to creative writing workshops, yet their works lack emotions and anything “večjega od resničnosti” (“bigger than reality”) (Ibid.). Matej Bogataj in his review “Vrlo nova osemdeseta leta” (1989) from *Dnevnik* classifies Ellis in the ‘non-generation’ (Bogataj 12). This group of writers of the Reagan era which also includes David Leavitt, Jay McInerney, and Marian Thurm, experienced instant success in their careers (Ibid.). The characters in this novel are children from affluent dysfunctional families who are left alone and out of boredom take drugs and change partners. The narrative about the loss of feelings and profoundness is occasionally interrupted by memories of Clay’s past when he was still able to feel and had a functional family. The novel excels in skillfully combining the past and present, describing parties, and in the narrator’s indifference (Ibid.). Mentioning the influence of creative writing workshop on Ellis, Bogataj compares ‘non-generation’ authors with beat authors. Both consumed alcohol and drugs, yet beatniks’ activity had a meaning; living on the edge, they searched for freedom; nonconformity; and a different, less alienated world. On the other hand, Ellis’s generation is superficially successful, financially independent and sets trends. However, it is also anxious, unable to communicate, and bored with videos; only a murder or a dead body can break its state of apathy for a while (Ibid.).

Aleš Debeljak wrote about *American Psycho* in a review “Obsceno je nasilje” (1991) in *Naši razgledi* before the novel’s USA release. After a brief analysis of Ellis’s other works, the journey of the novel’s problematic manuscript from Simon and Schuster to Random House is described. According to him, Ellis discovered the right elements for a successful novel which comprise “nasilje, sadizem, mizoginija in druge značilnosti ‘urbane džungle’” (“violence, sadism, misogyny, and other characteristics of the ‘urban jungle’”) (Debeljak 91). Moreover, he asserts the novel lacks the criticism which was present in his first novel, and which makes controversial literature historical, e.g. Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from Underground* (1864). He supports the idea of the National Organization of Women who promised to boycott books by Random House if it published *American Psycho*. The text is problematic because it is obscene – including elements of violence, torture, rape and intentional pain which are shown as esthetic pleasure without any comment. The article “Bret Easton Ellis, Ameriški psiho” (1992) in *Primorska srečanja* by Tomo Vidic includes the author’s own translation of a chapter. In his opinion, newer American authors like David Leavitt, Jay McInerney, Tama Janowitz, Joe McGinnis, Michael Chabon, David Mamet, Eric Bogosian, and Bret Easton Ellis are unfamiliar to the average Slovenian reader who does not read literature in English. He further states that Ellis’s first novel was not successful in Slovenia. Vidic speaks about the journey of the manuscript and believes the novel did not receive good reviews being “pretirano krvava in sadistična knjiga, bolešna in degenerirana štorija” (“an excessively bloody and sadist book, a sick and degenerated story”) (Vidic 1992: 153). According to him, it has “nenavadno sočen in slikovit jezik” (“an exceptional juicy and picturesque language”), it holds a mirror to the American society and presents a juncture of American dream and nightmare (Ibid.). The essay “Vprašanje zla” (1994) by Aleš Debeljak in *Razgledi* includes a chapter “Ubijanje psa” (“Killing Dog”) translated by Jure Potokar, and it precedes the Slovenian release of the book. The author

discusses the manuscript's journey and states the novel received major mass media attention; however, it did not get a single entirely positive review. So, it was Norman Mailer in the name of PEN who defended Ellis and his freedom of speech. Debeljak thinks the novel touched "nekega občutljivega socialnega živca" ("a sensitive social nerve") (Debeljak 1994a: 35), however, with his method of exaggeration Ellis succeeded in displaying the psychopathology of everyday life in a world controlled by media in which unmotivated evil becomes the main form of violence (Ibid.). If Clay in *Less Than Zero* critically observes the rape of a girl, Bateman's murders are random, unpredictable, unmotivated and his actions absurd in a world that has no meaning and where everything becomes acceptable. The author considers the work to be incomplete since Ellis does not explain the reason for Bateman's violence. The afterword to the book by the same author (1994) resumes the above article. Apart from this, Debeljak believes that the novel should be read considering the socio-historical frame of American culture at the end of the twentieth century. Ellis was irritated by reactions of the public and critics and stated his characters to be two-dimensional and as such unable to control their lives (Debeljak 1994b: 480). Together with Jay McInerney and Tama Janowitz Ellis represents a new literary trend – 'brat pack' (Ibid. 482). They became successful due to the fact that their works shifted away from metafiction, had a simple structure and were "mešanic[a] seksa, krvi, video iger, drog, elitnih klubov in prepoznavne pop ikonografije" (a "mixture of sex, blood, video games, drugs, exclusive clubs and recognizable pop iconography") (Ibid. 482). Ellis's technique of interrupting boring descriptive passages and enumerating lists with erotic or violent scenes creates an impression that violence and sexuality are connected or that violence derives from sexuality. On the other hand, enumerating trademarks, venues or exclusive clubs helps to stick the text parts together and prevent them from falling apart. Ellis's own critical distance to violence declares that violence is omnipresent. Debeljak deduces the novel is not naturalistic, since certain facts such as Bateman's job or the disappearance of his victims are rather doubtful. The article "Zlobno oko pošastnega Moby Dicka" (1994) in *Primorske novice* by Tomo Vidic includes an interview with the novel's translator Jure Potokar. The author assumes *Less Than Zero* was not popular in Slovenia as Slovenian readers could not relate to rich young Californians, drugs or expensive cars, which is also true for *American Psycho*. Potokar had difficulties in translating some passages that contain violence and torture, as well as neologisms, slang words, drugs and details from New York life. Since Bateman's world is very sophisticated including details from cosmetics, fashion or high technology, it is difficult for the reader to become familiar with it. Potokar lists Ellis, McGinnis, Janowitz, and McInerney into the 'brat-pack' generation. The group is not outstanding due to its being a result of creative writing workshops, commercials and publishers' enterprise (Potokar in Vidic 1994: 15). These authors have outsourced themselves and according to Potokar, only time will show their literary success. Potokar perceives the novel as a metaphor of the contemporary American society, and its structure of scene sequences reminds him of the video clip technique. The work is full of digressions, meaningless and banal conversations, nonsense words that aim at showing the emptiness of this social class, its confinement and lack of prospects (Ibid.). Potokar deems the Slovenian reader confused by Bateman's job, and by the narrative in present tense as he or she is not used to it. In conclusion,



he praises the novel's picturesque, multi-level and enigmatic character, which comes into prominence in the last chapter. Marko Golja in his article "V praznini, onkraj užitka" (1994) in *Primorska srečanja* asserts the novel is important as it deals with the good, the evil and the meaning of life in a radical and brutal way (Golja 874). He feels the characters, yuppies, have no moral values; are shallow; superficial and unable to communicate with or understand each other, yet they master social behavior. Their descriptions comprise the first part of the novel, while the second half focuses on an individual – Bateman and his unmotivated murders. Being a part of the world without cause and consequence, Bateman identifies violence as an everyday phenomenon and he lacks the will to fight the nihilism and its emptiness (Ibid.). The anonymous article "Pošast je moralist" (1999) in *Sobotna priloga Dela* claims the novel to be one of the best in the second half of the twentieth century as it not only shows yuppies but also a world that has experienced everything. Ellis was annoyed by critics who argued his works do not respect ethic values. On the contrary, he considers it moral not to judge. Further on, the author compares the superficial world in the novel with hell where one's identity is established by clothes (34). Bored rich teenagers cannot differentiate between the real world and the world of drugs and video clips, and only violence seems real to them. Bateman resorts to violence to escape superficiality and engagement with his own psychological life, which is what Norman Mailer misses in the novel. The novel's reality is composed of images from mass media and lifestyle magazines, and the language, which is unconnected with things; events; suffering and pain, is not sufficient to express reality (Ibid.). The anonymous writer of the essay "Tiranija lepote, mladosti in bogastva" (1999) from *Sobotna priloga Dela* interviewed Ellis and the French writer Michael Houllebecq whose works address violence and sexuality. According to the author, Ellis has been disturbed by the fact that in the USA, where violence is of everyday occurrence and people do not even perceive it, his novels have been understood literally. His point in the novel is that one can escape a superficial and material world only with an extreme act such as murder (39). The novel is also a critique of an indifferent and shallow society and of violent behavior that is not punished. He states Americans are burdened with sexuality and place too much importance on the outlook, the result being that they are not satisfied with themselves. Mitja Čander in "Michael Houllebecq, Bret E. Ellis, Sarah Kane – Zgodba o telesu" from *Sobotna priloga Dela*, 2002, analyzes the function of the body and extreme violence in the works by these authors. Čander states the world in the 90s of the twentieth century became abstract and shaped by the media which changed communication into simulated messages. As the spirit became weak and unable to define itself, the body came into the center. In the world of Wall Street yuppies, who are obsessed with status symbols, the body denotes just another commodity. Being obsessed with his own body Bateman is convinced he can manipulate with other bodies – his victims – to show his superiority. Ellis thematizes the body since in the world of mediated images it appears to be the only remnant that holds the true self (Čander 28-29). Yet, in an atomized world, in which communication is impossible, Bateman's character is nonexistent, a simulation, an automaton. The author concludes that the only way for the body to wake the spirit is to enter by force into its sphere (Ibid.). Ana Vogrinčič in her essay "Pripovedništvo praznine. Obsesivno potrošništvo Ameriškega psiha" in *Primerjalna književnost*, 2003, explores the

manifestations of consumerism in the narrative, narrative devices, and Bateman's constructed character. After explaining the term 'blank fiction', resuming Annesley she displays the characteristics of the fiction in terms of characters, style, authors, and themes. The author concentrates on consumerism as it is demonstrated on the level of the narrative and in the main character as a consumer. Further on, she provides the concept of consumerism, illustrates the response of the public and criticism of the novel, and the structure of the novel which consists of fragments. When addressing Bateman's relationship with the media, she analyzes Batman as a media user and his deranged perception of reality due to his inability to distinguish between the reality and mediated images. She doubts in the existence of Bateman's character as the novel offers little information on his family; apart from this, chapters with music reviews have a different tone, his colleagues persistently mistake him for others, and he even confesses his nonexistence to his secretary. In the end, Vogrinčič thinks the definition of 'blank fiction' is elusive and refers to younger "blank fiction" representatives. The M. A. thesis *Vrednote ameriške družbe v delih Breta Eastona Ellisa* (2004) by Lidija Stankovič defines values of the American society as presented in Ellis's works<sup>8</sup>. The author illustrates events of the 80s and 90s of the previous century from the frame of socio-history and pertaining literary history. Stankovič maintains that Ellis's work can be classified as postmodern literature, experimental realism, 'blank fiction', or 'brat-pack' literature<sup>9</sup>. Successively, the author provides brief summaries of the novels with critical responses, and the following characteristics and values of the American society in the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century: materialism; consumerism and deindividualization of consumers; alienation of individuals in the modern society; individualism; emotional apathy; violence; the importance of status; the importance of image and the cult of fame and famous people; sexual and racial discrimination; racial intolerance; xenophobia; and hyperreality. Examining film adaptations of some novels, Stankovič evaluates the impact of Ellis's work in Slovenia and determines that *Less Than Zero* and *American Psycho* had most critical response. The final chapter contains an interview with Jure Potokar who translated both aforementioned novels. Potokar explicates how he became acquainted with Ellis's novels, the problems he encountered while translating them and what he considers exceptional about Ellis's writing. Aleksandra Jović in her undergraduate thesis *Consumerism and the Media in Works by Bret Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney* (2009) examines the influence of the media and consumerism on works by 'brat pack' authors Ellis and McInerney, focusing on their debut novels *Less Than Zero* and *Bright Lights, Big City*<sup>10</sup>. Introducing the elements of

<sup>8</sup> Her analysis is based on Ellis's *Less Than Zero*, *The Rules of Attraction*, *American Psycho*, *The Informers*, and *Glamorama*.

<sup>9</sup> Stankovič classifies Ellis into postmodern literature due to open endings of his novels, characters who are not psychologically developed, author's lack of critical distance, elements of pop culture, and "MTV narration" (Stankovič 18). Owing to experimentation in narrative and detailed descriptions he can as well be an experimental realist. Including themes of violence, sexuality, boredom, passiveness in a world influenced by mass media and consumerism, his works are considered 'blank fiction'. Being a member of the literary 'brat-pack', he is not influenced by academic tradition and established authors but is a "reporter" of the postmodern society (Stankovič 21).

<sup>10</sup> As it is known to me, Jović's thesis is the first in Slovenian professional literature to introduce McInerney's biography, brief summaries of his novels, topics, and style of writing. It places emphasis on his first novel in "second person narrative on cocaine culture [which] started a trend of novels, which used the topic

the American culture in the 80s of the twentieth century, she explores Ellis's and McInerney's biographies, topics in their novels and styles of writing. Finally, Jović compares the two "rivalry" novels (Jović 42) in terms of plot, setting, characters, style and language.

Although Slovenian literary criticism has not found a parallel group of Slovenian authors or literary works bearing the same or similar characteristics in form and content to those of American Generation X, I believe some minor influence exists. Firstly, the novel *Pimlico* (2006) by Milan Dekleva includes references to global and Slovenian music, literature and art. The phrase "Ameriški psiho" ("American Psycho", Dekleva 110) is used by a main character's friend to refer to the future state of mind of Slovenian yuppies, who are unaware of the fact that their behavior and essence are clownish, conformist and inflexible. Moreover, negative reactions by the Slovenian police officials who recognized themselves in the novel *Čefurji raus* (2008) by Goran Vojnovič remind us of the responses to *American Psycho*.

The Slovenian press and professional literature have different critical opinions on the essence of Generation X. Douglas Coupland and his work is mentioned by authors Musil, Sirnik, and Stojan, and an exhaustive analysis of the novel *Generation X* is provided by Primožič. Briefly referring to other members of 'brat-pack', most critics focus on Bret Easton Ellis's life, bibliography, background and predominantly negative critiques of his novels *Less Than Zero* and *American Psycho*. Vogrinčič resumes Ellis's biography, defines 'blank fiction' and centers on the influence of consumerism on character and narrative in *American Psycho*. Stankovič offers a detailed biography and bibliography of Ellis and presents the socio-historical background to his novels, as well as analyzes the values in the American society in his work. Jović focuses the influence of the media and consumerism on Ellis's *Less Than Zero* and Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*. As only *Less Than Zero* and *American Psycho* have been translated into Slovenian, consequently, Slovenian readership is deprived of Generation X fiction, and also it remains unclear how Slovenian authors and their works have been influenced by Generation X fiction.

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## FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE ZWISCHEN PHILOSOPHIE UND LITERATUR

Matevž Kos

## Abstract

Der Artikel beschäftigt sich mit dem Verhältnis zwischen Philosophie und Literatur. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit liegt auf den Dionysos-Dithyramben, dem letzten Text von Nietzsche, den er vor seinem psychischen Zusammenbruch zum Druck vorbereitet hat. Die literarischen Texte von Nietzsche sind eine Art »andere Natur«, »die Rückseite« seines Denkens, zugleich spricht jedoch Nietzsches Dichtung auch über die wesentlichen Angelegenheiten seiner Philosophie. In diesem Sinne verlangt sie eine interpretative Abhandlung. Die Frage nach den Dionysos-Dithyramben ist auch die Frage nach dem besonderen Status der Dichtung innerhalb von Nietzsches Schaffen – aber auch nach dem Status des Buches *Also sprach Zarathustra*, soweit wir es vor allem als einzigartige philosophische Dichtung verstehen, das heisst, auch als literarische bzw. halbliterarische Gattung.

**Key words:** Nietzsche, philosophy and literature, *Dithyrambs of Dionysus*

Welches ist das *richtige* Wort für die Philosophie Nietzsches?

Dafür, dass der Einstieg in Nietzsches Denken ein ganz eigenes hermeneutisches Problem darstellt, hat er größtenteils selbst gesorgt. Dem grundlegenden Satz des Positivismus, der behauptet, „es giebt nur Thatsachen“, stellt Nietzsche in einem seiner Fragmente aus dem Nachlass die bekannte Antithese entgegen: „nein, gerade Thatsachen giebt es nicht, nur Interpretationen.“ (KSA 12: 315). Oder, mit anderen Worten: „*Wahrheit ist die Art von Irrthum [...]*“ (KSA 11: 506). Was kann die *Wahrheit* über Nietzsches Philosophieren sein, wenn dieses eben das Aussprechen solcher *Wahrheiten* problematisiert?

Einstweilen bietet sich nur die vorab angestellte Vermutung, dass das rigorose Ausharren auf dem Standpunkt, die „Wahrheit“ sei „eine Aneinanderreihung von Irrtümern“, auch die Kohärenz der eigenen (Nietzscheschen) Sprechhaltung infrage stellt. Er behauptet nämlich – ähnlich wie der Kreter in dem berühmten Paradoxon (über den Kreter, der sagt, dass alle Kreter lügen) – etwas, was er zugleich selbst verneint. Als ginge es um eine *Affirmation der Negation*.

Die Verwendung des Begriffs „Wahrheit“ ist bei Nietzsche demnach mindestens zweideutig. Eine eigenwillige Lösung der „Probleme mit der Wahrheit“, des Status seiner „Wahrheit über die Wahrheit“, ermöglicht der Horizont der *Geschichtlichkeit*:



Was ich erzähle, ist die Geschichte der nächsten zwei Jahrhunderte. Ich beschreibe, was kommt, was nicht mehr anders kommen kann: *die Heraufkunft des Nihilismus*. Diese Geschichte kann jetzt schon erzählt werden: denn die Notwendigkeit selbst ist hier am Werke. (KSA 13: 189)

Das, was Nietzsche erzählt, erzählt er „als der erste vollkommene Nihilist Europas“. Als jener, der, seiner eigenen Behauptung nach, „den Nihilismus selbst schon in sich zu Ende gelebt hat – der ihn hinter sich, unter sich, außer sich hat ...“ (KSA 13: 190).

Nietzsche erzählt die *Wahrheit* des Nihilismus. Diese Wahrheit kann nur der erblicken, der sie „von innen“ berührt hat. Erst dann kann er sie besiegen und über sie hinwegkommen (wenn ihm das natürlich gelingt), kann – wie ein Metaphilosoph – zurückblicken. Die Wahrheit, dass die Wahrheit eine Aneinanderreihung von Irrtümern ist, lässt sich nämlich erst aussprechen, wenn sich die Frage nach der Wahrheit überhaupt als überflüssig, bereits abgehandelt präsentiert. Auch daher die semantische Ambivalenz des Wortes *Wahrheit* bei Nietzsche.

Die Frage, ob die Wahrheit über den Nihilismus eine „nihilistische Wahrheit“ ist, bleibt offen. Ist eine solche Wahrheit auch ein „Wert“?

Und wenn sie einer ist, kann man einer „Umwertung aller Werte“ entgehen, einer der grundlegenden Intentionen von Nietzsches Philosophie?

## DIE SELIGKEIT DES UNGLÜCKS DER ERKENNTNISS

Die vorherrschende Eigenschaft in Nietzsches Denken ist die ambigue Struktur. Mit anderen Worten: seine Texte widersetzen sich „laufend“, beinahe apriori der rationalistischen Deskription, der Rekapitulation und den üblichen Verfahren objektivierenden und systematisierenden Denkens. Lieber als die *Form* des Ganzen ist ihm die Ausrichtung ins Unbekannte beziehungsweise der Wunsch nach Neuem, Abenteuer, Wagnis – und was es noch an ähnlichen, größtenteils metaphorischen Worten Nietzsches gibt. Seine Schriften widersetzen sich der *Form* der Wissenschaft, wie sie die bekannte Hegelsche Formulierung aus der *Vorrede* in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes* in Worte fasst, die behauptet, „[d]ie wahre Gestalt, in welcher die Wahrheit existiert, kann allein das wissenschaftliche System derselben sein“. Vor allem aber: „Das Wahre ist das Ganze.“ (Hegel 1998: 14, 24) Darüber spricht Nietzsche selbst mit ausreichender Entschiedenheit, wenn er in der *Götzendämmerung* behauptet, er vertraue „keiner Systematik“ und „der Wille zum System sei ein Mangel an Rechtschaffenheit“. (KSA 6: 63; vgl. KSA 13: 533). Diesen Gedanken – den wir jedoch keinesfalls als Versagen der Strenge des philosophischen Denkens und seiner Gegenstände verstehen dürfen, sondern ganz im Gegenteil – erhellt zusätzlich eines der „adornoartigen“ Fragmente aus Nietzsches Nachlass der Jahre 1872–1873, welches behauptet, es gebe „kein absolutes Wissen eines Ganzen“ beziehungsweise Wissen sei stets das Resultat von Verfahren wie „Separation, Abgrenzung, Beschränkung“ (KSA 7: 464).

*Systematische* Anti-Systematik, eine Form der Nicht-Ganzheit, ist eine charakteristische Eigenschaft von Nietzsches Philosophie. Nicht zuletzt ist auch der *Widerstand gegen das System* – eingeschrieben in die Struktur von Nietzsches Denken selbst – einer

der Gründe dafür, dass die Geschichte seiner Rezeption so komplex war und dass sie noch heute schwer überschaubar ist. Daher die sich überkreuzenden Deutungen und die stark voneinander abweichenden „Lesarten“ von Nietzsches Philosophie (aber auch der *Nietzscheanismus* als ausgesprochen vielschichtiges und nicht selten widersprüchliches Phänomen beziehungsweise als Prozess „komplexer Diffusion“).

In einem anderen Fragment – vom Ende des Jahres 1880 – warnt Nietzsche vor der Gefahr selbstverständlicher Wahrheiten, vor der apriorischen Gewissheit, vor der Bequemlichkeit des – gar nicht so seltenen – Philosophierens, das sich selbst genügt und von vornherein die Antworten auf alle Fragen kennt:

Man hat mir etwas vom ruhigen Glück der Erkenntniß vorgeflötet – aber ich fand es nicht, ja ich verachte es, jetzt wo ich die Seligkeit des Unglücks der Erkenntniß kenne. [...] Ich will keine Erkenntniß mehr ohne Gefahr: immer sei das tückische Meer, oder das erbarmungslose Hochgebirge um den Forschenden. (KSA 9: 350f.)

Das Syntagma „die Seligkeit des Unglücks der Erkenntniß“ – die Erkenntnis dessen, dass die Erkenntnis der Wahrheit eine unmögliche Aufgabe ist? – ist eine der typischen (und zahlreichen) paradoxen Wendungen Nietzsches, die auf den Kopf stellen, was irgendwie selbstverständlich scheint. Eine der beliebtesten Formen des Denkens, die auf das Paradox setzt, ist der Aphorismus. Und es ist kein Zufall, dass die *Aphoristik* eines von Nietzsches Lieblingsgenres ist, wenn nicht gar der Denkfiguren beziehungsweise intellektuellen Haltungen überhaupt. Dass der Aphorismus bei Nietzsche nicht nur ein stilistischer Einfall ist, sondern Form einer besonderen Denkstrategie, bekräftigt in ausreichender Deutlichkeit seine folgende – selbsterklärende – Formulierung:

In Aphorismenbüchern gleich den meinigen stehen zwischen und hinter kurzen Aphorismen lauter verbotene lange Dinge und Gedanken-Ketten; und Manches darunter, das für Oedipus und seine Sphinx fragwürdig genug sein mag. (KSA 11: 579)

Es liegt in der Natur des *Aphorismus* – sofern es sich natürlich nicht nur um eine gelegentliche geistreiche Äußerung handelt –, dass er sich gegen nichts verschließt, sondern ganz im Gegenteil: Der Aphorismus verwandelt das, was uns irgendwie selbstverständlich, gewohnt, vertraut erscheint, in eine offene Struktur. Anders ausgedrückt: Der Aphorismus macht, zumindest bei Nietzsche, aus etwas Bekanntem etwas *Unbekanntes*.

„– ich bin ein Doppelgänger, ich habe auch das ‚zweite‘ Gesicht noch ausser dem ersten. Und vielleicht auch noch das dritte“ (KSA 14: 472), schrieb Nietzsche 1888 bezogen auf den von ihm zurückgelegten philosophischen Weg. Im Vorwort zum *Anti-christ*, aus demselben Jahr, spricht er nicht nur von der „unbedingte[n] Freiheit gegen sich“, sondern macht „die Vorherbestimmung zum Labyrinth“ (KSA 6: 167) zu seiner – sozusagen programmatischen – Leitlinie. Die Frage nach dem Status der Wahrheit bei Nietzsche kann daher auch die Frage nach dem Borgesschen „Garten mit Pfaden, die sich verzweigen“<sup>1</sup> sein.

<sup>1</sup> “Le trait fondamental de la vérité de Nietzsche, c’est qu’elle ne peut être que mal entendue, objet d’une méprise sans fin.” (Blanchot 1949: 300)

## DIE WAHRHEIT DES LEBENS?

Die allgemeinste, „schulische“ Bezeichnung für Nietzsches Denken lautet „Lebensphilosophie“ – so bezeichnet Wilhelm Dilthey überhaupt die Philosophie der zweiten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, womit er auf jene gedankliche Strömung abzielt, in deren Mittelpunkt die „selbst“reflektierende Existenz steht. Kennzeichnend für diese ist der Versuch, sich den Fesseln des Rationalismus und Transzendentalismus früherer Zeiten zu entwinden, diese „Befreiung“ ist jedoch nur mit einer Problematisierung des akademischen Philosophierens möglich. Interessant ist dabei, dass Dilthey Nietzsche in eine Reihe mit Autoren wie Carlyle, Emerson, Ruskin, Tolstoj und Maeterlinck stellt, also eher mit Literaten als mit Philosophen im engeren Sinne (vgl. Vattimo 1992: 2).

Das Syntagma „Lebensphilosophie“ als handliches Etikett für Nietzsches philosophisches Streben fordert noch folgende Erklärung: Den Begriff *Philosophie* versteht Nietzsche in einem besonderen, keinesfalls neutralen Sinn, lehnt er doch den größeren Teil ihrer Tradition, angefangen bei Sokrates und Platon, ab. Ein solcher Standpunkt, der die griechischen Philosophen *vor* Sokrates privilegiert, war möglich auf Grundlage eines radikalen Gegensatzes, der sich für ihn zwischen der *Philosophie* auf der einen und dem *Leben* auf der anderen Seite auftat.

Den Begriff *Leben* setzt Nietzsche zwar mehrmals äußerst explizit mit dem *Willen zur Macht* beziehungsweise der Macht selbst gleich, aber jedesmal in einem etwas anderen Kontext, mit einem anderen Akzent, der ebenfalls ein eindeutiges Verständnis unmöglich macht. Nietzsches Lebensbegriff müssen wir auch unter Berücksichtigung seiner Kritik der metaphysischen Begrifflichkeit beziehungsweise der „Vorurtheile der Philosophen“ verstehen. Diese *Vorurteile* stehen durchweg in engster Verbindung mit einer bestimmten Interpretation von „Welt“. Und nicht nur das. Auch Nietzsches Lebensbegriff ist eben Resultat einer bestimmten, das heißt *Nietzscheschen* Interpretation. Und der Horizont dieser Interpretation betrifft auch Nietzsches Wahrheit über die Wahrheit.

Das Urteil, Nietzsche sei ein „Lebensphilosoph“, gründet auf der einfachen Tatsache, dass *Leben* eines der häufigsten Wörter in seinen Schriften ist. Verdeutlichen wir es zusätzlich mit dem Prädikat *schöpferisch(es) Leben*, sind wir schon bei dem Phänomen, das für Nietzsches Denken überhaupt konstitutiv ist. Wie das für die meisten seiner *Schlüsselworte* gilt, ließe sich auch im Zusammenhang mit „Leben“ von einer mindestens doppelten Bedeutung sprechen. Nietzsche verkündet nämlich einerseits den Verfall der alten Werte, bietet aber andererseits die Möglichkeit eines neuen, anderen Anfangs an. Beides, die Destruktion des Alten und das Aufkeimen des Neuen, hängt unmittelbar mit dem Phänomen „Leben“ zusammen – so wie wir in der Alltagssprache das „alte“ und das „neue“ Leben erwähnen. Genauer gesagt: Nietzsches Lebensbegriff, aus einer weiteren Perspektive betrachtet, enthält sowohl ein leugnendes wie auch ein aufbauendes Moment.

Einer der Punkte dieses Umbruchs ist Nietzsches berühmte Verkündung des „Todes Gottes“. Es geht nämlich um den „großen Bruch“, der – in der Folge – die Deutung des gesamten *Lebens* und der konkreten menschlichen Existenz „im Horizont des Unendlichen“ – um das Syntagma zu verwenden, mit dem Nietzsche den Aphorismus

Nr. 124 im dritten Buch der *Fröhlichen Wissenschaft* beginnt – bestimmt; das, was sich in diesem Horizont entfaltet, ist unter anderem, in malerischer poetisch-parabolischer Sprache, im Abschnitt *Der tolle Mensch* in Worte gefasst.

Nietzsche verkündet in der *Fröhlichen Wissenschaft* den Tod Gottes an sich, einer „positiven Alternative“, das, was sich am Horizont des toten Gottes entfaltet, ist jedoch mehr oder weniger nicht zu Ende gesagt beziehungsweise in eine metaphorische Sprache gehüllt: „eine neue Morgenröthe“, „Erstaunen“, „Ahnung“, „Erwartung“, „Wagnis der Erkennenden“, „*unser* Meer liegt wieder offen da“, „unser neues ‚Unendliches‘“ (KSA 3: 574, 626).

Doch, fügt Nietzsche im Abschnitt 374 der *Fröhlichen Wissenschaft* hinzu, „wer hätte wohl Lust, *dieses* Ungeheure von unbekannter Welt nach alter Weise sofort wieder zu vergöttlichen? Und etwa das Unbekannte fürderhin als ‚den Unbekannten‘ anzubeten?“ (KSA 3: 627).

## DER GROSSE KRIEG

Die Aufgabe für die nunmehr folgenden Jahre war so streng als möglich vorgezeichnet. Nachdem der jasagende Theil meiner Aufgabe gelöst war, kam die neinsagende, *neinthuende* Hälfte derselben an die Reihe: die Umwerthung der bisherigen Werthe selbst, der grosse Krieg [...]“ (KSA 6: 350)

Mit diesen Worten erneuert Nietzsche in *Ecce homo* seine grundlegende Intention in den Werken, die dem Buch *Also sprach Zarathustra* folgten. „Der jasagende Theil“, Nietzsches *frohe Botschaft* im *Zarathustra*, hing unmittelbar mit dem Gedanken vom „Übermenschen“, vom „Willen zur Macht“ und der „ewigen Wiederkunft des Gleichen“ zusammen, der Ausgangspunkt für Nietzsches Philosophie ist jedoch die Kritik der europäischen *Modernität*, das heißt der bestehenden Menschheit, wie sie sich in ihrer *Modernität* darstellt. Nietzsches „Philosophie der Zukunft“ ist erst auf der Grundlage der kritischen Genealogie der *Modernität* möglich. Nietzsches Intention ließe sich in diesem Kontext ziemlich treffend mit dem postmodernistischen Gemeinplatz „vorwärts in die Vergangenheit“ benennen. Oder aber, insofern Nietzsches Abwendung von den „modernen Ideen“ nur unter Berücksichtigung der Dionysischen Überlieferung möglich ist, mit seinem spiegelbildlichen Gegenbegriff: „zurück in die Zukunft“.

Nietzsches Destruktion der traditionellen Philosophie, das heißt des „Platonismus“, aber auch des Christentums als „Platonismus für das ‚Volk‘“ (KSA 5: 12), ist der Widerstand gegen ein angeeignetes Wertgefühl. Der Ursprung dieser Destruktion liegt in Nietzsches Einblick in das „Wesen des Lebens“: Das Leben ist, wie er an zahlreichen Stellen explizit bekräftigt, der Wille zur Macht. Wenn alles, was lebt, Macht bezeugt, und wenn alles „an sich gut“ ist, Platons Überwelt, die Welt der Ideen, nur eine der Fiktionen, der „Vorurteile des Metaphysikers“, dann zerfallen mit der Entblößung dieses Vorurteils auch die traditionelle Ethik und alle darauf gründenden moralischen Lehren, Kategorien wie Recht, Gleichheit, Gut (und – folglich – auch dessen Gegenpol: Böse). Eine Philosophie, die in sich die Kraft zu einer solchen Destruktion bestehender

Werte trägt, stellt sich, mit Nietzsches Worten, „damit allein schon jenseits von Gut und Böse“ (KSA 5: 18).

Das, was Nietzsche „jenseits von Gut und Böse“ nennt, könnte man auch als *jenseits von Wahrem und Gelogenem* bezeichnen. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit stellt sich ihm nämlich zugleich als *psychologische* Frage. Hier geht es natürlich nicht um eine „Psychologie“ im Sinne der älteren rationalistischen oder der neueren empirischen Wissenschaft. Nietzsche versteht die Psychologie zu dieser Zeit nämlich als eine Unterabteilung seiner Lehre vom Willen zur Macht, als „Morphologie“ und als „*Entwicklungslehre des Willens zur Macht*“ (KSA 5: 38). Die Logik und die gesamte Philosophie stehen in einem direkten Zusammenhang mit einer bestimmten Art von Leben. Die Wahrheit ist daher eine eigenartige Form der „Lüge“, die dem Wachstum dient, der Erhaltung einer bestimmten Lebensart, Lebensweise. „Es ist nicht mehr als ein moralisches Vorurtheil, dass Wahrheit mehr werth ist als Schein [...]“, ist eine von Nietzsches charakteristischen, den traditionellen Wahrheitsbegriff problematisierenden Formulierungen in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (KSA 5: 53). Noch genauer erklärt er diesen Gedanken in einem der Fragmente aus dem Nachlass, das im Frühjahr 1885 entstanden ist:

*Wahrheit ist die Art von Irrthum, ohne welche eine bestimmte Art von lebendigen Wesen nicht leben könnte. Der Werth für das Leben entscheidet zuletzt.* (KSA 11: 506).

## MUT ZUR WAHRHEIT

„Es giebt mehr Götzen als Realitäten in der Welt“, sagt Nietzsche im *Vorwort* zur *Götzendämmerung* (KSA 6: 57). Im Kommentar zu dieser Schrift in *Ecce homo* fügt er hinzu, der Götze sei „das, was bisher Wahrheit genannt wurde“ (KSA 6: 354). Aber: „Auch der Muthigste von uns hat nur selten den Muth zu dem, was er eigentlich weiss ...“ (KSA 6: 59)<sup>2</sup>

Nietzsche will sagen, dass wir stets nur so viel *denken* können, wie wir *ertragen* können. Und das Jahr 1888 war auch in diesem Sinne für ihn schicksalhaft. Hiermit meine ich nicht seinen Verlust des *logos* in den ersten Tagen des darauffolgenden Jahres (Nietzsches *persönliche* Katastrophe wurde zwar von zahlreichen Interpreten missbraucht, sei es als Mittel der „Mystifikation“ oder der „Demystifikation“<sup>3</sup> seiner

<sup>2</sup> Ähnlich schon in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*: „Etwas dürfte wahr sein: ob es gleich im höchsten Grade schädlich und gefährlich wäre; ja, es könnte selbst zur Grundbeschaffenheit des Daseins gehören, dass man an seiner völligen Erkenntniss zu Grunde gieng, – so dass sich die Stärke eines Geistes darnach bemässe, wie viel er von der ‚Wahrheit‘ gerade noch aushielte [...]“ (KSA 5: 56f.). Auf eine Paraphrase dieses Gedankens treffen wir einige Male auch in den *Nachgelassenen Fragmenten*, zum Beispiel im Fragment *Zur Genesis des Nihilisten*: „Man hat nur spät den Muth zu dem, was man eigentlich weiß.“ (KSA 12: 407). Oder aber in der Notiz vom Frühjahr 1888: „Wie viel Wahrheit *erträgt*, wie viel Wahrheit *wagt* ein Geist? – dies wurde für mich der eigentliche Wertmesser.“ (KSA 13: 492)

<sup>3</sup> In dieser Hinsicht ist beispielsweise auch eine der ersten „Vorstellungen“ von Nietzsches Philosophie in Slowenien bezeichnend, nämlich der Aufsatz *Modroslovec dekadentizma* (Der Philosoph des Dekadentismus) des katholischen Theologen Evgen Lampe, erschienen in der zentralen slowenischen Kulturzeitschrift *Dom in svet* in Nietzsches Todesjahr. Lampe gibt zwar in der Einführung zu, dass Nietzsche „einer der ersten Meister des glanzvollen Stils“ sei, dann jedoch weist er seinen Gedanken im Ganzen zurück unter der Prä-

Philosophie), sondern die Tatsache, dass 1888 die Intensität seines Schreibens einen ihrer Höhepunkte erreicht. In diesem Jahr verfasst er unter anderem die *Götzendämmerung* und den *Antichrist*, und noch immer bereitet er sich auf die Veröffentlichung seiner „Lebenswerks“, den *Willen zur Macht* vor (bis zum Herbst lässt er den Gedanken an dessen Veröffentlichung nicht fallen).

Nietzsches Kritik am beziehungsweise die *Ablehnung* des Christentums, dieses große Thema seiner Philosophie, ist natürlich am grundlegendsten im *Antichrist*. Nietzsche hat darin einen Großteil seiner vorhergehenden Analysen des Christentums als großes Symptom der *Dekadenz*, der Verneinung des Lebens, zusammengefasst, zugleich hat er in seine Abhandlung über das Christentum eine neue Dimension eingeführt: die „Psychologie Jesu“.

Betrachtete man Jesus beziehungsweise seine „frohe Botschaft“ aus Sicht der grundlegenden Postulate von Nietzsches Philosophie (Wille zur Macht, Umwertung aller Werte, die ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen, Perspektivismus, Übermensch etc.), stellte er sich einem als fleischgewordener Dekadenter dar. Dennoch ist Nietzsches Deutung seiner „Psychologie“ im *Antichrist* ungewöhnlich nachsichtig, manchesmal auf eine besondere Weise respektvoll. Nietzsches „Kritik des Christentums“ zielt *auch* auf Jesus. Einer der Gründe, warum Jesus dennoch aus dem allgemeinen antichristlichen Diskurs, wie wir ihn in nahezu allen Schriften Nietzsches verfolgen können, ausgenommen ist, liegt darin, dass – nach Nietzsches Interpretation – Jesus der *einzig* wahre Christ ist.

Betreffen Nietzsches Sätze darüber, dass „Gott tot“ ist und das Christentum „Platonismus für das ‚Volk‘“, unmittelbar auch Jesus?

Ja und nein, denn Jesus ist ja – in Nietzsches Interpretation – ein „Mensch“ und kein „Gott“. Nicht „Gottes Sohn“, sondern ein Mensch, der eine neue Art von Existenz praktiziert. Er kündigt nicht von einem „himmlischen Königreich“ im Sinne einer „Überwelt“, Platons Idee des Guten, sondern sagt, dass das „himmlische Königreich“ nichts anderes ist als ein „Zustand des Herzens“. Das heißt: reine Immanenz.

Die Frage nach Jesus ist für Nietzsche daher nicht die Frage nach dem „lebendigen“ oder dem „toten“ Gott, sondern nach Jesus als einer Figur, einem „großen Symbolisten“, dessen Lehre nicht den Glauben verkündet, sondern Arbeit, *Praxis*, und diese ist ihrem Wesen nach Nichtarbeit. Jesus „redet bloss vom Innersten: ‚Leben‘ oder ‚Wahrheit‘ oder ‚Licht‘ ist sein Wort für das Innerste, – alles Übrige, die ganze Realität, die ganze Natur, die Sprache selbst, hat für ihn bloss den Werth eines Zeichens, eines Gleichnisses“ (KSA 6: 204).

Die spätere Entwicklung des Christentums ist dann die Geschichte eines fortschreitenden „Missverstehens eines *ursprünglichen* Symbolismus“ (KSA 6: 209). Daher rührt nicht nur Nietzsches Trennung zwischen dem Christentum Jesu und dem des Paulus, sondern auch der unterschiedliche Ton des Nietzscheschen Diskurses. Bei der

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misse, Nietzsche habe sich „immer an der Grenze zum Wahnsinn bewegt, bis sein Verstandeslicht völlig erlosch“. Zur Illustration werde ich noch einen bezeichnenden Ausschnitt aus Lampes Aufsatz anführen: „Geisteskrankheiten sind sehr ansteckend, und Nietzsches Verehrung scheint uns eine Verstandesepidemie der neuen Zeit, die schnell gekommen ist und noch schneller wieder verschwinden wird.“ Und: „Als ihm der Wahnsinn immer mehr auf der Seele lag, schrieb er jene Bücher, die ihm den Ruhm eingebracht haben, und die jetzt jene ‚Gebildeten‘ lesen, die sich vom Christentum abgewandt haben. [...] und schließlich hat er die schlimmste seiner Schriften herausgegeben, den ‚Antichrist‘. Schon am Titel erkennt man den Sonderling, der Inhalt selbst jedoch ist halb wahnsinnig.“ (*Dom in svet* XIII, 1900, Nr. 19, S. 602, 603)



Abhandlung über Jesus ist Nietzsches eigenartiger Respekt offensichtlich (davor, dass Jesus – als radikaler *Dekadent*, als *Einzigster* – ohne Kompromisse und rücksichtslos „bis zum Ende“ geht), Nietzsches „Fluch auf das Christentum“ im *Antichrist* jedoch zielt vor allem auf das „historische Christentum“ der Kirche. Beide „Erscheinungsformen“ des Christentums sind Symptome der Verneinung des Lebens (indem Letztere eine „Fälschung“ Ersterer ist). Doch der einzig wahre, seiner Konsequenz wegen achtenswerte Gegenspieler des Dionysos, Nietzsches „Gott“ des Lebens, ist der *Gekreuzigte*.

## DIONYSOS' RÄTSEL

Indem das Christentum „Fiktionen“ wie Gott, die moralische Weltordnung, das Leben nach dem Tod, die Sünde, die Gnade, die Erlösung etc. geschaffen hat, hat es *als* Wahres die „Scheinwelt“ geschaffen. Das Christentum hat, im Lichte der „Philosophie“ Nietzsches, die befreiende Wahrheit vernichtet, aus der die Menschheit einst gelebt hat: die tragische Lebenswahrheit der vorsokratischen Griechen. Dabei ist Folgendes von Bedeutung. Nietzsches Verhältnis zum Griechentum als höchste Manifestation der Lebenskraft blieb in seiner Spätphase mehr oder weniger dem treu, was er am vollkommensten schon in der *Geburt der Tragödie* entworfen hat. 1886, also zwei Jahre vor dem *Antichrist* und vierzehn Jahre nach der *Geburt der Tragödie*, schreibt Nietzsche (in seinem *Versuch einer Selbstkritik* anlässlich des Neudrucks der *Geburt der Tragödie*) pathetisch, die Griechen seien „die wohlgerathenste, schönste, bestbeneidete, zum Leben verführendste Art der bisherigen Menschen“ (KSA 1: 12). Mit diesen Attributen zeichnet sich nicht das Griechentum generell aus: Der Bruch geschieht mit Sokrates und Platon, die eine Negation der dionysischen Welt bedeuten, zugleich jedoch ist, und das ist der „weltgeschichtliche“ Hintergrund von Nietzsches Kritik des Christentums, mit der Schaffung der Herrschaft des „sokratischen Geistes“, die ein Zeichen des Verfalls, der Müdigkeit, all dessen ist, was Nietzsche „Dekadenz“ nennt, dem Christentum selbst der Boden bereitet.

Das Christentum ist für Nietzsche keine besondere Metaphysik oder eine Art der Bewertung, sondern hat seine Wurzeln im Kern der Metaphysik selbst. Der christliche Gott – eine jener „Metaphern“ für Platons Idee des Guten und die gesamte Überwelt – ist für Nietzsche, wie er im *Antichrist* schreibt, eine „widernatürliche Castration“ (KSA 6: 182). Dementsprechend (wie schon in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*) teilt er auch die Begriffe *gut* und *böse* zu. Aus der Perspektive des „Willens zur Macht“ ist alles das *gut*, „was das Gefühl der Macht, den Willen zur Macht, die Macht selbst im Menschen erhört“ (KSA 6: 170), *schlecht* ist das, was aus der Schwäche, dem Nichtvorbereitetsein auf die Macht, auf *mehr* Macht, herrührt. Im Licht von Nietzsches „Psychologie des Christentums“ kann daher nur jenes Volk Gott als *gut* erkennen, das „den Glauben an sich verloren“ hat:

In der That, es giebt keine andre Alternative für Götter: *entweder* sind sie der Wille zur Macht – und so lange werden sie Volksgötter sein – *oder* aber die Ohnmacht zur Macht – und dann werden sie nothwendig *gut* ... (KSA 6: 183)

Das Syntagma „Volksgötter“ versteht Nietzsche in diesem Zitat im positiven oder zumindest „neutralen“ Sinne: diese sind Götter eines Volkes, das noch an sich selbst glaubt (vgl. Abschnitt *Zur Geschichte des Gottesbegriffs* der Fragmente aus dem Nachlass; KSA 13: 523). Der Gott eines Volkes, das noch an sich selbst glaubt, ist für Nietzsche Dionysos, der große Bejaher des *Lebens*. Doch nicht nur das. Nietzsche nennt sich, beispielsweise in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, auch selbst: „– ich, der letzte Jünger und Eingeweihte des Gottes Dionysos“ (KSA 5: 238). Aber Dionysos ist nicht nur der Lebensbejaher, sondern auch der „grosse Zweideutige und Versucher Gott“ (KSA 5: 238). Dionysos ist natürlich kein Gott im Sinne der „traditionellen“ Transzendenz, des Absoluten, der, mit Kant ausgedrückt, „Ding an sich“ wäre – „*Verfall eines Gottes*: Gott ward ‚Ding an sich‘ ...“ (KSA 6: 184) – sondern ist die innerste *Möglichkeit* des Subjekts. Die Möglichkeit, zu sein, was man noch nicht ist.

In diesem, folglich „dionysischen“, Kontext muss man auch den berühmten Ausruf Nietzsches vermuten:

Zwei Jahrtausende beinahe und nicht ein einziger neuer Gott! (KSA 6: 185; vgl. KSA 13: 525)

In einem der Fragmente aus dem Nachlass – später, im sogenannten *Willen zur Macht*, wurde es unter das Kapitel *Dionysos* eingereiht – treffen wir auf einen nicht weniger bekannten Satz, der sich als eigenartige „Fortsetzung“ des oben zitierten anbietet:

– Und wie viele neue Götter sind noch möglich! (KSA 13: 525)

Wenn Nietzsche diesen Satz/Ausruf in der Fortsetzung des Abschnitts erklärt, bezieht er Zarathustra in die Diskussion mit ein, den „Titelhelden“ des Buches *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Nietzsche beruft sich auf ihn, zuvor verweist er aber noch darauf, dass Zarathustra eine Autorität ist, die man nie genügend schätzen und repektieren kann. Und der Gedanke Zarathustras, auf den sich Nietzsche beruft, lautet folgendermaßen:

„ich würde nur an einen Gott glauben, der zu *tanzen* verstünde“ (KSA 13: 526; vgl. KSA 4: 49)

Der „Gott, der zu tanzen verstünde“, kann nur Dionysos sein. Umso mehr, als Dionysos in der griechischen Mythologie der Gott der Weinreben und der Ekstase ist, seinen göttlichen Eigenschaften nach ist er vor allem Freudenbringer und der, der Sorgen abwehrt. Im Zusammenhang mit seiner Verehrung spielten Dithyramben eine große Rolle, Chorlyrikverse zu Ehren des Gottes Dionysos. Und hier sind wir schon wieder bei Nietzsche, der seine eigenen Verse so betitelt – *Dionysos-Dithyramben*.

Wenn es um die Debatte über – unter Vorbehalt – Nietzsches Gottsuche geht, sollte eine von Nietzsches Dithyramben in die Diskussion mit einbezogen werden. Hier kämen insbesondere die enigmatischsten – und gerade deshalb die für die unterschiedlichsten *Lesarten* geeigneten – Verse aus den *Dionysos-Dithyramben* in Betracht. Im Gedicht *Klage der Ariadne* finden wir genau solche – sehr bekannten und häufig zitierten – Verse Nietzsches:

Oh, komm zurück,  
mein unbekannter Gott! mein *Schmerz*! mein letztes Glück! ...  
(KSA 6: 401)

Hans Küng beispielsweise liest in seiner umfangreichen Monografie *Existiert Gott?* (Küng 1978) im Kapitel über Nietzsche diese Verse „direkt“, im Sinne von Nietzsches bekenntnishafter Ich-Perspektive. Diese Auslegung setzt vor allem auf das psychologische beziehungsweise auf das psychoanalytische Moment, und zwar im Kontext von Nietzsches sonstigem „Fluch auf das Christentum“.<sup>4</sup> Küngs Deutung der zitierten Verse wird ein wenig erschwert durch die Tatsache, dass Nietzsche sie schon im vierten Buch des Werkes *Also sprach Zarathustra* zum ersten Mal geschrieben hat, und zwar im Kapitel *Der Zauberer* (KSA 4: 313–317). Der, der das Gedicht spricht (das „lyrische Subjekt“), ist ein alter Zauberer „mit stieren Augen“, der Zarathustra anspricht, ihn auf die Probe stellt. Als ihn Zarathustra während der Rezitation rüde unterbricht, erklärt ihm der Zauberer:

Solcherlei gehört zu meiner Kunst; dich selber wollte ich auf die Probe stellen, als ich dir diese Probe gab! Und, wahrlich, du hast mich gut durchschaut! (KSA 4: 317)

Das „Gedicht des Zauberers“ aus dem *Zarathustra* hat Nietzsche später, in den *Dionysos-Dithyramben*, *Klage der Ariadne* betitelt. Die lyrische Stimme in der ersten Person ist nun nicht mehr die des Zauberers, sondern Ariadnes, und Nietzsche fügt diesem „Dithyrambus“ in der neuen Version noch eine Strophe hinzu. In dieser meldet sich Dionysos zu Wort und spricht Ariadne an. Im letzten Vers, gesperrt geschrieben, sagt er: „*Ich bin dein Labyrinth ...*“ (KSA 6: 401).

Unter Berücksichtigung dieses Kontexts kann Küngs Interpretation auch diskutabel sein. Umso mehr, als seine Deutung in der Fortsetzung, gestützt auf Nietzsches Formulierung „Cosima ... Ariadne ...“ (KGB 8: 579), niedergeschrieben in einem Brief an Jacob Burckhardt Anfang Januar 1889 (das heißt bereits in der Phase von Nietzsches geistigem Zusammenbruch)<sup>5</sup>, auf die triviale Feststellung hinausläuft, dass Ariadne niemand anderer ist als Cosima Wagner, übrigens Nietzsches unerhörte Liebe.

Eine ähnlich „übereilte“ und in dieser Hinsicht problematische Deutung der *Dionysos-Dithyramben* findet sich auch bei Ivan Urbančič, dem namhaftesten slowenischen Erforscher von Nietzsches Philosophie. Bei der Interpretation des Gedichts *Nur Narr! Nur Dichter!* (und auch *Zwischen Raubvögeln*) schließt Urbančič beispielsweise auf eine dreifache Identifikation: zunächst zwischen dem, der das Gedicht „spricht“ und Zarathustra, und dann zwischen Zarathustra und Nietzsche selbst. Urbančič sagt wörtlich Folgendes: „Zarathustra, der Nietzsche selbst ist ...“ (Urbančič 1989: 366).<sup>6</sup>

Das Gedicht *Nur Narr! Nur Dichter!* findet sich bereits im vierten Buch von *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Auch hier ist, wie schon in der *Klage der Ariadne*, das „lyrische Subjekt“ der alte Zauberer, nicht Zarathustra. Zwischen Nietzsche und „Zarathustra“

<sup>4</sup> Ähnlich, wenn auch aus einer anderen philosophischen Perspektive, deutet beispielsweise Karl Jaspers Nietzsches Beziehung zu Gott, wenn er die These vertritt, „Nietzsches Kampf gegen das Christentum erwächst aus seiner eigenen Christlichkeit“ (Jaspers 1985: 7).

<sup>5</sup> Es handelt sich um den berühmten Brief, den Nietzsche übrigens in bombastischem Ton beginnt, bezeichnend für die ersten Tage des Januar 1889: „Lieber Herr Professor, zuletzt wäre ich sehr viel lieber Basler Professor als Gott; aber ich habe es nicht gewagt, meinen Privat-Egoismus so weit zu treiben, um seinetwegen die Schaffung der Welt zu unterlassen.“ (KGB 8: 577–578)

<sup>6</sup> Vgl. Urbančičs spätere „Selbstkritik“ einer derart „direkten“ Deutung der *Dionysos-Dithyramben* im Buch *Zaratuštrovo izročilo I* (*Die Zarathustra-Überlieferung I*; Urbančič 1993: 37–40).

können wir keine eindeutigen Zeichen der Gleichsetzung finden. Letztlich bedeutet eine solche Eindeutigkeit die Leugnung der Ambivalenz von Nietzsches Dichtung. Doch nicht nur das. Nietzsches „Wahrheit über die Wahrheit“ oder, genauer, seine *Versuche* mit der Wahrheit aus einer besonderen Perspektive, erhellen gerade seine *Dionysos-Dithyramben*. Nietzsches Dichtung spricht zweifellos von wesentlichen Dingen seines Denkens. In dieser Hinsicht dürfte man einer Überlegung über den Status der *Dithyramben* – aber auch des Buches *Also sprach Zarathustra*, sofern wir es auch als philosophische Dichtung, d.h. als para-literarisches Werk verstehen – an sich innerhalb von Nietzsches Werk nicht aus dem Weg gehen.

Was ist nämlich *dieses*, das beim Philosophen Nietzsche unausgesprochen bleibt und seine Verbalisierung im Medium der Dichtersprache sucht? Ist es das, was Nietzsches Denken selbst nicht mehr zu denken vermag?

Nietzsche nennt seine Dichtersprache: „Dionysos-Dithyramben“. Diese Bezeichnung fällt in die Endzeit seines Denkens, und zugleich kehrt er mit ihr an den Anfang zurück – nicht nur seines Denkens, sondern auch des Griechentums. Schon in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* findet sich nämlich eine Formulierung, die davon zeugt, dass der Mensch mit den dionysischen Dithyramben „angeregt war zur höchsten Steigerung all seines symbolischen Vermögens“ [um diese Gesamtentfesselung aller symbolischen Kräfte zu fassen] (KSA 1: 34).

Die letzten Worte von Nietzsches Aufsatz *Ecce homo* lauten:

– Hat man mich verstanden? – *Dionysos gegen den Gekreuzigten* ... (KSA 6: 374; vgl. KSA 13: 321)

Dieser zweideutige unvollendete Satz erhält seine zusätzliche Erklärung in einem der Fragmente aus dem Nachlass vom Frühjahr 1888. Darin heißt es unter anderem:

»der Gott am Kreuz« ist ein Fluch auf Leben, ein Fingerzeig, sich von ihm zu erlösen  
der in Stücke geschnittene Dionysos ist eine *Verheißung* ins Leben: es wird ewig wieder geboren und aus der Zerstörung heimkommen (KSA 13: 267)

Diese Sätze zeugen nicht nur vom radikalen Gegensatz zwischen Jesus und Dionysos, sondern variieren erneut Nietzsches Gedanken von der ewigen Wiederkunft des Gleichen. Das, was ewig aufs Neue wiederkehrt, ist der Wille zur Macht als selbst wollende Macht. Oder, wie eine der bekanntesten Definitionen des Willens zur Macht bei Nietzsche lautet, aus dem Jahre 1885: „diese meine *dionysische* Welt des Ewig-sich-selber-Schaffens, des Ewig-sich-selber-Zerstörens, diese Geheimniß-Welt der doppelten Wollüste, dieß mein Jenseits von Gut und Böse, ohne Ziel [...] *Diese Welt ist der Wille zur Macht – und nichts außerdem!* Und auch ihr selber seid dieser Wille zur Macht – und nichts außerdem!“ (KSA 11: 611).

Nietzsche hat seinen Gedanken von der ewigen Wiederkunft des Gleichen auch mit den Adjektiven *schwerster*, *schweigender*, *schauriger* Gedanke versehen. Offenbar deshalb, weil das der Gedanke ist, der sich permanent der sprachlichen Artikulation entzieht und für den es kein *richtiges* Wort gibt. Dennoch harrt Nietzsches Philosophie, ungeachtet all dessen, auf dem Weg dieser *Benennung* aus. Sie versucht, die Wahrheit

dieser „grausamen Gedanken“ zu finden, auszusprechen. Daher scheint es, als sei Nietzsches Denken über den Willen zur Macht, wozu auch der Gedanke der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen gehört, ein Denken darüber, dass das *Erkennen* (jeder) Wahrheit eine unmögliche Aufgabe ist. Dennoch *denkt* und *muss* Nietzsche selbst irgendeine Wahrheit denken, „weil wir *nur* in der sprachlichen Form *denken* – somit die ‚ewige Wahrheit‘ der ‚Vernunft‘ glauben (z. B. Subjekt, Prädikat usw.)“ (KSA 12: 193).

„Das vernünftige Denken ist ein Interpretieren nach einem Schema, welches wir nicht abwerfen können“, sagt Nietzsche im selben Fragment.

Nach diesem *Schema* zu denken, bedeutet, die Wahrheit stets als *Erkenntnis*wahrheit zu denken, also als *Wahrheit*, die nicht im Einklang mit der „Idee“ des *Willens zur Macht* steht:

Wir haben die Welt, welche Werth hat, geschaffen! Dies erkennend erkennen wir auch, daß die Verehrung der Wahrheit schon die *Folge* einer Illusion ist – und daß man mehr als sie die bildende, vereinfachende, gestaltende, erdichtende Kraft zu schätzen hat [...] (KSA 11: 146)

Nietzsches Denken ist bestimmt von der Idee des Willens zur Macht, zugleich kann sie jedoch der Tatsache nicht aus dem Weg gehen, dass ihr Haus ein Labyrinth der Wahrheit als *Erkenntnis* ist. Das Schicksal dieses Denkens ist daher, dass es sich immer wieder aufs Neue gegen sich selbst wendet. Als hätte das erkennende Subjekt, „der Wahrheit Freier“, der „von Einer Wahrheit / verbrannt und durstig“ ist, „*verbannt sei / von aller Wahrheit*“ (KSA 6: 377, 380), wie es in dem berühmten Dithyrambus *Nur Narr! Nur Dichter!* heißt, die vernichtende Kritik der erkennenden Macht ausgesprochen. Letztlich spricht er selbst die Worte, die vom Dichter-Narren zeugen, der „herumsteig[t] auf lügnerischen Wortebrücken / auf Lügen-Regenbogen / zwischen falschen Himmeln / herumschweifend, herumschleichend –,“ (KSA 6: 378).

Im Sommer 1888 hat Nietzsche zum Beispiel diese drei bedeutsamen Einzelzeilen/-verse verfasst, in welchen, nach seiner Fassung, die *Worte* von der *Ohnmacht der Worte* sprechen, das *Ich* von der *Ohnmacht des Ichs* (KSA 13: 575):

ich bin nur ein Worte-macher:  
was liegt an Worten!  
was liegt an mir!

Nietzsches Philosophie führt an ihrem eigenen lebendigen Leib den Zerfall des metaphysischen Denkens über die Wahrheit vor. Sie *weiß* nämlich, dass es ein Labyrinth von Wegen *ist* und dass dieses Labyrinth zugleich ihre einzige Bleibe darstellt.

\* \* \*

Wie man weiß, hat Nietzsche in den ersten Tagen des Januar 1889 – kurz vor seinem geistigen Zusammenbruch – die letzte Version der *Dionysos-Dithyramben* durchgesehen. Dabei ist nicht unbedeutend, dass zwischen Nietzsches Philosophie im engeren Sinne und seinem literarischen Schaffen eine besondere Beziehung besteht. Nietzsches *literarische* Texte sind eine Art „zweite Natur“, eine „Rückseite“ seines Denkens (hier müsste man vielleicht noch Nietzsches eigenes musikalisches Schaffen

beziehungsweise seine besondere Beziehung zur Musik überhaupt hinzuzählen). Was Nietzsches Dichtung betrifft, ist schon auf den ersten Blick klar, dass sie sich nicht vom Horizont seines Denkens abhebt. Letztendlich finden sich in seinen Gedichten nicht selten Worte, die auch sein Denken kennzeichnen (zum Beispiel *Wahrheit, Wahnsinn, Leben, Tod, Gott, Ewigkeit, Notwendigkeit* etc.). Damit sind wir aber eigentlich bei einer allgemeinen, grundsätzlichen Frage angelangt, die das Verhältnis zwischen *Literatur* und *Philosophie* betrifft. Was Nietzsche angeht, könnte man die Frage nach diesem Verhältnis konkretisieren. Und zwar indem man sich fragt, *was es eigentlich ist, was in Nietzsches Philosophie unausgesprochen bleibt*.

Oder gar: Was ist es, was in Nietzsches Philosophie *unausgesprochen* bleiben muss?

Was ist es, was in Nietzsches Philosophie unausgesprochen, ohne Worte bleibt, zugleich aber beharrlich seine *Verbalisierung* gerade im Medium der Dichtersprache sucht? Ist es das, was Nietzsches Denken selbst nicht zu denken vermag?

Nietzsche spricht vom Verlust der Wahrheit, und auch, nicht zuletzt, von der Dichtung als einer besonderen Art von *Wahnsinn*. Allerdings haben die Worte vom Verlust der Wahrheit *im* poetischen Text eine bestimmte Position beziehungsweise „Funktion“. Wenn die letzte, endgültige Wahrheit des Denkens lautet, dass die Erkenntnis der Wahrheit eine unmögliche Aufgabe ist, und ein Privileg der Kunst, des poetischen Textes gerade die *Überwindung* dieser Wahrheit auf eine bestimmte Weise ist – und zwar, indem sie sie beherrscht, in Worte fasst, formt, das heißt, in die Form eines Gedichts bringt.

Das konstitutive Moment der Kunst, die Überwindung der Unerträglichkeit des Gedankens, dass wir „von jeder Wahrheit vertrieben“ sind beziehungsweise dass es „die Wahrheit nicht gibt“, ist das *Schaffen*. Und es ist kein Zufall, dass die höchste Manifestation des Schaffens für Nietzsche gerade die Kunst ist.<sup>7</sup> Im Buch *Also sprach Zarathustra* vermag der „Titelheld“ – Zarathustra – „seine letzte Einsamkeit“, sein Vertriebensein von der Wahrheit, nur mithilfe des Schaffens, der Dichtung, das heißt mithilfe künstlerischer Schöpfung zu ertragen.

Wenn Nietzsches Denken an die Grenzen der *Artikulation* stößt, an das – um Wittgenstein zu paraphrasieren – „wovon man nicht sprechen kann“, wechselt er nicht selten in einen anderen „Diskurs“: meist ist dies gerade die dionysische Sprache der Dithyramben (und auch die Aphoristik als besonderes paraliterarisches Genre). Grundlage einer solchen Sprache ist eine gewisse, unter Vorbehalt, ekstatische Verbalisierungsstrategie. Ihr unverkennbarer Zug ist die Ambivalenz: die Sprache der *Dithyramben* ist nicht nur *poetisch*, sondern rotiert die ganze Zeit auf der Schwelle zwischen „ja“ und „nein“, „Verstand“ und „Wahnsinn“ – davon sprechen letzten Endes auch die Worte über den Dichter-Narren aus dem Dithyrambus *Nur Narr! Nur Dichter!*.

Überhaupt scheint es, als kämpfe Nietzsche gegen etwas, was man den Verlust der Mitte nennen könnte. Diesen Verlust verkündet er, zugleich jedoch kämpft er dagegen an. Nicht zuletzt in dem erwähnten Gedicht findet sich ein Vers, der vom „Vertriebensein von der Wahrheit“ spricht. Und der philosophische Gedanke kämpft gegen dieses „Vertriebensein von der Wahrheit“ – dieses Vertriebensein ist zugleich schon das Schicksal der (post)modernen Philosophie überhaupt – an, indem es den Verlust der

<sup>7</sup> „Die Kunst und nichts als die Kunst. Sie ist die große Ermöglicherin des Lebens, die große Verführerin zum Leben, das große Stimulans zum Leben ...“ (KSA 13: 194)



Wahrheit, das Vertriebenensein von der Wahrheit, die Heimatlosigkeit im tieferen Sinne des Wortes, sinnlich erfassbar abbildet. Die Heimatlosigkeit findet ihre Heimat in der Dichtersprache, der höchsten Manifestation menschlichen Schaffens.

„Die Wahrheit ist häßlich: *wir haben die Kunst*, damit wir nicht an der Wahrheit zu Grunde gehen“ (KSA 13: 500; vgl. KSA 13: 522; 227), behauptet Nietzsche. Und das ist ein Gedanke, mit dem seine Philosophie – aus der Perspektive der *Kunst als privilegiertem Modus der schöpferischen Kraft?* – vielleicht die Möglichkeit eines anderen Überdenkens dessen eröffnet, was in ihr ungedacht bleibt.

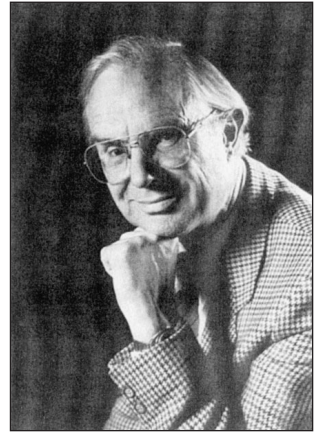
Universität Ljubljana, Slowenien

## QUELLEN UND LITERATURVERZEICHNIS

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**KARL HEINZ GÖLLER (1924–2009)**  
*In Memoriam*

*Janez Stanonik*



**Abstract**

The study is written in memory of Karl Heinz Göller, Professor of English literature at the Regensburg University, who died in Kelheim near Regensburg on 22. April 2009. University of Regensburg was founded in 1967, and Göller was the first Dean of its Faculty of Philosophy. For more than 40 years he worked for the development of good contacts between the universities of Regensburg and Ljubljana. Since 2000 he was member of the Advisory Committee of the review *Acta Neophilologica*. In 1983 he founded the Society of German Mediaevalists, one of the leading societies of German scholars from the whole Germany, and was elected its first president. The study gives report on the development of Göller as a scholar, and his basic achievement in his research, pedagogical work and in university administration.

**Key words:** Karl Heinz Göller, his biography, his research and his pedagogical work; University of Regensburg

Es ist für mich eine traurige Pflicht mit diesem Beitrag das Ableben meines guten Freundes und Berufskollegen Karl Heinz Göller zu melden.<sup>1</sup> Er starb am 22. April 2009, kurz vor der Vollendung seines 85. Lebensjahres. Die letzten Jahre seines Lebens lebte er zusammen mit seiner Frau Jutta in seinem Haus in Kelheim, einer Stadt auf Ufer der Donau, oberhalb Regensburg. Seit Jahrgang 2000 war Göller Mitglied des Aufsichtsrates unserer Zeitschrift *Acta Neophilologica*, und das ist Anlass zum Schreiben dieses Nekrologs.

Das Leben Göllers war tief von der Zeit, in welcher er lebte, geprägt. Das 20. Jahrhundert ist durch zwei Weltkriege charakterisiert, die nicht nur Deutschland, sondern auch weite Teile Europas, in Trümmer legte. Die Geschichte des Balkans zeigt für diese

<sup>1</sup> Nekrologe zur Erinnerung an Karl Heinz Göller haben geschrieben: Wilhelm BUSSE (Düsseldorf): Karl Heinz Göller (1924–2009), *Das Mittelalter XIV* (2009), B. 2, S. 162–163. – Richard UTZ (Western Michigan University): In Memoriam Karl Heinz Göller (May 13, 1924 – April 22. 2009), *Perspicuitas* (Internet-Periodicum für mediaevistische Sprach-, Literatur- u. Kulturwissenschaft, Universität Duisburg-Essen) Januar 2010.

Zeit, wie tief die Wurzeln dieser Tragödie lagen. Die Unfähigkeit der Weltpolitiker nach dem Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges führte Deutschland in eine tiefe ökonomische Krise, die in dem Wahnsinn des Nationalsozialismus endete. Uns sind noch immer die Erwägungen der deutschen Heeresleitung vor dem Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges unbekannt, die es Lenin ermöglichten nach Russland zu fahren. Wir hoffen, dass in Zukunft die Welt doch neue Auswege für solche Tragödien findet.

## 1.

Karl Heinz Göller war geboren am 13. April 1924 in Neheim-Hüsten, einem Orte östlich von Dortmund, im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen. Seine Ahnan waren Westfalen. Nach der Beendigung der Mittelschulbildung wurde er in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus in den Deutschen Arbeitsdienst mobilisiert. Während des Zweiten Weltkrieges diente er in der Wehrmacht. Kurz vor dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges geriet er in die englische Kriegsgefangenschaft.

Nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges wurde Göller bald aus der englischen Kriegsgefangenschaft freigelassen. Er wollte nun sein Studium an einer Universität verfolgen. Das gelang ihm anfangs jedoch nicht, da die Universitäten mit Studenten überfüllt waren. So überlebte er diese Nachkriegsjahre, die durch Hungersnot und ungenügende Heizung charakterisiert waren, als Volksschullehrer in Limburg an der Lahn (1946–1952). Hier vermählte er sich mit seiner ersten Ehefrau Annerose. Obgleich sie aus einer kommerziellen Familie kam, hatte sie Verständnis für seine intellektuellen Bestrebungen eine Universitätsbildung zu erlangen.

Im Jahre 1953 gelang es endlich Göller sein Studium an der Universität Bonn anzufangen. Er studierte Anglistik unter Professor Walter Franz Schirmer, in seiner Zeit einem der bekanntesten deutschen Anglisten.<sup>2</sup> Neben Schirmer gab es in Jener Zeit in Bonn noch mehrere wohlbekannte Professoren, die für Göller bedeutend waren, obgleich sie nicht Anglistik unterrichteten: der Literaturhistoriker Günther Müller mit Vorlesungen über die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters, die Philosophen Theodor List und Erich Rothacker, und der Romanist Ernst Robert Curtius, der sich auch für die Poesie T. S. Eliots interessierte. Sehr bedeutend für Göllers wissenschaftliche Entwicklung war auch der Altgermanist Werner Richter. Unter Göllers Mitschülern finden wir viele Namen, die später in Deutschland bekannt waren: Arno Esch, Ulrich Broich, Theo Golpers, Theo Stemmler, Rudolf Sühnel und Erwin Wolff.

Schon nach dem ersten Jahre seines Universitätsstudiums erweckte Göller die Aufmerksamkeit seines Universitätslehrers, Professor Schirmers: Göller war an der englischen Poesie des XVIII. Jahrhunderts interessiert. Das war auch das Gebiet in welchem Schirmer zu dieser Zeit arbeitete. In 1955 verteidigte Göller bei Schirmer mit Erfolg seine Doktorarbeit *Die Entwicklung von Thomsons Weltbild*. Der englische Dichter James Thomson hat in den Jahren 1726–1730 mit seinem Gedicht *The Seasons*

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Franz Schirmer, geboren in Düsseldorf am 18. Dezember 1888, war 1925–1929 Professor der Anglistik in Bonn, 1929–1932 Professor in Tübingen, und nach 1932 in Berlin. Seit 1946 war er wieder in Bonn, wo er 1957 emeritierte, doch blieb er wissenschaftlich tätig bis zum Ende seines Lebens. In den Jahren 1942–1964 war er Mitherausgeber der Zeitschrift *Anglia*. Er starb in Bonn am 22. März 1984.

das Gefühl für die Schönheit des Lebens auf dem englischen Lande erweckt und so die Bewegung der englischen Vorromantik ins Leben gebracht. Ein Jahr nach dieser Dissertation, in 1956, wurde Göller zum wissenschaftlichen Assistenten an der Universität Bonn ernannt. Ein Jahr darauf, 1957, wurde Professor Schirmer emeritiert, doch blieb er noch weiter wissenschaftlich tätig, diesmal in der englischen Literatur der Mittelalters. 1963 erwarb sich Göller mit der Habilitationsarbeit *König Arthur in der englischen Literatur des späten Mittelalters* den Titel des habilitierten Anglisten.

Im Jahre 1963 erhielt Göller den Posten eines Universitätslehrers für Anglistik in Göttingen. Doch blieb er in Göttingen nur vier Jahre, da er sich bald nach seiner Ankunft in Göttingen entschloss nach Regensburg weiterzufahren. Göttingen war für Göller nur ein kurzes Intermezzo in seiner Universitätslaufbahn.

## 2.

Die Universität Regensburg wurde 1962 gegründet. Das war eine der ersten Universitäten, die in Deutschland nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg kreiert wurden. Die Wahl des Ortes war sehr glücklich: sie verband die neue Hochschulanstalt mit einer der ältesten Städte Deutschlands. Der Lehrbetrieb an der neuen Universität begann Anfang November 1967.

Am 7. Oktober 1966 erhielt Göller in Göttingen die Verfügung dass er mit 1. Mai 1967 als Lehrstuhlinhaber für Anglistik an der Universität Regensburg ernannt war, das ist: ein Semester vor der Eröffnung der neuen Universität. Er kam Anfang Mai nach Regensburg als einer der ersten Professoren an der neuen Universität. Schon Anfang Juni wurde er, für die Dauer von einem Jahr, zum Dekan der neugegründeten Philosophischen Fakultät ernannt. Göller kann deshalb mit Recht der Gründungsdekan der Philosophischen Fakultät Regensburg genannt werden. Verbunden mit dieser Ehre waren jedoch schwere Pflichten, die den Bau des neuen Universitätsgebäudes und die Gründung der Universitätsbibliothek betrafen. Daneben gab es zahllose Konferenzen an der Fakultät, beim Rektorat der Universität Regensburg und in den Ämtern des Landes Bayern und des Staates. So geschah Göller was vielen von seinen Zeitgenossen zuteil wurde: man überforderte ihn mit Pflichten, die kaum noch zu tragen waren. Der Staat riskierte auf diese Weise ganze Generationen von seinen Zeitgenossen um das Land möglichst bald aus der Nachkriegsnot zu retten.

Die Gründung der neuen Universität war verbunden mit der Lösung der Frage, wie sich die neue Universität den Erfordernissen ihrer Zeit anpassen sollte. Göller war in seinen Ansichten vorsichtig konservativ. Er sah ein, dass das alte System der Ordinarien, die an den Universitäten ihre wissenschaftliche Arbeit pflegten, dabei aber den Unterricht als eine nebensächliche Pflicht betrachteten, für die Universitäten nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg nicht länger annehmbar war. Er betrachtete die Universität vor allem als die höchste Unterrichtsanstalt, die jedoch ihre alten Verdienste für die Wissenschaft nicht verlieren sollte. Gleichzeitig mit dieser Stellungnahme verteidigte er den Unterricht der englischen Sprache und Literatur an den deutschen Universitäten, wo die Anglistik eine der Zeit gemäße Stelle haben sollte. Er forderte auch, dass in Deutschland die Mittelalterforschung ihre alte Bedeutung behalten sollte. Die Interessen

der Mittelalterforschung unterstützte er auch mit seinen Bemühungen für die Gründung des Mediävistenverbandes, die 1983 mit der Gründung des Verbandes mit Erfolg gekrönt waren. Als Anerkennung für seine Bemühungen wurde Göller zum ersten Präsidenten des neuen Vereins gewählt und behielt diesen Ehrenposten noch mehrere Jahre, worauf er zum Vizepräsidenten des Vereines gewählt wurde. Heute verbindet der Verein die Mediävistenforscher aus ganz Deutschland und hat ein eigenes wissenschaftliches Organ, die Zeitschrift *Das Mittelalter*. Diese Zeitschrift ist heute als eine der besten wissenschaftlichen Publikationen Deutschlands gewertet.

Als Lehrer an der Universität Regensburg bemühte sich Göller neue Wege im Kontakt mit seinen Studenten zu finden. Einmal wöchentlich hatte er vor oder nach seiner Vorlesung Gespräch mit seinen Studenten bei einer Tasse Kaffee. Damit wünschte er den Studenten bei ihren Bemühungen für die Lösung ihrer Probleme zu helfen. Einmal monatlich lud er eine Gruppe von seinen Studenten in sein Landhaus in Kirn in Ostbayern um mit ihnen über das Wochenende in der schönen Umgebung der Wiesenlandschaft die Probleme des Universitätsstudiums der Anglistik zu diskutieren. Er führte 35 von seinen Studenten zur Erreichung der Doktorwürde, und 9 zur Habilitation. Er sorgte auch dafür, dass sie nach der Beendigung ihrer Universitätsstudien eine entsprechende Dienststelle bekommen haben. Er blieb auch später mit ihnen in einem fruchtbringenden Kontakt.

Als Universitätslehrer für englische Literaturgeschichte sorgte Göller, dass wichtige englische und amerikanische Texte auch in deutschen Ausgaben erreichbar waren, oft mit seinen Anmerkungen.

Als Forscher arbeitete Göller in allen Zeitabschnitten der englischen Literaturgeschichte, von der altenglischen Periode, über Chaucer und Shakespeare, bis in die Gegenwart, einschliesslich die Zeit nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Er widmete dem späten Mittelalter und der Wiederbelebung der Sage von König Arthur im XX. Jahrhundert grosse Aufmerksamkeit. Göllers Interesse für die Sage von König Arthur wurde in ihm schon von seinem Lehrer Walter Schirmer erweckt: unter seiner Leitung vollendete Göller seine Habilitationsarbeit über König Arthur in der englischen Literatur des späten Mittelalters. Göller publizierte in diesem Gebiet noch die Studien über *Die Wappen des Königs Arthurs* (1962), *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Reassessment of the Poem* (1981), *Arthurs Aufstieg zum Heiligen* (1989). Göller untersuchte auch die Entwicklung der literarischen Formen in der englischen und amerikanischen Literatur, die Geschichte der altenglischen Elegie sowie die Geschichte der Novelle in der englischen und amerikanischen Literatur. Göllers bedeutendste Leistung in diesem Gebiet ist sein Buch *Romance and Novel* (19–2), in welchem er die Darstellungsformen in der englischen Literatur von der spätmittelalterlichen Romance und bis zu den Anfängen des modernen Romans untersucht.

Göllers Bibliographie zählt über 100 wissenschaftliche Werke und über 60 Rezensionen.<sup>3</sup> Das ist eine ausserordentlich grosse Zahl wenn man berücksichtigt die Zeit

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<sup>3</sup> Göllers Bibliographie für die Zeit von 1952 bis 1985 ist publiziert in: *Göllers Festschrift zu seinem 65. Jahresjubiläum* (hgg. von Uwe Böker, Manfred Parma und Rainer Schöwerling, Stuttgart 1989, 375–383). – Göllers Publikationen aus der Zeit 1985–2003 sind bibliographisch erfasst in *Göller Festschrift zum 80. Geburtsjahr* (hgg. von Uwe Böker, Lang Vlg., 2004, Frankfurt a/M, S. 9–16). Göllers Werke aus seinen letzten Lebensjahren sind bibliographisch angeführt im Göllers Nekrolog geschrieben von Richard Utz. S. oben Anm.

in welcher er lebte und die Schwierigkeiten, die er umgehen musste, bevor er überhaupt erst die Möglichkeit hatte sich der wissenschaftlichen Arbeit zu widmen. Er war vor allem interessiert in der wissenschaftlich begründeten Deutung des literarischen Textes. Besonders lieb waren ihm Probleme, die anscheinend einfach waren, die jedoch mit der gut begründeten Analyse zur Lösung von Komplexen Fragen führen konnten. Göller erforschte vor allem den Inhalt, weniger die ästhetische Seite eines Werkes, oder seine theoretischen Grundlagen, obgleich er auch mehrmals seine Struktur eingehender besprach.

Ich kann diesen Teil meines Berichtes nur noch mit der Feststellung beschliessen, dass Göller in einer grossen Zahl von verantwortungsvollen Pflichten aktiv war, die ich hier nur kurz aufzählen kann: er organisierte in Regensburg und in Passau mehrere wissenschaftliche Konferenzen deutscher Forscher, an denen auch ausländische Wissenschaftler teilnehmen konnten. Er war Mitglied von mehreren deutschen und internationalen Organisationen, die ihm auch leitende Funktionen anvertraut hatten. Als Gast gab er einzelne Vorträge an verschiedenen Universitäten in Deutschland und im Ausland. Er erhielt Einladungen von den Universitäten Freiburg in der Schweiz, Tübingen und Kiel, dass er Lehrstühle für Anglistik an diesen Universitäten übernähme, er akzeptierte jedoch diese Angebote nicht. Er untersuchte Probleme aus der Frühgeschichte Regensburgs und schrieb wissenschaftliche Werke in diesem Gebiet. Er interessierte sich für die Qualität des Unterrichtes der fremden Sprachen in Regensburg und in der Umgebung von Kirn und sorgte für die Nachbildung der Mittelschullehrer. Er war tätig im Schriftstellerverein der Stadt Regensburg.

### 3.

Zum Schluss müssen wir noch über Göllers Tätigkeit für die Entwicklung guter Beziehungen zwischen den deutschen Universitäten und den Universitäten in anderen Teilen Europas und Amerikas berichten. In Slowenien waren wir in dieser seiner Tätigkeit besonders interessiert.

Als Professor für Anglistik hatte Göller gute Beziehungen mit den Universitäten in Grossbritannien, in den Vereinigten Staaten und in Kanada. An mehreren von diesen Universitäten arbeiteten seine früheren Schüler als Lehrer.

Göller hatte gute Beziehungen mit polnischen Anglisten, besonders mit der Jagiellonischen Universität in Krakau. Als Anerkennung für diese seine Verdienste wurde ihm die Verdienstmedaille der Jagiellonischen Universität verliehen.

Man findet in Göllers Biographien die Angabe, dass Göller auch Kontakte mit jugoslawischen Universitäten pflegte. Das ist nicht ganz richtig: Göller hatte nur engere Kontakte mit Slowenien. Seine Beziehungen mit anderen jugoslawischen Universitäten sind mir unbekannt: wahrscheinlich existierten sie nicht.

In 1977 kam Göller mit einer Gruppe von Universitätsprofessoren aus Regensburg nach Ljubljana um beim Rektorat der hiesigen Universität die Möglichkeit der wissenschaftlichen Beziehungen zwischen den Universitäten Regensburg und Ljubljana zu besprechen. Die Universität Ljubljana fand dieses Angebot interessant, da man von einer neugegründeten deutschen Universität frische Anregungen für solche Kontakte



erwartete. Man unterzeichnete den Vertrag für die Entwicklung der wissenschaftlichen Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Universitäten Regensburg und Ljubljana. Dieser Vertrag machte es auch mir möglich, dass ich mehrere Plätze in Bayern besuchen konnte, oft mit Göllers Hilfe: Regensburg mit seinen interessanten alten Gebäuden und mit der Walhalla am Ufer der Donau; Passau, Chiemsee und Burghausen. In Altötting war ich überrascht von der Form der dortigen Kirche, die eine grosse Ähnlichkeit mit mehreren Kirchen in Slowenien aufweist; so mit der Kirche des hl. Johannes des Täufers im Orte Muta, im Drautale östlich von Dravograd (Unterdrauburg); und die Kirche an der Strasse Velenje (Wöllan) – Slovenj Gradec (Windischgraz), im Orte Šentilj bei Mislinja (Missling).

#### 4.

Die interessanteste Reise, die ich mit Göller in Slowenien machte, folgte dem Weg den Wolfram von Eschenbach in seinem Ep *Parzival* dem Trevrizent zuschreibt. Wahrscheinlich ist Wolfram selbst diesen Weg geritten (s. *Parzival*, Verse 498, 21–499, 10):

Ūz Zilje ich vür den Rôhäs reit  
drî maentage ich dâ vil gestreit  
mich dûhte ich hat dâ wol gestriten:  
dar nâch ich schierste kom geriten  
in die wîten Gandine  
dâ nâch der ane dîne  
Gandîn wart genennet.  
dâ wart Ithêr bekennet.  
Die selbe stat lît aldâ  
dâ diu Greian in die Trâ,  
Mit golde ein wazzer, rinnet,  
dâ wart Ithêr geminnet.  
Dîne basen er dâ vant:  
diu was vrouwe überz lant:  
Gandîn von Anschouwe  
hie� si dâ wesen vrouwe.  
si heizet Lammire:  
so ist daz lant genennet Stire  
swer schildes ambet üeben wil,  
der muoz durchstrîchen lande vil.

Von der Mauer der Burgruine Cilli, die sich über den Gipfel des Berges ausbreitet, der sich über die Stadt Celje (Cilli) erhebt, hatten wir eine schöne Aussicht über das weite Tal des Flusses Savinja (Sann). Aus Celje fuhren Göller und ich ostwärts, entlang dem Bach Voglajna, der sich hier seinen Weg, der unserer Reiserichtung entgegengesetzt war, durch enge Täler, umgeben von dichten Wäldern und einzelnen Bauerngütern, fand.

Wir kamen in den Markt Rogatec (in Wolfram: Rohäs). Die hügelige Umgebung von Rogatec ist beherrscht von einer Anhöhe mit steilen bewaldeten Abhängen und mit einer mittelalterlichen Schlossruine auf der Spitze. Wir stiegen zu der Ruine und fanden an der Seite, die dem Tale zugewendet ist, eine geebnete Fläche mit Wiese bewachsen und durch eine niedrige Mauer von dem steilen bewaldeten Abhänge getrennt. Hier waren kleinere ritterliche Kampfspiele möglich. Grössere Turniere konnten nur unten im Tale in der Umgebung des Marktes statt finden.

Von Rogatec fuhren wir weiter über Pässe zwischen den Hügeln und durch enge Täler, umgeben von steilen Wiesen. Endlich kamen wir auf einen Berg mit mehreren Häusern und einer schönen gotischen Kirche. Die Kirche ist mit ihrer beherrschenden Lage schon aus der Ferne sichtbar. Sie stammt aus dem Spätmittelalter und wurde erbaut zum Andenken an die Schlacht bei Nikopol, einer Stadt in Bulgarien auf dem Ufer der Donau. In dieser Schlacht am 26. September 1396 wurde das christliche Heer bestehend aus Kämpfern aus verschiedenen Teilen Europas, darunter vielen Franzosen, vernichtend geschlagen. In dieser Schlacht hat sich Hermann II., Graf von Cilli, mit seiner Tapferkeit und kaltblütiger Geistesgegenwart besonders ausgezeichnet. Die Familie des Grafen gab eine bedeutende Summe Geldes als ihren Beitrag für den Bau dieser Kirche.

Zu Mittag sassen wir nahe der Kirche auf einer von der Sonne bestrahlten Terrasse, die angenehm warm war. Wir bewunderten die schöne Umgebung, von den Weinbergen reich bewachsen. Die Luft war gefüllt mit dem Singen der Grillen und Vögel in welches sich das Klappern der Klopotetz einmischte.

Von dieser Kirche fuhren wir bergab in das Tal des Flusses Drava (Drau) und in die Stadt Ptuj (Pettau). Wolfram nennt in seinem Ep *Parzival* den Namen dieser Stadt nicht, doch ist sie mit den Namen der Flüsse Greian und Trâ deutlich erkennbar. In der nördlichen Vorstadt der Stadt Ptuj fanden wir den Bach Grajena (in Wolfram Greian), der dann durch die östlichen Vororte von Ptuj in einer tiefen Rinne zu seiner Mündung in den Fluss Drava (deutsch Drau, Wolfram Trâ) fliesst. Wir besuchten noch die mittelalterliche Kirche Hajdina (in Wolfram: Gandin) wo Göller mehrere Photoaufnahmen von dortigen Fresken machte, die er dann in seinem Buche *Der Bildtypus Imago Pietatis* (Regensburg, o.D. Vgl. Abb. 24 und 25) veröffentlichte.

Von Pettau fuhren wir zurück nach Hause in Ljubljana (Laibach). Unterwegs besuchten wir noch ein Bauerngut in der Umgebung von Cilli (Celje). Die Leute in diesem Haus waren mir noch aus der Vorkriegszeit bekannt. Wir waren freundlich empfangen: man bewirtete uns mit frischgekochten Esskastanien, die im Walde gesammelt waren, und mit Weinmost. Dieser war noch etwas süß, obgleich seine Gärung schon beinahe beendet war. In guter Gesellschaft vergingen uns die Nachmittagsstunden schnell. Als wir spät am Abend nach Laibach zurück kamen, sagte mir Göller, dass er sich schon lange nicht so wohl gefühlt hatte wie in diesem Bauernhaus in der Umgebung von Cilli.

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## L'ACTUALITÉ DE L'ŒUVRE DE PIERRE CORNEILLE

*Boštjan Marko Turk*

### Résumé

L'univers théâtral de Pierre Corneille est un univers fondé sur la loi d'un côté et sur l'inspiration chevaleresque de l'autre. Il semble ainsi étranger à l'homme contemporain de même façon que nous percevons comme lointain les *topoi* de l'ancienne Rome et du monde médiéval. Pourtant le grand dramaturge nous ressemble en deux : l'homme évolutivement, n'a pas visiblement changé pendant l'histoire.

**Mots clés:** Rome, grandeur, intransigeance, noblesse, volonté, christianisme, époque moderne, culte du moi.

Le monde décrit par le dramaturge français Pierre Corneille, bien que rapproché des européens, semble lointain et étranger à l'homme contemporain. Le point de départ, l'éducation reçue par l'écrivain, nous l'indique clairement. Éduqué par les Jésuites, Corneille s'est adonné à l'étude des lettres anciennes, en particulier à celle du latin. C'est par l'intermédiaire de cette langue qu'il s'est familiarisé avec le monde romain qu'il représentera ensuite dans toute sa grandeur dans ses tragédies. Mais nous ne devons pas penser que cette grandeur s'exerce dans les œuvres sous la forme de cette cruauté que nous dépeignent les livres d'histoire. Les grands empereurs, en particulier Auguste, se distinguent des autres par ce que l'homme a de plus noble et qui était également le postulat de l'époque durant laquelle le dramaturge créait, le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle classique. C'est ce que l'on appelait alors le « sublime ».

La Bruyère définissait cette notion ainsi : « Le sublime ne peint que la vérité, mais en un sujet noble ; il la peint tout entière, dans sa cause et dans son effet ; il est l'expression ou l'image la plus digne de cette vérité. »<sup>1</sup> Il s'agit là aussi d'un trait typiquement « romain » du style de Corneille qui n'est ni lyrique ni typiquement rhétorique. Il sert avant tout à souligner la grandeur des hauts faits à l'aide d'une expression parfaite. Cependant, les hauts faits, les nobles actions sont incluses dans des duels rhétoriques. Suivant en cela précisément l'esprit du droit romain, l'écrivain organise des processus

<sup>1</sup> Jean de la Bruyère, *Les Caractères*. Paris: Garnier, 1960, p. 55.

dramatiques majestueux au cours desquels les personnes « sublimes » démontrent dans une langue élevée le bien-fondé de leur pensée, de l'histoire et de l'ordre moral. Ou bien le bien-fondé d'une décision humaine lorsque, par exemple, l'empereur Auguste déclare ne pas avoir envoyé les conjurés à la mort, mais leur avoir laissé la liberté en leur pardonnant le crime qu'ils s'apprêtaient à commettre.

Cependant le sublime chez Corneille n'est pas fondé sur des sentiments faibles. Il faut le comprendre, au contraire, comme la concrétisation de la volonté absolue qui donne au héros la force de réaliser les manœuvres morales les plus difficiles et inhabituelles. Comme l'a vu Brunetière dans ses *Études critiques*, la corrélation entre le devoir et la volonté, si caractéristique du théâtre de Corneille, constitue un trait caractéristique supplémentaire.

La volonté sort toujours triomphante de ce conflit, comme le remarque Paul Bénichou, l'un des principaux spécialistes de cette question, dans son illustre ouvrage *Morales du grand siècle*. Ainsi, la volonté est au premier plan de sa première pièce, la tragicomédie *Le Cid*. Bien que son argument s'inscrive dans le Moyen Âge, l'œuvre reflète la solidité de la force dialectique romaine. L'intrigue est reprise d'une pièce espagnole, *Mocedades de Cid (La jeunesse du Cid)*, cependant le dramaturge français a été contraint, pour respecter la règle des trois unités, de réduire considérablement les péripéties. Rodrigue, promis à Chimène, se voit contraint de provoquer en duel le père de sa fiancée pour venger une offense subie par son propre père. Le duel s'étant achevé par la mort du père de Chimène, Rodrigue se retrouve face à celle dont il a tué le père et qui, pour se venger, l'a livré au roi. Seule l'arrivée des soldats arabes, venus encercler la ville, résout le conflit des deux intransigeances. Rodrigue rassemble son armée, vainc les Maures et s'attire ainsi les faveurs du roi. Le roi apaise le conflit de la volonté et permet aux deux fiancés de se marier.

En réalité, nous pourrions reprocher au roi d'intervenir comme un *Deus ex machina* pour réconcilier les amants séparés par des sens du devoir opposés. L'enthousiasme du « moi », dans ce conflit interpersonnel concernant le point le plus sensible des rapports humains, acquiert parfois une acuité fantasmagorique. Il n'est pas insensé de le comparer à un duel à l'épée où l'un des adversaires se trouverait éliminé pour toujours. Ici, l'amour se trouve en contact direct avec la mort, car Rodrigue apporte sur la scène une épée, celle avec laquelle il a porté le coup fatal au père de son aimée. Cette tension sublime qui menace de briser le couple désormais réuni dans l'étreinte amoureuse est le *punctum saliens* de la pièce. Celui-ci est noyé dans la tradition féodale archaïque, c'est pourquoi nous ne pouvons aujourd'hui l'appréhender qu'à travers un voile qui, pourtant, n'est pas complètement opaque, car les sentiments tels que la tension et la volonté de puissance avec lesquels Corneille, selon l'expression de Benichou<sup>2</sup> examine l'âme humaine, sont également très présents dans les œuvres littéraires contemporaines. Sans approuver les points de vue exposés, nous voyons pourtant que l'amour et la mort y cohabitent dans la perspective de la déchéance du fondement qui établit l'homme dans la transmission de l'acte sexuel et cybernétique qui achève le chemin de l'*homo sapiens* sur la Planète.

Cependant, entre l'*eros* d'autrefois et celui d'aujourd'hui, il existe, sur le plan de la mort, une différence importante. La relation entre Rodrigue et Chimène est moderne

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1988, p. 18.

dans la mesure où elle est structurée horizontalement, c'est-à-dire synchroniquement. En revanche, elle est archaïque par le fait qu'elle n'est pas orientée dans une direction unique, mais générée dans un système de coordonnées. En effet, elle est déterminée par l'axe vertical que constitue l'autorité. Si l'homme contemporain est libre d'établir les relations selon sa propre volonté (la démocratie dont les élections sont l'ultime effet), en revanche, l'homme archaïque est prisonnier de la détermination verticale. C'est cette dernière qui l'établit comme tel. Entre Rodrigue et Chimène se trouve l'épée et sur cette épée le sang du père. Or, ce dernier ne réclame pas vengeance par le fait d'une émotion aveugle, mais parce que Chimène accomplir la punition, puis revenir à Rodrigue. Pour que cela soit officialisé, ces mots sont prononcés par le jeune homme. Il en est ainsi parce que, en tant qu'homme et gardien de l'autorité, il se réfère au code de l'autorité, au père ou, mieux, à sa mort. L'axe horizontal n'existe pas sans le vertical, c'est là le principal élément prouvant que nous avons affaire à un monde archaïque. Tout tourne autour de cela.

À partir de là, l'œuvre théâtrale de Corneille se subdivise en deux types de pièces, le premier type concernant Rome ou l'Empire romain durant la période préchrétienne et le second ce même Empire durant la période chrétienne. Dans le premier type, nous parlerons de la verticalité absolue du pouvoir, fondement du texte dramatique. *Cinna ou La Clémence d'Auguste* a pour argument l'histoire suivante : en raison de son amour pour la belle Émilie, Cinna, descendant de Pompée, s'engage dans une conspiration ayant pour objectif la mort de l'empereur Auguste. La haine d'Émilie est justifiée par le fait que son père, Toranius, est mort persécuté par Auguste. Pourtant ce dernier s'est montré généreux à l'égard de la jeune femme : il l'a introduite à la cour et a veillé à ce qu'elle y reçoive une bonne éducation. Il l'a traitée comme sa propre fille. Émilie, que toutes ces bontés n'ont pas émue, a promis sa main à celui qui tuera l'empereur. Lassé du pouvoir, Auguste demande conseil à Cinna et Maxime, ignorant que les deux hommes sont les initiateurs de la conspiration organisée contre lui. Il leur demande en toute amitié s'il doit ou non céder sa place à quelqu'un d'autre. À la grande surprise de Maxime, Cinna, qui souhaite obtenir la main d'Émilie grâce au meurtre de l'Empereur, déconseille à ce dernier de quitter le pouvoir. En apprenant ce qui motive les propos de Cinna, Maxime, furieux, dénonce son complice à Auguste. Blessé par cette nouvelle, l'Empereur exprime dans une tirade majestueuse ses peurs et ses reproches. Ayant fait venir Cinna, il sème le trouble dans son esprit et le désarme. Il fait de même avec Émilie et avec Maxime, le dénonciateur. Cependant, il s'élève au-dessus de la colère et de la rancune personnelle, disant « je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers. »<sup>3</sup> La pièce s'achève ainsi sur la grandeur de son pardon.

Le pardon d'Auguste est un acte de volonté. Cependant celle-ci, comme le montre l'action en elle-même, n'est pas réflexive dans la mesure où elle ne s'applique pas à des objets extérieurs mais réalise la glorification de l'Empereur dans sa verticalité sociale la plus exclusive. Cette verticalité s'est littéralement détachée de son socle horizontal et flotte dans l'espace. L'Empereur Auguste voit dans cet acte sa propre perfection qui en est la seule justification objective. Il est important de noter que cet acte ne peut en aucun cas avoir sa source dans l'époque romaine. En effet, les Romains

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Corneille, *Théâtre complet*. Paris: NRF, 1950, p. 957.



ne connaissaient ni le pardon (introduit plus tard par le christianisme) ni la valeur de la vie. À l'époque préindustrielle de l'esclavage, la vie était contingente, liée au hasard. Ainsi, l'acte d'Auguste n'est réflexif qu'en rapport avec l'Empereur lui-même ; il n'a de valeur qu'en tant que miroir de sa propre perfection. En dernière instance, il se rapproche entièrement, bien que *per negationem*, du dernier acte de *Caligula* de Camus, la « tragédie de la raison » écrite trois siècles plus tard. Au dernier instant de sa vie, alors qu'il est déjà transpercé par les lances des conjurés, ce dernier s'écrit encore au milieu des éclats du miroir brisé : « Je suis encore vivant, je suis encore vivant. »<sup>4</sup> Inutile de préciser que le noyau brisé de la pure verticalité sociologique n'est pas en contact avec le monde contemporain qui s'est aplati pour ne devenir qu'horizontalité pure avant de commencer à s'éparpiller : elle ne subsiste que comme une fresque des temps anciens, rien ne la retient dans notre présent.

La dernière œuvre sur laquelle il convient de s'attarder, *Polyeucte*, « tragédie chrétienne », comme l'intitule l'auteur lui-même, constitue le type dramatique tourné dans la direction opposée. L'intrigue est la suivante : au cours de l'acte I, nous apprenons que Polyeucte vient d'épouser Pauline, la femme dont l'histoire littéraire fera la plus honnête des épouses mariées à un homme qu'elles n'aiment pas. Néarque, ardent chrétien, essaie de convaincre son ami Polyeucte de se faire baptiser. La seconde péripétie importante de la pièce a son origine dans le fait que Pauline a, avant son mariage, aimé un notable romain du nom de Sévère. Félix, le père de Pauline, qui n'a jamais voulu de Sévère pour gendre, a décidé de marier sa fille à Polyeucte. Persuadée que Sévère est mort au combat, celle-ci a accepté. Finalement, Sévère revient triomphant et se prépare à offrir ses offrandes aux dieux. En pleine cérémonie, le mari de Pauline fait irruption, détruit les représentations des dieux païens et proclame sa foi. Il est fait prisonnier et son beau-père le conjure de renoncer au dieu chrétien s'il veut garder la vie sauve. Polyeucte reste ferme et obtient la mort qu'il demande, mais celle-ci entraîne la conversion de tous et son acte retentit comme l'apothéose de la volonté personnelle de prouver la validité de sa croyance.

Polyeucte est tout entier dans la volonté qui s'inscrit elle-même entièrement dans un but. À la différence de celui d'Auguste, son but est avant tout réflexif. Si Auguste fait figure d'exception brillante dans le cadre de la pré-histoire, de son côté, Polyeucte est l'arc qui, à travers l'instant actuel, relie la pré-histoire à l'histoire de l'*homo sapiens*. Polyeucte est un homme moderne. Sa réflexivité ne réside pas seulement dans sa conviction, mais avant tout dans l'acte de convaincre. Il est connu que Polyeucte passe pour la pièce la plus caractéristique de Corneille. En effet, l'auteur s'est toujours fixé pour objectif de choisir dans l'histoire des personnalités qui étonnent par leur force et leur singularité. En réalité, il a toujours cherché les exemples de l'extraordinaire énergie humaine. Cette dernière est le synonyme de l'auto-accomplissement de l'homme : le héros ne pouvait pas agir autrement qu'il ne l'a fait ; en se réalisant lui-même, il a également réalisé le monde. Polyeucte est moderne en ce qu'il s'affirme par un choix réflexif qui est implicite dans un contexte plus large. C'est ce que montre le fait qu'aucune jalousie n'intervient dans le triangle amoureux que constituent Pauline, Sévère et Polyeucte. À l'inverse de la jalousie, l'un des sentiments le plus autoréflexifs (la jalousie n'est même

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<sup>4</sup> Albert Camus, *Le Malentendu*, *Caligula*. Paris, Gallimard, 1958, p. 227

pas un miroir de soi-même, car elle est déformée) Polyeucte rejette tout poids structurel et dévalorise celle-ci dans son essence propre: en effet, Sévère est le seul à qui Polyeucte puisse prouver la valeur de sa volonté et de sa décision, au moment où il entraîne Pauline dans le plus difficile dilemme auquel peut être confrontée une femme qui aime : ou bien elle mourra avec son mari, ou bien elle vivra avec Sévère. C'est la première implication, car Pauline se retrouve maintenant placée devant le même dilemme par rapport à son mari : la dernière implication sera la fin de la pièce où tous reconnaissent que le dilemme de Polyeucte est la vérité et finissent par s'y plier. *Polyeucte* est ainsi la « transcendance » horizontale de la position de l'homme dans le monde que le héros réalise au prix de sa propre vie.

La pièce a longtemps été considérée comme représentant la victoire du sentiment religieux sur les devoirs humains, mais il s'agit là d'une *contradictio in adiecto*. Comment cela peut-il se produire dans une simple rocade si celle-ci n'est pas précédée par la volonté ? Et s'il s'agit bien d'une volonté plus forte que tout, alors il n'est pas question d'une pulsion de volonté, ni de son apothéose. C'est donc logiquement la volonté personnelle qui est au cœur de la pièce, cependant il ne s'agit pas de n'importe quel type de volonté. C'est la volonté d'accomplissement individuel, comme si la volonté de puissance était mise de côté pour devenir à nouveau autoréflexive. Nous touchons l'essentiel si nous disons qu'Auguste est un être de monologue, tandis que Polyeucte peut être considéré comme moderne du fait qu'il ne peut fonctionner autrement que dans un dialogue contraignant. C'est également ce qui relie Pierre Corneille à notre réalité contemporaine.

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## UN ROMAN POUR LA GÉNÉRATION DOT.COM? *LE COMTE DE MONTE-CRISTO* DANS L'ADAPTATION DE STEPHEN FRY

Katarina Marinčič

### Synopsis

En 2000, le romancier britannique Stephen Fry publie *The Stars' Tennis Balls*, une adaptation modernisante du roman *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* d'Alexandre Dumas. L'objectif de la présente contribution est d'analyser les techniques narratives des deux romanciers. Extrêmement fidèle au roman de Dumas au niveau de l'intrigue, Stephen Fry s'éloigne de son modèle au niveau stylistique, ce qui produit un effet de modernité qui ne s'apparente pourtant pas à celui des adaptations cinématographiques.

**Mots clés:** littérature française; littérature anglaise; Alexandre Dumas; Stephen Fry; littérature populaire; roman feuilleton; adaptations; technique narrative

### I.

Il est difficile d'assigner des bornes à la fécondité d'un écrivain, de supputer le nombre de lignes qu'il écrira dans un temps donné. Le roman surtout, ce genre frivole, a le droit de courir la poste et de semer à profusion les volumes. Encore faut-il néanmoins mûrir un sujet, dresser un plan, rassembler tous les fils d'une intrigue, coordonner les diverses parties d'un ouvrage, ou bien on marche en aveugle, on finit par se trouver dans une impasse, on se heurte en chemin contre des obstacles infranchissables. Or, en tenant compte de ces préparatifs, en supposant qu'un auteur ne prenne que le repos absolument nécessaire, qu'il mange à la hâte, qu'il dorme peu, que l'inspiration chez lui soit constante, toutes choses impossibles; dans cette hypothèse, l'écrivain le plus habile produira peut-être QUINZE VOLUMES par an..... quinze volumes, comprenez-vous, monsieur Dumas? [...] Vous avez publié TRENTE-SIX volumes dans le cours de l'année 1844, monsieur Dumas, et, pour l'année 1845, vous en annoncez le DOUBLE (Mirecourt 1845: 48).

Ainsi Eugène de Mirecourt dans son pamphlet *Fabrique de romans Maison Alexandre Dumas et compagnie* qui met en doute l'authenticité des œuvres de Dumas. La férocité de l'attaque s'explique par l'énorme succès populaire du romancier. En 1845, Dumas est à l'apogée de sa gloire. Au cours de l'année 1844, sa fabrique produit, entre autre, *Le comte de Monte-Cristo*, incontestablement un des plus grands, sinon le plus

grand *bestseller* de tous les temps. Le romancier-entrepreneur emploie de nombreux collaborateurs, tout en se réservant le droit de signer les manuscrits sortis de son établissement. Selon Eugène de Mirecourt, cette pratique, d'ailleurs bien connue et assez répandue à l'époque, dépasse toute décence dans le cas de Dumas: »Ceux qui écrivent avec vous doivent signer avec vous; ils doivent l'exiger formellement, ils doivent vous y contraindre: autrement, ils se ravalent à la condition de nègres, travaillant sous le fouet d'un mulâtre« (Ibid.: 47). De Mirecourt réduit Dumas à l'état de commerçant: selon lui, ce sont des employés plus ou moins anonymes de la fabrique Dumas qui font l'essentiel, ce sont les collaborateurs qui tracent les intrigues et posent les personnages, tandis que le soi-disant grand écrivain ne fait que boursoufler le texte.

Bien qu'exagérée et mal intentionnée, cette vue sur Dumas et son œuvre n'est pas tout à fait sans fondement. Pendant le travail sur *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, Dumas collabore avec Auguste Maquet, son co-auteur de préférence. (C'est avec Maquet également qu'il fait *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, *Vingt ans après* et *La Reine Margot*.) »Avec vos soixante-deux pages, j'en fais 25, mais me voilà comme Bilboquet, manquant de tout. Songez qu'il nous faut encore faire deux volumes *Monte-Cristo* et un volume espagnol, ce mois-ci,« écrit Dumas à son collaborateur au printemps de 1845 (cit. Compère 1998: 13). Le fait que la version de Dumas dépasse d'un tiers la longueur du texte proposé par Maquet n'est pas sans relevance pour le thème du présent article. Dans un certain sens, les adaptations modernes du *Comte de Monte-Cristo*, par exemple le livre de Stephen Fry avec ses 436 pages, font l'impression de vouloir retourner au texte primaire du roman.<sup>1</sup>

L'attaque d'Eugène de Mirecourt sur Dumas est singulière par son ton de haine personnelle et son manque de *political correctness*. Elle n'est pourtant pas isolée. Chez les auteurs »sérieux« de l'époque, l'immense succès des romans feuilletons provoque une grande inquiétude pour l'avenir de la littérature. Balzac se met à démasquer les auteurs qu'il considère comme ses indignes rivaux dans un des romans centraux de la *Comédie humaine* (*Illusions perdues*, 1837). Sainte-Beuve qui, tout en louant Balzac pour ses efforts, regrette que celui-ci aie enveloppé le thème »dans son fantastique ordinaire« (Sainte-Beuve 1992: 210), fait une critique mordante des feuilletons dans un article publié en 1839, intitulé *De la littérature industrielle*. La plupart de la production romanesque d'Alexandre Dumas, y inclus *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* avec sa surabondance de dialogues mélodramatiques, pourrait servir d'illustration à l'analyse de Sainte-Beuve.

Les journaux s'élargissant, les feuilletons essaient, l'élasticité des phrases a dû prêter indéfiniment, et l'on a redoublé de vains mots, de descriptions oiseuses, d'épithètes redondantes : le style s'est étiré dans tous ses fils comme les étoffes trop tendues. Il y a des auteurs qui n'écrivent plus leurs romans de feuilletons qu'en dialogue, parce que à chaque phrase, et quelquefois à chaque mot, il y a du blanc, et que l'on gagne une ligne. Or, savez-vous ce que c'est qu'une ligne? Une ligne de moins en idée, quand cela revient souvent, c'est une notable épargne du cerveau (Ibid.: 212).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. ex. Fillaire 2010: 48. Auguste Maquet en fit toujours reproche à Dumas. '*Les Mousquetaires*, *D'Harmental*, *Monte-Cristo*, *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge* sont, malgré beaucoup trop de négligences, de fort bons livres auxquels un peu de gloire restera plus tard. Si Dumas eût voulu suivre mon conseil et réduire d'un grand tiers tous nos ouvrages, j'en citerais dix excellents au lieu de quatre ou cinq.'

Conformément à son tempérament, Sainte-Beuve conclut le texte avec un appel à la prudence:

»Que cette littérature industrielle existe, mais qu'elle rentre dans son lit et ne le creuse qu'avec lenteur: il ne tend que trop naturellement à s'agrandir« (Ibid.: 222). Eugène de Mirecourt, plus incliné au mélodrame que Dumas lui-même, ne cache pas son indignation: »On verra le dix-neuvième siècle assister à la mort des lettres et suivre leur convoi funèbre. Oui, monsieur Dumas, oui, grand homme, vous tuez la littérature« (Mirecourt 1845: 50).

Malgré la différence de ton, le critique et le journaliste partagent la conviction que la littérature populaire présente un grave danger pour l'art littéraire.

L'histoire leur a donné tort. Le feuilleton, ayant péri de mort naturelle, n'a pas tué la littérature. D'autre part, quelques romans de Dumas – des romans feuilletons par excellence – ont survécu miraculeusement. Jugeant par le nombre d'adaptations cinématographiques, *Les Trois Mousquetaires* et *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* constituent la partie la plus vivante de la littérature française du XIXe siècle.

Une question se pose cependant: à quel point le nombre exorbitant d'adaptations cinématographiques fait-il preuve de l'actualité d'une œuvre littéraire *en tant que littérature*? D'autre part, le nombre considérable de *remakes* littéraires du *Comte de Monte-Cristo* au cours du XIXe et du XXe siècle<sup>2</sup> ne témoigne-t-il pas d'un certain malaise que l'on ressent envers ce livre jadis si populaire? »*Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* est sans doute l'un des romans les plus passionnants qui aient jamais été écrits, et c'est aussi l'un des romans le plus *mal écrits* de tous les temps et de toutes les littératures,« constate Umberto Eco (Eco 1993: 74). En 2000, l'enthousiasme avec lequel la critique britannique salue le livre de Stephen Fry comme »le *Comte de Monte-Cristo* pour la génération dot.com« laisse sous-entendre que le lecteur d'aujourd'hui ne sera plus attiré par l'originel.

## II.

Le roman *The Stars' Tennis Balls*, paru en traduction française sous le titre *L'île du Dr Mallo* (2004), est une transposition du *Comte de Monte-Cristo* d'Alexandre Dumas dans la Grande Bretagne des années 80.

Le héros principal s'appelle Ned Maddstone (anagramme d'Edmond Dantès). Fils d'un ministre conservateur, étudiant brillant, amoureux et aimée de la belle Portia Fendemann, il est haï, sans s'en douter, par deux de ses camarades: Rufus Cade (Canderousse), raté et drogué, et Ashley Barson-Garland (baron Danglars), enfant illégitime pour qui Ned, avec son charme personnel et son pedigree irréprochable, incarne tout ce qu'il n'est pas. Aux deux ennemis cachés s'ajoute un troisième: Gordon Fendemann (Fernand Mondego), cousin de Portia et amoureux d'elle.

Au cours d'une croisière, le moniteur de voile, mourant, remet à Ned une lettre à porter à Londres. Ned ignore complètement qu'il s'agit d'un message de l'IRA. Quand ses trois ennemis organisent une mise en scène pour le faire arrêter pour trafic

<sup>2</sup> Pour une liste d'adaptations du *Comte de Monte-Cristo*, cf. Compère 1998: 66-85; pour une analyse des 'remakes' au XXe siècle [www.pastichesdumas.com](http://www.pastichesdumas.com).



de drogue, la lettre trouvée sur lui le fait remettre aux services secrets. L'interrogateur Oliver Delft (de Villefort) découvre avec horreur que le message est destiné à sa mère. Il prend la décision subite de faire disparaître le jeune homme en l'envoyant dans un hôpital psychiatrique secret sur une île dans la mer Baltique.

Dans cet établissement, dirigé par le Dr Mallo, Ned passe vingt années, les dix premières dans un isolement quasi total, drogué, exposé aux électrochocs et aux brutalités de ses garde-malades. Quand son isolement cesse il se lie avec Babe (abbé), ancien agent envoyé à l'île par les services secrets du Royaume-Uni. Babe lui transmet ses connaissances encyclopédiques, aussi bien que les références du compte en Suisse où il a amassé une fortune détournée des fonds secrets britanniques. C'est en jouant aux échecs avec Babe que Ned saisit finalement tous les détails de sa propre histoire. A la mort de Babe, il s'introduit dans son cercueil et s'échappe de l'île. En 1999, il arrive à Londres sous le nom de Simon Cotter (Monte-Cristo), fondateur de l'empire CotterDotCom. Dès son arrivée, il lance une vengeance bien organisée et extrêmement cruelle contre ses anciens ennemis.

Au niveau de l'intrigue, l'adaptation du roman de Dumas semble parfaitement transparente. Dans une étonnante fidélité à l'original, Fry va jusqu'à transposer le contexte socio-historique du *Comte de Monte-Cristo* dans les temps modernes, tout en gardant l'ambiguïté des connotations politiques de l'histoire. Bien que *L'Île du Dr Mallo* puisse être considéré comme une satire de la société britannique contemporaine, la distinction entre le bien et le mal dans le roman ne correspond pas nécessairement aux divisions politiques. Chez Fry aussi bien que chez Dumas, le héros est une victime des circonstances; en tant qu'il est une victime politique, il l'est sans le savoir. Edmond Dantès n'a jamais été bonapartiste. Dans le roman de Stephen Fry, le plus grand vilain (Ashley Barson-Garland) et l'homme le plus irréprochable (le père de Ned) appartiennent au même parti politique. (Autre détail que Stephen Fry a gardé soigneusement: le père, pauvre et honorable, est le seul à rester absolument fidèle au protagoniste persécuté.)

Le nombre de changements que Fry apporte au synopsis de Dumas est très restreint, quoique certains de ces écarts ne soient pas insignifiants. A la différence de la belle Mercédès, Portia Fendeman finit par rejeter son ancien amant. Du point de vue psychologique, ce rejet s'explique par l'extrême cruauté de la vengeance de Ned, de sorte qu'un écart en entraîne un autre. Serait-il possible que, dans un livre si chaotique que *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, la vengeance soit bien organisée? La punition de Villefort, par exemple, consiste en une longue série d'empoisonnements, empoisonnements ratés et faux empoisonnements dans sa nombreuse famille. Avant de livrer Canderousse à son destin, Monte-Cristo lui offre une chance de repentir. Simon Cotter procède d'une manière beaucoup plus systématique. La possibilité de pardon ne fait pas partie de son plan. Rufus Cade sera livré sans pitié aux trafiquants de drogue auxquels il doit de l'argent.

Rufus was lying on the floor in a spreading pool of blood that had already reached the extreme edges of the carpet. On the coffee table ten feet away from him, his legs had been neatly laid, one beside the other, like bouquets recently delivered by a florist. 'Dear me,' said Simon. 'Legless again, Rufus.'

Rufus stared up at him. 'Fuck you,' he hissed. 'Fuck you to hell.'  
 Simon looked down and shook his head, 'Phew!' he said with distaste. 'I was right, wasn't I? Now you *do* know the meaning of shit scared. (*The Stars' Tennis Balls*: 337)

La scène finale pendant laquelle Simon Cotter force Oliver Delft à commettre le suicide dépasse encore en violence celle que nous venons de citer. (Inutile à dire qu'elle dépasse la production entière de la fabrique Dumas.)

'There are, in case you have forgotten, *two* Portias in Shakespeare. One, as you rightly pointed out just now, in *The Merchant of Venice*. But have you forgotten the other Portia. The Portia in *Julius Caesar*?'  
 Oliver's head was dizzy. 'I don't understand.'

'She chooses to take her own life, if you recall, by swallowing hot coals. Always used to fascinate me as a child. How could it be done? Well, the Aga there is old fashioned. The solid fuel type. There's no other means of self slaughter in the room, I'm afraid. [...] You simply lift up the lid and help yourself. Basically, Oliver, it's up to you. Swallow fiery coals like Portia or face the rest of your life in an insane asylum. You have ten minutes to make up your mind. [...]

Delft's hair and clothes were on fire, blisters the size of oranges had ballooned from his lips and his mouth was screaming. He had no tongue and no vocal chords with which to make a sound. He was hurling himself against the wall, clawing at his body.

He caught sight of Ned and lurched towards him. Ned smartly closed the door and bolted it. They heard the body bang against the rubber surface of the door.

'We'll give him another five minutes,' he said. 'He'll be done then.' (Ibid.: 432)

Le caractère explicite des descriptions citées suggère-t-il que la génération dot.com est abrutée au point de ne plus registrer que la plus extrême violence? Ironiquement, le moralisme à peine caché de cette question est moins étranger à Stephen Fry qu'à Dumas. Dans un certain sens, rien ne pourrait être plus éloigné des jeux d'ordinateur et du cinéma d'action que le supplice des victimes de Ned: une souffrance prolongée et hautement littérisée. Les allusions à Shakespeare n'y sont pas pour rien, de même que la citation de la *Duchesse de Malfi*, une tragédie de plus violentes, au début du livre<sup>3</sup>. La violence littérisée suscite une réflexion sur la nature de la violence. Autrement dit, dans la littérature, un surplus de violence peut amener à un plus haut degré du tragique.

Et c'est précisément de la littérature qu'il s'agit.

L'adaptation que Stephen Fry fait du *Comte de Monte-Cristo* démontre que l'impression de longueur crée par une œuvre littéraire ne dépend pas de sa longueur réelle, mais plutôt de ce que Gérard Genette appelle «un rapport de vitesse» (Cf. Genette 1972: 46). Certes, Fry abrège le roman de Dumas. Pourtant, le procédé artistique du romancier anglais est diamétralement opposé à la méthode de travail qu'Umberto Eco se propose en essayant de traduire *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* en italien:

<sup>3</sup> We are merely the stars' tennis balls, struck and banded / Which way please them (John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, Act V Scene 3) L'édition américaine du roman paraît sous un titre moins énigmatique (*Revenge*, 2005).

Dumas n'était-il pas un auteur qui travaillait en collaboration? Et pourquoi pas, alors, en collaboration avec son traducteur, cent ans plus tard? Dumas n'était-il pas un artisan prompt à modifier son produit en fonction des exigences du marché? [...] Le rythme, le souffle, tel est le problème qu'aurait résolu Dumas si, voulant réécrire *le Comte de Monte-Cristo* comme il est, on l'avait informé qu'il recevrait une prime pour chaque mot économisé, tout en sachant que *rien* ne devait être perdu (Eco 1993: 78).

Après une centaine de pages, Eco »capitule« devant le texte français: »J'ai capitulé parce que j'ai compris que j'allais devoir continuer sur deux mille feuillets [...] et aussi parce que je me suis demandé si les formes ampoulées, la platitude et les redondances ne faisaient pas partie de la machine narrative« (Ibid.: 81).

Selon l'analyse d'Eco, la redondance dans la narration dumasienne serait, en fin de compte, un moyen de créer le suspense:

S'il était abrégé, [...], l'œuvre produirait-elle un effet identique, réussirait-elle à nous entraîner même là où, dans l'impatience de savoir, on saute les pages et les descriptions (on les saute, mais on sait qu'elles sont là, on accélère subjectivement tout en sachant que le temps narratif est objectivement dilaté)? [...] Le roman dumasien est une machine à produire de l'agonie, et ce n'est pas la qualité des rôles qui compte, c'est bien leur longueur (Ibid.: 87).

Quelle que soit notre opinion sur le mérite littéraire de l'adaptation de Fry – et les opinions peuvent différer sur ce point – *L'Île du Docteur Malo* n'est pas un livre qui invite à sauter les pages. Au lieu d'économiser les mots, Fry économise les faits racontés ; il élimine les épisodes secondaires et réduit l'histoire de Dantès à l'essentiel.

On serait tenté de croire que l'auteur n'a lu Dumas qu'*après* avoir écrit *The Stars' Tennis Balls* (ce qu'il raconte à plusieurs journalistes britanniques<sup>4</sup>), si ce n'était pour quelques parallèles soigneusement établis entre les deux romans. Il suffit de comparer les scènes où, dans l'un et dans l'autre roman, le protagoniste se regarde au miroir après de longues années d'isolement, pour reconnaître que Fry n'avait pas seulement *lu*, mais *étudié* son modèle.

Le barbier regarda avec étonnement cet homme à la longue chevelure et à la barbe épaisse et noire, qui ressemblait à une de ces belles têtes du Titien. Ce n'était point encore la mode à cette époque-là que l'on portât la barbe et les cheveux si développés: aujourd'hui, un barbier s'étonnerait seulement qu'un homme doué de si grands avantages physiques consentit à s'en priver.

Le barbier livournais se mit à la besogne sans observation.

Lorsque l'opération fut terminée, lorsque Edmond sentit son menton entièrement rasé, lorsque ses cheveux furent réduits à la longueur ordinaire, il demanda un miroir et se regarda.

Il avait alors trente-trois ans, comme nous l'avons dit, et ces quatorze années de prison avaient pour ainsi dire apporté un grand changement moral dans sa figure.

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<sup>4</sup> »He no longer steals, cheats or lies nearly as much as he used to.« Phrase tirée de l'esquisse autobiographique (*About the Author*) qui introduit les mémoires d'enfance et de jeunesse de Fry (*Moab is My Washpot*, 1997).

Dantès était entré au château d'If avec ce visage rond, riant et épanoui du jeune homme heureux, à qui les premiers pas dans la vie ont été faciles, et qui compte sur l'avenir comme sur la déduction naturelle du passé: tout cela était bien changé.

Sa figure ovale s'était allongée, sa bouche rieuse avait pris ces lignes fermes et arrêtées qui indiquent la résolution; ses sourcils s'étaient arqués sous une ride unique, pensive; ses yeux s'étaient empreints d'une profonde tristesse, du fond de laquelle jaillissaient de temps en temps de sombres éclairs, de la misanthropie et de la haine; son teint, éloigné si longtemps de la lumière du jour et des rayons du soleil, avait pris cette couleur mate qui fait, quand leur visage est encadré dans des cheveux noirs, la beauté aristocratique des hommes du Nord; cette science profonde qu'il avait acquise avait, en outre reflété sur tout son visage une auréole d'intelligente sécurité; en outre, il avait, quoique naturellement d'une taille assez haute, acquis cette vigueur trapue d'un corps toujours concentrant ses forces en lui.

A l'élégance des formes nerveuses et grêles avait succédé la solidité des formes arrondies et musculeuses. Quant à sa voix, les prières, les sanglots et les imprécations l'avaient changée, tantôt en un timbre d'une douceur étrange, tantôt en une accentuation rude et presque rauque.

En outre, sans cesse dans un demi-jour et dans l'obscurité, ses yeux avaient acquis cette singulière faculté de distinguer les objets pendant la nuit, comme font ceux de l'hyène et du loup.

Edmond sourit en se voyant: il était impossible que son meilleur ami, si toutefois il lui restait un ami, le reconnût; il ne se reconnaissait même pas lui-même (*Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*: 200).

Stephen Fry exploite le thème du coiffeur à deux endroits dans son livre. Dans la partie finale, Portia Fendemann reconnaît Ned Maddstone en voyant une image de Simon Cotter sur l'ordinateur de son fils. (En jouant malicieusement avec la photo de Cotter, le jeune Albert Fendeman lui donne une belle chevelure blonde.)

Pourtant, la première confrontation de Ned Maddstone avec son apparence changée n'a pas lieu chez un barbier, mais dans l'ordination du Dr Mallo.

'You are growing quite a beard now. Does it bother you?'

'Well,' Ned's hand went to his face. 'It has taken some time getting used to. It itches and it must look very odd, I suppose.'

'No, no. Why should it look odd? A beard is a most natural thing.'

'Well ...'

'You would like to see yourself in your beard?'

'May I? May I really?' Ned's legs started to jog up and down on the balls of his feet.

'I do not see why not.'

Dr Mallo opened a drawer in his desk and brought out a small hand-mirror which he passed across to Ned, who took it and held it on his jiggling knees, face turned away.

'You are afraid to look?'

'I'm – I'm not sure ...'

'Set your heels on the floor and take some deep breaths. One-two-three, one-two-three.'

Ned's knees stopped their jogging and he moved his head. He lifted the mirror from his lap, swallowed twice and slowly opened his eyes.

'What do you think?'

Ned was looking at a face he did not know. The face stared back at him in equal surprise and horror. It was a gaunt face, a face of hard cheekbones and deep-set eyes. The straw-haired color on its head was long, hanging lankly over the ears, the beard hair seemed coarser and tinged with a suggestion of red. Ned put a hand to his own face, and saw a bony hand rubbing the beard line of the face in the mirror and pulling at its moustache.

'You like this face?'

Ned tried to avoid meeting the eyes in the mirror. They were resentful and coldly blue. They seemed to dislike him.

'Who is he?' Ned cried. 'Who is this man? I don't know him!'

The face in the mirror had tears streaking its beard. It licked its cracked lips. Its mouth pursed in disgust at the face of Thomas looking in.

'That is enough. Give me the mirror now.'

'Who is he? He hates me! Who is he? That isn't me! Is it Thomas? It isn't Ned. Who is it?'

Dr Mallo pressed a buzzer on the underside of his desk and sighed. Foolish of him to have tried such an experiment (*The Stars' Tennis Balls*: 176-7).

Laissant de côté la question de la vraisemblance psychologique, nous pouvons constater que la version de Fry, loin d'être plus sobre, est nettement plus dramatique, voire mélodramatique. Bien que Dumas soit considéré comme un auteur qui abuse du dialogue, c'est Fry qui s'en sert pour produire une *scène* – là où Dumas nous offre une sorte de compte rendu, un panorama des souffrances passées, enrichi des remarques sur la peinture de Titien et les changements de goût dans le domaine de la coiffure.

Pourtant, la version de Fry n'est pas nécessairement plus dynamique que le texte de Dumas. Tandis que la visite de Dantès chez le barbier rassure le lecteur et surtout la lectrice (le héros, quoiqu'un peu vieilli, est toujours beau!), la scène dans l'ordination du Docteur Mallo produit un effet pénible. La relative lenteur du récit (ou plutôt du dialogue), la presque équité entre le temps réel et le temps de narration est l'un des éléments clés de cet effet.

Certes, Stephen Fry abrège: après tout, il écrit pour un marché qui favorise les livres d'une longueur raisonnable. Il n'accélère pourtant pas le récit. Au contraire: au lieu d'imiter le dynamisme dumasien, au lieu d'adopter la narration cinématographique *ante litteram* qu'on a parfois attribué aux romanciers du XIXe siècle, en particulier à Balzac (Cf. Baron: 78-9), Fry nous présente une narration statique par excellence. Rien n'invite à sauter et rien ne saute dans ce récit, surtout pas la pensée. Exemple illustratif: chez les auteurs comme Dumas, Eugène Sue et Balzac, les allusions littéraires font souvent l'impression de provenir d'un *brainstorming* perpétuel; chez Fry, l'allusion littéraire est toujours réfléchie, motivée, étroitement liée à l'histoire racontée.

Ainsi, *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* commence par une page où le nombre de verbes de mouvement dépasse le nombre de lignes.

Le 28 février, la vigie de Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde signala le trois-mâts le *Pharaon*, venant de Smyrne, Trieste et Naples.

Comme d'habitude, un pilote côtier partit aussitôt du port, rasa le château d'If, et alla aborder le navire entre le cap de Morgiou et l'île de Riou.

Aussitôt, comme d'habitude encore, la plate-forme du fort Saint-Jean s'était couverte de curieux [...] (*Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*: 3).

Par contre, le roman de Stephen Fry s'ouvre par une *lettre*, objet anti-cinématographique par excellence.

It all began some time in the last century, in an age when lovers wrote letters to each other sealed up in envelopes. Sometimes they used coloured inks to show their love, or they perfumed their writing paper with scent. [...]

Darling Ned –

I'm sorry about the smell. I hope you've opened this somewhere private, all on your own. You'll get teased to distraction otherwise. It's called *Rive Gauche*, so I'm feeling like Simone de Beauvoir and I hope you're feeling like Jean-Paul Sartre. Actually I hope you aren't because I think he was pretty horrid to her (*The Stars' Tennis Balls*: 1).

Pour paraphraser la devise de Benjamin Constant<sup>5</sup>: Fry est un auteur beaucoup trop intelligent pour poursuivre un but moral en réécrivant un roman feuilleton du XIXe siècle. Néanmoins, son adaptation du *Comte de Monte-Cristo* pourrait avoir un résultat moral. Il ne s'agit pas d'amener un livre du XIXe siècle à la portée du lecteur – ou du non-lecteur – moderne. La gloire éternelle de Dumas semble assurée, et le cinéma y est pour beaucoup. Fry, de sa part, rend *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* à la littérature. Tant mieux s'il est vrai qu'il le fait sous le regard étonné de la génération dot.com.

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<sup>5</sup> Une œuvre d'art ne doit pas poursuivre un but moral, mais produire un résultat moral.





**“IN VIAGGIO VERSO IL NULLA”:  
ELEMENTI MITOLOGICI DEL VIAGGIO IN *SE QUESTO È UN UOMO*  
E NE *I SOMMERSI E I SALVATI* DI PRIMO LEVI**

*Irena Prosenc Šegula*

**Abstract**

Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (If This is a Man) and *I sommersi e i salvati* (The Drowned and the Saved) present complex relations to mythological elements, which are often filtered through Dante's *Divine Comedy* and are inserted as key components into the autobiographical narration, thus giving it a mythological dimension. The article proposes the triangular structure Levi-Dante-Ulysses as a basis for analysing the Jewish deportees' journey towards Auschwitz as a journey towards the mythological other world.

**Key words:** Primo Levi, autobiography, mythology, Odyssey, Divine Comedy, journey to the other world.

I legami che i testi leviani stabiliscono con gli elementi mitologici sono complessi; spesso si tratta non di rapporti diretti e univoci con le fonti mitologiche bensì di una struttura che si sviluppa su più livelli. Levi si riallaccia alla mitologia principalmente attraverso Dante e la *Divina commedia* (costruendo in questo modo un rapporto tutt'altro che semplice, visto che Dante, per parte sua, attinge a fonti intermedie, soprattutto per quanto riguarda la mitologia greca). Si può pertanto (ri)proporre come modello fondamentale per l'analisi della presenza di elementi mitologici nell'opera leviana la figura del triangolo, così felicemente sfruttata da Marko Marinčič nel suo studio su Stazio e la *Divina commedia*<sup>1</sup>. È però opportuno avvertire che, nel caso di Primo Levi, si tratterà di un modello necessariamente schematico e semplificato, vista la complessità delle relazioni intercorrenti tra l'opera di questo autore e la mitologia; un modello, inoltre, che verrà applicato non all'intera opera leviana, ma soltanto ai testi oggetto d'indagine all'interno del presente contributo.

La nostra analisi si incentra su due opere di Levi: il romanzo autobiografico *Se questo è un uomo* e il saggio *I sommersi e i salvati*, anch'esso di impronta autobiografica

<sup>1</sup> Nella sua analisi della figura di Stazio nella *Divina commedia* Marinčič propone come struttura fondamentale il triangolo Virgilio-Stazio-Dante (Marinčič, Marko, "Grška mitologija pri Staciju: Dante, Harold Bloom in meje politične psihologije," *Keria*, 12.1, 2010).

e strettamente legato al romanzo per le tematiche trattate. Nelle due opere, e particolarmente in *Se questo è un uomo*, l'elemento mitologico viene risemantizzato come componente fondamentale della narrazione autobiografica. Il presente contributo analizza la narrazione del viaggio dei deportati ebrei verso Auschwitz, che occupa la maggior parte del primo capitolo di *Se questo è un uomo* (intitolato, appunto, "Il viaggio"<sup>2</sup>) e compare, inoltre, in vari passi de *I sommersi e i salvati*, soprattutto nel capitolo "Violenza inutile"<sup>3</sup>; verrà, in particolare, evidenziato il modo in cui viene delineata la destinazione finale del viaggio, presentato come un viaggio verso l'altro mondo.

Nelle due opere si narra, ad un primo livello, un viaggio reale (reale non soltanto nei limiti della fittizia realtà letteraria ma anche in quanto fatto storicamente documentato), nel quale si concretizza un altissimo grado di sofferenza fisica e psichica vissuto dai deportati verso il campo di sterminio. Ad un secondo livello, però, il viaggio assume una forte connotazione metaforica e viene narrato come un viaggio mitologico verso l'aldilà. La sua valenza metaforica è costruita attraverso riferimenti espliciti o impliciti a elementi quali il viaggio di Ulisse nell'Ade, il viaggio di Dante nell'Inferno (attraverso il quale riaffiora, tra l'altro, la discesa di Enea negli inferi), e un *altro* viaggio di Ulisse, quello dantesco, oltre le colonne d'Ercole. Pertanto, il triangolo schematico al quale si alludeva sopra e che si pone come la sottostruttura delle strategie narrative relative al viaggio, è: Levi-Dante-Ulisse. Tutti e tre i suoi componenti sono protagonisti delle proprie vicende e allo stesso tempo narratori autodiegetici del proprio passato; si tratta però anche in questo caso di relazioni complesse che offrono degli spunti per altri parallelismi possibili. L'Ulisse omerico, ospite nella reggia di Alcino, narra la propria discesa nell'Ade. Tuttavia, a differenza del narratore leviano e di quello dantesco che si riferiscono ad un passato compiuto, volgendosi da lontano a guardare l'"acqua perigliosa" (*Inf*I, 24<sup>4</sup>; SES 57) che hanno attraversata, al momento della narrazione le vicende di Ulisse non sono del tutto compiute, visto che lo aspetta l'ultima tappa del ritorno ad Itaca. Il narratore omerico si rivolge, dunque, verso il proprio passato, ma non ne è ancora del tutto salvato ed è costretto ad anticipare anche il proprio futuro.

Per quanto riguarda, invece, l'Ulisse dantesco, egli compare come uno dei numerosi personaggi dell'*Inferno* che narrano in prima persona il proprio passato, assolutamente compiuto di fronte all'eternità della pena infernale. Allo stesso tempo, però, la sua narrazione è testimoniata da Dante che vi assiste e, anzi, la suscita. Come è noto, è, peraltro, significativo che lo faccia non direttamente bensì per il tramite di Virgilio, un altro elemento che si insinua nello schema triangolare (ecco perché si è avvertito che il triangolo è bensì fondamentale, ma in parte riduttivo rispetto alla complessità della materia trattata).

Anche il narratore leviano presenta delle particolarità. Narra, infatti, la propria vicenda, ma non solo. Si propone esplicitamente di testimoniare anche per conto di

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<sup>2</sup> Levi, Primo, *Se questo è un uomo*. La tregua, Torino, Einaudi, 1989, pp. 11–18.

<sup>3</sup> Levi, Primo, *I sommersi e i salvati*, Torino, Einaudi, 1991, pp. 83–101. Tutte le citazioni da *Se questo è un uomo* e da *I sommersi e i salvati* si riferiscono alle due edizioni citate, indicate con le sigle comunemente adottate SQU (per *Se questo è un uomo*) e SES (per *I sommersi e i salvati*).

<sup>4</sup> Tutti i brani citati dalla *Divina commedia* si riferiscono all'edizione: Dante Alighieri, *La divina commedia, Inferno*, a cura di Tommaso Di Salvo, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1993.

terzi, di coloro che sono stati annientati e perciò non l'hanno potuto fare. In questo modo narra sia il proprio passato che il passato collettivo, narra da protagonista ma anche da testimone e osservatore (quello dell'osservazione è, tra l'altro, un concetto caro a Levi che parla del Lager anche come di una "gigantesca esperienza biologica e sociale" – SQU 79).

Omero e Dante sono i due autori che Levi collega esplicitamente alla propria idea della narrazione. Il capitolo "Stereotipi" de *I sommersi e i salvati* si apre con una riflessione sulle modalità del racconto nella quale Levi riassume il detto jiddisch posto a epigrafe del suo *Sistema periodico*, "Ibergekumene tsores iz gut tsu dertseyln"<sup>5</sup>, mettendolo a confronto con due passi, uno dantesco e uno omerico:

Parlano [i reduci] perché (recita un detto jiddisch) "è bello raccontare i guai passati"; Francesca dice a Dante che non c'è "nessun maggior dolore | che ricordarsi del tempo felice | nella miseria", ma è vero anche l'inverso, come sa ogni reduce: è bello sedere al caldo, davanti al cibo ed al vino, e ricordare a sé ed agli altri la fatica, il freddo e la fame: così subito cede all'urgenza del raccontare, davanti alla mensa imbandita, Ulisse alla corte del re dei Feaci. (SES 121)

Una possibile interpretazione della struttura triangolare si profila dunque anche per quanto riguarda la concezione leviana della narrazione autobiografica. Levi collega così la propria figura di narratore autobiografico, abbinata a quella del narratore-testimone ebraico, alla tradizione letteraria di Dante e Omero<sup>6</sup>. In questa prospettiva, Ulisse viene recepito non soltanto nella sua accezione di viaggiatore per eccellenza ma anche come un raccontatore di storie che ha "conquistato l'autorità sufficiente ad essere ascoltato perché è scampato alla morte ed è capace di raccontarla"<sup>7</sup>.

Per quanto riguarda gli aspetti tematici del triangolo Levi-Dante-Ulisse, un problema è posto dal fatto che i viaggi di Ulisse pertinenti alla narrazione del viaggio leviano sono due: la discesa dell'Ulisse omerico nell'Ade (*Odissea* XI, con l'anticipazione nella profezia di Circe in *Odissea* X) e il viaggio dell'Ulisse dantesco oltre le colonne d'Ercole che finisce con l'avvicinamento alla montagna del Purgatorio (*Inferno* XXVI).

Come è noto, nell'undicesimo capitolo di *Se questo è un uomo*, intitolato "Il canto di Ulisse", vengono esplicitamente citati i versi del canto XXVI dell'*Inferno* che il deportato Levi cerca di richiamare alla memoria per recitarli ad un compagno. Il significato simbolico dei versi danteschi all'interno del romanzo è stato ampiamente studiato<sup>8</sup>, prendendo come punti di riferimento soprattutto l'ultimo verso del canto, "infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso" (*Inf*XXVI, 142), nonché i versi relativi al discorso nel quale Ulisse si rivolge ai compagni per incitarli ad attraversare le colonne d'Ercole:

<sup>5</sup> Levi, Primo, *Il sistema periodico*, Torino, Einaudi, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> A questo proposito, anche Belpoliti osserva che Levi mette in parallelo "il desiderio di narrare di Francesca a Dante" con il proverbio jiddisch (Belpoliti, Marco, *Primo Levi*, Milano, Mondadori, 1998, p. 64).

<sup>7</sup> Ciccarelli, Roberto, "Del pensiero narrativo", in *Primo Levi: l'a-topia letteraria, il pensiero politico, la scrittura e l'assurdo*, Napoli, Liguori, 2000, p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Si rimanda soprattutto al saggio di Piero Boitani, *L'ombra di Ulisse. Figure di un mito*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1992; v. anche Cases, Cesare, "Introduzione. L'ordine delle cose e l'ordine delle parole", in Levi, Primo, *Opere, I*, Torino, Einaudi, 1987, pp. IX-XXXI; Falaschi, Giovanni, "Ulisse e la sfida ebraica in 'Se questo è un uomo' di Primo Levi", *Italianistica*, 31.1 (2001), pp. 123-131.

Considerate la vostra semenza:  
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,  
120 ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.  
(*Inf* XXVI, 118–120)

Nella presente analisi ci interessano, invece, i legami testuali che collegano il viaggio dell'Ulisse dantesco alla narrazione leviana del viaggio verso Auschwitz, sullo sfondo più ampio del viaggio di Dante nell'*Inferno*. Quest'ultimo, inoltre, sarà pertinente per la presente analisi soprattutto per quanto riguarda i primi contatti di Dante-protagonista con l'*Inferno*, che nei testi leviani vengono assunti ad indicare soprattutto il passaggio tra i due mondi.

Il viaggio verso il campo di sterminio viene narrato come un viaggio mitologico nell'altro mondo, nel mondo dei morti. In questa prospettiva, il campo di annientamento si pone come l'aldilà, un non-luogo imprecisabile sia dal punto di vista geografico che da quello temporale. Alcune delle strategie narrative che riguardano l'aspetto spaziale e temporale del viaggio dei deportati nonché della destinazione del loro viaggio sono parallele a quelle che caratterizzano il viaggio di Ulisse dell'*Inferno* XXVI, analizzato con perspicacia da Piero Boitani. A proposito della dimensione geografica della navigazione di Ulisse, lo studioso osserva che:

l'ordine perentorio di Virgilio specifica un "dove" ("dove, per lui, perduto a morir gissi") che rimane senza risposta nel racconto di Ulisse, e senza risposta nella *Commedia* sino al canto I del *Purgatorio*. Dove va a morire Ulisse? Egli stesso non lo sa, come poco, in effetti, sa in generale del suo ultimo viaggio nel momento in cui lo compie.<sup>9</sup>

Nel racconto dell'Ulisse dantesco, il viaggio si divide, infatti, in due parti ben distinte: la prima è contenuta entro i limiti del Mediterraneo, ovvero del mondo conosciuto, mentre la seconda si estende al di là delle colonne d'Ercole. Come rileva Boitani, la prima parte del viaggio è narrata da Ulisse con dovizia di particolari geografici e "con la precisione dell'accorto esploratore"<sup>10</sup>:

L'un lito e l'altro vidi infin la Spagna,  
fin nel Morrocco, e l'isola d'i Sardi,  
105 e l'altre che quel mare intorno bagna.  
Io e ' compagni eravam vecchi e tardi  
quando venimmo a quella foce stretta  
108 dov' Ercule segnò li suoi riguardi  
acciò che l'uom più oltre non si metta;  
da la man destra mi lasciai Sibilia,  
111 da l'altra già m'avea lasciata Setta.  
(*Inf* XXVI, 103–111)

Per Ulisse, il limite del mondo geograficamente descrivibile, del mondo dicibile, di *questo* mondo, è dunque lo stretto segnato da Ercole che, nel momento in cui

<sup>9</sup> Boitani, Piero, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> *Ivi*, p. 47.

viene attraversato, assume il significato simbolico della soglia tra il mondo dei vivi e il mondo dei morti, oltre la quale è impensabile qualsiasi precisione geografica. Come osserva Boitani, da questo punto in poi “si misura il tempo, improvvisamente preciso ed urgente dopo l’intervallo indefinito che, nel Mediterraneo, aveva fatto trascorrere ad Ulisse l’intera seconda parte della propria vita”<sup>11</sup>. Ulisse e i suoi compagni arrivano all’occidente (che si profila anche come un punto geografico, ma soprattutto come la metafora della morte) “vecchi e tardi”, per cui rimane loro poco tempo per esplorare il “mondo senza gente” e senza precisioni spaziali:

Cinque volte racceso e tante casso  
lo lume era di sotto da la luna,  
132 poi che ‘ntrati eravam ne l’alto passo  
(*Inf* XXVI, 130–132)

Per quanto riguarda, invece, il viaggio dei deportati ebrei, la concisa narrazione dei suoi preliminari in *Se questo è un uomo* è densa di riferimenti temporali. La precisione documentaria relativa al tempo è manifesta sin dalla prima frase dell’opera: “Ero stato catturato dalla Milizia fascista il 13 dicembre 1943.” (SQU 11); Levi arriva al campo di internamento di Fossoli “alla fine del gennaio 1944” (SQU 12); la precisione delle informazioni temporali continua (“Il giorno 20 febbraio i tedeschi avevano ispezionato il campo [...] Ma il mattino del 21 si seppe che l’indomani gli ebrei sarebbero partiti.” – SQU 12) e si protrae fino al momento della partenza: “il treno non si mosse che a sera” (SQU 15). Il narratore si sofferma anche su alcune informazioni geografiche: “venni inviato a Fossoli, presso Modena” (SQU 12); “ci portarono alla stazione di Carpi” (SQU 14).

Se passiamo, invece, alla narrazione del viaggio stesso, una prima caratteristica formale che si può osservare è la prevalenza della prima persona plurale. Questo indica il fatto che il viaggio trascende la vicenda individuale e fa parte del destino collettivo, della sfera epica riguardante l’intera comunità; il narratore autobiografico assume qui la funzione di testimone. Nel passo che riportiamo, la nostra analisi si soffermerà soprattutto su aspetti pertinenti alla narrazione dello spazio e del tempo:

Avevamo appreso con sollievo la nostra destinazione. Auschwitz: un nome privo di significato, allora e per noi; ma doveva pur corrispondere a un luogo di questa terra. Il treno viaggiava lentamente, con lunghe soste snervanti. Dalla feritoia, vedemmo sfilare le alte rupi pallide della val d’Adige, gli ultimi nomi di città italiane. Passammo il Brennero alle dodici del secondo giorno, e tutti si alzarono in piedi, ma nessuno disse parola. [...]  
Dalla feritoia, nomi noti e ignoti di città austriache, Salisburgo, Vienna; poi cèche, infine polacche. Alla sera del quarto giorno, il freddo si fece intenso: il treno percorreva interminabili pinete nere, salendo in modo percettibile. La neve era alta. Doveva essere una linea secondaria, le stazioni erano piccole e quasi deserte. Nessuno tentava più, durante le soste, di comunicare col mondo esterno: ci sentivamo ormai “dall’altra parte”. Vi fu una lunga sosta in aperta campagna, poi la marcia riprese con estrema lentezza, e il convoglio si arrestò definitivamente, a notte alta, in mezzo a una pianura buia e silenziosa.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.



Si vedevano, da entrambi i lati del binario, file di lumi bianchi e rossi, a perdita d'occhio; ma nulla di quel rumorio confuso che denuncia di lontano i luoghi abitati. (SQU 15-16)

Il viaggio collettivo inizia, dunque, nella speranza che la destinazione sia “un luogo di questa terra”, accompagnata, tuttavia, dal presentimento che così non sarebbe stato: si tratterà, appunto, di un luogo fuori da questo mondo. Come nell'*Inferno* XXVI, le precise indicazioni geografiche (città italiane, austriache, ceche e polacche) si susseguono fino a quando il treno comincia a percorrere “interminabili pinete nere” passando per stazioni “quasi deserte”, dove i deportati non cercano più di “comunicare col mondo esterno”. Il convoglio si ferma finalmente in “una pianura buia e silenziosa” dalla quale sono assenti i rumori tipici dei luoghi abitati. Come nel viaggio dell'Ulisse dantesco, anche nel testo leviano le determinazioni geografiche sono dunque inutili quando i viaggiatori passano “dall'altra parte”, ritrovandosi in un vuoto che pare disabitato, alla stregua del “mondo senza gente” dantesco. L'unica misura che scandisce il viaggio verso il mondo dei morti rimane quella temporale, come nel viaggio di Ulisse oltre le colonne d'Ercole.

I deportati sono “in viaggio verso il nulla, in viaggio all'ingiù, verso il fondo” (SQU 14); il loro è un “viaggiare verso l'ignoto, alla cieca” (SES 44), alla fine del quale si sentono “alla soglia del buio e del terrore di uno spazio non terrestre” (SES 37). Viaggiano verso un luogo dal quale nessuno torna, come nessun dannato torna dall'*Inferno* dantesco e come non tornerà l'Ulisse dantesco dal suo viaggio oltre le colonne d'Ercole: “diventa chiaro che non ritorneremo. Noi abbiamo viaggiato fin qui nei vagoni piombati; noi abbiamo visto partire verso il niente le nostre donne e i nostri bambini [...] Noi non ritorneremo.” (SQU 49)<sup>12</sup>; la morte è imminente: “[m]orremo tutti, stiamo per morire” (SQU 35)<sup>13</sup>. Il treno viene presentato come l'elemento centrale del viaggio verso la morte, ma anche come uno “strumento di morte” (SES 85) esso stesso.

Ne *I sommersi e i salvati*, il viaggio dei deportati è associato all'immagine del mare che si riallaccia alla navigazione dell'Ulisse omerico e al viaggio periglioso di Dante, assumendo delle connotazioni negative. Il mare viene reinterpretato da Levi come un pericolo, una minaccia di naufragio che sottende la morte; il titolo stesso de *I sommersi e i salvati* e l'occorrenza del vocabolo “sommersi” nel saggio ne sono un segno. I deportati, infatti, “stavano annegando ad uno ad uno nel mare tempestoso del non-capire” (SES 74); per Levi, inoltre, riflettere sulla propria prigionia dopo la liberazione è come “volgersi indietro a guardare l'acqua perigliosa” (SES 57; *Inf* I, 24). Il mare viene interpretato anche come un'immensa quantità di dolore che minaccia di distruggere: “Il mare di dolore, passato e presente, ci circondava, ed il suo livello è salito di anno in anno fino quasi a sommergerci. Era inutile chiudere gli occhi o volgergli le spalle, perché era tutto intorno, in ogni direzione fino all'orizzonte.” (SES 67).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. anche: “Ecco dunque, sotto i nostri occhi, sotto i nostri piedi, una delle famose tradotte tedesche, quelle che non ritornano” (SQU 14); e ancora, a proposito dei deportati “partiti alla cieca” nei primi convogli dal campo di raccolta olandese di Westerbork: “non si sa quanti siano stati i morti durante il transito, né come il terribile viaggio si sia svolto, perché nessuno è tornato per raccontarlo” (SES 87).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. anche: “chi crede di vivere è pazzo [...] io ho capito che presto sarà finita” (SQU 21); “siamo schiavi [...] votati a morte quasi certa” (SQU 35); “di qui non si esce che per il Camino” (SQU 25).

Auschwitz, che nella prospettiva del narratore-testimone non è “un luogo di questa terra”, si delinea attraverso immagini riconducibili all’Inferno dantesco e viene esplicitamente definito come un “mondo infero” (SQU 36), “un inferno indecifrabile” (SES 44) nel quale i deportati si sentono “fuori del mondo” (SQU 20). Il locus terribilis continua ad incutere paura sin nel momento della narrazione; pertanto il narratore leviano commenta: “il suo ricordo ancora mi percuote nei sogni” (SQU 19), riallacciandosi al dantesco “nel pensier rinnova la paura” (*Inf* I, 6)<sup>14</sup>. Il passaggio tra i due mondi è segnalato esplicitamente dall’inserimento, nel capitolo relativo al viaggio di *Se questo è un uomo*, della figura del Caronte dantesco (una figura che si riallaccia, come è noto, al Caronte virgiliano<sup>15</sup>). Nel testo leviano, la figura di Caronte viene filtrata attraverso la figura dell’ironia, ottenuta tramite la sovrapposizione del banale al mitico, fino a suscitare nei deportati un contraddittorio senso di sollievo:

ci siamo presto accorti che non siamo senza scorta: è una strana scorta. È un soldato tedesco, irto d’armi: non lo vediamo perché è buio fitto, ma ne sentiamo il contatto duro ogni volta che uno scossone del veicolo ci getta tutti in mucchio a destra o a sinistra. Accende una pila tascabile, e invece di gridare “Guai a voi, anime prave” ci domanda cortesemente ad uno ad uno, in tedesco e in lingua franca, se abbiamo danaro od orologi da cedergli: tanto dopo non ci servono più. Non è un comando, non è regolamento questo: si vede bene che è una piccola iniziativa privata del nostro caronte. La cosa suscita in noi collera e riso e uno strano sollievo. (SQU 18)

Una delle immagini dominanti nella narrazione leviana del Lager è il buio, onnipresente e significativo nell’Inferno dantesco e individuabile in Omero nella nebbia che copre la città dei Cimmeri: “Là c’è il popolo e la città dei Cimmeri, avvolti di nuvole e nebbie; il Sole fulgente non li illumina mai coi suoi raggi né quando sale verso il cielo stellato né quando dal cielo discende verso la terra: una cupa notte incombe su quella gente infelice.” (*Odissea* XI<sup>16</sup>). Similmente, il Lager è caratterizzato dal grigio, dalla nebbia, dall’assenza di colori che si estende agli stessi deportati: “tutto è grigio intorno, e noi siamo grigi” (SQU 64); “la Buna è disperatamente ed essenzialmente opaca e grigia” (SQU 65); i deportati sono “curvi e grigi” (SQU 133), sono una “moltitudine senza colore” (SQU 64) che cammina “spalla contro spalla nella lunga schiera grigia” (SQU 129)<sup>17</sup>.

I prigionieri di Auschwitz sono raffrontabili alle vane ombre dei morti che Ulisse incontra nell’Ade. Sono “fuori del mondo, uomini e donne d’aria” (SES 125) ai quali il narratore si riferisce a varie riprese come a “larve” o un “esercito di larve” (SQU 30; SQU 152; SES 5); sono “la folla dei semivivi” (SQU 145), “uomini spenti” (SQU 45)<sup>18</sup>,

<sup>14</sup> Cf. anche *Inf* III, 131–132: “de lo spavento | la mente di sudore ancor mi bagna”.

<sup>15</sup> *Eneide* VI, 298 ss. Cf. l’osservazione di T. Di Salvo in nota al testo dell’*Inferno* III: “Come personaggio Caronte giunse a Dante direttamente attraverso Virgilio [...] e indirettamente attraverso la mitologia.” (in Dante Alighieri, *op. cit.*, p. 63).

<sup>16</sup> Omero, *Odissea*, a cura di Maria Grazia Ciani, Venezia, Marsilio, 2005, p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. anche: “Ieri sera il sole si è coricato irrevocabilmente in un intrico di nebbia sporca, di ciminiera e di fili” (SQU 110).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. anche: “spenti nell’anima prima che dalla morte anonima” (SQU 49).

“vermi vuoti di anima” (SQU 63)<sup>19</sup>, “fantasmi” (SQU 23), “spettri” (SQU 143), “fantocci” (SQU 26; SQU 118) che “partono in marcia come automi; le loro anime sono morte [...] Non c’è più volontà [...] non pensano e non vogliono, camminano” (SQU 45).

La dimensione temporale nel Lager viene deformata; questo è, infatti, un luogo “fuori del mondo e del tempo” (SQU 138). C. Segre parla a questo proposito dell’“uccisione del tempo”<sup>20</sup>, mentre E. Mattioda usa l’espressione “cesura del tempo” e osserva che nel Lager leviano il tempo è “schiacciato sul presente o sul futuro prossimo”<sup>21</sup>:

non pareva possibile che veramente esistesse un mondo e un tempo, se non il nostro mondo di fango, e il nostro tempo sterile e stagnante a cui eravamo oramai incapaci di immaginare una fine.

Per gli uomini vivi le unità del tempo hanno sempre un valore, il quale è tanto maggiore, quanto più elevate sono le risorse interne di chi le percorre; ma per noi, ore, giorni e mesi si riversavano torpidi dal futuro nel passato, sempre troppo lenti, materia vile e superflua di cui cercavamo di disfarcì al più presto. Conchiuso il tempo in cui i giorni si inseguivano vivaci, preziosi e irreparabili, il futuro ci stava davanti grigio e inarticolato, come una barriera invincibile. Per noi, la storia si era fermata. (SQU 104–105)

La misura del tempo diventa la sofferenza, per cui anche il tempo, come lo spazio, assume una valenza negativa e diventa un nemico contro il quale bisogna lottare:

Anche oggi, anche questo oggi che stamattina pareva invincibile ed eterno, l’abbiamo perforato attraverso tutti i suoi minuti; adesso giace conchiuso ed è subito dimenticato, già non è più un giorno, non ha lasciato traccia nella memoria di nessuno. Lo sappiamo, che domani sarà come oggi [...] Ma chi mai potrebbe seriamente pensare a domani? (SQU 119)

Riguardo all’indeterminatezza temporale, Levi ci offre anche un’altra chiave di lettura del capitolo “Il canto di Ulisse”, osservando che i ricordi letterari richiamati alla memoria durante la prigionia gli “permettevano di ristabilire un legame col passato” (SES 112), aiutandolo dunque in questo modo a ristabilire un legame con il tempo.

Il viaggio verso i campi di sterminio narrato in *Se questo è un uomo* e ne *I sommersi e i salvati* è un viaggio verso una realtà così diversa che, per poter essere narrata, va trasportata in una dimensione mitologica, legata al viaggio oltremondano di Dante, al viaggio oltre le colonne d’Ercole dell’Ulisse dantesco nonché al viaggio nelle dimore di Ade dell’Ulisse omerico. Gli elementi mitologici, risemantizzati, diventano così una componente essenziale della narrazione autobiografica leviana.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. anche: “Si immagini [...] un uomo a cui, insieme con le persone amate, vengano tolti la sua casa, le sue abitudini, i suoi abiti, tutto infine, letteralmente tutto quanto possiede: sarà un uomo vuoto, ridotto a sofferenza e bisogno, dimentico di dignità e discernimento, poiché accade facilmente, a chi ha perso tutto, di perdere se stesso” (SQU 23); il prigioniero chiamato Null Achtzehn “dà l’impressione di essere vuoto interiormente, nulla più che un involucro” (SQU 37); il protagonista parla anche di se stesso come di un uomo vuoto: “resto impalato, cogli occhi vuoti [...] [i]n un crepuscolo di esaurimento” (SQU 60).

<sup>20</sup> Segre, Cesare, “*Se questo è un uomo* di Primo Levi”, in *Letteratura italiana, Le Opere, IV, Il Novecento, II. La ricerca letteraria*, a cura di Alberto Asor Rosa, Torino, Einaudi, 1996, p. 499.

<sup>21</sup> Mattioda, Enrico, *L’ordine del mondo. Saggio su Primo Levi*, Napoli, Liguori, 1998, p. 37.

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## ST MILDRITH OR THE MONASTIC LIFE AGAINST ALL ODDS IN GOSCELIN'S *VITA DEO DILECTAE VIRGINIS MILDRETHAE*

Alenka Divjak

### Abstract

This paper discusses St Mildrith (*dies natalis*\*, 13 July, †732/733) in Goscelin's *Vita Deo dilectae virginis Mildrethae*, the abbess of the famous monastery Minster-in-Thanel, Kent, and a consecrated virgin descended from the Kentish and Mercian royal families. The emphasis of the paper is on the examination of a limited number of hagiographic elements which stress most pointedly Mildrith's associations with monasticism and which are viewed in the broader perspective of Anglo-Saxon female sanctity.

**Key words:** early Anglo-Saxon Christianity, Anglo-Saxon concept of female sanctity, founding abbesses, consecrated virgins, hagiography

### INTRODUCTION

The successful completion of the process of conversion in Anglo-Saxon England in the seventh and eighth centuries, described alternately as the golden age of Christianity and the golden age of culture and scholarship, is in great measure the result of material, military and moral support given to Christian missionaries by the kings of the so-called Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy.<sup>1</sup> The kings emerged from their cooperation with the Christian Church and the Papacy with enhanced prestige,<sup>2</sup> and the Church even more explicitly expressed its gratitude for the royal support by elevating to sanctity a

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\* Latin: day of birth, in this case the date of the saint's death or birth into heaven, spiritual rebirth.

<sup>1</sup> Heptarchy is a collective name to denote the supposed seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex and Wessex, which were believed to have emerged in the early medieval period in the areas settled by Teutonic tribes in the sixth century. The term is attributed to Henry of Huntingdon, who had used it in his *Historia Anglorum* in the 12<sup>th</sup> century: James Campbell, "Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past", in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*. London: Hamledon P, 1986: 209–228, 213. For the use of the term in the sixteenth century, see Walter Goffart, "The First Venture into 'Medieval Geography': Lambarde's Map of the Saxon Heptarchy (1568)", in Jane Roberts and Janet Malcolm Godden (eds.), *Alfred the Wise. Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of Her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997: 53–60.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Swanton, *English Literature before Chaucer*. London: Longman, 1987, 9–11.



number of royal men and women from this early Anglo-Saxon period. If pagan ancestors of Anglo-Saxon kings traced their origin back to the pagan gods, especially Woden,<sup>3</sup> close familial connections of royal families with Christian saints promoted in various hagiographic accounts served as another, even more effective way of emphasising the sacral nature of their reign.<sup>4</sup>

Hagiography constituted an important literary genre in the early Christian church, providing the accounts of early Christian saints whose fates were recorded in either *passiones* or *vitae*. The *passio* focuses on the saint's suffering and martyr's death, this aspect being particularly emphasised in the period of massive religious persecutions before Constantine I. The *Martyrdom of St Polycarp* is the earliest extant example of the *passio*, written in Greek, and provides an eyewitness account of Polycarp's martyrdom in 155, which was followed over the course of the next century and a half by many other *passiones* of those men and women who suffered execution because of their faith. The *vita*, by contrast, asserted its position later, in the age of Constantine and his successors, when the focus of sanctity shifted from the saints' martyr's death to their renunciation of the world, their fight against evil forces, temptations of all kinds and even their own bodies, the so-called bloodless martyrdom, the best known examples of this kind of sanctity being provided in the fourth century by *Vita sancti Antonii eremitae* (the *Life of St Anthony the Hermit*) and *Vita sancti Martini* (the *Life of St Martin*).<sup>5</sup>

Hagiography, Latin and vernacular, grew increasingly popular in the early Anglo-Saxon period which created a wide variety of native Anglo-Saxon saints, such as abbots who had founded monasteries (Benedict Biscop), missionary bishops (Wildrid and Cuthbert) and hermits (Guthlac). Apart from those saints, the early Anglo-Saxon period abounded in native saints of the royal stock, such as kings who had been murdered by their pagan opponents (Oswald), princes and kings murdered by their rivals for the throne (Æthelred and Æthelberh), queens who had founded monasteries (Etheldreda) and consecrated royal virgins (Mildrith).<sup>6</sup> This paper focuses on St Mildrith, the abbess of the rich and prestigious monastery Minster-in-Thamet, Kent, and a consecrated virgin, related through her father to the kings of Mercia and through her mother to the Kentish royal family.<sup>7</sup> Although Minster-in-Thamet was a monastery with a firmly established

<sup>3</sup> Herman Moisl, "Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies". *Journal of Medieval History* 7, 1981: 215-248, 215.

<sup>4</sup> D. W. Rollason, "The cults of murdered royal saints in Anglo-Saxon England". *Anglo-Saxon England* 11, 1983: 1-22, 15-16.

<sup>5</sup> S. H. Wallis, "Understanding and Dealing with Evil and Suffering: A Fourth Century A.D. Pagan Perspective". U of Adelaide. School of European Studies and Languages. The degree of Masters by Research in Classical Studies, 2008, 89. <<http://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/handle/2440/49853/2/01front.pdf>>. Accessed: February 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Head, "The Development of Hagiography and the Cult of Saints in Western Christendom to the Year 1000". Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY, 1999. <<http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/hagiography/survey1.htm>>. Accessed: March 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Mildrith was brought up in the monastic environment of Minster-in-Thamet, founded by her mother Domne Eafe (Lady Eve), the Kentish princess and divorced wife of Merwalh, the sub-king of Mercia, by whom she had three daughters (Milgith, Mildburg and Mildrith) and a son (Merefin), all her children being elevated to sanctity. According to the legend, she and her husband decided to separate "for the love of God". Mildrith seems to have been raised in Kent by her mother and more elaborate accounts provide additional information about Mildrith's education at the abbey of Chelles near Paris, an elite school for future nuns. According to Goscelin, Mildrith prospered as a disciple in this environment, but found herself in mortal danger after having rejected the marital offer of one of the abbess's relatives. The offended abbess, named

learned tradition under Mildrith's successor Eadburga<sup>8</sup> (abbess from 732/733-751),<sup>9</sup> no contemporary or nearly contemporary Minster-in-Thanel version of Mildrith's life has survived. The saint's *dies natalis*, 13 July, is recorded in several calendars from the late ninth to the late eleventh century<sup>10</sup> and various hagiographic sources, Latin and vernacular, from the late Anglo-Saxon age,<sup>11</sup> but it was not until the second half of the eleventh century that she was singled out in a crowd of her saintly relatives by the Flemish monk Goscelin of St Bertin in Flanders. He arrived in England in the early 1060s, became a member of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, in the late 1080s, and wrote for this religious house a number of hagiographic texts.<sup>12</sup> His *Vita Deo dilectae virginis Mildrethae* (*The Life of the Virgin Mildrith, beloved of God*, BHL 5960)<sup>13</sup> is the first hagiographic account which concentrates primarily on St Mildrith rather than on her prestigious Kentish ancestry, the first Anglo-Saxon family to be converted. Goscelin's text underlines those hagiographic elements which emphasise both her family's proselytising efforts and her own eligibility for sanctity: 1) the family's royal status and its active role in the conversion process, 2) the saint's inclination for monastic life, 3)

rather sarcastically Wilcoma, exposed the rebellious girl to a series of tortures, but Domne Eafe managed to rescue her daughter, whom she had consecrated as a nun, and after giving up her abbatial post in the late 690s, she appointed Mildrith as her successor. Mildrith probably died as an old woman in the early 730s.

<sup>8</sup> According to K. P. Witney, "Kentish Royal Saints: An Enquiry into the Facts behind the Legends". *Archaeologia Cantiana* 101, 1984: 1-21, 15-18, Eadburga/Bugga was the daughter of Eormengyth/Eangyth, Domne Eafe's sister, and Centwine of Wessex. For Eadburga's connections with St Boniface, see Eckenstein, *Women under monasticism*, 120-124.

<sup>9</sup> According to D. W. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England*. Leicester: Leicester UP, 1982, Mildrith died after 732, 16, while Eadburga, according to Witney, "The Kentish Royal Saints", 16, died in 751. For the possibility that Mildrith's successor Eadburga and her disciple Leobgyth/Leoba belonged to the community at Minster-in-Thanel, see Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 35-36, and Witney, "Kentish Royal Saints", 16.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Wormald (ed.), *English Kalendars before A. D. 1100*. Henry Bradshaw Society, vol. 72. London, 1934.

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For a discussion of the lists referring to the resting-places of Anglo-Saxon saints, see D. W. Rollason, "Lists of saints' resting-places in Anglo-Saxon England". *Anglo-Saxon England* 7, 1978: 61-93.

<sup>11</sup> For the most detailed report on the sources and diffusion of Mildrith's legend, see Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 15-40. Witney's article also contains a short summary of sources analysed by Rollason in *The Mildrith Legend*, 20-21.

<sup>12</sup> Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 60-62; D. Rollason, "Goscelin of Canterbury's Account of The Translation and Miracles of St Mildrith (BHL 5961/4). An Edition with Notes". *Medieval Studies* 48, 1986: 139-210; Susan Millinger, "Humility and Power: Anglo-Saxon Nuns in Norman Hagiography", in John A. Nichols and Lilian Thomas Shank (eds.), *Medieval Religious Women: Distant Echoes*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1984: 115-127, 111-116; F. Barlow (ed.), *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1962, xlv-xlviii; Georges Whalen, "Patronage Engendered: How Goscelin Allayed the Concerns of Nuns' Discriminatory Public", in Lesley Smith and Janet H. M. Taylor (eds.), *Women, the Book and the Godly*. Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1995: 123-135, 126-127.

<sup>13</sup> Goscelin's *Vita Deo dilectae virginis Mildrethae* is divided into 28 chapters. Chapters I-III concentrate on Mildrith's Kentish ancestors who were baptized in the early seventh century; chapter IV provides an account of Mildrith's paternal grandfather, Eormenred, her mother, Domne Eafe, and Mercian father, Merwalh; chapters V-VI focus on the old family feud culminating in the deaths of Mildrith's maternal uncles, Æthelred and Æthelberh, and the foundation of Minster-in-Thanel; chapters VII-XX deal in detail with Mildrith's upbringing, monastic education at Chelles, her ordeal at the monastery and her return to Kent; chapters XXI-XXVII are dedicated to her consecration, abbatial position, saintly virtues and death after a long illness, while the final chapter describes the translation of St Mildrith from St Mary's church at Thanet to the church of SS Peter and Paul within the same community organised by her successor Eadburga.

the obstacles on the way to it, 4) the preservation of virginity, 5) monastic life, 6) the translation,<sup>14</sup> and 7) the official recognition of her sanctity. This discussion, however, is limited to the examination of the following three most significant ‘monastic’ elements 1) the foundation of Minster-in-Thanel, 2) Mildrith’s decision to embrace monasticism, and 3) her abbatial position at Minster, all of which are viewed within the wider context of Anglo-Saxon female sanctity.

## HAGIOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS

### The foundation of Minster-in-Thanel

In spite of the vehement protestations consistently repeated in hagiographic accounts about how their women saints mercilessly severed all the ties with their kin, the royal families in Anglo-Saxon England retained a central place in the lives of their monastic womenfolk, saints or non-saints, at all stages of their lives,<sup>15</sup> as confirmed by the cases of several Kentish royal women.<sup>16</sup> They seem to have felt safer in the vicinity of their relatives, and the establishment and endowment of monasteries to which they retreated either as widows or divorcees was regarded as the most convenient and decent way of providing for the bereaved royal women.<sup>17</sup> The kings on the other hand also benefited from the arrangement. Apart from removing unnecessary women relatives from the court, the role of generous protectors of monastic communities enhanced the kings’ prestige and enabled them, by appointing their womenfolk to the top positions in monastic communities, to reinforce royal control over a considerable source of wealth and influence.<sup>18</sup>

By granting a substantial tract of land to his relative Domne Eafe, Mildrith’s mother, for the foundation of Minster-in-Thanel, the Kentish king Ecgbert (664-73) therefore continued the family tradition of removing ‘retired’ female relatives from the court to the relatively comfortable and highly prestigious monastic environment. He, however, had another, even more pressing reason for being rid of Domne Eafe. By having

<sup>14</sup> The *translatio* as an independent sub-genre of the *saint’s life* and the literary motifs typical of the *translatio* are discussed by Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 6. See also Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, ‘*Saints’ Lives as a Source for the History of Women*’, in Joel T. Rosenthal (ed.), *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History*. Athens/London: U of Georgia P, 1990: 285-320, 296-297.

<sup>15</sup> See Witney, ‘The Kentish Royal Saints’, *Æthelberg*, 2-3, Eangyth, 14, 17-18, Eormenburg, 14. For the other functions of the monasteries in this early period, see Joan Nicholson, ‘*Feminae Gloriosae: Women in the Age of Bede*’, in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978: 15-29, 28-29.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, *Æthelburg*, the widow of Edwin of Deira (ca. 586-632/3), Eormenburg, the widow of Ecgrith of Northumbria (ca. 645-685), and Eangyth, the widow of the West-Saxon king Centwine (676-685).

<sup>17</sup> Witney, ‘The Kentish Royal Saints’, 19. For a suggestion that monasteries often housed ‘difficult’ royal women, see, for example, Pauline Stafford, ‘Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reform in Tenth- and Eleventh-century England’, *Past and Present* 163, 1999: 3-35, 24-25. For a view that the famous abbess Hild of Whitby in Northumbria entered a monastery because, as member of a truncated royal branch of Deira, she could expect no advancement in the reign of the rival branch of Bernicia, see Christine Fell, ‘Hild, abbess of Streonæshalch’, in Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al. (eds.), *Hagiography and Medieval Literature, A Symposium*. Odense: Odense UP, 1980: 76-99.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*. London: Continuum, 2003, 124.

granted her a substantial plot of land for founding the monastery on the Isle of Thanet, he wanted to settle an old family feud which reached its peak with the murder of his two cousins, Domne Eafe's younger brothers, Æthelred and Æthelberht (Goscelin, *Vita Deo Dilectae Virginis Mildrethae*, Ch. 5, 118-119).<sup>19</sup> The two princes, the sons of Ecgbert's uncle, the prince Eormenred, whose claim to the throne had been ignored in favour of his younger brother, Ecgbert's father Eorcenberht (640-64),<sup>20</sup> were most likely killed at Ecgbert's instigation.<sup>21</sup> He must have suspected them of having designs on the throne, especially as they seem to have been young men at that time, not mere boys as the Mildrith legend depicts them: "Ermenredus ....filios suos Æthelredum atque Æthelbrihtum .... fratri Eorconberto regi adhuc infantulos commendavit..." (Ch. 5, 116),<sup>22</sup> and nine years later, after Eorcenberht's death, they are still – rather illogically – referred to by Goscelin as 'pueri' (boys).

Domne Eafe for her part also seemed to be interested in the settlement which offered her the opportunity to settle in Kent after the divorce from her husband. Nowadays it is impossible to check the veracity of Goscelin's explanation that the divorce took place at the wish of both partners, eager to concentrate on heavenly kingdom after having given up their earthly possessions (Ch. 4, 115), but even in the eyes of the Church, the staunch believer in the indissolubility of marital union, this divorce was beyond every reproach.<sup>23</sup> This combination of exemplary piety and unblemished moral reputation additionally enhances the reputation of Mildrith's parentage and invests Domne Eafe with undisputed moral authority. Her saintly reputation enables her to return to Kent not as a destitute divorcee in need of shelter but as a worthy representative of her murdered brothers, soon to be regarded as martyrs and elevated to sanctity.<sup>24</sup> Her acceptance of Ecgbert's offer was additionally motivated by her preference for the intellectually and culturally advanced Kent, over the less sophisticated land of her husband: "...ubi, inter sanctorum luminaria et populos diuina religione florentes, beatius quam inter rudes adhuc Cristicolas Domino seruiat" (Ch. 5, 118).<sup>25</sup> According to the legend, she is far from being a passive recipient of royal favour, as by having used a clever device, she managed to trick the king into granting her more land than he was originally prepared to do.<sup>26</sup> Thus she wished to receive from the king as much land as her pet stag could encompass within one day, and when the king's advisor Thunnor, the murderer of the

<sup>19</sup> All quotations and chapter references from Goscelin's *Vita Deo Dilectae Virginis Mildrethae* are taken from Rollason's edition in *The Mildrith Legend*, 104-143.

<sup>20</sup> Witney "Kentish Royal Saints", 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> Political consequences of this murder are analysed, for example, by Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 39-40; Witney, "The Kentish Royal Saints", 7-14; D. P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*. London: Routledge, 1991, 44; B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*. London: Routledge, 1997, 34-35.

<sup>22</sup> Translation: Ermenred .....entrusted his two sons, Ethelred and Ethelbriht, little children at that time, to his brother Ethelred.

All the passages are translated by the author of this article.

<sup>23</sup> Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*. Woodbridge: Boydell P, 1992, 72.

<sup>24</sup> Rollason, "The cults of murdered royal saints", 11-14.

<sup>25</sup> Translation: ...where, amidst the lights of the saints and the people flourishing in divine religion, may she serve the Lord more devotedly than amidst even now rough worshippers of Christ.

<sup>26</sup> Stephanie Hollis, "The Minster-in-Thanet Foundation Story". *Anglo-Saxon England* 27, 1998: 41-64, 50-51.

young princes, angrily opposed the king's consent to her wish, being shocked at the miraculous speed with which the stag was obtaining large tracts of land for Domne Eafe's foundation, the ground opened and swallowed him (Ch. 5, 118).

On the basis of the legend alone it is difficult to penetrate into the true character of Domne Eafe, hidden under several layers of fiction, nevertheless the legend suggests that she was a clever and resourceful woman. Historical evidence also implies that she must have possessed considerable political and diplomatic skills with which she managed to obtain the continual support of Kentish kings for her monastic foundation.<sup>27</sup> Her decision to take her daughter with her to Kent, train her as a nun and have her educated in an elite monastic school in Merovingian Gaul, the most prestigious kingdom in the West, suggests that she had a plan to change Minster-in-Thanel into a first-rate monastic institution. Apart from that, she must have been planning to establish a female royal dynasty within the monastery, and by passing her abbatial position on to her daughter Mildrith some years before her death,<sup>28</sup> she clearly articulated this ambition.

According to the legend, it is Domne Eafe and not Mildrith who founded the monastery. However, even though Mildrith does not play an active part in the foundation story of Minster-in-Thanel, this episode constitutes an integral part of her *Vita*, serving as an impressive introduction to Mildrith's equally impressive monastic career. In addition, this episode implies that being the head of such an institution is a privileged experience reserved for an exceptional personality. The main purpose of Goscelin's *Vita* is therefore to convince its audience that Mildrith deserves her leading position and saintly status for her own sake, and in order to prove the point, the text focuses on these aspects of her monastic life and these personal qualities which make her worthy of being venerated as a saint.

### Monastic life against all odds

According to the legend, Mildrith is raised by her mother as a nun, which was in line with the tendency of Anglo-Saxon royal families to oblate some of their daughters in their infancy or early childhood.<sup>29</sup> Mildrith's position of a monastic child in the *Vita* is depicted as a source of enormous prestige, as she is, according to Goscelin, encouraged in her vocation by the leading ecclesiastical authorities of her time, the archbishop Theodore of Canterbury and the abbot Hadrian of St Peter's, Canterbury (Ch. 6, 119-120). The pious Domne Eafe is also depicted as having reared her daughter in an atmosphere of piety. Her habit of dressing Mildrith soberly, and her endeavours to raise in the girl an interest in spiritual matters are indeed in line with St Jerome's

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<sup>27</sup> For example, there are several charters, all dating from 690, and all record grants of land to a certain abbess Aebba, who must be identified with Domne Eafe: Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 34. For a list of charters associated with Minster-in-Thanel, see S. E. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, and Minster-in-Thanel*. Anglo-Saxon Charters 4. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. <<http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/kemble/pelteret/Csa/Csalist.htm>>. Accessed: October 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Hollis, "The Minster-in-Thanel Foundation Story", 56.

<sup>29</sup> Nicholson, "*Feminae Gloriosae*", 16-17, where she discusses the fate of Abbess Ælfled, daughter of Oswy of Bernicia, as the most obvious example of an oblate child. See also Yorke, *Nunneries*, 110-111.

suggestions about the proper upbringing of the girls destined for monastic life:<sup>30</sup> “... hanc preclara genitrix non aurotextis uel gemmatis purpuris, sed uirtutum monilibus et diuinis dotibus adornare atque ad ardentem lampadem ipsius oleum indeficiens amministrare satagebat” (Ch. 6, 119).<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, Goscelin is eager to depict Mildrith as cherishing monasticism and yearning for the life of piety, renunciation and humility entirely of her own accord, which links Goscelin’s account with *vitae* of other consecrated Anglo-Saxon royal virgins who, even though being sent into monasteries as infants and children, reveal unmistakable signs of future saintliness at an early age. Thus according to the *Vita*, Mildrith displays from her childhood onwards all necessary signs of a pious nun, feeling contempt for secular matters and preference for the spiritual life: “Hec enim non ut terrigena sed ut celigena id est non quasi in terris sed in celo nata, ita a tenera etatula spernebat infima et anhelabat ad superna” (Ch. 6, 119).<sup>32</sup> The marriage offer, which she receives at the abbey of Chelles from a high-born suitor and which she rejects, serves as an additional opportunity to highlight her determination (Ch. 10, 123). Mildrith’s action, however, has parallels in the broader hagiographic tradition where the oblate girls are depicted as being firm in their determination to remain consecrated virgins in spite of tempting marriage proposals from powerful suitors. As a result of her refusal, Mildrith has to undergo a series of tortures which link her to a certain degree with well known women martyrs from the early age of Christianity, such as St Agatha, St Catherine, St Eulalia, St Agnes, St Lucia etc., who also refuse the marriage offer of an influential suitor and pay for their determination first by a series of tortures and then by a martyr’s death, their fates being the topic of an influential hagiographic genre, the *passio*.<sup>33</sup> The enraged abbess, the relative of a rejected suitor, puts Mildrith into a lighted oven, but Mildrith remains unhurt by the fire, being even safer among the flames than among human furies: “Tutior hic erat innocentia inter flammicomos uigores quam inter humanos furores” (Ch. 11, 124).<sup>34</sup> Having realised the futility of her attempts to burn Mildrith, the abbess resorts to various forms of physical violence: “... teneram puellam allidit in terram, calcat pedibus, terit calcibus, tundit pugnibus acsi plumbatis et cestibus, lacerat et

<sup>30</sup> Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions. Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997, 37-38.

<sup>31</sup> Translation: ...the illustrious mother endeavoured to adorn her not with gold-woven textiles and the purple ornamented with precious stones, but with the necklaces of virtues and with spiritual jewellery, and she also endeavoured to administer unfailing oil to her burning lamp.

<sup>32</sup> Translation: This one just as if she was not earth- but heaven-born, that is not as on land but in heaven, so she from the tender age spurned the lowest and aspired to the highest.

<sup>33</sup> The pattern of the virgin martyr and the stages in her *passio* are presented, for example, by Raymon S. Farrar, “Structure and function in representative Old English saints’ lives”. *Neophilologus* 57, 1973: 83-93, 84: ‘The following constitutes the *topoi* for a virgin-martyr: her good character is briefly mentioned at the outset; her chastity is in some wise challenged, but her virginity is never lost, a figure of authority, but not necessarily a judge, tries to sway her, often in a trial-like setting, the saint delivers a series of set speeches either praising Christ, expounding some point of doctrine or rebuking the foolishness of the pagans and the impotence of their gods; she undergoes various torments, in some of which God intervenes to prevent her being harmed; she is killed by a sword blow; miracles occur after her death; a church is built on a site associated with the martyr.’ For further discussion on the life of a virgin martyr, see Joscelyn Wogan-Browne, “The Virgin’s Tale”, in Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (eds.), *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature*. New York: Routledge, 1994: 165-194, 173-174.

<sup>34</sup> Translation: Innocence was safer among the vigorous flames than human fury.



laniat uenantis unguibus, discerpit et extirpat crines furiosis tractibus'' (Ch. 13, 126).<sup>35</sup> However, unlike early virgin martyrs, the heroines of the *passio*, Mildrith, the heroine of the *vita*, is not destined to die a violent death. She is rescued first by divine intervention, which prevents the abbess from murdering her: ''Iam denique hanc suffocasset, extinxisset, enecasset, nisi alioquo forte interveniente diuina manus succurrisset'' (Ch., 126),<sup>36</sup> and then by her mother, who sends ships to Gaul to rescue her daughter.

The fact that Mildrith's chastity was threatened in the nunnery, which she had entered with the express purpose of preparing herself for the life of chastity and renunciation and on the assumption that in this elite monastic institution she would be safe from the intrusions of the secular world, only to experience there the ordeal of her life in the shape of an aggressive suitor, is not without a historical nucleus. The need for eligible brides was strong in the early medieval period which experienced the lack of marriageable women and witnessed their high mortality due to the harsh conditions of the age, malnutrition, and the risks of childbirth and pregnancies.<sup>37</sup> As a result, female monasticism was less safe in terms of renunciation and irreversibility than men's monastic communities, and monastic women could be reclaimed by their families in case they were needed as brides and heiresses.<sup>38</sup> Nunneries, housing so many high-born and influential women with first-rate dynastic connections, were therefore in need of efficient political protectors. In Merovingian Gaul, for example, women monasteries tended to be located within city walls in order to discourage aggressive magnates from abducting nuns.<sup>39</sup> In early Anglo-Saxon England, aggression towards consecrated women increased in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, after the extinction of the majority of those Anglo-Saxon royal families which had been responsible for the foundation of several wealthy nunneries in the conversion period. The extinct royal families were replaced by other rulers who felt far less attachment towards the monastic institutions with which they had no familial ties. As a result, the new kings were hardly motivated to fund and support expensive monastic institutions,<sup>40</sup> always in need of additional material resources and privileges and always desirous of being exempted from taxation, road repairs and military service.<sup>41</sup> In this position, the new kings and their magnates did not hesitate to molest and abduct the nuns belonging to unprotected and vulnerable monasteries, even though such action incurred the wrath of monks, churchmen and saints alike.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Translation: ...she throws the tender girl to the ground, kicks her with feet, tramples her with heels, thrashes her with fists as if with lead balls and gauntlets, tortures and tears her with predatory nails, grabs and plucks her hair with furious motions.

<sup>36</sup> Translation: ...Undoubtedly and eventually, she would have strangled, destroyed, murdered her if by some chance the divine hand hadn't intervened.

<sup>37</sup> David Herlihy, ''Did Women Have a Renaissance?: A Reconsideration'', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 13, 1985: 1-22.

<sup>38</sup> Stafford, ''Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen'', 16-17.

<sup>39</sup> Patrick J. Geary, *Die Merowinger. Europa vor Karl dem Großen*, trans. Ursula Scholz. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988, 147.

<sup>40</sup> Yorke, *Nunneries*, 63.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Brooks, ''Development of military obligations in the eighth and ninth-century England'', in Kathleen Hughes and Peter Clemoes (eds.), *England before the Conquest. Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971: 69-84.

<sup>42</sup> Lina Eckenstein, *Women under Monasticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1896, 123, 125-126.



The fact that virgin martyrs and consecrated virgins always manage to preserve their purity against all odds confirms a prestigious position of virginity as a vital element of female sanctity from the very beginnings of the Christian Church.<sup>43</sup> In fact, female sexuality was an object of contempt and suspicion within the early and medieval Church, and by medieval standards only the state of virginity, i.e. the rejection of sexuality, enabled a woman to be spiritually and intellectually equal to a man.<sup>44</sup> As a result, even though the Church in early Anglo-Saxon England elevated to sanctity many widowed or divorced royal women, who often acted as founding abbesses,<sup>45</sup> and carefully handled the rhetoric of virginity in order not to offend and degrade this influential social group, it was the category of virgin saints who were held in the highest esteem by the Church.<sup>46</sup>

Mildrith's purity is again on the agenda later, after her death, when her chastity is confirmed in the presence of Mildrith's successor Eadburga and the archbishop Cuthbert (Ch. 28, 143), ca. 748, when the incorruptibility of Mildrith's body, her similarity to a sleeping, not a dead person, and the cleanness of her clothes are regarded as a visible sign of her spiritual and physical purity: "Tum miracula miraculis occurrunt. Inueniunt virginem vestibus mundissimis et toto corpore post tot scilicet annos integram et incorruptam, ita ut uideretur magis dormire in thalamo quam putrescere in sepulchro. Hac quippe incorruptione et odoris suauitate diuina benignitas dignata est propalare, quanta sibi seruierit mentis et corporis puritate" (Ibid., 143).<sup>47</sup> To sum up, the preservation of virginity against all odds is the topic which occupies the most prominent position in the *Vita*, being explored in greater detail and with more emphasis than any other aspect of Mildrith's *vita* before and after her nightmare in Gaul.<sup>48</sup> The episode must therefore be regarded as a central point of the narrative and seen as an ordeal from which she must emerge with unblemished reputation in order to earn her position at Minster-in-Thanel, first as a nun and later as an abbess.

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<sup>43</sup> McNamara and F. Wemple, "Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Medieval Women", in Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (eds.), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977: 90-118, 94-96; Jo Ann McNamara, "Muffled Voices: The Lives of Consecrated Women in the Fourth Century", in John A. Nichols and Lilian Thomas Shank (eds.), *Medieval Religious Women: Distant Echoes*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984: 11-29, 11-18; Jane Tibbett Schulenburg, "Sexism and the celestial gynaeceum – from 500 to 1200". *Journal of Medieval History* 4, 1978: 117-133, 117-118.

<sup>44</sup> Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "The Heroics of Virginity. Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation", in Mary Bath Rose (ed.), *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Literary and Historical Perspectives*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1986: 29-73, 32-33.

<sup>45</sup> J. T. Schulenburg, "Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles, ca. 500-1100", in Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowalesky (eds.), *Women in Power in the Middle Ages*. Athens/London: U of Georgia P, 1988: 102-125, 105, 112; Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne F. Wemple, "Sanctity and Power", 98-99.

<sup>46</sup> Janemarie Luecke, "The unique experience of Anglo-Saxon nuns", in Lillian Thomas Shanks and John A. Nichols (eds.), *Medieval Religious Women: Distant Echoes*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984: 55-65, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Translation: Then the wonders of the wonders occur. They discover the virgin in the cleanest clothes and of the undecayed body, untouched and uncorrupted after so many years, so that she seemed to be sleeping in her bed rather than to be rotting in a sepulchre. By means of this incurrption and the sweetness of the odour, the divine benevolence decided to announce how well she had preserved the purity of her mind and body.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Hollis, "The Minster-in-Thanel Foundation Story", 56.

## MILDRITH'S ABBATIAL POSITION AT MINSTER-IN-THANET

There is some historical evidence about Mildrith's function as abbess. Her name appears in charters from the late seventh and early eighth centuries, referring to her abbatial position at Thanet from ca. 696 to ca. 732/733<sup>49</sup> and recording her attendance at the *witenagemot* at Baccanceld in Kent about 696-716.<sup>50</sup> In one of the preserved charters, ca. 716/7 A.D., Aethelbald (716-757), the king of Mercia, grants Mildrith a toll remission for one ship at the port of London.<sup>51</sup> This transaction suggests that Mildrith was a shrewd politician who recognised the growing influence of Mercia in the early eighth century. Even though her maternal Kentish dynasty was still in control in Kent, Mildrith must have found it wise to secure the good will of the kings of Mercia,<sup>52</sup> the policy which was even more energetically embraced by her successors at Minster.<sup>53</sup>

Goscelin's *Vita*, however, never praises the saint's political talents which were vital for the survival and prosperity of Minster-in-Thanet, focusing instead, in rather great detail, on her personal qualities. An ideal nun is humble and does not yearn for secular functions,<sup>54</sup> but if she is compelled to accept a leading position within her monastery, she does so with perfect modesty and humility. Mildrith was designated by her mother to succeed her as abbess, the hereditary abbatial status being a characteristic feature of early Anglo-Saxon royal nunneries,<sup>55</sup> and even Goscelin who tends to minimize the secular aspects of Mildrith's abbatial position, is not trying to conceal the fact. However, he words the situation in such a way that Mildrith, in spite of accepting this position from her mother, emerges even from this unmistakably secular situation as a model of humility. Goscelin argues that, by having accepted this function, she did a favour to her ailing mother who wanted to be relieved of her abbatial duties and who eventually resigned with the archbishop's consent: "Venerabili autem Domneua supplicante et pre diuturna egritudine se excusante, adhuc sacratissimus archipontifex superaddidit benedictionem dignissime Mildrithae, et pro ipsa matre tamquam spiritualem Saram prole innouandam ordinat in principem domus ac familie diuine, et abbatissam consecrate sanctimonialis choree" (Ch. 21, 135).<sup>56</sup>

Mildrith's authority as abbess is not based on fear, punishments and threats, but she endeavours to set a good example to the others by her own behaviour, wishing to be loved, not feared: *Ire uirtutis uia non tam imperat quam monstrat, non tam documentis quam exemplis comites prouocat. Ut omnibus precellentior, ita apparebat humilior. Ministra esse malebat quam magistra, prodesse quam preesse, famulatu quam precepto*

<sup>49</sup> Witney, "The Kentish Royal Saints", 15-16.

<sup>50</sup> Schulenburg, "Female Sanctity", 111, 124, fn. 36.

<sup>51</sup> S. E. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, and Minster-in-Thanet*. Anglo-Saxon Charters 4. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995, 168-169 (no. 49). <<http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/kemble/pelteret/Csa/Csa%2049htm>>. Accessed: October 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Yorke, *Nunneries*, 56.

<sup>53</sup> Yorke, *Nunneries*, 165; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 38; Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 16, 35.

<sup>54</sup> Millinger, "Humility and Power", 119-120.

<sup>55</sup> Luecke, "The Unique Experience", 58.

<sup>56</sup> Translation: When the venerable Domneua begged to be dismissed for the sake of a long-lasting illness, the most sacred archpriest bestowed his blessing on the most virtuous Mildrith, and on behalf of the mother herself, like the spiritual Sarah, rejuvenated by the offspring, he ordained her to be the chief of the house and the saintly family, and consecrated her as abbess of the pious saintly choir.

caritatis obsequium docere. Mansuetudine magis quam rigore, patientia quam terrore uincere curabat, diligi potius quam timeri satagebat” (Ch. 23, 136).<sup>57</sup> She is a charismatic woman who is imitated and admired by all her nuns who compete to imitate their abbess as eagerly as possible in piety, humility and vigilance: “Una erat in eis contentio, que humilior, que obedientior, que vigilantior, que in omni probitatis emulatione sanctissime matri esset proximior” (Ibid., 136).<sup>58</sup> Apart from all these qualities, humility and piety on one hand and patience and personal gentleness on the other, Mildrith is praised by Goscelin for her ability to learn and study,<sup>59</sup> being depicted as reading in her cell. In her youth, she was given a good education, and at Chelles, she is depicted as surpassing other disciples and equalling her teachers: “Tradita ergo litterali discipline, docentes se precurrebat diuina capacitate. Vix audierat et docta erat. Thesaurizata memorie nec uolucres celi nec fures poterant auferre. Condiscipulas superabat, magistras equiparabat uel preueniebat” (Ch. 8, 121).<sup>60</sup>

On the basis of preserved information it is nowadays difficult to explain the posterity’s partiality towards Mildrith which enabled her to eclipse two well-articulated and energetic abbesses, the shrewd Domne Eafe, and the intellectually active Eadburga. It is also impossible to determine to what degree the popularity of Mildrith’s cult was the result of Eadburga’s energetic promotional activity and to what extent it was the result of Mildrith’s own actions. It can be argued, however, that Goscelin’s *Vita*, which depicts her as a gentle and spiritual woman, at least suggests which qualities might have attracted people around her.

## CONCLUSION

Goscelin’s *Vita*, the Latin text from the late eleventh century, is the first fully preserved hagiographic account which focuses primarily on St Mildrith, a royal virgin saint and an abbess, rather than on her illustrious maternal ancestors, the kings of Kent. The paper focuses on the following hagiographic elements in Goscelin’s *Vita* which are most closely associated with Mildrith and Minster-in-Thamet: 1) the foundation of the monastery, 2) the saint’s predilection for monasticism, and 3) her abbatial position. All of them are heavily influenced by the Anglo-Saxon concept of female sanctity, which,

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<sup>57</sup> Translation: To follow the path of virtue she did not require but demonstrated, not so much with admonitions rather than with examples did she encourage her companions. She preferred to be a servant rather than a teacher, to be of use rather than in charge, to teach the principles of charity by serving rather than by prescribing. More with gentleness rather than with severity, with patience rather than with terror she strove to be victorious, she endeavoured to be loved rather than feared.

<sup>58</sup> Translation: There was one competition between them, which of them would be humbler, more obedient, more vigilant, which one would most resemble the holiest mother in the imitation of every virtue.

<sup>59</sup> For a cliché of a saint as a precocious child and talented student and the use of this motif in other medieval genres, see R. Boyer, “An attempt to define the typology of medieval hagiography”, in Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al. (eds.), *Hagiography and Medieval Literature, A Symposium*. Odense: Odense UP, 1980: 27-36. For the motif of a precocious child with an adult mind, see G. Kreutzer, “Der puer-senex-topos in der altnordischen Literatur”. *Skandinavistik* 16, 1986: 134-145.

<sup>60</sup> Translation: Having been committed to the study of letters, she surpassed disciples in divine ability. As soon as heard, she was taught. The stored treasures of memory neither the birds of heaven nor the thieves could carry away. She surpassed her female school-fellows and either equalled or overtook her teachers.

in common with the broader ecclesiastical tradition, favoured in particular two types of saintly women: the founding abbess and the consecrated virgin, both of the two being praised as devoted nuns, excelling in the virtues of piety, humility and renunciation. On the other hand, Goscelin's *Vita*, in spite of its ecclesiastical vision of female sanctity, cannot completely ignore secular concerns and factors which influenced the actions of St Mildrith and her family in relation to the monastic community at Thanet. It is this continual intrusion of the secular world into Mildrith's monastic life at all stages of her life which directs the reader back to the study of historical and social circumstances fostering the foundation of women's monasteries, the most important recruitment base for early Anglo-Saxon royal women saints.

*Novo mesto, Slovenia*

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## SUMMARIES IN SLOVENE – POVZETKI V SLOVENŠČINI

UDK 821.163–2.09”1876/1932”:821.111–2.09 Shakespeare W.

*Mirko Jurak*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE IN SLOVENSKI DRAMATIKI (II):  
J. JURČIČ, F. LEVSTIK, I. CANKAR, O.ŽUPANČIČ, B. KREFT  
TVORCI MITOV

Pričujoča študija predstavlja nadaljevanje moje raziskave o vplivih angleškega dramatika Williama Shakespeara na dramsko ustvarjanje Antona Tomaža Linhart, posebej še na njegovo igro *Miss Jenny Love*, ki je bila objavljena v Augsburgu leta 1780. Čeprav je Linhart to meščansko tragedijo napisal v nemščini, velja *Miss Jenny Love* kot prva tragedija, ki jo je napisal nek slovenski dramatik. V zadnjih desetletjih osemnajstega in v prvih desetletjih devetnajstega stoletja pa je ne le v slovenski, temveč tudi v zahodnoevropskih literaturah sicer nastalo malo pomembnih iger, ob koncu stoletja pa je prevladovala simbolistična dramatika, (npr. Maurice Maeterlinck), nad katero sta se navduševala tudi Ivan Cankar in Oton Župančič.

Slovenski dramatik in njihova dela, ki jih obravnavam v tej študiji, so bili vsi veliki občudovalci dram Williama Shakespeara, ki so bile do tridesetih let dvajsetega stoletja že deloma prevedene tudi v slovenščino (večino prevodov je pripravil O. Župančič, dve igri pa je prevedel tudi I. Cankar). Leta 1876 je izšel Jurčič – Levstikov *Tugomer*, nekaj desetletij kasneje pa tudi Cankarjeve drame *Kralj na Betajnovi* (1901), *Pohujšanje v dolini Šentflorjanski* (1907) in *Lepa Vida* (1911). Župančičeva poetična drama *Veronika Deseniška* je izšla in bila tudi prvič uprizorjena leta 1924, Kreftova realistično-problemska obravnava motiva o celjskih grofih pa 1932. Shakespeareove igre so močno vplivale na dramsko ustvarjanje omenjenih avtorjev (med katerimi so bili slednji trije tudi prevajalci), kot tudi na igre nekaterih drugih manj znanih slovenskih dramskih piscev tega časa.

Slovenski literarni zgodovinarji in kritiki so že zgodaj opazili Shakespearov vpliv na slovenske dramatike, pri čemer so najbolj pogosto omenjali klasično strukturo teh iger in občasno tudi značajske sličnosti njihovih junakov s Shakespearovim liki. Pri tem

so se pogosto omejili na en sam, včasih tudi manj pomemben vir, niso pa podrobneje vzporejali motivov, tematskih ter figurativno-jezikovnih sorodnosti med angleškimi in slovenskimi deli. Med kritiki, ki so tem značilnostim doslej posvetili nekoliko več pozornosti, so zlasti Jakob Kelemina, Alfonz Gspan, Anton Slodnjak, France Koblar, Joža Mahnič, Dušan Moravec, Janko Kos in Irena Avsenik Nabergoj. To seveda ne pomeni, da so bile deležne knjižne izdaje in uprizoritve obravnavanih slovenskih dram le skromnih kritičskih odmevov, temveč zlasti dejstvo, da je bil Shakespearov neposredni oziroma mestoma tudi posredni vpliv le redko konkretno in podrobneje predstavljen. To pomanjkljivost skuša nadoknaditi pričujoča razprava. Obenem želim v študiji tudi dokazati, da so bili navedeni in tudi nekateri drugi, manj pomembni slovenski dramatik, v obravnavanem obdobju že sorazmerno dobro seznanjeni s Shakespearovimi deli in še zlasti, da so njegove drame vplivale nanje v večji meri kot pa je bilo to doslej znano.

UDK 821.111(73)–31.09 Lewis S.:82.09(497.4)

*Vanja Avsenak*

## SLOVENSKI KRITIKI O ROMANIH SINCLAIRJA LEWISA

Namen članka je predstaviti recepcijo Lewisovih del pri slovenskih kritikih. Članek se osredotoča na življenje in delo Sinclairja Lewisa, poseben poudarek pa daje družbenim vplivom, ki so Lewisova dela zaznamovali tako po literarni kot po družbeni plati. Njegova dela zato danes prištevamo k leposlovju, prav tako pa jih razumemo kot socialne dokumente o družbenopolitični situaciji na ameriških tleh v medvojnem obdobju. V splošnem torej delujejo kot kritičke razprave o deželi onkraj Atlantika, ki nujno potrebuje socialno preobrazbo v širšem družbenem prostoru.

V času nastanka in objave Lewisovi romani niso deležni ustreznega priznanja, saj avtor preveč odkrito kritizira svoje rojake in jih opozarja na njihove slabosti, pri čemer je velikokrat precej neizprosni. Prav tako pa so neizprosni tudi kritiki. Tako tuji kot tudi domači kritiki v obdobju med prvo in drugo svetovno vojno so pogosto nestrpni in skoraj nekoliko agresivni. Verjamejo, da njegovim delom manjka umetniške vrednosti. Takšnih očitkov v kritikah poznejšega obdobja ne zasledimo več. Članki in eseji tujih, predvsem pa domačih avtorjev so mnogo bolj prizanesljivi in objektivni. Lewisu priznavajo literarno pomembnost, pa tudi družbeno angažiranost, zaradi česar se njegova dela še vedno prevajajo v različne svetovne jezike in ostajajo kritičsko zanimiva tudi stoletje po svojem nastanku.

*Jerneja Petrič*VISOKA ALI POPULARNA KNJIŽEVNOST? UPDIKOVA SERIJA ROMANOV  
O RABBITU

Avtorica v prispevku obravnava vprašanje razlikovanja med tako imenovano visoko in popularno književnostjo. S slednjo se ukvarjajo številni literarni kritiki; o vprašanju je bilo napisanih veliko razprav in knjig. Eden najbolj vidnih piscev je Avstralec Ken Gelder, ki definira značilnosti popularne in visoke umetnosti. Razlike vidi predvsem v stopnji sofisticiranosti, diskretnosti, fabuli in umetniškosti. Mnenju, da gre pri popularni književnosti za lažjo zvrst namenjeno manj zahtevnim in manj izobraženim bralcem, se pridružuje vrsta anglosaških in tudi slovenskih kritikov (npr. Korda, Kmecl, Hladnik, itd.). Avtorica ugotavlja, da se v moderni književnosti očitno brišejo ostre meje med visoko in popularno književnostjo, kar s svojim delom in razmišljanjem nakazuje vrsta sodobnih piscev, npr. E.L. Doctorow pa tudi Updike. Prispevek analizira štiri Updikove romane o Rabbitu in peto delo, ki je izšlo v obliki novele, tako da jih preverja s stališča omenjenih Gelderjevih predpostavk. Posebej se zaustavlja ob pisateljevem literarnem slogu in jeziku, analizira izbrane odlomke iz vseh del in prihaja do zaključka, da Updikova serija v veliki meri ne izpolnjuje Gelderjevih zahtev. Avtorica je mnenja, da bi bilo treba kriterije posodobiti in v delih išče ter najde tiste elemente, ki pisatelja nedvomno uvrščajo v kategorijo visoke književnosti.

UDK 821.111(73)–312.4.09"1965/1994"

*Leonora Flis*PREPLET DEJSTEV IN FIKCIJE V TREH AMERIŠKIH DOKUMENTARNIH  
(KRIMINALNIH) ROMANIH

Članek se ukvarja s pripovedmi, ki bi jih najlažje opredelili kot dokumentarne romane. Takšne pripovedi lahko pogosto ubesedujejo brutalne zločine. Prispevek obravnava besedila, ki so nastala v treh različnih časovnih obdobjih, saj želimo pokazati, kako (če sploh) sta se percepcija zločina in posledično njegova ubesediti spreminjali skozi čas. Hkrati nas zanima tudi odnos različnih piscev do dejstev (empirične realnosti), ki jih njihovi narativni diskurzi povzemajo in interpretirajo. Roman *Hladnokrvno* (1965) Trumana Capoteja, *Krvnikova pesem* (1979) Normana Mailerja in delo Johna Berendta *Vrt dobrega in zlega* (1994) so primeri dokumentarnih pripovedi, ki osredinjajo nasilje in problematizirajo (ponavadi precej zabrisano) ločnico med dejstvi in fikcijo ter posledično navajajo k vprašanju žanrskih klasifikacij posameznih besedil. Ti narativni diskurzi vsebujejo lastnosti novinarskih, zgodovin-

skih, (avto)biografskih in tudi fikcijskih pripovedi in neprestano nihajo na tehtnici/lestvici fikcijskosti oziroma faktičnosti. Fluidnost je torej inherentna in centralna lastnost tovrstnih besedil.

UDK 821.111(73)–311.2.09 Toole J.K.

*Julija Potrč*

PRAZNIK NORCEV: KARNEVALSKI ELEMENTI V ROMANU JOHNA  
KENNEDYJA TOOLA ZAROTA BEBCEV

Kljub temu, da se dogajanje v romanu *Zarota bebcev* Johna Kennedyja Toola pogosto primerja s karnevalom, glavni junak Ignacij Reilly nima prav veliko skupnega z udeleženci pravega srednjeveškega karnevala, kot ga je v delu *Ustvarjanje Françoisa Rabelaisa in ljudska kultura srednjega veka in renesanse* opisal Mihail Bahtin. Ignacij skuša svojo večvrednost vzpostaviti z vzvišenim načinom govora in obnašanjem, kar je v nasprotju s konceptom karnevalske enakosti. Prav tako ima Ignacij odklonilen odnos do spolnosti, ki je v karnevalski kulturi izrazito pozitivna, saj predstavlja plodnost, rast in novo rojstvo. Eden od bistvenih virov humorja v izvirniku je izrazita razlika med Ignacijevim učenim govorom in pogovornim jezikom ostalih junakov. To razliko je v slovenščino uspešno prenesla prevajalka Nuša Rozman, ki je socialne razlike med junaki nakazala z uporabo različnih pogovornih izrazov, pri zapisu pa se je držala standardnega knjižnega jezika. Ta praksa je že dolgo prisotna tako v izvirnem kot v prevodnem slovenskem leposlovju, kar kaže na dejstvo, da kljub porastu del pisanih v pogovornem jeziku v zadnjih letih še ni splošno sprejete pravila o zapisovanju pogovorne slovenščine.

UDK 821.111(73)–3.09"195/20"

*Romi Češčut*

GENERACIJA X V SLOVENIJI

Nejasne predstave o pomenu termina Generacija X onemogočajo enoznačno uvrščanje avtorjev in avtoric v pripovedništvo Generacije X. Dela mladih ameriških avtorjev in avtoric iz osemdesetih in devetdesetih let dvajsetega stoletja prikazujejo neustaljene podobe družine, medosebnih odnosov, službe, zgodovinskosti in apokaliptičnosti. Iskanje posameznikove identitete v urbanem okolju v poznem dvajsetem stoletju določajo popularna kultura, množični mediji in potrošništvo. Skopi odmevi pripovedništva Generacije X v slovenskem tisku in strokovni literaturi prav tako razkrivajo razhajanja pri opredelitvi termina Generacije X in značilnostih njenega

pripovedništva. Redki prispevki nudijo vpogled v dela Douglasa Couplanda in Jaya McInerneya, večinoma se avtorji osredotočajo na sprejem in analizo del Breta Eastona Ellisa, pri čemer so v ospredju narativni postopki, temi potrošništva in množičnih medijev, liki in slog pisanja.

UDK 821.112.2.09 Nietzsche F.:1 Nietzsche F.

*Matevž Kos*

## FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE MED FILOZOFIJO IN LITERATURO

Članek se ukvarja s razmerjem med filozofijo in literaturo pri Nietzscheju. Posebno pozornost posveča *Dionizovim ditirambom*, zadnjemu Nietzschejevemu tekstu, ki ga je sam, tik pred svojim duševnim zlomom, pripravil za tisk. Nietzschejevi literarni teksti so neke vrste »druga narava«, »hrbta stran« njegovega mišljenja, obenem pa Nietzschejevo pesništvo govori tudi o bistvenih zadevah njegove filozofije. V tem smislu zahteva interpretativno obravnavo. Vprašanje o *Dionizovih ditirambih* je tudi vprašanje o posebnem statusu pesništva znotraj Nietzschejevega opusa – pa tudi o statusu knjige *Tako je govoril Zaratustra*, kolikor jo razumemo predvsem kot svojevrstno filozofsko *pesnitev*, se pravi, tudi kot literarni oziroma paraliterarni žanr.

UDK 929 Göller K.H.

*Janez Stanonik*

## V SPOMIN KARLA HEINZA GÖLLERJA (1924–2009)

Študija je posvečena spominu na Karla Heinza Göllerja, univerzitetnega profesorja za angleško literaturo na univerzi v Regensburgu, Nemčija. Univerza Regensburg je bila ustanovljena leta 1967, Göller pa je bil prvi dekan Filozofske fakultete v Regensburgu. Štirideset let je delal na razvoju prijateljskega sodelovanja med univerzama v Ljubljani in Regensburgu. Leta 1983 je ustanovil društvo nemških medievalistov, ene izmed najpomembnejših zvez specializiranih znanstvenikov te stroke iz vse Nemčije. Študija prikaže Göllerjev znanstveni razvoj in osnovne značilnosti njegovega znanstvenega in pedagoškega dela ter njegove dejavnosti v univerzitetni administraciji.

Boštjan Marko Turk

## AKTUALNOST DELA PIERRA CORNEILLA

Francoski dramatik Pierre Corneille je v svojem delu združeval različne tipe inspiracij. Navdihoval ga je najprej Rim s svojim občutkom za pravo in udejanjanjem volje do moči posameznika v največjem imperiju, kar ga je poznala zgodovina. Nadalje mu je bil blizu svet srednjeveškega viteza, pa tudi čas krščanskih mučencev, ki se v diahronem smislu nahaja med obema.

Gre za dobo, ki je oddaljena vsaj tisočletje od današnjega časa in bi potemtakem bila docela nestična z moderno fiziognomijo zahodnega človeka. Da temu ni tako, je pokazalo že nekaj avtorjev, ki jih štejemo za moderne. Tako Albert Camus v svojem delu *Caligula*, kot tudi Corneille, ki si je za podlago literarnih junakov onega časa (Avgusta, Polievkta, Rodriga in drugih) jemal moderno voljo do moči. Ta je temeljni motor, spričo katerega bledijo tudi ostali, bolj vzvišeni motivi, kot npr. mučeništvo za vero. Razprava si prizadeva pokazati, da je skupni imenovalac Corneillevih junakov prav enotna voljo do moči, ki jih združuje. To pa avtorjevo delo približuje občutju sodobnosti.

UDK 821.111–311.2.09 Fry S.:821.133.1–31.09 Dumas A.

Katarina Marinčič

## ROMAN ZA GENERACIJO DOT.COM?

Britanski romanopisec Stephen Fry je leta 2000 objavil roman *The Stars' Tennis Balls*, adaptacijo znamenitega romana *Grof Monte-Cristo* Alexandra Dumasa. Kritiki so Fryjevo priredbo pozdravili kot »Monte-Crista za generacijo dot.com«, k čemur jih je bržkone navedlo predvsem dejstvo, da je Fry Dumasovo zgodbo, ki se godi v prvi polovici 19. stoletja, prestavil v osemdeseta leta 20. stoletja. V pričujočem članku pa se bolj kot z vsebinskimi vzporednicami in razhajanja ukvarjamo s pripovednotehninimi postopki obeh avtorjev. Ob naslonitvi na nekatere ugotovitve Umberta Eca, ki je ob prevajanju *Grofa Monte-Crista* prišel do zaključka, da je redundantnost v feljtonskem romanu pravzaprav sredstvo za ustvarjanje napetosti, skušamo osvetliti Fryjev pristop k posodabljanju in neizogibnemu krajšanju Dumasovega romana. Ugotavljamo, da se Fry, kljub temu da njegova različica predstavlja le približno tretjino prvotnega besedila, namesto za dinamizacijo odloči za izrazito upočasnitev pripovedi.



Irena Prosenc Šegula

“POTOVANJE V NIČ”: MITOLOŠKE PRVINE POTOVANJA V DELIH  
*ALI JE TO ČLOVEK IN POTOPLJENI IN REŠENI* PRIMA LEVIJA

Levijevi deli *Ali je to človek in Potopljeni in rešeni* se kompleksno navezuje na mitološke prvine, ki vanju pogosto pronicajo prek Dantejeve *Božanske komedije*. Mitološke prvine se kot ključne sestavine vključujejo v avtobiografsko pripoved, ki ji je s tem podeljena mitološka razsežnost. Prispevek se opira na trikotno strukturo Levi–Dante–Odisej, na podlagi katere analizira potovanje deportiranih Judov proti Auschwitzu kot potovanje v mitološki drugi svet.

UDK 821.124'04–97.09 Goscelin:27–36:929 Mildrith

Alenka Divjak

SV. MILDRIETH ALI SAMOSTANSKO ŽIVLJENJE ZA VSAKO CENO  
V GOSCELINOV *VITA DEO DILECTAE VIRGINIS MILDRETHAE*

Članek se osredotoča na sv. Mildrith (†13. julij, 732/733) v Goscelinovi *Vita Deo dilectae virginis Mildrethae* (Življenje Bogu ljube device Mildrith), latinskem hagiografskem besedilu iz poznega 11. stol., ki podaja življenjepis znane svetnice iz zgodnje anglosaške dobe, opatinje uglednega samostana v Kentu, Minster-in-Thamet, in potomke kar dveh anglosaških kraljevskih rodbin, kentske in mercijske, kar je pomembno vplivalo na razvoj njenega kulta. Članek se osredotoča na tri hagiografske elemente iz Goscelinovega besedila *Vita*, in sicer na ustanovitev samostana v izrazito dramatičnih okoliščinah družinskega spora, Mildrithino trdno odločenost za samostansko življenje za vsako ceno in njeno opravljanje dolžnosti opatinje. Obravnava teh treh elementov bodisi posredno bodisi neposredno odseva merila Cerkev, za kakšno vedenje si ženska zasluži položaj svetnice, istočasno pa razkriva, kako pomembno vlogo so pri ustanavljanju ženskih samostanov in nastavljanju opatinj v njih igrali posvetni in družinski oziri kraljevskih družin, glavnih ustanoviteljic in podpornic takih ustanov.

