

TRANSFORMATION OF SENSUALITY IN THE SLOVENIAN BALLAD OF LEPA VIDA (LOVELY VIDA)

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The article analyses the mental movement in the character of Lepa Vida, as portrayed in the ballad by France Prešeren, in terms of communicative context. Through a mixture of realism and tragedy, the reader is taken and moved from the story to the scheme of transformation of values in the span between unsatiated sensuality and unfulfilled longing. The fatal error brings about a total inner reorientation of longing.

Keywords: *Lepa Vida, sensual existence, temptation, intuitive apprehension, existential problematic.*

Prispevek analizira duševno gibanje v značaju Lepe Vide, kot jo prikazuje France Prešeren v baladi v smislu komunikativnega konteksta. Bralca zajame mešanje realizma in tragedije in ga vodi iz zgodbe v zasnovano transformacije vrednot v razponu med nepotešeno čutnostjo in neizpoljenim hrepenenjem. Usodna napaka povzroči popolno notranjo preusmeritev hrepenjenja.

Ključne besede: *Lepa Vida, čutno življenje, skušanje, intuitivno dojetanje, eksistencialna problematika.*

INTRODUCTION

The name *Lepa Vida* (Lovely Vida) appears in many folk songs in Slovenia and in many artistic variations on folk traditions, as well as in literature and music, ballet, and the visual arts. All the folk poems and the later artistic renderings describe a similar situation in the life of a young, beautiful woman known as Lovely Vida. Whereas the folk poems describe a real, historical occurrence – because the folk creator always verbalized what had been part of his existential experience – various artists' renderings of Vida's story often treat it symbolically, moving it into the realm of artistic imagination. The motif can also function as a starting point for their artistic expression. Through this expression, they try to represent the emotional and spiritual experience of Lovely Vida, strive to render her feelings concretely, and with personal dismay or careful distance scrutinize her fate. The figure of Lovely Vida unites the human emotional and spiritual dimension in a special manner, and through this the meaning and value of the primary and secondary elements of humanity are recognized. Depending on a number of factors, the valuing of the emotions in connection with spirituality differs from interpretation to interpretation in the various instances of the Lovely Vida motif. These varying emphases especially depend on the individual author's relation to Vida's existential and religious situation, which is influenced by the author's personal existential and religious background, as well as by the values of the particular era and society.¹

¹ According to Grafenauer, this is an instance of the personal feminine type of folk song. Slovenian folk

The Slovenian folk ballad about “the true Beautiful or Lovely Vida” has been preserved in various written accounts from throughout Slovenia; Ivan Grafenauer classifies them into three types, calling them “variant types,” which are similar to each other at the story’s beginning, but differ with regard to the fate of Lovely Vida after her abduction.² Of all the primary versions and later interpretations of Lovely Vida, Slovenians are probably most familiar with that of their greatest poet, France Prešeren. In the final, emotion-filled era of Romanticism, he drafted his poem based on a folk ballad that he found in Smole’s collection of folk songs.³ In the Slovenian folk tradition there are also quite different lyrical treatments of Lovely Vida; however, their lack of uniformity means that they have not found their place among later artistic treatments.⁴ Prešeren’s Lovely Vida is a young woman and mother that is lured by a Moor – in the traditional folk view, a heathen and unbeliever – onto a boat. She forsakes her husband and child in order to depart with the Moor for a faraway land, and she can never return home. The scope of this paper is limited to an analysis and short evaluation of Prešeren’s treatment of Lovely Vida.

THE CONTENT AND FORM OF PREŠEREN’S BALLAD “LOVELY VIDA”

Prešeren’s romantic ballad “Lovely Vida,” first published in 1832 in *Kranjska Čbelica*, is a work of great artistic virtuosity. In it he was able to link the emotionality and religiosity of the young woman and mother, as revealed in the most fateful period of her life, during

songs contain other male and female proper names that show various human existential positions – such as King Matjaž, Alenčica, and others [Grafenauer 1943: 9–11]. On the motif of King Matjaž and Alenčica, see Štrekelj [1895–1898: 1–8].

- ² In the first variant type, Lovely Vida does not surrender to the fate of being the unbeliever’s slave and concubine; she leaps from the boat and drowns in the sea. Breznik’s version from Ihan belongs to this type of the folk ballad of Lovely Vida (published in *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 20, 1925, 93, and in *Dom in svet* 50 (5), 1938, 233–234; see Grafenauer [1943: 61–62]), as does Kramar’s variation from Goričica pri Ihanu, which is cited by Grafenauer [1943: 46–48]. In the second version, the Moor takes Lovely Vida as his slave to Spain, from whence she never returns. She nurses the Spanish queen’s princely son, and is thereby protected from harm. Smole’s poem about Lovely Vida, the basis of Prešeren’s poetic recreation, belongs to this type. In the third variant type, the Moor also takes Lovely Vida with himself to heathen Spain, taking her to be his mistress or housewife. According to the Kropa version, Vida returns from abroad in a miraculous manner with the sun’s help (*The sun returned her home*) [Štrekelj 1895–1898: no. 75]; in another version, Vida returns home, with the Moor’s permission, but only to collect her son, who in the meantime has grown up to become a shepherd; this motif is found in the version from Hraše (near Lesce) and has not yet found its way into print [Grafenauer 1943: 19].
- ³ Prešeren felt that collection and publication of Slovenian folk ballads was of utmost importance for the Slovenian nation. Through the artistic treatment of Slovenian folk traditions, he wished to elevate this tradition in terms of language and style for the world [Kidrič 1938: ccxxxvi–ccxxxvii].
- ⁴ Grafenauer is of the opinion that other poems about Lovely Vida that employ different motifs should be separated from “our Lovely Vida” if it is seen that there is no link between them aside from the name, or if it is proven that *the real Lovely Vida is from a source with no genetic connection to other poems about ‘Lovely Vida’* [Grafenauer 1943: 16].

her most dire existential crisis.⁵ His “Lovely Vida” is a literary variation on a folk ballad from ancient times, which came to Slovenia from the Mediterranean before assuming its characteristic shape here. The English translation by Tom Priestly and Henry Cooper reads as follows:

Lovely Vida

*Lovely Vida stood down by the sea,
Swaddling clothes she wove out on the lee,
When a moor emerges from the waves,
Lands the ship; he lovely Vida prays:
“O, my Vida, why've you lost your glow?
Such a glow, the bloom of long ago?
As you had in many a year gone by.”
Lovely Vida answered, telling why:
“Glow or bloom, no, neither is for me:
I've been struck by such a tragedy.
My dear child at home is very sick,
Faulty counsel I was wrong to pick.
With an elder man I tied the knot —
Happy times no longer are my lot.
All day long my child just cries and moans,
And all night coughs wrack my husband's bones.”
So the blackamoor says and explains:
“If their home's not happy, then the cranes
Flee beyond the sea, so take my hand.
We'll a balm find in another land.
Beauteous Vida, now I'll tell you true:
Spain's queen sent me here to beg of you,
Come and nurse her tiny royal son,
Regal is this little princely one.
Nurse him, rock him, carry him around,
Tuck his covers so his sleep is sound.
Lull him with a song, bedeck his rest:
Work like that is good: you will be blessed!”
Lovely Vida stepped into the boat,
But no sooner were the two afloat,
And the boat was putting out to sea,
Vida burst out crying mightily.
“What a wretch I am, what have I done?”*

⁵ Among others, Terseglav [2000: 411–421] wrote about Prešeren's efforts on behalf of the folk poem.

*Sick at home I've left my darling one,
 Unattended, frail, my baby dear,
 And my husband, bent 'neath many a year!"*
*Full three weeks had passed before the moor
 Landed with her on the queen's far shore.
 Next day early opened she her eyes,
 Waiting at her window for sunrise.
 Wordless grief she wishes to relieve,
 Asking yellow sun to grant reprieve.*
*"Rays of sunshine! Sun, please tell me how
 He, my frail boy, fares. What does he now?"*
*"What then should he do, thy sickly boy?
 Candles round his bed the poor deploy,
 While thy dear old husband's gone to sea,
 Searching high and low for trace of thee,
 Searching and the while his piteous tears
 Rend his heart, embitter it with fears."*
*When the evening's moon shines pale and plain,
 At her window Vida sits again.
 From her heartfelt griefs she seeks a rest,
 Pale and plain the moon's by her addressed:*
*"Rays of moon! Oh, moon, please tell me how
 He, my frail boy, fares. What does he now?"*
*"What then should he do, thy sickly child?
 He was laid to rest, your orphan mild,
 And thy dear old father's gone to sea,
 Searching high and low for trace of thee,
 Searching, and the while his piteous tears,
 Rend his heart, embitter it with fears."*
*Lovely Vida weeps then all the more,
 Spain's queen comes to ask whatever for:
 "What, dear Vida, has befallen you,
 That you weep so copiously anew?"*
*Beauteous Vida tells the queen her plight:
 "Why should I NOT weep with all my might?
 I was standing at the windowsill,
 Washing a gold cup, when, if you will,
 It fell from my hands far down below,
 To the sea's deep depth I saw it go."
 The good queen her sorrow seeks to ease:*

"Stop your weeping, no tears if you please,
 I can buy another cup to use,
 To the king your error I'll excuse,
 Go, please, now and nurse my royal son,
 And your grief will soon pass and be done."
 And in fact the queen replaced the cup,
 Kingly wrath in fact she covered up.
 Daily Vida stood at windowsill,
 For son, father, husband weeping still.

[Prešeren 1999: 51–55]

In terms of form, Prešeren's ballad is a romantic epic in verse that unites elements of three literary genres: the lyric, epic, and dramatic. Lyrical expression and dramatic content are particularly pronounced in this version. In terms of content, Prešeren gives the folk poem new emphasis; namely, his expression of his personal confession, his standpoint towards universal existential problems of freedom, love, guilt and punishment, and his standpoint towards his view of human sensuality in relation to general ethics and morality. The time and place into which Prešeren places the events of his poem establishes an almost timeless atmosphere, and the earthly scene has the aura of the mystical and the undefined. In the style of the poem one can observe an alternation between everyday reality and the tragic style. At the heart of Prešeren's romantic ballad is a series of clearly connected, charmingly simple events; the tragic figure of Lovely Vida is portrayed in the development of her spiritual state and in her spiritual conflict – a conflict that is entirely understandable for the reader.

ANALYSIS OF PREŠEREN'S BALLAD "LOVELY VIDA"

Prešeren's poem begins with a beautiful young woman named Vida washing her young son's linen on the shore. As she works in solitude, the Moor emerges from the waves.⁶ The poem states no other reason for his appearance here, so we can conclude that he has intentionally set out to find Vida. Lovely Vida obviously already knows him. With seeming devotion, compassion, and care, he notes that her face has lost the *glow, the bloom* that she had *in many a year gone by* – that is, when he first came to know her.

⁶ Because of the Spanish setting, Grafenauer concludes that the "blackamoor" in Prešeren's ballad is a "Moor." For people of the Middle Ages the term had an ambiguous meaning: primarily, it designated people of the Islamic faith; in the narrower sense it was an ethnic group that arose as a mixture of the ancient Moors with the Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, and Arabs. In the 8th century, this Moorish mixture began to spread to the southern Iberian peninsula. Jože Pogačnik, on the basis of the conviction that folk creators always wrote about what was a part of their lived experience, concludes that encounters with dark-skinned individuals were more likely to occur in the Turkish wars as well as during the Crusades. In Pogačnik's view, this points to an entirely different geographic area, which it is also possible to recognize in the folklorically different Serbian and Croatian linguistic expressions [Pogačnik 1988: 37].

The second stanza confirms that the Moor and Lovely Vida have known each other for quite a long time; Vida unreservedly and uninhibitedly entrusts him with her personal problems. She laments that the source of her gloominess is a feeling of being in a hopeless position after having *tied the knot . . . with an elder man* after heeding *faulty counsel*. From the subsequent lines it becomes clear that the relationship with this man leaves her emotionally and sensually unsatisfied, not least because of his illness. Vida tells the Moor that *all night coughs wrack my husband's bones*; her desperation and weariness is compounded by the fact that her young son is ill and cries all day long. As a result of this weighty concern for her husband and son, Vida has become a mere shadow of the once blooming girl. She blames herself for her unhappy destiny and lack of freedom, which arose from her obedience to the people that advised her so poorly in the choice of a husband. In this denial of guilt and the passing of responsibility onto the shoulders of others, which sounds superficial and foolish (as though Vida herself did not actually believe her words), lies her weakness and the core of her future, unhappy destiny. When Vida's weariness of life becomes too overwhelming, she, with the help of the Moor's words, shifts the full weight of her existence onto the side of sensuality. The Moor arouses her former sensual vigor, and she gives herself over completely to sensual urges. These urges in Vida become so strong that they lead her, against her will, directly into the abyss.⁷

The entire third stanza consists of the Moor's response to Vida's confession. Vida's dissatisfaction plays to his advantage because he had actually set forth to present Vida with the Spanish queen's invitation for Vida to travel to court to act as a wet-nurse for the prince. The Moor is also obviously convinced that Vida will acquiesce, as he states:

*If their home's not happy, then the cranes
Flee beyond the sea, so take my hand.
We'll a balm find in another land.
Beauteous Vida, now I'll tell you true:
Spain's queen sent me here to beg of you,
Come and nurse her tiny royal son,
Regal is this little princely one. . . .*

He promises her that her only labor will consist of nursing the young prince, rocking him, holding him in her lap, putting him to bed, and singing songs. The Moor's words are deceptive, as he is merely appealing to Lovely Vida's instincts, and comforting her hidden desires with the intention of further gaining her confidence in order to coldly carry out the plan he has conceived. As she listens to his words, she longs for freedom and complete autonomy, independence in determining her life path; there is also the appeal of her mo-

⁷ The expression "sensuality" is used here in the sense it has in the domain of traditional ethical and natural life; in this traditional "psychological," philosophical, theological and moralistic sense, sensuality in a person is something that is neither reason nor will.

mentary rejection of all authority – except for that of the Moor, which in the ballad can be compared with devilish temptation.⁸

In the conversation between Lovely Vida and the Moor, Prešeren portrays the “veiled” battle between good and evil with symbolic adeptness. This battle between the mysterious forces of good and evil is the basis of many religions. For example, in Christianity there is the battle between God and Satan, between the angels and the demons, between heaven and hell. Where the world of God and an honest life are quite strictly determined and limited, the world of Satan and his lures is less determined. Because of this, God offers the possibility of seeking a solid base in the fog and confusion. Prešeren places Vida’s “dark longing” and her moral downfall in the realm of the sensually uncontrolled, the symbolic – in the realm of the Moor. He tried to justify her flight from her husband and child, which was simultaneously a flight from the completely tangible laws of ethics, justice, and belief. In any case, the poet was just in his portrayal of Vida’s punishment. Because Vida made a “pact with the devil,” so to speak, or submitted to her own egotism and for this reason neglected her powerless, ill child, the child’s death was hastened. Because of this fact there could be no forgiveness for her in this world.⁹

Vida does not respond with words to what the Moor says. The fourth stanza tells only how Vida *stepped into the boat*. Her response was the immediate, unpremeditated, unreasoned result of her intensely emotional conversation with the Moor. It is clear that the Moor’s words awoke Vida from a long weariness, torpor, and state of depression, causing her once again to believe in the possibility of the more beautiful, freer and happier life depicted by the Moor. He clearly knew her well because he immediately discovers that she has grown weary of a hard, difficult life, as well as her unsatiated sensuality; he takes advantage of her

⁸ As Pogačnik argues, in the oral tradition the mythical does not exist independently of the real. Historical experience, however, was always negative in the tradition of the Slovenian, Serbian, and Croatian term *blackamoor*: *Mythological belief (black was a symbol of some sort of evil) was further linked to anthropological knowledge (dark-skinned person), and both functioned in the context of historical occurrences that coincided with mythological premises. The figure of the ‘blackamoor’ or the ‘black Arab’ was, from a historical viewpoint, an attacker, a plunderer and abductor. This means that the material with the potentially neutral (anthropological) meaning of the adjective ‘black’ was changed into a semantic term laden with affect and a negative connotation. The figure of the Arab (= Moor) was taken to be the figure of a violent individual; it is for this reason that the adjective ‘black’ is the result of the preceding inner evolution as well as direct historical memory* [Pogačnik 1988: 37]. The word *blackamoor* is thus shown to be a cultural, historical, conceptual, and esthetically important element of Prešeren’s ballad. It allows for numerous connotations and extends the centuries-old tradition in the conceiving of one of the archetypal themes of Slovenian folk tradition. After Prešeren, this word disappears from further variations on the theme of Lovely Vida, although the affective content remains – the Moor is changed into an abductor, but is always portrayed in the same negative, conceptual or affective frame as that of the Arab in tradition. The mythical material is, with this, entirely lost, although the ethical content remains. From a concrete event of the past, the motif has been broadened into a general problem of evil in interpersonal relations and with this it addresses the sensibility of modern man.

⁹ On the characteristics of the Romantic mentality and ethical codes in Prešeren’s day, see Pogačnik [1988: 22–24].

weak point, and Vida, in this moment of frailty, falls into his trap.¹⁰ He immediately lures her onto his boat and sails away from the shore, despite the fact that he must have been able to sense her immediate regret at this thoughtless move and even later would have been able to steer back to allow Vida to return. Prešeren says that Vida was immediately filled with horror as she became aware of her fatal mistake, as the poem says:

*But no sooner were the two afloat,
And the boat was putting out to sea,
Vida burst out crying mightily.
"What a wretch I am, what have I done?
Sick at home I've left my darling one,
Unattended, frail, my baby dear,
And my husband, bent 'neath many a year!"*

Prešeren portrays Vida's tragedy in a most convincing manner. Vida's outer and morally protected life suddenly disintegrates and her earlier trust in the natural order, as represented by her family, is ruined. The severance of the connection between Vida and her entire home life, especially her child and husband, unleashes powerful regret, guilt, and sadness. Vida is now convinced that no flight will lead to a more beautiful, happier life, and that her longing was illusory; she has awakened the full force of the pricks of conscience. Now for the first time in her life she realizes her responsibility to her husband and son, especially because they are both sick and helpless and without her care they might not be able to survive for long.

Only now does the Moor reveal his true nature: having achieved his intentions, he no longer speaks to Vida with supportive words; rather, the poem shows how he withdraws into a cold, even demonically horrible peace. In essence, he has the role of a deceiving, sadistic tyrant, who in reasoned control of consciousness carefully carries out his coldly crafted plans. His words entail the cruelest treachery and the most underhanded means of deception, because it is through his words that he flatters the misled Vida's instincts and exploits her secret desires.

The fifth stanza relates how after *full three weeks* afloat, they finally arrive at the queen's court. Though Vida is now more alone than ever, she does worry about herself, rather than only about her husband and child. In the awareness that only now has she become a true captive, she trusts only in the Sun and the Moon and asks them about her family's destiny.¹¹

¹⁰ Pogačnik sees in Vida's flight *a profile of moral liberalism, which a few decades later even became a central theme in Slovenian literature* [1988: 24]. Liberalism originally meant an attitude of individual freedom with regard to actions, thoughts, and expression. Progressive civic philosophy from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment strongly expressed its ideas – rationalism, individualism, and undeterministically conceived freedom. In modern liberalism, the ethos of freedom also plays an important role. *Libertas* [Lat. *libertas*, freedom] is the goddess of liberty and freedom in ancient Roman mythology.

¹¹ Vida's conversation with the Sun remains from the folk ballad, but with Prešeren it is formed in the sense of romantic esthetics, in which nature is man's friend and it is to her that the poet directs his most intimate confessions.

In the fifth stanza, Lovely Vida, unable to sleep in her anguish, arises early and turns to the Sun. However, the Sun's response, rather than consolation, causes the greatest pain:

*... early opened she her eyes,
Waiting at her window for sunrise.
Wordless grief she wishes to relieve,
Asking yellow sun to grant reprieve.
"Rays of sunshine! Sun, please tell me how
He, my frail boy, fares. What does he now?"
"What then should he do, thy sickly boy?
Candles round his bed the poor deploy,
While thy dear old husband's gone to sea,
Searching high and low for trace of thee,
Searching and the while his piteous tears
Rend his heart, embitter it with fears."*

Vida learns from the sun that they have already begun to pray for her deceased child (*Candles round his bed the poor deploy*), and that her husband's *gone to sea* to seek her, racked by sorrow. Only now does Vida become aware of just how strong her husband's love for her is, and how delusory her longing had been.

Because she cannot bring herself to believe the Sun's words, at nightfall, full of hope that the sun had perhaps erred and that her boy has not died, she addresses *the pale and plain moon*. But the Moon, rather than consoling her, merely confirms everything the Sun had said. The greatest pain of all stems from the news that they have buried her small child. Not only her husband but also her caring father are drifting about on the seas in search of her; the father, too, cries *piteous tears* that *rend his heart*, as the sixth verse relates:

*When the evening's moon shines pale and plain,
At her window Vida sits again.
From her heartfelt grief she seeks a rest,
Pale and plain the moon's by her addressed:
"Rays of moon! Oh, moon, please tell me how
He, my frail boy, fares. What does he now?"
"What then should he do, thy sickly child?
He was laid to rest, your orphan mild,
And thy dear old father's gone to sea,
Searching high and low for trace of thee,
Searching, and the while his piteous tears,
Rend his heart, embitter it with fears."*

Most likely the father had also been among those Vida had defied through her flight because they advised her to marry the older man that, despite his age and sickness, is a noble and loving husband. Vida now clearly recognizes how much she has hurt them and how great their love was. Vida's dialogue with the Sun and the Moon, taken from the folk tradi-

tion, shows how the poem both encompasses and transcends earthly reality in its everyday form; this can be seen in the fact that Vida, at the most fateful moments, seeks comfort in supernatural creation and in the sort of fairy-tale world manifested by her discussion with the Sun and the Moon.

When Vida confirms all the fears that her flight has caused, she sees that this seemingly banal existence with all the bonds that existed between her and her family had a dear, profound meaning. As though spellbound by her previous illusions, and especially with the recognition that she cannot return home to the grave of her dead child, who died as a result of her fanciful delusion, she is condemned to continual suffering, to hell on earth.

In the seventh stanza she laments her fate, which is so ponderous that she cannot bear it alone, without respite. She cannot even tell the queen about the cause of her tears because she does not trust her; in spite of the queen's friendly, gently compassionate, and consoling words, Vida must know that she too is linked to the Moor. Even if she was unaware that he tore Vida from her family, from her child, it was the queen that sent for her. At this recognition she is ashamed to the depths of her being, and comes to share the fate of Adam and Eve, who followed the duplicitous snake in paradise and desired what is not in accord with human nature. Adam and Eve, after the Fall, hid themselves before God's face. Vida invents the story that she is crying because she accidentally lost a golden cup, as the poem relates:

*Lovely Vida weeps then all the more,
Spain's queen comes to ask whatever for:
"What, dear Vida, has befallen you,
That you weep so copiously anew?"
Beauteous Vida tells the queen her plight:
"Why should I NOT weep with all my might?
I was standing at the windowsill,
Washing a gold cup, when, if you will,
It fell from my hands far down below,
To the sea's deep depth I saw it go."
The good queen her sorrow seeks to ease:
"Stop your weeping, no tears if you please,
I can buy another cup to use,
To the king your error I'll excuse,
Go, please, now and nurse my royal son,
And your grief will soon pass and be done."*

The eighth stanza concludes the poem with Vida's awareness of the hopelessness of her situation and portrays her ceaseless suffering:

*And in fact the queen replaced the cup,
Kingly wrath in fact she covered up.
Daily Vida stood at windowsill,
For son, father, husband weeping still.*

The scene depicts the tremendous irony felt by Lovely Vida and, by extension, the reader. The queen offers Vida a golden cup in light of her understanding of the situation, which has nothing in common with the true state of Vida's soul. Vida accepts the cup silently, as befits her suppression of the truth of her fatal guilt. For this reason the golden cup will never bring comfort, and the longing for the lost paradise of the family, which signals love and compassion, remains.

THE DIMENSIONS OF THE EXISTENTIAL PROBLEMATIC BETWEEN SENSUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY

In the ballad "Lovely Vida" the mute tension, the "wordless grief," is discharged emotionally through tears and "weeping."¹² The ballad speaks of tears and weeping as an expression of great sorrow in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh stanzas. In the fourth stanza, Vida *bursts out crying* when the boat sets out for the sea, and accuses herself: *What a wretch I am, what have I done? / Sick at home I've left my darling one / Unattended, frail, my baby dear, / And my husband, bent 'neath many a year!* In the fifth stanza, the poet portrays Vida, who wishes to relieve the "wordless grief" by turning to the sun. She finds out about her child's death, finds out, too, that her *dear old husband's gone to sea, / Searching high and low for trace of thee, / Searching and the while his piteous tears / Rend his heart, embitter it with fears.* In the sixth stanza, Vida turns to the moon. The poet says that Vida *seeks a rest . . . from her heartfelt grief*, but finds out from the Moon about the burial of her son, as well as the fact that her *dear old father's gone to sea / searching high and low for trace of thee, / Searching and the while his piteous tears, / Rend his heart, embitter it with fears.* Such emotional portrayal is in all the stanzas that follow Vida's flight, all centering on the single sorrow and bitterness felt both by Vida and those that seek her. The seventh stanza relates that the queen's words arouse in Vida "all the more" weeping. The queen is worried about why Vida *weep[s] so copiously anew* and implores her to *stop your weeping, no tears if you please* and alleviate her "grief" by nursing the royal son.¹³

¹² In this section, the term "sensitivity" is used in its epistemological sense. Here sensuality is understood as the working of the senses and the input that the senses collect as organs of a specific feeling or process of feeling: sight, hearing, touch, and so on. Sensory stimuli are transmitted by the sensory nerves into the brain, where they activate the sensory centers and we become aware of them. Among the basic senses – sight, hearing, taste, and touch – we have more complex senses, such as pain, comfort, and so on, which reach into the world of our feelings; this is sensual experience in the broadest sense. The empiricists believed that sensuality is the main source of recognition; rationalists, meanwhile, more or less downplayed the role of the senses. In Truhlar's view *the faculties of sense stem from the base of the human soul and are partly an effect of the forming that the bodily material accepts from the spirit. For this reason they are always . . . and a priori received by the soul. And the reverse: spiritual faculties can only be realized through what has a priori been 'sensed'* [Truhlar 1974: 102].

¹³ As Aueberbach ascertains, tears in the literature of the 18th century were beginning to acquire a meaning they did not previously have as an independent motif. Literature began to use the power of

The many terms indicating sorrow have a particularly strong emotional effect precisely because these expressions pertain to a person that is at the crossroads between the spiritual and the sensual. The increasingly frequent use of expressions from the thematic areas of guilt, regret, suffering, unfulfilled longing, and even more dire sorrows – with no room for the possibility of forgiveness, let alone the recovery of Lovely Vida's earlier life with her husband and child as well as, with this, catharsis and a new life – raises the emotional tension, which reaches its peak in the final lines of Prešeren's ballad. Although the final stanza suggests a sort of consolation, this is only an illusion; when all the tears have been shed, there remains an even harsher inner, suppressed pain in Lovely Vida, which is caused by the awareness of the hopeless suffering of the judgment on her being.

It seems as though the conclusion of the poem, which includes Vida's regret and incessant crying, attempts to enhance the moral value of the poem and, with this, is a means of shielding Vida from readers' accusations. The main bearer of responsibility is the "Moor" and not Vida. Despite her flight, we have the impression that Vida, as a simple, inexperienced young woman, remains the victim of her youthful foolishness and the malice of others. It seems that suffering automatically cleanses her, such that the reader experiences a sense of grace, fragility, sorrow, melancholy, and – despite her fall – a sort of cleansing of the heart and unstained dignity. Vida is without malice, and it was her intense longing that was abused. This is why her guilt is a tragic guilt. It also changes her conception of love, namely from the sensual to the sublime; from an overly strong sensual passion with a breath of physicality and sexuality, which causes one to go out of control and become destructive, to a quiet, submissive, purifying spiritual emotion, with a readiness to sacrifice. At the conclusion of his poem, Prešeren emphasizes that ethical striving is more worthy than longing for satiety of physical sensuality. Lovely Vida's melancholy, vitality, and distress at the beginning of the poem derive from the fact that she never really subjugated her needs for sensuality to motherhood, hence the longing for un-experienced, un-lived sensuality. However, Vida's melancholic longing continues even after all the tragic experiences that precipitated her flight from the family have died away; longing is eternal, but it acquires a tragic air. Far from a home that has collapsed because of her, she longs for the former ethical purity she can no longer sense, and with her crying and regretting she cleanses her errant life.

Prešeren's romantic ballad "Lovely Vida" is appreciated not only as Prešeren's variant of the folk poem, but because of its strongly personal tone in terms of content, form, and ideas, and also for manner in which his originality, epic vividness, lyricism, and dramatic tension intermingle.¹⁴ The poem is dramatic and very emotional. The changes in Vida's

their effect on the border between the spiritual and the emotional, which proved especially useful for mediating the stimulus represented by erotica and sensitivity, which was very much in vogue at that time. In the visual arts as well as literature, individual tears streaming from the eyes of a beautiful, moved woman or flowing over her cheeks become ever more popular [Auerbach 1998: 293–294].

¹⁴ From the folk ballad Prešeren borrowed only the motif, reworking it into a ballad that contains figures of that time. In Pogačnik's view, the ballad "Lovely Vida" became an *expression of Prešeren's recognition of himself, of the world and of life*. With Prešeren's new poetic perspective, the folk elements *shifted*

emotional and spiritual life, when she falls victim to the conflict of various internal and external forces, and the conflict of her character with societal rules, unleash great sensitivity. Vida's sensitivity surpasses her own negative relation with herself and her actions, which manifests itself in self-accusation (*What a wretch I am, what have I done?*), feelings of guilt towards her husband, father, and child (*Sick at home I've left my darling one, / Unattended, frail, my baby dear, / And my husband, bent 'neath many a year!*), feelings of fear and distrust of the Moor, as well as fear of the queen. Her sensitivity shines forth in the poem through expressions that portray both physical and psychological changes (including Vida's crying, the paleness of her cheeks, which contrast with the "glow" and "bloom" of the first stanza, etc.). In all the life situations in which Lovely Vida finds herself, both in the first scene, where she is washing linen on the shore, and even more so in the continuing development of events, emotional discomfort prevails. Lovely Vida cannot find spiritual peace because she is unable to control her affects and passions, and at the same time she does not cultivate religiosity because the ballad does not mention this at all. When her lively spirit is first trapped into the monotony of wearying daily life, it gradually changes into an effusive but ever hidden passion that leads Vida, in her emotional state, which follows like an explosion, to flee. In the continuation of the text, everything sensual fades under the weight of guilt and her conscience's accusations; there follows a mood of constant regret without any consolation until the conclusion of the poem.¹⁵

Prešeren's Lovely Vida is, in terms of the image of a human being, relatively simple. Simple, too, is the reality of the life it describes. Joy at sensual existence is everything for Vida, and her first longing is directed precisely at the greatest fulfillment of this sensual existence. The poem hides nothing, nor is there another, higher sense. Even Vida's final longing for self-sacrifice fades away into nostalgia, not into a striving for any higher and deeper truth that would imbue all that has happened with sense. The reader does not feel the religious perspective that would provide the narrative with a sort of sense and a goal; rather, this

towards a new, qualitatively higher, level that is explicitly Prešeren's. Pogačnik determines this on the basis of the *human dimension of the erotic, ethical, and moral, world-view and esthetic problematic* as well as from the entire inner structure of this work of art by Prešeren [Pogačnik 1988: 31].

¹⁵ Great comfort could be brought to Vida by the Christian belief in the possibility of redemption, of which the ballad does not speak – hence, her existential tragedy. At best we would be able to determine the influence of Christian religiosity in the final punishment of Lovely Vida, because by committing herself to the sensual she has neglected her duty as a faithful wife and a caring mother. The opposition between sinful sensuality as well as the refusal of spiritual feeling belongs to the traditional moral outlook of Christianity. However, some contemporary Christian philosophers hold the view that physical sensations are intimations of future spiritual perfection. The attraction between men and women is, for example, in the view of the Russian philosopher Solovyov, *a spontaneous and biological expression of truth, sensual love is not yet love in the true sense of the word; it is, however, its intimation. It must be spiritualized* [Špidlík 1998: 89]. In Pogačnik's view, Prešeren's poem is about pure humanism. Vida's problem is the *problem of the battle between egoism and altruism Prešeren, whose human standpoint was pure humanism, naturally presupposes subordination of the self to the good of the other; in Vida's case, then, the child, who represents the future, and the mother as such, befits him. The child has the right to her subordination; Vida has the duty to motherhood* [Pogačnik 1988: 24].

remains mutely unanswered. The poem only bears witness to what is a problem in human terms and does not touch on the spiritual. It would be easy to assume that Prešeren was attempting to loyally follow the ancient folk ballad, without importing any other elements different in their ideas. Perhaps this was the reason for his later crossing out of the motto that originally was written above the beginning of his poem, which read:

Motto

*At night the frost descended,
Taking the greenery and flowers.
My happiness is in the deep earth,
My wishes are up with God.*¹⁶

The motto reveals Prešeren's highly personal interpretation of the content of the events in *Lovely Vida* in terms of ideas. In Pogačnik's view, it is a matter of *critical-reflective discourse, which in the original Prešeren text stands alongside the artistic discourse*. For Pogačnik, the content of this commentary is *markedly romantic . . . , in view of the extension of content of 'Lovely Vida'; however, it is too unambiguous and subjective*. Prešeren likely felt before publication that the motto and the ballad did not go together and he removed the motto in time [Pogačnik 1988: 40]. In his poem, Prešeren surely tried to retain the esthetic objectivity of the folk poem, but at the same time he extended its range to the extremes, in the individual as well as the universal direction. Boris Paternu said of this poem:

These semantic distances with regard to Vida's destiny suggest erotic, social, and, not least of all, also philosophical motivation . . . and they are all the richer for the fact that a work of art with perfect content could arise alongside them. What is more, after Prešeren's wonderful version of Lovely Vida crossed the frontier of his artistry, it became for Slovenian literature a myth with myriad characteristics, traveled many semantic paths, and has remained productive in poetry, prose, and drama through Ivan Cankar's time to our own. [Paternu 1976: 141]

CONCLUSION

Prešeren's *Lovely Vida*, based on folk songs of many artistic variations and manifesting the unity of action and a fine use of language, especially metaphor, reflects the general human phenomenon of the attraction of what is unattainable or forbidden. The ballad points to

¹⁶ Due to space restrictions, this article does not examine Prešeren's worldview, but limits itself solely to analysis of his folk ballad "Lovely Vida" from the viewpoint of sensuality and religion. Nevertheless, the problematic is, in this connection, significant. Kos [1991, 2000, 2002], Kermauner [2000], and others have written about Prešeren's worldview. From the point of view of Christianity, the human despair that is finally expressed by *Lovely Vida* actually stems from this worldview because a person does not know or does not care about his eternal self and, along with this, about his relation to the Almighty. In this, finally, lies the sin before God [Kierkegaard 1987]. In connection with the idea of the poem about *Lovely Vida*, it is reasonable to look into Prešeren's relation to Greek antiquity [Gantar 2000].

the inscrutable riddle that is always part of human existence wherever and as long as it is lived; namely, that people have to live in ordinary circumstances and that they hurt each other simply through the ways in which these conflicting facts are juxtaposed with one another. Even love can cause suffering and catastrophe. This tragic fact of life becomes the ordinary circumstance of the temptation to transcend oneself by overstepping the limits set for us in this or another way. The ballad begins with seduction, a motif that belongs to the very nature of the human state and indicates more than mere sensual pleasure. Lovely Vida complies with the offer of seduction when confronted with the terrible aspects of life. The seducer discloses the connection between the limits of the present situation and the longing for a new and hitherto excluded dimension to life. Senses work together to arouse the desire for new possibilities of life that are apparently opened by escaping the present state of reality. Lovely Vida is extremely susceptible to temptation and she acquiesces. The result of this fall is an opening of the eyes and the awareness of a fatal error. The text is deliberately only suggestive, but it nonetheless exposes all the more strongly the consequence of seduction as a fatal new experience for Lovely Vida. The impression is that Lovely Vida is a relatively good woman whose frailty and error lead to her misfortune, which arouses pity in the reader.

No path is open to the possibility of escaping this consequence. Something has been lost that cannot be replaced, and has been lost through the transgression. However, the important point of this new experience is the awareness that it is not right for Lovely Vida to continue life in splendid isolation. The text provides an indication of how this woman gone astray has progressed through her error to maturity and to a realization of responsibility. In such a situation, a human being conducts himself in the manner portrayed in the poem. His reactions are in accord with this situation. The Sun and the Moon expose the state of Vida's distant home to suggest that she is guilty and will not be consoled. Something has happened, something totally different from her expectations. The awareness that the state of innocence is lost is the new reality. The text exposes the essential dignity and greatness of Lovely Vida: she has fallen deeply, but she crushes the tragedy with her bitter weeping. Her possible tragedy would be not to demonstrate consciousness of her guilt.

It is not certain whether pity is aroused by merited or unmerited misfortune, even though Lovely Vida displayed some error of judgment that caused her great misfortune. However, by deploring the tragic consequences of complying with her sensual nature, she discovers her true nature in her innermost being. Recognition of the truth refers to the change from ignorance to knowledge, brings about restitution of the passions to a healthy balance, and consequently brings about a kind of catharsis in recognition of the force of familial love and duty. The ballad does not signal any reversal of misfortune, which augments the arousal of pity. The conflict is centered in the soul of Lovely Vida. Her tears are an answer to the universe that has so pitilessly crushed her. The ballad is an espousal of life in spite of life's underlying absurdity; in the end, it implies affirmation of the grandeur of Lovely Vida, not denigration of her personality. The ballad resolves disagreement and reconciliation

by showing that conflict is between what Lovely Vida consciously wanted to do and what she unconsciously has done. Resolution is achieved by the comprehension and feeling of reconciliation in the soul at the point where she stands with an intuitive apprehension of a transcendent realm of values.

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TRANSFORMACIJA ČUTNEGA V SLOVENSKI BALADI O “LEPI VIDI”

Dejstvo, da religija po svoji naravi želi svet razložiti kot celoto in znotraj sveta ljudi in presežno v njihovi celovitosti in medsebojni povezanosti, se dotika bistva pomena lika Lepe Vide v slovenski kulturi. Lepa Vida izraža stremljenje po lepoti, lakoto in žejo po pravičnosti in hrepenenje po ljubezni v polarnosti med telesom in dušo, čuti in njihovimi ustreznimi objekti, in posledično med časovnim in presežnim, dobrim in slabim, svetnim in sakralnim s takšno intenzivnostjo, da človeška bitja napolnjuje s presežnimi atributi ter danostmi tako v svetnem kot sakralnem okolju. Prispevek je raziskava starodavnega motiva o lepi Vidi glede na njeno nesrečno usodo in večno hrepenenje mlade matere in skuša prodreti v samo bistvo motiva v njegovi čustveni in duhovni razsežnosti.

Motiv je v Slovenijo prišel iz Sredozemlja in se je naprej pojavljal v ljudskem slogu, od Prešerna pa znova in znova tudi v slovenskem slovstvu. Z literarno analizo Prešernove umetniške predelave preproste zgodbe o usodi Lepe Vide se odpira vprašanje večnosti tega motiva. Lepa Vida izraža eksistencialno, moralno in religiozno soglasje človeštva s tem, ko dokazuje, da človeško življenje ni prazno, ker obstajajo objekti končne veljave, ki jih nikoli ni mogoče v polnosti zaznati. Očitne prirojene težnje človeških bitij in občutki, ki so vsajeni v človekovo zavest, ljudem omogočajo motrenje objektov njihovih občutkov in želja bolj iz središča njihovega bitja kakor iz zunanjih stremljenj njihovih čutov.

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