

original scientific article  
received: 2017-04-26

DOI 10.19233/ASHS.2018.06

## THE ROLE OF MIGRATIONS AND CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN LITERARY SYSTEMS: STUDYING THE CASE OF ALOJZ GRADNIK IN ARGENTINA

Ana TOROŠ

University of Nova gorica, Vipavska 13, 5000 Nova Gorica, Slovenia  
e-mail: ana.toros@ung.si

### ABSTRACT

*This article attempts to reconstruct the literary and familial ties between the descendants of the Friulian Codeas family, one of these descendants being Alojz Gradnik. The article's methodological approach stems from the interpretation of the personal correspondence between the Codeas family descendants (from Trieste, Zagreb and Rosario). Based on all this, the second part of the article offers a few prompts for research on Gradnik's reception in Argentina, based on systemic approach to literature. We come to the conclusion that Gradnik's cultural hybridity allowed him to access the Argentine literary space through two cultural groups: the Slovene and Argentine.*

**Keywords:** Alojz Gradnik, Eduardo A. Dughera, Maria Samer, Friulians, literary translation, migrant literature

## IL RUOLO DELLE MIGRAZIONI E L'IBRIDISMO CULTURALE NEI SISTEMI LETTERARI: LO STUDIO DEL CASO DI ALOJZ GRADNIK IN ARGENTINA

### SINTESI

*L'articolo intende ricostruire i legami letterari e familiari tra i discendenti della famiglia friulana dei Codeas, di cui fece parte Alojz Gradnik. L'approccio metodologico del saggio si basa sull'interpretazione della corrispondenza personale tra i discendenti della famiglia Codeas (da Trieste, Zagabria e Rosario). Grazie a ciò, la seconda parte dell'articolo ci offre alcune proposte per una ricerca sulla ricezione nei confronti di Gradnik in Argentina, fondate su un approccio sistemico alla letteratura. Si giunge alla conclusione che il suo ibridismo culturale gli permise di avere accesso allo spazio letterario argentino attraverso due gruppi culturali: quello sloveno e quello argentino.*

**Parole chiave:** Alojz Gradnik, Eduardo A. Dughera, Maria Samer, friulani, traduzione letteraria, letteratura emigrante

This paper espouses an interdisciplinary approach to literary processes connected to migrations (Žitnik Serafin, 2014). Namely, it is interested in establishing how a given author's belonging to two cultures (Jurić Pahor, 2012) influences the reception of his literature (stimulating or inhibiting it) in the two given cultural spaces, more precisely, in the migration communities stemming from the two cultures (and their literary systems). It takes its inspiration from systemic approaches to literature, that is to say from examining literary production in a line of interrelated factors from within the literary system, encompassing literary production (cultural, political, economic circumstances of the author), dissemination (motivation of intermediaries, polical relations, etc.), reception and processing (Dović, 2004).

With this intention, the paper will look at the example of Alojz Gradnik, exploring his personal experience of cultural hybridity (Slovene father, Friulian mother), his public image of a Sloveno-Italian poet and the attendant reception of his poetry by the representative of Slovene and Friulian migrant communities in Argentina in the interwar period. Gradnik's correspondence will provide an important primary source that will allow us to reconstruct the familial and literary relationships that bound Gradnik to Argentina. We will therefore proceed from autobiographical materials (letters), fully realizing that the analysis of such material is entirely subject to the researcher's subjective interpretation (Milharčič Hladnik, 2009, 17–18). The letters address a variety of themes, but we will focus mainly on the more literary passages. The findings will be further confronted with Gradnik's other biographical accounts (interviews) and documents from his literary estate (letters from his family and relative, family chronicles). In researching his reception in Argentina, we will draw on the history of migrations from the present-day Goriška region towards the end of the 19th century and the inter-war period, with a special focus on the cultural activities of both communities in Argentina between the two wars.

Alojz Gradnik was a poet and translator from a Slovene-Friulian background. He was born in 1882, in the village of Medana in Goriška Brda, a hilly region known for its winemaking, olives and cherries. During Gradnik's youth, the Brda region was under Austro-Hungarian rule. After the Treaty of Rapallo in November of 1920, Brda fell under the Kingdom of Italy. Since the end of WWII, the borderline between Slovenia and Italy runs directly through the region (which was under Yugoslavia until 1991).

The Slovene and Italian (Friulian) population collide in Brda and its environs. Our research is mainly interested in the juncture between the Slovene and Friulian worlds. It also bears to mention that Brda and the surro-

unding area are predominantly rural, where generations of *coloni* made ends meet by farming the land, mostly by tending to vines. We are therefore talking about a community of people with a rural identity, which is existentially and intimately tied to its native land.

Due to the worsening economic situation, the great deal of locals decided to emigrate to Argentina towards the end of the 19th century. The wave of emigration continued in the interwar period due to the unfavourable socio-national circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

Both emigration waves are of interest for our research, as they are directly linked to Argentina's interest in Alojz Gradnik, and unfold within two separate historical and cultural contexts. The first sign of interest in Gradnik's work was recorded during the first half of the 20th century, namely expressed by a descendant of Friulian immigrants who went to Argentina at the end of the 19th century. In the 21st century, a female descendant of the interwar Slovene immigrant community in Argentina translated and published Gradnik's poetry collection. As mentioned before, Gradnik came from a Slovene-Friulian family, and that allowed him to breach the Argentine literary market via two cultural means – the Slovene and Argentine.

During Gradnik's lifetime, a Slovene-Italian cultural identity (cultural hybridity; Jurić-Pahor, 2012) was unacceptable, as it was a time of immensely strained Slovene-Italian relations. These were especially fraught in Brda, the juncture between the Slavic and Romance worlds. All this was highly inconvenient for Gradnik, who was just beginning to uncover his dual cultural identity concurrent with the rise of fascism. In his early youth he took on his father's Slovene identity (Pertot, 2007) and accepted Slovene as his mother tongue without any deeper self-reflection. In his adolescence however, especially after reading Heinrich Mann's novel *Zwischen den Rassen*, he began to become aware of his mother's cultural and linguistic heritage (Toroš, 2011). He thought of himself as an heir to Italian culture, which is in keeping with the view of the then feebly expressed Friulian identity being part of the larger Italian identity. The Friulian identity begins to solidify only after the end of the WWII (Kerševan, 2003).

In the sonnet *Vprašanje* (Question), written in the 1920s, Gradnik symbolically declares his belonging to both the Slavic and Romance cultures. This self-definition through poetry was not highlighted by the Slovene (anti-fascist) literary criticism, as the Slovene cultural politics of the day needed poets with a fixed (Slovene) identity, whom they could proclaim as a Slovene national poet (Toroš, 2014).

After publishing the aforementioned sonnet, Gradnik refrained from discussing his dual cultural identity, possibly because the Italian politicians used his poem

1 The migration of the Slovene community from Venezia Giulia during the interwar period was the consequence of two intertwined factors – social and national. The first wave of emigration started at the beginning of the 1920's, with a larger wave following during 1927–1930. Regardless of their ideological opposition, the Slovene community in Argentina had a national consciousness, collectively offered support to the Slovene community in Venezia Giulia and was anti-fascistically oriented (Kalc, 2016).

to implant the perception of Gradnik as a Slovene-Italian cultural mediator throughout the Slovene Littoral<sup>2</sup> region. We must not overlook that Gradnik was an educated person, who had already suffered through a prison sentence due to his anti-Austrian activism. During the interwar period he wished to begin working in diplomacy (Gradnik, 2008, 394). As such, he must have thoroughly contemplated the risk factor of embracing a multicultural identity.

As will be made clear in the following chapters, Gradnik saw a few advantages in the seemingly troublesome situation of having such a cultural role and wished to use them to his advantage for promoting his poetry, although this was overlooked by the (national) literary history (Dovič, 2013). Gradnik wanted to express his Romance heritage and use it outside of the confines of the Slovene literary system, more specifically in Italy, where he wished to publish his poetry. Only the latest discoveries in his manuscript legacy allow the possibility that Gradnik had ambitions that reached even Argentina.

To better understand the circumstances surrounding Gradnik's connection to both migrant communities in Argentina, we must first shed light upon the circumstances in his social life. Gradnik grew up in a time when the local Slovene community was campaigning for more national rights within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the last few years before WWI, Gradnik successfully finished his graduate programme in Vienna and started work as a court trainee in the Goriška and Istria regions. During this period, he was politically active. After the war, when the Goriška region was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy, he was, in his own words, deeply disappointed and worried about the anti-Slovene political stance. Like many other educated Slovenes decided, he too chose to move to Yugoslavia, where he procured a job at the ministry of foreign affairs in Belgrade. The image of Yugoslavia as the new homeland, that he had nurtured in previous years revealed itself to be false and idealised. The terrible disappointment he felt was expressed through poetry, where he confessed his aching homesickness and pain at the occupation of the Slovene Littoral. His best known poem that deals with his homesickness is entitled *V tujini* (Abroad). Apart from the homesickness, Gradnik depicted the rural identity of the Brda region's residents, highlighting their link to the native land that sustains them. The poetic language, full of motifs and metaphors, served as the basis for these feelings. The motifs included imagery of the grapevine, vineyards, cherry trees, olive trees, and other typical Brda vegetation. Also found in his poetry are many descriptions of rural Brda customs, farmstead tasks and local cuisine. Therefore, it is of no coincidence that lines from his swansong poem *Pojoča kri* (Singing blood) are part of the Brda Municipality's coat-of-arms.



**Image 1:** *In front of the homestead of Alojz Gradnik in Medana, from left to right: Gradnik's aunt and uncle from Krmin, his mother Lucia (born Godeas) and father Jožef Gradnik (Photo: most probably Alojz Gradnik, private legacy)*

The pieces of his poetry that most likely touched the residents of Brda and the surrounding Slovene and Friulian regions were those which expressed homesickness. The residents, who had to emigrate due to unfavourable socio-political circumstances, did so despite being tied to their native land. In Gradnik's poetry they found imagery of their beloved towns and a homesickness that was very much their own.<sup>3</sup>

Amongst all this information, we must not forget about Gradnik's personal life. He married after WWI, but the marriage was sadly unhappy, resulting in a divorce just a few years later with Gradnik taking custody of their only son, Sergej Gradnik. Now a divorcé and whilst living and working in Belgrade and later in Zagreb as one of the seven supreme judges in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, he found support and human connection

<sup>2</sup> The Slovene Littoral is a region with a Slovene population, under which both Brda and Gorizia fall. From the end of WWI till 1943 it was under the Kingdom of Italy's rule. For more on this subject, see Kacin Wohinz & Pirjevec, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> This cluster of poems is also well known among the Friulian community in Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Toroš, 2013).





**Image 2: Harvesting in Medana: in the foreground the mother and father of Alojz Gradnik, in the background relatives. On the top, with a jug in his hands, a Friulian worker (Photo: Alojz Gradnik, private legacy)**

with his cousin Maria Samer from Trieste. She was his maternal cousin, whose Friulian family originated from the Cormons area, very close to Brda. Gradnik was very attached to his Friulian family, since he never knew any of his father's family considering he grew up with a foster family.

Gradnik and Maria wrote to each other in Italian, their surviving letters penned during 1937–1944 add up to more than 100, either handwritten or typed.<sup>4</sup> Gradnik confided in her about his private life and the details of

his literary works. At the time, Maria was employed as a saleswoman in Trieste. However, she was an educated woman for those times; she spoke several foreign languages and had contact with the Italian Triestine literary elite of the day. Literature was therefore common ground for the two cousins, with Maria often encouraging and helping Gradnik with certain artistic endeavours by sending him any necessary literature from Trieste, to aid his translations. This put Maria in the de-facto role of literary and intercultural correspondent.

Despite Maria being of seemingly great importance to Gradnik's life and work, she has been overlooked in literary history. Neither the Slovene, Italian nor Friulian literary history has acknowledged her contributions. By analysing Gradnik's letters to Maria we wish to shed light upon her role and importance in international literary circles. Foremost, we must acknowledge her translations of Gradnik's poetry into Italian and her promotion of his poetry across Italy.<sup>5</sup>

Until now, Maria was not known to be an author, despite this she wrote the Godeas family chronicle during the interwar period. Some of the text's passages have the characteristics of a literary text. Maria wrote the chronicle based on the memories of her mother, who was a sister of Gradnik's mother, Lucia Godeas.

The chronicle is typed in Italian and it describes the life of the Friulian Godeas family, who lived half way between Brda and Cormons. Content wise, we can divide the chronicle into two parts. The first part recounts the love story between Gradnik's mother Lucia Godeas and Gradnik's father. The second part of the story talks about the life choices made by Lucia's brothers and sisters. They all grew up in a large *coloni* family, which barely made ends meet. One sister marries and moves to Trieste, later giving birth to Maria. The other two sisters (Antonia and Maria) and their brother Nazio decide to try their luck in Argentina.<sup>6</sup>

Maria Samer's chronicle can be taken as a piece of discourse on migration and gives valuable insight into the migration process' subjective background. The chronicle is based on the memory of the Friulian family and tells us about the circumstances in the Gorizia region towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which encouraged some of the members to emigrate to Argentina. The chronicle only recounts the emigration story of one family, but circumstances described in the chronicle greatly coincide with scientific findings on the migration

4 The letters and other handwritten texts are part of two collections: The National and University Library (NUK) Ms 1398 and Sergej Gradnik's personal collection.

5 It takes place towards the end of the 30s, when Maria's translations of Gradnik's poems were published, mostly from the *Večni studenec* (1938) collection, in the *Meridiano di Roma* and *Il Piccolo della sera* newspapers.

6 In Gradnik's manuscript archive (NUK, Ms 1398) there is a letter from Maria to Gradnik. Her letter is typed (it is not dated) and in Italian. In the letter, Maria answers his questions about their Friulian ancestors, informing him that the source was her mother Paškuta (Gradnik's aunt). Compared to her chronicle of the Godeas family there are a few differences, although they are not big: the first to leave for "America" (called such in the letter, fn. A.T.) was Ignac (Nazio), following close behind were Mija (Marija) and Antonia, and last was Francka. All in all four members of the family left home, in three separate waves of migration. Even Francka, who had been working as a maid in Trieste, married in Argentina. As a widow, Marija married again, this time to an Argentine (Robiros) of Italian roots. She reportedly had two daughters from her first marriage.

wave to Argentina from the Gorizia region towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Based on this information, we know that the Austrian-Friulian region was also hit by the wave of emigration, which encompassed the Friulian lowlands and the Veneto region. The wave of migration to South America from the Austrian Littoral, or rather the Austrian part of the Friulian lowlands, which was an ethnically mixed area, began towards the end of the 1870s (Kalc, 1995). Thus in the period between 1876 and 1896 it was mainly the farmers and *coloni* who left the Austrian Littoral for Argentina (Cecotti, 2003, 33). More accurately, 1878 marked the beginning of the migration wave (Kalc, 1995) partly due to a bad harvest year and a seemingly hopeless future.

At least one member of the Godeas family (Nazio) left that year, closely followed by three sisters at the behest of travel agents in Cormons and their wishes to live a better life. The Godeas family had 11 members, the father had recently passed away, and so staying under one roof was not an option. Central to the story is Nazio, who sees Argentina as the land of opportunity, but he does not idealise it. He wishes to go abroad to earn enough money so he can one day return and buy land. Leaving was not only painful because of the distance between him and his family, but also because of the distance between him and his hometown and with it his rural identity (Samer, s. a.: 9). This part of the narrative coincides with the scientific findings on the emigration from the Brda region, wherein the migrants wished to retain their rural heritage and acquire land (Kalc, 1995). At the same time it is important to bear in mind the crisis of identity the migrants would have experienced and which had encouraged them to form close relations with each other so as to preserve their culture (Alberston, 2003, 59).

According to the chronicle, Nazio never did return, but like most other first generation migrants from Friuli, he found a better life (Kalc, 1995). Once in Argentina (Santa Fè), Nazio rented a plot of land with a French migrant, who later married his sister Maria and together, the couple moved to Buenos Aires. Nazio reportedly married a Brazilian woman, a merchant's daughter, with whom he ran a business.

We can surmise that Nazio was with the group of people who left after the big propaganda of 1877 (Cecotti, 2003, 34) or rather after the agents came from Italy (Cecotti, 2003, 18), this receiving mention also in Maria Samer's chronicle (s. a.). On 10th November 1878, this group of migrants boarded the ship in Genoa, arriving in Buenos Aires on 28th December. Several of them settled in Santa Fè (Cecotti, 2003, 43).

In connection with Gradnik's literary activities what is of special importance is his connection with Nazio's sister Antonia, who got married in Argentina to a Spaniard by the name of Dughera, who worked as a notary. Together they moved to Rosario (Samer, s. a.: 14). Antonia Godeas gave her husband a son, by the



**Image 3:** Gradnik's cousin Maria Samer, third from the right, with relatives; Medana, 16th October 1938 (Photo: Alojz Gradnik, private legacy)

name of Eduardo Dughera. By analysing the chronicle, we see that the family members kept in contact even after emigrating, so there is no surprise to hear that Eduardo, Maria and Gradnik also wrote to each other. Of course in their case these were not letters written by poorly educated migrants, tackling the most essential practicalities or relating family news (Cancian, 2010, 11, 44). In other words these letters will not showcase stories from the socially deprived strata of society (Micelli, 1997), rather they are penned by educated individuals from an urban environment, Dughera himself not being a migrant but a descendant of migrants to Argentina. Dughera, Gradnik and Maria had never met, or rather they had never experienced a »separation« (Cancian, 2010, 44), which is probably why the emotional bond between them was not as strong and it was literature that became the overarching subject of their letters. Given Gradnik's significant public function at the time of correspondence (supreme judge), we paid special attention to the strategy of his letter writing. In the pre-war political climate of Europe, there was a tendency towards

auto-censure, coded language, usage of false names and abbreviations (Goldberg, 2006, 158, 163, 164), though these strategies were absent from his more literary passages. One should not overlook however the absence of the then current political themes in these letters, since in decoding the letters from the interwar years and in establishing the circumstances in which these letters were written, attention must be paid as much to what is unsaid (Gerber, 2006, 142, 151). Even more telling is the absence of letters or other sources that would relate the presentation of Gradnik in the Argentinian cultural circles during World War II and after. Probably this has something to do with the more existentialist difficulties related to the war, which Gradnik was then confronting.

Besides the letters between Gradnik, Dughera and Maria, two other sources are relevant in disclosing Gradnik's connection with Dughera. To these we turn now:

In an interview with the literary historian Maria Boršnik in 1954, Gradnik proudly spoke about his Argentine cousin: „*In Buenos Aires, my aunt Antonia married an Argentine, a Spaniard, whose parents, with the surname Dughera, emigrated from Piedmont. Their son, Eduardo Dughera, my cousin, is a professor and a well-respected Spanish author (poet, novelist and publicist) in the city of Rosario*“ (Gradnik, 2008, 260).

Gradnik had mentioned the family relation before, during WWII. In 1943 he published a collection of Spanish poetry and the literary critic Anton Debeljak wrote a review for the *Slovenski narod* newspaper. The review mentions Gradnik having a cousin in Argentina, with whom he was in touch.

Debeljak's statement can be confirmed by Dughera's archived correspondence, more specifically two letters sent to Europe in 1939 and 1940. The first of the two that Dughera sent to Gradnik in Zagreb was dated the 6<sup>th</sup> September 1939 (NUK, Ms 1398, 6. 9. 1939).

In the letter, Dughera refers to Gradnik as „*querido primo Gigi*“,<sup>7</sup> and from the content we can extrapolate that they already knew each other. He wrote to Gradnik to say that Maria had informed him about Gradnik's letter which he never received. The first part of Dughera's letter is on family matters. Dughera offers his condolences at hearing of Gradnik's sister's death<sup>8</sup> and promises to send stamps for his son Sergej. The second part deals with literature. Dughera informs Gradnik that he will send him two of his works, *El malacara* (1938) and *Toomillo* (1939), adding that a copy of *Toomillo* had already been sent to Maria. At the end he adds that in his next letter he will describe his literary workings and expects an update from Gradnik.

It is clear from the letter that Maria Samer was part of the correspondence. The correspondence was not a

two-sided affair, but three-sided, taking place between all three cousins, in a triangle between Trieste, Zagreb and Rosario. In a letter to Maria dated 10<sup>th</sup> March 1939, Gradnik informs her that he had received a letter from Dughera (Gradnik, A., private legacy, 10. 3. 1939). Maria's answer from 12<sup>th</sup> March 1939 tells him that she already answered Dughera a week before and sent him some new Italian translations of Gradnik's *Večni studenti* (1938) collection (Gradnik, A., private legacy, 12. 3. 1939). In a letter to Maria dated 15<sup>th</sup> December 1940, Gradnik finishes off the letter with a sentence in Spanish instead of Italian: „*Que noticias tienes de nuestro primo?*“, by which he is asking Maria for news about their cousin Dughera and sends his greetings (Gradnik, A., private legacy, 15. 12. 1940).

Unfortunately, there is only one letter in the archives which Dughera sent to Maria on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1940 (Gradnik, A., private legacy, 12. 2. 1940). The letter was sent from Rosario to Trieste. It is important from a literary historical point of view as it hints that the three cousins were planning to present Gradnik's poetry in Argentina and Dughera's poetry in Italy. Maria had an important intermediary role in all of this, as it was she who translated both her cousins' works into Italian. The manuscripts of her translations of Gradnik's poetry are preserved complete with Gradnik's notes. As already mentioned, some of her translations had previously been published in Italy. Translations of Dughera's poetry (from the *Toomillo* collection) are saved within Gradnik's manuscript collection in the National and University Library in Ljubljana.<sup>9</sup> Gradnik was very pleased with her work, saying this in a letter to her dated 1<sup>st</sup> April 1940: „*Dalle tue traduzioni mandatemi vedo che conosci lo spagnolo meno di me. Traduttrice di due cugini!*“ (Gradnik, 2008, 181). Gradnik was very attentive regarding Maria's translations of his works into Italian, as can be seen from the many notes and comments that litter Maria's translations. As it turns out, Dughera was as attentive as his cousin, and kept a close eye on Maria's translations. In a letter he explained the specifics of his *Toomillo* collection, which he sent alongside the letter. He also pointed out that he used local dialect words in his work and suggested certain solutions for the translation of rhymes.

At the end of the letter he added that he would welcome Gradnik's opinion as well as that of Italian Slavist Umberto Urbani (1888–1967). He proudly included an excerpt from the review the important *La Nación* newspaper printed on his *Toomillo* collection. Besides all this, the letter is valuable because of Dughera's statement that in Argentina no one was writing about Gradnik or about Yugoslav poetry in general. He expressed the wish to do so himself before the year ran its course.

7 In his letters to cousin Maria, he always signed them as 'Gigi'. (fn. A. T.)

8 From Gradnik's family tree states, that towards the end of June 1939, Gradnik's sister Gizela Juretič died (NUK, Ms 1398).

9 It must be noted, that the translations are not correctly labelled as Maria's (fn. A. T.). In any future studies that go beyond the framework of this one, Dughera's life and work will have to be examined more closely, and check if Maria was successful in publishing translations of his works and present him to the Italian literary scene like she did Gradnik.



Even after Gradnik's death in 1967, the literary historical chapter on literary correspondence among the three Friulian relatives continued. On 1<sup>st</sup> June 1971, Maria wrote (in Italian) to Gradnik's second wife Francka in Ljubljana. She wished that the book she had lent Gradnik years ago, Dughera's *Tomillo*, were returned to her, explaining that the book had a signed dedication to her. When she received no reply, she tried again on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1971 and added that she is now retired and therefore not working at her shop anymore.

Francka answers Maria (in Slovene) on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1971 (NUK, Ms 1398, 12. 7. 1971) and explains that Gradnik's son Sergej must have taken Dughera's book.<sup>10</sup> After six months, in a letter dated 29<sup>th</sup> February 1972 (NUK, Ms 1398, 29. 2. 1972), Francka writes to Maria she has nevertheless found Dughera's book – *Tomillo* (with the dedication). She adds that she has found another of Dughera's books in Gradnik's library, entitled *Huellas en el Quebrachal*. Francka planned on bringing the books to Trieste in the following weeks, intending to leave them in the shop, where Maria had once worked.

The existing information from the analysed letter correspondence unfortunately does not allow for a comprehensive reconstruction of events. Nevertheless, they provide enough clues to develop certain hypotheses.

One hypothesis is based upon the assumption that literary processes were going on in Argentina within both the native and immigrant communities' literary systems. Aside from the Argentine literary system we will also be interested in the Slovene literary system in Argentina, which we presume to have been developing as a separate entity from the native system. The assumption is backed up by Dughera's statement in his letter to Maria (NUK, Ms 1398, 12. 2. 1940), saying that so far in Argentina no-one had reported on Yugoslav literature or Gradnik. This knowledge is based on the situation within cultural circles; ones that he was a part of himself and which most likely were not in contact with Slovene cultural circles in Argentina and most likely did not speak Slovene, which would be key for inclusion into the Slovene literary system in Argentina.

We should also consider the possibility that Dughera was well-connected to the Friulian cultural circles in Argentina. It was precisely at the time of the correspondence between Maria, Gradnik and Dughera that Friulian societies were being established in Argentina, in Buenos Aires and elsewhere, starting with the first from 1926 (Club Sociale Friuli), followed by Famiglia Friulana Associations (1927) and many others (Alberton, 2003, 60). At the beginning of 1930s, there was some ideological tension existing between the societies, even as they shared a common love for the native country, joint roots, passing it on from one generation to the next,

also onto the children born in Argentina (Alberton, 2003, 65). With the example of Dughera, however, it is worth pondering over Albert's claim that with the descendants of Friulian migrants, it is the Friulian identity that is kept as a memory of the native land of their forefathers (Alberton, 2003, 65). Dughera's father was Spanish and in his case it is very likely that the transmission of identity passed along the male lineage (Pertot, 2007), as we found out to be true of Gradnik, or rather Dughera was already integrated into the Argentinian society and had an Argentine identity (Bockelman, 2011). This supposition is supported by his letters to Maria and Gradnik, in which there is no reference to »Friulian-ness«, as well as an overview of his literary and other writings about literature, his biography, in which there is no mention of his Friulian roots from his mother's side.<sup>11</sup> Moreover Dughera is not mentioned amongst the active members in Friulian societies or as one of the important Friulian migrant writers in Argentina (Alberton, 2003, 65), despite the fact that he was an established literary figure of his day in Argentina. In line with this, Dughera used Spanish to communicate with Gradnik and Maria. Even his scientific and literary works were written in Spanish. He worked as a university literature professor as well as holding management positions in the academic and library worlds. Alongside all of this he was also an acclaimed writer, who wrote award-winning literature. Unlike Gradnik, he also wrote prose. Dughera was almost 30 years younger than Gradnik, and began writing in his early thirties judging by his published work. He had seemingly began his literary journey relatively late, just like his cousin Gradnik, who only published his first collection at the age of almost 35.

After a short ten year creative period (1938–1948), during which he published 4 literary works, Dughera concentrated on his scientific writing on Spanish, French and Italian literature resulting in 6 books published (with several reprints) in the period between 1952 and 1967.

The archived correspondence between Gradnik and Dughera dates back to 1939. It is possible that there was no prior correspondence between the cousins, as Dughera was much younger than Gradnik. The beginning of their correspondence chronologically coincides with Dughera's first published collection of poems. In one of the letters (NUK, Ms 1398, 6. 9. 1939), Dughera expressed the wish to hear his cousin's opinion on his poetry, which makes sense given that by 1939 Gradnik was already a renowned poet.

Unfortunately, there is no information on how long the cousins kept in contact. They most likely continued at least until 1948, when Dughera's last literary work, also found in Gradnik's personal library, was published (*Huellas en el Quebrachal*).

10 Francka's first letter was handwritten, so it is not clear, if Francka copied out the letter and actually sent it. The second letter is typed. In it she says that she will inform Maria by post before her impending visit to Trieste, but sadly this (third) letter is missing from the archive. Therefore, we cannot be certain that Dughera's books were brought back to Trieste.

11 As surveyed from the available materials in Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, Buenos Aires.

Seeing as Dughera and Gradnik expressed interest in certain Italian and Spanish authors during the same time period, we can assume that the cousins most likely shared their opinions on the works they had read and gave each other recommendations and encouraged each other to translate or rather analyse Romance authors.

For example, in 1943, Gradnik translated Lorca for his Spanish poetry anthology. The Spanish poet later became the subject of Dughera's own studies in 1952. Similarly, Gradnik translated Ugo Betti's work (1940) as well as corresponding with him via letters (there are archived letters from Betti to Gradnik from 1942 in NUK, Ms 1398). In 1956, Dughera published a literary scientific work on Betti, entitled *El teatro interior de Ugo Betti*.

Given all the facts, Dughera had every chance to present Gradnik to the Argentine cultural circle of which he himself was a part of. Disregarding whether Dughera actually followed through with the project, it is important that the intent was there, most probably generated by Gradnik. From the cousins' letter correspondence we know that Maria had sent Dughera Italian translations of some of Gradnik's poems from the *Večni studenci* collection. It is not known which poems were sent. What is known is that Maria translated the *Kmet govori* (*The Farmer talks*) cycle from the same collection, which heavily features references to a rural culture and identity. This theme would probably be of interest to the Friulian migrant community from the Brda region, which kept the memory of their native land in their hearts. The Godeas family, who migrated to Argentina before 1900, would be a case in point. Even Dughera was most probably linked to Brda and its surroundings through communicative memory, that is to say memory which is passed on orally, from one generation to the next and lasts for as long as the representatives of that memory are alive, roughly one hundred years (Assmann, 1992). In this sense, Gradnik's poetry could have ignited interest among Dughera and his Argentine colleagues, who had a similar family situation. At the same time, Gradnik's poetry could speak to the migrant community in Argentina also through characteristic migrant themes, including homesickness, uprootedness and a sense of loneliness (Žitnik Serafin, 2014, 34), all of which amply feature in Gradnik's opus once he had left for Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 20th century.

It is possible that Dughera received, from either Gradnik or Maria, some of the literary criticism of Gradnik's poetry in Italian, which would give Dughera insight into Gradnik's image, created by Italian Slavists during the interwar period. This option should not be ruled out, as Dughera knew Umberto Urbani, the main promoter of Gradnik's poetry in Italy and who presented him to society as half-Italian (Urbani, 1935). In a letter to Maria (NUK, Ms 1398, 12. 2. 1940), Dughera suggests to seek out Urbani's help in translating his poetry into Italian.

This image of Gradnik, that was created by Italian Slavists and emphasised his Romance heritage, was most likely welcomed by him, as it allowed him to

express his Slovene-Italian identity, which was undesirable in the Slovene (Yugoslav) space at that time. He wished to break free from the framework of the Slovene literary system, to be able to promote himself abroad with a different image than what was assigned to him by the Slovene literary critics.

In this very period, Gradnik theoretically had the opportunity to promote his literary work in Argentina through the Slovene community. Until now, no information has been found that indicated (Gradnik's interviews, archived personal and public correspondence) his wish to present his work to the Slovene community in Argentina (and through it get to the Argentine literary system), as through this medium his image would be restricted, tied solely to his Slovene cultural identity.

It is safe to assume that the Slovene cultural workers in Argentina, taking part in the literary process of accepting, editing and publishing literature (Dovič, 2004), were more connected to the Slovene literary circles in the Kingdoms of Yugoslavia and Italy (Littoral) than the Argentine cultural space. The Slovene interwar community in Argentina strove to preserve their Slovene identity and so established its own societies (Kalc, 2016). The Slovene cultural workers in Argentina were focused on Slovene authors and their works, that were accepted in the Slovene literary system, which then became part of the Slovene migrant community's literary system (articles in magazines, plays, celebrations, etc.). All of the mentioned activities mostly occurred in Slovene. We presume that during the transatlantic literary processes that took place, the image of Slovene authors and their works, which were allotted to them by the Slovene literary history, were preserved. This premise is supported also by the fact that in the 1930s in Argentina Slovene writers were given more attention than the »local« ones (Žitnik Serafin, 1997, 184).

Based on the content in Gradnik's poetry collections, his political and social work, he was most likely unacceptable to the social-democratic base of Slovenes in Argentina (Ljudski oder), as he was in conflict with the Slovene Social Democrats in the Trieste region even before WWI (Gradnik, 2008, 334–335). Gradnik's poetry highlights only the rural class's financial distress, completely omitting the problems of the working class.

Nevertheless, Gradnik used his poetry to bear witness to the oppression of the Slovene people and to condemn the fascist violence. This made him a potential reference point for the liberal and anti-fascist Slovene group in Argentina (Slovensko prosvetno društvo – Slovene education society). However, as already stated, in the interwar period Italian Slavists led by Umberto Urbani pushed forward the image of Gradnik as a Slovene-Italian poet. As the fascists abused this image to facilitate the cultural assimilation (Italianisation) of Slovenes living in the Venezia Giulia region (Toroš, 2014), Gradnik would find it difficult to become a symbol of the Slovene population's fight against fascism.



Further research would concentrate on uncovering whether the image of Gradnik as a Slovene-Italian poet was successfully spread amongst the Slovene community in Argentina. Another point of interest will be to see if the works Gradnik published after WWI were available in Argentina. We do not possess any information on Slovene libraries in Argentina from the interwar period, through which we could inquire about the presence of Gradnik's poetry collections. However, we do know that Slovene societies and individuals had access to books published in Yugoslavia (Mislej, 1993; Pertot, 2011). Still, the correspondence between the three cousins supports the fact that it was difficult to maintain contact and exchange books from such a distance. Bearing all this in mind we could conclude that it was only some individuals who had access to Gradnik's books, while Gradnik's poetry could not have been in the forefront of the cultural life of the Slovene migrant community. This supposition finds support also in an overview of the journal *Duhovno življenje* (Spiritual Life), one of the more important Slovene magazines in Argentina, published by a Catholic group from 1933 onwards, modelling it on the cultural publications from their homeland (Mislej, 1993, 8). There is no mention of Gradnik, in the issues published during the interwar period. He was first mentioned in 1982, at the centenary of his birth, when Tine Debeljak wrote an article about him and published some of his more religiously themed poems and the sonnet *V tujini*, which discusses migration (Švent, 1993). Even in studies on the cultural life of migrants from the Slovene Littoral and other early migrants to Argentina, we find no mention of Gradnik. Neither is he among the Slovene poets (Prešeren, Gregorčič, Aškerc) whose works were translated into Castilian by Slovenes in the 1940s (Brecelj, 1992, 177). It was his slightly older Slovene Littoral compatriot, Simon Gregorčič (Pertot, 2011), who took on an important role of a 'cultural saint' (Dovič, 2013).

Looking at all the evidence, we can conclude that Gradnik was not among the popular poets within the Slovene community in Argentina during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (most probably on account of his »Italian persona«), nor did he strive to be.

By taking into account that the main wave of migration from Venezia Giulia took place in the 1920s and if we presume that Gradnik's publications were not easily available in Argentina, the major part of migrants from the region only knew Gradnik through his first poetry collection, which was published in 1916. Through it they came to see him as a poet, who had a strong social sensitivity towards the rural population and had a loving relationship with the farm land.

The hypothesis is supported by the fact that Julia Sarachu, granddaughter of a Slovene interwar migrant from Venezia Giulia, who became interested in Gradnik's poetry through her grandfather's stories (communicative memory; Assmann, 1992), decided

to translate Gradnik's first poetry collection (*Padajoče zvezde*, 1916; translated as *La tierra desolada*, 2009). In her translation, she highlighted the importance of the rural land in Gradnik's poetry.

It must be taken into account that Julia Sarachu (Argentine born) translated Gradnik's poetry to promote and present him on the Argentine literary market, beyond the setting of the Slovene community in Argentina. Gradnik's poetry was therefore published in Argentina at the behest of a Slovene interwar migrant community's descendant; it was not however published due to interest expressed by the Slovene community in Argentina. According to the translator, the book, published by the small publishing house, had a small circulation and it did not receive much critical response. Despite this, the collection is Gradnik's first poetry collection in Spanish globally (according to the latest information).

As the initiative for a literary translation originated from the Slovene migrant community (Julia took on her grandfather's image of Gradnik as a Slovene Littoral poet), Gradnik's image in the collection (preface) is tied to his role and importance he has within the Slovene literary history. It does not highlight his ties to the Romance world, as would have been the case had Dughera been the one to present Gradnik in Argentina. Further research will uncover whether Gradnik actually made steps into the Argentine literary system during the interwar period.

## CONCLUSION

Gradnik's literary production was marked by his family background. Hailing from an ethnically mixed family (Sloveno-Friulian) and at the interface between Slovene, Italian and Friulian worlds at the time of rising Fascism, he had difficulties manifesting his intimate sense of belonging to two cultures, Slovene and Italian respectively. The only literary text in which Gradnik openly addresses this problematic (his sonnet *Vprašanje* / Question), the Italian Slavists incorporated in the interwar years into an »Italian image« of Gradnik (as a Slovene-Italian poet, translator of Italian literature and, symbolically speaking, a go-between these two cultures) that was shaped and disseminated through the media (prefaces to book publications, radio broadcasts, newspaper contributions, etc.) and which was propagated mainly across the Italian region populated predominantly with Slovene inhabitants. This image was different to the image of Gradnik then preponderant in Yugoslavia, for the literary academe emphasized a different side to Gradnik's life (not paying much attention to Gradnik's connections with the Romance world).

Gradnik in turn, with the help of family connections (cousins Maria Samer from Trieste and Eduardo Dughera from Argentina), tried to put his »Italian image« to effective use in promoting his poetry in the Romance world, that is to say outside the Yugoslav (and Slovene) literary

systems, which enabled him to give freer expression to his Slovene-Italian cultural roots. Gradnik as a poet succeeded in entering the pages of Italian journals and newspapers and thus, for a while at least, penetrated the Italian literary system (publications of the translations of his poetry, literary reviews of his work, etc.) At the same time Gradnik harboured a hope to make it also into the Argentinian literary system, given his Romance origins. With this intention Maria sent Dughera her translations of Gradnik's poetry into Italian and Dughera promised in a letter to present Gradnik to Argentina some time in the course of 1940. As a university profession and organiser of literary meetings Dughera indeed had the possibility to realize the promised intention, but the sources that would confirm this we have sadly not been able to find. He would have presented Gradnik to his university and

literary colleagues (the Argentinian literary system), but not in the context of Friulian migrant community, since we have no evidence of existing contacts between Dughera and the Friulian societies in Argentina. Gradnik's name does not appear amongst the main Slovene literati which the Slovene migrant community in Argentina took over from out of the Slovene literary system in the interwar period. Gradnik's »Italian image« most probably contributed to this fact. It is only in the 21st century that Gradnik decisively enters the Argentine literary market, when a descendant of Slovene migrants translated his first poetry collection into Spanish. In the collection's foreword, Gradnik gets presented as a Slovene poet with all the emphasis on those segments on his life and work that have long been established within Slovene literary history.

## VLOGA MIGRACIJ IN KULTURNE HIBRIDNOSTI V LITERARNEM SISTEMU: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA ALOJZA GRADNIKA V ARGENTINI

Ana TOROŠ

Univerza v Novi Gorici, Vipavska 13, 5000 Nova Gorica, Slovenija  
e-mail: ana.toros@ung.si

### POVZETEK

*Pričujoči prispevek rekonstruira literarne in družinske vezi med potomci furlanske družine Godeas, iz katere je izšel eden izmed najbolj znanih pesnikov v slovenski literarni zgodovini, Alojz Gradnik. Pri tem prispevek metodološko izhaja iz interpretacije pred kratkim razkrite zasebne korespondence med potomci družine Godeas, ki je potekala v prvi polovici 20. stoletja na relaciji Trst (Italija), Zagreb (Jugoslavija), Rosario (Argentina), literarizirane kronike družine Godeas, ter nekaterih drugih arhivskih virov. Na tej osnovi prispevek v drugem delu postavi nekaj iztočnic za raziskavo recepcije Gradnika v Argentini, izhajajoč iz sistemskih obravnav literature. Pri tem ugotavlja, da so imeli potomci migrantov slovenske in furlanske skupnosti v Argentini vlogo posrednikov pri recepciji Gradnika v Argentini in da je Gradniku kulturna hibridnost omogočala vstop na argentinsko literarno prizorišče preko dveh kulturnih sredin: slovenske in argentinske.*

**Ključne besede:** Alojz Gradnik, Eduardo A. Dughera, Maria Samer, Furlani, literarno prevajanje, izseljenska književnost



## SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

**NUK, Ms 1398** – Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica (NUK), Ms 1398 – Zapuščina Alojza Gradnika.

**Gradnik, A. (private legacy):** Private legacy of Alojz Gradnik, kept by Marko Gradnik.

**Alberton, L. (2003):** Isontini e friulani in Argentina: storie comuni di persone comuni. In: Cecotti, F. et al. (ed): *Un'altra terra un'altra vita: l'emigrazione isontina in Sud America tra storia e memoria, 1878–1970*. Centro isontino di ricerca e documentazione storica e sociale Leopoldo Gasparini; Comune di Gradisca d'Isonzo, Assessorato alla cultura; Fondazione Cassa di risparmio di Gorizia, 59–86.

**Assmann, J. (1992):** Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen. München, Beck.

**Bockelman, B. (2011):** Between the Gaucho and the Tango: Popular Songs and the Shifting Landscape of Modern Argentine Identity, 1895–1915. *Am Hist Rev* 116/3, 577–601.

**Brecelj, A. (1992):** Slovenski etnični tisk v Argentini do druge svetovne. Dve domovini: razprave o izseljenstvu = Two Homelands: migration studies, 167–183.

**Cancian, S. (2010):** Families, Lovers, and their Letters. Italian Postwar Migration to Canada, University of Manitoba Press.

**Cecotti, F. (2003):** L'emigrazione dal Litorale austriaco verso Argentina e Brasile. 1878–1903. In: Cecotti, F. et al. (ed): *Un'altra terra un'altra vita: l'emigrazione isontina in Sud America tra storia e memoria, 1878–1970*. Centro isontino di ricerca e documentazione storica e sociale Leopoldo Gasparini; Comune di Gradisca d'Isonzo, Assessorato alla cultura; Fondazione Cassa di risparmio di Gorizia, 15–58.

**Micelli, F. (1997):** Stagioni, luoghi e parole: le lettere di un emigrante temporaneo (1905–1915). In: D'Agostin, A. et al.: *Ti ho spedito lire cento. Le stagioni di Luigi Piccoli, emigrante friulano. Lettere familiari (1905–1915)*. Comune di Codroipo: Centro Studi Storici Menocchio di Montebelluna Valcellina. 9–57.

**Dovič, M. (2004):** Sistemske in empirične obravnave literature. Ljubljana, ZRC SAZU.

**Dovič, M. (2013):** Kulturni nacionalizem, literatura in Enciklopedija romantičnega nacionalizma v Evropi. In: Krakar Vogel, B. (ed.): *Slavistika v regijah*. Ljubljana, Zveza društev Slavistično društvo Slovenije, 38–44.

**Gerber, D. (2006):** Epistolary Masquerades: Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters. In: Gerber, D., Elliott, B. & S. Sinke (eds.): *Letters across Borders*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 141–157.

**Goldberg, A. (2006):** Reading and Writing across the Borders of Dictatorship: Self-Censorship and Emigrant Experience in Nazi and Stalinist Europe. In: Gerber, D., Elliott, B. & S. Sinke (eds.): *Letters across Borders*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 158–174.

**Gradnik, A. (2008):** Zbrano delo Alojza Gradnika V (eds. Hladnik, M. and Pretnar, T.). Maribor, Litera.

**Milharčič Hladnik, M. (2009):** Krila migracij: po meri življenjskih zgodb. Ljubljana, Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU.

**Jurić-Pahor, M. (2012):** Transculturation and cultural hybridity: two key notions of postcolonial studies as a challenge for the study of national and ethnic identities. *Razprave in gradivo: revija za narodnostna vprašanja*, 69, 36–65.

**Kacin Wohinz, M. & J. Pirjevec (2000):** Zgodovina Slovencev v Italiji 1866–2000. Ljubljana, Nova revija.

**Kalc, A. (1995):** Nekateri vidiki primorskega izseljevanja v Južno Ameriko do prve svetovne vojne. In: Jurak, M. et al. (eds.): *Kulturno ustvarjanje Slovencev v Južni Ameriki*. Ljubljana, Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, Slovenska izseljenska matica, 33–55.

**Kalc, A. (2016):** Antifascisti sloveni della Venezia Giulia in Argentina tra le due guerre. *Storia contemporanea in Friuli*, 45, 46, 31–55.

**Kersevan, A. (2003):** Kratek zgodovinski opis furlanske književnosti. In: Costantini, E. (ed.): *Dobrodošli v Furlaniji*. Videm, Società filologica friulana, 215–254.

**Mislej, I. (1993):** Duhovno življenje v slovenski skupnosti v Južni Ameriki. In: Švent, R.: *Bibliografsko kazalo Duhovnega življenja*. Ljubljana, Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, 4–13.

**Pertot, M. (2011):** Lepa Vida ob Srebrni reki: kulturno in gledališko delo primorskih in drugih zgodnjih priseljencev v Argentini. Trst, Mladika.

**Pertot, S. (2007):** V imenu očeta: Medgeneracijski prenos slovenskega jezika in identitete po moški liniji. In: Košuta, M. (ed.): *Živeti mejo*. Trst, Slavistično društvo, 255–266.

**Švent, R. (1993):** Bibliografsko kazalo Duhovnega življenja. Ljubljana, Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete.

**Toroš, A. (2011):** Alojz Gradnik in Heinrich Mann: literarne refleksije medkulturne razpetosti. *Slavistična revija*, 59, 1, 83–91.

**Toroš, A. (2013):** O zemlja sladka: kamen, zrno, sok: Alojz Gradnik ter romanski in germanski svet. Ljubljana, Slovenska matica

**Toroš, A. (2014):** Alojz Gradnik, a poet and translator at the linguistic, cultural and ideological crossroads. *Interlitteraria*, 19, 2, 388–399.

**Urbani, U. (1935):** Alojz Gradnik, un poeta dall'anima italo-slava. In: Urbani, U. (ed.): *Scrittori jugoslavi*. Zara, Libreria internazionale E. de Schönfeld, 93–98.

**Žitnik Serafin, J. (2014):** Vloga izseljenske/priseljenske književnosti in literarne vede pri raziskovanju migracij. Dve domovini: razprave o izseljenstvu = Two Homelands : migration studies, 31–42.

**Žitnik Serafin, et al. (1997):** Slovenski izseljenski pisci v tridesetih letih. In: Vodopivec, P. et al. (ed.): *Slovenska trideseta leta*. Ljubljana, SM, 181–193.