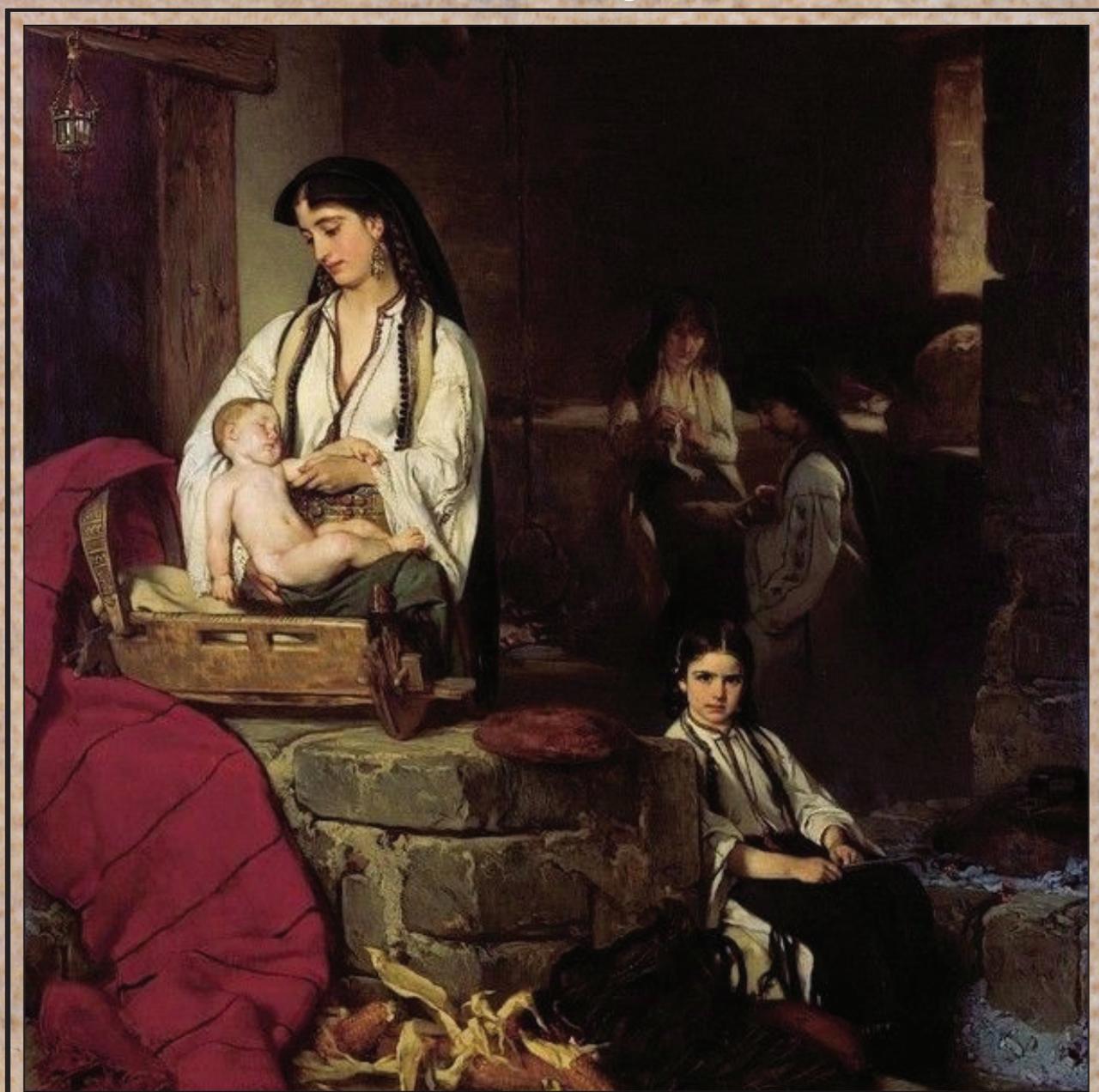


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IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES ON THE RECEPTION OF KARL MAY IN SLOVENIA

Janko TRUPEJ

Laška vas 21, SI-3273 Jurklošter, Slovenia
e-mail: janko.trupej@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the extent to which ideological factors affected Karl May's reception among Slovenians. The analysis encompassed writings about May in Slovenian serial publications from the beginning of the 20th century until the present. The results showed that May's reception during a particular historical period was influenced by both the ideological orientation of the serial publication in which the writer was discussed, which is especially characteristic of the Habsburg era, and the contemporary socio-political situation in the country of which the Slovenian territory formed part at a particular time, which is most true for the socialist era.

Keywords: Karl May, reception, ideology, German literature, popular fiction

INFLUENZE IDEOLOGICHE SULLA RICEZIONE DI KARL MAY IN SLOVENIA

SINTESI

Nell'articolo si discute la misura in cui i fattori ideologici hanno influenzato la ricezione slovena di Karl May. L'analisi si basa su scritti su May pubblicati nei periodici sloveni dall'inizio del novecento fino ad oggi. I risultati hanno mostrato che la ricezione di May in un particolare periodo storico è stata condizionata sia da influenze legate all'orientamento ideologico del periodico in cui si è discusso dello scrittore, il che è particolarmente caratteristico del periodo asburgico, sia da quelle legate alla contemporanea situazione socio-politica dello Stato di cui il territorio sloveno faceva parte in un determinato periodo, e si sono manifestate specialmente nell'era socialista.

Parole chiave: Karl May, ricezione, ideologia, letteratura tedesca, narrativa di genere

INTRODUCTION

Karl May (1842–1912) is the most commercially successful German writer of all time, with estimated sales of more than 200 million copies worldwide (Kimmelman, 2007; Connolly, 2012; Fleischhauer, 2012). While the phrase *nemo propheta in patria* may hold true for many literary figures, May is not among them: although virtually unknown in the Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere (Ferens, 2008, 90; Reagin, 2016, 554; cf. Berman, 2002, 283–84), he has remained popular in Germany throughout the various social, political and economic changes the country has experienced (Berman, 2002, 301). He has also achieved prominence in many other European countries; for instance, Heribert Frhr. v. Feilitzsch even claimed that »Karl May's travel narrations of the 1880s are main sources about the American Southwest for German speaking Europeans« (Feilitzsch, 1993, 173). Jan Makarovič made a similar statement about May perhaps being Europeans' main source of information about the Balkans (qtd. in Šabec, 2004, 54; see also Kappus, 1935; Kurent, 1982, 353), while Nina Berman noted that because May was so widely read, he had a profound influence on shaping people's views of the nations he wrote about (Berman, 1998, 53, 67; see also Ferens, 2008, 108). Kate Connolly gave the following explanation for his enduring popularity across Europe:

At the time of the Kaiser, May provided Germans with a fantasy world to inhabit when ordinary people didn't travel. Later, when communism gripped large parts of Europe, his novels gave a sense of the world that was out of bounds to his captive audience, who hung on his words in a similar fashion to how downtrodden readers of another era must have lapped up their Dickens (Connolly, 2012; cf. Morton, 1987; Berman, 2002, 287–288; Fleischhauer, 2012).

Miha Mazzini even went as far as to state that, considering May's popularity in Central Europe, the region could be referred to as 'Karl May's Europe' (cf. Morton, 1987).¹ This includes the Slovenian nation, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during

the time that May was writing, and since German was the *lingua franca* in the country, Slovenians came in contact with May's works quite early (Hladnik, 1993; Steinmetz, 1994, 313, 320–328).² He remained popular among Slovenian readers until almost the end of the 20th century, and while in recent decades May has not been nearly as widely read in Slovenia as he once was, he is far from forgotten (Pokorn, 2012, 83).³

By means of a comprehensive textual analysis, this article will address how May's reception changed in Slovenia⁴ through successive historical periods; as representatives of reception aesthetics and reader-response theory assert, readers' changing perception of literary works over time deserves just as much attention as interpretation of the texts themselves (Pezdirč Bartol, 2000, 195). Research has shown that ideological interventions were made in Slovenian translations of May's works: occasionally this occurred in pre-World War II translations, but it is more characteristic of the translations published during the socialist era, when the important role of both the Christian religion and German nationality in May's stories was toned down (Pokorn, 2012, 84–92), along with parts of the texts that could be perceived as racist (Trupej, 2017). These and other potential interventions may have influenced the interpretive possibilities of particular works, and thus their reception.

The research was conducted with the help of the Digital Library of Slovenia. The analysed corpus encompassed around 2000 individual issues of serial publications in which Karl May is mentioned. The focus of the discussion will be on articles expressing explicit value judgements about May's persona and/or his works, since this approach will most clearly show how ideology influenced reception.

KARL MAY'S RECEPTION IN THE SOURCE CULTURE

Karl May was born into poverty and in his youth entered upon a life of petty crime, because of which he had spent around 8 years behind bars by his early thirties. After he was released, May began to publish the serialized stories that would soon make him famous. Proceeds from the sales of the book versions of these stories enabled him to acquire many artefacts supposedly

1 Delo, 24. 3. 1998: Slovenski knjižni zid Karla Maya, 21.

2 Among May's early readership were some Slovenians who would go on to become prominent representatives of the intelligentsia, including the nation's most canonized prose writer, Ivan Cankar (1876–1918) (Löffler & Slodnjak, 1976, 471), and the well-known Slovenian-American author, Louis Adamič (1898–1951) (Kurent, 1982, 353). May himself had some ties to the Slovenian nation: he and his wife spent time at the spa in Dobrna in 1907 (Šepetavc, 1988, 185) and were pen-friends with a Slovenian family—despite never having met them in person, May even agreed to be the godfather to one of their daughters (Lajovic, 1964; 1965).

3 In the first half of the 1980s, re-translations of some of May's novels were printed in more than 10,000 copies, which was an imposing number back then, and even more so nowadays, when printings of works of fiction rarely exceed a thousand copies. The most recent book publications of May's works appeared in the mid-1990s: new editions of some pre-World War II translations were published (see the Appendix for the bibliography of all the Slovenian translations of May's novels). To put May's popularity in the 21st century into perspective: in 2007, the ratio between the number of individual copies of May's works and individual copies of J. K. Rowling's or Dan Brown's works borrowed from Slovenian libraries was approximately 1 to 4 (see Trupej, 2017, 124).

4 For the purpose of this article, 'Slovenia' denotes the Slovenian ethnic territory, i.e. the area that now constitutes the Republic of Slovenia, as well as border regions with a Slovenian minority.

substantiating his claim to having visited the lands he wrote about and having performed the deeds he related as the first-person narrator of his stories—a German *deus ex machina* going by the name Old Shatterhand in the novels set in the Old West, and Kara Ben Nemsi in those set in the ‘Orient’. In the late 1890s, May’s fabrications of the accounts of his travels, his false claim of having been awarded an honorary doctorate and his criminal past began to be exposed, which led to a series of libel suits and countersuits; however, all the controversy did not substantially affect his popularity (Fleischhauer, 2012; see also Morton, 1987; Kimmelman, 2007; Reagin, 2016, 557).⁵ In 1923, Aloys Fischer speculated that May’s enduring appeal stemmed from the substantial differences between the civilized, practically organized world, and the world of the ‘Indians’, in which the characters are still allowed to act in accordance with their primal instincts (qtd. in Kordigel, 1990, 15).⁶

May’s *opus* became somewhat problematic in Nazi Germany, since some of his most beloved characters were non-Aryans, and his pacifist views were not in accordance with Nazi militarism (Heermann, 1995, 143–145; Reagin, 2016, 562). During the time that the Nazi Party was in power, some of May’s more pacifist works were thus out of print (Reagin, 2016, 562–563; cf. Lutz, 2002, 178); however, certain of his characters and plots were even employed to endorse Nazi values (Lutz, 2002, 178; see also Feest, 2002, 26; Fleischhauer, 2012; Reagin, 2016, 565). As Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers puts it, »Karl May’s stereotypes anticipated a rhetoric of nature and Heimat, racial purity, anti-Semitism and heroic Übermenschentum« (Schwandner-Sievers, 2008, 57; emphasis in the original).

In the divided post-War Germany, there were different attitudes towards May. By the 1960s, he was no longer politically problematic in West Germany (Reagin, 2016, 570),⁷ while in East Germany—although not officially banned—May was considered *persona non grata* by the government: his works were not published, were removed from libraries and confiscated by customs officers and schoolteachers, etc. (Heermann, 1995, 147).⁸ Among the reasons for

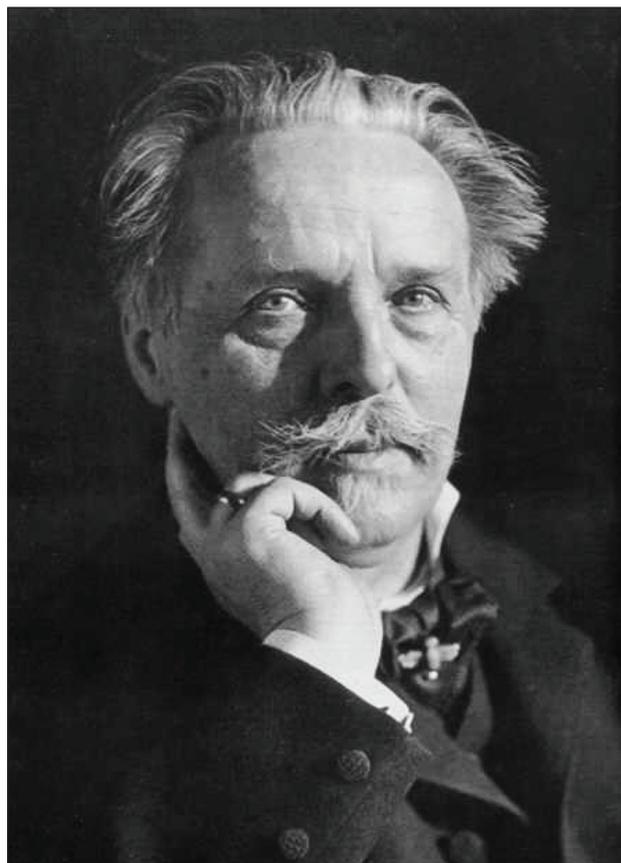


Image 1: Karl May in 1907 (Wikimedia Commons).

May’s unacceptability to the socialist regime were that he was known to have been Hitler’s favourite author and a champion of Christianity (Kimmelman, 2007), as well as that some of his works were perceived as racist and as not affirming the values of the working classes (Heermann, 1995, 166). Furthermore, many of May’s novels were set in the USA—the ideological antagonist of the Eastern Bloc; these works were thus *de facto* perceived as belonging to an ‘imperialist’ American genre (Reagin, 2016, 565).⁹

5 Even in Slovenian serial publications there were reports about May’s contemporary status in German-speaking countries. For instance, *Slovenski učitelj* reports how, at a meeting of Catholic educators in Vienna, one of the speakers stated that May’s books were not suitable to be read by young people, since literature for youth should be »Catholic, morally pure, patriotic and artistically-aesthetic« (N.N., 1905, 48; see also Glonar, 1910, 319–320). Despite attempts to limit May’s popularity, his readers included figures as influential as Kaiser Wilhelm II and Karl Liebknecht, as well as representatives of the intellectual *crème de la crème*, for instance Albert Schweitzer, Hermann Hesse, Albert Einstein, Franz Kafka, Ernst Bloch and Martin Walser (Morton, 1987; Kimmelman, 2007; Fleischhauer, 2012).

6 The German nation has traditionally shown a strong affinity for Native Americans, as is evidenced by the fact that during the time May wrote most of his works, approximately one thousand other titles of ‘Indian fiction’ were published; these had a substantial impact on the German perception of Native Americans (Feest, 2002, 37–38; cf. Reagin, 2016, 554–555, 558). Shortly after May’s death, a culture of ‘Indian’ hobbyists re-enacting his stories began to develop, and this practice remains strong today (Reagin, 2016; cf. Feest, 2002, 31–32).

7 May’s popularity surged again after his works entered the public domain 50 years after his death, and many films based on May’s plots began to be produced. Most enjoyed commercial success and are still shown on TV today, although they are not considered to be of major artistic value (Schmiedt, 2006).

8 No new editions of May’s works were published in the German Democratic Republic until the 1980s (Reagin, 2016, 565–566; see also Morton, 1987; Kimmelman, 2007; Fleischhauer, 2012).

9 Hans Christoph Buch used the term ‘philistine imperialism’ to describe May’s writing (Buch, 1965, 1296).

Some of May's most popular novels are indeed set in the United States during and after the Civil War, but most of the protagonists are Germans or at least have German ancestry (Kriegleder, 2011, 16).¹⁰ Klaus Zelewitz states that, for May's works, it is partly true that Native Americans direct the plot (Zelewicz, 1992, 106); however, it is implied that Winnetou, the most famous Native American character in May's *œuvre*, owes his considerable nobility to his Christian upbringing by a German mentor (Berman, 2002, 290; see also Feest, 2002, 33; Lutz, 2002, 176). Similarly, Dominika Ferens observes that in *Winnetou*, the title character's adoption of Christianity and German values are foregrounded (Ferens, 2008, 92; cf. Feilitzsch, 1993, 173).

Religion and ethnicity also play important roles in May's novels set in Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans. Ferens notes that anti-colonialist messages can be found in May's works (Ferens, 2008, 91, 96; cf. Berman, 2002, 300); however, she further observes that although May propagated good relations between Caucasians and other ethnicities, he presented the former as clearly superior (Ferens, 2008, 91, 98). Berman states that after May undertook a journey to the 'Orient' in 1899, he began to write works of a pacifist and anti-colonial nature (Berman, 1998, 66–67; see also Morton, 1987); however, she also claims that in the series of novels collectively referred to as the *Orientzyklus* (written before May ever set foot in the 'Orient'), the development of the German protagonist »teaches the reader how to think and act like a colonizer, a Eurocentrist, and a racist« (Berman, 1998, 56; cf. Heermann, 1995, 146). Kara Ben Nemsí's Bedouin sidekick Hadschi Halef Omar is described as physically unimposing and somewhat ignorant; the dynamic between the two characters can be seen as a representation of the relationship between Europe and the Middle East (Berman, 1998, 59). Berman further asserts that May's literary *alter ego* often displays a patronizing attitude towards other 'Oriental' interlocutors (Berman, 1998, 60–62; cf. Ferens, 2008, 91) and »is a self-appointed master and judge, who derives his legitimacy from belonging to Western culture« (Berman, 1998, 62). Such attitudes may be perceived as problematic by many readers in the post-colonial era.

KARL MAY'S SLOVENIAN RECEPTION

Until the end of World War I

Karl May was sporadically mentioned in Slovenian serial publications in the late 19th century, but it is only towards the end of his life—when his persona was also frequently scrutinized in his home country—that value judgements about his works and/or him as a public figure begin to be expressed. For instance, a report in the Catholic literary magazine *Dom in svet* about a court case May brought against a publishing house states that one should not believe the famous writer actually performed the unsurpassably heroic deeds he describes, and that he is not too particular as far as his rich imagination is concerned, but that his writing is always morally decent.¹¹ Similarly, in an article published in the conservative newspaper *Straža* about the events that led to May divorcing his first wife, his works are described as interesting, but perhaps too fantastical; the anonymous author of the article claims that in ill-treating his ex-wife, May showed his true colours.¹²

Several noteworthy articles about May were published in 1910. An article appearing in both *Edinost* and *Učiteljski tovariš* reports that May—an ardent supporter of the Church and a moralist—has been exposed as a common ne'er-do-well, who in his youth spent years in prison for fraud and theft. Furthermore, the article states that in a libel case, it was proven that May had never travelled outside Germany and that his travelogues were thus fake and plagiarized.¹³ In a report about May allegedly being ill-informed about the customs of Native Americans, the daily *Narodni dnevnik* describes him as »a disreputable writer of Catholic-themed stories and unnatural novels«. ¹⁴ The liberal daily *Jutro* reproaches the conservative daily *Slovenec* with hypocrisy for having previously reported on May's criminal past and his works being forbidden in school libraries, but nevertheless recommending this writer of 'trashy' literature to their readers after his latest book was made available for purchase in a local Catholic bookshop.¹⁵ *Slovenski narod*, another influential liberal daily, reported on the details of May's criminal past;¹⁶ a few days later, *Slovenec* published an article on the libel suit brought by the writer against those claiming to have knowledge of his

10 May's works about the Old West were so influential that even in the 1960s, employees of the American State Department were reportedly encouraged to read May in order to better understand the German perception of the USA (Cracraft; qtd. in Ferens, 2008, 92; see also Feest, 2002, 25–26).

11 *Dom in svet*, 1907, 20, 1: Karl May, 527–528.

12 *Straža*, 4. 10. 1909: Karl May, 3.

13 *Edinost*, 15. 4. 1910: Karel [sic] May – razkrinkan kakor slepar, tat in ropar, 2; *Učiteljski tovariš*, 29. 4. 1910: Karel [sic] May – razkrinkan kakor slepar, tat in ropar, 6.

14 *Narodni dnevnik*, 12. 7. 1910: Indijanci proti Mayu, 4. All quotations not originally in English were translated by the author of the article.

15 *Jutro*, 21. 7. 1910: Kupčija je kupčija, 2.

16 *Slovenski narod*, 9. 8. 1910: Razkrinkan mladinski pisatelj Karel [sic] May, 1.

wrongdoings,¹⁷ while the following month, *Slovenski narod* reported on a countersuit against May and one of the witnesses (accused of perjury) in the previous libel case. In the latter article, May is referred to as a »propagator of Catholic ideas«.¹⁸

Much of this negative information about May's life is included in an article published in *Jutro*, which adds that, for various reasons, May's works were a bad influence on youth but were nevertheless recommended by Catholic educators, as well as that May falsely claimed to have a Ph.D.¹⁹ *Narodni dnevnik* reported that May had been in court for perjury and that his falsified doctoral diploma had been confiscated.²⁰ In the literary magazine *Ljubljanski zvon*, Joža Glonar published a lengthy and extremely damning article on May. Glonar begins by relating the writer's criminal activities, which May allegedly pursued until he wrote a few stories for a Catholic serial publication and realized that by writing Catholic-themed moral stories, he could make more money than by committing petty crimes—despite not having had a Catholic christening himself. The author of the article continues by stating that May wrote first person accounts of lands he never visited, declared that he translated from languages he barely knew by name and falsely claimed to have been awarded an honorary doctorate. Glonar concludes by asserting that such a person should not have as great an influence on the youth as is unfortunately the case, and therefore discourages Slovenian translation of May's works (Glonar, 1910, 319–320).

After May's death, the daily *Dan* published a rather negative obituary, which includes a detailed description of May's life of crime. The article further states that, after May was released from prison, he wrote first person accounts of countries he never visited and heroic feats he never accomplished, as well as that he falsely claimed to have a doctoral degree; nevertheless, his works were extremely successful and were recommended for young people, especially by Catholic serial publications. Despite claiming that reading May could be harmful to young people because it could make them lose their taste for *belles-lettres* and could potentially inspire them to imitate what they read, the anonymous author of the obituary concludes that May's works do have some positive qualities and will therefore probably continue to be read.²¹ May's troubled past is illuminated once again in *Slovenski*

narod, which reports that in his posthumously published memoirs, May wrote about his felonies, but that his widow edited many parts referring to his court cases.²²

Until the end of World War II

In the years immediately following the end of the Great War and the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, May was not as present in Slovenian serial publications as had been the case in the years preceding his death. A rare exception is an article in the intellectual magazine *Čas*, in which Janez Filipič mentions May among literature written for the sole purpose of making money and thus not suitable to be read by young people (Filipič, 1919, 236). In the late 1920s, May again begins to be discussed more frequently; for instance, an anonymous author in the magazine *Mentor* offers the following assessment of his *œuvre*:

*Few writers are as prolific as May was. [...] His writing is not artistic, but his stories are pleasant to read. His language flows smoothly and his style is refined. Let him be read by young people, as he has been up to now—he will stir up their imagination, and perhaps he will even offer them something more.*²³

Slovenski narod reports on a delegation of Native Americans visiting May's grave to pay their respects; their chief reportedly stated that May had done considerable good for Native Americans and devoted his whole life to them.²⁴ *Slovenec* also states that May wrote many positive things about the 'Indians' and reports that a Native American chief and his wife recently visited May's grave.²⁵ When announcing a translation of one of May's works, the leftist magazine *Svoboda* claims that other novels would have been more deserving of translation. The article further states that May never visited the lands nor accomplished the deeds he claimed, but nevertheless remains popular with young readers, since there seems to be something appealing about his imagination.²⁶

In parallel with the publication of many translations of May's works in the 1930s, there is a surge of articles about him. In *Jutro*, Anton Debeljak's translation of *Old Surehand* is described as better

17 *Slovenec*, 11. 8. 1910: Karl May, 4.

18 *Slovenski narod*, 1. 9. 1910: Zopet Karel [sic] May, 4.

19 *Jutro*, 24. 10. 1910: Karl May in Lebins [sic], 2.

20 *Narodni dnevnik*, 5. 12. 1910: „Doktorska diploma« Karla Maya, 4.

21 *Dan*, 3. 4. 1912: Karl May, 2.

22 *Slovenski narod*, 22. 7. 1912: Spomini pokojnega Karla Maya, 5.

23 *Mentor*, 1927, 14, 7–8: Karl May, 178–179.

24 *Slovenski narod*, 21. 1. 1928: Indijanci na grobu Karla Maya, 6.

25 *Slovenec*, 21. 6. 1929: Indijanci na grobu Karla Maya, 6.

26 *Svoboda*, 1929, 1, 4–5: Karl May: Križem po Jutrovem, 130.

than the original because it omits the long-winded, preachy passages.²⁷ This sentiment is echoed in an anonymous review published in *Slovenski narod*, *Jugoslovan*, *Mariborski večernik »Jutra«* and *Nova doba*; the translator of this novel, which is described as colourful and exciting, is praised for having shortened the philosophical deliberations.²⁸ When giving an account of May's life in the weekly publication *Tedenske slike*, an anonymous author mentions the felonies May committed in his youth, but expresses no value judgement about his moral character.²⁹ In the Catholic magazine *Društvenik*, May's stories are described as lacking in artistic value, but the anonymous author of the article asserts that they are exciting, interesting and even educational, because through them, readers get to know foreign nations.³⁰ In the literary and cultural magazine *Odmevi*, popular writer Josip Vandot states that May's stories do have some ethical value (Vandot, 1933, 68). *Slovenski narod* reports on a polemic about the suitability of May as reading for young people, which appeared in the German newspaper *Kölnische Zeitung*, and which concluded with May being branded a Marxist and a pacifist; May's lack of objection to inter-racial marriage was reportedly also singled out as problematic.³¹ In the magazine *Življenje in svet*, Anton Kappus relates how he once heard his German teacher state that May was a shame to the German nation and a bad influence on young people, because his works made them want to seek out adventures instead of studying; the author of the article concurs with this opinion (Kappus, 1935, 159). The right-wing daily *Slovenski dom* refers to May's criminal past, which came to light towards the end of his life and allegedly affected him so much that shortly afterwards he died.³² In *Jutro*, Boris Rihteršič responds to a previously published article in *Slovenec* by Tine Debeljak, whom he reproaches for championing Catholic writers, including May.³³ An anonymous article published in the Catholic weekly *Mi mladi borci* proclaims May as one of the best popular writers, an educator and an expert in the Christian conception of the world; examples from May's works are provided to substantiate the latter claim. The article also quotes a passage in which May expresses a negative opinion about Islam.³⁴

Only a few notable articles on May were published during the time that the Slovenian territory was occupied by the Axis powers from 1941 to 1945. To commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth, *Jutro* published a lengthy article on May, who is described as a popular and widely-read writer, despite his works' lack of artistic or moral value. The anonymous author of the article speculates that May's writing, which is full of naive fantasy and describes lands and nations the author never encountered, was well-suited for an era with no world-shattering events—it allowed the petit bourgeoisie to read about exciting events instead of actually experiencing them. The author of the article predicts that in the present and future young people might not be as drawn to May's works because they would be living in more dramatic times.³⁵ An anonymous author in *Slovenec* published a revisionist article, claiming that although many people think of May as having composed his stories sitting at his desk, recently uncovered evidence showed that in his youth he had visited the lands he wrote about. The article asserts that May spoke English fluently, that since his youth he had owned the famous guns featured so prominently in his novels, and that when he visited the United States later in life with his wife, he encountered many people he knew from his previous travels there. The article further claims that May spoke Arabic excellently, that his servant Halef from the novels set in the 'Orient' was a real person, and that May's detailed knowledge of the lands he wrote about and all the mementos he brought back from his travels are further proof that his travelogues were not merely a product of his imagination.³⁶ Despite the Slovenian territory being occupied by Germany at the time, not all mentions of May are as positive as the previous one—in *Dom in svet*, Ksaver Meško (1944, 41) states that he never much cared for May's writing, firstly because his stories did not seem believable, and secondly because May seemed not merely pious, but a bigot.

The Socialist period

Soon after a socialist regime was established in Slovenia, May's works were branded as problematic. For instance, *Ljudska pravica* laments the lack

27 *Jutro*, 30. 11. 1930: Tri nova knjižna darila za našo mladino, 4.

28 *Slovenski narod*, 28. 11. 1930: Karel [sic] May: Old Surehand, 3; *Jugoslovan*, 30. 11. 1930: Karel [sic] May: Old Surehand, 10; *Mariborski večernik »Jutra«*, 4. 12. 1930: Karel [sic] May: Old Surehand, 2; *Nova doba*, 5. 12. 1930, Karel [sic] May: Old Surehand, 4.

29 *Tedenske slike*, 3. 3. 1932: 90 letnica [sic] rojstva Karla Maya, 2.

30 *Društvenik*, 1933, 3, 6; Nove knjige, 47–48.

31 *Slovenski narod*, 31. 12. 1934: Karel [sic] May marxist, 10.

32 *Slovenski narod*, 18. 2. 1936: V imenu dobroteljnosti, 4.

33 *Jutro*, 13. 1. 1936: O slovenskih prevodih v lanskem letu, 2.

34 *Mi mladi borci*, 1939, 3, 41: Karl May, 164.

35 *Jutro*, 14. 2. 1942: Stoletnica Karla Maya, 5.

36 *Slovenec*, 21. 11. 1943: Karel [sic] May naj bi bil svoja potovanja doživljal le za pisalnikom?, 5.

of quality books for young people, whose preferred reading reportedly remains May and similar adventure fiction deemed tasteless and of little value.³⁷ *Slovenski poročevalec* reports that the Centralna knjižnica library in Ljubljana has removed literature that, from an educational standpoint, allegedly had a negative effect on the young—including all of May's works.³⁸ In *Novi svet*, Bogo Pregelj states that, considering the lack of suitable children's and young adult literature, it is no wonder that some libraries do not want to remove May from their shelves, since otherwise they would not have enough books to offer to their younger readers (Pregelj, 1948, 787).

A few years after the first post-War translations of May's works were published, an author with the initials 'S. Z.' in *Zasavski tednik* advocates limiting young people's reading of May, since some of his stories supposedly exert a bad influence.³⁹ In an article published in *Ljudska pravica* and later also in *Ptujski tednik*, an author with the initials 'V. Š.' claims that reading May's works has both positive and negative effects on children: they gain knowledge of foreign continents and nations, but their imagination may take an unhealthy direction, because they read about killing, foolhardiness, etc.⁴⁰ An anonymous author in *Tribuna* had the following to say about the quality of May's writing:

*One may safely say that May's works are tasteless, unnatural trash from a moral and emotional standpoint; nevertheless, every youngster—I too was among the most ardent admirers—has to read them, if he is not a bore as far as his imagination and emotions are concerned. But later, when his taste and emotions become more refined, May's works become really boring.*⁴¹

In the concluding paragraph of an article recounting May's life story, an anonymous author in *Tovariš* claims that during the last decades of the 19th century, May's stories were popular not only because of the well-rounded characters and exciting plots, but also because at that point in time the German nation demanded colonies, and May reminded them that there were vast lands out there just waiting to be conquered.⁴² In *Knjižnica*, a review of a book by Franček Bohanec about children's literature states that May's works have no artistic value, which may cause chil-

dren to lose the taste for more sophisticated literature (A. R., 1959, 93).

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of May's death, the Catholic newspaper *Novi list*, published by the Slovenian minority in the Italian city of Trieste (Trst), devoted almost a whole page to him. The article begins by claiming that prior to World War II, many primary school students considered May the greatest writer in the world. The anonymous author of the article declares that May's works have a strong ethical foundation, since they teach young people to be brave and upright and show them that noble people can be found among all ethnicities. Furthermore, his books are deemed to be educational, since they introduce readers to foreign lands, cultures and religions. Because of all the above, May's works were again being published in Slovenian and widely read in Germany and many other countries. The author of the article claims that—despite many 'serious' writers and literary historians disregarding him—some of May's best works can be considered classics of juvenile literature.⁴³

An author with the initial 'K.' in *Tednik* claims that reading May's books has a negative effect on children, because it may inspire them to play dangerous games. He or she concludes by giving the following negative assessment of the writer's body of work—quoted *in extenso*:

*May's books are exciting, adventurous, and are very much liked by our youngsters, who yearn for adventures and heroism. To such readers we recommend that while reading they think for themselves and recognize the books' shortcomings. Karl May's stories are fictitious and far from real life. They are all more or less the same: the protagonist (more often than not Karl May, i.e., a German) goes scot-free through every possible and impossible danger, because he is the most clever and cunning person, has the fastest and most intelligent horse and the best weapons, which he knows best how to wield. In short: there is an ever-present self-praising of German intelligence, cunning, heroism. Events tend to repeat themselves and too many various crimes are committed. Readers carefully reading these books and using their own reasoning will find all of these and other shortcomings.*⁴⁴

37 *Ljudska pravica*, 27. 10. 1946: V. Kaverin: Dva kapitana, 5; *Ljudska pravica*, 18. 8. 1947: Sindikalne knjižnice naj postanejo močno sredstvo za idejni in strokovni dvig delovnega ljudstva, 3.

38 *Slovenski poročevalec*, 14. 8. 1947: V ponedeljek je pričela spet poslovati preurejena Centralna knjižnica Ljubljana, 5.

39 *Zasavski tednik*, 21. 1. 1956: Knjiga uči in vzgaja, 5.

40 *Ljudska pravica*, 29. 7. 1956: Zdravo branje – koristna šola, 7; *Ptujski tednik*, 15. 7. 1960: Dobro čtivo – koristna šola, 4.

41 *Tribuna*, 1956, 4, 9: Dve mladinski knjigi, 6.

42 *Tovariš*, 1959, 15, 3: Winnetou se je rodil v zaporu, 90–91.

43 *Novi list*, 14. 6. 1962: Karl May – prijatelj mladine, 6.

44 *Tednik*, 31. 10. 1963: Ljnbitelji [sic] knjig Karla Maya, 4.

The right-wing *Novi list* gives a rather different assessment of May's work:

It is known that immediately after World War II, Karl May was being removed from libraries in Slovenia, but nowadays his books are being reprinted or translated anew. Educators have become convinced that his works represent harmless and even useful reading for young people, because they teach them to be noble-minded, as well as that it is necessary to help the weak and to be courageous. Furthermore, May's works develop young people's imagination and dissuade them from more dangerous 'amusements'.⁴⁵

In *Teorija in praksa*, prominent politician Mitja Ribičič⁴⁶ brands May's writing as »tearfully romantic and primitivistic« (Ribičič, 1965, 710). In *Delo*, Milan Šuštar claims that May's works do not merely entertain, but are educational, since they contain factual geographical and historical information; they therefore broaden young people's horizon and may be considered part of one's general education.⁴⁷ In *Primorski dnevnik*, Slavko Rupel states that while May's works may not have much artistic value, they are exciting, interesting and have a certain moral nucleus; thus, they affect young people in a more or less positive way, not merely entertain them.⁴⁸ Similarly, when announcing a series of new translations of May's works by the biggest Slovenian publishing house, Mladinska knjiga, an anonymous author in *Delo* states the following: »It cannot be denied that May's stories have a good educational core, since they glorify humanity, heroism and honesty.«⁴⁹ In *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, Dušan Željeznov notes that May has a special place in literary history; scholars barely acknowledge him, but millions read him. Željeznov states that he is so popular because his rich imagination in combination with knowledge of geographical and historical facts enabled him to write compelling stories, in which his protagonists always fight for a just cause.⁵⁰ In an article published in the same newspaper—and anonymously under a different title also in the literary magazine *Knjiga*⁵¹—Branko Man also expresses a positive opinion about May: his works supposedly help young people to develop a reading habit and enrich their imagination, while giving them a sense of what is right.⁵²

In the 1970s, only a few noteworthy articles discussing May were published; these focused on his works' alleged unsuitability for a socialist society. When discussing children's and young adult literature in *Otrok in knjiga*, Milan Divjak mentions that writer and educator Jan Baukart did not consider May's works to be suitable reading for young people, since the books are not in accordance with socialist ideology (Divjak, 1972, 16). In *Knjižnica*, Bruno Hartman reports that German researchers in Göttingen discussed the 'German bourgeois ideology' present in May's writing (Hartman, 1976, 162). In a highly ideologically charged research article published in the academic journal *Časopis za kritiko znanosti, domišljijo in novo antropologijo*, Bojan Pucelj uses several examples from May's works to criticize the writer's perceived Eurocentrism, nationalism and avarice, along with his religious views and the lack of recognition of the class struggle (Pucelj, 1976).

Opinions expressed about May in the decade before Slovenia declared independence from Yugoslavia were quite diverse and somewhat more positive. An anonymous author in the Catholic newspaper *Katoliški glas*, published by the Slovenian minority in the Italian city of Gorizia (Gorica), notes that religious elements were censored in the translations of May's works published under the socialist regime.⁵³ When discussing Gert Ueding's views of the German writer, Miran Hladnik states in *Slavistična revija* that May did not write about a self-affirming bourgeois society but about a world of freedom and adventure (Hladnik, 1981, 106). In an article with a rather different sentiment, published in *Mentor*, Jaro Dolar discusses the prominent role of religion in May's works and the censorship that these religious elements underwent in Slovenian translation (Dolar, 1981, 11–12). He further speculates that both young and adult Germans were drawn to May's works because the German first-person protagonist is initially perceived as weak but soon shows that he is superior to everyone else; Dolar even goes as far as to claim that May's works contributed to the emergence of fascism (Dolar, 1981, 13–14). Both issues were also brought up in a roundtable discussion later published in *Otrok in knjiga*. Ivan Minatti, who served as editor of some of May's works translated during the socialist period, noted that in the stories there is an abundance of sentimental Catholicism and glorification of the

45 *Novi list*, 22. 10. 1964: »Nevarni« Karl May, 6.

46 At the time that the article was published, Ribičič was a member of the Executive Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia, and shortly after he became a member of the Executive Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

47 *Delo – Knjige za vas*, 1. 6. 1967: Pomenimo se!, 3.

48 *Primorski dnevnik*, 15. 7. 1967: Karl May za današnji čas, 2.

49 *Delo*, 21. 7. 1967: Pet knjig spisov Karla Maya, 23.

50 *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, 15. 8. 1968: Dobri stari Karl May, 8.

51 *Knjiga*, 1969, 17, 9: Karl May na knjižnem trgu, 395–396.

52 *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, 19. 10. 1969: Knjige, ki jih ne bero samo otroci. Od Karla Maya do – Tolstoja, 10.

53 *Katoliški glas*, 17. 7. 1980: Ideološka ozkost in prezir do božjega, 2.

German nation; translators were therefore advised either to tone down such passages or to omit them altogether. Minatti further stated that such adaptations did not diminish the quality of May's work (Minatti, 1984, 69). Majda Stanovnik concurred and added that without such interventions, the novels could not have been published at that point in time (Stanovnik, 1984, 70). In *Dialogi*, Janko Pleterski asserts that May had a respectful and non-racist attitude towards Native Americans (Pleterski, 1985, 111), while in *Celjski zbornik*, Anton Šepetavc observes that May's writing is repetitive and that his typical characters are one-dimensional, but that nevertheless there is something positive about his works:

In the spirit of pacifism and humanism, May takes the side of the Indians and other non-Aryans who are dying out (although he is at the same time glorifying the exceptional virtues of the Germans—he was very popular in the Third Reich). The educational function of his works is thus evident: to spread friendship, courage and understanding of the small and the weak (Šepetavc, 1988, 184).

In *Otrok in knjiga*, Metka Kordigel states that by reading May and similar adventure stories, young readers become acquainted with the characteristics and structure of works of fiction; they have to remember multiple characters and follow the plot, which later helps them to move on to more demanding literary works. Therefore, she is of the opinion that there is no harm in children reading May—if this is not the only literature they read (Kordigel, 1990, 15–16).

After Slovenia's independence

In the Catholic academic journal *Bogoslovni vestnik*, Marijan Smolik claims that Slovenians have always liked May's writing because it contains many educational and Christian passages, and speculates that this is why in the 1930s Catholic priest Anton Jehart translated *Winnetou*. Smolik further notes that when Jehart's translation was adapted in the 1950s by Oskar Hudales, it was 'cleansed' of everything Christian; therefore, the foundation of the positive characters' humanity was not clear (Smolik, 1995, 383).⁵⁴

In *Otrok in knjiga*, Polonca Kovač gives a rather critical assessment of May's literary output:

The most prominent writer of adventure stories was certainly Karl May. As trivial as his stories may be, literary history cannot ignore him, because for a good hundred years young readers were ent-

husiastic about his books. [...] He was a prolific writer, all of his stories are easy to read and buzzing with excitement. They are heart-stirring and contain a lot of humour. [...] When reading May's works, kindness, joyfulness and inquisitiveness are virtues that one acquires in passing. [...] There is nothing strange about him being one of the most popular writers among those in their early teens. But when re-reading these books from an adult perspective, one is astonished. How could one have been charmed by this shallow complacency, this lofty attitude towards others, the petty bickering? (Kovač, 2001, 65–66).

In *Laški bilten*, linguist Tomo Korošec (2010, 31) claims that in the decades after World War II, reading May was not explicitly forbidden by the authorities but was discouraged because his works glorified the German nation and often invoked the will of God. When reminiscing about the literature that shaped him in his youth in another article in the same publication, Korošec stated the following about May:

[H]e uses good language and it is indisputable that his descriptions of nature are impeccable—this I can assure you as a stylist, a language teacher. Completely impeccable, and you would be hard-pressed to find a living author who describes landscape with more clarity. He has profoundly influenced me (qtd. in Košak, 2014, 7).

In the last decade, a few notable articles on May were published in *Primorski dnevnik*. In a letter to the editors, Aldo Rupel asserted that in post-World War II Slovenia, reading May's novels set in the Old West substantially affected the way people perceived Native Americans.⁵⁵ To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the writer's death, the same daily newspaper published a full-page article by May enthusiast Bruno Križman, recounting the events in May's life, as well as discussing the background of some of his novels and his reputation in Germany and other countries, including Slovenia. The author of the article notes that May was a champion of Christianity, which is evident in the novels set in the 'Orient' and perhaps most prominently in May's *magnum opus*, the *Winnetou* series, where the pagan titular character eventually converts to Christianity. Križman also mentions that religious references were censored in the first Slovenian translation published under the socialist regime. Furthermore, he notes that anti-Semitism can be found in the novel *Satan und Ischariot*, that May was one of Hitler's favourite writers because he glorified the German nation and that, owing to May's nationalism and egocentrism, the

54 Later the same year, Smolik discussed the censored passages in a series of articles published in the Catholic weekly *Družina* (issues 29 to 42).

55 *Primorski dnevnik*, 5. 6. 2012: *Winnetoujeve generacije*, 18.

socialist regime in East Germany tried to suppress his works.⁵⁶ Both *Primorski dnevnik* and *Novi glas* reported on a later lecture by Križman, in which he discussed many of the topics mentioned in the previous article; in the latter report, it is noted that in his novels, May expressed positive attitudes towards Native Americans, i.e. championed their rights.⁵⁷

In *Delo*, renowned editor and translator Aleš Berger reminisces about reading the pre-War translations of May's works in his early teenage years. He states that they helped form his sense of exciting and colourful language, and that they were educational, both because they described foreign lands and nations and because of their ethical dimensions: during a time when American westerns were trying to justify white settlers' actions by portraying Native Americans as primitive scoundrels, in May's novels the latter were portrayed as noble. Berger relates an anecdote about prominent literary theorist Dušan Pirjevec being an avid reader of May,⁵⁸ and in the last part of the article briefly discusses the ideological interventions concerning Christian elements in the translations published during the socialist era.⁵⁹ Religion is also mentioned in an article published in *Novi tednik*: Božo Mulej describes May as a writer who addressed the fate of some nations, which—from a Christian standpoint—were being oppressed.⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

During Karl May's lifetime, both conservative and liberal Slovenian serial publications sporadically published articles about him but focused on his persona and the lawsuits he faced rather than his literary output. May as a public figure was more present in liberal publications, where negative opinions about him were often expressed, and Catholic publications were at times reproached for their support of May, despite his works being perceived as having little quality and his alleged lack of personal integrity. The fact that May was German seemed not to have been an issue, although during the time the articles about May were written, the Slovenian nation was struggling for more rights in a state where German-speaking Austrians were the dominant nation.

During the inter-war period, May was still regarded as an author of little artistic value, but articles about him were considerably less hostile than in the previous period; even facts about his felonies and false claims were for the most part related *sine irā et studiō*. He was also less often used as a pawn in the ideological

struggle between right-wing and left-wing publications. A prominent exception is an article published when much of the Slovenian territory was occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II: with false claims, it attempted to sway readers' opinions about the authenticity of May's travel accounts and his personal integrity—a testament to the amount of manipulation present in the media during the occupation.

At the beginning of the socialist period, there were attempts to quell May's popularity, but after only a few years, there was a reversion to the *status quo ante*: reading May was again tolerated, although ideologically 'purified' translations began to be published with the intention to replace older ones. Although the adapted Slovenian versions of May's texts, i.e. those censoring German superiority, the importance of Christianity, and certain racist elements, seemed to have been acceptable and in certain respects even useful to socialist ideology, the quality of May's work was nevertheless quite frequently attacked in the press. While the socialist regime never fully embraced May, in Slovenian newspapers published in Italy, the attitude towards him was markedly more positive.

In the period after Slovenia declared independence, May is less present in serial publications; most of the noteworthy articles about him are marked by a certain nostalgia, and he is seldom attacked, which may be because he is no longer widely read by the young people, and thus the ideas in his works that could be perceived as problematic are less likely to be a bad influence on multiple young minds.

The analysis thus showed that the reception of May's works in Slovenia was indeed influenced by the socio-political situation during a particular period, and especially in the translations published during the socialist period, by additional ideological interventions in the texts—since elements of Christianity and German superiority were censored, these aspects of May's works were seldom singled out as problematic by Slovenian reviewers. Further analyses of the translations from that era could show whether reception was affected by censorship of other elements. For instance, while May undoubtedly had a sympathetic attitude towards Native Americans, in the original works there are passages describing them as inferior to Germans / Caucasians—if such sentiments were censored or somewhat toned down in the socialist period, they could not then have been pointed out as problematic by reviewers. Considering that Yugoslavia was part of the Non-aligned Movement alongside many of the nations that May wrote about, the same may be true with regard to the translation strategies for passages in which

56 *Primorski dnevnik*, 3. 6. 2012: Winnetou ... Kdo danes ve zanj?, 17.

57 *Primorski dnevnik*, 28. 5. 2014: Bruno Križman o Karlu Mayu in o njegovih pustolovskih romanih, 8; *Novi glas*, 12. 6. 2014: Kako vzbuhati željo po potovanju, 10.

58 Polonca Kovač also mentions that Dušan Pirjevec reportedly had a positive attitude towards young people reading May (Kovač, 2001, 66).

59 *Delo*, 24. 3. 2015: Pisec, ki je obsedal dedka in vnuka, 15.

60 *Novi tednik*, 3. 8. 2017: Knjige, ki jih morate prebrati to poletje, 10.

May describes ethnicities from the 'Orient'. This article can thus serve as an incentive for further examinations of May's Slovenian translations from a post-colonial / post-socialist perspective.

APPENDIX

Bibliography of the Slovenian translations of Karl May's novels

The works are listed in the chronological order in which the Slovenian translations were first published; all editions of a particular translation are listed. The year next to the title of the German original refers to the publication in Karl May's *Collected Works* by the publishing house Karl-May-Verlag after the author's death. For the novels that were first translated before May's death, the year of the first publication in book form is listed. Some of the novels that form a series (*Waldröschen* oder *Die Rächerjagd rund um die Erde*; *Der Orientzyklus*; *Satan und Ischariot*; *Im Lande des Mahdi*) were first published under a single title, while later individual novels were published; this is reflected in the bibliography.

Der Waldläufer (1879)

- 1) 1898: *Gozdovnik: povest iz ameriškega življenja*. Translated by Hrizogon Majar. Ljubljana, A. Turk.
1918: *Gozdovnik: povest iz ameriškega življenja*. Translated by Hrizogon Majar. Ljubljana, A. Turk.
1921: *Gozdovnik: povest iz ameriškega življenja*. Translated by Hrizogon Majar. Ljubljana, A. Turk.
- 2) 1968: *Stezosledec: zgodba z divjega zahoda po romanu Gabriela Ferryja*. Translated by Ludvik Mrzel. Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga.

Waldröschen oder Die Rächerjagd rund um die Erde (1882–1884)

- 1) 1901: *Beračeve skrivnosti ali Pregarjanje okoli sveta: velik roman, poln razkritja skrivnostij človeške družbe*. Translated by N.N. Vienna, J. Rubinstein.
- 2) **Schloss Rodriganda [Waldröschen I] (1924)**
1968: *Grad Rodriganda*. Translated by Mimi Malenšek. Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga.
Die Pyramide des Sonnengottes [Waldröschen II] (1924)
1968: *Piramida boga sonca*. Translated by Tanja Premk. Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga.
Benito Juarez [Waldröschen III] (1924)
1968: *Benito Juarez*. Translated by Rozi Kukar. Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga.
Trapper Geierschnabel [Waldröschen IV] (1925)
1968: *Lovec Jastrebji kljun*. Translated by Branimir Kozinc. Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga.
Der sterbende Kaiser [Waldröschen V] (1925)
1968: *Smrt cesarja Maksimilijana*. Translated by Ludvik Mrzel. Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga.

Die Rache des Ehri (1894)

1901: *Eri*. Translated by Janko Pretnar. Ljubljana, J. Giontini.

Der Orientzyklus (1892)

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IDEOLOŠKI VPLIVI NA RECEPCIJO KARLA MAYA V SLOVENIJI

Janko TRUPEJ

Laška vas 21, SI-3273 Jurklošter, Slovenija
e-mail: janko.trupej@gmail.com

POVZETEK

Analiza zapisov o Karlu Mayu v približno 2.000 številkah slovenskih periodičnih publikacij iz različnih obdobj je pokazala številne skupne značilnosti, pa tudi nekatere razlike pri recepciji tega priljubljenega nemškega pisatelja. O Mayu se je začelo podrobneje poročati proti koncu njegovega življenja, vendar v središču zanimanja ni bilo njegovo literarno ustvarjanje, temveč njegova osebnost in sodne bitke. O njem so občutno bolj pogosto pisale liberalne publikacije, v katerih zasledimo tudi več negativnih zapisov; med drugim katoliškim publikacijam očitajo, da Maya priporočajo svojim bralcem, četudi gre za avtorja vprašljive kakovosti in s pomanjkljivo osebno integriteto. Čeprav si je slovenski narod v obdobju, ko so bili zadevni zapisi objavljeni, prizadeval za več pravic v državi, kjer so bili hegemoni nemško govoreči Avstrijci, pa Mayevo poreklo ni bilo izpostavljeno kot problematično.

Tudi v obdobju med obema vojnoma Mayu ne pripisujejo velike umetniške vrednosti, vendar so zapisi o njem manj negativno nastrojeni kot v predhodnem obdobju; celo poročanje o njegovih mladostniških kaznivih dejanjih in lažnih trditvah večinoma ni tendenčno. May je tudi manj pogosto uporabljen kot sredstvo v ideološkem boju med desno in levo usmerjenimi publikacijami. Izjema je zapis iz časa, ko je bil med drugo svetovno vojno precejšen del slovenskega ozemlja pod nemško okupacijo, in ki priča o obsegu tedanje manipulacije v medijih: članek bralce in bralke namreč poskuša prepričati, da je May dejansko prepotoval kraje in izvršil junaška dejanja, ki jih je opisal kot prvoosebni pripovedovalec.

Na začetku socialističnega obdobja je iz nekaterih člankov v periodičnih publikacijah razvidno, da si je oblast prizadevala zmanjšati Mayevo priljubljenost med mladino, vendar je že v 50. letih 20. stoletja branje ideološko ‚prečiščenih‘ prevodov zopet postalo sprejemljivo. Čeprav je iz nekaterih zapisov razvidno, da naj bi bilo branje Mayevih del celo poučno oz. vzgojno, so napadi nanj še vedno razmeroma pogosti; med drugim so mu očitali pomanjkanje kakovosti, poveličevanje nemškega naroda in krščanstva ter splošno neskladje s socialistično ideologijo. Medtem ko socialistični režim Maya nikdar ni povsem sprejel, pa so mu bili v istem obdobju veliko bolj naklonjeni zapisi v časopisih zamejskih Slovencev v Italiji.

V obdobju po slovenski osamosvojitvi je May v periodičnih publikacijah prisoten precej manj kot v preteklosti; pri večini omembe vrednih člankov gre za nostalgичne zapise, napadi nanj pa so redki. To je verjetno posledica dejstva, da ni več tako priljubljen, zato obstaja tudi manjša verjetnost, da bi sporne ideje v njegovih delih lahko imele občutno negativen vpliv na mladino.

Ključne besede: Karl May, recepcija, ideologija, nemška književnost, trivialna književnost

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