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THE HEADY TIMES  
OF BOUNDLESS LITERATURE

1.

The collection of prose pieces in this book is representative of a specific poetic phenomenon which began in the early 1970s with a collection of short stories by Marko Švabič, entitled *Sonce sonce sonce* (Sun sun sun) (ZO 1972). The stories had been previously published by the student newspaper *Tribuna* and in the review *Problemi*. Švabič's book is, however, a forerunner of a literary phenomenon which came into full swing in the fifteen years that followed, influencing significantly the course of the contemporary Slovene prose. The phenomenon was initiated and developed by a generation of young authors, born in the first ten years after the civil war: Marko Švabič (1949), Uroš Kalčič (1951), Emil Filipčič (1951), Boris Jukič (1947), Tone Perčič (1947) and Milan Kleč (1954). The »new prose,« as the works by this generation of authors were dubbed by the critics, was characterized by an exceptional formal, stylistic and linguistic per-

fection. It was a blend of various genres, including the elements of the fantastic, lacking all ideology, but sometimes parodying ideology. This particular brand of poet-ics marked the very first works of these authors. The works were thus great literary achievements right from the beginning. 1977 is the publication year of *Čas* (Time) by Branko Gradišnik and *Tvoji obrazi* (Your faces) by Vladimir Kovačič. In 1979 were published *Mehika* (Mexico) by Uroš Kalčič and *Grein vaun* by Emil Filipčič; *Ukleta graščina* (Bewitched mansion) by Boris Jukič came out in 1980, *Pot v nestalnost* (The way to instability) by Tone Perčič was published in 1981 and in 1985 Milan Kleč published *Briljantina* (Grease). Some prose had been previously published in reviews, such as Milan Kleč's story »Baba« (Hag) from *Briljantina*, which was published already in 1973 in the literary supplement of *Mladina* called »Nomenklatura.« Thus the poetic similarities are

complemented by the contemporaneity of this literary event. Two of the above writers were also the co-authors of a book called *Kerubini* (Cherubim) (ŠKUC 1979). This fantastic futuristic novel was written by Filipčič and Gradišnik. Concurrently, as well as later, there were also other young Slovene literary aspirants who also wrote this kind of prose. Thus a short story by some other authors could also be included in this anthology. Our selection is thus »historical,« comprising those authors who marked the new poetic endeavors with integrity, innovation and quality. Specific features of the »new Slovene prose« can, of course, be found in the works of other Slovene writers. After all, almost all literary innovations throughout the

## 2.

This is a time that marks the end of the students' movement and the disintegration of the independent student organization called »Zveza študentov,« which was a part of the Socialist Youth Alliance. The world-wide student movement, which also cropped up in Slovenia, opened up entirely new spiritual vistas of unbound anarchy, and introduced various, previously forbidden ideologies: permanently revolutionary Trotskyism, which had turned into a kind of communist hygiene; Maoism for the more radical red priests; the European new left for

history of literature have their antecedents in an earlier time and concepts. Then comes a time when these concepts fuse into a poetic focus which is no longer merely coincidental, but provides an adequate answer to the preceding literary tradition. This is what happened in our case. That is why the term »new Slovene prose« is already history and may be emblematic, since what is »new« in terms of literary evolution may already denote a phenomenon with a time lag of several centuries. Today, each Slovene writer is pursuing a path of his own, which is entirely different from what constituted literary initiation fifteen years ago. What was a common denominator then and is now something different?

the practical exercises of theoreticians; Che Guevara; the mimesis of Zen-Buddhism, hippies, liberated in the Spock vein, the »flower power« movement attempting a sexual re-education; the yuppie movement, and the theory of spontaneous mass movements. The latter are no longer led by an avant-garde, but go hand in hand with the issues of ecology, nature as a fetish, and are interspersed with the institutionalized struggles of student organizations for true socialism, which had been cold shouldered by the years of dictatorship of red feudalism and

had been touted as having a human face. The young also attended the midnight mass at Christmas in such numbers as not even the elderly could remember, and perused the Bible along with the works of the young Marx. This was a time of a luxurious growth of the young Slovene consciousness and a time of significant material comfort, thanks to foreign loans which turned life into a carnival. The students could thus purchase whisky in Ljubljana at a much more affordable price than in Trieste, and French Gitanes at the same price as the smelly domestic cigarettes. And there was also Coca Cola. We availed ourselves of all the good things. This was a time of the great celebration of self-confidence. Surely, in keeping with the tradition of a country whose revolution had become a fetish, to have had a revolution (nonviolent) of our own was a source of great happiness. It was a time of such student revolution. And this was the time when the letter from our great president arrived, urging the population to restore socialism. The letter was promptly followed by years of consolidation of the »healthy forces,« the oppressive period of traitor-like transformations of the formerly liberal university professors into the exorcisers of Beelzebub from the righteousness of the self-managing socialism. Those who refused to bend lost their jobs, and the ranks of secret police swelled impressively. These were the years when the proletarian

leaders gazed at us through their dark glasses indistinguishable from the dark glasses of some friendly tribal kings of the non-aligned African countries, who from time to time stooped to eat the bodies of their enemies. South America, Haiti, Africa were filled with the eyes of such strongmen. We continued to live under their persistent, hidden gaze. The more we were politically and existentially secure, the more we were morally worthless, until the onset of the current agony and denouement.

The damage wrought by the liberal lifestyle of the 1970s was carried like an indispensable luggage into the times of oppression precisely by literature. This was the generation of writers who were active fellow travellers and participants of the student movement of the 1970s. A few of them also took part in the occupation of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana in 1972. This political and social environment was, for them, a crucial factor. According to the homology of structures, the luxuriant, anarchical profusion of ideologies and world views must surely have influenced their anarchy of genre, which was the poetic novelty in their prose. Anything was possible now. Everything could exist and be written, and not only the committed humanistic resistance against the dictatorship of a single historical truth or writings as the mouthpiece of this truth, which was the obligatory task of the older, suppressed,

generation of Slovene writers. Here lies the fundamental difference in the constitution of the free personality between the pre-war and the post-war generation of writers. Regardless of the independent and unyielding artistic spirit of some writers who paid their personal dues as dissidents, the student generation of the 1970s is free of the orthodox political determination of the socialist concentration camp, enjoying a different kind of freedom. Science fiction, fairy tales and reincarnation of trivial genres became quite a serious preoccupation for these writers, which to dissident freedom fighters was quite heretic. It comes as no surprise that the prolific chronicler of Slovene literature Taras Kermauner first eagerly welcomed and then cursed these »ludists« and literary autonomists, »intertextual writers,« because they did not adhere to the basic world-oriented tasks of literature in totalitarian countries, but, on the contrary, indulged in playful exploration of the language. Here lies the fundamental difference in literary freedom: the literary freedom of our generation begins when we no longer have to fight for it; where the fairy tale is only indirectly a diversion, because it

3.

Literature itself had a particular influence on the contemporary spiritual life of the young generation of Slovene artists. According

is urgently needed for the preservation of the free, infinitely rich life, where the language sets the limits onto ever newer horizons. The freedom of literature had become an »ontological need« for this generation. It was no longer an existential activity. Almost all of our »ludists« were free-lancers at the time when they were writing the short stories published here. Some of them continue to work as free-lance authors.

They pawned their existence to become the servants of literature and did not embrace the safety of the regime's water holes so that they could indulge in linguistic games in the safety of their room after work. The paths of free literature were dedicated to the freedom of literature and not to the struggle for it. As the children of vulgar Zen we knew that a free man does not inquire about freedom. As the parable would have it: a Zen climber is looking for the best climber in the world in order to teach him the skill. When he finds him, he sees that the best climber in the world does not climb.

In addition, politics is a mere banality. Literature, on the contrary, is truth for the initiated.

to Barthes, books write other books. At that time a powerful team of writers was at work. Their poetics is probably the forerunner

of prose. These were such influential writers as Tomaž Šalamun, Milan Jesih, Ivo Svetina, Matjaž Kocbek, Tomaž Kralj and others, with their Ezra Pound-like unified verse, open to associations. The innovative poetic relevance of the Slovene poetry was followed by the relevance of prose, which adopted several formal innovations. Above all, the prose espoused the entropic character of poetry. Šalamun's poetry, unlike the traditional coherent lyrical unit, falls apart into verses and words which are in themselves independent units. Kalčič's, Filipčič's poetry and Vladimir Kovačič's prose breaks down into sentences and paragraphs. Like in poetry, the transparency of the linguistic message vanishes into the magic of language itself. The extra-linguistic substance disappears and the language emerges as the true hero of a literary work. The basic principle of narrative prose, association by way of direct contact, whereby the narration moves from one selected object to the next one following spatial and temporal causality (Jacobson), no longer holds true. Prose approaches association by way of similarity, which is the property of poetry. This type of prose is used by almost all of the above-mentioned authors, at least in the extreme applicability of the literary vocabulary and the non-transparent, aesthetic autonomy of the word.

The second significant influence was provided by Dušan Pirjevec

with his essays and lectures at the realm of autonomous truth, which can find its compatibility with the world structurally and no longer with the aid of traditional mimesis. His was the theory of the romanesque hero who has to fail so that his life could be perceived as an idea, while his end would bring about the revelation of the difference between existence and essence. He broke significant new ground with his theory of the subject in terms of the will to attain power, which he also applied at the level of a nation. He was an indisputable guru of the most potent section of the young Slovene intellectuals and artists, a charismatic personality whose lectures were attended by some of the most outstanding writers and authors, as well as the authors we have mentioned in this essay. Pirjevec's impact on the contemporary spiritual life is immeasurable and has survived to this day in some cultural circles. He emphasized the ontological status of literature and finally untied the knot which bound it with the »idea«. Hence also the decline of the hero-subject in one part of the new Slovene prose, such as Šeligo's earlier poetics reminiscent of the French 'nouveau roman' as well as his later poetics when he returns to the magic foundations of literature. Similarly, the new Slovene prose does away with the concept of the »hero-idea,« replacing it with the creator-writer himself, who identifies with the narrator, the creator of living things,

creating worlds and endowing them with essence, unlike the precedent procedure of aligning the real, concrete world with its own mimesis. The autonomy of art thus becomes, largely with Pirjevec's help, the space of the world-language, and not the space of mimesis of the world through the language, as well as the sacral space of truth where dirty politics is denied entrance. The reality of the language lends itself equally to: all genres, because they are »ontologically real.« Consequently, the elements of the fantastic, the fairy tale, the detective story, historical records and travelogues all qualify as prose texts, stretching the limits of the world through the limits of the language into infinite, free literary spiritual areas. The subject as the literary hero is often the fundamental Narcissus - the creator, i. e., the subject who again and again encounters himself, not changing the world with the idea, but simply creating it with words in his own image. Perhaps this »pathological Narcissus« as a socially mandatory form of subjectivity, according to Slavoj Žižek (*Družboslovne razprave inštituta za sociologijo* 2, 1985), is most evidently established in the »new Slovene prose« and its narrative hero as a kind of frustrated thirst for power. The hero no longer possesses the will to fight the world with the sword, but prefers to sit on a convenient tree stump, eyeing himself in the lightness and smoothness of the stainless blade. After all, the

world is ugly and it inevitably leads to utter failure; the hero on the contrary is handsome, and his heroic sword represents the finest talisman against misfortune: himself. The fact that misfortune begins with him only now is another story altogether.

The external literary influence worth mentioning is the great interest in science fiction, which at the time is able to express significant human adventure at a quite symbolic level, which can not be mastered by the classical genres. Mere mention of Clark's *Odyssey 2001* and the works of Stanislav Lem suffices to stress the point that these works of science fiction have come a long way from the stories of the past, where the leading role was played by flying saucers, belligerent Martians and technological fetishes. Science fiction opens the door to symbolism, ecology, criticism of robotics, mechanism, and an entirely new ethics, whereby man is no longer the principal actor of the globe's history, or master supreme of all things living. This means a singular reduction of subjectivity, as well as a love for all that lives and is different.

The other significant external influence was the flourishing of the Latin-American novel with its new dimension of magical realism transferring the invention of surrealism into the prose of Latin America, as if the right to true life was endemic to the region. The self-evident fantastic elements, leading the plot in quite literary,

autonomous, logical way, have quickly gained currency in the Slovene prose, in an autochthonous way. The procedure, however, was quite possible and constitutive, endowing the prose with a new beauty. Marques's work *A Hundred Years of Solitude* came out in 1971 in an excellent translation by Alenka Bole Vrabec. The works of other Latin American writers of magic realism followed suit. This is further proof that prose can conquer new »poetological« space. A completely different matter is Borges, whose influence on the contemporary Slovene prose of various authors of different generations from Šeligo, Jančar, Gradišnik, Perčič and the younger Blatnik and Bratovž, was particularly strong. Borges greatly influenced the »new Slovene prose,« especially the formation of the Post-Modern movement.

Most of all, this was the period of the rise of experimental theater, which begins with Jovanović's production of *Pupilije Ferkeverk*, and is followed by the founding of the theatres *Glej* and *Pekarna*. In performances such as *Spomenik G. Limite* and *Jesih's Grenki sadeži pravice* (The bitter fruits of justice), which became a true cult play of a generation, similar concurrent poetic con-

cepts can be discovered in the experimentation with the language of drama: sequential disintegration and self-liberation of the text and the performance, introduction of the fantastic into the dramatic language. A poetic dichotomy between the experimental theater and the new Slovene prose is easily discernible. Thus, three basic literary genres, poetry, prose and drama, display in this period a similar poetic inclination.

The »new Slovene prose« is a first-rate, radical level of modernism, which logically led to Post-Modern. There, the autonomy of literature in its radical rendition is such that only books constitute its real environment.

This, of course, is also the time of a different, yet compelling Slovene prose, the kind written by Vitomil Zupan, Andrej Hieng, Rudi Šeligo, Lojze Kovačič, Danilo Lokar, Marjan Rožanc, Jože Snoj, Drago Jančar, Florjan Lipuš and many others, as well as the politically committed literature produced by Branko Hofman, Dimitrij Rupel, Boris Pahor and Igor Torkar. But this is another story. Now is the time to talk about the trimmings at the top of the building called Slovene literature.

4.

In Marko ŠVABIČ's first book *Sonce sonce sonce* practically all formal and thematic properties of

the new prose are already present. First of all, the language undergoes a renovation, and acquires



a more extensive vocabulary, archaic expressions as well as neologisms. The syntax is often deliberately awkward and the direct speech infantile, reminiscent of Pugelj. And yet, this is the period when the former linguistic mistakes acquire an aesthetic glow, and become the staple of a refined style. However, this linguistic menagerie is applied purposefully, and above all, wittily, entering the literary consciousness in a novel, vivid context, establishing archaisms as linguistic renovation of the literary Slovene language — something for language enthusiasts. The plot is treated quite casually: the writer may suddenly forget all about it, or it goes out on a tangent and does not return to its previous path. The plot is strewn with fantastic elements, which can hardly be labelled science fiction (Kvinta Kvarta). Here, friendly, almost indescribable beings manufacture blue light. Švabič utilizes a gentle hippy-like allegory to make Ljubljana the home for the stars, space ships and alien beings. He adroitly handles a variety of genre principles and different themes: from a story of conspirators (in *Siva ptica je letela v svinčeno jutro* (A gray bird flew into the oppressive morning)) to a fairy tale (*Afrika iz cunj* (The Africa of rags)) and establishment of his own character (author) as the literary hero in his own work, i.e., eliminating the distance between the author and the narrative medium of a literary character. The author becomes the

aesthetic object himself and thus also Narcissus, observing himself in his own literature, which is not an autobiography, but literature as fiction par excellence. This heterogeneous prose, which does not proceed from a common, basic (external) aspect, designed to convey a message in a literary form to the world, is an attitude toward truth and literature. Švabič's literature is autonomous, self-sufficient and as such totally real, devoid of any ideological linkage with reality. The contemporary criticism was aware of this aspect of his prose: »The writing has no theme, no content, no motif... nothing is superimposed on literature; everything is (if it is) indirectly present in the text, in that specific, irrepressible »play,« even pleasure, encouraged and maintained by the word, in its every meaning, changeability, in all of its potential, countless associations and combinations. This also implies that the language of Švabič's prose is not merely a 'component,' exposed and worthy of special attention, but is its fundamental, vertical, all-defining and all-determining dimension, encompassing everything that stories are about.« (Andrej Inkret, NR 1972). What is established here is a trans-ideological literary reality, »intertextuality,« whose limits are set by the language and not by the ideological message from the outside. This is a crucial, structural shift in the Slovene prose, which is anchored in its »ontological status.« Says Ivan

Focht of the modern art; »Science and philosophy merely consolidate, explicate the truth, while art gives it existence... Artistic truth does not exist if it can not be directly accepted as a certain being... The truth exists; it does not matter, but it is — this is unique in our world: truth is, because it is and it is, because it is truth... Artistic truth is the truth of practice and not of theory. Therefore, it can not be proved, shown, nor described. It has to be.« (Ivan Focht: *Moderna umetnost kao ontološki problem* (Modern art as an ontological issue)). The Slovene modern prose was »autonomous« in terms of ontology per se, while the »new prose« was autonomous in terms of status. The very position of the poetized, aesthetic author points to this fact.

In his later work, Švabič further extended the narcissistic position of the artist. The artist becomes a young hero whose task of priority is his own megalomania (*Mladi junak* (Young hero), *Bitka proti prahu* (Struggle against dust)). Words become aesthetic mirrors reflecting the writer's beauty in a thousand little images.

Branko GRADIŠNIK is a cocoon of genres and aesthetic orientations. His first book (*Čas*) established him as one of the pioneers of Slovene fiction after the war. Previously this genre was mostly intended for the children (Vid Pečjak). Gradišnik, however,

elevated the genre to a high-quality literary class. However, he eschews the »scientific foundations« in his stories, giving up the accompanying »mechanistic fantasy,« remaining on a purely literal level. In the short story by the same title »Čas,« the structure of Post-Modern short story (1977) is visibly inspired by Borges' works. It is a short story which, in order to unravel, makes use of narrative quotes taken from other books and fates (Jules Verne: *The Mysterious Island*, etc.). Literature is thus a recording, a »remaking« of literature, a recording of a recording and more: it is a reality, a factual argument for another fiction, a maze of parallel spaces of stories which communicate among themselves, never leaving the domain of literature. When the hero of the story wakes up, he finds himself in a different story which might have already been told. Branko Gradišnik uses and comments on the fantastic with the greatest of ease and deliberation — in his book *Zemlja zemlja zemlja* (Earth earth earth), for example — unlike Švabič, who uses the fantastic as part of a quite straightforward story line. »Jona« and »Jasnovidec« (*Čas*) are two short stories where the fantastic dimension is applied quite deliberately. Branko Gradišnik also probes the human self and soul in his second book, whose title directly answers Švabič's *Sonce sonce sonce: Zemlja zemlja zemlja*. In this work, Gradišnik explores the human intimate

world, which turns out to be infinitely more fantastic than science fiction. Branko Gradišnik is a stylistic and linguistic purist of the highest order and an excellent master of classical short story, if necessary. Branko Gradišnik is a giant of the new Slovene prose, who has influenced a number of younger post modernists. In his later books (*Mistifikacije*) his shift to Post-Modern was openly displayed, while in his novels he embraced the genre of a detective story (*Nekdo drug* (Someone else)) and poured out a number of well-written commercial texts. His sovereign mastery of the skill of writing thus becomes a creative practice for the purposes of the pragmatic craft of writing.

A special feature of his first books is his use of a number of narrative tricks of realism in order to discover the fantastic behind the realistic. And vice versa. He does it with a masterful construction of the story, with its surprising and logical twists and adept turns. Branko Gradišnik comes across as an extremely skilled combination artist, going through his motifs with a composure of a chess grand master, so that each of his ideas is firmly grounded in the field at which it is aiming. His rationality of a master of combinations, unknown by the more spontaneous Slovene explorers of the fantastic, can be truly quite fantastic. Gradišnik actually perfected the structure of the short story, which requires a sharply profiled story and a precise the-

matic structure to boot. In his perhaps the best book yet *Zemlja zemlja zemlja*, he toys with his plots; his narrators speak in all three persons; the stories unravel into verse or are tied up into several-pages-long sentences. His aesthetic combinatory efforts clearly show that the borderline between the theme and its narrative form is blurred; the manner in which something is said is the essence of what is said. Perhaps his greatest achievement is a finely chiselled sentence of pure, classical beauty, resonating in a magic and novel way within the given context.

Since Gradišnik is a co-founder and a successor of the »new Slovene prose,« one could not easily point out a specific thematic preoccupation: what he writes about is what the story and the genre offer him. In *Zemlja zemlja zemlja*, he nevertheless surrendered, to the greatest possible degree, to the intimate sphere, resulting in a surprising rehabilitation of the soul amid a host of genre innovations.

Vladimir KOVAČIČ first appeared on the literary scene in 1977 with a tiny book *Tvoji obrazi* (Your faces). He is best known for smooth writing devoid of any temporal or spatial coordinates. The plot gels and disappears, knits and unravels; here and there the objects come alive and a locomotive unhitches all by itself, and to boot, the writer tells us that what we are reading is not true, because it is merely images thriv-

ing in the mind. These images may also be told in the second person as if to suggest what we (the readers) do ourselves, or the narrator's self is separated from the person of the author, which is subsequently addressed to in the second person singular. These images have grown so luxuriously that in 1984 the writer published his second book *Življenje v glavi* (Life in the head). The »hero from the head« runs around meeting Slovene writers, Prešeren, Cankar, as well as Jesus and Mary, an array of women of all types, having sex with all of them, which is not significant at all for he is really mourning for a lost girlfriend, whom he had killed in a feat of jealousy, but this again is not entirely clear. The book is like a parody of Orpheus searching for his Eurydice, if not Ulenspiegel, not minding the world, in search of adventure, on foot or by car and boat. There is no clear story line here, just a lot of fun. Vladimir Kovačič introduced into modern prose relaxed chatting without any narrative limitations and without a clear-cut separation from reality. The writer puts on paper the life in his head. Thus, of course, everything begins and ends with the writer and his realization of the »essential« life.

Uroš KALČIČ published *Mehika* in 1979. With this book of short stories the author reached the climax of the modern Slovene style. So far, the linguistic achievements of the new Slovene

prose have been stressed. Kalčič, however, reaches even higher: in the most radical of his texts all that remains is language and style basking in their magic and suggestive powers. All other tangible »contents« are excluded. His text is simply a modern musical composition of the Slovene language, which offers immense enjoyment in its parts, but the whole remains elusive outside stylistic compactness. Nevertheless, the linguistic and stylistic integration is so magical that some plot coherence is required only to take it to a new level of linguistic association. To put it simply, a pretty set of words leads the writer out of his narrative and allows him to take pleasure in the many stylistic and clever syntactical inventions. Kalčič's stylistic guided tour of his prose is truly hypnotic for the worshipping reader. In *Mehika* Kalčič's plot is mostly anarchy; he is not even interested in the mood. However, he does not lack humorous sarcasm, nor self-irony towards the narrator, who in his second book (*Dokumenti o črčkah* (Documents on crickets)) evolves into a bad guy. Kalčič's *Mehika* is a linguistic nucleus of the new prose, most readily savoured by the poets. It is virtually nontranslatable, so deeply it is embedded in the roots of the Slovene language. The connotations are so typically Slovene that they would be completely lost through translation.

Kalčič is a linguistic Gargantua, robustly baroque and witty,

endlessly innovative in metaphor, but not without an occasional subtle emotion. Thus he proceeds from an all-encompassing, primeval linguistic chaos, where everything is mixed up and possessing a virginal freshness and beauty (everything is more or less similar), to his second book, where the prose of the plot is urbanized and so is the character of the hero. He introduces the narrator with precise psychological insight—most of the time an extremely sensitive ego-centric—as if we were reading an Emanuel Bove: *Moji prijatelji* (My friends), which the writer sets in a carefully composed universe of words. Such a problematic, unattractive character is unprecedented in the Slovene prose. The author also uses epistolary form so that the events either take place through the actual writing or sometime in the past, i.e., in the language of the narrative.

Emil FILIPČIČ surprises the reader already with his first book *Grein vaun* (1979), where his writing takes the form of a wild narrative: river rolling in a pell-mell fashion, swallowing everything that comes in its way. His are a kind of heroic adventures, megalomaniacal historical episodes, sports news, fables, religious tracts, and surrealist flashes of wit. Everywhere, however, the author is present in his own right, turning from time to time into a god. Also in his more recent works, Filipčič continues to give free rein to his fantasies. He may conquer

Europe as a jaguar, then again as a great military leader, only to conclude, after many heroic battles and long reign, with a dissertation on the repression rampant in a military insane asylum (*Kuku* 1985), where the battles and uprisings continue. Taking his inspiration from comic books, he offers the reader relevant stories as well as memoirs.

Filipčič is a god-writer, unimpeded in his search for the universal word, which is also the sum total of all words, attempting to embrace the entire world in their narration and inhabit all beings and all history, in the form of an animal, man or king. His narrative is an elated epic cataclysm, partaking of everything that had ever been written. And yet this is not enough. Filipčič also tackled the dramatic arts and wrote several successful plays. There is something theatrical, spectacular and exhibitionistic in his prose, a kind of mobile energy devouring other artistic media, since he also writes screenplays and acts in films. Unlike other prose writers, he does not manufacture language with a certain precision. He can nonchalantly write an entire page in Serbian. His epic drive utilizes the entire linguistic scope ranging from the most vulgar utterances to words he supposedly coined himself. This epic cataclysm does not have the time to fashion the beauty of the word, but has to rage on in the pursuit of an invisible, intractable, immense thought which would bring salvation. »To find

sense,« says the author. Emil Filipčič is a megalomaniacal epic writer, unrivalled in Slovene literature.

Boris JUKIČ's first book *Ukleta graščina* immediately ranked the author among the mature stylists, as well as masters of narrative technique. Jukič makes use of the Werther-like framework, where sheets of paper are being sent to the author, permitting mirror reflections of the author and the narrator. The peaceful beginning, however, is misleading. The reader is plunged into the old chronicles, memoirs, instances of peasant wisdom, and writer's commentaries. Jukič designs his work quite thoughtfully. The old mansion turned into an old people's home is the sum of stories and personal fates intertwined with the history of the castle and its present occupants, forming an indivisible whole. All levels of narrative are thus simultaneous. Jukič taps from Modernism. Thus the narrative fragments are not successive but are juxtaposed and seemingly unconnected. Only by viewing the whole can one perceive their linkage. The book seems like an abstract painting, where the concerted readers's participation brings fullness and unity to the narrative universe. Love is Jukič's guiding light through the universe. He lends an attentive ear to the life stories of his old men, scribbling them down with the gentleness of a father confessor and comforter, carefully and gently applying

words to human wretchedness, letting it be. Jukič displays no revolt or sarcasm typical of Švabič or Kalčič, but accepts everything with the quiet wisdom of a seasoned man. His laughter is benevolent. Thus in his recent works he exhibits the traditional narrative maturity, the third eye, the invention of the classic writer who understands and forgives from his extra-terrestrial vantage point. In *Ukleta graščina*, the real, socially transparent world and the autonomous (parallel) text are balanced, passing one into the other, guiding each other. Sometimes the lead is taken by a true-life episode, then again by literary magic and fiction, such as the apocryphal supplements to the events surrounding Jesus's crucifixion. Here, Jukič is still the writer of new prose and literary autonomist, as well as a narrator of life stories. In his more recent books (*Loreana in druge zgodbe* (Loreana and other stories)) he is increasingly intrigued by popular wisdom (as displayed by the people from the coastal region of Karst), thus turning into a traditional story teller. And yet, Jukič's fundamental horizon is eros, against which the personal fates of his heroes are delineated and where life goes on under the watchful eye of a capricious god. Boris Jukič is the principal narrator of love among the current crop of writers.

Tone PERČIČ has so far published a single book *Pot v nestal-*

*nost* (The way to instability)(1981), which nevertheless secured his acceptance among the foremost masters of the Slovene language who employ a mixture of genres and fantastic elements. Typically, he adopts a specific genre, using the language and metaphors of that genre with prowess. The reader thus again encounters intertextuality, which narrates the world according to the rules of a literary play and not according to the rules governing the conception of the universe. Genre is merely a tool with which the reader is able to perceive the universe from a particular viewpoint, i. e., it is considered as a communication vehicle, such as language, but does not lend itself to a straightforward, ideological explication of the world. Here begins the autonomy of literature and its ontological status.

Perčič can thus write an excellent short story about war (*Klet* (Basement)) in a realistic style, and can also write prose straddling the «waking and the dream worlds.» It is a borderline along which, in his own words, his pencil «moves with refined caution.» Behind the opaque magma of literary dreams exists a universe which helps us perceive our world in a different light. We do not know what man is really like until we see him in our dreams.

Milan KLEČ is the youngest of this generation of writers, but his works are of an even earlier date.

He first wrote poetry, but switched to prose relatively early (1973). After a hiatus of several years he published in 1985 a collection of prose *Briljantina*. Today, Kleč mostly writes prose. His writing reveals a human, social and artistic attitude of a man who could never have become a bricklayer, an agricultural worker, or a customs officer. He had no other recourse but to become a problematic individual, unable to contribute to the society economically or politically. His contribution narrows down to the mastery of the pen and invention of stories spawned by an imagination soaked in idleness and stupor. And what stories they are! A bear is the engineer of a train; a woman's strand of hair rises in the air, outshining the sun; stuffed birds fly up and away; a politically concerned fork lift slays a woman who has a national flag spread out under her bed sheet; a man's penis is in fact the image of a well-publicized killer from a newspaper. All this is narrated as if these events were the hallmark of normality in the world, as if our reality was but a mere pretense, hiding another, more relevant reality, unorthodox and fantastic. This is where things can go wrong for the literary heroes: pure love spawns shameless necrophilia; civil obedience causes phallic obsession. Under the epidermis of the universe, torn apart by the traveller thirsting for adventure, there exists a dangerous, parallel world, where all things paradoxi-

cally and terrifyingly come true.

Kleč's prose is suffused with black humour, parody, caricature, and lumpen-proletariat vulgarity, with a certain delicacy and mystique woven into it. Again and again the writer surprises with self-evident transitions from one drastic literary hallucination to

5.

The age of «new prose» was a time of boundless literature, when the horizons of the written word discovered ever newer worlds. The Slovene literature displayed all the positive traits of a drunk: wisdom, power and wealth. This was the time when sausages were hung on the fences of houses and chil-

another, eliciting the reader's admiration. Milan Kleč writes in the naive style of a thick-headed story teller, who, in his naive superstition, confuses truth and falsehood, which he has never been able to tell apart in the first place.

dren were given fresh cherries in winter in exchange for a good story. It was a time when literature forged horseshoes for mosquitoes and we rode off into starry skies on their backs. Today, the sky is closer and we no longer need a ride to reach it.

Translated by  
Marjan Golobič



Tomo Virk  
FROM LITERATURE  
TO LITERATURE

Slovene prose of the last two decades is so varied in comparison with previous periods that it is impossible to embrace it within a single group name. In evolutionary-historical terms, at least three generations are interchangeable: ludist, new Slovene prose and young Slovene prose. Alongside these zeitgeist mainstreams, socio-critical literature has been created throughout which has also contributed to the extension of the Slovene literary horizon. This time is still considered a continuation of some of the previous literary periods, e.g., realism or socrealism. At the same time, the novel *Strangers* by Lojze Kovačič, which cannot be convincingly included in any of the mentioned tendencies, is likely to be recorded in literary history as the basic prose text of this period.

Setting out a cross section of two generations, New Slovene Prose and Young Slovene Prose, cannot thus embrace all the important prose production in

this period. However, it draws attention to two unexamined landmarks. With the entrance of New Slovene Prose (NSP) the criteria of quality of Slovene prose was unexpectedly brought to the level of contemporary world prose; Young Slovene Prose (YSP) is, it appears, finally—actually throughout the second half of the century — again in step with contemporary world literary trends.

A number of problems emerge with attempts to distinguish between the two generations. NSP authors have continued to write vital texts also while MSP was being formed and was finally formed. These texts on the one hand continue the creative tendencies of NSP, but at the same time the »logical development« was such that they are also close to MSP. It should not be forgotten that between the end of the seventies, when NSP emerged and the mid eighties when MSP came into being, many transitions occurred in the Slovene literary

stage with breathtaking speed: in a way, we Slovenes first discovered postmodernism at this time; Borges began to be read; Marques was translated in large quantities, we became acquainted with Ecco and a whole series of American metafictionalists; journals in particular brought translations of contemporary disputes about postmodernism; the journal »Problemi-Literatura« systematically created a »new literary spirit« under the title »School of creative writing« etc. All this explains why texts published in the second half of the eighties, at least in

some cases, could no longer be reliably divided into e.g., NSP or YSP. However YSP had radical particularities which distinguished it from NSP: we no longer talk of schools, currents, movements but only about generations. On some formal-declarative level, writers no longer wanted to have anything to do with groups: the basic characteristic of Slovene prose (and indeed poetry) became some kind of autopoetic illustration and the author's autonomous ethic. This is the property which also here essentially characterizes the presentation of authors.

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*Mexico* (1979), a collection of »short stories« by Uroš KALČIČ, brought to Slovenia an hitherto unimagined dimension of literature. Kalčič's writing in this book is characterized by linguism and ludism. This ludism is displayed in some typical approaches, such as for example, changes not only in the narrative perspective but also in the »subject of the narrative« itself, although this is no longer extreme, objective ludism; it is an unique intertwining of intimacy and distance in which the intimate finally prevails. It resolves in the author's surrendering to imaginative words, flashes of wit, associations which tend almost without exception towards parody and irony. Language, as an exceptional resource in a play of syntax and semantics (and not, e.g., as in »strict ludism« in a bare

play of characterization), achieves unexampled perfection. Kalčič's virtuoso use of linguistic and stylistic particularities is simultaneously a parody of them. So it is not surprising that the critical (e.g. A. Zorn and D. Bajt) response to the publication of *Mexico* could be expressed in the judgement: »The actual hero of Kalčič's text is language«. And so it is not possible to doubt that Kalčič, in his own words, is really »one of those who also see words from their reverse«. Language as a game is, of course, the sphere of ludists; Kalčič's use of language differs from this. It is not an unconsidered play of meaning or even only of designation but the parodying of standard thoughts, genres, narrative examples and clichés. The basic »symbolic« moment of Kalčič's writing is thus not language

as such but always some moulded, canonized language, »genre«. However, not only literary, also, e.g., political, biblical (paratactic biblical style), speech, dialectic, propagandist, etc, although perhaps »fine phrasing« really prevails, an archaic »literary« genre. This is therefore the base from which Kalčič works: combines, makes neologisms, parodies, paraphrases, makes metaphors and metonyms on these models, phrases, ready-made forms, but not, e.g., of basic syntactic or semantic units, individual words or even letters. He is uncompromising with all clichés, even linguistic ones. In the sense of the fragmentation of fiction, it achieves this also on the level of discursive thought which *Mexico* offers the recipient.

*Documents about Crickets*, another book of prose texts (*Spirits* is also translated from this book), was published eight years later and this time the difference is clearly visible. Where it is still possible to understand the »soft« linguism of *Mexico* as some kind of Idea (e.g., of a »pure« literary text), with *Crickets*, Kalčič abandons himself to narrative »story-itself«. Although this writing is, at least partly, still not directed towards some carefully preconsidered composition, but flashes of wit and association, certain more »classical« elements still appear.

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Some kind of »hero« of the text is identifiable, who is almost without exception still some feeble, confused being who mistakenly enters some situation. The contours appear (in some texts) of some kind of »femme fatale«, although this functions more as a stylistic figure than an actual authorial obsession. It creates also the suggestion of intimism which here and there is reminiscent of Jančar. However, all these elements serve story-itself. If *Mexico* is a parody as parody with at least a tiny drop of meaning external to the text, *Crickets* no longer has such implications. Even if in this book one comes across: »I am indebted to none and I have settled all my debts on entrance to the world ...«, this is (no longer) binding on us. Even though psychology appears, it does not appear such that the reader must be persuaded of or taught something, but only as an element propelling the story. If language was the main hero in *Mexico*, in *Crickets* it is story. Story-itself. Or text; the text itself. This textuality-itself is not destroyed even by the frequent epistolary forms (e.g., in *Spirits*) which could evoke some vital subjectivity. In Kalčič there is none. Everything is pretence and is shown as such. What remains solid is only the objective text.

Kalčič does not introduce anything apocryphal to Slovene literature with such a development. It is not only typical of some of the representatives of YSP (Blatnik, Bratož, Zabel ...) but similar to Branko GRADIŠNIK. His stories appear in three collections: *Time* (1977), *Earth Earth Earth* (1981) (both the texts presented are from here, *Oeopath* is partly completed and rewritten) and the metafictional *Mystifictions* (1988).

Gradišnik started as a writer of science fiction stories and he has so far remained faithful to love and genre writing in general (his most recent work, *The Other Man* (1990) is a criminal story). As a master of storytelling (perhaps it is no coincidence that he is the only Slovene with the title, acquired in Britain, of »Master of creative writing«) he has created a type of short story which has become a model for a number of the writers of YSP. »We are dealing with 'short stories' with an exceptionally pure structure, with a genre which demands a sharply defined story and its precisely subjective construction«. (A. Zorn). Gradišnik's stories do not relate to some metaphysical author's subject but – through the author – to literature itself. So life is in a way removed from literature. Gradišnik does not achieve this only with »blind realism« but on every level. Individual syntagmas or decisive passages (also e.g., in both of the texts here published) sometimes evoke feelings of profound philosophical and existen-

tial wisdom, although never in reality exceeding the competence of literature but remaining within them. This is as valid for the problem of time which is treated in the first of Gradišnik's collections of short prose as for the existential-philosophical basis of some of the stories in the collection *Earth Earth Earth*. With such an approach to writing, Gradišnik creates a position from which it is possible to deal with these »existential« life problems and philosophical experiences in a new way, without the concern that this literature could turn into some kind of existential wisdom, lesson, declaration. This new approach occurs as literature-itself. An inversion occurs which the critic D. Bajt characterized thus: »it is no longer literary reflections on life, but living reflections of literature.« Gradišnik had introduced such writing even in *Of Time*, in which it is denoted by an acrobatic narrative style and mental complexities and oscillations between fantastic, almost classical tales and metafictionism. Gradišnik writes under the influence not only of Anglo-Saxon science fiction, but almost more under the increasing influence of masters of »classical« novelettes, satire or even humoresque, such as, e.g., Čapek, Hašek, Zoščenko, Frank, Lewis, Leacock, Altenberg, Saltykov-Ščedrin, etc. So he evolves a surprisingly rough style which often verges on the imitative. *Of Time*, in fact, gave Slovenes the first

story directly influenced by Borges.

The texts of *Mystifictions* are strongly influenced by American metafictional prose, although the traditional is also not abandoned here. The peak of Gradišnik's short prose remains some of the first and last prose collections, in *Earth Earth Earth*. Here are also combined all the autopoetic properties of Gradišnik's storytelling in general: variety, a mixed introvert and extrovert narrative perspective, the self-thematizing of the author's own treatment, metaphysics, experiment, obligation to genres and pithy, considered and instructive parable, concern for »pure literary« language, etc. The

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Novelist, short story writer and dramatist Drago JANČAR is undoubtedly one of the central figures of contemporary Slovene literature. His writing as a whole, especially in comparison with other representatives of NSP, is linked to existential problems. »Jančar's short stories spring from anguish at the unique unrepeatable human material, and simultaneously also from reflective revelation of the 'atavistic' architypal elements in him«. (A. Inkret). Such a position is also characteristic of his plays and novelettes. Although it is of equal strength in all the forms which he cultivates, our concern here is with novelettes and short prose.

Jančar's fascination with

events do not follow the dictates of the laws of physics but literature. In fact, in the stories *Oeopath* and *Mouseday* we are set before a unique tangle of genre and the existential, with of course demonstrable limitations: even when dealing with an »intimate« theme, Gradišnik does not abandon himself to intimacy or confession: he remains strictly on a literary level. »Intimate« and »metaphysical« »problems are presented as literary problems which it is necessary to resolve in the context of literature-itself. So Branko Gradišnik, along with his younger colleague, Andrej Blatnik, is a »storyteller par excellence« of contemporary Slovene prose.

Borges' idea of repetition, as evident from the prose collection *Death at Mary of the Snows* (1985), it is also paradigmatic of his literary path. From the intimately presented questions in the collection of short stories *The Pale Sinner* (1978) through both »historical« novels (*Galjot*, *Northern Gleam*) and the first story in the book *Death at Mary of the Snows* he returns in the last text of this book to his starting point. In some of the texts, Jančar is really uncritically fascinated by J.L.Borges and Danilo Kiš, although it is necessary to seek elsewhere for the models of the basic movements of his global poetic »northern lights«: in authors like Kafka and perhaps

Doblin or even expressly in the fundamentalism of I.B.Singer.

This central trait of Jančar's writing is dominant not only in his novels, but also in his best short prose. Although Jančar – as some of his Borges texts show, but also, e.g., the sketch *Ultima Creatura* – is also a master of literary anecdote, his real strength lies elsewhere: in Singer's »fundamentalist« lines. From these lines spring also the source of his fascination with the Borgese idea of repetition already mentioned, which evokes the image of some destiny. Critics have also drawn attention to the problem of destiny as one of the basic thematic constituents of Jančar's texts. However, it should be added that this destiny has specific features. Some kind of primordial God breathes from Jančar's writing, God the Father, I am that I am (e.g. in *Look of an Angel*). The world of Jančar's prose is actually the ideal world of the God of yore (and so Jančar is clearly one of those Slovene writers for whom God is not buried): before us is always set a lone(ly), gigantic, »father« figure who is nevertheless weaker than God. This God appears, more than in explicit form, as destiny (more explicitly: e.g., as God's eye); but this is not blind fate or some Oedipus condition in which a strong individual vainly fights the destiny which governs the whole world. Jančar's destiny is not some fate decided in advance, in which there is no sense in resisting but more a con-

dition which is familiar from Old: when conflict occurs, which is not always – it is the struggle of man with God, the »hero« with »destiny«. The destiny of Jančar's stories is thus – as with Singer – the God of Isaac, Jacob and Saul.

Such a condition of the spirit is already »surplus« in the spiritual-historical sense and does not in itself bear sufficient esthetic charge. To come alive again, it must be »made literary«. Jančar, whose mastery of language critics have not normally stressed, achieves this with an evocative »patina«. Practically all his texts characterized by the dusty inspiration of old books, as well as those in which he handles more contemporary themes, bear the indelible mark of inspiration. In the formal sense, it is this »counterfeit« gesture of comparative mimesis: the artist no longer produces a copy but a copy of a copy which art on the one hand thrusts more and more into some primarily fictional, and thus also autonomous sphere, and, on the other, simultaneously distancing itself from (if we take it from Plato's concept of the idea) any ideology. So in the end, the basic tendency of Jančar's approach to writing does not essentially differ from the tendency of other representatives of NSP; it is not then the true reflection of an »idea« but clearly in contrast. Namely, literature which has its own effectiveness which is essentially different from the effectiveness of the Idea.

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Andrej BLATNIK was one of the initiators of MSP with his three collections of short prose (*Flowers Wilt for Adam* (1983), *Biographies of the Nameless* (1989), *A Change of Skins* (1990) – from which both published texts are taken; *Kyoto* was also published in *Biographies*) and, with the novel *Torches and Tears* (1987), also one of its most outstanding representatives. Of world models, they are close above all to Borges and the metafictionalists, and still more – as with his Slovene »mentor« Branko Gradišnik – on the inspiration of classical European storytellers. Blatnik's writing is decisively typified by short stories which are distinguished by stylistic perfectionism and literary artism, archaisms, genre, short sentences, fragmentation, imitation, citations, irony, parody, travesty, etc. Such an approach was already visible in Blatnik's first book and has only increased in the remaining works.

The basic »compositional« attribute of Blatnik's short prose (visible in both the texts presented) in addition to the concern for the art of storytelling is perhaps the absence of classical sting. It is this property which could probably be linked to Blatnik's minimalism. It is a shift from the great to the minor story (a shift which is most demonstrative in *Biographies*). The minor story does not depend on the extent but on the

theme. The theme of minor stories is everyday marginalia, the moment, fragment, movement, gesture, pose which is decisive for nothing in the transliterated world and can be invested in no way with great (metaphysical) stories. This shift is not of course accidental, it has some exceptional zeitgeist: a recognition of the equal value of the profound and the marginal, large and small, central and peripheral, total and fragmentary, etc. At the same time it signifies a consummation of their autonomous intentions which NSP had already established to a great extent and the result of which is literature-itself.

This shift appears on another level as metafiction: as a shift from classical »als-ob« misleads with radical literarization. Although it is expressive in Blatnik's texts of some kind of metaphysical truth in accordance with the dictates of the narrative itself, it never occurs with the intention of transcending literature-itself. Blatnik remains in this literature-itself and his link to it in his most recent prose collection with a shift from some modernistic spiritual metaphysical approach only enhances it. So – also in the texts which are presented in the present selection – it finally becomes clear that the writer does not intend in his literature to »announce« anything to the reader, at least not in the classical sense. His writing is intend-

ed for those who delight in literature: if you want: the literary hedonist. An analysis of the meaning of Blatnik's short stories would be analogous to explaining a joke to someone who hasn't understood. That is to say: here it is necessary to pay attention from word to word in the spirit of distortion, allusion, hidden quota-

tion, palimpsest, etc. An approach which is not overly sympathetic; which does not destroy the self-sufficiency of the text but actually questions the classical interpretation of a literary work. Blatnik's texts are not in fact meant for analysis or a considered reception of the recipient. They are intended for pleasure.

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Jani VIRK epitomizes, in an independent, autopoetic way, some of the basic tendencies of MSP. Especially his short prose (*The Leap*, 1987; and his next book, now in print, *The Door and Other Stories*) is characterized by strong elements of fantastic, glittering grotesque upheavals, startling associative chains and innovative metaphors and metonymies (it is probably no coincidence that Virk has also published a collection of poems *Running through the Fields* (1990). Some characteristic metaphysical handling can be found in this prose: a first person approach to a third person narrative perspective, a metaphysical questioning of authorship, minor stories, etc. Of all representatives of contemporary short prose, Virk perhaps most of all embellishes a glittering, imaginative (and as we know typically postmodernistic) combination of the veristic and hermetic, banal and sublime, superficial and profound, popular and elite, etc. This is clearest in the novel *Rachel* (1989), and above all it is

also clearly visible in his characteristic short prose, such as, e.g., in the story *Rošlin and Verjanko*: from a veristic start (starting from everyday events, sometimes almost naturalistic description) it achieves a veristic complication which unravels as a subtle, harmonious (sometimes also fantastic) point which is structured only as the trace of a sense or a wish. This point retrospectively shatters the feeling of normality so that judgements on Virk's verism are, if not unjust, at least a generalization. The truth is probably that both veristic (predominantly in e.g., *Regatta*) and artistic elements are associated in his writing. *Rošlin and Verjanko* starts with a completely banal, everyday situation, embodying in itself the points which represent, e.g., some basic postmodernistic tendencies. The hero writes his text (his literature) so that he sticks signs from some (other) book along the ground of the labyrinth. What is postmodernistic here is not just the fact of metaphorical quotation (since this



»glueing« paraphrases exactly this) but also such a thematization of the labyrinth (dominant in Borges and Eco).

The labyrinth in *Rošlin and Verjanko* does not appear accidentally, since it can be found — as an internal structure — also in other of Virk's texts, e.g., in the story *On the Trail of the Altar*. There a detective follows the threads of a web which every time entwines him and ever more he recognises that all roads are interwoven. The point appears at the moment when the detective seeking the altar becomes aware that he is standing on the place of the vanished altar — he himself! This situation suggests that the subject is always, wherever he finds himself, in the center of the labyrinth (also paraphrased in *Rošlin and Verjanko*): the hero, as we suspect, becomes aware of his here-to-be when he finds himself insoluble caught within the walls of the labyrinth and that it is this holy place (emptied transcendence) which is the measure of Virk's symbolism, man himself.

This shows that Virk — like Jan-

čar — does not cut all links with the extra-textual world. This is perhaps most clearly seen with the stories which are actually closest to verism: e.g., *Regatta*. In comparison with other texts of contemporary Slovene short prose, it is evident that Virk's emphasis is not so much on storytelling as some of the others: his subjects are casual, uninterested, »relenting«; traces of their former hardness; a »memory« of great stories and Ideas which oriented European literature over the centuries; an inkling of the atmosphere which, e.g., F. Kafka and E.A. Poe created with their writing. So it is possible to claim that the difference between Virk and those storytellers who write »pure literature« rather than about a classical »author's subject« is that it is possible to equate the narrator with the author's subject. The boundary between literature and its Great Story is narrow. Virk successfully resists the temptation and remains on this side of the divide.

Translated by  
Lili Potpara

Drago Bajt

## SLOVENE SHORT PROSE OF THE LAST TWENTY YEARS

1.

Two expressions in particular have been used in the critical literature about Slovene prose of the last twenty years, both only something of a prop in need: »new Slovene prose« and »young Slovene prose«. Critics (especially the author of these lines and the critic, Aleksander Zorn) needed them as a term by which to embrace the prose writing of young Slovene authors, born after 1945, who entered the literary scene at the end of the sixties, during the turbulent times of student unrest and for about a decade thereafter, and who wrote their first novel after one or two collections of short stories. This prose was created at the end of the sixties as a reaction to the prose writing of the earlier, reistically and psychoanalytically oriented generation. The first publications appeared in the student weekly, »Tribuna« and the journal, »Problemi«. The rebound from »reism«, as the »new novel« in Slovenia was called by the literary publicist, Taras Kermauner,

was thus a break with the description of a world of things in which man ceased to be the centre of things, was not full-faced and complete; we find exact descriptions in the style of »Reism«, as much with Dušan Jovanovič as Ditmitrij Rupel and Marko Švabič, who Kermauner characterized as »Ludist«. The young novelists opposed above all the canons of realistic, psychological, existential, philosophical prose, so they fragmented the rational framework of storytelling at the boundaries of probability and approached the region of the absurd, fantasy, grotesque, where there was no longer space for psychological descriptive literary form nor the great eschatological questions of classical and modern prose. Literature as an imitative or transformative sublimation of the existent world began to change into literature as the generation and structuring of imaginary textual worlds. Writing became above all a creative game

in the open space of literary speech and fable; it no longer wished to serve traditional ideology and social mythology. Rupel and Švabič were early joined by the Maribor writers, Franček Rudolf and Drago Jančar, and were followed by Branko Gradišnik, Emil Filipčič and Uroš Kalčić, and some time later by Vladimir Kovačič, Tone Perčič and a few others, so that in the seventies, they formed a strong group of prose writers who were fused

## 2.

We will try to designate some of the characteristics of this prose of the seventies in Slovenia. In comparison with modern world literature, it is a mainly recognisable literary reaction to the world internal and external to the work, well-tried »techno-poetic« procedures – nevertheless both are new in the development of Slovene prose literature, in its role in society, in its national significance, in the humanist mission of the artistry of words. Literature lost the aureole of the basic values of the Slovene nation – it was no longer the voice of a nationally established ideology, faith, humanism, the Word, capitalized, which would become flesh and redeem the world. Young authors introduced a whole series of ways of degrading the stock of Slovene myth and reestablishing a zero condition without hierarchies or the

into the central, dominant current of contemporary Slovene literature and took over the sceptre traditionally held by poetry – in spite of there being no firm overall graphic and esthetic link between them. They formed, therefore, no literary school, or group or movement in the recognised sense of the terms. Precisely for this reason, there was also no more adequate term created further to aid in classification than »new« or »young« Slovene prose.

supremacy of certain elements over others. The literary world of Slovene prose of the seventies was brotherhood and equality for all; if anything prevailed it was literature itself. A writer wrote a world, the world became only as written, there was nothing outside the written world. The literary world was the only reality, no longer confined to the world of the writer, to external reality, formerly decisive for literature.

The literary world has its own laws and regulations which can – and often are – in conflict with the logic of cause and effect of matter in the human world. The classical laws of truth and reality do not apply; there is no harmony of name and thing, no identity of literary form, no linear story or symmetrical composition of realistic prose. This world is »collapsed

into story«, as the critic Aleksander Zorn put it; the story is a chain of associations which project a crumbling structure; the text is not clear in its genre nor finally formed. Contemporary critics found in the »new prose« a poetic construction plan, the expressly »lyrical« and »metaphorical« characteristics of the poetry of Salamun, Jesih, Svetina, who take the structure of the story much as a narrator and stylize the words. This is the stylistic efficacy of this prose which is typified by magic phrases which also operate on the reader, and from here derives the frequent linguistic exhibitionism and esthetic mannerism as the final and highest intent of this prose. Zorn characterizes its lithosphere thus: »In all these works, to a greater or lesser extent (although strikingly and deliberately) one can detect the following poetic characteristics which connect them: a disintegration of the causal construction of the storyline – the scheme of the story suddenly disappears like a sinking river, it disconnects with a new story anecdote, and again

with a third and so on – and in conjunction with this there is complete anarchy of genre, there is no kind of logical and clear genre, since writers now project a fable, now a naturalist episode, and then again psychological prose which suddenly ends in science fiction; and not infrequently there is a radical abolition of the status of the storyteller, who appears briefly but importantly for the prose story, then is cast as the author himself, who steps into the world of his own literature as the hero. Everything is permitted, nothing forbidden. And everything is cast in a special hallucinatory light both credible and forceful. It seems that the »new prose« is chaos in which all elements are mixed, fixed haphazard when all was present at the moment of creation. Everything seems to lead back to the magic of »clean« literary words; everything which literature has invented and distinguished flowing again into a single liquid totality of a world of language and story. And language and story again hold the power of a mythical magic world.«

## 3.

Slovene prose of the eighties also developed under the flag of »liberation from imitation« (M. Bogataj), so in the direction of the further autonomisation of literature, and marked by »autopoetics and autoethics«; the critic Tomo

Virk claims that the most appropriate characterization of the work of a group of the generation mentioned, born at the end of the fifties and start of the sixties, remains »young« or »new« Slovene prose. Virk listed 13 names: Andrej

Blatnik, Franjo Francič, Vlado Žabot, Igor Zabel, Lidija Gačnik, Lela B. Njatin, Jani Virk, Igor Bratož, Feri Lainšček, Andrej Morovič, Mart Lenardič, Boštjan Seliškar and Milan Kleč. Another critical follower of this prose, Marko Juvan, divided the above names into four groups: 1. metaphysicists («literarists») – Blatnik, Bratož, in part Zabel and Lela B. Njatin – who moved especially within «the horizon of the Borgese vision of the world as a great labyrinth of literature»; 2. subjective realists («individualists») – Francič, Seliškar, Morovič, Lela B. Njatin; 3. archaicists – Gačnik, Žabot; 4. total fantasists – Kleč. He also arranged them in the context of previous periods «antirealists, antimimeticists and extratextualists», who were characterized thus: «The sovereignty of the author's subject is raised above that of the words, the creator of his own narrative world, a commentator on his own writing and life who stresses the precision and self-validity of style (stylisation and stylistic breaks), parodies various typical practices and plays with them (genre, functionalist and other language forms, ideology and convention), mixes perspectives, reality and fantasy, abuses empirical detail and the literary pomposity of thought, as well as metaphorically «trying it on» (flowing together of narrative levels, 'stream of character', shifting of the hero of the text in the text and into 'reality').» The youngest generation of Slovene prose writers appeared

after 1983, especially in the magazine »Problemi – Literatura«, (Problems – Literature) which still today shows its conceptual, theoretical and receptive background of the seventies, above all French post-structuralism, and Anglo-American postmodernist and metaphysical literature. Almost all have returned to some kind of metaphysical idea and have deconstructed the story even more than in the seventies: they are distinguished (e.g., Blatnik in *Biografije brezimnih* (Biographies of the Nameless )) by minimalist »story moments« which are actually marginal fragments, only described movement or gesture in the context of poetic imitation and simulation. Some of the philosophical stands of this literature (e.g., that of the »mellowing subject« and radical desubjectivisation or the revelation of absolute, capitalized, Thought which disintegrates into a pluralist net of thoughts) are engendered by a questioning of authorship: the author is turned into a mere scribe, a copyist, a quoter; and also »the collapse of great stories«, since it has led to fragmentation and a »collage of discourses«, as Igor Zabel put it. On the other hand, this is a stated claim of technopoetic strategy and tactics: it has strengthened even further literary artism, individual style has been perfected (e.g., Bratož or Aleks Šušulič), leading to minimalistic literary genres (anecdote, prose maxims, parables, e.g., Blatnik or Miha Mazzini).

Young Slovene prose writers of the last two decades, as we have said, were not a single school or movement, so it is necessary to look at the specificities of their individual poetics. The choice has been restricted.

The Slovene language is the hero of the prose of Uroš KALČIČ (1951), in all its historical breadth from Janez Trdina to Rudi Šeligo. Aleksander Zorn wrote of his *Mehika* (Mexico): »... the extraordinary stylistic suggestivity, the playing with syntax, grammar, whose richness encompasses an entire opus in a single book, are characteristics which enable us to read *Mehika* with real pleasure... The language game leads us on with suggestivity and hypnosis. Kalčič is here a great master of storytelling...» The collection, *Mehika*, is an abundant store of archaisms and poeticisms, dialectics and jargon, vulgarisms and neologisms. The language distorts the narrative tale, opens up the traditional scheme of art, channels the narrative perspective, moulds narrative time and space. The result of this babble of tongues is an evermore polished description, bizarre episode, genre fragment. Language stylisation is the basis of Kalčič's literary universe, captured in the charm of word pictures.

Literary speech also has an essential role in the prose of Drago JANČAR (1948). In the novel *Galjot* (Galley Slave), e.g., the

author gives it a variety of roles: it is adapted to the energy of the inquisitor and the stutter of the witch, the judges clarity and the drunken babble, and especially the old world atmosphere of the 17th century. Jančar's words are sometimes as descriptive as Šeligo's, and all the time serving the writer's basic thinking on the »ungovernable chaos of existence«, in constant service of ideas of a world without a centre and of people without a spiritual core to life; this is the language of Jančar's universal metaphor. The »ungovernable chaos of existence«, the theme of *O bledem hudodelcu* (Pale Sinner) (as well as the novel *Severni sij* (Northern Gleam) or the book of short stories *Smrt pri Marija Snežni* (Death at Mary of the Snows) – and of course his plays), as the tyranny of blind, bloody violence, torments all of Jančar's heroes, including Kristof in the story of the same name. This spiritual-corporal disarray expresses itself narratively as an internal monologue, dialogue, or even internalized discussion, as a soliloquy on and significance of the hero's ego. (It is natural that after these prose works, Jančar is best known as a dramatist.)

Branko GRADIŠNIK (1951) is often unable to avoid conscious keys to reading, so his stories are a modern parable about the existential problems of all, about truth and lies, about time and

space. Time and man's destiny are the thematic dominants in the collections *Čas* (Time) and *Zemlja zemlja zemlja* (Earth Earth Earth). Gradišnik tries to renew the solid connection of story with a mental sting in the tail (e.g. in *Zgodbi* (Stories) or in the novel *Leta* (Lethe), although paradox and a disintegration of logic distinguish it from classical realism; the literary play of conscious and subconscious is close to sheer fantasy prose, sometimes set in the genre of science fiction, sometimes parodying pseudohistorical novel (e.g., in *Kerubini* (Cherubins). Gradišnik creates a web of literary and authorial reality, situations of matter in an unreal cosmos: he equates himself with his own heroes, he seeks in them personal identity and evidence of his own existence.

Jani VIRK (1962) is fascinated by death and love, as well as being dedicated to breaching a fantastic world of momentary spiritual enlightenment, and also

pays attention to the appropriateness of his prose form. The question of genre in general greatly engages the younger prose writers, especially the problem of post-modernism, which Branko Gradišnik was one of the first consciously to introduce into the Slovene prose of the last twenty years with his book *Mistifikacije* (Mystifictions).

Andrej BLATNIK (1963) is known to have been initially a disciple of Gradišnik. Then with the novel *Plamenice in solze* (Torches and Tears) and the collection of short stories *Biografije brezimnih* (Biographies of the Nameless), he created an example of fiction-faction prose which was a »genre mix« of trivial forms (love stories, melodrama, detective, science fantasy, horror stories) given technostylistic metaphysical treatment, such as hidden citations, an obscure subtext or false context, parody, apocryphal stylisation, syncretically included metatexts.

*Translated by  
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