

LOUIS ADAMIČ – SLOVENE-AMERICAN LITERARY JOURNALISM *AVANT LA LETTRE*

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ABSTRACT

Louis Adamič (1898–1951) immigrated to the U.S. as a young boy and eventually established himself as one of the most prolific and shrewd writers, journalists, and socio-political commentators of Slovene descent in America. This article focuses on those of Adamič's narratives that display characteristics of literary journalism, a discourse that has been in use for over a hundred years, but particularly grew in importance during the 1960s in the U.S. Adamič wrote texts that could be labeled literary or narrative journalism three decades before the big boom of this literary-journalistic genre. My analysis searches for typical features of this subjective, perceptual discourse in Adamič's longer, book-length narratives (the two most notable examples being *The Native's Return* [1934] and *The Eagle and the Roots* [1952]) and, moreover, gives insight into political, social, as well as more personal circumstances that inspired Adamič to produce such writing.

Louis Adamič (1898–1951), probably the most prolific American writer of Slovene descent, left an indelible mark on the journalistic, literary, and political activity of Americans with Slovene roots, native Slovenes, and the American public in general, regardless of their origin. Being a keen social observer, Adamič in his writings internalized the rhetoric of literary, social, and political reportage, dramatized his compulsion to be involved in the subject matter, and consistently denied his readers a complacent, non-critical reading stance. Many of Adamič's journalistic pieces as well as longer narratives display characteristics that literary and journalism studies attribute to literary journalism.¹ Following Norman Sims's description of the key characteristics of this type of literary-journalistic discourse in *The Literary Journalists* (1984),² Adamič's writing often reveals the author's

¹ I mainly use the term literary journalism in this article. When other terms, such as narrative journalism and literary reportage are used, they refer to the same type of discourse.

² Norman Sims is a professor of journalism at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst and an expert in literary journalism. *The Literary Journalists* is a collection of some of the best articles by the most distinguished literary journalists of our time: Joan Didion, Tom Wolfe, Jane Kramer, Mark Kramer,

immersion in the subject matter, or rather in the life of the subject(s) he is writing about,³ structured narrative, high standard of accuracy, the presence of the individual voice of the writer/journalist, the use of novelistic techniques, and lastly, responsibility towards the characters in the narrative. Or, as Henry A. Christian writes in one of his essays on Adamič, referring predominantly to Adamič's longer narratives published in a book form: "His developing use of the fictional narrative 'I' in combination with an emphasis on personal, factual accounts of the American experience was leading to work which would eventually mark him as a prophet of what was called in the 1960s 'the New Journalism'" (1977–78: 49). My article focuses on those of Adamič's narratives that come closest to the domain of literary journalism, be it in the form of magazine articles, or longer, novel-length texts and, moreover, illuminates the socio-political conditions that inspired Adamič to produce such accounts. In addition, my analysis glosses a few of Adamič's narratives that dwell mostly in the sphere of fiction, yet depend largely on factual information, thus functioning as narrative hybrids, vacillating on the scale of factuality-fictionality.

Literary journalism is a term denoting a specific "narrative impulse," as Norman Sims reports in *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (2007), a "broader sensibility toward telling stories in journalism" (11). Literary journalism is frequently discussed together with New Journalism, which is simply a narrower notion, applied to the type of 1960s–1970s journalistic writing in the U.S. that used literary techniques. Moreover, especially in the American literary-journalistic sphere, "we observe how subjective journalism often spills into longer narratives, specifically into documentary novels that constantly oscillate between historical novels, crime narratives, (auto)biographies, travelogues, and political commentaries, on the one hand, and journalism, on the other" (Flis 2009: 33). However, neither the literary journalism of the 1960s, nor the kind that

Tracy Kidder, and John McPhee, to name a few. Sims edited the book and wrote the introduction.

³ Immersion reporting means that the journalist often witnesses the events he is writing about, participates in them, has intimate interactions with other witnesses, and makes every effort to research and comprehend the perspectives of all involved parties. In *Literary Journalists*, Sims defines "immersion" as one of the key characteristics of literary journalism (8–12). He lists structure, a distinct voice of the journalist, accuracy, and responsibility towards the subjects as well as the readers as the other essential characteristics. Another valid description of immersion reporting comes from Chip Scanlan, for example. He explained it in a panel discussion "Sharing the Secrets of Fine Narrative Journalism": "It's just being there, immersing yourself so that the writer inhabits the story and, by taking up residence in the story, it seems to affect everything, including choice of language and, most of all, the sense of authority that a good narrative has" (Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference, *Nieman Reports*, 2002).

we find in Adamič's writing three decades earlier, was an entirely new phenomenon. In fact, we can trace the beginnings of literary journalism back to the late nineteenth century.⁴ The techniques of literary journalism have been in use for over a hundred years and many writers whose works are now regarded as classics wrote nonfiction works with a distinct literary flair—namely, Charles Dickens, Jack London, George Orwell, Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, and John Hersey, to list a few distinguished names. Nevertheless, it was Tom Wolfe, the proverbial father of New Journalism and somewhat of a cultural icon in the 1960s and the 1970s, who anthologized a group of writers under the rubric “New Journalism” and identified them as “rivals to the best novelists of their time.”⁵ (Flis 2010: 15, 16) In Sims's words: “Literary journalism has developed its styles and standards in a long evolution over several centuries—an evolution in which the most dramatic changes came in response to disruptive cultural forces such as revolution, economic depression, war, and liberation—and has its basis in the origins of nonfiction prose.” (2007: 20). Indeed, we can identify newspapers and magazines with a stance and a voice similar to that found in present-time papers that promote literary journalism as early as in the early 1900s and then throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

After WW I, impersonal objectivity ruled in the journalistic world for a while, and that pushed literary journalism to the side for a shorter period of time. However, already during the Great Depression, literary journalism came back to life, especially in the more radical and alternative media. There, as Sims notes, “it could hide from the dominant journalistic forces” (2007: 22). Sims (2007) also points out that the first serious newspaper coverage of the Great Depression came sometime around the latter part of 1932. That was the time of “great erosion of confidence and trust among the middle class ... the suicide rate rose, a million unemployed wandered the country, and thirty-eight states closed their banks” (134). Those were the conditions in which a style of journalism appeared that “drew on such predecessors as the sociological style of the Muckrakers and

⁴ Most of these nineteenth-century narratives, however, evade a direct confrontation with the historical authenticity of the present or the recent past. Rather, they depict “distant pasts”—e.g., Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) and William Morris's *News From Nowhere* (1891). George Orwell wrote a witty account of his life among the poorest in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). The book is a vivid first-person account of the writer's battle with poverty in the two capital cities. He deliberately chose this sort of life after working as a policeman for the Indian Imperial Police in Burma for a few years left him feeling miserable and ashamed of British colonialism.

⁵ For further insight into Wolfe's cultural and social positioning, see Shafer (2005).

anticipated many of the characteristics of the New Journalism of the 1960s,” explains Sims (134). Those were also the circumstances that offered a perfect working environment to Adamič, as well as other proponents of literary reportage at the time, such as Dos Passos and Sherwood Anderson. Adamič was undoubtedly an important part of the group of writers and journalists who contributed to the preservation and gradual perfecting of this particular method and style of reportage.

Adamič felt a genuine need to respond to topical social, political, and economic issues with accuracy (a result of detailed research) but also with a personal note that expressed his and his characters’ more intimate struggles and aspirations. He was particularly concerned with the lives of immigrants, workers, and various ethnic groups in the United States. He traveled throughout the country to meet with different groups of labor rights leaders,⁶ immigrant workers and their families, as well as people that he found interesting in terms of their immigrant background. As observed in Dan Shifman’s book *Rooting Multiculturalism* (2003), Adamič’s writing about the United States has an even greater intimacy that we find in his works on his homeland, Slovenia (and more broadly, the then Yugoslavia) (21). He stated many times that he was an American writer and a proud American citizen. In the opening chapter of *The Native’s Return* (1934), entitled “After Nineteen Years,” he writes:

At fourteen—a son of peasants, with a touch of formal “city education”—I had emigrated to the United States from Carniola... In those nineteen years I had become an American; indeed, I had often thought I was more American than were most of the native citizens of my acquaintance. I was ceaselessly, almost fanatically, interested in the American scene; in ideas and forces operating in America’s national life, in movements, tendencies and personalities, in technical advances, in social, economic, and political problems, and generally in the tremendous drama of the New World... All my emotional and intellectual life now seems to be rooted in America. I belong in America. (3–5)

However, throughout his writing, Adamič also addresses his and his characters’ uncertainties about their status of “emerging Americans.” This is how the narrator of his novel *Grandsons* (1935), referred to as L., describes his marginal position in America: “I was caught in this America; her beauty, wealth and size had captured my imagination and emotions; but simultaneously, I was a bit apart. I wasn’t a native... I came from a place

⁶ The class struggles and the struggles between workers and the managerial circles are probably best described in Adamič’s book *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America* (1931).

called Carniola, of which no one in America seemed to have heard before” (80). Such moments of insight into personal struggles are ample in Adamič. Many times, when describing other people, he really writes about himself, but, in the words of Shiffman (2003), “this is not to say that any of his portraits are ‘stand ins,’ who precisely embody Adamič’s own anxieties and hopes” (22).

A lot of Adamič’s topics also revolved around the notions of truth and accuracy in reporting and writing in general. This preoccupation (a significant point of interest to many literary journalists) was triggered by the work of Upton Sinclair, with whom Adamič corresponded between 1923 and 1946. Adamič admitted that *Dynamite* (1931) was heavily influenced by Upton Sinclair, especially his work *The Jungle* (1906), which is based on detailed research and is full of factual data. This is how Adamič recalls Sinclair’s world view at time when Sinclair published *The Jungle*: “He was then still a regular Socialist, a member of the party, but not averse to hearing the truth, even if unfavorable, about radicals and their movements and politics” (Browder 1998: 20). An excerpt from *My America* (1938) also reveals Adamič’s musings on the notions of truth and the understanding of reality in his writing:

[...] Of late my inclination is to the following belief or notion:
To approach truth and understanding and, through them, to experience a more or less steady feeling, one must be free, intelligent, and essentially sound as a human being; one must possess a wide and deep consciousness, good instincts, intuition, a sense of humor, and a sense of drama... I believe that the drama of things is the truth of things. To say this in other words: the truth of a thing, condition, situation, or whatever it may be, is the essence of the interplay or interaction of all the factors therein, which is the drama thereof. I think that to the extent that one perceives the drama of a thing one perceives the truth of it... To write truthwardly, then, is to write dramatically. (xii)

Moreover, in his journalistic pieces (particularly in *Harper’s*, *The Nation*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, and *T&T* journal), as well as in his longer narratives, Adamič was keen on applying cynicism, sarcasm, and irony, thus revealing both subjectivism and, at the same time, distance towards his subject matter. On the one hand, such distance prevented him from being overtly sentimental or too nostalgic, and on the other hand, enabled him to maintain a close personal involvement in the subject matter and thus stay in line with the requirements of narrative journalism. It was H. L. Mencken with his renowned cynicism and sharp criticism of American society that hugely influenced Adamič, who started publishing in Mencken’s journal *The American Mercury* in the late 1920s. Already many

of Adamič's early journalistic texts display techniques of fiction-writing (e.g., dramatization, dialogues, distinctive plot, and character formation). In addition, the impressionistic picture of emotions and characters is normally supplemented with the author's (frequently critical and cynical) contemplations on a given topic which are further supported by documentary material gathered through meticulous research. In *Dynamite*, Adamič is contemplating the post-1929 America, describing the typical employer-businessman:

[T]he average employer is incapable even of grasping and discussing the idea of industrial stabilization. He is usually a college graduate, but has no developed social ideas. Socio-economically, he *is* a moron. He is solely a business man. He is keenly alert and opportunistic in keeping up-to-date with "progressive business methods" (most of which operate to reduce employment), but ponderously tenacious when business touches on anything outside business. ... [H]e calls himself an "executive" but, so far as I have been able to detect, he hasn't the faintest idea where he and his enterprise are headed. (420–21)

Adamič, does, however, still see positive sides of life in America in the Depression decade. This is how he describes his encounter with "Communists and their 'fellow travelers' in different parts of the country during 1931–35" in his book *My America: 1928–1938* (1938):

They either attacked me because I opposed their wild talk about the imminent "revolution" or tried to convert me to their ideas. ... I called the "Communists'" attention to such, to me obvious, facts as that America of the 1930s was not Russia of 1917; that in America, even in these years of the Depression, we had 10,500,000 owner occupied homes, with an average value of \$4,778; 20,600,000 registered automobiles, exclusive of trucks; 39,000,000 deposits in savings accounts totaling over twenty-one billion dollars; over 115,000,000 insurance policies in force, their insurance exceeding one hundred billion dollars—etc. All of which, however, meant nothing to my adversaries. ... I insisted that America, with its complex industrialism, was not feudal-peasant Russia. (336)

Adamič, in the vein of literary journalism, constructed "a multilayered historical and psychological portrayal of the society in a specific period of time" (Žitnik Serafin 1993: 88). He wanted to give a pluralistic picture of a selected fragment in history and he did that by employing a multitude of voices and perspectives, which also goes well with his idea of cultural pluralism, expressed so well in his pieces in *Harper's Monthly* in the 1930s, as well as in the journal he edited in the

1940s, entitled *Common Ground*. Adamič was aware of this pluralistic and, at the same time, fragmented reality that he portrayed. In an opening paragraph of *My America* we read:

This is only a partial picture of my America. It is made up—mosaic-like—around a central theme—of things and people, chiefly people, within my experience and observation (from various angles, in various moods) during these last ten years in the United States that seem interesting or significant to me personally as an individual and as an American, and lend themselves to telling at this time. (xi)

It was apparent from the very beginning of Adamič's professional career that his vocation was not only that of a writer and a journalist, but also of an advocate of ethical movement in the U.S., a politician, and a literary and social critic. Throughout his writing career, Adamič was concerned with various aspects of social, ethnic, and racial discrimination in the U.S. and worldwide. The discrimination issues were foregrounded in his articles in the journal *Common Ground*.⁷ Adamič's most productive decades were the 1930s and the 1940s. He became, in his writing and in his social activism—especially after the publication of his book *The Native's Return: An American Immigrant Visits Yugoslavia And Discovers His Old Country* (1934)—a very active (unofficial) ambassador of Yugoslavia to the United States. He gained respect and trust in selected American cultural and political circles, receiving endorsements from such esteemed literary figures as Upton Sinclair, Sherwood Anderson, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Moreover, in 1932, he was awarded the prestigious Guggenheim fellowship for two of his works—*Dynamite* (1929), in which he discusses the history of racial tension in the U.S., and the autobiographical *Laughing in the Jungle* (1932). In *Laughing in the Jungle: The Autobiography of an Immigrant in America*, which deals mainly with the author's reactions to his new living environment and the people in it, Adamič partly transformed reality into literary fiction, but, at the same time, like a proper journalist, always checked and cross-checked every piece of factual information that he included in his narrative.

The Guggenheim fellowship started the sequence of Adamič's longer narratives. It enabled him to travel to Yugoslavia, and *The Native's Return* was the chief product of the trip. This first-person narrative, combining features of an illustrated travelogue (the book includes many

⁷ Adamič was very much involved with the complexities of the lives of (mostly European) immigrants in the U.S. He never came to drawing a clear demarcation line between the concepts of cultural pluralism and assimilation; he believed in the continuous merging of the two notions. By stressing that there was no reasonable middle ground between unity and diversity, he gave an important lesson to present-day multiculturalists (Shiffman 2003).

photographs of the places Adamič visited and of the people he talked to on his journey), a political and social commentary, as well as those of an ethnological study, reflects Adamič's strong penchant for literarization and offers a realistic and authentic description of an often complacent and dull atmosphere that the writer observed in Yugoslavia. A young Muslim from Sarajevo named Omar, whose thoughts Adamič quotes, explains this well in the book:

There is much that is charming in our life, but we are mediaeval, over-conservative, unspontaneous, stuck in a historical and geographical rut. ... We need something drastic to push us out of the rut. It may be that something will come along and do that. It may be the forces that were released here in 1914 will finally reach back into these mountains and make a change in our situation. (201)

Adamič offers a plurality of truths and perspectives, weaving together the stories of many Yugoslavians, from peasants to newspaper editors, writers, artists, and, ultimately, King Alexander himself. He also attempts to explain in considerable detail the psychological, sociological, historical, anthropological, and political contexts framing the state of affairs that he encountered in his homeland. Here's a passage where Adamič is discussing rich and powerful Serbian men with a professor from Belgrade University:

One evening I sat in a Belgrade café with an English-speaking professor of the Belgrade University. When two new guests entered and all the waiters in the place rushed to assist them in removing their enormous fur coats, he said to me: "He was in office eight months, years ago, and in that time increased his wealth from nothing to 150,000,000 dinars"—nearly \$3,000,000. "The man on the right is his brother-in-law, formerly an important official in the Administration of Forests. Now he's a millionaire, too. A couple of robber-barons!" (251)

Adamič always searches for a story, a narrative in the depicted events, which is one of the principle characteristics of literary journalism. As the reporter, the writer, and the commentator, he is continually part of the narrative, complementing his views with a multiplicity of his characters' perspectives, never giving a uniform view on a particular issue that is being discussed, thus shunning the principles of traditional journalistic narratives as well as those of conventional historical storytelling. The meeting of King Alexander described in *The Native's Return* was preceded by Adamič talking to many "ordinary" citizens of Belgrade as well as a few state officials. They all gave him their own opinion on the king. The writer retells all of the discussions and comments upon them. A former minister of the government, "now in passive opposition to the *diktatura*," as Adamič

describes, stopped by his hotel room the day before Adamič visited the King at the Royal Palace of Dedinje.

“You will meet an interesting man,” he said. A man of great ability and capacity for work. ... He is ambitious for fame. The fame of another person within Yugoslavia he considers an insolent invasion of the royal prerogative. ... He likes only yes-men who know how to keep themselves subdued, in the background. He is spiteful, ungrateful. He uses a man, then tosses him aside... (345–46)

Adamič ends the chapter titled “I Met the King-Dictator” with these thoughts:

He was a cog in the new political system of post-war Europe, helping to hold together a crumbling civilization with gangster methods. He was a figure in the dreadful European nightmare that seemed rapidly and inevitably approaching its climax—another great war to be followed (as nearly everyone with whom I talked appeared to believe) by general upheavals of the masses. At the moment he had the whole country “on the spot”; he might stay in power one, two, five or ten more years; but the future was clearly and definitely against him and his kind. (351)

Adamič never held back when it came to expressing his personal opinion on the Yugoslavian political situation. He openly communicated his political bias; as noted, he was critical of the dictatorship-like rule of King Alexander I, whom he compared to none other than Al Capone.⁸ At the same time, he showed his sympathy for the Communist opposition.⁹ His unequivocally biased view of Yugoslavia counters the principal rules of traditional reporting, specifically the avoiding of too explicit declarations of the writer’s political preferences. However, Adamič is clearly within the sphere of the literarized reportage, where such declarations are frequently found. An additional proof of Adamič’s literary journalism is the quality of his narrator: it has a distinct personality, an audible voice that resonates throughout the narrative—normally, he is puzzled, wry, critical, but also

⁸ The entire chapter 17, entitled “I Meet the King-Dictator,” is dedicated to King Alexander. Adamič felt a tension between them throughout their conversation, which made him feel quite uncomfortable: “My audience with Alexander was no pleasant experience” (348). Alexander strongly disliked the U.S., because he blamed “the severity of the depression on Herbert Hoover,” whom he held responsible for the fact that Germany ceased paying reparations.

⁹ Adamič’s “Yugoslavian writings” clearly reveal an affinity towards the partisan movement and certain communist ideas, not to mention his unfaltering support of Tito, who could not possibly be a dictator in his view, because his “personal glow” reminded Adamič of Wendell Willkie (Adamič 1952: 88).

sympathetic towards the struggles of those he favors. Examining the narrative/reporting style of *The Native's Return* shows that the writer's critical socio-political commentary sometimes merges with more poetic passages, especially when the author is talking about his family, his mother, in specific. This is how the writer describes his first encounter with his mother after living in the U.S. for nineteen years (even though the passage focuses more on his mother's reactions, it is possible to detect Adamič's emotionality):

The sight of my mother, who waited for me (as I recalled in that instant) on the same spot in the courtyard of our home where I had said good-bye to her in 1913, gave me a sharp sting. She had aged and her body had shrunk; her hair was gray and thin, her eyes and cheeks were sunken, but her hug told me she was still hale and strong. She smiled a little and, holding my hands stiffly in front of hers, her body swayed a little, right and left, in sheer, unwordable happiness. (20)

Still, Adamič never lets himself get too carried away emotionally. He is aware of his conjoined role of a cultural commentator, a philosopher, and a "contemporary humanist," as Boris Paternu called him (1981: 85).

Another trait that clearly connects Adamič with literary journalists is the way he carries out a careful investigation prior to writing any story. In *The Native's Return*, where the text is accompanied with documentary photographs, he dug deep into the epic past of Yugoslavia, going back all the way to the famous battle of Kosovo in 1389, which revealed troublesome relations between the Yugoslavian nations. Moreover, Adamič not only pointed to the past turmoil in the Balkan region, but also prophetically anticipated the forthcoming conflicts that have lasted to this day. We read this insightful comment:

A close study of the great Kosovo lore reveals another great weakness of the Serb people—and not the Serbs alone, but all the Yugoslavs. They have a hard time in getting along among themselves. Their leaders almost invariably are opportunists, rather than men of principles and programs. They act on the theory—historically, natural enough—that they are surrounded by enemies and cannot wholly trust anyone who is the least bit unlike themselves... For centuries, as the Kosovo epic so tragically records, the Yugoslavs have had within them two powerful urges—one toward union, the other toward discord. (230, 231)

Nonetheless, Adamič made it clear that he loved his homeland and the U.S. equally. He wanted America to be interested in Yugoslavia, to realize its

importance within the Balkans and within the entire Eastern European region:

I'm glad that I'm an immigrant American... Much is wrong with America and I suppose that in the next ten years the whole country will go through a lot of misery; but at the moment I'm thinking mainly of us immigrants in America... Much of our immigrants' energy is frozen in America's present-day greatness; in the tall buildings of New York, in the bridges and railroads throughout America... Bearing all this in mind, it's grand to be a Yugoslav-American and to come back after a visit to the old country. I love America. I think that with Russia, she will be the most important factor in the future of the world and mankind... I love Yugoslavia and I think Americans should be interested in it—should try to understand its problems and its importance in the international situation. (364, 365)

The Native's Return was soon followed by two books—*Grandsons: A Story of American Lives* (1935) and *Cradle of Life: The Story of One Man's Beginnings* (1936). In these two accounts, Adamič moved into the sphere of fiction, while still depending largely on factual data. Let us briefly list a few main features of the two accounts that, in the context of the entire Adamič's opus, probably disassociate themselves the most from literary journalism, and come closest to what we can term generic hybrids. *Grandsons* is a novel that reads partly like a biography and partly like an autobiography; we can describe it as a literarized (auto)biography. The first person narrator, L., is never revealed as Adamič himself, but there can be no doubt that he is “Adamič's autobiographical double,” as Dan Shiffman notes in *Rooting Multiculturalism* (2003: 53). The protagonist Peter Gale is a “worker—an immigrant, a Hunky from Carniola” (64) and an aspiring writer with a “split” identity; he is torn between his feelings for his homeland, on the one hand, and his despising of the enclosed and ignorant circle of peasantry that represents his roots, on the other. Moreover, Gale is ambivalent towards America as well. He sees the life in the U.S. as that of elusive pleasures and often stresses that the life of an immigrant demands a lot of sacrifices and suffering, as assimilation is not an assumed thing. Following Gale's life, we trace Adamič's own view of a battle for survival in an adopted land and his portrayal of a somewhat contradictory stance of an immigrant towards his homeland and the “new” world. L. contemplates:

Actually, it now occurred to me, I was probably as jumpy and jittery as this fellow, Peter Gale. I was perhaps but a different version of the same type. In fact, there was no “perhaps” in this. I was... [B]eneath our psychological skins as Americans, he and I possibly were brothers or cousins, relations of some

sort, birds, more or less, of a feather, naturally drawn to one another. (*Grandsons*: 23)

Another amalgam of biographical, autobiographical, and fictional elements is found in *Cradle of Life*, a first-person narrative which depicts the life of the Croatian painter Makso Vanka, a friend of Adamič's. Žitnik Serafin sees in it a combination of a piece of social realism and a historical novel with neo-romantic traits (Žitnik Serafin 1999: 218). Adamič's presence is felt throughout the narrative; the characters, fictional or not, begin to sound like the "psychological and social apprehensions of the author" (Shiffman 2003: 56), but this time around, they have a somewhat melodramatic feel about them. Henry R. Cooper in his article "Are Louis Adamič's Novels Slovene Novels?" (2003) points out that in *Cradle of Life*, Adamič owes more to the work of Mark Twain, specifically *Prince and the Pauper* than to his more regular influences, Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis.

Adamič's nonfiction account *Two-Way Passage*, published in 1941,¹⁰ reduces the input of impressionistic descriptions and emotional reactions and deals mainly with America's role in the reconstruction of the economically and culturally weakened Europe. Here, Adamič once again lucidly expresses his conviction that America owes it to Europe, since it is a country made up of mostly European immigrants who contributed greatly to the development of the U.S.. The book is predominantly a historical, socio-political, and a psychological study of America and Europe, as well as a comprehensive list of concrete proposals for America's engagement in establishing the United States of Europe (USE), as the writer termed this potential union. Despite the fact that Adamič's narrative is carefully structured and in part literarized (Adamič uses metaphors and stylized language from time to time), *Two-Way Passage* conforms more to the demands of a social commentary and a political platform than to those of literary journalism. In a subchapter entitled "The United States Was Europe's Vent," we read:

The dollars that immigrants sent from America spread their balm beyond the family, beyond the village; they penetrated the entire economic life of the old countries. Yugoslavia, for instance, even after emigration to the United States was restricted, received from her people there from twenty to forty million dollars a year. This sum was a boon to the Belgrade regime. It helped to keep it in power. It enabled the government to pay foreign debts and the interest on them,

¹⁰ *Two-Way Passage* is also the second book in the collection (tetralogy) titled *Nation of Nations*. The first book is *From Many Lands* (1940), the third *What's Your Name?* (1942), and the last *A Nation of Nations* (1945).

cover trade balances, maintain the value of its currency on foreign exchanges, pay its diplomatic corps, and hold taxes lower that they would otherwise have been. (53–54)

Adamič's very last work, *The Eagle and the Roots*, edited by his wife Stella and published posthumously in 1952, was written after his second visit to Yugoslavia, in 1949. As far as the style of writing is concerned, the book echoes *The Native's Return*, drawing the narrative close to the domain of the book-length literary journalism. *The Eagle and the Roots* is a detailed, first-person account of the country's state of affairs, especially of Tito's rule and his dispute with the Soviet regime (Adamič spent over thirty hours in Tito's company). Adamič's personal views are not as dominant and explicit as they were in *Two-Way Passage*; instead, he confronts Communist, non-Communist, and anti-Communist perspectives, thus providing the reader with a pluralist and multilayered picture of reality, as a literary journalist would do. However, the book was considered controversial on both sides of the Atlantic for a long time. In the U.S., it was accused of being pure propaganda (Adamič was subjected to numerous investigations by Senator McCarthy's "club" as well as by Yugoslavian political immigrants); in Yugoslavia, the book was banned from publication for eighteen years due to its supposedly critical attitude towards the Yugoslavian domestic policy and lack of criticism of the American foreign policy. Similarly to *The Native's Return*, *The Eagle and the Roots* connects the elements of narrative journalism (scene-by-scene construction, recording of dialogues in full, as well as detailed descriptions of habits, customs, and manners of the depicted characters) with those of travel writing and complements this type of merging with a collection of personal reminiscences, meditations, historical facts, as well as some more explicitly poetic passages. While in Slovenia, Adamič, exploring the region, once found himself at a remote mountain hamlet, a place that "spelled Peace itself" (172). The following lines clearly reveal the writer's desire to make his narrative novel-like:

A large, brownish-black object near the base of a tall beech was heaving upward, flapping in the air, and hitting the ground with a thudding might... It was an eagle with a five- or six-foot wingspread... A sharp wind swirled about the mountainside. It cut low amid the bare trees and lifted away some of the loose eagle feathers... The westering sun vanished behind a bank of clouds. The wind whistled steadily. There was a brief snow flurry, and I watched the flakes melting on my cold, tensely clasped hands... Returning to the lodge, cold and drained emotionally, I recalled Melville's curious footnote

about the albatross. “Through its inexpressible, strange eyes, methought I peeped to secrets.” (172–74)¹¹

In another passage from *The Eagle and the Roots*, Adamič is discussing communism with Slovene intellectual Josip Vidmar and other guests at a dinner at Vidmar’s house in Slovenia. He records their dialogue word for word:

When I asked him, as one writer to another, what he was working on, he replied he was preparing to write a book entitled “Communism—the New Humanism.”

“New Humanism?” I asked. “I’m faintly familiar with a couple of humanist movements in America, through the magazines they publish—rather fuzzy-minded stuff, full of wordy concern about ‘humanity,’ which these humanists haven’t yet defined in terms I understand. What do you mean by ‘New Humanism’?”

“People,” said Vidmar. “Human beings. A chance for them to grow as close as possible to their full stature and performance. In this country, I think, that’s achievable only if there is an intelligently organized collective economy and a culture providing freedom for the individual and opportunities for his creative integration with the society. Clear?”

I said I thought it was.

Someone else at the dinner table was reminded of a folk saying current in Macedonia and also known in Greece: “We do not live, we wear out one against the other.”

“Will your new system, now being organized around this ‘Tito’ concept and symbol tackle that?”

“Quite a few of us believe it will.” (140–41)

Adamič’s writings are versatile in terms of depicted themes, as well as in their formal features, ranging from traditional journalism to narrative hybrids combining life writing and novelistic techniques. He usually uses the first person narration, when he describes his own, first-hand experience, yet, occasionally, he also appears as an omniscient narrator.¹²

¹¹ The end of this chapter (Book One, Chapter Seven) explains that Adamič’s eagle established himself in his mind as the symbol of Tito, of the Yugoslav Revolution, while the roots began to represent the Soviet and the “Western systems of life” (175).

¹² Guy Talese, a renowned American literary journalist, claims that neither omniscient narration nor complete immersion into the narrative (the writer becomes a character) is a deviation from the domain of literary journalism. He

Regardless of his narrative stance, he always has a strong and audible voice, which is one of the key characteristics of literary journalism. Moreover, subjectivity is highlighted in all of his accounts. Consequently, many of Adamič's texts conform to at least some of the rules of literary journalism. Let us consider another quote from *The Eagle and the Roots* to illustrate his direct way of expressing his stance:

If I'm worried about the Yugoslav Communists, it's not because I question whether you're wise or entitled to call yourselves Communists, or your Party is more truly communistic than the Soviet Party. That scarcely interests me. I'm worried because I feel 'Marxism-Leninism' and your fight with Stalin doesn't even begin to touch the problem we are caught in. As far as I can see, your fight with Stalin merely points up that problem and our American diplomats—as it seems to me—are merely being clever in trying to find out if they can use the Cominform split in the 'cold war' game or in the hot war which is likely to come. (424)

All of Adamič's writings display a plurality of vision, a hybridity of ideas and sentiments, as well as humanistic idealism, expressed mainly as a belief in the victory of the labor movement in the U.S. or, as he puts it in *Dynamite*, a belief in: "the formation of a new movement, a *real* American labor movement of the producing masses, born of the economic and social problems here in America, in tune with the future psychology and philosophy of American life, which will be along collectivist lines, just as the A. F. of L.¹³ was in tune with the American philosophy and psychology in the past" (457). I believe that Adamič, as a writer and a humanist, essentially embodied qualities that Derek Walcott once so eloquently expressed: "Hybrid writers possess a fresh but not innocent sense of place and a new but not naïve vision, which provides them with inexhaustible material. Hybrid writers accept differences on equal terms, and that is their strength" (Cooper 2003: 623).

When reading Adamič's texts, Mark Kramer's words may also come to mind:

Journalism as a civic mission is about an address to citizens on bureaucratic forms. But beyond that, readers are people, and there's a world of real life people beyond newspapers. Reporters of narrative may now include the style of a subject, the flavor, motivation, longings, angers, loyalties, irration-

explains that literary journalism "permits the writer to inject himself into the narrative if he wishes, as many writers do, or to assume the role of a detached observer, as other writers do, including myself" (Hartssock 2000: 201).

¹³ American Federation of Labor.

alities. That's when you're in a position to do what the gods do, to breath life into the clay citizen. Give us the gift an artist does of making people come alive. That's excellence. (Nieman Reports 2002: 8)

In my view, Adamič's texts convey Kramer's message well, as Adamič certainly shows us life in a multifaceted way, incorporating in great detail the eternally fluctuating moves of the reality we live in. This offers valuable proof that a writer of Slovene origin wrote in the vein of literary journalism long before this sort of writing revolutionized the Anglo-American literary and journalistic worlds in the 1960s. In his articles and longer narratives, he was mostly inspired and influenced by other American writers who, as early as 1929, exposed the reality of the Depression to the American public in the form of literary reportage in small-circulation political journals such as *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, but also in more widely read magazines, such as *Harper's* and *The Atlantic*. Both in his texts on America as well as in those on Yugoslavia, Adamič combined structural conventions of traditional journalistic and historical storytelling with the subjective focus of literary journalism and created narratives that are both intimate and credible testimonies of either immediate or distant historical and social reality.

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POVZETEK**LOUIS ADAMIČ – SLOVENSKO-AMERIŠKO LITERARNO
NOVINARSTVO *AVANT LA LETTRE***

*Louis Adamič (1898-1951) je v ZDA emigriral kot mladenič in s časom se je v Ameriki uveljavil kot eden najbolj plodovitih in pronicljivih pisateljev, novinarjev in družbeno-političnih komentatorjev slovenskega porekla. Članek se osredotoči na Adamičeva besedila z lastnostmi diskurza, ki ga imenujemo literarno novinarstvo. Tako strukturirana besedila so pisali že pred več kot sto leti, vendar je literarno novinarstvo—predvsem v ZDA—doživelo silovit vzpon v 60. letih prejšnjega stoletja. Adamič pa je tako zasnovane tekste pisal tri desetletja pred sunkovitim porastom priljubljenosti tovrstnega načina pisanja. Pričujočo analizo zanimajo tipične poteze tega, subjektivnost pripovedovalčeve perspektive izpostavlajočega, novinarsko-literarnega žanra v Adamičevih daljših besedilih, ki so izšla v knjižni obliki. Izstopata knjigi *Vrnitev v rodni kraj* (*The Native's Return*, 1934) in *Orel in korenine* (*The Eagle and the Roots*, 1952), ki se najbolj približata omenjenemu diskurzu. Obenem članek poda politično, družbeno in tudi bolj zasebno ozadje, ki je Adamiča spodbudilo k ustvarjanju besedil z obeležjem literarnega žurnalizma.*