

**AMERICANIZING SLOVENE LITERATURE, OR,
TAKING THE DAY-TRIPPERS' PATH TO THE
SUMMIT INSTEAD OF THE NORTH FACE:
SLOVENE TO ENGLISH LITERARY TRANSLATION
ON THE SOCIETY'S FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

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This article's title may initially come across as a deliberate provocation, though in fact the meaning intended here has little to do with the inexorable process of cultural homogenization that the world long ago came to identify as Americanization. If what we mean by the term is the colonization of Slovene cultural space with a continuous flood of cheap, efficiently produced, and easily consumed American artifacts translated into Slovene—mainly detective and romance novels and sagas of vast, worldwide conspiracies by authors ranging from Danielle Steele to Dan Brown—then the Americanization of Slovene literature has been underway for well over two decades. Apparently even as numerically marginal a market as Slovenia can muster enough sales of each new American bestseller to offset the expense of translating it into Slovene—sales that eclipse the press runs of even the best-selling Slovenian literature. Americanization understood by this definition is the *bête noire* of Slovene writers and, indeed, creative artists of all kinds, as they try to stake out a space for their own product against an avalanche of cheap, interchangeable and exasperatingly more popular American imports.

Instead, the process of Americanization that I propose to discuss here proceeds in the other direction, taking original Slovene literature—and not just any Slovene literature, but the kind most likely to find a niche and thrive in the alien environment of North America—translating it, and pushing it through just the right publishing conduits to make it available to the broadest possible contemporary American audience, giving it a second, alternate life here in its own right, beyond its first life in Slovenia. In this sense the process of Americanizing is something more than just translating and just publishing: it consists of making the literature at home in America, so that it's read not mainly as a curiosity or an artifact, or as textbooks by students in comparative Slavic literature classes (a dwindling demographic), but as an organic if still other part of our own, contemporary, American literature, much as Czeslaw Milosz or Joseph Brodsky functioned in their day, and as Tomaž Šalamun, Adam Zagajewski or Aleksandar Hemon function in America now. Accomplishing this is a complex process that requires the application of a few high-level competencies and certain long-term investments on the part of both author and translator. In many past translation efforts for Slovene, rarely have all of these prerequisites been

fulfilled. My thesis is that, in order to fully Americanize Slovene writers and their work in the future, sustained efforts that bring all of the relevant competencies and investments to bear are needed.

The mountain climbing metaphor of the paper's alternate title has been auto-suggested by images from Vladimir Bartol's 1935 collection of short stories *Al-Araf*, which I recently had to leave temporarily suspended in mid-translation, amid the sequence of four stories featuring a fictionalized version of the historical figure Klement Jug and his entirely fictional antagonist, Dr. Krassowitz, just at the point where the daredevil, young mountain-climbing Jug is depicted happily dangling from a precipice. Which leads by a further leap of associative illogic to the rhetorical question, "Why do we translate?" and (not to break the mountain-climbing metaphor) the inevitable response to that question, "Because it is there." Translating first-rate writing offers challenges and rewards comparable to those of scaling a high Alp, minus the altitude sickness. It forces the translator into one the deepest and most challenging kinds of reading experiences there is and, best of all, it leaves a tangible, durable product that allows subsequent readers who lack the translator's second language skills to retrace nearly the same quality of reading experience. And if I'm to keep pushing the metaphor and insist that translating (or, more precisely, the process of publishing a translated work) is akin to mountain climbing, then let me be clear and suggest that translating is all about taking the much longer, meandering day-tripper's path to the summit, if only because there is no feasible north face approach to getting a translation published, at least not in today's highly commercialized U.S. publishing market. The north face of my title refers to the more common, breakneck approach to trying to bring Slovene writing in English translation before the broad Anglophone readership that we know it deserves—an approach that has dominated our efforts or at least our imaginations till now and that's had few results. My argument will be that the north face approach is vastly inferior to and far less productive than taking the *položna pot* of the day-trippers' trail. And while no one is going to get killed trying to scale this particular metaphorical north face, the odds are overwhelming that if the climbers persist, the expedition will be aborted, the climbers will have to turn back before achieving the summit, and the goal of getting the work published prominently, or at all, in English translation will be abandoned.

A look back at the cumulative output of English translations of Slovene literary works over the past century shows effort distributed more or less evenly between Britain, the U.S., and Slovenia, as one might expect. Prior to 1973 (the year of the founding of the Society for Slovene Studies) Slovene literary translation into English was primarily the domain of British and Slovenian expatriates. Of the dozen or so book-length translations of Slovene literature that had been published in Britain and North America up to that year, some of the most notable include W.K. Matthews's 1957

anthology of Slovene poetry *The Parnassus of a Small Nation*, Matthews's 1954 *Prešeren's Poems* (co-translated with Anton Slodnjak), Janko Lavrin's *Selected Poems* of Alojz Gradnik (1964) and his version of Ivan Cankar's classic *The Bailiff Yerney* (1930). Lavrin, when not lecturing or writing on Russian literature at the University of Nottingham, was one of that early era's most productive translators from Slovene, with subjects ranging from Gradnik and Srečko Kosovel to Matej Bor and Ivan Minatti. In the U.S., a first version of Cankar's *Yerney's Justice* came out in American English as early as 1926, thanks to the translation and promotional efforts of Louis Adamic, then in the early stages of building his career as an American writer.¹ And in Slovenia, the British expatriate Fanny Copeland, who had found work in the 1920s as a lecturer in English at the newly established University of Ljubljana, also took up translation, producing English versions of books by Fran Levstik (*An Adder's Nest* 1931; *Martin Krpan* 1960) and Ciril Kosmač (*A Day in Spring* 1959). The Slovene writers most widely translated and available in English by 1973 included Ivan Cankar (with individual short stories scattered throughout journals and Slovene émigré newspapers such as *Ameriška domovina*, plus two separately published books), and the early twentieth-century poets Oton Župančič and Alojz Gradnik. In the years just after 1973 most translations continued to be produced by Britons (Michael Scammell, Alasdair MacKinnon, Harry Leeming, Margaret Davis, David Limon) or native Slovenes with a high level of competency in English language (Janez Gradišnik). The impact on translation efforts of the lecturers in English dispatched to Ljubljana by the British Council from the 1950s to the 1990s was considerable, especially since many of those lecturers—some of them also Slavicists by training, or even Slovenists trained in the program that Lavrin established at the University of Nottingham—were able to engage with Slovene language and literature at high levels of competence. Since Slovenia was still a component of Yugoslavia and therefore obscure as a national and cultural presence in its own right, the job of producing, disseminating and promoting literature in translation was that much more arduous and fell mainly to the Slovenes themselves. Beginning in 1963, the quarterly issues of the Ljubljana-published journal *Le Livre slovène* began archiving these efforts at internationalizing Slovene literature for French-, German-, and English-speaking audiences, even though the international impact of a periodical published in Slovenia was necessarily limited.

¹ Research into the circumstances that led to some of the early successful efforts to present Slovene literature in English translation would be a welcome addition to the Society's pre-history. Janko Lavrin and Louis Adamic we know about. But what about William Kleesmann Matthews, born in Estonia to an Estonian mother and British father, who lived to be just fifty-seven and taught Slavic studies at the University of London? His archive is available at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London.

Also in 1973, the poet Tomaž Šalamun had just completed his first full year of residence in the U.S. at the Iowa International Writers Program, a major center for creative writing that for decades has played a key role in introducing world writers to America and internationalizing American literature. Several chapbooks of Šalamun's early work translated into English were produced in Iowa City and involved as collaborators some of the American poets then in residence there: Anselm Hollo (a native Finn who adopted English as his primary medium), Michael Waltuch, Bob Perelman, Eliot Anderson, and Deborah Kohloss. While all of these collaborators were aspiring young poets in English, none of them was fluent in Slovene, and they were wholly dependent on their native informant—in this case Šalamun—for English glosses of the original poems. A number of these translations are stylistically powerful and have even become the canonical English versions, though their fidelity to the originals bears scrutiny. While at Iowa, Šalamun also collaborated with his American colleagues on translations of a number of other Slovene writers, including Ifigenija Zagoričnik, Ivo Svetina, Milan Kleč, Matjaž Kocbek, and others.

Around the same time as Šalamun and his Iowa colleagues were producing their first wave of American translations, Slovene poet Venko Taufer was engaged with his British co-translator Michael Scammell in producing English translations not only of Taufer, but also of prominent post-war poets of his own generation: Gregor Strniša, Dane Zajc and Kajetan Kovič. Yet for so literarily productive a country, the published output resulting from these Anglo-American-Slovene efforts was still extremely modest, limited mainly to cameo appearances in British and American literary magazines. When compared with the panoply of Serbian and Croatian authors—poets and prose writers—who were then already available in English translation, many already with multiple, prominently published books to their names, not to mention a presence in British and American journals—authors including Ivo Andrić, Milovan Djilas, Dobrica Ćosić, Miodrag Pavlović, Vasko Popa, Ivan Lalić, Miroslav Krleža, Ivan Kušan, and Borislav Pekić – Slovenia's showing on the Anglophone stage up to that point must still have struck Slovenes as painfully thin.

If we now fast-forward forty years, from 1973 to 2013, and look back again at the most recent forty years, the picture shows remarkable development, while at the same time still reflecting some of the familiar challenges that have vexed Slovene literature in its quest to internationalize from very early on. The principal categories of translators remain largely the same, with the notable difference that the American contingent has grown dramatically. This fact is significantly, though not exclusively, due to the strong American connections of Tomaž Šalamun, who as a perpetual font of creativity in Slovene and a catalyst for translation into English is now well into his fourth generation of American translators, most of whom approach the work with the credentials of poet, not Slavist. Most recently

Michael Taren (a creative writing student and recent Fulbright student fellow to Slovenia) and Ana Jelnicar (as the team's Slovene informant) have collaborated to produce some elegant, accurate and powerful translations appearing in *Harvard Review*, *Bateau*, and numerous other American magazines. Other occasional Šalamun translators include the American poets Joshua Beckman, Matthew Zapruder, Brian Henry, Peter Richards, Matthew Rohrer, Andrew Zawacki, Phillis Levin, and Christopher Merrill, most of whom have collaborated directly with Šalamun on translations. As faculty in various creative writing programs around the U.S., some of Šalamun's American colleagues have been instrumental in introducing their own students to a number of contemporary Slovene poets and encouraging their students' collaboration with them in translation efforts. The results of these collaborations sometimes reflect a great deal of latitude from the standpoint of denotational accuracy, but the literary and creative connection, writer to aspiring writers, is strong and the finished translations often bear the stylistic imprint of the translator as much as they do the author's. The substantial blind spots in Slovene to English interlinguistic competency that can mark these collaborations are often interestingly offset by the powerful phrasing and distinctive imagery that are characteristic of these more writerly translations.

The contingent of translators who are Slovene expatriates in English-speaking countries or their descendants has also continued to grow and diversify. In New Mexico Sonja Kravanja has translated book-length collections of Šalamun, Iztok Osojnik, Edvard Kocbek and Dane Zajc, as well as the novels of Berta Bojetu (the latter still seeking a publisher). Since resettling in Slovenia, Australian author Bert Pribac's bilingualism, acquired as a child of immigrant parents, has allowed him to translate prolifically and effectively in both directions. Most notably, his collaboration with Australian poet David Brooks on a new collection of Srečko Kosovel's poems, published by Salt in 2008 under the title *The Golden Boat*, has introduced Kosovel to English-language poets with an immediacy and impact not achieved by previous translations. In Canada Tom Ložar, in addition to his numerous critical essays on Slovene literature, has translated Edvard Kocbek, Alojz Ihan, and others.

The long tradition of British expatriates living and translating in Slovenia continues and has now expanded to include Americans and other Anglophones who have similarly adopted the language, culture and country as their own, achieving near-native colloquial proficiency. American Erica Johnson-Debeljak is a prolific translator of Slovene children's literature, as well as novels and poetry by Boris Pahor, Boris A. Novak, and her husband Aleš Debeljak; Rawley Grau and Nikolai Jeffs have collaborated on translations of Vlado Žabot and Slavko Grum; while the team of David Limon and Maja Visenjajk-Limon have together produced translations of novels by Miha Mazzini and Maja Novak.

Two essentially new categories of translator that have emerged over the past forty years mirror each other across the Atlantic. One is a cohort of American Slovenists, mainly employed in language and literature or history departments at various North American universities, who translate as a secondary professional activity. These include Timothy Pogačar (Tavčar), John Cox (Cankar, Dolenc), Henry Cooper (Prešeren), Tom Priestly (Balantič, Haderlap, Hartmann, Januš), Michael Biggins (Bartol, Jančar, Lipuš, Pahor, Šalamun), and Andrew Wachtel (Jančar). On the Slovene side are a number of Slovene Anglicists who have translated a large volume of poetry, drama and prose into English (Lili Potpara, Anne Čeh, and others).

Cumulatively and in retrospect, a remarkable amount has been achieved in the way of translations, but a far larger amount of first-rate writing still remains untranslated as the problem of venue continues to vex efforts to bring Slovene writing prominently into Anglo-American view. As a permanent archive of translations and a catalyst for getting new ones completed, the semi-annual journal *Litterae slovenicae* (the successor to *Le Livre slovène*) performs an invaluable service and is admirable in many respects, but its worldwide distribution and visibility are dismal and as a Slovene-produced vehicle for texts in languages other than Slovene it suffers from linguistic and editorial shortcomings that no British or American publisher would countenance. More successful in reaching a larger readership have been the book-length translations published by a large number of small, independent presses with international reach in Britain, North America and elsewhere: White Pine (Fredonia, NY), Scala House (Seattle, now defunct), Spuyten Duyvil (New York), Ugly Duckling (New York), Poetry Miscellany (Chattanooga), Forest Books (London), Salt (London), Twisted Spoon (Prague), Open Letter (Rochester, NY), and Dalkey Archive (Urbana, IL) have served as the untrumpeted foot soldiers in bringing most of the better translations completed to date into the hands of a broad Anglophone readership. So far only three university presses have carried Slovene authors—Northwestern (in its *Writers from an Unbound Europe* series under Andrew Wachtel's editorship), Central European University Press, and Princeton University Press (Kocbek). And in the past forty years only three Slovene authors—Šalamun, Pahor and Svit—have had the good fortune of seeing their work published in English by major trade presses with high visibility and excellent distribution—Pahor with Harcourt (subsequently consolidated into Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, or HMH), Šalamun with Ecco Press and HMH, and Brina Svit with Harvill in London. Tellingly, two of these authors found their way to their English-language publishers via an intermediate translation – Pahor by way of the French translation of his *Necropolis*, and Svit via her own published French translations of two of her novels, a fact which suggests that Anglo-American trade publishing still remains dependent on the West European

market to surface and vet new East European properties before taking a risk on them in the Anglophone world. Placing a book with a major U.S. or British trade publisher is not the be-all and end-all of literary translation—and, indeed, with the consolidation and increasing commercialization of U.S. trade publishers over the past twenty years and their ever-increasing obsession with profitability above literary quality, it has become an ever more difficult goal to reach, the steepest of all the approaches to the summit – but even so it remains the surest way to command the broadest, most immediate attention possible for any outstanding Slovene work.

Publication with a major trade publisher is indeed a formidable target. American publishers are particularly notorious for their reluctance to publish foreign authors. We have the lowest ratio in the developed world of literary translations to total literary output, and the recent turmoil, consolidation, and technological shift in the publishing industry only compound the problem. Yet on the optimistic side, we should note the recent rediscovery of the function of literature and story-telling as a socially adaptive activity useful for building the capacity of its readers for empathy and social cooperation, a concept that has not only gained purchase in literary criticism over the past decade as never before, but is also being surfaced in scientific studies of the social and psychological impacts of adolescent and young adult online hyperconnectedness.² Then there is the increase in translation activity among academics since 1973 and the consolidation of its foothold in the U.S. as a recognized secondary scholarly activity in the humanities – this will not particularly be news to the Society for Slovene Studies, which has fostered literary translation among its members for decades, but it does promise greater validation of this work within academia at large and thus a more confident (because more likely to be rewarded) pool of active academic practitioners of literary translation in the future. And finally, as much as publicly-traded commercial publishing

² Dutton, Kevin, “Psychopathy’s double edge,” in *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 22 October 2012, available at <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Psychopath-Makeover/135160/>. The author reports that researchers have documented a 40% decline in empathy levels among college students since 1980-1990 and posits as one causal link the decline in book reading over the past twenty years: “Reading a book carves brand-new neural pathways into the ancient cortical bedrock of our brains. It transforms the way we see the world—makes us, as Nicholas Carr puts it in his recent essay, *The Dreams of Readers*, ‘more alert to the inner lives of others.’ Books make us see in a way that casual immersion in the Internet, and the quicksilver virtual world it offers, doesn’t.” In a more recent article, “Reading literary fiction improves theory of mind,” appearing in *Science*, 18 October 2013 (vol. 342, no. 6156): 377–80 (DOI: 10.1126/science.1239918), authors David Kidd and Emanuele Castano report on experiments demonstrating significantly higher capacity for empathy among young test subjects after reading an excerpt from a work of literary fiction than after reading popular fiction or non-fiction.

may be the subject of seemingly endless corporate buy-outs and ever greater agglomeration aimed at maximizing profits, privately held independent publishers are not—on the contrary, the best of the long-established independents are as vital, as productive and as open to first-rate translated work as ever (New Directions, Dalkey Archive, Copper Canyon, North Point, Gray Wolf, Salt, and many more), while in the meantime this field has grown to include many highly respectable, if often oddly named newcomers (Ugly Duckling, Twisted Spoon, Open Letter, Spuyten Duyvil, and others). These stalwarts, we should especially note, are often seeded by work that first appears excerpted in any of a number of the most widely read and appreciated literary journals that are scattered by the dozens and even hundreds across the North American (and British) landscape.

The Four Variables of Any Published Work in Translation and How We Can Influence Them

With the advantage of this cumulative experience and an awareness of the challenging environment in America for literature in translation, how can we, either individually or collectively—as the Society—looking ahead to the next forty years, shape those circumstances that are more or less within our ability to influence in ways that will favor the production and publication of first-rate translations of the very best Slovene writing? I suggest we first break the subject into its component parts, establish optimal criteria for each of those components, then identify ways we can take action. Some of the criteria will seem self-evident or mundane, others may seem calculating, while yet others may seem lofty and unachievable. Yet taken together they are part of a calculus consisting of four main variables—the work, the author, the translator, and the publisher—that should help to move one of Europe’s most remarkable literatures from the Anglo-American margins into the center of attention.

The *work*, obviously, is the first and most essential component of translation and, put simply, the foremost criteria for selecting it is that it be world class (in Slovene the untranslatable term *vrhunska*—“paramount,” again derived from mountaineering—is used to describe precisely this type of literature). It needs to be imaginative, distinctive, stylistically or linguistically innovative yet with resonances of literary tradition, to provide unique insights into the author’s (Slovene) reality, yet present these in a way that makes them relevant and compelling to readers who have no prior experience of that reality or Slovenia. If a work were not some or all of these things, there would be little point in translating it for any but the narrowest group of potentially interested readers (Slovenists? Slavicists? Slovene Americans?) While famously there is no arguing taste, there is less disagreement than one might think about what constitutes first-rate literature—the record of Kresnik, Prešeren, Veronika, and other prominent

Slovene literary awards should provide a very general roadmap which the translator can modify and complete against his or her personal discoveries, preferences and instincts. We'll return to the topic of the work and discuss it in more detail at the close of this paper.

Frequently overlooked as a critical component of any translation's likely success is the *author*, where the foremost criterion is that he or she still be among us. A living, breathing, actively writing author, and if at all possible one who is willing to travel to countries where publication in translation is sought, and who can speak the target language passably well, is almost a prerequisite of any American trade publisher contemplating new "properties" (i.e., authors and works) from overseas. Independent and small presses are likely to be less categorical about this preference, though they do share it. Living authors can participate in publishers' promotional book tours and provide a face and an ongoing biography that it's thought living readers can more easily relate to. Over the past forty years there have been no instances of U.S. trade publishers taking on works by dead Slovene authors. Those few past authors who have recently gained some limited recognition through publication in English (Kosovel and, to a lesser extent, Kocbek, Cankar, and Bartol) owe that distinction to a few well-received books produced as labors of love by prominent Anglo-American academic and independent presses, as well as to excerpts appearing in journals, but these are exceptions that prove the rule. Otherwise, the train carrying past foreign authors to English-speaking lands left the station long ago, during the authors' lifetimes, and no Slovenes were on it. One might object that major trade publishers are constantly bringing out new translations of works by long past authors—Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol, and even lesser lights. This is true, but Tolstoy's (and the other Russian classics') train to Britain and America departed during their lifetimes, and luckily they boarded it in the persons of Constance Garnett and other able translators of their day, becoming Anglophone cultural property and a part of our canon and commanding the periodic attention of new translators to their work even to this day. Moreover, pre-modern literature from the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries may in fact be too much of a stylistic stretch for twenty-first-century readers, the archaic prose style too difficult to render in readable, non-anachronistic English, though this is an involved translational topic in its own right.

Not just the publisher, for marketing purposes, but the translator is also helped by having a living writer available, because writers, if sufficiently motivated, can add their own vested interest in being translated, published and read in English to the translator's commitment, and together the writer and translator (and publisher) can generate greater momentum toward success. If the writer engages in reading tours or teaches in U.S. creative writing programs (as Milosz and Brodsky did in their day and as Šalamun, Zagajewski and Hemon do today), he or she is able to build a

more solid readership and a much more loyal following among aspiring American writers. In the best case, the writer is able to contribute in this way to the process of shaping American reading tastes and writing habits. Again, Šalamun is the pre-eminent Slovene example of this magnitude of influence, and perhaps even—without exaggeration—the pre-eminent European example today. Open almost any good American literary journal from the past twenty years and Šalamun’s legacy is likely to show through unmistakably in the work of at least one of the younger American poets represented. Those of us who do not inhabit the professional world of imaginative literature in the U.S. are unlikely to fully appreciate Šalamun’s impact on the new American literature all around us. But his is a unique case of a poet who nearly fifty years ago envisioned the creative arc ahead of him as enmeshed with American poetry, which he was convinced was driven by greater vitality and a spirit much closer to his own than Slovene or any other European poetry offered at the time. Šalamun’s presence and prodigious U.S. output in translation are unlikely to be matched by other Slovene writers, but this concession does not diminish the fact that some sort of authorial presence here is essential for the work’s immediate recognition, not to mention its long-term success.

A further benefit to the translator of working with living authors is that they’re usually best able to provide helpful answers to a translator’s questions about all sorts of opacities in the original text. Absent a living author, these problem passages can be destined to remain obscure and likely mistranslated forever. At the same time, caveats against relying too much on authorial input regarding the final shape of translation choices ought to be heeded in direct proportion to the limitations of the author’s knowledge of English.

The third variable, as essential as the first, is the *translator*. It’s a truism that a translator should be as fluent in both languages as possible, and axiomatic that he or she should have native proficiency in the target language. The lack of this qualification in a translator working alone nearly always leads to a systematically deficient translation. It’s in the target language where a translation flourishes or dies, and death can be achieved as assuredly by a hundred nearly imperceptible stylistic slips as by major lacerations. Only in infinitesimally rare exceptions does a translator have the phenomenal ability of a Nabokov or a Conrad to learn a new mother tongue. Lacking that ability—or perfect bilingualism—the translator (or translation team) should meet the following set of minimum qualifications:

1. be a native speaker of English with a high level of competency in Slovene, consulting with native Slovenes when necessary, OR,
2. work in a team, typically of two, which is particularly good at the early stages of a translating career and if each

member of the team contributes complementary skills (e.g., one native Slovene, the other native English, but each also with strong skills in the other language). In the long run, however, team-translation is an overconcentration of effort on a task that can and should be performed by one person, AND ...

3. bring a high level of skill in English creative writing to the task, AND
4. be well-read in both contemporary and classical American and English prose and poetry, as well as Slovene literature, to ensure a coherent approach to stylistic nuance and intertextual reference, AND...
5. respect, admire and appreciate the integrity of the text being translated, from its overarching structure down to its finest details, because this sort of relationship of translator to text is a further guarantee of the translator's attention to artistic detail.

Poetry translation is a special case with its own considerations that may override these guidelines for prose. Good poetic diction—even contemporary American poetic diction, with its general disregard for strict formal markers such as meter and rhyme—still adheres to generally accepted standards of craftsmanship that may not be apparent to the average reader. Poets, who are acutely aware of these standards, view themselves as a guild and are unlikely to accept the work of non-members as valid poetry. For this reason, the optimal solution for translating poetry is a team consisting of an American poet (established or aspiring) and a highly qualified language and literary informant who can both gloss the denotational content of the original and convey and interpret its poetic dimensions.

We have already been introduced to the three or four main professional or demographic categories of Slovene to English translators. As we've seen, each translator tends to represent the perspective, interests and strengths (as well as weaknesses) of the specialized guild to which he or she belongs. There are the Slavicists and Slovenists who are acutely attuned to the linguistic complexities and the cultural dimensions of the original text, but for all that may be deaf to contemporary American prose cadences and unfamiliar with either contemporary or classic English and American literature; then there are the American poets and prose writers, including teachers and students of creative writing whose exposure to a Slovene work is most often the result of a personal or literary encounter with its author, and who are prone to bring more creative spark and less cultural context and knowledge of Slovene language to the task; and finally there are the expatriates who have grown into the language, literature, and translation over time, but who may lack formal training in literary translation, or readerly breadth in either Slovene or Anglo-American literature. Each of

these constituencies in its natural state is likely to lack one or more of the qualifications that are essential for producing literary translations worthy of their originals, and hence each is likely to need some sort of remedial training.

There is a solution to this problem that we in the Society can have some influence over, and that is to provide the conditions in which members of the creative writing guild and other non-Slavicists can acquire an education in Slovene language, culture, literature and literary translation—and, conversely, in which aspiring Slavicists can acquire the rudiments of creative writing. If we were to establish Slovene language and literature tracks in existing M.A. programs, or create certificate programs in Slovene studies, we would have a guaranteed, steady trickle of highly motivated, goal-driven students to populate them; and not only that, but we would also be filling the present void in North American Slavic graduate programs that ought to be filled with options for Slovene studies. Where would these programs be located, ideally? At three or four institutions with strong graduate programs in Slavic studies, creative writing, and translation studies—and, of course, decent Slovene library collections—giving the students who enroll in them the maximum possible options for combining the tracks that are crucially important to them. Courses should include advanced Slovene language, Slovene literature survey courses and seminars, workshops in Slovene literary translation, creative writing, and some East European history and culture studies for broader context. Drawing on existing course offerings, the efforts of resident Slovenists and the expertise of visiting Fulbright scholars from Slovenia, we should be able to graduate at least one new generation of competent Slovenist translators/writers/scholars within four to six years. The first of these aspiring Slovenists—bright, energetic, twenty-something poets and prose writers and Slavicists and translators who are full of inspiration and motivation and looking ways to build a career that incorporates Slovene writing—are already looking for these educational opportunities.

The last variable is the *publisher*, the medium whose services consist of working with the translator to scrutinize and refine the work in translation before providing the work with its trajectory and delivering it to its audience of readers. Ideally, to assure an optimal trajectory and audience, it should be a major, respected trade publisher of both Anglophone and world literature in English translation, commanding the broadest possible attention among both serious and casual readers. Farrar Straus Giroux, Knopf, Harper/Collins, Simon and Schuster, Macmillan, Random House, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt constitute something of an American literary Pléiade to which every writer aspires. Translators should want as much for their very best texts, but these publishers are nearly always too high a summit, atop too steep a slope for us to achieve—and certainly not by approaching them head-on via their north face, without adequate preparation.

There is a somewhat less renowned, though no less respected array of smaller, independent, mostly privately owned publishing houses that are also highly selective in what they accept for publication, though less driven by profit (precisely because non-profit, themselves) than the seven (or eight) corporately-owned sisters, and generally much more open to literature in translation. Archipelago, Ariadne, Copper Canyon, Dalkey Archive, Graywolf, Grove, New Directions, Melville House, New York Review, Open Letter, Overlook, Seven Stories, Small Beer, and Ugly Duckling are a short list of well-regarded, currently active, independent publishers known for quality prose and poetry, which also publish a respectable amount of world literature in translation.

The north face approach, as I've suggested, typically consists of a cold submission to a major trade publisher, which is at worst ignored or at best politely refused. The potential gain to be had from publishing with a leading trade publisher is great—with greater visibility and a greater likelihood of book reviews appearing in prominent publications, broad distribution and enhanced sales, acquisition by a vast number of public as well as academic libraries on the distribution side, and on the production side a significant investment of first-rate editorial effort into finalizing the translation typescript, including substantive fact-checking and minute probing for both logical inconsistencies and those tell-tale breakdowns in English stylistics commonly known as *translatorese*. Not every trade publisher submits its manuscripts to the same rigorous editorial review process, but the best ones do, with enduring benefits not just for the final published product, but also for the translator's professional growth as a writer and improved skill as a self-editor.³ Nor are independent and academic presses, large or small, by any means strangers to quality editing—the best of them, like the best trade publishers, make substantial investments of editorial effort in every new property they deem worthy of publishing.

The day-trippers' path to publishing that we Slovenists have been neglecting all these decades, much to the detriment of our cause, is lined by the hundreds of literary magazines being published all over the U.S., Canada and Great Britain that are always in search of good writing, and all selective to a greater or lesser degree. Literary magazines come in all sizes and complexions—some specializing exclusively in poetry, others exclusively in prose, but most featuring a variety of genres and most of

³ An instructive exercise (and a translator's professional hazard) is to take a stack of newly published English translations of literature from languages one knows and read the first two pages of each one in search of instances of *translatorese*. These usually jump off the page and are most frequently due to the translator's failure to disentangle the English from some linguistically idiomatic but otherwise stylistically neutral structure of the source text.

them amenable to distinctive foreign work in English translation. The magazines are essentially where young American writers earn their stripes before moving on to book publications, and where they come back subsequently, again and again. There is no conceivable reason why the process should be any different, much less easier for Slovene writers. The 2011 edition of *The Poet's Market* lists over 600 titles of literary journals published in North America and provides a thumbnail sketch of each one's profile.⁴ *Poets & Writers Magazine* features an online database of literary journals that currently numbers upwards of 900 titles.⁵ Titles range from the familiar and prestigious (*Agni*, *Antioch Review*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Babel*, *Bateau*, *Boston Review*, *Calyx*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Iowa Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *River Styx*, *Sewanee Review*, *Spoon River Review*) to the regional (*California Quarterly*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Cottonwood*, *Mississippi Review*, *Seattle Review*, and then all the Souths: *South Carolina Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Southeast Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Southern California Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and the just plain *Southern Review*), to the eccentric, avant-garde, and highly specialized. The contributors to the best of these magazines include most of the best American poets and prose writers working today, though most magazines reserve space for talented newcomers. This is where our Slovene writers need to be seen and appreciated, in a thoroughly American environment that brings them shoulder to shoulder with the best that's being written by American writers, and in literary vehicles that are regularly read by aficionados of good writing, students of creative writing, other writers, and not least of all the editors of major American publishing houses. This is our medium of maximum penetration in the North American reading market, short of that break-through book publication which is, in any case, less likely to occur if we don't populate American magazines with our translations of the best Slovene writing than if we do.

The Work, Revisited

The work, of course, is the key element on which everything else rests. Since literature takes pride of place on the Slovene Parnassus that W.K. Matthews discovered for English readers over half a century ago, we don't have to look far for worthy candidates. My position is that contemporary Slovene literature has dozens of distinctive and masterfully written book-length works yet to share with the world, a repertory that will only increase over time. I've suggested that our subjects should be contemporary writers who come out of the Slovene tradition but react

⁴ *The Poet's Market*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2011.

⁵ See http://www.pw.org/literary_magazines.

against it and liberate themselves from it in novel ways—innovators, in a word. The novel comes with the explicit promise of something new, the poem with the implicit promise of the made thing. It is hard, though not impossible for us to meet this reasonable expectation readers have of newness with translations of pre-modern work a hundred or more years old, although there will always be exceptions. In any case, the preponderance of our candidates will be contemporary in a broad sense—spanning the developmental arc from modern to post-postmodern, but common to all of them will be their ability to reach through and out of the specifics of their Slovene origins to lift American readers out of the ordinary and mundane.

Let me share what I think is an outstanding example of one such recent prose work that is practically made for North American success, and which is already translated and ready to go, first for publication of its individual parts in American literary journals, then ultimately as a free-standing book—a triptych consisting of three loosely interconnected short stories—life portraits, in fact, of fictional or fictionalized men, by a professor of French literature at the University of Ljubljana, a specialist in Proust and Balzac and sometime literary author Katarina Marinčič. Her book *O treh* (Three) was published by Mladinska knjiga in 2005 and was awarded the 2007 Fabula prize for best Slovene short prose fiction of the previous two years. *O treh* consists of three medallion-sized life stories—first, of a young, well-to-do Etruscan of the sixth century BCE; second, of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Belgian botanical painter Pierre-Joseph Redouté; and finally of a young Slovene immigrant to the U.S. in the mid-twentieth century. The first two thirds of the book—and indeed, much of the third part—force the average Slovene reader out of his accustomed reading environment and into the wider world not just geographically, but also chronologically. The narrative focus of all three portraits is on the emotional lives of the three protagonists as they respond to their environments, with occasional intrusions of historical events and personages which, however, remain peripheral to the protagonists' stories. A number of subtle recurring motifs plus one not-so-subtle but highly enigmatic, even mysterious identical recurring element serve to link the life stories together, while a masterful, recurring narrative focus on the characters' sensory perceptions—particularly of the visual, auditory, taste, and olfactory stimuli in their lives that either motivate or fail to motivate them toward greater creativity succeeds in evoking the reader's empathy with characters who are anywhere from a half-century to twenty-five centuries removed in time, yet as immediate to us as the taste of a ripe fig or our own memory of adolescent resentment at being micromanaged by a parent. The book's brief, final paragraph in which the dominant image is the sudden scattering of a flock of crows—the age-old Slovene literary motif connoting a suicide—brings the otherwise expansive, buoyant narrative arc to a sudden and emotionally devastating close, but in an unexpected way

that constructively and vigorously pushes back against the traditional motif of suicide in Slovene literature. This aspect of the book will be most keenly felt by readers who are already steeped in Slovene writing, but by no means does the archetypal Sloveneness of the third and final portrait shut non-Slovenes out of a full appreciation of the work.

The fact that Marinčič's triptych spans two continents and three millennia is no accident and no surprise at this stage in the history of Slovene literature, as it continues to expand outward to intertwine with other globalizing literatures, to lean on that sorely overworked term. This is not to say that new work that remains rooted in Slovene settings will be unsuited to translation—since innovation can take many forms, stylistic as well as thematic—, just that a higher proportion of new work is likely to transcend the specifically national and incorporate more non-Slovene themes, characters and settings. In doing so, the very best writing will make itself all the more adaptive to American and other non-Slovene readerships, at the same time as it remains—paradoxically, perhaps—profoundly Slovene at its core.

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POVZETEK

AMERIKANIZACIJA SLOVENSKE LITERATURE, ALI, IZBIRA POLOŽNE POTI NA VRH NAMESTO SEVERNE STENE: SLOVENSKO-ANGLEŠKO LITERARNO PREVAVANJE ŠTIRIDESET LET PO USTANOVITVI SSS

V članku avtor predlaga vrsto najboljših praks tako za prevajanje slovenske literature v angleščino kot za plasiranje prevodov v ameriških literarnih revijah in pri založnikih s čim večjim dometom, ponuja tudi kriterije za izbiro tistih slovenskih avtorjev in literarnih del, ki bodo najbolj zmožni uspeha med anglojezično bralsko javnostjo. Obravnava še druge dejavnike, ki lahko vplivajo na uspešnost avtorjev in del na ameriškem literarnem prizorišču in trgu, in ponuja kratek pregled posameznikov in inštitucij, ko so največ prispevali k širjenju slovenske literature v angleškem prevodu skozi preteklih sto let. Poudarja pomembnost združitve različnih strokovnih kompetenc v osebnosti prevajalca, predvsem čim višje ravni znanja tako ciljnega kot izvornega jezika, poznavanja literarnih ved (tako anglistike kot slovenistike) ter teorije literarnega prevajanja, in nenazadnje sposobnosti kreativnega pisanja v ciljnem jeziku. Za te veščine in znanja in še več bi lahko v prihodnjem skrbeli meddisciplinarni centri slovenskih študijev (slovenistike v okviru slavistike oz. primerjalne književnosti, s slovensko zgodovino in družbenimi vedami v sklopu) na več severnoameriških univerzah z uveljavljenimi študijskimi programi za slavistiko in kreativno pisanje na podiplomski ravni.