

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE SIGN: CONTEMPORARY SLOVENE POETRY*

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1.1. By the title "Contemporary Slovene Poetry" we understand that poetry which was written between the appearance of Tomaž Šalamun's volume of verse, *Poker* (1966), and the end of 1980. It is also that poetry which has introduced innovations into the poetic act, giving it the signs of modernity. This would be then the poetry that moves between the experiment and neo-traditionalism. This rather large time span cannot of course be subsumed under one poetic heading, for modern Slovene poetry is a multi-faceted phenomenon. To understand what contemporary Slovene poetry has contributed, we must review what has appeared in modern verse, and particularly that which was written immediately after the war.

Modern Slovene poetry is a reflection of all the cultural, social, moral, political and literary-esthetic currents occurring in today's Slovene territory. It is a living tissue which is pan-human, but realized in the perimeters of Slovenia. A literary work is the result, on the one hand, of the state of literary awareness, and on the other hand of the state of social awareness. Every literary realization, and in a particular fashion poetry, is a peculiar method of exploring the world, and at the same time a creator of that world. In Slovene literature the dominant place is occupied by poetry, for its essence is to explore most directly and create a human identity in its historical given, and to create its own poetic identity.

This modern poetry moves in many varied directions. It appeared and grew in a time characterized by both a lack of peace in the literary atmosphere and the intense enthusiasm of postwar socialist construction, as well as the enthusiasm of exploring the offerings of a new world, especially: philosophy, contemporary technology, electronics, linguistics, pictorial arts and above all that which a materialist concept of the world and art revealed.

In writing about modern Slovene lyric poetry Boris Paternu divided this material into three periods.¹ The first begins at the end of the war in 1945 and ends with the beginning of the 1950's. The second begins with the opening of the 1960's and closes at their end, and the period of "directly contemporary" lyric poetry Paternu places in the 1970's. He also enumerates the signals forming its "idejno-stilski sistem."² This division is also accepted by Jože Pogačnik³ with the reservation that with the appearance of Šalamun's *Poker* in 1966 one would have to mark the opening of a new period, adding:

Sodobna slovenska lirika je do sredine šestdesetih let prizorišče tistega širšega procesa, ki se je začel z moderno v zadnjem desetletju XIX stoletja; silnice, ki so nanjo delovale v tem času, so po svojem bistvu iztek omenjenega procesa. S koncem sedmega desetletja se dokaj opazno pojavijo znamenja, ki naprej napovedujejo sklep predhodne dobe, nato pa z izredno programatsko in precej manjšo slovstveno voljo oblikujejo slovstvena izhodišča prihodnosti.⁴

It is obvious that this periodization takes into view Slovene poetry beginning in 1945 and continuing up to what was new and the newest in 1970 or 1975. Both Paternu and Pogačnik speak of Šalamun's collection *Poker* as something new, so much so that

Pogačnik considers a new period to have begun with it. As a result of all this, contemporary (and let us call it anti-traditional) avant-garde Slovene poetry must be placed then in these last ten years, that is, in the time of *Tribuna*, through *Poker* and *Problemi*, the group OHO, up to *The Anthology of Concrete and Visual Poetry in Slovenia* by Franci Zagoričnik. In this paper we will attempt a survey of what preceded contemporary Slovene poetry in order to analyze the transformation of "word" and "poetry" that has taken place in the past ten years. Or, to put it in another way, we wish to approach the cortège attending the rather noisy "ritual of the death of the word," which is new in Slovene poetry, and to establish what the latest poetic collections are proclaiming as phenomena of neo-traditionalism.

2.1. The national liberation struggle was clearly characterized by an atmosphere of social and political contradictions and the crucial class struggle, which were continued into the postwar years. In the class struggle literature is not only a socio-ethical problem but also a revolutionary one. Writers occupy a critical, militant and engaged position vis-à-vis social and political reality, and that necessarily inclines them to a more-or-less realistic and romantic attitude in literary activity. In Slovenia this meant simply the continuation of the literary attitude from before the war, in the 1930's. As a result of this the primary concern of the greater part of the poets of that period was the external, and the technique for characterizing experience was black-and-white. The source and goal of that poetry were the same: the war and the renewal of the destroyed homeland. This attitude inevitably produced "lovely little poems," poetically without aim, with individual qualities, and in that fashion it was devoid of that dialectic existing between the individuum and reality. The contentual level of that poetry determined its poetic form, which had to be pretty, simple, traditional. Such poetry was written for the "masses", thus its expression was adapted to "breadth and massiveness" in its comprehensibility and exemplary clarity. By the end of the 1950's some volumes were beginning to appear which in content and expression were aimed at the individual human being, and his internal world (Lojze Krakar, *V vsponu mladosti* [1949]; Jože Šmit, *Srce v besedi* [1950]). But this was a poetry without a real "poetic face, traditional to the point of conservatism," as was often said of it; it was indelibly marked by a total involvement in the refashioning of reality and in the revolt which had come from the human vision of freedom in revolution and war. I believe that this categorizes this particular generation, though it arose from a prewar literary tradition and was operative in the postwar renewal, as the *war-time generation of Slovene poets*, for all its efforts and the poetic potential of its creative impulses, remained tied to the war and the revolution. That this poetic generation was expressly traditionalistic, if not to say conservative, was not the result of some mere external compulsion, but of an internal law of the literary development itself of the Slovene art of the word. It was the continuation of the theoretical and stylistic heritage of the social realism of the prewar years. It is clear that in its internal and external features this poetry requires particular treatment, and that one does it a disservice, as is frequently done, to consider it contemporary poetry because it is more recent poetry. It is contemporary poetry neither in the mode of its artistic birth, nor today in terms of the time in which it arose.

3.1. It is customary to consider the appearance of the volume entitled *Pesmi štirih* (1953) (K. Kovič, J. Menart, T. Pavček, C. Zlobec) as the "conscious" break with socialist realism. All four of the poets were collaborators on the journal *Beseda* (1951), which from its first issue depicted the revolution as a value for itself and art, especially poetry, as a world in which freedom of thought and expression was realized. The former scheme, that war and revolution are the source and means of poetry, is now

changed to the following: revolution and war are not poetry, revolution is a socio-economic process, while poetry is preoccupied with *man* and his fate. This poetic metanoia was apparent even earlier: along with the "constructionist poetry" before 1949 there also appeared a thematic redirection toward man, the phenomenon of death, love and so on (F. Balantič, M. Bor).

3.2. The transformation from "the new world" to "our modern age" (the change of the journal title in 1958 from *Novi svet* to *Naša sodobnost* is thus interesting) would be the beginning of that which in its poetic practice seeks to be called more modern Slovene poetry. Regardless of how one could or should name individual currents within this twenty-five-year period (neo-expressionism, surrealism, existentialism, structuralism, concrete, visual poetry according to Paternu, Pogočnik and Kermauner), one thing is clear: in this time frame we cannot speak of linear literary development. This something new did not become more new through its own internal requirements.

Between the lyric subject and the world around it there yawned an abyss, which we might call the postwar atmosphere. If some historical phenomenon or the war forces us to reflect on life, freedom, man as a drowned individual, the relativity of good and evil, this all leads to social and personal relativism and agnosticism. Existential problems force man to be alone. Reality becomes an imperative, and that a poetic fictive reality which hovers and strains for a look at the future—tomorrow it is transformed into terror (V. Taufer). That atmosphere, moving away from the hovering horror of the recent past, seeks a new, contemporary literary expression but does not find it; it reaches for the expression of prewar expressionism, neo-romanticism and realism. We found such well-known images (by which "I spoke my own and save my soul") in Pavček, Menart and at the beginning in Taufer. What is evident is the restlessness of the "search for a literary expression that would reveal the problem of human existence in its original image."

4.1. The motto of the "Krugovaška" generation of Croatian poets, "Let there be liveliness!" found as it were an echo in the mountains of Slovenia, "...liveliness, liveliness!" Liveliness looks at human life in the most general sense. The conquest of the abyss between reality and the poetic subject is possible (D. Zajc). One must speak poetically of existence, what it is and how it is realized in society and the individual, as well as about the unity of the poetic subject and the world. Dane Zajc is aware of the obligation of the poet "to seek the deeper meaning of events, the salvation of one's being and the submission of the self to others."

The poet is the synthesis of all occurrences and he does not speak in his own name, for personally he is above all only a man who is called to poetry. The poet is "tormented by torments", by a "responsibility" which he would like to "destroy," and all that in confrontation with his own "I". That confrontation takes place in the poetic act. "Pisanje pesmi, zaklinjanje bivanja, kamenitev časa, zaledenitev saočnja s samim sabo, zaledenitev obkrožena z ločjem sveta, ki ga obdaje"⁵ (D. Zajc). "Pesnik sporoče o svojem bivanju v verzih in živi, dokler ni umrl tiste smrti, ki je konec duha."⁶

5.1. The poetry volumes *Požgana trava* (1958) by D. Zajc, *Svinčene zvezde* (1958) by Venko Taufer and *Mozaiki* (1959) by G. Strniša, are not novelties only in their essentially new relationships to the fact of human life but even more so in their search for a new role, their punctuation, the form of poem and word that it receives by its own independence. Language, especially in Taufer's case, surpasses its linguistic sense and communicates along with its meaning also the world of the poet who saves his life in creating a new dimension of the word. This "alienated" lyric demands also an alienation of the poetic expression by shattering its expressive integrity. The duality of the

cerebral and the experienced was a consequence of the desire for realization in the word itself. Poets wish to free themselves of the tradition of punctuation, syntax and words themselves for tradition burdens them and betrays both poet and word. Here we can already notice the beginning of the shattering of language as a cerebral process and its redirection toward language of cosmic signs (especially in Taufer) which is spoken about by the Slovene poetry of our present world. Thus "torment" and "effort" accompany poetry and such poses for the poet "must seek to capture the sense of events" (D. Zajc).

6.1. New inquiries, particularly in the transformation of the means and the expression of the poet's world and its content, were begun by a group of poets gathered around the journal *Perspektive* (1960), and later *Problemi* (1962), *Dialogi* and *Tribuna*. To grasp poetry as a form of human power, as the totality of relations in the world and the poet's stance vis-à-vis the world means to project poetry from among the ultimate questions of human existence. For Braco Rotar, poetry is "projekcija sveta, v katerem umetnik živi, na neko novo ravnino." Liberation in poetry occurs in the direction of one's own deification. The foundation of this poetry is figurativity, metaphoricity, the struggle, eternal movement. Everything moves and in moving has its being. Time is a constant of this movement, it gathers what has been dispersed together again, and binds the lost into new forms. In a wave of such poetic pre-occupation the poet's world opens up, a world certainly built upon the philosophical bases of antique materialists and post-Hegelian bourgeois philosophy, but this wave is not alone either in the comprehension of the dialectic of movement and existence, nor in the comprehension of man as a synthesis of finiteness and the infinite. Kierkegaard's proposition that all essential recognition influences existence has obsessed the poets of this wave.

To open existence before its annihilation, the word in all its dimensions must become existent, even at the cost of annihilating the word, for that is the only correct way. The mimetic principle of poetry has already been overcome by the fact that poetry is not engaged in the "postvarenje" of the world, but precisely by this kind of apprehension of the world, and by the issue of its existence, has poetry been forced into a shattering of "poetry" itself in itself and in the word as a representative of meaning

7.1. Acquaintance with contemporary Slovene poetry is possible primarily from the poetic works themselves, but the poets of this period write much about themselves and their poetry, and frequently state the theoretical bases of their poetry (F. Zagoričnik, T. Šalamun). "Poezija je zato, ker človek ni bog, in to je kar človek najteže prenese" (T. Šalamun). The poet neither wishes nor is able to be accommodated in any frame of political reference whatsoever: "Zahtevam ličitev literarnega in političnega nivoja... Politiku je pesnik nevaren, ker je le-ta svoboden in ne priznava demokracije prividov. Politični nivo družbenega medija se je profaniral. Filozofsko mišlel je spremenil v utrujeno parolo zmedenega praktika..." (Ivo Svetina). Philosophical and political systems require frameworks in which to exist and be serviceable, means by which to live "correctly," "wisely" and "well". Life in such an atmosphere rests on tradition, and that tradition inevitably insinuates itself into poets and the traditional way of writing. Poets have recourse to well-known themes—love, philosophy; they use well-known means of expression, continue the tradition of the artistic word, and all of that is betrayal because it is—well-known. All this to some degree bears the mark of Aristotle's concept of mimesis, all these poets are to some extent *creators* who to some particular degree speak about something to someone—this poetry has its teleological aspect. The poet as seer, creator, the poem as a form of expression, creation, all that must be rejected. Writing and reading must become one thing, and that is provocation:

“Provocation without ceasing. Provoke all for all!” (Ivo Svetina). Modern esthetic systems have been built upon firmly grounded principles which one could enumerate and fulfill, they were a decalogue. Chance according to the laws of cosmology and traditional al esthetics could only be the cause of disorder.

8.1. Precisely because of this characteristic of theirs, in the current generation of Slovene poets *chance* becomes a principle in the literary and social sense. They began their provocation, that is to say their writing (in that I write, I provoke!) in the publications by Ljubljana University students entitled “Tribuna” and “Katalog” I and II (1968 and 1970). Esthetic bases were given to this generation by Iztok Geister-Plamen, who again had reached for an enumeration of principles only so that “argument would be unarguable”:

- Nobena poezija ne more biti takšno, kakršna je stvarnost.
- Poezija ni drugačna od stvarnosti.
- Poezija je stvarnost.
- Stvarnost sestavljajo stvari.
- Stvari v poeziji imenujemo besede.
- V klasični poeziji se besede vežejo navidezno.
- V novodobni poeziji se besede vežejo očitno.
- Kar si kdorkoli o poeziji misli, to ni poezija, ampak so misli.⁷

8.2. This process of poetic purging is difficult to subsume under just one name, but it is uncontested that this is a poetry which is liberating itself from “language” and destroying the border between reading and the writing of the poem; there exists only the *existence* of the poem where space and time are one. The poem declares itself as visual, acoustic and kinetic provocation and must therefore develop into many variants, with however the same goal in mind. Poker is a game in which one can bluff one’s opponent, yet when it comes to showing the cards, the highest ones win—thus chance wins. In this atmosphere of “the game” anti-traditionalist Slovene poetry came into being. At its origin we would place the poetry of those poets who by the dialectic of relations and words and signs derive reality, materiality, the world as it is.

9.1. The encounter of the old and new is always new and always old. Rebirth is nothing less “painful and tear-ridden” than birth itself. This relationship is in its external signs a crossroads which forms camps and requires a declaration of adherence. One can look for the reason for such a relationship in those who need to comprehend the new and in those who bring the new. Is this really that Freudian *Verlustangst*, that ancient fear that what we own or learn will be lost, that a balance will be upset, or is it that ‘avant-gardism’ is in itself unacceptable until the time for it is ripe? It was necessary for almost half a century to pass for the group “OHO” (1967) to “discover” Kosovel’s *Integrali*. Slovene avant-garde poetry—Podbevšek’s, Černigoj’s and Kosovel’s—was beyond the interest of literary criticism (except to pass over it in total silence), for it did not bring anything new to the traditionalist structure of Slovene lyric creativity. Croatian and Serbian avant-gardism of the first period appears together with “zenitism” and attempts, and to some degree succeeds, too, to find its “place in the sun” in “Zenit”. In the thirties in Slovenia a literary current prevailed whose ideological basis was materialism and Marxism, but whose literary orientation was “well-trodden” realism, and as a result it was unable to discover the materialistic style on which avant-garde Slovene poetry rests. This “inability” has compelled the avant-gardists of the seventies as well (M. Pogačnik, I.G. Plamen, F. Zagoričnik, M.

Hanžek) to appear at the very least as eccentrics whose books are useless, whose materialist credo is unread.

9.2. The beginning of a sovereign avant-gardism in Slovene lyric poetry occurred with the appearance of Tomaž Šalamun's poetic anthology *Poker* (1966). In truth this anthology is not based on the classical conception of "the word," but it could not free itself from a message even in its negativist method. More radical than Šalamun's would of course be the destruction of language and poetry itself as expressed in the dialectic of Franci Zagoričnik. Just as the Croatian avant-gardists (Mrkonjić, Stamać, Zidić and others, among whom most certainly the closest to the Slovenes was Borben Vladović) follow B. Pavlović and Ivan Slamnig, so Slovene poetry had in part its model in the existentialist V. Taufer, for whom the breakup of the sentence as sense, as message, has resulted in mere word order, but who is still far from reism.

9.3. The blossoming of contemporary avant-garde poetry in the world and in Yugoslavia had among others two sources which for our conditions are especially interesting: one is the victory of the materialist conception of the world and of art, whose consequence is the rejection of the eschatological and teleological understanding of existence; the other is the possibilities of modern linguistics which has broadened the realm of applicability of its theories beyond the realm of natural language, and has articulated the theory of signs, of structures in general, semiotics.

In 1943, the linguist L. Hjelmslev wrote:

In a new sense, then, it seems fruitful and necessary to establish a common point of view for a large number of disciplines, from the study of literature, art, and music, and general history, all the way to logistics and mathematics, so that from this common point of view these sciences are concentrated around a linguistically defined setting of problems. Each will be able to contribute in its own way to the general science of semiotics by investigating to what extent and in what manner its objects may be submitted to an analysis that is in agreement with the requirements of linguistic theory.⁸

10.1. Tomaž Šalamun understood that one could not belong to two different orders at the same time, and that it was necessary to speak and to avoid that distant possibility that that would happen. Two identical poems like Župančič's "Slovenec kremeniti" could not exist at the same time without one or the other being either socially or poetically a failure, and the same could be said of two of his "Duma". That is Šalamun thumbing his nose at poetic and social tradition, and that means revolt. The encounter of literary and social tradition with the new is for some (the new ones) a betrayal of self, for others (the old ones) also a betrayal, but of tradition. In his first poems Šalamun decided upon a betrayal of tradition and that in the poetic act.

Poker (1966) is a poetic collection at whose base lies the *identification* of man and thing as the basis of the poet's world. Before this Slovene poets considered the existential schism between man and thing something which by itself meant existence and the schism was a form of existence (D. Zajc). A conquest of this inimical relationship was impossible (V. Taufer). Šalamun on the other hand considers this identification absolutely possible. He does not accept the classically metaphysical relationship essence—existence, for he considers the identification of subject and object the starting point of his poetry. This "Copernican revolution" has deprived Šalamun's poetry of "conflict", "pain", it is not a poetry of reconciliation or recreation. In this same revolution Šalamun realized as well a new model of poetic language, or rather he does

not consider sense as the essential basis of language. Objects are realized in a poem by words. *Esse* does not get its *existere* in poetry, and that means the destruction of poetry. Thus *Poker* is a poetic anthology without poetry in the "real sense". This turning to a "self-thinking" and away from the traditional "self-perception" meant the height and the victory of the conflict in the relationship of poetry and its creation. This destruction went as far as to destroy the "poetic" in the words themselves, as far as the esthetic destruction of language. The esthetic-stylistic level lies in the identity of word and event (the removal of metaphor, the images of so-called poetic language):

Kakor je Cerar postal svetovni prvak
Ker je imel nekaj na nogi ali kaj
tako bom jaz postal blažno velik poet
ker so me zamorili

(Homage kapi stricu Gvidu in Ekiotu)

The symbolic depth of the language was necessary for overcoming the "I" reality and positivity; when the "I" ceased, it became possible to approach reistic poetry. This was expressed in Šalamun's collection *Namen pelerine*. Poetry must be the result of the play of words. *Arena* (1973) and *Sokol* (1974) are merely the deepening of that play which implies the ousting of the Slovene conception of poetry, the dethroning of poetry as such and the de-estheticizing of the Slovene language. Poetry is that which is theory unto itself, and at the same time a theory of future Slovene poetry, like words in the dimension of the game, but not the art of words. Thanks to Šalamun's poetic volumes Slovene poetry was shorn of the Aristotelian burden in an ontological and logical sense. In his collection *Metoda angela* (1978), however, it was as if he himself wound up before the closed door of his verse, and he opened a new door which led him into the world of lyric confession.

10.2. In his search for unity, space and time in the "word" Franci Zagoričnik based his poetry on a double dialectic: the first time among words which contradicted each other mutually in meaning, the second time between words, which are as such outside of meaning (there is only linguistic play in a particular syntax), and the meanings of the words. In this fashion even the rejections of meaning are preserved: preserved in the traditional reading of the poem, rejected in the pictorial-formal reading as of material signs. Just as with Matijaž Hanžek, we might designate Zagoričnik's structure of meaning as an opposition of being and nothing, as the relationship of plus and minus, as the poetry of argument. The world is composed of relations which are maintained in conflict and which conflict as they are maintained. Thus Zagoričnik's poetry is based on and built from two bases which move parallel to each other, and those are the maintenance of the sign system within language and the destruction of any logical comprehension within traditional poetics. And the result of that is the construction of a new system of signs, of a photo montage, of typographical signs as independent and definitive units of the text. By reducing language to the zero level of meaning Zagoričnik discovered its "material" structure. Thus Zagoričnik plays the "game of words" conceived by Šalamun by introducing a text without text—topographic poetry, and so he wins first place on the scoreboard of the Slovene avant-garde league.

10.3. In fact the chronological first place belongs to Iztok Geister-Plamen, but in his first collections he created a poetry of "word strings," in fact without meaning, but still dependent upon words (*Pegam in Lambergar*, 1968). In his texts combinations of

chance intertwine. The internal laws governing the discovery of the materialness of art have led Plamen into a particular variant of the concrete poetry of the box, which he composes along with M. Pogačnik. Neither boxes nor Pogačnik's illustration (which is not an explanation of the text), nor Plamen's text, nor (and this is most important) the reader exist individually. "Creation" is co-creation in threes. Here the concept "creation," whose traditional meaning is rejected by concrete poetry, must be understood "vere et realiter" as a game, with the help of a new alphabet and the destruction of the created one. Truly "letters carry in themselves capability, possibility, "madness"⁹ but "madness" we can read in words. The development of contemporary Slovene poetry shows that this "readability" means the betrayal of its contemporaneity. I am convinced that I.G. Plamen's "betrayal" has its own structure and that it is part of his poetry, his experiment.

10.4. It was Pythagoras who maintained that harmony derives from particular numerical relationships which control the world, and the entire modern system of constructing programs rests on this harmony of "numbers" (though shorn of any Pythagoreanism!). According to the principle of the harmony of combinations which derive from order and not from the things themselves program poetry has been formed. In search of the rejection of "content," "message," "awakening of emotions" and "recognition," Marko Pogačnik utilizes the properties of mathematical signs "in order," without that order's coming from anyone or linking with anyone, but it is in itself like the form of a great number of word combinations. Pogačnik achieved the pinnacle of avant-gardism in the poems which "we see only," the sign is like a circle and what we see offers us the possibility merely of exploring the structure of that circle free of any message.

11.1. It is not my desire, nor would it be possible, in such a presentation as this to speak of everything that Slovene avant-garde poetry entails or of all, or even the most important, names and publications connected with it. I have wished only to show the way toward the death of "the word" and some means of its incorporation into the sign. The passing of "the word" and the appearance of signs is the greatest novelty in contemporary Slovene poetry. The word has been objectivized, and indirectness has been as destroyed as the word! The word is the matter and form of poetry. Testing the meaning of a word gives place to the sign, the word finds its identity in the manifest, in what it concretely is—in something written and not in what it means. The principal error has been the attempt to discover the sign, seeking meaning in this poetry. This poetry is not "understood," but the structure rather of its production is revealed. Nothing exists beneath the sign, all is upon it and it is all. The poetic world is composed of pieces, and can never achieve that harmony which is the greatest esthetic and philosophical evaluative principle of traditional poetry. But for that it is the faithful reflection of the sensibility and situation of contemporary man. Openness, inconclusiveness, chance, disintegration, fragmentariness, accumulation are bound tightly to the retreat, the destruction of the metaphor and the transformation of phenomena into pure material, into the graphically depicted and extra signification, audio-visual word. And that word introduces throughout new laws, in no way less severe than the previous ones, but completely different. As a result traditional reading (in time and space, in order) does not bring them into its visual or aural field, and so this poetry, this kind of poetry, seems a poetry without law, without sense, and gives the impression of an experiment, which ought not to last too long. An experiment should not be its own goal or at least not customarily.

12.1. Somewhere at the height of reism and ludism, of the poetry that the members

of OHO and Šalamun had begun to write, a return appears to those poetic ideals which it was thought Šalamun had just sung the dirge for. Some young poets (Lev Kreft, David B. Vodušek, and Jaša Zlobec) consciously left the world of reistic and ludistic experiments. Thus the joint volume of poetry by Kreft and Vodušek, *Mejdun, so dobre pesmi* (1975) was the first more serious attempt at breaking with the ten-year-old experiment in contemporary Slovene poetry. These two (and let us add Jaša Zlobec, with *Zeleni bunker* and *Mlado jutro*, 1976) start out in the field of the tested, the traditional, without scandal. They experience the world as a great expanse of tranquil being in which from time immemorial the subject of poetic confession has been determined. The poet is once again summoned to create, to confess with feeling. To the same traditionalism Pavel Lužan returns (*Potovanje*, 1973), as does Miha Avanzo (*Pravica skazica*, 1973, *Deklice*, 1975), but with new means. They attempt, at least in their earlier anthologies, to re-establish tradition by means of experiment, but it appears that their "attempt" was somewhat weaker than their inclination to tradition, and it very quickly sets out on the road of well-trying poetic means and ideals. Experimenting on the level of language is evident in S. Šimčič's *Hram* (1975) and J. Detela's *Zemljevidi* (1978); this experimenting is based upon the linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein.

12.2. At the same time as this return to tradition is occurring in Slovenia, some poets are continuing as well the tradition of concrete and visual poetry. To mention at least a few: M. Hanžek, *61 tekstov* (1977), Ifigenija Zagoričnik, *Te pesmi*, (1976), *Drevesa so se takrat premikala in sem pomešala njihova imena* (1978), Ivan Volarič-Feo, *Desperado tonic water* (1974). In the pursuit of Šalamun's equating the omnipresence of the world and its visible parts with the flow of words the most outstanding figure is Janez Strehovec with his volume entitled *Okrogli kvadrat* (1975). The desire to penetrate by means of poetry into the world of the unknown and unseen, which was powerfully expressed in Jesih's collection *Kobalt* (1978), receives particularly interesting treatment in the verse of Boris A. Novak, *Stihožitje* (1977) and Majda Kne, *Popisovanje in rondo* (1978). Kne's and Novak's poetry concentrate on the search for new relationships between words, the affirmation of worth and expressiveness in sentence structures. They wish in their poetry to penetrate from the other side of poetry into the poetry of poetry itself, the word remaining for them the principle of all relationships in the essence of poetry itself. Their poetry abhors all chance except the chance necessity that the poem be spoken to the end. It seems that it is exactly for these features that the poetry of Novak and Kne is in modern Slovene poetry the most interesting and poetically the most provocative.¹⁰

13.1. From this brief review of anthologies, names and general features it is difficult to uncover all that characterizes the latest modern Slovene poetry, but two facts are obvious: these lyrics do not continue what the members of OHO began nor what Šalamun proclaimed and very successfully realized. Second, these new continuations have still not formed peculiar contentual-formal structures with clear and specific features. What has appeared we might call neo-traditionalism, but it is very difficult to say what its fundamental feature is. Is it a return to tradition only on the level of language and confession, but not of content, or the other way around?

If we wish to say something about poetic language and its fate in this most recent poetry, then it is possible to affirm, at least on the basis of the collections mentioned here, that it lives still as an experimental layer, as a discovering and expressing of the new, but that this process has been slowed down in comparison to earlier periods (especially the periods of reism and ludism).

If it is also necessary to say something of the external "social" dichotomies which the current generation of Slovene poets encounters, then let us say that also this orientation towards traditionalism and neo-traditionalism has been accepted peacefully, without resistance or revulsion. This "orientation" awaits still its critics and its journals, but it is important to note that it has the sympathy of the institutional cultural apparatus. Let us then conclude: this new thing in Slovene poetry is just beginning, and in that there is hope.

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
3. J. Pogačnik, *Zgodovina slovenskega slovstva: Eksistencializem in strukturalizem* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1972).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
5. This quotation and all others in this paper are taken from the journal *Perspektive*, 36-37 (1963/1964).
6. Pogačnik, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
7. *Pericarežeracirep (Antologija)* (Maribor: 1969), p. 14.
8. L. Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (Madison: 1963), pp. 108-9.
9. T. Kermauner, "Fragmentarni zapis k zgodovini in analize konkretne poezije v Sloveniji," *Problemi* 1 (1974), p. 28.
10. Denis Poniž's work has also received great attention. See *Off*, Zagreb 1980, No. 2/3, pp. 111-114.