

## THE CONTEMPORARY SLOVENE NOVEL

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The contemporary Slovene novel,<sup>1</sup> like contemporary Slovene literature in general, is difficult to define with any degree of exactness. Its development is connected to the wider social and cultural context, while temporally it is a very complex phenomenon that has been subject to many changes over more than sixty years of development. The period of the contemporary Slovene novel is also the period of the greatest qualitative and quantitative development of the Slovene novel in general, which in recent decades has been enriched by new narrative techniques and literary themes.

The beginnings of the contemporary Slovene novel coincide with the beginnings of modernist tendencies, in particular of the modernist and existentialist novel. The appearance of the Slovene modernist novel can be dated to the mid-1950s, when the most powerful literary trend in Slovenia was social realism. From the end of the Second World War, Slovene society had experienced radical changes that had also influenced the conditions within which literature was written. The early post-war years were marked by reconstruction of the ruined homeland, by Communist Party leadership in all areas of life, and by hidden violence against the opponents of revolutionary change. This situation clearly called for a literary approach that would emphasize revolutionary ideas and the life of the “common man.” The representatives of social realism who had been publishing before the war (Prežihov Voranc, France Bevk, Miško Kranjec, Ivan Potrč, and Anton Ingolič) supplemented the theme of the common man in accordance with the spirit of the new socialist system. As they also attached themselves to the doctrine of Soviet socialist realism, this post-war literary tendency is also referred to as socialist realism. Literature only inconsistently took account of the demands of socialist realism and, after the Cominform Resolution of 1948 that marked Yugoslavia’s schism with the Soviet Union, its influence diminished considerably.

Slovene story-telling after the war went through a number of developmental phases (social or socialist realism, existentialism, modernism, postmodernism, literary eclecticism, and so on). In addition to social realism and the tradition of Slovene prose, writers also looked to the example of the romantic realist prose of the nineteenth century (in, for

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<sup>1</sup> In Slovene literary studies the phrase “contemporary Slovene novel” is often treated as a synonym for the “modern Slovene novel,” except that the latter is more often used to describe the novel up to 1945, while the contemporary Slovene novel belongs to the post-war period.

example, the psychological realism of the novels of Mira Mihelič and Andrej Hieng), as well as the naturalistic, decadent, and symbolist prose of the twentieth century. These narrative connections to the Slovene prose tradition of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also characterized the Slovene contemporary novel in the second half of the twentieth century when, in addition to modernist and postmodernist, there were (and still are) other narrative tendencies. The emergence of an impulse to break with the realist tradition was also influenced by both European and global trends and, above all, contact with existentialism, modernism, the new novel, and the theater of the absurd. After 1950, a number of works by representatives of the modernist novel, as well as modernist poetry and drama, were translated into Slovene, making a contribution to an important shift in Slovene literature.

In addition to foreign contacts, the work of post-war writers was influenced by Slovene literary journals, around which gathered writers who shared the same or had similar ideas. Their intellectual, political, and even stylistic rebellion alarmed the ever-watchful authorities, who saw to it that the journals *Beseda*, *Revija 57*, and *Perspektive* were banned. In the 1950s there were attempts by younger authors such as Ciril Kosmač and Beno Zupančič to modernize, in line with contemporary European novels, the tradition of social realism with its extensive descriptions of war, of the national liberation struggle, and of the post-war era. But this modernization involved exclusively formal changes. To trace the development of the contemporary Slovene novel we need to look back even further, to the very start of the century, where we can discern the beginnings of the modern Slovene novel in the works of Ivan Cankar. Here we have in mind primarily the longer texts that replace linear narrative with a new form of fragmentary, associative, personal narrative that at the same time, and to at least some extent, deals with the nihilism of the age (*Gospa Judit*, *Hiša Marije Pomočnice*, *Nina*, *Novo življenje*, *Milan in Milena*). We should also include as precursors of the Slovene modern novel Izidor Cankar's *S poti* and Bartol's *Alamut*.<sup>2</sup> The latter can boast a rich conceptual backdrop of metaphysical nihilism, but because of its completely unmodern narrative form it is still rather traditional.

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<sup>2</sup> *Alamut* (1938) by Vladimir Bartol (1903–67) became a hit after the appearance of a French translation in 1988. A year later it enjoyed great success among readers in Spain and, after the events of 11 September 2001, in the United States. A world readership was attracted by its Persian theme, given contemporary resonance by religious fundamentalism and political terrorism. European interest in the novel triggered a kind of Bartol renaissance in Slovenia, with literary critics and historians re-evaluating what had become an almost forgotten work.

Due to its limited scope, this literary-historical survey will be unable to offer a complete picture of contemporary Slovene novel writing and will restrict itself to those authors that can be seen as most interesting and important, as well as being innovative within the confines of literary currents, trends, and forms. I have chosen twelve authors whose work I will present in more detail, with illustrative references to their novels. They are Dominik Smole, *Črni dnevi in beli dan*; Vitomil Zupan, *Potovanje na konec pomladi* and *Menuet za kitaro (na petindvajset strelav)*; Zorko Simčič, *Človek na obeh straneh stene*; Rudi Šeligo, *Triptih Agate Schwarzkobler*; Lojze Kovačič, *Prišleki*; Florjan Lipuš, *Boštjanov let*; Andrej Blatnik, *Plamenice in solze*; Drago Jančar, *Galjot* and *Katarina, pav in jezuit*; Marjan Tomšič, *Óštrigéca*; Feri Lainšček, *Ki jo je megla prinesla*; Berta Bojetu, *Filio ni doma*; and Suzana Tratnik, *Ime mi je Damjan*. Other novelists are included by way of information, and co-creators of literary phenomena and forms will also be mentioned. The survey will trace literary trends and texts, while the socio-political situation will be dealt with only in so far as it impacts upon literary texts and is reflected in them. I shall not break down the development of the Slovene novel into generational steps, as this would additionally burden a presentation which is already factually weighty. For most of the selected authors I shall analyze only one novel, but in the case of two of them (Zupan and Jančar), because of their particular literary quality and the extensive meta-literary response they evoked, I shall deal with two works.

This selection can be distinguished from the usual, more complex, and wider literary-historical surveys of this kind by one other feature: it includes more recent Slovene literary works, among them six recent novels. This bold step is justifiable for a number of reasons, of which I shall cite only three: first, to take into account the whole developmental arc of the contemporary Slovene novel, which extends right up to the latest texts; second, to incorporate the extensive and interesting novel writing at the end of the century; and third, a desire to update the reader's mental image of the current Slovene novel, as this is precisely what, due to literary-historical caution, many syntheses of literature lack. In making my selection I have taken into account: literary quality or (already confirmed) ability to convince artistically; thematic or formal-stylistic innovation; and the ability to evoke a clear public response (recognition, important awards, and a wide, well-founded critical meta-literature). I have approached the novels in both a literary-historical and interpretive-analytical fashion, making use of a multi-layered genre analysis<sup>3</sup> in those instances when a particular novel is marked by generic heterogeneity.

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<sup>3</sup> The novel is the most open, indeterminate and transitional literary type. The oldest and only constant characteristic by which we can recognize the novel today is its heterogeneity—of variety, type or genre—which we can deal with

The arrival of the contemporary Slovene novel was announced (between 1957 and 1960) by three texts: Zorko Simčič's *Človek na obeh straneh stene* (1957), Dominik Smole's *Črni dnevi in beli dan* (1958), and Alojz Rebula's *Senčni ples* (1960). The first of these came out of the émigré community in Buenos Aires, and as it was almost unknown to the Slovene public and evoked little literary response, it could not have a modernizing influence on the Slovene writing of the time. A similar literary fate met an even earlier modern novel, Vitomil Zupan's *Potovanje na konec pomladi*, written in 1940. For a number of reasons it was published in Slovenia thirty-two years after it was written, so it could not help shape the literary fate of the Slovene novel.

The pioneer of the Slovene modern novel is Dominik Smole (1929–92), who is known mainly as a dramatist (e.g., the poetic drama *Antigona*). Upon reading his novel *Črni dnevi in beli dan* (1958), the reader wonders what is the source of the lethargy and passivity of the main characters, the unnamed painter and his lover, the redheaded actress, Maruša. Why can they not deal with even the most banal issues such as going to a different tavern, going for a walk or getting to work on time? Their actions in this grotesque Kafkaesque world of artists are made impossible by a metaphysical nihilism which transfers the Slovene novel from the previous war-of-liberation ideology to the realm of the modern novel. Although it still follows Cankar's heritage of similar emotional states, particular moods, and a lyrical narrative, it is characterized by the following modernist traits: the shaking up and disintegration of the story, and the disposal of traditional (psychological) characterization and a unified narrative standpoint, as well as spatio-temporal and cause-effect logic. The lack of action is replaced by the sequencing of the states of mind and internal dialogs of a number of literary characters and their differing truths. The anguish of the unresolved narrative situations in the novel arises from an existentialist understanding of the world and of life which, in Slovene literature, draws above all upon the work of Sartre and Camus. Our citation of Smole's novel as the first Slovene modern and contemporary novel is also justified by the fact that in the mid-1950s Slovene narrative prose began to be influenced by modernism (primarily stylistically) and existentialism (the choice of themes), and that this novel represents a meeting point [...between the two styles.] of both of these.

Smole's novel reflects the position of Slovene literary existentialism in general: a nihilistic hopeless variant of existentialism

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only through a multi-layered genre analysis. Such analysis becomes multi-layered when it encompasses theoretical narratological approaches to three modes of writing (description, narration, speech) and basic narrative elements (story, perspective, narrator, literary character, space and time) in a manner of methodological pluralism (Zupan Sosič 2006: 50–60).

appears only rarely (for example in the novels of Peter Božič); generally, it features a more vital clinging to life, as can be seen in the existentialist prose of most novelists—Vitomil Zupan, Zorko Simčič, Alojz Rebula, Marjan Rožanc, and Drago Jančar. This stance can also be used to explain the open ending of Smole's novel. In *Črni dnevi in beli dan* a modernist form and existentialist theme are supplemented by an irony and poeticism that bring to this work originality and quality (Kos 1996: 208).

While it is only at the end of Smole's novel that the existentialist theme of feeling lost and lacking a center admits the possibility of a more life-enhancing perspective, this is more indubitably and wholly present in all of Vitomil Zupan's artistically most complete and well-received novels: *Potovanje na konec pomladi*, *Menuet za kitaro (na petindvajset strelov)*, and *Levitan*. The writer, dramatist, and poet Vitomil Zupan (1914–87) interweaves it with the erotic to such an extent that this erotic life force outgrows the decadent, neo-romantic, existentialist, and social realist base or rather keeps it at an embryonic level. For the erotic is Zupan's central theme, his characteristic narrative perspective, and the source of his novels' dynamism. This is proven by today's reception of his novel writing: younger readers in particular approach his work in an unencumbered way, no longer perturbed by his critical stance towards Communist ideology or the provocativeness of his descriptions of political manipulation. The writer's erotic activism is similar to the rebellion of Henry Miller, while its connections with some of Freud's psychoanalytical concepts bring it close to the tradition of the prose of Vladimir Bartol and to certain novels and novellas by Andrej Hieng.

In Zupan's novels the intimate story usually unfolds in parallel with the historical one, although this is not the case with *Potovanje na konec pomladi* (1972),<sup>4</sup> where only the former is present. In this apogee of Zupan's pre-war novel writing, the novelist ironically criticizes the petty bourgeoisie through the demonic individualism of the hero, the schoolboy Tajs. In the desire for a different identity and to escape from banality, Tajs's teacher, an unnamed Slavic studies specialist, joins his pupil on beer-drinking and sexual adventures in which the theme of duality, along with title of the novel, shows what it has in common with Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932).

If the essence of *Potovanje na konec pomladi* is the erotic nature of innocent (rhetorical) seduction, in *Menuet za kitaro (na petindvajset strelov)* (1975), this means to the partisan and adventurer Berk something very

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<sup>4</sup> Literary historians (e.g., Aleš Berger and Helga Glušič) have often lamented the fact that the novel was published in 1972, even though it was written in 1940, for it was thus unable to make contact with contemporary European currents and have a more marked influence on the modernization of Slovene prose.

human and primary: “There are barriers, chasms, walls and stones between people, that prevent complete contact, touch, fusion. Sexual contact is something primeval. All the junk of civilization only serves to hinder the contact of sexual truth” (Zupan 1980: 94).<sup>5</sup> The first person narrator in this generically heterogeneous novel (it is a *mélange* of a developmental, picaresque, collective, war novel and a novel of character) through a dual, Slovene and Spanish story, interprets the whole of history as the history of war, in which the possessive-destructive character of society seems worse than war itself. This character is also at the center of the prison novel *Levitan* (1982), which caused quite a storm when it was published and was subject to mainly political criticism, even though it avoided any clear political stance. In spite of the naturalistic description of Levitan’s suffering in the Dachau show trials,<sup>6</sup> the first-person narrator does not wish to portray his seven years of imprisonment merely as an unjust torture chamber, but more as a school of life. Socialist ideology and in particular its police-court apparatus, were accused in a more documentary and programmatic way by the writers Vladimir Kavčič and Igor Torkar, both of whom were also victims of the Dachau trials. In their novels *Zapisnik* (1973) and *Umiranje na obroke* (1983) narration is seen as bearing witness or as warning future generations so that such absurd cruelty should not happen again. Zupan communicates injustice in a different, more artistically sublimated way: Levitan survives imprisonment only because he is afflicted by both scribomania and erotomania—the therapeutic power of the erotic is equated with that of writing.

In Zorko Simčič’s (1921) novel *Človek na obeh straneh stene* (1957) the existential theme of rootlessness and the search for freedom in modernist garb is similarly interwoven with an erotic theme, but is also linked to another issue—that of emigration, which is described in a distinctive way. The main character, an unnamed intellectual, does not criticize the homeland for his status of political emigrant, nor does he succumb to naive idealization of his memories of the Slovenia of his youth. Here, the construction of one’s own identity outside the homeland is dealt with in a completely different way than in some of the novels by members of the Slovene minorities in countries bordering Slovenia, such as Alojz Rebula, Boris Pahor, or Florjan Lipuš, who had to deal with the threatened Slovene communities in Italy and Austria in a much more engaged fashion. The refugee’s situation is artistically widened by Simčič to encompass the whole existential drama of the modern individual, who feels at home

<sup>5</sup> “Med ljudmi so ovire, prepadi, zidovi, kamen, ki onemogočajo prvotne stike, dotike, zlitja. Spolni stik je nekaj prvobitnega. Vsa navlaka civilizacije samo ovira stik spolne resničnosti.”

<sup>6</sup> At these show trials, beginning in 1948, former partisans and prison camp inmates were falsely charged and sentenced to long prison terms—in Zupan’s case to eighteen years, which was only later reduced to seven years.

nowhere (least of all internally). Thus being foreign is best illustrated by the following thought drawn from the monologue of the third person narrative: “Two abroads, but no homeland” (Simčič 1991: 36).

The exhaustive search for one’s own identity also marks the modernist novels of Pavle Zidar and Saša Vuga, while an extremely objectivized expression of it is expressed in a special form of the modernist *nouveau roman*. An example of this is *Triptih Agate Schwarzkobler* (1968) by Rudi Šeligo (1935–2004), which introduced into Slovene literature in a new way the powerlessness of the modern subject. The main character Agata is treated as an object, with even the parts of her body (arms, legs, eyes, etc.) being given independence following the logic of the objective film camera. The reader is unable to ascertain who or what Agata is, what is happening to her or how she is feeling. The dehumanization of and alienation from the world is testified by the very style of Šeligo’s modernist prose, which was established in Slovene avant-garde literature around 1970. This is reism, which replaces psychological descriptions with descriptions of objects, environments, and man as body or object that has with its objectification lost its central role in the world. The choice of the name of the main character, the image of violence beside water, the polarization of the world into suffering woman and violent man all connect this novel to Ivan Tavčar’s classic of Slovene prose, *Visoška kronika* (1917).

If it is unclear in *Triptih Agate Schwarzkobler* how much meaning Agata’s individuality has, in the modernist trilogy *Prišleki* (1984–85), by Lojze Kovačič (1928–2004), the boy Bubi ceaselessly and even explicitly fights for it. Due to Bubi’s position of social and national inequality, his struggle for recognition is harder than that of his peers. This autobiographical tale of an immigrant, the son of a German mother and Slovene father, is also a Bildungsroman that shows the writer growing up in his new homeland, Slovenia. The novel unfolds as a sequence of events, descriptions, and moods. The fragmentary nature of the narrative is not just a technical matter of gathering together fragments, but a complete creative conviction based on the esthetics of the fragment. Thus the reader is presented with mental content (stream of consciousness), fragments of memory, associations, and mental impulses that are linked together by rapid cuts, jumps, and editorial connections. The simultaneous presence of verism and of an expressively subjective narrative can be clearly seen in *Prišleki* in the writer’s redirection from a realistic description of the world of objects to the actual process of perception, which provides an alienating effect that might be labeled puzzle-description. When, for example, the author presents rural life, he first describes through the amazed eyes of a child the objects, animals, and events as if seen for the first time, not naming them but leaving it up to the reader to name and make sense of them. The child’s

perspective<sup>7</sup> opens up a different, unusual view of external and internal events, thus stirring up the veristic-modernist narrative.

One representative of the contemporary Slovene novel who has been faithful to the modernist approach from the very beginning is Florjan Lipuš (1937), the most important writer in Austrian Carinthia and a central Slovene literary figure. His last novel, *Boštjanov let* (2003), represents a continuation of his characteristic narrative tendencies, but at the same time surpasses his previous work. The writer's critical gaze is still directed at the mundaneness and narrowness of life in a village as a traditional model of Slovene culture and a universal image of contemporary society. Although the novel's narrator treats with irony the harmful stereotypes of tradition (the cult of work and death, the Church as protector and master of the believer, the inequality of the genders, the obedience of children) he stands up for the preservation of traditional values, especially the family, directness, and sincerity. The most contemporary aspect of the novel is the way it deals with the harmonization of the two modes of life—traditional and modern—and this is also the most developed literary trait of this lyric, romantic novel: the escape route from distorted interpersonal relations is friendship, not mutual loathing between the sexes. The life-enhancing openness of love as the highest ethical value and existential category of the surpassed introduces, into the context of this contemporary Slovene novel, an innovative image of true love unmarked by the exhaustion and emptiness that characterizes almost all the love stories in the the more recent Slovene novels.

Alongside the prevailing modernist traits of the key contemporary novels there began to appear certain postmodernist characteristics (metafictional techniques, such as the erasure of the line between fact and fiction that appeared in the work of Peter Božič and Jože Snoj after 1960), but in the new postmodern literary currents that started to emerge in Slovenia in the 1970s and to fade in the 1990s we can include only “the new Slovene prose.”<sup>8</sup> Slovene postmodernism first flourished in poetry and short prose, and made an appearance in the novel only in the 1980s, mainly in the work of Dimitrij Rupel. A textbook example of a postmodernist Slovene novel is *Plamenice in solze* (1987), by Andrej Blatnik (1963). In it, the dialog of literature with itself is characteristically postmodern, incorporating as it does numerous quotations, ironic commentaries, allusions, and parodies of established (literary) texts (such as Kafka, the Strugatsky brothers, and Ivan Cankar) involving metafiction and intertextuality. The

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<sup>7</sup> The child's perspective also opens up a different, unusual view of events in Marjan Rožanc's novel *Ljubezen* (1979).

<sup>8</sup> “New Slovene prose” is the name for the narrative creators working in the early 1970s: Marko Švabič, Uroš Kalčič, Emil Filipčič, Branko Gradišnik, Boris Jukić, Tone Perčič, and Milan Kleč.



central theme of the novel is thus literature itself, which is left only with self-reference, through which the literary status of the central character Konstantin Wojnovski is constantly weakened. His longing, wrapped in the image of the golden ball is postmodernistic: he wants to write a book that would encompass the whole world. Virk (2000: 230–31) claims that Konstantin, with his passivity and unsatisfied longing is directly related to the (characteristic) longing of the hero of the Slovene novel. Of course, Konstantin differs in that the golden ball bestows irresistible sexual attractiveness and thus satisfies his subconscious wish. The transformation of the unattractive wimp into a demonic seducer is a comic one and involves numerous allusions.

Certain postmodernist characteristics have also marked the central figure of contemporary Slovene literature, Drago Jančar (1948), the most translated and awarded writer, dramatist, and essayist. His parabolic, historical, vagabond novel *Galjot* (1978) is not postmodernistic: the status of reality within it is modernist, although it does have some postmodern features. It is its independent varietal, generic, and linguistic stamp that bears witness to the artistic accomplishment through which the reader is drawn to share the anguish of the seventeenth-century hero Johan Ot, his ups and downs, as if he were a completely contemporary figure. The recurrent message of all of Jančar's prose is that history repeats itself. The absurdity and brutality of history is in *Galjot* related through the theme of witchcraft and the apocalyptic atmosphere of spiritual decadence. The sense of existential anguish also arises from within the hero himself: throughout the whole novel Johan Ot is fleeing. When he flees from Germany to Slovenia he is fleeing from himself, but when denounced for membership of a heretic religious sect,<sup>9</sup> his flight from his persecutors—inquisitors—ultimately leads to a galley.

The flight from oneself appears in almost all of Jančar's prose works. In the novel *Posmehljivo poželenje* (1993), for example, it develops into an ironic raising of awareness about the national character, determined in the most schematic way as "Slovene melancholy." Similarly, in the historical novel *Katarina, pav in jezuit* (2000), the eponymous Katarina must distance herself from her homeland in order to arrive, in a different, more intense manner, at some truths about life. On her pilgrimage to Cologne she wants above all to forget about her unhappy love for the conceited and swaggering "peacock" Windisch (an officer in the Austrian artillery) and it brings her new love and pain when she falls for the former Jesuit Simon Lovrenc. These violent emotional shifts are reflected in the

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<sup>9</sup> The Slovene expression (*štiftarstvo*) refers to a sixteenth-century religious sect whose adherents set up churches and monasteries. When they were enraptured, they danced and jumped about. They were popularly referred to as *skakači*, or jumpers.

story of the mid-eighteenth century pilgrims, which also tells of the rift between hope (faith) and dissolution (war). The construction of the novel is that of the triptych, combining the strands of narrative style: Naturalism colored by the grotesque and by humour (the dramatic descriptions of the mass scenes in the novel); expressive-symbolic, above all in the recording of spiritual and imaginative events (the rift between ethical conscience and erotic longing); and the third layer of mythical elements (the Song of Songs, legends of the saints, angels and evil spirits (Glušič 2002: 283).

This last novel of Jančar's brought something new to his writing. In the foreground is an intimate story whose outcome is determined by a woman's perspective. The centrality of the intimate story is characteristic of all of Slovene novel writing at the end of the twentieth century, when the form truly flowered. How, then, to characterize the most recent Slovene novel if the scattered neo-realist and minimalist tendency can be described as a trait, but cannot be generalized into a new direction or course? One solution offered by other national literatures which is broad enough in its openness is literary eclecticism, a label for a *mélange* of influences and phenomena. The dispersed nature of different narrative tendencies leads to the search for a common narrative model: the modified traditional novel with traits of realism. In spite of the richness of the poetics of the novel we can still arrive at a common denominator of numerous novels (between 1990 and 2005 there were about 620 of them) which is at the same time a distinguishing feature of the period under discussion and perhaps even the harbinger of a new direction. In the relation between the genders, the theme of love (both characteristics are present in what is referred to as the "small story"), and an attachment to literary tradition we can locate the beginnings of a special new emotionalism,<sup>10</sup> a sensibility towards new shifts in (sexual) identity (Zupan Sosič 2006). This new emotionalism is not only connected with identity, but also with the manner and direction of feeling—toward the novel's emotional environment, and above all toward certain stereotypes, there is adopted an ironic, cynical, or parodic distance with a post-postmodernist esthetic in which an important part is played by postmodern spleen, a combination of superficial hedonism and boredom.

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<sup>10</sup> This new emotionalism derives from a special kind of sincerity in the Slovene novel that differs from the "new sincerity" described by Epshtein (1998: 134–36): contemporary emotionality in the Slovene novel is often subject to comment, irony, or parody. As I have encountered—in the most recent novels—mainly shifts in sincerity and feeling with regard to the formation of personal identity, I have labeled this type of change new emotionalism, which Slovene metaliterature has not yet dealt with. German critics and literary historians have written about these general shifts in subjectivity, calling it new subjectivism, while an interesting label from English literary criticism for shifts in the modern subject is the expression *postnational subjectivity*.

There were a great many changes in Slovenia at the beginning of the 1990s, which had been anticipated a number of years earlier. The short (nine-day) Slovene war was soon followed by the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the establishment of an independent Slovene state that in the new millennium joined the European Union. Independence also brought political changes: the shift from a socialist to a capitalist system. Democracy, gradual Europeanization, and globalization marked the whole of literature, although novels reflected these socio-political changes in a non-traditional way.<sup>11</sup> The contemporary Slovene novel is dominated by small stories in which social changes have only a marginal role. Thus in the most significant years during the 1990s, novels were not socio-politically committed (such engagement is partially visible only in the choice of the special, the anti-utopian, the generic, which burgeoned precisely in those years). If we interpret political change in a more implicit way, we can in this period include under this heading the greater proportion of literature from the Slovene periphery—from Istria, Prekmurje, and Prlekija—and the parallel growth of interest shown by central Slovenia (as a consequence of a new national awareness) for the margins. The literature of the Slovene periphery that attracted the widest readership was the fantastic of a particular type—regional fantastic—that charmed the reader with unusual stories and a patina of archaism.

The regional fantastic in the novels of Marjan Tomšič (1939) is connected to Istria, its hilliness and archaic character. In the novel *Óštrigéca* (1991) the Istrian writer combines the characteristics of folk and artificial (contemporary) fairy-tales so that they are subordinated to the dictates of the following fairy-tale conventions: the predictability of the miraculous story, that the hero is chosen and destined for the (fairy-tale) task, anthropomorphization of animate and inanimate nature, and a hard-to-determine location in space and time. Fairy-tale characteristics also shape the central character, the vagrant Boškin, who uses his mysterious powers to help people and animals in the villages of Istria. His fight against black magic takes place in two independent areas. One is formed by archaic Istria with its superstitions and magic. The other is the space inhabited by all the literary characters who consistently reject the miraculous, the fantastic, and the fairy-tale-like. In this novelized fairy-tale, Boškin wanders among the local villages, driven by (unknown) forebodings and forces. Istria is a symbolic space in which, as in real life, evil makes progress in spite of man's desire for peace. Boškin's struggle against black magic is captured in the love story involving him and Vitica. Even though the novel has some

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<sup>11</sup> The contemporary Slovene novel has avoided obvious narratives on national themes, such as the creation of the new state, in the form of large stories with recognizable elements, preferring instead small stories in which political shifts are included as understated narrative background or are compressed into an encoded image of the social background.

very beautiful erotic scenes, its dominant element is longing for spiritual love, which opens up the novel by making it cyclical and open ended.

The source of the fantastic in *Ki jo je megla prinesla* (1993), by Feri Lainšček (1959), is also of a regional nature but with influences of the horror novel rather than the fairy-tale. In the characteristic landscape of Lainšček's novels—the lowlands of Prekmurje—the main character, the individualistic priest Jon Urski, tries to strengthen the faith of the immoral villagers. His strivings are unsuccessful, so this generically heterogeneous novel (a combination of parable, spiritual, romantic, horror, crime, psychological novel, and conspiracy novel) with its horrific scenes becomes ever more of a crime novel. It degenerates into the hunt for the killer and the flight from evil. This evil is hard to unmask as it has a seductive surface. At the very beginning of the novel the priest Urski encounters a beautiful bird that calls him ever deeper into the marshes, where he becomes lost. In the same way he is misled by the initial friendliness of the blacksmith and an older village woman. After talking to him the blacksmith shuts him up in the smithy and violently shoes him, like a horse, while the doughnuts given to him by the village woman turn to horse dung. Even in the introductory motto Feri Lainšček addresses the secret, while from its non-resolution stems the constant uneasiness whose tripping points can be connected to the horror novel, particularly the unusual story and the state of slowly losing consciousness connected with horrific nightmares.

As in Lainšček's novel, the horrific fantastic in Berta Bojetu's (1946–97) *Filio ni doma* (1990) has a generic impulse, but in this case it comes not from the regional fantastic but from the anti-utopian novel, interwoven with the parable-like, grotesque, psychological, satirical, and erotic novel. The unusual lives of the women and men in the book are shaped by anti-utopian devices: a remote island, placement in the indeterminate future, control of intimate life, and strict, unjust, hierarchical authorities. The heroine Helena rebels, but even with the help of her women friends, her granddaughter Filio, and her adopted son Uri, she cannot prevail. In spite of external repression, the literary characters suffer most because of their internal imbalance, as they carry the greatest evil inside themselves, in their psychological make-up. The usual message of the classical dystopia regarding the harmfulness of technological advance is reduced by Bojetu to the message that all violence against people is harmful, which is symbolized in the novel by birds and rape. The unhappy destinies of the protagonists in novels at the transition to the 1990s apocalyptically prophesied violence while at the same time warning against it; *Ptičja hiša*, 1995 (a sequel to *Filio ni doma*) transfers the absurdity and senselessness of violence to a description of (the Bosnian) war and its horrors which has symbolic significance. In spite of their dystopian engagement, in the foreground of both novels is an intimate story, which is also characteristic of the novels of this period.

The theme of love, marked by a crisis of gender identity, usually in the relations between men and women, is becoming central to this intimate story. And in recent years the repressiveness of hetero-norms has been joined by the theme of the other genders<sup>12</sup> (such as homosexuals, the third sex, transvestites). In the novel *Ime mi je Damjan* (2001) Suzana Tratnik (1963) links this theme to an inability to communicate that is so strong that the central character Damjan requires psychiatric treatment as he can no longer make contact with those around him. This block is also the source of the narrative drama, as the reader, until (at least) the second half of the novel, is unable to determine the (sexual) identity of the first person narrator Damjan. This puzzle of identity is also a narrative puzzle in which the reader can share this young person's anguish. Only toward the end of the novel do we find out that Damjan's secret is a different understanding of his own sexuality: as a woman who feels like a man he does not include himself among lesbians and is also extremely ironic<sup>13</sup> towards transvestites. One source of his neurosis is also an unhealthy (depicted as incestuous) childhood relationship with his father, and above all the communication block between members of the family that only deepens when he changes his name from Vesna to Damjan. Damjan's passive resistance, expressed as self-destructiveness, can be read as implicit criticism of the pathologically distorted interpersonal relations caused by a heterosexual society that determines what is normal and what is not. And through this hetero-normative repression it unleashes hatred towards gender minorities, while at the same time causing within them unease, revolt and shame before those who feel in the same way. The repressiveness of the heterosexual society, criticism of distorted interpersonal relations and the inability to communicate—symptoms of the modern world—are not only a constant where sexual themes are involved, but as contemporary themes of the third millennium appear in the majority of novels.

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<sup>12</sup> The theme of gender identity is dealt with by many contemporary Slovene writers, most radically and profoundly by Brane Mozetič.

<sup>13</sup> Damjan does not identify with lesbians and is very critical towards them, even though his girlfriend is a lesbian. Considering his behaviour, he could be classed as a transvestite, although he is also intolerant towards them, or he could be understood in a wider way, as a member of the third sex.

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**POVZETEK****SODOBNI SLOVENSKI ROMAN**

*Sodobni slovenski roman je razplasten pojav, saj so ga od petdesetih let 20. stoletja do danes zaznamovali različni kulturni pogoji, družbene spremembe, literarne smeri in pojavi ter skupine in posamezni avtorji. Sredi petdesetih let 20. stoletja sta začela na razvoj slovenske proze očitneje vplivati eksistencializem (na izbiri tem) in modernizem (predvsem na stilne postopke). Takrat se je pojavil tudi prvi sodobni slovenski roman Črni dnevi in beli dan (1958) Dominika Smoleta (1929–1992) s svojima »sovrstnikoma« v izseljenstvu (Zorko Simčič, Človek na obeh straneh stene, Buenos Aires, 1957) in v zamejstvu (Alojz Rebula, Senčni ples, Trst, 1960). Smoletov eksistencializem odseva položaj slovenskega literarnega eksistencializma nasploh, saj je nihilistični eksistencializem (vsaj delno) presežen z vitalistično trdoživostjo. Ta je prisotna tudi v romanu Vitomila Zupana (1914–1987), nesojenega začetnika slovenskega modernističnega romana, ki jo izpisuje kot erotični vitalizem v vseh obravnavanih romanih, npr: Potovanje na konec pomladi (1972) in Menuet za kitaro (1975). Eksistencialistična tema iskanja svobode v modernistični preobleki je prisotna tudi v romanu Zorka Simčiča (1921) Človek na obeh straneh stene (1957, 1991).*

*Drugačno podobo notranjega nemira literarne osebe predstavlja slovenska različica novega romana, Triptih Agate Schwarzkobler (1968) Rudija Šeligo (1935–2004). O dehumanizaciji in odtujenosti sveta priča že sam slog modernistične proze, ki se v slovenski avantgardni literaturi imenuje reizem. Tako skrajne oblike modernizma ostali romani ne dosegajo: bolj tradicionalni se zdijo predvsem tisti, ki z modernistično naravnostjo povežejo avtobiografsko izpoved. Poleg že omenjenega Vitomila Zupana je avtor najbolj obsežnega avtobiografskega opusa Lojze Kovačič (1928–2004), v katerem izstopa trilogija Prišleki (1984–1985). V njej otroška in mladeniška perspektiva prenovita (pogoste) motive vojne, revščine in svobode. Tudi Florjan Lipuš (1937), avtor obsežnega modernističnega opusa, v svojem romanu Boštjanov let (2003) spoji otroško in odraslo perspektivo ter razkrije razkol med tradicionalnim in sodobnim. Lirizirani ljubezenski roman postavi v romaneskni svet izčrpane eksistence ljubezen kot pravi etični imperativ.*

*Vzporedno z modernistično in (tradicionalno) realistično pripovedno prozo na Slovenskem v osemdesetih letih nastaja tudi postmodernistična, predvsem kratka proza. Nova literarna smer je začela k nam »prodirati« v sedemdesetih letih, ko so jo naznanjali predstavniki »nove proze«, v romanu pa se je zasedrila v osemdesetih letih, predvsem v romanopisje Dimitrija Rupla. Vzorčni primer postmodernističnega romana so Plamenice in solze (1987) Andreja Blatnika (1963), ki z osrednjo temo – literatura sama – nenehno prevprašuje lastni romaneskni status.*

*Postmodernistične značilnosti so opazne tudi v romanu osrednje osebnosti sodobne slovenske književnosti, Draga Jančarja (1948), a so za oznako njegovega obsežnega literarnega ustvarjanja le obrobne značaja. Najbolj uveljavljen in priznan sodobni slovenski pisatelj je skozi zgodovinsko zgodbo (Galjot, 1978, ter Katarina, pav in jezuit, 2000) pripovedoval o problematiki sodobnega človeka. Njegov zadnji roman Katarina, pav in jezuit je nastal ob koncu stoletja, ki beleži pravi razcvet slovenskega romana in prinaša pripovedno stalnico, osrednjost intimne zgodbe.*

*Devetdeseta leta 20. stoletja poleg intimne zgodbe zaznamuje še literarni eklekticizem in romaneskni model, ki različne spremembe ponotranja – modificirani tradicionalni roman z realističnimi potezami. To je čas skokovitega porasta sodobnega slovenskega romana (od 1990 do 2005 je nastalo ok. 620 romanov), hkrati pa tudi čas večjega deleža fantastike. V romanu Óstrigéca (1991) Marjana Tomšiča (1939) je to pravljiciha fantastika, v romanu Filio ni doma (1990) Berte Bojetu (1946–1997) antiutopična fantastika, v romanu Ki jo je megla prinesla (1993) Ferija Lainščka (1959) pa se fantastika navezuje na zglede grozljivega romana. Čeprav so naštetih romani iz devetdesetih let bralno mikavni predvsem zaradi posebnega deleža fantastike, se v njih zarisuje še ena pomembna skupna lastnost, mogoče tudi znanilka nove smeri: nova emocionalnost. To je čutečnost premikov (spolne) identitete, ki vzpostavlja do znotrajliterarnega in zunajliterarnega sveta, posebej do stereotipov, ironično, cinično ali parodično razdaljo. V njej igra pomembno vlogo postmoderni spleen, mešanica površnega užitka in (turbokapitalistične) zdolgočasnosti. Nova emocionalnost poudarja komunikacijsko blokado, ki pa ne nastane samo zaradi represivnosti heteronormativov, kot npr. v romanu Ime mi je Damjan (2001) Suzane Tratnik (1963), pač pa predvsem zaradi sprevrženih medčloveških odnosov. Ali prinaša novo tisočletje sodobnemu slovenskemu romanu poleg literarnega eklekticizma, male zgodbe in nove emocionalnosti še kakšno pomembno novost, pa je vprašanje, na katerega bodo odgovorile nadaljnje raziskave.*