

Slovene Literature in the Postmodern Age

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(translated by David Limon)

Slovene literature since 1990 has been characterized in the following ways: post-Yugoslav, post-communist, post-independence, transition, and postmodern literature; modernist and postmodernist literature; literary eclecticism, new emotionality, and transrealism. Among these sociological, culturological, and literary labels, those that best address the specific characteristics of Slovene literature in this short period are literary eclecticism, new emotionality, and transrealism. The first term recognizes the heterogeneous nature of recent Slovene literature or the way it combines different currents, directions, trends, groups, individuals, and poetics, while the second relates to the common features of texts with regard to the shaping of personal identity and a new type of feeling shown by the literary subject. Transrealism, as a label for a new literary trend following postmodernism, is a possible common denominator for phenomena apparent in Slovene literature since 1990: the prevalence of a realistic technique, method or style, and a connection with previous trends in European realism, transformed by a new role of the literary subject—i.e., a new emotionality.

key words: Slovene literature, literary eclecticism, new emotionality, transrealism

Slovene literature of the last twenty years, from 1990 to 2010, is part of a wider period that critics refer to as **contemporary Slovene literature**. This period, which combines different currents, directions, trends, groups, individuals, and poetics, was established after 1945, but most intensively after 1960. Its development is connected with the wider social and political context, but it is also, in terms of both quality and quantity, the time of the greatest quantitative development of Slovene literature. As further research could encompass the development of all three literary types—lyric, epic, and dramatic—the production of which from 1990 to 2010 was massive and almost impossible to survey, I will limit discussion to quality texts¹ that were subject to more (media) attention. In

¹ In the past decade literary production in Slovenia has become truly large scale. To make comparison easier, let me just mention that Slovenia has a population of two million, including a large number of writers, many more than in the previous century, but who publish their books in smaller runs—if in the past an established writer would be published in a run of 10,000, now the figure is likely to be 500. Thus while between 1980 and 1990 160 novels were

discussing the literature of the last twenty years, I will be on the lookout in particular for the new specific features that have marked Slovene literature during that relatively brief time and thus try to identify what marks it most strongly. Although Slovene post-Yugoslav, post-communist, post-independence literature has similar traits that of the majority of new EU member states (specially, ex-communist countries), these traits nevertheless differ in their specific features, which are most systematically described by group of terms for literary trends and phenomena, modernism, postmodernism, transrealism, literary eclecticism, and neo emotionality.

In order to arrive at a systematic explanation of the Slovene literature that flourished after the break-up of Yugoslavia, I must first offer some insights into the points of contact with the whole literary period known as contemporary Slovene literature, primarily by returning to the 1980s and analyzing the important political and cultural shifts that took place at that time. Contemporary Slovene literature from 1980 to 2010 comes under the heading of the wider socio-cultural phenomenon known as the postmodern, which is best characterized by literary eclecticism (Zupan Sosič 2006: 13–50). The important political and cultural shifts of the time are connected with the already-mentioned concepts of post-Yugoslav, post-communist, post-independence and transition literature. While in 1980s Yugoslavia dissatisfaction with the socialist system and economic crisis was growing, there was also a burgeoning desire for independence within some Yugoslav nations due to increasing inter-ethnic disagreement and tension. The independence struggle in Slovenia was not as bloody as in some other former Yugoslav republics (such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia), as the armed conflict lasted only ten days, from 27 June to 7 July 1991. The war of independence in Slovenia was fought by local civil defense forces against the Yugoslav army, which had responded aggressively towards the declaration of Slovene independence on 26 June 1991. There followed membership of both NATO (29 March 2004) and the EU (1 May 2004). Not only the fight for independence but also the change of political system—from socialism to capitalism—was relatively peaceful in Slovenia. There was a gentle break with communism, rather than a revolutionary one, with the former leader of the Communist Party becoming the head of the new state. If independence and the appearance of the new state of Slovenia

published—i.e., sixteen per year, and from 1990 to 2000 there were 370, or thirty-seven per year, over the past decade the average has risen to 100 per year and in 2009 there were as many as 150 novels published.

was the realisation of a thousand-year dream, the same cannot be said about the consequence globalisation. The restructuring of capital within the global neoliberal system is not only destroying the Slovene economy (e.g., the collapse of key Slovene companies), but is also having a fatal influence on the development of non-commercial literature—which includes the Slovene lyric, epic and dramatic—as now literature appears in print runs of only 500 (in the former Yugoslavia this could be as high as 10,000) and the financial position of authors has similarly deteriorated. Neoliberal capitalism subjects book publishing to market conditions, which dictate to publishers the printing of books that sell, such as cook books, travel books, and various New Age guides to personal growth, and rarely non-commercial literary works.

In addition to the demands of the market, the development of Slovene literature had been hindered by its changed role from national-affirmative to one concerned merely with the personal and with individual identity. In socialist Yugoslavia, the state substantially financed the production of original literature and translations of these works, strengthening the national identities of Slovenes and other Yugoslav nations, as well as an appurtenance to the Yugoslav multi-ethnic identity. With the appearance of an independent Slovenia a paradoxical situation arose: the new state no longer felt the need to ensure the publication of books in order to strengthen (national or European) identity and handed over the responsibility to publishers, whose interests were personal rather than collective. Marko Juvan (2002: 411) explains the current situation with the following hypothesis: contemporary political changes (post-communist transition, the disintegration of multi-national states and political formations, the formation of new states), the self-regulation of national cultural-artistic systems, and a tendency to adapt to global (Western) culture have shaped a similar literary life, marked by the commercialization and trivialization of literature and the disappearance of its mythic-ideological collective role. In the post-independence period of Slovene literature, the loss of the ideological collective role also undermined the paramount importance that it had been able to retain in the past—paradoxically, even at the time of the greatest political repression. If in the 1980s literature still retained its nation-affirming (and thus state subsidized) mission,² in the

² The 1980s was marked by a different kind of engagement by literary figures. In Slovenia, they were the ones who reacted most dramatically to political changes or herald such changes. Thus the fight for independence was connected with the Slovene Writers Association and the setablishment of the journal *Nova revija* (New Review, 1982), although the “Slovene Spring” was also triggered by some other institutions, as well as by new social movements and the magazine *Mladina*. In 1987, issue number 57 of *Nova revija* caused quite a stir by publishing *Contributions to a Slovene National Program* in which authors addressed from different viewpoints the issue of the organization of Slovene

1990s it slowly took on a more personal role. Thus within the new state financial support shrank, although fortunately it did not disappear altogether. State subsidies, though smaller, are still available, as those responsible for cultural policy realized that without them, in a country with a population of only two million, “non-commercial” literature would simply die off. The weakening of the nation-affirming role of literature plays a decisive role not only in the reduction of state subsidies, but also influences the selection of literary themes. With the coming into being of a new state, one would expect “big” themes—independence, state building, Europeanization to come to the fore in literature, but in fact these were pushed out by “small,” personal issues. Strangest of all, these “big” themes failed to play a central role even in the novel, that widest of narrative formats which lends itself to the addressing of social issues. As political and social shifts are hard to discern in contemporary Slovene literature, we need to ask which themes actually do prevail. From the late 1980s onwards “small stories” that most often construct rather than national identity, individual (often gender) identities, offer themes such as alienation, boredom, dissatisfaction, conflict in love, the encroachment of the public on the private and the subsequent fear of loss of identity, the traumas of turbo-capitalism,³ an inability of communicate, and so on. The victory of the private over the collective has led to the centrality of themes relating to love, which also has an influence on what type or genre is chosen: the most common type of novel is the romantic novel and in poetry love poems and erotic poems.

In addition to the replacement of social themes with personal ones, it is also interesting to note a change in the literary hierarchy: poetry’s long-standing position at the top of the tree has been usurped by the novel. Until the 1990s, Slovene poetry was in first place for reasons connected with the historical development of Slovene literature. This took on a European value only during the Romantic period, with the poet France Prešeren (1800–49). From that time on, all the important cultural, literary and political shifts were first delineated in poetry, while the Slovenes, thanks to the quality of their poetry and the great number of poets, characterised themselves as a nation of poets. Poetry is still very important in Slovenia, but the focus of media attention and reader interest is now the novel. So while the 1980s was a time of short stories, the 1990s was undoubtedly a decade of the novel. From one decade to the next, the number of novels published almost

civil society and national politics in a democratic republic. This was built upon by issue number 95 of the same publication (1990), with the title *Independent Slovenia*, which argued for a democratic Slovenia with parliamentary elections and territorial independence.

³ Turbo-capitalism is a media term for describing a psychological-philosophical-political situation in the third millennium that is based on the New Age “belief” in consumer society, naive hedonism, and the fairness of reducing social rights.

tripled and the level of interest increased accordingly. An important extra-literary factor here was the Kresnik Award (Zupan Sosič 2003: 54), a prize for the best Slovene novel of the year, which has been given by the newspaper *Delo* since 1991. The Kresnik Award strongly promotes the Slovene novel: the names of the five nominees are known by most of the public and large numbers of readers read the winning novel. In addition to this domestic reason, the novel's rise has also been helped by the general air of globalisation, which favours story-telling and suspense. This has been described by David Lodge (2003: 1432) as the victory of the "petit-bourgeois" novel: "No matter what is the style and method of contemporary writing, whether it is realistic or not; fabulation, metafiction, or non-literary narrative, or a mixture of all of these, it is usually reader-friendly."⁴

Although post-Yugoslav, post-communist and post-independence Slovene literature have similar transitional traits as the literatures of most of the new EU member states, it nevertheless has some specific features, which I shall throw light on through a close examination of literary directions in this period, of modernism, postmodernism and possible new trends, such as transrealism and eclecticism. The most important of is **modernism**, as it was the systematic entrance of modernism into the Slovene literary space that signified the beginning of contemporary Slovene literature and has been a constant presence—even at the end of the century, when Slovene literature said goodbye to postmodernism. Modernism appeared in Slovene literature after 1960, linked with Existentialism, and is still present. The central characteristic of modernism is conceptual relativism, closely bound up with a metaphysical nihilism in which the subject's divided personality is assembled through the flow of consciousness as a process. Slovene modernism, like its European counterpart, can be recognized by its subjective approach to reality, its search for the new and original, and its tendency to fill the transcendental gap by ascribing an excessive worth to artistic values, which at the text level are realised through the abandonment of narrative logic and linearity, as well as a looser adherence to the chronological and causal principles of events. The shift from single to multiple layers of meaning is facilitated not only by a poetics of fragmentation and self-referentiality, but also by multiple perspectives and narrators, as well as by a withdrawal from the referential function towards the poetic and aesthetic. The most important representatives of modernism after 1990 were all active in the field before this date: the poets Niko Grafenauer, Ifigenija Simonović and Dane Zajc; the prose writers Lojze Kovačič, Florjan Lipuš, Rudi Šeligo, Vladimir Kavčič, Nedeljka Pirjevec, Nina Kokelj, and Vlado Žabot; and the dramatists Emil Filipčič and Peter Božič.

⁴ Translated from the Slovene (translator's note).

In the mid-1970s, modernism was replaced by **postmodernism**—although not completely, as some modernist texts (e.g., those of Niko Grafenauer, Lojze Kovačič, and Florjan Lipuš) appeared alongside postmodernist ones, and all the while there were also present traditional texts or texts that do not fit into either of these categories. This transition was specific to Slovene literature, with postmodernism first making its presence felt in poetry and only gradually appearing in narrative writing and drama (elsewhere, postmodernism is most characteristic of narrative prose), while modernism still survives in Slovenia, even after the disappearance of postmodernism. Most experts (e.g. Huyssen 1986, Hutcheon 1996, Jameson 1988) viewed the latter as a response to modernism, its hermetic character, and critique of mass culture. With regard to literary categorization,⁵ definitions of postmodernism vary in terms of their degree of specificity; I favour a narrower definition, which rests on the relationship between intra-literary and extra-literary realities in modernism and postmodernism. This can be explained as follows: while modernism cultivates the belief that reality, although lacking any metaphysical foundation, is to be found in consciousness and its psychological content, postmodernism increases metaphysical nihilism⁶ with the warning that there is no difference between intra- and extra-literary realities. Postmodernist texts avoid both external and internal reality, and are left with self-reference; the attitude to reality also changes because of a different understanding of literature. Whereas modernism values originality and what is new, postmodernism sees the literary text as a dialogue of literature with itself, a fabric of different texts, in which we discern quotations, comments, allusions, and parodies of existing literary texts. In postmodernism, the main theme of literature is thus literature itself, and the central procedures of meta-fiction and meta-textuality mean that the boundaries between reality and fiction disappear. In addition to the state of truth/reality, in any discussions of postmodernism it is also worth bearing in mind Jameson's (2001: 13) term "new shallowness," which relates to the establishment of a new society—labelled as post-industrial, consumer, media and information—in which there has

⁵ We need to differentiate between literary-historical and socio-cultural approaches to postmodernism: the first looks at postmodernism as a literary or artistic trend within the postmodern period, while the second considers the postmodern era, its society and culture. The concept of the postmodern is wider and superordinate, while that of postmodernism is narrower, more specific and subordinate. Postmodernism, the artistic trend or current, as opposed to the postmodern period, which is still with us, is easier to delimit temporally: it began in the second half of the twentieth century, in Slovenia in the 1980s, and it ended with the close of the millennium, more precisely in the mid-1990s.

⁶ I agree with Vattim (1997: 23) that the metaphysical nihilism in postmodernism has entered a phase that, to use Nietzsche's words, could be referred to as "complete nihilism"—i.e., a nihilism that has recognized that nihilism is its only option.

been a crucial abandonment of the traditional dichotomy between serious and popular literature, while triviality has become a popular postmodern literary characteristic.

Postmodernism had a much smaller influence on Slovene literature than modernism. In a period of about twenty years, roughly from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, a number of collections of postmodern poetry appeared, but very few works of narrative prose or dramatic texts (e.g. poetry collections from Svetlana Makarovič, Ivo Svetina, Milan Jesih, Boris A. Novak, and Milan Kleč; prose works by Andrej Blatnik, Dimitrij Rupel, and Goran Gluvić; and dramas by Drago Jančar and Dušan Jovanović). Along with the appearance of postmodernist texts, postmodernism can be “credited” with introducing new literary perspectives and approaches. I have already mentioned Jameson’s (2001: 13) “new shallowness.” The growing proportion of genre writing and thus trivial texts is not only a consequence of postmodernism, but rather, in Slovenia, of entry into the EU and globalization, which, in the name of naïve hedonism or the postmodern conviction that reading literature should only be a source of fun and enjoyment, privileges primarily bestsellers. Even though postmodernism was already fading in the late 1990s, literary approaches introduced by postmodernism are still present in Slovene literature in an unsystematic way: a reliance on traditional (generic) formulae and their modification through allusion, irony and parody, as well as quotation and self-reference. Some literary approaches introduced by postmodernism are still present in the novels *Vrata skozi* by Goran Gluvić, *Cimre* by Maja Novak, and *Drevo brez imena* by Drago Jančar.

Across the world, the fading away of postmodernism has raised the question of how to refer to the literature appearing after postmodernism: whether to use wider sociological labels such as postmodern literature (Hassan 1987) and general literary analytical terms such as post-postmodernism (Epshtein 1998), or whether to take a risk and combine the new tendencies under a new literary heading or label them as a new literary trend. In Slovenia, both approaches are present and only further research will show which is the more appropriate. The co-existence of different phenomena in the Slovene postmodern is most successfully embraced by the term **literary eclecticism**, which relates to type, sub-type, genre, style, and form. A closer look at this eclecticism shows us that it is made up of traditional approaches or reliance on tradition literary types, genres and formulae, reshaped through the addition of new features or strategies. As in contemporary Slovene literature, the traditional base is modified in different ways through modernist, postmodernist, minimalist,⁷ or realist traits, in

⁷ Slovene literary minimalism is restricted to short prose (e.g., the short story), while speculation about its presence in the novel ended with the finding that minimalist traits were to be found in only a few Slovene novels. The minimalist

addition to the term eclecticism we might also use “modified traditional literature,” and indeed the term “modified traditional novel” has already gained some currency. There are many modified traditional novels. Among them I would include *Ki jo je megla prinesla* (Feri Lainšček), *Óštrigéca* (Marjan Tomšič), *Filio ni doma* (Berta Bojetu Boeta), *Tao ljubezni* (Andrej Blatnik), *Vladarka* (Andrej Morovič), *Tek za rdečo hudičevko* (Vinko Möderndorfer), *Pimlico* (Milan Dekleva), *Sovrašтво* (Franjo Frančič), *Balerina, Balerina* (Marko Sosič), and *Porkasvet* (Zoran Hočevar). The novel *Óštrigéca* is a modified traditional novel because it is based on folk and artificial (contemporary) fairy tales and it is modified to include some modern narrative techniques, like lyricism about nature, modern metaphors, and the existential doubt of the main character Boškin. The regional fantastic in this novel is very close to the fantastic in the modified novel *Ki jo je megla prinesla* by Feri Lainšček. The traditional bases are the gothic novel and the criminal novel, modified by contemporary parable, spiritual, romantic, and psychological novel forms. The main hero is an individualistic priest, Jon Urski, who tries to strengthen the faith of the immoral village. His strivings are unsuccessful, because evil is hard to unmask due to its seductive surface. A very similar structure to that of *Ki jo je megla prinesla* can be found in *Filio ni doma* by Berta Bojetu. The traditional base is an anti-utopian novel, modified by contemporary parable, the romantic, and psychological novel. The unusual lives of the women and men in the book are shaped by anti-utopian devices, but the “traditional” message of the classical dystopia regarding the harmfulness of technological advances is reduced by Bojetu to the message that all violence against people is harmful. The novels *Tao ljubezni* by Andrej Blatnik and *Vladarka* by Andrej Morovič differ from the previous novels: they are travelogues (*potopisni roman*) modified by the ironic romantic novel and a postmodern scepticism. Although the traditional base of the novels *Tek za rdečo hudičevko* by Vinko Möderndorfer, *Pimlico* by Milan Dekleva, and *Sovrašтво* is the romantic novel, they are not traditional romantic novels. The love story is modified by postmodern ennui vis-à-vis tradition, and the gender stereotypes are redefined and reconstructed. Unique in this list of novels are *Balerina, Balerina* by Marko Sosič and *Porkasvet* by Zoran Hočevar. They are also modified traditional novels, and they are modified in their specific way. The base for them is family novel modified by an unreliable narrator; in first novel, the narrator is a thirty-year old woman, *Balerina*, whose rational and psychological development is like that of a three-year old child; in the second, it is a driver, Janez Kolenc, a man without empathy or proper education. Both heroes influence the reader with their narrow perspectives and ways of thinking. Whereas *Balerina*, with her

short story in Slovenia (e.g., works by Polona Glavan, Andrej Blatnik, and Dušan Čater) takes as a role model American minimalism—for example, the prose of Raymond Carver.

tenderness and powerlessness, evokes our sympathy and pity, Kolenc's brutal humour destroys some national stereotypes about Slovene people (for example, Slovene are serious and hard working).

A contribution to a more precise definition of Slovene literature since 1990 can also be made by the term **new emotionality**. This embraces common traits relating to the shaping of personal identity and a new type of emotional subject in literary texts. This subject does not participate in the fictional world in order to engage with specific problems or to put together a "big story," but rather desperately strives to guarantee his/her individuality through readable "little stories" connected with recognizable generic, stylistic and formal patterns. In writing about personal rather than social problems, these patterns are modified in the direction of a new emotionality, which is a particular feeling of ennui (or spleen in Walter Benjamin's sense), which can be called postmodern ennui in relation to tradition. It differs from postmodernist feeling or sentiment, which in its almost baroque and positivistic excess points to the sources and inspiration for writing, to its interlocutor in the dialogue of literature with literature; the new emotionality directs its irony and parody towards extra-literary and intra-literary stereotypes without citing its antecedents or connections. Erasing postmodernist mechanisms of intertextuality also nullifies the impression of contrived and simulated emotion, which was the most obvious characteristic of postmodernist emotionality. It is precisely in the relationship between the sexes, the theme of love and connection to literary tradition that we can locate the source of the new emotionality, which poses a number of questions relating to gender roles, (in)flexible identity and personal predicaments. The new emotionality thus emanates from somewhere between the new seriousness and humorous-ironic-parodic awareness, and the postmodern ennui that characterises the passive boredom and lethargy of the postmodern subject enamoured with New Age hedonism. The features of the new emotionality are present in following texts: *Ime mi je Damjan* (Suzana Tratnik), *Morje v času mrka* (Mate Dolenc), *Limonada slovenica* (Vinko Möderndorfer), *V okvari* (Aleš Čar), *Vzporednice* (Suzana Tratnik), and *Vrsta za kosilo* (Urška Sterle).

All these characteristics accustom us to the idea that, after the demise of postmodernism in Slovene literature, different tendencies can combine to form a new literary trend. All these characteristics accustom us to the idea that, after the demise of postmodernism in Slovene literature, different tendencies can combine to form a new literary trend. The possibility of such a new trend is indicated by the sociological fact that the abandonment of a trend or its decline usually means the imminent "birth" of a new one. Potter and López (2006: 3–16) justify this dialectic by the necessity for different intellectual currents to appear, as they demonstrate that postmodernism no longer offers an appropriate response to the exigencies of the time. They observe that even during the period of the

postmodernist narrative there appeared a challenge to its complexity, which could simply be referred to as realistic writing and which they recommend as a counterpoint to postmodernism, referring to it as critical realism. Jameson (2007: 261–71), too, identifies the presence of realism in postmodernism, in which he sees the renewal of various stories or stronger fabulation, which he refers to as “remnants of realism” adapted to mass culture. I concur with these views, for in Slovenia, alongside postmodernist literature, there also appeared traditional literature with realist tendencies, which was stronger, both qualitatively and quantitatively. It is for this reason that the Slovene novel from 1990 to 2010 is standardly referred to as the modified traditional novel with realist traits, as represented by the novels of Berta Bojetu, Aleš Čar, Mate Dolenc, Franjo Frančič, Nejc Gazvoda, Polona Glavan, Zoran Hočevar, Feri Lainšček, Miha Mazzini, Andrej Morovič, Boris Pahor, Andrej E. Skubic, Marko Sosič, Marjan Tomšič, Suzana Tratnik, and Jani Virk. This kind of novel models itself on the traditional novel, but has undergone various (post)modernist transformations. The traditional character of these recent Slovene novels is based on a compressed story, motivated relationships between the literary figures, and a recognizable chronotope. The contemporary Slovene novel is narrative in a narrow sense—in spite of an occasional leaning towards the lyrical and essayistic, the prevailing characteristic is narration, structured as a sequence of events that through chronotopic and cause-effect relations build the story. The nature of the story is removed from traditionalism by three reshaping factors: genre eclecticism, the revamped role of the narrator, and a larger proportion of spoken fragments.

In order to justify discussion of a new realist trend, it is necessary to show what are the common characteristics of the mass of texts that we read as realistic, and above all to distinguish between realist techniques (different narrative techniques, such as mimetic description, suspense, and introspection) and the realist trend as a literary trend. This is really a matter of our understanding of realism in the narrower or wider sense. The former, historically conceived realism is restricted to nineteenth century realism, which extended into the twentieth century as psychological, social and socialist realism, and neo-realism. By contrast, the wider, non-historical interpretation does not explain realism as a trend, but rather as an approach, method or technique of writing, which gives the impression of describing or reflecting real life. Of course, realism is not a direct or simple reproduction of reality, but a system of conventions (Baldick 1996: 184) that creates the illusion of some real world outside the text through the principle of probability that, because of recognition of real-life issues, negates idealization and escapism. Although I do not concur with those scholars (such as Lodge) who divide literary texts in a bipolar way into realist (readerly and metonymic) and modernist (writerly and metaphorical), I do believe that in each period of literature realist texts do appear, but not

necessarily modernist ones. In the last twenty years in Slovenia, these are the texts that I have referred to as modified traditional narratives with realist traits. Their common characteristics are: a predominant realist technique aimed at convincing description of reality, the principle of typification, and differentiation of speech with regard to the social, psychological and intellectual characteristics of the characters. These characteristics were fundamental to some earlier realisms, but now some new qualities have been added: the influence of different media, a higher level of idealisation and hyperbole, the need for a readable story connected with the aesthetic of identity or enjoyment of the familiar, no extending of the aesthetic into the social, playing with established genres, styles or narrative formulae and maxims of triviality, the absence of unified aesthetic or philosophical guidelines, turning from the social to the personal and from the general to the specific, and so on. If further analysis shows that most Slovene narrative in the last two decades is realist, it is necessary to find an appropriate prefix to add to the base word "realism." With regard to choosing a prefix for labelling the new trend after postmodernism, I agree with Epshtein (1998: 139–42), a Russian researcher into recent literature, who offers in particular "trans-." In other words, the phenomena and concepts of the new age, such as reality, objectivity, subjectivity, or sentimentality are transformed into concepts prefixed by "trans": transreality, transobjectivity, and so on. These are concepts that incorporate comparativity (as/like reality, as/like objectivity) and are aware of their repetitiveness, but wish to be expressed precisely as repetition. Although this seems paradoxical, it is through repetition that these concepts gain authenticity. If "proto-" signals openness and an unresolved future, then "trans-" confirms the continuity of future and past, which crosses the domain of alienation, irony, parody, to mark its renewed status as the possible, as possible-reality, possible-objectivity.

My proposed term for the trend in contemporary Slovene literature is therefore transrealism, which, however, must also have a shared thematic structure, as it is not to be equated only with the realist technique outlined above. The very prefix in the term transrealism shows that it is closely connected with the previous realist trends and that in it repeatability and eclecticism take on a significance permeated by the new role of the literary subject. This is labelled differently in different literatures: in German the term "new subjectivity" has become established; in Russian "new sincerity"; in English "supranational subjectivity"; in Slovene I have labelled the special spiritual-historical and emotional state of the postmodern subject as "new emotionality."⁸ I understand this as a link

⁸ In my book *Robovi mreže, robovi jaza* (Edges of the Net, Edges of the self, 2006: 28–45), I explained the new emotionality as a common denominator of novels over the last fifteen years and their shifts in personal identity, which could in the context of a post-postmodern aesthetics also be an indicator of a new trend.

between a particular spiritual ennui and the issue of identity in the contemporary Slovene narrative. The narrative subject, literary figure and/or narrator does not participate in the fictional world in order to comment in an engaged way on society's problems (as was the case, for example, in realism, neo-realism, social/socialist realism), but feverishly strives to ensure its individuality through a readable story connected with a recognized generic, stylistic or other narrative formula. The personal story is part of the postmodern ennui, the weariness and boredom of the postmodern subject, enamoured with naïve hedonism and new emotional shifts in the search for identity: re/evaluating gender and national stereotypes in creating a flexible identity; the establishment of a humorous, cynical or parodic distance; and the absence of unified aesthetic or philosophical guidelines. The realist principle of typification is aimed primarily at differentiating speech as a mimetic means of characterisation, so in contemporary Slovene narrative the proportion of speech has greatly increased. Transrealism thus has both old and new characteristics: in its reliance on the universal realist technique and previous realisms it confirms established characteristics, while the new emotionality renews it with contemporary perspectives and methods, and in doing so recaps some post/modernist traits.

Conclusion: Slovene literature since 1990 is not yet a complete phenomenon and so my research is faced with two challenges: to combine the literary perspective with the sociological, historical and culturological, and to achieve sufficient (academic) distance from current literary production. In my discussion I faced these challenges by first analyzing the important political and cultural shifts of the period, and then summarised them alongside an analysis of what is new and specific in Slovene literature in this time. I divided possible labels into two groups: in the first are those that refer to the broader culture-political context, i.e. post-Yugoslav, post-communist, post-independence, transition and postmodern literature; in the second are those that refer to the literary system itself—i.e., modernist and postmodernist literature, literary eclecticism, new emotionality and transrealism.

The most general is postmodern literature, while those terms connected with the break-up of Yugoslavia and the appearance of the new state of Slovenia are most specific. So, for instance, the term post-Yugoslav literature encompasses Slovene literature after the collapse of Yugoslavia, which is more specifically determined by the terms post-independence and post-communist literature, as the winning of independence was accompanied by a change of system—from communism or socialism to capitalism. The history of our new state is brought close to that of other (Slavic) countries undergoing similar changes in this period by the expression transition literature, which incorporates it into common transition processes linked to globalization and Europeanization. Although

Slovene post-Yugoslav, post-communist, post-independence literature has similar traits that of the majority of new EU member states, they nevertheless differ in their specific features, which are most systematically described by the other group of terms for literary trends and phenomena.

The most important trend in the Slovene literature of the last twenty years is modernism, as it is the systematic entry of modernism into the Slovene literary domain that signifies the beginning of contemporary Slovene literature, and it remains a feature, even after the end of the century when the Slovene literary scene took its leave of postmodernism. The influence of postmodernism was different. In a relatively short time—roughly from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s—a number of poetry collections appeared, plus a few narrative and dramatic texts. More than the appearance of postmodernist texts, Slovene postmodernism can be “credited” with some new literary perspectives and approaches: the abandoning of the traditional dichotomy between serious and popular literature with the introduction of triviality; and reliance on traditional (generic) formulae and their modification through allusion, irony, and parody, as well as quotation and self-reference.

A more precise definition of Slovene literature since 1990 can also be arrived at with the help of the terms literary eclecticism and new emotionality. The first captures the heterogenous nature of recent Slovene literature or the way it combines different currents, directions, trends, groups, individuals and poetics, while the second term relates to the common features of texts with regard to the shaping of personal identity and a new type of feeling of the literary subject. The new emotionality is a particular kind of postmodern ennui, connected with attachment to tradition. In posing numerous questions regarding gender roles, (in)flexible identity and personal predicaments, the new emotionality emanates from somewhere between the new seriousness and humorous-ironic-parodic awareness, and the passive boredom and lethargy of the postmodern subject. In conclusion, I add to the discussed classifications a new term for this literary trend—transrealism—as a possible common denominator for phenomena apparent in Slovene literature since 1990 and combined under the heading modified traditional literature: a predominant realist technique, method or style, and links with former European realist trends, revived by a new emotionality.

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POVZETEK

Slovenska književnost v postmoderni dobi

Slovenska književnost po letu 1990 še ni sklenjen in dokončan pojav, zato se moje raziskovanje v tej študiji srečuje kar z dvema izzivoma: združiti literarno perspektivo s sociološko, zgodovinsko in kulturološko ter vzpostaviti primerno (znanstveno) razdaljo do sočasne literarne ustvarjalnosti. V svoji razpravi sem se z obema izzivoma spoprijela tako, da sem najprej analizirala pomembne politične in kulturne preobrate v tem času in jih povezala z analizo posebnosti in novosti, ki so zaznamovale slovensko književnost po letu 1990. V tem smislu so tudi poimenovanja razdeljena v dve skupini; v prvi so postjugoslovanska, postkomunistična, poosamosvojitvena, tranzicijska in postmoderna književnost, ki označujejo širši kulturnopolitični kontekst, v drugi pa oznake modernistična, postmodernistična književnost, literarni eklekticizem, nova emocionalnost in transrealizem, poimenovanja ožjega literarnega sistema. Najbolj splošna oznaka je postmoderna književnost, znatno bolj konkretne pa tiste, ki so povezane z razpadom Jugoslavije in nastankom nove države Slovenije. Tako npr. termin postjugoslovanska književnost zajema slovensko književnost po razpadu Jugoslavije, ki ga natančneje določa izraz poosamosvojitvena in postkomunistična književnost, saj se je vzporedno z osamosvojitvijo in nastankom države Slovenije zamenjal tudi politični sistem, iz komunizma/socializma v kapitalizem. Zgodovino naše novonastale države približuje ostalim (slovanskim) državam s podobnimi spremembami v tem obdobju izraz tranzicijska književnost, ko jo vključuje v skupne procese tranzicije v smislu globalizacije in evropeizacije. Čeprav ima slovenska postjugoslovanska, postkomunistična in poosamosvojitvena literatura podobne tranzicijske poteze kot večina novih članic EU, se vendarle razlikuje v svoji literarni specifičnosti, ki jo najbolj sistematično razlagajo oznake druge skupine oz. poimenovanja za literarne smeri in pojave. Izmed

vseh smeri je za sodobno slovensko književnost, kamor spada slovenska književnost zadnjih dvajsetih let, najpomembnejši modernizem, saj prav sistematični vstop modernizma v slovenski literarni prostor pomeni začetek sodobne slovenske književnosti, prav tako pa je njena stalnica, kajti modernizem se iz sodobne slovenske književnosti ni umaknil niti ob koncu stoletja, ko se je slovenska književnost poslovila od postmodernizma. Na sodobno slovensko književnost je postmodernizem vplival drugače kot modernizem. V kratkem časovnem obdobju dvajsetih let, postmodernizem je namreč trajal približno od sredine sedemdesetih let do sredine devetdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja, je izšlo nekaj zbirk pesmi ter zelo malo pripovednih in dramskih besedil. Bolj kot za nastanek postmodernističnih besedil je slovenski postmodernizem "zaslužen" za uvedbo novih literarnih perspektiv in postopkov: opuščanje tradicionalne dihotomne delitve na visoko in nizko literaturo z uvedbo trivialnosti, navezovanje na tradicionalne (žanrske) obrazce in njihovo modifikiranje s pomočjo aluzije, ironije in parodije ter citatnost in avtoreferencialnost. K natančnejši določitvi slovenske književnosti po letu 1990 prispevata poleg oznak literarnih smeri tudi termina literarni eklekticizem in nova emocionalnost. S prvim zaobsežemo spoznanje o neenotnosti najnovejše slovenske književnosti oz. prepletu različnih tokov, usmeritev, smeri, skupin, posameznikov in poetik, z drugim pa skupne poteze besedil v smislu oblikovanja osebne identitete in novega tipa čustvenosti literarnega subjekta v književnosti. Nova emocionalnost je namreč čustvenost posebnega spleena, ki ga lahko imenujemo postmoderni spleen, povezana z navezovanjem na tradicijo. Ko zastavlja številna vprašanja spolnih vlog, ne/fleksibilne identitete in intimnih zadreg, se nova emocionalnost rojeva med novo resnostjo in humorno-ironično-parodično ozaveščenostjo ter postmodernim stanjem pasivnega dolgčasa in omrtvičenosti postmodernega subjekta, t. i. postmodernega spleena. Za zaključek dodajam omenjenim klasifikacijam še novo oznako literarne smeri – transrealizem – kot možnost skupnega poimenovanja pojavov, ki so opazni v slovenski književnosti po letu 1990 in so se združevali pod oznako modifikirana tradicionalna književost: prevladovanje realistične tehnike, metode ali stila ter navezovanje na prejšnje smeri evropskega realizma, prenovljeno z novo emocionalnostjo.