

Elizabeth Rappaport's photographs are glorious. There is a Muslim refugee holding her son on p. 39 who should be remembered as The Madonna of Srebrenica.

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**Josip Vidmar**, *Kulturni problem slovenstva; išlo ob stoletnici avtorjevga rojstva*. Spremnna beseda, Aleš Debeljak. Edited by Andrej Blatnik. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1995. 93 pp. (paper).

The recent reprint of Josip Vidmar's *Kulturni problem slovenstva* (*The Cultural Problem of Slovendom*)<sup>1</sup> represents one of the most timely publications of a classical text on the existential problem of Slovenes in the new, independent Republic of Slovenia and neighboring, ethnolinguistically related Slovene minorities in today Italy, Austria and Hungary's frontier regions. The first edition of this essay appeared in 1932,<sup>2</sup> at the time of the earliest existential crisis of Slovene intellectuals in Yugoslavia;<sup>3</sup> it was reprinted in 1963 by Vidmar himself;<sup>4</sup> three decades later it has reappeared as a memorial to the 100th anniversary of Josip Vidmar's birth.

Josip Vidmar's interest in the Slovene national question underlying his essay, *Kulturni problem slovenstva*, is in a way simply a continuation of his mission during his student years in the

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<sup>1</sup> Sloven-dom (*slovenstvo*), with a living suffix -dom [OE -d ōm, OHG -tuom, -dom, freely employed to form nonce-derivatives with the sense of state of fact of being, dignity, realm, jurisdiction as in king-dom, duke-dom, free-dom, Christen-dom, Anglo-Saxon-dom. For the Contemporary Standard Slovene *slovenstvo*, compare with German *Slovenen-tum*. Cf. -dom in *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1977) and in *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Josip Vidmar (1895-1992); cf. Franc Zadavec, "Vidmar, Josip," *Slovenski biografski leksikon*, 4.13 (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1980-1992) 444-451.

<sup>3</sup> Josip Vidmar, *Kulturni problem slovenstva*, *Slovenske poti*, 3, ed. Juš Kozak (Ljubljana: Tiskovna zadruga, 1932).

<sup>4</sup> Josip Vidmar, *Srečanje z zgodovino* (1932; Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1963) 23-84.



Preporodovsko gibanje (Preporod movement, 1912–1914), and its concerns with the problems of *slovenstvo*—its meaning, its constituent parts and traditions reaching deep into Eastern Alpine Slovene history. More than that, Josip Vidmar's essay is primarily concerned with the questions of special generation adherence and loyalty to the linguistic, historical, social and cultural Slovene community—that is, to a collective Slovene ethnic and national realm and jurisdiction.

Vidmar's essay consists of two parts, on *narodnost* (nationality) and *slovenstvo* (Slovenedom), each based on a set of eight arguments. The first part of the essay defines the concept of nation in general—its meaning and sense of life history and death, and with possible inherent factors and powers which could help societies to resist the process of self-annihilation. The individual sections of this part focus on the historical processes of nations' emergence—autochthonous, or transplanted (as Slavs and Germans), or welded (as English or French); on the processes of national awakenings; their dying out by processes of languish and fatigue; and on their death (chapter 5); on the fact that the nationality is defined by a nation's culture and language, the tool and carrier of its spiritual organism (chapter 6).

Thus Vidmar defines societies by their national characters, very often by their real or assumed cultural missions, their vital force, physical, intellectual and moral (chapter 7). Finally, he characterizes the society of the Slovene nation: there are two basic social classes: its peasants, tilling the soil as small landowners or as workers, mostly uneducated; and its middle and upper-class intellectuals, the artists and cultural elite, springing into existence directly from the peasantry (chapter 8).

The second part of Vidmar's essay is devoted to *slovenstvo*. It starts with a proposition, a contradictory and grotesque thesis to maintain and vindicate his argument:

"These days, we Slovenes, a young nation with a rather developed cultural life and all the prerequisites needed for the survival and growth of our own culture, are beginning to dream of an ecumenical Yugoslavism (*jugoslovanstvo*), already prepared to mix and blend the genuine historical Slovene cultural tradition into a Yugoslav Serbian-Croatian melting pot" (chapter 9).



The propositions to set in motion the cultural *slovenstvo*, argues Vidmar, have been raised and tested several times in Slovene history, most strongly perhaps during the Reformation (Primož Trubar against Petrus Paulus Vergerius, Jr., 1497–1565); again and again during the Napoleonic Illyria (Valentin Vodnik against Marshal Marmont, the French Governor of the Illyrian Provinces in Ljubljana, 1809–1813); intensely during Romantic South Slavic Illyrianism (France Prešeren vs. Stanko Vraz, Matija Majar Ziljski, 1835–1848–1865); and later in discussions of the South Slavic political programs in Slovene lands, led by Ivan Cankar, with the journalists and professional politicians of the Neo-Illyrian movement of the time (1904–1914). The lesson of history is that the Slovene cultural elite and its position within society as a whole has always been rooted and grounded in the doctrine of individualism, their own spiritual life, their local tradition and the influence of the art of their Western neighbors (chapters 10–12).

Two more Illyrian arguments against *slovenstvo* are discussed in Vidmar's essay: once upon a time there was but a single South Slavic ethnic commonality of tribes and dialects between the Alps and the Black Sea, and the numerical inferiority of the Slovene Völklein (Stanko Vraz). Vidmar does not dispute the first one—that the Slovene-Croatian-Serbian sense of close relationship is an undeniable fact. As to the second argument, the numerical inferiority of the Slovene national community, Vidmar simply points to the logical contradiction between the equilibrium of life in large and small societies, with less dynamism and propensity for change in the former and more in the latter (chapter 13).

And what would happen if the Slovenes decided to accept the Illyrian/Yugoslav proposition to abandon their nationality and become Yugoslavs, to accept Serbo-Croatian and join the cultural sphere of the Stokavian dialects? As the Kajkavian speakers in the Croatian Hrvatsko Zagorje and in Zagreb, the capital of Croatian lands, the Slovenes would still maintain spoken Slovene in their lands, on the streets and in their homes; the only language of communication of the countryside and the peasants would continue to be Slovene. And as in the Kajkavian Zagorje, such a situation might and would continue to exist during the centuries throughout Slovene lands. Neither a unified and uniform Serbo-Croatian-speaking Yugoslavia, nor a disjointed and disjunctive Slovenia would derive any profit from such a situation.



And Josip Vidmar's final thought: "Should we Slovenes give up our historical ideal, the ultimate dream-vision which granted us the strength to live though one thousand years of servitude?"

Aleš Debeljak's "Spremna beseda" to Josip Vidmar's essay, *Kulturni problem slovenstva*, addressed with a rhetorical formula, "Konec slovenstva—Ne, hvala!" represents a graceful apologetic retreat from his earlier—by one year—"Recollection of a Lost Yugoslavia," the subtitle of his *Twilight of the Idols*.<sup>5</sup> Now the author alludes to the, "transcendental sense and consciousness of the cultural tradition to which we, Slovenes, are attached by our entire existence." And to the sequel:

Tako spoštovanje tradicije navsezadnje ni samo naša eksistencialna potreba, marveč tudi svojevrsten imperativ etične odgovornosti: nacionalne kulture namreč nismo podedovali od svojih prednikov, ampak smo si jo izposodili pri naših vnukih.<sup>6</sup>

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**Paul Laric**, *Maribor Remembered*. Great Neck, NY: Todd & Honeywell, 1989. 131 pp. (paper).

Given the small number of Slovene-American books that one could classify as fiction, Paul Laric's seemingly autobiographical narrative, *Maribor Remembered*, comes as a surprise. First, because it is not in fact autobiography, and second, because it is so well written. The jacket informs the reader that the book "is a nostalgia trip turned mystery," whereas the author's introductory note states, "The story ... is fiction. While certain liberties were taken with historical events, some of the

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<sup>5</sup> Aleš Debeljak, *Twilight of the Idols, Recollections of a Lost Yugoslavia* (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1994). The "lost Yugoslavia" here, surely not in semantic variations of the verb *lose*, *lost*, *losing* (sub verb Transitive 3, or verb intransitive: "to undergo deprivation of something of value.") See *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, sub *lose*, *lost*, *losing*.

<sup>6</sup> Aleš Debeljak, commentary, *Kulturni problem slovenstva*, 38.