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SLOVENE POPULAR NOVELS ABOUT EMIGRATION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Bilo je krasno na božjej zemlji; ali za vse to se ni zmenil Valentin, kajti drugačne misli so mu rujile po glavi. Vračal se je iz mesta, kjer je mnogo čul o Ameriki, ležečej Bog vedi kje tam za morjem, in kako zelo dobro je ondi .

The above is a quotation from the opening of the novel *Amerika*, written by Josip Podmilšak (Ljubljana, 1869). Podmilšak is explicit in stating the didactic theme of his work at the very beginning of the novel:

> Ni ga ne—po vsem svetu—lepšega kraja mimo domovine . . . Vender se nahajajo kratkovidni možjé, ki zapusté, nadjaje se kmalo obogateti, domovino in se preselijo v Ameriko . . . V sledeči povesti skusim dokazati, kako nespametno je zapuščati domačo deželo, in da smo s pridnostjo, delavnostjo in vednostjo v domačem kraji lahko srečni—dà, srečnejši, nego kjerkoli si bodi.

The quotations show decisively the author's negative attitude towards America and emigration in general, an attitude which was not only widespread in the literature of the sixties of the past century, but it characteristic of the decades preceding and following. For example, a few sentences of Janez Cigler's story *Sreča v nesreči*, which was the first work of modern fiction in Slovene:

> Svetin še zadnjikrat pogleda Ameriko in vzdihne: "Dve leti in dva meseca sem srečno prestal sužnost. Bog mi je dal srečo, poslal mi je angela, kateri me je rešil iz rok amerikanskega gospodarja. Hvaljen bodi, dobrotljivi nebeški oče!" (Ljubljana, 1836)

Janez Cigler's story was very popular; it was reprinted three times in the following four years in more than 3000 copies, which (considering that there were only one million speakers of Slovene, 50% of whom were illiterate) was an exceptional sales record. Fran Levstik referred to Cigler's story (in 1858) as a model for Slovene Catholic folk-literature, comparing it with popular story of *Robinson Crusoe*. The story earned its great popularity because of the exotic setting: France, Russia, Spain, Africa, Trieste, Vienna. However, the adventure was only a sweetener for the more essential purposes of this type of literature: religious (Catholic) education and preaching.

A year later (1837) a book in German appeared in Ljubljana, which was completely dedicated to America.[1] The author was the famous Slovene missionary, known as the "Indian apostle", Friderik Baraga. In the same year it was translated into Slovene as *Popis navad in zaderžanja Indijanov polnočne Amerike*, and also into French. Janez Cigler was never in America; Baraga, on the other hand, spent thirty years among the Indians and wrote for them prayer books, a grammar and a dictionary. A zealous worker, he spent his last dollar for his faith, but he had no literary ambitions. It was a

little different with his follower, the missionary Franc Pirc, who gave his name to the town of Pierz, Minnesota. He wrote a book on the Indians, likewise in German (*Die Indianer in Nord-Amerika*, St.Louis, Mo., 1855) and some poems in Slovene, inspired by his missionary voyages. Today his verses, which were also on the subject of Indians, seem naive, awkward and humorous:

Eno varno pokrivalo
Le pokriva ledja zgolj,
In le majhno zagrinjalo
Ima tu obojni spol.

Živeža jim vedno manjka,
Zver in ribe jih rede,
Kadar jim pa tega zmanjka,
Vsi od lakote medle.

(F. Pirc, "O Čipevcih v Minesoti", *Zg. Danica* 1853, 61.)

Some of his poems are of substantial length (e.g., 60 stanzas); he occasionally interjected complete stanzas in one of the eight languages he knew. A third missionary, Bernard Smolnikar, was a utopian socialist with extremist plans, who wrote a number of books rarely less than 500 pages long, in several languages but not Slovene. In contrast to Baraga and Pirc he was neither translated nor written about by his contemporaries. Because of his unorthodox ideas Smolnikar did not succeed in popularizing any of his theories, including his project of Christian community life. He constantly wrote letters of advice to European monarchs, but he received no response.[2]

In later years the subject of America appears sporadically in Slovene fiction, mostly as a refuge for disappointed lovers (Fran Erjavec: *Zamorjeni cvet*, 1861). These refugees are usually unsuccessful in America, and die because of their sorrow. Only in second-rate novels did they return and marry a new girl. The other American theme is the civil war in Mexico, where young Slovene men were sent to battle for the Mexican emperor, Ferdinand Maximilian, brother of Austrian emperor Franz Josef (Josip Jurčič: *Božidar Tirtelj*, 1867; and his epigone Anton Koder: *V gorskem zakotju*, 1882, 1905, 1911). Between 1864 and 1866 volunteers were recruited also in Slovenia to travel with emperor Maximilian to Mexico. They were nicknamed "meksikajnarji" and in the periodicals of that time a great deal was written about them. In 1868 a book about them by Jakob Alešovec appeared in Ljubljana: *Cesar Maks in Mehika*.[3]

The first Slovene novels dedicated to the subject of America were preceded by translations of American books. *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among the Lowly* by Harried Beecher Stowe was translated only one year after it was published in America. It was so topical that two translations appeared at the same time, one in Ljubljana (by Fran Malavašič) and the other one in Celovec—Klagenfurt—(by Janez Božič), 1853. Bret Harte's *California Stories* were also quickly translated (in 1876). Frequent mention of Harte in Slovene 19th century fiction attests to his great popularity. But the above translations can not be compared in popularity with the translations of Henryk Sienkiewicz's story *Za chlebem*, which was published five times under different titles (*Srečolovec, Za kruhom*), beginning in 1884. The message of Sienkiewicz's story is, interestingly, similar to that found in Slovene fiction: only a few immigrants are successful in America; all the others die on the way there, are cheated by travel agents,

killed by Indians, or meet uncomfortable conditions for survival in their new land. Numerous new editions of this book were not only proof of its interesting plot or literary qualities, but the result of a well considered publisher's project designed to manipulate readers and make propaganda. It can be said that their literary or esthetic qualities—plot and picturesqueness—were only the wrapping for a social message. This dimension was important, although the book was published in the commercial publishing house of Anton Turk in Ljubljana, which regularly published pocket-sized popular and uplifting books for mass consumption. The same was true of a second book of this type: *Eno leto med Indijanci* by Lipe Haderlap (Ljubljana, 1882), which opens with the sentences:

> Amerika se imenuje novi svet, kamor se podá, komur se stara domovina več ne dopade. Tam je že marsikdo sreče iskal, pa je ni vsak našel.

Neutrality did not have a place in writing about the nation in 19th century Slovene literature. Works without a national dimension were altered by the translator, or a preface was added. But it can be observed that ideological tendencies in the novel were not dogmatic. Furthermore, racial conflict was not a concern of the writer. Indians and black Americans were described with sympathy and are allied with the protagonist. These pocket-sized books were the forerunners of the frontier novel, which was introduced to Slovenes in the translations of J.F. Cooper and Karl May. The latter was especially popular among young readers of the end of the century, and his fame endures to the present day.[4] In the 20th century the Indian theme began to be combined with that of crime in dime-novels (Josef Čekal: *Preizkušnja in rešitev, ali Doma najbolje*, 1894) or weekly serialized adventures (*Grofica beračica*, 1902).

We will select three Slovene novels or stories as examples of this type of popular adventure literature. The first (already mentioned at the beginning of this article) is entitled *Amerika ali povsod dobro, doma najboljše*. It was published for the first time in a family magazine (Ljubljana, 1869). It was adapted from Polish, and was, in contrast to *Eno leto med Indijanci*, highly dogmatic, besides being stylistically conservative. These American adventures are presented in a frame which shares the didactic themes of the tale enclosed therein. On one hand such a narrative in a frame is more realistic, but on the other hand it limits the potential of adventure and fantasy and hinders the reader's identification with the protagonist. There is a very distinct relation between good and evil. Both poles are determined by nation, race, and religion. The bad people are Germans, Jews and Blacks. As a matter of fact, everything different, alien, and foreign is evil and everything homelike, familiar and domestic is good. The main character in the novel, it is true, learns foreign languages, English and a "negro" language, but not for the purposes of relating with people in America, but only to fill his free time. The moral of the story is clearly defined at the end of the novel: happiness is not to be found abroad. There is no need to leave the homeland except to serve in the military.

The second story *Ne v Ameriko!* by Jakob Alešovec (Ljubljana, 1983, 1912) is one of the most beautiful Slovene popular adventure stories. It is long and full of suspense: shipwrecks, sea traveling, robbery, smuggling, struggles with Indians, slavery and escapes. However, artificial complexity on the structural level is paralleled by superficial thought—strange motivation, moralistic style and propaganda. Because of this the book did not achieve a place in the history of Slovene literature. The book presents several motives for emigration: dislike of Austro-Hungarian taxes; family and friend-

ship; evasion of military service. The novel's complex plot belies a simple conclusion. Only one of the characters survives, as in stereotyped western or war stories, and he takes the symbolic step of becoming a priest in atonement for the sins of his fellow immigrants who left their homeland against God's will ("božja roka [jih] tepe zato, ker so pustili zemljo, na kateri smo bili rojeni—ne brez Bŏje volje," 163). The final sentences are pessimistic:

> [U]ril [je] dekleta in dečke v cerkvenem petji, pa ne v slovenskem, ker jezik slovenski se tam izgubi kakor čista voda v motni. (231)

It is notable that the book was published by the author himself and, in principle, was not liable to the institutional demands of nation and religion. Yet it takes these demands into account, and makes them of prime interest. Thus Alešovec describes Slovene self-identity:

> Kaj je Slovenec? V boji ljut kakor zver, ko pa vidi sovražnika na tleh, prizanesel mu bo in če je ranjen, obvezal mu bo rane. (162)

The story *Domačija nad vse* (Celovec, 1889) by Pavlina Pajk[5] corraborates the above view of emigration. Her argument against going to America is that "Amerika ni ustvarjena za pošteni, ponižni značaj slovenskega kmeta." The plot is short: An unscrupulous father comes to take Dr. Jarnej's foster-daughter to America. The girl languishes there because of homesickness and dies. Her fate is a warning to the inhabitants of Dr. Jarnej's village, who wanted to emigrate, to stay at home.

These stories urged the Slovene reader not to emigrate to America. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, when emigration had become intense, national consciousness could no longer ignore it. Then a book appeared with positive instructions on how to survive in America (F.S. Šušteršič: *Poduk rojakom Slovencem, ki se hočejo naseliti v Ameriki*, 1903), edited not in Ljubljana, but in the USA (Joliet, Illinois). Nevertheless, the mentality that writers sought to instill in the people and which they desired to make a constant Slovene national feature, was identical to that which is still seen today in popular samplers with proverbs like: *Ljubo doma, kdor ga ima*; or: *Povsod lepo, doma najlepše*. Slovenians were told to avoid being ambitious and embarking on adventures. These desires were to be fulfilled by fiction. The self-image of the self-sacrificing peasant as opposed to the adventurous hunter was propagandized by all writers. For hundreds of years the education of Slovenes had as a basis the ideal of self-denial[6], which often resembled masochism. This temperament was not uncommon in stories about emigration:

> Svoj živi dan je bil navajen trpeti, in navadil se je trpljenja tako, da mu je bilo v nekakšno naslado. Kakor kaka izstradana uboga konjska para, ki ne ve, da živi, če ne pada po njej trda palica, tako se je zavedal tudi on življenja samo tistikrat, kadar je trpel. To pa, da so trpeli tudi drugi okrog njega, mu je bilo se v posebno zadostilo. Nekako čudno veselo so se mu lesketale oči, i n njegove trepetajoče ustne so se mu zaokrožale v zadovoljen nasmeh.
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> (Fran Zbašnik: *Za srečo!* Ljubljana, 1901, 37.)

It is not difficult to understand the negative reaction of producers of Slovene literature to the intense emigration. They were afraid of democracy, of the more open way of life, of a more self-confident Slovene and they feared social changes, threatened by emancipation. This fear lived long into the 20th century and was seen, for example, when Louis Adamič returned to Ljubljana from America as a famous writer and raised a polemic in cultural circles which is still alive today. On the other hand, Slovene leaders feared the depopulation of the arts in the country, and the encroachment by German newcomers. From the point of view of national economy, emigration presented the loss of laborers who were necessary to a new and still weak Slovene middle class.

A brief comparison with German literature about emigration helps to shed light upon the topic. In general, the Germans looked upon their emigration differently. They were optimistic about America and even promoted it. There are at least two reasons for the difference between Slovene and German emigrant literature. There is the disillusion of the German middle class after the revolutionary year 1848, when it remained without its anticipated political rights and then focused its interest towards America. The other is on the Slovene side: the Slovene middle class was bilingual in the 19th century, so it knew German literature about emigration and already, because of a sense of rivalry, wanted from Slovene literature something different and new.

In the 20th century the theme of America was no longer uncommon. Several translations of American classics and popular authors appeared, describing emigrant, Indian and city life. In Slovenia the emigrant theme became part of the social novel (Tone Seliškar: *Rudi*, France Bevk: *Lukec in njegov škorec*; Anton Ingolič: *Kje ste Lamutovi*). Soon, the first Slovene-American novels on the topic appeared (Ivan Molek.)[7] These are not part of popular literature about America and thus do not come under the preview of this paper. The tradition of popular literature is continued, for instance, by Joži Petrič-Munih in her story *Za kos kruha*, edited in popular publishing house Kmečki glas (Ljubljana, 1980). With the exception of a happy ending and the absence of Indians and slavery, its formula does not differ much from 19th century's examples: the narrator's attitude towards emigration remains negative.

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REFERENCES

1. *Die Geschichte, Character, Sitten und Gebrauche der nordamerikanischen Indier.*
2. See, for example: *Slovenski biografski leksikon*; or Drago Jančar's play *Disident Arnož.*
3. This theme is still current: the diary and letters of the Slovene-Austrian officer Kastelic, which were published in *Novice* at the time of the war, form the documentary basis of the novel *Maks* by Dimitrij Rupel (Ljubljana, 1983). The name Maks is a play on Maks (emperor Maximilian), Mars (the god of war) and Marx (Karl), and leads the reader to interpret Maximilian as the founder of Slovene national politics and the carrier of the European cultural and pluralistic political model.
4. It is interesting that May's most popular novel, *Winnetou*, appeared in translation for the first time in the Slovene émigré magazine *Glas naroda* (New York, 1906)

and only later in May's collected works in Slovenia. The other titles of earlier Indian stories were: *Naselnikova hči, cvetlica pustinje* (1887), *Gozdovnik* (1898), *Eri* (1901), *Natanel Bumpoo* (1901-1902).

5. Pavlina Pajk was a representative of the so called Slovene "petticoat novel" (the term is a translation into English by Velemir Gjurin of the Slovene "ženski roman", or the German "Frauenroman.")
6. According to Vitomil Zupan, this was the reason for the nation's survival.
7. More bibliographical data is available in Joseph D. Dwyer's book *Slovenes in the United States and Canada. A Bibliography*, University of Minnesota, 1981.