

Dialogism in Contemporary Slovenian Poetry: Aspects of External Dialogization¹

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Abstract This paper presents an introduction to a broader project that deals with the articulation and configuration of subjects in contemporary Slovenian poetry. In the theoretical introduction, I provide a brief outline of the different aspects and forms of dialogism defined by Mikhail Bakhtin and put forward some conclusions reached after my re-reading of Bakhtin's thoughts on the monological nature of poetry. In the empirical section, I situate the chronological landmarks of the increased use of dialogism in recent Slovenian poetry and list the key authors involved. An introductory difference is made between the dialogic strategies that concern the structuration of the poetic discourse and its subjects on different levels of discourse (the speaking positions and the position of the enunciative subject) on the one hand, and representations of the decomposition of the "hard" conceptions of the (philosophical) category of the subject and/or the (sociological) category of the individual by using monological procedures in the structuration of the poem on the other. From the standpoint of poetic strategies, recent phenomena of dialogism on the level of the poem is often incorporated into the apparent monologic model of the subject configuration: the plurality of the poetic subject is introduced above all in the macro-system of the book and less in the micro-system of the poem or even the utterance. From the standpoint of the difference between *external dialogism* as the emergence of polyphony through the introduction of speaking characters, and *internal dialogism* where different strategies of the multiplication of point of views and voices occur within an apparently single, but decentered, speaking position, the former prevails in recent Slovenian poetry to the extent that we can speak of a strong current of polyphony. The remainder of the paper presents some examples of external dialogism that, according to Bakhtin's typology, would be considered the external type of the *two-voiced word*: the introduction of the persona poem and the dramatic monologue (especially prevalent in women's writing). It seems that the

emergence of external dialogism is often a strategy used in the engaged thematic exploration of the intimate and social habitus that were kept in silence, while the very gesture of acquiring voice undertaken by until now “fragile” subjects — women, animals and even plants — is endowed with the symbolic value of subversive and transformative impulse.

Key Words Slovenian poetry; Bakhtin; dialogism; persona; dramatic monologue; écriture féminine

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Theoretical Section: Bakhtin’s Theory of Dialogism and Poetry

When the term dialogism is mentioned, Mikhail Bakhtin is the first major figure that comes to mind. Bakhtin is also the thinker who articulated the now famous assumptions on the monological nature of poetry in his essay “Discourse in the Novel.” These assumptions were not Bakhtin’s invention; rather, they were rooted in the Romantic theory of the lyric, common in virtually all of early modern theories of poetry.² However, such understandings of the monologic or the dialogic are based on certain generalized conceptions of external dialogism (the use of dialogue), while Bakhtin theorizes the inner dialogism of each discourse, which, Bahtin argues, the philosophy of language and linguistic did not detect because the focus of these disciplines remained on dialogue as a compositional form of discourse and not on inner dialogism that “endows the entire structure of discourse” (*Estetika* 60). A detailed study of Bakhtin’s entire opus shows that the understanding of poetry as purely monologic as presented in his “Discourse in the Novel” exists in contradiction to Bakhtin’s own theory of dialogic relations in literature and more generally in language.³ This theory was partly developed in his earlier works, prior to “Discourse,” but not finished until his later essays. Throughout his oeuvre, Bakhtin articulates the following different levels and aspects the dialogism:

Dialogism in its broadest sense means the intersubjective nature of the language in the sense of an instrument of communication (*langage* in French). Bakhtin grounds his conception of discourse in this broad sense, and opposes it to language in the sense of a system of signs (*langue* in French). Such a conceptualization is identical to Emile Benveniste's theorization of discourse. Bakhtin and Benveniste (and Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt before them) realized that each text has two levels or layers: each text is language but is also more than language in the sense of a system of signs.⁴ In "Discourse in the Novel," the second dimension is not taken into account because Bakhtin is dealing with *poetic language*, and not *poetic discourse* or *poetic utterance*. An important aspect of the general concept of dialogism is *voice* or *point of view* (točka zrenija), which does not appear in Benveniste's theory of discourse.⁵

Aesthetic dialogism, the dialogism of the aesthetic event, was developed in Bakhtin's earlier works. Each aesthetic activity presupposes the so-called *exotopy* of the author in relation to the character, and also in the lyric. The consequence of this insight is similar to that about general dialogism in language: namely, the multilayered quality of each utterance. In his text *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* (1920–1923), Bakhtin defines different levels of the lyric utterance and lyric subjectivity, introducing instances he calls the author and the hero.⁶

There is dialogism in the sense of *heteroglossia* (*raznorechie*), that is the coexistence of varieties of sociolects, idiolects, linguistic styles, etc. in a single language. Bakhtin argues in "The Discourse in the Novel" that this sense of dialogism is characteristic above all in the novel, and not, or to a lesser degree, in poetry.

Finally, there is the dialogic structure of subjectivity: decentration, the processual nature of the subject, and the intersubjective ground of subjectivation. In Bakhtin and Voloshinov's texts, which have a Marxist slant, this dialogic structure signifies the "polyphonic nature" of the conscience, which is understood as a social and communicative act.

In my investigation of contemporary Slovenian poetry, I will take into account all of these aspects of dialogism. Together, they form my theoretical starting point: namely, I understand the poem as a discourse that always includes two levels, the level of enunciation and the level of the enounced. The subject of the discourse is also always articulated in a double way: as the subject of the enunciation (Bakhtin's author as a discursive instance) and as the subject of the enounced (Bakhtin's hero as a discursive instance). In addition to these two layers, there are a variety of possible subjective positions, voices, and perspectives on different levels of each

discourse. This potential multiplicity is especially present in literature as artistic discourse.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963), Bakhtin develops the following practical-analytical typology of dialogic procedures:⁷

Direct unmediated discourse directed toward its referential object as an expression of the speaker's ultimate semantic authority;

Objectified discourse (discourse of a represented person);

The double-voiced discourse, that is to say discourse with an orientation toward someone else's discourse. It includes the following sub-categories:

1) Undirectional double-voiced discourse;

2) Vari-directional double-voiced discourse including parody and all of its nuances;

3) The active type (reflected discourse of another) including hidden internal polemic.

It should be emphasized that Bakhtin deals with various types of prose discourse. Therefore, his classification includes exclusively prose fiction. In addition, Bakhtin notes that "poetic speech in the narrow sense requires a uniformity of all discourses, the reduction to a common denominator, although that denominator can either be discourse of the first type, or can belong to certain weakened varieties of the other types" (200). However, as in "Discourse," he relativizes this assumption claiming that:

even in poetic speech works are possible that do not reduce their entire verbal material to a single common denominator [...] even in poetry a whole series of fundamental problems cannot be solved without some attention to the above-mentioned plane for investigating discourse, because different types of discourse in poetry require different stylistic treatments. (*Problems* 200)

In view of the fact of that Bakhtin's warning and of our own assumptions that poetry enters into the general theory of dialogism (the dialogism of language itself), it is legitimate to consider the appearance of these procedures in dialogic strategies in poetry. It should be recalled that two of the main procedures in modern poetry are narrativization and dramatization and that dialogism relates to them, especially

“external polyphony” in the sense of introducing speaking personas-characters into poems. We can thus presume that some elements of Bakhtin’s classification will remain useful for the study of poetic dialogism. However, this undertaking will only be productive if it is combined with the reconceptualization of the fundamental concepts of the lyric, and especially of the lyrical subject and the different layers of poetic discourse.

Dialogism in Contemporary Slovenian Poetry: Mapping the Phenomena⁸

The lively reality of poetic texts from Romanticism and then definitively from the birth of poetic modernity onwards, deconstructs the theoretical representations of the monologism of poetry. It is sufficient to think of the works of poets such as Victor Hugo, Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Augusta Webster, Jules Laforgue, Robert Frost, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Ezra Pound, Langston Hughes, Fernando Pessoa, Henri Michaux, or Carol Ann Duffy to mention only the most typical in this respect. Medieval troubadours (François Villon, Rutebeuf) and Renaissance poets (Pierre de Ronsard) reveal a lively dynamics of both external and internal dialogisation. Despite this, the apparently monologic model prevails even today in poetry, creating the illusion of spontaneous utterance and experience through the apparent overlapping of the instances of the lyric persona, the subject of enunciation, focalizer(s), and the implicit author⁹ (cf. Wolf 251–289). Slovenian poetry, including its contemporary production, is no exception in this regard. Still, in the last decade, the increased use of dialogic procedures as defined by Bakhtin can be perceived.

For the moment, my investigation is limited to developments in Slovenian poetry after 2000. I am not attempting to offer a global insight into overall poetical production, but rather will focus on poetic works that make use of strategies that might be qualified as dialogic. Drawing on the collected material from this period, it is possible to claim that diverse practices of dialogism are present in the works of all generations of poets. Representatives of the older generation are fewer, including some four authors and an even lower number of collections using dialogism. Dialogic strategies, and in particular the dramatic monologue, are more frequent in women’s writing, and particularly in the work of authors of the middle and the young generations. This is especially the case from 2011 onwards.

The period from 2000 to 2016 can be provisionally divided into three parts; the period from 2002 (marked by the publication of Miklavž Komelj’s *Rosa* [Dew]) to 2007 when only a few collections using dialogic strategies are noteworthy; the period from 2007 to 2011 when the phenomenon becomes more intensive;

the period from 2011 to 2016 when the use of dialogic strategies, especially in women's writing, becomes even more frequent.¹⁰

At the outset, it is necessary to distinguish two types of aspects of dialogism:

1) the difference between *external dialogism* as the emergence of polyphony through the introduction of speaking or non-speaking characters (Bakhtin's unidirectional objectified discourse (discourse of a represented person); unidirectional double-voiced discourse; vari-directional double-voiced discourse; see above) and *internal dialogism* where different strategies of the multiplication of point of views and voices occurs within an apparently single, but decentered, speaking position and/or character (Bakhtin's active type, the reflected discourse of another).

2) two aspects of dialogism that are absent in Bakhtin's typology: a) dialogic strategies in the structuration of the poetic discourse and its subjects on different levels of the poem (speech strategies and positioning of the speaking subjects), and; b) the decomposition of a "hard" understanding of the philosophical category of the subject and/or the sociological category of the individual depicted on the level of the "poetic plot" (via motifs and themes from the more traditional theoretical perspective, or — in terms of cognitive approaches to literature — via schemes, frames and scripts, isotopies and events).¹¹ These two aspects of dialogism can occur together or not. Heuristically speaking, we could distinguish between structure and content without accepting the sharp bifurcation between content and form. In a poem with an apparently traditional model of the lyrical subject, it is possible to detect the deconstruction of the (category of the) subject on the level of the plot (storyworld, *diegesis*) without realizing it on other structural levels. We could presume that the most holistic, global, and probably most relevant are examples of poems, collections, and entire oeuvres where both of the above mentioned aspects are realized not only in the artistic sense, but also from the perspective of transformative ethical, epistemological, and social potentials. All the same, this hypothesis has yet to be proved. In this respect, contemporary Slovenian poetry belongs to the traditionally oriented modern mainstream of post-postmodern poetics based on an instable subjectivity and its small stories. More radical experimental poetic practices that draw from (different) modernistic and avant-garde traditions are rare. There are some important exceptions, for instance the work of Miklavž Komelj which has considerably influenced the younger generation of poets, and especially

the ones gathered around the magazine *Idiot*: Muanis Sinanović, Karlo Hmeljak, and Jan Krmelj should be mentioned in this regard. This generation, along with the boom of *écriture féminine*, is responsible for diversifying the somewhat uniform landscape of Slovenian poetry in the last few years.

In this paper, I focus in particular on aspects of external dialogism because the phenomenon of the disappearing of traditional lyrical *I* from the central speaking position in favor of diverse voices has become a frequent poetic procedure in contemporary Slovenia poetry. It is not insignificant that this procedure has become a particular characteristic of women authors.

a) Persona and the “poem-novel”

Although the introduction of the persona by Anglo-Saxon modernists is viewed as a historical variation on the dramatic monologue, it seems important methodologically to distinguish between the genre of dramatic monologue and the procedure of the (fictive) persona. The two are different from each other in at least two respects. The first difference relates to the speaking position. In the dramatic monologue, the character is necessarily a speaker who, at least in the original Victorian form of the genre, always addresses someone, while in the persona poem, the character does not necessarily have a voice. In persona poems without voice, the level of the subject of enunciation can be more marked, sometimes to the point that the “person” of this extradiegetic speaker is formed on the extradiegetic level and that this speaker penetrates the lower diegetic level, that is the level of the plot (storyworld). What’s more, the “person” of the diegetic speaker (the narrator in narratologic terms) can be more or less obviously related to the empirical author. The second difference is that both are products of their historical formations. The classical (Victorian) dramatic monologue and the modernistic persona poems are therefore distinct in the following aspects: the dramatic monologue is more focused on the psychology of the character and its disclosure in the speech. The methods of the character’s construction are very different from the strategies employed in modernist’s persona poems. In contrast with the Victorian dramatic monologue — in which we often observe the rapid “construction” of the coherent identity of a character that is frequently derived from the socio-critical dimension of the poem — the typical modernistic dramatic monologue — T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and Ezra Pound’s “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” being two paradigmatic examples of the form — strive to deconstruct the coherent identity of the character. The poem, relying on associativity and frequent impersonality,

provides only dispersed parts of the persona's identity, which is in any case unstable, uncertain, and decentred. Unpredictable shifts of voices, enunciative ventriloquism, and decentration on the level of the spatio-temporal situation of the character are typical of these poems. This is the frame of modernist poetics in which the modernist procedure of the persona has appeared. Today's use of this strategy is generally quite far from the modernist approach; indeed, it seems much closer to the original dramatic monologue, even though it is not entirely authentic as the persona is not a speaker. The strategy today often derives from narrativity as it attempts to depict a slice of the persona's life and its coherent psychology.

To be even more methodologically precise, we must distinguish particular persona poems and persona books where one or more characters appear within a collection. In certain persona books, particular persona poems (where the character is not speaking or is not the central speaker) alternate with true dramatic monologues and with dialogues. Examples of this are: Taja Kramberger's *Opus quinque dierum* and Peter Semolič *Druga obala* [*The Other Shore*] and, to a lesser extent, Barbara Pogačnik's *Alica v deželi plaščev* [*Alice in Coat Land*]. Because there are a greater number of persona poems/books after 2000 in Slovenia¹² (this is prior to the increase of the dramatic monologue), I will deal with this variant first, beginning with two samples from the older generation. These books form an impression of the fragmented poem novel.¹³ The books of Taja Kramberger and Katja Gorečan, which I will discuss later in this paper, also fall into this general category.

In 2003, Ivo Svetina (1948) published *Oblak in gora* [*The Cloud and the Mountain*] subtitled *Yüan Hung-Tao: 1568-161*. The book, written in 1999, includes one hundred and eleven prose poems that synthetically depict the life of the ancient Chinese poet. The two words in the main title are essential to the entire collection as they present two distinct aspects of life. The cloud is the symbol of the changeability and fugacity of everyday life, while the mountain presents the atemporal solidity of several valid truths.¹⁴ The nature of clouds and mountains is also represented formally in the poetic texts, which have a double structure: the first part addresses Yüan's perceptions and thoughts, while the second part offers wisdom gleaned from the details of everyday life, an observation of a bird's flight, drinking tea, etc. The narrator also maintains this duality especially in its temporal aspect: sometimes the narration shifts from the prevailing retrospective into simultaneity stressing the validity of the thought in each moment, even in the present moment of the reader. The punctuation marks designating reported speech are intentionally inconsistent throughout the book. Thus we can never really be

sure who is actually the speaker. Is it Yüan himself or the narrator providing a resume or even reading directly from Yüan's book? The ambivalent definition of the focalizer is especially pronounced during the expression of intimate experiences and cognitive insights when it seems that focalization is not flowing through the persona, but rather that the focalizer is the narrator himself or that the reader is participating in a sort of two-layered double focalization. The book presents a lively interlacing of different subject instances: the narrator, the character, and the focalization, which is multiple and shifts from the diegetic to the extradiegetic level, and in this way plays with the dynamization between two-layered narration and the poetic utterance traditionally understood as monologic.

Milan Dekleva (1946), the author of one of the most notable poetic oeuvres in the last thirty years, made the pre-Socratic thinker Anaximander the central character and speaker in his collection *Panični človek* [*Panic Man*] (1990) a decade before 2000, the landmark date I chose for this study. In his more recent book, *Izganjalci smisla* [*Exorcists of Sense*] (2012), Dekleva intensified his poetics of confronting the diverse philosophical and cultural traditions, including the poetry, of East and West. *Izganjalci smisla* is composed of fifty-eight poems featuring three historical personalities from eastern and western tradition: the poetess Sappho, the Taoist sage Laozi, and the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclites. The three characters speak and address each other in the poems, or alternatively a speaker/narrator speaks about them on a higher poetic level. The soliloquies of the protagonists as well as their dialogues with each other alternate with the narrator's entrances and departures from the diegetic level of the plot, all of the forms of address coming together to create a long discussion with many digressions. The speech of the narrator, who frequently takes the position of the observer of the character's states, thoughts, and words, is often nearly imperceptible, functioning to mark time, to penetrate the poetic plot, drawing the poem and the reader out of transhistorical atemporality and into the actual moment. Discourses about everyday life, philosophy, science, and poetry traverse the speech of all four voices in particular poems and throughout the entire collection. The specificities of the poetic existence of the three personae reside in their transhistoricity: each one exists in its own time (antiquity) and, simultaneously, in today's moment, the poems including abundant contemporary references to, for example, Srebrenica, Chernobyl, Osama bin Laden, Barack Obama, Hotmail, Lionel Messi, etc. The interesting phenomenon of transhistoricity should be emphasized in this discussion as it appears alongside dialogic strategies in the works of many poets, not just Milan Dekleva and Ivo Svetina. For example, Miklavž Komelj frequently uses transhistoricity as a topic in

his poetry collections in which procedures of inner dialogisation also prevail.

Taja Kramberger (1970), poet, historian, and historical anthropologist, wrote the collection *Opus quinque dierum* in 2009 and its publication marked an important turning point in Slovenian poetry in at least two aspects; first, as regards the systematization of the poetic polyphony throughout the entire book, and; second, as regards the shifts in women's writing towards more pronounced, even militantly expressed, feminists standpoints. The collection is a poetic mosaic built on the historical data from the Dreyfus affair (1894-1906) and coheres into a sort of documentary poetic novel. Its thematic inspiration, the Dreyfus affair, stands as the paradigmatic event of wider European society, "a symptom of all debilitated regimes" (Kramberger, *Opus* 11). As such, the Dreyfus affair is not only part of the past but is understood as still relevant in the present era, occurring time and again in various masks of symbolic and physical violence. *Poetics is politics and politics is poetics* is the starting point of the collection. Poetics and politics are inseparable because their common link, *ethics*, is the sole imperative. As far as poetic strategies are concerned, the *ethics* of Kramberger's writing is expressed in attacks on "the petrified fossil colonies in the language" and in "the resistance with combinations of words that we snatch away from the paltry society and return to dignity" (41). For the poet, the poetic exposition of the symbolic domination of all the oppressed, including women, animals, the silenced, and other marginalized groups, and the violence perpetrated against them, represents a struggle to decontaminate the foundations and start on a path towards the transformation of society. In *Opus quinque dierum*, this struggle is closely related to the strategy of systematic polyphony, which also dictates the composition of the whole. In the collection, eight cycles featuring different voices shift back and forth between the chronological period of the Dreyfus affair and the present. The poems programmatically introduce scientific discourse into poetic speech and depict the intimate, ideological, social, and political conditions of the scandal. Reading them, we encounter well known, lesser known, or unknown historical personalities that were involved in the Dreyfus scandal in different ways. Some characters appear in the collection as central speakers of a specific poem (e. g. Emil Zola, Karl Kraus, Alfred Dreyfus's brother) and sometimes even of an entire cycle of poems (Dreyfus himself in the cycle "Hudičev otok" [*The Devil's Island*]). As for others historical personae that appear in the poems, they are markedly polarized between positive and negative. When women narrators speak on a higher diegetic level, parts of the persona's speech is reported via quotes in the poem. In such cases, the woman speaker often penetrates the level of the poetic plot through the author's comments,

by referring to her present time, to the collective subject “us,” or to circumstances from her personal life. One of the cycles is entirely composed of poems constructed of fragments from Slovenian newspapers from the historical period of the Dreyfus affair that directly refer to the scandal and bring to light the state of mind in Slovenia at that time, a state of mind that also extends into the present era.

The 2011 poetry collection by Katja Gorečan (1989) entitled *Trpljenje mlade Hane* [*The Sorrows of Young Hana*] aroused great interest on the part of both literary critics and readers, and was nominated for one of Slovenia’s most important poetry awards. The title itself clearly refers to Goethe’s novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, while Slovenian readers also recognized the allusion to the seminal expressionist play by Slovenian playwright Slavko Grum entitled *Dogodek v mestu Gogi* (*An Event in the Town of Goga*), featuring a sexually abused girl as the main character. The work announces the auto-ironization of the confessional mode of poetry with a centralized lyrical *I*. In the collection, this process is realized by the clear constitution of two poetic levels — the enunciative level and the plot level — and simultaneously two women subjects — the narrator and the character. The book makes good use of the difference between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enounced, which is, according to Benveniste and Bakhtin, inherent to the language itself, bringing it toward a clearer dialogization based on a strong narrative structuration. By sequencing events about the intimate and partly also the public life of Hana, and plotting them with intentional stylistic simplicity, a fragmented auto-ironizing *bildungsroman* about the formation of a young woman artist is created. Different aspects of physicality, and especially of sexuality, told from a girl’s or women’s perspective create a strong thematic and motivic isotopy for the whole. Throughout the collection, this dimension is expressed in a deliberately distanced, almost banalized, sometimes even infantilized point of view. The key intertextual reference, the Austrian author Elfride Jelinek, appears explicitly in one of the poems when the hero is reading the Nobel Prize laureate’s novel *The Lovers*. The collection does not just draw on narrative procedures inspired by the Austrian writer, particularly in terms of the relation of the narrator to the main character, but thematically refers to Jelinek’s novel *The Lovers* by dealing with the subject of womanhood in a secluded, mentally narrow, and provincial environment. At the same time, the humorous and on the surface facile and banalized style could easily be read as an attempt to ironically introduce elements of so-called chick lit (on the order of *Bridget Jones Diary*’s) and thus break the high poetic register. The poems with two-part titles that recall of titles of children picture books or cartoons with the name of the hero followed by a related

event (for example, Hana and the world, Hana and her period, Hana and shaving, Hana and anorexia, Hana and penises, Hana and masturbation) reveal the dynamic relationship between the speaker, often taking the standpoint of the community, and the maladjusted main character. These dynamics oscillate between distancing and identification through a range of different emotive and judgmental relationships: from scoffing disapproval to (rare) sympathy. This strategy is frequently realized with shifts in focalization, intercalated utterances of the main character (always written in italics), and metaleptic penetrations from one poetic level to another that occur either throughout an entire poem or in one part of it and sometimes in a single utterance. In the latter case, the explicit dialogic dynamization of the sentence is realized: in a single sentence, multiple voices/perspectives/levels of the narrator and the main character crash into one another. What was previously expressed only by internal focalization suddenly attains its own voice that penetrates the grammar of the sentence: “hana *am not afraid of death*” (Gorečan, *Trpljenje* 66) “hana *am moving in the area of the minus*” (Gorečan, *Trpljenje* 67) “hana is not striving for the realization of her own happiness, but *am striving for the realization of my own unhappiness*” (Gorečan, *Trpljenje* 67).¹⁵

In Barbara Pogačnik’s (1973) latest book *Alica v deželi plaščev* [Alice in Coat Land] (2016), women characters from the world of fairy tales appear: Alice, Snow White, Cinderella, Ronia. With this collection, Pogačnik joins the archeological excavation of women’s memories and women’s psychological, experiencing, bodily, thinking, cultural, and socio-political traditions. In the last decade, this excavation has consistently, intensively, and programmatically taken place in several notable poetical oeuvres as well as in single books by Slovenian women artists of different generations (Barbara Korun, Stanislava Repar, Taja Kramberger, Maja Vidmar, Alenka Jovanovski, Anja Golob, Alja Adam, Katja Gorečan, Ana Makuc, etc.). Pogačnik (and this can also be seen in the work of Maja Vidmar and Meta Kušar) has added this archetypal approach, that is the reference to specific woman archetypes from fairy tales, to the more general exploration of womanhood and approaches that could be, with slight classificatory exaggeration, be termed as documentary-historical (Kramberger), historical-imaginative (Barbara Korun, Alenka Jovanovski), historical (Ana Makuc), mythical (Erika Vouk, Veronika Dintinjana, Miljana Cunta), and “in-yer-face” (Katja Gorečan, Monika Vrečar). By representing the experience of fairy tale characters in their external and internal worlds, *Alica v deželi plaščev* draws a more imaginative and playful horizon of a poetic world that is constructed outside of the firm referential framework of reality and amalgamates the fantastic with the real. Pogačnik’s writing adds a unique

approach to the prevailing realistic poetics of everyday life and brings a slice of surrealistic Luddism and a neo-symbolistic dimension to current Slovenian poetic production through a refined narrative exploration of the image. The narrative scope, the linguistic subtlety and richness, the giving-in to the impulses of the unconscious in relation to the double procedure of metaphorization-narrativization, the use of the Symbolist and Surrealist heritages, the focus on the intimate within the social: all of this comes together to create a non-declarative, non-militant, and artistically convincing kind of women's writing in which authenticity and art are not subjected to the project of ideological disclosure and/or new ideologization. Pogačnik's *girls* are nomadic subjects. Non-rootedness, motion, foreignness, the ever present tension between the symbols of "the house" and "the coat" and the intermediate symbol of "the threshold," eternal nomadism, including linguistic nomadism, are the essential thematic ingredients of the book. The most frequent character, Alice, is constantly confronting her intimate world, which she develops by wondering at the miracle of life with its subjection to diverse forms of symbolic violence within her own sociality. The girls that appear in these poems are mostly not the speakers. Rather, a (female?) narrator is speaking from a higher diegetic level. However, internal (sometimes multiple and changing) focalization prevails, which is especially emphasized by the element of wondering. Sometimes the girls speak their own words, which are marked in italics. In some poems, the speech can be attributed to Alice, even when she remains unnamed. That is the case in the poem "Pajek"[Spider], while in the poem entitled "Ronja in oče" [Ronja and Father] it is clearly Ronja speaking. A lyrical persona that is more authorial begins to appear in the subsequent parts of the collection where the multi-perspectiveness of the fairy tale girl heroes is replaced by the voices of women artists (Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, Isadora Duncan, Dalida etc.) through introductory quotes to their poems. At the same time, the fairy tale dimension that was an integrative part of the whole poetic world shifts to more realistic moments and casts, without however disappearing completely thanks to the audacious metaphorization.

b) *Voices of Their Own*¹⁶: Dramatic Monologue, Women and Animals Take Control of the Speaking Domain

The persona poem and the real dramatic monologue are combined in Kramberger's *Opus quinque dierum* and to an extent also in Pogačnik's *Alica v deželi plaščev*. A great deal has occurred in women's poetics in Slovenia between 2009, when Kramberger's book appeared, and 2016, when Pogačnik's collection was published. During this period, a series of relevant female poetic voices have

emerged and the number of women authors in Slovenian poetic production has increased. In this context, it becomes possible to speak of a boom in women's poetry. Within this phenomenon, the renaissance of the dramatic monologue is of particular interest. The renewal of the dramatic monologue is, with some exceptions (e. g. Peter Semolič's *Druga obala* [*The Other Shore*], (2015), closely related to the opening of the female speaking field. Given that some Slovenian women authors explicitly refer to the English tradition of the dramatic monologue, I will provide a short presentation of the emergence of this genre and its variations.

Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson are generally accepted as simultaneous but independent inventors of the dramatic monologue, a form that is considered a Victorian response to the Romantic theory of poetry with its autonomous, self-assured, and universal lyric subject. (However, a closer investigation of the Romantic subject in some crucial poetic oeuvres of Romanticism, such as that of Novalis and Victor Hugo, reveals that such representations may be oversimplified). Attempts to define the subject became more obsessional and vain after the period of classic idealistic philosophy when new discoveries in the sciences, evolutionary theory, and schools of psychological thought created a world of uncertainty that resulted in the loss of absolute values and a coherent position from which to speak.

Browning's *My Last Duchess* (1842) and Tennyson's *Ulysses* (1833) stand as the paradigmatic examples of the dramatic monologue.¹⁷ What is less known is that, according to some recent researchers (Isobel Armstrong and Glenis Byron to name two), the form expanded as a result of the efforts of Victorian woman poets such as Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans. By including fictive speakers in their work, these poets began to use the genre to deconstruct the traditional dichotomy man-poet/women-muse, and to refute the general understanding of Victorian women as exclusively emotional beings. If Browning and Tennyson still pass for the inventors of the dramatic monologue, it was Augusta Webster who most strongly influenced the subsequent use of the technique (for example, the way it is used by English poet Carol Ann Duffy). According to Ana Makuc¹⁸ who quotes Glenis Byron, Webster introduced several novelties into the genre that Duffy later adopted: the woman's assumption of the subject's and speaker's position, the shift from characteristic sensibility to materialism, the social critique behind the mask, the problematization of the autonomous subject, the bestowal of voice to marginal subjects, and the use of colloquial language. Researchers distinguish two variants of the form in the work of Augusta Webster and other poets. In the so-called *sympathetic dramatic monologue*, the implied author's empathy and compassion with the lyrical personae and speakers (for example, with the prostitute in Webster's "A Castaway" can

be perceived. The *revisionist* variation, in contrast, works on the level of the subversive deconstruction of the accepted understanding of history, culture, and mythology. This is often achieved by plotting the story of a well-known figure from the cultural tradition and subversively deconstructing either the established story, character, role, or perspective with the goal of cultural transformation: for example, giving the female perspective of a mythologized story such as Orpheus and Eurydice, Arianne and Theseus, or Cassandra.

The intensive use of dramatic monologue techniques in recent Slovenian poetry, especially its strong prevalence among women authors, was first observed in magazines publications in 2008 (Alenka Jovanovski's "Lord Byron pozablja, o čem govori, zato govori o mehkužcih" [Lord Byron forgets what he is speaking about, and therefore speaks about molluscs]), then in more condensed form in Kramberger's *Opus quinque dierum*. The practice reached its apex in 2011 with the award-winning collection *Pridem takoj* [Coming Right Away] by Barbara Korun (1963). In two cycles from Korun's book, "Monologi" [Monologues] and "Antigona, okruški," [Antigona, Debris] (which, in terms of unity of plot, actually forms a kind of *play in poems*), the dramatic monologue has definitely obtained *ledroit de cité* in Slovenian poetry. At the same time, it has become more firmly rooted in writing with more or less intensive feminist themes, ground that was previously prepared in Kramberger's *Opus quinque dierum*.

In Korun's cycle "Monologi" composed of fourteen poems, it is not only women who give themselves the right to their own autonomous voice and supplant (the predominantly masculine) lyrical *I* of the intimistic-narrative poetry rooted in fragments of post-postmodern light subjectivity, but even men, animals (a rat), and plants (a hellebore) acquire their own voice. In "Monologi," all the aspects that researchers noted in A. Webster and later in C. A. Duffy appear: the female takeover of the position of the subject and speaker, the social critique behind the mask, the (implicit) questioning of the autonomous subject, and the bestowal of voice to marginal subjects. Throughout the poems, we encounter characters — speakers such as Noah's nameless wife, Monica Lewinsky, Mother Theresa, Queen Elisabeth I, J. S. Ratzinger, the future pope, Austrian politician Jorg Heider and his lover, the poets Barbara Korun and Iztok Osojnik, the rat Terry, a bud of a hellebore, etc. The *dramatis personae* are always disclosed in the title of the poem, which *didascalically* also gives the time and/or location (for example, "after the deluge," "the beginning of the third millennium," "the end of the second millennium") and sometimes also the circumstances. The poems mostly follow the original form of the dramatic monologue in which the speaking character addresses his or her

speech to a listener (Mother Theresa speaks to a novice nun, Monica Lewinsky to Bill Clinton, poet Iztok Osojnik to his climbing partner Barbara Korun, the author of the book, etc.). However, a new variant of the form merging with the previous sympathetic and revisionist appeared, one which used irony and absurdity to subvert a given historical situation or, at least, to reveal the dominant (and always symbolically violent) social-cultural-political models. The first poem spoken by Noah's wife after the deluge, "the woman without a name," uses a fundamental gesture to revisionistically slice into polarized cultural history. The poem looks both back and down at the silenced ones, at subterranean history, redirects its focus, and gives voice to the first representative of the marginalized, all those to whom history hasn't bothered to give a name. Noah's wife, feeling compassion for the forgotten animals, boards the arc and goes below deck. She enters into a place of complete darkness where she lives together with all the other marginalized ones. The poem concludes with an astonishing image of a chtonic body with many tails that rises with great force from the darkness to the light at the moment that Noah, God's legate, sets the animals free. To use Julia Kristeva's words: the semiotic chora breaks from the darkness, rising to the symbolic order of the light.

Ana Makuc's (1982) awarded book *Ljubica Rolanda Barthesa* [*The Mistress of Roland Barthes*] (2015) continues in the path that Kramberger began with *Opus* and was more powerfully defined in Korun's "Monologi." Until now, it is the only collection built entirely on the technique of the dramatic monologue. In all other cases, the dramatic monologue coexists with other forms in the same collection, most frequently with the I-form poem (for example, in Jovanovski's *Hlače za Džija* and Pogačnik's *Alica v deželi plaščev*) and/or with persona poems (in addition to Kramberger's *Opus* and Dekleva's *Izganjalci*, also in Peter Semolič's *Druga obala* and Maja Vidmar's *Minute prednosti*). *Ljubica Rolanda Barthesa*, a tiny booklet composed of fifteen short poems accompanied by illustrations by Nevena Aleksovski, reveals to the reader a different and revised intimate history of women, not anonymous women this time, but well-known female intellectuals and especially artists (Frida Kahlo, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Anaïs Nin, and June Miller), women from mythology, fairy tales, and literature (Cassandra, Little Red Riding Hood, Salome, and Lolita), and those who have entered into history as the partners and muses of famous men (Ann Boleyn, the wife of Christopher Columbus, and Gala, the muse of several Parisian Surrealists). Patriarchal history has either swept these women from the scene or hidden them behind the veils of men's representations of their fragility, passivity, fatality, or inferiority. The collection presents an engaged programmatic decomposition of the literary and

cultural canon. Using the technique of the revisionist dramatic monologue in which these women are each given their own loud and lucid voice, often addressing their partner (for example, Henry Miller, Diego Rivera, and Salvador Dali), they are liberated at last from the position that the cultural canon has imposed upon them. At the same time, the collection engages in the poetic exploration of aspects of womanhood, sexuality, and gender relations, asserting itself as one of the most clearly established literary projects in this regard.

From her first collection onwards, Maja Vidmar's (1961) poetry has been intimate, stylistically condensed, and elliptical with a strong rhythmical-semantic dimension. Recently, she had made increasing use of different forms of external dialogism in her questioning of the relationship of the female *I* towards the other in intimate, social, cultural, and natural spheres. She has also introduced personae and the dramatic monologue into her poetry. These techniques could already be observed in *Sobe* [Rooms] (2008), while the dialogism is more fully developed in her last book *Minute prednost* [Minutes of Advantage] (2015). Throughout the collection, dialogic procedures are interwoven through different thematic-motivic fields. The appearance of the animal voice or animal focalization, the pluralization of the traditional lyrical *I* using the procedure of allegory, and the introduction of different personae are of a particular interest among these structural-semantic configurations. The collection begins with a poem that contains an image of a symphonic orchestra playing in the woods. The image could be said to meta-poetically announce the emergence of different voices in the subsequent collection, while the exhortation of the lyrical persona to herself at the end of the poem — "breathe through all possible changes, change all skins" — heralds the emergence of different personae that appear in the poems that follow. The book finishes with a variation of the poems with the title "kdo si?" [who are you?]: "I don't know. / All the mentioned / are / there" (Vidmar 107). The first and the last poem provide a frame for the process undergone by the subject and the world in this book. Even though its readers are always on the track of a female lyrical *I* who seems to be authorial, the position of this *I* within the storyworld of the poem is no longer central but instead is marginalized in two ways: either in the relationship of the *I* to the Other(s) (in particular to animals) or the relationship of a "central ego" with various identities within the (female) subject. In the case of the latter, what is at work is the procedure of archetypal allegorisation. The technique of dialogisation through the use of allegorical personae enters the dialogic category of the non-speaking persona poem that was presented in the previous chapter, and becomes more similar to the technique used in the construction of the hero's psychology

in medieval literary genres (for example, in allegorical romances where the *I* is presented by the allegory of a castle inhabited by different psychological characteristics and phenomena). Interestingly, the masks or personae that emerge in this category of poems in Vidmar's book are virtually always masculine — the great pursuer, the scared, the bright, the one who judges, the cautious, the unbeliever — while the plural *I* to which they refer is clearly female. This gender difference is explicitly inscribed in the questioning of relationships between men and women, which has been a dominant thread in all of Maja Vidmar's poetry. *Minute prednosti* embodies both aspects of dialogism: dialogism in the very structuration of the poetic discourse as well as in the decentration of the subject on the plot level. Decentration occurs in the first part of the book where animals speak: a hermit crab, a scorpion, a baby roe deer, a titmouse, wolves, a swan, a fly, and an ant. The animals no longer symbolize the different states of the lyrical persona as they once did in the poetry of high modernism (for instance, in the work of Dane Zajc, one of the most important Slovenian poets of the twentieth century). The animals speak from their own, marginal animal position and point of view. However, the animal speech is expressed in an intimistic way, without a trace of explicit animal activism or reference to "the animal question" or "animal rights." They construct themselves into animal subjects, but the subjectification of the animal occurs on the intersubjective base, in their relationships to the other. The other is not just present in the poem's storyworld. She is also the recipient of the animal's address, although it cannot be ascertained that she even hears the animals speaking to her. In these female personae, whose point of view seems to intermittently appear in a poem through changing focalization, the reader is able to identify the authorial lyrical persona from other poems in the collection. However, it is the animals that seem to have an omniscient speaking position in the poems. They have the ability to penetrate the feelings and thoughts of the female personae addressed as *you*, which are no longer subjects or genuine objects.

Conclusion

In the last fifteen years, the prevalent monological and single-voice *paysage* of Slovene poetry has diversified and that process still continues today. Within a single collection of poems, the fatigued lyrical *I* often coexists with other voices emerging from the *loci* of different cultural traditions. Now Sappho, Laozi, Heraclites, Mother Theresa, Christopher Columbus's wife, Joseph Ratzinger, Hamlet, Pocahontas, Alice, Monica Lewinsky, Lord Byron and many others perambulate and speak in Slovenian poetry. A rat, a snail, a hermit crab, and a bud of a hellebore

join these voices. In recent Slovenian poetry, the equation of *voice* + *narration* creates a formula that it is not new, having already been inherent to the tradition of the dramatic monologue. However, the renaissance of the genre in a new historical, social and, poetological moment gives it fresh values. Without a doubt, this shift testifies to the exhaustion of monological confessional poetics, which thematically were often focused only the experience of a single, most frequently, authorial *I*. At the same time, it testifies to the exhaustion of prevalent procedures related to the structuration of the poetic discourse. The combination of narrativity and external dialogisation has led to the emergence of fragmented “poem novels” or “poem plays” built on the level of entire collections or poem cycles. Furthermore, the external dialogisation has become one of the key instruments in an increasingly intensive excavation of women’s “memory” and deals with all aspects of women contemporaneity in poetry, which is a project emerged in the Slovenian literary field albeit with a delay of several decades in comparison to others parts of the literary world-system. The emergence of external dialogism is thus often linked with an engaged thematic exploration of areas of silenced intimate and social habitus. The gesture of acquiring voice when performed by “fragile” or “minority” subjects — by women, animals, and even plants — is endowed with the particular symbolic value of subversive and transformative impulses.

Notes

1. Translated by author and Erica Johnson Debeljak.
2. For instance, they appear in J. Peterson’s *Die Wissenschaft von der Dichtung* from 1936 (Kos, Janko. *Lirika*. Ljubljana: DZS, 1993, 46–47) and persist today, for example in *Das lyrische Gedicht*, D. Lamping’s 1989 book that was influential in German-language criticism.
3. See Varja Balžalorsky Antič. “Bakhtin in Ducrot v perspektivi rekonceptualizacije lirskega subjekta”. *Slavistična revija* 64.2 (2016): 165–179.
4. Mihai Bakhtin, *Estetika in humanistične vede*. Trans. Helena Biffio et al. Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis, 1999, 289; Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale I*. Paris: Gallimard, 1972, 63.
5. In the 1980s, Oswald Ducrot transferred Bakhtin’s concept of *point of view* into linguistics and called it the *enunciator*. *Voice, point of view*, or the *enunciator* are more or less identical to the narratological concepts of *focalisation*, *point of view*, and *perspective*, with the important distinction that they are not only operative on the level of the text, but also on the level of the single utterance.
6. These assumptions from the 1920s did not enter directly into later theories of poetry, in part

because this unfinished work was published only in 1972. Some theoreticians have consistently and relatively successfully introduced the distinction between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enounced (similar to Bakhtin's distinction between author and hero) into poetry primarily on the basis of Benveniste (Karlheinz Stierle, in the 1970s) and a combination of Benveniste and Lacan (Antony Easthope, in the 1980s).

7. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and trans. C. Emerson. Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 190.

8. Some of the following conclusions are also the fruit of discussions I had with master students at the Department of Comparative Literature and Literary during practical exercises in the 2015/2016 school year. We were dealing with some works presented here (Ivo Svetina's *Oblaki in gora*, Milan Dekleva's *Izganjalci smisla*, Barbara Korun's *Pridem takoj*). I would like to take this occasion to thank my students.

9. Cf. Werner Wolf, "The Lyric: Problems of Definition and a Proposal for Reconceptualisation". *Theory into Poetry*. Eds. E. Müller-Zettelmann and M. Rubik. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2005. 21–56.

10. The more or less empathic use of dialogization can be perceived in works of the older generation of poets as well (those born after 1945): such as Ivo Svetina in *Oblak in gora* [The Cloud and the Mountain], 2003, Iztok Osojnik in *Gospod Danes* [Mister Today], 2003, B. A. Novak in *MOM*, (2007), Milan Dekleva in *Izganjalci smisla* [Exorcists of Sense], 2012, and Milan Jesih in *Lahkoda* [It is Likely], 2014. The middle generation is represented by Barbara Korun in *Pridem takoj* [Coming Right Away], (2011), and some poems published in literary magazines, Maja Vidmar in particular in *Minute prednosti* [Minutes of Advantage] (2015), and previously in *Sobe* [Rooms] (2008), and Peter Semolič in *Druga obala* [The Other Shore] (2015). The generation born after 1970 is represented by Lidija Dimkovska in *ph Neutral History* (2012), Primož Čučnik especially in *Nova okna* [New Windows] (2005) and *Delo in dom* [Work and Home] (2007), Taja Kramberger in *Opus quinque dierum* (2009), and partly also *V tvojem objemu je prostor zame* [In your Embrace There is a Place for Me] (2014), Miklavž Komelj in *Rosa* [Dew] (2002) and more intensely in the following collections, *Hipodrom* [Hippodrome] (2006), *Nenaslovljiva imena* [Unaddressable Names] (2008), *Modra obleka* [Blue Dress] (2011), *Roke v dežju* [Hands in the Rain] (2012), *Noč je abstraktnjša kot N* [The Night is more abstract than N] (2014), *Minima impossibilia* (2015), Alenka Jovanovski in *Hlače za Džija* [Trousers for Dži] (2012), and individual poems published in magazines, Anja Golob in *Didaskalije k dihanju* [Didascalies to the Breathing] (2016), Barbara Pogačnik in *Alica v deželi plaščev* [Alice in Coat Land] (2016), and Radharani Pernarčič in *Bull Roarer* (2013). In terms of the poets of the generation born in at the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s, the following are worthy of mention: Katja Gorečan in *Trpljenje mlade Hane* [The Sorrows of Young Hana] (2012), Tibor Hrs Pandur in *Enerđi mašin* [Energy Machine] (2010), Karlo Hmeljak in *Krčrk* [Contractletters] (2012),

Ana Pepelnik in *Pod vtisom* [Under the Impression] (2015), and Ana Makuc in *Ljubica Rolanda Barthesa* [The Mistress of Roland Barthes] (2015).

11. See Peter Hühn, Peter. "Plotting the Lyric". *Theory into Poetry*. Eds. E. Müller-Zettelmann and M. Rubik. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2005. 147–172.

12. In the works of some poets, the consistent use of persona has appeared well before 2000.

13. Cf. concerning Ivo Svetina's *Oblak in gora*: Boris. A. Novak. *Zven in pomen Študije o slovenskem pesniškem jeziku*. Ljubljana: Znanstvenoraziskovalni inštitut filozofske fakultete, 2005, 190.

14. Boris. A. Novak. *Zven in pomen Študije o slovenskem pesniškem jeziku*, op. cit., 190.

15. Translated by V. B. A.

16. A paraphrase from C. Ann Duffy's poem *A Voice of Her Own* and the eponymous title of an essay about dramatic monologue in C. Ann Duffy and A. Webster by the poet Ana Makuc.

17. Michael D. Hurley, Michael O'Neil, *Poetic form. An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 170, 174.

18. Ana Makuc. "A voice of Her Own: Dramatic Monologues by Augusta Webster and Carol Ann Duffy" *Apokalipsa* 165-167 (2012): 139–153. 143.

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