

Otherness and the Contemporary Slovene Novel

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Abstract In this paper, three contemporary Slovene novels are discussed in which the otherness of the literary figure is closely linked to the otherness of the literary language used: Vitomil Zupan's *Journey to the End of Spring*, Berta Bojetu-Boeta's *Filio is Not at Home* and Lojze Kovačič's *Childhood Things*. The otherness of these novels is not only confirmed primarily within the context of the contemporary Slovene novel, but also in comparison with the world stage, where the Slovene novel represents a minority literature. The novel *Journey to the End of Spring* is different because of the main character Tajsi, who is an erotomaniac, a compulsive writer and a picaresque figure; as well as the otherness of the protagonist, the dynamics of the poetics is also shaped by the modernist narrative connected with the universal category of the neo-picaresque. The contribution of the novel *Filio is Not at Home* to the sense of otherness lies in the generic syncretism of dystopia, as well as in the eponymous female character whose name, Filio, indicates a vision of the female and male principles being brought together. In the new millennium, the greatest sense of otherness has been brought to the Slovene context by the autobiographical novel *Childhood Things*, particularly the child's perspective, the unreliable narrator and enigmatic descriptions. The very technique of this autobiographical novel is also different, combining realist and modernist poetics into realistic modernism; this connects smoothly with the difference of the main character Bubi, who in spite of his young age (from newborn to eleven years old) expresses himself with merciless candour, an innovative critical stance, radical provocation and consistent nonconformism.

Key words otherness; contemporary Slovene novel; erotomaniac; dystopia; autobiographical novel

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In recent times, the primarily ethically related theme of literature as a space of the Other, of otherness and differentness has been tackled by a great many theorists, from Bahtin, Camus, Iser, Derrida, Blancot and Lévinas to Nussbaum and various critics of multiculturalism. Unlike many literary theory studies in this area, my contribution does not deal with otherness as a largely ethical problem. My starting point is Peggy Kamuf’s¹ thesis that literature is capable of opening up otherness precisely because of its fictional character, which has no references and thus no firmly fixed (linguistic) borders, but because of the semantic breadth of otherness restricts itself to the otherness of the main literary characters, as well as of the otherness of the whole narrative. The following discussion also takes into account the novel as a space of otherness in the context of European or world literature. Even a cursory glance at various surveys, anthologies and canonic list shows that very few Slovene novels are included in the European/Western canon. This is partly due to the newly established (1991) Slovene state, which has not entirely found its way into the European consciousness; Slovenia is often dealt with only as part of the former Yugoslavia (because of the Nobel Prize, Ivo Andrić’s *The Bridge on the Drina* was well known). In this article I discuss three contemporary Slovene novels in which the otherness of the literary figures is closely linked with the otherness of the literary language used: Vitomil Zupan’s *Journey to the End of Spring*, Berta Bojetu-Boeta’s *Filio is Not at Home* and Lojze Kovačič’s *Childhood Things*. The otherness of these novels is confirmed primarily in the context of the contemporary Slovene novel, but I also draw attention to their otherness through comparison with similar world novels. I shall refer to two great shifts in Slovene literature that strongly marked the cotemporary Slovene novel: the first is the birth of the modernist novel in the mid-20th century, and the other is the appearance of the new

national state and of transitional literature at the end of the millennium.

Before I turn to these works, which represent the peak of Slovene novel writing and undoubtedly belong among the world literary canon,² I shall briefly present the contemporary Slovene novel. This is a multi-layered phenomenon that since the 1950s has been marked by different cultural factors, social changes, literary currents and trends, and by both groups and individual authors. Its beginnings coincide with the appearance of modernist strivings, particularly the modernist and existentialist novel, which brought a significant shift within Slovene literature. The appearance of the modernist Slovene novel can be placed in the 1950s, when the most powerful literary current in Slovenia was social realism. After the end of the Second World War Slovene society underwent fundamental changes that also conditioned the writing of literature. The early post-war years were marked primarily by the rebuilding the devastated homeland, the leadership of the Party in every domain of life and the doctrine of Soviet social (and socialist) realism. Slovene literature followed the demand for socialist realism rather inconsistently and after the *Informbiro* resolution of 1948 its influence waned. As well as internal reasons, initiatives that represented a break with the realist tradition were also encouraged by events on the European and international scene, particularly encounters with the existentialist, modernist “new novel” and the theatre of the absurd.

For literary historians, Dominik Smole’s *Black Days and a White Day* (1958) is usually cited as the first contemporary Slovene novel, although mention is also made of Vitomil Zupan’s *Journey to the End of Spring* (1940, 1972), which was written in 1940 but for both objective and subjective reasons was published only in 1972. I chose to analyse this novel by writer, dramatist and poet Vitomil Zupan (1914-1987) for a number of reasons. The first is that Zupan’s existentialism reflects Slovene literary existentialism in general: there is rarely an appearance of the nihilistic, hopeless variant of this creed that developed in France (e.g. Céline’s *Journey to the End of the Night*), rather it is characterised by a vital resilience, although the existential anxiety arises from an existentialist understanding of the world and of life which in Slovene literature was linked primarily to the works of Sartre and Camus. The other reason has already been mentioned: that in the context of contemporary Slovene literature, Zupan’s main character is very different, as is the language of the novel. More than in other Slovene novels, Zupan’s heroic-picaresque figures decide for the “arena,” for constant struggle against the absurdity and apathy of a society in which adventure is identified with woman, woman with the erotic, the erotic with writing and writing with life. The erotic is Zupan’s

central theme, the characteristic narrative perspective and the source of the novel's dynamism.

The dynamic poetics of *Journey to the End of Spring* differs from that of Zupan's contemporaries, for in his novels the erotic is not only a literary record of sensuality, but pervades the existential and essential anguish of modern man. It speaks not only of erotic dimensions, but presents an outline of the individual's fate and the collective one. In the Slovene literary context, the exceptional vitality of this erotic perspective still seems unusual and even demonic, and Zupan differs from other erotic poets and writers above all in a romantic experiencing of the erotic as something essential, transcendental and heroic. This narrative intensity was undoubtedly influenced by the author's literary models, among which, in addition to Russian and French classics, he mentions Greek *kalokagathia* and the erotic-heroic model of Casanova, while literary historians compare his erotic activism with the rebellious stance of Henry Miller,³ whose metaphysical interpretation of sexuality raises the meaning of art in a similarly romantic way. Both writers put sexuality in first place and made use of certain psychoanalytical (primarily Freudian⁴) concepts, although they did not explore physicality in order to uncover its pathology.

A comparison of Zupan's novel with Miller's work is justified only at the story level, not that of the narrative, for the narrative procedures used by the initiator of Slovene modernism are much more radical in the sense of loosening traditional (realist) models. His poetics of the fragment shattered the linear narrative line and loosened the causal logic of the essayistic and lyrical approach, while leaving realism to descriptive elements, as is characteristic of the modernist approach, which no longer adhered to the principle of imitation but rather emphasised Wilde's maxim that "life imitates art." This novel is connected with modernism also by the temporal manipulation that is labelled as a typical modernist characteristic; in his view, time offers literature more opportunities for manipulation than does space. The narrative innovations, such as multilinearity, fragmentation and associativeness, can be connected not only to modernism and existentialism, but also certain generic models within the overall category of the picaresque. While Zupan's modernist narrative is sometimes a "collage" of mental, emotional and sensory states underlain by the stream of consciousness, it is the unusual and diverse events that form the dynamic elements connected with the picaresque. This is not presented as the application of generic formulae to Zupan's narrative, but rather as a unit of basic structures that form into the generalised and suprahistorical dimension of the picaresque.

Today some literary historians (e.g. Will 1991) refer to the neopicaresque and as a synthesis of defining traits of picaresque novels in the 20th century do not measure it only against traditional picaresque novels (from, for example, the 17th and 18th centuries). Since the contemporary label picaresque is extremely wide and made up of contradictory properties, let me first list the essential features of the picaresque situation, the conditions for the phenomenon including the updated or neopicaresque: a picaresque perspective, a panoramic structure or loose episodic nature, first person narrative with a narrative gap between the experienced and narrative self; the *picaro* as a pragmatic and isolated protagonist is a protean figure, the relationship between the *picaro* and the environment switches from exclusion to inclusion and back again, and there is implicit parody of other types of novels and of the picaresque itself. In the novel by Zupan discussed here there are quite a number of basic picaresque situations, as well as the characteristic picaresque themes of vanity and freedom. The first of these speaks of the vapidness of life and is connected with the portrayal of moral perversion, while the theme of freedom actually involves exploring the paradox of being trapped by freedom. The categorisation of Zupan's novel as (neo)picaresque also suits the selection of the two main characters, who come closer to each other through erotic adventures.

The main characters of *Journey to the End of Spring*, an unnamed professor and his pupil Tajsji, are not only picaresque figures, but also erotomaniacs and compulsive writers, whose neopicaresque perspective is captured through satire and irony. Their neopicaresque character is connected to the nihilism of intellectuals who critically judge both society and themselves, and see as the greatest value the will to strength. The unnamed professor is not satisfied with himself, with his profession or his marriage, and so Tajsji teaches him to tear down the established norms and look at the world differently, i.e. in a neopicaresque way. The pupil Tajsji rebels against petty bourgeois morals by writing unusual (modern) narratives and through erotic adventures, among which his attachment to the professor can be interpreted as a suppressed homosexual inclination. In the desire for a different identity, the professor joins his pupil (as his antipode) on alcohol fuelled erotic journeys, where the theme of dualism and the title of the novel point to what it has in common with Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932).⁵ In that French work, also a mixture of picaresque novel and Bildungsroman, Bardamu (a traveller and the main protagonist) imitates Robinson, his travelling companion, but at the same time fears, hates and avoids him. The ambivalence of dualism differs between the two novels, for Tajsji is led by a vitalist will to strength⁶ as in lines , "To live! That is the cry! / To live in spite of everything, above everything, to live! To forget

everything!” (Zupan *Potovanje* 57) and rebellion, given meaning by sensual beauty.

Postmodernism could be described as the second shift in the contemporary Slovene novel, but I did not mention it at the beginning of my paper and I will not go into this new literary direction in the 1970s in any detail here since it did not influence the two novels that I shall present below. I prefer to discuss literature at the end of the century, connected with a number of social tremors, such as the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the appearance of the new Slovene state, and membership of the EU and NATO. These changes are labelled by the terms post-Yugoslav, post-communist, post-independence, transition and post-modern literature, as well as literary eclecticism, new emotionality and transrealism. Among these sociological, culturological and literary labels, the ones that best define the specificities of the Slovene novel in this short period of time are the last three: literary eclecticism, new emotionality and transrealism. The first expression embraces findings about the lack of unity of the latest Slovene literature or rather the complex of different currents, tendencies, directions, groups, individuals and poetics, while the second covers the common features of texts with regard to the formation of personal identity and a new type of emotional literary subject. The third term — transrealism — referring to the new literary current following post-modernism is a possible way of describing the phenomena visible in Slovene literature since 1990 as facets of post-realism: the prevalence of realistic technique, method or style, and a link to the previous tendency within European realism, renewed through a new position for the literary subject, i.e. new emotionalism.

In the final decade of the 20th century the novel that stands out as most different is *Filio is Not at Home* (1990), by writer, poet and actor Berta Bojetu-Boeta (1946–1997). Where does its otherness lie? The very choice of the genre of dystopia, which is not an established one in Slovenia (although right at the end of the 20th century five Slovene dystopian novels appeared), points to the special sensitivity with which the author reflected the sense of apocalypse at the end of the century, marked by fear at the disintegration of the old state, the possibility of war as its consequence (as in Bosnia) and unease at all the other social changes taking place. As her narrative model Berta Bojetu took a modified traditional novel, but enriched it with generic syncretism, an allegorical structure and symbolism; *Filio is Not at Home* is a fusion of dystopian, psychological, erotic, socio-critical and allegorical novel. The main setting for the events is an island, the established meaning of which (isolation from the world, inaccessibility, lack of openness) becomes a symbol of totalitarianism. The dystopian message about the harmfulness of technical advance that wants to change people into machines is compressed

by Bojetu into a truth about the damage caused by any kind of violence to the individual, which makes her novel different from the usual European dystopia. The very absence of the literatisation of certain ideas (such as Huxley's criticism of behaviourism and psychoanalysis in *Brave New World* and *Island*) differentiates Bojetu from other dystopian writers and her characters are not bearers of technical ideas (as in Zamyatin's *We* or Orwell's *1984*), but rather the main evil originates from the social system itself and from dysfunctional families, not from technical inventions. In her whole literary oeuvre, not only in this work, the author uncovers the world as a place of violence, in which the most important relationship is that between man and woman. She offered a vision of the "right" path — the connectedness of (not the distance between) the male and female principles, which the author symbolically marked with the name of her main character. For Filio (in Italian "figlio") means son and this common name became the name of the main heroine.

An allegorical and symbolic reading of *Filio is Not at Home* undermines the established binary male and female principle: the female in women and men is eternally longing, its unrealisability speaks through the symbolism of the bird, the house and rape. Bojetu does not condemn the male sex, but the prevailing principle that assigns to it extremely destructive properties: dominance and the aggression connected with it, parvenuism, materialism, the preference of rationality over emotionality and so on. The positive aspects of the "masculine" principle (such as courage, action, creativity, pride, overcoming monotony) represent a sharp alternative to the despised determinants of the "feminine" principle: resignation to one's fate, passivity, non-sublimated instinct, persistence in everyday monotony. Of all the symbols, the most frequent is the bird, the symbol of cagedness, conventionality and lack of innovation; in the image of the bird Filio sees her psychological burden, men and almost all women. The child rulers in particular, because of their uniform (a tight blouse with short sleeves, a short skirt gathered at the waist; thick stockings in soft, thin slippers; an untied head scarf) and appearance (thin, aged hands; a sharp profile with a long, thin nose and neck; a high forehead, baldness), are reminiscent of large, dangerous birds and almost all the groups scenes on the island are connected with bird images. Various symbols balance the relationship of the literary and the didactic in the novel with considerably more success than in classical European dystopias, although the presence of didactic elements in such works as novels of ideas or thesis novels is not at all surprising, for in the dystopian novel the main hero is always an idea. Thus Huxley referred to his novel *Brave New World* as a fable, that is a story with an overt moral purpose⁷,

for he did not see it only as a work of literature, but also as a means of expressing general philosophical, religious or social ideas.

Symbolism and didacticism are also combined in the role of woman who, as in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*⁸, is reduced to a womb. Both writers place utopian attempts to do away with the family at the heart of their novel, whereas in other European dystopias it is only one of the themes of alienation. In this way they radicalise Plato's idea that women's equality⁸ could be achieved by doing away with the family (but his proposal for controlled sexual relations also conceals a desire to root out personal interests, which would lead to a totalitarian society). The two authors rejected the one dimensional role of women in dystopias: self-sacrificing wives, daughters and lovers who are companions to clever men, dreaming clairvoyants. They ironize the stereotype of women in the kitchen, the salon or the bedroom — their merely decorative role. They do not preserve their heroines from pressures in a revolutionary way, but retain the generic traumatic tension. Attentive listeners to what is absent or hidden, they weave into their description of social sadism minimalist descriptions of domestic life, where female vitalism takes on a metaphysical scope. It is no coincidence that Berta Bojetu chose the dystopia as the main genre for her novels (the work discussed here was followed in 1995 by the dystopian *Bird House*). In the 1990s, a time of political change in Slovenia, she joined the wave of other dystopian novels that appeared during this transitional period. Her message was clear: the imaginary island warned of social errors, the grotesque struggle of the main protagonist was intended to awaken awareness of the importance of individualism and the clear references to the worst effects of violence (the real war in former Yugoslavia) was meant to shock readers into condemning or even preventing any kind of sadism. In its engagement and advocacy of activism her novel is similar to Zupan's *Minuet for Guitar*. The next novel I shall discuss, by Lojze Kovačič's *Childhood Things*, which appeared in the new century, is easier to compare with Zupan's *Journey to the End of Spring*. Although the two works are very different, autobiography plays a key role in both of them: Zupan and Kovačič are the two writers that attracted most attention to the Slovene autobiographical novel.

The novel *Childhood Things* (2003) by Lojze Kovačič (1928-2004) continues the poetics of the writer's best received novel *Newcomers*, thanks to which he was referred to abroad as the "Slovene Proust." So why did I choose a less well known work? Because of the otherness that is more obvious in *Childhood Things*: Kovačič deepened his constant theme of childhood⁹ and the age of the main character Bubi "stops" at eleven, just before puberty, which brings a number of consequences

such as the special perspective of the child, an unreliable narrator, and enigmatic descriptions which I shall present in more detail below as markers of otherness. Although it is hard to precisely define the autobiographical novel, as De Man's relativisation of autobiography holds: "Autobiography is thus not a genre or mode but a figure of reading and of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" (921), the very technique of this autobiographical novel¹⁰ is different in the way that it blends realist and modernist poetics into an individual style. This can be referred to as realistic modernism, where metaphysical nihilism is discernible in the fluidity of the character, forming in the stream of consciousness as a process, while the connection with realism comes from the detail of precise description and the principle of probability. The term realistic modernism incorporates a number of contradictions at different levels: the story is fragmented and broken, but nevertheless conforms to causal and temporal logic; in contrast with modernist (and in line with realist) logic, space and time are evident and recognisable; and the descriptions are dominated by a sense of alienation and by gaps. Since the autobiographical novel is based on certain facts from real life, some biographical details would be helpful here: the novel describes Kovačič's family in Switzerland, from where they were forced to move to Slovenia in 1938 because the Yugoslav father, out of national pride, did not ask for Swiss citizenship; Bubi's bilingual childhood is overshadowed by the unstable socio-political situation, but although the author was not particularly fond of his parents, the novel comes across as a benevolent reminiscence of the family.

It is no coincidence that Bubi's Swiss period ends in play: they are making Indian costumes when Bubi has to leave the game and go with his family to Slovenia (then in Yugoslavia) which, because of poverty and the Second World War rejection of the Germanic aspect of the Kovačič family (the mother speaks only German, the children struggle to learn Slovene), soon loses its exotic, idyllic and fairy-tale character. The fact that play is at other crucial points placed at the centre of interesting stories is due to the theme of childhood and the child's perspective. This perspective permeates the minute descriptions of a string of objects, people, phenomena and concepts in an apparent non-hierarchical and non-evaluative way — childhood things, and hence the title of the novel. There are thus precise and careful descriptions of things that from an adult point of view are unimportant, but they vitally surround the child's viewpoint: a basket, a mechanical goose in a shop window, gelatine figures, a fountain in the park, a picture in a spa, the River Sava, food. As the title suggests, more than literary characters, the narrative is devoted to things and through their precise descriptions we get to know the whole of Bubi's

childhood and characterisations of the members of the family.

The child's perception influences the child's perspective, which in turn influences the character of the description; in their mimetic nature, descriptions that seem simple and sincere contain a surplus value, particularly in contact with the real and unreal, or the material and the sensory. Euphoric following of reality could be called, using Schelling's term, *identity*, meaning the removal of the division between the sensory and the material world, which is possible in art. Kovačič's principle — to recount the truth — undoubtedly influenced the realistic effect of his descriptions also in his other novels, where the surplus value is the enigmatic structure which compels readers to think actively and also diverts them from aesthetic commitment towards reflection, when what is described is merely hinted at and demands that readers unravel an enigma. The individuality and otherness of Kovačič's descriptions comes more than anything from enigmatic description or description-puzzle, which among the various kinds of description brings to the descriptive structure the most freshness and excitement. In European literature many novels have dealt with childhood in various innovative ways, but it is Kovačič's use of enigmatic description¹¹ that helps his work transcend the traditional novel. An example is an enigmatic description from a novel that does not name the object, phenomenon or person, but simply describes: "Here and there appeared one of the white figures. If it was small, with a lot of hair at the top, I wasn't pleased, because it always stayed there where it appeared, far away. It screamed and vanished" (12). At the same time, an enigmatic description is the most effective equivalent of the child's perspective and of the unreliable narrator, where the object in question is not named, but its appearance is motivated by visibility, by the alienating effect and the sense of amazement that extends the reader's reception or makes it more difficult (Zupan Sosič, "Potepanje" 149). In unravelling the enigmatic description, we are dependent on the child Bubi, the main character, whose age varies from newborn to teenager, his precise description and the child's lack of awareness.

At the narrative level, the unreliable narrator best captures the child's perspective, which offers a child's incomplete understanding and naivety. The unreliable narrator is the one whose narrative or commentary we doubt because of different sources of unreliability: the narrator's limited knowledge, personal involvement or a questionable framework of values. The choice of the child Bubi brings to the narrative a particular subjectivity coloured by ambivalence: on the one hand the childishness of the child's perspective alienates and relativises the narrative, on the other the realistic descriptions with a hint of autobiography make

it more convincing and justified. In Kovačič's novel revealing the mechanism of memory is similar to that in Nathalie Sarraute's *Childhood* (1983): Kovačič's memory functions as an accumulation of descriptions of things, people and events, while Sarraute awakens it through "key" words or expressions known as tropisms. Despite their different poetics, the two novels have common characteristics, including shared themes of childhood, love, friendship, individuality, creativity, empathy, art, native land, native language and education, whilst Bubi and Natasha have in common individuality, a strong personality, a vivid imagination, growing up in a bilingual environment, being indelibly marked by conflict between their parents and artistic talent. At the story level rather than the narrative one, Kovačič's novel is also related to Thomas Bernhard's world classic *Childhood* (1975). The protagonists of both have in common their relentless honesty, innovative critical stance, radical provocativeness and consistent non-conformism. In fact, these three characteristics can be used to describe the otherness of the protagonists of all three novels discussed here¹², just as it defines the individualists who with a distinct approach to novel writing in Slovenia (as well as abroad) still trigger positive responses among readers and critics.

Notes

1. Peggy Kamuf. "Fiction and the Experience of the Other." *The Question of Literature. The Place of the Literary in Contemporary Theory*. Ed. Elizabeth Beaumont Bisseli. Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2002. 156-174.

2. The canon as a collection of evaluated, recognised and model texts, arranged with regard to the quality of representative literary examples, was first questioned by feminist and post-cultural critics and cultural studies, primarily in relation to sexual identity and the Western tradition, summarised in the acronym DWEM (dead white European males). Since the creation of a canon is also a biased elitisation of specific texts — in the past its creation was largely a male domain and dominated by Western culture on the axis Paris-London-New York — it is necessary to keep examining it critically and supplementing it with overlooked, particularly minority literatures, which also includes Slovene literature. In this context I would like to mention a number of contemporary Slovene novels which due to lack of space I was unable to include in my discussion, but which are of high quality and in line with various literary criteria belong at the very peak of Slovene (and probably world) novel writing: Drago Jančar, *Galley Slave*; Ciril Kosmač, *Spring Day*; Lojze Kovačič, *Newcomers*; Maruša Krese, *That I Am Afraid*; Florjan Lipuš, *Boštjan's Flight*; Boris Pahor, *Necropolis*; Dominik Smole, *Black Days and a White Day*; Marko Sosič, *Ballerina, Ballerina*; Suzana Tratnik, *My Name is Damjan*; Vitomil Zupan, *Minuet*

for Guitar.

3. Literary critics have drawn attention to the flirtation with Miller's prose primarily in relation to the novel *Playing with the Devil's Tail*. When exactly Zupan read Miller's work is not known, but that he read it in the original language can be concluded from his statements about frantically learning foreign languages. At an early stage (after 1932, when he travelled round the world), he taught himself French, English and Italian because he did not trust translations and because he did not want to get to know foreign literature through the delayed process of translation. He said himself (Pibernik 30) that among foreign authors he highly valued Henry Miller, especially the trilogy *Nexus-Plexus-Sexus*, and he explicitly mentions the author in *Leviathan* and *The Comedy of Human Tissue*. See Pibernik France, *Čas romana*, (Ljubljana: CZ, 1986). See also Alojzija Zupan Sosič, "Potepanje po pomladi" (spremna beseda). Vitomil Zupan: *Potovanje na konec pomladi*. Ljubljana: eBesede, 2014. 171-190.

4. Zupan's metaphysical approach to sexuality and art is reminiscent of Freud's understanding of art. Here I have in mind primarily Freud's idea of the bridging effect of art, which steers a way between the two principles of comfort and realism. Freud explains these as opposite poles in a state of constant tension. Man primarily leans towards the first, but upbringing teaches respect for the principle of reality. Freud believed that the repression of civilisation dictated oscillation between the two principles, preventing freedom of the instincts.

5. In his autobiographical novels, particularly *The Comedy of Human Tissue*, Zupan mentions the influence of Bernanos, Céline, Malraux, Sartre and Camus, although we do not know exactly when he read these authors. Kermauner (241) is convinced that Zupan read Gide, Céline and Kafka before 1940. See Taras Kermauner. *Družbena razveza. Sociološko in etično naravnani eseji o povojni slovenski prozi*. (Ljubljana: CZ, 1982).

6. The vital will is more intense in erotic imperatives, which are also existential ones: "To live! That is the cry! / To live in spite of everything, above everything, to live! To forget everything!" (Zupan *Potovanje* 57) Although in Zupan's novel sensuality develops from a nihilistic position, its vital optimism swears by hedonism, whereas Céline's metaphysical nihilism prevents the flourishing of the sensual. In contrast to Zupan's two main characters, Céline's hero does not accept the existentialist solution of a new humanism, but expires in lucid resignation and social pessimism, whereas, in spite of its picaresqueness and adventurism, Zupan's novel contains the idea of the "right ethical stance" of the individual and of society. See Nicholas Hewitt. *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*. Ed. Peter France. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 139-140. See also Wicks, Ulrich. "The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach." *PMLA (Publications of the Modern Language Association of America)* 2 (1974): 240-249. See also Van der Will, Wilfried. "Aspects of the Neo-Picaresque in Twentieth-century German Literature." *New Comparison* 11 (1991): 24-40 (*Special Section: The Picaresque*).

7. Atwood writes about overt moral intention in a comment on *Woman on the Edge of Time*,

when she asserts that “Utopias are products of the moral rather than the literary sense” and that, because of political and social commentaries, they contain ever stronger didactic elements. They should be read with at least a partial knowledge of the social context at the time when the dystopia arose for the reader to be able to discern certain special characteristics of the text. See Coral Ann Howells. *The Handmaid’s Tale. York Notes* (Longman Literature Guide). (London: York Press, 1998)50. See also Routh, Michael. *Brave New World. York Notes* (Longman Literature Guide). London: York Press, 1982.

8. The stereotypical dystopian novel was fundamentally transformed by the publication of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* in 1985 (Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *Encyclopedia of Utopian Literature*. California: ABC – Clio Literary Companion, 1995). Considering that *Filjo is Not at Home* was written at roughly the same time (and published a few years later), I feel justified in claiming that Bojetu’s contribution to the European-American utopian genre is equally significant and in its apocalyptic sexual antagonisms even more universal, but in the encyclopaedias and discussions it is sadly unacknowledged due to the already mentioned problem of Slovenes as a small nation or rather smallness in the context of world literature.

9. Even in More’s *Utopia* women work outside the home, but because of the strict social hierarchy they are not equal. Neither utopian solution (the abolition of the family or a more just social hierarchy) offered women a better social position. An optimistic vision was offered only by an anonymous author (under the pseudonym Daughter of Eve) in *A Women’s Utopia*, where a solution is offered to dealing with the difference in knowledge through a better education system. See Sargent Lyman Tower. “Women in Utopia.” *Comparative Literary Studies* 4 (1973): 302-310.

10. In a number of places Lojze Kovačič emphasised the centrality of the theme of childhood, for instance in the book *The Time of the Novel* by Pibernik France (*Čas romana*), 1986: 96): “Every writer chooses a particular age of the human creature through which to narrate. This is an important question, decisive, which ideal of a person and mankind sleeps within you, what beauty you draw from the human species, what kind of person you would like to have. At the same time this means a choice of aesthetics and poetics, a way of thinking, mystery, attractiveness. On the surface, nothing was easier for me than choosing as the weapon I forged against the world my own ten-year-old human life.” About unreliable narrator see Rimmon-Kenan, Slomith. *Narrative Fiction*. Contemporary Poetics. London: Routledge, 1999⁷.

11. It is hard to precisely define the autobiographical novel since even autobiography is an almost undefinable concept and so there are many definitions and labels. Lejeune’s(Lejeune, Philippe. *Le pacte autobiographique*. Paris: Seuil, 1975) expression autobiographical contract is widely accepted; this includes first person narrative, retrospectiveness, the identity of the narrator, the central character and the referential self.

12. Enigmatic description was systematically explained by the Polish theoretician Janusz Sławinski (O opisu.” *Republika* 6 (1984): 101-111) as a category which is the opposite of the

(more usual) synoptic description.

13. The article is translated by David Limon. The authors acknowledge the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding No. P6-0265).

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