

» Between Fear, Truth and Fate Literary Accounts of (Post)War Violence in the Time of Slovenian Democracy

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In spite of civilization's (seeming) progress, violence remains a constant in all societies and thus a subject for art, especially literature. 1989 marked a historical turning-point primarily for those states that had been behind the Iron Curtain, but it was also a turning-point for other states that had existed under various dictatorships. With the change in political systems, many authors devoted themselves to problematic aspects of the Second World War and the system that immediately followed it; no longer were themes like violence, murders, expropriation, persecution and stage trials taboo topics. In Slovenia, such texts were created already in the 1980s by the writers Branko Hofman, Igor Torkar, Drago Jančar and others. Slovenian literature that concerns itself with the former regime can be divided into three categories: 1) Texts that were created entirely after 1989, e.g. by Lev Detela, Alojz Rebula, Drago Jančar and Tone Brulc.¹ 2) Texts by Slovenian emigrant writers originally published outside Slovenia and not re-published in Slovenia until after 1989, e.g. by Frank Bükvič, Zorko Simčič, Franc Sodja.² 3) Previously censored literature, e.g. by Angela Vode.³

1 Cf. Lev Detela, *Dunaj na poštni znamki* (Vienna on a postage stamp, 2009); Alojz Rebula, *Ob babilonski reki* (By the River of Babylon, 2007), *Skrivnost kostanjevega gazda* (The Secret of the Chestnut Wood, 2010); Drago Jančar, short stories in the 1980s, the novel *To noč sem jo videl* (I Saw her, that Night, 2010); Tone Brulc, *Judeževi groši* (Jewish Groschens).

2 Cf. Frank Bükvič's *Vojna in revolucija* (War and Revolution, 1990); Zorko Simčič's *Človek na obeh straneh stene* (A Man on Both Sides of the Wall, Buenos Aires, 1957; Ljubljana, 1991), *Poslednji deseti bratje* (The Last Tenth Brothers, Ljubljana 2012); Franc Sodja, *Pisma mrtvemu bratu* (Letter to a Dead Brother, 1991).

3 Cf. Angela Vode's *Skriti spomin* (Hidden Memory, 2004).

This article examines four literary works: Drago Jančar's novel *To noč sem jo videl*, Zorko Simčič's novels *Človek na obeh straneh stene* and *Poslednji deseti bratje* and Angela Vode's autobiographical novel *Skriti spomin*. Looking back on the cruel period of the Second World War – times when even those who lived aloofly on the margins of historical turmoil were struck by violence – Jančar relates the tragic narrative of a young bourgeois woman from Ljubljana. Zorko Simčič, meanwhile, portrays an alienated Slovenian political emigrant who feels at home neither in Slovenia nor in Argentina, the land he emigrated to after the Second World War. He constantly revisits the past in hopes of discovering the complicated truth about himself. Angela Vode's novel, which was not published until after her death, brings to light memories of her membership in the Communist Party as well as of the period of her exclusion and complete social isolation. Rather than concentrating on the causes of violence, this article focuses primarily on individual spiritual experiences of war's violence and the protagonists' responses to that violence.

Recorded experiences of the Second World War and the post-War period gave rise to literary narratives during the time of Slovenian democracy. While the works explored here depict various fates, all of the main protagonists are united by the experience of violence and pressure and by having confronted fear both during and after the War. Literary authors attempt to unveil another truth from this period, one which was suppressed for decades after 1945. Only after Slovenian independence in 1991 could these works be published. The main characters in the selected literary works were persecuted because they allied themselves with the "wrong" people even as they tried to live apolitical lives in the winds of war (in the case of Jančar's novel); in Simčič's novels, refugees and exiles who feel excluded, isolated, and stigmatised in their new environment long to return to the homeland, thereby confronting their fear and resignation.⁴

⁴ For reasons of space, this paper does not include an analysis of the remaining works mentioned above, notably I will endeavour to publish on them in another article.

» Love and Violence in Drago Jančar's Novel *To noč sem jo videl*

In the novel *To noč sem jo videl* Drago Jančar (1948, Maribor)⁵ depicts the wealthy bourgeois woman Veronika Zarnik and her life before and especially during the Second World War.⁶ In writing this story, in which he was not directly involved, Jančar was inspired especially by empathy and compassion. (He based his writing on a 2006 interview the literary historian and ethnologist Marija Cvetek had with Vilma Mlakar, the former maid at Strmol Manor, who had witnessed the relevant events from the life of Marija Ksenija Hribar – the real-life model for the fictional Veronika Zarnik). One sleepless night, Jančar pondered the fate of the owners of Strmol Manor, a fate known from stories as well as historical sources, and posed the agonizing question of why a woman had to lose her life in such a brutal manner, for there was neither motif nor reason for the murder. Jančar asked himself, “kakšen hudičev čas je bil to, da je bilo človeško življenje tako malo vredno?”⁷ (Leiler 2010:8)

The novel unveils an unusual love story. Every one of Veronika's life decisions is rooted in a love that does not concern itself with social norms during a time when every person was required to take sides openly. In 1937 Veronika is prompted by love to flee from her husband to her lover Stevo in the Serbian town of Vranje, only to return to her husband, who receives her with love and understanding. The German doctor Horst, who pays visits to Strmol Manor, also falls in love with Veronika, but after her affair with Stevo Veronika remains faithful to her husband, albeit while remaining fond of and showing empathy towards all individuals she encounters. She is imbued with a spontaneous, courageous, trusting, unceasing love for life, which seems to protect her from becoming entraped in the winds of war when people, with very few exceptions, are benign-

5 Drago Jančar is one of the leading Slovenian writers; his works have been translated into more than 20 languages, and he is also one of the most insightful socially critical thinkers in Slovenia.

6 Veronika Zarnik is the writer's name for Marija Ksenija Hribar (1905–1944), the mistress of Strmol Manor. As Vilma Mlakar, who was the maid at Strmol Manor, recalls, she was an intelligent, peaceful, friendly and simple woman who was admired by all. A keen athlete, she drove a car, and was in fact the first Yugoslav woman with a pilot's licence. She was educated in Ljubljana and Berlin, where she studied languages (Cvetek 2006:240).

7 “What monstrous times were those that human life was of such little worth?” [All translations by Jason Blake.]

ted especially by mistrust and fear. This is why the reader is especially stirred by the cruel deaths of the married couple at the novel's conclusion. The deaths are a rather faithful record of a real occurrence recorded in the interview with Vilma Mlakar. The dialectic of the individual, who wishes only to survive, and of fate, which prevents her from doing so, is concentrated into five stories that reveal various truths about Veronika's fate. Veronika's all-embracing love is shattered by a violent death, by "*eros-thanatos v sicer velikokrat videni, a obenem vselej novi, presunljivi podobi*"⁸ (Virk 2010:11).

From the very outset of his literary attempt to recreate the past, Jančar was aware that he was not only risking the accusation that he was misrepresenting the past, but also that his conscious literary reconstruction had a sort of quasi-documentary quality. It is for this reason that he opted for the subjective principle (Leiler 2010:9), employing for his novel the effective approach of the so-called "Rashomon structure", which means that rather than judging a narrated occurrence himself – he presents a variety of different perspectives on a single event, thereby allowing the reader to judge. Through the use of this strategy Jančar does not set himself on one side or the other. He is not interested in "abstract history" of great events, the history of structures, the history of winners or losers, but in "the history of everyday life" (Virk 2010:11). The reader senses that in the novel Jančar does not speak of a right or wrong side in the chaos of the Second World War in Slovenia; instead, he speaks of individuals who merely wanted to live during the utterly incongruous times of a cruel war. Jančar's literary strength does not evolve from a politically or ideologically tinged idea of the "proper" historical truth. Rather, like Balzac writing in the Restoration period in France, he strives for a neutral and "metaphysical" truth by describing the time of the Second World War from the vantage points of many social layers and functions as well as from various ideological viewpoints and world views (ebd.).

In the novel he uses the memories, or rather perspectives, of five secondary characters to unveil the story of the main protagonist, the lovely, lively Veronika. The heroine is faithfully modelled on the former lady of the Strmol Manor, Ksenija Hribar, whom the Partisans killed because they unjustly sus-

⁸ "Eros-Thanatos in an often-seen, but nevertheless new, heart-rending form".

pected her of collaboration.⁹ Veronika herself never speaks, and yet the reader constantly senses that she is the focal point of the story.

The first truth about Veronika is revealed by her former riding instructor, her lover Stevo, a Serbian officer of the Royal Army and Chetnik commander whom she met in 1937 during his military service in Ljubljana (and who was ordered by his superiors to give her riding lessons). A passionate love developed and Veronika decided to leave her husband and her comfortable life to depart for Stevo's town of Vranje in Serbia. However, after one year she decided to return to her husband, who had since purchased the Podgorje manor house in the region of Upper Carniola. The Serbian officer remembers Veronika as a woman who incessantly longs for love as the central meaning of her life. She is prepared to sacrifice all material security for love, and to leave people she had been close to all her life, even her beloved mother.

In the novel's second story, Veronika's mother unveils another image of Veronika and thus supplements the truth about her. She speaks about Veronika a few years later, when her daughter is no longer there, since she disappeared from the estate in early January, 1944. The mother sits waiting at the window in hopes of seeing the face of her Veronika. Has Stevo taken her away to Vranje? Maybe she and Leo have secretly departed for Italy? Or to France, where Leo knows some people? Or to Switzerland, where many others went? She sees Veronika in the guise of other women, and wanders about the house constantly ruminating on past events.

The German Horst, who was selected to be the personal doctor at the Zarniks' estate, is the third to illuminate a truth about Veronika. Although he knows nothing specific, he suspects that she has died and he asks himself why precisely she had to die, she who had wanted only to live in harmony with herself, and who only wanted to comprehend the people around her (Jančar 2011:108). Horst already knows the answer: the reality of that time called for and respected only those who, whether alive or dead, had been prepared to fight or even to sac-

⁹ A few decades ago it would not have been possible to publish such a book because until the 1980s the dominant view in Slovenian literature – and about a decade longer in Slovenian history – regarded without exception the national liberation struggle and the revolution during the Second World War only positively; anything else that happened during the War was viewed negatively. Not until the 1980s did the circumstances in Slovenia begin to change (cf. novels by Jože Snoj, Marjan Rožanc, Lojze Kovačič, and others) (Virk 2010:10).

rifice themselves for communal ideas; that is how both the eventual winners and the losers thought. Nobody valued individuals who merely wanted to live. Such was not sufficient during those times. Only with difficulty can the doctor admit that one of the possible main causes for Veronika's death was her consorting with him, and deep down he is aware that the Partisans interpreted Veronika's consorting with German officers to be an act of treason.

With each story, Jančar increases the narrative tension as he inches towards revealing the final truth about Veronika's destiny. In the fourth narrative, Veronika's maid Joži recalls the day armed Partisans dragged the young woman and her husband from their estate. When she heard them, it became clear to her that the woman had been betrayed by Jeranek or by the gardener, since each had known that German officers frequented the manor and that Veronika, who had studied in Berlin, maintained contact with friends from her university days.¹⁰ The maid recalls that Jeranek had taken to speaking poorly about Veronika, to pointing out that she enjoyed German company, and also to stating how much that had surprised and angered him. When she saw the master and the mistress uncharacteristically dressed in hiking boots, she knew the matter was serious. Because all of the telephone lines had been cut she no longer saw a way out for them and began to cry uncontrollably. When the Partisans took them away, she tried to console Veronika's mother. Later she cared for the mother who waited so anxiously for her daughter, sitting at the window and staring into the distance.

The dynamic conclusion of the story comes in the fifth narrative, when the truth of Veronika's disappearance is revealed. It is Jeranek who confesses the dark details about his shameful act.¹¹ As an embittered young man, who had been unrequitedly in love with Veronika, he was unable to bear that she was unattainable for him and that she was on good terms with the German doctor

¹⁰ In the chapter *Obiski na gradu (Visits to the Castle)*, Marija Cvetek (according to Vilma's account) states that Dr. Otto Haus liked to visit Strmol. During the war he was conscripted into the army as a military doctor, and he would visit the castle in a German uniform with the highest rank (Cvetek 2006: 244).

¹¹ In the chapter *Aretacija in likvidacija zakoncev Hribar Kronika (Arrest and Liquidation of the Hribar Chronicle)* it is reported that during bitter winter, at around seven p.m. on January 3, 1944, some ten Partisans arrived at the Castle. The secret police ("vosovci") who belonged to the Kokriški detachment drove the master and his wife in the deep snow towards Štefanji Gora and killed them. Tone Umnik (who is cited by Marija Cvetek among "oral sources" [252]) told Marija Cvetek about the beastly torturing of the Hribar couple; Ksenija was allegedly raped by all ten members of the vosovci who were present. Though this crime echoed among the people, they had trouble believing it (249).

Horst; he began to refer to her as a German prostitute. Decades later, now an ancient Partisan, he admits that it was he who informed the Partisans about Veronika's contact with the leading figures of the German administration. This prompted the Partisans to begin observing and collecting information about the Zarniks. Without being fully aware of the consequences of his actions, Jeranek later realized that he had got himself trapped in a net from which he could not disentangle himself – his survival hinged on his constantly denouncing his masters, until the fateful night in 1944 when the Partisans arrived at the estate and carried out their final action against the couple. Jeranek felt tortured by his behaviour, though he never suspected it would lead to Veronika's death. Unable to help her, he experienced a horrific trauma and was panged by guilt.

Through the figure of Jeranek Jančar sensitively embodies a fundamental human dilemma of the time. He depicts Jeranek as a sensitive being who, in circumstances where fear reigns, struggles with himself and only gradually becomes properly aware of his great influence – namely, that he has decided on the life and death of those who are close to him. No one had coerced him into betraying Veronika. Utterly free, he willingly decides to denounce her – even if he is not initially aware of the great responsibility his decision entails. But his choice begins to weigh increasingly on him; because he realizes that he chose wrongly, he is overcome by an existential sense of fear, anguish, horror and even self-disgust. Because Jeranek was already aware of the extreme consequences of his denunciation, he did not want to participate in the arrest of the couple, aside from standing guard. He was not present when, one by one, the Partisans raped Veronika, before killing the couple. However, the Jewish character remains forever burdened with the difficult awareness that he, as a denouncer, is the main guilty party for the death of his benefactors.

Thematically, Jančar's novel also revolves around the personally-coloured problematic of relations between the person as an individual and the person as an active participant in historical events. This especially problematic relationship is exacerbated through the main hero Veronika. As Jančar has emphasised, "naivnost, nedorečenost, morda tudi površnost v spletu zgodovinskih in osebnih okoliščin"¹² leads her closer to violence (Leiler 2010:9). Veronika's freethin-

12 "naivety, vagueness, perhaps also her sloppiness in the confusion of historical and personal surroundings".

king behaviour unwittingly attracts the desires of men, while her luxurious life, which is something she took for granted, gives rise to “zavist podložnikov in jezo revolucionarjev”¹³ (ibd.). Veronika’s character epitomises man’s historical bond as well as his existence and humanity, which is not merely contingent on history; the character of Jeranek, meanwhile, emphasises the themes of ethnic conflict, deciding between personal conscience and unconditional “revolutionary” obedience.

» **Confessions of a Political Refugee in Zorko Simčič’s Novel *Človek na obeh straneh stene***

The six years of the Second World War produced the largest manslaughter in history, claiming 45 million casualties (Virk 1996:15); it also drove an astonishing number of people from home, including scientists, authors and other intellectuals, among them, the Slovenian author Zorko Simčič (1921, Maribor). His memories of his departure from the homeland are most evidently recorded in two of his novels: *Človek na obeh straneh stene*, which he wrote already in 1957 in Argentina and which was re-published in Slovenia after independence in 1991; and *Poslednji deseti bratje* (2012, Ljubljana). Whereas Simčič’s first novel focuses on the fate of an individual refugee, the second novel reveals the collective memory of several Slovenian emigrants dispersed over various continents. The theme of these works is tightly linked to the author’s personal experience as a refugee and his life in exile.¹⁴

Simčič’s half-century exile in Argentina was linked to the Communists’ seizure of power in Slovenia. Though he initially fled because he feared for his life, later he remained abroad because he did not want to live under the regime

13 “the envy of her subjects and the anger of the revolutionaries”.

14 Simčič was born in 1921 in Maribor, where he finished the lower grammar school before enrolling in teacher’s school, from which he graduated in Ljubljana during the War. In 1941 he was in an Italian concentration camp; after the War he lived and worked in Carinthia and Trieste until 1948. In 1948 he arrived in Buenos Aires (Argentina) with other emigrants.

that was responsible for the deaths of his two brothers, who had been members of the Home Guard. His frequent, and for the most part involuntary, change of residences left deep traces in him; he became a man of broad horizons and of originality, “ki želi do vsega obdržati kritično distanco in iz nje snovati vrednotenje sveta in življenja. Življenjska usoda mu ni dovolila razmaha čustvenosti.”¹⁵ (Pogačnik 1999:184) It was, however, difficult for him to write in a foreign land, because he felt alone and because he felt that his works did not find resonance. Nevertheless, in Argentina he became the cultural catalyst for the Slovenian community – a cultural organizer, the editor of *Meddobje*, Slovenian emigrants’ central cultural magazine, and a lecturer in Slovenian at the tertiary level. He stayed there until 1994, when he returned to a now-democratic Slovenia.

In the 1950s Zorko Simčič wrote that the weight of writing is no longer based on heroic acts or external factors, but on psychological matters that arise in the hero’s relation to himself, or between him and society. The new sensibility, consistent with the new experiences and thematic points of departure, gave rise to a new manner of creating literature. In the case of Simčič, this new manner reflected itself in the transition from describing people and actions to putting profiles to use (192). His novel *Človek na obeh straneh stene* exhibits a modern type of prose, as in it we find narrative techniques such as internal monologue, stream of consciousness, free association, retrospection and introspection, and fragmentation.¹⁶

The main protagonist of Simčič’s novel is an anti-hero. He is given to painful self-enquiry, which leads him to conclude that there is no way out and that, given the absurdity of life, all he can do is keep going. The background of this mind-set is the main premise of Albert Camus’ works *The Stranger* and *The Plague* and the philosophy of the absurd, which comes “iz racionalne ugotovitve o absolutni nesmiselnosti človekovega bivanja”¹⁷ (195). In the novel Simčič depicts a man who, aware of this weighty senselessness, nevertheless does not

15 “one who wants to keep a critical distance towards everything and from that create an evaluation of the world and life. His fate in life did not allow him the buoyancy of sentimentality.”

16 Simčič included modern literary creative techniques already in *Odhajene stopinje* (*Departing Footsteps*), when he wrote that nothing one of the main characters did was in fact of his own volition. It was on the same basis – namely, that a man is left solitary so that something will happen to him – that he wrote the novel *Človek na obeh straneh stene*. Though this new approach imported a new sensibility into Slovenian literature, critics were dismissive of his work.

17 “From the rational conclusion about the absolute senselessness of human existence”.

despair. The author realises that such an anti-hero – who is marked by scepticism, by both intellectual and moral relativism, and who tends to cosmopolitanism – is not far removed from many people of that time back in the homeland. Simčič himself experienced, at least partially, the unsustainable position of a “man on both sides of the wall” and he understood it as a human feeling.

The hero of *Človek na obeh straneh stene* has neither a name nor a concrete social identity. The story’s temporal frame is limited to a late Saturday afternoon, the same night and early the next morning, when strange things happen to him, both in his conscience and in the memory through which the retrospective part of the story is presented. It is through this memory that the civil war echoes, though the war is not the main theme of the novel. The main theme is man’s alienation in the modern world. The author subtly describes the feelings of fear and distrust that the emigrant experiences in a foreign land, but also in contact with people from his homeland.

The novel reveals the tragic experience of a refugee who thinks that his stigmatisation is a moral condemnation; in a foreign country, he is doomed to isolation and social exclusion. He wonders whether his fate of exclusion, exile and stigmatisation has a deeper sense or whether it is merely a coincidence brought about by the cogs of history. The novel describes the life of a Slovenian political emigrant – of a nameless man who, after the end of the War and the Communists’ rise to power, manages to escape via Trieste to Argentina. Matters are complicated when it is revealed that he had been involved in a love affair with a suspected Communist agent. The agent, after she finds out that he is going back to his wife, intends to kill him but changes her mind at the last minute. Through exile the author addresses the universal theme of foreignness and delves into the emotional and mental effects of exile an emigrant experiences. After several years of living abroad in a maelstrom of people he feels alien and recognises that he belongs elsewhere, that he belongs to the innumerable war refugees – “največji, kar jih je katerakoli vojna doslej zlila po svetu”¹⁸ (Simčič 1999:41–42).

Simčič describes how the experience of war and emigration completely changes the refugee. Nothing remains of the man he had previously been, with the exception of a few memories. The times of war and exile have birthed a new,

18 “the most that any war had ever poured out around the world”.

unsettled being who is aware of the vanity of everything and has held a mirror up to the impermanence of his personal convictions, desires and seeking. Though not altered on the outside, he feels “kakor da mu je čarovna kapljica prišla v žile in ga spremenila do zadnjega vlakna”¹⁹ (ibid.). As if it were too painful to talk about his great ache, he never discusses this personality change with his oldest acquaintances. And yet he senses that he will never be able to set down roots in the new land; it is as if he had once been imprinted with an “invisible stamp” and that he will always be separated from the others.

The exiles never speak with each other of how their old friendships from overseas are fading and disappearing, and neither do they speak of how their native words are disappearing from their speech. Even the “invisible stamp” by means of which they separate themselves from others is becoming less evident. The emigrant, moreover, feels that the locals in the foreign land occasionally take him for one of their own and that, in spite of having a different heritage, he is gradually assimilating with those others. But at base he remains aware that he will always be a stranger among them – a man with two foreign lands and no homeland. For him the past becomes a period “na oni strani črte”²⁰ (43). He feels a desire to flee from others and mix among the unmarked, if only for one day, for one hour. He wishes to forget everything that has kneaded him into what he is, everything that has put him where he is. At the same time, he knows that he cannot escape from himself and that he will always be alone on a lonely path.

In the novel, being a refugee is also associated with social degradation, with a loss of employment. The loss of employment when abroad is severe, especially for an older worker; for the hero, being old in the large city is like being unfree. And the hero experiences this lack of freedom as the greatest injustice (66). Limited opportunities for contact with home and with friends, months and years of waiting for a return that are imbued with dark foreboding of insatiable hope for a re-uniting with the homeland and people from the homeland, painful moving from one place to another in search of any sort of employment that will enable survival – all of this can kill the emigrant’s hope and his inalienable right to life. It is little wonder that some emigrants’ lives end in despair.

19 “as if a magic drop had entered into his veins and changed him to the last fibre”.

20 “on the other side of the line”.

The main protagonist senses that he has gone astray also in the world of love. While in Buenos Aires as part of a trade delegation, his former lover Katja searches for him through the mediation of her brother, and wants to meet up with her former lover. The potential meeting with the woman he had betrayed his wife with after the War fills him with unrest. He oscillates between the wish to meet her and the longing to leave for quarters where nobody would even want to begin looking for him. Although tortured by the temptation to meet her, no meeting occurs. Walking pensively along the sidewalk one evening, he hears a car. The author does not state that it is Katja, and yet the reader is clearly given to understand that she is the young woman behind the wheel of the dark car. The hero of the novel, worn out by his weighty thoughts, only hears the vehicle approaching, and “ni imel ne volje ne časa, da bi se obrnil in videl orokavičeno roko z revolverjem.”²¹ (175) His ears begin to ring, and he is in a state of complete weakness. But the car behind him passes him and races towards an overpass. At that point he realizes that Katja would neither be able to nor want to kill him. His exhausted knees give out; that very morning he will board a train going north.

» Lonely Fate in Exile. Simčič's Novel *Poslednji deseti bratje*

In the 716-page novel *Poslednji deseti bratje* (2012), which Simčič spent three decades writing as an emigrant in Buenos Aires and which he further revised after returning to the homeland, the author tells several parallel stories about various refugees and emigrants. In this work, he proves himself to be a careful observer of people of various ages, natures and stations; he also proves himself a fine observer of relationships, a clear writer and an erudite cosmopolitan. He asks himself whether accepting the fate of exile, exclusion, and stigmatisation is also a path towards making amends for the sins of a generation, though he does not provide an answer – he answers by means of further seeking and testimony. All of the characters' destinies are linked at the existential level. He is aware

21 “he has neither the will nor the time to turn around to see a gloved hand with a revolver.”

that many of these people will never meet each other, but they will nevertheless “touch” each other’s lives in a certain manner (Simčič 2012:28). Many an exile feels condemned to a slow death, errantly wandering around the world (40), and he muses that exiles who rove around the world are like birds. And yet he himself feels like a tree, while noting that there is strength in the tree’s static nature, which he lacks. He senses that he lives for the people among whom he is inhabited in Argentina; however, at the same time he – as a victim – is symbolically dying also for those from Slovenia who sent him into the world (75).

The collective fate of Slovenian refugees, who are scattered over various continents in the world, is involuntary life abroad. In the novel, their fate is also symbolically linked – namely, through the old Slavic archetypal story of the tenth offspring. This tradition is not limited to Slovenia, as the figure of the tenth son or daughter exists also among other Slavic, but also Baltic, peoples as well as the Irish. In some nations, meanwhile, a similar tradition is retained for the seventh consecutive child of a single sex (Kropej 2008:145). The tradition states that the tenth brother or sister must leave home to go out into the world, and he or she can only return after seven years. The child becomes an archetypal child – an orphan (147). The fate of this child is to wander through forests and foreign places and when finally, after many years, he or she returns to his native village, nobody recognizes him or her. In his novel Simčič presents Marjetica, a tenth daughter who functions as a linking thread for various sorts of life situations. Thus, throughout the novel the chapters about the tenth one, about Marjetica, serve as a red thread as they depict her arriving in new places and show the changing landscapes around her. She continually asks herself how her mother, father and siblings are faring, whether they are living in peace or whether they are intimidated by Avars. Though she knows that she herself cannot help them, she is able to ask the Slavic deity Svetovit to watch over them (Simčič 2012:273). She meets a tenth brother who tells her that nobody recognizes him, not even his mother. At the same time he tells her not to feel sorry for herself, as that will only cause nuisance for her; and neither should she consider pulling the thread of life. Only through forgetting herself she can save herself; she will have experienced much that is bad, but time will show her that even bad can turn to good (294–295).

Simčič informs the reader that the myth of the tenth offspring, of Marjetica, will outlive the fate of exiles and mark Slovenian historical memory, since some literary characters live longer than people do. Thus, she is like Hamlet, who never existed and yet will survive those who are alive now, or like the character Vida, a young mother who was taken abroad and who appears throughout Slovenian history, inhabiting many literary works from the folk tradition up to the present because it is “usodno povezan z globljo slovensko psihofizično osnovo”²² (380).

The author also delves into the paranoia and fear among the refugees when he describes how they treat someone from the homeland – be he an acquaintance or a schoolmate – if he happens to join them abroad. Never knowing who is who, the refugees become increasingly cautious over time because they cannot tell who is a spy and who a friend. Sometimes the man assumed to be a spy turns out to be an irreplaceable friend, and at other times a person taken to be an old friend is in fact a spy (134). He fears oblivion, observing that after years of exile nobody talks any more about returning to the homeland, for they have lost hope and fallen into pessimism and despair. It seems as though the people, after having consumed a wondrous potion, suddenly forget the years gone by (124–125); bitterly disappointed, they resign themselves to succumbing to their destinies.

Simčič's novel also includes the representation of a rebel, through whom the author sheds light on the tragic destiny of many exiles who were robbed of hope and driven to death while abroad. The rebel cannot bear being a refugee; the thought that he, along with others, must leave home because some fate has decreed it thus seems senseless to him. Whereas his first experience was one of homesickness, this almost agonizing homesickness grows from month to month, until it transforms into despair, the man devours himself and sees nothing else. The fate of the tenth is not a myth but a reality for him. He wants to take fate into his own hands and the narrator fears that this person is capable of inflicting harm upon himself (178).

22 “indelibly linked with the deeper Slovenian psycho-physical basis”.

» *Angela Vode's Skriti spomin*

Any selection of contemporary Slovenian works that focus on World War II and the post-war period would be incomplete without the memoirs of Angela Vode (1892–1985), which appeared posthumously in 2004. Angela Vode lived in circumstances and surroundings that were ideologically supportive of socialism and communism, and she too believed strongly in the ideals of communism. Though she worked spiritedly within the Slovenian Communist Party, ultimately she became a victim of this movement. After being excluded from the party in 1939, she felt somewhat relieved and yet she was continually disturbed by the question “kam naj krenem?”²³ (Vode 2004:80) As Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik writes, Vode spent the length of the occupation collecting food, clothing and money for the interned and their children. In February, 1944 she was arrested and transported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, returning from there in September of the same year. Despite her thirty-seven years of working in the service of the public – in publishing, in volunteer and humanitarian work as well as anti-fascist and feminist efforts – in 1947 a political show trial (the infamous Nagode Trial) sentenced her to twenty years of prison and hard labour, while depriving her of political rights for a period of five years thereafter. Upon release in 1953, she was unable to find employment, and neither was she eligible for a pension or financial reparation; she could not publish or work publicly either. In 1960, after two years of service as a secretary at the Vocational School in Ljubljana, she retired (Milharčič Hladnik 1998:13).

As Vode writes, in her activities she endeavoured to follow truth as a basic guiding rudder, and in this she felt supported by her emotional literary encounters with writers such Ivan Cankar, Fëdor Dostoevskij and Stefan Zweig. But her efforts on behalf of the disadvantaged and the discriminated led to imprisonment and exclusion from society (Vode 2004:7); she was sentenced to sixty years of silence (Milharčič Hladnik 1998:7). Even her published works on gender equality, such as *Žena v sedanji družbi* (1934) and *Spol in usoda* (1938, 1939), were received negatively by the public (Milharčič Hladnik 1999:7).

23 “where do I go [now]?”

In her memoirs Angela Vode tried to uncover the truth about her life, about events she witnessed and was involved in, about the society she assessed critically and attempted to change, and about the post-war regime introduced by the Communist Party of which she had been a member for some two decades. Initially she considered this regime to be rude and cynical, but as time passed it seemed to her to be a mixture of dishonesty and incapability (Puhar 2004:377). Five years after her death the Communist Party had lost its position. In the spring of 1985, at the age of 93, “se je odločila, da je dovolj živeła. Poslovala se je od najbližjih, pospravila za sabo še zadnje stvari in nehala jesti.”²⁴ (373) One month later, she was dead. Her final wish was for a private, Christian burial away from the eyes of the general public (374).

» Conclusion

Using a selection of accounts that have appeared in the form of literary narratives after Slovenia’s democratisation in 1991, this article has elucidated experiences of the Second World War as well as the immediate post-War period. The past two decades have seen tension between those who are striving to uncover the memory of a not-yet revealed truth about the fates of people during and after the Second World War and those who seek to forget. 1945 saw the loss of a clear perspective and the forming of a strict delineation between black and white, between good and bad. Because these categories went virtually unquestioned, there is a need for new interpretations.

Memoirs and literary testaments bear intimate witness to the fear, apprehension and horror that those caught up in the times of war experienced. Through their narrating, the three examined authors bring to light another reality about that period, without – as some contemporary critics have pointed out (Tomo Virk, Jože Pogačnik, among others) – writing in an ideological vein. In a time in which there are no longer political taboo topics in Slovenian literature,

²⁴ “she decided that she lived long enough. She took leave of her loved ones, put her last things in order and stopped eating.”

both Simčič and Jančar won literary awards. Simčič's *Človek na obeh straneh stene* received the Prešeren Prize in 1993, while Jančar's *To noč sem jo videl* won the newspaper *Delo*'s Kresnik Prize for 2010. In 2013 Zorko Simčič received another Prešeren Prize – this time for his life work. His literary oeuvre has been accepted into the canon of 20th century Slovenian literature, and his final novel, *Poslednji deseti bratje*, is regarded as a one of the most important Slovenian novels of the 21st century. The work of Angela Vode, which was silenced after World War II, has enjoyed newfound success in Slovenia through the publication of most of her written legacy as well as of her novel *Skriti spomin*. The latter also served as the basis for the 2008 Televizija Slovenija documentary film *Skriti spomin Angele Vode*.

Though the works examined here deal differently with their protagonists' fates, each protagonist is united by an experience of violence and the burdens of confronting the fears, apprehensions and horrors arising from the unethical acts committed during and immediately after the Second World War. The miscomprehension these works would have met with during the 1950s has now turned into recognition among the majority of contemporary critics, who praise the works also for their ethical value.

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