

CHILDHOOD, HOMESICKNESS AND THE GENERATION GAP IN THE LITERATURE OF SLOVENIAN EMIGRANTS

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ABSTRACT

Childhood, Homesickness and the Generation Gap in the Literature of Slovenian Emigrants

The author discusses various aspects of childhood and impacts on childhood as they are mirrored in literary works written by sixty Slovenian émigré writers. She is interested in how émigré literature pictured for Slovenian emigrant children themes like childhood in the old country and life in the new homeland, what these children actually experienced within and outside their families in different historical periods of Slovenian emigration, and how all this influenced their world views as well as the typical features of the generation gap in migrant context. The author compares some thematic characteristics of Slovenian émigré literature with similar elements found in the works written by immigrant writers in Slovenia.

KEY WORDS: Slovenian émigré literature, childhood, idealisation of homeland, nostalgia, generation gap

IZVLEČEK

Otroštvo, domotožje in medgeneracijski prepad v književnosti slovenskih izseljencev

V prispevku avtorica obravnava različne vidike otroštva in vplive na otroštvo, kot se odražajo v književnih delih šestdeseterice slovenskih izseljenskih pisateljev. Vprašanja, ki jo še zlasti zanimajo, so, kako je slovenska izseljenska književnost slikala izseljenskim otrokom otroštvo v stari domovini in življenje v novi domovini, kaj so izseljenski otroci dejansko doživljali v krogu družine in kaj zunaj njega v različnih obdobjih slovenskega izseljenstva in kako je vse to vplivalo na njihov pogled na svet, še zlasti pa na specifične značilnosti medgeneracijskega prepada v izseljenstvu. Avtorica primerja nekatere tematske značilnosti slovenskega izseljenskega leposlovja s podobnimi prvinami v delih priseljenskih avtorjev v Sloveniji.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: slovenska izseljenska književnost, otroštvo, idealiziranje domovine, nostalgija, medgeneracijski prepad

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INTRODUCTION²

*Children do not need boats to cross the seas
or satellites to fly beyond the stars,
theirs are dreams in which all things happen,
everything that in a thousand years will be the truth.³*

In literary theory childhood has often been labelled as a reference point of the writer. In the case of immigrant writers, this is even more marked. Memories of childhood also contain memories of the primary socialisation which, in a foreign environment, is inevitably relativised or exposed to resocialisation (Dimkovska 2006: 143). In the case of immigrant writers there is often a 'symptomatic overlapping of the two themes – home and childhood – to form a new chronotope of childhood, which is presented as a paradise lost and an inexhaustible creative arsenal.' (Šeleva 2005: 25) There is therefore sufficient material in the literary work of Slovenian emigrants for an analytical treatment of the chronotope of childhood and its reflections in emigrant literature, and also for consideration of the influence on childhood in an emigrant community of those values and emotional aspects that are specifically connected to emigration, as reflected in literature.

The questions that occurred to me immediately concerned the way Slovenian children lived in a time of general want among the emigrant proletariat before and during the First World War and after it, how life in the old country and abroad was painted for them by emigrant literature, what they experienced inside the family circle and outside it in different periods of Slovenian emigration, and how this influenced their views of the world and their attitude towards their surroundings and, in particular, on the generation gap in emigration.

In accordance with the contemporary methodology of seeking connections between an artist's work and the socio-cultural background in which it was created, I shall also talk about some specific themes and motifs of emigrant/immigrant literature which can be explained by specific socio-cultural aspects of emigration. I shall compare the specific features that I detect in Slovenian emigrant literature with parallel characteristics of the literary works of some immigrant writers in Slovenia.

CHILDHOOD IN EMIGRATION

A gilded picture of childhood in the old country is a very common emotional refuge among emigrants. There are, however, relatively few emigrant writers who also describe

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³ Bert Pribac, *Sanje otrok so velike kot veter* [The Dreams of Children Are As Big As the Wind], extract (Detela 1991: 33).

childhood in emigration with lightness or optimism. Examples of this are the book of short prose writings by Anna Valencic (2002) or the sketch story *Teta Zofi in Indijanci* [Aunt Sophie and the Indians] by John Modic (Petrič 1982: 333–341). Modic recounts the charming and mischievous adventures of a grandson and his puckish grandfather, who live in terror of Aunt Sophie, who – according to the custom of the old country – is always making them eat the same kind of soup and worries about them excessively. A fairly realistic fragment from his own childhood in the German emigrant community is provided by the Slovenian-American author Anton Zaitz (born in Westphalia in 1898) in an extract from his unpublished autobiography *One of the Million*. In a humorous manner he talks openly about the embarrassing consequences of his childish investigation of the opposite sex. Before the age of five he also remembers his mother's illness and her desire to return with her family 'to a little country called Slovenia, in Austria.' She daydreamed about earning enough money to buy a little farm in Slovenia. 'This was her life's ambition and we children listened patiently when she talked to us, full of homesickness, about the little farm with a cow, a dog and a few chickens.' (Petrič 1982: 327)

Children, in fact, did put up 'patiently' with their parents' homesickness, as Zaitz says, although this could also be traumatic for them, too. In *Dnevnik neke žene* [A Woman's Diary], Nataša Kolman writes in the third person about the feelings of an emigrant mother whose homesickness and loneliness alienate her even from her own children. Excessive homesickness can be causally linked to a whole series of other symptoms and consequences, from self-pity and wilful isolation to feelings of guilt over the deprivation suffered by children:

... her mother will not be there to dandle her children on her knee; her sisters will not be there to advise her and make her feel that she is not alone in the world. Her acquaintances will not be there – those who have known her whole life and who no longer criticised everything she did because they knew and accepted her as she was. But here she is a foreigner, without a past [...]
Her son pesters her to play with him. She does not feel like it. She tells herself that she has the right to be in a bad mood, for she too has nothing but dreary and empty days... (Petrič 1982: 376–377)

On the other hand, there is as much childish mischief, of the kind that Modic writes about in *Aunt Sophie*, in emigrant children's literature as there is in the children's literature of the homeland. Since, however, children's literature created in emigration will in the future be the subject of analysis in its own right, I shall for the most part avoid it here. I must make an exception in the case of Katka Zupančič, since a good part of her work for children reflects the premature 'adulthood' of children in the hard conditions of a foreign country in which their parents were struggling for survival. The social aspect of growing up (the influence of poverty)⁴ is unobtrusively pushed into the background in Zupančič's

⁴ Much has been published on poverty among emigrant workers, also on modern poverty that emerged among immigrants in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s (for example Lukšič-Hacin 2007: 200–203).

work (for example in the short story *Okenca* [Little Windows], Petrič 1982: 265–273), since this is, in the end, children's literature that is supposed to encourage children to read. With the same skill, however, this aspect is pushed to the foreground at the end of the children's poem *Pismo stričku* [Letter to Uncle], the original of which Zupančič published in *Mladinski list* in 1933. This is an apparently humorous poem with a playful tone (in the first person singular): at her father's bidding, a daughter must write a letter to her uncle back in the homeland and tell him that here in the new country there is a great commotion because moths have got into the American flag. If the flag had been redder, says her father, this would not have happened. The girl starts off pretending to take literally her father's metaphors of moths, the satiated wolf and the goat. In the end, however, she reveals in her surprisingly witty childish way, that she understands their real meaning all too well.

Following the model of the naturalistic, socially engaged American prose of the early 20th century (the so-called muckraking novel), the social theme of a hopeless life in factories and mines, along with poverty and unemployment, began increasingly to establish itself in this period among Slovenian-American writers and even poets. The majority of their original publications of this kind date from the 1920s and 1930s and even the early 1940s, but quite a number actually appeared before 1920. Social themes are most characteristic of short prose by Slovenians living in the USA. An anthology entitled *Ameriške povesti* [American Tales], a characteristic example of this kind of prose, was published in 1943, while these themes also found a response among post-war Slovenian authors in the USA (e.g. Mauser in the short story *John Kovach*, Gobetz and Donchenko 1977: 75–81). Social issues were also dealt with in novel form, notably by Ivan Molek (the novel *Zajedalci* [Parasites] and the trilogy *Dva svetova* [Two Worlds], *Veliko mravljišče* [The Great Anthill] and *Sesuti stolp* [The Collapsed Tower], Molek 1920; 1932; 1934; 1935), while other authors mainly used these themes in short prose and, to a certain extent, poetry. Zupan paints a dark picture of life in a foreign country and of emigration in his poem *Kovač sreče* [Faber fortune] (Petrič 1982: 110), and similar themes are covered by Kristan in the poem *V hiši tlake* [In the House of Drudgery] (op. cit.: 112), Mary Jugg in the poem *Sveti večer* [Sacred Evening] and the prose piece *Priseljenka* [The Immigrant Woman] (op. cit.: 295–304), Beniger in the prose work *Samotar Jože* [Solitary Joseph] (*Ameriške povesti*: 5–10), and Praček Krasna in the sketch story *Zibel* [The Cradle] (op. cit.: 22–24). In two sketches, *Staro zlato* [Old Gold] and *Jutri* [Tomorrow] (Petrič 1982: 290–294), Klančar writes about the bitterness of life in a foreign country, contrasted with the idealised image of his parents' homeland, with which he has fallen in love by reading the books his parents brought with them. Most moving of all, however, are the bitter pictures of a difficult childhood in emigration offered by Oven in the sketch *Božična alegorija* [A Christmas Allegory] (op. cit.: 158–161), Slabe in *Novo življenje* [A New Life] (op. cit.: 248–251) and *Dekle iz tovarne* [Factory Girl] (*Ameriške povesti*: 101–104), Medvešek in *Sužnji ponoči* [Slaves By Night] (op. cit.: 80–85) and, most notably, Katka Zupančič in the sketch story *S tujega na tuje* [From Foreign to Foreign] (op. cit.: 105–111). In this last sketch the author describes in a naturalistic manner how a mother with four

small children begs to be allowed to stay at least one more night in their lodgings. For 20 years they have regularly paid the rent, but last month they were unable to. Despite her pleas, the bailiffs throw them out of the house, although they have nowhere to go. Slabe, on the other hand, writes about a young girl who first loses her father in a mining accident and then her mother. At the age of 15 she gets a job in a factory, where the young foreman gets her pregnant. The latter gives her some herbs to induce a miscarriage, but this results in the girl dying.

CHILDHOOD IN EMIGRATION AND THE GENERATION GAP

Parents, on the other hand, also like to paint nostalgic scenes of family warmth and the former carefree happiness of their now grown-up children, who one after the other have left the safe shelter of home. This is the spirit of the fragment by Marie Priland entitled *Memories of Our Old Wood Stove* (Gobetz and Donchenko 1977: 171–173). Their children, however, experienced this childhood extolled in such bright colours somewhat differently, eternally split between the family traditions of the Slovenian home and the new challenges of the modern age, including the painful experiences that lay in wait for them beyond the threshold of home or outside their neighbourhood. Rose Mary Prosen, the granddaughter of Slovenian immigrants to the USA, reminisces in the lyrical prose piece *Looking Back* (Novak 1976: 1–8) with touching nostalgia and love about her childhood in the warm embrace of her family in Cleveland, when her mother combed her hair and dressed her as an Easter angel to walk at the head of the procession strewing flower petals up to the altar of the nearby church (Novak 1976: 1–2). She remembers the little gardens in front of the houses of the Cleveland Slovenians, in which one could count dozens of types of flowers. She remembers the smell of animal blood in the cellar when her father killed a chicken. 'No chicken today tastes like the chickens my mother cleaned and prepared for Sunday dinner. There is no chicken soup in America today like the chicken soup my mother made from our home grown chickens.' (op. cit.: 5)

The safe, closed and homely world of the descendants of immigrants in the Slovenian community of Cleveland did not in fact contain that bitter sense of incompleteness, of being uprooted,⁵ the poor attempt of their parents and grandparents to transplant a fragment of their lost homeland in a foreign country. The childhood home of their descendants in the new homeland was inwardly complete, authentic space, innate and self-evident. The life of the children of immigrants was complicated by another aspect that only became apparent when they began to have closer contacts with the wider environment: shame, mockery for being different, in other words everything that the children of immigrants

⁵ Accounts of a feeling of rootlessness are quite frequent in immigrant literature. A typical example is the prose sketch *A Patch of Earth* by Zdravko Novak, which contains the following: 'Here I live on my own, self-supporting and independent, but I am like an exotic plant uprooted from the soil which bore me. I have never entirely taken and grown in the soil into which I was transplanted – maybe I never will!' (Gobetz and Donchenko 1977: 175)

from less developed countries still experience today, even in Slovenia.⁶ It is just such childhood experiences and feelings that Rose Mary Prosen describes in the English prose piece mentioned above. The members of her generation became Americans, says the author. But if anyone asked her what her nationality was, she always answered that she was a Slovenian, even though her parents were born in Cleveland (Novak 1976: 7). When she was little, she did not want to speak Slovenian:

What was a Slovenian? A hunkie. A greenhorn. A dumb Slav. /.../ I became ashamed that my parents spoke “funny”; that we laughed too loud; that we drank homemade wine; that our walls were wallpapered in flower patterns; that we grew our own vegetables; that my father raised chickens in our garage; that he constructed his children’s beds out of scrap wood with his own hands; that he repaired all our shoes in our basement; that my mother never sat down to eat dinner with us (she cooked, served, ate when everyone was finished); that our clothes and our curtains and towels were homemade... (Novak 1976: 3)

How familiar would this sound to the child of an immigrant worker in Slovenia? The childhood of the offspring of immigrants is full of entirely specific traps the fateful importance of which their parents and grandparents most often are barely aware of. After a few painful experiences, the children try to avoid the traps of the wider environment by establishing, even within the family, certain defensive mechanisms of rejecting everything for which they are mocked outside the home. In the sketch story *Being Naked Is a Sin* (Gobetž and Donchenko 1977: 121–123) John Modic offers a fragment of intergenerational conflict in the emigrant community, albeit in a playful, humorous tone. Aunt Rose, brought up in the 'old country' according to the strict rules of Christian decency and commendable modesty is horrified to see her 12-year-old nephew leaping 'naked' around the room. The boy is not naked, of course: he is pretending to play basketball and he is wearing a bright yellow basketball suit. On account of this shameful display of naked skin, which the neighbour might see through the window at any moment, Aunt Rose argues loudly with her brother. The boy, meanwhile, does not pay much attention to their quarrel and carries on eagerly scoring baskets for 'his team'. During the argument the distressed woman is even more offended by the fact that her nephew replies to her in English, which she herself barely understands.

Jože Krivec offers an even more vivid picture of the intergenerational language barrier in his short story *Tri slike* [Three Pictures] (Tavčar et al. 1992: 222–227). The narrator is astonished to learn that his friend has not taught Slovenian to his two young sons. The language barrier creates alienation between the two grandsons and the grandfather, who lives with the family in the same home. The grandfather says:

The children do not understand me. As a result we are separated and only know each

⁶ This is confirmed by the answers to the survey which we carried out some years ago among immigrants and their descendants in Slovenia (ISIM Survey 2005).

other on the outside, like neighbours. They will never become attached to me and will never shout affectionately: 'Grandpa! Grandpa!' For them I am only an 'abuelo' – someone who smiled at them but does not know how to answer their inquisitive questions. We live under the same roof but we are strangers to each other. We sit at the same table, but we do not understand each other. All the beautiful things that have accumulated in me these last years – I have no one to give them to. My love will not bear fruit but will die with me. (Tavčar et al. 1992: 226–227)

Many foreign authors of renown have written about the specific characteristics of the generation gap in emigration, and the theme is also dealt with by Slovenian writers (among them Lukšič-Hacin 1995; Mikola 2005; Toplak 2008; Toplak 2009). On the basis of his own empirical research, the Slovenian-Australian psychiatrist Jurij Zalokar covers this topic in his essay *Duševne stiske in bremena izseljenstva: izziv in poguba* [Mental Distress and the Burdens of Emigration: Challenge and Ruin]: 'Unfortunately the majority [...] acquired an insufficient knowledge of English. Many found themselves in a situation where to begin with they had no knowledge of the language whatsoever. Naturally, this isolated them further, often even from their own children.' (in Prešeren et al. 1988: 208–210) The immigrant tries to escape the flood of new impressions by limiting contact with the outside world. Initially, this is a matter of self-preservation, but it can develop into permanent isolation and loneliness, says Zalokar. If we add to this the struggle for survival (many immigrants worked two shifts) and the consequent lack of time and will to learn the language, we can see how the emigrant's social environment becomes very restricted. Not only this, but the focus of identity (Južnič 1993: 147), which in the old homeland had an equivalent place, changes, on crossing the border, into a margin, and thus the emigrant becomes a marginal, a pariah. The consequence of this is painful homesickness, often connected with an idealisation of the homeland, which is reflected in all emigrant literature. When Dimkovska (2005: 65–66) writes about the three most markedly patriotic immigrant poets in Slovenia – Vučkovac, Dimkaroski and Ignjatović, she states that in these three poets 'the abandoned homelands are idealised mental constructions, they are inclined with intensive nostalgia towards the primary homelands and in their literary works little attention is paid to Slovenian reality, to the Slovenian thematic, social and mental side.' This last statement, of course, in general only applies to the most weakly integrated emigrant/immigrant writers, who are more the exception than the rule. The great majority of migrant authors are characterised by a heightened attention towards phenomena in the new environment and the discovery of differences between patterns and models in the original environment and the new environment.⁷ Relatively good integration in the new environment merely reduces the importance of homesickness, but is still far from eliminating it.

⁷ Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik (2007: 240) analyses in this sense, for example, the comparative aspect of the migrant experience as it appears in the literary work of Marie Priland.

IDEALISED CHILDHOOD IN THE OLD COUNTRY, HOMESICKNESS AND THE GENERATION GAP

Among Slovenian emigrant writers too, homesickness intensified to the point of pain, loneliness, idealisation of the homeland and demonisation of a foreign country are frequent themes. Idyllic images of childhood and adolescence in the homeland are in the foreground in Mauser, e.g. in the poems *Razigranost* [High Spirits], *Velika noč* [Easter], *Hvalnica* [Hymn] and *Pomladna hvalnica* [Springtime Hymn] (Debeljak and Papež 1980: 103–105), in Krivec in the poems *Pomlad* [Spring], *Poletje* [Summer], *Jesen* [Autumn], *Zima* [Winter] (op. cit.: 91–92), in Kovačič in *Šenklovski zvon* [The Bell of St Nicholas's] (op. cit.: 121–122), in Voršič in the poem *Doma* [At Home] (*Meddobje* 2008: 26), in Kobal in the prose piece *Šmarnice* [May Devotions] (Petrič 1982: 206–208). In the case of Žitnik, this applies to almost all his poetry – two clear examples are the poems *Dolenjska* and *Domov* [Homeward] (Debeljak and Papež 1980: 39–41). Tonkli dealt explicitly with homesickness in his poem *Domotožje* [Homesickness] (Bergles 1990: 32), while Pavlovčič's *Spomin na junij* [Memory of June] (Debeljak and Papež 1980: 95) is one single idyllic picture of growing up in the old homeland. In the case of Kunčič, love of home, nostalgia and the idealisation of the homeland are in the foreground in many of his children's poems, for example *Čudežna ptička* [The Miraculous Bird], *Vlak* [The Train], *Ded pripoveduje* [Grandfather Tells a Story], *Na dedovih kolenih* [On Grandfather's Knees], *Matjažek šteje* [Little Matthew Counts], *Ded se poslavlja* [Grandfather Says Farewell] (op. cit.: 31–36).

The idealisation of the homeland becomes more understandable if we know that many immigrants continued to experience their new homeland as a foreign country for a very long time after arriving there, while in some cases this situation never changed. In Šuštaršič's poem *Noč v pampi* [Night on the Pampas] the new country is unfriendly and lonely, while in the poem *Po tujih obzorjih* [Foreign Horizons] its loneliness is 'like an inflamed wound, / caught among the prickly cacti, / like a great thorn – / driven into the forehead' (op. cit.: 113–114). In his poem *Zakaj si daleč, domovina* [Why Are You so Far Away, Homeland], Jaruc makes a nostalgic mental return to his homeland from the cold and unrelenting reality of the new country; in the poem *Čemu bi spraševal* [What Is the Good of Asking], a gloomy picture of life abroad and the unbearable pain of remembering the lost world, the poet wanders the world 'like the Wandering Jew', while inside he feels only emptiness and homesickness (op. cit.: 85–87). In the case of Rakovec, the journey that the emigrant makes in the new country leads down steep steps (the poem *Sestop* [The Descent], until it reaches the last step, beneath which there is only a terrible void. In his poem *Pismo* [The Letter], a certain amount of irony and sarcasm makes its way into Rakovec's image of the empty new country: 'It suits us well. / Instead of love / we have banks and tanks.' (op. cit.: 99–100).

Just as homesickness is a natural reaction to the bitter experience of a foreign land among pre-war Slovenian writers in the USA (e.g. Snoj's prose piece *Na starega leta večer* [New Year's Eve], Petrič 1982: 384–392, or Miklavčič's poem *Nazaj v domovino* [Back to the Homeland], op. cit.: 394), 'abroad' is a synonym for suffering among post-war emigrant writers in various parts of the world: in Magister, e.g. in the poem *Jaz* [I] (Debeljak and

Papež 1980: 206), while in the case of Tine Debeljak Jr. (both Argentina) loneliness stands out in the poem *Sončni odblesk* [Sunshine] from the otherwise somewhat gloomy collection *Prsti časa* [The Fingers of Time] (Debeljak Jr. 1986: 15). In the case of Father Bazilij Valentin (Australia), homesickness and yearning for what has been lost appear like a natural mirror image alongside the dark picture of a foreign land and suffering (*V senci tujine* [In the Shadow of a Foreign Land], Debeljak and Papež 1980: 187), while Tea Rovšek-Witzemann (Austria) expresses a feeling of having been uprooted (Desetnica, Bergles 1990: 115). The contrast between the tranquil idyll of the lost homeland and the bitter loneliness of the new country is particularly marked in the case of Beličič (Italy), in the poems *Spomin na Belo krajino* [Memory of White Carniola], *Češminov grm* [The Barberry Bush], *Zreli ruj* [Autumn Sumac] and *Sončni zahod* [Sunset] (Debeljak and Papež 1980: 70–73).

This contrast between the idyll of a lost home in the past and the gloomy present in a new country is also strongly expressed in the poetry and, in part, prose of Australian Slovenians. In the case of Pribac, homesickness (and occasionally the idealisation of the homeland) is in the foreground in the poems *Daljna, hladna morja* [Far Cold Seas], *Valežanska cerkev* [The Welsh Church], *Prinesla mi bo starega vina* [She Will Bring Me Old Wine] (Bergles 1990: 51–55), *V Istri* [In Istria], *Sanjam o domači vasi* [I Dream of My Home Village] and *V hiši mojega očeta* [In the House of My Father] (Cimerman 1990: 23–25). Homesickness is prominent in Hliš in her poem *Nezanimivo pismo* [An Uninteresting Letter] (Bergles 1990: 65), in Gruden in poem IV of the cycle *Socvetje* [Inflorescence] (Cimerman 1990: 115), in Tomašič in her poem *Lojze* (Prešeren et al. 1988: 46), in Žohar in the poem *Žaližale* (Cimerman 1990: 82), in Lapuh in the poems *Vidim te, moj dom* [I See You, My Home], *Domače gore* [The Mountains of Home], *Spomin sprašuje* [Memory Asks], *Tvoj objem* [Your Embrace] (Prešeren et al. 1988: 38). Painful homesickness with idealisation of the homeland is also prominent in Žigon's poem *Sonet izseljenca* [Sonnet of the Emigrant] (op. cit.: 58) and in Žohar's prose piece *Mati* [Mother] (Detela 1991: 7) and the poem *Natoči mi vina* [Pour Me Some Wine] (Bergles 1990: 80). In the case of Žagar homesickness is interwoven with loneliness and alienation in the poems *V čolnu* [In a Boat] and *Novo leto* [New Year] (op. cit. 1990: 71–72); in Žohar, too, the foreign land brings a whole series of frustrations and a feeling of rootlessness (*Zakaj naj bi bil* [Why Should I], *En sam sen* [Just One Dream], *Divjina, divjina* [Wilderness, Wilderness], op. cit.: 82, 85, 87), loss and hardship (the prose piece *Valovanje* [Undulation], in Detela 1991: 5–6), and also disunity (the poem *Šepamo v črni vijugi* [We Limp in a Dark Curve], Bergles 1990: 89). Rootlessness is also the theme of Cilka Žagar's poems *Draga teta* [Dear Aunt] (Prešeren et al. 1988: 56) and *Tujci* [Foreigners] (Cimerman 1990: 141). In his poem *Smreka* [The Spruce], Kobal characterises his bitter experience of the new country in the following concise manner: 'Invitingly, the foreign land conceals from them what it is: / a rich treasure house of bitter morsels.' (Prešeren et al. 1988: 31) If we add to this the gloomy picture of life in the new country that is offered by the writers cited in the last part of the first section dealing with the literary image of childhood in emigration, Zalokar's explanation of the generation gap in emigrant communities also becomes more understandable:

We have seen how varied the shocks that accompany life in a foreign country can be. The human being's social interaction and environment are strangely narrowed. Slowly, a person becomes restricted to his own family. He protects it like a treasure, since he feels that this is his last refuge. But at the same time the family becomes the place where its members release their tensions, and this release can grow into quarrels and accusations. The husband becomes the target of his wife and vice versa. Accusations fly and he (or she) becomes a scapegoat, and everything that has happened in the new country is his (or her) fault. Usually the woman is the biggest victim. And so it happens that imperceptibly the family changes from a refuge to an inferno. [...]

Allow me to end with a question which, for many people, is the most important of all: that of the effect on the children [...]: If we have allowed the family to become an inferno, if in our desire for possessions we have not had time, even in the evenings, to really devote ourselves to our child, if our personality has grown narrow, if we have not been able to speak the language that our child has adopted, then it is clear that the gulf between the generations that is characteristic of everyone has become, in the case of emigrants, even more marked and driven to tragic consequences. We have regulated our clubs, societies and churches according to the models that we followed in our youth. In reality, these models are no longer followed by anyone, not even in the homeland. But here, in the foreign country, we have demanded of our young people that they remain faithful to them. Their answer has been their abstinence.

They want something else. And so it happens that young people become ashamed of their parents, their culture and their identity. (Zalokar in Prešeren et al. 1988: 208–210)

A minority of writers portray childhood in the old country more realistically (e.g. Terbovec, Rogelj, Zorman, Jontez, Grill and Praček Krasna in Petrič 1982: 82–84; 133–138; 148–149; 154–159; 196–205; 216–219; Bahovec 1987: 12–17). Some offer a balanced picture of the good and bad sides of childhood and adolescence in the old country with a hint of Slovenian traditions, customs and archetypical Slovenian characteristics, including tragic ones such as the choice of a wealthy husband for a daughter who loves someone else, and slanderousness, quarrelsomeness, foolishness, drunkenness, etc. (e.g. Kerže, Ambrožič and Novak in Petrič 1982: 45–51; 52–55; 87–97). An even smaller number of writers also include in their works the darkest moments of childhood in the old country (e.g. Daniela Dolenc in Gobetz and Donchenko 1977: 13–23; Potokar in Geržinič 1960: 75–78; 106–115; Detela 1987; Medvešek in Petrič 1982: 277–283). In the case of these authors there is less nostalgia than in the first group, and their healthy patriotism or love of home does not have such a painful connotation. This also means that in these cases one of the important specific factors of intergenerational conflict in emigration is absent.

CONCLUSION

The bitter disappointments of life in a hostile, foreign land can cause excessive and even painful homesickness. Unappeased yearning for the homeland, and the transfer of various collective frustrations of emigrants to their descendants (e.g. the frustration of a fratricidal war and the slaughter of the *domobranci*, the members of the Slovenian home guard; how this intergenerational transfer is reflected in literature will be discussed elsewhere) – all this has undoubtedly left a mark on the children of emigrants.

Stories of *Amerikanci* (emigrants who have returned from the USA) who caught the imagination of village children back home with their self-confident manner, sumptuous outfits and purses full of money, tales of rich Slovenian returnees like those we read in the works of Louis Adamic (Žitnik 1991: 111–116), were also written by other emigrant authors. Jože Ambrožič writes about this in the sketch story *Črnorokar* [The Blackhander] (Petrič 1982: 57); a similar picture is offered by Jože Zavertnik in the sketch story *Oj ti lumpje* [The Scoundrels] (Petrič 1982: 78), while Frank Kerže weaves a fantastic story about Podboj's return and success in his native Slovenia (Gobetz and Donchenko 1977: 165–169).

Time and again, such stories awakened illusions and yearning on both sides of the ocean: in the old country children dreamed of becoming rich in a fabulously wealthy foreign land, while for immigrants around the world they awakened hope of a happy return to the country of their birth, where all the injustices of years of drudgery far from home would be put right and all sorrows forgotten. In both cases, great expectations were most commonly followed by disappointment. This clear duality of a 'demonstrably better' other world (the homeland or the foreign land) is a more frequent thematic element in emigrant literature than elsewhere; for this reason a sense of yearning, which in a migrant environment has specific connotations, is all the more marked in emigrant literature. The promised land, in emigrant literature, is almost always that other world, the world of the past or a possible future, and almost never the here and now. Exceptions portraying the promised land here and now are extremely rare (e.g. Nielsen in Gobetz and Donchenko 1977: 157–163; Terbovec in Petrič 1982: 84–86). Unappeased yearning and the idealisation of the parents' homeland also had a noticeable influence on children,⁸ either directly (via everyday communication and patterns of behaviour) or indirectly, also via children's literature (e.g. Kunčič in Debeljak and Papež 1980: 31–36).

What did the children of emigrants get from their parents and grandparents? The latter, judging from the content of their literary production, lived almost more in the past than in the present. They filled the ears of their children and grandchildren with stories of their own golden childhood in some far-off country, a kind of Wonderland that contrasted vividly to the impersonal, grey, foreign country where it was only possible to survive within the narrow confines of the closed Slovenian community. Their intergenerational

⁸ Tone Mizerit (born in 1944!), for example, in the fragment *Buenos Aires 22* (Tavčar et al. 1992: 258–263) compares Buenos Aires to Ljubljana, although at the time of writing he knows the latter mainly from photographs. Some children of emigrants did actually 'return' forever to the lost but, at the same time, only true home of their parents.

message, full of fears and warnings, is best summarised by the moral of the didactic tale which Simčič tells his three 'as it were nephews' in the sketch story *Pod Tronadorjem v osrčju Andov* [At the Foot of Mount Tronador in the Heart of the Andes]. The story tells of a calf which, despite warnings, leaves the pitiful shelter of the shivering, famished herd (the Slovenian community), trapped in a frozen, snow-covered landscape, and sets off on a difficult journey to find a pasture where they can graze. The calf's attempt ends in failure and it freezes to death in the snow. The moral of this cruel outcome is clear: children, if you leave the Slovenian community, no matter how difficult a situation it may be in, you are doomed. But the youngsters do not give in so easily. The middle one of the three young listeners, a seven-year-old 'painter' blessed with a considerable degree of imagination and optimism, suggests to his uncle an alternative ending for the story (Tavčar et al. 1992: 353):

The calf went away. He walked and walked and walked, down, down, down and then up, up, up, and he walked for a long time. And then [...] he saw in front of him a beautiful, beautiful little valley hidden among tall trees where there was no snow at all. Just lush grass, tall green grass, and flowers. And he ate his fill and then retraced his steps back to the cows and his mummy and told them what he had found, and then he led all the cows back with him. And the cows lived happily ever after. That's it.

The young storyteller knew something that we grown-ups stubbornly refuse to see: new generations always find new paths. And this is where their salvation lies.

If, then, a large part of the literary production of Slovenian emigrants contributed, deliberately or otherwise, to reinforcing the stereotypes of the idyllic childhood in the old country, the neglectful foreign country and the pernicious effects of assimilation, a considerable part of this production contributed with equal success to destroying such stereotypes. Neither one nor the other is the basic mission of literature. Most often they are merely a side effect. And yet, in the name of strengthening ties within the emigrant community, the potential educational effect of an emigrant literary work can quite quickly grow into its central mission. Excessive didacticism and moralising can of course have an off-putting effect on readers (including children), while on the other hand they almost always reduce the literary and aesthetic value of the text. The above extract from Simčič's parody of the excessive didacticism of the emigrant literary tradition is, with its frank irony, evidence of the fact that nothing can make such an effective stand against literary anomalies of this kind as emigrant literature itself.

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POVZETEK

OTROŠTVO, DOMOTOŽJE IN MEDGENERACIJSKI PREPAD V KNJIŽEVNOSTI SLOVENSКИH IZSELJENCEV

Janja Žitnik Serafin

Članek prinaša problemsko razčlenjeno obravnavo kronotopa otroštva, kot se odraža v izseljenski literaturi, ter vplivov specifično izseljenskih vrednotnih in emocionalnih vidikov, izraženih v književnosti, na otroštvo v izseljenstvu.

Avtorica uvodoma pojasnjuje poseben pomen kronotopa otroštva za izseljenske avtorje. V nadaljevanju predstavi otroštvo v izseljenstvu, jezikovno pregrado in medgeneracijski prepad, kot se kažejo skozi leposlovje. V naslednjem razdelku raziskuje načine literarne upodobitve otroštva v starem kraju ter vpliv domotožja, idealiziranja domovine in demoniziranja tujine na medgeneracijski prepad. V zaključku povzema svoje ugotovitve o vlogi izseljenske književnosti pri utrjevanju in rušenju stereotipov, ki so poglobljali medgeneracijski prepad v izseljenstvu.

Pozlačena slika otroštva v starem kraju je najpogostejše čustveno zatočišče v izseljenstvu. Sorazmerno malo pa je izseljenskih piscev, ki tudi otroštvo v izseljenstvu opisujejo z lahkotnostjo ali optimizmom. Domotožje staršev so otroci največkrat potrpežljivo prenašali, čeprav je bilo to tudi zanje bolj ali manj travmatično. Pretirano domotožje staršev je namreč lahko verižno povezano s celo vrsto drugih simptomov in

posledic, od njihovega samopomilovanja in zavestne osamitve do občutkov krivde zaradi prikrajšanosti otrok, o čemer piše med drugim pisateljica Nataša Kolman.

Življenje otrok priseljencev se je zapletalo tudi ob trpkem predznaku, ki se je začel razkrivati šele onkraj domačega praga, v njihovem tesnejšem stiku s širšo okolico: sramovanje, zasmehovanost zaradi drugačnosti, torej vse tisto, kar še danes doživljajo otroci priseljencev iz »manj razvitih« dežel, tudi v Sloveniji. Prav take otroške izkušnje in občutke opisuje tudi Rose Mary Prosen. Otroštvo potomcev priseljencev je namreč polno docela specifičnih pasti, katerih usodnega pomena se njihovi starši in stari starši največkrat komajda zavedajo. Otroci se po nekaj bolečih izkušnjah poskušajo izogniti pastem širšega okolja tako, da že v družinskem okolju vzpostavijo nekatere obrambne mehanizme ograjevanja od vsega tistega, zaradi česar so zunaj doma zasmehovani. Nekateri pisci prikazujejo posledice takšnega ograjevanja, ki se odražajo tudi v medgeneracijskem prepadu in medgeneracijski jezikovni pregradi v izseljenstvu, v izrazito šaljivem tonu (John Modic), drugi pa tudi v resnejšem (Krivec).

Tako kot med drugimi izseljenskim avtorji so tudi med slovenskimi izseljenskimi pisci do razbolelosti stopnjevano domotožje, osamljenost, izkoreninjenost, idealiziranje domovine in demoniziranje tujine izrazito pogoste teme. Idilična podoba otroštva in mladosti v domovini je v ospredju v številnih delih slovenskih izseljenskih književnikov v vseh obdobjih in v vseh delih sveta. Idealiziranje domovine in otroštva postane razumljivejše, če vemo, da so mnogi še zelo dolgo časa po prihodu doživljali svojo novo domovino kot tujino, pri nekaterih pa se to sploh nikoli ni spremenilo. Podobno kot je domotožje samoumevna reakcija na trpko doživljanje tujine že pri predvojnih slovenskih izseljenskih avtorjih, je tujina sinonim za trpljenje tudi pri povojnih izseljenskih piscih v različnih delih sveta. Kontrast med idilo izgubljenega doma in preteklosti ter temačno sedanostjo v tujini je enako močno izražen v vseh literarnih zvrsteh in vrstah. Pisci, ki prikazujejo otroštvo v starem kraju z več realnosti, so v manjšini.

Slovenski izseljenci so, če bi sodili po vsebini njihove literarne produkcije, skorajda bolj živeli v preteklosti kot v sedanosti. Otrokom in vnukom so polnili ušesa s svojim zlatim otroštvom v neki daljni deželi, nekakšni Indiji Koromandiji, živem nasprotju brezosebno sive tujine, kjer je mogoče preživeti le znotraj tesnih okopov zaprte slovenske skupnosti. Obljubljena dežela je v izseljenski književnosti skoraj vedno tisti drugi svet, svet preteklosti ali morebitne prihodnosti, skoraj nikoli pa tu in zdaj. Če je torej velik del literarne produkcije slovenskih izseljencev hote ali nehote prispeval k utrjevanju stereotipov o idiličnem otroštvu v starem kraju, mačehovski tujini in pogubnih učinkih asimilacije, pa je dobršen del te produkcije prav tako uspešno pripomogel k rušenju tovrstnih stereotipov. Ne eno ne drugo sicer ni osnovno poslanstvo književnosti, pač pa najpogosteje le njen stranski učinek. In vendar lahko v imenu utrjevanja vezi znotraj izseljenske skupnosti morebitni vzgojni učinek izseljenskega literarnega dela kaj hitro preraste v njegovo osrednje poslanstvo. Vsiljiva didaktičnost in moraliziranje seveda na eni strani delujeta odbijajoče na (tudi otroško) bralstvo, na drugi strani pa skoraj praviloma zmanjšujeta literarno-estetsko vrednost besedila. Prepričljiv primer navidez nedolžne parodije (pisatelja Zorka Simčiča) na pretirano didaktičnost izseljenskega slovstvenega

Janja Žitnik Serafin

izročila s svojo odkrito samoironijo priča o tem, da se takšnim književnim anomalijam nič ne more tako učinkovito postaviti po robu kot izseljenska književnost sama.