

## THE OLD MAN AND SLOVENIA: HEMINGWAY STUDIES IN THE SLOVENIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

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### *The Echoes of Ernest Hemingway in Slovenia*

The name of Ernest Hemingway was first mentioned in Slovenian literary criticism by the writer and critic Tone Seliškar<sup>1</sup> in 1933. Soon afterwards, Griša Koritnik, the foremost translator of English and American literatures in the period between the two wars, in his article »The Great War in the English Novel«<sup>2</sup> described the protagonist of the novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) somewhat enigmatically as »the symbol of the old generation«. In a short survey of contemporary American literature, which Anton Debeljak in 1939 freely adapted from the article previously published by J. Wood Krutch in *The Times*,<sup>3</sup> Hemingway was grouped together with the Nobel Prize winner Pearl S. Buck and novelist Erskine Caldwell, which is to say with the giants of the then mainstream American fiction. However, it is curious that a Slovenian reader should already from this article have learned how Hemingway, the author of »powerful stories«, had recently become monotonous, which was before he even had a fair chance to get acquainted with any of his works translated into Slovenian.

After World War Two Slovenians got an insight into the existence of the »Lost Generation« first from the Russian perspective, namely from the Russian critic A. Starcev's study »On a Social Novel in the United States of America«<sup>4</sup>, translated by the poet Mile Klopčič. John Dos Passos and Ernest the Social Novel in the United States of America«), *Novi svet*, 1947, pp. 130—137. Hemingway were the only writers of this generation to be explicitly named in the article, whose literary work the author considered as »worthy of every respect« and classifying them as »critical realists«. Starcev's outlook is all the more important, for he was one of the few who did not label at least this part of American literature as »the decadent literature of the Imperialist reaction«, unlike several other Cold War Russian critics.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Tone Seliškar, »Pisatelji na indeksu« (»Writers on the Index«), *Ljubljanski zvon* LIII, 1933, 7/8, p. 512.

<sup>2</sup> Griša Koritnik, »Svetovna vojna v angleškem romanu« (»The Great War in the English Novel«), *Življenje in svet*, 1936, 20, p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> Anton Debeljak, »Današnja ameriška književnost« (»The Present American Literature«), *Jutro* XX, 1939, 165, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> A. Starcev, »O socialnem romanu v Združenih državah ameriških« (»About

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. Anisimov, »Razkroj leposlovja v Združenih državah Amerike« (»The Disintegration of American Belles-Lettres«), *Vprašanja naših dni*, 1948, 35, pp. 703—707.

Lost Generation that in the 1920s emerged as literarily victorious was still active after the Second World War and in fact reemerged in the centre of interest. It was only then that the Slovenians began to get to know it, through translated literary texts.

The novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) had a fairly strong impact in Slovenia just after the Second World War. Several articles praised the novel and the film version highly in 1948.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that already then, and continuing on into the fifties and sixties, much news on Hemingway's latest works and life were brought to the readers' attention in *Primorski dnevnik*, the paper of the Littoral and the Primorska region, which due to its geographic position relied greatly on the Italian press. Thus Slovenian readers learned about Hemingway in many instances via Italian literary critics, where he was, for obvious reasons, very popular.

In 1950 the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* made a memorable literary entry in the translation of Janez Gradišnik,<sup>7</sup> who for the first time did not try at all costs to adapt and change the characteristic lexical and syntactic aspects of the English original, which had been the set custom of literary translators up to then. He consistently followed the stylistic and compositional characteristics of Hemingway's »terse« fiction, thereby introducing into Slovenian a fresh new literary practice. Moreover, the translations (or merely extracts) of many of Hemingway's works, novels and short stories, were at the time extremely popular with the reading public (*The Green Hills of Africa*, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, etc.)<sup>8</sup>. Likewise, the author's private life and travels were followed with great interest: his travels to Kenya, Spain, and the like.<sup>9</sup>

The representatives of the Lost Generation seem to have enhanced the Slovenian interest for American literature *in abstracto*.<sup>10</sup> American literature of the twentieth century first appeared in Slovenia with the stylistically and

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<sup>6</sup> »O romanu in filmu *Komu zvoní zvon*« (»About the Novel and film *For Whom the Bell Tolls*«), *Glas mladih* III, 1948, 4, p. 3; the author is unknown.

»Kaj čitajo v Italiji« (»What is read in Italy«), *Primorski dnevnik* IV, 1948, 897, p. 2; the author is unknown.

»Za koga zvoní zvon« (»For Whom the Bell Tolls«), *Vprašanja naših dni* V, 1949, 45, p. 731—732; the author is unknown.

Janez Gradišnik, »Pogled na ameriško literaturo v letu 1950« (»American Literature in 1950«), *Novi svet* VI, 1951, 1, p. 378.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Komu zvoní?* (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*), translated and introduced by Janez Gradišnik. Ljubljana: CZ, 1950.

<sup>8</sup> »Pogovor o ameriški književnosti« (»A Talk about American literature and an extract from *The Green Hills of Africa*«), *Ljudska pravica*, 3. XI., 1951, p. 5, the translator is unknown; by Mira Mihelič, *Obzornik*, 1951, pp. 385—392.

»Most na Tilmentu« (»The Bridge on Tagliamento«, an extract from *A Farewell to Arms*), *Naši razgledi*, 1952, 4, pp. 12—13.

»Sneg na Kilimandžaru« (»The Snows of Kilimanjaro«), translated by J. G. (Janez Gradišnik), *Novi svet*, 1952, pp. 1008—1028.

<sup>9</sup> »Hemingway in Ike« (»Hemingway and Ike«), *Ljudska pravica* XIII, 1952, 50, p. 11.

Franček Bohanec, »E. Hemingway gre v Kenijo« (»E. Hemingway goes to Kenya«), *Delavska enotnost*, 16. X., 1953, p. 7.

»Hemingwaya zanima Afrika« (»Hemingway is interested in Africa«), *Slovenski poročevalec* XIV, 1953, 161, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Majda Stanovnik, *Angloameriške smeri v 20. stoletju* (*Anglo-American Trends of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*). Ljubljana: DZS, 1980, LL 8, pp. 30—43.

formally less demanding, »easy« works of the »Found Generation« (cf. »la génération bien trouvée«<sup>11</sup>), and only then the literary critics and Slovenian authors learned about the more experimentally oriented writings of the Lost Generation. They were specifically attracted by its compositional procedures (the study of Dušan Pirjevec on *The Old Man and the Sea* is treated in this article in detail).<sup>12</sup>

Whether or not we accept it, the contacts with modern American fiction undoubtedly left visible, although so far not yet properly evaluated influences on Slovenian literature. This is particularly true of the novelists who began to publish their works in the decade before the war and immediately after it.<sup>13</sup> (The dramatic activity of the fifties was not immune to American drama either.<sup>14</sup>)

There are traces of Hemingway's stylistic touches, some of which are very significant for Slovenian fictional development. Thus the short story »Sonce vzhaja in zahaja« (»The Sun Also Rises«, 1953) by Mimi Malenšek significantly bears the same title as Hemingway's novel from 1926. Malenšek's story was published in Slovenian translation later, although it had been mentioned before in literary criticism, where the author must have learned about it. There are strong resemblances between Hemingway's work *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) and the novel *Balada o trobenti in oblaku* (*The Ballad about the Trumpet and the Cloud*, 1956) written by Ciril Kosmač, especially as far as motives and composition are concerned. The literary critic Janko Kos maintains it is in fact the Slovenian parallel to Hemingway's novel.<sup>15</sup>

The most significant American impetus for Slovenian fiction writing was therefore in the more subjectivized and more carefully structured narration in post-war, which had been, so far, simple, *mutatis mutandis*, if not documentary. Thus we witness the emergence of the more compressed literary forms: sketches, novellas, short stories and novels. In turn, Slovenian fiction writers of the fifties and sixties, under the influence of the Lost Generation, began to use also the inner monologue of the protagonists, in view of a new, subjective time perspective of the novels.

Ernest Hemingway's presence in Slovenian press continued to be strong in the late fifties and sixties, including his nomination for the Nobel Prize,<sup>16</sup> his supposed visit to Yugoslavia in 1959,<sup>17</sup> and his sudden (mysterious) death

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Marc Saporta, *Histoire du roman américain (The History of the American Novel)*, Paris, 1970.

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Starec in morje (The Old Man and the Sea)*, translated by Janez Gradišnik, introduced by Dušan Pirjevec. Ljubljana: MK, 1959, Kondor, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Helga Glušič, »Stilni tokovi v sodobni slovenski prozi« (»The Trends of Style in Contemporary Slovenian Fiction«), *Deseti seminar slovenskega jezika, literature in kulture*, Ljubljana, 1974.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Anton Ocvirk, »Metafizične blodnje« (»Metaphysical Searches«), *Naša sodobnost*, 1956, pp. 748—754.

<sup>15</sup> Janko Kos, *Pregled slovenskega slovstva (A Survey of Slovenian Literature)*. Ljubljana: DZS, 1976, p. 400.

<sup>16</sup> »Hemingway — kandidat za letošnjo Nobelovo nagrado« (»Hemingway — A Candidate for the Nobel Prize of this Year«), *Borba* XIX, 1954, 245, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> »Ernest Hemingway pride v Jugoslavijo« (»E. Hemingway comes to Yugoslavia«), *Ljubljanski dnevnik* VII/IX, 1959, 19, p. 2.

Jože Dolenc, »E. Hemingway — lanskoletni Nobelov nagrajenec za književnost« (»E. Hemingway — The Last Year's Nobel Prize Winner«), *Knjiga*, 1955, pp. 139—140.

in 1961<sup>18</sup> which was compared to that of Louis Adamič.<sup>19</sup> In 1965 the Slovenian reporter Bogdan Pogačnik visited Cuba and the Hemingway estate *Finca Vigia*, where he was surprised to find that the housekeeper was Ana Starc, a Slovenian from Trieste, who had been a maid with the Hemingway for sixteen years. She was very complimentary about the writer: »Oh, Mr. Hemingway was a good man. We were not considered his servants and maids, but he was more like a father to us«.<sup>20</sup> Ana Starc left her home town Trieste in 1930 for Argentina. In 1947 she came to Cuba, where she answered an ad to get the job of a maid with the Hemingways. Eventually she became their close friend, together with René Villareal, the housekeeper.

Finally, Hemingway's play *The Fifth Column* was staged in Ljubljana in 1970 and was not a great success. It was seen by the critics solely as an episode from the Spanish Civil War.<sup>21</sup>

Several of Hemingway's novels have since been re/printed in Slovenia (the list of translations of his major works is to be found in the *Notes*),<sup>22</sup> including the translation of his last novel *Islands in the Stream* in 1973<sup>23</sup> and a few recent mentionings of *The Garden of Eden*, the novel published after his death and in Slovenian translation in 1989.

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<sup>18</sup> Dušan Dolinar, »Legenda Hemingway« (»Hemingway: A Legend«), *TT*, II. VII, 1961, p. 5.

Janez Gradišnik, »Ernest Hemingway 1899—1961, *Delo*, 9. VII., 1961, p. 11.

Josef Toch, »Komu zvoní...« (»For Whom the Bell Tolls...«), *Naši razgledi*, 1961, pp. 366—367.

Leicester Hemingway, »Moj brat Hemingway« (»My Brother Hemingway«), *Tovariš*, 1962, 32—45.

<sup>19</sup> »Hemingway in Louis Adamič« (»Hemingway and Louis Adamič«), *Naši razgledi* XV, 1966, 19, p. 405; the author is unknown.

<sup>20</sup> Bogdan Pogačnik, »Doma pri Ernestu Hemingwayu. Slovenka iz Trsta — hišnica muzeja«, *TT*, 22. VI., 1965, pp. 6—7 (»In Ernest Hemingway's home. A Slovenian from Trieste — the Housekeeper of the Museum«.)

<sup>21</sup> Marjan Javornik, »Epizoda iz revolucije. *Peta kolona* E. Hemingwaya v MGL« (»An Episode from the Revolution. *The Fifth Column* by E. Hemingway in the Municipal Theatre of Ljubljana«), *Delo*, 5. VI., 1970, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Komu zvoní (For Whom the Bell Tolls)*, translated and introduced by Janez Gradišnik. Ljubljana: CZ, 1950.

*Starec in morje (The Old Man and the Sea)*, translated and introduced by Janez Gradišnik. Ljubljana: DZS, 1955. The book is a collection of fifteen Hemingway's best known short stories or novels; the second edition 1969.

*Starec in morje*, translated by J. Gradišnik, foreword by Dušan Pirjevec. Ljubljana: MK, 1959; the second edition 1973.

*Zbogom orožje (A Farewell to Arms)*, translated and introduced by Rado Bordón. Maribor: Obzorja, 1960; the sec. ed. 1964, III. 1972.

*Komu zvoní (For Whom the Bell Tolls)*, transl. by J. Gradišnik, a study by Janko Kos. Ljubljana: CZ, 1964.

*Sonce vzhaja in zahaja (The Sun also Rises)*, translated by Bruno Hartman. Maribor: Obzorja, 1964.

*Imaš in nimaš (To Have and Have Not)*, translated by Janko Moder. Maribor: Obzorja, 1965.

*Čez reko in med drevje (Across the River and Into the Trees)*, translated by Bruno Hartman. Maribor: Obzorja, 1967.

*Komu zvoní, Starec in morje (For Whom the Bell Tolls, The Old Man and the Sea)*, translated by J. Gradišnik, a study by Mirko Jurak. Ljubljana: CZ, 1975.

<sup>23</sup> *Otočje v Zalivskem toku (Islands in the Stream)*, translated by Srečko Balent. Ljubljana: MK, 1973.

*The Old Man and the Sea* brought Hemingway the Pulitzer Prize in 1952, and was instrumental in winning him the Nobel Prize two years later. It goes without saying that, as in other European countries, this short novel also had a great impact in Slovenia. If we leave aside the intricate and abundant Anglo-American criticism that attempted to analyse this undoubtedly arresting work,<sup>24</sup> it seems most appropriate to mention in this respect the Slovenian study »About the Idea and the Composition of the Novel *The Old Man and the Sea*« by Dušan Pirjevec,<sup>25</sup> which, in our view, opened up a whole new dimension in understanding this work. Pirjevec (1921—1977) was primarily a comparatist, particularly interested in the structural poetics that most certainly influenced the discussed study of Hemingway's novel, since in it he is essentially concerned with the structure and the underlying philosophical dimensions *per se*.

Despite the fact that the framework of the discussed novel appears rather simple, the proportional distribution of individual parts should not pass unnoticed. Pirjevec contends that there are two stories which are intertwined in the novel, the one about the hunt and, on the other hand, the depiction of Santiago's innermost thoughts, feelings and his final recognition, comparable to the ancient Greek notion of the »anagnorisis« of the main protagonist. Consequently, the novel seems to have the structure of the classical tragedy. Hemingway according to him used the principles of symmetry and contrast in order to be able to elaborate his views about the laws of human destiny, the Greek »moira«. Just like Oedipus, Santiago also transgressed against some »higher order of things«; because of the inborn human blindness and ignorance about his position in the universe, he was guilty of »the tragic error« that Aristotle called »hamartia«. Pirjevec goes on to say that »the question of Man's existence generally lies in the core of this novel. He is not interested in the destiny of each individual embedded in society, which is why his novel remains without the actual social or political point . . . The clash, therefore, is not limited only to the level of individual and society; rather, it occurs between Man and Life in their cosmic dimensions«.<sup>26</sup>

The two parallel stories Pirjevec hypothetically divided into five parts: I. Ashore before the Hunt, II. The Old Man in Search of the Fish, III. Santiago wrestles with the Fish, IV. The Fisherman returns to the Shore, V. Ashore after the Hunt.<sup>27</sup> The third part is the central one and the longest: it comprises approximately twenty-five pages. It is surprising that the first two are of similar length (the page ratios of the individual parts are 9:6:25:12:3). It is not gratuitous that the beginning of the novel is of about the same length as the last part, whereby the writer in Pirjevec's view achieved a symmetrical distribution of the compiled material.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Carlos Baker, *Hemingway, the Writer as Artist* (Chapter XII, »The Ancient Mariner«). Princeton: Princeton UP, the fourth ed. 1972, pp. 289—328.

<sup>25</sup> »O ideji in kompoziciji novele *Starec in morje*« (»About the Idea and the Composition of the Novel *The Old Man and the Sea*«), a study by Dušan Pirjevec. Published in *Starec in morje (The Old Man and the Sea)* by Ernest Hemingway. Ljubljana: MK, 1983, pp. 164—173.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

If we wanted to show graphically the line of the old man's thoughts and feelings, we would get the form of an isosceles triangle, where the two sides represent a thesis and an antithesis: the rise of the fisherman's self-confidence, and the eventual decline of his inner strength to his final hideaway in the dreams about the lions. The story about the hunt itself is quite different, though. The *denouement* is much longer, for the climax, when Santiago hits the fish with his harpoon, occurs much later. Despite the apparent double compositional line of the novel, one should not think of it as lacking the necessary internal balance, because the two line developments are closely interrelated throughout the text. The lines of the old man's thoughts and of real events are constantly competing, each trying to get ahead of the other, which creates the tension and jerking fictional impulses. Thus, in our view the novel's action line is perhaps a »leaping and lingering« one, rising in a balladesque atmosphere up an imaginary staircase. All the qualities which Pirjevec pointed out undoubtedly revealed additional artistic merits of *The Old Man and the Sea* to the Slovenian reading public.

On the other hand, the comparativist Janko Kos in 1964 wrote in the foreword to the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* an *a priori* uncomplimentary appreciation of Hemingway's art, stemming particularly from the criterion of the gap between the uncommitted writer and society.<sup>28</sup> Kos accused Hemingway's fiction of »escapism«, not morely in its motives, but also in the impasse of its ideas and view of life. Kos especially referred to his »gross« eroticism, as well as to his atheism. Also, Hemingway's frequently praised individualism is, for Kos, just a kind of cheap adventurism, which simply is, regardless of any social dimensions.

Professor Mirko Jurak in 1975 wrote an afterword about Hemingway's art, published in a joint edition of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, in which he reinstated the value of Hemingway's art in Slovenia.<sup>29</sup> He counted him among those American writers of the first half of the twentieth century who managed to go beyond the one-sided, pragmatic or deterministic view of the world. Jurak emphatically dismissed the reproaches about the supposed Hemingway's antiintellectualism, for they were based on the hypothesis that he cherished a naturalistic literary expression and by extension adhered to its philosophy, which is why he remained on the surface reality in the depiction of Man's existence.

According to Jurak the reader has no particular difficulty in finding out that, in Hemingway's best novels, the protagonists always transcend the surface fabulae and wrestle also with the ultimate / cosmic issues of human being or non-being. The writer achieved this dimension through the use of symbolism and metaphorical language, which are both organically and inextricably linked to the development of the action.<sup>30</sup> *The Old Man and the Sea* therefore depicts the idea that the essential meaning of life still dwells mysterious for Man, showing his impotence to penetrate this focal enigma, despite his continuous efforts to do so. According to Jurak, one cannot but love and cherish one's own life, one's position in the world and the universe,

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<sup>28</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Komu zvoní (For Whom the Bell Tolls)*, translated by J. Gradišnik, the introductory study by Janko Kos. Ljubljana: CZ, 1964, pp. 5—30.

<sup>29</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Komu zvoní, Starec in morje (For Whom the Bell Tolls, The Old Man and the Sea)*, translated by J. Gradišnik, the afterword by Mirko Jurak. Ljubljana: CZ, 1975, pp. 593—611.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 594.

by struggling with them and not running away, despite occasional defeats, for, like Emily Dickinson observed, »'Twere blessed to have seen —«,<sup>31</sup> but those to have tried to penetrate the elemental mystery of life were few indeed, if not unsuccessful altogether.

### *Hemingway on the Banks of the Soča River*

The novel *A Farewell to Arms* is of special importance for the Slovenians, since its events take place on Slovenian ground by the Soča river (the Italian name was *Isonzo*), on the so-called »Isonzo front« during the Great War in which Hemingway personally participated.<sup>32</sup> According to some sources he saw the terrible defeat of the Italian army at Kobarid (Italian *Caporetto*) and its erratic retreat via Gorica (*Gorizia*) to the river Piave front,<sup>33</sup> where he was himself seriously wounded. He later recovered in a military hospital at Milan.

The fact that the novel deals with an event that happened on Slovenian ground, which was at the time divided between Italy and the Austro-Hungarian empire, was so significant for Slovenian critics that one of them even expressed his disapproval with Hemingway's novel, because »he could have known the Soča front better, he should have been aware of the fact that the local population spoke Slovenian to him, and not some strange sort of Italian dialect«. <sup>34</sup> Indeed, according to the critic Rado Bordon, the young Hemingway did not know he was fighting on Slovenian ground, for he thought he was among the Italians on their ground.<sup>35</sup>

In one passage from the novel, Hemingway describes two refugee girls that Frederic Henry and his driver Aymo Barto picked up in Gorizia during their retreat. They speak »a dialect« that neither Aymo, who is Italian, nor Frederic, who is fluent in Italian, can understand. Although the writer never explicitly names the place and the river it seems very likely that the subtle and lifelike descriptions refer to the Soča river and Kobarid, in Italian *Caporetto*: »I remember it as a little white town with a campanile in a valley. It was a clean little town and there was a fine fountain in the square«. <sup>36</sup> Although Hemingway does not mention the Slovenians, one must bear in mind that the Slovenian language was not recognized as official in Italy before the Great War, and what is more, there were strong (but unsuccessful) tendencies to italianize the Slovenian population of the Primorska region, tendencies which continued until the Second World War.

It is interesting to read the study of Bruce McIver (*Acta Neophilologica*, XXI, 1988, edited by Professor Janez Stanonik), who maintains that Hemingway did not take part in the retreat from Kobarid at all, since at the time of retreat (in October 1917) he was still a reporter on the *Kansas City Star*.

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Peter Jones, *Fifty American Poets*. London: Pan books, 1979, pp. 85—92.

<sup>32</sup> Charles A. Fenton, *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1954, p. 61.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>34</sup> France Novšak, »Hemingway na soški fronti« (»Hemingway on the Soča Front«), *Delo* II, 1960, 283, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> E. Hemingway, *Zbogom orožje* (*A Farewell to Arms*), translated and introduced by Rado Bordon. Maribor: Obzorja, 1972, p. 367.

<sup>36</sup> E. Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*. New York: Scribners, 1929, p. 164.

McIver is right for Hemingway did not arrive to the Italian front until the mid-June of 1918.<sup>37</sup> It is obvious that Hemingway used the Kobarid debacle as a fictionalized event without himself having actually participated in it. However, it does not necessarily follow that he never visited the scene of the retreat, the Soča, Kobarid, Plave, not even Gorizia, nor that he met two Slovenian girls at the time of the retreat. We do know that he visited the Italian town Fossalta di Piave, where he also had been stationed during the war, to show his wife Hadley where he had been wounded.<sup>38</sup> McIver writes that the girls Hemingway met were probably the refugees who were in large numbers swept during the retreat of the Italian army from Kobarid out of the Soča valley onto the plains of Northern Italy (to the river Piave), which is possible, for the front villages suffered many fierce battles. He therefore concludes that the descriptions of the fights and the landscape are the result of Hemingway's detailed research of battle accounts and relative topographic maps.<sup>39</sup> McIver's constatations, although partially valid, perhaps still warrant further research.

A piece of evidence is also an interview with a well-known Croatian poet Gustav Krklec.<sup>40</sup> Krklec in 1971 told reporter Herman Vogel that Hemingway was his friend during the »roaring twenties«, namely his Paris years: »In the autumn of 1927 there was the funeral of the famous American dancer Isidora Duncan. I came to Paris for a month and met a few writers, among them Ernest Hemingway, who was the correspondent for some American papers there. He was not yet famous then, but nevertheless highly esteemed in the Paris literary circles. The Serbian poet Rade Drainac introduced me to Hemingway one evening in the *Café Rotunda*.<sup>41</sup> Krklec furthermore described Hemingway's fascination for the black dancer Josephine Baker who had a bar on Place Pigalle, the meeting already described in a book by Hemingway's friend Hotschner.<sup>42</sup> Krklec remembered one night when they met an old man playing a violin in the street. Hemingway threw a thousand francs into his empty hat, which was a great deal of money then. On some other occasion he met a poor Polish émigré poet and gave him his whole vallet: »I had not seen Hemingway since, but he sent me two postcards from Madrid during the Civil War. On the first one, John Dos Passos and general Ludwig Röhm were also signed. Some Americans offered me five hundred dollars for them. Hemingway also sent me a tie with red stripes that the republicans demonstratively wore in Spain at the time.<sup>43</sup>

Gustav Krklec visited the town Bovec and the Soča river in the summer of 1970, where he allegedly met a retired colonel, Hemingway's friend from the war, and decided to write a scenario for a television series about Hemingway on the Soča. He visited the pub »Pri mrzlem studentcu« (»At the

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<sup>37</sup> Charles A. Fenton, *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1954, p. 57.

<sup>38</sup> Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway, A Life Story*. New York, Scribners 1969, p. 94.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce McIver believes that Michael S. Reynolds made this point abundantly clear in his book *Hemingway's First War: The Making of A Farewell to Arms*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976.

<sup>40</sup> Herman Vogel, »Hemingway na Soči« (»Hemingway on the Soča«), *TT*, 13. X., 1971, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>42</sup> A. E. Hotchner, *Papa Hemingway: A Personal Memoir*, 1966.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. note 40.



Cold Spring«) in Kobarid and the innkeeper told him that Hemingway had had twelve rums in a row there one night during the Great War. According to Krklec, Hemingway used his military experience from the Soča river in two of his novels: *A Farewell to Arms* and *Across the River and Into the Trees* (especially as far as descriptions are concerned).

It seems that Hemingway admired the Soča river from the Banjščice (*Bainsizza*) plateau, where many fights had taken place (also Carlos Baker writes that his descriptions are those of this plateau). Krklec even mentioned someone from Bovec who showed him the very house where Hemingway had been (?) stationed with ambulance vans.<sup>44</sup> For the purpose of a good scenario Krklec plunged into the study of Hemingway's life in Italy during the war. He visited Hemingway's friend Jacob Altmayer, a German who fought with him in Spain: »Altmayer told me that Hemingway often remembered the Soča river and always wanted to revisit Kobarid, Tolmin and Banjščice. Altmayer was a volunteer in the American army during World War Two, and after the war a member of the German parliament. I was his guest in Bonn where we talked about Hemingway, nights in, nights out.«<sup>45</sup> However, Gustav Krklec for unknown reasons never finished his project and the whole truth about Hemingway's presence on the Soča front during the Great War still remains to be disclosed.

As to the not fully established truth about the fictionalised/imaginary experience of the young Ernest Hemingway in the very battles of the front on the Soča (*Isonzo*), it is of great interest for our research to review the most recent biographical books on the life and times of the young Hemingway: Jeffrey Meyers, *Hemingway: a Biography* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1985); Michael Reynolds, *The Young Hemingway* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986); Michael Reynolds, *Hemingway's First War* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987).

M. Reynolds in *The Young Hemingway* brings to light a new fact. According to him Hemingway found a rich source of data about the events on the Soča front, which he later included in his *A Farewell to Arms*, in an Italian whom he met at the Milan hospital, where he had been transported after a severe wound on the front, when an ambulance was blown apart by an Austrian shell. Nick Nerone told him some wonderful and real war stories which supplemented Hemingway's reading about the history of the Great War, including the Italian disaster at *Caporetto* (Kobarid).<sup>46</sup> Reynolds says about Nerone: »When the Italian army moved up toward the Bainsizza plateau, Nerone was there at *Plava* (Plave, my note) and Mount Kuk. And he was there in the mountains on the morning of October 1917, when the Austro-Hungarian forces broke the Italian front at *Caporetto*.«<sup>47</sup> It is more than certain that listening to Nerone's authentic war stories Hemingway learned many details which he combined eventually in the novel with his own experience as an ambulance driver at the front at the Italian town of Schio. The author of the book maintains that he never forgot Nerone's stories of Gorizia, the Isonzo and *Caporetto*. Having read numerous war histories and military maps Hemingway seems to have changed Nerone's

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Reynolds, *The Young Hemingway*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd. 1986, p. 180.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

character into that of Frederic Henry, an ambulance driver with the Italian army, who was at the front from the very beginning.

Reynolds's most recent book on Hemingway's participation in the First World War *Hemingway's First War* gives the so far most detailed description of the making of *A Farewell to Arms*. We first learn that in April 1918 Ernest Hemingway finally left his job on the local paper *Kansas City Star* and departed in search of his own war experience in Northern Italy.<sup>48</sup> According to the sources, American Red Cross Ambulance to which Hemingway was assigned was stationed at Schio in the Dolomites, where there was little action. In July 1918 he was at his request transferred to Fossalta di Piave, where his van was blown up by the Austrians.<sup>49</sup> Wounded, he was sent to Milan, where he met the already mentioned Italian soldier Nick Nerone, who after the war migrated to the United States. Reynolds is, despite Hemingway's own contentions, persuaded that the writer had not seen the Tagliamento river when he wrote *A Farewell to Arms*, and that it was not until 1948 that he saw Udine: »He may never have seen Gorizia, the Isonzo river, Plava, or the Bainsizza plateau; he certainly had not seen them when he wrote the novel... His 1927 trip to Italy with Guy Hickok did not cover the war zone of 1915—1917. Not only had Hemingway not experienced the military engagements in which Frederic Henry takes part, but he had not seen the terrain of Books One and Three of *A Farewell to Arms*.«<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, Hemingway's description of the *Caporetto* retreat with detailed military reports is masterly and true to life, although he may not have served on the Italian front. Italian critics, some of whom took part in the described battle at Kobarid, did not find fault with Hemingway's depiction of history and geography in the novel. It is interesting to note that the Italian fascist government considered the defeat at Kobarid such a traumatic experience that *A Farewell to Arms* was banned in Italy until the end of the Second World War.<sup>51</sup> In 1954 Alberto Rossi reminded the Italian readers that Hemingway might have indeed taken part in the retreat of the Italian army from *Caporetto*, especially because of the extreme accuracy of his descriptions: »That the work was in effect one of imagination and not of history, however evident this seems, was not an affirmation which could satisfy everyone's curiosity.«<sup>52</sup>

In 1948 Ernest Hemingway wrote his own introduction for an illustrated edition of *A Farewell to Arms*, where he made no pretense of having experienced the historical events described in the novel firsthand: »I remember living in the book and *making up* what happened in it every day. Making the country and the people and the things that happened I was happier than I had ever been... Finding you were able to make something up; ...«<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. also Carlos Baker's seminal work on Hemingway's life *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*. New York: Scribner's, 1969, pp. 20—38.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41—56.

<sup>50</sup> M. Reynolds, *The Young Hemingway*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Umberto Morra, »*A Farewell to Arms* di Ernest Hemingway«, *Solaria*, 2/ 1930, published in *Antologia di Solaria*, ed. Enzo Siciliano. Milan: Editore Larici, 1958, pp. 377—380.

<sup>52</sup> Alberto Rossi, »Ernest Hemingway e la guerra italiana«, *La Nuova Stampa*, Anno X, No. 261, November 2, 1954, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Ernest Hemingway, »Introduction«, *A Farewell to Arms* (ill. ed.). New York: Scribner's, 1948, pp. vii—viii.

Michael Reynolds therefore maintains that Hemingway masterly recreated the war experience from books, maps and firsthand sources. In his view, aided by military histories, he recreated the Austro-Italian front of 1915—1917 more vividly than any other writer,<sup>54</sup> and to read *A Farewell to Arms* as his biography is to misread the book. Reynolds however concludes his introduction to »The Making of *A Farewell to Arms*« with the view of F. S. Fitzgerald, who assumed that Hemingway was in Italy in 1917 and that the experience of the book is largely autobiographical. Hemingway himself did not correct Fitzgerald's assumption, neither did he encourage anyone to read the novel as autobiography. In this particular case it is clearly difficult to establish the degree of fictional reality and »objective« reality described in the novel, since we examined proofs which confirm either hypotheses: Hemingway's participation in the Caporetto retreat and his non-participation in this debacle.

»In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains.« In this first sentence of *A Farewell to Arms* critics have often in vain attempted to establish the answer to the questions of »in which village?«, »looking across what river to which mountains?«. For a literary critic it is interesting to discover just how accurate the geography of the *Isonzo* (Soča) front and chronology were for a period of the Great War and a part of the country that Hemingway might or might not have seen. According to Reynolds Hemingway described all the battles of the Isonzo with extreme historical precision.<sup>55</sup> As to the »village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains« we could say that there were only two villages that looked across the Soča river toward the mountains: Gradišca (Slovene-Gradiška) and Lucinico, both of them only a few miles west of Gorizia (Gorica). Particularly the view from Gradiška across the river Soča was in 1915 recorded by an Italian-born American journalist Gino Speranza, which is indeed very similar to the description of Hemingway's protagonist Frederic Henry at the same time and at the same place: »In front lay the Isonzo, with fields running down to its banks, across it, a low livid red mountain, the Carso (Kras, my note), and farther away to the left (north), under the protection of the Austrian mountains, Gorizia!«<sup>56</sup> Just as the rest of the extant literary criticism on Hemingway, this study does not attempt to say the final word in the discussion of Ernest Hemingway's participation in the fictionalized battles of the Caporetto retreat. We have pointed to the facts in favour of both possibilities. Hemingway himself wanted the readers and the critics to believe that he used in the novel *A Farewell to Arms* his real war experience, which was probably inkeeping with his wish to lend all the possible verisimilitude to the described events. The mentioned documents by some Slovenian authors confirm his presence at Kobarid with the Italian troops, while certain American critics assert that Hemingway could by no means have been at Kobarid (*Caporetto*) during the time of the battle. Whatever the truth, what counts is the novel itself that is here, *hic et nunc*, to be enjoyed by avid readers.

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<sup>54</sup> Michael Reynolds, *Hemingway's First War*, »The Making of *A Farewell to Arms*«, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987, p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>56</sup> Gino Speranza, *The Diary of Gino Speranza*, ed. F. C. Speranza. New York: Columbia University Press, 1941, p. 233.

The present consideration of »Hemingway studies« in Slovenian cultural context has followed three distinct lines of research development: the echoes of Ernest Hemingway in Slovenia, some specific Slovenian critical perspectives of Hemingway's art, and finally Hemingway on the banks of the Soča river. The three discussed thematic clusters, all of which have largely attempted to deal with the impact/reception of his works on Slovenian ground, show through their complex interrelatedness that Hemingway has been a very popular novelist among the Slovenians, who has again and again forced translators to render his works into Slovenian and encouraged literary critics to analyse his *oeuvre* in some detail, while the response of the readers depended on contemporary social events (e.g. World War Two) and political circumstances (the period between the two wars).

The first part discovers the fact that Slovenian readers learned about Hemingway already in 1933, while they first got a better insight into the existence of the writers of the »Lost Generation« in 1947 in an article by the Russian critic Starcev, who with ideological limitations of his mind labelled it »the decadent literature of the Imperialist reaction«. Hemingway's novels only became properly evaluated and more widely read in the sixties, when they also influenced a number of Slovenian writers. The second part of the article discusses Dušan Pirjevec's study of *The Old Man and the Sea*, who from the viewpoint of structural poetics compared the structure of the novel with that of the classical Greek tragedy, for it also meets all Aristotle's requirements for a tragedy. It furthermore presents the views of Janko Kos, who accused Hemingway's fiction of »escapism« and labelled his so often praised individualism as »cheap adventurism«, and Mirko Jurak, who reinstated the value of Hemingway's art in Slovenia, particularly because he stressed the need for Man to grapple with his destiny and not run away, despite occasional defeats or fear.

The final thematic cluster tries to shed new light on the fact whether Hemingway did actually participate in the battle of Caporetto (Kobarid) on the banks of the Isonzo (Soča) river during the Great War, which he so vividly described in his novel *A Farewell to Arms*. The extant biographical data and several new sources were considered, all of which point to the fact that both the fictionalized or real experience of the young Hemingway on the Isonzo front are possible, although we established that Hemingway decidedly wanted the readers of his novel to think that he had used in the novel his real war experience. Having examined the relevant documents, it is no exaggeration to say that he was at least present on the Isonzo front for a certain period of time, although he may not have actually participated in the defeat of the Italian army at Caporetto (Kobarid).