

Transnationalism in American poetry

Nina Kremžar

Abstract

The article researches the concept of transnationality on the basis of American theoretical sources and tries to connect it closely to the study of modern and contemporary poetry. Among several challenges of the transnational approach, the concept of the nation is mentioned as an important element, in addition to global connectedness, as is the importance of studying transnational contacts with all involved cultures in mind. Tomaž Šalamun and Charles Simic, two poets who have found success and a positive reception in the other culture, are given as examples of a transnational contact between Slovenia and the U.S. To explain and closely study this contact, the article offers an overview of the characteristics of both poetics, which have made both poets attractive for American or Slovenian critics and readers. Translation, its impossibility and urgency, is mentioned as the central activity that creates transnational moments between cultures.

Keywords: transnational, translation, contemporary poetry, Charles Simic, Tomaž Šalamun

INTRODUCTION

Due to globalization, we are witness to a constant flow of capital, people, ideas, and also literary works, which now more than ever easily and often reach other or distant cultures. Because it is impossible in today's world to isolate and separate any national literature from others, literary theory of recent years has started to turn to transnationality. If the literature in focus is American, it is most important to remember that the U.S. represent not only an economical but also a cultural world power that, more than any other, intensively and constantly crosses the borders of its own nationality, and transports its cultural products to the rest of the world. The United States of America are centered around migration – from the very beginning, it has accepted new cultures openhandedly, at the same time connecting them and transforming them into American culture, which is a conglomerate of many different cultures that are still linked together by language and national belonging.

A transnational approach is necessary, because it “puts the focus on how those local and national structures interact with globalizing forces that work with and against them” (Ramazani, *Lines* 310). The approach is even more essential in American studies, since it is precisely American nationalism (including its military attitude) that brings the most consequences to the entire world. The turn to transnationalism in the U.S. happened mostly due to the different movements of the 20th century that denied the idea of American exceptionalism and started to foreground ethnic studies, feminism, and minority studies (Davis 3). However, it would be impossible to claim that the idea of American exceptionalism and superiority has ceased to exist. That is why “[a] complex and nuanced picture of cross-national and cross-civilizational fusion and friction is badly needed today, and denationalized disciplines in the humanities may be able to help provide it [...]” (Ramazani, *Transnational Poetics* 355).

TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE U.S.

Most critics agree that in the 21st century, when globalization has connected the world to the degree where data from anywhere is accessible immediately everywhere else, a transnational approach is necessary also in literature. One reason is that literature in our time of the Internet constantly crosses the borders of individual countries. In this scope it is also important to note that the position of English as a global language has made it possible for literature written in English to be accessible to everybody who speaks the language. However, different critics of course understand and define the term *transnational* differently. At this

moment, we will deal mostly with critics who think about transnationality in the context of the U.S., also specifically connected to poetry.

In the introduction to *Singularity and Transnational Poetics*, Birgit Mara Kaiser summarizes the idea of transnational poetics in the following manner:

Transnational poetics has emerged as a term for literary production that transgresses and questions national limitations and canonization, and critical literary scholarship is increasingly aware that the national framework of literary analysis has lost purchase in this regard. (Kaiser 3)

Winifried Fluck, on the other hand, very interestingly divides transnational movements into aesthetical and political ones. The former describe transnational phenomena in terms of experience that enrich and deepen cultural contacts, and therefore focus on fruitful consequences of cultural plurality that the U.S. has always been constructed of (368). According to Fluck, political transnational movements strive for political change mostly by including those most pushed-away groups that become new political actors (373). The mentioned division obviously exposes the double role of the transnational approach – highlighting intercultural connections and including the periphery. In the context of the U.S., transnationalism could be studied from both aspects, with the second one perhaps being the more obvious choice, since the literature of the field offers a large number of literary-theoretical anthologies and articles that describe and put focus on peripheral and minority groups¹. Nonetheless, this article will primarily deal with the aesthetical aspect of the transnational approach, since its purpose is to study the reciprocal cultural influences and relations between the U.S. and Slovenia through an overview of poetry translations. The aim of this article is therefore not to surpass the peripheral position of the Slovenian literary space, which might be achieved by translating Slovenian poetry into English, but rather to offer a detailed overview of the position that is occupied by a dominant (American) literary production in this Slovenian peripheral territory, which is also a specific crossing of national borders on both sides.

Similarly to Fluck, Shelley Fisher Fishkin mentions four different approaches to transnationalism, which currently represents the central approach in American studies:

1 Routledge, for example, publishes a series of literary-theoretical anthologies and monographies under the joint title *Transnational Perspectives on American Literature*, in the scope of which we can find the following titles: *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism, and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930* (edited by Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham), *Fictions of Black Atlantic in American Foundational Literature* (Gesa Mackenthum), *Mexican American Literature: The Politics of Identity* (Elizabeth Jacobs), *Native American Literature: Towards a Spatialized Reading* (Helen May Dennis), etc.

(1) I'll call the first category *broadening the frame*, integrating U.S. history and literature into broader historical contexts and comparative frameworks and integrating multiple national histories and literatures with one another more fully.

(2) The second category involves work exploring *the cross-fertilization of cultures*, particularly the ways in which literature and popular culture from different locations influence and shape each other.

(3) The third category involves exploring previously neglected *transnational dimensions of canonical figures* not generally viewed in transnational contexts before.

(4) The fourth category involves *renewed attention to travel and migration*. It also involves renewed attention to *how texts travel* and what we learn about different cultures in the process. This latter category of work often involves *recognizing the limitations of an English-only approach to American studies*. (14–15)

As can be observed, Fisher Fishkin's idea is not far from that of Fluck. It could even be said that Fisher Fishkin summarizes Fluck's concept of aesthetical transnationalism in her first and second category, and encompasses political transnationalism in the third category. Similar to Fisher Fishkin and Fuck, Rocío G. Davis, the editor of *The Transnationalism of American Culture: Literature, Film, and Music*, also defines the term *transnational* in close connection to the context of the U.S. and sees it as researching "the multilayered contexts of cultural production in and beyond the United States" (1). The one word that can be foregrounded in the mentioned quote is *beyond*, which is of key importance to Davis, who believes that transnationalism examines "the ways U.S. cultural production has been reimagined as a result of political and social movements in the twentieth century, how it has traveled and been received outside the country, as well as how globalization has shaped American sensibilities and artifacts" (1). It is exactly these aspects – the traveling of American culture, poetry specifically, and its acceptance in a foreign country, which is in this case Slovenia – that I put in the focus. However, this transnational consideration of the reception of American cultural production in Slovenia has certain demands, since "[t]hinking through the prism of the transnational requires us to reexamine and reconfigure the political and theoretical frames we use to discuss texts produced in the United States and/or consider the ways 'American' themes, motifs, or styles have influenced cultural production beyond the country's borders" (Davis 1).

In his article "A Transnational Poetics," Jahan Ramazani, who is one of the main experts in the field of transnationalism when applied to poetry, provides numerous examples of American poets and on that basis lucidly explains the necessity of a transnational method in poetry studies. In the introduction Ramazani first

points out the indisputable influences “globe-traversing” has had on the shaping of English-language poetry since modernism until now (*Transnational Poetics* 332). In the scope of the mentioned process of interaction, Ramazani especially points out individuals – poets, novelists and playwrights, but also readers, who together form new connections and surpass the boundaries of “geography, history, and culture” (333).

According to Ramazani, it is exactly because, in times of globalization, the Internet and ceaseless communication, literature cannot exist solely inside one national frame, the only possible method to deal with contemporary poetry is transnationalism:

The main reasons why mononational constructions of modern and contemporary poetry do not suffice should be obvious. That many of the key modernists were expatriates and exiles, transients and émigrés, is well known and frequently rehearsed; yet, the implications for nation-based literary histories have not been fully absorbed within institutions of literary instruction, dissemination, and criticism, which remain largely nation-centric. Further, the modernists translated their frequent geographic displacement and trans-cultural alienation into a poetics of bricolage and translocation, dissonance and defamiliarization, and this hybrid and strange-making art also defies the national literary genealogies into which it is often pressed. (Ramazani, *Transnational Poetics* 333)

Like Ramazani, in his article “A New Beginning? Transnationalism,” Fluck finds the reasons for the increasingly more frequent resorting of American literary theory to transnationalism mostly in the fact that American studies have recently reached an “impasse”, where, in dealing with different questions, the effects of power actually become inevitable, which means that while reevaluating the relations between countries even more obvious peripheries are created. Transnationalism, on the other hand, offers a retreat from the idea of “American exceptionalism” and transcends national borders, which seems especially appropriate in a period of globalization (365).

However, globalization (and the related fast global flow of capital that) is not the only reason why the approach to contemporary American poetry should be changed. As some of the changes that put American and British poets, even those who never left their country, into contact with “images, peoples, arts, cultures, and ideas” from all over the globe, Ramazani mentions researches done by anthropologists, who are simultaneously world travelers, the expansion of the British empire, which controlled a quarter of land before World War I, and the development of the U.S. into a political and economic super-power (*Transnational Poetics* 334).

THE CHALLENGES OF A TRANSNATIONAL APPROACH

Despite a widespread consensus of the necessity of a transitional approach and the aforementioned inevitable intertwining of American cultural production with the rest of the world, it is interesting to notice that a large number of critical monographies and anthologies that dealt with modern and contemporary English² poetry in the 90s and 00s adopted national approaches rather than transnationalism (Ramazani, *Transnational Poetics* 334).

Ramazani nicely describes this paradox and the senselessness of insisting on a mono-national approach in his article “Lines and Circles: Transnationalizing American Poetry Studies”:

Yet we still trick ourselves into believing there can be a poem or novel or song unambiguously ‘made in the U.S.,’ when such works, however nationalist in ideology, are verbal machines made out of words, techniques, and ideas of diverse origins. Their rhythms, images, or stanzas, their characters, plots, or narrative structures bear a multinationally heterogeneous array of traces. For scholar-teachers in the world’s most powerful nation, often susceptible to self-congratulatory exceptionalism, it may be especially important that we remind our students of the myriad extranational elements migrating through culture’s porous boundaries, lest we communicate the illusion that the literary or cultural artifact is a smoothly unitary mirror of the massive construct of the nation and its monadic reflection in the citizen. (*Lines* 311)

It could be said that the transnational approach has been given more attention in literary theory and has been used more consistently in the 21st century; however, new problems have appeared. Fluck, who never denies the usefulness of transnationalism and agrees that its different approaches can serve several purposes, reminds us that the transnational is always inevitably connected to the national of which it originates, or, in other words, that the two concepts create each other and remain co-dependent. Therefore, we can conclude that American transnationalism remains exactly that – American. By claiming that it widens the limits of understanding, American transnationalism at the same time supports the idea of America. And since a supposition about America always exists, every transnational approach will likewise be determined by this very supposition (366–37). Moreover, the U.S. have later started to excuse its imperialism with transnationalism and in this way remained the same leading force in new clothes (Fluck 370). Ramazani understands this vastness of the American canon, which is possible exactly due to the U.S.’s leading position, both as a positive result of the “American multicultural openness”, but also as “an unfortunate consequence of American

2 English here meaning written in the English language

cultural imperialism and its need for aggrandizing self-narration" (*Transnational Poetics* 344).

The U.S., surely the biggest cultural melting pot in history, is therefore seemingly setting a good example for the rest of the world by emphasizing the plurality of cultures it encompasses or by insisting that this country includes and accepts all cultures. But when considering this idea of complete acceptance of cultural diversity, it is imperative to remember that we are talking about a country where it is also expected that all cultures intertwine in a specific way – some of their aspects can be kept, but at the same time they all should also adopt certain characteristics of Americanness. For example, the culture of those with Italian descent living in the U.S. (who maintain certain aspects of the Italian culture – be it the language, customs, food, etc.) cannot be equated with present Italian culture in Europe – even the contact between these two cultures is transnational. Thus, it could be said that one of the characteristics of the American cultural area is precisely the intensive mixing of different cultures; but this does not mean that this sort of Americanness should not be studied in full through a transnational approach and in the context of the rest of the world.

Ramazani expresses a similar idea when he writes that it is necessary to apply the deconstructive approach “not only to mononational narratives but also to the distinction between indigenists and cosmopolitans” (*Transnational Poetics* 348). When rethinking transnationalism (in Ramazani’s case that of modern and contemporary poetry), “nationality and ethnicity still need to play important roles” and cannot be erased. Ramazani also claims that “*translocal poetics*” is “[n]either localist nor universalist, neither nationalist nor vacantly globalist”, but rather emphasizes “dialogic intersections [...] of specific discourses, genres, techniques, and forms of diverse origins”. Transnationality therefore does not mean “postnational history,” where the author is seen as “floating free” and not belonging to any nation. Even in times of the most obvious globalization the existence of nation states and the influence of national cultures cannot be denied (*Transnational Poetics* 350).

The transnational approach therefore should not be understood unambiguously or as a negation of some other approach. In comparison to the national model that adopts a binary division between “self” and “other”, the transnational approach is heterogeneous and emphasizes “infinite differences” that do not stem from us ourselves and thus do not oppose the equality as “dialectical negation” (Spivak in Kaiser 14). That is why, according to Kaiser, the heterogeneous approach does not mean denied inequality, but also not “celebrating ‘global’ harmony” (14). The transnational approach therefore neither excludes the nation nor presumes a homogeneous cultural area, but is based on pointing out differences and the dialogue between them. It is only with this understanding that the transnational model can really serve its purpose.

Another challenge of transnationalism that Ramazani points out is also its false inclusion under the broader term of modernism, which is supposed to similarly include also postcolonialism and other movements. This type of categorization would unite different cultures into a uniform category of modernist cultures of 20th and 21st century and in this way erase the differences between nations and cultures. Ramazani understands the term “global” as an expression for all world literatures as a similar danger, since in this way “intercultural friction and assimilation” (*Transnational Poetics* 353) would disappear once again. What is more:

When using such contested terms as transnationalism, hybridization, and creolization, we need to remind ourselves constantly that the cultures, locations, and identities connected or juxtaposed are themselves agglomerations of exceedingly complex origin [...]. (Ramazani, *Transnational Poetics* 353)

As mentioned, American culture is a conglomerate of its own history and an intertwinement of cultures that migrated to the country with new immigrants, and should be researched as such. But because the U.S. has always been primarily a cultural melting pot, defining what is “American”, specifically what is “American poetry”, proves to be problematic at times.

Ramazani, for example, disagrees with the following explanation of American poetry, offered by editors Stephen Burt and Alfred Bendixen in their introduction to *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*:

Although our focus on poetry in the United States requires specific attention to the development of distinctively American literary traditions, including the role poetry played in the work of nation building and in shaping the social and political life of the United States, we also recognize that poetry crosses borders and boundaries, and that American verse has always existed in the context of the transatlantic, the transnational, and the international. (Bendixen and Burt 3)

Ramazani accuses the editors of maintaining a mononational approach under a guise of transnationality (*Lines* 310). He is mostly bothered by the fact that this definition of American poetry does not emphasize the concept “American” enough or, in other words, that the editors do not “take the poetry’s ambition to be self-consciously American [...] as an index of its value” (Bendixen and Burt 9). Ramazani warns that the editors no longer understand “Americanness” as a concept that unites American poetry, but they rather look at American poetry in the narrowest of senses, meaning the poetry that is written by citizens of the U.S. (*Lines* 309).

Besides the mentioned introduction, in his article Ramazani also deals with Burt’s article “Is American Poetry Still a Thing?”, which was published in the

same issue of *American Literary History* and where Burt defines American poetry as “a more or less diverse collection of representations – some apparently trivial, some almost holy – around shared events, chosen and brought into shared spaces, where they might be shining for a century or a day” (Burt 276). Ramazani sees this definition as too broad and could, as such, serve also for “Jamaican, British, or Indian poetry – or even world poetry” (*Lines* 310).

If we apply the transnational approach to American (or any other) poetry, the question whether the term “American” poetry even still exists appears sooner or later (Ramazani, *Lines* 308). I am of the opinion that all national literatures maintain certain characteristics that are bound to linguistic, cultural, historical, geographical, social and other differences between countries, and that uniquely form every national literature. This remains true also for American literature, which might be the most globalized, but also remains connected to a specific (American) cultural area, which was formed in a unique way – through the process of numerous migrations, the entering of new languages and cultures, and their own way of mixing and accepting the American culture as an open one, but at the same time one that possesses dominance precisely because of its dominance. But even if we disregard all the characteristics that separate American culture from others, we can, as does Ramazani, agree with Burt, who points out that the expression “American poetry” ultimately remains useful at least as an “organizing concept, so long as we acknowledge its porous borders” (Ramazani, *Lines* 312).

POETRY BETWEEN THE U.S. AND SLOVENIA

The theoretical overview of the concept of transnationality has made it obvious that no poet can be placed solely in the national frame from which they originate, but is always also influenced by movements and influences from elsewhere. “[M] other tongue and familial, religious, and educational background” are not the only entities that affect the “poet’s sensibility”, since it cannot be overlooked that also new “geographic, cultural, or linguistic displacement can alter these fundamentals”. All migrations the poet experiences – acquiring new languages or intense experience of foreign cultures – shape and change them (Ramazani, *Transnational Poetics* 343).

Ramazani gives famous modern and contemporary poets (Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Mina Loy, Claude McKay, Denise Levertov) as an example to show how deeply and fundamentally the transatlantic migrations of experience and ideas affected their poetics. The reverse is also true, as some foreign poets who moved to the U.S. adopted and adapted to the American cultural tradition and became “American poets” themselves. As Ramazani writes, alluding to Shakespeare:

“Some poets are born to Americanness, some achieve Americanness, and some have Americanness thrust upon them” (*Transnational Poetics* 344).

At this point it is important to understand that Ramazani deals exclusively with modern and contemporary poetry also because modernist poetic techniques (transnational collage, polyglossia, etc.) are precisely the ones that are based on intercultural enrichment (*Transnational Poetics* 336). Therefore, we will look at two examples of a transnational contact between American and Slovenian poetry on the example of two contemporary poets – Tomaž Šalamun and Charles Simic – to practically point out the characteristics of the American-Slovenian transnational relationship.

Tomaž Šalamun is without a doubt the one Slovenian poet who has gained the greatest recognizability in the U.S. His popularity is noticeable especially in the plentitude of translations and publications in numerous literary magazines and anthologies (Maver 24). The reasons for this can be mainly found in specific characteristics of Šalamun’s poetry which are in one way or the other close to the American poetic tradition and have made it possible for American readers to genuinely connect to Šalamun’s poems in translation. Igor Maver also points out the necessity of certain connections between the cultures when he writes about the critic Robert Hass, saying that in his introduction to *The Selected Poems of Tomaž Šalamun* he excellently “contextualizes Šalamun’s poems from an American point of view and helps the reader view his work through American eyes while appreciating his popularity abroad as well” (25). This quote actually rephrases the idea of transnationalism where one work is moved or adapted in a way that can reach the members of the other culture, while at the same time the multicultural influences and changes stay recognizable. What is more, Maver emphasizes those characteristics of Šalamun’s poetry that strongly resemble Walt Whitman (e.g., “catalogues, self-mythologizing, an emphasis on the subjective view with the ‘I’ in focus, a kind of transcendental self as the center of the universe, and, last but not least, a profound confidence in the power of imagination”) and thus sound typically American, and which undoubtedly contributed to Šalamun’s popularity in the U.S. (27–28). There also exists a significant similarity between Šalamun and T. S. Eliot, which is mostly expressed in “modernist and radically experimental poetic language” (28). We could further point out “Šalamun’s ‘radical imagism,’ which links him, if only indirectly, with the radicalism and the powerful imagery of the American Imagist school of poets from the beginning of the century” (31). However, Šalamun did not remain only a Slovenian poet recognized in the U.S., but, according to Brian Henry, became (together with other foreign poets, such as Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, Czeslaw Milosz and others) an important influence on the younger generation of American poets:

The international allegiances of these young poets make them distinctly American: what is American poetry, after all, but the absorption of the past and the

present, the local and the distant, the familiar and the foreign into the mind and heart of a poet whose music is American English? (Henry in Maver 34)

The American culture, despite being bigger and more dominant, is therefore prepared to accept contemporary Slovenian poetry, which is capable of integration, but of course the same is even more true when the roles are reversed. The Slovenian culture has been accepting American contemporary literature with open hands for some time. T. S. Eliot was the first poet to receive a very positive reception in the 1960s, but was later joined also by Alen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, Gary Snyder, James Tate and John Ashbery in the 1980s. When I say positive reception, I of course mean mostly a rise in interest in the poetry of the mentioned poets, which resulted in new translations, since the number of translations is surely the indicator that appropriately reflects the position of foreign poetry in the local literary area. After the 1980s, the interest in translating contemporary American poetry into Slovenian has decreased, but some poets remain interesting for the Slovenian audience. One of them is certainly Charles Simic – an American poet born in Serbia, a recipient of numerous awards, among them the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1990, and currently one of the more important poetic figures in the U.S.

Simic's poetry has been translated into Slovenian multiple times. The collection *Razgaljanje tišine (Dismantling the Silence)*³ was published in Slovenian in 2001⁴ and then again in 2016 (when the poet was a guest of the Days of Poetry and Wine festival). Likewise, the collection *Izbrane pesmi (Selected Poems)* was published in 2012, when Maribor was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture and hosted Simic. Since Simic's *Dismantling the Silence* was published already in 1971, we could say that the Slovenian translation happened relatively late, which is also recognized by Aleš Debeljak. In his foreword to the mentioned collection, Debeljak points out that the translations of Simic's poetry coincide with the interest of Slovenian readership (241), which could be seen as another sign of the reborn Slovenian interest in American poetry. In the context of transnationalism, Simic is an interesting figure both because of his personal emigrational history and because of his connection to the Balkan culture, where an opportunity to connect to Slovenian culture arises. Interestingly, in her critique Gabriela Babnik points out that Simic is not only an American poet, since he "unites different voices":

Simic, born in 1938 to a bourgeois Belgrade family, could just as well be considered a Serb, a Balkan, a Mediterranean, later, when he found himself in Paris at

3 The translated collection has the title of one of Simic's collections, but actually includes selected poems from several collections, published between 1971 and 1999.

4 It is interesting to point out that the poems were selected and translated by Tomaž Šalamun himself.

fourteen years of age and was faced with the limitations of his mother tongue, he acquired the stigma of a “displaced person”; it wasn’t until 1954, when he arrived in the United States of America and settled in industrial Chicago, that he started drawing his poetical face, in which the anxious experience of being uprooted is one of its most characteristic traits. (Babnik)

The characteristics that Babnik points out in Simic’s poetry are “leaning on the Eastern-European experience”, irony, his focus on objects, and the easiness with which he mixes opposite elements. Veronika Šoster shares a similar idea in her critique of *Dismantling the Silence*, where she writes:

[H]is poetry is the constant mixing of tragical and comical, which has a relieving effect, but also a serious and strong one; but at the same time he is comfortable with playing with supernatural elements, mentioning all sorts of references from philosophy to mythology and also keeping enough distance from what is being said, and because of that manages to tell the most bitter of stories with taste. (Šoster)

In his foreword, Debeljak also emphasizes Simic’s “emigrant fate”, but does not see it as the main characteristic that makes Simic’s poetry quality. Debeljak believes the thing that makes Simic’s poetry great is “the masterful asceticism in using lyrical language where the profane easily mixes with the sacred, the comical with the tragical, and where a love ode walks hand in hand with rebellious ridicule” (224). Debeljak sees very obvious influences of the American poetic tradition “from Walt Whitman onward” mostly in Simic’s “spontaneously refined language that is intimately connected to the underground rhythms of jargon and the grandeur of street talk” (228).

It might be that the feeling of not belonging, which he experienced as an immigrant, made Simic develop such a sensibility for *otherness*, making his poetry more accessible to a wider audience and, consequently, more popular:

The high degree of universality, which has been noticed by both professional critics and the wider reading audience (let’s not forget that Charles Simic is one of the most popular poets in the U.S.), originates from a constantly renewed tension between detailed displays of situations of mostly the throb of city life on one hand, and the focal dilemmas of human existence on the other: this makes Simic’s poetry attractive and fresh at the same time. (Debeljak 235–236)

However, when researching the transnational contact between American and Slovenian poets, focusing only on the characteristics of specific poetics that manage to find common ground between two different cultural areas and open doors to

cross this boundary is not the only thing to keep in mind. As mentioned, Šalamun was the one who prepared the first translations of Simic, and Simic took care of translations of Latin American and European poets (Šalamun among them) into English. This fact emphasizes two things. Firstly, personal contacts between poets, and their personal affinity to the poetry they write essentially influence or enable transnational contacts. Isn't it the national poet, who is inseparably connected to the poetry and language of their home country, the one who will in a foreign cultural space intuitively find that type of poetry that will be positively accepted in their country? And secondly, translation is the only technique that makes a transnational contact even possible.

THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN THE SCOPE OF THE TRANSNATIONAL

Kaiser points out that for the transnational approach translation is the most necessary foundation, since language is an inevitable trait of every literary work, and precisely language, which is also intertwined with other languages, demands translation (19). But translation also presents an unsolvable paradox, since translation “demands that we develop literacies which move between translation and untranslatability” (15). To support his claim, Kaiser uses Derrida and his deconstructive understanding of literature as something that can never be truly translated, but also needs to be translated constantly. Or, as Derrida writes: “what remains *untranslatable* is at bottom the only thing *to translate*, the only thing *translatable*” (257–258). This means that both the idea that translation is impossible and “a denial of their untranslatability” should be denied. No translation is final (Kaiser 16), translation is, as is transnationality, a constant crossing of borders.

Translations also open up another dimension, since it functions as an indicator of “how literary texts travel around the world” (Fisher Fishkin 23). “The project of exploring what translations and adaptations of works by American writers can teach us about the cultures in which these works are translated and adapted has been a particularly fruitful one in recent years” (24). In other words, taking a look at the reception of Simic in Slovenia has taught us just as much about Slovenian culture as it did about American, and the same remains true for Šalamun and his position in the U.S. This transnational contact between Slovenia and the U.S. is, as seen, reciprocal and mutually enriching.

CONCLUSION

Even though literary theory still often overlooks the transnational approach, the overview of American theoretical sources discussed in this article has shown that this is the only sensible way of studying American literature, since American culture intensely crosses its own borders, imports, and mostly exports its own cultural products, which are bound to transform at the very moment when they cross the mentioned borders. It is then only logical to assume that no country, of course not even the U.S., exists independently and untouched by the rest of the world. The United States of America, where the flow of people, capital, knowledge, and ideas certainly is not limited to only one specific political entity, need to be understood in the broader context of the world in its entirety. Migrations work in all directions, and that is why only a broad transnational approach can deepen the understanding of the past and the present (Fluck 366).

The concept of the nation offers at least an organizational if not an identificatory label and cannot be entirely excluded in the transnational approach, but needs to be carefully observed so as to identify its characteristics and boundaries, and determine the changes that happen when different nations meet. However, when it comes to poetry (and literature in its broadest sense), it is also true that poets themselves “make and remake their often-interstitial citizenship” through writing and rewriting of their works “that can span multiple nationalities and ethnicities” (Ramazani, *Transnational Poetics* 354). Both Tomaž Šalamun and Charles Simic are good examples of poets who have in the process of crossing national boundaries acquired multinational personas.

Modern and contemporary poetry that has been and is being made in the times of globalization is a complex transnational mosaic, created by “unwilled imaginative inheritances and elective identifications across national borders” (Ramazani, *Transnational Poetics* 354). To study it, we need transnationalism that will make it possible for us “to rethink the local and the global and how categories are modified when delinked from earlier static configurations” (Davis 2).

In the framework of the transnational, translation remains the main activity that enables transnational contacts between literatures and specific texts, even though translation is still an act that remains unfinished or that constantly tries to reach a text that will necessarily become different through translation. Nevertheless, these new translations sooner or later acquire a character and life of their own and start forming an entirely new canon, which we could also call “the literature of the transnational” (Lim in Fisher Fishkin 21). This new canon demands its own approach – the transnational one, which can “reveal to us the ways in which creative intelligences and critical approaches formulate more comprehensive premises about our place and action in a complexly interlinked world” (Davis 10).

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Nina Kremžar
Ljubljana
nina.kremzar.48@gmail.com



Transnacionalizem v ameriški poeziji

Članek na podlagi ameriških teoretskih virov razišče pojem transnacionalnosti in ga poskusi čim bolj tesno vezati na študije moderne in sodobne poezije. Izpostavi tudi določene izzive transnacionalnega pristopa, predvsem dejstvo, da je kljub globalni povezanosti narod nemogoče odmisлити in je vsak transnacionalni stik potrebno premisliti skozi prizmo vseh vključenih kultur. Kot primera transnacionalnega stika med ameriško in slovensko poezijo sta izpostavljena Tomaž Šalamun in Charles Simic, ki sta oba na svoj način prestopila omenjeno mejo in doživela uspeh na tujih tleh. Pregled omejenih stikov služi predvsem kot oris določenih potez obeh poetik, ki so privlačile ameriške ali slovenske kritike in bralce. Članek izpostavi še nezmožnost, a hkrati nujnost prevajanja, ki je tisti postopek, ki sploh omogoča transnacionalne stike med kulturami.

Ključne besede: transnacionalno, prevod, sodobna poezija, Charles Simic, Tomaž Šalamun