

ARTISTIC VS. POPULAR ELEMENTS IN PAUL LARIC'S NOVEL *MARIBOR REMEMBERED*

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Abstract

The article discusses Paul Laric's *Maribor Remembered* (1989) as a hybrid novel in terms of genre and artistic value. Essentially a detective novel, it also includes ethnic elements and humor as well as satire used to alleviate the growing tension as the elements of foul play multiply. Other elements, such as minute descriptions of Slovenian cuisine, or portrayal of Slovenian landscape further confirm the mixed-genre thesis.

Key words: Paul Laric, popular fiction, hybrid novel, WW 2, *Maribor Remembered*

1. INTRODUCTION

A debate over the value of so-called popular novel has been going on for quite some time. After all, even Henry James complained in *The Art of Fiction* about the intrusion of popular art, such as represented by the novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, in the sacred field of high art (Gelder 16). Most literary critics nowadays more or less agree about popular literature as being genre literature including such diverse genres as cowboy, western or science fiction novel, romance, crime and detective novel, thriller, mystery, etc. Neuburg brings in comics as well (7). Whereas for some "popular" is a synonym for "second-rate", "trash", "pulp" etc.¹ others see "popular" as a synonym for "successful" (*Canadian Encyclopedia*). It is not my intention to contribute towards a kind of completeness as I agree with Neuburg who in his *Popular Literature* claims to be "asking questions rather than providing a set of neatly tabulated answers" (17). My understanding being that high and popular literature are nowadays so intertwined that it is difficult to draw a clear line between the two of them, I want to focus on a Slovenian American novel in order to demonstrate both its "popular" features as well as literary qualities. If Gelder claims the characteristics of a high novel to be sophistication, restraint/discretion, potential absence of plot, high artistry and elitism (19) whereas popular novels display the opposite qualities, I want to see how this theory applies to

¹ Cf. Neuburg, Gelder, Mc Cracken, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Kmecl, Hladnik.

Paul Laric's 1989 novel *Maribor Remembered*. Another point of interest is whether *Maribor remembered* qualifies as an ethnic novel or not? According to Dorothy Burton Skårdal "authors in English who betray no trace of their foreign origin should probably be classified as American writers (...)" (51), however, Werner Sollors objects proposing "a broader and more inclusive definition" (243) such as comprising "works written by, about or for persons who perceived themselves or were perceived by others, as members of ethnic groups (...)" (Ibid.).

Slovenian Americans have left us rich written record ranging from simple letters to literature proper. In spite of the opulent variety of literary genres to be found in Slovenian American literature, detective fiction is rare which can easily be explained with the harsh reality the early authors were confronted with. Bare existential struggle prevented them to get an education; as writers they concentrated on the glooms and dooms of their immigrant existence with nostalgia on the very top of their list of writing topics. All this is to say that for the first generation immigrants mainstream literature passed by virtually unnoticed. Sweeping statements like this can, of course, be misleading and unfair. After all, Slovenian American authors have written stories and even novels that contain rudiments of detective fiction. *V močvirju velemesta* (In the Swamp of a City, 1921) by an anonymous L.C. (or L.G.), Ivan Molek's *Sesuti Stolp* (The Collapsed Tower, 1935) and his drama *Poročna noč* (The Wedding Night, 1928), Frank Tauchar's story "Slovenec, glavar Indijancev: Povest o zlatoiskalcih" (A Slovenian, Indian Chief: A story of Goldiggers, 1917), Jože Ambrožič's "Obesili so ga" (He Was Hanged, 1915), Zvonko A. Novak's "Strta življenja" (Shattered Lives, 1940), Etbin Kristan's plays *Bomba v tovarni* (The Bomb in the Factory, 1915) and "Maščevanje" (The Revenge, 1940-41) are all exceptions to the rule. Paul Laric, a first generation immigrant from Maribor further belies our bold assertion regarding first-generation immigrant authors' disregard of mainstream literature. Having emigrated on the eve of the Second World war, the circumstances of his life were radically different from the turn-of-the century Slovene immigrant who unlike Laric could not afford an education.

Laric was born March 26, 1926 in Vienna to Bohemian parents who had left their homeland six years before. They moved to Maribor and became nationalized. Paul's father owned a textile factory in Maribor where his son attended a "realka" (secondary school). The pending German aggression forced the family to emigrate – via India – to the United States. After a period of detention on Ellis Island they relatively quickly established themselves in the New World. After high school Laric studied at the Naval Academy in Annapolis graduating in 1949. He served with the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean where he met his future wife. Five years later he left the service to begin a new career working as a Public Relations officer for several New York companies and corporations. He studied at New York School of Social Research and completed a couple of courses in creative writing, public relations and advertising at New York University. He retired in 1990 but has continued to play an active role in New York's Slovene societies.

Apart from *Maribor Remembered*, Laric published *Fractured Italian* together with Frances Russell, "a collection of imaginative, and sometimes naughty translations of the way Italian words sound" (Moser 4). He co-edited *Tales from Annapolis* (2000) with Richard Zino, a

/collection of 91 stories from 61 graduates of US Naval Academy from classes of 1934 through 1994 relating personal experiences from their Midshipman days. It is humorous, candid, eye-opening and entertaining. Contributing authors include a former US President, a former head of the CIA, a former Chief of Naval Operations and a former head of Naval Intelligence, as well as numerous other Academy grads. (“Annapolis, Maryland”)

Laric contributed three stories of student life in Annapolis - “Mealtime Molestation”, “Bells Galore” and “Pulling Through”.

2. MARIBOR REMEMBERED

Maribor Remembered is a hybrid novel containing such diverse components as autobiography, travelogue, memoir, detective novel, letters, history, politics and gastronomy – in short, fiction largely based on fact. Should we take it simply as an example of popular literature, “a work of amusement”² or should we lay critical demand upon it? My suggestion is to avoid the reductionist error of disqualifying an unpretentious work in advance; I want to show something of the variety and range Laric’s book offers. Although I will settle on the components mentioned above, my primary focus will be on the detective novel, a rarity among Slovenian American writers, particularly in the present time of relatively lean literary crops.

The plot is comparatively simple. An anonymous omniscient narrator tells the story of a first-generation Slovene American Peter Kovar known as Pete. The narrative opens in the French Alps in Val d’Isère where Pete and his French wife Danielle, called Dani, enjoy their skiing holidays. It is February 1984, the time of winter Olympics in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. Vacationers watch TV broadcasts of sporting events in the evenings and when a heavy snow storm terminates all skiing for a couple of days, Pete retires to the TV room to watch the Olympics. Due to a parallel storm in Sarajevo, however, he can only watch substitute footage on Sarajevo and the fine points of Bosnian culture in the broadest meaning of the word, all of which reawakens in him a sense of nostalgia and pride. That evening he and his wife decide to visit Yugoslavia at the very next opportunity. He writes a long letter to a one-time schoolmate Boris Pravnik “who surely, following his father’s footsteps, must be a university professor and therefore be reachable by a letter addressed to him in care of the University of Ljubljana” (4), an assumption that proves him right. The letter tells about the Laric family’s last carefree days spent in Crikvenica, Croatia just before emigration, followed by a description of their hasty departure and stressful journey via Bulgaria, Turkey, Iran, India, South Africa and Trinidad to the United States – the only route still open to fugitives. Pete outlines his life story and tells about other family members as well. He emphasizes the fact that he has “been blessed with good health, a good marriage and sufficient success in /his/ chosen field to make for a comfortable, rewarding life” (9). He met Dani while on duty

² The term was coined by Herman Melville to name his last novel *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2010. 245.)

with the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. They have a grown-up daughter Katja and a Lhasa Apso darling of the family called Kim.

Back in New York, Pete digs up some skeletons from the closets: a letter from the year 1941 written by his first love Sonja only days after his departure for the States, and another one by Tomislav or Tomi, Pete's closest friend and high school chum, dated May 8, 1941, a month after the German occupation of Maribor. Sonja's letter is deeply emotional although she bravely attempts to hide her distress under a mask of humor. Tomi's letter, on the other hand, hides a solution to the enigma to be resolved by Pete at the end of the novel. The key passage of his letter refers to a love triangle consisting of Tomi, Hinko, Pete's schoolmate, and Slava, Hinko's ex-girlfriend and Tomi's new flame. In his letter Tomi proudly reports of his successful courting of Slava which Hinko "doesn't seem to mind" (17). On the contrary, he is even prepared to go out of his way to arrange a secret meeting for the lovebirds. Tomi wants this to remain a secret between him and Pete while he proceeds with more detail,

You know that his uncle manages the Hotel Orel. Well, Hinko asked if he could use an empty suite this Sunday for a party with some friends, and his uncle said yes. Yesterday he told me that the party idea wasn't working out, and would I like to have the use of the suite for myself? Boy, did I jump at this chance to be alone with Slava! Can you imagine? When I told her about it last night, she first hesitated and blushed all over. But I told her that in these times we must take advantage of every moment because we don't know what the next day will bring. We kissed, she said she loved me and she consented. So, you see, life isn't all bad. Hinko must have connected with some new number, or else he wouldn't leave me such free reign with Slava. Anyway, he's not such a bad guy. (17)

Having re-read both letters Pete can hardly wait to see Tomi and learn the rest of the story. However, Boris' letter, which arrives shortly upon their return to New York, shatters his hopes: Tomi did not survive the war – he was shot after he had been caught in a German ambush. The majority of former schoolmates having survived the war, they now live either in Maribor or Ljubljana. Everybody is looking forward to meeting Pete after forty-five years and his wife. The couple embarks on a journey not knowing what awaits them in Slovenia.

Their journey begins in Kranjska Gora. Since skiing is not as good as expected they almost immediately contact some of Pete's friends. Everybody is married except for Slava. After Tomi's tragic death and the equally tragic deaths of her closest family members, Slava isolated herself from the world devoting her life to orphaned children. Milan, Tomi's brother and his wife visit the Kovars while still in Kranjska Gora. The phone keeps ringing all the time, life stories and old memories are being swapped. Pete and Dani visit some of the friends at their homes, each time enjoying a unique culinary experience and a very warm welcome. Then they move to Ljubljana, pay some more home visits, and then everybody, except Slava, meets at the town's foremost hotel where an unforgettable reunion is celebrated.

Eventually the Kovars move to Maribor, Pete's hometown. They check in at the Hotel Orel. This is a very emotional time for Pete: walking the streets brings back

memories of old times – it is Pete’s youth revisited. One of the most poignant moments arrives when Pete goes to see his father’s textile factory that has been nationalized and the house they lived in – now occupied by a practicing veterinarian.

Suspecting Slava is not going to participate in their Maribor reunion at the Hotel Orel, Pete visits her at her workplace, an orphanage and day-care center the director of which she is. “Seated behind a large desk in the spacious, well-appointed office was Slava, whom Pete recognized instantly because the years had only transformed a beautiful child into a handsome woman. Her eyes were as sparkling blue and her smile as warm and genuine as ever”(87). Pete shows her Tomi’s last letter; she reads it and breaks down which makes Pete angry with himself for having embarrassed her thus spoiling the moment he expected to be the highlight of his visit.

Everybody else gathers at the evening reunion at the Hotel Orel. Hinko brings his wife and, when challenged, repeats the story Pete has heard from numerous other people: that fateful Sunday when Tomi was due to meet Slava at their secret tryst, he and Hinko went to the movies together. When they were leaving the building, the Germans were waiting in an ambush. They had been shooting innocent people in reprisal for the sabotage on one of their cars that had been carried out by a resistance group. Hinko spotted the ambush and quickly returned to the building unnoticed. Tomi innocently fell in the trap and was shot. His name along with the names of other victims was printed on a leaflet and posted on the walls around the town the next day. Pete eventually articulates the inconsistency that has been bothering him ever since his arrival in Slovenia, “It’s not that, Hinko. I just can’t understand why the two of you wound up going to the movies together, instead of at least one of you going on a date with Slava. After all, it was a Sunday. Wasn’t it?” (103). A schoolmate’s teasing remark saves Hinko from having to explain the delicate situation. He just mentions that things happened such a long time ago he can no longer remember the details. After the party inconsistencies in Hinko’s story bother Pete even worse than before. He invites a schoolmate Jože and his wife to his suite where they mull over the events of that Sunday. After he reads Tomi’s letter, Jože agrees with Pete, “I see what you mean. Tomi certainly had only Slava on his mind when he wrote this letter, certainly not going to the movies with Hinko. Something must have happened to his plans with Slava”(105). Now that he knows the contents of Tomi’s letter Jože recalls that Hinko never ever mentioned Slava when talking about Tomi’s capture. As it turns out, several hypothetical explanations regarding Tomi’s silence have been passing around.

On the day of Pete and Dani’s departure from Maribor they all meet for a farewell lunch at Kliček’s Restaurant, now called The Three Ponds. It is another emotional episode for, “(...) it seemed to Pete as if the Vadnica school bell had rung and class was about to begin” (119). Everybody is there, except for Slava. Farewell speeches are delivered, toasts proposed, eyes wet “from the powerful combination of wine and sentiment” (121). Pete finally offers a toast to their common friend Tomislav Dornik thereby triggering the inescapable climax. Jože takes over informing the others about the existence of Tomi’s letter written on the day he died. Hinko is summoned to retell his version of the events of that ill-fated Sunday. He complies albeit very unwillingly; when asked what movie he and Tomi saw, he can’t remember pretending it must have been “some trashy story with Anny Ondra and Willi Fritsch, those rotten superstars of the German screen” (123).

Right after this Jože reads Tomi's letter aloud discretely masking Slava's name and then asks the question that is on everyone's mind, "What do you know about Tomi's change of plans that day?" (125). Hinko defends himself desperately claiming the details are getting fuzzy and he can no longer recall everything. But he knows they don't believe him and is eager to drop the subject, "Tomi is long dead and what difference does it make whether he spent that Sunday at the movies with me or in bed with X?" (Ibid.). Confronted with stern faces and staring eyes, he inquires, "You're not trying to pin some kind of blame for what happened to Tomi on me, are you? I just happened to be the last person to see him. That's all" (Ibid.). Before anyone can reply, a soft female voice from the doorstep announces the presence of Slava who didn't want to let Pete return to America with a feeling he had been indiscreet towards her.

Having overheard Hinko's last words Slava now wants to unburden her soul of a burning suspicion that has been weighing her down ever since Tomi's death. She offers her version of the events that took place on that black Sunday and begs everyone to keep it to themselves.

She and Tomi met at the Astoria café next to the Hotel Orel. They ordered lemonade and felt very anxious. Awhile later Tomi paid for the drinks and was preparing to run across the street to the hotel's reception desk in order to get the key to their suite. Not wanting to embarrass Slava, she was to wait for him in the café. She did as told watching Tomi as he disappeared through the main entrance. Minutes later a Nazi limousine pulled up in front of the hotel and two Gestapo officers disappeared inside. They soon returned with Tomi squeezed between them and Hinko following. They got in the limousine and drove off. She never saw Tomi again. Next day Hinko sought her out during a school break and told her the well-known movie theater story. He also tried to sweet-talk her into being his girlfriend again now that Tomi was dead. Slava rejected Hinko's persistent advances that continued for months.

At the same time she embraced Hinko's version; for one, she could not believe Hinko was capable of having his competitor murdered, and she also thought she needed to protect her reputation. She had to live with the gnawing suspicion that something was terribly wrong for which she got the confirmation once she had read Tomi's letter. Only then did she realize how naïve Tomi had been trying to arrange for their secret meeting with someone who hated him and wanted him out of the way. Had she known Hinko was the nephew of the owner of the Hotel Orel, she could have warned Tomi in time. But she hadn't had the faintest idea.

The story told, Slava bids farewell to Pete and Dani and departs, leaving behind a stunned roomful of people staring at the defiant Hinko who fights back, "Look, that's her story. Her version. There can be any number of versions. She can't prove any of it. If she tried to prove it, who would take the word of a jilted, self-pitying, semi-recluse against my word?" (129). They give him one last chance to tell a credible story that would prove Slava wrong, however, he suddenly evokes the 1962 amnesty law which – as he believes – forgave people "for any alleged complicity in collaboration with the occupying forces" (130). A schoolmate quickly sets the record straight on this informing him the law only "put a halt to further prosecution" (ibid.). Dani and Pete cannot wait any longer, they have to catch a plane. The last scene they witness looks like a "kangaroo court about to convene"(130).

3. STRUCTURE, CHARACTER, SETTING AND TIME

The structure of Laric's novel is classical, consisting of thirteen titled chapters – the only exception being Chapter One. The titles are either descriptive (e.g. Chapter 2: Val d'Isère; Chapter 3: Skeletons from Closets), named after schoolmates or after the setting (Chapter 8: Ljubljana etc.). The narrative progresses forward, one scene preparing another. The novel has a circular structure beginning at the end. Following the Acknowledgments, Laric added a note to the reader informing him/her that there is no need to read the end first for, "I've written the last chapter first" (n.p.). There are two stories, one in the past (the analytical story) and the present one (the synthetic story). The novel partly relies on the traditional modes of emplotment – structured narrative, time relations based on a stable chronology, spatial representation, etc.

Characters are either based on real personalities, made up from several personalities or are entirely fictitious. That, too, is explained by the author. The protagonist of the synthetic narrative, Pete Kovar, is presumably the writer's alter ego. Like Laric he was born to a Czech father who turned Slovenian and set up Yugoslavia's first textile factory in Maribor. Pete recalls him as a highly professional and honest man who "knew textiles from the ground up and taught the craft to every employee he hired (...) He was more interested in ways to improve production, in research, in the application of patterns he obtained for a silk-screen process that is still in use today. He was a craftsman, not a businessman"(110). He had to start all over again in the U.S., at first successfully, but then, after a spell of bad luck, lost everything and died embittered and disappointed. The protagonist of the analytical story is no longer alive. Nevertheless, his presence in the novel is strongly felt due to a letter written the day he died. We may presume that he was modeled after a real person named Bojan to whom the novel is dedicated. Other characters are presented explicitly (the narrator sums up their life stories) and dramatically, through their actions and speech. Five schoolmates died during the war whereas the others survived. Having all taken up important positions in the postwar economy, politics and health service, they represent the cream of society thus maintaining equilibrium with the well-situated and cosmopolitan Pete.

The story is told by an anonymous, omniscient third person narrator who tells the story as if it were seen and understood by Pete and occasionally by Dani. I believe the author acts self-consciously as narrator, recounting his story and commenting on it. Laric decided upon a mixture of scenic and panoramic method. The conversations are given in detail, as they occurred, objectively though frequently followed by the narrator's, or rather Pete's, commentary.

Laric has an interesting way of temporal and spatial miming. Kmecl uses the term "posedanjevalni učinek", i.e. creating an impression in the reader of everything happening now, at the time of reading, in the reader's present, as if he/she (the reader) were part of that world, time and characters (214). Indeed, Laric creates the impression of present according to the principle of "pramenska kompozicija" (streak composition) (Ibid.) – namely he omits time periods not crucial to his narrative and focuses mainly on two temporal streaks – the first weeks of German occupation of Maribor at the beginning of World War II and the Kovar's visit to Slovenia in early Spring of 1985.

Laric rearranged the chronology of events according to the “inner, literary time” (224), placing the epilogue at the very beginning of his book,

Ten days after Pete and Dani Kovar returned to New York from a visit to Yugoslavia, there arrived an airmail letter, postmarked Maribor, Yugoslavia, March 6, 1985. The flimsy, typewritten envelope bore neither name of sender, nor return address. (...) Inside was a newspaper clipping, from the front page of *Mariborski Glas*, the evening paper – and nothing else.

Pete read the headline and his face turned ashen. “Listen to this.” He began translating from the Slovenian, his voice shaking and his body tense.

BATTERED CORPSE FOUND
IN CITY POND BY CHILDREN
Police Launch Full Investigation (1)

Laric reversed the usual order in that the book’s ending poses a question whereas its beginning introduces an answer that, incomplete as it may be, is enough to trigger the reader’s interest. The newspaper article is incomplete; whoever sent it forgot (or did not bother to) cut out the follow-up as well. There is no name of the victim and nothing is said as to what may have happened. How did the body end up in the pond? In order to learn more, one must read the whole book, expecting a detective story. Making his way through a variety of genres the reader must advance carefully: things are hinted at as forthcoming, the narrator cues the reader on how the events of the novel are to be viewed. There is a character who is referred to more often than the narrative seemingly justifies – Hinko Gribec. As apparently the only witness to the incident in front of the movie theater he appears pretty untrustworthy. The narrator presents him as a person of shifting attitudes towards the Partisans and the Germans. Pete is the only schoolmate to hear his story for the first time after 45 years. Thus unburdened by possible explanations he becomes aware of the fact that, “(...) only Hinko seems to be telling the story of the hostage roundup outside the movie theater. There must have been quite a commotion with people scrambling to get away from the SS men (...) Did anybody else see Tomi apprehended? Were there any witnesses to the apprehension?” (84-5). Pete wonders why Tomi didn’t follow Hinko’s example to save his life. He questions himself what made him change his carefully prepared plan in the very last moment without saying anything to anyone, especially Slava. He feels as if he were trying to put all the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle together with some very crucial pieces missing. Apparently casual remarks only fire his suspicion, e.g. when Milan says, “The way *we were told*³ it happened...” (35) or when Zlatko remarks, “(D)on’t forget that Hinko has always been a windbag” (96). Vlado’s words of welcome upon Pete and Dani’s arrival in Maribor all of a sudden acquire a prophetic undertone; “You and Dani are in for a time you won’t forget” (71) to which the reader might want to add a pinch of genuine Montresoresque irony, “True – true” (Poe 249).

There is less chronological, synthetic action in the first four chapters and more analytical retrospection. The narrator brings into play old letters that help him portray the feelings and actions of the novel’s main characters, especially Tomi. The letters also make it possible to show one and the same action from different points of view. New

³ My emphasis.

characters are being introduced continually, all of them young teenagers of approximately fourteen, fifteen years. Dramatic details from the past are turning up thereby intensifying the suspense. The last, fifteenth chapter "The Three Ponds" resumes this kind of synthetic-analytical organization of action. When the fateful conflict erupts nothing suggests the catastrophic outcome.

4. ARTISTIC VALUE OF LARIC'S NOVEL

A popular novel like this has supposedly little or no lasting esthetic value. A brief inspection of Laric's literary style discloses a level of artistry not usually found in a novel to be read in order to pass the time. The first chapter brings news of the discovery of a body. The narrator uses short, concise sentences well suited to the dark contents. Unlike this, the second chapter set in the French Alps, contains long, complex sentences, figures of speech and sound effects. In his letter to Boris, Pete says, "You said in that letter that you and your family had moved from Maribor to Ljubljana during the war – *out of the Nazi fire into the Italian frying pan*, so to speak, because many Italians did their dirty work with occasional lapses of compassion, unlike the Germans who *went about their atrocities with bravado*"⁴ (5). In Ljubljana, the Kovars are horrified at the damage modern architecture did to the old castle causing Dani to express her indignation with a passable simile, "It's *like draping the Venus de Milo in an evening gown by Yves St. Laurent*" (54). The get-together of one-time schoolmates in a Ljubljana hotel is described by the narrator with the following words, "(...)what began as a party of some twenty guests *had mushroomed* into a mob of fifty" (63). A little later, on page 66, he creates some memorable lyric passages while describing the history of Maribor, containing personification, alliteration, assonance, sibilance and polysyndeton:

Maribor had suffered wars, the bubonic plague, hunger, fires, floods and droughts, devastations by the Turks, occupations by Crusaders, slavery under the Holy Roman empire and subjugation under the Austro-Hungarian empire. Throughout all this you have Slovenian Maribor standing tough and fighting back.

The following excerpts from Pete's letter to Boris are fine examples of rhythmical prose accomplished through careful positioning, carried out with an almost mathematical precision, of short and long vowels and diphthongs.

After graduation from Brown University, he landed a job with the State Department in Washington (we all knew that it was the CIA), got married, had three children, skied, played a lot of tennis, traveled extensively, learned new languages on top of his basic six and, despite his many previous amorous flings, became a model husband and father, until his untimely death in 1959 at age 35, under mysterious circumstances in Madrid. (8-9)
Mother is now 82, superbly active and enjoying life to the fullest with annual trips to Europe, volunteer work at the Metropolitan Opera, visits with

⁴ Italics mine.

us and friends the year round, and active correspondence with relative, and friends the world over. A tireless gourmet cook, she enjoys eating her delicacies as much as preparing them. (9)

5. HUMOR AND SATIRE

One of the greatest merits of Laric's novel is its humor ranging from verbal to situational that occasionally turns to irony. According to the narrator, the person most naturally endowed with a special kind of humor is Pete's wife Dani. Her humor may occasionally strike one as impolite although she never meant it to be that way. Here are some examples from the book.

A few days into their trip, while still in Kranjska Gora and taking a walk, Pete spots "a skier in a fur jacket and well-shaped stretch pants, walking about 100 yards in front of him" (26). The silhouette, the hair color, the gait, everything reminds him of his first love Sonja as she was 45 years ago. Suspecting that she, too, must have aged, he wonders if the silhouette could be her daughter. Possessed by curiosity, he overtakes the would-be Sonja or her daughter to end up standing face to face with "a rather bearded, mustachioed young lad with distinct Scandinavian features" (ibid). When he reports his faux pas to his wife, she fires off, "You better watch out when the real Sonja shows up. Meanwhile I'll try to warn every Swede I see about a horny ex-Slovenian on the loose"(26-7). Sonja, a happily married middle-aged lady, does turn up a few days later at the meeting in Ljubljana. Emboldened by a couple of drinks she wants to make everybody happy with a "throaty version" (63) of a song. Sensing disaster her husband comes to the rescue with a plate full of delicious canapés much to Dani's amusement, "He's either très gallant, or wants to prevent an encore by keeping her mouth occupied in other ways" (63). Back home in Maribor Pete reminisces about his clumsy skiing beginnings on a hillock called Kreningl near the three ponds, his fondest memory being how he put his arms around the girls' waists to pull them upright after they had failed to execute a stem-turn. Evidently knowing her husband very well, Dani's comment comes right on cue, "You can wipe off that smile Kovar. Does looking at this hill bring up something unmentionable?" (119).

The narrator is not particularly tactful towards Pete either for he reveals many a spicy detail concerning his youthful vices, particularly his fondness for "girls' sweaters and unbuttoned blouses" (56). The following hilarious passage describing Pete's unsuccessful attempt to borrow a pair of pants from his brother points toward a change in perspective: what was once perceived as painfully mischievous is now fondly remembered as a funny episode in Pete's young life,

Ivan, always the practical one in matters of the heart or pants, told Pete to do two things: "Use your own pants, but tie the belt around the hips instead of the waist; then go to your seat late, when the lights will be out, and just before sitting down, raise your belt again, so that you can sit comfortably. Nobody will see, and when the movie is over, pull your pants down again as you get out of your seat." (45-6)

Pete's sense of humor is as good as his wife's and he frequently pays her in her own coin as shown in the following excerpt: "Kim's outdoor mission completed, Pete hurried back to the hotel room, where Dani was putting on the last touches of eye-shadow in anticipation of the upcoming confrontation (i.e. with Sonja, J.P.), harmless as that turned out to be. Pete wondered whether the Boy Scout motto "Be prepared – always prepared" wasn't female-inspired" (45).

Although humor largely targets either Pete or Dani, it now and then escalates to ironic commentary of the nutty reality of socialist life: "The taxi was a four-door Zastava. The driver was a tall, swarthy mustachioed, middle-aged Bosnian, who had added a sideline to his taxi business. He delivered eggs and live poultry from Kranjska Gora farmers to the Ljubljana market. Dani was to sit at the back, together with the chickens" (51). The driver, only too happy to have two devoted listeners, elaborates upon Yugoslav politics so vigorously that he gets overexcited; losing control, the car veers off the road, hitting a snow embankment. "The engine stalled and for a moment there was a total silence even from the chickens, who were too stunned to complain" (53). But Mate is prepared, his panacea a bottle of slivovka which Dani and Pete eagerly accept.

What then is the function of Laric's humor? According to Sollors "the community of laughter itself is an ethnicizing phenomenon, as we develop a sense of we-ness in laughing with others"(132). Although there is plenty of laughter and merrymaking when former schoolmates come together to have fun and share memories in *Maribor Remembered* the most hilarious scenes are those shared between Pete and Dani. Rather than creating a sense of unity, the humor eases the tension as indications of foul play multiply.

There are passages in the novel that are pure history and political talk with Pete taking up the role of a tourist guide explaining and commenting. He claims to recollect what he had learned in history class forty-five years ago which is hard to believe. What's more, one would expect a lot more politics in Laric's book, however, Pete makes it clear right at the beginning that he did not come home for that. "Boris, I didn't make this trip to talk politics, much less to start a revolution. I came to see my old-time friends regardless of their political leanings. I don't give a damn, for example, if you're a 200 percent Communist" (40). Nonetheless, he can't completely avoid the topic. His former schoolmates are well-educated professionals whose potential goes unrecognized by socialism. A fellow American, a journalist from New York, whom they meet at the hotel shakes his head unable to bring together a triple digit inflation and a relatively high living standard. Mate, the taxi driver from Kranjska Gora, updates them on the political and economic retrogression since Tito's death; he is pessimistic regarding the future of the multi-nation state. Discussing the post-Tito era with the American, Pete marvels at the institution called rotating presidency comparing it to a "fast game of musical chairs" (74) to which the American retorts, "More like a Russian Roulette, if you ask me (...). A system that rewards political compliance over professional competence can't succeed, can't compete in international markets. How are they going to repay their \$20 billion foreign debt? But even more to the point, where are they going to get their next loan?" (Ibid). With the benefit of hindsight, his words sound prophetic. Nevertheless, Pete gets the wrong idea in one particular

point – the highways. Perhaps under the impression of their American friend’s negative critique of Yugoslav grandness, Pete asks himself while driving on a half-empty highway “whether this super-highway was not another bureaucratic overkill spawned by a zealous political bigwig with delusions of grandeur” (64). Today we just smile at this.

6. A POPULAR TOPIC: CUISINE

No evaluation of Laric’s novel can be complete without one of its most important as well as most popular topics – food and cooking. This does not come as a surprise for early in the novel the narrator says, “Dani identifies with gourmet cooks, from Escoffier to Julia Child. And Pete is no slouch when it comes to the palate. Both usually go to great lengths discussing the finer points of a tasty dish” (57). In many places *Maribor remembered* reads like a gourmet guide. Slivovka (Yugoslav plum brandy), for example, is mentioned time and again as inseparable ingredient of every friendly reunion, followed by “kranjska klobasa” (the Kranj sausage), “štruklji” (cooked cottage cheese roll) etc. The narrator minutely describes the meals prepared either by ex-schoolmates or their wives or served at hotels and restaurants. He dispenses with superlatives such as “a bacchanal” (63), “an unforgettable culinary and oenological experience” (79), “delicious (...) nothing short of outstanding” (111) etc. or takes pleasure in page-long descriptions of the protagonists’ response to epicurean pleasures. Sonja’s dinner renders both Pete and Dani speechless, whereas the sheer memory of it sets the narrator-Pete in ecstasy,

Their only noises were subdued groans of pleasure, morsel after succulent morsel. Sonja outdid herself with the desert. Something Pete didn’t taste since the days of the *slaščičarna* (confectionary) Ilih on Aleksandrova Street in Maribor: a real, home-made apple strudel, the kind that calls for a full day’s kneading and stretching and then rolling of the dough to a gossamer-thin consistency, adding dabs of butter, apples, raisins, cinnamon and – the crowning glory – sautéed bread crumbs with a sprinkle of irresistible goodness whose overpowering aroma promises and then delivers certainly one of the world’s supreme pleasures. (57-8)

7. POPULAR AND ETHNIC?

Maribor Remembered is not a sophisticated novel nor does its narrator show any particular restraint. Definitely not written for the elite it has a clear-cut plot and can pride itself on a visible degree of artistry. In short, *Maribor Remembered* is a well-written, readable popular novel. Does the fact that it has been written by a Slovene American automatically classify it as ethnic novel? In my opinion it is both, the origin of the author and the book’s content that do it. But Laric also draws a clear line between his

protagonist's past in the old country and the present life in the United States. There was an in-between phase, of course, of assimilation and adaptation but that is dealt with summarily, in Pete's letter to his friend Boris. The protagonist thus displays no acute sense of doubleness, the only exceptions being his visit of father's textile factory and the family's old home in Maribor. I don't believe *Maribor Remembered* was written for "the inside audience" only (Johnson in Sollors 249) despite the inclusion of Slovenian words – translation offered in parentheses – an otherwise popular formal strategy used by ethnic authors while targeting the so-called insiders.

Laric's book in a way resembles Louis Adamic's *The Native's Return* (1932). Adamic and Laric's protagonist returned home after a number of years (nineteen in Adamic's case) to meet old friends and acquaintances. Both were plagued by a similar sense of alienation. Pete expressed it in a letter to Boris in the following way, "How do you write to someone you haven't seen or heard from in 45 years? And how do you manage that anyway in Slovenian, a language that (although your native tongue) you can no longer call your own?"(5). Adamic verbalized the dilemma in a similar manner, "In those nineteen years I had become an American. (...) I spoke, wrote and read only in English. (...) of late years I could express only the most ordinary things in my native tongue. I could not write in Slovenian of involved matters, such as my life in America" (3, 6).

For both protagonists the journey begins as a geographical one but soon turns into a search for their roots. Although a sense of loyalty and belonging among the former schoolmates fascinate Pete, his visit of the family sites in Maribor creates a subtle drama: he comprehends that, although temporarily, he is defined by his Slovenian descent:

Further down, they came to a textile mill district and stopped at what were once Pete's father's weaving and spinning mills, now a part of a much larger textile complex owned by the state and administered by the workers' councils. "They just simply took over and continued what father started," said Pete almost casually. But the lump that was building in his throat did not escape the perceptive Dani. She remained silent. She knew her Pete well. She knew that seeing the factories marked another milestone in Pete's pilgrimage into the past, and that any words from her would be an intrusion. (109-10)

In the 1960s Kurt Vonnegut struggled to resolve a major dilemma; having experienced the Allied bombing of Dresden during World War II and wanting to write a novel about it, he knew the American readers were pretty much fed up with the war themes. If his novel were to succeed, he needed a modern approach and so he chose science fiction: *Slaughterhouse-Five* was and remains a success. I see a parallel with Laric's novel here, his dilemma being how to communicate an immigrant's experience of homecoming with so many similar narratives already on the shelves. The dilemma was resolved by combining the narrative of nostalgic homecoming with an exciting detective story to create "a tale propelled by the warmth of childhood memories and the power of adult vengeance" (Louis Serille qtd. on the dust jacket flap).

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SUMMARIES IN SLOVENE – POVZETKI V SLOVENŠČINI

UDK 929Stanonik J.

Mirko Jurak

JANEZ STANONIK – DEVETDESETLETNIK

Redni univerzitetni profesor za angleško in ameriško književnost dr. Janez STANONIK je 2. januarja letos slavil devetdesetletnico svojega bogatega življenja. Je še vedno čil in poln zamisli za bodoče delo, o čemer pričata tudi dva članka, ki ju je pripravil za objavo letos. Zanimivo je, da ga oba prispevka o treh slovenskih rekah (Mislinji, Hudinji in Voglajni), povezujeta s Celjem, kjer je Janez Stanonik preživel svojo mladost ter tudi z etimološkimi vprašanji o katerih je pisal tudi na začetku svoje znanstvene poti. Še posebej je za njegovo delo pomembno dejstvo, da je leta 1968 ustanovil revijo *Acta Neophilologica*. V pričujočem članku omenjam še nekatere najpomembnejše dolžnosti, ki jih je imel na Filozofski fakulteti in na rektoratu Univerze v Ljubljani. V imenu številnih generacij študentov anglestike, ki jih je vzgojil, v imenu sodelavcev in prijateljev ter v svojem imenu, želim profesorju Janezu Stanoniku še mnogo zdravih in ustvarjalnih let.

UDK 821.111(73)–31.09Laric P.:908(497.4Maribor)

Jerneja Petrič

UMETNIŠKOST IN POPULARNOST V ROMANU PAULA LARICA *MARIBOR REMEMBERED*

Izhajajoč iz predpostavke, da sta visoka in popularna književnost v današnjem času tako prepleteni, da je nemogoče potegniti jasno ločnico med njima, avtorica predstavlja delo Paula Larica *Maribor Remembered* (1989) kot hibrid v žanrskem in umetniškem smislu. Roman, ki ima jasne avtobiografske poteze, posebej odlikuje

napeta kriminalna zgodba, ki poskrbi za potrebno ravnotežje z nostalgijo prežetim spominom iz preteklosti. Ena od izrazitejših kvalitete dela je humor, ki razbremeni stalno naraščajočo pripovedno napetost in mestoma prehaja v satiro. Opazne so slogovne kvalitete dela, saj Laric pripovedni slog spretno prilagaja vsebini in pa etnična komponenta, kjer se je Laric spretno izognil stereotipni pripovedi o vrnitvi v stari kraj. Vse omenjeno *Maribor Remembered* uvršča med dobro napisane, berljive popularne romane.

UDK 316.74:276.2(73)

Maja Štekovič

PRESTOPANJE KULTURNIH MEJA: REPREZENTACIJE AMIŠEV V AMERIŠKI KULTURI

Članek obravnava tipologijo amiškega leposlovja, reprezentacije Amišev v ameriški literaturi, ter vlogo avtorjev, založnikov in bralcev. Posebna pozornost je posvečena vlogi, ki jo imajo filmski režiserji kot kulturni popotniki, pri prestopanju kulturnih meja s čimer vstopajo v amiško kulturno okolje. Članek zagovarja bolj kritično obravnavo amiškega načina življenja s prikazom spreminjanja percepcije amiške skupnosti skozi čas – od časov, ko so bili Amiši žrtve verskega preganjanja v lastni domovini do takrat, ko so postali s pomočjo literature in filma izredno romantizirani ljudje v obljubljeni deželi.

UDK 821.111–2.03=112.2:792(436–89Ljubljana)

Margarete Rubik

ANGLEŠKA DRAMATIKA V NEMŠKEM GLEDALIŠČU V LJUBLJANI V ZADNJIH DESETLETJIH HABSBURŠKE MONARHIJE

Avtorica v prispevku raziskuje repertoar angleških iger v nemškem gledališču v Ljubljani v zadnjem obdobju monarhije in njihov sprejem v lokalnem časopisu v nemščini, v *Laibacher Zeitung*. Obravnava le dramatiko, ne pa tudi oper in operete. Angleška dramatika je bila seveda uprizorjena v nemških prevodih, za razliko od iger uprizorjenih v slovenskem jeziku vse od 18. stoletja naprej, zlasti še posebej v okviru kroga Dramatičnega društva ustanovljenega leta 1867. Izbor iger vseeno daje zanimiv vpogled nemške gledališke kritike ob koncu 19. in v začetku 20. stoletja do angleške kulture kot tudi do samopodobe, ki jo je želelo ustvariti Nemško gledališče v Ljubljani.