

Franc Zadavec. *Slovenski roman 20. stoletja. Prvi analitični del.* Murska Sobota: Pomurska založba; Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, 1997. 378 pp., ISBN: 86-7195-233-9.
Slovenski roman 20. stoletja. Drugi analitični del in nekaj sintez. Murska Sobota: Pomurska založba; Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, 2002. 376 pp. ISBN: 86-7195-355-6.

The Twentieth-Century Slovene Novel (Slovenski roman 20. stoletja) describes and analyzes in various ways (stylistic, structural, historical, and others) major long prose works of approximately 100 Slovene writers beginning with, chronologically and thematically, Ivan Cankar's *Na klanecu* (1902). The two-volume organization is both simple and ingenious—the author treats groups of from three to ten works in thirteen (including two two-part) topical sections. In volume 1 the sections are not named but the commonalities are evident (and most are sketched on the dust jacket): Slovene prose in the early twentieth-century European context, relations between generations, novels with outsider protagonists, World War II and its consequences, spiritual and political reflections, love stories, and Slovene-American cultural interfaces. Volume 2 contains the sections “Tyrants and Rebels” (“Tirani in uporniki”), “Disputes and Oppression” (“Razdori in tesnobe”), “To Be Free or Not” (“Biti svodboden ali ne”), “Love and Time” (“Ljubezem in čas”), and “Autobiographical and Family Portraits” (“Autobiografski/rodbinski obrazi”). There are three essays on the Slovene novel on the last sixty-one pages of volume 2. I call this arrangement “ingenious” because it frees Zadavec from critical constraints that perhaps otherwise would make it impossible to deal with so many writers and major works in 750 pages. Thought-provoking juxtapositions and continuities arise from consideration of individual authors and works in each section and between sections in what reads like a series of informative and inspired lectures that do not pretend to—and in fact reject—a comprehensive definition of the Slovene novel's evolution in the twentieth century.

Zadavec's studies are in fact far less concerned with the genre than the artists. A leitmotif of the two volumes is that “every novel inevitably reveals ... a part of its author and his world” (2, 176)—meaning that to a great extent novels are autobiographical works, whether explicitly defined as such or not. This remark is made in a discussion of Lojze Kovačič's *Resničnost*, and it permits, I think, locating Zadavec's general approach to the novel in the tradition of Lukács's view of the

genre as a search for the self (in contradistinction to the epic search it superseded). If the reader follows this path of understanding Zadavec's collected studies, then the emphasis on the discretely individual in each artist makes sense. Zadavec pursues this logic in the essay "Views of the Novel and Guardians of Art" ("Pogledi na roman in na umetnostne straže") (314–40).

For Slovene writers, Zadavec's logic runs, "the primary challenge is *the word* [emphasis in the original]. If beauty is the ethos of art, then the word is the material with which the author constitutes this ethos" (2, 332). This material-spiritual struggle that a writer engages in results in a text, "the structure of which admits only 'fresh words'—that is, individual words that well up from the 'language of the soul' and come to life in opposition to standard language, as in law, politics, preaching, and everyday conversation ... and all tendentious esthetic and poetic programs as well..." ("...struktura umetniškega besedila priznava samo »novo besedo«, tj. osebno besedo, ki vstane iz »jezika duše« ter zaživi kot nasprotje uvajenim jezikom, kakor so pravniški, politični, prižniški in vsakdanja govorica ... tudi vsem klanskim estetiškimi in poetičnim programom..."; 2, 339). This reasoning harkens back to Zadavec's enthusiastic discussion of Lojze Kovačič's novel *Crystal Time* (*Kristalni čas*, 1990) in volume 1:

In the chapter on the literary craft as a public cultural institution he confronts literary progenitors in the form of conversations. He posits the word as the starting point of literary art. The word must have its unique place in the dialog; in terms of meaning, sound, and shape (visual) it has either full integrity or it does not. It must be personal and not tendentious, professed, or formal; metaphorically put, it must be the voice of a lark, not a frog.... The first-person voice, from a unique personal substance, from an individual language he [Kovačič] calls the "language of the soul" or internal language ... fashions the artistically justified word. (1, 117)

Zadavec, along with Kovačič, frequently acknowledges the limitations that the individualized artistic view imposes. To this end he quotes Matej Bor (author of *Jernov rokopis ali Martinova senca*, 1993) on the creative act:

Every person actually lives in an individually created world; that is to say, not in a wholly true world, for no one can fully master that. A person is constantly becoming entangled in great and small confrontations with his surroundings because he thinks people either better or worse than they are in reality. (Vsak človek živi pravzaprav v svetu, kakršnega si ustvari sam. Se pravi, ne v popolnoma resničnem svetu, zato ga tudi nihče ne more povsem obvladati. Venomer se zapleta v večja ali manjša navzkrižja z okolico, bodisi zato, ker ima ljudi za boljše, kot so v resnici, ali slabše.) (1, 137–38)

Zadravec's essential interest seems to be in exploring a fundamental, Kantian view of art that Lukács adopted to question the relationship between individual and world.

The importance for Zadravec of individual perception and its artistic rendering (the disposition of form and content) might explain the author's decision to present his observations on examples of Slovene novels. For at least the past quarter of a century, of course, book-length studies of prose have been devoted primarily to narrative and aspects of it. *The Twentieth-Century Slovene Novel* includes, to be sure, some interesting observations about general narrative trends; for instance, the shift from third- to first-person narrators (2, 323) and, as relates to Vladimir Kavčič's *Ne vračaj se sam* (*Do Not Return Alone*, 1959), the uses of monolog and dialog (1, 220). It may be the case that in the Slovene context there was simply not time or opportunity for frank commentary on novelistic worlds when that author-work kind of approach was more widespread in Europe and North America. Certainly the timing of publication takes nothing away from Zadravec's well-honed expositions on these works. Here and there are found historically-based criticism—for instance, of accounts in Lojze Kovačič's *Prišleki* (*Newcomers*, 1984–85; 1, 89). Further, one imagines these two volumes were possibly a great source of enjoyment for the author given the voluminous editing, writing on the history of the literature, and studies of individual writers that he has done over the past forty odd years.

Zadravec's observations on each of these novels' stylistic features may be for many readers the most interesting parts of the two books. From notes on Cankar's syntax in *Na klanecu* (19–20), to Andrej Hieng's incorporation of montage in *Čudežni Feliks* (*The Amazing Feliks*, 1993; 1, 106), to Miško Kranjec's use of words from the socialist lexicon in *Pod*

zvezdo (*Beneath the Star*, 1950; 1, 271–73), the critic offers a wealth of suggestions for how to read these novels. As a rule, stylistic notes come at the end of each commentary.

Information on the social or literary contexts is understandably less abundant. The author alludes, for example, to the hostile reception Florjan Lipuš's *Zmote dijaka Tjaža* (*Seminarian Tjaž's Errors*, 1972) received in Catholic circles (2, 168) and to critics' tepid reaction to what they perceived as Vladimir Bartol's unpoetic style in *Alamut* (1938; an opinion Zadavec appears to share; 2, 14), but generally contemporaries' views of the novels, publication histories, and status, whether in educational curricula or on the book market, are absent. There are a few brief exceptions, as in the case of Miško Kranjec, an author Zadavec has written on extensively, whose unfinished *Za svetlimi obzorji* (*Beyond the Bright Horizon*, 1960–63) Zadavec explains on the basis of personal correspondence with the writer (1, 147). Nor is there an apparent principle according to which Zadavec included or excluded Slovene novels. He treats most all of the novelists that Janko Kos lists for the three post-World War II decades in *Pregled slovenskega slovstva*, but not necessarily the same novels. Thus, however curious the reader might be to know this leading Slovene critic's "favorites," *The Twentieth-Century Slovene Novel* is not an evaluative but a companion work that functions best as an introduction to individual artistic visions.

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