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THE LITERARY ESSAY AND LITERARY CRITICISM

The aim of this article is to show how recent Slovene literary scholarship has assessed literary criticism and the practice of the literary essay. The chief finding confirms the assumption that in the past decade and a half there have been many works that significantly expand previous historical and theoretical understandings. If other scholarly events are included, it is possible to conclude that literary scholarship vigorously and competently reflected upon both forms.

Key words: literary essay, literary criticism, Slovene literary history, axiology, history of the essay

I will trace scholarly and academic events that show what Slovene literary studies have had to say in the past decade about literary criticism and essay writing. I have in mind articles, theses, monographs, proceedings, and so forth. My interest is in to what degree Slovene literary studies have attended to the deeper, theoretical bases of essay writing and criticism, and the complexity of essays and criticism on literary history. A general evaluation of the situation, taking into account not only very recent developments, is that theoretical inquiry has reflected on current critical and essayistic practice with great interest. Reflections have been relatively more frequent and deeper at two times in particular—in the 1930s, when different ideological and philosophical impulses substantiated the necessity and “correctness” of Roman Catholic, liberal, and Marxist models of evaluating the arts; and again after WW II, when circumstances in the socialist state and all that they implied led to more or less measured thinking about what current literary evaluation ought to look like and which direction creative writing should take. Something similar took place with essay writing, though, of course, the situation was more tolerant because of the nature of the essay. Consideration was directed for the most part to the genre’s form, poetic features, topics, and stylistic models, without overly much attention to different ideological practices.¹

In the past decade there have been at least four important scholarly monographs about criticism: Matija Ogrin’s two books *Literarno vrednotenje na Slovenskem* (Literary evaluation in Slovenia 2002 and 2003), Draga Šega’s *Literarna kritika* (Literary criticism 2004), and Robert Jereb’s dissertation, “Struktura in funkcija literarne kri-

¹ B. Ziherl (Nekaj opomb o naši kritiki [Some notes on our criticism, 1953], J. Vidmar (O estetskih kriterijih [On aesthetic criteria, 1953], J. Kos (O marksistični estetiki in marksistični kritiki [On Marxist aesthetics and Marxist criticism], 1954, Prispevek k splošnemu čiščenju pojmov v kritiki [Towards a general cleansing of ideas in criticism], 1953), T. Kermauner (O dveh prevladujočih tipih v sodobni marksistični kritiki [On the two prevailing types of contemporary Marxist criticism], 1953), H. Grün (Poskus o poskusu [An attempt about an attempt], 1953), B. Borko (Kaj je in kaj ni esej [What is and what is not an essay], 1965).



tike” (The structure and function of literary criticism 2009). For a complete picture it is also necessary to include Boris Paternu’s *Estetske osnove Levstikove literarne kritike* (The aesthetic bases of Levstik’s literary criticism 1962), which is among the most important reflections on Slovene literary criticism. The author deals with a precisely defined critical paradigm, but at the same time answers many questions vital to criticism—historical, cultural, political, psychological, sociological, and anthropological. Paternu links literary criticism’s reliability with solid aesthetic principles and takes into account the subjective and objective possibilities determined by the various contexts in which it appears. The study’s integrity and thoroughness is achieved by analyzing the genesis of Levstik’s concept of literary criticism, and then his main ideas and aesthetic grounding: the origin and purpose of literature, relations between external and internal literary reality, linguistic outlook, and theory of features. He placed Levstik’s accomplishments in the comparative context of German, French, and Russian writings on realism, and thus revealed Levstik’s sophisticated views on contemporary literature. He emphasized that Levstik’s young literary reflection avoids didacticism and gravitates to spontaneity, liveliness, and sincerity. He remains firmly wedded to the ideals of personal and national freedom as they derive from Prešeren’s liberated poetic person, but at the same time he materializes and thus recontextualizes them. When Paternu takes up Levstik’s intellectual profile, he finds evidence to assert that already in his youth Levstik tended to search out the intellectual components of a work of literature, and in each case replaced philosophic and speculative content with a search for insights anchored in reality. Paternu discusses Levstik’s critical model of literary development, culture and civilization, history and politics so as to isolate the causes and effects of events and situations and to show how they motivated Levstik’s critical thought on the Slovene and broader European spheres. In the first place, there are the problems of literary provincialism, a strong clerical coloring, and Jovan Vesel Koseski’s mentorship, as well as theoretical principles. Paternu paints a broad canvas onto which he places education at the time, domestic literary opinions, current German theoreticians, and traditional views. He organically inserts Levstik’s intimate poetic convictions, formed of personal experience, polemics with conservative views of literature, personal correspondence with the few who agreed with him, and comments on the wider cultural, public opinion, and national situation. Among teachers important to Levstik, Paternu points to the high school teacher Peter Petruzzij. He recalls Levstik’s disappointment that the reading public ignored his collected *Pesmi* (Poems 1854), while the Roman Catholic party sharply attacked it. He defines the most significant features of Levstik’s critical work, which he finds in the introduction to a review of Valjaveč’s poems (1855), and he underlines that here Levstik creates an integrated literary aesthetic concept, which he generally adheres to later on: He extended his understanding of poetry to all of literary production, paying special attention to characters’ traits, natures, actions, and physical appearance, thereby emphasizing his interest in objective models of literature. Paternu sees the importance of Levstik’s criticism in his consideration of domestic conditions and adherence to a universal view keyed into contemporary literary trends.²

² Jože Pogačnik reviewed Paternu’s study in *Naši razgledi* (1962). On the whole, he acknowledged that Paternu had successfully handled a very complex and dynamic topic, highlighted essential things, and



At the end of the 1980s, another important book by Paternu came out, a history of literary criticism *Modeli slovenske literarne kritike* (Models of Slovene literary history 1989).³

Drago Šega's monograph *Literarna kritika: Termin, geneza, teorija* (Literary criticism: Terms, genesis, theory), which was originally intended for the collection *Literarni leksikon* (A literary lexicon), took shape over the course of decades. It, too, deserves consideration in view of its main emphases—on terminological questions, the genesis of literary criticism, and theoretical topics. The author writes on the concept of literary criticism, taking into account the direct connection between literary praxis and its evaluation, the nomenclature for creative writing, and the development of the noun “criticism,” which already in its Greek version of meaning implies “judgment” and “selection”—an indication of the concept's semantic underpinnings in Antiquity—and the term “grammar,” which was predominantly used for some time. Then he carefully traces the use of the concept in vernaculars, bringing the reader to a synthetic knowledge of the problem under consideration, yet without the term's conceptual precision becoming a hindrance to reading itself. The most important factor here is the decision to emphasize the pre-structural meaning in further uses of the concept, which he finds in French in the seventeenth century. He correctly concludes that its early meaning stresses the uniqueness of a historical approach, which leads to following historical events objectively, searching for causal connections, and to logical findings. Šega precisely and rigorously summarizes the situation before the appearance of Bleiweis's newspaper *Novice* and after—I have in mind his enumeration of Slovene parallels to the German noun *Recension* and then the gradual introduction of the concepts *kritika* ‘criticism’, *kritikus* ‘critic’, *kritikovanje* ‘writing criticism’, and others. In the second chapter, entitled “The Genesis of Literary Criticism,” he relates the development of the concept with actual practice in the first half of the nineteenth century. He relies on French and German practice, but also keeps his distance, because it inadequately respects the position that already in Greek Antiquity was accorded to criticism's relation with literature. Šega covers the Greek treatment of literature completely and with no lapses. He precisely describes various of the Greeks' “situations with

pointed out areas of further research. Among his criticisms, it is necessary to stress Pogačnik's opinion that Levstik's introduction to the review Valjavčev's poems does not in fact have significant meaning for explaining Levstik's literary outlook. He bases this statement on the opinions of some other students of Levstik's work, such as Anton Ocvirk and Anton Slodnjak, and writes that in spite of a “large scholarly apparatus,” Paternu had not overturned their conclusions about the eclectic nature of the Valjavčev review. Further, Pogačnik observes that while Paternu's broad understanding of contemporary European aesthetics evidence his knowledge of the subject, there are too few specific connections with the central research topic. In 1963, Pogačnik had published a similar kind of book, *Stritarjev literarni nazor* (Stritar's literary outlook).

3 Paternu analyzed the development of central critical concepts from the standpoint of key literary events from Zois's Enlightenment period literary mentorship to the Slovene modernists. His research identified, which methodologically accounted for internal and external conditions, two basic models, one didactic and the other aesthetic. The interview by Meta Kušar (*Delo* 2000) on “Slovene literary and drama criticism” belongs to this general line as well. Respondents in general agree that criticism is a unique genre that evaluates a given work from different perspectives and directs public attention to it. The most divergence in answers can be found in expressing positions on ideas and ideologies.



literary criticism,⁴ highlights the meaning of the Alexandrian school of philosophy, influences and impetuses relevant to the field in ancient Rome, notes overlapping Greco-Roman developments, and so forth. A quality of the study's readability is that he situates criticism in the broader context of understanding literature—for instance, in the Middle Ages or Renaissance. He explains new contextual links by connecting old and new cultural and historical circumstances, Zeitgeist paradigms, and epistemological codes that in one way or another the Aristotelian view of poetry governed even into the late sixteenth century, preserving its literary conventions, renewing them, or gradually abandoning them.

The second, shorter part of the monograph aims to form a typology of literary criticism insofar as its content and form can be defined on the background of a practical and theoretical model. Šega identifies three main types: biographical, impressionistic, and immanent. He sees the difference between them in the particular interest that, in the first instance, is directed at the author of a given work, and in the second to its reception, and in the third the work itself. He is concerned not only with describing features, but at a minimum with comparisons with current critical practice and determining how much an individual type actually appreciates literature or how much it in fact has to say about it. The genetic type is tied to the Romantic cult of the creative subject⁵ and with an empirical, later to become positivist approach to the phenomenon. In this regard he notes the danger of a retreat from aesthetic judgment and, in the extreme case, from literature in general. He sees another danger in applying psychoanalytic methods to literature in a reductive way, dealing in psychological determinism with the author only. The second, reception type of criticism seems to him to relativize *beauty* from the standpoint of the literary work and to exaggerate the meaning of *experience*. The third, impressionistic type he understands as the absence of the author and devaluation of the reader. He situates this immanent criticism in the context of Schlegel's position that the literary work is an *autonomous entity*,⁶ discerning a logical line to Russian formalism, the Prague Linguistic Circle, and American New Criticism. Next he precisely summarizes the concepts' characteristics, points out the difference between literary criticism and evaluating, and says that there can never be a judgment that is purely immanent and remain within the content and formal frame of a literary work. He ends this integrally and logically structured book of scholarly breadth by differentiating between book reviewing and literary criticism, warning of the danger of instrumentalizing literature—that is, upholding the worth of *autonomous aesthetic evaluation*.

In both of his critical and historical monographs, entitled *Literarno vrednotenje na Slovenskem (Od Frana Levstika do Izidorja Cankarja, 2002)* (Evaluating literature in Slovenia [From Fran Levstik to Izidor Cankar]) and *Literarno vrednotenje na*

⁴ The turning point was the reevaluation of the relation between philosophy, truth, and poetry, as Plato and Aristotle first effected it.

⁵ Šega implicitly includes the content of the Romantic paradigm in his explanation, which via the Romantic subject emphasized the specific and, foremost, free relation to the world, autonomous creative will, and the meaning of sensibility and imagination, along with a special understanding of truth and beauty.

⁶ Literature reveals a deeper truth and beauty in a way that does not depend upon normativity supported by imagination and emotionality. Perhaps it even commands our way of perceiving the world.



Slovenskem od 1918 do 1945, 2003) (Evaluating literature in Slovenia from 1918 to 1945), Matija Ogrin traces changes in evaluating literature through the decades. He does this by determining the intellectual and philosophical background of individual critics and the aesthetic concepts that shaped their literary views and evaluations. Both books are groundbreaking forays into the history of Slovene literary criticism that also involve literary axiology and fundamental evaluations. Unlike literary judgments that are “descriptive presentations as evaluative judgments,” here we have evaluation in the sense of broad, multivalent apprehension and definition that is tied not only to criticism. He gradually unveils his basic postulate that literary criticism must be a synthesis of a broad horizon of references that includes views connected to literary phenomenology; philosophical, ideological, political, and religious sources; various aesthetic concepts; cultural qualities; and essential evaluative assumptions. The very selection of writers indicates the monograph’s intention of capturing the dynamic that guided literary reflection in Slovenia. Ogrin’s history of Slovene axiology and literary criticism thoroughly considers multiple models—developmental, culturological, sociological, ideological, philosophical, and aesthetic. He also goes into the field of theory and introduces the concept of a *concordant whole*, which he uses to define the essence of (Slovene) critical thought in such a way that, from an empirical point of departure, he emphasizes the complexity of evaluating literature and literary criticism. The author compresses his thought into several well-argued conclusions. The first covers the relation between literary activity and its aesthetic value; the second targets the difference between the literary and extra-literary vantage point and observes how some critics, consciously or not, desired in addition to literary value, practical national, religious, philosophical, general literary, cultural, and political discourse. The third conclusion has to do with autonomous judgment and explores the phenomenology of literary works in the sense of independent and sovereign art. This is important because it has to do with a corpus that formed in an ideologically, intellectually, and philosophically diverse period, and the relations between its ethical, aesthetic, and cognitive components were the space in which different extra-literary pressures, intents, and tendencies played out. Ogrin’s work also reveals for literary practice itself the exceptionally important fact that literary criticism has perpetually and despite regressions preserved as its main intellectual structure the measure of a *concordant whole*.

In the second book the author formalized and, most importantly from the perspective of the history of criticism, treated philosophically and ideologically different evaluations of Slovene letters in the first half of the twentieth century. Although it was well known material, the overview is an important systematic and comparative analysis of a state of affairs that had far reaching consequences. He chronologically traces the main representatives with a view to three main currents—the liberal, Roman Catholic, and Marxist. He points out the generative connection with the situation at the turn of the twentieth century, taking into account socio-cultural facets and current literary praxis. His outlook on the ties between philosophy, aesthetic views, and critical activity is here more comprehensive than in the first monograph: he devotes equivalent attention to literary works and their artistic integrity. He makes a distinction between practical and metacritical models and thus conditions under-



standing of the situation. He certainly encountered certain difficulties here, because his project theoretically reflects on rather few critics. The author clearly assumes the stance that criticism⁷ that holistically weighs the essence, nature, and value of a literary work can only appear after contemplation of how the topical and purely aesthetic interact. He further points out the components that motivate a give opinion and recalls the possibility of different types that lead in gnosiological, aesthetic, or moralistic directions. Here Ogrin harks to Kos's principle of intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic components.⁸ The period is divided into the 1920s and 1930s based on literary, historical, and spiritual considerations—not only related to the literary dynamic, but bearing in mind socio-political differences and philosophical issues as well. A look at the beginning of the twentieth century suggests a genetic connection between Ivan Cankar as critic and later critics; social criticism influenced Marxist writers. Ogrin finds a link between saintliness and devotion and the liberal conception of art as a universal human religion. He finds a far-reaching connection between Cankar's premise of "the unity of all artistic directions" with young Catholic literary opinion that adhered to the idea of an artistic synthesis of the religious, ethical, and aesthetic. Theoretically, Ogrin highlights two kinds of evaluating, *organic* and *reductive*. The first type evokes the interweaving of content and form and thus rejects idealistic aesthetics; the second underscores just one of the components of an artwork—for instance, the ethical. France Vodnik is the most important representative of the Catholic group. Ogrin sees in him a writer who already in the 1920s managed to surpass Izidor Cankar's⁹ aesthetic-formal model and in such a way that it highly appealed to young Catholic intellectuals,¹⁰ using Oskar Walzel to facilitate a modern understanding of a literary work as an *artistic organism*.¹¹ The most prominent Slovene liberal writer in the 1920s and 1930s was Josip Vidmar. Ogrin summarized his literary evaluative complex by concluding that Vidmar understood art in an ahistoric way, emphasizing its universal meaning and unique ethos. He linked it to "detached depiction," or the view that an artistic work must derive from the artist's very essence, from his personhood, which is by definition creative. Ogrin sees Ivo Brnčič as the most outstanding Marxist critic. He sees in his work analytic perspicacity and consistent reliance on the Marxist conviction of a fundamental reformation of soci-

⁷ The syntagm indirectly indicates criticism that, based on firm ideological principles, uses a literary work for extraliterary aims and evaluates it in this sense.

⁸ He refers to Siegfried J. Schmidt, who speaks of cognitive-reflexive, moral-social, and hedonistic-emotional functions. The names of the very similar content of the German philosopher would be more suitable, because they would clearly underscore the line critic-view-work-evaluation. In essence this suits Ogrin in order to highlight the conditions that enable or thwart an adequate judgement.

⁹ In some of his early works, for example "Evolucionizem v estetiki" (Evolutionism in aesthetics 1908), "Ljudsko gledališče" (Popular theater 1908), and "Pogovori o umetnosti" (Conversations about art 1910), Izidor Cankar evinced a relatively strong adherence to older aesthetic views. Using Frančišek Lampe, he linked beauty and an artistic work's tools of depiction. The artistic outlook that centers on an objective criterion he later sharpened and so converted to aestheticism and emphasized historical significance.

¹⁰ Besides this, it is necessary to point out the spiritual bases of Slovene crusaders.

¹¹ Vodnik's evaluative concept and critical practice sparked a large polemic with Josip Vidmar, who continued Levstik's heritage of a liberal thinking and democratic writer in the twentieth century.



ety.¹² Ogrin's monograph is a methodologically formidable, complete, and formally and stylistically accessible analysis that fully grasps the actual state of affairs.

I conclude this overview of developments in the field of Slovene literary criticism with a doctoral dissertation entitled *Struktura in funkcija literarne kritike na primeru sodobnega slovenskega romana* (The structure and function of literary criticism in the case of the contemporary Slovene novel 2009), by Robert Jereb.¹³ The author understands the body of Slovene literary criticism as a diversified and rationally constituted organism, whose chief features and functional integration into late twentieth-century socio-cultural and spiritual conditions can be identified, given an appropriate approach. The project is situated in the context of contemporary foreign and domestic theories. Jereb diachronically and synchronically analyzes a large corpus from the standpoint of formal and stylistic markers, and the topics from the point of view of the socialization of literature and criticism. The work is based on quantitative, empirical data gathering and critical analysis of the material. The selection of the corpus takes into account generational differences between writers and critics, and works from the center and periphery of the Slovene cultural space. Jereb concludes that metacriticism's fundamental function is to determine the distribution of individual kinds of expression (descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative), and he graphically illustrates the quantitative data he obtained on the structural components of evaluation, noting intertextual models and stylistic and formal patterns.

The development of thinking on the theoretical essay and historical essay¹⁴ in recent decades has been in the main similar to that in criticism, yet with some differences. The common point can be found in a deeper intellectual interest in both fields; the difference in the fact that essay writing acquired its synthetic theoretical foundation somewhat earlier than criticism and has recently directed its reflections to historical and anthological insights. Here I have in mind two monographs that treated Slovene essay writing by topics, ideas, and style: *Slovensko esejistiko v drugi polovici 20. stoletja* (Slovene essay writing in the second half of the twentieth century 2003) and *Slovensko esejistiko od začetkov do leta 1950* (Slovene essay writing from the beginnings to 1950 2010), as well as the anthology *Aristokracija jezika in duha* (The aristocracy of language and spirit 2005) and Katja Bergles's doctoral dissertation, "Slovenska esejistika med letoma 1995 in 2010" (Slovene essay writing between 1995 and 2010).¹⁵

I will begin a description of the situation in essay writing with Denis Poniž's study *Esej* (The essay 1989), which appeared several years before the period under consideration and remains one of the touchstone contributions¹⁶ about this sphere

¹² Of course, despite Brnčič's consideration of the artistic qualities of a literary work, it must be said that for him art was foremost production spurred by progressive social forces so as to project positive social motifs from the past, through the present, and into the future.

¹³ His mentor at the Filozofska fakulteta, University of Ljubljana, was Miran Hladnik.

¹⁴ Critical notes on selected Slovene essays is published 2004 in Matevž Kos's book *Branje po izbiri* (Selective reading).

¹⁵ In 2009, the Društvo za primerjalno književnost (Society for comparative literature) organized an international conference entitled *The Essay and Singularity*.

¹⁶ Of course, it is necessary to recall the anthology *Sodobni slovenski esej* (The contemporary Slovene essay 1979). Janko Kos introduced the collection of sixteen essay writers, alling the essay a "polyliterary"

of rational prose. The author deals with the topic in depth. At the time, there were many publications on the Slovene theory of the essay; however, with the exception of Kos's study, they only dealt with specific models. Another premise was needed to combine the various levels of the topic into a unified whole. Thus Poniž traced the term's semantic models, offered a broad review of the formal and content bases, went back to the history of the French and English essays, and then followed developments over the centuries. In the main chapter, he devotes himself to poetic and typological questions. In this way he gradually approached comparative models and Slovene reflection on the essay. This is methodologically a comparative survey work that selectively relies on foreign writers. Of course, the author cannot omit Max Bense, Theodorja W. Adorno, Gerharda Haas, Ludwig Rohner,¹⁷ Klaus G. Just.¹⁸ Poniž observes that the essay is a hybrid genre and therefore its poetics and typology are relative categories that are difficult to define in terms of form and content. For him, the essay is foremost a dynamic and open genre. He explores its typological features by using Roberta Sholes, Caril Klaus, Artur Hänyo, Theodorj Adorno, and others, concluding the typology is frequently tied to the essay's relation to cousin genres. He considers themes and essayists' particular interests. An instructive part of the book is the comparative analyses of the essay and book reviewing, reports, and feuillets.¹⁹ The second half of the monograph is a tripartite reflection on the essay: information on "European essay writing," situating the concept in the Slovene cultural and intellectual space, and Slovene essay praxis, as well as theoretical and historical responses to it. The book's structure logically arranges the material: after acquainting the reader with the poetic and typological attributes, it urges reconsideration of Slovene conditions, both practical and theoretical. The author identifies two stages in the Slovene essay's development. He sees the end of the nineteenth century as a "preparatory period" that gradually created conditions for the appearance of the "true" essay at the time of the Slovene Moderna.²⁰ In the author's opinion, the situation after 1945 was different. At first it was limiting in the creative sense, and later motivated essay writing. Poniž's description of the situation fits that actual status because he adduces facts from all relevant authors, attaches a survey of theoretical writings to the historical model, and cites genre markers from several key works after 1936.

genre and highlighting its formal, content, and spiritual characteristics. Kos significantly surpassed all that had previously been written about the essay. I have in mind genealogical questions, capturing the situation in several other national literatures, and the historical aspect. I would also add Jože Pogačnik's "O esejišičnem in kritiškem diskurzu (On essayistic and critical discourse 1996)," which connects the essay with authentic, engaging, and stylistically polished exploration of literary matters.

¹⁷ Janko Kos also included Ludwig Rohner is his "Sodobni slovenski esej."

¹⁸ The variety that essay theory offers Poniž shows as well through Just's assertions that place the essay in relatively elite reading.

¹⁹ If comparisons are important for distinguishing the poetics of the essay—for instance, with the feuillet—then doubtless the chapter "Esej in roman" (The essay and the novel) is important for both genres. In it, the author establishes the creative accomplishments of Robert Musil and especially Gerhard Haas in both genres.

²⁰ Poniž notes in particular the contributors to *Sodobnos*, *Kritika*, and *Modra ptica*, opining that before WW II they significantly expanded familiarity with the essay in practical terms.



The first Slovene historical monograph on the history of the essay, *Slovenska esejistika v drugi polovici 20. stoletja* (Slovene essay writing in the second half of the twentieth century), was part of the organization Slovene matica's project of rethinking post-1950 Slovene literature in a broad and accessible manner. The monograph has three parts. First it is concerned with general questions about the essay and essay writing. Then it synthetically takes stock of the situation in the areas of theme, form, and style. The last part is on individual essay writers' works. Of course, it is first necessary to elucidate the theoretical models, describe the situation, and distinguish essay writing from criticism and scholarly activities. The historical consideration shows that it is possible to find the sprouts of the "Slovene" essay at the end of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century in the foreign-language works of Slovene authors.²¹ Thus the first essays are part of the works of Fran Levstik, Josip Stritar, and Fran Levec. Concentrated involvement with essay writing began at the turn of the twentieth century with Ivan Prijatelj and Izidor Cankar. For analytical purposes, it seemed to me necessary to define the essay by theme. In doing so I summarized Slovene (Denis Poniž, Janko Kos) and foreign theoreticians (Max Bense, Theodor Adorno, Gerhard Haas, Ludwig Rohner), and took into account essay praxis. The term "mental and formal markers"²² is new in the theoretical part of the monograph, as is the definition of the essay as "a genre of rational prose." The definition that was my standard for selecting texts states that the essay is a synthesis of a unique and authentic spiritual state and a stylistically balanced creative act in which the subject and object are revealed in tandem. One of the first general conclusions of the book is connected with a sociological model, or the sociology of essay writing. It attempts to elucidate a possible link between production and, let us call them, external motivators. The book traces key developments, takes into consideration the Rožanec Prize, observes that awareness of the essay as a special genre of intellectual prose has increased in Slovene and foreign scholarly writings, and emphasizes connections in the international arena. The synthetic part of the monograph comparatively analyzes the topical, formal, and stylistic²³ nature of Slovene essay writing. Essay writing of the second half of the twentieth century can be categorized by topics but is an externally uniform corpus: it evidenced universal models of the nation, language, aesthetics and criticism, literature, existence, ethics, and morals. In a detailed analysis of the state of affairs, the monograph shows considerably great internal changes to the essay. Thus as regards literary themes, I demonstrated that essay writing had done three things: it revealed new meanings and interpretations of texts whose codes had been long fixed in the Slovene mind, it reflected on contemporary literary production, and discussed it in so a way as to extend interest in a given text to more general themes. The monograph offers a unified grasp of Slovene essay

²¹ Anton Tomaž Linhart and Matija Čop, respectively, wrote parts of *Versuch einer Geschichte von Krain und Übrigen Ländern der südlichen Slawen Österreichs* (1788) and *Geschichte der slawischen Sprache und Literatur* (1831) in German; Stanko Vraz wrote *O Dubrovčanima* (1847) in Croatian.

²² Individual components of mental and formal markers follow well known facts about deduction, synthesis, meditation, reflection, intuition, etc.

²³ Emil Staiger was the first to speak about the elusive understanding of style already many decades ago. I consider style along with certain key features of Slovene essay writing, like polemicism, investigativeness, autobiographicalness, criticalness, etc.



writing by differentiating its style. This is an important aspect because it explains one of the most recognizable typological features of Slovene essay writing—that is, the as a rule balanced coming of unlike stylistic elements. The first part of the book is structured by topic, the second chronologically. Fifty-four individual writers are ordered from the most senior, Josip Vidmar, to the most junior, Matevž Kos. The selection of writers and works takes into account differing authorial motivations and seeks to prove primary, synthetically formulated postulates about thematic, stylistic, formal, and typological characteristics.

In 2005, my large selection of Slovene essay writing after 1950, *Aristokracija jezika in duha*, appeared.²⁴ Essays by thirty-six Slovene authors are collected in the anthology, including by Josip Vidmar, Edvard Kocbek, Marjan Rožanc, Drago Jančar, and Mitja Čander. The book concludes with a commentary on the stylistic, intellectual, and thematic features of Slovene essay writing, as well as its intellectual bases. At the end are “Notes on the writers.” The purpose of the anthology is to capture the diversity of Slovene creativity in the essay and to show its chief topical, stylistic, and intellectual developments. The corpus of texts has now grown significantly from what it was in the previous anthology because the selection takes in a longer period, which especially at the end of the twentieth century saw a marked increase in production. In choosing the materials I considered the importance of thematic, philosophic, intellectual, stylistic, and formal components; the representativeness, quantity, and importance of individual opuses; and the Rožanc Prize. I also included writers who had not produced a great deal but who are interesting because of their original and aesthetically polished writing. In the commentary to *Aristokracija jezika in duha* I write about the developmental, stylistic, Geistesgeschichte and thematic aspects of Slovene essay writing. I summarize some things from the 2003 monograph, but the compact portrayal of prominent individual essayists’ thought is new.

My further research on the subject is contained in the monograph *Slovenska esejistika od začetkov do leta 1950* (2010). Following the previous two books, it is a needed for a complete picture of Slovene essay writing, and to promote its historico-cultural and national historical importance. The book is conceptually related to the first one, which means that after the most essential theoretical definitions are set forth, it transitions to a synthetic view of events, and then to detailed treatment of leading individual writers. There are twenty-one of them and they are arranged in chronological order from the most senior. In making selections I took into account that there was as yet no monograph about essay writing before 1950; therefore, the selection is somewhat expanded. I also took into consideration that in the humanities during this period it is often difficult to distinguish between literary scholarship and the literary essay on theoretical, formal, and stylistic bases. A good deal of space is given over to the circumstances in which the corpus of essays appeared. In the chapter “Čas in prostor” (Time and space) and on the basis of several important authors (Peter Vodopivec, Janko Kos, Franc Zadavec, and others), I outline the historical

²⁴ Editors of essay anthologies include D. Šega (*Antologija slovenačkog književnog eseja*, An anthology of the Slovene literary essay 1964), Janko Kos (*Sodobni slovenski esej*, The contemporary Slovene essay 1979), Denis Poniž (*Slovenački esej*, The Slovene essay 1984), Matevž Kos (*The Slovene Essay of the Nienties*, 2000)



and national political shifts that directly defined the contemporary Slovene ethos, culture, views, and values. I then consider events that can be tied to the perpetuation of various philosophical stances or with the appearance of new ideological concepts. My aim was to prepare the ground for the reader to historicize the corpus. The main chapters are “Problemska in nazorska razhajanja ter stičišča” (Topical and philosophical divergences and confluences), “Slovenstvo, kultura, jezik, literatura” (Slovenism, culture, language, literature), and “Avtorji in dela” (Authors and their works). The conclusions can be summarized in the following thought: The essay appeared among the Slovenes relatively late, really only at the beginning of the twentieth century. We can find individual examples before this, but there was no unified and systematic writing of essays. However, from the very start there were talented writers, such as Izidor Cankar and Ivan Prijatelj. After them and because of the questions faced by Slovenes and Slovenism, essay writing motivated great creative talents and quickly developed into a recognized and topically diverse genre of rational prose. Essay writers differ by spiritual profile, are separated by philosophical inclinations and interests, and their creative abilities vary, yet they are a very important group in the national, spiritual, and cultural senses. Some of my conclusions correspond to those I presented in the 2003 monograph, to the effect that Slovene essay writing is topically, stylistically, and intellectually most honed when treating literary matters, the Slovene language, and the people. I have in mind the variety that also includes foreign literatures, literary ontology, aesthetic themes and the arts, existential models, and so forth. In the first fifty years of the twentieth century, essay writing was a productive and important field in the national, cultural, and spiritual senses.

Katja Bergles’s dissertation,²⁵ *Slovenska esejistika med letoma 1995 in 2010 – problemski krogi, postopki notranjega sloga in njihova funkcionalna zveza* (Slovene essay writing between 1995 and 2010 – topics addressed, stylistic approaches, and their functional connection 2012), examines Slovene essay writing during the last two decades. The first part adopts the theory of the essay as intellectual prose and divides and explains the terminology. In the second, longer part, the author typologically distinguishes and compares a select corpus. This is done from a topical and from a formal, stylistic perspective. The essay is diverse and includes extensive literary essays, writings about cultural life, artistic and aesthetic questions, and essays about nature, politics, ecology, and so forth. From the standpoint of style, the essay is not a uniform genre of rational prose, but we can usually identify a combination of different approaches in it. The author not only connects formal and stylistic approaches with individual themes, but also with the extent of the essayist’s personal involvement, responsibility, respect, uncertainty, or emotional engagement.

Both kinds of writing I have surveyed have in the past decade enjoyed considerable attention from Slovene literary scholars, who have placed them side by side with literary history. Of course, we ought not to be satisfied with these accomplishments. Essay writing requires yet more fundamental stylistic study; criticism would

²⁵ Mentor, Miran Štuhec, Filozofska fakulteta, University of Ljubljana. In 2013, Anita Laznik will defend a dissertation entitled “Idejna podoba esejistike Marjana Rožanca z vidika Frommvega humanizma” (The intellectual shape of Marjan Rožanc’s essay writing from the vantage point of Fromm’s humanism).



be served by a synthetic exploration of what took place after WW II, and perhaps an anthology. Further research would undoubtedly increase basic knowledge about both fields and—perhaps most importantly—focus questions about contemporary criticism, the comprehensiveness or even existence of its aesthetic grounds, philosophical positions, and axiology.

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