PURDUE UNIVERSITY

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture
ISSN 1481-4374
Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

Volume 8 (2006) Issue 3 Article 4

Gender Identities in the Contemporary Slovene Novel

Alojzija Zupan Sosic
University of Ljubljana

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, and the Critical and Cultural Studies Commons

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, Purdue University Press selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation

Zupan Sosic, Alojzija. "Gender Identities in the Contemporary Slovene Novel." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8.3 (2006): <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1316>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.
The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 893 times as of 06/01/15. Note: the download counts of the journal's material are since Issue 9.1 (March 2007), since the journal's format in pdf (instead of in html 1999-2007).

PURDUE UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY PRESS <http://www.thepress.purdue.edu>

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>
Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series.* Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Langua-ge Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monog-raph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

***CLCWeb* Volume 8 Issue 3 (September 2006) Article 4**
Alojzija Zupan Sosic,
"Gender Identities in the Contemporary Slovene Novel"
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss3/4>

Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8.3 (2006)
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss3/>

Abstract: In her article, "Gender Identities in the Contemporary Slovene Novel," Alojzija Zupan Sosic argues that perspectives of sexual identity have become prominent topics. Based on her library and publication research, Zupan Sosic proposes that in the period of 1990–2005 the Slovene novel is illuminated by a development of the personal or intimate story. In this development, changes of sexual identity evolve through the binary system of the heterosexual matrix whereby issues of sexual minorities remain. Important innovation in the Slovene novel include aspects connected to an identity formation determined by sexual identity where perhaps the most significant innovation is found in the narrative structures and themes of the Slovene novel of today, such as the increasing number of female literary figures as main characters, in turn the result also of the increasing number of women novelists. Zupan Sosic suggests that the second main innovation touches upon the sensitivities of new movements in identity formation representing a reflection of post-postmodern sincerity she designates as a new "emotivity." Zupan Sosic argues that the development of the said new emotivity is located in the contemporary Slovene novel in the relationship between the sexes, the romantic theme, and in an ironic and parodied attachment to literary tradition.

Alojzija ZUPAN SOSIC

Gender Identities in the Contemporary Slovene Novel

Translated from the Slovene by Veronika Fürst*

In my article, I explore the question as to how is the quest for identity illustrated in the contemporary Slovene novel: is it possible to draw a distinction between the issues of identity and questions of gender identity? How does gender representation in these novels compare to gender differentiation in contemporary scholarly and scientific discourse? Does gender itself already constitute identity? And if so, which explanation of sex is definitive, sex or gender? Can studies of gender identity avoid sexual discrimination? Is it thus better to stress gender differences or, at least in theoretical discourse, try to overcome them? Theories and definitions of identity are nowadays inextricably linked with gender identity issues. Hence, for example, Judith Butler asserts that it would be wrong to consider identity without relation to gender identity. In my opinion, this distinction is proved wrong by the fact that a person can be identified only when being ascribed gender according to the conventional standards of social and gender clarity. Consequently, the following is called into question: to what extent the methods of (social) gender formation and division constitute identity, internal balance and self-awareness of a person? Is identity a normative ideal or rather an expression of experience? The identity of an individual is determined by gender and since gender itself already constitutes identity, gender identity is subject not only to sexual and racial differences but also to ethnic and cultural ones. But application of differences generates uncertainties: is a difference the subject of (gender) identity studies or a prerequisite for recognition. Should difference be understood as something definite, existing and present in history and therefore considered as theoretical background? In his *A History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault underlines the importance of effect and not origin in the framework of gender identity. Gender is thus not a pre-given essential entity but rather a product of discourse. Difference should be regarded as a prerequisite for recognition, "undefinable on its own, because the difference is not something that should be recognized but rather identified as an everlasting process" (Biti 12).

The gradual shifting of focus away from "women" to issues of identity restates the understanding of gender and this is today not only characteristic of feminist and post-feminist movements, but also of philosophical, sociological, anthropological, cultural, and psychological discourses. What they all have in common is a dilemma, arising from a simple question in contemporary identity studies: how many genders are there? The most common answer, two, is a reflection of biological theory which determines the actual gender on the basis of biological evidence. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century (biological) sex was considered a constitutive and comparative part of (social) gender, opening up the following problematics: is gender derived from sex?; is gender an imitation of sex; and can we really talk about a "given" sex and a "given" gender without defining previously their origins and characteristics? These questions are answered by the difference between sex and gender, whose primary purpose was to contest the principle biology-is-fate. Butler upholds the difference between sex and gender by defining gender as social construct, i.e., not merely automatically derived from sex. Gender does not represent a fixed identity in certain time and space and it therefore cannot be a mere reflection of sex whose binary aspect also becomes irrelevant. Post-feminist theory on gender, identity, and the Other inherited the issue of whether there are one, two, or three sexes from feminism. Since the further reflection upon the subject is going to comprise the binary aspect as a normative gender system in Western society, the existence of a different classification of genders appears logical. The highest number of categories -- ten -- derives from theories which took into consideration basis of relevant group affiliation, while the theories concentrating upon human genitals enumerated five categories (see Lorber 59-70). Five gender categories consider the biological aspect of sex: undoubtedly male, undoubtedly female, hermaphrodite, transsexual man becoming a woman, and transsexual woman becoming a man considering basis of relevant group affiliation, i.e., important family ties and the number of categories rises substantially: "straight" male, "straight" female, homosexual woman, homosexual

man, bisexual woman, bisexual man, transvestite man, transvestite woman, transsexual woman, and transsexual man.

Studies have shown that overemphasizing gender differences reinforces stereotypes as well as amplifies the delineation of masculine and feminine genders, thus maintaining the inferior social position of women. Stereotypes are deeply ingrained in the upbringing and personality of an individual, molding girls' identity on the basis of sex, i.e., the feminine gender scheme conveyed through stereotypes of women's roles in society. Since boys also construct a so-called masculine gender role under the strong influence of stereotypes, many authors point out an androgynous gender scheme as a psychologically healthy as well as an individually and socially viable one. The androgynous gender scheme was supposed to combine masculine as well as feminine categories of gender schemes, but as later turned out masculinity still prevailed. According to Darja Kobal-Palcic, there is a drawback to the androgynous gender scheme: if androgyny is only a sum of commonly stereotyped masculine and feminine gender schemata, then androgyny itself must be permeated by gender stereotypes. Cognitive psychology, through the study of gender stereotypes and schemes, advances towards sociological differentiation, according to which a person is born into certain sex whereas gender is acquired. According to Jacques Lacan, sexuality, played out through demand and desire, falls into the realm-domain of instability. Lacan claims that because of this, each of the sexes begins to represent mythically and exclusively that which completes and satisfies its opposite. As soon as "male" and "female" categories begin to represent absolute and complementary concepts, the sexes become subject to mystification. Thus, as Lacan affirms, psychoanalysis should not try to construct "male" and "female" categories as interdependent entities, fully convinced of their identity and each other, but, rather, point out these concepts' phantom foundations. This notion is further explained by the idea of a mask: Lacan claims that the mask dominates identifications that resolve rejections in love. Lacan's theory of the fictional interplay of gender identity is broadened by Butler's ingenious insight on gender: she considers gender a variable, non-universal identity formation and a performance of socially-constructed subjects in a given cultural context.

However, gender does not only constitute identity, a place where we can seek refuge, but it also represents a notion we struggle against. The thesis of gender's chameleon-like nature should not lead into self-sufficient passivity because the perception of gender as a scientific term makes it possible to escape the repressiveness still present in contemporary society. Social order in the Western societies is based on racial, class, and gender differences. The outlook for the near future, regarding the desired equality of the sexes thus remains bleak, since the repressive heterosexual matrix is still not able to allow for it. Because there are no such criteria that would not impose further inequalities, the revolutionary concept of an eradication of gender schemata probably seems too one-dimensional as it is based on the loosening of heterosexual repressiveness while, at the same time, bringing into view cultural possibilities of bisexual and homosexual behavior and identity. Accordingly, the eradication of heterosexual repressiveness would also mean the obliteration of social gender itself. Thus, Butler proposes we should consider the following: what changes are still possible and to what extent can we define gender as such? Since gender cannot be completely Protean or fluid, it forms itself in the framework of technological, social, economic, and cultural constraints in a particular space and time. If an individual's identity is oriented towards an unknown goal, where a "secret desire" is influenced by different ideologies, we could acknowledge the post-feminist definition of gender as a chameleon-like category. Correspondingly, Butler defines gender as a variable construct and neutral identity. According to this definition, gender should be understood as an effect and a product, sometimes transcending identity and at other times not attaining it. The discourse of the feminist paradox about the shaping of female identity or, on the other side, the elimination of the female category out of fear of feeling inferior is supplemented by the issue of minority gender groups (transsexuals, transvestites, hermaphrodites, homosexuals). The ambivalence of this paradox does not only cause it to be enigmatic, it also seems to make it very productive. How do we find our way out of the maze of gender confusion? The only answer is a paradoxical one: there is no need to find the way out because gender issues

are inevitable. As Butler affirms, all we can do is to cause a growing unrest in the best possible way, by way of encouraging, confusing, and spreading the concept of gender.

The above discussed Protean nature of gender also brought "sexual confusion" into the contemporary Slovene novel of the the last decades. Slovene scholarship of literature suggests that already with the early 1990s, postmodernism has disappeared from the Slovene novel and that its remnants remain of a formal nature (in Slovene scholarship it is argued that with the early 1990s postmodernism has disappeared form the Slovene novel and that its remnants remain of a formal nature; on this, see, e.g., see Zupan Sosic, *Zavetje* 46; Virk 96). The prevalent characteristic of the Slovene novel -- similar to the European novel at large -- is literary eclecticism, namely a blend of different influences and phenomena. The most accurate definition of the contemporary Slovene novel is, therefore, based on its most frequent model: a modified traditional novel including features of realism and reshaped in the spirit of modernism and postmodernism, emerging in the form of genre syncretism, the new role of the narrator, and an increased number of spoken passages. Despite the variety of the poetics of the contemporary Slovene novel, a common feature of contemporary Slovene novels, this common feature is distinctive of the period under consideration (according to library holdings, about 620 novels were published from 1990 to 2005). At the same time, the suggested common characteristic may also herald an innovative feature and period of Slovene literature and I propose to designate this comon feature a new "emotivity." This perception of shifting (gender) identity represents a reflection of a unique (postmodern) sincerity and pertaining to relationships between the sexes, the theme of love, and frequent references to aspects of literary tradition. The said new emotivity and its parallel sentiments are associated with re-valuated traditional views of masculinity and femininity, thus affecting inevitably the gradual dissipation of male authority and inducing an interconnectedness of male and female categories, as well as the shifting and elimination of social roles. New emotivity is revealed through the prevalent intimate story whereby the dedication to national identity is replaced by the pursuit of varieties of personal identities. In turn, changes in politics and society such as achieving independence, changes in the political system, the accession to the European Union hardly affected the contemporary Slovene novel: protagonists' striving for national identity gave way to the quest for construction of personal identity. The dedication to more particular themes such as the love story -- a most frequent theme in the contemporary Slovene novel -- is one of the general characteristics of the new Slovene novel, thus confining experiences to smaller (social) groups and intimate issues of the novels' protagonists. The self-orientation of post-modernist emotionality gradually wore off, the abundance of baroque and scientific notions clearly revealing the sources and inspirations of its writing, whereas post-post-modernistic emotivity directed its irony and parody at interior and exterior literary stereotypes while concealing its sources. The focal point of the new emotivity is a distinctively spiritual spleen, a sort of passive boredom and oriented towards a New Age hedonism. Spiritual void and fatigue are reshaped and modernized in the turbo-capitalistic trauma of an inability of communication, thus alienation and the fear of losing individuality being prevalent themes. In the era of "empty existence," devoid also of love and affective communication between the sexes is performed only physically. The notion of loss, suffering, and helplessness is all that is left in the disassembled and manipulated world. Thus, it is hardly surprising that this gives rise to erotic themes in the latest Slovene novels and the crises of gender identity is generally incorporated into the relationship between men and women in the contemporary Slovene novel (see Zupan Sosic, *Zavetje* 49; of note is that a similar development can be observed in Hungarian literature, for example; see Totosy; Vasvári <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss1/2/>).

In the contemporary Slovene novel many women authors -- as well as certain social changes -- contributed to the different portrayal of sexes at the beginning of new millennium. In general, a central position of female characters in novels is becoming more common in world literature and thus it is not surprising that it is being chosen by even those Slovene writers who had previously depicted woman only superficially, as a frail companion of a man or a fatal being, guided by sensual and emotional impulses. In the last couple of years, women authors mark Slovene literature throughout in poetry, drama, and the novel. Their influence is not only seen in the growing number of female characters, but also in innovation of theme and form. However, in contrast to the

larger numbers of women novelists, gender minority groups are still hardly represented in the contemporary Slovene novel. Women represent central characters in half of the selected novels -- for example, women are represented as protagonists in sixteen out of thirty-five novels; a man and a woman, approaching events from two different perspectives, although equally, are central characters in two novels -- whereas minority gender groups are scarcely represented although compared to previous decades, their presence has also increased. A homosexual theme is present in eleven novels, while three novels are entirely dedicated to the issues of gender deviation (see, e.g., the novels *Angeli* [Angels] and *Zgubljena zgodba* [A Lost Story] by Brane Mozetic; *Ime mi je Damjan* [My Name is Damjan] by Suzana Tratnik). Since literary character is a narrative element, effectively combining all literary elements into a whole, character selection carries great meaning. Accordingly, I consider a selection of different protagonists in the contemporary Slovene novel an interesting narrative novelty and changes of gender identity are therefore portrayed through the binaries of the heterosexual scheme, contended by stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. The most common stereotype is that of the notion of femme fatale.

A most common character of woman is represented by the "dark continent," a metaphor used by Freud for unexplored and undiscovered femininity. In the contemporary Slovene novel, this metaphor signifies not only the awkwardness of the recognition that a woman is an "unknown continent" even to a specialist (e.g., the physician, the psychologist, etc.), but it also encompasses the ambivalence of understanding and the accepting of women. In the patriarchal system the terms "man" and "woman" are understood as different sets of ideas for the purposes of hierarchical interdependence; "man" has been proclaimed as a ruling principle, supreme and superior and this enforced gap between the male and female principle made men experience women as a blend of "lower," instinctive forces, placing them simultaneously into the mysterious undiscovered world, where they worshipped and deified women for as long as they remained enigmatic. The ambivalence of the stereotype of the dark continent is thus veiled and concealed, whereas the binary aspect of the stereotype of the domestic angel is recognizable on the outside. This stereotype of women, biologically defined as more suitable to do housework, was elaborated upon by authors such as Virginia Wolf and represented with a word phrase that brings together two contradictory concepts. It unearths the repressiveness of the heterosexual scheme through an image of a virtuous, subservient, compassionate woman who is falling apart and silently (so she would not disturb anyone while doing her housework) reigns supreme over the household. As we know, Wolf tried to unmask the domestication of women that justifies the mission of a housewife by disguising her in an abstract and ideal image of a woman. Both stereotypes, the dark continent and the domestic angel -- often inextricably linked also in traditional Western literature -- mirror the transformation of a kindly/enforced domesticated woman to a sacral image of the mysterious angel.

In the contemporary Slovene novel, sexual stereotyping, in particular the dark continent and the domesticated angel, is severely condemned by two anti-utopian novels such as in Berta Bojetu's and Miha Mazzini's texts. Berta Bojetu dedicated her novels to the negative critique of contemporary/future society, choosing the prevalent genre of anti-utopia. In Bojetu's novel *Filio ni doma* (Filio is Not at Home), the anti-utopian depiction of intimacy is placed in a pathologically alienated society played out in the relationship between men and women and in her novel *Pticja hisa* (Bird's House), the repressive society of a remote mountain village disintegrates in the protagonists personalities in various ways, namely with a schedule of sexual encounters, the rule of separation for men and women, and by taking away their sons. Here the role of a woman is -- in many ways similar to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* -- constrained to her womb, stereotyping a woman's confinement to the kitchen and the bedroom. At the same time, Bojetu avoids the binary concept of masculinity and femininity by using the symbolism of a bird, a rape, and a house, thus defining femininity as the yearning of women as well as men. Allegorical and parabolical readings of her novel therefore do not suggest to condemn men, but the principle of violence in contemporary society. Bojetu depicts a universal and timeless image of an alienated life the beginning of which we are only vaguely informed. The depiction of life in the novel is hyperbolic, consisting of anti-utopian elements found n such texts as Zamjatin's *Mi*, Huxley's *Brave New World,* or in Orwell's *1984*. There are many symbols in the novel developed from repeated motifs and descrip-

tions; for example, descriptions of the physical appearance of women who live separately from the men in the Upper Place (while men live in the Lower Place) multiply, while the portraits of literary characters whose minor characteristics are abstracted and the typical emphasized are gradually transformed into the symbol of restricted, constrained, and strange life. This form of life is symbolized by a bird, here a symbol of confinement, conventionality, and a lack of invention. The heroine did not like the birds even in her childhood: their sharp beaks, long necks, claws, and expressionless look: when just before her mother's death she sees her transformation into a bird, birds become her obsession as a symbol of women's confinement and emotional insensitivity all of which is associated with rape. Moreover, even the mental obsession that Filio cannot get rid of even with painting is pervaded by the vision of a bird. The bird is the projection of mass neurosis that reigns on the island and can be transmitted to the main characters only by multiplication.

Miha Mazzini, in her 1993 novel *Satanova krona* (Satan's Crown), depicts grotesque personal relationships in a less stern and at times even ironic-humorous ways. The protagonists' introvert nature, concealing misanthropist and puritan attitudes, is not only a lighthearted idiosyncrasy but also a consequence of a strict hierarchical organization, enforced rules, overwork, and alienation (on this, see in more detail Zupan Sosic, *Zavetje*). The narrative depicts a society where one fears to lose individuality, people have lost their social sensibilities. Because courtship seems interminable and "unprofitable" and including another in one's own erotic world appears to be dangerous, men opt for obedient, predictable, and practical women: androids. Men consequently try to elude the despair of love by preferring robots, which in *Satanova krona* seems an ironic and less than tragic solution. In the above introduced anti-utopian novels, the problematic issues of the roles of the sexes pertain to love relationships and family: Bojetu and Mazzini unveil these roles through the stereotyped woman as the dark continent and the domestic angel. Both stereotypes are inextricably linked, introducing the woman as an unknown, unfathomable, mysterious, and domesticated being, the stereotype of the Freudian woman as the dark continent closely associated also to the stereotype of the femme fatale. These associations maintain the mysterious and ethereal nature of women and eradicate her domestification by way of attributes of fatality, demonism, adventurism. At the same time, such interpretations and depictions of the femme fatale offer an insight into the formation of male identity and socio-cultural authority. Male identity is thus put to the test by the femme fatale, not as much an actual image of a woman but rather her phantom. A femme fatale's aspirations for freedom, affluence, and independence are invoked by forces that jeopardize the protagonists in a novel.

In Feri Lainscek's 1993 novel *Ki jo je megla prinesla* (Brought by Fog), the protagonist -- a femme fatale -- is immersed in mystery and involved in relationships with passive men. We can surmise that the most frequent literary characters in contemporary Slovene novels men are emotionally unstable and naïve, with no particular purpose in life; they are guided through life by women, who are mysteriously incomprehensible and irrational, mostly because they yearn for something better and a love relationship between such opposing characters can drive men only to spiritual and physical breakdown. Further, even the horror fiction of such authors as Vlado Zabot's 1996 *Volcje noci* (The Night of the Wolves) preserve a tinge of mystery of the literary relationship between the femme fatale and her passive man. This unequal relationship of the femme fatale and the unsuccessful man mirrors ignorance and the misunderstanding of the opposite sex: in Andrej Skubic's 1999 *Grenki med* (Bitter Honey), the dubiousness of love is divided into two basic questions. "What can we do with a woman anyway?," the question of young men that undermines women's confidence and molds it into the existential question: "how to keep a man?" Yearning for (spiritual) love could be understood as the focal Romanesque distinction between the sexes where the male literary characters are inclined more towards a reflection on sexual differentiation, for they comment on and define the social standing of women, and excuse their own rigid roles with patriarchal laws. Perhaps the most ironic portrait of sexual lapses and unreliable sexual identity was written by Maja Novak in her 1995 crime story *Cimre* (Roommates). Not only is her crime story interesting because of the reversed sexual roles, but also because of the basic messages she posits: Novak's novel depicts the world of depressed recluses, autocratic psychopaths, naïve weak-

lings, sensitive individualists, and possessive mothers, while men also get their share of caricaturing.

As mentioned previously, a prominent innovation in the more recent Slovene novel are the varieties of the narration of sexual identity, prominently the increase of female literary figures as main characters: women protagonists are no longer confined to intimate quarters but are living out their inner restlessness by changing places, people (lovers), and habits. An intense insight into their own enigma is provided by the entire journey, as the most mobile chronometer and it is their enigmatic nature that presents a greater problem than the unfulfilling opposite male sex. It is suggested that in times of altered sexual roles, women have become prisoners of their own freedom and (still classic) concept of man, which, in the romantic sense, makes her unable to move forward. In a literary landscape of exhausted existence they wander in the world of drugs, consumerist fancy, and perishable emotions. What seems to be most astonishing, however, is the seeming inability of even the intellectual heroine to resist the stereotypical notion of the "right" man, and as such continues succumbing to the stereotype of the proverbial Don Juan. While this stereotype is less prominent than the aforementioned stereotype of woman, yet it relates to the still active male principle. The destructiveness of the sexual stereotype is the greatest, namely when the still active male principle crashes against the stereotype of the passive female principle, most painfully experienced by the woman literary figure. However, emotional numbness as the result of sexual stereotypes is shown differently in novels with children or with a juvenile perspective. In my opinion, one of the most optimistic view of relations between the sexes was written by Florjan Lipus in his 2003 novel *Bostjanov let* (Bostjan's Flight). Here, the search for one's own identity is closely linked to changing the traditional sexual roles, where the child Bostjan already sees that the only solution out of perverted relationships is friendship and not tension between the sexes. The adolescent boy feels instinctively that it is erotic love that reprsents the right way out of the limits of tradition (family, village, church), and at the same time an opportunity to change traditional behavior: he is not ashamed to show affection and care; he tries to break the tradition of silence and establish genuine communication with women, he is interested in herbs (in the traditionally regulated village this is, for example, considered predominantly a female task); he is attached to the old house (the house as a symbol of shelter and the mother); he enjoys walking and observing nature; and treats a girl as his friend. With the vision of love -- perhaps only as the object of desire -- exceeding outdated traditions, Lipus joins Slovene novelists who have just as well brought a fresh wind against the stereotypes of "male" and "female" principles (on this, see in detail Zupan Sosic, "Tradicionalno" 80-92).

The main setting in Lipus's novel is a village which is not a natural, mythical society any more it used to be in the narratives written by, for example, Peter Handke. However, from the very first Lipus's publications, the village has been the laughing stock of Slovene criticism, in acidity similar to the early criticism of Thomas Bernhard. Comparatively speaking, Lipus and Bernhard criticize mercilessly but subtly provincialism, hair splitting, and the workings of traditionalism. Their criticism is not directed at the village as a special venue but, rather, at its typical characteristics abstracted into a grotesque image of the world. The presence of the village with its restrictions of an individual's freedom and his basic individuality has an explicitly negative connotation. The crowd in the village claims its right to supervise and judge the villagers according to the conventions of the traditional organization of society. Such a society is fundamentally determined by Christianity, mainly by its apotheosis of death. In the novels, the villagers are preoccupied with death and thus they are antagonistic to the joy of life, something they have never actually experienced. The only purifying event in such a necrophilic civilization can be unhappiness or death. From his first publications, Lipus has been dealing with the model of folk literature and he has been struggling with the wrong conviction that the Carinthian reader can be addressed in plain words only (this is an aside to Haider's prominence in the neighbouring Austrian state of Carinthia where there is a substantial Slovene population). The critical attitude towards the village as a destructive place is mitigated by the introduction of some narrative perspectives; however, his protagonist Bostjan observes the world through a child's and a young man's perspectives, although the child's perspective is much more inclined to tradition thus being less critical than the youth's

perspective. Besides, national customs as well as the habits of the community (pilgrimage, procession, holidays and Sundays, healings with herbs, and care for animals), the child accepts all as an indispensable part of the everyday life, sometimes even as its most important component but also as the source of suffering: the youth's perspective of the narrator in the third person is one dimensional rejecting the narrow-minded tradition.

Lipus's *Bostjanov let* represents an exceptional achievement of this author's creativity in order to innovate Slovene literature. His criticism is directed towards frivolity and narrow-mindness of living, and his condensed, rhythmical, and esthetical language is colored by the grotesque. Village as the main setting is a social model of traditional Slovene culture and at the same time a universal portrait of modern society. Yet, Lipus offers new dimensions emerging from the relationship between tradition and contemporaneousness. Although the narrator is ironical of the stereotypes of tradition (the cult of work and death, the church-as-the-guardian-of-life-and-society, and the obeisance of children), he stands for conservation of traditional values, particularly of family life, straightforwardness, and sincerity. He affirms traditional behavioral patterns while he is also being equally critical of contemporaneousness as he is of tradition. Using nadrealistic metaphor, he touches the fading image of village pointing out the centralization of cities (big towns) and thus the deteriorating village is a symbol of a village loosing the connection with the past and nature. The vital openness of life as the highest ethical value are described as the innovative portrait of real and contemporary life, still unaffected by exhaustion and frivolity.

In sum, a large number of the contemporary Slovene novel engages with the problematics of sexual identity, shown not only in narratives of less-constrictive and traditional roles of the sexes but also in the softening of hetero-sexual traditional standards including homosexual motives and themes. While several texts depict the turn of the imaginary towards homosexual perspectives, they remain in conformity with the heterosexual perspective. The perception of homosexuality in the contemporary Slovene novel (as well as in the Slovene media, another important topic I am unable to discuss here) is approaching a level of normalization and a breakthrough can be observed from stereotypization to secrecy and medicalization followed by initial forms of normalization. The path towards normalization leads through the testing of the hero's identity in current prose, where homosexuality is presented more as an exceptional, sometimes even imposed experience, and less as a sexual practice of the literary personae. At the same time, it is clear that innovation with regard to the landscape of sex and gender roles form a prominent thematic of contemporary Slovene literature expressed in the form of the novel.

Works Cited

Biti, Vladimir. "Identiteta." *Primerjalna knjizevnost* 23.1 (2000): 11–23.
Bojetu, Berta. *Filio ni doma* (Filio is Not at Home). Celovec: Zalozba & Salzburg: Wieser, 1990.
Bojetu, Berta. *Pticja hisa* (Bird's House). Celovec: Zalozba & Salzburg: Wieser, 1995.
Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1990.
Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990.
Handke, Peter. Prosa, Gedichte, Theaterstücke, Hörspiel, Aufsätze. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970.
Lacan, Jacques. *Le Seminaire de Jacques Lacan. Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*. Paris: Seuil, 1990.
Kobal-Palcic, Darja. "Preucevanje kognitivne spolne sheme z vidika sterotipov ali z vidika samopodobe" ("The Researching of Cognitive Gender Schema through the Stereotyps and Selfimage). *Casopis za kritiko znanosti* (*Review for the Critique of Science*) 26.188 (1998): 247–57.
Lainscek, Feri. *Ki jo je megla prinesla* (Brought by Fog). Ljubljana: Presernova druzba, 1993.
Lipus, Florjan. *Bostjanov let* (Bostjan's Flight). Maribor: Zalozba Litera, 2003.
Lorber, Judith. *Paradoxes of Gender*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1994.
Mozetic, Brane. *Angeli* (Angels). Ljubljana: Center za slovensko knjizevnost, 1996.
Mozetic, Brane. *Zgubljena zgodba* (A Lost Story). Center za slovensko knjizevnost, 2001.
Mazzini, Miha. *Satanova krona* (Satan's Crown). Celovec: Zalozba & Salzburg: Wieser, 1993.
Novak, Maja. *Cimre* (Roommates). Maribor: Zalozba Obzorja, 1995.
Skubic, Andrej. *Grenki med* (Bitter Honey). Ljubljana: DZS, 1999.
Tratnik, Suzana. *Ime mi je Damjan* (My Name is Damjan). Ljubljana: SKUC, 2001.
Totosy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Hungarian." *Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature*. Ed. Gaëtan Brulotte and John Phillips. New York: Routledge, 2006. Vol. 1, 650-54.
Vasvári, Louise O. "Queer Theory and Discourses of Desire." CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 6.1 (2006): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss1/2/>.

Virk, Tomo. *Tekst in kontekst: eseji o sodobni slovenski prozi* (Text and Context: Essays on Contemporary Slovene Prose). Ljubljana: Literarno-umetnisko drustvo Literatura, 1997.

Zupan Sosic, Alojzija. *Zavetje zgodbe. Sodobni slovenski roman ob koncu stoletja* (A Sheltering Story: The Contemporary Slovene Novel at the End of the Century). Ljubljana: Literarno-umetnisko drustvo literatura, 2003.

Zupan Sosic, Alojzija. "Tradicionalno in sodobno v romanu *Bostjanov let* Florjana Lipusa (Traditional and Contemporary in a novel Bostjan's Flight by Florjan Lipus). *Seminar slovenskega jezika, literature in kulture* (Seminar on Slovene Language, Literature and Culture) 40 (2004): 80-92.

Zabot, Vlado. *Volcje noci* (The Night of the Wolves). Murska Sobota: Pomurska zalozba, 1996.

Author's profile: Alojzija Zupan Sosic teaches Slovene literature at the University of Ljubljana. Her interests in scholarship include the contemporary Slovene novel in a comparative context, theories of the narrative, and gender identity, and she has published numerous papers in Slovene, Croatian, Bosnian, Polish, and Russian in journals such as *Jezik in slovstvo* (Language and Literature), *Slavisticna revija* (Slavic Review), *Primerjalna knjizevnost* (Comparative Literature), *Razlika* (A Difference), *Opcje* (Options), *Vsemirnaja literatura* (World Literature), as well as in English in the *Journal of the Society for Slovene Studies*. Zupan Sosic's book publications include *Zavetje zgodbe. Sodobni slovenski roman ob koncu stoletja* (A Sheltering Story: The Contemporary Slovene Novel at the End of the Century) (2003) and textboks of literature for Slovene secondary school curricula such as *Branja 3* (Readings 3) (2002) and *Branja 4* (Readings 4) (2003). E-mail: <alojzija.zupan-sosic@guest.arnes.si>.

*****Translator's profile: Veronika Fürst received her M.A. in English from the University of Ljubljana. Fürst also studied at the Darlington College of Arts, United Kingdom. She teaches English in Ljubljana and translates various texts from the Slovenian into English. E-mail <veronikafurst@hotmail.com>