

## CONTEMPORARY CROATIAN PROSE LITERATURE: FROM HISTORICAL FICTION TO AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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### Introduction

In this article I give a brief synopsis of Croatian prose literature of the second half of the twentieth century, and the diachronic development of the novel, short story and fable in particular. Attention is given to contemporary Croatian short prose. Though recognising their importance as constant and dynamic influences, I refrain from making specific, detailed references to Croatian history and issues of a linguistic nature. For an overview of nineteenth and twentieth century Croatian history, see Mislav Ježić's article which appeared in the 1997 edition of the *Croatian Studies Review*. Relevant details about Croatian linguistic policy can be found in articles written by Josip Matešić and Luka Budak, both of which appeared in the same edition of the *Croatian Studies Review*. Other authors that offer an insight into Croatia's linguistic and historical reality, and the way they condition contemporary literature, include Banac (1990), Moguš (1995), Kačić (1997) and Perić (1998). More complete studies can be found in the literary journal *Most (The Bridge)*, Vaupotić (1968) and Donat (1970 and 1996). Bogert (1991) offers a good survey of the literature of Krleža's time, while Eekman (1978) writes on South Slavonic literatures in general. Though a systematic history of Croatian literature has yet to be written in English or translated into English, sources from non-Croatian authors can be found in Škvorc (1997 and 1998).

### 1. Three open questions

Towards the end of his book *Povijest hrvatske književnosti (A History of Croatian Literature, 1997)*, Dubravko Jelčić<sup>1</sup> offers a diachronic table portraying events in Croatian and world

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<sup>1</sup> Jelčić (1930) is a Croatian literary historian. He is the head of the Department of Literature at the Institute of Croatian Literature, Theatre and Music, which is affiliated to the Croatian Academy of Science and the Arts.

literature, as well as a parallel survey of Croatian and relevant world history. The final part of the table is particularly interesting on account of the writers and works mentioned. During the period between the two World Wars, beginning with 1932, a year significant for contemporary Croatian literature, Jelčić singles out the following Croatian writers: Miroslav Krleža, Slavko Kolar, Ivo Kozarčanin, Mile Budak, Vjekoslav Kaleb and Ivan Goran Kovačić. As for early pre-war prose writers, we should mention August Cesarac and Milan Begović. A new generation of writers appears in the table for the period immediately after the Second World War. This generation includes Petar Šegedin, who wrote two important novels, *Djeca božja* (*The Children of God*, 1945) and *Osamljenici* (*The Lonely*, 1946), Mirko Božić, Ranko Marinković and Vladan Desnica. Also active during this period is the aforesaid Kaleb.

The next generation of prose writers to achieve renown appeared in the mid-1950s, and asserted itself again in the early 1970s. Members of this generation, known as the *krugovaši* (because of their connection with the journal *Krugovi* – engl. *Circles*), include Antun Šoljan, Marinković, Desnica, Slobodan Novak and Ivan Slamnig.<sup>2</sup> Jelčić mentions Ivan Aralica, Nedjeljko Fabrio and Pavao Pavličić as writers who wrote important works during the 1970s and 1980s. A younger generation of writers rose to prominence with the appearance of the journal *Quorum* in 1985.<sup>3</sup> While the journal itself is mentioned in the table, the names of writers of the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s are not.

At this point, I want to draw attention to three noticeable facts. First, the complete absence of female authors in Jelčić's table of

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<sup>2</sup> These writers are *krugovaši* only conditionally. For, as Frangeš (1989) states, the best writers do not usually emerge from within literary movements, even though they are conditioned by them to some extent. Visković (1983) and Bošnjak (1999) also note that the best works are usually written when a particular movement comes to an end.

<sup>3</sup> The individual generations of Croatian writers after the Second World War are essentially determined by three literary journals: *Krugovi* in the 1950s, *Razlog* in the 1960s and *Quorum* in the 1980s. On literary journals, see Bogišić, et. al. (1998: 413-459).

Croatian literature after 1945;<sup>4</sup> secondly, the complete absence of Miroslav Krleža for the same period, in spite of the fact that he had published the novel *Zastave* (*The Banners*, 1967); and, thirdly, the difficulties encountered in following the stylistic, formal trends in Croatian literature from 1945 to the present. In all this, it is clear that the current situation in Croatian literature does not occupy much space. But from other surveys of the history of Croatian literature, such as the one offered by Frangeš (1987), it is also clear that questions relating to the status of women writers, Miroslav Krleža and the systematisation of post-war literature still require an answer.

## 2. Modernity and post-modernity in contemporary Croatian prose expression

I would suggest that the specific character of contemporary Croatian literature takes its point of departure from Krleža's *Povratak Filipa Latinovicza* (*The Return of Filip Latinovicz*, 1932). Namely, there remains to this day a restrictive givenness in Croatian literary practice which originates in Krleža's novel. In the narrative, Krleža portrays the enforced and formal structure of the world in which the main protagonist, Filip, finds himself, and from which he seeks an exit. Those writers who are burdened by the restrictive factors instantiated by Krleža's famous novel include Kozarčanin, Šegedin, Marinković, Novak, Desnica and Šoljan. Keeping this in mind, tertiary and secondary students often ask why they should study the story about Filip Latinovicz and its 'bickering in Pannonian mud'. The novel should be studied, I think, precisely because Krleža's intonations and impermeability overshadows decades of Croatian prose writing, and because the novel became, in spite of itself and Krleža's intentions, the catalyst which initiated that element of restrictiveness and enclosure which pervades the most interesting, and probably most enduring, works of Croatian literature. Whether symbolised by mud, rocky ground or the crashing waves of the sea, this restrictive factor is present in a number of works from the 1930s to the 1970s. One need only

<sup>4</sup> I refer only to prose writers in Jelčić's table. As for women writers, Jelčić mentions the poet Vesna Parun.

recall Marinković's novella *Samotni život tvoj* (*Your Solitary Life* - 1940 and 1974) and Kaleb's *Gost* (*The Visitor*, 1940).

To substantiate the claim that Krleža's novel has a restrictive influence on the works of other writers, it is sufficient to cite a few examples. Viewed from the perspective of inter-textual interpretation, Kozarčanin's novel *Sam čovjek* (*Man Alone*, 1937) is more a prolongation of Filip's searchings than a reflection of Dostoyevsky's presence in twentieth century Croatian literature. Šegedin's *Djeca božja* and *Osamljenici*, and especially his late work *Crni smješak* (*Black Smile*, 1969), builds on this theme to the utmost. Take also the main character in Desnica's novel *Proljeća Ivana Galeba* (*The Spring of Ivan Galeb*, 1957), who is enclosed, as though trapped, in the world of his hospital room. The heroes of Šoljan's *Drugi ljudi na mjesecu* (*Other People on the Moon*, 1978) are defined by their disorientation in the world, even though the world itself is seen to function in a more orderly and better fashion in the eyes of others. And in Slamnig's novel *Bolja polovica hrabrosti* (*The Better Half of Courage*, 1972) this restrictive factor unifies the story of the main character, as well as the 'story within the story,' which is given to the main character as a manneristic love game to be read.

Perhaps the most indicative examples to which this type of interpretation can be applied, with particular emphasis on diachronic inter-textuality, are Marinković's *Kiklop* (*Cyclops*, 1965) and Novak's *Mirisi, zlato i tamjan* (*Frankincense, Gold and Myrrh*, 1968). In the former, the hero has a dream about the impossibility of escape; in the latter, the illness of the 'the old woman' entraps the two main characters. At the same time, however, both novels open up possible ways of ending the 'givenness' of the imposed, that is, the structural semantic model which is encapsulated in the world of Krleža's 1932 novel.

A twofold relation opens up for the reader in the novel *Kiklop*: one is oriented towards the reality of the pre-war city and the impending catastrophe; the other is oriented towards internal ruin and the deconstruction of that restrictive factor from which there is an escape after all - an escape in some far-off place where the earth can be eaten, and where one can live in an animal-like state

and, perhaps, forget. But this is not the central feature of liberation from inter-textual limitations. Instead, it is above all a liberation created through ironic focuses and the dialogical opening up of the text to every other, albeit only hyperbolic, possibility. In *Mirisi, zlato i tamjan*, a chasm emerges with the collapse of the given, as a better and more genuine form of existence than the one offered 'up there' (where decisions are made for *us*) makes itself felt. Here, ironic focus allows for a different interpretation. The *otherness* of Novak's expression, so complete in this excessively modern novel, is developed further in the altered, post-modern perspective of the narrator of *Izvanbrodski dnevnik (Diary Outside the Boat, 1977)* which, in my opinion, is his best text. Paralleling Marinković's *Kiklop*, there also appeared Krleža's *Zastave*, a novel consisting of five books, in which the world of impossibility dissipates and is superseded by a multitude of meanings and the dialogical deconstruction of every conceivable unity. Irrespective of how much Krleža's narrator, in contrast to Marinković's or Novak's, had the (authorial) intention of controlling the uttered material, the spoken word eludes him and liberates itself through a series of ironic focuses and independent post-modern potentialities.

Ernest Behler (1990) understands post-modernism to be the highest level of modernism, for the modern can no longer express itself in a direct manner. According to Behler, circumlocution becomes the only possibility of meaningful expression, and what is supposed to be transferred is attainable through that which can still be expressed in ironic focuses, language-games and allegoric speech. This, of course, pertains to the novel's expression in relation to inter-textual and extra-textual connotative restrictions. In the case of Krleža's *Povratak Filipa Latinovciza*, for instance, the cramped nature of space (and language) is expressed in the story of the unhappy painter. Marinković and Novak's literature, however, speak differently. They express themselves extra-textually and contextually in relation to modern reality and history, and inter-textually in relation to Krleža and the wider framework in which Croatian prose expression flourished (the Russian, German and French contextual frame). In this sense, we notice the end of modern and the beginning of post-modern Croatian prose utterance during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Elements that characterise the post-modern on the international scene<sup>5</sup> are interwoven here with local elements. In particular, there is a parting of ways with Krleža's imposed horizon of literary expectations.

*Kiklop* begins with a description of an advertisement board. The political language of self-management socialism is the object of irony in *Mirisi, zlato i tamjan*. The so-called dialectical thinking of self-management socialism is completely de-contextualised in *Izvanbrodski dnevnik*. In this respect, Šoljan's *Luka* (*The Harbour*, 1972), *Drugi ljudi na mjesecu* and Slamnig's stories also deserve a more careful reading.<sup>6</sup> The post-modern is announced in later narrators, such as Pavličić and Tribuson, through a playful attitude to style, and a mixture of the trivial and the serious, the modernistic and playfulness.

### 3. Croatian literature of the 1980s and early 1990s

For the period of the 1980s and 1990s, Croatian literary critics speak less about particular writers and more about generations of writers. The generation of the 1970s is characterised by so-called *mlada proza* (young prose, or better still 'new evolving prose'), a term coined by Velimir Visković (1983). The main writers of the period are Pavličić, Tribuson, Veljko Barbijeri, Stjepan Čuić and Dubravka Ugrešić.<sup>7</sup> This generation is also known as the

<sup>5</sup> These elements include the collapse of unity, the end of the narrative, loss of a unified style, and the penetration of everyday and trivial styles in so-called high literature. See Lyotard (1984), Hassan (1980) and Waugh (1992).

<sup>6</sup> I have overlooked, perhaps unfairly, the works of the *krugovaši* generation here. Apart from Šoljan and Slamnig, who paved the way for Croatian urban poetry, I should mention that Fedor Vidas (1924), Saša Vereš (1928-1991), and especially Dalibor Cvitan (1934-1993), whose late novels *Polovnjak* (*The Second Hand Man*, 1984) and *Ervin i ludaci* (*Erwin and the Crazies*, 1992), together with some later stories by Ivan Kušan, resemble the prose expression the younger generation uses in its 'Carverean' context. Kušan translated Carver into Croatian. I should also mention Tomislav Sabljak (b. 1934) who, in his later phase, wrote fantastic prose, such as *Pas ispod kože* (*A Dog Under the Skin*, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> The majority of these writers began their careers as writers of short prose. Pavličić is the most proficient Croatian writer, with over 50 published books.

*fantastičari* (fantastic writers) because the majority of its members wrote short stories with fantastic elements, and were influenced most by Louis Jorge Borges. They were also influenced by other Croatian writers of fantastic prose, including the realist Janko Leskovar and some of the works of Antun Gustav Matoš, who was himself influenced by Edgar Allan Poe (see Donat, 1996). When referring to the literary generation of the *fantastičari*,<sup>8</sup> I do so only to stress that the aforesaid writers wrote short prose and fantastic novels during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Important novels of this generation include: Pavličić's *Umjetni orao* (*The Artificial Eagle*, 1979), *Stroj za maglu* (*The Fog Machine*, 1981) and especially *Večernji akt* (*The Evening Act*, 1982); Tribuson's *Čuješ li nas Frido Stern?* (*Do You Hear Us, Frido Stern?*, 1981) and *Ruski rulet* (*Russian Roulette*, 1982); Čuić's *Orden* (*Decoration*, 1981) and Barbijeri's *Trojanski konj* (*The Trojan Horse*). Ugrešić's novels, however, belong to this group only conditionally.

The year 1985 saw the inception of the journal *Quorum*. Though probably not the most significant literary journal, it still deserves special mentioning here on account of its importance for contemporary Croatian literature. A good survey of the literary works of the *Quorum* generation or *quorumaši* can be found in the introductory text of Krešimir Bagić's *Poštari lakog sna* (*The Postmen of Easy Sleep*, 1996).<sup>9</sup> Also, Jurica Pavičić gives a reliable account of *quorumaši* short stories in his article "Između

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After the collection of short stories *Brod na vodi* (*The Boat on the Water*), he wrote criminal novels, some of which, such as *Večernji akt* (*The Evening Act*), contain fantastic elements. Tribuson also wrote criminal stories, but occasionally writes very interesting books, such as the generational novel-chronicle *Povijest pornografije* (*History of Pornography*). Čuić is not so prolific at this stage, but his most interesting works are the collections of short stories *Stanjinova slika i druge priče* (*Stanja's Picture and Other Stories*, 1975) and *Tridesetgodišnje priče* (*Thirties Stories*, 1979). Ugrešić is a very original author. She first wrote fantastic stories, such as *Život je bajka* (*Life is a Fairy-Tale*), and then very original novels, including *Štefica Cvek u raljama života* (*Štefica Cvek in the Jaws of Life*, 1981) and *Forsiranje romana rijeke* (*Forcing the River Novel*, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> On the difference between 'generation' and 'posterity' in literary-scholarly terminology, see Bagić (1996).

<sup>9</sup> On the *Quorum* generation, see *Dubrovnik* 2, 1996.

fragmenta i detalja" ("Between Fragment and Detail"). When defining 1980s Croatian literature, Pavličić returns to the definition of short prose. He rightly notices that, in contrast to the novel, whose development can be traced from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, short prose frequently repeats an already established formal model. From Chekhov and Poe, on the one hand, and Kafka, on the other, it is possible to trace two types of short prose: one is realistic in its nature and tends to be fragmentary; the other is fantastic and tends to incorporate themes of an illusionary nature.<sup>10</sup> These two types intertwine in contemporary prose, especially in view of the post-modern perspective and Lyotard's dictum that "everything can be united in a new, artificial unity."

The first type of short prose stresses detail and presents a small portion of reality. It also includes so-called realistic prose, whose development reached a climax of sorts in the prose utterance of Richard Carver and the American meta-narrators. Not surprisingly, Carver occupies a special place in *Quorum* and later became a cult author for the following generation of young Croatian writers.<sup>11</sup> The second type of short prose took its inspiration from that form of prose expression which developed from Poe and Kafka to Gabriel Garcia Marques and Louis Jorge Borges. Fantastic Croatian short prose attained prominence also through the mediation of two Serbian Jewish writers, Danilo Kiš

<sup>10</sup> Both types of short prose expression are evident in Krleža. The first type is evident in the prose structure of *Hrvatski bog Mars* (*The Croatian God Mars*) and the late, larger prose work, *Glembajevi* (*The Glembajs*). The second type can be seen in *Veliki meštar sviju hulja* (*The Grand Master of Every Blasphemy*), *Kako je doktor Gregor po prvi put u životu susreo Nečastivog* (*How Doctor Gregor Met the Evil One for the First Time in His Life*) and, perhaps, Krleža's final novella *Cvrčak pod vodopadom* (*The Cricket Under the Waterfall*).

<sup>11</sup> Works of three 'post-*Quorum*' writers, Ferić, Mlinarec and Karuza, are presented in this edition of the *Croatian Studies Review*. When referring to Carver as a cult writer, I have in mind those 'portions of raw reality' that are motivated by post-idealistic and post-ethical motives. (See Miriam Clark [1995], "Contemporary Short Fiction and the Postmodern Condition," in: *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 32/2.) It is no coincidence, then, that we find this sort of naked meta-narrative and meta-historical reality in Miljenko Jergović, a Croatian writer who emerged out of war-torn Sarajevo. His stories are motivated greatly by ethical concerns.



and David Albahari, and the strong tradition of local fantastic prose, primarily the early Pavličić and Tribuson. Links to the prose expression of Krleža and Marinković were probably indirect.<sup>12</sup> More direct links to the 'pre-Krleža era' of the early twentieth century are discernible, that is, to Matoš and Galović. Pavičić notes that the *quorumaši* contributed most in unifying these two models into a post-modern (con)fusion.<sup>13</sup> This generation did not produce the same sort of important writers as did the *fantastičari*, but some of them evolved into very respectable writers all the same. I am primarily thinking here of Zoran Ferić (b. 1961).

Bagić classifies the short prose of the *quorumaši* into three groups: minimalist prose, conceptual prose and the prose of the urban landscape. Perhaps the most interesting authors of the first group are Stanislav Habjan (b. 1957), Carmen Klein (b. 1962) and Boris Gregorić (b. 1961). Writers of conceptual prose reveal a heightened meta-structural consciousness about writing, and write about writing (Bagić). The most representative writer of this group is Damir Miloš (b. 1954) who later, somewhat uncharacteristically of the *quorumaši* generation, became a skilled novelist. Another significant writer of the conceptualist type is Edo Budiša (1958-1988). The most interesting authors of urban landscape prose are Edo Popović (b. 1957) and Mate Bašić (b. 1958), who now resides in Australia.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Marinković, like Novak, belongs to the group of realist writers, who announced the deconstruction of the narrative by means of meta-structural digressions, and not parallel worlds. Marinković's most interesting fables are *Anđeo (Angel)* and *Zagrljaj (The Embrace)*. As for Novak, his short prose *Dalje treba misliti (One Should Think Further)* and *Tvrđi grad (The Fortified City, 1961)* deserve mentioning. As an example of realist prose, Šegedin's collection of short stories *Crni smješkak* is particularly interesting. The breakdown of the novel's structural unity reappears later in the prose of the 1990s. I should mention here Mlinarec's *Georinine suze (Georina's Tears)* and Tomislav Zajec's *Soba za razbijanje (The Breaking Room, 1998)*.

<sup>13</sup> An interesting example of this is Slamnig's collection of short stories *Čudovište (Monster, 1980)*, the first to announce a synthesis of sorts.

<sup>14</sup> In this group, Bagić names Mićanović and Ferić, who I think developed 'alongside', and not 'with', the *Quorum* generation. The same can be said of Miloš and Rešicki.

Alongside the prose of the *quorumaši* and *fantastičari*, a third prominent form of prose appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, the so-called *novopovijesni roman* (the neohistorical novel; see Milanja, 1994 and 1996). This specifically Croatian type of novel is only conditionally comparable to Western post-modern genre trends in pseudo-historical novel writing, which flourished during the mid-1980s and early 1990s, thanks mainly to the novels of Umberto Eco, Salman Rushdie and, to some extent, South American writers (Marquez, Fuentes). The Croatian *novopovijesni roman* does not encroach upon parallel worlds, and it does not reconstrue 'other possible variants' and deconstruct historical time by introducing new, and hitherto unknown, fictitious elements.<sup>15</sup> In other words, there is no post-modern play of 'mixed' codes. Rather than offer possible re-interpretations of history, the new historical novel often calls to mind the way historical events impinge upon the present. In the Croatian literary version of questioning history, the new historicism of the 'conditioned viewpoint' and its deconstructive intention is evident in the novel's structure and undeniable diachrony. The relation to this diachrony from every possible synchronic perspective is frequently determined by respect and, occasionally, the posing of questions, and is less a case of 'drawing to a close' in the sense of finding an answer through the deconstruction of the given and the construction of the possible.

One possible exception to the above depiction of the *novopovijesni roman* is the novel *Psi u trgovištu* (*Dogs in the Market-Town*, 1979) by one of the most widely read Croatian writers of the 1980s, Ivan Aralica (b. 1930).<sup>16</sup> According to

<sup>15</sup> Julijana Matanović (1997) claims that Fabio's novels should also be described as the works above because of the way they refer to texts rather than history itself.

<sup>16</sup> According to Milanja, Aralica relativises history (just as Fabio does) not in his novels, but in his early stories, such as *Opsjene paklenih crteža* (*Delusions of Hellish Drawings*, 1977). After *Psi u trgovištu*, Aralica wrote several historical novels that have 'moralising' discourses, and in which history becomes the 'teacher of life'. Of Aralica's later novels, which invite comparison with Ivo Andrić, special mention should be given to *Put bez sna* (*The Sleepless Path*, 1982), *Duše robova* (*The Souls of Slaves*, 1984), *Graditelj svratišta* (*The Builder of the Guest-House*, 1986) and *Asmodejev šal* (*Asmodej's Scarf*, 1988). Whilst Andrić's characters tend to 'moralise' in

Cvjetko Milanja, the other crucial representative of the new historical Croatian novel is Nedjeljko Fabrio (b. 1937), for both he and Aralica began to focus on historical themes with their novellas (Milanja, 1994). Indeed, the post-modern relativisation of the actual and its ironic deconstruction is more evident in their novellas than in their later historical novels, in which they take on the role of constructors, and not re-constructors, of a period which can no longer be construed. This is due mainly to the altered conditioned viewpoint of the changing environment (Jackson, 1988), but also to its singularity, irrespective of the renewed attempt to bring historical cycles to an end (White, 1973). Apart from Aralica and Fabrijo, other significant authors of this genre are Ivan Supek and Feđa Šehović.<sup>17</sup> It would be worthwhile to determine just how much the utterance of Aralica and Šehović's *novopovijensi roman* is dependent on, and even evolved from, Nehajev, as well as the first pre-new historical novel *Denuncijada* (*Denunciation*) by Viktor Car Emin<sup>18</sup> - and how much it depends on the type of expression associated with post-Turkish Bosnian story-telling, exemplified best in the fables and novels of Ivo Andrić, Novak Simić and, to some extent, Meša Selimović.

#### 4. Short stories in the late 1990s

In the 1990s the short story became an even more dominant form of Croatian prose expression than in the 1980s, for it was during the 1990s that the Croatian readership finally began to appreciate the works of 'home grown' writers. In newspapers articles critics

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relation to the story determined by the (Bosnian) everyday, Aralica's are guided by the authorial intention (in Eco's sense of terms) of the author himself. Particularly indicative of this is the novel *Knjiga gorkog prijekora* (*The Book of Bitter Admonishment*, 1994), which interprets history from a very determined and conditioned historical perspective.

<sup>17</sup> Šehović relativises the historical model, through ironic layers of deconstruction, in the novel *Gorak okus duše* (*The Bitter Taste of the Soul*).

<sup>18</sup> Fabrio's expression is more dependent on Car Emin than on Andrić or Simić. His most famous novels are *Vježbanje života* (*Exercising Life*, 1985) and *Berenikina kosa* (*Berenika's Hair*, 1989). His novel *Smrt Vronskog* (*The Death of Vronski*, 1994), which departs from the new historical novel genre through the deconstruction of structural elements, is, in my opinion, the first example of the postmodern deconstruction of history in Croatian literature.

continuously reiterated that Croatian prose had reached a level of literary quality comparable to other European literatures. Also, contact with dominant European cultures went in both directions, and writers such as Ferić, Miljenko Jergović (b. 1966) and Pavičić have now been translated into German, English and French. A significant feature of contemporary Croatian short prose is the return of the strong narrator and neorealistic utterance, which are currently dominant in other European literatures, from the Hungarian to the Norwegian.

A leading Croatian literary critic, Velimir Visković, divides contemporary Croatian literature into the two streams of neorealism and essayistic writing. In the first group he mentions Jergović, Pavičić, Ante Tomić (b.1970), Robert Perišić (b.1969), Ferić and Mlakić. The major representative of the second group is Stanko Andrić (b. 1967). Bagić, on the other hand, divides the prose of the 1990s into four poetic types. The first he calls critical mimesis, the representatives of which are Jergović, Perišić, Tomić, Ferić, Borivoj Radaković (b. 1951) and Tarik Kulenović (b. 1969). The second poetic stream is escapism, and is represented by Roman Simić (b. 1972), Robert Mlinarec (b. 1966), Milana Vuković-Runjić (b. 1970) and Miroslav Brumec (b. 1969). The third group, represented by Stanko Andrić and Boris Perić (b. 1966), is characterised by inter-discursive poetics and the mixing of codes with essayistic layers in the text. The final group Bagić mentions continue the urban landscape prose of the 1980s. Its major representatives are Delimir Rešicki (b. 1961) and Krešimir Mićanović (b. 1968), as well as Senko Karuza (b. 1957), Neven Uršumović (b. 1972) and Marinela (b. 1971).

What Bagić calls critical mimesis is a continuation of meta-realism and the 'strong' narration. Again, we should stress the substantial influence of Richard Carver and his poetics. The escapists have numerous influences, including Croatian fantastic prose, Anglo-Spanish writing (Simić and Brumec) and ethnographic material (Mlinarec). Writers of urban landscape prose build on that type of literature where Budiša and others stopped in the 1980s. It is a kind of poetics that combines realism and the microcosm of the unnamed city. Authors of this orientation all began with lyrical expression and later wrote short

prose. Owing to his specific inter-discursive approach to narration, Stanko Andrić belongs to a special category where fiction, essayistic and academic discourses blend in a type of text that is a reconstruction of any period of history. In this respect, his most interesting text is *Dnevnik iz JNA (Dairy from the Yugoslav National Army)*.

Ferić occupies a special place in the generation of the 1990s. He represents a stream in contemporary Croatian literature which retains a strong formal relationship to the Croatian classics of the twentieth century (Marinković, Novak, Šoljan). At the same time, his microstructural sense for the grotesque and irony is more radical compared to other contemporary authors. This feature of Ferić's work won the hearts of the Croatian readership, and he became the best selling Croatian writer of the late 1990s. In two collections of short stories, *Mišolovka Walta Disneya (Walt Disney's Mousetrap, 1997)* and *Anđeo u ofsajdu (The Angel Who is Offside, 2000)*, Ferić explores the wide range of present day issues in Croatia and does not hesitate to talk about taboo themes. He addresses, for instance, the topics of AIDS, prostitution and war in a complex manner. Always on the edge of the grotesque, Ferić manages to return to the world of realistic utterance. He develops, within the framework of neorealism, a type of prose utterance that pushes Marinković and Novak's explorations ('island topics') to another level, and employs several post-modern connotative elements. His 'displaced' narrators are not artificial, but are the products of processes in contemporary society which, at first glance, sometimes appear absurd, but are nonetheless very real.

The other successful Croatian writer of the 1990s is Jergović, whose *Sarajevski Marlboro (Sarajevo Marlboro, 1994)* has been translated into numerous languages, including English. Originally from Sarajevo, he settled in Zagreb in the early 1990s when the war broke out in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Jergović makes use of urban, everyday story-telling to construe a specific world which contains Carver's postmodern instinct for the post-idealistic and post-moral, on the one hand, and the warmth of Ivo Andrić's utterance, on the other. He also possesses Ivo Andrić's love for story telling, irrespective of how much it may be concealed

behind the surface of his de-ideologising tendency. This is particularly true of one of Jergović's symbolic stories, *Bosanski lonac (The Bosnian Pot)*. In most of his other novellas one can decipher a mixture of post-modern and traditional elements, emotional descriptions and ironic deconstructions. Jergović presents his heroes through ironic distance, but also with a feeling of directness at the level of receptive consciousness. Namely, the reader senses that the narrator sympathises with his characters. Authorial intention, however, is not imposed, but manifests itself through the process of story-telling, which is not burdened by Krleža's legacy and opens up new horizons for Croatian literature. This is especially true of *Karivani (The Caravans)*, a collection of short stories.

During the mid-1990s a number of Croatian playwrights and poets - such as Bošnjak, D. Jelčić, M. Bazina and B. Vlahović - began to write prose. One other writer who deserves mentioning here is Miro Gavran. He is the most translated contemporary Croatian playwright, and his plays have been performed on many European and American stages. Gavran also penned three novels: *Zaboravljeni sin (The Forgotten Son, 1989)*, *Kako smo lomili noge (How We Were Breaking Legs)* and *Klara (Claire, 1997)*. The third of these novels is especially interesting, because it can be read either as a post-modern deconstruction or as an affirmation of the 'how' question of 'contemporary practical philosophy'.

## 5. Croatian women writers

At the beginning of this article, I noted that Jelčić does not discuss in any great detail the works of contemporary female authors in his *Povijest hrvatske književnosti*. Also, I have only mentioned Dubravka Ugrešić,<sup>19</sup> who belongs the *fantastičari* generation,

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<sup>19</sup> Ugrešić is the most translated contemporary woman writer, and her books have greatly influenced so-called Croatian female writing. This type of writing achieved prominence in the 1970s with Sunčana Škrinjarić and Slavenka Drakulić. Examples of female writing in the 1990s include: Sibila Petlevski's *Francuska suita (The French Suite)*, Irena Lukšić's *Noći u bjelom satenu (Nights in White Satin)*, Vesna Bega's *Oprezne bajke (Cautious Fairy Tales)*,

and who played an important role in the growing appreciation of so-called female writing in Croatia. Though evident in Croatian literature from the time of Dragojla Jarnjević (1812-1875), female writing attained prominence during the period of the 'Second Moderna', and especially in works by Mirjana Matić Hale and Ivanka Vujčić-Lazovski. And though female authors do not necessarily ascribe to the separation of the 'feminine' from the corpus of Croatian literature, critics have nonetheless accepted the challenge of *otherness* these authors present. They analyse not only women writers, but also traditional 'male' prose from the 'feminine perspective'.

The most important women writers of the 1970s and 1980s are Sunčana Škrinjarić, Višnja Stahuljak, Dubravka Ugrešić, Irena Vrkljan, Slavenka Drakulić, Julijana Matanović, Carmen Klein, Ljiljana Domić, Višnja Stahuljak, Irena Lukšić, Sibila Petlevski and Vesna Bega. I should also mention the youngest of these women writers, such as Marinela and those writers connected with the journal *Plima*, Suzana Jukić and Stela Levanić. During the period of 1990s, female writing tended to be of the autobiographical type. Authors such as Vrkljan, Ugrešić and Andrea Zlutar still lead the way. It is difficult to say which authors that came onto the literary scene in the early 1990s will be incorporated into the so-called canon of Croatian literature. However, awareness of the existence of a unified literary corpus of national literature is, I believe, unquestionable among traditional critics and promoters of 'female writing'. The 'feminine' critics, from Dunja Detoni Dujmić to Morana Čale Felman, Zlutar and Julijana Matanović, begin with the position of 'otherness'. They discuss not only issues relating to 'masculine prose' from the 'feminine perspective', but also provide a fresh, invigorating and different approach to the Croatian literary corpus in general.

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1981) and *Čovjek koji je čeznuo čudo* (*The Man Who Yearned for a Miracle*, 1998), Sonja Lovrenčić's *Wien Fantastic* (*Vienna Fantastic*, 1998), and Marinela's *Lift bez kabine* (*The Lift Without a Cabin*, 1996). Irena Lukšić was also allied to the journal *Quorum* and the *quorumaši* generation.

## 6. The hybrid forms of the mid-1990s

Croatia has undergone enormous transformations over the past ten years. It changed from being a federal unit in communist Yugoslavia, dominated by Serbia, into an independent country recovering from several years of war. Important events in recent history include: the first free elections in Croatia (1990); the declaration of Croatian independence (1991); Yugoslav army aggression against Croatian cities (Vukovar, Osijek, Sisak, Karlovac, Zadar, Šibenik, Dubrovnik) between 1991 and 1995; the occupation of one third of Croatian territory by Yugoslav and local Serbian paramilitary forces; two major military operations by the Croatian army, whose purpose was to liberate occupied territories (1995); and, finally, the end of military conflict in Croatia and central Bosnia-Herzegovina (1997). This period also saw the privatisation of industrial complexes and other state-owned companies, modernisation and an effort to fall into step with the international community. To add fuel to the fire, daily newspapers are filled with reports on the suspicious activities of tycoons and economic crime. But in spite of the damage inflicted by the Yugoslav army, as well as the unfavourable consequences of NATO strikes against Serbia on Croatian tourism, Croatian national reserves are still larger than most former communist countries.

I mention these details to 'set the scene' for new developments in Croatian literature during the mid-1990s. The most prominent feature of this period is the emergence of the hybrid autobiography, penned by literary writers, journalists, university professors and students, and former and current politicians. These narrators speak in the first person, and their discourses range from diary entries to musings on moral, political and social issues that cover the ex-Yugoslavia. Attempts are made to explain and make sense of the horrific events of war from different, and now personal, perspectives - crouching in bomb shelters and cellars, the bombing of cities, houses, schools and factories.

As already suggested, the authors of this period come from a diversity of backgrounds. They include: university professors and poets who were affiliated with *Quorum* in the 1980's (Ivan Rogić



Nehajev, Goran Rem); former military generals (Janko Bobetko); writers who experienced the hell of war (Željko Ivanković);<sup>20</sup> writers from the *fantastičari* generation (Ivan Barbijeri); writers with significant political influence (Ivan Aralica); those persons associated with the journals *Razlog* and *Krugovi* (Antun Šoljan); former eminent politicians (Savka Dapčević-Kučar); and current politicians and political scientists. Almost all literary people saw it as their duty to say something 'in this terrible hour',<sup>21</sup> when their country faced military aggression. This duty later grew into the obligation of trying to rationalise the inexplicable (such as heavy artillery attacks on civilian targets and the destruction of entire cities). Up until the early 1990s autobiographies and biographies were not popular literary forms in Croatian literature. This was partly due to the restrictions on freedom of speech and the infamous 'self-censorship' of Titoist Yugoslavia. With the establishment of a multi-party system, and especially towards the war's end, critical autobiographical prose made itself heard more and more. Such prose was either exclusively autobiographical or contained some extra-genre connotations, be they related to the political situation or the fictitious world of literature.

Even before the war, Tribuson wrote one of his best novels, *Povijest pornografije* (*A History of Pornography*, 1988), under the influence of autobiographical discourse. With the gradual breakdown of 'communist political correctness', sufficient room opened up for him, in the qualitative sense, to reflect on the 1960s and 1970s. Pavličić wrote a number of novels saturated with autobiographical elements - *Škola pisanja* (*The School of Writing*, 1994), *Diksilend* (*Dixieland*, 1995), *Šapudl* (1995), and *Nevidljivo pismo* (*The Invisible Letter*, 1993). Jergović's short stories, in spite of his 'Carverean' affinities, also have a strong autobiographical flavour. And the dominance of this type of expression is evident even in the *novopovijesni roman*, and especially in Stjepan Tomaš, who reflects on both the past (non-

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<sup>20</sup> Ivanković's *Ljubav u Berlinu* (*Love in Berlin*, 1995) was the first novel written in war-torn Sarajevo.

<sup>21</sup> Hence the title of a collection of poems edited by Ante Stamać and Ivo Sanader - *U ovom strašnom času* (*In this Terrible Hour*).

freedom) and the present (freedom).<sup>22</sup> The illusory nature of the autobiographical approach is also evident in Tomislav Zajec's *Soba za razbijanje* (*The Breaking Room*, 1998). From the standpoint of narrative, this novel is made up of a series of broken perspectives, offered by untrustworthy reporters liberated from every moral obligation. Indeed, a unified narrative is not even recognisable in this novel, which depicts the world of a whole generation lost in cocaine-snorting and their longing to take on an identity that opposes the social environment. Unfortunately, I have not discussed the works of the most recent generation of Croatian writers. Some of these writers, who have affiliations with the journal *Plima*, have already established themselves as a new 'Carverean' generation in Croatian prose.

*Translated by Damion Buterin*

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<sup>22</sup> Since Tomaš's novel *Zlatousti* (*The Golden Tongued*, 1993) was published in the wake of Serbian attacks against Osijek, the emphasis on otherness and difference by a forceful and confident narrator, though perhaps the novel's weakest feature, is historically justifiable.

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