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**THE IMPACT OF HISTORICAL HERITAGE AND THE
HOMELAND WAR ON CENTRAL EUROPEAN INTERNET
RECEPTION OF CONTEMPORARY CROATIAN WRITERS**

Abstract

The area of Central Europe through its turbulent historical changes, shifting of national borders, wars, divisions and connections, marks the strongest record in literature of the two world wars, of course. Mutual reception of allied and opposing literatures was changing according to political parties, alliances and opposing blocks in order to again be apparently uniformed within the European Union. However, Croatia is the only Central European country which has experienced a big and difficult war in its recent history which was re-recorded in literature as well, but also in the horizon of expectations and literary reception of the Central European literary audience which was caught unprepared by the occurrence of war in the immediate neighbourhood. This paper shows the change of literary reception researched through the analysis of the website contents of certain Central European countries, while the given results are put in the context of the historical heritage and national interactivity.

Keywords: literary reception, horizon of expectations, Central Europe, Homeland War, Internet

1. Introduction

Literature is a specific way of transferring our own self to other people, that is our personality, feelings, thoughts and opinions, which are then received by the other side, or they are received through other people's own prism and construed and interpreted on the basis of one's own experience, feelings, identification and empathy. Reception of particular (national) literatures very often overlaps with the reception of certain nations, while it represents a reflection of extraliterary impacts such as ways of being introduced to a literary work, historical heritage, geographical environment, political factors, economic factors and individual attitudes. The area of Central Europe has always been space of great social turmoil, numerous national or multinational states, different associations, migrations, religions and world views, and national literature was considered the basis of identity of a particular nation. Therefore, it is often the case that a certain image of a nation is created through literature, but the image of literature is also created under the influence of stereotypes (or experiences) of a particular nation. The area of Central Europe, in addition to the geographic area, has a common history, since through certain periods entire nations were a part of different supranational states and all the nations share the common experience of the First and Second World War. This shared experience and collective history create a prerequisite for empathic closeness between the nations of this area and the prerequisites for a successful literary interaction. For some time now, I have been studying the reception of Croatian literature in Central Europe, but the challenge for writing this paper was my wish for the interpretation of the singular experience of the Homeland War, specific only for one country in the whole of Central Europe, transmitted through the form of literature and received among the different national literary audiences whose attitude is being shaped by various elements of conditionality of literary reception.

2. Methods

The method of content analysis was used in the research, while the subject of analysis included websites marked by national domains and websites in Central European languages. Because the Internet is an extremely variable medium, just before the handover of my paper, I re-examined all the used sites and updated data to a lesser extent (the most common alteration was only the date and hour of access to a particular website, which is now 12, 13 and 14 August 2015, although the cited pages were accessed to in the earlier stages of research). The starting concept of research was 'Croatian

literature' (in Hungarian *horvát irodalom*, Polish *literatura chorwacka*, Czech *chorvatská literatura*, Slovakian *chorvátska literatúra*, Slovenian *Hrvaška književnost* and in German *kroatischen Literatur*) in order to obtain as neutral results as possible, and the term "Homeland War" was then attached, or "War" as it is translated so into certain Central European languages (in Hungarian *háború*, Polish *wojna*, Czech *válka*, Slovakian and Slovenian *vojna*, German *Krieg*) as the name of the war as Homeland War is mostly used only in the Republic of Croatia, and (possibly) with members of the Croatian national minority in other countries. Such non-discrimination of different wars in the initial research stage produced in some cases the results of the World War I (more often) and World War II (more rarely). As they were not the topic of this research they were simply excluded from data processing, but maybe, in some subsequent research, it would be interesting to compare and analyse the Central European Internet reception of war in general, and of all wars in this area. The names of certain writers were not used as the starting concepts in any phase of the study (which makes this study different from previous ones) in order to prevent routing results and increase objectivity. Since the goal was to include the most extensive Internet audience of Central European region, Google's search engine was used in the research, because it is the simplest one and most commonly used by the average audience. The study mostly involved texts ranked high in search results since these texts have been reviewed most often or they are recent, so they give the most vivid display of contemporary Internet reception. Computer-determined hierarchy of the obtained data can probably show some flaws from certain aspects, but since the aim was to explore the reception of the target audience, rather than give a value judgment, such use of the data turned out to be the most appropriate one. In addition to websites of Croatian literature, scientific literature was also used including the topics of literary reception, Internet and international literary and historical ties which are mostly presented in the chapter Discussion.

3. Results

Website searches of the Hungarian-speaking area and/or domain .hu primarily provide well-organized outlines of the entire Croatian history of literature, but shortly afterwards they offer literary topics related to the Homeland War or the war in Bosnia. The most interesting contemporary writer for the Hungarians is Miljenko Jergović, although they correctly point out that the writer is of dual affiliation. Croatian war texts are connected to Dubravka Oraić-Tolić, Josip Mlakić, Ratko Cveniĉ, Nedjeljko Fabrio, Robert

Perišić, Vedrana Rudan, and others. It is interesting that in the context of Croatian literature Slavenka Drakulić and Dubravka Ugrešić are mentioned and (which is not the case elsewhere) they are clearly characterized as ‘a volt Jugoslavia iránti nosztalgiával’- yugo-nostalgic writers.

Although the criteria were clearly set out in the ‘*literatura chorwacka*’, the search of the Polish-speaking area mainly offers social considerations about, as stated, the *civil* war between Croats and Serbs. The Homeland War is undoubtedly an interesting literary topic, which is seen in the offer in Polish bookstores which offer novels and collections of short stories by Slavenka Drakulić, Dubravka Ugrešić, Miljenko Jergović, Igor Štiks, Zoran Ferić, Daša Drndić. Since the works of Slavenka Drakulić and Dubravka Ugrešić are the most common, it should perhaps not be surprising that there is a (wrong) perception of the war as a civil one, rather than the Serbian aggression on Croatia, which once again shows how literature affects the perception of a particular nation. Polish websites also offer interviews with Olja Savičević and Miljenko Jergović, thus showing interest in the Croatian writers who write about war themes. 'Teraz chorwaccy pisarze mając za sobą, naturalną jak się wydaje, fazę czysto wojenną, reportażową i rozliczeniową, biorą kolejny głęboki oddech i dają się poznać z innej strony. /.../ Wydawać by się mogło, że chorwacka literatura nabiera rozpedu. Czas uzna, co w niej jest wartościowe, które tendencje przetrwają, a które znikną w konfrontacji z żywą materią gustów publiczności.' (Hopfer) Recently, the focus of Polish literary audience in relation to the Croatian production has moved towards urban themes which are much closer to them and identification is much easier. And although the Croatian websites were not the subject of research, we need to add a quote from the website of Matica Hrvatska to obtain the plastic image (Vijenac 426): 'There is no significant Croatian writer who has not already been translated in Poland. Even playwrights have dozens of published drama books in Poland, not to mention the prosaics. Perhaps the poets are represented somewhat less, but time seems not to be generally favourable for poetry./.../ There is a lot of common thematic ground, because we share the same problems of globalized world, decades of censored and rewritten history, the painful transition from a bad and unjust social system into a worse one...' (M. Martić in an interview with M. Peterlić, 2010).

Many of the Czech websites are also dedicated to Slavenka Drakulić and Dubravka Ugrešić, and Miljenko Jergović, but also to Edi Popović, Robert Perišić, Ante Tomić, Miro Gavran, Tatjana Gromača and Ivan Šimić Bodrožić, and therefore they have the widest range of representation of Croatian contemporary writers. However, since the most common sites are the ones of Croatian 'asylum seekers', the perception of the Homeland War in

this country is a little distorted, and it must be noted that the publications of war themes are of somewhat older date and that interest in war themes in this country subsides as well.

Slovakian Internet audience is interested in the Croatian dramatic production (interest is strongest for Miro Gavran) and Croatian film. As for the literature, the Slovaks are familiar with Croatian writers, but interest in the Croatian war literature is not in focus and a lot of the growing interest moves towards urban themes. Therefore, the previously discussed search methods showed the worst results in the Slovakian websites, offering mostly texts of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the First and Second World War.

Besides Croatia, Slovenia is the only Central European country which shared the experience of Serbian aggression, although to a much lesser intensity and duration, so based on their own experience and strong interest and understanding of studied topics, it was to be expected that the Slovenian pages would show many results of linking the concept of Croatian literature and war. However, as the Slovenian-Croatian interactions are extremely vital in all areas, even linking of the two terms brings various daily-political results that, ultimately, are not the subject of this research.

Websites of the German-speaking area provide hypermedia documents from three Central European countries: Germany, Austria and a part of Switzerland (French-speaking part of Switzerland is not addressed in this study since it can be considered as part of Western European cultural circle) and because of the great similarity of the obtained results, they will be processed jointly. This is thus the largest processed area and therefore it is not surprising to see the scope and quantity of the offered sites. There is an especially interesting book by Gertraud Wagenhofer (2013), *Kroatische Literatur und Krieg: Krieg und Kriegsfolgen in Kroatien im Spiegel ausgewählter Literatur*, which is being offered on sales pages of amazon.de and which shows that interest in the war in Croatian literature has finally moved from daily political sphere and has become the subject of various (more or less successful) analyses. The sites of above mentioned countries also include numerous interviews with Slavenka Drakulić, but these sites are older and are set very low in the hierarchy of the search engine so we can assume that the interest in them is negligible or there is no interest at all.

4. Discussion

The reception of a literary work depends on the context, but also on the medium through which it is received, therefore, when we talk about the

Internet reception of literature in Central Europe, it is certainly conditioned by the digital revolution, global changes as well as changes in the region, and all the way to changes at the individual level of each individual member of the Internet and/or literary audience. 'We live in a world that is increasingly global, but at the same time local/.../ More and more people live in an environment that transcends national boundaries, which was once a privilege that only upper-class business people and intellectuals might have experienced. Not only through migration, but also through the globalization of services, many ordinary people come into contact with the expanding national environment. Modern means of communication - radio, television, telephone and press – are not only assimilable forces, as was once assumed, but they are also the media used for the preservation of the collective identity in a foreign environment.' (Mesić, 2006: 51)

The reader may notice a new literary work both through the narrow horizon of his literary expectation, as well as in the wider horizon of his life experience (according to Jauss, 1978) so that the homogeneity of the literary audience must certainly result in homogeneity of literary reception. 'According to the reception theorists, individual reception is in advance determined by the so-called social reception or material and ideological intermediaries between the work and the reader, such as various social institutions, publishing companies, bookstores as well as literary criticism and literature teaching.' (Tkalec 2010) And although individual reception seems to be much freer on the Internet, its commercialization makes individual reception conditioned by the social one.

With the changing geopolitical structure in Europe, but also the development of information and communication technologies and the globalization process, the need for new contextualization has been created; the geographical, historical and political, and philological contextualization. In the modern, altered circumstances national cultures are becoming more open, especially national literatures while interculturality becomes an important feature. In the new circumstances, traditional comparative methods of literature begin to fail while contact ceases to be dominant (according to Tkalec 2010), because with the means of the Internet, every literature may create contact and (according to Lemos, 2001) symbolic territoriality occurs in which the idea of territoriality and neighbourhood gets separated from the constraints of physical geography and does not depend on physical proximity, and thanks to information technology it can create the symbolic 'emphatic closeness' at a distance - a feeling of closeness stems from the common interest, common tastes and ideas. Lemos considers symbolic territoriality to be one of the most impressive characteristics of cyberspace

where body restraints have been annulled. However, the area of Central Europe, through its common history, has already formed an audience of common interests, tastes and ideas that is connected with 'symbolic closeness' but also with strong economic, geopolitical and even geostrategic connections. Contemporary literary reception is almost uniform in the whole area of Central Europe.

Cultural, social, political and other connections of Croatia to the other countries of Central Europe have been recorded and evaluated in extremely numerous scientific papers, monographs and considerations. Relations between nations are determined by genetic kinship (among the Slavic nations; Poles, Slovaks, Czechs, Slovenes and Croats) which is the origin of their linguistic closeness, mentality, folk customs, mythology, then geopolitical space, geographic kinship and centuries of coexistence within a single state formation. Migrations of the population have contributed to the intensification of these relations. Contacts of the first princes date all the way back to the 9th century, cultural contacts are continued through the church, shared episcopacies and the migration of church dignitaries, but also teachers. Particular importance in the formation of mutual relations, and therefore mutual (positive) reception, is the establishment of universities and education of many generations of students at foreign schools and universities. Extremely abundant translation work (let us recall the *Dictionarium quinque nobilissimarum Europae linguarum, latinae, italicae, germanicae, dalmaticae et ungaricae*; Dictionary of Five Most Respected European Languages by Faust Vrančić dating back to 1595), the intertextuality (the Czech manuscript *Rukopisy královédvorský a zelenohorský* contains the parts written on the model of Gundulić's *Osman*) and intense cooperation between the writers among all the nations of the region create the foundations for today's modern literary reception of one's own literature as well as the foreign literatures. Hungarian-Croatian state mutuality and legal reciprocity was constant, even from 1102, and the signing of the *Pacta Conventa* and creating of a personal union, through the Croatian-Hungarian agreement when Croatia enters the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1867 until 1918 and the establishment of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, while 'in this age citizens in a tiny Croatia within large Habsburg Monarchy were completely imbued with German culture. German language was almost completely dominant in the Croatian public and cultural life.' (Gavrin, 1970: 51)

Throughout the history of literature in this area there have been transnational literary characters recognizable in their national environment, while the shared experience has been a prerequisite for empathy. World War I and World War II themes are appearing in all national literatures, and are

recognized and accepted with non-national audiences as a way of experiencing post-traumatic stress situations and facing the truth. But in the period of exaltation of EU enlargement and the creation of new communities on the basis of unity and equality, the Homeland War occurs as an undivided experience and it brings compassion and astonishment, but also interest in "exotic" literature from the neighbourhood and a bit sensationalist hunger for war texts from these areas in which the literary text appears as a biased interpreter of the war events substituting objective social analyses of the tragic events in which literary audience adapts the unknown to personal experience through the 'function of empty spaces' and 'conative structure of text' (according to Isser 1978). In such a subjective image of war events (because literature is always subjective), there is a problem of self-proclaimed asylum seekers (Drakulić, Ugrešić) who give their own interpretation of the war which does not provide the real and objective global picture and thus creates a distorted reception of historical events among literary audience. 'We know that cultures disappear or are weakened, we know that they are used for conquering, for manipulation. We know that a programme of complete objectivity is a difficult undertaking.' (Čačinović, 2001: 26) As time has passed, the war literature but also the events of the war can be viewed from the diachronic level, hence a more realistic, but still not entirely objective reception (it will never be entirely objective due to earlier created stereotypes) is slowly formed on the websites of almost all Central European countries, however, suppressing the literature in the background.

The diachronic level of study of the Internet is therefore interesting, because until recently it was considered, which was also true, that the Internet knows only about synchronic level. However, since the Internet has now existed for a number of years, 'relationship between a literary work and the audience' as defined by Jauss can be applied to the websites. This change is very important for the study of Internet reception because it is no longer exclusively contemporary and we can watch its change through different time slots, shorter and longer ones. When we talk about the reception of the Homeland War in Croatian literature, we must point out that it has been changing over the last 20 years. In my previous researches I noticed a division of reception to 'eastern' and 'western' with surprising similarity of reception in accordance with the missing bloc division, but this study shows a uniform collective reception, but also the weakening of interest in the Croatian war texts showing that the value of a literary work is not the main prerequisite for its popularity, but, very often, it includes socio-political relevance, the curiosity of topic, author's political engagement and - good marketing. Unfortunately, the spheres of the Internet witness, as in the other

media as well, an almost alarming lack of quality literary criticism, which has not recognized this media as the possibility of its (re)affirmation.

5. Conclusion

Internet reception of Croatian literature is a reception mediated by global, transnational and transregional medium that has its own laws and that makes any literature, but also each audience contact. Still, this reception shows significant impact of historical, geographical and social factors, but also the daily political factors and the very characteristics of the media. Under these influences literary reception is altered at the diachronic level indicating that the interest for Croatian war texts used to be more significant in the war years and immediate post-war years, while modern synchronic level is recording a decline of interest in the war topics. The Homeland War, unlike previous wars, is an experience that was not shared with the other countries of Central Europe and thus the (Croatian) literary production and (Central European) literary reception have become a way to share this experience in some way which meets the expectations and horizons of authors and audience and the epoch in which the reception of literature is reflected on the reception of the nation (people) while ignoring the subjectivity of literature and creating new stereotypes. These new stereotypes are nevertheless alligned with the old ones, which were created through centuries of cultural and political interaction, thus creating an image of collective reception which on the relatively new medium of the Internet affects the formation of thousands of mini-nuclei of individual receptions that correlate with each other and create a surprisingly uniform picture of reception in Croatian literature in the whole area of Central Europe showing how the historical context has a much more significant impact on the individual and the collective rather than information and communication technology in whose epoch we exist.

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Sažetak

UTJECAJ POVIJESNOG NASLJEĐA I DOMOVINSKOGA RATA NA SREDNJOEUROPSKU INTERENTSKU RECEPCIJU SUVREMENIH HRVATSKIH PISACA

Gordana Tkalec, Sveučilište Sjever, Sveučilišni centar Koprivnica
Odjel za novinarstvo

Područje srednje Europe kroz svoje burne povijesne mijene, pomicanja državnih granica, ratove, podjele i povezivanja, u književnosti najznačajnije bilježi, naravno, dva svjetska rata. Uzajamna recepcija savezničkih i protivničkih književnosti mijenjala se prema političkim stranama, savezima i suprotstavljenim blokovima da bi ponovno naizgled bila ujednačena unutar Europske unije. Međutim, Hrvatska je jedina srednjoeuropska zemlja koja je i u bližoj povijesti doživjela velik i težak rat ponovno zabilježen i u književnosti, ali i u horizontu očekivanja i književnoj recepciji srednjoeuropske književne publike zatečene pojavom rata u neposrednom susjedstvu. Ovaj rad pokazuje promjenu književne recepcije istražene analizom sadržaja internetskih stranica pojedinih srednjoeuropskih zemalja, a dobivene rezultate stavlja u kontekst povijesnoga nasljeđa i nacionalnih interaktivnosti.

Ključne riječi: književna recepcija, horizont očekivanja, srednja Europa, Domovinski rat, internet