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POPULAR/FOLK AND HIGH CULTURE IN THE CROATIAN RECEPTION OF IRISH
LITERATURE AND CULTURE: SYNGE, JOYCE, IRISHNESS VS. SLAMNIG, SENKER,
MUJIČIĆ¹

Abstract

This article explores the relationship between high and popular/folk culture in the Croatian reception of Irish literature and culture, viewing it from a literary-historical – i.e. (post) modernist perspective. Its first aspect is illustrated through the Croatian translations of John Millington Synge's texts and his specific blend of folk and high literature and culture. This is followed by the analysis of the representation of James Joyce, as another Irish modern classic, in a play by the contemporary Croatian dramatist Boris Senker (*Pulisej*), a postmodern reinscription of *Ulysses* based on the playful interrogation of history and cultural and national identities. The last issue is highlighted in the third aspect as well, focusing this time on the general representations of Irishness in the poetry of another Croatian postmodern author, Tahir Mujičić (*Irski Iranec i Iranski Irec*), also known for his playful conflation of 'high' tradition and popular culture. The aim is to show how popular images and literary representations take different directions when crossing national borders, and result in various combinations and interplays of sameness and difference, seriousness and humor, as well as high and low domains of literature and culture.

Keywords: Irish-Croatian links, popular, folk and high literature and culture, modernism, postmodernism, James Joyce, Tahir Mujičić, Boris Senker, Ivan Slamnig, John Millington Synge

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1. Croatian-Irish links

Every form of transnational literary and cultural exchange rests on certain notions of the identities of the source and target literature and culture, as well as of their positions in the wider, European and world, contexts. As an integral part of such notions, the domains of both high and low (the latter in the twofold meaning of folk and popular) literature and culture, and their various interplays, can be involved in this process. This article will aim to show and discuss some of the mechanisms of such multilayered transnational dialogue, focusing on three illustrative examples of the reception of Irish literature and culture in Croatia.

Croatian culture has developed a rich and multifaceted tradition of sympathy with Irish culture. This sympathy can partly be ascribed to the Croatian-Irish ethnopolitical parallels, which were particularly emphasized in the twentieth century. The comparisons of the positions of Croatian and Irish nations and their struggles for independent national and cultural identity, not only during the twentieth, but previous centuries as well,² have created a 'pool' of motifs and ideas for Croatian popular culture, where they continue to be used in the twenty-first century.

The basis for such parallels has often been traced back all the way to the common 'Celtic background', out of which independent nations would later develop in the period from the Middle Ages up to the present. When the Croatian tribes arrived in Europe during the Middle Ages they encountered the Celtic tribes that had already ethnically and/or culturally amalgamated with the native Venetian and Illyrian tribes. The territory of the present-day Croatia was then inhabited by an Illyrian tribe that had become strongly influenced by the Celts after their invasion in the fourth century BC – the Iapodes. Numerous archaeological sites containing the remnants of Iapodean culture (e.g., Prozor, Kompolje, Vrebac, Ribić, Golubić, Jezerne), as well as the artefacts stored mainly in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, are still very much alive in Croatian cultural memory, and the traces of our 'precivilization' continue to attract great interest (Kovačec 2003: 304).³

During the twentieth century Croatia was a part of various South-Slav state unions, from the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs (1918) through the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes to several Yugoslav unions. It soon became clear that all of these political (pan-Slavic) entities were not based on the principle of equality of all their member nations, but on the tendencies towards domination and assimilation.⁴ Such tendencies placed Croatian culture in a subordinate position, particularly in the matters of language, religion, and social rights. This prompted it to search, both in history and art, for other European cultures with which it could compare itself and share experiences, and from which it could learn and gain – at least – moral support in the attempts to overcome its own difficult situation. The Irish nation seems to have proved the most suitable 'candidate' for this kind of kinship – at least on the level of popular image.

Furthermore, following Croatia's relatively recent entry into the European Union (2013), and the beginning of Ireland's recovery from the 2007–2010 economic

2 For a critical overview of possible parallels from a postcolonial perspective, see Knežević 2007.

3 For a more extensive overview, see Olujić 2007 and Balen-Letunić 2004; and for the common Irish-Croatian Celtic cultural heritage predating the links with Iapodean culture, see Galin 2010^a and 2010^b.

4 The roots of these tendencies can be traced to the nineteenth century, when they developed both out of the idealistic 'romanticist' ideas and the various radical and imperialistic ideas that appeared and alternated throughout the century. See, e.g., Stančić 2002; Korunić 2006; Lukić and Škoko 2011.

crisis, its image has even developed a new dimension: Ireland is now also perceived as a 'promised land' and a desirable model of a prosperous welfare state, where a growing number of Croats emigrate in search for a job and a better future.⁵

The feeling of kinship with the Irish is evident in different aspects of popular culture in Croatia, such as football matches, where supporters of Croatian and Irish football clubs, and particularly of national teams, hug, rejoice, fraternize, sing, and celebrate together, and the percentage of conflicts is much lower in comparison to matches with other nations. Rather popular are the performances of Irish dance troupes and Irish musicians of different profiles, sometimes promoted as 'Celtic' bands, since such Celtic 'formula' regularly attracts larger audiences, even with less known musicians. Another case in point is the celebration of St. Patrick's Day all over Croatia. During the so-called socialist – and actually communist – regime, when Croatia was a part of Yugoslavia, all celebrations of saints' days, and especially of Catholic saints, were banned at the 'official level', and particularly in the Croatian capital Zagreb. Following the break-up of Yugoslavia and the emergence of Croatia as an independent state, St. Patrick's Day was soon introduced and nowadays it is celebrated as a true Croatian 'folk festivity' and 'folk celebration', marked by Irish rock and even folk music, beer, and green as the colour of 'spring' and the 'fraternal' country of Ireland.

All the above mentioned popular events can serve as first indicators of the average Croatian image of Irish popular culture; however, the said feeling of Croatian and Irish kinship has also been reflected in film and literature. A good example from the first domain is a feature film *Transatlantic* (1998, directed by Mladen Juran), the story of two Croatian immigrants forced to leave Croatia in the final year of the First World War because of adverse political and economic circumstances, where the appearance of an Irishman helps to establish an explicit parallel with the position and destiny of the Irish.⁶

Irish-Croatian relations have developed in the domain of (high) literature as well, where they have been investigated by a number of eminent Irish studies scholars in Croatia (Ivo Vidan, Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan, Sonja Bašić, Stipe Grgas, Borislav Knežević, Tihana Klepač), whose research has shown that Croatian twentieth century (literary) culture was open for dialogue with both high and low segments of Irish literature and culture. It would be interesting to point out that this dialogue has recently been strengthened and further developed at the Zagreb Book Festival, also tellingly entitled *Irska – obećana zemlja* (May 16-22, Zagreb, 2016; in English translation: *Ireland – a promised land*). It hosted a number of contemporary Irish and Croatian authors, and provided an opportunity for the presentations and comparisons of the latest achievements in Croatian and Irish poetry, prose, children's literature, film, and music, as well as for deeper theoretical reflection on the possible parallels (and differences) between the two cultures and national histories.

This article will focus on the three earlier and equally important examples of the above-mentioned dialogue, which will encompass three of its different, but interconnected levels: literary translation, the reception of Irish classics, and the

5 This issue was explored in more depth in a recent documentary entitled *Lijepa naša Irska – obećana zemlja za hrvatske građane* (in English translation [by the authors of this article]: 'Our Beautiful Ireland – a Promised Land for Croatian Citizens'), directed by Josip Šarić. Basic information is available at: <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/288824/lijepa-nasa-irska-obecana-za-hrvatske-gradane> (02. 10. 2016.)

6 For basic information on the film, see the Croatian film database at: http://www.filmski-programi.hr/baza_film.php?id=62. (02. 10. 2016.)

literary usage of popular images of the Irish.

2. John Millington Synge in Croatia

The first level can be illustrated by the Croatian translations/adaptations and performances of the plays by John Millington Synge, as one of the key figures of Irish modern literature and the Irish Literary Revival, who successfully and innovatively appropriated Irish folk literature and culture within his modern poetics. According to the currently available data, Synge's overall Croatian reception covers the time span from 1965 to 2010, beginning with the three translations made in the period 1965-73. Two of them were made by the Croatian writer, scholar, and translator Ivan Slamnig, who is now counted among the classics of Croatian twentieth-century literature – *The Tinker's Wedding* (1965; Croatian title: *Kotlokrpina svadba*) and *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1973; Croatian title: *U sjeni gudure*) – and were performed as radio plays on the then Radio Zagreb. The third translation was done by Nada Šoljan, also an acclaimed translator, and staged by the ensemble of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb – *The Playboy of the Western World* (1968; Croatian title: *Najveći junak zapadne Irske*). After a longer time span, two further translations appeared in 2010, this time by Petar Vujačić, a Croatian director and another prolific translator: *The Well of the Saints* (Croatian title: *Zdenac svetaca*) and *Riders to the Sea* (Croatian title: *Jahači ka moru*). Both of them were again performed as radio plays on the Croatian Radio (the former Radio Zagreb). The last example – the adaptation of *The Playboy of the Western World*, by Michal Babiak, a Slovak director, dramaturge, and university professor, and Tomislav Alaupović, a Croatian actor – was made one year earlier, in 2009, and performed by the amateur theatre group Petar Hektorović in Stari Grad (the island of Hvar). Since it is rather different from all the previous examples, it will need to be presented and discussed separately.⁷

The issue of language, as the first important barrier in every translation, demands particular attention in any translator's negotiation with Synge's texts both with regard to their Irishness, and to their specific blend of high and folk literature and culture.⁸ Synge's distinctive – stylistic and national feature, achieved by the infusion of the English text with Irish language structures and vocabulary, stylized from Irish rural idiom, presents a big challenge in his texts' transposition into any foreign language and culture. Accordingly, certain losses are expected and almost inevitable and Croatian translations were here no exception.⁹

Losses on the level of vocabulary are most easily discernible in the instances of Synge's direct lexical borrowings from Irish, which needed to be 'neutralized' in Croatian texts: for example, "Samhain" in the expression "after Samhain" (Synge 1984: 105; translated descriptively as "zimski" ["wintry"]; Synge 2010^a: 25), or the diminutives ending in -een (such as "boreen" ["little path"; Synge 1984: 210] – "puteljak" [neutral Croatian diminutive; Synge 1968: 60]).

A number of typical Irish syntactical features appropriated in Synge's idiom were

7 We owe special gratitude to Ms Željka Turčinović and Ms Nada Zoričić (the Croatian Radio), Ms Fedra Peresson (the Croatian National Theatre), Mr Filip Kovačević (the Croatian Cultural Association) and Mr Tomislav Alaupović (Petar Hektorović Theatre), who have given us the permission to use the Croatian translations/performance texts of Synge's dramas in this research.

8 The notion of translation as negotiation is here used in the meaning of the necessary balance between faithfulness and unavoidable losses or deviations from the original. See Eco 2003.

9 For the description and analysis of Synge's idiom, see: Price 1961: 43–6; Henn 1984: 1–21, Kiberd 1993: 204–215.

sometimes impossible to transpose into Croatian, such as the extensive and repetitive use of the verb to be (e.g.: “when it’s your own fault is” [Synge 1984: 180] – “kad si ti svemu kriv” [Synge 1968: 9; i.e. the underlined Croatian equivalent is used only once]), or atypical use of parataxis in numerous cases (e.g.: “What way would I see a power hanged, and I a dark woman since the seventh year of my age?” [Synge 1984: 136] – “Kako ću vidjeti čudo kad sam slijepa još od sedme godine?” [Synge 2010^b: 6; literally: “How will I see a miracle when I have been blind since the age of seven?”]).¹⁰

In other words, Slamnig’s, Šoljan’s, and Vujačić’s renderings of Synge’s texts are closer to the standard language than the originals; yet, they managed to keep some of Synge’s impression of archaic and formulaic speech. This was achieved, first of all, by employing lexemes and expressions reminiscent of oral/folk idiom, which sometimes even replace their stylistically neutral English counterparts. Such elements include the Croatian equivalents of various ‘empty phrases’, common in spoken communication and regularly used by Synge’s characters (such as: “It’s lonesome and cold you’ll be feeling the ditch where you’ll be lying down that night, I’m telling you” [Synge 1984: 111] – “Bit će ti samotno i hladno uz rub ceste te noći, to ti ja kažem” [Synge 1965: 4; literally: “You’ll be lonesome and cold by the edge of the road that night, that’s what I’m telling/saying to you”]), as well as semantically ‘full’ words and phrases with a formulaic/oral resonance (e.g.: “čeljade” [a more stylistically marked version of ‘person’] for “*person*”, “kind” [meaning ‘*this kind of person*’], “woman”, “the like of you” [multiply used in *The Playboy of the Western World*, *In the Shadow of the Glen* and *The Tinker’s Wedding*]; or “zakleti životom” [Synge 1968: 66; literally: “swear on my life”] for “to lay a mighty oath” [Synge 1984: 214]).

The impression of non-ordinary speech, sometimes resembling poetic diction, was partly kept by merely transposing, as much faithfully as it was possible, the original syntactic-semantic units, which, even when translated, can create a similar effect as in the original. Thus, in the cases when it was possible, Synge’s paratactic constructions were replaced with analogous Croatian sentence structures, and this type of syntax can create – at least an indirect link – with Croatian oral/folk speech and literature, where it is also a common feature (Bošković-Stulli 1975: 158–59). See, for example: “It’s a hard thing they’ll be saying below if the body is washed up and there’s no man in it to make the coffin, and I after giving a big price for the finest white boards you’d find in Connemara.” (Synge 1984: 98) – “Svašta će se govoriti ako tijelo ispliva na žalo, a u kući neće biti muške ruke da načini lijes – a ja sam skupo platila ove bijele daske – najbolje koje se moglo naći u Connemari.” (Synge 2010^a: 8; literally: “Bad things will be told if the body is washed up on the shore and there’s no man’s hand in the house to make the coffin – and I paid dearly for these white boards – the best that could be found in Connemara.”).

There was one more stylistic feature that needed to be properly addressed in order to convey the naturalistic and ironic aspects of Synge’s depiction of rural Irish life: the introduction of ‘low’ content and expressions, many of which were borrowed from Irish rural culture and idiom. In the Croatian versions of his texts, this aspect is underlined through the occasional usage of modern Croatian colloquial expressions (with the exception of *Riders to the Sea*, as the only tragedy in this selection), sometimes introduced instead of neutral English expressions as well (“pajkani”

¹⁰ Translations of excerpts from Synge’s translations, as well as from Boris Senker’s and Tahir Mujičić’s texts have been done by one of the authors of this article.

for “peelers” [equivalent expression; multiply used in *The Tinker’s Wedding / Kotlokrpina svadba*]; or “odapeti”, “krepati”, “lipsati” [equivalent to ‘kick the bucket’] for “to die”/“to get my death” [more neutral; used in *In the Shadow of the Glen / U sjeni gudure*], and similar).

Finally, it would be interesting to stress that the two newer translations are somewhat closer to modern standard speech than the older ones, both on the level of vocabulary and syntax. It seems that, in their case, the content (they were selected by this criterion and aired as part of the programme *Fantastic radio-drama*) and probably appeal to contemporary radio audience have been given slightly more weight, rather than the idiosyncrasies of Synge’s style.

Despite the fact that some linguistic and stylistic features of Synge’s texts were lost or diminished, their Croatian translations still managed to transpose their key aspects, and to present them in accordance with Synge’s own poetic programme. His appropriation of Irish rural idiom can be described, in the words of Declan Kiberd, as a “heightened version of natural peasant speech” (Kiberd 1993: 204–205) where the borrowed folkloric elements help to create specific poetic effects for “a sophisticated urban audience” (Kiberd 1993: 218). It is regularly emphasized, however, that Synge presented a complex image of Ireland and Irish folk culture – both poeticized and (humorously) critical with regard to some of their stereotyped images idealized during the Revival (such as rural life in Western Ireland or the figure of Irish women) or had negative connotations in folk culture (tramps and tinkers).¹¹ This image was also supported by his aforesaid stylistic strategy (combining poeticized speech with ‘low’ content and style; Henn 1984: 20; Price 1961: 35–77; Hilský 2000: 160) and was mostly preserved in the translations, all of which, it should be added, kept the original names of characters and localities. The title of *The Playboy of the Western World* was even changed in one more aspect in order to indicate the play’s setting more clearly – *Najveći junak zapadne Irske* (“The Greatest Hero of Western Ireland”). There are a few exceptions in this case – the omissions of some localities in individual characters’ lines in several plays, but they are not relevant on the level of the entire texts.

Nevertheless, some losses couldn’t be avoided here either. The translations of the titles of two plays – *The Playboy of the Western World* and *The Tinker’s Wedding* – can serve as good examples. Since the present connotations of the word “playboy” in Croatian culture do not encompass all of its original semantic span,¹² it was translated by the word “hero” (“junak”) in the 1968 version, which doesn’t possess the ironic, mock-heroic undertone of Synge’s term (braggart or trickster; Hilský 2000: 154–155). Still, it is hinted at by adding the superlative “greatest/biggest” (“najveći”), the irony of which gradually becomes apparent throughout the play. In the 2009 adaptation a single augmentative expression was used – “junačina” (“big hero”), of the same core meaning but somewhat stronger ironic potential, making it more suitable for the authors’ overall strategy of adaptation, which will be described below. One of the title words of the second play, on the other hand, has a Croatian equivalent – “kotlokrpa” for “tinker”, but it refers primarily to the protagonist’s occupation and doesn’t fully convey the (negative) cultural connotations of the original term, which Synge partly transformed in line with the Revival-era scholarly

11 See, e.g., Frawley 2009; Burke 2009; Kiberd 1996: 166–188.

12 In the *Novi rječnik stranih riječi* “playboy” is defined as an “irresponsible young man, prone to enjoyment”. See Klaić 2012: 815.

reaffirmation of tinkers as representatives of indigenous nomadic communities and symbols of the archaic Irish past (Burke 2009: 44–45).

By trying to establish the balance between preserving the Irishness of Synge's plays and adequately transposing them into the Croatian language and culture, all the so far analyzed translations thus managed to present him as a modern classic who was open to an enriching dialogue with folk culture as well. The authors of the final example, on the other hand, went one step further, as they completely transposed one of Synge's texts – *The Playboy of the Western World* – in the code of folk/popular culture, and at the same time 'de-Irishized' it and adapted it to the Croatian context. The difference along the lines of higher and lower forms of entertainment is already discernible in the fact that this adaptation was performed by a non-professional, popular theatre. Furthermore, it is evident on the level of style and genre: the text is explicitly defined as a "farce based on John Millington Synge's comedy *The Playboy of the Western World*" ("farsa prema komediji Johna Millingtona Syngea *Heroj Zapadnog svijeta*"; Alaupović and Babiak 2009: 1). Although the main plot line was preserved, Synge's original story was shortened, simplified and set in a fictional backward rural area in the hinterland of the Croatian region Dalmatia, with the usage of mock-rural idiom and parody of its traditional/oral poetry. All the characters' names have been localized, with added humorous and sometimes vulgar connotations (e.g., Christy Mahon – Krsto Prdipura [the second term is derived from the Croatian word for *fat*]), and the fictional location is named "Prčestina Gornja" ("Upper Prčestina"), in mockery of the typical place names in this area, and with several dialectal and colloquial connotations implied in the first word (goat meat [as the typical food of this area], sexual excessiveness, bragging and/or violence; Sabljak 2013: 345; Gusić and Gusić 2004: 353).

Following the tradition of farce, the original content was modified in one more aspect – by placing particular emphasis on scatological and obscene elements, and especially on the characters' sexual desires (Pavis 1998: 147–148). Finally, the proximity to lower and popular entertainment is signalled through the occasional mentions of the current popular culture – magazines, soap operas and the figure of Superman (as an ironic reference to Christy/Krsto's mock-heroic role). In other words, by introducing all of these transformations, the 2009 adaptation employed a strategy reverse to Synge's, appropriating a 'high' literary text to the lower domain of popular theatre, albeit a text that contained the elements which possessed the potential for such interpretation.

3. James Joyce and Boris Senker

Another modernist author has proved inspiring for a somewhat different form of Irish-Croatian literary dialogue – James Joyce, who occupies an important place in the overall history of Irish-Croatian literary relations.¹³ Joyce has become a part of Croatian popular culture as well – partly due to the fact that Croatia has joined numerous other European countries in the annual celebrations of Bloomsday, but even more importantly because of his biographical connection with Croatia. As is well known, Joyce lived in the town of Pula for a short period of time before

13 See Bašić 2007; Klepač 2007; and for an extensive bibliographic overview of Joyce's reception in Croatia, see Cvek 2007.

becoming worldly renowned (1904–1905) and made his living there as a teacher of English. Although his memories of this town were not pleasant and he even wrote a rather defamatory description of it in one of his letters (addressed to his aunt Josephine Murray on New Year's Eve 1904; Arambašin Slišković 1996: 423–424), present-day Pula is, naturally, proud that it once hosted a future world classic and it honoured him with a sculpture on the terrace of the café *Uliks* ('*Ulysses*'), made by the sculptor Mate Čvrljak in 2003.¹⁴

This biographical detail prompted a well-known Croatian postmodern dramatist Boris Senker to write a play entitled *Pulisej*, a 'local' reinscription of Joyce's *Ulysses*, wittily indicated in the title by merging the words '*Pula*' and '*Uliks/Odisej*' ('*Ulysses/Odysseus*'). The play was first performed at the Istrian National Theatre in Pula in 1998 (Klepač 2007: 211) and published nine years later, in 2007. *Pulisej* is based on a postmodernist play with the popular image of Joyce as a provocateur and of his equally provocative relationship with his enchanting life-companion Nora, as well as with the high literary aspects of his work, which only a limited number of people – the connoisseurs of world literature – are familiar with. In addition, the figure of Joyce is here deeply steeped in the popular image of the Irish as a nation prone to rude speech, carnal pleasures, fighting, and drinking. Hence, during his wanderings through Pula, which invoke Leopold Bloom's wanderings through Dublin, Joyce provokes and engages in violent physical encounters and there are even hints of his paedophilia. In such a typical representation of Irishness an equally important role is given to Nora. Her words: "Nobody speaks Irish, not even in jokes... Only the dead..." ("Irski nitko ne govori, čak ni u šalama... Samo mrtvi...") [Senker 2007: 259] contain another commonplace – an 'elegy' over Irish culture, and its suppression in difficult political and historical circumstances, which included the threat of extinction of the Irish language.

As an important element of national identity and national culture, language generally plays a significant part in *Pulisej*, which could even be described as a 'patchwork' of languages: Croatian, Slovene, Italian, German, and English. Apart from serving as a means of characterization (indicators of different characters' individual/national identities) and a source of their misunderstanding, these languages help to recreate the image of the multinational society of the early twentieth century Pula and, either directly or indirectly, the then current political and historical issues. They include the Austro-Hungarian rule of Pula and Croatia (hence the usage of German), Italian aspirations towards political and cultural domination, Croatian striving for political and cultural independence, and the relationship between Slovenes and Croats. The choice of Joyce as one of the protagonists here acquires additional significance if we bear in mind the previously mentioned parallels with the Irish struggle against English political, cultural, and linguistic domination. On the other hand, a further parallel could be drawn with Joyce's general tendency towards language play, which culminated in *Finnegan's Wake* (Klepač 2007: 215) and which Nora in her closing monologue (Senker's version of Molly Bloom's monologue in *Ulysses*) links with his wish to escape from his homeland and from any form of affiliation:

"Ireland is dead for us", he says... And we are for it... "Don't wait for your homeland to

¹⁴ For a more detailed account of Joyce's stay in Pula and his relations with this town, see Ellmann 1983; Vidan 1972; Kalčić 2013.

banish you; instead, banish it from yourself!" And because of this, because of a word play, we are never, never going back... He is running away from home, and from me, and from himself... ("Irska je za nas mrtva", veli on... I mi za nju... "Ne čekaj da domovina progna tebe; prognaj ti nju iz sebe!" I zato, zbog igre riječima, nikad, nikad više natrag... Od doma bježi, i od mene bježi, i od sebe... [Senker 2007: 259]).

The final and only destination of this escape is his own art/writing:

He is escaping into words, into small and big lies, into stories, into make-believes that he offers for two or three pennies per line, as street vendors offer small and big portions of roasted chestnuts, and he thinks he is different, he is special, extraordinary, unique... (Bježi u riječi, u male i velike laži, u priče, u izmišljotine koje nudi naokolo za dva-tri penija po retku, kao pečenjari male i velike mjerice marona, i misli da je nešto drugo, da je poseban, izniman, jedini... [Senker 2007: 259]).

Similarly, literature and theatre function as a place of freedom and verbal and artistic play in Senker's text, albeit in a manner somewhat different from the modernist exclusivist notions ascribed to Joyce in Nora's ironic portrayal. In a typical postmodernist gesture, Senker amalgamates not only languages, but various forms and conventions of high and low/popular literature, theatre and music, such as ballet, mime, cabaret, operetta, puppet theatre, "popular, provincial theatre", nineteenth century realist theatre, stream-of-consciousness technique, and other (for a complete list, see Klepač 2007: 212). The play itself is organized as a sequence of "eighteen postcards of old Pula", parallel to the eighteen episodes of *Ulysses*, indicated in the title of each "postcard" (see also Klepač 2007: 212). By blurring the borders between languages, nations, literatures, and various (high and low) art forms and conventions, *Pulisej* offers a symbolic carnivalesque 'relief' (in the Bakhtinian sense of the term) from the turbulences and traumas of history, both political and personal. In terms of the latter, it is interesting that the author is playing not only with Joyce's, but his own family history: the other protagonist Karl, whose wanderings through Pula are analogous to those of Joyce and whose plot line is intertwined with his, is based on the figure of Senker's grandfather, a Slovene non-commissioned officer of Austro-Hungarian Navy who lived in Pula in the same period, although he never met Joyce himself (Klepač 2007: 212; Senker's fictional Karl, on the contrary, is ordered to deliver a love letter from his lieutenant to Nora, and he communicates with Joyce on two occasions, even saving him from being badly beaten up by sailors towards the end of the play). At the same time, Senker's literary and theatrical strategy (a distinctive feature of his entire dramatic oeuvre) functions as an effective means of questioning different national stereotypes, including the aforesaid popular image of Irishness.

4. Tahir Mujičić: Irishness and Croatness

Although Croatian intellectuals have always been aware that such popular stereotypes of the Irish are based on prejudice, they proved to be particularly suitable for constructive comparison with the Croatian auto-images, interfering with the perceived similarities between the two nations and helping to strengthen the contours of Croatian national identity in the Western European context. Such prejudices were subjected to humorous treatment by another Croatian postmodernist playwright, poet, and prose author, Tahir Mujičić, whose individual poetics is in many ways comparable to Senker's (the two authors actually collaborated for several decades, from the 1970s to the mid 1990s, at first together with Nino Škrabe, and later as a dramatist duo). Most pertinent in this case is Mujičić's poetry collection tellingly entitled *Irski Iranec i iranski Irec. Svehrvatska pjesmarica* ("An Irish Iranian and an Iranian Irishman. An all-Croatian songbook").

This songbook/poetry collection is comprised of short lyrical forms written in different metres and short dramatic-poetic dialogues, all involving humorous and effective usage of rhyme. The author's strategies of poetic ludism are centred on language: the title already suggests that the poetic subject will be playing with identity. And indeed, this collection includes:

1. the usage of dialect
2. humorous antithesis, as well as humorous intertwining
3. if interpreted in a simplified manner, the title in the bottom line refers to Croats. As has already been explained, Croats believe they are close to the Irish in terms of mentality and history has shown that the two nations have shared similar statuses, destinies, and strategies of coping with difficult situations. Furthermore, a well-developed scientific theory claims that Croats are not a Slavic people at all, but have only become slavenized in time, whereas their true origin is Iranian (Galín 2010b: 107–116).¹⁵

In order to express and formulate such resemblance between Croats and the Irish, Tahir Mujičić uses the postmodernist technique of collage of citations, which includes:

1. high literature (J. Swift, J. Joyce, S. Beckett)
2. oral and ancient Irish literature and culture
3. contemporary popular image of the Irish as temperamental merry individuals
4. popular Irish music and its rhythms.

In this playful and disheveled collection of poems various components of the overall European culture unexpectedly emerge and alternate, from English and Basque through German and Czech to Muslim, so that the Irish component is not actually dominant, but its presence is by no means negligible. In contrast, the Iranian component hardly ever appears in the collection itself, but the very fact that it has been emphasized in the title makes it sufficiently significant and content-bearing and gives it all the weight and symbolism of a signifier strongly connected with its signified. Although non-dominant, the Irish segment, moreover, occupies the central position in the set-up of the collection: it is placed in its very middle, and represented by three literary forms, occupying pages 49–60, out of the total of 133 pages.

The popular image of Ireland and the Irish is already established in the first text

¹⁵ See also Vidović 1991; Bauer et al. 1994; Tomičić and Lovrić 1999; Sakač 2000; Marčinko 2000; Jurić 2003.

dealing with Irish motifs, a dramolet/poem *Shakespeare Limerick Fest* (Mujičić 2000: 49–55). The story is symbolically set in the 1950s, on “a cold and foggy spring evening” (“proljetna i proladna, maglovita večer”), and in “a free and very green Ireland” (“slobodna i vrlo zelena Irska”): freedom was indeed the object of a century-long Croatian longing and a pronounced green colour is one of the motifs which are most commonly associated with Ireland and Irishness, but it is also a symbol of unspoilt nature and a life dedicated to nature, emphasized as the distinctive features of the ‘Croatian way of life’ (in comparison with other European countries). The action is set in the city of Limerick at the bar of the pub Djetelina (Shamrock): pubs have been imported into Croatia in the last few decades, but the same or similar gatherings have been part of the Croatian life-style for centuries, taking place in the establishments resembling pubs or other similar premises, such as ‘*klet*’, ‘*konoba*’, ‘*oštarija*’, or ‘*pivnica*’ (vineyard hut, tavern, inn, alehouse, and other). The action is described as a multiple contest – “Irish folk empowering and overpowering contest” (“irsko pučko jačanje i nadjačavanje”), as well as a contest in drinking, folk games, shouting, and singing “in dialogue in Celtic” (“dijaloškokeeltsko”), all of which help to build up a stereotyped image of Irish mentality. Parallels with Croatian culture are here explicitly established, since the author uses specific Croatian terms and mentions specific Croatian customs for some of the Irish features, such as “*kamena s ramena*” (“stone-throwing contest”), a popular folk game, or “*ganganje*”, “*reranje*”, and “*ojkanje*” for singing. All of these terms refer to the well-known forms of dialectal/traditional singing in the rocky parts of Croatia, which are now registered as part of UNESCO’s non-material cultural heritage, and can remind foreign visitors of the noise made by the braying of an ass (“*revanje*”), also mentioned in the description of the Irish singing contest.

Characters’ names are based on ludic comparison as well: Patrick Mc’Tachy is the ‘Irishized’ version of the author’s name Tahir, here combined with the typical Irish name Patrick; in addition, Tachy is a real name from one of the most well-known segments of Croatian history, albeit connected with the ‘negative’ historical figure – the sixteenth century nobleman Franjo Tahi. It should be added that the author Tahir Mujičić is of Muslim origin and his name and surname aren’t ‘typically’ Croatian, which, naturally, doesn’t preclude him from speaking out as a Croatian patriot. The name of the other protagonist Shonn O’Muyo blends another typical Irish name and, this time, the author’s surname – Mujičić, transformed into O’Muyo, which can, again, be read as a humorous variant of the name Mujo, often used in jokes about Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Then, there is the female dance troupe which appears in the prologue and epilogue – “*Sestre slada i hmelja*” (“Sisters of malt and hops”), whose name invokes the setting where it is important to soak one’s body, primarily in beer, but other liqueurs as well. The bartender has the typical red moustache, the piano player is drinking Guinness, the pub also serves Kilkenny, there are even two nuns and a protestant who “just happens to be passing” (“u sasvim slučajnom prolazu”) ... – Irish atmosphere is created by accumulating stereotypes and historical facts. At the same time, the two protagonists parody Shakespeare’s plays, which is in accordance with the collection’s focus on the most popular and easily recognizable contents. In the field of drama, this primarily (and perhaps unfortunately) is Shakespeare, although the author ends his poem-dramolet with a cry: “Fuck Shakespeare, give us Joyce, O’Casey, O’Neill, Beckett!” (“Jebo te šekspir, daj đojsa, okejsija, onila, beketa!”). Both the swearword and the names of the Irish classics are originally spelled in a way

consistent with the folk and popular image of these authors, which is not based on a genuine knowledge of them, but raises awareness of their national identity. Significantly, this scene closes with an invocation of the sad and anxiety-ridden Irish history, which is also comparable with Croatian historical aspirations: "Shots and detonations are heard outside, together with weak cries and whisperings: 'Freedom, freedom!', 'Bread and games!', 'Autonomy and independence!' " ("Izvana odjekuju pucnji i detonacije, te slabašni krici i šaputanja: 'Slobode, slobode!', 'Kruha i igara!', 'Nezavisnosti i neovisnosti' ") ... and we should bear in mind that the action takes place in the late 1950s Ireland.

In the final definition of the text's nature, which contains a new whirl of associations connected with Irish history, and with both popular and high Irish culture, the author labels it as a member of a genre that is again defined by its form of presentation: "opaska" ("remark"), spelled in the 'Irish' manner as "O'Paska". Hence, even the concluding statement is wittily given an Irish touch.

This text is followed by a lyrical miniature entitled *Gaelic song na hirskom* ("Gaelic song in Hirish"; Mujičić 2000: 59), which connects the topic of poetry with language twisting and language itself as the leitmotif of the entire collection. Apart from the title, the Gaelic component is included only in one direct reference ("drljam na gaelicu" – "I'm scribbling in Gaelic") and two refrain verses which imitate the rhythms of oral/folk poetry: "deirim dan on deirim dan", whereas all other motifs have more universal connotations (a song about the poet's need for singing, food, and drink).

Language continues to be Tahir Mujičić's main preoccupation in the third poem, where he amalgamates Dublin and Zagreb into Zagblin in the title: *He is in the town of Zagblin ili Negdar roker bijah ja iz Dubrave* ("Once I used to be a rock singer from Dubrava"; Mujičić 2000: 60), adding an inscription: "to Shann from Dubliners, Shwalek from Dalmatinec and Wat from the suburbs" ("za Shanna iz Dublinersa, Shwaleka iz Dalmatineca i Wata iz predgrađa"). The poem is an imitation of the Irish drinking-songs and merry dance songs performed by the rock band *Dubliners*, but in a manner typical of Zagreb and Croatia. It is written in macaronic/pigeon English and invokes rock blues, but in a recognizable Zagreb milieu, mentioning one of its well-known squares ("swachix square" – Trg Petra Svačića [Petar Svačić Square]), a bar in a Zagreb city theatre ("bar gawella" – Gavella) and streetcar number 11 ("streetcar no. eleven"). The hero of this narrative song – rock-blues ballad, described as an "old guy" and a "tuff guy", moves in these spaces, meeting girls in the lascivious context of popular songs ("the girls are ugly or maybe they are nice/but shure he can once and never never twice"), with allusions to the metaphysical trajectory to afterlife, and the comparison of the life in Zagreb with heaven, in opposition to the life in an unnamed and (contextually) smaller place, comparable to hell ("he come with streetcar no. eleven/directly from hell to the heven"). Croatia has a different tradition of drinking songs, wine songs, and ballads, but, due to the immense popularity of their Irish forms and traditions, which is felt all over Europe, they have now been present in Croatian culture for quite a number of years.

5. Conclusion

The three analyzed instances of Croatian reception of Irish literature and culture

encompassed several layers of literary-cultural dialogue. Bearing in mind that the images of other nations, either positive or negative, have always played a significant part in the creation of every nation's self-image and its culture, it was evident that, in this case, it was first of all the Croatian popular culture of the last few decades that has, due to the perceived political-historical kinship with the Irish, accepted Irish culture in the greatest degree and adapted it easily to its own nationally coloured repertoire, enriching it with various manifestations of Irishness. This phenomenon could, again, be connected and/or contrasted with literary texts still remaining closer to the domain of high literature, which also used the existing national images and stereotypes, but subjected them to witty manipulation and transformation, involving critical reflection on their origin and meaning, and a skilful employment of literary technique. On the one hand, this could be said of Synge's appropriation of Irish national stereotypes and the ideology of the Irish Literary Revival, as well as of Irish folk culture. His 'poeticized' and in some aspects critical image of Irishness was introduced to Croatian audience thanks to the efforts of Ivan Slamnig, continued by other Croatian translators. It proved to be an image which could even be perceived and received individually, and on a more universal level – that is, outside the boundaries of the said feeling of Croatian-Irish kinship. On the other hand, Senker and Mujičić offered two humorous representations of the popular images of Ireland and the Irish, emphasizing their link with Croatian history and culture, and using a typical postmodern technique of conflation of high and low culture. In Boris Senker's text the figure of James Joyce as an Irish and world classic was merged with his popular image, formed both on the basis of his biographical links with Croatia and the popular stereotypes of the Irish. In Mujičić's poetry collection these stereotypes were fused with the popular image of Croatness, also becoming objects of playful interpretation.

What all of these examples finally showed was that popular images and literary representations can take different directions when crossing national borders and can result in various combinations and interplays of sameness and difference, seriousness and humour, as well as of high and low domains of literature and culture.

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POPULARNA/PUČKA I VISOKA KULTURA U HRVATSKOJ RECEPCIJI IRSKE KNJIŽEVNOSTI I KULTURE: SYNGE, JOYCE, IRSKOST VS. SLAMNIG, SENKER, MUJIČIĆ

Sažetak

Članak razmatra odnos između tzv. visoke te popularne i folklorne književnosti u hrvatskoj recepciji irske književnosti i kulture, i to s književnopovijesnoga – točnije, (post)modernističkoga – stajališta. Prvi se aspekt toga odnosa ilustrira na primjerima hrvatskih prijevoda dramskih tekstova Johna Millingtona Syngea i njihova osobita spoja folklorne i visoke književnosti i kulture. Nakon toga, analizira se prikaz Jamesa Joycea, kao još jednoga klasika irskoga modernizma, u drami suvremenoga hrvatskog dramatičara Borisa Senkera *Pulisej*, koja nudi postmodernu reinkripciju *Uliksa* utemeljenu na ludičkome propitivanju povijesti te kulturnih i nacionalnih identiteta. Potonje se pitanje naglašuje i u trećemu dijelu rada, koji je usredotočen na općenite predodžbe o „irskosti“ u poeziji drugoga hrvatskog postmodernog autora – Tahira Mujičića (*Irski Iranec i iranski Irec*), također poznatoga po ludičkome spajanju „visoke“ tradicije i popularne kulture. Radom se nastoji pokazati da se popularne predodžbe i književne prikazbe mogu kretati u različitim smjerovima prilikom prelaženja nacionalnih granica i pritom rezultirati različitim spojevima istosti i različitosti, ozbiljnosti i humora, kao i visoke i niske književnosti i kulture.

Ključne riječi: irsko-hrvatske veze, popularna, folklorna i visoka književnost i kultura, modernizam, postmodernizam, James Joyce, Tahir Mujičić, Boris Senker, Ivan Slamnig, John Millington Synge