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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29162/ANAFORA.v11i2.3>

Izvorni znanstveni članak

Original Research Article

Primljeno 30. listopada 2024.

Received: 30 October 2024

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Prihvaćeno 2. prosinca 2024.

Accepted: 2 December 2024

MEDITERRANEAN IDENTITY OF MILJENKO SMOJE'S AND ENZO BETIZZA'S SPLIT AND DALMATIA DEPICTED BY THE GROTESQUE COLORING OF THEIR CHARACTERS

Abstract

The paper analyzes two Dalmatian chronicles titled *Kronika o našem Malom mistu* [*The Chronicle of Our Little Place*] (1971) by Miljenko Smoje and *Egzil* [*Exile/Esilio*] (1996) by Enzo Bettiza, in which Split and Dalmatia are presented as an integral part of the Mediterranean. Applying the methods of analysis, explication, and comparison, the paper will attempt to show that the Mediterranean identity is manifested in personality traits and behavior of peculiar characters, their relationship with space and fellow citizens, and their wry and bitter humor. In terms of themes, ideas, and style, Mediterranean elements are seen in the merging of opposites. Various opposed elements are inscribed in the real and fictional narratives of the Mediterranean, which, due to its position and socio-historical circumstances, absorbed various influences. As the analysis will show, the opposites are shown in grotesque presentations and the use of irony as a polyphonic figure of discourse.

Keywords: chronicle, grotesque, irony, peculiar characters

1. Introduction: Personal and Social Chronicles

Accepting postmodern identity theories on liquid and constructed personal and social identity, the paper will analyze several elements of the Mediterranean identity of Split and Dalmatia (and their *small* and *big places*¹) in the novels *Kronika o našem Malom mistu* (*The Chronicle of Our Little Place*, 1971) by Miljenko Smoje (representative of Croatian literature) and *Egzil* (*Exile/Esilio*, 1996) by Enzo Bettiza (representative of Italian literature). Mediterranean identity will be explored in the context of contradictions, as a mixture of opposites—in terms of geography (the Mediterranean comprises mountains and coasts, it is situated in the center among the three continents of Europe, Africa and Asia), politics (conquered by different imperial powers from Greek and Roman, through Genoese and Venetian to British), various ethnic, social and religious affiliations, gastronomy (multiethnic dishes from the East and the West), personality traits (impetuous temperament and sensitivity), language (various vernaculars but also in terms of using harsh and sweet words), and the like. Special focus will be on Dalmatia, as “a Mediterranean province on the periphery of the empire which should be understood geographically, historically and culturally as the origin and center of the European spirit” (Zelić 12).

Presenting the merging of opposites as a Dalmatian and Mediterranean constant, the emphasis will be placed on peculiar characters as focal figures and bearers of the Dalmatian and Mediterranean spirit, which develops in interpersonal relations constituting the specifics of both the Southern mentality and Southern literature (as opposed to the Northern ones).² The hypothesis is that the Mediterranean narratives revolve around peculiar characters and interpersonal relationships because of the potential of the sea which calls people to cross one's borders and discover, but also to go to the unknown and possibly dangerous (cf. Hegel; qtd. in Zelić 8). Thus, the sea incites people to be cunning and playful, to accept the challenge and, using wry and bitter humor, reconstruct their identity in contact with the “Other,” facing/mock/accepting/rejecting the unknown.

¹ Referring to *Malo misto* and *Velo misto*, the novels written by Miljenko Smoje and adapted into famous TV series.

² Mediterranean was constructed through literary narratives, it entered literature thorough ancient myths, while later narratives changed the image of the South into a negative stereotype. Some of those narratives are based on the North – South dichotomy (Bešker and Zelić; qtd. in Lujanović 173).

In the analyzed texts, characters are both real and fictional, mimetic and caricatured, which is expected given the chosen literary genre. Namely, the novels are character-and-space-based chronicles that portray Dalmatia as a Mediterranean community *sui generis*, with its own dialect and local idioms, a turbulent past, and a greater degree of autonomy. The Dalmatian spatial imaginarium in Bettiza and Smoje is a precisely defined part of the Mediterranean (primarily Split and the surrounding islands) located at the crossroads of numerous trade and military routes. This space absorbed various social and cultural influences, remaining a cultural-sports-spiritual center, and yet on the edge of historical and modern empires.³

In Smoje, the reader is introduced to such literary imaginarium by a first-person narrator, a feigned small-town chronicler (postman), a contemporary witness of the presented events, while in Bettiza, the autonarrator tells the family saga with a time lapse, prompted by the 1990s war in the “lost homeland” (cf. Miletić and Vidović Schreiber 2020). *Kronika o našem Malom mistu* is a social satire with caricatured protagonists (i.e., the locals who belong to different social strata: doctor, mayor, waiter, shoemaker, barber, fishermen, prostitutes, etc.). At the same time, they are peculiar and unique characters as well as convincing archetypes that can be easily found in other small and isolated Mediterranean surroundings. Bettiza’s *Egzil* is a personal and family chronicle as well as a chronicle of his native Split and Dalmatia, in which, as in his other literary works, he “tried to understand the psychological merit of the personalities of our century (ranging from communist revolutionaries, officials, and dissidents to fighters for the national cause), probing deep into the psychology of characters and even the physiology of some decisions and options, mostly taking into account the characteristic mixing of races and blood” (Maroević; qtd. in Bettiza 6). The plot of Bettiza’s novel, much like in Smoje’s, revolves around peculiar characters; the author builds on a memoir, autobiography, and documentary genre with narrative fantasy and imagination, offering a range of archetypal characters that are vivid as local phenomena, but also from a wider, national, and even global perspective. Personal exile thus becomes a well-known Proustian symbol of the lost homeland of beloved Dalmatia and Split, viewed through the prism of a child and a teenager. Although having a foothold in reality, such

³ Historically, it is worth mentioning Nikša Stančić’s statement that Dalmatia was the least developed Habsburg province and that it came under Austrian rule as a deeply polarized society (Stančić 232; qtd. in Đinđić 122).

topoi are nevertheless imaginary and intimate, interwoven with a longing for the time and space of the Arcadian, cosmopolitan “Illyria” that preceded the war, revolution, concrete covering, the new social system and, according to the protagonist, the “breakout of the semi-barbaric regiment that descended from the Dinaric mountains [to Split] with the devastating lava-like force” (Bettiza 105).⁴ Focusing on similar spatial and temporal coordinates, Smoje follows political and social changes since 1936 and their reflection in the Dalmatian and Mediterranean part of the eastern Adriatic, trying to keep the memory of the then people and places alive. Thus, both novels can be considered personal and social chronicles of the two journalists and writers.

2. Representational and Performative Roles of the Chronicles

As emphasized in the previous section, the analyzed chronicles are character-and-space based novels in which protagonists become representatives of space, and at the same time are shaped by that very space. Their personal and social identity is constructed in a dynamic relationship with space and fellow citizens, and at a general level the characters become symbols of the small place (small-town) milieu. Mirošević (1) points out that the most important determinants in the formation of social identities are common space, culture, and past, so in this context, identification is constructed on the basis of recognizing a common origin or common trait with another person or group, or with an ideal, but still in accordance with solidarity and loyalty on the naturally set foundations. Therefore, further analysis will be devoted to the relationship with the Other, who, in the context of the selected novels, is everyone/everything that the individual is (seemingly) not, and in contact with whom/which the individual forms their identity; therefore, the Other may refer to: *furešti* (foreigners), *vlaži* (pejorative name for the inhabitants of rural, hinterland areas in Dalmatinska Zagora), residents of big cities (as opposed to the small place Malo misto), and *ridikuli* (ridiculed persons with some deformation) (in Smoje); *esuli* (exiles), *dušmani* (secret enemies), Slavs, Italians, Albanians, and *ridikuli* (in Bettiza), and even to the space itself, which is both real and produced.

⁴ In this context, facts support the narrative; referring to the mixed population of Dalmatia, Đinđić (122) interestingly notes: “On the one hand, there was peasantry making up the majority population, and on the other, the urban population without modern citizenship. In addition, Dalmatian society was divided into patriarchal, coming from mountainous Dalmatia, and urban—Mediterranean.”

Although this paper does not directly refer to spatial sciences, it is useful to recall the three definitions of space presented in Henry Lefebvre's book *The Production of Space*: in addition to the physical space clearly outlined in the novels analyzed here, there is also an imagined space presented through mental representations, abstractions, conceptualizations. Finally, there is a living social space with accompanying social imaginarium, collective memories, and narratives (cf. Kale 14). These spatial determinations illustrate the representative role (presentation, description) and performative role (imagining, inventing, producing, constructing) of Smoje's and Bettiza's chronicles.

The plots of both novels are set in the South of Croatia where life takes place on streets that are narrow and white just like the paper that captures different (intimate) narratives; what is outside is being displayed as if it were inside, as opposed to northern architecture that uses colors and shapes to give an impression of the exterior to what is inside (cf. Pavličić 77–79). It is precisely in life on the street, among people, that Pavličić finds justification for the tendency of writers from the South to write comedies. Thus, literature from the South describes people and interpersonal relations (social reality), and literature from the North describes nature (natural reality). Since social reality can be influenced, and natural reality cannot, southern writers are more prone to comedy, and northern to tragedy (Pavličić 17). Applied to the analyzed works, it can be concluded that the plot in Smoje develops in open spaces through dialogues and the interrelationship of the protagonists. Bettiza replaces this southern component with an essayistic and autobiographical approach, emphasizing, however, that exile is typical for the South and that the first Dalmatian exile was the emperor Diocletian. Considering that within the ancient Greeks and Romans only higher classes had the privilege of exile, while the lower social classes were punished with prison and forced physical labor (Gunjević Kusanović 8), exile can be considered a typical Mediterranean component. Finally, the role of space and the longing for a specific (imaginary and real) space is emphasized in both the small-town and exile-related narratives, thus confirming the representational and performative role of literature that describes real spaces using the medium of language, but also produces new spaces (cf. Brković 125). Further sections will explore this dual role of literature in the analyzed chronicles showing the merging of opposites in themes and ideas, and the use of grotesque and irony in the stylistic layer.

3. Dalmatia as a Mixture of Opposites

Both novels portray Dalmatia as a mixture of opposites; in Smoje, the opposites are seen in the social and cultural features (conditioned by protagonists' geographical origin) as well as different personality traits, while in Bettiza, Dalmatian opposites can be found in geography (the region comprises hundreds of islands and a mountain range), but also in social, national, and cultural terms. The author poses an indicative question: "How many different Splits, how many opposing Dalmatias have I come to know over the years?" (Bettiza 271). The geographical contrast is a characteristic of the entire Mediterranean, which the French historian Fernand Braudel sees as a sea steeped in mountain massifs, and this "contrast and conflict of threatening mountains and thin coasts before the sea imposes itself as a fundamental framework for regulating social relations in the Mediterranean" (Jakšić 20). The geographical framework serves to construct local micro-identities, thus distinguishing *primorci* and *zagorci* (lowlanders on the coast and highlanders in the hinterland), and *boduli* and *vlaji* (islanders and inhabitants of rural and/or more distant areas), which are all opposed to *furešti* (foreigners, mostly tourists). While Bettiza stresses a distinct dichotomy between *us* (Slavic, Slavicized, and Italian Dalmatians—natives) and *them* (savages from the hills), Smoje presents *vlaji* in a more comical light, primarily through the figure of a simple but resourceful Anđa perceived by Mrs. Bepina in this way: "But, Luidi, she is a poor *štramba*⁵. Viljaka⁶—the caring Bepina said—she does not understand, she does not have our education, our finesse" (Smoje 62). At first glance, Smoje seems to expose and ridicule the lack of finesse and education in one social stratum, but a deeper analysis reveals the irony of the entire chronicle, that is, the ridicule of all social strata. Namely, Smoje uses irony on a microstructural level, that is, as a Quintilianesque rhetorical figure based on the use of opposites, whereby the speaker says the opposite of what is meant (cf. Solar 130), but also on a macrostructural level because irony extends through larger parts of the novel, so the ironic layers of the text take control over the totality of the textual structure, thus becoming a central element in text interpretation (cf. Škvorc 51–52). Therefore, the aforementioned statement of Bepina, who is far less resourceful than Anđa, not only serves to mock *vlaji*, but also testifies to the unjustified vanity of the urban population. Since the two protagonists (as well as other characters) have been (successfully) living together on the island

⁵ A strange or odd person.

244 ⁶ Referring to oral literature and Anđa's rural origin.

for years and due to the ironic tone of the narrator who mocks all characters, the above statement might suggest the acceptance of heterogeneity, even in a small place, “malo misto,” both *boduli* and *vlađi*, *primorci* and *zagorci*, representatives of the authorities and institutions as well as marginalized members of society (especially *ridikuli*), construct a small-place milieu and are equally exposed to criticism and revaluation (cf. Dizdar and Miletić 221). This statement (as well as the entire Smoje’s chronicle) confirms the Mediterranean component of the identity; the small place is a mixture of opposites, a home to characters of different social and cultural statuses. On the one hand, this testifies to cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, and on the other hand, Dalmatia (just like the Mediterranean) is a “space of turmoil and chaos” (Lujanović 174) due to intolerance and war madness.

In Bettiza, the Mediterranean component of identity in Dalmatia is confirmed in the multiethnic/multinational affiliation of the characters. Historically, Dalmatia has been inscribed in the Mediterranean narrative due to its turbulent past, the rule of several authorities, and the intersection of three major world religions.⁷ Offering a psychological characterization, Bettiza repeatedly emphasizes the multiple identity of the characters, which in a national sense is manifested in Serbian influence on the protagonist through his Orthodox nanny, Italian influence during the protagonist’s schooling in Zadar, Croatian influence in his childhood, followed by German and Russian influences in adult years. While Bettiza writes longingly about an old and respectable Split, Smoje’s Dalmacija is not the center of civilizational or cultural spheres, but the margin of great empires (cf. Lujanović 174). In both authors, the Dalmatian imaginarium, although separated from Europe and Croatia, is the center of the protagonists of the world, which is in line with the notions of human geography, i.e. the idea of a universal perception of the homeland as “the center of the world” (Tuan 189), as a place of special value.⁸

⁷ Romantic writers, who created the basis for Tommaso’s theories about a special Dalmatian nation, accepted the theory of the multi-ethnicity of Dalmatia. Italodalmatian Francesco Carrara in his “cultural nationalism” explained the “Dalmatian nation” as a mixture of races dominated by Slavs and Italians, with 400,000 Slavs, located predominantly in the hinterland, and 16,000 Italo-Dalmatians (Vrandečić 65–67; qtd. in Đinđić 122). The Autonomist Party sought the focal point of integration outside the regional frameworks of Dalmatia. While Italian revolutionaries wanted to include the region in the liberal “Ausonia” (Italy and the eastern Adriatic coast), Metternich’s cultural nationalism encouraged the development of Italian culture in Dalmatia (Vrandečić 62; qtd. in Đinđić 122).

⁸ Unlike emphasizing Dalmatian identification of the young protagonist in *Exile*, Bettiza vividly describes the feeling of a distant homeland among young Italians in the Italian enclave of Zadar surro-

Bettiza pays attention to spatial contradictions in terms of mixing the opposites in Split and Zadar. The contradictions in Split can be seen in the city symbols; the monumental Roman palace on the northern, Golden Gate is rivaled by a statue of Bishop Gregory of Nin, a medieval fighter against Latin liturgy, raising his index finger as a possible threat to those who oppose Slavic unity (the statue was built in the time of first Yugoslavia). The battle of Italian and Vlach⁹/Slavic blood is also manifested in a personal narrative; in the episode about the black lamb Gaša, with whom the five-year-old protagonist builds a special bond, thus reaffirming the bond with his Orthodox nanny Grandma Mara. Eventually, the parents conspire against the heretical Vlach trio, while the slaughter of the lamb causes the child trauma, but also a greater connection with the Slavic nanny who comforts him.¹⁰

Similar contradictions are also seen in Zadar, portrayed as a narrow-minded fascist enclave despite being a free port and the capital of Dalmatia, primarily due to the atmosphere in the italophone high school. As a kind of revolt, the protagonist passionately reads American comics in which superheroes bring freedom.¹¹ The oppositions can also be seen in exaggerating the Mussolini at-

unded by Croats in the interwar period: "For the youngest Dalmatian Italians, the word 'homeland' was not just a blank word. In particular, it was not blank for those young adults coming from Zadar, this strange piece of land geographically separated from Italy by the Adriatic Sea and Kvarner, who had no memories Austria or kept only vague children's impressions about it. The term 'homeland', identified with the claustrophobic sense of territorial separation from the distant mother, got a nostalgic, almost mysterious physical meaning for them" (87).

⁹ Referring to *vlaži* from Dalmatinska Zagora, not to *Vlaži* as the ethnic groups of Romance-language speakers living south of the Danube.

¹⁰ He will feel this connection with the Orthodox nanny and his Slavic roots again upon coming to Russia in his mature years, where he begins to feel the largest Slavic country "as a giant replacement, the eastern extension of Dalmatia" and has "a pleasant feeling that I have returned almost home from exile" (Betizza 250). Eighteen years after his exile from Split, at the age of thirty-six, working as a correspondent from communist Russia, he will slowly feel a hint of healing from the typical trauma of exile, which he experienced as a young man, torn from his native homeland. The trigger was the realization that communism had failed completely to destroy the Slavic Russian soul, who fought against rigorous totalitarian prohibitions with irony: "Soviet Russia could half-ban what was largely allowed in Slavic Russia, a more hidden and authentic country. False and rhetorical communist rules were tempered by ironic Slavicism with the popular saying: here, everything is possible, and nothing is allowed (*u nas vsjo vazmožno a ničevo nelzja*)" (Betizza 250). He notices a similar, Dalmatian sense of humor. He is also surprised by the distinct linguistic affinity of Russian with his mother tongue, so he enthusiastically states: "I had the encouraging impression that I had known this idiom forever, that I knew it more by blood than by learning" (Betizza 251).

¹¹ This is the then popular comic book *Mandrake and People Without Faces*, whose authors used the character of Cobra "to portray and symbolize the mongrel synthesis of the Nazi-Stalinist sorcerer as a balance between medieval inhumanity and totalitarian modernity. Cobra, the paranoid master

mosphere, earning the city the title of Italian Zadar, as shown in the inscription on a pier, later replaced with the inscription “Tolja’s Zadar” devoted to the then richest and respected family of Zadar Albanians, who are Dalmatians by their way of life, and Italians by language. On the other hand, there is a representative of the other part of Italians in Zadar who did not absorb irredentism; Professor Consuelo is an example of a widespread ambiguous psychoideological paradox that combines the visible sense of Italianism and hidden Slavicism.¹²

In *Kronika o našem Malom mistu*, there are no such direct oppositions in the representation of space, and even when different micro-locations are mentioned, their contradictions are in the background of interpersonal relationships and character behavior. For example, the workers from the brothel, together with the respectable doctor Luidi, drag the mayor unconscious in front of the church, holding a feigned funeral for him; the little town has all the micro-locations of a big city, infirmary, brothel, hotel, church, rich villas, the modest room

of the night, had built an underground empire and created an army of loyal slaves by hunting down normal people, and wiping their eyes, nose, and mouth from their faces by the magic blow of a sponge; what was left was the drum of oval skin without the slightest bulge, replacing their blank face. Devoid of physiognomy, all equal in the anonymity of an army of ghosts without identity, they became very loyal torturers manipulated by a sorcerer who reduced them to blind and mechanical beasts. In a masterful and decisive hypnotic duel with this spirit of evil, Mandrake eventually manages to defeat him and restore not only human features but also the lost dignity to unknown slaves” (Bettiza 66-67). Bettiza confirms his liberal spirit developed in his young school days by rejoicing in the victory of this wizard Mandrake, who, as he writes many years later, “brought [...] from America a breath of fresh air into the stuffy Mussolini atmosphere that I had to breathe in the regime school and on the Zadar playgrounds” (67). Referring to this and other comics (*Flash Gordon*, *Masked Man*, *Agent X9*), he will say that he “especially [...] gladly watched and read them in Zadar, where on the one hand they were united with the Italian climate of that time, and on the other hand they were opposed to it [...] as if they brought me the primordial messages of the freedom of the infinite universe. Less cramped and significantly less anxious than the fascist enclave in which I was forced to live, this obscene universe seemed to have a redeeming effect on my subconscious and on my imagination” (66).

¹² Unlike the moderate Professor Consuelo, another Italian language professor, Maria Pasquinelli, symbolically embodies the frustration of the majority of the Italian population who emigrated to the West from the former parts of the Kingdom of Italy on the eastern coast of the Adriatic after signing the Paris Peace Treaty with Italy on February 10, 1947, seeking their happiness in Italy or in overseas countries. When this peaceful, self-effacing humanitarian and Italian language teacher of Split origin found out that the agreement (in her opinion fatal for the Italians) was concluded, she could not rationally accept the fact that almost all the former parts of the Kingdom of Italy on the eastern coast of the Adriatic came under the sovereignty of the Slavic socialist state of Yugoslavia, and she indulged in an extremely radical act. Finding herself in Pula, massively depopulated by her compatriots, she takes a gun and kills General Robert W. De Winton, commander of the 13th English Brigade that controlled that part of Istria (Selimović 2015).

of Servantes,¹³ barbershop, etc. which present the setting and are all included in various small-place narratives.

In portraying the characters, there is a focus on opposites in both writers, whereby in *Egzil* they are pronounced within the protagonist's family. The father Vice is Italian by his origin and national feelings, and *homo austriacus* by his lifestyle,

by nature and life habits, by university studies, by the Viennese nobility in his behavior and clothing, he was the embodiment of the role model of that rare and already vanished citizen of the world once called *homo austriacus*. But in the Austrian areas that became Yugoslav, things were always much more complex than they seemed at first glance. The definition of *homo austriacus*, which encompassed areas from Vienna to Krakow descending all the way to Split, implied a certain refinement, beautiful habits, an adaptable imperial way of thinking. But it did not include the characteristic of nationality, which remained in some way inappropriate and consensual, separated more than combined with the characteristic of civility. A citizen of the Empire could act and behave in society quite naturally as a perfect *homo austriacus* and feel at the same time Slovenian, Czech, Polish, Jewish, Croatian, and Italian. (Betizza 32)

In contrast to fascist Zadar, uncle Ugo is described similarly, so the protagonist realizes many years later

that he is a preserved remnant of old Austria, hierarchical, bureaucratic, conservative, and yet liberal, a remnant not intending to be entangled in the web of modern sectarianism and vulgarity. The former romantic Zadar, the most Böcklin-like of all our old walled cities, the seat of the Austrian governor in Dalmatia, with its conscientious officers, its multinational military crews, spirit-wise was certainly closer to uncle Belich than the Italian-Fascist oasis of the 1920s and 1930s, in which the insufficiently autarkic grandeur of the free port and the rampant ideological autarky of belligerent and frantic border nationalism were simultaneously and contradictorily celebrated. (Betizza 71)

¹³ The nickname of one of the characters, Tonči, who comes from Chile penniless and claims to have translated the most famous novel of Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes.

Oppositions can also be seen in Bettiza's presentation of his mother Marija, of Georgian origin but coming from the island of Brač. Children speak Croatian with their mother and the Venetian dialect with their father. While the father is "an unusual and harmonious mixture of sensual selfishness and ethical selflessness, lewd and at the same time moral, fickle and accurate, funny and serious, frugal and broad-minded" (Bettiza 135), the Slavic part of the mother's mentality is described as the untamed and primal. Describing the mother's Slavicism, Bettiza also points out her intolerance toward everything Italian. She least liked traveling to Zadar, "a foreign city, in her opinion artificially Italianized, which captured her two sons in an unnecessary Italian school, so she felt aversion to Zadar, and perhaps hatred" (Bettiza 93). This Slavic exclusivity of his mother will be elaborated by stating that,

[i]nfluenced by some kind of defensive and distrustful egoism ..., she looked at the human race as being divided in two strictly separated Manichean species: on the one side there were a few good people who without discussion accepted her person as she is, on the other there were a number of wicked people whom she classified into the rank of damned *dušmani*. *Dušman* is an indefinite term, because it is completely Slavic and Balkanian, weird, riddled with the shaman and tribal meaning, without the correct equivalent in other European languages except in Russian. *Dušman* is a little less and a little more than a frontal enemy attacking with his face exposed. It is a concealed, invisible, secret enemy, it is the one who is tempting to inflict evil upon us without a notice of open conflict, the one who plagues evil and misfortune behind our back and is therefore very difficult to be protected from him. (Bettiza 95)

The term *dušmani* is of Turkish/Persian origin. Bettiza points out that using that word, Russian *Pravda* "wrote that for the Russian soldiers, the Afghan guerrillas were more *dušmani* than real enemies. For the Serbs today, those are Muslims in Bosnia. And for my mother, most of the Italians in Zadar" (Bettiza 95).

In addition to the oppositions in the character, behavior, and mentality of the characters, the gastronomic diversity shows a vivid blend of the incompatible not only because of the different types of multiethnic dishes that arrived in this part of the Mediterranean from all over the world, but also because culinary passion erased class and gender differences, so it was common to see members of different social groups discussing meat or fish. Bettiza depicts gourmet

hedonism as something Homeric, thus showing Mediterranean elements in Dalmatian cuisine (cf. Miletić and Vidović Schreiber 202). Here, too, Bettiza's family represents the Mediterranean and Dalmatia on a smaller scale; just as different dishes and people come to the eastern Adriatic through different channels, so in Bettiza's multi-story house there are special passages and tables for different food suppliers. Food, just like people, adapts to the climate to different extent, from *sarma* that came from Anatolia to Europe to be Mediterraneanized in Dalmatia, to *ćevapi* which make it difficult to determine the border between the intersection of Turkish dishes with native Balkan dishes.

In Smoje's novel, oppositions in character portrayals are seen in a series of small local stories that become a mirror of wider and larger narratives. Smoje presents unique personalities that are actually archetypes, combining neighborly bitterness and jealousy with daily socializing while playing a game of *bocce* or card games, etc. The locals are contradictory in terms of their personality traits; there is a resourceful and witty waiter "Roko, vrag i uncut" (devil and rogue; Smoje 10), his simple and unsophisticated wife Anđa, a moody intellectual and doctor Luidi, his faithful and naive unmarried partner Bepina, who grotesquely indulges her husband in everything, a vice-prone mayor, an *inberlani* (silly) bohemian writer and translator Servantes (Smoje 182), and others. Each of their flaws is caricatured and criticized, while Smoje grotesquely refers to all of them as *kurbanjski svit* (sly world/people; Smoje 7) and *đente balkanika* (Balkan people; Smoje 35). By twisting social values and presenting flawed characters as likeable protagonists, Smoje achieves an effect of surprise and humor in the reader. However, the characters are not black and white, although their flaws are overstated. For example, they are bitter and prone to vulgarism regardless of their social status and occupation (for example, the bourgeois doctor Luidi swears just as much as the fisherman Stipe), but despite such discourse, they maintain good neighborly relations; the same applies to marriages: the warm-cold relationship of Luidi and Bepina brings dynamics, Luidi and the mayor are family people who regularly visit brothels, etc. Regardless of any disagreements, community life is encouraged, even in a caricatured way, for example in the scene when the mayor and the doctor urinate together: "*A deto Marko Polo ke maj višto un dalmato ke piša solo*"¹⁴ (Smoje 50) or when they drink together with the political opponents, the barber and the shoemaker: "So, both those who

were in power and those who were against it walked *šotobraci*,¹⁵ as if they were the closest brothers” (Smoje 52).

4. Irony and the Grotesque as Elements of Split-Dalmatian-Mediterranean Humor

While at the level of themes and ideas the authors combine the oppositions, at the stylistic level humor proves to be an important determinant of both chronicles inscribing them in local Split-Dalmatia and wider Mediterranean narratives. Both Smoje and Bettiza present their characters grotesquely offering a distorted representation of the (literary) reality that evokes an impression at the border between the bitterly serious and the funny (cf. Solar 114). Both authors use and support harsh humor, cynicism, mockery, irony, grotesque, and satire to entertain and teach, criticize, or simply give the Mediterranean spirit to their chronicles. Smoje’s small place is a large theater, full of comic scenes creating the impression of a fluttering, small-town narrative, while on the other hand, such statements have a satirical, critical note, and even a revolutionary background. Smoje elevates authentic and specific small-town narratives to a wider social and national level. All social strata can be subjected to ridicule, especially representatives of the government, whose authority comes precisely from the position of power.¹⁶ At the beginning of the book, the municipal (local) mayor from the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia is mocked, followed by a mockery of communist officials, especially the president and secretary, but also others (Miletić and Dizdar 213). Vices such as lack of morality, alcoholism, gluttony, marital fraud, and laziness are mocked. The latter is associated with the sentence of Galileo, who spends his brother’s money sent from America: “bravura je živiti bez lavura”¹⁷ (Smoje 181). Similar to Bepina’s statement from the beginning of the chronicle, *irony* can be seen here on the microstructural plan (the ironic twist refers to the conclusion that it is not at all brave to live without a job and that laziness is a great vice), while the ironic layers of the entire chronicle (on the macrostructural plan) reveal the purpose of such statements is to point out social flaws (developing a social satire of authority, of incompetent local government, of society prone to manipulation and vice, etc.) and/or general human

¹⁵ Ital. *sotto braccio* meaning “arm in arm.”

¹⁶ The book was published and the series broadcast during the political conflict of the “Croatian spring.”

¹⁷ “It is a bravery to live without a job.”

flaws (using caricatured portrayals of characters and mockery) (cf. Solar 262). On the one hand, the creator of this sentence, Galileo, arouses (at least temporarily) the admiration in readers because he finds other ways to survive, but in the overall context of the novel, this does not seem to be a long-lasting or recommended solution. Consequently, the meanings that are differentiated in the use of irony do not tend to exclude each other but are implied in spite of their non-compliance (Biti 157). At the same time, Galileo is a likeable and mocked figure, just like the rest of the locals. This confirms that irony is a polyphonic figure of discourse that involves the internal split in the statement encoded by the writer and decoded (interpreted) by the reader (cf. Bačić 158, 164).

Subtle irony and grotesque are seen also in Bettiza's portrayal of his family members, for example, in the already mentioned *homo austriacus* father Vice and uncle Ugo, the untamed Slavic soul of his mother Marija, and the like. Additionally, Bettiza longingly portrays old Split citizens whose main characteristic is an opposition to sentimentality with a strong dose of *cynicism* and *ridicule*, whereby *ridikuli* become the city symbols (Caruso Mimica, Vice Tikitak, Giovanna Cocola, Toma Bačir or Toma Pipun, Stipe Igra, etc.). These peculiar characters and weirdos are parts of Split's satirical tradition and presented in a caricatured and concise manner. *Ridikuli* are also mentioned in Smoje, in the same context as in Bettiza—that is, during the mayor's New Year's party. In this episode and in Smoje's entire novel the focus is on the small-town carnivalesque and ridiculous atmosphere (spring cross-country, work actions, etc.) in which the protagonists are grotesquely depicted and caricatured. Although without a visible deformity and reduced mental skills (as opposed to *ridikuli*), their function is to entertain the reader, and the purpose of declaring someone a *ridikul* in Split is pure entertainment (cf. Vidović Schreiber 217).

Along with cynicism and mockery, another feature of Split's humor is *grotesque laughter through tears*, expressed in the portrayal of the misunderstood intellectual Servantes (in Smoje) turning into a mildly ironized *ridikul*. He is similar to the character of the family gravedigger Bepo Mitrović (in Bettiza), who takes his duty too seriously; with a dose of black humor, Bettiza presents an episode with a broken and scattered coffin during one of Bepo's burials. In bitter humor as a characteristic of eminent and old Dalmatians of Italian and Slavic origin, Bettiza perhaps finds the main feature of the mentality of Split and Dalmatia. During the Yugoslav period, this humor was lost due to (auto) censorship, only to return in satirical newspapers such as the *Feral Tribune* or,

as Bettiza says in the last chapter of his *Egzil*, in the works of Miljenko Smoje.¹⁸ Even Smoje's relationship with Bettiza includes a contradiction; while in newspaper articles Smoje vehemently criticizes and provokes Bettiza, resenting his Serbophilia, but also irredentism, he is happy to spend time with him without addressing mutual disagreements (Bettiza 274–75).

The humor in Smoje is enhanced by the use of the Split Chakavian dialect and words of Romance origin (present mostly in the discourse of Luidi, who suffers from nostalgia for his student days in Padua). Given the frequent Smoje and Bettiza's walks in the city and the sharing of nostalgia for the former Split, it is possible that loanwords in *Malo misto* are a deliberate substrate of the Roman culture that practically disappeared from Dalmatia after World War II, due to the consequences of the brutal Anglo-Saxon bombing. This was most evident in Zadar, and partly later due to Italians' opting¹⁹ for Italy mainly because of disagreement with the newly established communist system and the fear of drowning in the Slavic mass after the fall of Italy (Miletić and Vidović Schreiber 2020).

5. Conclusion

In the analyzed chronicles, Smoje and Bettiza present the personal and social narratives of Split and Dalmatia, which fit into the wider Mediterranean context at the level of themes and ideas. The chronicle as a literary genre enables a documentary and biographical background on which an autonomous world is developed, both caricatured and inverted, but also likeable and comical. In a nostalgic recourse to the lost spirit of the Mediterranean belonging to the previous century, the writers emphasized the merging of the opposites as the main characteristic of the space, conditioned by geographical, historical, social, and political circumstances. They used those representations and stylistic figures that indicate splitting and/or contradiction of statements. Therefore, their characters

¹⁸ Even in the time of socialist Yugoslavia, Miljenko Smoje was allowed and famous for using this type of humor. Referring to this exclusivity, Bettiza stresses that Smoje "was the only satirical critic tolerated and respected by the regime, granting only him the permission to mock leaders, bureaucrats, ministers, ideologues, and other important party and state figures: almost official permission, which was valid not only for Split but for the entire national territory. The writer did not allow himself to be corrupted at all by this extraordinary luck. Moreover, he felt a certain grudging opposition to fame, sudden wealth, special immunity that protected him from scissors, and the rigors of censorship" (Smoje 298–99).

¹⁹ Dalmatian Italians were given the freedom to opt, that is, the right of residents of an area that belonged to another country to choose between two citizenships under certain conditions (Zupanc 2004).

are grotesque and ironic. On the one hand, they arouse feelings of remorse, and their behavior is criticized, and on the other hand, they are symbols of the past time and certain space and can only partly be found in other Dalmatian and Mediterranean environments known to the reader. *Kronika o našem Malom mistu* and *Egzil* therefore simultaneously describe and produce narratives of the eastern part of the Adriatic, whose protagonists are peculiar characters.

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MEDITERANSKI IDENTITET SPLITA I DALMACIJE KOD MILJENKA SMOJE I ENZA BETIZZE KROZ GROTESKNI PRIKAZ NJIHOVIH LIKOVA

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U radu se analiziraju dvije dalmatinske kronike, *Kronika o našem Malom mistu* (1971.) Miljenka Smoje i *Egzil* (1996.) Enza Bettize, u kojima su Split i Dalmacija predstavljeni kao integralan dio Mediterana. Primjenom metoda analize, objašnjenja i usporedbe, rad nastoji pokazati kako se mediteranski identitet očituje u prikazu osobina i ponašanja osebujnih likova, njihovu odnosu prema prostoru i sugrađanima te njihovu suhom i gorkom humoru. U tematskom, idejnom i stilskom smislu, mediteranski elementi prepoznaju se u spajanju suprotnosti. Različiti suprotstavljeni elementi utkani su u stvarne i proizvedene narative Mediterana, koji je, zbog svojega položaja i društveno-povijesnih okolnosti, apsorbirao raznolike utjecaje. Kako će analiza pokazati, suprotnosti se očituju u grotesknim prikazima i korištenju ironije kao polifone figure diskursa.

Ključne riječi: kronika, groteska, ironija, osebujni likovi