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SLOVENIAN MIGRANT LITERATURE IN
AUSTRALIA: AN OVERVIEW WITH A READING
OF THE WORK OF JOŽE ŽOHAR**IGOR MAVER**

The first Slovenians came to Australia in the 1850s and 1860s, working on Austrian warships on their journeys around the world, since Slovenia, like most of the other Central European countries, was part of the Habsburg and the later Austro-Hungarian Empire. They did not decide to settle there, despite the alluring sensational news of the goldrush in Victoria. In the period between the two world wars, some 10,000 Slovenians migrated to Australia. They were mostly people from the Primorje (the Slovenian Adriatic Littoral) region, which after the Great War became part of Italy. They wanted to avoid the strong Italianising process in the area, and also find a better life, since the economic situation was extremely difficult because of the Great Depression. The main reasons for the migration of Slovenians to Australia after the Second World War were, however, the changes in the socio-political system of the then socialist Yugoslavia Slovenian territory, as well as the increasingly difficult economic situation in the country which had resulted from rapid industrialisation and de-agrarisation. The number of Slovenian migrants living in Australia today is around 25,000, although with the second generation of migrants included, it may be as high as 30,000. Since the 1970s the massive immigration stream has vanished and even some return migration has occurred. Slovenian migrants have

established a number of associations/clubs in all the major cities, they have their churches and newspapers, they broadcast on multicultural radio and, most importantly, they can learn the Slovenian language at the elementary and secondary level.¹

The literary creativity of Slovenian migrants in Australia started soon after the biggest influx of migration to Australia at the beginning of the 1950s. It was then that the publication of the journal *Misli* [Thoughts] started (1952), where along with the discussion of religious issues and life among the migrants, the Slovenian Catholic priests first tried their hand at writing literary pieces – Rev. Klavdij Okorn and Rev. Bernard Ambrožič. Later laypersons started publishing their works in the journal, among them Neva Rudolf and Ivan Burnik-Legiša. Rudolf lived in Australia only a couple of years; however, with her collection of poems *Južni Križ* [The Southern Cross] (1958) and the collection of sketches, *Avstralske Črtice* [Australian Sketches] (1958), though not published on Australian ground, she was one of the first literary authors among the Slovenians living in Australia. With the publication of the migrant magazine *Vestnik* [The Bulletin] in that period literary creativity received a new impetus and a new possibility of getting migrant literature published emerged. Ivan Burnik-Legiša, despite his numerous collections of verse, has drawn critical attention only in the last two decades with his collections *Jesensko Listje* [Autumn Leaves] (1991), *Za Pest Drobiža* [For a Handful of Coins] (1993), *Hrepenenje in Sanje* [Yearning and Dreams] (1995), and *Klic k Bogu: Pesmi* [The Call of God: Poems] (2008). In the poems he recollects his youth at home in Slovenia; it seems he has never come to accept the new Australian environment as his very own, while, clearly estranged, he does not feel at home in Slovenia either.

The first book in the Slovenian language to be published in Australia was the collection of poems by Bert Pribac, *Bronasti Tolkač* [The Bronze Knocker] (1962). Among his numerous publications, the collections *V*

¹ See the Slovenian-Australian Network, www.glasslovenije.com.au.

Kljunu Golobice [In the Beak of a Dove] (1973) and *Prozorni Ljudje* [Transparent People] (1991) have to be mentioned, and more recently *Kiss Me Koštabona = Poljubi me, Koštabona: Ljubezenske Pesmi in Baladice* [Kiss Me Koštabona: Love Poems and Short Ballads] (2003) and *Tam daleč pod Južnim križem* [Far Away under the Southern Cross] (2010) which indicate that Pribac with his substantial quality literary output ranks along with Jože Žohar and Pavla Gruden among the very best Slovenian migrant poets in Australia (see Maver 1994). In 2000 the second edition of his first collection *Bronasti Tolkač* with some additional poems was published in Slovenia in Koper, the Northern part of the Istrian peninsula. In these the poet, both a Slovenian Istrian and an Australian, symbolically (and literally) returns to Slovenia, although he remains split between the two countries,

neither in this nor in the other homeland
fully anchored,
yet frozen in the love of both ... (Pribac, *Bronasti Tolkač*, 199; my translation)

Pribac can be placed high among Slovenian poets writing in Australia. It is true that his early work is characterised by a somewhat baroque language, coupled with the typical migrant nostalgia and longing for home. However, he quickly outgrew this early apprentice stage to mature into a subtle impressionist poet of his native Slovenian Istria along the Adriatic Sea and his 'new' second homeland, Australia. He can for this reason also be called a poet of two homelands, who feels at home here in Slovenia and in Australia; who uses in his verse images taken from both lands and whose poetry transcends the borders of space and time to address generally valid issues. Pribac, who has now permanently moved back to Slovenia, has also written a number of essays on the literary productivity of Slovenian migrants in Australia and was instrumental in bringing to publication various recent translations from Australian verse into Slovenian (see Pribac 2003).

Together with Jože Žohar, Danijela Hliš and Jože Čuješ, Bert Pribac was a co-founder of SALUK (1983), the Slovenian-Australia Literary and Cultural Circle, which was founded as a natural outgrowth of the literary magazine *Svobodni Razgovori* (see Suša 1996 and 1999). This magazine, established in 1982 by the energetic editor Pavla Gruden, was a natural Slovenian literary response to *Naš List*, a literary journal of Yugoslav migrant writers in Australia and New Zealand. SALUK gathered most literary Slovenians in Australia, but its foremost merit was that it brought its exponents during the 1980s into close contact with their Slovenian counterparts, resulting in numerous publications of Slovenian migrant authors in Slovenia and several organised reading tours. There were three major literary anthologies published during that time by SIM, the Slovenian Emigrant Association from Ljubljana, which featured fictional and verse works by the authors gathered in SALUK: *Zbornik Avstralskih Slovencev* (1985; An Anthology of Australian Slovenians), *Zbornik Avstralskih Slovencev* (1988; An Anthology of Australian Slovenians), and *Lipa Šumi med Evkalipti* (1990; The Lime-tree Rustles among the Eucalypts).

Pavla Gruden, along with her important work as editor, published a number of poems both in English and Slovenian. Her poetic strength can especially be seen in her collection of haiku verse *Snubljenje Duha* (1994; Courting the Mind). She reveals herself as a subtle poet of this originally Japanese epigrammatic verse, which helps her to depict her migrant experience in Australia (see Jurak 1997). Australia is no longer conceived as a foreign land but rather as a *terra felix*, which may offer migrants refuge, showing them the way out of the controversies of the modern world:

Softly the Southern Cross
Shows the way to the shipwrecked –
The Earth is all turned upside down. (Gruden, *Snubljenje Duha*, 53;
my translation)

Her contemplative stance and *carpe diem* approach speak in favour of a harmony between Nature and Man. Pavla Gruden's recent book of verse published in Slovenia is titled *Ljubezen pod Džakarando* [Love under the Jacaranda Tree] (2002).

The group of migrant poets include the interesting but little published poet Peter Košak – *Iskanje* [Search] (1982), *Ko Misel Sreča Misel* [When a Thought Meets Another Thought] (2006), Marjan Štravs – *Pesmi iz Pradavnine* [Poems from Ancient Times] (1993), Ivan Žigon, Danica Petrič, Ivan Lapuh, Ciril Setničar, Caroline Tomašič, Ivan Kobal, Draga Gelt, Marcela Bole, Rev. Tone Gorjup, and others. Jože Žohar deserves special attention, for he belongs among the best of Slovenian poets in Australia. His collection of verse *Aurora Australis* (1990) was the first book by a Slovenian migrant from Australia to be published in Slovenia, and its thematic and stylistic experimentation and innovations received a very positive critical response (Maver 1992). In 1995 he published his second collection in Slovenia, *Veku Bukev* [To the Crying of Beeches], and in 2004 his third collection *Obiranje Limon* [Lemon-picking] was published. For a detailed analysis of Žohar's work, see the second part of this paper.

As regards Slovenian migrant poetry written in English and sometimes bilingually, the poetry and prose of Danijela Hliš comes first to mind. She represents the first-generation of migrants who write in English, with, for example, Michelle Leber and the deceased Irena Birska-Škofic, as members of the second generation of Australians born to Slovenian parents. These writers are no longer preoccupied with such typical migrant themes as nostalgia for home or the problems of migrants trying to establish themselves in a linguistically and culturally different environment, for they take as themes existential issues, urban impressions and the like, though tainted with the typical Slovenian melancholy. Bilingualism fits into the framework of the Australian policy of multiculturalism and has thus changed the conditions of literary creativity, especially since the 1980s (Maver 1999, 305–17). Hliš writes

her sketches and poems mostly in the two languages. With her perfect command of English as a literary medium of expression, she is the first author of Slovenian origin who has managed to enter Australian multicultural anthologies and even a secondary school reader for Australian schools, with her bilingual verse collection *Whisper/Šepetanje* (1991) and the collection in English *Hideaway Serenade* (1996). Poems in the latter book show her migrant experience as essentially ambivalent: she describes the Slovenia she had left behind not only nostalgically but also bitterly, and, on the other hand, she seems to have accepted Australia as the new homeland with which she emotionally identifies not only in the poems but also in the short stories, essays and sketches.

Apart from poetry a great number of short prose or documentary writings have appeared in Australia and Slovenia: Rev. Bernard Ambrožič, Marijan Peršič – *Per Aspera ad Astra* (2001), Draga Gelt, Stanka Gregorič, Danica Petrič, Ivanka Sluga-Škof, Pavla Gruden, Danijela Hliš, Ivan Žigon, Lojze Košorok, Aleksandra Ceferin, and many others. From among the longer prose works, the book by Ivan Kobal written in English as *Men Who Built the Snowy* (1982) appeared first, published later in the Slovenian language as *Možje s Snowyja* (1993). This essentially memoiristic work is based on the author's personal experience working on the construction of the Snowy Mountains hydro-electric system in the during 1954–58 in which many migrants participated, including Slovenians. The book is a documentary testimony of this project, which according to Kobal, brought migrants of various nationalities together to work in a harmonious union to build the new Australia.

Cilka Žagar is probably the best-known migrant fiction author, for two of her published novels were received very favourably: *Barbara* (1995) and *Magdalena med Črnimi Opali* [Magdalena among Black Opals] (2000). She published the book *Goodbye Riverbank* (2000) in Australia, describing various life stories of Australian Aborigines who she knows well from her work and life among the opal seekers at Lightning

Ridge; she also wrote about Aborigines in the book *Growing Up Walgett* (1990). Žagar's novel *Barbara*, written originally in English and then translated into Slovenian, presents a chronicle of the Slovenian migrant community in Australia, from the construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme to the current problems of the community. Through the eyes of the protagonist Barbara and her family in the fictitious town of Linden, one receives an insight into the sad and even cruel but also happy moments in the lives of Slovenian migrants living under the Southern Cross. Her novel *Magdalena med Črnimi Opali* is about a split personality, the double ego of a single migrant (Magdalena) and develops into a saga of a migrant family. While Magda takes care of the family, Lena looks back and tries to find ways to return to the past, when she was loved and she herself loved and still nourished the hope of a better future. Magdalena, two aspects of a personality, dualistically set asunder between the search for the material and the spiritual aspect of life, constantly seeks a perfect love that would provide safety and spiritual meaning as opposed to material things.

Ivanka Sluga-Škof, author of many articles, published in 1999 a memoir on her childhood in Slovenia and her life and cultural work among the Slovenians in Australia. Among the younger generation of writers Katarina Mahnič should be mentioned. She has for some years now been editing the journal *Misli* and has already received important recognition of her writing published in Slovenia. She now lives in Slovenia again, where she also acts as a translator of Australian literature into the Slovenian language. In 2000 a book was published by Ivan Lapuh – *Potok Treh Izvirov* [The Brook of Three Sources] (2000), containing mostly sketches, some poems and a few aphorisms. Two more books should be mentioned in the context of Slovenian migrant literature, although they are written in English. *The Second Landing* (1993) by Victoria Zabukovec, who is not of Slovenian origin, is an historical, memoiristic and part-documentary book based on the experiences of her Slovenian husband. Janko Majnik in his memoir *Diary of a Submariner*

(1996) describes his experience of the Second World War as a Yugoslav submariner, when, not wanting to be captured by the Germans he, together with the crew, defected to the allies and via Egypt eventually migrated to Australia (Maver 1999, 75–84).

The Poetry of Jože Žohar

Born in 1945, Jože Žohar has been living in Australia since 1968. As a contemporary Slovenian migrant poet, Žohar experiments with the potential of the Slovenian language and constantly tries to expand the borders of his world and language through linguistic self-awareness by transcending traditional poetic aesthetics. Žohar's verse written in Slovenian is characterised by linguistic experimentation using palindromes, alliterations, vocal colouring, puns, homonyms and ornamental adjectives, as well as lexical and syntactic play – for Žohar, as a migrant in an English-speaking environment, is interested in testing the very borders of Slovenian poetic (linguistic) expression. Experimentation is central to contemporary Slovenian 'poetology' and to Žohar it in a way signifies even more: his personal freedom.

He could also be described as a migrant poet from the Prekmurje region, for *genius loci* is of great importance in his verse: the Prekmurje region on the one hand (the plain and the hills of the Goričko region in Slovenia bordering with Hungary and Austria), and the arid bush of Australia on the other. Žohar constantly moves between the two locales and identifies with each of them in his poems. The fact that the poet writes about his Prekmurje experience is significant, because this experience is like the region itself, close to the archetypal, elementary folk tradition, and the typical melancholic, mostly flat Prekmurje landscape may be seen as the landscape of the mind. In all three collections of his poetry, the specific geographical environment is strongly present and it appears in a dual relationship: on the one side the poet's native Prekmurje and Goričko, and on the other the Australian desert landscape. He wishes

to be at the same time 'one in two, be there and be here', something he considers a special yet agitating privilege.

Jože Žohar migrated to Australia in 1968 and published several of his poems in the Slovenian press as well as the migrant press in Australia. But it was only in 1990 that his first collection of poems in Slovenian, *Aurora Australis*, appeared in Slovenia, which became an independent European country in 1991 after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. In an interview Žohar made it clear that he did not approve of the division between a physical and a spiritual migration, for 'a physically displaced Slovenian is at the same time also a spiritually displaced Slovenian'. He chose exile primarily for social-economic and not for political reasons, unlike many of the Slovenian migrants who left immediately after the Second World War to go to Argentina, Canada and Australia. He describes his situation thus:

To spend half of my life in a country that is so terribly remote and different from my mother country, to overcome all the migrant traumas and problems, to try to integrate into the foreignness and probably to live with homesickness, is to be an Australian, and still, especially to be a Slovenian. All of this must influence a migrant to make his world alive in quite a different manner. (Žohar 1990b)

In his verse Jože Žohar seems almost erotically attracted to Slovenia, his native land:

I shall be in you for a very long time
And you shall be in me
the eternal serpentine. (*Aurora Australis*, 11)

The crucial question for him seems to be how to reconcile in himself the two lands: he has merely become displaced and never really settled. Almost all of his poems are written in Slovenian, although his good command of English would certainly allow him to write poetry in English as well: Slovenian, however, remains the language of his heart.

The displacement and dividedness that characterise Žohar's *Aurora Australis*, shows how he deals with the migrant's sense of estrangement in the new world, his search for a true mother country and, interestingly, a possible acceptance of the new land, Australia. In an earlier poem written and published in English ('Let's Go Home'), after the initial description of the migrant's suffering, the lines towards the end rather unexpectedly suggest an identification of the Sydney suburb of Penrith as a new home. Home is capitalised and accepted by the speaker as a new reality:

In our quiet, great desire,
In hidden suffering we burn.
Maybe after all
Somehow, someday
To the land of our birth
We'll finally return.
But there's the beauty
Of the Blue Mountains that we have
Yet to see, and to discover ...

With new zeal
From the sadness we shall sustain,
And agree: 'Let's return to Penrith.
Let us go Home! (1981)

Žohar's collection of verse *Aurora Australis* features an artistically intriguing poetic cycle entitled 'Apple Poems', written during a sleepless night in a motel in Orange in April of 1987. They transcend the typical migrant nostalgia and again reflect the poet's erotic relationship with his homeland, tinged with thoughts about death. The external flight is replaced, and thus balanced, by the withdrawal into an 'inner exile' that remains laden with existential anguish: 'We are drowning, drowning, oppressed and twisted, deafened by the howl inside ...' (*Aurora Australis*, 25). These poems are characterised by unusual tropes, paradoxical comparisons and very private symbolism. An apple as the symbol of

'Slovenianness' has turned into mere apple peel, Australia having squeezed out all its juices of life. Elsewhere, only sour, sulphured wine remains, as in the poem 'We Are Apple Peel'. Žohar's stream-of-consciousness technique enables him to make ample use of private hermetic symbols which are difficult to decode. 'Apple Poems' also point to the multiple alienation of the speaker of the poems (geographical, personal, social). The 'black sister' which appears in some of the poems metaphorically stands for the night, death or a prostitute, with an Eros-Thanatos relationship firmly in place. The poet contends that there is no easy or relaxed erotic connection between man and woman, but rather a constant mutual self-denial and fear, a search for something else, a fear of spiritual chaos and hallucinations caused by separation. Frequent sound effects and typography, not devoid of semantic significance, show the poet's postmodern *penchant*.

It all betrayed me.
Even the sun and the sky.
Through a blind pane the black sister
Stares black into my Eye

BEFORE DAWN I have to wash my face
With the blood of the sky, bloodless and restless
For apple-trees, for apples ...

APPLE-TREES MIGRATE with overripe faces
Into my dreams that are for me by the town of Orange.

THE APPLE WIND from the apple ships
Is breaking through the cracks of the tired windows.
The galleon oars are rowing into darkness.
Oh, Man, why are we so alien to each other,
Why is there no Sybilla, no words among us? ...

WE ARE APPLE PEEL and nothing can save us.
The black sister squeezes us black
Among the apples in the green press. (*Aurora Australis*, 26)

The Eros-Thanatos relationship is clearly recognisable in the final stanzas of the twelve-poem cycle 'Apple Poems', where night, death, the poet's mistress, and by extension his homeland, all metaphorically merge into one:

SATISFY ME, oh Night! Make me
A statue, a beam, something
That knows no nightmares and peaceful dreams.
But you are growing pale, retreating from the room!
Far behind the mountains you take off your clothes,
The black robe, and you are white. You are hope.
You are faith. (*Aurora Australis*, 27)

The second part of *Aurora Australis* in particular shows the poet's predilection for linguistic experimentation in the fields of Slovenian lexicon and syntax, which is difficult to render in English translation. He is, for example, fond of homonyms, synonyms, phonetic intensifications; he deftly uses onomatopoeia, occasionally adds alliterations, internal rhymes, assonance, interlocking and end-rhymes, and the like. The poetic cycle 'Mourning Poems' is tinged by the hue of sometimes pathetic migrant nostalgia. The speaker of these poems longs for a spiritual and physical *néant* and laments the fact that he shall forever try in vain to return home:

Only you shall never sleep
In these beds between the furrows,
Your own with your people.
You are too far. A disconnected joint.
In vain searching for the way back. (*Aurora Australis*, 66)

As a migrant poet in Australia Jože Žohar finds himself in a double exile; as a migrant from his native country and as an artist, thus by definition an outsider in society at large. His verse has nevertheless managed, metaphorically, to span two continents, Europe and Australia. He has

found a striking balance between his memories of the old country, Slovenia, and the experiences in the new country, Australia, with an emphasis on the characteristic Australian landscape, this paramount Australian literary trope. In contrast to many other migrant poets, there is no place for pathetic, maudlin and self-centred melancholy in *Aurora Australis*. The two elements causing schizoid displacement in his verse are geographical distance and the poet's past. Hence his constant departures and returns create an impression of the transitoriness of life:

Every time I come back, there are fewer warm hands,
Ready to be shaken.
And there are more and more of those
Who cannot recall me.
At least I know how I fade into nothingness ...
And southerly wind blows
Over white bones. (*Aurora Australis*, 40)

In summary, in his very first collection of poems, *Aurora Australis*, Jože Žohar states that he does not acknowledge the division between a 'physical' and 'spiritual' migration, since the two appear to him complementary. In his almost erotic link with not only his native Prekmurje, but with all of Slovenia, which is to remain in him as 'the eternal serpentine', he feels that the key question is how to reconcile the two countries within himself. He became 'dis-placed' and never finally 'trans-placed', remaining a cultural hybrid, half Slovenian and half Australian, which in his case represents a sort of homelessness (see Maver 1992; Jurak 1997). It should be stressed that in the different thematic clusters of this first collection he reveals a gift for linguistic experimentation, which suggests an allied formal significance, reflecting his dividedness between the 'old' and the 'new' homeland (Suša 1999). The initial homely sentimentality is replaced by the existential anguish of a migrant and a person *per se*.

Žohar's second collection is called *Veku Bukev* [To the Crying of Beeches] (1995), which can refer to a chronological definition of his youth spent among the beeches but also crying after it; that is, an ode to a Proustian 'time lost', time spent among the reeds, poplars and beeches (See Maver 1995 and 2003). Geographical locale is again of prime importance in the book and it appears in a typical dual relationship: the Prekmurje and the Australian bush country are constantly contrasted and juxtaposed. This second collection of the poet's verse represents his attempt to identify Australia as his new home; yet Žohar remains caught 'in-between' and sings to the Australian 'harem of camels in the desert, tombstones under the eucalypt trees, the waves broken on the shore, kangaroos, run away from bush fires' (*Veku Bukev* 29; my translation). Žohar revives alliterative verse, amply uses paronyms (words that are identical but have a different meaning in a changed context) and palindromes (that can be read forwards and backwards and may have the same or a different meaning), amasses numerous homonyms, synonyms and uses onomatopoeia. However, the question remains: has Žohar really migrated? Certainly physically, but not (completely) spiritually. As in his first collection *Aurora Australis*, Žohar still remains set asunder in the pain between Eros and Thanatos, between the erotic experience of the homeland, Slovenia, and a wish for a physical and spiritual nothingness in the vicinity of death that can only bring 'salvation'. This dichotomy also accounts for the poet's ambivalent attitude towards his homeland, which on the one hand urges him to become erotically involved with it, and on the other, makes him suffer, triggering off a wish for death because of the abandoned homeland. The poet's dilemma is how to 'reconcile' the two homelands, Slovenia and Australia, within himself. Indeed, he remains displaced and has never completely migrated to the newly adopted land.

In Žohar's new collection, a specific geographic environment again appears in a typically dichotomous relationship: on the one hand there is the poet's native Prekmurje and Goričko, the river Mura, and on the other the Australian desert landscape. They are being constantly

juxtaposed in his verse. In his melancholy, the poet is constantly returning home and at the same time bidding farewell to it: he wants to be 'one in the two, to be there and to be here,' which he finds a special privilege that especially excites him (*Veku Bukev*, 9). However, it is not that he thus finds himself in a sort of homelessness and a divided position, he who describes himself as 'an excited galley-slave between Scylla and Charybdis'? (*Veku Bukev*, 29). Žohar's displacement and geographic schizophrenia never become a self-centred, pathetic lamentation or weeping. The poetic account of Žohar's migrant experience is clearly set into the Slovenian-Australian context, although it could represent any migrant or exilic experience. A certain thematic development in the collection is represented by the poet's Heraclitean preoccupation with the transience of everything, with the flow of time which, in his view, runs in a circle, with the approach of old age and, with the poet's shame from his running away from himself, 'into a non-day, non-being' (*Veku Bukev*, 21).

The collection structurally consists of four cycles, each of which comprises several sections or units, which could only conditionally be called stanzas, for the poems are written in free verse, with occasional embracing and internal rhymes. Žohar's linguistic experimental vein is also strongly present in *Veku Bukev*. Not only does he experiment with typography (for example, in the verse sections 'a mar rama' and 'mure erum'), sound colouring and ballad characteristics, but he tries to revive the old Germanic alliterative verse, which is an important novelty in contemporary Slovenian poetry.

Žohar uses rather sophisticated paronyms and palindromes. His experimentation with words, the changing of individual letters in them which completely changes the meaning and the poetic description of his stream of consciousness represent a significant development in contemporary Slovenian poetic expression. The surprising introduction of alliteration into contemporary Slovenian poetry is perhaps the result of Žohar's knowledge and attachment to the Anglo-Saxon, Germanic

accentual-syllabic metrical system, while the palindromic arrangement of letters and the search for new or similar meanings, lexical and syntactical experimentation, the accumulation of homonyms, synonyms and onomatopoeic sound colouring, places the poet among successful Slovenian (postmodern) verse experimenters. It should be pointed out however that his puns and word games are practically impossible to translate into English.

In the first poetic cycle of the collection *Veku Bukev* titled 'Emigrants' Žohar asks himself about the motives of Slovenian migrants to go and live in Australia 'by the muddy rivers,' 'in the Snowy Mountains' or on the sugar cane plantations of northern Queensland (*Veku Bukev*, 6). He mentions the attraction of displacement, of leaving one's homeland for an exotic land. In Žohar's descriptions nature is completely indifferent to the fate and life of an individual, a migrant – 'the beeches in the Panonian marshes do not care' (*Veku Bukev*, 6). The poet is 'an erring figure,' the prodigal son who has to write his poems, odes to 'the time of beeches that is no more,' which turn out to be elegies (*Veku Bukev*, 6). The last part of this artistically effective cycle is partly surrealistic and full of painful awareness of approaching old age and passing away.

The second cycle of the collection, 'To the Time of Beeches,' establishes Žohar's life paradox: 'To grow there. To grow up here.' The poet tries to identify himself with the beech and to define himself by a series of original metaphors. He suffers because of the separation from home, which is, however, not characterised only by nostalgia for time lost, but also by the wish to actively participate in the growth and development of the now independent homeland, Slovenia, 'to witness the burgeoning of the land.' Žohar's verse at times becomes painfully trapped in merciless nihilism: he merely sees living corpses around himself that travel through the day into a 'non-day' (*Veku Bukev*, 21). The poem becomes an invisible apron string which ties the poet to this 'eternally young woman,' the homeland (*Veku Bukev*, 23). The cycle ends with two short typographic stanzas, which clearly express the poet's allegiance and

feelings: instead of 'hare krishna', Žohar cries out 'mura mura' (*Veku Bukev*, 25).

'I Am In-between, I Am In-between', the third cycle of the collection, is the longest one. The speaker suffers because he is split between the two countries, Slovenia and Australia, he is 'in-between', 'a mixture, a conglomerate of both, the blood of the blood of generations, departed beyond their boundaries' (*Veku Bukev*, 35). He is aware of his flight that has found expression in 'crying' from 'the time of beeches', which opens itself as a spiral and at the same time closes and collapses within. The attitude of the poet towards his homeland is very telling: in his first collection the erotic relationship between a man and a woman comes to the fore, while in *Veku Bukev* it is complemented by the relationship ('old') baby-('ancient') mother. Biblical allusions represent another thematic novelty in Žohar's collection – 'I lay myself down on beech-nut, crucified I lay down on it' (*Veku Bukev*, 39), and assume apocalyptic significance – 'until the return of the Shaman who will be a snake' (*Veku Bukev*, 39). Painful departures and returns characterise this third verse cycle.

The collection is thematically and structurally concluded by the fourth cycle, 'The Dry Shadow-Time', which is not set in the Australian setting by coincidence. The cycle is dedicated to Australia, which in his eyes is a dry, deserted and empty 'stolen continent' (*Veku Bukev*, 45), this is the environment where the poet now lives, 'the kind second home, surrounded by the power of oceans' (*Veku Bukev*, 44). There is a biblical allusion to the saviour – 'him who shuns the grave' (*Veku Bukev*, 45), who is to return 'from the sky'. But according to the poet, the saviour is not going to arrive there, 'there will be no sky with clouds above the poor consumed by fire'. Žohar's allegorical journey across the Australian desert countryside is described in a masterly manner. The ironic label 'Lucky country' refers to the description of a kind of hell, where the Australian Aborigines live. They are identified with the land, which represents for them 'a bowl of memory' and is no hell to them (*Veku Bukev*, 47). Žohar

envies them, for in contrast to him, the migrant, they are on their own piece of land and they feel at one with it, with 'the land into which they are cursed' (*Veku Bukev*, 47). How to win over time and transience in the dead, dried-out country? The poet answers it by describing a metaphysical search in a love act between two people, who 'pant into the sky and the earth, who hold back, prolong the moment' (*Veku Bukev*, 48), with which they would at least for a moment experience this illusion. Just as the black Aborigine blows the memory of ancient times into his *didgeridoo*, the poet at the end of the poetic cycle cries out for darkness and water for the dried-out land. It should drink till it is drunk, which he himself also desires: to forget.

In Žohar's most recent verse collection *Obiranje Limon* [Lemon-picking] (2004) he has remained true to his bold linguistic experimentation. As a migrant he constantly tests the borders of Slovenian poetic expression, and in this book for the first time he uses rhythmical prose, representing the dark inventory of the poet's life via the metaphor of lemon-picking in Australia. This rhythmical prose or poems in prose also represent a sort of reconciliation with the anguish of a migrant abroad and the significance of 'homeland,' reflected in 'Wanderings' for an emigrant as 'one of us, displaced, with home away from home. Jernej. Domen. The tenth child. And much more' (*Obiranje Limon*, 49; my translation). Žohar intimately yet only partly accepts Australia as his new homeland, because as a migrant he remains constantly displaced and not fully transplanted (Maver 2004). He sees his life as an endless process of saying goodbye and claims there is each time less of himself, whether departing from Slovenia or Australia, where, as the prodigal son, he tries to find his peace but also poetic inspiration. In 'Complaints, Conciliations' he writes:

Where you are now, there is June, when lemons and oranges become ripe, time when you leave all behind and everybody leaves you behind, because you want it like this for a change. For you know full

well that among lemon trees sensually rich poems happen too. Find yourself shelter among them. (*Obiranje Limon*, 29; my translation)

The poet's new collection of poems *Obiranje Limon* contains seven cycles or thematic clusters: 'At Home! At Home! At Home! (The Two of Us)', 'Symposion', 'From Apple-tree Orchards', 'Indian Fragments', 'Lemon-picking', 'Nameless', and 'Word Anguishes'. The first cycle represents the poet's most explicit wording of his migrant experience and the overpowering sense of homelessness. 'Lemon-picking' consists of lengthy poems in prose, and the cycle 'Nameless' features puns and linguistic experimentation. Žohar's poems in rhythmical prose are a new form for him, and he shows his essential dividedness between the two 'homes' in 'Lemon-picking':

You feel: there is less of you with each new coming back. Anywhere you go, you are merely saying good-bye. From everything and everybody. From bays and beaches.

From the Blue Mountains, when they dwell cold in silence or when they speak out in fire.

From the house which is the home of Home. From eucalypts, magnolia. From fences and walls between wordless neighbours.

From new roots. Yes: from new roots. You feel: there is no more of you with each new coming back. You bite into a ripe lemon,

Suck out its juice. The tongue pricks you. The tongue that is called ...

You feel like crying. (*Obiranje Limon* 35; my translation)

The poem in 'Word Anguishes' cycle are consistently written in rhymed stanzas, and here as in his earlier work, he establishes an erotic relationship with his homeland personified as a woman:

Who is this coming back
down the muddy road? An old man
to see his bride. (*Obiranje Limon*, 65; my translation)

The cycle 'Symposion' re-establishes the image of a dark 'aurora australis' (Australian dawn), the themes and the allusions and elements taken from Greek mythology are, however, quite new for Žohar. In the third cycle 'From Apple-Tree Orchards' expresses the poets melancholic nostalgia, not only for a home left behind (characterised by apple trees) but also for one's own lost youth at the realisation of man's fragility and transience, which drives him to an Australian pub where he does not find solace nor does he feel at home.

The cycle titled 'Indian Fragments' represents an important novelty in Žohar's poetic opus, although certain references to Buddhism (or Hinduism in his most recent collection) can already be found in the collection *Veku Bukev*. In 'Pilgrimages', Man's anguish at the realisation of his own transience suddenly strikes the poet – a Man, a migrant, as Everyman and as a pilgrim through life – as less dense and pressing during his visits to India, for he seems to be able to find a way out of it in an afterlife voyage and search for a new life after death:

Scented flames, –
O, bright flames of cremation,
Anoint the body that through you
Offers itself to the gods.
There is the time of search and migration.
All the destinations and terminals are also the returns. (*Obiranje Limon*, 18; my translation)

It is interesting that the speaker's experience and thinking about life (abroad) ends with a projection into the future, into what is for him a more 'neutral' locale and culture, India – not Slovenia and not Australia. India represents for him, physically and symbolically, 'something in-between', the phrase he uses to describe himself in a previous collection, a Slovenian migrant to Australia ('Pilgrimages', 'For Indira', and 'Vishnu'). Jože Žohar's *Obiranje Limon* connects descriptions of man's existential anguish with questions of migration.

Conclusion: The Future Culture/Literature

Does the future culture/literature of the newly settled migrant countries such as the United States of America, Canada, and Australia belong to the ethnic mosaic, a transnational hybrid or a new fusion of various ethnic identities? Polyvocality and hybridity are recently introduced concepts, in addition to the already well-established multiculturalism. Homi Bhabha (1994) argues that the concept of hybridity as a form of cultural difference, while sometimes regarded as manipulative, allows the voices of the Other/migrant, the marginalised and the dominated to exist within the language of the dominant group whose voice is never fully in control. In recent theoretical debates, diaspora and diasporic writing have been connected to the constructed and transnational nature of identity formation, since the concept refers to both voluntary and involuntary migrations and movements. In the future, migrant/diasporic writing should be examined for how it represents 'otherness' in a text and how it brings this otherness to bear on the actual experience of reading. Contemporary theory of diasporic literature perceives Home as several locales, liberated from the spatial concept of location, which is at the same time deeply embedded in the cultural memory of a migrant and her/his own personal biography. In Jože Žohar's poetry displacement and trans-placement and the fluid diasporic identity, as well as the changing position of the subject in the globalised world, show his contemporary, dynamic global view. The sense of movement in his verse underscores his themes. The two remain the source of an original and assured artistic inspiration in his poetic opus.

Considering the numerous – over a hundred published books (Milena Brgoč, 1996) – and increasingly noteworthy literary works by Slovenian migrants in Australia, at least two ideas for the future suggest themselves. Artistically, important works ought to be more adequately represented in the anthologies of the unified Slovenian literature within the so-called common Slovenian cultural space, a syntagm very rarely heard during the past years; and secondly, literary critics and editors

should try to publish and republish individual literary works, especially if they were previously published in Australia with success. With the increasing number of verse collections and books of prose published during the last years, the situation is improving, yet the status is far from satisfactory.

Among the literary genres in Slovenian migrant writing, (confessional) poetry is by far predominant, followed by short fiction, biographical and documentary fiction and, more recently, novels. Within the Slovenian migrant community there emerges the problem of the literary language, English, which is mastered fully by the second generation of authors – Michelle Leber and Irena Birska – and by some representatives of the first-generation of migrants to Australia – Bert Pribac, Pavla Gruden, Danijela Hliš, and several others. The most important body of migrant writing is, of course, still published in Slovenian, although works by Slovenian migrants written in English (or bilingually), one may claim, also belong within the framework of Slovenian literary sensibility and creativity, a phenomenon that can be found also with other migrant-emitive European nations. Bilingual collections of poems result from a longstanding physical and spiritual displacement, whereby many migrants artistically and intimately increasingly experience Australia as their new or ‘second homeland’. Slovenian migrant experience has recently seen its first major literary expression (and film version) outside the Slovenian diaspora, in the novel by the Tasmanian writer Richard Flanagan, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1997). Flanagan based his book on the tragic life story of his wife Sonja, a Slovenian migrant who had arrived in Australia at an early age with her parents after the Second World War (see Jurak 2000).

Slovenian migrant literature in Australia, despite its relatively short history in comparison with that in the USA deserves special mention and research due to its swift growth and artistic quality. By the beginning of the new millennium quite a few of its *literati* have independently published their collections of poems or prose works in Australia and in

Slovenia, and they have seen a warm reception. The most productive and successful among them justifiably ask themselves why they have not been included in the most significant Slovenian literary anthologies and histories (and thus become 'canonised'), in light of the publicly proclaimed artistic merit of their literary work. They do not wish to be pushed, in Slovenia too, into a kind of ghetto, in which some migrant writers still at times find themselves despite the Australian 'multicultural' environment. Many factors, among which artistic merit is of prime importance, speak in favour of including individual migrant works in the Slovenian literary canon. They frequently transcend the thematisation of the Slovenian migrant experience in Australia and adopt a cosmopolitan existential stance which addresses readers internationally, in Slovenia and abroad.

In the present processes of globalisation, all migrant literature is valuable and should not be treated separately or ghettoised, certainly not for the geographical 'tyranny of distance' and even less so for its artistic merit, which in some instances is high indeed. This has been acknowledged also by 'emitive' nations much larger than Slovenia, with a considerable migrant body living abroad. Spiritual and physical dividedness in which many migrant authors have found themselves may even represent an advantage for artists as, less burdened and with a greater critical (di)stance, they can reflect the world around them, the new migrant environment, and also the world they left behind 'at home' in Slovenia. It is true, however, that their country of origin is also changing quickly and is no longer as it was when they left it. Slovenian migrant writers in Australia translate reality in two different systems, which is why their work can be enriching to both cultures, the source and the target one: thus they emerge as 'transcultural' writers in the best sense of the word, figuring both in the unified Slovenian cross-border cultural space worldwide and the Australian multicultural society. Their empowered literary voice and vision have pluralised and globalised Australian as well as Slovenian literary production *per se* and the spaces

they have created in their diasporic writings are fully open enabling a constant construction, deconstruction and reconstruction.

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