

## HOMER AND SLOVENE CULTURE

### 1.

The beginnings of Homer's influence upon Slovene artistic creativity are veiled in the mists of illiteracy, spun in a net of invisible, scarcely discernible threads, which are not likely ever to be disentangled or definitely identified.

These traces can be felt in many Slovene folk songs where we notice expressions, thoughts and images which are at times surprisingly similar to the Homeric ones. So for instance in a folk song St. Scholastica, who is in mortal danger from the Turks, is suddenly covered with a thick mist and hosts of angels who come to deliver her from her enemies.<sup>1</sup> This reminds us of Homeric scenes in which Apollo saves his protégé Hector by wrapping him in a thick haze, or of Poseidon saving Aeneas in a similar way. The folk wisdom which runs in Slovene proverbs, shows similar traits to the Homeric sayings.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, we come across real Homeric motifs in Slovene folk tradition, in most cases, of course, in a Christianized version, e.g. the motif of Polyphemus,<sup>3</sup> Psychostasis,<sup>4</sup> Gigantomachy.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Cf. Karol Štrelkelj's collection of Slovene folk songs (*Slovenske narodne pesmi*, Ljubljana 1895-1923) 38, 28-32.

2. Cf. Miroslav Zakelj's article, published in the Reports of the Rijeka Secondary School (*Izvestje gimnazije Reka* 1868, 3-25). It is mainly the Croatian proverbs that Zakelj compares with Homer, but these are on the whole identical with the Slovene ones (Zakelj was a Slovene by birth and thus of course knew the Slovene proverbs better than the Croatian ones).

3. The tale was recorded in the mountains near Tolmin by Andrej Kragelj and published in *Ljubljanski zvon* 1886, 266. The role of Polyphemus was in this Slovene tale taken over by the devil, the role of the cunning Odysseus by a Slovene hunter of dormice, who does not present himself as "Nobody," but as "Myself."

4. Cf. Štrelkelj's collection, mentioned above (footnote 1), 386-389, where St. Michael weighs the souls of the dead, or rather their good and bad deeds. This motif, however, which is not exactly a Homeric one, but of older, Egyptian origin, was already a common European motif in the Middle Ages and appeared in the greatest works of art and literature. Cf. Ludwig Kretzenbacher, *Die Seelenwaage* (Buchreihe des Landesmuseums für Kärnten, Klagenfurt 1958). Among the great European poets who sang about this motif after Homer, Kretzenbacher mentions Milton, Klopstock and Schiller. The greatest Slovene poet, France Prešeren, could be added here. He gave to this motif a completely original interpretation: he dreamed that St. Michael had been weighing his and Petrarch's poems. Prešeren's poems were lighter and therefore his scale flew high, but when Laura added her virtue to Petrarch's and Prešeren's beloved Julija hers to Prešeren's poems, the scales were even.

5. Cf. Štrelkelj's collection, 60, 30-35: "I am coming from the third country, / where big

All these motifs, which could undoubtedly be added to by systematic research, show some interweaving of Homeric and Slovene folk tradition, either existing from prehistoric times or created in later centuries, when the mythical stories and other motifs were making their way all over Europe along their marvellous hidden paths. The name of Homer, however, remains in this connection completely invisible in the background; what we discern are only the far-away reflections of his creative genius, only some relationship of souls, Hellenic and Slavic, a relationship in that most intimate substratum, which is common to mankind and which can hardly be defined.

But this chapter could hardly be placed in the history of our connections with Homer, it could at best be defined as a kind of prehistory of these relations. In this period, Homer is not yet physically present—if we may say so—in the Slovene cultural area, though one can indirectly feel the traces of the magic influence which his personality radiates through the centuries.

## 2.

One can speak of Homer's direct presence in the Slovene cultural area only relatively late, especially if we bear in mind the enormous influence the Homeric epos had on poetic creativity in other European countries from the appearance of Humanism onwards.<sup>6</sup>

It is known, however, that a certain Andreas Divus, a native of Slovenia, from Koper in Istria (= *Capodistria* = ancient *Justinopolis*, hence his name "*Justinopolitanus*"), provided one of the first printed translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey, which appeared in Venice in 1537, in Latin prose. But it is uncertain whether this Humanist was of Slovene or Italian origin, for in the towns of the Istrian Littoral with their Slavic hinterland a powerful Romance population had been settled since ancient times.<sup>7</sup>

It is known, moreover, that one of the pioneers of Slovene literature, Jurij Dalmatin, the author of the greatest work of the Slovene Reformation, the translation of the whole Bible (1584), possessed in his private library an edition of Homer in the original Greek.

It is also known that Greek language and literature were taught at the

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people are at home:/ they put one mountain upon the top of another,/ towards heaven they breathe and strive,/ but the higher they get,/ the more powerful thunder-bolts strike them."

6. Cf. Georg Finsler, *Homer in der Neuzeit von Dante bis Goethe* (Leipzig-Berlin 1912); Andrej N. Egunov, *Homer v russkikh perevodah* (Moskva-Leningrad 1964).

7. Some data about this interesting humanist personality, who is not mentioned either in the *Yugoslav Encyclopedia* or in the *Slovene Biographic Lexicon* (or, on the other hand, in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, are gathered in Michaud, *Biographie universelle* (Paris 1811-

Jesuit Grammar School, which was established in Ljubljana in 1596, and that among the Greek authors who were read in the 6th class (*rhetoric*) the teaching programme also included "einiges aus Homer;"<sup>8</sup> in 1670 measures were even taken to give more importance to the teaching of Greek. The themes of the Homeric epics and the Trojan cycle were undoubtedly well-known to the pupils of this secondary school. There is, for instance, an interesting fact dating from 1631, when the Spanish Princess Mary, the bride of the Emperor Ferdinand III, visited Ljubljana. On that occasion the pupils of the Jesuit Grammar School performed a play (*De Rachel pulchra*) in honour of the Spanish princess, and "at the end a student, who represented Paris, the king's son of Troy, awarded a golden apple to the noble visitor."<sup>9</sup>

Homer's influence, however, in this period did not impinge on contemporary cultural situation in Slovenia, but remained inside the school walls.

Baron Ziga Zois von Edelstein (1747-1819), who is considered the guiding spirit of the Slovene Enlightenment, possessed several editions of Homer in his library, among them also an incunabulum, Latin translation of the Iliad, arranged by Laurentius Valla (Brixiae, 1497).<sup>10</sup> But when he, as literary mentor, gave advice to Valentin Vodnik, the first Slovene poet (1758-1819), who was then meditating the creation of a Slovene historical epic, Zois did not recommend him to read Homer, but Homer's competitor of that time, Macpherson's "Ossian."<sup>11</sup> This shows Zois as a true child of his age which showed much more appreciation of Macpherson's forgery than of Homer's poetry.<sup>12</sup>

But Zois's advice to Valentin Vodnik fell on deaf ears; in the latter's sober and merry stanzas there is no trace of Ossian's northern mysticism and

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1828), vol 11, p. 109 (in an article by Weiss), as well as in the study by Giacomo Babuder, *D'alcuni Istriani cultori delle lettere classiche dal millequattrocento in poi* (published in Atti dell' I.R. Ginnasio Superiore di Capodistria 1865, 3-56, especially p. 18 ss.; my attention to this study was called by Prof. Sergio Cella from Padova). Of some importance for the Slovene literary history is the fact that Divus was a friend of the famous humanist Vergerius, the bishop from Trieste, to whom he dedicated his translation of the Iliad with a *Praefatio* written in elegant Latin prose.

8. Cf. Johann Nečasek, *Geschichte des Laibacher Gymnasiums* II (Programm des Overgymnasiums zu Laibach 1860), 6.

9. J. Nečasek, *o.c.*, 8.

10. Cf. A. Gspan - J. Badalič, *Inkunabule v Sloveniji (Incunabula quae in Slovenia asservantur*, Ljubljana 1957), p. 169 and 347.

11. Zois' letter to Valentin Vodnik, dated 30 Nov. 1795, published in *Vodnik-Album* (Ljubljana 1859), 61.

12. It is probable that Zois' enthusiasm for "Ossian" originated from his years as a student, which he spent as a pupil at the Seminario Collegio at Reggio Emilia (1761-1765). For

elated melancholy. On the other hand, one looks in vain for influences of Homeric poetry in Vodnik's rhymes.

Vodnik, however, was not only a poet, he was also the teacher of classical languages at the secondary school in Ljubljana during the time of Napoleon's Illyria. And as a teacher "he knew well the spirit of the Greek language and continuously stimulated pupils to study the Greek examples which he esteemed more highly than the Latin ones," as one of his pupils reported.<sup>13</sup> It is no doubt that among the "Greek examples," which were so highly appreciated and praised by Vodnik, Homer had his place. This supposition can be proved by different arguments.

For instance this very pupil of Valentin Vodnik's Peter Petrucci, later on showed a great interest in epic poetry, which can be seen in his attempt to write an epic poem "*Emonas Erbauung*" as well as in his theoretical meditation, in his later study "*Ideen zu einer Abhandlung über das Epos*,"<sup>14</sup> in which he allotted the highest position to the Iliad.

The second fact which supports our supposition may be found in the attempt made about 1811 by another of Vodnik's pupils' J.N. Primić, to translate the Iliad into Slovene hexameters. This is at the same time the earliest attempt to translate Homer into Slovene. And it is probably no mere accident that J.N. Primić, the purest Romantic among the Slovene writers and a great admirer of Herder,<sup>15</sup> took to this work, for, as is known, Herder adored Homer as the purest "*Volksdichter*" and wrote a number of enthusiastic and deep interpretations of Homer's art.<sup>16</sup> But J.N. Primić, whose character

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just in this period the first Italian translation of "Ossian" was published, provided by Melchior Cesarotti (1763), who raised this Scottish bard, or rather his Scottish mystifier, high above Homer. It is not out of the question that Zois, who in the years of his studies himself attempted to write poetry in Italian and who undoubtedly carefully followed the contemporary trends in Italian literature, also knew Cesarotti's translation and introduction, indeed it would have been strange if he did not, for "quando comparve l'Ossian, girò la testa a tutti" (Francesco de Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana II*, Milano, s.a., 315; cf. also Benedetto Croce, *La letteratura italiana del Settecento*, Bari 1949, 9-10, and Georg Finsler, o.c., 111-112). The source of his enthusiasm for "Ossian" should probably be sought here. And when Zois returned to Ljubljana, "Ossian" was already in great vogue; Denis's translation of "Ossian" into Gerean hexameters had been published in Vienna (1768), and it aroused enthusiasm of the originator of the Slovene theatre, A.T. Linhart, as can best be noticed in many of the poems written in his youth in German, "*Blumen aus Krain*" (1781).

13. Peter Petrucci, *Vodnik und seine Zeit*, published in *Vodnik-Album*, p. 13.

14. Published in the *Programm des academischen Gymnasiums zu Laibach* 1851.

15. Cf. Štefan Barbarič, *Herder in začetki slovenske romantike* (with a German summary: *Herder und die Anfänge der slowenischen Romantik*, Slavistična revija 1968, 231-256).

16. Cf. Georg Finsler, o.c., 429-437.

was very unbalanced (his life ended in a mental hospital), did not have the perseverance and energy, demanded by the difficult work of a translator, and gave it up after the first 17 lines of the first Book of the Iliad. His attempt remained in manuscript, and was only sought out and published a hundred years later.<sup>17</sup>

There is one more argument in favour of our supposition. Vodnik's friend, a preacher and Latinistic poet, Jurij Miklavčič, composed a poem in Vodnik's honour in Latin distichs.<sup>18</sup> One can see from this poem that Vodnik has first sent him a Latin translation of the Iliad and Miklavčič asks Vodnik to send him the German translation of the Iliad as well, to become his double "*Vodnik*"<sup>19</sup> to Homer:

Sum tibi non minimus jam debitor, optime Vodnik!  
Qui mihi Maeonidis sacra legenda dabas.

.....  
Iliadem Latio, fateor, legi ore tonantem;  
Nescio, Teutonica quomodo voce tonet.  
Hanc quoque si fas est eposcere, rure morantem,  
rure reversuram non mihi, quaeso, nega!  
Sic mihi divinum bis commostrabis Homerum,  
ejus et ad cantum bis mihi ductor (Vodnik) eris.

### 3.

As regards the greatest Slovene poet France Prešeren (1800-1849), one can assert with much more certainty than about Valentin Vodnik, that he knew Homer very well and that he read his works often, and with pleasure. His poems as well as his private correspondence are full of Homeric reminiscences. So for instance in Prešeren's most characteristic epic poem, the "*Introduction to 'The Baptism at the Savica,'*" two widely used Homeric metaphors follow:

Like to the torrent in its spate in springtime  
From the steep crag adown the valley rushing,  
All in its path with swiftest waves engulfing,  
All that resists its flood unchecked o'erwhelming,  
Unresting till the barrier breaks before it—

17. Luka Pintar, *Iz neobjavljenih rokopisov (Zbornik Slovenske Matice, Ljubljana 1904. 235-236).*

18. The poem was published by Michael Kastelič in *Vodnik-Album*, p. 43.

19. A pun is made upon this word, for Vodnik means in Slovene "the guide" (*ductor*).

So falls Valjhun upon his pagan foemen.

.....  
When the dawn breaks over the piles of slain,  
They lie like corn or barley after reaping  
Gathered in sheaves and heaped upon the plain.

(Translated by Alasdair MacKinnon)

The first of these two metaphors, the metaphor of the torrent, can be found in the Iliad in at least seven places;<sup>20</sup> it is especially beautifully expressed in the XIth Book (XI. 492-495), where the metaphor of the harvest may also be found (XI. 67-69).

Further frequent expressions used by Prešeren, such as the *power of storms*, the *power of time*, the *power of bad times*, the *power of the army*, the *power of memory* remind us of the Homeric expressions with ἰς, μένος, βίη.<sup>21</sup>

In Prešeren's "*Elegy for my Countrymen*" we find this description of Ithaca:

Ithaca was never rich in  
Men or horses, corn or wine,  
Small and narrow, steep and rugged—  
Yet she boasts age-old renown

For each of her children loved her  
Till his death, with passion true,  
Beside Ithaca despising  
All the towns Odysseus knew.

(Translated by Alasdair MacKinnon)

When Prešeren wrote this description he undoubtedly had in mind the following lines from Homer's Odyssey (IX 25-28):

But Ithaca, though in the seas it lie,  
Yet lies she so aloft she casts her eye  
Quite over all the neighbour continent;  
Far northward situate, and, being lent  
But little favour of the morn and sun,  
With barren rocks and cliffs is over-run;  
And yet of hardy youths a nurse of name;

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20. These places are: IV 452-456, V 88-94, XI 492-497, XIII 137-143, XVI 384-393, XVII 263-266.

21. Such expressions are e.g. μένος ἀνέμων, πυρός μένος, Κρατερή ἰς Ὀδυσσεύς, βίη Διομήδεος.

Nor could I see a soil, where'er I came,  
More sweet and wishful.

(Translation of George Chapman)

In another poem the poet compares the draining of the Ljubljana marsh with the taming of the hundred-handed Briareos about which we read in the first Book of the *Iliad*.<sup>22</sup> In a letter dated 1832 the poet compares his anger with friends who did not wish to publish an abusive sonnet with the anger of enraged Achilles, when Agamemnon took away his mistress Briseis.<sup>23</sup> Especially famous are Prešeren's words in a letter dated 1840, in which the poet condemned the idea that the Slovenes, being a very small nation, should give up their language; according to this idea the Slovenes should melt with other Southern Slav nations into one great Illyrian nation, which would speak the Illyrian language, an artificial mixture of all Southern Slav languages. Prešeren rejected this idea with the words which are spoken in the *Odyssey* by the dead Achilles, saying, he would rather be a swineherd among the living than the ruler of all the dead (XI 489-491).<sup>24</sup>

But although Prešeren read and quoted Homer with such enthusiasm, it was his aim to become not a Slovene Homer, but a Slovene Orpheus. In his most splendid poetic sequence "*The Wreath of Sonnets*," and in the most noticeable place, he expressed the following wish: "Oh, that heaven would show us its favour, and send us an Orpheus who would sing native songs!" In another sonnet Prešeren composed an extensive repertoire of themes from the Slovene past which he offered as a grateful motif to Slovene Homers:

Our fathers' noble exploits in their glory  
Which in the ancient tales we hear with pride  
And how Metullum Caesar's force defied  
And all that passed in old Ljubljana's story,

How for the faith our nation battled long  
And how at Sisak by the Kolpa's side  
The valiant Slovenes stemmed the Turkish tide  
Shall be the burden of our Homers' song.

(Translated by Alasdair MacKinnon)

But the thought that he himself would deal with these themes Prešeren resolutely rejected in the same sonnet, saying that his strings are "too weak to sing about famous battles."

22. Cf. Ivan Tertnik's article "*Briarej v Prešernu*" (*Jahresbericht des Gymnasiums zu Marburg a. Drau* 1898).

23. Prešeren's letter to Matija Čop, dated 7 March 1832.

24. Postscript to a letter dated 20/26 Oct. 1840.

## 4.

The Slovenes, however, were not satisfied with the Orpheus embodied in the genius of Prešeren. The wish to have a Slovene Homer did not die away: on the contrary, it burned on, stronger from year to year and finally grew into a real "Homeric mania."<sup>25</sup> The articles published in Slovene newspapers around 1848 overflow with this wish. The problem of a "Slovene Homer" then becomes the central literary problem.<sup>26</sup> So, e.g., J. Šubić writes "that Valvazor's great books<sup>27</sup> should be read, and much of fame will be found, that has been long awaiting a Slovene Homer or Herodotus."<sup>28</sup> If a Slovene pupil made literary plans at that time, he did not omit to put down: "I should also like to write a national epic in Slovene hexameters."<sup>29</sup> The poem was the more honoured the longer it was. Janez Trdina makes a humorous statement in his survey of then existing Slovene literature with regard to Zemlja's poem "Seven sons," "who are rather spoilt, but because of their long figure rather praised."<sup>30</sup> The articles on culture in the newspapers of the time often express admiration of Serbs and Croats who already have some "Homeric" poems. This admiration, however, was shared by the whole of Europe especially since the Serbo-Croat heroic songs were included as the proof of various hypotheses concerning the creation of Homer's epics. So, e.g., Jakob Grimm wrote in 1826: "Since the Homeric epics we do not know of any phenomenon which would teach us more about the essence and origin of epic than Serbian heroic poetry."<sup>31</sup> But this admiration was nowhere so sincere and ardent than with the Slovenes where it intermingled with feelings of Slav solidarity, fraternal links and utopian Illyrian trends. The beginnings of this enthusiasm stem from the time of Jernej Kopitar (1780-1844), who acquired permanent merit as Vuk Karadžić's mentor and who had often called attention to the parallels between Homeric and Serbian heroic epics. This admiration reached its peak just in the period around 1848, when one could also read such state-

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25. Cf. Rastko Močnik, *Problemi* 1968, 235.

26. Cf. Boris Paternu, *Slavistična revija* 1968, 10.

27. One of the fundamental works necessary for the understanding of the Slovene past, J.J. Valvazor's "*Die Ehre des Herzogtums Krain*" (1689, four volumes), is referred to here. Krain (Kranjska, Carniola) is the central region of Slovenia.

28. *Slovenija*, 28 July 1848.

29. From the notes of Jože Kogej, a later translator of Pushkin (National and University Library of Ljubljana).

30. *Ljubljanski časnik* 1850, p. 284.

31. In his review of Talvja's *Volkslieder der Serben* (cf. Jakob Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften* 4, 419).

ments: "In the rhapsodic-epic poetry of the south Slavs the inheritance of the old Greeks is transmitted through the words of blind rhapsodes and minstrels."<sup>32</sup> A Ljubljana newspaper published the translation of a study by S. Kapper, "The National Epic of the Serbs," where a great number of parallels between Serbian heroic epic and Homer's epic are given.<sup>33</sup> The native philologists wrote studies discussing the essence of epic poetry; the most penetrating among them is Peter Petrucci's "*Ideen zu einer Abhandlung über das Epos*,"<sup>34</sup> in which mainly the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid* and *Nibelungenlied* are compared. The study is concluded with a characteristic wish:

"Möge es (sc. das Nibelungenlied) durch seine Schönheit unserer studierenden Jugend Liebe abgewinnen; möge es durch die Geschichte seiner Entstehung, die jener der Ilias gleich ist, unsere für das Gute empfängliche Jugend zur Forschung und Sammlung der unter den südslavischen Völkern so zahlreichen Heldenlieder und Sagen aufmuntern; möge ein hochbegabter Mann durch Anordnung und Umschmelzung derselben Lascasa's Ahnung, dass in den Romanzen der Illyrier vielleicht der Stoff zu einer Ilias liegt, ihre lang ersehnte Erfüllung finden!"

Poets and poetasters tried to realize these theories in practice in their verses. Therefore it is not surprising that in these years a number of epic attempts appeared, taking examples from Homer, or blindly imitating the Serbian folk songs, attempts which are now only a literary curiosity.<sup>35</sup> Even the best among these versifiers, Matija Valjaveč, did not succeed in creating the Slovene national epic which was so strongly desired by the whole Slovene literary community.<sup>36</sup> The translations of the Serbian folk songs which were often printed by the Slovene newspapers at that time sprang out of similar inclinations.<sup>37</sup>

To awake "the Slovene Homer," to create "the Slav Iliad," these were the unrealized wishes of belated Slovene Romanticism. This was essentially "the wish to have a heroic epic with a brave hero, wonderful historic action

32. Goslar, *Slovenska Bčela*, 15 Sept. 1851.

33. *Ljubljanski časnik*, 13. Sept. - 8 Oct. 1850.

34. Published in *Programm des academischen Gymnasiums zu Laibach* 1851.

35. Such versifications were written by Matija Valjavec, Janez Trdina, Anton Umek Okički, Jovan Koseski, Luka Svetec Podgorski, Josipina Turnogradska, Fran Cegnar, Josip Novak. Most of these epic attempts appeared in the newspaper "*Novice*" in the years 1847-1854.

36. Ivan Grafenauer, *Zgodovina novejšega slovenskega slostva II* (Ljubljana 1911), 232-233.

37. Fran Levstik, the leading Slovene critic of the time, also prescribes Serbian heroic poetry as an example to Slovene writers: "The poems of the Serbian nation should teach us

and fine language. Today it is not hard to see in this wish everything that the Slovenes did not represent after the failure of the 1848 Revolution, what they could not do and what they did not have. The idea of such a heroic epopee was, of course, in the middle of the 19th century in Slovenia still only an illusion, a retreat to an appealing falsehood formed in the subconscious."<sup>38</sup>

But it was difficult to give up this beautiful illusion. And because "a Slovene Homer" showed no signs of emerging, the conservative philologists wanted to create him at any price. So Josip Marn, a man of letters and of comparative merit otherwise, presented the versification "*Abuna Soliman*," written in 1863 by Anton Umek Okiški about the Slovene missionary Knoblehar, as a "*Slovene Iliad*." Josip Stritar made fun of it in one of his "*Vienna Sonnets*": "Abuna Soliman is the Iliad..." The poet Simon Jenko dealt even more mercilessly with this Homeric passion in his parody "*Ognjeplamtič*,"<sup>39</sup> which is really a genuinely anti-epic poem, and the hero, mentioned in the title, is an anti-hero.<sup>40</sup>

Taking all this into consideration, we do not wonder at the resigned words spoken by the novelist Josip Jurčič in the introduction to his tale "*The Daughter of the City Judge*," written in 1886:

"I should consider it a vice and an offence, if anybody dared to say that you, France Prešeren, were not a great poet! But do not be indignant at my reproaching you for not being a prophet. For three decades have passed since you wrote in a beautiful sonnet addressed to the Slovenes:

And all that passed in old Ljubljana's story

.....  
shall be the burden of our Homers' song.

But we look in vain, even today, around the Slovene fields to discover such a Homer. Among the mushrooms, which sprout here in rainy weather, we come across one fungus or another, living from one day to the next, but we seldom see any stronger ones. It is true, that one man or another has begun playing on the lyre and singing of the epic muse, but some among us say—I cannot say whether they say so because of envy or some other reason—that these melodies are more offensive than pleasing to the ear of an expert..."

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how to describe. Every Slovene writer should know, of all dialects primarily, or at least, the Serbian."

38. Boris Paternu, *Slavistična revija* 1968, 11.

39. *Ognjeplamtič* is the humorously pointed name of the main hero; it denotes a man glowing ("*Plamtič*") in the fire ("*ogenj*") of love.

40. Cf. the interpretation of this poem by Boris Paternu "The Structure and the Func-

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And so the final sober judgement came, after so many broken illusions and disappointments: the awareness that Homer is not born in every century and with every nation, the awareness that Homer represents something unique.

The name "Homer," however, had in the meantime penetrated too deep into the Slovene cultural consciousness to be overlooked, it had become a real literary programme. And when this programme could not be realized in the Romantic illusion of a grandiose national epopee, the philologists tried to save at least what they could. Some, with greater literary gifts, endeavoured to translate the Homeric epics in the most authentic form, others, more academically orientated, were engaged in a deep analysis of Homeric poetry, mainly in studying the parallels with the Serbo-Croatian epics.

Janez Trdina (1830-1905) was the first to come to this sober judgement. When he was a youth in his twenties, he wrote in prose an "attempt at a national epic of the Slovenes," entitled "*A Tale of Glasan-Bog*." This epic which according to Trdina's own statement is a "combination of several folk tales and imagery of my own fantasy and thinking," he wrote "extremely quickly, with a fiery soul and such gladness as nothing else before and after."<sup>41</sup> But this very speed in writing was fatal to him, for "in poesia far presto e bene ne Apollo ne Giove a ingegno umano il concedono" (V. Monti). Self-critical as he was, Trdina was probably soon aware himself that this was not "a national epopee"; in other words, that this was not that great poem which critics and the reading public expected from a "Slovene Homer." In the following year he began a new work, he made plans for a historic poem "*The Defence and the Death of the Iapods*," which has an expressively heroic-epic character, but which is in its poetic aspect even less successful than the former. When he thus recognized the limits of his poetic power, he put aside his original epic plans and published the first Slovene printed translation of Homer, the first Book of the Iliad, in the newspaper "Bčela" in the following year (1852). Before that of Trdina's only two attempts at a translation of Homer are known, but they both remained in manuscript; in addition to the above mentioned attempt of J.N. Primić there was another one by Stanko Vraz, who translated some lines from the 19th Book of the Iliad around 1830. Trdina's translation was rather stiff, his hexameters were not smooth, he purposely did not pay attention to caesuras. The translation made an impact, not so much be-

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tion of Jenko's Parody in the Disintegration of Slovene Romantic Epics" (*Slavistična revija* 1968, 7-64; written in Slovene with a summary in Russian).

41. Cf. Janez Trdina's Works, vol. (Ljubljana 1951), 157.

cause of its poetic value, but as a sort of sensation, as "a first attempt to transplant the noble Greek fruit to the Slovene garden."<sup>42</sup>

The attempt did not remain without its repercussions. Jovan Vesel Koseski, the official leader of the Slovene contemporary Parnassus, was personally affected by the fact that a youth and a beginner like Trdina had dared to begin translating "the king of all poets."<sup>43</sup> J.V. Koseski, who some years before that had himself planned a national epic<sup>44</sup> in a few months' time made a similar change to Trdina's and began translating Homer with frantic speed. Let it be mentioned in passing that only then did he begin learning Greek. In the same year, 1852, he published the translation of the 19th Book of the Iliad in *Novice*, the leading Slovene newspaper, and later on he translated five more Books.<sup>45</sup>

Koseski is considered by the Slovene literary historians as a writer of "swollen" pathos, empty rhetoric and false patriotism. His poetic expression, so called "*koseščina*," became a synonym for empty and not easily comprehensible language which borrowed new words from all other Slav languages, and coined new words according to foreign examples put them on a Procrustean bed, stretching or amputating the limbs as desired. Although Koseski aroused in his readers the feeling of pity, so that they wept when reading his verse full of dithyrambic rhythms and of tumultuous character, none of his verses are alive today, or perhaps be only some saying proverbial for lack of sense.

The magnates of Koseski's time, however, could not find enough praise for his translation of the Iliad and they tried to persuade him to translate the whole poem. But critical minds did not share this panegyric opinion. So for example Fran Levstik wrote the following thoughts about this translation:<sup>46</sup>

Who would not laugh when reading how the heroes say in front of Troy: "the final stroke will soon be heard"<sup>47</sup> or when Priam calls Agamemnon a man "of the general decency of a Tsar"<sup>48</sup> or when Helen (*Helenca*)<sup>49</sup> reproaches

42. Cf. Janez Trdina's Works, vol. 2, 53.

43. Koseski's letter to Janez Bleiweis, dated 16 March 1852.

44. He published his epic poem "*The Enchanted Rifle*" in the *Novice* 1847.

45. Besides the 19th he translated also the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 12th, 14th Book of the Iliad. These translations were published in his Selected Works (Ljubljana 1870), 222-302.

46. In Levstik's letter to Tomčič, dated 17 Febr. 1871.

47. Iliad V 284-285: Οὐδὲ σ' ὀϊω δηρὸν ἔτ' ἀνσχήσεσθαι.

48. Iliad III 170: Βασιλῆϊ γὰρ ἀνδρὶ ἔοικε. (translation of A. T. Murray: "he is like unto one that is king").

49. Koseski had a habit of using the diminutive "*Helenca*" for Helen of Troy. Levstik wrote in his criticism of Koseski's translation about this: "When a man hears the name '*Helenca*' he would think a house maid, a nurse or a barmaid is being spoken of."

Paris with "did you make haste on the way home?"<sup>50</sup>... Koseski made such a cynical translation and Homer never sang so. Homer did not use even one inappropriate word in these instances with the exception of ἐμίγην φιλότῃ, καὶ εὐνῇ. But what a translation was made by this "Master of singers!"

(Then Levstik mentions Koseski's translation of the Iliad III 442-448, full of ambiguous, somewhat obscene words, which cannot be found in the original.)

What a foolish old man! It is true, *difficile est saturam non scribere*... At times, to fill in the hexameter, Koseski gives to a hero or goddess a Latin and Greek name, e.g. "Odysseus Ulyxes," or "Minerva Athena," as if it were "table Tisch," "fish Fisch," "porridge Brein" etc.

Let me mention only one more drastic example of Koseski's art of translation: the line Iliad I 592 (πᾶν δ' ἡμᾶρ φερόμεν) was translated by him as "I went on like a balloon..."

But on the other hand it should be mentioned that Koseski was not without an ear for music, his hexameters sounded better than those of many other Slovene poets, he took his translations seriously, and he thought over them a good deal.<sup>51</sup> He was well aware of his difficult task especially with regard to the translation of the Iliad: "The matter is much more difficult than is usually thought. The original is in many instances so dark that the scholars have been trying to throw some light on it for nearly 3000 years, without ever succeeding in illuminating it completely."<sup>52</sup> And finally, he was also aware that his translation was only the prototype which would be soon surpassed by others: "If there is only one Book well translated then my successors, who are not going to be few, will be forced to continue at least on this level, if not better, and this is already a great profit."<sup>53</sup>

## 6.

The number of successors was in fact considerable. Especially in the de-

50. Iliad III 428: ἦλυθες ἐκ πολέμου.

51. A letter written by Koseski to Janez Bleiweis in German (dated 13 April 1852) is proof of that. His meditation about a translation of two Homeric epithets ἀργυρόπεζα and λευκώλενος is an interesting problem discussed in this letter: "So bekommt Thetis *srebronozična* and Hera *limbaroramna*, weil mir *srebronoga* und *beloroka* nicht ganz entspricht, ob-schon auch gegen meine Version manches eingewendet werden kann. *Srebronogata* würde bezüglich des ersten einen schönen Klang geben. Allein, es ist wegen des Beygeschmackes vom großen Fuß nicht anwendbar, zumal es sich um eine olympische Dame handelt, und die Damen, nach einer dunklen Erinnerung aus meinen grünen Lenztagen, für dergleichen Anspielungen sehr feinhörig und zartfühlend zu sein pflegen."

52. A passage from Koseski's letter, mentioned in the former footnote.

53. A passage from the same letter.

cade 1860-70, when the dreams of "a Slovene Homer" were definitely dead, hardly a year passed without a Book or passage from the Iliad or Odyssey being translated. Young philologists and poets measured their strength on Homer, they attempted to establish the flexibility of Slovene words and the sonority of Slovene verses in Homer's hexameters. But all efforts stopped short at attempts: there was hardly a writer who translated more than one Book. By the end of the century nearly two dozen such attempts had been made,<sup>54</sup> but each of the translators soon gave up in spite of his extensive plans and youthful enthusiasm. A great number of these translations appeared only in various magazines issued by pupils of secondary schools, so that they are hardly more valuable than a test-paper written in verses.

The task was more seriously attempted by Valentin Kermavner (1835-1908), a secondary school teacher, well read in Classical philology, with all the distinctions which became an attribute of this branch of science in the 19th century, such as accuracy, clearness of expression and concrete presentation. These distinctions also adorn his text books of classical languages, and are apparent in his translations of the Odyssey. He published three Books, he prepared in manuscript all the first 13 Books of the Odyssey and a translation of the Homeric parody *Batrachomyomachia*. He was unfortunately led by his exaggerated accuracy into an unpoetic pedantry. The style of his translation is in some cases rather literary and prosaic, but he was far from the grotesque degeneration which can be observed in Koseski.

Among the great Slovene poets who translated Homer, special attention should be paid to Simon Gregorčič (1844-1906). His original poems are distinguished by a soft tenderness of feeling and by a charming musicality of poetic expression, which gained him the sobriquet of "the Goriško Nightingale;"<sup>55</sup> his poems were described as "the golden book of the Slovene nation." Gregorčič is a supreme virtuoso of sonority in his verse, which is lavish in rhyme, feminine and dactylic. It is no wonder that this lavishness was also shown in his translations of Homer. In 1879 Gregorčič translated a large part of the first Book of the Iliad, not in hexameters as all his predecessors did,

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54. Detailed bibliographical data about these translations are given by Janko Moder in his Supplement to the translation of the History of Greek Literature (Ljubljana 1966), 563-577. He gives besides the name of each translator some lines from his translation. Let me only add to this survey that a versified translation of the 5th and 6th Books of the Odyssey was also found among the material left by writer Alojz Kraigher (1877-1959), but it is not possible to judge from the manuscript whether this translation, which was undoubtedly made during Kraigher's school years, is by Kraigher or by one of his school-fellows.

55. Gregorčič was born in the village Vrsno near Kobarid, in the Gorica region ("Goričko"), and he also spent most of his life in this region.

but in rhymed iambic tetrameter.<sup>56</sup> In addition to rhymes he enriched his translation in many cases with new images which cannot be found in the original: the Homeric Μοῦσα became "a fairy-singer;" μύρια ἄλγεα "the darkness of misfortune;" ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν "the leader of fighting forces;" κυνὸς ὄμματ' ἔχων "staring like a mad god;" ἐμοῦ ζῶντος was translated "as long as my foot takes firm steps;" instead of the line I 156 b - 157, as it is in the Iliad (ἐπεὶ ἡ μάλα πολλὰ μεταξὺ, οὐρεά τε σκιάοντα θάλασσά τε ἤχηεσσα), he made three lines:

For in between lies many a mile,  
For in between, dark mountains tower,  
For in between, the sea-waves murmur.

These anaphoras cannot be found in the original; nevertheless, they do not disturb the Homeric atmosphere, because they give to the translation an unintentional nuance of authentic folk rhapsody. Gregorčič thus created a melodious poetic work of art, "a work of art, unique, such as no other nation has," as was enthusiastically claimed by one of his friends, the classical philologist Andrej Kragelj. But this was no longer Homer's, it had become Gregorčič's own work of art; instead of a dark ballad, as the Iliad in the first Book really is in essence, we often hear the sounds of an easy, playful romance. Gregorčič, of course, did not choose the rhymed metrical form because of his inability to deal with the hexameter, for he showed later, when he translated the beginning of the 22nd Book of the Iliad in hexameters, how well he could master it.<sup>57</sup>

The first attempt to give both Homer's epics complete to the Slovene public, was made by Gregorčič's above-mentioned friend Andrej Kragelj (1853-1901). This was a prose version or "a tale for Slovene youth," as the subtitle ran, first of the Odyssey (1st edition 1894, 2nd edition 1900), and later of the Iliad too (1st edition 1900, 2nd edition 1909). Gregorčič tried to persuade Kragelj to attempt further translation of Homer in Slovene verses, and Kragelj "threatened" that he would try to do this. Gregorčič, who knew the poetic abilities of his friend only too well, made a joke out of this with an epigram:

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56. The wish that Homer should be translated into Slovene in rhymed iambs was expressed by Fran Levstik in his evaluation of Cegnar's poem "*Pegam and Lambergar*" (1858). But it is also interesting that even Levstik himself did not stick to this rule when he attempted to translate Homer some years later. His translation of different passages from the Iliad, which is in manuscript, is written in hexameters.

57. Gregorčič's translations of Homer remained in manuscript. The poet did not wish to publish them although his friends tried to persuade him. They were first printed only in the 3rd volume of the collected edition of his work, edited by France Koblar (Ljubljana 1951, p. 205-219 and 439-440).

"Quick, Andrej, mount Pegasus, thou Odysseus, for this will be better than all the sharp wits of Prešeren, and the whole of Slovenia will be astound."

Kragelj's work sprang out of his great love of Homer, to whom he dedicated all his energies; and although his paraphrases showed no special artistic power either in the originality of the composition,<sup>58</sup> or in the argumentation of his aesthetic judgement,<sup>59</sup> nor yet in Slovene stylistic expression, his Homeric tales for the youth nevertheless played a significant role in spreading interest in Homer not only among the young but among the Slovene public generally. In recognition of his merits in this field, Simon Gregorčič composed these verses at his death:

Thou too hast sailed away before us  
From lands of failure, fraud and lies;  
Thy body in the deep grave slumbers,  
Thy soul inherits Paradise...

Short was the span to thee allotted,  
A winter's daytime too soon lost —  
A day which in its troubled passing  
Knew less of sunshine than of frost.

But yet one sun on thee shone glowing  
To gild the waning of thy day  
Both light and warmth of thee bestowing —  
Great Homer's own immortal ray.

On this grand volume of all volumes  
Thou, as night neared, work'dst faster yet  
And, thy book scarce complete, departing,  
Left us forever in thy debt.

(Translated by Alasdair MacKinnon)

At the beginning of the 20th century Franc Omerza (1885-1940), a classical philologist, began translating Homer. He also had to give up in the middle of his endeavours: he translated only the first 14 Books of the *Iliad*, which first appeared in a secondary school magazine, *Mentor*, and then in two separate brochures (Books I-IV in 1916, Books VII-XII in 1919). Although his

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58. Kragelj himself said in the introduction to the *Odyssey* that he "diligently compared German writings of the same kind."

59. So, e.g. Kragelj dealt with the *Iliad*, Books XII-XVI, very shortly, saying that these Books sang only about "events of secondary importance."

translation is philologically careful and precise, it scarcely represents any progress in linguistic and metrical views, if compared with Kermavner's translations of the *Odyssey*. The critics blamed him for his lack of Homeric driving force, lack of liveliness and plasticity, crude construction of hexameters, the wrong usage of tenses and unpleasant insertions of unpoetic padding. It was not his fate to make such a translation of Homer as would become "a book for all nation." But if nothing else, Omerza was one of the "relay team" of the Slovene translators of Homer and he passed on the baton to the last one, Anton Sorvè, who finally reached the goal.

In connection with the efforts made to translate Homer into Slovene one more fact should be mentioned which is not yet known to the Slovene public. Oton Župančič (1878-1949), the greatest Slovene poet of the 20th century, also thought of translating Homer. As the writer of the present study was told by Jaro Dolar, director of the National and University Library in Ljubljana, Župančič once wrote to his father, Anton Dolar, a classical philologist, asking him to send him Homer's works in the Greek original and in a Slavonic translation so that Župančič could recast it into Slovene.<sup>60</sup> Dolar complied with Župančič's request, but it is not known that Župančič ever actually attempted to realize this plan. We are not really surprised to hear of Župančič's interest in Homer, for as a translator he aspired to the highest peaks in world poetry; he translated Dante, Goethe, Pushkin, Molière and in particular Shakespeare. We can only regret that he did not realize his plan with Homer, even partially: what has once been well translated by Župančič will be hardly done better by anybody else. Two cantos from Dante's "Hell," translated by Župančič, are even today an example to Slovene translators of this poem. If Župančič had given us at least one book of Homer's this would probably play the same role. The traces of Župančič's studies of Homer might be felt in his fine poem "*Duma*," which is full of majestic dactylic rhythm, and in which real, faultless hexameters sound spontaneously from time to time.<sup>61</sup>

## 7.

Among these efforts to acquire a solid Slovene translation of Homer, which lasted for more than a century, many a critical word was said and many

60. This letter was kept by the Dolar family as a rarity, but was lost during World War II.

61. Some ideas about the poetry of Oton Župančič can be also formed by those who do not know Slovene language, for two longer studies in Italian and French have been printed by Arturo Cronia (Roma 1928) and by Lucien Tesnière (Paris 1931).

a philological, metrical or literary problem raised, which outgrew the narrow scope of professional polemics and made a deep impression on Slovene literary history.

One significant chapter of Slovene literary history, arising from the translations from Homer, is "the Slovene hexameter quarrel." In the eighteenth-seventies all the important Slovene critics, such as Fran Levstik, Fran Levec, Josip Stritar, Janko Pajk, took part in this quarrel; "one of the most furious battles in Slovene literature"<sup>62</sup> flared up. This was the question of the nature of the Slovene hexameter, i.e. the fact that the Slovene system of accents—and therefore of Slovene metrics—is diametrically opposed to the Old Greek quantitative system. How can a Slovene poet "forge" spondees, if real spondees are practically unknown in the Slovene language? What difference should there be between "the forged spondees" and trochees, which cannot be used in a good hexameter? What should the caesuras be like and where should they stand? Should a good Slovene hexameter have only a masculine caesura (such as *penthemimeres*, *trithemimeres*, *hepthemimeres*)—in opposition to the antique hexameter, which can also have only a feminine (trochaic) caesura? Is it true that the Slovene hexameter is improved if the spondee is in the third foot, i.e. exactly in the position in which the antique metrics tried to avoid the spondee and in which the dactyl is nearly always used?

Today when Slovene poets ignore not only all the established schemes of traditional metrics, but when even the basis of punctuation and the principle of rhythm, as an organic tissue of a poem, are very often rejected, such questions may appear pedantic, hair-splitting and almost grotesque. But one hundred years ago these questions inflamed the blood of critics, they were the causes of sharp polemic struggles and they added to the separation of minds into two ideologically opposite groups.

Another question, which was, however, not discussed with such polemic sharpness, but which was nevertheless raised at each translation of Homer, was, how the names of Homeric heroes should be translated. There came to be two extreme positions with regard to this question. Some insisted on the preservation of the most authentic form of the original name, using the argument: if there is anything that each man, and each literary character has a right to have, it is surely the right to an undistorted rendering of his name. The representatives of the other extreme tried to make the names from the antique literature sound like native names, saying it was in the interest of Homer, in the interest of his publicity, to make these heroes close to us,

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62. Milan Pajk, *Zbornik Matice Slovenske* 1900, 13.

familiar, and that this should be shown in the orthography of their names! In accordance with this principle they removed all those sounds, which were not included in the Slovene dictionary, such as diphthongs, double consonants, *y, x, ph, ch, th, rh*. So some wrote: *Tydeus, Phoibos, Aineias*; and others: *Tidej, Feb, Enej*. Some went even a step further and they replaced the suffixes of family names of Homeric heroes ending in -ides with the Slav -iči. Thus the Homeric Πηλείδης, Ἀτρείδης, Νεστορίδης, Αἰγείδης, Φιλείδης, Καπανηιάδης, Τυδείδης became the Slovene *Pelejevič, Anrejeviči, Nestorjeviči, Ajgejeviči, Filejeviči, Kapanojeviči, Tidejeviči*; and Zeus himself was changed from *Kronios* into *Kronojevič!*

Nowadays the translators are not led into such extremes of Slav romanticism. But the question of translating not only Homeric but also all other old Greek names into Slovene is not yet satisfactorily solved; it still causes a lot of difficulties to the translators and forces them to make various kinds of compromise.

## 8.

As it has already been mentioned Slovene interest was redirected after the "sobering," in two ways: on the one hand into translations of Homer's epics, and on the other, academic, into the studies of Homer's poetic creativity, whose basis our philologists hoped to ascertain mainly by comparisons with the Serbian and Croatian heroic epics.<sup>63</sup> The scholars in Slavic studies<sup>64</sup> showed even more enterprise than the classical philologists, and published several important studies, which also aroused lively interest in the world of international scholarship.

The parallels between Serbo-Croatian poetry and Homer had already been pointed out by Jernej Kopitar (1780-1844). In 1816 for instance he wrote in a review of a collection of Serbian national poems:<sup>65</sup>

"An Homer wird man hier überhaupt am öftersten erinnert; Königssöhne tragen selbst Briefe, umarmen Diener; Kaiserinnen pflegen Verwundete; Prinzen hüten Schafe, Helden weinen usw., und um der Ähnlichkeit die Krone aufzusetzen, sind es blinde Rhapsoden, die diese Lieder zur Geige absingen."

A short, but interesting study of the imagery in Homer and in Serbian

63. I should, however, not like to undervalue other minor studies, which were published mainly in various reports of secondary schools during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The titles of these can be obtained from the bibliography of these reports.

64. A sharp line between the Slavic and classical scholars can hardly be drawn, because the Slovene classical philologists were mainly Slavic scholars, and vice versa.

65. Jernej Kopitar, *Kleinere Schriften* (Wien 1857), 349.

national songs was written by Maks Pleteršnik (1840-1923).<sup>66</sup> In this study the main subject was a comparative analysis of motifs which are reflected in images. Out of these motifs a mosaic was made, including the sparkles of all the cosmos, fire, the heavenly bodies and phenomena connected with the weather, as well as the world of plants and animals, everyday situations of man's life and man's activities, just as this cosmic world is shown in Homeric epic on the one hand, and in the Serbian folk songs on the other. This mosaic design reminds us of "*Bild der homerischen Gleichniswelt*" recently so successfully presented by Wolfgang Schadewaldt.<sup>67</sup> Although his reception was rather modest, Pleteršnik's work did not remain completely unnoticed in professional literature.

The researches of Gregor Krek (1840-1905), a professor of Slavonic philology at Graz University, concerning the numerous variants of the Polyphemus' motif in the folk tradition of different Slavic nations, was much more noted.<sup>68</sup> His findings have been—to a greater or smaller extent—taken into account by all who have dealt after him with this interesting motif.<sup>69</sup>

The greatest Slovene philologist of the 19th century, Fran Miklošič (1813-1891), had a great interest in Homer. As a student at the University at Graz (after 1830) he also made Stanko Vraz enthusiastic for Homer,<sup>70</sup> and it is probable that in this period he also attempted a translation of Homer.<sup>71</sup> In his

66. The study was first printed in German: *Die Vergleiche im Homer und in den serbischen Volksliedern* (Programm des k. k. Gymnasiums zu Cilli 1865, 3-10); and later on in a slightly different form also in Slovene (*Zora* 1873, 312-316 and 325-330).

67. In the first chapter of his paper "*Die homerische Gleichniswelt und die kretisch-mykenische Kunst*" (Wolfgang Schadewaldt, *Von Homers Welt und Werk*, Stuttgart 1951, second ed., 130-132).

68. Gregor Krek wrote about this motif in a serial published in the Slovene magazine *Kres* (1882), then he devoted to it a long chapter in his "*Einleitung in die slavische Literaturgeschichte*" (Graz 1887, 2nd ed., 665-759). Before that he put his material at the disposal of a Danish scholar, Christian Nyrop, for his study "*Sagnet om Odysseus of Polyphem*" (Kopenhagen 1881). Additional material on this theme was published by Krek in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 1898, p. 305 ss.

69. Cf. O. Hackmann, *Die Polyphemsage in der Volksüberlieferung* (Abhandlungen Akademie Helsingfors 1904, passim); Ludwig Radermacher, *Die Erzählungen der Odyssee* (Sitzungsberichte Akademie Wien, phil. hist. Kl. 178, 1, 1915, 13),

70. Miklošič was in his youth a great friend and a kind of literary mentor to Stanko Vraz, whose dedication of an epic poem ("*Badji Klanjac*") to Miklošič is a proof of that. Here, the poet says among other things: "Do you still remember how I walked with you through pure spheres, from Maro and Homer, from Byron and Alighieri to Saavedra? We enjoyed our walks in the gardens of the Hesperides, it was pleasant when we drank from the springs of Pierides, we were free of all care..."

71. Cf. Anton Slodnjak's note in: Stanko Vraz, *Slovenska djela II* (Zagreb 1952, 251).

mature years he wrote a study "*Die Darstellung im slavischen Volksepos*,"<sup>72</sup> including in it a number of interesting parallels from Homer in the analysis of Slavic folk songs. The material collected in this study is mainly based on Serbian, Croatian, Bulgarian and Russian folk songs; in some cases the parallels are also made from other Slav languages, from Lithuanian and from modern Greek. In the introduction to this study Miklošič describes himself as a supporter of "the theory of minor poems" ("*Kleinliedentheorie*") and he throws down a challenge to the numerous opponents of this theory. Although the study is wrongly based upon this initial supposition, it nevertheless includes a great number of interesting observations, which are in many cases surprisingly near to the contemporary parallel research into Homeric and Serbo-Croatian epics, as carried out by Milman Parry and A.B. Lord. In some cases, Miklošič roughly anticipates a large part of the programme of the later Parry-Lord research into oral poetry.

But Parry and Lord considered as the forerunner of their research not Fran Miklošič (they were obviously not acquainted with his study at all), but another Slovene, Miklošič's disciple Matija Murko (1861-1952), a professor of Slavic studies at the Universitè in Graz, Leipzig and Prague. A.B. Lord writes about him: "The wisest accounts of singing and of field work are to be found in the writings of Matija Murko, a true pioneer. See especially his posthumously published *Tragom srpsko-hrvatske narodne epike*, vols. I and II (Zagreb 1951), and his earlier works listed therein. All of these are important ..."<sup>73</sup> Then he enumerates five most significant of Murko's studies of this theme. It is not strange therefore that Matija Murko should have acquired a name in Homeric studies accorded to nobody else among the Slovenes, although his studies are dedicated chiefly to Serbo-Croatian heroic poetry, and scarcely touch on Homer. Albin Lesky writes about him in his *History of Greek Literature*:<sup>74</sup>

"Richtungsweisend waren die Arbeiten des Slawisten Mathias Murko, der bereits vor vierzig Jahren an lebendiger südslavischer Epik Wesenszüge aufwies, denen für das Verständnis frühgriechischer Heldendichtung entscheidende Bedeutung zukommt."

72. Published in *Denkschriften Akademie Wien*, phil. hist. Kl. 38, 3 (1890), translated also in Russian (Moscow 1895). Cf. Rajko Nahtigal, *Slavistična revija* 1954, 279-280.

73. A.B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1960), 280-281, footnote 1.

74. Albin Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* (Bern-München, 2nd ed., 1963), 32. - Murko's findings were also highly appreciated by the nestor of English classical philologists, Gilbert Murray.

## 9.

Thus the time was ripe for the realization of the long-felt wish of the Slovenes to have the Iliad and the Odyssey in a complete poetic translation. In the meantime the Slovene philologists had paid their tribute to the Homeric studies, their colleagues, translators, sweated a good deal during the stations of the cross through which the Slovene hexameter had to be taken. With these efforts the small Slovene nation acquired a kind of moral right and thus created the conditions for the plucking of this most noble fruit of the Hellenic garden.

This hopes were fulfilled by Anton Sovrè (1885-1963), "a master of the antique" or "the last humanist," as he was often called.<sup>75</sup>

One can hardly imagine the scope and significance of the Sovrè's rich contribution to the Slovene humanistic tradition. During the forty years of his activity he presented to his countrymen in his artistically perfect translations the greatest works of the Greek and Latin writers, beginning with the Presocratics, the Lyricists, the Tragic poets and Herodotus, then continuing with Plato, Plutarch, Lucian, Lucretius and Horace to Apuleius, Marcus Aurelius and St. Augustine. In addition to this he wrote a monograph on the ancient Greeks (1939), in which he gave a synthesis of his views upon the Hellenic world, written in essay form. His disciple Alojz Rebula, one of the most prominent modern Slovene writers, was fully justified in writing, "that Sovrè did among us for the Classics something that had not been done by any Slovene before him, he served it with an energy which represented a real biological miracle, he ploughed the desert for all of us, and he did this in such a way that the plough will not be needed for at least a century... Sovrè translated Herodotus so well that competition would be hopeless... And his share in the field of Slovene studies! His indefatigable coinage, which was not directed by such infallible taste as that of Župančič, but which sprang out of the same conviction that the Slovene language is a sleeping queen who should be enchanted back to consciousness and to life. When he died, I once again bowed before the miracle of our Moderna,<sup>76</sup> before this single explosion of the national genius, the spark of which was also Anton Sovrè..."<sup>77</sup>

In the chorus of Ancient poets who attracted Sovrè's attention Homer

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75. I have tried to give a detailed presentation of Sovrè's life and work in *Slovenski biografski leksikon III* (1967), 474-476.

76. *Moderna*—a Slovene literary movement at the end of 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century.

77. *Nova pot* 1964. 102.

could not be ignored. Even when Sovrè spent some time in Montenegro, as an officer of the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War, he enjoyed listening to the heroic poetry of the "*guslari*," and to the melancholic lamentations of Montenegrin women and tried to find similarities between this and Homeric poetry, which he had already begun to love as a pupil in secondary school. He made long and careful preparations for the Slovene translation of Homer. His first attempt was published in 1942. This was a selection from the Iliad, which included about one fourth of the Homer's text. A lively introduction to the book was especially important: it was a real revelation to us. Sovrè condensed into some 40 pages the most significant findings on the excavation of Troy, the Homeric question, epic style and all other problems which may help us better to understand Homer and his age.

But Sovrè was not satisfied with selection. Another nine years and the translations of the complete Iliad and complete Odyssey were published. This year, 1951, has remained in the history of Slovene literary translation as "Homer's year."<sup>78</sup> Exactly four centuries had passed since the appearance of the first printed Slovene book.

The Slovene hexameter in Sovrè's translation sounded fine as never before. The translator was well aware of this fact, and therefore he wrote the following words: "I never considered the Slovene hexameter with regard to its rhythm a foreign plant grafted on native stock, as one can still feel with the German hexameter,"<sup>79</sup> but as a form which corresponds to somewhat elevated Slovene prose in a completely free way." Out of this reflection on the hexameter and out of his practical use of it, Sovrè even formed a theory about the dactylic nature of the Slovene language: he found spontaneously written but nevertheless faultless hexameters even in the prose works of the greatest Slovene writer Ivan Cankar, and also in common everyday prose.<sup>80</sup>

The translation of Homer surpassed all expectations. The experts were, however, slightly restrained in their judgements: the archaeologists called readers' attention to some anachronisms, Slavic scholars blamed Sovrè for archaic tendencies in language, classical philologists for Latin stressing of Greek names. But these were minor points if we remember for instance that Vincenzo

78. Both books, the translation of the Iliad and of the Odyssey, really appeared in 1951, although the year 1950 appears on the title-page of the Iliad.

79. Sovrè is obviously carrying on the polemic against an argument presented by Fran Levstik some hundred years ago in his criticism of Koseski: "I cannot say that our language is created for hexameters, just as the German is not. Our hexameters are forced and have no root in the language."

80. Anton Sovrè, *Daktilotdnos Cankarjeve proze (Jezik in slovstvo 1956-57)*, 326-327.

Monti, in his Italian translation not only stressed Homeric names in the Latin manner, but made Homeric Gods into Roman ones—*Hera* was changed into *Juno*, *Hephaestus* into *Vulcan*, *Ares* into *Mars* etc. Besides, the archaic characteristic suits Homer well, for it gives him the appeal of the distant past; the archaic vocabulary, enriched with dialectic idioms, is some sort of Slovene counterpart to the Homeric dialect; for this dialect was completely understood by the Greeks, although it was not spoken in such a form anywhere, but it absorbed the elements of different speeches and carried over the inheritance from one generation to another.

The Slovene public was far less pedantic and Sovrè's translation was accepted with enthusiasm: in 16 years 8 editions of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* followed, either complete or in selections,<sup>81</sup> and this for a nation which numbers less than two million! The translation was especially warmly received by many Slovene writers. One of the most inventive Slovene novelists of the younger generation, Andrej Hieng, published his "*Diary on Reading Homer's Iliad*,"<sup>82</sup> in which he says:

"The *Iliad* enchanted me, I was lost in the forest of Homer's hexameters, and I hardly knew any other reality but the poet's ... The *Iliad* is the most accomplished translation of a work of art in Slovene literature. The *Iliad* is just as necessary for our nation as Shakespeare is, and I dare say that we have had more luck with it. I could never quite forget when reading Shakespeare in Slovene that it was a translation, but I could do that with Homer all the time. I spoke with people who are experienced in these things and I thought it out myself: the translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* represent enough work for one complete human life... When I come to Ljubljana tomorrow the stars will appear among the clouds. Then I shall half-close my eyes and

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81. The books appeared in the following order: the *Iliad* in 1951 (see n. 78), the *Odyssey* in the same year 1951. Sovrè published also a prose version of the *Odyssey* for youth in the same year 1951; it was also translated into Serbo-Croatian and three reprints of this translation appeared there (1953, 1955, 1961). In 1956 a selection of 8 Books from the *Iliad* appeared, in 1959 a second, enlarged edition of this selection. In 1964 the second edition of the prose version of *Odyssey* was reprinted, in 1965 the second edition of the complete *Iliad*, in 1966 the second complete edition of the *Odyssey* appeared. —Let it be mentioned briefly that the first edition of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were illustrated by Marij Pregelj, whose illustrations were highly admired by painters and art critics, but were critically received by classical philologists. The artist used in them a rich treasury of artistic material, he joined a number of different elements into single monumental composition, and so he created an expressive artistic explanation of the Homeric contents.

82. Published in magazine '*Beseda*' 1951-52, 114-119.

in the shimmering rays I shall notice among the heavenly bodies, the messenger of the gods, Iris... Thus was I enchanted by the old man."

In Sovrè's translation Homer really became a popular Slovene book. And if we meet more and more often in contemporary Slovene literature Homeric heroes and Homeric regions, either as literary motifs or symbols, or as far-away reminiscences, then this is due perhaps not to Sovrè alone, but at any rate principally to him.

# 10.

Let us briefly retrace our steps.

If one compares the fate of Homer in Slovene culture with his fate among other European nations, we can first establish a long delay. Everything comes so late with the Slovenes. The wish to have a national Homer was a kind of puberty which other European nations underwent during the period of the Renaissance; we need only remember Trissino's *"Italy Liberated"* and Tasso's *"Jerusalem Liberated"* in Italian literature, and Ronsard's, Chapelaine's or Scudery's epics in French! The Slovenes were beset by a similar mania only three centuries later.

There is a similar case with translations. When J.N. Primić, as the first translator of Homer, weakly stammered out the first seventeen hexameters in Slovene in 1811, other European nations already possessed their artistic translations, some of which have not yet been surpassed. The Germans had Voss's translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey some decades earlier; the Italians had in the same year Monti's Iliad, "opera tra le più compiute e perfette e stupende di tutta la letteratura italiana,"<sup>83</sup> and only a few years later Pindemonte's Odyssey (1822); Gnedič was translating the Iliad into Russian in those years (1809-1829); not to mention the English, who came to know Homer's poetry two centuries earlier through Chapman's poetic translations (1598-1615), for which "the learned well may question it, whether in Greek, or English, Homer writ" (S. Sheppard). It is true that the Croats had Maretić's complete translation of Homer only towards the end of the previous century (the Odyssey in 1882, the Iliad in 1883, but this is still 70 years earlier than the Slovenes), although they had paid homage to Homer one hundred years before with two beautiful Latin translations, Kunić's Iliad (1776)<sup>84</sup> and Zamanja's Odyssey (1777).

83. Manara Valgimigli, *La traduzione della Iliade* (Vincenzo Monti, *Opere*, Milano-Napoli 1953), 3.

84. This work served as a basis for Monti's translation, so that Foscolo made fun of him in the well-known epigram, calling Monto "gran traduttore dei traduttori d' Omero."

Nor were the Slovenes spared the polemics which begin with the translation of Homer and which then overstep the limitations of a professional debate and become a central literary problem. The difference is again in the hundred years' delay: the French had experienced the storm caused by the translation of Mme Dacier and of all its consequences at the beginning of the 18th century; with the Slovenes a similar storm raged in the form of the quarrel over the Slovene hexameter as late as the second half of the 19th century.

However, the tough willingness and tremendous energy with which this small nation tried to catch up with its great neighbours, and to make up for the delay, remains the fact at which we may really be surprised. This energy is reflected mainly in a long range of attempts which follow from one decade to another and which all aim at one goal, the poetic translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This goal has been achieved and Homer is now present in the Slovene culture and society as never before. But this presence, no doubt, signifies only the beginning of some new, even richer chapter in the history of our meetings with Homer.

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