

THE IMAGERY OF HELLAS IN SLOVENE LITERATURE

Memoriae Basilii Laourdas sacrum

Although more than a thousand kilometers separate the Slovenes and the Greeks, we are not strangers. We meet traces of Greece everywhere, we can feel its presence at every step. Let me illustrate this closeness with the words which were written by a Slovene writer, Alojz Rebula, not long ago after his walk through his native town!¹. «Telephone wires are buzzing in the wind in a Greek way... The obelisk over the bay is Greek... Half-pillars on the façade of the nearby palace are Greek... The anxieties of our lives, our irreconcilable Why is Greek...»

As this present-day writer has felt the nearness of Greece, when he was walking through his native town, we shall feel it as much or even more if we go for a short walk into the past, into the history of Slovene literature.

The history of Slovene poetry usually begins with the name of *Valentin Vodnik* (1758-1819). He was not really a great poet, but a modest, hard working and industrious versifier, who has also written a few deeply-felt lines in some of his happy moments. His longest poem, entitled *Illyria Revived*, was written in 1811. It is an ode on Napoleon Bonaparte whom the poet considered—along with a great proportion of the small group of Slovene intelligentsia—a noble and benevolent knight who will support the Slovene nation with its struggle for political and cultural revival. To Vodnik and his disciples «Illyria» was, of course, a synonym for «Slovenia» because of the incorrect theory that the Slovenes were autochthonous inhabitants of the countries in which they live today and direct descendants of old Illyrian tribes. As the poet himself states, «Illyrian» would be, according to this theory, only an old label for a «Slovene»:

A Latin and Greek
would call me «Illyrian»,
but all the natives
call me «Slovene»².

1. Alojz Rebula, *Gorje zelenemu drevesu. Dnevnik* (A Diary). Maribor 1971, p. 158.

2. V. Vodnik himself translated this poem in Latin. The mentioned lines run in Latin translation as follows:

Illyrium eum vocat
Latinus et Graecus,
Slovenos se dicunt
indigenae omnes passim.

This theory was well supported by the fact that Napoleon united a considerable part of Slovene regions in a political structure, to which he gave the name of the «Illyrian provinces». Valentin Vodnik approved of this Napoleon's act in the mentioned poem. Vodnik's enthusiasm grew out of sincere patriotism. In the poem, Illyria is presented as a personification of the Slovene nation, who concludes her monologue with the following meaningful program¹:

I'm leaning
with one arm on Gaul,
and giving the other
friendly to Greece.

Corinth stands
at the head of Greece,
Illyria lies
in the heart of Europe.

Corinth was called
the eye of Hellas,
Illyria will be
Europe's ring.

Illyria should thus rely upon France on one hand and upon Greece on the other. This attachment was obviously not meant geographically but culturally and politically. The poet intentionally omitted two immediate neighbours, Germany and Italy, that exercised the greatest threat to the Slovenes throughout the centuries. Instead of this natural neighbourhood, the poet envisioned an alliance with the distant France and with the then even more distant Greece. The reliance upon France is politically and emotionally comprehensible as the poem is dedicated to Napoleon and was written at the time of the French military presence in our country. It is, however, surprising, that Greece is mentioned in this context: our poet, as a philhellene, obviously saw

1. Or, in Vodnik's mentioned Latin translation:

Unam manum innixam
in Galliam habeo;
alteram vero Graecis
amice porrigo.

In Graeciae fronte
Corinthus sita es,
Illyria in corde
Europae iacet.

Corinthus fuit dicta
Graeciae oculus,
Illyria anulus
Europae fiet.

in Greece a spiritual power that was equal to Napoleon's political power.

And this, exactly, is one of this intuitive, far-seeing thoughts by which Vodnik surpassed himself. The French cultural presence disappeared from Slovene geographic area for half a century after the defeat of Napoleon's large army. Greece, however, has remained present all the time as a spiritual power that was giving support to Slovene poets and intellectuals. Let us mention just some of them. Firstly, the greatest, the most eminent of all Slovene poets, *France Prešeren* (1800-1849).

In one of his poems, Prešeren explicitly calls Greece, «Greece the Wise». He considers Greece first of all as a source of wisdom and knowledge; in Greek mythology and history he finds an inexhaustible vocabulary for illustration of his thoughts and feelings, strivings and longings. Parnassus is, of course, most often mentioned of all Greek countries, and it has become, in the transplantation of the poet, «the young Parnassus», «the native Parnassus», «Parnassus of our fathers». And it is this Parnassus, on which the poet places Greek gods and heroes, poets and scholars: Aeolus and Dioscuri, Terpsichore, Thalia and Clio, Giants and Erinyes, Plutos, Charon and Kerberos, the surgeon Machaon and the unhappy son of Poias, Philoctetes, Helen of Troy and the beautiful priestess Hero of Abydos, Homer, Sappho, Pindar, the learned Aristarchus and the painter Apelles—we meet all these and a number of other figures of the Hellenic world in Prešeren's poems, in his Parnassus. This Parnassus is by no means an idyllic country, drawn with clear contours into the ethereal spheres like the Parnassus of other romantic authors, and later in the famous Parisian *École Parnassienne*. His Parnassus reminds us of a more harsh Karstic countryside:

The lawns of Parnassus were deserted,
moss, darnel and thistle at the sides, in the middle.

The image of Greece, as Prešeren sees it, is beyond all artificiality and idealization: the Greek landscape is for him cruel reality, on which only the love of its sons and the power of their spirit impressed a sign of immortality. Such is, for instance, the image of Odysseus' country 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...

(Translated by Alasdair MacKinnon)

Similar is the description of mountainous Thrace in the «Wreath of Sonnets»:

Above them savage peaks the mountains raise,
Like those which once were charmed by the refrain
Of Orpheus, when his lyre stirred hill and plain,
And Haemus' crags and the wild folk of Thrace.

(Translated by V. de S. Pinto)

This realistic vision regarding Hellas does not surprise us. This is a point of view that illustrates, how a small nation can also rise to immortality despite its smallness and poverty.

Prešeren acquired such an image of Hellas by reading constantly Greek classical authors. It is beyond any doubt that he also sympathized with the Greeks in their fight for liberation from the Turkish yoke. He admired Byron who participated in this fight, and who found his death in it, Prešeren was the first to translate Byron into Slovene.

Perhaps, an important part in this acted also Prešeren's best friend, the learned classical philologist and enthusiastic byronist Matthias Čop (1797-1835). In this connection may I remember the fact, that just some weeks ago, in Čop's manuscripts were discovered some Greek folk-songs from the time of Greek fight against Turkish tyranny¹. Obviously, Čop has become so enthusiastic about Greek folk-songs, that he even made a copy of them with his own hand.

In his poems Prešeren often mentions «slavery which Christians have to endure under the Turks». Prešeren's Inscription on a bell is also interesting. It begins with the following lines:

My brass was found at the botton of the sea,
As Navarino put an end to the Turkish kingdom in Hellas.

The inscription refers to the famous battle at Navarino where the allied navy conquered the Turkish marine force (1827); it was this victory that made the rising of the Greek nation successful. The victors then raised the guns made of brass out of the sunken ships and sold the brass to bell-founders all over Europe. They sold approximately 1000 hundred weights of such brass in Ljubljana only². From this brass the mentioned bell was made. It is now in the church of saint Jošt above Kranj (25 km north of Ljubljana) where it is still

1. This discovery was made by contemporary Slovene poet Lojze Krakar, who also entrusted these particulars to me.

2. Cf. A. Slodnjak's remark in his edition of France Prešeren, *Pesmi in pisma II* (Poems and Letters II). Kondor 35, Ljubljana 1960, p. 271.

announcing, with Prešeren's inscription, the victory over the Turks and the beginning of freedom for Greek nation.

Besides Vodnik and Prešeren, there is another Slovene to be mentioned who was neither a poet nor a writer yet he exercised great influence upon the Slovene as well as the Serbian literary creativity with his philological and tutorial activity. This was the famous philologist *Jernej Kopitar* (1780-1844) — a generation younger than Vodnik, older than Prešeren, well acquainted with both of them, but not exactly a friend of either of them. Kopitar was an eager catholic, a conservative and Austriaphil in his belief, and a forerunner of romanticism and a great philhellene in his literary orientation. He had personal relationship with a number of Greek scholars and writers, merchants and patrons, who lived in Vienna at that time, and he reported enthusiastically in Austrian newspapers on their efforts for a renewal of Greek literature.

He greeted, for instance, the Greek newspaper «Mercury», which archimandrit Anthimos Gazi started to publish in Vienna, with the following enthusiastic words: «... The Greeks! Who of us is not reminded by this name of everything that is beautiful and great mankind has created! Europe, the smallest of all continents, owns to the Greeks its spiritual and thus also its political supremacy over the others. As long as the immortal Greek masterpieces are read, humanism will not decay on earth. Partly by sending their talented young men to German and Italian colleges, partly by founding schools in Greece itself, the Greeks endeavour, now more than ever—according to their own true words—'to awaken the Muses to return to their old native country'. Long live men, who dedicate their wealth like the brothers Zosima, or their knowledge like Korai and Gazi, or both at the same time (together with his decisive spiritual influence) like the new Vlachian metropolitan Ignatios to this high purpose!»¹.

1. Vaterländische Blätter IV 160-162 = Kopitar, Kleinere Schriften, herausgegeben von Fr. Miklosich (Wien 1857), 73-74: «... Griechen! Wem von uns ruft dieser Name nicht alles schöne und große, was je die Menschheit vollbracht, ins Gedächtnis zurück! Den Griechen verdankt Europa, der Kleinste der Weltteile, sein geistiges und eben dadurch auch sein politisches Übergewicht über die übrigen alle. Nie, so lange die ewigen Meisterwerke der Griechen gelesen werden, kann Humanität auf Erden untergehen! Teils durch Absendung talentvoller Jünglinge auf die Schulen Deutschlands und Italiens, teils durch Errichtung von Schulen in Griechenland selbst streben die Griechen nun mehr als jemals nach ihrem eigenen schönen Ausdrücke 'die Muses in ihre alte Heimat zurückzurufen'. Heil den Männern, die wie die Gebrüder Zosima ihren Reichtum, oder wie Korai und Gazi ihre Kenntnisse, oder wie der neue Metropolit der Walachei, Ignatios, beides zugleich (samt ihrem entscheidenden geistlichen Einfluß) diesem schönen Zwecke weihen». Cfr. also these enthusiastic Kopitar's words (Kleinere Schriften p. 94-95): «Keine andere Nation hat bisher im ganzen jene Stufe der Humanisierung erreicht, auf der das Volk des Perikles einst stand. Rom hat später zwar

Kopitar was especially interested in the discussion on pronunciation of the old and the new Greek, and took and defended Erasmian viewpoint and rejected the Reuchlinian pronunciation. He also condemned the artificially forced intrusion of old Greek elements into the new Greek, and labeled it 'macaronismus'¹. He published (in German) a number of important articles on this matter, among which the most extensive was his dispute with Prof. Neidlinger, entitled «Über Alt-und Neugriechisch»². Yet even in this professional debate he could not help but release his romantic enthusiasm and with his prophetic vision he announced the resurrection and revival of the new Greek literature: «Latin is dead forever, so is Greack. Here Italian has developed from the former—the daughter even more beautiful than her mother, there French and there again Spanish and Portuguese. Similarly also the new Greek has developed from the old Greek in the course of ten to twelve centuries and it is spoken now by three to four million people. It is waiting only for its Dante in order to establish also an independant literary language... In the same way as Italian has developed anew and majestetically from the ruins of Latin, the new Greek will also flourish some time...»³.

He welcomed the publication of two Greek newspapers in Vienna (Ἑρμῆς λόγιος and Ἑλληνικός Τηλέγραφος)⁴, he even took deep interest in the

Griechenland unter jocht und ausgeplündert: doch - Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit; der Römer ward beinahe selbst zum Griechen; und nachdem Constantin den Sitz des Reiches nach Byzanz als den Mittelpunkt der drei Welttheile verlegt hatte, gab der Römer Justinian sogar Gesetze in griechischer Sprache und noch einmal beherrschte wie unter Alexander der überwundene Grieche die Welt. Zwar war Justinian kein Perikles, kein Alexander, und die Griechen seiner Zeit aus den ehemaligen Männern durch armselige Mönche verküppelte Zwerge; aber in jenen und den darauf folgenden barbarischen Jahrhunderten waren es am Ende doch nur sie, die das Bischen Wissen und Kunst und die Liebe dafür noch (auch das macht ihnen Ehre, unter solchen Umständen lernbegierig gewesen zu sein) nach Italien und Frankreich wallfahrten, um ihren Homer verstehen zu lernen».

1. Or also a «Genengsell von Alt - und Neugriechisch» (Bartholomaei Kopitarii Scriptorum Pars II, ed. R. Nahtigal, Ljubljana 1944, p. 398.

2. Jahrbücher der Literatur VI (Wien 1819), 123-153 = Barth. Kopitarii Scriptorum Pars II, p. 106-137.

3. Barth. Kopitarii Scriptorum Pars II, p. 128-129: «Todt auf immer ist die lateinische Sprache, todt auf immer auch die griechische. Aus jener hat sich hier die italienische, der schönen Mutter schönre Tochter, dort die französische, hier die spanische, portugiesische etc. neu gestaltet. Und eben so aus der altgriechischen im Verlaufe von zehn bis zwölf Jahrhunderten die neugriechische, nun gesprochen von drey bis vier Millionen, die also nur noch Ihren Dante erwartet, um auch als Schriftsprache selbstständig aufzutreten... So wie aus den Trümmern des Lateins das Italienische sich neu und herrlich gebildet, so wird auch das Neugriechische einst blühen...».

4. Cf. Kopitar, *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 94-110 and 198-208.

typographical problems of the Greek printers there¹. He wrote a report on a collection of poems by Kaminar Christopoulos, whom he characterized «the new Anakreon»². He wrote about the dramatization of the Iliad by the same author (Δράμα ἡρωϊκὸν εἰς τὴν αἰωλοδωρικὴν διάλεκτον), as well as about Fauriel's collection of Greek folk songs (Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne, Paris 1824)³, he knew even the translation of Molière's Tartuffe by Kokkinaki⁴.

Kopitar especially admired the learned Korai and his Ἑλληνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη, his zeal for collecting and decoding old Greek manuscripts. He warmly approved of and gave support to Korai's suggestion that a Greek central library should be founded on the island of Chios, where all European academies and publishing houses would send one example of each edition of a Greek classic⁵. He admired the self-sacrifice of Greek patriots, merchants and patrons, who would buy all the issues of Greek books and would send them gratis to their native country⁶. Kopitar also intended to publish a systematic survey of the whole new Greek literature⁷; unfortunately, he never realized this purpose.

Kopitar also took Greek as a model in his theory on the development of Slavic Languages. Slavic languages should develop along the same line as the development of the Greek dialects that coexisted for a long time as characteristic organs of certain genres of literature (as, for instance, Ionic was the language of Epics and Elegiacs, Doric of Choral Lyrics, Eolic of Melics etc.); and thus finally they merged into an unitary κοινὴ. Slavic languages—according to Kopitar—should also develop in a similar way, and at the end of this amalgamating process an all-Slavic literary language (lingua Slavica universalis)

1. Cf. Kopitar, *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 199 n. 1.

2. Λυρικά τοῦ εὐγενεστάτου ἀρχόντος Καμηνάρη κυρίου Ἀθανασίου Χριστοπούλου (Wien 1811). Kopitar's recension was published in *Wiener allgemeine Literaturzeitung* 1813, p. 1232 (= *Kleinere Schriften* p. 228-229).

3. Kopitar *Scriptorum Pars II*, p. 397-400.

4. Kopitar *Scriptorum Pars II*, p. 111.

5. Kopitar, *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 176: «Die Nachricht von der öffentlichen Bibliothek in Chios, zu der die Chioten 1813 durch die bisherige Gymnasialbibliothek und den Ankauf neuer Bücher für 20.000 Piaster den Grund gelegt, und von 1814 an jährlich 3000 Piaster zu ihrer Vermehrung gestiftet haben. Bei dieser Gelegenheit ladet Korai alle Gelehrten Europas, die einen Ietinischen oder griechischen Classiker herausgeben, und die Akademien ein, Exemplare ihrer Editionen und Abhandlungen in diese Chier Bibliothek zu stiften, als Denkmale Ihrer so oft ausgesprochenen Liebe für Griechenland . . . Wir machen es uns zur angehensten Pflicht, diese Einladung Korai's, so viel es an uns ist, zu verbreiten».

6. Kopitar, *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 199: «. . . gewöhnlich der Autor oder sein Mäzen die ganze Auflage, so wie sie gedruckt ist, nach Griechenland mitnimmt oder schickt».

7. Kopitar, *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 200: «eine wohlgeordnete chronologische Übersicht der ganzen neugriechischen Literatur».

would be created. Instead bigger languages forcing their predominance and the smaller one being neglected, all present Slavic languages should coexist having the same rights. Their neighbourhood, the knowledge of each other and reciprocal influence, the borrowing of each other's words and morpheme—all this would gradually bring them close to each other until a complete integration, an unitary panslavic κοινή, would take place in an organic way¹.

Let us omit half a century and discuss now the beginning of the present century!

The first Slovene poet to know Greece by autopsy was *Anton Aškerc* (1856-1912). Impressed by his journey through Egypt and Greece, he published the book of poems *Acropolis and Pyramids* (1909) with the characteristic subtitle «Poetic Walks Through the Orient». As the subtitle indicates, Aškerc considered Hellas a constituent part of the exotic Orient which interested him especially as a folklore and tourist attraction. An example of this is given by the fact that «Egyptian Arabesques» form the first part of the collection, and «The Sun of Hellas» is only in the second place. Besides, the first part, which is dedicated to Egypt, dominates over the second part, the Greek one (102 pages: 68 pages).

In the collection, the poet deals with a number of motifs taken from the Greek countryside and history. The poet presents the rocky Acropolis with the Parthenon of white marble, the mysterious awakening of Eleusis in the blooming spring, the urns of the Athenian Kerameikos, Aigina, Olympia, Corinth, Ithaca. There we meet Olympian gods and Homeric heroes, Perikles and Aspasia, Praxiteles and Pheidias, Socrates and Platon, Sophocles and Aristophanes. However, there is no more to it than the names—it does not go beneath the surface. There is no profound experience of Hellas in these poems: the rationalist Aškerc was not capable of such an experience. We could, with malicious irony, give as a motto to the whole collection his own lines:

I am strolling
Along the beautiful Athenian streets
Deep in thought all day long...
Looking around... looking in vain
For the famous acquaintances from the old times.

There are also two poems from more recent history—the history of the

1. This Kopitar's Greek-dialect-model was later exhaustively developed by Matija Majar Ziljski (1809-1892) in his Slavic common grammar (*Uzajemna slovnica slavjanska*), published in 1863/64. Cfr. R. L. Lencek, «The Theme of the Greek Koine in the concept of a Slavic Common Language and Matija Majar's Model». *American Contributions to the Sixth International Congress of Slavists* (Prague 1968), Vol. 1, p. 1-28.

struggle for the liberation from the Turkish yoke, first celebrating the death of the Greek hero Markos Botzaris (August 20th 1823), second the siege of the fortress Mesolonghi (April 25th 1826); but they are more like pathetic reports than artistically expressed ballads. In short, the whole collection—with exception of a few stanzas—reads like a versified Baedeker.

As we do not want to be unjust to Aškerc, we must add that he was a very successful poet in the years of his young manhood. His first volume of poems, *Ballads and Romances* (1890), consists of a number of excellently expressed, well stylized, and dramatically effective ballads which belong among the greatest masterpieces of Slovene epic poetry. Yet later in his career as a poet he became lost in rhetorical verbiage. As he grew older his poetical talent obviously declined as he published volume after volume in rapid succession. And the collection «Acropolis and Pyramids» stands, unfortunately, nearly at the end of his career as a poet. Besides, his poetry was getting more and more tendentious in the sense of liberalism and eager anti-clericalism that was in fashion then. This tendentiousness is especially obvious in this collection in which he uses the antique Hellas as a kind of military flag in the struggle against «Christian obscurantism». Therefore, many stanzas in this volume sound like a propaganda poster. Let us take, for instance, these blasphemous lines in the poem «Easter in the Acropolis»:

Rise the beauty of Hellas,
Let you be seen, thou pagan!
Spring, thou, spring,
Thou fresh source of the antique!
Our soul has been parched
And longing for you already;
Too long we were tortured and killed
By the Christian bareness.
Our long fasting,
Long great fasting is over!

Thus we are not surprised that Socrates—in the poets interpretation—has become a convinced atheist who has «died for his conviction as well as for his liberal thought». When in jail, the great sage asks himself the following:

Why am I here? I denied their Gods,
Spoiled their youth, spread a new faith...
Is this not true? Gods are nowhere to be found!

And it does not surprise us either that apostle Paul, who speaks to the citizens of Athens on the Areopagus, is presented as if he were half insane:

A simply man, still young and disheveled,
Slightly well-behaved, carelessly washed,
Is announcing a new religion...
He secretly joined the Jews of Athens
And at night this fanatic preaches to them,
He, who once in passing
Touched some Greek culture...

At approximately the same time a young Slovene writer, *F. S. Finžgar* (1871-1963) published his extensive text *Under the Free Sunshine*, which is one of the most popular Slovene novels¹. The work grew out of patriotism to show the compatriots living in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy that «our fathers had not been such servants as we were now», «that the Slaves had not been humble lambs but heroes, very eager to fight». This is a novel which is full of optimism towards life, sound pathos, and faith in the future of the nation. It is set in the 6th century, in the time of the great migration of Slaves to the Balkan peninsula.

Hellas is present throughout this novel. Yet this is not the liberal, pagan Hellas that Aškerc was discovering in the Acropolis, but the Christian Byzantium from the times of the emperor Justinian. The writer thoroughly prepared for the work by studying the historian Procopius and other professional sources and by examining the material in museums. With his plastic and concise expression, he conjured images from Justinian's Byzantium, images of the splendid metropolis at Bosphorus that gleams in gold and marble (I II):

«And the city rose in luxurious splendour, all of a sudden, like in a fairy tale, like an apparition in the midst of the sands. A throne, diadem and scarlet drapes sparkled where the natural heart of three continents used to be. There rose Byzantium, the new Rome, situated on the blue Propontis, on seven hills like the old Rome. There were palaces all the way from the sea along the quay, the whole town was one single great amphitheatre. Water ways were alive again, they were overgrown with forests of masts; wings of sails covered them like crowds of birds. The corn poured over the earth in the north and in the south, on Bosphorus and Propontis, the wealth of Archipelagos and Egypt poured into Byzantium. The African and European art were competing with one another as to which of them would first take over the markets of the new Rome. Caravans found a new route across Asia Minor; crowds of merchants were streaming from Thrace. The whole world was sailing in majestic waves and all the waves were running into the heart, into Byzantium, situated on a fabulous embank-

1. First published in the review *Dom in svet* 1906-1907, then in book 1912. The novel has already been published in 11 printings up to this time.

ment like gigantic jewel. Sparkling waves like a chain of diamonds surrounded Byzantium on three sides, while the fourth side was covered by emeralds of green hills».

Byzantium is flooded by Phenician scarlet, Arab perfumes and Persian carpets, by Indian wood and Chinese silk: this is Hellas, overwhelmed with Orient.

Yet behind this splendid façade, tears of the oppressed and blood of the enslaved, moral corruption and deceitfulness, denunciation and greediness are hidden. «Byzantium is like the sea: it swallows up everything, yet it is always hungry, it never says 'enough', it is like an infernal precipice. Justinian is a greedy dragon». Byzantium—this is «wealth that hammers golden bracelets out of nations' blood onto the hands of delicate women, that changes the tears of barbarians into pearls in order to scatter them over the hair and the silks and scarlet robes that belong to bodies tired from pleasure. «Hardly any trace is left of the former Hellas that used to rule in the spheres of the mind; there is hardly any merchant who would remember in his wiser moments that «he was born from the blood of that race which had given people like Aristoteles and Themistokles to the world», therefore he will not let Theodora, the daughter of the circus clown and a whore on the imperial throne, deceive him!

This image of Hellas, with an exterior so splendid, yet with an essence so obscure and corrupt, depresses us. Although this image is supported by quotations from Procopius and proven by a number of minor historical facts, yet its basis is false. It is obvious of course—at least on the Balkans at this time—that it was not Byzantium that greedily conquered the land of barbarians, but vice versa, the conquerors were Slavs, and Byzantium found itself in a position of desperate defence. Even the writer himself admits this when his main character, the combative Slav warrior Iztok, says: «We, the Slavs, are used to claiming somebody else's land and not letting others conquer ours!»

We can explain these words as well as the whole obscure image of Hellas and Byzantium in this novel only if we consider the conditions that the novel grew out of: it grew out of a feeling of weakness, humiliation and injustice which the Slovene nation had to suffer for hundreds of years during the presion of germanization by the Austrian feudalists. It grew out of the wish that the nation would rise out of humiliation, that this feeling of weakness would be conquered, if not in the reality of the present moment, then at least in the idealized past. And to conquer this feeling of weakness and humiliation the novelist clothed it in a conflict between the young, healthy, barbarian Slavic people and the tired, corrupt, refined Byzantium. In other words, the writer used Hellas and Byzantium in this novel only as a cover for the hated Germans and the imperial Vienna.

The novel certainly did not intend to raise anti-Greek feelings; its only purpose was to awaken the national conscience and to strengthen the backbone of the nation. Various facts prove that the novel —despite its great popularity— really did not raise anti-Greek feelings.

Thus, for instance, the movement named after Cyrill and Methodius originates from the same time¹; the soul of this movement was theologian *Franc Grivec* (1878-1963). The movement glorified evangelism in that sense which we would call 'ecumenical' today. The brothers Cyril and Methodius from Thessalonike carried it out among the Slavs with their cultural broadmindedness and sensitive ear for the values of a nation. Grivec and the disciples of his school confirmed that the two brothers were Greeks by nation (as an opposition to some scholars who tried to present Cyril and Methodius as born Slavs); they emphasized the rich inheritance of Greek patristics that guided their theology, and contrasted their activities with the methods of Christianization used by German missionaries. 'The Cyril-Methodian idea' became a program of national defense that opposed the political ambitions that the churches of Salzburg, Aquileia and their bishoprics performed along with their pastorate. 'It is time that we separate our religious history from various legends which Aquileian patriarchs gave as reasons for their rights to rule over our countries', Grivec wrote at that time.

Another important event that dates from the time immediately after the publication of Finžgar's novel is the Balkan war. During this war, Slovene newspapers with enthusiasm reported the Greek army's and navy's victories over the Turks. Also during the second Balkan war the sympathies of the Slovene public and Slovene newspapers —despite the different official policy of the Austrians— were throughout with the Serbs and the Greeks.

However, Hellas was not only present on the surface of Finžgar's novel and in the actual political events of that time, but it fermented and thoroughly leavened the exuberant artistic creativity in Slovenia at that time. The greatest Slovene architect, *Jože Plečnik* (1872-1957), whose reputation reached far beyond boundaries of his native country², showed great affection for Greek art. The chrysal sharp contours of his façades, pillars and colonnades, the elaborate workmanship of single elements, and careful ponderation of the whole, his inexhaustible fantasy when handling the material and a strict sense for rounding off the space—all this clearly indicates that the great master was continually inspired by the architecture of the Parthenon as well as other monu-

1. «The Apostolate of Saint Cyril and Method» was founded in Slovenia in 1909.

2. He reconstructed, for instance, the castle Hradčani in Prague according to Masaryk's order.

ments of Greek classical art. Many churches in Slovenia radiate, due to their master's hand, that harmony of shape and content, of light and shadow, material and space, which is more characteristic of an old Greek temple than of a Christian church or chapel.

The leading Slovene literary historian and critic of the first decades of this century, *Ivan Prijatelj* (1875-1937), too, was a great admirer of Greek culture and art. He observed it especially in the point of view of young Nietzsche. According to his spirit, Prijatelj was proclaiming the Apollonistic and Dionysian principle of artistic creativity. The Greek psyche was for him that unattainable ideal, in which both principles meet in harmony and complete each other: «In the Greek national psyche, there was the Dionysian principle as well as the Apollonistic principle... The content walked here like Antigone and the shape joined her quietly like her sister, to walk hand in hand across the happy Greek country—like a big synthesis of the great human psyche»¹.

Among poets followed the Apollonistic creative principle the most outstanding one was perhaps *Vojeslav Molè* (born 1886). He does not, however, reach the top of the Slovene Parnassus, yet he was considered in his time to be one of the most sensitive masters of cultivated poetic diction. His book of poems, *Tristia ex Siberia* (1920), grew out of his horrifying experience during the war imprisonment in Siberia. He inserted a special cycle «In Antique Diction» which is not only antique in diction², but also regarding the contents. He presents Hegesó, a young woman who is sculptured on an Attic funeral relief; further on, he presents Thanatos, “a shy shadow”, who invites us to visit places, “where there are no sweet lies intoxicating as poison, no sins...”. The poet encounters the antique comic as well as tragic mask that show him the absurdity of human existence; he encounters the Venus of Milo, whom «the eternal fate has brought into winter from the blue Hellenic spring». Hellas is present in the collection as a light, as a warm contrast to the dark, icy cold, dreadful Siberia:

Out there is night, all in cold and snow...
The teacher reads the lines of Theognis—
And inspired us with the warmth of southern countries.

It would be superfluous if we tried to enumerate in detail all the reflections of Greek mythology and history in contemporary Slovene literature. Titles of numerous post-war collections of poems and prose works speak for

1. Ivan Prijatelj, *Izbrani eseji* II (Selected essays), Ljubljana 1953, p. 387.

2. Thus, for example, the poems in this cycle are composed of elegiac distichs and Sapphic strophes.

themselves: Odysseus, Antigone, Argonauts, Agamemnon, Prometheus, the Cheerful Melpomene, Odysseus at the Mast, Alexander the Great etc.

Yet let us mention briefly at least one text from this period, in which Greece is present not only in the title but on every page, nearly in every single line. That is the novel «In Sibyl's Wind», published in 1968 by *Alojz Rebula* (born 1924) whom we have already mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The novel is set in the time of the Emperors Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius and reflects the huge Roman Empire from Pannonia to Mesopotamia, from Galia to Egypt. It is a novel, in which three streams of that period meet: the beams of the eternal Greek culture, the pervasive feelers of the Roman imperial power that is already being gnawed by the «termites of the Empire», the Christians.

It is obvious that the author's sympathies are more with the Hellas than with the Rome, more with the Greek language than with the Latin language. The main character of the novel, Namazianus, for instance, describes his first encounter with Greek letters as follows: «They look nicer than the Latin ones, they seemed to be like an eternal game of the tendrils of plants. Who knows what the light language behind these figures was like? Latin letters are written "in solemn verticals", whereas the Greek ones are "as if they were vine tendrils". For him, Greek grammar is also nicer than the Latin: "I was altogether too fascinated by that game with cases —objective case is solemnly called αἰτιόμενος in Greek; between singular and plural, the dual is dancing in the richer Greek". On the occasion of meeting Christian believers, the same hero states: «But I was also becoming religious. That was a religion, in the centre of which there was Mnemosyne, Terpsichore's mother, the bright bearer of Muses... I was reading Homer and the hypocaust was reflected in his battles as if he came from the light itself... I did not want to go anywhere from there...».

And as we started this paper by citing Rebula, let us also conclude with the enthusiastic words with which one of the characters in this novel, Okean, an Athenian professor of astronomy, describes Hellas (II 3):

«In the midst of continents there arose a peninsula shaped like a leaf of a plane tree and it split into the water of the Mediterranean, spread into a number of islands. The peninsula was not blessed with rich Egyptian soil but with a rocky barren land... Yet, at the same time, it was allotted that its barrenness was eroded from all sides by the sea that should challenge it with impetuosity, with luxurious choice of direction and with nakedness without horizon... An example of biology and a symbol, the peninsula was given the modest fame of an olive tree, the glitter of a bay tree, the fertility of a fig tree, the greatness of

Jupiter in an oak tree. For this was humus, out of which the tree of Man grew to the most attainable height.

Man, a Hellen, grew in all the happiness of growing. The tree spread in all directions of the wind. Its branches grew with all possible human originality. The unique biped has developed a dimension here which will be, from now on, his own... It was here that he said to himself, being of age, with triumph and despair at the same time: "I, a man"».

With these words the Slovene writer modestly thanks Hellas once again for everything it has given to him—not only to him personally, but to his whole nation and to all his national culture.