



What Does the Literature of the “Silent Republic” Talk About? Voices of Resistance in the Prose by Alojz Majetić and Antun Šoljan

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Ewa Szperlik

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0755-4842>

e-mail: ewaszper@amu.edu.pl

Abstract

This article offers an analysis of selected works by Alojz Majetić and Antun Šoljan, Croatian writers associated with the literary movement known as *jeans prose*. This current emerged as an expression of opposition to the Yugoslav illusion of freedom and the welfare state. These rebellious writers, often subjected to harassment, censorship, and publication bans by the authorities, transformed their literary works into a form of protest, embedding within them encoded anti-system messages. Their texts portray a generational conflict between the post-World War II constructors of socialism and their defiant descendants, for whom the social ideal was represented by the capitalist West and its consumer culture. The voices of discontent arising in Croatia – peaking in 1968 and 1971 – were interpreted by the regime as manifestations of nationalism and separatism. Following the events of the Croatian Spring, Slavko Ešeš famously referred to Croatia as the “silent republic”.

Keywords: Antun Šoljan; Alojz Majetić; Croatian *jeans prose*; literature of resistance; Titoism

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Introduction

Recalling the political atmosphere in Yugoslavia from the 1950s, with particular regard to the events of the Croatian Spring in 1971, one of the leading critics of this period, Branimir Donat, refers to it as "communist despotism" (Donat, 1992, p. 9). The ideology of Yugoslav communism on the territory of Croatia reflected in the phenomenon of censorship, self-censorship, the authors being cautious in expressing opinions, and a list of prohibited topics, which included criticism of the authorities' actions, suppression of interethnic tensions, and (relating to the controversial memory of the past) concealed narratives of the former prisoners of Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška concentration camps, Bleiburg tragedy, and the taboo of the Way of the Cross, as well as the functioning of penitentiary-correctional facilities, known as the Goli archipelago. Simultaneously, in the domain of literature, a directive to write politically neutral texts was in force (Nemec, 2003, pp. 5–10). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, works by two rebel writers: *Čangi* (1963) and *Čangi off Gottoff* (1970) by Alojz Majetić, and *Kratki izlet* [A Brief Excursion] (1965) and *Luka* [The Harbour] (1974) by Antun Šoljan, functioned as a sign of protest and a disguised demonstration of opposition to the illusion of freedom and welfare society. They also became a picture of the mentality of the lost generation after World War II.

After 1945, various currents in literature emerged. Although the social realist model was to become the dominant one, it failed to become popular in Yugoslavia, especially after the conflict in relations between Tito and Stalin (1948) and the Yugoslav Writers' Congress in Ljubljana (1952). However, these landmark dates and events did not guarantee the expected "thaw" and greater freedom of expression, neither in public life nor in the arts. Civic freedom was rationed, and artistic licence soon turned out to be an illusion because of the party censorship and writers' self-censorship (repressive measures¹ and "Croatian silence"²). After the ruthless handling of the ideological enemy (1945–1948 and after), a new system of values could be set in place. The party authorities' and the government's attempts to silence any criticism of the political system employed the most perfidious means of eliminating ideological opponents. The atmosphere that prevailed in Yugoslavia was described by Branimir Donat as a frenzy of ideology which had lost its idea and retained only the need to wield authority (Donat, 1992, pp. 83–84). There came

1 Political repressions related to the elimination of Tito's opponents (mainly so-called Stalinists) after 1948 and the suppression of the Croatian Spring in 1971.

2 This refers to the "Croatian silence" that followed the suppression of the Croatian Spring in 1971. This expression had been used earlier, after 1948, as a manifestation of Croatian resistance against attempts to suppress their national identity in Yugoslavia. Hence, the term "silent republic" was applied to the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. Due to repression, many intellectuals emigrated, but others chose internal emigration, that is, silence. For more see Ešeš (1990, pp. 90–104).

the dark times of *udbocracy*,³ whose leader was Aleksandar Ranković (1909–1983), one of the key figures responsible for the terror and even for the killing of ideological opponents (Bilandžić, 2006, p. 51).

The defence mechanism of Croatian literature against the existing reality involved inaudible, repressed voices of Croatian émigrés (works by excluded writers, so-called *raseljena lica* 'displaced persons', "*raseljena Hrvatska*") as well as "local resistance" of artists and writers who remained in the country. The rebellious writers of the "silent republic" (Croatia), commonly associated with the movement known as *jeans prose* (*proza u trapericama*), through the fictional prose of metaphorical contestation and euphemisms, often subjected to censorship and bans, defended the Croatian literature of the late 1960s and early 1970s from the flaws and distortions of the prevailing ideology: they turned their works into a form of protest with encoded anti-system content.

Literary works by the representatives of Croatian *jeans prose* and writers known as the *Krugovi* generation (grouped around the magazine *Krugovi* [Circles]) have been the subject of many literary studies (see Donat, 1972; Flaker, 1983; Stamać, 1996, pp. 22–27). In this type of literature, the rebellious spirit of the generation growing up in post-war Yugoslavia is often contrasted with "socialist morality", and the "imaginary" freedom of the novels' characters is only apparent, existing solely in the realm of utopia. Most often, the characters of *jeans prose* escape out of town and spend time on leisure and fun activities (this phenomenon was referred to as *dokolica*).⁴ Distinct linguistic defiance manifests itself in the writers' use of youth slang and the language of the metropolitan street, which is contrasted with the language of propaganda and the party bureaucracy (Flaker, 1983, p. 120). Majetić's novel *Čangi* caused a scandal, a lawsuit, and was strongly condemned by the party. Šoljan's *Luka* voiced quite clear and bold criticism of the socialist system, which was exploiting communities and devastating the environment. *Kratki izlet* revises the centuries-old history of Croatia, and, as a result, paints a gloomy image of yet another enslavement – this time, under the banner of the five-pointed star.

Alojz Majetić's *Čangi* as a Scandal and an Attack on Socialist Morality

Initially, an unintentional literary contestation of socialist reality came with *Čangi* by Alojz Majetić (born in 1938). Due to emphasising sexual freedom and outrageous language, his novel was considered an open attack on ethical and social norms, which caused a scandal and entailed legal consequences. It is a story of a rebellious teenager

3 *Udbocracy* is a term coined from the abbreviation UDB, which stands for Ured Državne Bezbednosti, a security service repressing the citizens (1946–1991).

4 *Dokolica* – a term meaning "here and now", free time; *dokolica* is, in a sense, also a "third place". The term "third place" was introduced by sociologist Ray Oldenburg in the 1980s and refers to a place where one can relax, watch others and show oneself to them (Oldenburg, 1989).

who, being under the influence of alcohol, hits a man with a stolen car and flees the scene of the accident. Hiding from the militia and justice, he attempts to take refuge in a youth work camp (*radne akcije*).⁵

In 1963, the novel by this young Rijeka-born, Zagreb-based writer, published by the little-known Novi Sad publishing house Progres in a small edition of 15,000 copies, ended up in court. Before the trial began, barely 1,000 copies had been sold, and *Čangi* had already been blacklisted. The remaining copies were withdrawn from sale and impounded until the ruling was announced by the District Court in Novi Sad. The prosecutor demanded that the printing be withheld and the book be withdrawn from the market, with which the court largely concurred. The prosecutor's argument amounted to an opinion that the novel for/about the youth presents a false picture of the Yugoslav *omladina*.⁶

Amidst attacks and harassment, the then 25-year-old Majetić practically vanished from the Croatian literary scene. The same year, his book of poetry *Otimam* [I Abduct] was banned for similar reasons, namely for excessive eroticism and the use of youth jargon. It was one of the first post-war scandals of this kind. Several older writers defended Majetić, protesting against the adamant attitude of the authorities, but to no effect. Having withdrawn from public life, Majetić revised his novel and added passages about his experience of the trial. The text was republished in 1970 under a slightly altered title, *Čangi off Gottoff*. It is believed that the censors intervened once again, and that some passages may have been removed or altered in this new edition.⁷

Apart from the vulgar youth jargon, another argument against the author was the alleged promotion of pornography. The young characters are portrayed as morally feral and volunteer for community service only to have sex. This depiction reportedly sparked outrage among readers. Strikingly, the criticism of socialism and voluntary community work in the novel turned out to be less iconoclastic than in the case of the moral aspect. By making insights into the minute elements of Yugoslav daily life, Majetić exposed the repressiveness of the whole system, which, amid scandal, doomed him to oblivion. Camps for *omladina* were portrayed as places where obedient builders of socialism were raised, but voluntary work turned out to be exploitation of cheap labour recruited mainly from among young people. In fact, Majetić showed socialist morality as a dummy. In his novel, brigades compete to

5 *Radne akcije* – volunteer activities and community service typical of socialist states and involving mainly young people; in Yugoslavia, their tradition goes back to the National Liberation War and was connected with the idea of the post-war reconstruction of the country. Their aim was usually to perform real (socially useful) work, such as building facilities, and create social bonds among the Yugoslav nations; *radna akcija* symbolised "society in a nutshell" (Supek, 1963, p. 7). For more about this see a book by Reana Senjković, *Svaki dan pobjeda: Kultura omladinskih radnih akcija* [Every Day a Victory: The Culture of Youth Labour Actions] (Senjković, 2016).

6 Literally: 'the youth'; in socialist times, this term had an ideological connotation; it was used to refer to the organised socialist youth.

7 The second edition of Majetić's novel, published in 1970 under the title *Čangi off Gottoff*, was even more explicit in its social and political criticism than the first edition, which had been withdrawn from circulation. Yet this "renewed", politically more subversive version was issued and widely distributed by Znanje (one of the most prominent Yugoslav publishing houses at the time) in its popular series called *Hit*.

exceed norms, and the rebuilding of the country is driven by propaganda slogans such as "We build the highway, the highway builds us" (Majetić, 2004, p. 39); this one concerns the construction of the Brotherhood and Unity Highway: work on the Ljubljana-Devđelija section of this highway is an element of the plot.

The young writer unknowingly exposed a weak spot of society that the official narrative attempted to portray as perfect. *Radne akcije* were a venue for promoting socialist ideas. However, Majetić clearly ridiculed the position of the *omladina* in society and the functioning of the labour brigades. On the other hand, the *klapa/škvadra* (a bunch of friends), whose aim is only leisure, adventure and hedonism (that is, the aforementioned *dokolica*), became its antithesis, created in the imaginary of the communist propaganda, deriving from the Partisan tradition of community service for the good of the collective (Kolanović, 2014, pp. 133–134). Majetić's novel became an example of the involvement of Croatian prose in the times of repression and a testimony of the reality of the period, while the allegations against the author and his work were "a quasi-puritan excuse to protect public morality" (Jelčić, 2004, p. 541).

The "official" argumentation in the trial against Majetić, namely the focus on the social outrage, vulgarity and pornography, instead of the political thread, was an indication of manipulation (Radelić, 2006, p. 324). As presented by the prosecutor, the bold erotic scenes and the uninhibited language of the characters talking about intimate matters were to prove that the book was outrageous, e.g. "Do you masturbate before or after studying?" (Majetić, 2004, p. 12). Similarly to Šoljan (*Izdajice* [Traitors], *Drugi ljudi na mjesecu* [Other People on the Moon]), Majetić pictured the world of Zagreb's *klapa/škvadra*, characterised by young people's frivolousness, lack of responsibility for the country, and lack of interest in their own future.

Following the convention of the socialist realism *roman à thèse*, Čangi, by joining the brigade, voluntarily decides to undergo "re-education" (*preodgoj*), but his ideological transformation never happens. Quite on the contrary – he is incapable of complying with the system, the brigade's rules and the discipline: "Tidying up in the camp from seven to nine [...]. Compulsory sleep from nine to eleven [...]. Return to the camp at twelve forty-five [...]. After lowering the flag, there will be dancing in the Titograd Barrack" (Majetić, 2004, p. 56). At some point, rebellious Čangi avoids doing work and, instead of helping his comrades on the bank, cools himself in the river; the commander chases him out of the water; Čangi attacks him and they engage in a fight. However, during the evening assembly, the incident is presented to the brigade in an altered, distorted version, according to which foreman Čangi left the camp without permission, almost drowned, and, by his insubordination, he put the whole brigade at risk of losing the title of "shock workers" (*udarnici*, sing. *udarnik*) (Majetić, 2004, p. 55). After a few more incidents, Čangi flees the camp. The descriptions of the protagonist's appearance are a clear indication of his degradation. One of the witnesses describes Čangi as an uninhibited member of Zagreb's

klapa: "He was wearing a blue *miki-maja* top,⁸ I'm not a hundred per cent sure. Trousers, like those freaks wear today – jeans, you know, blue, imported [...], lots of pomade in his hair... suffocating perfume" (Majetić, 2004, pp. 24–25). By contrast, Čangi, full of disgust, perceives himself as a participant in the labour brigade as follows: "I stink,' thought Čangi. 'Sweat has soaked into my sweatshirt, trousers, fingernails and it turned sour. I stink.' Above his head there was a plate with a slogan: 'Clean and healthy member of the *omladina* is the pride of the community'" (Majetić, 2004, p. 68).

In *Čangi off Gottoff*, more mature Majetić engages in a polemic against the discourse of authority, which in the novel is represented by the guard Pero. The extended plot concerning Čangi's stay in prison is a warning for those who escape the cogs of the system (it is also an allusion to the political reality, repression, political isolation, and totalitarian regime). In the reflections of the protagonist's lawyer, Majetić introduces a space of ironic consciousness,⁹ where totalitarianism can be resisted. This version of the novel includes excerpts from the press, which appear at the end; they comment on the course of the trial against Majetić and his novel from a few years before. *Čangi* became a cult novel and circulated in the underground circuit. Krešimir Nemec notes that it acquired the status of a literary accusation of the repressive system that suppressed human freedom and the freedom of artistic expression (Nemec, 2003, p. 155). Donat calls the Zagreb hooligan nicknamed Čangi a fallen angel who fell to earth from heaven, where his parents – "the new class" – dwelled (Donat, 1978, p. 202). This particular group of the post-war Yugoslav society was insightfully described by Milovan Đilas in his famous dissident work *The New Class* (1955).

Luka and Kratki izlet by Antun Šoljan as Political and Anti-Regime Novels

Antun Šoljan's (1932–1993) *Kratki izlet* [A Brief Excursion] (1965) and *Luka* [The Harbour] (1974) are examples of a more subtle resistance against Tito's system and Yugoslav reality. The characters of his prose belong to the so-called lost generation that grew up during the Cold War, behind the Iron Curtain, and was later accused of a lack of political involvement, ideological abstinence and maladjustment to life. Šoljan became known as a charismatic rebel, one of the first who not only ventured to oppose the socialist realism model of art, but also drew his inspiration from the ideologically condemned Anglo-American literature.¹⁰ He was one of the Croatian Spring activists marginalised from social and

8 *Miki-maja* is a type of top made of velvety cotton material, with long sleeves, without buttons (*Hrvatski jezični portal*, n.d., s.v. miki-màja).

9 It is worth noting that both Majetić and Šoljan employ a playful narrative and a witty approach, which creates ambiguity in their statements. This approach involved not only an indirectly encoded language of political criticism, but also a postmodern literary style of the period.

10 It should be emphasised that Šoljan occupied an important place on the Croatian literary scene of the Yugoslav period, which also points to the cultural and political ambiguities characteristic of the Yugoslav literary field, especially in the second half of the 1950s.

artistic life by politics. Often contradictory labels were attached to his name: an enemy of the people, a man of the regime, a minion of the authorities, a foreign agitator, a cursed writer, and so on. He wrote during a difficult time for Croatian literature, a period when, following the closure of the *Književnik* [Bookman], there was no quality literary magazine in Croatia.¹¹

On the occasion of Antun Gustav Matoš's 50th death anniversary, on 17 March 1964, Šoljan gave a speech over his grave and criticised the literary community as well as the political system. This controversial speech classified the author of *Luka* as a rebel who committed political sabotage. At the meeting of the Central Committee, his prior request for funding for a literary magazine was dismissed; moreover, Šoljan was described as "a politically immature person who asks questions that annoy the authorities" (Donat, 1992, p. 65). Soon, the censors interfered with the publication of his novel *Kratki izlet*.

During the difficult period following the Croatian Spring (the "Croatian silence" mentioned above), in 1973, Šoljan failed to secure the release of his arrested colleagues (including Vlado Gotovac) and consequently resigned as president of the Croatian PEN Club. He found himself at the very centre of an ideological conflict with the authorities, largely as a result of the publication of "Tako nam je suđeno ili o slabim pjesnicima" [It Was Meant to Be, or On Weak Poets] (1976), a voice against dogmatism in the arts and in daily life. Throughout the years of communism in Yugoslavia, Šoljan stated that he considered himself an author writing in Croatian who identified with the group of Eastern and Central European dissidents (Prosperov Novak, 2003, p. 192). In his homeland, he was the target of frequent attacks. Nevertheless, under the circumstances of the day (also in the eyes of Western public opinion), the phenomenon of Croatian dissidence was not regarded as a fight against the regime of Tito's totalitarian state, but as a nationalist voice (so-called "Croatising")¹² and an unnecessary internal Yugoslav conflict destabilising the federation (Jezernik, 2018; Radelić, 2006).

Luka is a novel exposing the socialist revolution in Yugoslavia and the power apparatus, which is represented by incompetent people at the local level, such as the construction manager Grašo (responsible for devastation of the landscape and displacement of people) and heritage conservationist Rakek (responsible for the eradication of tradition and tangible cultural heritage). Tatjana Jukić places Šoljan's prose in the context of socialist literature or literature about socialism, of which typical is the crisis of resistance in the post-revolutionary society. In her view, following the completion of the revolution, the implementation

11 *Književnik* (1952–1961) – the last Zagreb literary magazine, of which Šoljan was the editor; it was dissolved for unclear reasons, under the pretext of lack of readership and the allegation that it was controlled by a hermetic, exclusivist clique.

12 Croatian: *hrvatovati*; in the pejorative sense: to overemphasise Croatian national identity (*Hrvatski jezični portal*, n.d., s.v. *hrvatovati*). For example, Croatian disapproval of the Serbianisation of the Bay of Kotor; the activities of many Croats in favour of free Istria, especially after World War II. In both cases, the post-1945 Yugoslav authorities regarded Croatian attitudes as manifestations of Croatian nationalism, "Croatising", subversive socio-political involvement, allegedly dangerous to the new state order.

of socialist ideology encountered difficulties because – paradoxically – it is everyday life that proves to be the source of resistance against the socialist reality (Jukić, 2014, p. 27).

The novel's protagonist, construction engineer Slobodan Despot, arrives in his Dalmatian home town of Murvica, where oil deposits have allegedly been discovered. As a result, the decision to build the eponymous harbour for tankers has been made. A relentless battle for the displacement of the local people ensues, which translates into human tragedies, fighting tradition, and even the desecration of the local cemetery to clear the site for a new road. The oppressiveness of the socialist system, with its disregard for insignificant, weaker individuals or local communities, can be seen in the following passage:

[One of the characters, Dujam] had only one goal now: wandering along the paths with a huge sharpened stake in his hand, he was looking for the vampires that desecrated the graves. "Humans couldn't have done it," he said standing in the area of the cemetery that had been dug up, which now resembled a military training ground burrowed with trenches (when leaving Murvica, some of its habitants also took away the bones of their loved ones). "Not jackals either. They're vampires!" And until midnight he kept beating the air with a sharpened stake, pitting the shadows and calling for his dead dog, friends and rescue. (Šoljan, 1981, p. 143)

Eventually, Despot himself gets into trouble, the plans to build the harbour misfire when the information about the oil deposits turns out to be false, the breakwater is damaged, and the only (side) effect is the devastation of the local environment. The hated harbour is somehow personified and takes the form of an intangible monster that brings destruction:

Along with the dynamite that pierced roads through the rocky slopes came the miners with mutilated, fingerless hands and cold, wary eyes; the rumble of their mines blended in with that of mines in the harbour and on the road. The dead fish, their white bellies shining, flowed into the old harbour in broad daylight and rotted in the water. Fishing boats were turned upside down on the beach like fish thrown ashore, with gaping cracks, gradually desiccating. [...] soon both the vines and beds were covered with fine, thick dust, [...] the plants shrank and withered, as if stifled by the filthy paw of the Harbour. (Šoljan, 1981, pp. 142–143)

Soon a conflict arises between Despot and the management of the project. He has an affair and his marriage falls apart. At the beginning of the story, Despot's main aim is to complete the construction of the harbour, which would be the extension of the socialist revolution.

Slobodan Despot turns out to be a socialist antihero, and Šoljan's work is a production novel *à rebours*, in which the protagonist, instead of being a significant agent of a socialist construction project, and instead of exceeding standards and motivating workers to work hard, becomes a saboteur and a subverter of the system and the people behind it. The engineer proves to be a local patriot, lost in the surrounding world; he engages in a struggle for a wayside shrine and for the protection of peaceful life of the natives of Murvica, mostly old and sick people. However, he is trapped in a network of bargains;

he is also trapped by his own wife, Magda, a cold, calculating woman who personifies the oppressive state and does not treat him as a partner: she treats him like a child, son, or a little boy. Identification of the state with a woman is reinforced by the fact that in the Croatian language the state (*država*) is a feminine noun. The state/Magda is "an Oedipal mother figure who punishes" (Jukić, 2014, p. 30).

In the preface to the 1996 edition, Ante Stamać writes that *Luka* is the best Croatian novel about communism; he adds that its reception was influenced by the very political taboos concealed in the text (Stamać, 1996, p. 22). Šoljan exposes the enslavement of people by the mechanism of the totalitarian ideology. An ill-considered political-bureaucratic decision about the harbour construction project leads not only to the destruction of the local community and its traditional values, but also to the erasure of the local cultural heritage. The dispute over the demolition of the twelfth-century wayside shrine, which is an important element of the landscape, can serve as an example. A heritage conservationist, Rakek, who is to inspect the shrine and decide its fate, turns out to be a significant figure in the development of the plot. The drunkard and bribee ridicules its value: he says that the Murvica shrine is a meaningless "relic" in comparison to Italian cathedrals and mockingly calls it "the cathedral of Our Lady, the Beggar" (Šoljan, 1981, p. 137). Rakek is an idealess careerist, typical of the communist system; he missed his vocation, and instead of safeguarding the tangible heritage of the past "he would burn it with his own hands!" (Šoljan, 1981, p. 133). Despite having a rather comfortable life and "a cushy job", figures like Grašo and Rakek are also trapped in the mechanism of the oppressive system. In the end, they are defeated: Grašo loses his job, and Rakek is en route to becoming an alcoholic.

The tanker harbour was supposed to be a giant step towards enabling this backward fishing/pastoral area to make the transition into a modern industrial society. However, persuading the local people into accepting the expropriation proved to be a problem. As a consequence of the tension, conflict and dispute, a tragic incident occurs and one of the characters dies: "old Dujam fell on his back and a caterpillar went over his chest as if it was an empty cardboard box. [...] His corpse was ragged by the caterpillar and flattened by its weight. [...] The bloody mass lying in the dust was an accusation" (Šoljan, 1981, pp. 160–162). Through the character of Slobodan Despot and the construction of the world presented in the novel, Šoljan shatters the myth of socialist progress. There is also a clear correspondence between the meaning of *Luka* and his previous works. In his youth, the engineer belonged to a *klapa* (*Izdajice*), but in his adult life he gave up his carefree lifestyle for a career in Tito's bureaucratic state. The confrontation between the dream of a bright future (which is a projection of the protagonist's mind) at the beginning of the novel and the misery of the reality at the end of it (the image of devastated and deserted Murvica) is a telling element of *Luka*. The utopia of the socialist enterprise, pursued against the local community, tradition and nature, is destroyed and leaves behind devastated landscape, "empty spaces like white scars" (Šoljan, 1981, p. 162).

In the novel *Kratki izlet*, a group of young intellectuals embarks on a journey across Istria to Gradina. The aim of the expedition is to find semi-legendary frescoes; however, through the voices of his protagonists, Šoljan undertakes a kind of revision of Croatian history. The members of the expedition are: the guide and mastermind Roko, Vladimir, Ivan, Petar and "two Ophelias". It is no coincidence that the characters in the novel: an archaeologist, an art historian, a copyist-painter, a photographer, and a journalist, concern themselves with art – an area that guarantees relative creative freedom. What seems to be an adventure plot is full of ambiguous interpretative cues, metaphors and encoded content used in *roman à clef*. One of the most important points of the plot is when the members of the expedition discover a signpost that reads "*Ovdje skreni lijevo*" ("Turn left here") (Šoljan, 1997, p. 76), which is a kind of code for the insiders or a task for scouts playing hare and hounds. The left turn is an allusion to the communist regime in Yugoslavia. When the characters follow the signpost, the path proves to be a wrong one; it leads nowhere and puts an end to the journey. In various editions of the novel, due to the censorship, the phrase is different: "*Treba skrenuti desno*" ("You should turn right") (Visković, 2000, p. 66). In another passage, Ivan and Roko fall into a pit which is "red with blood" of other tourists: "The rock in the pit was stained with blood of many tourists who had passed this way. Or, perhaps, it was just bauxite ore, red soil this part of the country has always been famous for" (Šoljan, 1997, p. 77). Red soil, common in Istria, is a reference to the history of Croatia, where the land repeatedly ran with blood.

The sought-after frescoes turn out to be somewhat illusive (time- and moisture-worn) paintings that also symbolise the fate of Croatia, which (by turning left) has once again in its history found itself at a disadvantage. When one of the characters, Roko, notices that what is left of the monastery (a heap of ruins) is sheer *reliquiae reliquiarum* (literally: the relics of the relics), he alludes to the centuries-old martyrdom of Croatia, which was conquered, manipulated by foreign powers, plundered and territorially pruned.¹³ Constructing the enigmatic character of Roko, Šoljan created another dimension for reading the novel as a political allegory of the Yugoslav road to socialism, which, finally, turned out to be a path to a totalitarian state governed by the party authorities and a self-appointed leader. Roko, the mastermind of the excursion, is a caricature of Tito himself, who "promises a lot, but has no idea where he is heading" (Nemec, 2003, p. 134).

When another character, Ivan, makes a symbolic decision to stay in the mysterious place (which may imply his desire to return to his homeland, to its old Croatian roots), a plethora of intertextual references to the history of the Croats, deprived of their own statehood for several centuries, is set in motion. This is confirmed by Ivan's words; he quotes Croatian writer Vladimir Nazor: "Na siki je, al još tu je" ("She struck the reef, yet still endures", an excerpt

13 In Croatian discourse, the Latin term *reliquiae reliquiarum olim magni et incltyti Regni Croatiae* is a reference to the disastrous territorial losses of the Kingdom of Croatia that took place as a result of the Turkish conquests (Rapacka, 1997, pp. 156–157).

from the poem "Zvonimirova lađa" [Zvonimir's Boat]);¹⁴ he suggests that despite the graves and the corpses, of which Croatia's history is full, King Zvonimir's boat (homeland) is "still here". The exit from the monastery through a dark tunnel into an empty, barren landscape, is a symbol of the times and the communist regime that seized Croatia, and before which "you must bow your head and accept the stone path under your feet" (Šoljan, 1997, p. 111). A monk, who appears in the novel as a guardian of the ruins, guards the eleventh-century frescoes from robbers. It is an allusion to the invaders who actually appeared on Croatian territory, according to King Zvonimir's curse: "The conquerors were everywhere. It's impossible to avoid destiny. This country was hell" (Šoljan, 1997, p. 112).

The strongly emphasised need for a historical continuum between the past and the future, and between generations, is also apparent in the topos of the library (the legacy of national heritage: manuscripts, copies, parchments) that the monk guards and protects: "I guarded the library [...]. From mice, from dampness, from mould; but most of all from time" (Šoljan, 1997, p. 119).¹⁵ In the context of King Zvonimir's curse and the nation's thousand years' enslavement, it is the passage of time and the absence of memory about the past, passed from generation to generation, that constitute the most destructive factor. The tour of the unspecified ruins of an Istrian monastery ends with the exit from the tunnel and, in the case of Ivan, literally with a song on his lips:¹⁶ "It seemed to my deafened ear that the whole underground army was singing in unison with me, marching towards freedom. The entire gallery resounded with our heroic song" (Šoljan, 1997, p. 129). Leaving the ruins, Ivan undergoes a kind of spiritual transformation and develops a higher degree of awareness of his own identity. The protagonist feels closeness and unity with his ancestors: kings and poets who once walked along the same "uncertain passageway" (history): "Seeking rescue from the enemies, the conquerors, the world, themselves. [...] My two grandfathers, who created the land and the sea for me; one – a tenant farmer, the other – a sailor" (Šoljan, 1997, p. 127).

14 The quotation refers to King Zvonimir's boat from Vladimir Nazor's poem of the same title (from his 1912 volume *Hrvatski kraljevi* [Croatian Kings]), in which he praises the strength of the Croatian nation with an allegory of a boat shackled with chains, stranded on the reef, over which a "kockasti barjak" (that is, a red-and-white checkered Croatian flag) flutters; the flag could not be displayed as a national symbol during the Yugoslav period. King Zvonimir was killed by his opponents in 1089; according to the legend about his curse, the punishment for this deed was to be a thousand years of enslavement of the Croatian nation, a period without their own statehood.

15 A similar intertextual device was adopted by Marino Zurl in his novel *Truba za Bleiburg* [Requiem for Bleiburg] (1997), where he refers to the topos of the library as a repository of national legacy and memory. The protagonist of the novel, which is set in Zagreb in 1962, works on the preservation of the books that once belonged to his father, who "went missing" at Bleiburg in May 1945. The notes he had made on the pages form an encoded message about the martyrdom of Croatia. In Zurl's novel, Tito's Yugoslavia appears as a bureaucratic-party structure based on censorship and suffering from the malaise of socialist ideology (Szperlik, 2019, p. 97).

16 It is no coincidence that Šoljan puts into the mouth of his protagonist fragments of old patriotic songs quoted from the greatest works of Croatian literature of the Baroque era ("Na vojsku, na vojsku vitezi izbrani" [To the Army, to the Army, Chosen Knights], from Book 10 of *Osman* by Ivan Gundulić, c. 1638) and of the Illyrian movement (song "Prosto zrakom ptica leti" [Straight Through the Air a Bird Flies], also known as "Pěsma Ilirah" [Song of the Illyrians], from Dimitri Demeter's drama *Grobničko polje* [The Field of Grobnik], 1842).

In Šoljan's novel, the five-pointed star, a symbol of communist Yugoslavia and, at the same time, Ivan and Roko's guide on their way to the monastery, is a travesty of the biblical comet leading the Three Wise Men to their destination as foretold by the prophets. Ivan's bitter words expressing defiance, execration, powerlessness and disappointment are a prayer *à rebours*, addressed to the state leaders, hiding behind the five-pointed red star:

I brought the jug of water up to my lips. There was a star floating in the water. I looked up and through the gap in the ceiling I saw a star in the dark-blue sky. [...] I grew angry with my own powerlessness and with this star, so incomprehensible, indifferent. You're nothing, star, I said to it. We believed in you, we followed you in the sweat of our brows, we hoped. And? (Šoljan, 1997, p. 120)

As exclaimed by Ivan, the suffering, humiliation and obedience were elements of the collective sacrifice that needed to be made in the name of a better future. This can suggest a reference to the fight for national liberation during the Second World War. For a part of society, the war was fought under the banner of the five-pointed star – the herald of the approaching communism and the construction of the socialist welfare state, which ended up in bitter disappointment.

Conclusion

Under the circumstances of the Yugoslav political regime, resistance to the authorities and the ineffective system could be performed only through the euphemistic literature of metaphors, camouflage, allusion and understatements. Bolder authors, who criticised the post-war changes and the socialist reality, could easily fall into disfavour because of the vigilant censorship apparatus and the activities of *agitprop*.¹⁷ After the events of the Croatian Spring of 1971, social discontent emanated especially from Croatia – the rebellious "silent republic" (Eseš, 1990, pp. 90–104). In Tito's state, artistic freedom proved to be an empty word, and the ruling party infiltrated every sphere of life. Despite having broken the ties with the USSR, the apparatus of power keenly applied Stalinist methods, manipulated, harassed and repressed the citizens.

The conflict with the imposed ideology and defiance against the distorted reality became a distinctive feature of Croatian *jeans prose*. The literature of this now iconic movement echoes the power of ironic discourse, criticism of the Yugoslav state, its indiscriminate economy, "reforms for reforms' sake", and the bureaucratic mechanism. Šoljan shatters the myth of socialist progress by exposing its absurdities, squandering, misplaced priorities and non-accountability of the policymakers. Furthermore, he shows the theme

¹⁷ *Agitprop* (a shortened name for agitation and propaganda); committees (modelled on the Soviet Union) in former Yugoslavia responsible for ideological compliance of any activity with the communist party line; already present in the early 1940s during the National Liberation War.

of Croatian history through the prism of the subsequent enslavement of the Croats in Tito's state. In turn, Majetić articulates the defiance against the new reality, highlighting the conflict between individual freedom and collectivist society. Linguistically, the use of Zagreb street jargon and uninhibited approach to matters of eroticism constitute a provocative attempt to break the taboo. Both writers represent a stance that exposes the dissonance between the ideology of the "socialist dream" and the grey reality of the oppressive system. The eponymous harbour from Šoljan's novel can be read as a metaphor of Yugoslavia. From a centrifugal perspective, Yugoslavia reveals itself to be a flawed country, a substitute, a poorly managed dummy state marked by "daily life of shortages" of electricity, fuel, groceries, clothes, and so on. The works by Alojz Majetić and Antun Šoljan also outline the intergenerational conflict between the builders of the state of socialist promises after World War II and their rebellious descendants, hungry for cultural novelties from the Western world, such as original jeans, Coca-Cola, and jazz and rock-and-roll records.

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O czym mówi literatura „milczącej republiki”? Głosy sprzeciwu w prozie Alojza Majeticia i Antuna Šoljana

Abstrakt

Przedmiotem analizy w niniejszym artykule są wybrane dzieła Alojza Majeticia i Antuna Šoljana, chorwackich pisarzy przypisanych do nurtu literackiego *jeans prozy*, która stała się demonstracją sprzeciwu wobec jugosłowiańskiej iluzji wolności i społeczeństwa dobrobytu. Zbuntowani pisarze, często poddawani szykanom, cenzurze i zakazom ze strony aparatu władzy, przekształcili swoją twórczość w środek protestu o zaszyfrowanej, antysystemowej treści. Dzieła przedstawiają konflikt pokoleń między konstruktorami socjalizmu po II wojnie światowej a ich zbuntowanymi potomkami, dla których modelem społecznym był kapitalistyczny Zachód z jego dobrami konsumpcyjnymi. Głosy niezadowolenia dochodzące z Chorwacji, które osiągnęły punkt kulminacyjny w 1968 i 1971 roku, były postrzegane przez władze jako przejaw nacjonalizmu i separatyzmu. Po wydarzeniach Chorwackiej Wiosny Slavko Eseš użył syntagmy opisującej Chorwację jako „milczącą republikę”.

Słowa kluczowe: Antun Šoljan; Alojz Majetić; chorwacka *jeans proza*; literatura sprzeciwu; titoizm

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