Boris Pahor's *Necropolis* and World Literature

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Abstract The present contribution addresses the question of how the novel Necropolis (1967) by Boris Pahor, a Slovenian minority author (with Italian citizenship) born in 1913 and living in Trieste, is placed in world literature. It sheds light on the novel's path from the semi-peripheral Slovenian literary system to the canonical works of Slovenian (national) literature via various actors in the informal social networks of the globalised literary market and through its consecration in one of the prestigious intellectual and artistic centres of the world literary system (Paris), as well as through the mediation of translations into the dominant world languages. Attention is also given to the uniquely poetic character of this novel of memory about life in a concentration camp, which is a glocalised version of one of the world's major literary testimonies of the Shoah.
Key words Slovenian literature; novel of memory; testimony; concentration camp literature
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> Boris Pahor is a focus of life energy and a true witness to the 20th century.
> — Miroslav Košuta

Necropolis by Boris Pahor, a Slovenian minority writer from Trieste, where he was born and still lives today, is not the author's only work representing his experience

of life in a concentration camp, but it is widely regarded as "his best work on this topic" (Latković and Kovač 27). The author himself considers the novel to be a digested version of his autobiographical writing about concentration camps; in the first edition, on the opening pages (following the motto), he added a clarification for his revisiting the topic: "I have included some previously published pages in this testimony, in which they acquire their final form" (Pahor, *Nekropola* 6, Transl. by Mojca Šorli and Neville Hall).[1] In the opinion of historiographer Marta Verginella, the statement "is of no small importance as it confirms that the autobiographical narrative of *Necropolis* had evolved into a true testimony" ("Boris Pahor" 62). Nevertheless, it is a specific testimony delivered through the filter of a novel of memory[2] rather than conveyed by way of a simple chronological sequence. Only being familiar with the entire opus of the writer enables the reader to put together the master narrative from the individual "pieces" in works such as *People Beyond Hell* (*Onkraj pekla so ljudje*) (1958), *A Difficult Spring* (*Spopad s pomladjo*) (1978), *Jours Obscurs (Zatemnitev)* (1975), *In a Horizontal Position* (*V vodoravni legi*) (1997) and *Oberdan Square* (*Trg Oberdan*) (2006) — Pahor's comprehensive testimony of internment. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that experts on his work have recently started to seek parallels between Pahor and other famous witnesses, such as Jorge Semprún (Latković and Kovač), Primo Levi, Imre Kertész, David Rousset, Shlomo Venezia (Verginella, "Boris Pahor"), Jean Améry, Robert Antelme, Vasilij Grossman, Kertész, Levi, Semprún, Varlam Šalamov,[3] and again Levi,[4] Levi and Kertész, as well as the two predecessors, Fyodor M. Dostoevsky with his *Notes from the Dead House* and Silvio Pellico with his memoirs *My Prisons*,[5] etc.

Although, in recent times, it may seem self-evident for Slovenians to relate Pahor's *Necropolis* to the important works of European "concentration camp literature,"our goal here is to reflect on the positioning of this work in the universal space of world literature. Following Goethe and, in the contemporary spirit, perceiving world literature as literary works that have crossed the language and cultural borders of their literary systems, spreading — whether as originals or translations — into the transnational cultural space, we must, of course, be concerned with translations and the international reception of texts. Only in this way will it be possible to create an impression of the "active presence" of this work in the literary system beyond its culture of origin, which, according to David Damrosch, is necessary for the "inclusion of a work in world literature" (4). A query in the COBISS.SI system, the Slovenian co-operative online bibliography database, revealing that *Nekropola* had been translated into as many as 16 European languages by 2016,[6] as well as Esperanto (1993), does indeed offer

grounds for optimism. Nevertheless, a comparison of the global rate of translation for Pahor, Levi and Kertész provided by UNESCO's *Index Translationum — World Bibliography of Translation* for the period 1979–2009 paints a sobering picture: while 19 of Pahor's works were translated into foreign languages in this period, as many as 301 translations are recorded for works by Primo Levi and 242 translations of works by Imre Kertész. As the latter originally writes in Hungarian, which, as a non-dominant world language, is more comparable with Slovenian as the language of a small nation, we can assume that the consecration of the author by the Nobel Prize in 2002 contributed significantly to the translation rate of his works.

Pahor's positioning in the international literary market has not been easy. He comes from Trieste, a city located in the border area between Italy and Slovenia, with an ethnically mixed population and a predominantly Slovenian hinterland, which, together with a third of the Slovenian ethnic territory, became part of the Kingdom of Italy upon the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy following the First World War and the Rapallo Peace Treaty in 1920. With the rise of Fascism to power in 1922, all of the minorities in Italy, including the Slovenian minority, were subjected to violent processes of linguistic and cultural unification,[7] which represented an extremely traumatic experience for the young writer, about which he later often reported in his texts. Although he studied mostly in Italian schools and, as a largely self-taught Slovenian speaker, was bilingual in his cultural formation, he defied forced assimilation into the dominant Italian culture from the very beginning of his literary career, including with his first publications from before the Second World War in the Primorska clandestine press, the *Mladika* journal from Celje and the *Dejanje* literary journal edited by Edvard Kocbek in Ljubljana, all of which were in Slovenian, as were all of the subsequent literary works and diaries,[8] as well as the vast majority of essays and other works.[9]

After the Second World War, Trieste once again found itself in Italy. With the end of Fascism, the Slovenian language was no longer prohibited, and the literary production of authors from Trieste and other Slovenian authors in Italy, including Pahor, flourished. As the literature of an ethnic minority, it was nonetheless stuck on the periphery of two semi-peripheral literary systems: the Italian system centred in Rome and the Slovenian system centred in Ljubljana. This had multifaceted implications for the reception of Pahor's work and his literary engagement in both cultural and linguistic spaces. During the Cold War and the bloc division of Europe into the democratic West, of which Italy was a part, and the socialist East, which, despite Tito's principled policy of non-alignment, included the former Yugoslavia and Slovenia as one of its republics, the chances of success in both

(semi-peripheral) centres were modest due to political and ideological prejudice and a distrust of ideas that could, through the authors and their works, spread from one side of the iron curtain to the other. For Italians — who, unlike the Germans, had failed to collectively process their responsibility for Fascist crimes, instead suppressing it in the unconscious — Pahor's literature and other writings and public appearances expressing condemnation of Fascist violence at all stages of its existence, including his persistent and consistent commitment to the rights and protection of the Slovenian minority in Italy and minorities across the world,[10] were correspondingly disconcerting. The response on the Slovenian side, however, was marked by disruptions owing to a number of issues that must be examined in more detail. During the period of declarative Communist internationalism, even Pahor's nationalism and fervent support of Slovenian identity was problematic for the Yugoslav authorities, but his opposition to the real-socialist totalitarianism of Yugoslavia was especially controversial, as was his general commitment to democracy and pluralism in society and politics.

While post-war Yugoslav cultural policy was supportive of the artistic endeavours of the Slovenian ethnic minority in Italy, and the publication of Pahor's books was permitted not only in Trieste and its Italian hinterland, but also in Slovenia, the impression was still maintained that this was regional production, peripheral with regard to its central Slovenian counterpart. Thus, Pahor failed (with a few exceptions) in his attempts to establish himself as a writer in the broader Yugoslav space; he was twice awarded the rather marginal Slovenian Writers' Association Prize[11] for his novels in the 1950s, rather than, for example, the central republican Prešeren Prize, which eluded him right up until 1992, when Slovenia gained its independence. Initially, the critiques of his work were ongoing and current, appearing in periodicals throughout the Slovenian territory, not just on the periphery, but in the later decades they became few and far between.[12] Thus, *Necropolis*, which was first published in 1967, only received three Slovenian literary reviews, two in Trieste and one in Ljubljana, with the second being rather positive, but nonetheless expressing reservations regarding the aesthetic characteristics of the work.[13]

In 1975, Pahor fell from grace with the Slovenian and Yugoslav Communist Party leadership due to an interview that he and Alojz Rebula conducted with Edvard Kocbek, published in the Trieste journal *Zaliv*, in which Kocbek, as a representative of the highest wartime authorities of the Resistance, spoke publicly about the post-war killings of more than ten thousand home guards ("domobranci").[14] The journal was subsequently banned in Yugoslavia and Pahor

was not allowed to enter the state for two years.[15] In addition, as a writer, he was pushed into even greater isolation on the outskirts of the Slovenian cultural space; for example, his novel *Jours Obscurs* (*Zatemnitev*), which was published in 1975 in Trieste, did not receive a single review in the cultural centre according to Legiša.[16]

It was not until the 1980s, which, in the ongoing process of democratisation, brought a cultural and political thaw that Pahor's books once again began to be published in the centre of the Slovenian semi-periphery and the absence of critical reaction was finally broken.[17] Furthermore, a glance at the writer's bibliography reveals that Pahor, who wrote the bulk of his short stories and novels in the 1950s and 1960s, was not entirely overlooked by literary criticism. The coverage of the author is captured in encyclopaedic entries and historical overviews, while the thematic characteristics of his writings received scholarly treatment in individual studies. Pahor was, however, frequently discussed in the context of the cross-border Slovenian literature of Trieste, while, in the 1980s and 1990s, Lojze Kovačič and Drago Jančar were canonised as the most important Slovenian post-war writers in the central area, and as such, unlike Pahor, even made it into high school curricula.

In the 1990s, there was a turnaround in the evaluation of Pahor's opus, which coincided with the independence of Slovenia and the writer's 80th anniversary; he was finally awarded the (state) Prešeren Prize and the monograph *Proceedings on Boris Pahor (Pahorjev zbornik)* (1993) was published, with contributions from a number of Slovenian literary scholars and cultural workers, shedding new light on Pahor's personality and work, and on his place in Slovenian literature. However, more critical for the positioning of *Necropolis* in the context of world literature than its ranking within the national literary field was the role played by the 1995 "denationalised" universal capital of the Republic of World Literature (Casanova), Paris, where, on the publication of the novel *Printemps difficile* (*Spopad s pomladjo*), Pahor gained accolades from literary experts and readers alike. The consecration that occurred as a result of Pahor's recognition by autonomous critics, prominent translators and cosmopolitan mediators was defined by Pascale Casanova as a "crossing of a literary border" (126), which was extremely effective and had real consequences for the reception of the text, and which was due by definition.[18] Indeed, the crossing of this invisible line is interpreted by Casanova as a unique kind of transformation, almost a type of alchemical transmutation. In her view, the consecration of a text is as good as a magical metamorphosis of the ordinary to "gold," to absolute literary value, "In this sense the sanctioning authorities of world literary space are the guardians, guarantors, and creators of value, which is nonetheless always changing, ceaselessly contested and debated, by virtue of

the very fact of its connection with the literary present and modernity" (127). The consecration,[19] which at the same time denationalised and universalised Pahor and retroactively "gilded" *Necropolis* (Bavčar 15) — published in 1990 under the title *Pèlerin parmi les ombres* — also, of course, provoked responses in the Slovenian media.[20]

In thinking about world literature, one should, according to Marko Juvan, be aware of its paradoxical principle of *ex pluribus unum*, a pluralist multiplicity of literatures in one system. "World literature is composed of multiple related planes," says Juvan (11), without the functioning of which the integration of *Necropolis* into the space of world literature would not have been possible. In his essay *Boris Pahor: The Ethics of Slovenianhood*, Parisian Slovenian Evgen Bavčar, who is among the most deserving of credit for Pahor's breakthrough in France, reports, for example, on a number of connections that he established in order to activate media and institutional support, the publishing apparatus and the cultural market, as well as the archives and practices involved in global circulation, memory expansion and retention of literary works; but without the transnational social network of writers, critics, translators, editors, literary experts and other individuals, who paved an informal way for the author and his work by forging links between them, he would, of course, never have succeeded. Bavčar also reports how, in establishing contacts with the French publisher Phoebus, which had already published a commercially successful translation of the novel *Alamut* by Slovenian writer Vladimir Bartol, he referred to this novel precisely because its author had already transcended his home language and literature and become firmly established in international circulation through translation.[21] It should be remembered, however, that, following the successful breakthrough of *Necropolis* in France, without the related contemporary literary production and the globalised publishing distribution that relied on the elite readership of international works in global cultural markets, translations of this same work into other European languages might have been few and far between. Speaking of translations, it should be pointed out that only three translations of *Necropolis* into European languages (French, English and Italian) and Esperanto were published in the 1990s, while all of the others only appeared after 2000, mostly, in fact, in the last decade.[22] It is quite possible that the growing number of translations into foreign languages in recent times reveals a growing interest in Pahor on the wider European and global scale and, with this, the active presence of his work in the literary system beyond its original culture; it would seem that Slovenian actors on the international cultural and translation market no longer play a decisive role in the emergence of the latest translations of Pahor's work.

"World literature also consists of segments of translated literature, which are highlighted in the domestic literary field as examples of the major current global literary phenomena or canonised as the 'timeless' classics of humanity," states Juvan (11). In this respect, it should be noted that Pahor had access to numerous original and translated works addressing the theme of camps, and he even lists some testimony bearers in the novel itself: Franz Blaha, Primo Levi, David Rousset, Edith Bruck, André Ragot and Vincenzo Pappalettera. While these authors may have been important role models for Pahor when he was writing *Necropolis*, there were still others a few decades later when the novel was making its way to global cultural markets. By mentioning them, I seek to draw attention to the fact that, with the aging and dying generation of survivors of Nazi prison camps, their verbalised experience, in addition to becoming an example of the current major global literary phenomena consecrated with the highest awards,[23] also became a kind of a niche market. Whereas, for Pahor as a minority author, the Italian book market remained hermetically closed, so to speak, right up until his consecration in Paris,[24] Pahor's success in France was due to his personal commitment, his cosmopolitanism and a great desire to establish a name for himself in the very centre.[25] Of considerable importance were, and still are, his willingness to appear publicly, and the fact that, thanks to his longevity, he has preserved a living link with historical events that are increasingly transferred to the younger generations purely through memoirs.[26]

Pahor's success in France, his series of translations into foreign languages, and the fact that he was increasingly classified by international literary criticism as one of the classics of the 20th century — all of which the Slovenian public was informed about in the domestic media — accelerated the canonisation of his works in the Slovenian literary system, as did the solid readership of these works, the multiple Slovenian reprints of *Necropolis* and shifts in the perception of reputable experts in Slovenian studies, who have written a series of discussions about the work.[27] Pahor has been nominated several times as a candidate for the Nobel Prize, with the most public attention being focused on the proposal made by the University of Ljubljana, which followed the initiative of the Faculty of Arts in 2009. Whereas, in *Proceedings on Boris Pahor* of 1993, the author was regarded as an important citizen of Trieste, but still only a regional and thus peripheral Slovenian author, he is introduced in the preface by the editors of the monograph *The Poetics of Slovenianhood* (*Poetika slovenstva*) (2011) as a "writer of European stature," the author of *Necropolis* and *A Difficult Spring*, which form part of "the fundamental works of world literature's treasure house" (Pregelj and Kozak 7). The editors invited both Slovenian and foreign literary experts, philosophers, historians

and other scholars[28] and translators of his oeuvre to participate in the monograph, thus enabling — and in some contributions actually establishing — a broader comparative perspective. A typically revised perspective on the writer can also be detected in two articles by Boris Paternu, a renowned Slovenian literary historian, who, in 1993, contributed a favourable and well-balanced overview of Pahor's opus to *Proceedings on Boris Pahor*, in which he highlighted four novels as central, including *Necropolis*; he listed its translations, as well as recognising the favourable French reception and breakthrough to the wider world.[29] In the first sentence of another article published two decades later (2014), Paternu immediately classified *Necropolis* as Pahor's central work [30](29) and, comparing it to other works of the world literature on prison camps, thoroughly analysed its unique artistic character.

Necropolis is undoubtedly one of those works in which universality is always subtly intertwined with singularity.[31] The central problem in the novel — how to survive, how to preserve one's "bare life" in a state of exception, in a camp as a place "in which the most absolute *conditio inhumana* that has ever existed on earth was realized" (Agamben 166) and the environment that Pahor refers to as a "world of ultimate negation" (*Necropolis* 88) — again concerns the question of memory and, more generally, the ability as such to revive and communicate the experience of a camp. To survive the terrible violence and dehumanisation, and to express them, is a truly great universal theme of all testimonial literature. Where the struggle for bare life is so ubiquitous and (almost) unthinkably cruel and depersonalising, interpersonal communication is itself reduced to a minimum. Levi, for example, in his *If This Is a Man* writes of Auschwitz: "[N]o one here speaks willingly" (35). All the more so for a witness/protagonist in the process of memory reconstruction, who, after 20 years, returns (as a tourist) to the former concentration camp Natzweiler-Struthof in Alsace, and who, in dealing with the camp, must also be faced with the restrictions of memoiristic narrative. The latter unfolds in the novel on two mutually intertwining temporal planes. The first chronologically follows the most recent turn of events, covering a time span of approximately 24 hours during the author's visit to the camp as part of a tour. The bulk of the narrative reaches 20 years back to the wartime period (1944–1945), and, especially in the second part of the book, deals with its traumatic core elements more stochastically.

Although it seems that the chances of survival in the camp are decided by pure coincidence, the narrator imagines that of crucial importance for him was the conscious erasure of all beautiful memories and past images from his consciousness and the rejection of any thought of the future. Setting aside anxiety and focusing

on bare life developed a sort of numbness in him, "a defence system which would not allow the emotion to get to the human core and erode its compressed, self-defensive powers" (Pahor, *Necropolis* 125). Nevertheless, how does one express the horror of a concentration camp experience? It repeatedly occurs to the narrator that the reality presented could perhaps be better captured by a movie camera, but he also has doubts about that:

> The celluloid of a movie camera could certainly capture the early-morning shoving of striped uniforms in their cramped beehive as they jump down from their three-tiered bunks and jockey position in the washroom, each hoping to stake claim to a pair of clogs with the canvas intact so they won't come off that day in the snow, mud or deep puddles. And film could capture the firm hand shoving the bowling-ball head of a walking skeleton under a stream of water, the rib cage creaking like a dried-out wicker basket as the hand pushes the spine down even more firmly. […] Or this moment: the shaved heads all bent over their wooden spoons. Or the zebra-striped anthill as it prepares to turn in at night, tying its rags in bundles before it can run into that freezer full of ticks. But not before each one steps up on a stool so a man holding a caged light can examine his crotch. […] Maybe it's just as well there was no camera; for who knows what people today might think of that herd of half-naked creatures taking turns stepping up on the stool while the rest look on fearfully incredulous that this member, floodlit, exposed, and withered, is the begetter of all the countless specimens of their two-legged breed. A good thing there was no film–today these wizened creatures with their crotches on display could be taken for a pack of trained dogs, taught through hunger to stand on a stool on their hind legs and sniff each other's parts. (Pahor, *Necropolis* 14-15)

The narrative of the witness gives space to questioning and doubts about the possibilities and meaning of the transmission of the concentration camp experience to those who lack this experience, with his reservations digging into the very nature and character of his memories. In the process, he seeks comparison with other writers:

> For a long time now I've been aware that my own experiences were modest compared to what others described in their memoirs. Bláha, Levi, Rousset, Bruck, Ragot, Pappalettera. And that I wasn't observant enough. I was trapped in my dark world, a hollow world populated by shadows. I saw with my eyes,

> yes, but did not allow those images to reach my heart. This was not a matter of will; at my first contact with the reality of the camp my spirit was submerged in a fog that filtered events, that bled them of their power. Fear deadened me, but also protected me from the greater evil of accommodating myself to that reality. And so it never occurred to me to take an interest in the names of our superiors, or to join the circles of the influential, or to participate in camp politics. I learned about this only later, when I read the testimonies of others. Even as an interpreter, and later as a medic, I remained one of the herd, another cell in the body of mass fear. (100-101)

Despite doubts in his own strength, Pahor's narrative develops producing an "absolutely realistic" or "radically realistic" (Paternu, *Pahorjeva* 31, 32) memoiristic narrative, which opens up the traumatic totality of camp life and the world, and depicts it in powerful, direct and haunting details; it could be said that reading is made difficult for the reader due to the writer's unsparing directness. The images of the miserable prison accommodation, cruel working hours, devastating hunger, complete exhaustion, fear and apathy regarding everyday events, penal executions and cremations of the dead are raised before the reader's inner eyes. In addition, the narrator, as a nurse in the crematorium world, is faced with unbearable odours having to deal daily with the mass diarrhoea of emaciated prisoners, with their lumpy, smelly growths and bruises, accompanied by a general lack of medicines, minimal means for hygiene and very basic medical equipment. Among his tasks is removing the dead, and the fact does not escape him that their bodies are piled up in front of the furnace in which the water for bathing living prisoners is heated. Not only does Pahor's testimony give form to his personal story, but also to many portraits of his fellow sufferers of different nationalities, highlighting first and foremost — and this is the characteristic singularity of *Necropolis* — the fate of his compatriots from Trieste and Istria, as well as that of Slovenian and other Slavic prisoners, rather than Jews.

Particularly disturbing are the ethical insights of the novel driven by primal egotism; among others, the insight into the ambivalent aspects of the prisoner's instinct for self-preservation. Thus, Pahor both admits (to himself) and self-reproaches the fact that nurses also survived on the bread of their deceased patients: "When the stretchers carried the corpses to the storehouse, their squares of bread stayed on our table. Yes, we ate them. I know what you're thinking. That the crime wasn't in eating them but in counting on eating them. We knew exactly whose bread would stay" (132). Examining his conscience, he reveals the sense of shame

and guilt of a survivor, which, according to Agamben, is the very "*locus classicus"* (cited in Latković and Kovač 33) of the literature about camps: "I want to say something to my former companions, but cannot. I am alive, and that fact makes my best thoughts insincere, my best feelings impure" (Pahor *Necropolis* 68). Later, he adds: "Yet, no one can deny that somewhere deep down it is comforting to see the other being in danger rather than oneself. In a gesture of comradery, when offering drink to the condemned, there is, despite all of the goodness, a tinge of gratitude for the order of things that has determined that you are the one offering and not the one being offered drink" (Pahor, *Nekropola* 137, Transl. by Mojca Šorli and Neville Hall).

What saves the narrator from the infinite emptiness and all-embracing flood of nothingness, which he resists with all the power of his consciousness, is his modesty and timeless belief in survival. His inner strength is derived from the fact that, being a nurse, he must care for others. Caring for others gives a feeling of usefulness and meaningfulness: "Maybe I owe it to my peasant nature, who knows, but I never had a problem dealing with pus, feces, and blood. While attending befouled bodies my only wish was for them to be clean and lying in bed again, as though a body put to rights externally would be put to rights internally, too" (106). Caring for others or for another, therefore, is manifest in Pahor as a self-sacrificing care for the weary, starving, diseased, decaying and humiliated *bodies* of prisoners. In all probability, the writer's focus on the body and the corporeal comes from different backgrounds, including the ideological background, as noted by Marta Verginella (*Boris Pahor* 63-65), but it paradoxically transcends the focus on "bare life" in exceptional circumstances typical of camp prisoners, testifying to the resilience of Pahor's humanist ethos and human solidarity. The very ability to think the body in the most extreme conditions of camp life is, according to Verginella (ibid. 64), the specific character of Pahor's work, distinguishing him in terms of content from the rest of the eminent witnesses of the Holocaust.[32]

Furthermore, *Necropolis* is special for its unique expression of style and rich metaphorical language, which builds on and elaborates the realistic representation of events by which testimonial narrative is typically characterised. An example of the metaphorical supplementation of a veristic description is the scene of the mass washing and shaving of prisoners in the camp bathrooms:

> But many can't stand up, because with their rags they have removed their last strength. They sit on their bundles. The light bulb above the entrance etches agitated shadows on callused skin stretched over ribs. On this harp of a human

> chest the wind's cold fingers play a quiet requiem. (Pahor, *Necropolis* 29)

The description of events can also be more radically detached from reality, creating drastic and terrifying images:

> Then I saw the men who had given up waiting for help and had risen from their mattresses on their own. Or maybe it was the unusual silence that got them out into the sun–frail phantoms whose bare feet made no sound. Naked, their shirts barely reaching their hollow crotches, they groped their way over the narrow terrace. Flapping their arms to keep their balance, like blinded birds whose feathers had been singed off. They went to the steps and began training uphill, as if to escape the fire that would have ravaged the last cells of their bodies. They hung onto the steps and crawled up on all fours, spindly water striders, scorched, knock-kneed spiders as if each excruciating move was the last. (47)

The narrator concludes the reminiscing part of the novel by depicting a scene charged with an unmistakably humanistic point, in which, bracing his strength, he calls on his memory for help. The scene is part of a larger reflection on the collective responsibility of the German people for the existence of concentration camps, about which the writer once again has some doubts, despite the fact that it is from humans that he experienced the terrible humiliation of his body (and soul and spirit). The narrator tries to recall at least one compassionate gesture by the perpetrators that he experienced in the fourteen months spent in camps; it was when a German non-commissioned officer, who noticed him tending to a pus-filled lump on an inmate's leg, provided him with a portion of rice:

> The blond noncommissioned officer, who was sitting at the base of a fieldpiece as he ate from his mess tin, looked up and pointed at me with his spoon. I gave him a slight, tired nod, took a small carton, and returned to my corner. It was half full of rice. Ludicrous of the young Siegfried to think he could redeem himself with it. I sat on my blanket and squeezed the warm, pliable carton in my hands. [. . .] And as I tried to divine his thoughts, I felt as if I had some small, live creature in my hands, a young white rabbit, and the warmth that slowly rose from my hand and up my arm seemed familiar. I closed my eyes and with all my strength forced memory to come to my rescue. (137)

The metaphors and stylistic expression that merge in the novel with the essentially realistic depiction upgrade the documentary narrative about concentration camps with a poetic quality. This is characteristically peculiar and unique among the testimonies of the Shoah. For this reason, as well, it seems likely that Pahor's placement in the canon of world literature is far from complete.

Notes

1. In the subsequent editions of *Necropolis*, including the English translation, this note is omitted. All quotations from *Necropolis* are from Biggins's translation of this novel, if not marked differently.

2. One of the greatest novels of memory written in the 20th century is Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27).

3. See Simona Škrabec. "Ostrina pisave: Boris Pahor v evropskem okviru." *Poetika slovenstva: Družbeni in literarni opus Borisa Pahorja*. Eds. Barbara Pregelj and Krištof Jacek Kozak. (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem, Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče, Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2011) 139–155.

4. Marta Verginella. "Pahorjev odnos do telesa – ogledala 20. stoletja." *Pahoriana 2013*. Ed. Zdravko Duša. (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2014) 17–32.

5. See Boris Paternu. "Pahorjeva *Nekropola*." *Jezik in slovstvo*, 59.2–3 (2014): 29–41.

6. There are records of translations into Romanian (2015), Albanian (2014), Swedish (2013), French (1990), Spanish (2010), English (1995), Russian (2011), Serbian (2009), Macedonian (2014), Portuguese (2013), Croatian (2012), Dutch (2011), Italian (1997), Finnish (2006), Catalan (2004) and German (2001).

7. For more on the denationalisation of Slovenians under Fascism, see Verginella. *Meja drugih: Primorsko vprašanje in slovenski spomin*. Trans. by Tea Štoka (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2009.).

8. Interestingly, Pahor never translated his works into Italian.

9. Pahor graduated from a classical grammar school in Koper, but his qualification was not officially recognised by the state. After two years, he abandoned the study of theology at the Roman Catholic Seminary in Gorizia and was recruited into the Italian army in 1940. He was sent to Libya, where he completed his matriculation exams. On returning to Italy, he began studies at the University of Padua. While pursuing his studies, he worked in the area of Lago di Garda as an interpreter in a camp for captured officers of the Yugoslav armed forces. Upon the Italian capitulation in 1943, he returned to Trieste and joined the Slovenian National Liberation Front movement. He was, however, betrayed. In January 1944, he was arrested by home guards, who extradited him to the Germans. In 1944, he was taken to the Dachau concentration camp, and from there to the camps Natzweiler-Struthof, Dora-Mittelbau, Harzungen and Bergen Belsen,

where, at the end of the war, he was liberated by the Allies together with the other inmates. He then spent 18 months convalescing from tuberculosis in a French health centre, Villiers-sur-Marne, close to Paris. By the end of 1946, he was back in Trieste, and he graduated in Italian in Padua the following year. He worked as a freelance writer for some time. Then, after marrying Slovenian Radoslava Premrl and until his retirement in 1975, he held teaching posts at Slovenian high schools in Trieste. In the meantime, he wrote, edited and co-edited the literary journals *Sidro, Tokovi* and *Zaliv*. He has remained faithful to writing up to this day.

10. Pahor was a member and a vice-president of AIDLCM, an international association for the protection of endangered languages and cultures (Association internationale pour la défense des langues et cultures menacées).

11. The awarded novels were *Vila ob jezeru* and *A Difficult Spring*.

12. See Martina Legiša. "Bibliografija Borisa Pahorja." *Pahorjev zbornik.* Eds. Marija Pirjevec and Vera Ban Tuta. (Trst: Narodna in študijska knjižnica v Trstu, 1993) 240–246.

13. See France Pibernik. "Boris Pahor: *Nekropola.*" *Sodobnost*, 15.8 (1967): 927–930.

14. For more details on the role of Boris Pahor in the publication of this famous interview and the consequences for all three participants — Pahor, Rebula and Kocbek — see Tine Hribar. "Pahorjevo prijateljevanje s Kocbekom." *Poetika slovenstva: Družbeni in literarni opus Borisa Pahorja*. Eds. Barbara Pregelj and Krištof Jacek Kozak. (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem, Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče, Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2011) 115–123. And Igor Omerza. "Boris Pahor ob jamboru: Pahorjev vpliv na Edvarda Kocbeka v primeru objave povojnih likvidacij in odnos uradne slovenske politike do Borisa Pahorja." *Poetika slovenstva: Družbeni in literarni opus Borisa Pahorja*. Eds. Barbara Pregelj and Krištof Jacek Kozak. (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem, Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče, Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2011) 105–113.

15. Due to their critical positions towards the Slovenian Communist Party leadership, two collaborators of the *Zaliv* journal — Viktor Blažič and Franc Miklavčič — were sentenced to imprisonment in Slovenia at the time.

16. See Martina Legiša. "Bibliografija Borisa Pahorja." *Pahorjev zbornik.* Eds. Marija Pirjevec and Vera Ban Tuta. (Trst: Narodna in študijska knjižnica v Trstu, 1993) 245.

17. In the entire Slovenian territory, as many as nine reviews were published about the novel *V labirintu* (1984).

18. For more details on the critical response in France, see Meta Klinar. "Odzivi medijev na objave Pahorjevih del v Franciji." *Poetika slovenstva: Družbeni in literarni opus Borisa Pahorja.* Eds. Barbara Pregelj and Krištof Jacek Kozak. (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem, Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče, Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2011) 190–192.

19. We cannot, of course, at this point enter a polemical debate with Pascale Casanova, who was accused on many occasions of being Gaul-centric in her claims that consecration in Paris

was inevitable for the authors from dominated literary spaces, because Paris enjoys the status of a kind of literary central bank, in which books subject to independent critical assessment and transmuted may become denationalised, and their authors "made" universal (cf. Casanova 127).

20. More about critical reception of Pahor's books in France in Meta Klinar. "Odzivi medijev na objave Pahorjevih del v Franciji." *Poetika slovenstva: Družbeni in literarni opus Borisa Pahorja.* Eds. Barbara Pregelj and Krištof Jacek Kozak. (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem, Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče, Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2011) 189, 198–200.

21. See Bavčar, 2011, 15–19.

22. Reflecting on the positioning of *Necropolis* in world literature, it would be interesting to investigate how many translations are, in fact, a result of endeavours on the part of Slovenian mediators and translators, and which translations, on the other hand, are a result of the response of cosmopolitan actors to the developments in the globalised book market.

23. In 2002, the Nobel Prize for literature was awarded to the now deceased Imre Kertész, a Hungarian writer of Jewish descent who was himself a testimony bearer for the Auschwitz Nazi camp.

24. On Italian reception of Pahor's work see Martina Ožbot. "O prevodnem posredovanju slovenske književnosti ob besedilih Borisa Pahorja." *Poetika slovenstva: Družbeni in literarni opus Borisa Pahorja*. Eds. Barbara Pregelj and Krištof Jacek Kozak. (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem, Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče, Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2011) 157–168.

25. According to the Cobiss online bibliography service, ten works by Pahor have been translated to date: nine novels and a collection of short stories. Some of the works have also been reprinted, with *Necropolis* (*Pèlerin parmi les Ombres*) seeing the most reprints. As noted by Meta Klinar (189), Pahor is the most translated and best-known Slovenian writer in France.

26. In addition, Pahor received the following awards in France: in 2006, he was appointed a Knight of Arts and Culture by the French Minister of Culture; in 2007, he received the highest French decoration, the Knight of the French Order of the Legion of Honour, awarded by the President of France; and in 2011, he was appointed a Komtur of the Order of Arts and Letters (Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres) of the French Republic (Klinar 196).

27. See, for instance, Ivanka Hergold. "Zapiski o Pahorjevi *Nekropoli*." *Pahorjev zbornik.* Eds. Marija Pirjevec and Vera Ban Tuta. (Trst: Narodna in študijska knjižnica v Trstu, 1993) 160–174. And "Bivanjska muka in upornost nesvobodnih ljudi v opusu Borisa Pahorja." In: Boris Pahor, *Nekropola*. (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1997) 195–228. Also see Franc Zadravec. "Od povratnikovega vitalističnega dialoga do njegove spominske slike o *Nekropoli*." *Pahorjev zbornik.* Eds. Marija Pirjevec and Vera Ban Tuta. (Trst: Narodna in študijska knjižnica v Trstu, 1993) 118–132. And "Slovenski roman o nasilju: Na primeru romana *Nekropola*." *Individualni in generacijski ustvarjalni ritmi v slovenskem jeziku, književnosti in kulturi*. Eds. Marko Juvan and Tomaž Sajovic. (Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, 1994) 409–417.

28. See René de Ceccatty. "Pahor, dostojanstvo, identiteta, spomin." Trans. by Krištof Jacek Kozak. *Poetika slovenstva: Družbeni in literarni opus Borisa Pahorja*. Eds. Barbara Pregelj and Krištof Jacek Kozak. Koper: Univerza na Primorskem (Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče, Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2011) 21–26. And Thomas Poiss. "Razumevanje bolečine: pogost motiv v opusu Borisa Pahorja." Trans. by Gašper Malej. *Poetika slovenstva: Družbeni in literarni opus Borisa Pahorja*. Eds. Barbara Pregelj and Krištof Jacek Kozak. (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem, Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče, Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2011) 43–49.

29. See Boris Paternu. "Pisatelj Boris Pahor." *Pahorjev zbornik.* Eds. Marija Pirjevec and Vera Ban Tuta. (Trst: Narodna in študijska knjižnica v Trstu, 1993) 111–115.

30. See Boris Paternu. "Pahorjeva *Nekropola.*" *Jezik in slovstvo*, 59.2–3 (2014).

31. On singularity see Derek Attridge. *The Singularity of Literature*. (London and New York: Routledge, 204) 63–64.

32. Verginella (65) adds: "In his capacity to either relive the camp experience through the body and physical changes or the exposition of camp atrocities in their physical determinedness, Pahor comes closest to Shlomo Venezia, a member of Sonderkommand in Auschwitz, who testifies about shifting corpses from the gas chambers to the crematorium furnaces."

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