In the Name of Freedom: The Poetic Ludism of Milan Jesih

U ime slobode: pesnički ludizam Milana Jesiha

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This paper examines how the demand for freedom was fulfilled in Milan Jesih’s poetry from different periods, paying particular attention to the origin of the label *ludism*. In the broader perception, language play was central to Slovenian ludism, but it flourished without a clear link to Derrida’s concept of the play of signification or Heidegger’s idea of being as play. A comparison of Jesih’s poetry collections *Uran v urinu, gospodar!* (Uranus in the Urin, Master!), *Soneti* (Sonnets) and *Maršal* (Marshal) shows that all three books open up space for carnivalisation, as they connect the high with the low, and the comical with the serious. This happens against the background of belief in the autonomy of art. Freedom remained an imperative in Jesih’s poetic oeuvre, which made his poetry comparable to play. The notion of ludism thus seems appropriate both in conceptual and stylistic terms.

SLOVENIAN POETRY, MILAN JESIH, LUDISM, NEO-AVANT-GARDE, PLAY, AESTHETIC AUTONOMY

U radu se analizira pitanje kako je ostvaren imperativ za slobodom u različitim periodima pesničkog stvaralaštva Milana Jesiha, s posebnim naglaskom na genezu termina *ludizam*. U širem smislu reči, jezička igra je ključna za slovenački ludizam, međutim, takvo polazište se razvilo bez jasnog oslanjanja na Deridin pojam igre označavanja ili Hajdegerovu ideju o biću kao igri. Upoređivanjem Jesihovih zbirki *Uran v urinu, gospodar!* (Uran u urinu, gospodare!), *Soneti* i *Maršal*, postaje evidentno da sve tri knjige otvaraju prostor za karnevalizaciju, s obzirom na to da povezuju visoko s niskim, smešno s ozbiljnim, na temelju pretpostavke o autonomiji umetnosti. Sloboda je ostala imperativ u Jesihovom pesničkom opusu, što čini mogućim poređenje njegove poezije s igrom. Stoga je termin *ludizam* primeren kako u pojmovnom tako i u stilskom pogledu.

SLOVENAČKA POEZIJA, MILAN JESIH, LUDIZAM, NEOAVANGARDA, IGRA, ESTETSKA AUTONOMIJA

MILAN JESIH AND THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

The first public appearance of Group 442, which evolved from Group 441 (Ivo Svetina, Denis Poniž and Ferdinand Miklavec) when it was joined by new members, including Milan Jesih, came in the form of a special issue of the journal *Problemi*. Published in December 1968, it featured six poems by Jesih. According to Svetina, *Problemi 442* (Problems 442) became the manifesto of the group, and they published Poniž's 'Esej o golem človeku' (Essay on the Naked Man) as its programme. However, as Poniž later pointed out in his role as a literary historian, the members of the group developed their own poetics, 'which were loosely associated with only a few characteristics' (Poniž: 116). Jesih's memory also testifies to the fact that the group's appearance was anything but a sign of a literary movement with clearly defined goals:

> *[W]e found it inappropriate to talk about each other's poetry. Only occasionally I exchanged a few words with Ivo Svetina about possible differences and common points, but more in the manner of amateur cooks [...]. But to sit together over the verses—never. Never. [...] It may be that others did, but we didn't; Matjaž Kocbek was even dismayed that it would seem as if we were showing our penises to each other. We didn't identify with the manifestos, which Ivo Svetina especially liked to write, as well as Denis Poniž, even though they were signed 442 or 443. (Jesih 2011)*

In addition to the desire for public recognition, the members of Group 442 appear to have been primarily associated with youthful resistance to restrictions, be they social, ideological or aesthetic. Thus, one can understand the fact that the group took its new name from Jesih's poem

'Obljuba' (Promise), in which one's complete freedom is not a utopia but an attainable goal, a promise that will come true: 'lahko si boš nadel ime Ferkeverk ali Pupilo ali Stemson / lahko boš Jaka ali Judež / lahko se boš rimal ali pa se opajal s čim drugim / lahko boš počel prav vse ('you can get the name Ferkeverk or Pupilo or Stemson/ you can be a Jake or a Jew/ you can rhyme or indulge yourself in something else/ you can do just about anything' [quoted in Svetina 2009: 28]). The political message is hidden in the verses because they can be read as criticism of collectivism and totalitarianism, but one would seek in vain the call for a change in society. Jesih's poetry was implicitly engaged in the context of social happenings, but the author was not a revolutionary. Although he was, by his own assurance, restrained from programmatic writings by the members of the group, his political activities can be explained in these words from one of them: 'The poet is not a revolutionary at all! Only a provocateur provoking the public from behind (safe enough) ramparts.' (Svetina 2009: 37)

Artistic provocation, the inheritance of the avant-garde and Baudelaire's maxim that the bourgeois should be shocked, were perceived as insufficient by some Group 442 contemporaries, as can be seen from the student journal *Tribuna*. In May 1969, Group 442 staged an evening of poetry at the Drama theatre in Ljubljana, entitled *Žlahtna plesen Pupilije Ferkeverk* (Pupilija Ferkeverk's Precious Mould). The review in *Tribuna* stated that the group was primarily about a new way of presenting one's poetry, 'breaking the conventional image of a literary poetry evening' (Šrot: 7). The authors took equal account of three levels: poetry, the acoustic image of the word and the visual dimension; however, according to the reviewer, they got stuck halfway, remaining within the frame of the formal and the usual. He was critical of the selection of poems (Andrej Brvar's poems did not seem to be in tune

with other texts, and some poems were extremely bad), and he praised the directing by Dušan Jovanović. He compared the performance to 'the playful and unprompted happenings of the groups OHO and Katalog', emphasising that, in such a constellation, 'every provocation loses its focus and transforms into a sufficient purpose and goal only in itself' (Šrot: 7).

Jesih co-authored the play *Pupilija, papa Pupilo pa Pupilčki* (Pupilija, Pappa Pupilo and Little Pupillos) in October of the same year, at that time as part of the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre, which was active from 1969 to 1972. In a memorial to Pupilija Ferkeverk, Svetina pointed to its political role, which did not require a clear ideological definition. According to him, it was mainly a

> *controlled opposition to socio-political currents, party resolutions, and so on. The Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre was ideologically unburdened, but also undefined, because we did not follow the ideas of extreme leftists, young Marxists who (also) gathered around the student periodical* Tribuna*, or in the neighbouring premises in the Casino Building, where the University Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia was based […]. The members of Pupilija did not identify with the ideas of* Perspektive*, or, to be more precise, with the most radical views of former members of* Perspektive*, which were then assembled in the editorial board of* Problemi*. (Svetina 2008: 90)*

Jesih's engagement in the student movement, too, can be understood against the background of the exercise of individual freedom, ideological relaxation and indeterminacy. In April 1971, Jesih participated in demonstrations that took place in front of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. The students first protested with the permission of the

authorities against the noise caused by traffic, demanding the construction of a bypass. A few days later, protests followed a visit by French Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas. An indictment was filed against Jesih for allegedly calling for physical confrontation with the police, and a student, Frane Adam, was in criminal proceedings for a different offense. Darko Štrajn, a student official who was also interrogated at the time, remembers how they tried to explain Jesih's call for the policemen to be shot between the eyes as a metaphor. Police investigation at the Faculty of Arts was the reason for the student occupation of the faculty, which took place under the motto *Our Movement is a Struggle for Socialism* from 26 May to 2 June 1971, when it ended due to university holidays. In addition to reports of a boom in creativity at the time of the occupation, *Tribuna* published an article in which a supporter of a political programme written by Jaša Zlobec incidentally described the role of Jesih and other poets during the occupation of faculty: 'Jesih is a bluffer, a false martyr. In the faculty occupation, he and Cizelj, with their poetry, only muddied the water and confused people. Other "revolutionary" poetry also caused more bad than good.' (Gruden: 6) In the interview mentioned above, Jesih said the following:

> *A young man shouted, 'I'm here!', he wanted to be seen and heard, I would write anything to be noticed. We provoked, used nasty words, wrote something politically questionable, albeit always with a healthy sense of keeping our asses safe… One time, the editor of Radio Student replaced some of my silly verses with music, something like 'Tito washed his bloody hands in the wide waterfall…'—Something like this, purely silly. As far as I was concerned, the student movement was also like this, nothing particularly heroic. (Jesih 2011)*

In 1972, Jesih's first poetry book, *Uran v urinu, gospodar!* (Uranus in Urine, Master!), was published in an elite book series. It was regarded as a representative example of Slovenian ludism, neo-avant-garde and modernism. An external feature of Jesih's poems is the consistent abandonment of capital letters; about halfway through the collection, stanzas with four rhyming lines begin to appear, with the number of stanzas in a poem varying in number; the rhythmic order and sequences of rhyme known from traditional Slovenian poetry are typical. The basic creative principle is the logic of associations; phrases and sentences are logically linked in terms of meaning, and word games, quotes, allusions and stylisations abound.

THE CONCEPT OF LUDISM IN SLOVENIAN LITERARY STUDIES

The term *ludism*, derived from *ludus*, which is Latin for play, was introduced into discussions of Slovenian literature by Taras Kermauner. As noted by Marko Juvan (272), the term emerged 'around 1970, first in the comments on Jovanović's satirical and parodical grotesque *Znamke, nakar še Emilija* (Stamps, and Then Emilija)'. Kermauner wrote about the play earlier, in the context of the poetry of Tomaž Šalamun. In 1967, he published a study on Šalamun's *Poker* in *Problemi*, announcing the beginning of a new era: 'The human kingdom, the era of human-ism is over. The Age of the Thing (res-ism) has begun.' (Kermauner 1968: 64) In this essay, Kermauner (1968: 66) equates play with human labour because 'the many years of dealing with nature and objects that we ourselves proclaim as Work [...] are just a kid tossing colourful pebbles, a monkey stacking dice, blindly trying, gambling, in which victory is completely random and has no meaning outside the game itself'. In these words, Heraclitus's famous words about time

as a pebble-playing child echo as well as Nietzsche's doctrine of nihilism. Kermauner's equation of work with play has no positive connotation; it is obvious that his set of metaphors points to the randomness and meaninglessness of human action. The title of Šalamun's collection is interpreted in the spirit of existentialism, as a version of the metaphor according to which human existence is a childish, meaningless game: 'Man's yearning for Meaning is hopeless in advance. And this blind hopeless manoeuvre, this game of human existence, is called Poker by Šalamun.' (Kermauner 1968: 66) Not only human existence in its thousands of years of history, but also the loss of values in modernity was equated with senseless play by Kermauner. For the onset of the new era was sociologically interpreted as the introduction of banal middle classes and mass consumer society, in which no elite view is valid anymore: 'Everything has become a game … And that is why the lucid man today has nothing left to do but play poker.' (Kermauner 1968: 66)

Kermauner was born in 1930 and his generational peers include the literary critic and historian Janko Kos. Kos's contribution to the reception of Slovenian avant-garde literature is invaluable as well. In 1970 and 1971, he published a series of articles entitled 'Med tradicijo in avantgardo' (Between Tradition and the Avant-Garde) in the journal *Sodobnost*. There, he argued that ludism 'can be used to designate the spiritual core of the literary avant-garde, which is essentially directed at "play" as the only possible form of human existence' (Kos 1971: 148). Much like Kermauner, Kos was not impressed with play as such, much less with turning poetry into play. Commenting on the belief that poetry should become a type of play, he noted that freedom, spontaneity, adventure, immediacy and other values which give meaning to play belong to the Romantic metaphysics of the absolute and autonomous subject—a metaphysics which 'has fallen apart and can no longer

be taken with complete seriousness as something which is real in our time' (Kos 1971: 144). Kos recognised the common origin of both the literary avant-garde and the European left, especially the New Left, in Romantic metaphysics; this is how he chose to explain their apparent affinities, occasional cooperation and interlacing. For him, their most notable common feature was 'the need for the destruction of the structures, forms and institutions of European civilisation, in which they see something which is "bourgeois" and therefore destructive' (Kos 1971: 144). He declared that the poetry of Tomaž Šalamun was the only 'authentic and internally valid achievement' of the Slovenian poetic avant-garde because, in Šalamun, 'poetry is still a higher structure of experience and creation, not "play" in the true sense of the word' (Kos 1971: 149–150).

In the first years after its release, neither Kermauner nor Kos called *Poker* a ludist collection. They regarded it highly because of its message and commitment to the values of traditional poetry. Kermauner focused his interpretation of *Poker* on its link to current social conditions in Slovenia. He explained Šalamun's poetry as a critique of the new middle class and at the same time as a mockery of the values of the former bourgeois elite. He placed *Poker* in the realm of mimetic poetry, recognising in it a meaningless play which mimics how meaningless the world itself has become. He also wrote about the world as play in connection with Jesih's early poetry, which he proclaimed to be ludist, because it 'gives what is possible and not what is banal in reality'. The world is 'a play of emotions, opinions, descriptions, facts, events, thoughts, values, things', but in Jesih's poetry relationships between them are multiplied as 'poetic language creates variations that have hitherto been unimaginable. Thus, poetry is the creation of the world'. Whereas Šalamun's poetry was meaningless play by which the poet

revealed the nihilistic essence of the world, Jesih's poetry was completely free, non-mimetic and purely aesthetic. Kermauner did not explicitly equate Jesih's poetry with play, but he wrote that Jesih was one of the poets who 'chase the word in crazy dialectical paradoxical games' (Kermauner 1975: 81). The method of Jesih's poetry is absurd, but it does not herald death or nothingness; on the contrary, its 'absurdity is joyful, bouncy, full of fervent pleasure with existence'. Kermauner recognised a completely new type of poet in Jesih, a poet related to Šalamun in the strongest way, but only partially. He declared Jesih a rhetor who 'enjoys words, while enjoying their meaning much less or not at all' (Kermauner 1975: 80).

In that essay, Kermauner did not explicitly address the quality of Jesih's ludic poetry, though he wrote favourably about it. He claimed that the poet's goal was not to expose the meaninglessness of the world (which was the role of Šalamun's poetry), but to enjoy the words. In doing so, Kermauner did not deviate significantly from his original understanding of play as an activity that has no meaning beyond itself. He described Jesih's poetry as ludist because of its ability to create a world which exists solely at the word level. Absurd, meaningless combinations of words in Jesih's poetry 'embody freedom', which Kermauner (1975: 80) interpreted as 'the destruction of familiar banal forms and contents'. The traits that link Jesih's poetry to play are (besides the silent assumption of the absence of meaning in both) freedom and independence from ordinary reality.

Freedom and separation from real life were highlighted by Johan Huizinga as a key feature of play in his classic 1938 study *Homo ludens*. In the 1960s, his thesis on the play was 'in vogue across Europe, including in Ljubljana and Belgrade'. Dušan Jovanović played an important role in the reception of his ideas in Slovenia. In 1963, writing the drama

Norci (The Fools), he 'read the book *Homo ludens* with great interest' (Kralj: 400). *Norci* was published in the magazine *Problemi* in 1968, and staged three years later in Celje. In that period, Jesih also collaborated with Jovanović within the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre.

Huizinga explained the freedom of play as a consequence of the fact that games were never imposed by physical need or moral duty, and he considered poetry to be the most noble type of play. For him, the creation of poetry is anchored in the area of play from which it originates: '*Poiesis*, in fact, is a play-function. It proceeds within the play-ground of the mind, in a world of its own which the mind creates for it. There things have a very different physiognomy from the ones they wear in "ordinary life," and are bound by ties other than those of logic and causality.' (Huizinga 119) Whereas young Slovenian creators from the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre valued play much like Huizinga, it would be hard to argue the same for Taras Kermauner and Janko Kos. It may be inferred from Kermauner's essay about Jesih's poetry that, at least for a short time, he favourably accepted the idea of poetry as free play, but very soon disappointment ensued. In a 1978 essay, he described the unfulfilled prospects of ludism as follows:

> *One should no longer be committed to demagogic ideas, false ideologies, cherished visions which have been exposed as so many masks with which authoritarianism cheated people. Play is supposed to eliminate these masks and develop spontaneous creative powers of the man. But what happened was that only letters, phonemes, graphemes, reflections and materials were at play. (Kermauner 1978: 37)*

Kermauner's words display the humanist's frustration over the inability of ludic poetry to expose a free man hiding under the guise of false

ideologies. The finding that only letters, phonemes, and so on are played out could be linked to Derrida's category of language play. It should be noted that art, which creates a 'para-world within language', was given its own name by Kermauner—*linguism*. Kermauner justified his disappointment with a reference to emerging theories which, as he thought, deny the existence of a world outside of language: 'Language analysis has finally found that there is nothing but Language; language is a conventional system, it is a computer and we are all its food.' (Kermauner 1978: 37) He reinforced the existing critique of modernism by arguing that an ideology of opposition to all ideologies was played out. Just six years after the publication of Jesih's first book of poetry, he wrote about it in a completely new way: 'Poems from the poetry collection *Uran v urinu, gospodar*, incredibly humorous, innovative, fun, mocking, popping, fresh, not seen in Slovenia before, are fading; their god, Milan Jesih, remains on the chamber pot.' (Kermauner 1978: 38) In other words, Jesih's poetry is childish.

In the late 1960s, Andrej Medved, himself a poet, began to study the philosophical aspects of play. In 1970, he published the essay 'Bit in/kot igra' (Being and/as Play) in *Tribuna*, in which, by relying on late Heidegger, he argued for the identity of being and playing. For Medved, 'being has no foundation because it is "in" play', and the play is therefore 'not a "centre"/foundation, but rather an indication of the absence of the foundation, of transcendence, of the absence of the transcendental signified'. In brief, '[t]he notion of being-as-a-game belongs to a "decentred" mind' (Medved: 1393). These are categories that point to Derrida. In 1970, Medved's essay 'Poezija kot igra: razmišljanje o sodobni slovenski poeziji' (Poetry as Play: A Meditation On Contemporary Slovenian Poetry) was published in the journal *Naši razgledi*. In it, Medved (1588) rejected the claim that modern poetry was a 'useless toy without

meaning'. He showed that although poetry as play is aimless and pointless, because it is not determined from the outside by a higher principle, this does not mean that it is completely meaningless. Play, and with it contemporary poetry, 'represents and embodies our situation in the world', he wrote. 'Everything in the world is in the spontaneous process of creation and change of all things, everything (the world) is played in play.' (Medved: 1618) Contemporary poetry as play returns to its origin, that is, to the thinking characterised by a 'relaxed imagination, unsystematic and unsystematised mythicality, childlike unconscious animality, spontaneous savagery placed between consciousness and unconsciousness, original disorder as a source play, unlawful in its change' (Medved: 1620). In this way, contemporary poetry as play 'utters the world in its presence' (Medved: 1624). In connection to this statement, Medved referred to the concluding thoughts of 'Vprašanje o poeziji' (The Question of Poetry), a 1969 essay by Dušan Pirjevec where contemporary poetry is defended as a type of play designed to show the primacy of the existence of all that is.

In the discussion on the meaning of poetry that took place in Slovenia in the 1960s and 1970s, Medved's position is that a contemporary poem should be 'theoretically justified through literary theory' (Medved: 1628). His essays can be read as an attempt to conceptually justify the poetry of the time, although they are not programmatic writings around which a literary group could form. In the discussion on the development of the concept of ludism in Slovenian literary studies, it is interesting that Medved did not evoke the notion of ludism in his essay on poetry as play. But as he referred to reism, on the other hand, it is not likely that he knew the concept of ludism at the time, otherwise he probably would have expressed his opinion about it. Thus, while pointing out the inappropriateness of the label 'reist poetry'

insofar as 'it points to something objective, substantial', he added only this: 'The constitution of modern poetry is at play.' (Medved: 1624) In 2001, Medved published an extremely comprehensive anthology of theoretical and poetic works titled *Fantasma epohé: poezija in/kot igra* (*Fantasma epohé:* Poetry and/as Play). In the titles of the chapters in which Slovenian poetry is compiled, Kermauner's terms are used for different directions of Slovenian modernist literature, whereby ludism and reism appear as two names for the same phenomenon, that is, for play as a thing. Linguism is referred to as the play of language; carnism is a game of the body or play as a body; and the shortest section is called 'Igra smrti in usode' (The Game of Death and Fate).

In a study on ludism in Šalamun's *Poker*, Marko Juvan notes that only in Slovenian criticism and literary history did ludism 'solidify itself as a label for *an ism*, that is, for a modernist or neo-avant-garde current or even movement', whereby one should not neglect the fact that it is 'a retroactive label for artistic happenings and phenomena given from the outside by criticism' (Juvan: 274). In my opinion, in addition to writings by Kermauner and Kos, the theories of Huizinga were particularly important for the original use of this designation, and less so Heidegger's idea of being as play or Derrida's category of the play of signification. Although, in a broad perception, the central feature of Slovenian ludism was play with language, it flourished without a clear reference to Derrida. A Slovenian encyclopaedia of literature describes ludism as the name for those 'aspirations in contemporary avant-garde literature to which artistic creation is a particular example of "play"; poetry is based on free, spontaneous, creative "play" with language'; in ludism, playfulness 'is a socio-moral ideal or model of true life and spiritual freedom' (Kos et al 2009: 219). According to this interpretation, ludism is a view that emphasises freedom as the

main value; in literature, this turns out to be play with language, but the encyclopaedia does not explain what kind of procedures this game includes. In fact, Juvan was the first to attempt to justify ludism as a literary movement or current by presenting its structural features. At the conceptual level, he proceeded from Derrida and Huizinga, and, before defining ludism's stylistic procedures, he expanded the field of play to include 'play with language, characters, textual patterns, conventions, possible worlds, roles, ideologies, etc.' (Juvan: 274). Juvan is careful to note that the ludists have taken procedures from tradition, accumulating and developing them, including wordplay anagrams, palindromes, magic squares, paronyms, calembours, etc.), games of rules, restrictions and conventions (radicalised by the French group OULIPO), play with fictional worlds (characteristic of the literature of nonsense), play with the text's reception (non-linear reading), parodies of genre, style and text templates, the carnivalisation and transgression of moral codes, and metafiction procedures and romantic irony (see Juvan: 282). Juvan also shows that many of these processes are present in Šalamun's *Poker*; Šalamun, Juvan notes (291), even thematised the ontological meaning of the 'game of the world', most obviously in the poem 'Mrk V' (Eclipse 5).

URAN V URINU, GOSPODAR!, SONETI, MARŠAL

Jesih's first book of poetry, *Uran v urinu, gospodar!*, is the most consistent of all his collections in terms of violating the communicative role of poetry. The verses formally follow the established rhythms and patterns of the rhyme, but they cannot easily be compiled into a narrative with one narrator. Because of the familiar rhythmic and sound image of the poem, the implicit reader expects either a traditional

confession or a narrative, but, searching for a meaning, has to resort to individual phrases or verses which only lead at a dead end. In the circumstances in which the book was published, verses with no apparent meaning could be a caricature and critique of the idle talk of politicians. In addition, even today, readers can devote themselves to unravelling ambiguous places and hidden messages and be rewarded with their subversiveness. Thus, for example, the verse 'kdo bo mačka zaklal' ('who will slaughter the cat' [Jesih 1972: 18]) can be read as an allusion to the prominent politician Ivan Maček (*maček* literally means 'cat'), and the verse 'nihče neba naj ne zaklepa' ('no one should lock the sky' [Jesih 1972: 42]) can be understood as a metaphorical demand for freedom. Considering the political situation in socialist Slovenia and Yugoslavia, the reader easily forms the image of a lyrical speaker who is a skilful, witty and sufficiently careful critic of the ruling ideology, which matches the role played by the author during the student movement. Kermauner's interpretation, with its emphasis on the non-mimetic nature of *Uran v urinu, gospodar!*, seemingly shed light on something else, namely the autonomy of poetry. However, insisting on the autonomy of the arts had (and always has) a political connotation. In his study of Dušan Jovanović's plays, Lado Kralj (401) emphasises this aspect: 'In a socialist country, the artist seeks creative autonomy of even more than in a capitalist one, resisting not only petty-bourgeois habits and morbid deformities but also the forced optimism of Marxist ideology, an optimism which conceals dogmatism and violence.'

Of the poetry collections published by Jesih after *Uran v urinu, gospodar!*, none experienced such a reception as his 1989 book *Soneti* (Sonnets). Reprinted twice, this book of poetry had a significant influence on discussions on Slovenian poetic postmodernism. Postmodernism was widely discussed in Slovenia from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s

when the belief that it was over prevailed. In 1990, the literary historian Boris Paternu published a study in which he focused on Jesih's 'non-diversionary relation to the poetic tradition' (Paternu: 204). Due to the many intertextual figures—the most important Slovenian references are the poets France Prešeren and Simon Jenko, and other writers include Joseph Brodsky, Guido Cavalcanti and William Shakespeare, who are referenced in Jesih's notes, as well as A. P. Chekhov and Patrick Süskind, who are mentioned in the poems themselves—one classify Jesih as a postmodern poet 'if one wanted to', Paternu thought (205), but he found it more important to note that Jesih maintains his autonomy in relation to tradition. According to Kos (1995: 141), *Soneti* 'should be considered a real example of Slovenian poetic postmodernism' if they were to be read it in a way that would convince us that we 'can no longer determine whether any reality is even true or what should be real in this ambivalent, indeed already polyvalent composition of the world'. This type of reading is quite widespread, as is the argument that the lyric speaker plays different roles and is hence always more than one.

Soneti was perceived as a postmodern collection because it included features that were not difficult to relate to Jesih's ludic beginnings. At the ideological level, the freedom of the lyric speaker, with its different roles, still stands out: the lyric speaker can be a poet, a thinker, a lover, an observer, and so on. When it presents itself as a poet, it often points to the potential of its imagination as a power to create fictional worlds. Unlike *Uran v urinu, gospodar!*, *Soneti* does not abolish the mimetic function, as it is characterised by leaps between ordinary and fictional reality. Like *Uran v urinu, gospodar!, Soneti* is a conceptual book of poetry, and the stylisation of the traditional poetic form of the sonnet is much more recognisable in it because there is no Slovenian reader who would not notice the allusion to Prešeren's sonnets. In addition

to the poetic procedures mentioned above, both books are characterised by word games. The main difference between them, however, is that the book of sonnet is more accessible to narrative attempts because of its narration of small, everyday experiences. The sonnets were published at a turning point, and—although they do not contain direct allusions to political developments—they corresponded with the general desire to assert the individual's needs and desires. Perhaps, along with their relaxed communication, this was the main reason for their popularity.

Jesih's poetic imagination grew most widely in his most recent book of poems, *Maršal* (Marshal). Its conceptual framework is not formal but substantive in nature as individual poems make up a story set in a time when the lyric speaker was still a child. It is through this speaker's eyes that we get to know an unnamed marshal who resembles Marshal Tito in many ways, even though his qualities are so intensified that he grows into a caricature. The marshal is a genius, he knows everything, and (almost) everyone loves him (almost all of the time). In Jesih's burlesque, one of the main roles is played by the child's mother, a fat ballerina whom the marshal loves, even though sometimes he treats her 'kakor z živaljo ne ravna žival' ('worse than an animal treats an animal' [Jesih 2017: 70]). There are scenes in the field of fiction in which the ballerina starts to fly while dancing—the only thing the marshal cannot do. The mother's concern for the marshal, her unfailing admiration and forgiveness (she is aware that the marshal's regime is defective), and especially the mourning of the marshal's death, these are all characteristics which help Jesih reveal the long-repressed attitude of the people of ex-Yugoslavia towards Tito. Different-minded people are represented by the boy's father's character, but after a period of political re-education, even he 'kot dež na pogrebu joka' ('cries like a baby at the funeral' [Jesih 2017: 34]).

In addition to thematic and formal differences, the comparison of *Maršal* with *Soneti* and *Uran v urinu, gospodar!* shows a trait shared by all three books: they all open a space for carnivalisation, for the connection of the high and the low, the funny and the serious. This happens against the background of the belief in the autonomy of art. Freedom remained an imperative in Jesih's poetic oeuvre, which made his poetry comparable to play. Ludism is therefore an appropriate term both conceptually and stylistically. If absolute freedom turned out to be a utopia in everyday life, it is still true that one can do everything in its name at least in poetry.

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Povzetek

Prispevek se ukvarja z vprašanjem, kako je v poeziji Milana Jesiha iz različnih obdobij uresničena zahteva po svobodi, pri čemer se posebej posveča genezi oznake *ludizem*. Jesih je bil v študentskih letih član skupine pesnikov 442, kasneje Gledališke skupine Pupilije Ferkeverk, aktivno je sodeloval tudi v študentskem gibanju. Člani skupine 442 so se izogibali ideološkim opredelitvam, bili pa so politično angažirani. Poleg želje po javni uveljavitvi jih je povezoval predvsem mladostni odpor do kakršnih koli omejitev. Leta 1972 je v elitni knjižni zbirki izšla Jesihova prva pesniška knjiga *Uran v urinu, gospodar!*. Obveljala je za reprezentativen primer slovenskega ludizma, neoavantgardizma in modernizma. Pojem ludizma (iz lat. *ludus*, igra) je v razprave o slovenski književnosti uvedel Taras Kermauner okoli leta 1970, o igri pa je pisal že v eseju o Šalamunovi zbirki *Poker*, kjer je igro izenačil s človekovim nesmiselnim delom. Medtem ko *Pokra* še ni označil za ludistično zbirko, je ta pojem uporabil za Jesihovo zgodnjo poezijo. Njegovo razumevanje igre se je za kratek čas približalo idejam iz vplivne knjige *Homo ludens*, v kateri je Johan Huizinga poudaril, da je poezija kot vrsta igre neodvisna od vsakdanjega življenja. Kermauner je svoje mnenje o ludizmu kmalu spremenil, saj mu ni uspelo razkriti svobodnega človeka, ki naj bi tičal pod krinkami lažnih ideologij.

V širši percepciji je za osrednjo lastnost slovenskega ludizma obveljala igra z jezikom, vendar se je to zgodilo brez razvidne navezave na Derridajev koncept igre označevanja ali Heideggerjevo idejo o biti kot igri, o katerih je okoli leta 1970 pisal Andrej Medved. Ludizem je kot literarno smer ali tok znotraj modernizma prvi poskusil utemeljiti Marko Juvan. Na idejni ravni je izhajal iz Derridaja in Huizinge ter naštel značilne postopke, ki so jih ludisti prevzemali iz tradicije.

Primerjava Jesihovih zbirk *Uran v urinu, gospodar!*, *Soneti* in *Maršal* pokaže na njihovo skupno lastnost: vse tri knjige razpirajo prostor za karnevalizacijo, za spajanje visokega in nizkega, smešnega in resnega. To se dogaja na ozadju prepričanja o avtonomiji umetnosti. Svoboda je v Jesihovem pesniškem opusu ostala imperativ, zaradi katerega je njegova poezija primerljiva z igro, oznaka *ludizem* pa je zanjo primerna tako z idejnega kakor s stilnega vidika.

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