

# From Post-Communist to Anti-Canon: The Rebels

Nuo pokomunistinio kanono iki antikanono: maištininkai

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*Abstract:* This paper conducts a short survey of the shift in the literary canon typical of the post-Homeland War period in Croatia. It is mainly owing to Croatian-Dalmatian authors who gathered around the magazine *Feral Tribune* and were inspired paradoxically by a rude, direct, and at times heavy and disturbing humour, and veristic-like scenes of everyday life, that the change happened. The shift was slow, and the authors, who were often accused of dissenting and publicly accused of activism, insisted on writing about issues other than mere patriotism, persistently succeeded in changing the mindset of the public. This would not have been possible had it not been for the political changes that took place in the country. Among other things, the paper explains the gradual appearance of the anti-canon, and argues that humour, notwithstanding the huge amount of cynical denunciations of political elites, served as a cathartic means of introspection, and a collective way of awakening from past dilemmas. Furthermore, the paper presents the situation from the 1990s to today, arguing against the hyperproduction of patriotic books, and explaining the gradual shift in the literary canon, owing to the transformation of literary practice.

*Keywords:* Croatian literature, transition literature, post-communist, hyperpatriotism, canon, social engagement, anti-canon.

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*Anotacija:* Straipsnyje apžvelgiama literatūrinio kanono kaita po Kroatijos nepriklausomybės karo. Pokyčius didžiąja dalimi inicijavo Kroatijos dalmatų autoriai, susibūrę apie žurnalą *Feral Tribune*, savo kūryboje naudoję grubų, tiesmuką, kar-tais trikdantį juodą humorą ir natūralistiškai vaizdavę kasdienį gyvenimą. Estetinio

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kanono kaita vyko lėtai, vis dėlto, išsivaduoti iš perdėto patriotizmo reikalavusiems ir dažnai disidentizmu bei aktyvizmu viešai kaltintiems autoriams galiausiai pavyko pakeisti visuomenės mąstyseną. Kanono pokyčiai tapo įmanomi politinių procesų dėka. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas ir antikanono susiformavimas, teigiama, kad politinio elito cinizmą demaskavęs humoras pasitarnavo kaip katarsj sukelianti introspekcijos forma, būdas bendruomenei atsikratyti praeities dilemų. Straipsnyje taip pat apžvelgiama kroatų literatūros situacija nuo XX a. 10-ojo dešimtmečio iki šių dienų, pasisakoma prieš perteklinę patriotinių knygų leidybą, atskleidžiama, kaip kintančios estetinės praktikos transformuoja ir patį literatūros kanoną.

*Raktažodžiai:* kroatų literatūra, pereinamojo laikotarpio literatūra, pokomunistinis, perteklinis patriotizmas, kanonas, socialinis įsitraukimas, antikanonas.

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## Introduction

Marina Protrka (2010), speaking about the distinctive features, and at the same time, the limitations of the literary canon(s), considers it a dedicated space within national literatures. In order to create a canon, it appears necessary to standardise the national literature, and then to make the necessary cultural differentiation within, which would subsequently derive from every such attempt. It is clear that differentiation would imply a whole range of aesthetic, ideological, ethical, sociological and other debates, and would definitely point to some of the main features of such a newly created canon. The debates appear to be necessary, in order to shake up 'traditional' literature, and especially cultural, educational and academic institutions, gently lulled into a literary standard. Enver Kazaz (2009), on the other hand, insists that there should be more literary canons within standard literature, insisting on the multi-level diversity of canons. In democratic communities, it appears necessary to alternate canons, in order to contribute to the versatility of the standard literature, and to break the normativity of the leading literary canon. Namely, it seems that in many cultural communities, academies that represent the centre of power are capable of influencing literary creativity. The academic community, as Kazaz correctly points out, is capable of imposing one 'sacred' canon, which leads to the sterilisation of the cultural identity of every such community, and subsequently to the vasectomy of every literary production. There is no doubt that after the Croatian War of Independence,<sup>1</sup>

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1 The Croatian War of Independence was fought in the 1990s (from 1991 to 1995), after the Croatian declaration of independence from Yugoslavia and subsequent aggression (directed

usually referred to in Croatia as the Homeland War, there has been a political and ideological shift in the literary canon. Literary classics (we could mention here Vladimir Nazor and Miroslav Krleža), and several others (such as Miljenko Smoje and Predrag Matvejević), who influenced the Yugoslav and Croatian literary scene, were almost completely ignored by the post-communist mindset, which was frequently covered over by the enthusiasm of the newly discovered patriotism.

The slow but persistent transformation of such a literary practice started in the early 2000s, when a number of relatively young and now successful Croatian-Mediterranean authors, such as Ante Tomić, Ivica Ivanišević, Jurica Pavičić, Renato Baretić, and a few others, using narratives enveloped by a subtle refined humour, tried to influence the canon by reopening some then unpopular topics, tackling issues like the switch from the post-communist to the pseudo-democratic mindset, the hypocrisy of some newly established political elites, collective and individual amnesias, the relationship between the state and the Church, and minorities issues, etc. Igor Gajin (2020: 13) correctly points to the attempt by the ‘new’ generation of authors to revise the canon, claiming that they ‘found a hole in the impervious fabric of academic-patriotic lamentation, and contributed to the canon shift’. Gajin (2020: 37–38), furthermore, explaining the social and political background in the country, argues that in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, a radical shift happened, or rather ‘the transition from socialism to capitalism [...] from totalitarianism to liberalism [...] from the state-centred economy to the market economy’. A ‘transformation of giant proportions’ happened to all countries of the Eastern Bloc, including the countries of the former Yugoslav Federation, immediately after the fall of the socialist regime. Krešimir Bagić (2016: 100), speaking about the ‘disintegration’ of Yugoslavia, highlights the role of the new political elites that ‘directly influenced the (re)shaping of national identity by supporting the narrative of Croatia as a bulwark of Christianity, a Mediterranean and Central European country, a country with a thousand-year-old tradition of literacy and culture. Special efforts were made to emphasise the differences from the identities of neighbouring peoples.’<sup>2</sup>

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from Belgrade by Slobodan Milošević’s regime) exercised by paramilitary Serbian forces supported by some local Serbs, and by the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA).

2 All quotes in the text are translated into English by the authors of the article.

Independently of the attempt to define it as a ‘transformation’ or as ‘special efforts’, the situation was and remains very complex, and the attempt to explain the mindset behind the canon shift is not an easy task.

The speed of the acceptance and implementation of the ‘transition literature’ was greatly contributed to by the willingness of former socialist societies to completely uncritically accept the capitalist paradigm, which was motivated more by imagining Western capitalism through images of the consumerist spectacle and a utopian society of abundance rather than by a real understanding of capitalism (Gajin 2020: 13–14). We should take into consideration the deep polarisation of Croatian society, which in the past influenced the processes of the revision of the canon. However, the present is not immune to polarisation as well, for we daily witness attempts to standardise political preferences and turn them into literary canons.

### **Transition literature**

In post-Yugoslav countries, including Croatia, the outbreak of war in the early 1990s produced a significant destabilisation of the literary scene. Here we must again agree with Gajin’s arguments (2020: 13) that the destabilisation was even more extreme because of the Homeland War, which radically interrupted the rhythms of everyday life and the order of civilian life; while the negative attitude towards the former order, which was now interpreted as an aggressor and occupier, became almost absolute. At this point, it should be said that the most potent driving force, serving (understandably) as a background to many literary outbursts, became blind patriotism, defined by some even as nationalism. However, given the fierce destructiveness of the war, it did not come as a surprise. Velimir Visković (2006) argues that nationalist rhetoric became a defensive weapon, and that such relations are fully legitimised by the outburst of the war of independence and the real threat to Croatia of Serbian chauvinism.

In the opinion of the previously mentioned Gajin (2020: 80), Pavlaković and Korov considered the intensification of mechanisms of ‘cultural memory’ towards earlier centuries of national history to be of the utmost importance, explaining the necessity for a new collective identification, and emphasising the need to find escape mechanisms from the socialist past, only too well known to

contemporary authors, by considering a ‘break with recent identifications’, and suggesting it would be of the utmost relevance.

Jagna Pogačnik (2002: 279) insists that the 1990s were a time of hyperproduction of pathetic and, in a literary sense, almost irrelevant literature. Gajin (2020: 211) agrees with this, suggesting furthermore that the narrative practices for a good part of the 1990s were primarily focused on the narrativisation of the reality of war, pushing the social and political turmoil into the background. This meant that the atmosphere embraced since the beginning of the 1970s, mainly inspired by the work of Borghes and his magic realism (Visković 2006: 129–142), mostly surrendered under the hyperpatriotic literary outbursts.

Again, Pogačnik (2002: 269), explaining the lack of literary maturity, claims that some authors (like Nedjeljko Fabrio, for example, with the 1994 novel *Smrt Vronskog* [The Death of Vronski], considered to be the first novel about the Homeland War), experienced an ‘obvious downward trajectory with their novels, conditioned by complete uncriticalness’, arguing that such authors wanted to, or felt they should, respond immediately to the reality of the war. This should not surprise us, on the other hand, because an immense number of people were caught up in the limbo of the war, so it was probably their way of purging the bitter reality. Even though ‘newborn’ authors dominated the literary scene, ‘old forces’ helped in delineating the borders of the prose map as well.

Owing to this phenomenon, as Pogačnik (2006: 79) correctly points out, ‘the 1990s mostly brought a whole series of works written without a break, often from the position of “excited” patriotism, with an excess of a black and white setting.’ This actually meant that there was a significant number of authors ‘outside the profession’ (Pogačnik 2002: 271), who decided to reach their audience by confessing their realities and retelling their private stories, sharing reminiscences of their fragmented souls. Bagić (2016: 113), for example, considers the collection *Priče iz Vukovara* (Stories from Vukovar), by the legendary radio journalist Siniša Glavašević, to be the first collection of war stories.

## **Engaged journalism and the satirical magazine *Feral Tribune***

Visković (2006: 129–142), speaking about the development of the literary canon in the 1990s, points to the significance of the independent satirical magazine

*Feral Tribune*, first published in 1993 in Split. The founders of the magazine, Viktor Ivančić, Predrag Lucić and Boris Dežulović, who were at first concerned primarily with satirising and pointing out (at least, in their opinion) some crucial social issues, at the beginning, with the first editions of the magazine, showed no literary vanity. As Visković suggests, they did not even sign their satirical articles personally, thus showing that they did not hold too much to the literary cult of authorship. However, all three of them later became seriously relevant to the literary scene. Ivančić collected his newspaper articles written by his *alter ego* Robi K., entitled *Bilježnica Robija K.* (The Notebook of Robi K., 1994),<sup>3</sup> making fun of the entire social establishment through the eyes of a child, using dialect and sharp humour, as opposed to the solemn and somewhat 'serious' literature in the Croatian standard. 'The Notebook' is considered one of the most relevant political short story collections of the 1990s. Ivančić later published an important number of books, suggesting a serious literary potential. The other founders of *Feral Tribune* also pursued their own literary paths: Dežulović with his books, poems, short stories, etc, later also extended to neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Lucić, with collections of parodic, dramatic and poetic texts. Visković (2006) in fact suggests that there had never been so many journalists among writers, or so many writers among journalists, insisting that in the second half of the 1990s there was a radical change in the dominant poetic concept. 'Postmodernist escapism' ceased to inspire younger artists who, in Visković's opinion, needed a literary concept that communicated more directly with the turbulent postwar reality. At this point another Dalmatian-Mediterranean author should be mentioned: Jurica Pavičić, who later won many significant international awards, though continuing to comment in his articles on social issues, choosing bitter social and political satire, subsequently profiled himself mainly as a crime novel writer, remaining faithful, however, to his preferred social topics.

M.R. Thomsen (2008) suggests that in order to establish the existence of a literary canon, it is necessary to trace and determine the existence of centres that can develop and format the properties of the new canon. There is no doubt that one such centre in Croatia was, and continues to be, the city of Split, the hometown of all (in the 1990s) 'new' authors, who gathered around the *Feral Tribune*. The magazine greatly influenced the shift in literary intonation,

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3 Since its first edition in 1994, 'The Notebook of Robi K.' has seen five more editions, the last one in 2023.

the significant twist in the selection of topics, always with paradoxical, sometimes even grotesque, humour, typical of the Dalmatian-Mediterranean area. Pogačnik (2002: 272) points clearly to the importance of the city of Split with regard to the shift in canon, suggesting that Split was most active in the 1990s in Croatia in the creation of what was then considered anticanonical. Transparent names in journalism and non-fiction, such as the aforementioned Pavičić, Tomić, Đermano Senjanović and Ivančić, in their prose, turn (first of all) to the social reality of the 1990s, ranging from Pavičić's thrillers (the social thriller *Ovce od gipsa* [Alabaster Sheep, 1997]) and a thriller of the betrayed genre *Nedjeljni prijatelj* (Sunday Friend, 1999), via Ivančić's above-mentioned satirical newspaper column, which reads in the book like excellent prose *Bilježnica Robija K.* (The Notebook of Robi K.), Senjanović's humorous manuscript *Dorin dnevnik* (Dora's Diary, 1997), and *Made in US&A* (2001), the most relevant Split prose debut, including one by Tomić *Zaboravio sam gdje sam parkirao* (I Forgot where I Parked, 2018), etc. According to Pogačnik (2002: 108), the word 'communication' with Tomić acquired a new meaning, in the sense of a dialogue with as many readers as possible, which in our opinion seems to be extremely important, not only with regard to this author, but also with regard to the whole generation of authors born in the 1960s and 1970s, here in part mentioned as well. They opted for direct communication with readers, thus choosing to convey important messages to an (often very) blinded public, trying, above all, to make them develop critical thinking, and to make them not accept passively what was served up to them.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the Croatian literary hub went through a period of change. Ivan Aralica, who for at least a decade remained the preferred canonical literary role model, and the author preferred by the establishment, ceased to serve as a political and literary authority, thus freeing the way for 'younger' authors who showed much less understanding of the dramatic postwar society. Visković (2006) describes the period as 'turbulent', explaining it by the 'collapsing authority of Tuđman's government' now that 'a thousand-year-long Croatian state-building yearning' has come to be realised. In fact, it was a period of change, after the understandably difficult postwar period, which preferred, as we mentioned earlier, patriotic topics.

The 'new' authors, including those mentioned above, were suddenly not too impressed by the establishment, but chose to present another face of the

reality, and chose to speak, for example, about the corruption of the political elites, unemployment, tycoonisation, the collapse of moral values, etc. We should again quote Visković (2006), and agree with his vision of the state of the art at the time. He emphasises the terms ‘neorealism’ and ‘realistic literature’ as labels both for the mentioned writers and the turnover in literary preferences, and in particular their criticising the Establishment, preferring to write about everyday issues, family problems, and how the common citizen copes with the social reality.

However, there are some other terminological challenges to the definition of the new scene. Maša Kolanović, the editor of a book on Slavic experiences of the transition and the post-transition period (2013), believes that the terminologically most correct syntagma, describing this period in post-communist or post-socialist countries after the break up, would be ‘comparative post-socialism’. Along with the term ‘post-socialism’, the terms ‘post-communism’ and ‘transition’ often appear (even as synonyms). Bojan Koštić (2013: 184–186), commenting on Kolanović’s terminological choice, suggests the correctness of the choice. Kolanović refers to more or less the same period after the collapse of socialism, or obvious hints of that collapse up to the present day. Since the term ‘post-communism’ would imply the previous existence of communism, to her, the term ‘post-socialism’ is most neutral.

For the purposes of this paper, we will, however, prefer the term ‘post-communist literature’, not only because of the suggested terminological synonymy, but also due to the official existence of the communist background, and generally because of the historical context it brought along. We therefore consider it more appropriate, both with regard to its literary and its political aspect.

### **The new wave**

In the opinion of Visković (2006), when two autobiographical books about the Homeland War appeared in the year 1997, Ratko Cvetnić’s *Kratki izlet* (A Short Excursion) and Alemka Mirković’s *Glasom protiv topova* (A Voice against the Canons), it was of decisive importance in changing the mentality of the nationally conscious wing of the intellectual and literary scene. Cvetnić’s irony in his observations of the Croatian political scene and its protagonists is



extremely impressive, an irony that could not be said to be ‘hostile’ and ‘Yugo-nostalgic’, because it was uttered from the position of a soldier from the front line, a patriot who idealistically joined the defensive war for Croatia. In the same year, Pavičić’s first novel *Ovce od gipsa* (Alabaster Sheep, 1997) appeared, speaking critically of the violence against Serbs. Both authors spoke critically about the war and the violence it brought to people of both nationalities. Gajin (2020: 84) also considered ‘A Short Excursion’ (1997) by Cvetnić and ‘Alabaster Sheep’ by Pavičić as a highly relevant moment on the Croatian literary scene, which is ‘no longer represented as a monolithic point of view that is entirely structured by a dominant nationalist narrative, but the Manichean opposition towards the satanised *Other* is moved to internal opposition of a once compact collective’. However, Gajin points to the breaking point in the literary post-transition period, highlighting the relevance of Tomislav Zajec’s first post-transition novel *Soba za razbijanje* (The Breaking Room, 1998) ‘when the rest of Croatian literary production was just beginning to delve into the postwar problematisation of the social aspects of transition’ (2020: 26), describing the ‘society of abundance, or the capitalist paradise on Earth’ which is supposed to be served by a cheap labour force, to serve mainly the privileged. Bačić is also of the opinion that, instead of politics, the world was beginning to be governed by the logic of capital, which only seemingly ‘spreads optimism and promises peace, progress and prosperity’ (2016: 91).

Let us at this point mention the constitution of the itinerant Festival of Alternative Literature (FAK) in 2000, in particular for drawing attention to some writers of the ‘new’ generation. The festival succeeded in attracting each time in its short life around 80 Croatian writers and a number of international writers. Among the Croatian writers, the names of Miljenko Jergović, Senjanović, Edo Popović, Tomić and Pavičić should be mentioned, but there are also others who contributed significantly to the creation of the *new wave*. The mentioned authors would surely have become famous individually even if it had not been for the FAK, but the ‘group’ gave them much more visibility. The FAK<sup>4</sup> tried to draw

4 When speaking about FAK authors, they are mainly referred to as ‘urban’ writers. Kolanović (2008: 69-70), quoting Pogačnik’s syntagma ‘urban guerrilla’, explains the term urban vs. rural, and ‘urban prose’ in the context of the ‘new’ writers’ inspiration with the neo-capitalist topics: The adjective ‘urban’, often combined in the phrase ‘urban prose’, undoubtedly represents one of the most frequently used terms in the discourse of domestic literary criticism that follows contemporary Croatian prose. It is primarily associated with writers affiliated

attention to what was important to the younger generation, to what interested them, to places where young people felt good, and the attractiveness consisted of listening to authors reading aloud their latest prose in a kind of a *variété*-like environment. As Visković (2006) suggests, ‘the people of the FAK decided to bring literature down from the monuments to young people, to cafés and bars, to places where young alternative people gather, engrossed in some kind of art concepts.’ Pogačnik (2002: 281) emphasises that ‘the new prose writers, at least the loudest and most media-exposed part of them, decided to respond loudly and clearly, strongly and with a firm narrative, to their literary predecessors on the one hand, but they could not remain silent on the reality that surrounded them, so it is partly correct to call the new prose writers neorealists.’ This new urban generation of writers considered themselves not only as the literary opposition, but also as a cultural and political opposition to writers of previous generations. They were anti-political urban types who despised politics, and if they had ‘to be political, then they are first of all anarchists’ (Visković 2006: 129–142). We cannot, however, agree that they are apolitical, because many of the ‘new’ writers, loudly and clearly, even by means of their newspaper activities, expressed their disapproval of the political establishment. Logically, they could not have remained immune to it in their literature. Pogačnik (2002: 281) suggests that the ‘new’ novelists, destroyed the myth of writing as a deadly serious job on the path of scientific research and through loosening the heavy artillery. In fact, whoever found the courage could participate in the performances, and the thing that

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with the Alternative Literature Festival (FAK), a prominent media event in the ‘public life of literature’ (Carter & Ferres, 2001) at the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century. The articulation of the term ‘urban prose’, both in texts of domestic literary criticism and in the vast array of internet pages where the phrase has come to life as the best reserve in the absence of a better definition, appears intermittently at the level of theme, style, location, aesthetic and ideological values. Thus, sometimes the new prose writers are referred to as urban types, rockers who more or less disdain politics (Visković 2006: 15); then there is talk of urban themes, a tendency towards characters of urban marginals, and colloquial (jargon) phrases (Ibid.: 29); new prose has affirmed urbanity against the ‘rural’ (Rade Dragojević at the round table Croatian Literary Scene, ‘Zarez’, VI/121–122, 29. 1. 2004: 30); sometimes new prose is characterised by ‘the lack of reality and a positive fascination with universal, acceptable, narcissistic urbanity’ (Pavičić 2004: 52); sometimes new prose brings ‘urbanity as a perspective from which everything is viewed: domestic reality, recent war, results of transition, youth in the eighties, etc’ (Pogačnik 2004: 8), while the drastic urbanity of FAK writers is their only real common ground (Pogačnik 2002: 141) and this ‘urban guerrilla’ [...] represents the most interesting, most read, and most effective segment of Croatian prose’ (Ibid.: 142).

attracted most was the freedom of choice, the fact that there were no forbidden topics. Despite the critics and their internal disagreements, the FAK managed to make changes to Croatian literature. For example, they managed to promote Croatia abroad by hosting foreign writers who were later able to convey what they had heard, and spread the word (especially British writers). As a group, they attracted the attention of the media, and their ‘togetherness’ helped them to become more famous. The critics of the FAK believe, as Gajin suggests (2020: 88), that the festival was blessed by market mechanisms, and through it literature became a medium of affirmation and relevance. In the rapturous march into the commercialisation and commodification of literature, the FAK’s synergy with the media and agreement with market regulation presented (post) transitional capitalism to the literary mainstream as a promised world, and not as a problematic phenomenon that should have been confronted, or at least questioned. Eventually, the Festival of Alternative Literature became the Festival of A Literature, suggesting, as Visković (2006) correctly noted, the ‘ambitions of the entire group’, as well as their literary pride, to transform literary trends, and to become mainstream literature, ‘the first league of Croatian literature!’.

Generally speaking, Delimir Rešicki (2010: 22) is right when he claims that in the past 20 years Croatian writers somehow had to find a way to survive the golden age of socialism, which strove to present its so-called human face, behind which there was always another hidden side, which was not at all harmless. Therefore, a realistic fear of repression persisted, whereas the ‘unaccepted authors’ were facing a strategy of complete media isolation. This, quite simply, suggests Rešicki, following the logic of Baudrillard, that banishment from the media is a much more terrible punishment than banishment from the fundamentally lost reality.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be said that there are several general regularities when it comes to Croatian prose in the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium. As regards the selection of topics, the canonical authors who were ‘preferred’ and advocated by the establishment and believed to be the bearers of national and ideological strivings (Aralica, Mihalić, Novak, etc) were mostly preoccupied with the past, including the remote past, rather than with the present. For example,

they were less preoccupied with the Homeland War than with the Second World War, even if their readers expected them to be, justifying it with significant implications to the (back then) present time, and also with the lack of so-called ‘lustration’ (meaning that many issues voluntarily remained concealed, or fully buried in the past). In the meantime, there emerged some new representatives of post-Homeland War literary production. They too were concerned mainly with patriotic issues, and felt the urge to share their inner dilemmas and tragic experiences, and scenes of personal horror, for they themselves participated in the Homeland War. Pavičić suggests that they did not deal with the Homeland War at all, or almost not at all, with descriptions of the battlefield and combat situations, and that the exceptions were only a few poets and some very weak second-rate prose writers. Pavičić claims that, instead, Croatian war prose much preferred to detect the devastating effects of the war in the background: PTSD, war crimes, economic ruin, the explosion of crime, the erosion of the family, the hypocrisy of politics (2004: 125–136). Nevertheless, the Homeland War did have an immensely important impact on literature in Croatia. Besides the hyperproduction of patriotic writings, it served as the background for much introspection and many novels, and autobiographical and similar pieces. Gajin considers the documentary and autobiographical production that advanced from ‘the author’s status of a witness [...] to the highly ethically based conscience of society’, to reach the status of a moral compass in the turbulent transition process. Gajin (2023: 151) suggests that such prose indicated the perceived injustices and deviations of social transformation. This Homeland War prose could be considered the natural extension, or the integration, of the (back then) existing canon.

Bagić (2016: 114) argues that ‘the 1990s saw a predominance of communicative texts, simple solutions, and the elimination of distances from events, language, reality and narrative forms’, whereas the later period could be divided into ‘three key poetic tendencies’: critical mimetism, escapism and interdiscursivity, pointing to ‘urban landscape’ prose writers who initially ‘gathered around the journal *Quorum*’. To Bagić, critical mimetism represents ‘interest in ordinary people and events’, with authors like Jergović, Perišić and Ferić, among others (2016: 115), whereas escapism brings authors looking away from the Croatian reality. The beginning of the new millennium, in Bagić’s opinion, brought a real ‘explosion of novels’ (2016: 143). Bagić quotes

Pogačnik's novel scheme, structured according to eight types: 'the war novel (Mlakić, Dežulović, Kulenović), the humorous novel (Tomić), the genre novel (Pavličić, Tribuson, Naprta, Pavičić), the urban novel (Popović), the love novel (Koščec, Radaković, Ferić, Pintarić), the autobiographical novel (Andrić, Jeger, Gromača), the women's novel (Matanović, Čulina, Rudan), the escapist novel (Slamnig), and the global-trend novel (Čarija, Zajec)' (2016: 144).

However, we would like to highlight the work of the 'new' generation of authors, gathered mainly around the *Feral Tribune* or the FAK, who in our opinion contributed significantly to the anti-canon movement. In our opinion, the turning point from (sometimes) boring, and at times deeply touching patriotic literature (even if often cathartic and necessary), to the birth of neo-capitalist prose with doubtful literary value (represented by some entertainers, influencers, etc), was the appearance of Croatian-Dalmatian authors (with their intellectual centre in Split, gathering around the *Feral Tribune*), who chose to denounce (what they considered) social injustice, by ridiculing everyone and everything, inspired paradoxically by a rude and direct, and at times heavy and disturbing, humour. We are convinced that, notwithstanding the huge amount of cynical denunciations of political elites, humour served as a cathartic means of introspection, and a collective way of awakening from past dilemmas. These authors insisted on writing about issues other than mere patriotism, and eventually helped in changing the mindset of the public, under the motto that nothing is forbidden, and that everything could be accepted for the sake of the good present and a better future.

Furthermore, a significant number of 'new' authors (like, for example, the already-mentioned Tomić, Baretić, Lucić, and some others, like Olja Savičević Ivančević, who became one of the most important female writers of the generation as well) finally started to be greatly appreciated by the critics.

In the ensuing decades, there have also been several awarded books that have been turned into films, acclaimed both by international critics and audiences (such as Tomić's *Karaula* [The Border Post] directed by Rajko Grlić [2006], and *Ustav Republike Hrvatske* [The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia] directed by Rajko Grlić [2014], or Baretić's *Osmi povjerenik* [The Eight Commissioner] directed by Ivan Salaj [2018]), that were acclaimed, in our opinion, mainly for ridiculing reality and for the predominant comic genre the 'new' authors opted for.

Still, the shift was slow, since the situation was and remains very complex. Gajin (2020: 213) considers this social-critical engagement towards the neo-capitalist system as a rather late response, and suggests that frequent topics like citizens taking out long-term loans, the relaxation of Croatian literary production towards entertainment, or the post-FAK detachment, which happened only with the plan of expanding the thematic repertoire and introducing new genre attractions, was driven more by the market's need for new sensations rather than by artistic impulses, suggesting that the shift could perhaps be most clearly observed in the changes to the so-called Yugo-nostalgic genre, a genre that constructs an image of a better past in order to critically point to the problems of the present.

Finally, we think that the intense literary activity and turnover in a relatively short period of 30 years (from the 1990s till today), including the change in literary tastes, are due mainly to the strong polarisation of Croatian society, both then and today. The fluidity of the canon was also evidenced by changes made in school curricula,<sup>5</sup> so that what was considered anti-canonical at the beginning of the new century, or a few years earlier, in a relatively short space of time managed to become representative of the canon. Since literature should represent the face of society, with its various nuances, it does not surprise us that literature cannot remain immune to political preferences. It was not an easy transfer, from post-communist to the current (literary) society. It brought into the literary scene (at first) the hyperproduction of war-oriented literature, putting patriotism above everything (including common literary values), and later on a switch: complete non-selectivity in genres, presenting it as more mature literature, owing to democratic development. It seems that, again owing

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5 The first curricular reform (2016) proposed to introduce significant innovations to the school curricula by granting autonomy to teachers in selecting books for reading. Jergović (2016) in the article 'Nova školska lektira' (New School Book-Reading) praised the selection of books by Slavenka Drakulić, Tatjana Gromača, Kolanović and Tomić for the school reading list. Sadly, the reform was dropped, and a new one was proposed in 2019, and was again disputed by many. Jergović (2019) commented again that despite the disputes between scholars, he was confident that the teachers would list, for example, the works of Olja Savičević Ivančević, Ivana Bodrožić, Baretić, Tomić and Kristian Novak on the reading list. The two attempts to reform the curriculum, and other ongoing discussions, testify again in favour of the deep polarisation of society, and consequently the reading community, based on political convictions. Still, other authors (like Sanja Pilić, Zoran Pongračić and Silvia Šesto) that were included in the school reading list, at least at the elementary school level, helped 'refresh' the school curriculum with new and more up-to-date topics, as a kind of counterbalance to the previously described state of the art.

to political preferences, some would prefer to remember selectively, and others to selectively forget certain events from the recent past.

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