

Evaluation of France Prešeren's Poems

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Abstract

The paper, referring to the school selection of Prešeren's poems, deals with the problem of evaluating Prešeren's poems. When selecting literary texts for secondary school reading books, the modern literature didactics recommend giving priority to the principles of reception and literary history. A study of the evaluation criteria of three leading experts on Prešeren from the second half of the 20th century brings recognition that, in spite of significant differences between them, literary historians, above all, value formally complex and receptively demanding poems belonging to the central period of Prešeren's romanticism. Although the influence of literary-historical principle is also noticed in secondary school students, these attribute the most value to Prešeren's poems with simple forms and less demanding reception, predominantly those that have a story, are easier to understand and provide a complete experience.

Key words

France Prešeren's poems, literary history, reception, evaluation, empirical research

1 Introduction

Within the frame of the doctoral thesis entitled *Poezija Franceta Prešerna v srednješolskih učbenikih in njena recepcija* (Poetry of France Prešeren in secondary school textbooks and its reception), I carried out a year-round pedagogical experiment at four grammar schools in the Severna Primorska region in the 2005/2006 academic year, as an attempt to confirm the didactic usefulness of prosification of some of Prešeren's poems. Three test questionnaires (before reading Prešeren in class, after it and at the end of the academic year) were used, not only to check the understanding and experiencing of Prešeren's poems, but also their evaluation. By doing this, I built on the awareness that empirical research of poem evaluation in Slovenia is still in its infancy, although, as early as in the 1970s, Meta Grosman reported on the empirical test of Ivor A. Richards (the first to deal with this type of problem was the scholar and publicist Silvo Fatur, who prepared a selection of Prešeren's poems according to the affinities of the best grammar school graduates, Prešeren, 2000), presented in the between-the-wars period in his notable work *Practical Criticism* (Grosman, 1974).

Since it was already Richards who indicated important differences between the evaluations of literary historians and casual readers (in his case,

undergraduate students), I compared the evaluations of Slovene literary historians (Anton Slodnjak, Janko Kos and Boris Paternu – the three most important 20th century researchers of the poetry of France Prešeren) to the evaluations of second year grammar school students. In the first case I mostly used qualitative research methods, while in the second case quantitative methods prevailed. Four grammar schools of the Severna Primorska region (from the towns of Tolmin, Vipava and two from Nova Gorica) took part in the empirical study; all of the said schools had two classes of students in the second year, when Prešeren's poems are in the curriculum. Approximately two hundred students, a hundred girls and boys respectively, participated. Evaluation-related tasks were included in the Questionnaire II (after discussion of Prešeren's poetry) and Questionnaire III (at the end of the school year).

For modern study of evaluating Prešeren's poems, the most explicit seems to be the table in the Annex B (Richards, 1929, p. 365), where Richards presents an evaluation of thirteen poems treated (The relative popularity of the poems). One poem is from the 17th century, four from the 19th century, seven from the 20th century. There is no data for the remaining poem.

The evaluation of Richards' students was compared (poems were numbered successively from the most to the least popular) with the evaluation of literary history, for which the on-line British encyclopaedia (The British Encyclopaedia contains only eight of the thirteen authors, which means that the remaining five belong to marginal authors, according to beliefs of English literary critics and historians) and Wikipedia were used (in Wikipedia other four authors can be found, while the author of the most popular poem, J. D. C. Pellet, is absent even in Wikipedia). Poets were ranked according to the evaluation designations (John Donne "is often considered the greatest love poet in the English language", Thomas Hardy is "in general opinion the most important poet of the 20th century", Henry W. Longfellow is "the most popular American poet of the 19th century", Christina Rossetti is "one of the most important English poetesses in terms of the scope and quality", etc.) and also arranged in succession from 1 to 13. This is referred to in the Table 1.

The results were stunning: the first three authors, according to the evaluation criteria of the literary history (Donne, Hardy and Longfellow), scored last in the evaluation of Richards' students, and vice versa, the first three authors in the students' evaluation criteria (Pellet, St. Vincent Millay and Studdert Kennedy) seem to be more or less marginal poems according to the evaluations of literary critics and historians. Certainly, one could argue that the evaluation of literary history has essentially changed over the last eighty years, however, Grosman mentions that Richards' readers, "without supporting data on the canonical value of particular poems, strongly criticized some most notable English poets for their

shallowness and mistakes, while exalting poetry of inferior quality” (2004, p. 123-124).

Table 1

AUTHOR	EVALUATION OF RICHARDS' STUDENTS	EVALUATION OF THE LITERARY-HISTORY
Phillip J. Bailey	7	10
Christina Rossetti	4	4
John Donne	10	1
Geoffrey A. Studdert Kennedy	3	11
Edna St. Vincent Millay	2	8
Gerard M. Hopkins	11	6
J. D. C. Pellew	1	13
David H. Lawrence	12	5
Alfred Noyes	5	7
Gordon H. Luce	8	12
Thomas Hardy	9	2
Wilfred Rowland	6	9
Henry W. Longfellow	13	3

In order to influence the selection of Prešeren's poems in the secondary school Slovenian language curricula and in accompanying didactic materials (in the chapter Principles of Selection and Classifying Literary Works, didact Boža Krakar Vogel presents in detail four principles of literary didactics for the school selection of literary works: the reception principle with students as the central criterion, the principle of literary history/a period as the central criterion, the principle of literary theory - theme, type, text as metatext, and similar criteria - as well as the principle of national or international comparison and importance (2004, p. 61-65), my observing focused on the evaluation of secondary school students, i.e. in both experimental and in control groups together. To expose as much as possible the evaluation criteria used by the creators of the curricula and authors of readers (particularly in ascertaining whether a balanced representation of literary-historic and reception-related criteria was observed), I decided first to systematically and in detail research the evaluation criteria of major experts on Prešeren of the second half of the 20th century. The question of literary evaluation is actually one of the most neglected areas of Slovenian

literary science which, however, has been gaining importance lately (Paternu, 1989; Dovič, 2000; Ogrin, 2003).

2. Evaluation of the literary history

Individual literary historians and critics attributed different values to Prešeren's poems, evidently depending on the criteria used for that purpose. Lances were broken not only with *The Baptism at the Savica*, where differences in evaluation were influenced mainly by different, ideologically marked explanations, but also with relatively simple poems, such as *The Unmarried Mother*. While Boris Paternu acknowledges that this poem "presents a highly complex, yet harmonious and artistically efficient merging of arts and folklore", he never puts it side by side with *The Baptism at the Savica* or *Sonnets of Unhappiness*. Stritar, however, in his essay on Prešeren "attributes extraordinary merit to it and puts it as an example", and Levstik, in his critique of Kleinmayer's *History of Slovenian Literature* proclaims the poem to be "one of the most beautiful in the world" (Paternu, 1977, p. 265). According to Paternu, Stritar referred to the principle that the best poetry is the one that is "of the highest artistry and completely national", while Levstik attributed "magic language" to *The Unmarried Mother*.

To analyse literary and historical evaluation, I first chose the extensive Paternu's monograph *France Prešeren and His Poetic Work I-II*, in spite of its thirty years of being published, since it still presents a basis for the secondary school selection of Prešeren's poems (this is based on the fact that seven out of the nine selected poems are those that "give fundamental orientation in Prešeren's content-related world"; Paternu, 1976, p. 107. Moreover, with the romance *The Daughter's Advice* - optional choice: *The Student* and the poem *The Unmarried Mother*, all five periods of Prešeren's literary creation are covered, according to Paternu), and then also *Prešeren's Poetic Development* by Janko Kos and *Prešeren's Life* by Anton Slodnjak, two monographs that marked the 1960s and 1970s. They are namely two living and influential literary historians, while Slodnjak is included due to the fact that his monograph had by far the most reprints with a surprisingly high number of copies.

2.1 Monograph by Boris Paternu

Although there are almost no poems by Prešeren in which Paternu would not find at least some sign of quality, there is a quite clear hierarchy in his evaluation. Prešeren's poems of exceptionally high quality are ranked as the most important, as pieces of art, artistic works, as one of the peaks, etc. Although he highly values poems, such as *The Water Man*, *Rosamund of Turjak* or *Apelles and the Shoemaker*, in his opinion the undisputable artistic peak is achieved by poems such as

Farewell to Youth, Sonnets of Unhappiness, A Wreath of Sonnets, The Baptism at the Savica, To The Poet, A Toast and The Still Beating Heart, that have “an existential theme as a medium of the author's fundamental experience, awareness of life and his search for the meaning in it” in the focal position (Paternu, 1976:107). Together with this thematic criterion, crucial for Paternu's value-related classification, are also romanticism, the role of a poem in the conceptual and stylistic development of Prešeren's poetry, as well as its role in the development of Slovenian literature, i.e. literary-historic criteria are emphasized. These three criteria are clearly present in Paternu's designation of the *Sonnets of Unhappiness* cycle, which he considers to be “a highly visible work of art written by Prešeren, the most important poem beside *The Baptism at the Savica*”: “Yet the cycle has not only an excellent explanatory and referential value for his whole poetry until *A Wreath of Sonnets* and beyond it” (ibid.: 187). And further on: “The elegy *Farewell to Youth* starts and the *Sonnets of Unhappiness* ultimately establish the Slovenian poetic romanticism. However, the cycle did not remain a mere historical fact. With its thematic and expressive state of development, it resounded far into the future until our present time” (ibid.: 210).

It is no coincidence that the above mentioned poems are connected with a pronounced formal and linguistic artistry and an extremely grave, even elegiac relation to the subject-matter. This at the same time means that poems with a simple form and folklore-like style or a humorous or ironic experiential perspective may well be artistic (According to Paternu, such a case is with *New Writing* which “acted and can act across its time and belongs to poems that “literary entropy” cannot approach easily” (ibid., p. 163). While Kos classifies the poem among occasional ones and does not interpret it, Paternu dedicates almost 5000 words to it and designates it as a “famous satire in dialogue” or a “subjective artistic satire” that, in spite of expression of rough and “low” type, acknowledges that its beginning is a “true small masterpiece of logic and intelligence”, and presentation of purism “consistent, well-rounded and picturesque” (ibid., p. 153-162). Paternu's treatment of *New Writing* testifies that, together with literary-historic evaluation, he also uses the experiential evaluation, although seeing the latter as less important.

Yet are considered less artistic and of inferior quality to the above-mentioned by Paternu. That and the almost cultish relation to Prešeren's “high poetry” are seen in Paternu's designation of *Farewell to Youth* and *Baptism at the Savica*: “The first general personal declaration of Prešeren is in front of us. What is new is a tone of soberness, completely devoid of humour. New is also the form, the elegy in first-person, a lyrically direct and distinctively emotive narration” (ibid., p. 107). “The narrative poem could stay in verse form and elevated, high and solemn wording, because Prešeren, even with new awareness, retained a deeply

elegiac, retrospective relation to the great world of romantic rebellion and romantic love" (Paternu, 1977, p. 145).

Paternu writes about the poem, such as *Commands*: "The poem is therefore an example of artistry which leaves personal poetry and adapts strongly to the procedures of poetic folklore. The latter is even prevailing, if we abstain from stricter observation" (Paternu, 1977, p. 222). And about *Saint Senan*: "In spite of jocular occasional quality, Prešeren's text of *Saint Senan* is carefully developed ... (...) The same holds true for the language that, in spite of the occasional similarity with the language of *The Water Man*, it occupies an essentially lower stylistic plane that corresponds to the humorous and satirical tone of the narration" (ibid., p. 271). Paternu's designation of this poem confirms the use of experiential criteria: "The story has a dramatically fast pace, it is full, without narrative voids."

2.2 Monograph by Janko Kos

Similar evaluation criteria can be detected in the monograph by Janko Kos, with the subtitle *Interpretation* (as Dović refers, following Conrady's interpretation of Goethe's poems, the founder of empirical literary science, Siegfried J. Schmidt, divides all interpretative statements into three basic types (descriptive, explanatory and evaluating) - 2004, p. 56) - therefore evaluation makes part of literary-historic interpretation). This is evident from the mere division of the book into individual chapters, since both historians mark as the most important the central romantic period, while definitions of the preceding and following periods indirectly and also directly convey clearly inferior evaluation designations. Paternu begins his treatment of Prešeren's poems with the chapter entitled *Through Poetic Currents of the 18th Century* and Kos with *The Period of Beginnings*; Paternu concludes the treatment of the three periods of Prešeren's romanticism with the *Last Years* (evaluating as an extraordinary work of art only *The Still Beating Heart*), while Kos designates the entire fourth decade as the *Period of Conclusions and Decrease* (only the poems *In the Memory of Andrej Smole* and *A Toast* are designated to have outstanding quality).

Kos denominates the most important or the highest quality of Prešeren's poems as "one of the peaks", "the poem that stands above all other of Prešeren's erotic testimonies", "point of culmination", "the most representative work of his mature period", "the most explicit of Prešeren's national and social expression", however, as a rule, he avoids terms such as artistic and a piece of art. A detailed analysis shows that poems *Farewell to Youth*, *Sonnets of Unhappiness*, *A Wreath of Sonnets*, *The Baptism at the Savica*, *In Memory of Andrej Smole* and *A Toast* are classified among the peaks of Prešeren's poetry. Kos points out that romanticism, thematic completeness and type balance are the most important values.

Romanticism: "As to the motif, the mere title (*Farewell to Youth*, note by Z. B.) and then the poem itself make it immediately evident that it contains the theme that, by 1830, became such general property of European romantic literature, that is was almost inevitably part of its motifs and life psychology" (Kos, 1966, p. 56).

Thematic completeness: "The poet's expression of life view in *The Baptism* is most closely connected to his erotic, national and social expression. This all but explains that *The Baptism at the Savica* is the most evident final and actually the only synthesis of all three components of Prešeren's poetic world in his thirties" (ibid., p. 145).

Type balance: "The original balance (i.e. that appeared in key poems of the mature period, note by Z. B.) of lyricism, narration, drama and reflection will be discovered only in very few poems of that period ..." (ibid., p. 217).

Contrary to Paternu who, as already mentioned, does not know "bad" Prešeren poems, Kos is considerably more critical, namely he terms a text of inferior artistic quality as an occasional poem. This term is attributed to poems, such as *Night Owl (Ponočnjak)*, *Romance of Strmi Grad*, *New Writing (Nova pisarija)*, *How to Write the Word Porridge (Al prav se piše kawa ali kafha)*, *Elegy to My Compatriots*, *When Apelles Exhibits his Painting*, *Of the Iron Road*, *Celestial Procession*, *In Memory of Matija Čop*, *Saint Senan* and *The Nun and Her Canary*. For Kos, the term occasional poem has a double meaning: in the chapter National, Social and Cultural Declaration, he focuses primarily on the occasional emergence of the poem "in connection with detailed circumstances of a particular environment" (ibid., p. 140; according to these criteria, the poem *Dem Andenken des Matthias Čop*, which he considers an undisputable piece of art, should be classified as an occasional poem by Kos), in the chapter The Period of Conclusions and Decrease, an explicitly evaluating designation is given, since Kos considers occasional those poems that reveal "clear signs of decreasing poetic powers", therefore "it is not only the period of conclusions, but, in its final image, also a period of decrease" (ibid., p. 184). Kos continues: "This fact is not so much visible in the outer matter, but more in the character of some texts. We can simply name them occasional poems."

An overview of the poems, designated by Kos as inferior in terms of artistry and quality, such as in Paternu's monograph, shows that they are either formally simple or satirical and humorous poems. According to Kos, Prešeren's poetry in the forties "due to their arbitrary, freely built and unfinished framework of form, allows much more optional, free of outer discipline and thus more direct poetic expression – direct can be, of course, in the positive or in the negative meaning of the word" (ibid., p. 181-182). And Kos's attitude towards humour: "And finally, in

checking inner constituent parts, we should not forget the humour that appears in some occasional songs, etc.” (ibid., p. 218).

While in Paternu's text, the inferiority of humour is evident mostly because of the praising grave and elegiac character of a poem (a similar formulation also appeared in Kos, when depicting the type of woman, addressed by Prešeren in *Wreath of Sonnets*: “If she is to be a suitable subject for them, she should be serious, sublime and even strict to others and herself...”, ibid., p. 107), Kos explicitly proclaims humorous poetry to be a sign of human weakness: “... humour, in a certain sense, acknowledges the impossibility to control the outer world, as it is exactly through humour that man escapes by retreating into intellectual acknowledgment of one's own defeat.” (ibid., p. 164). That is why, according to Kos, due to the inner certainty that “there was no room for retreat”, humour has no significant role in Prešeren's mature period (ibid., p. 164). Thus it is of no surprise that in his monograph, Kos does not interpret at all some of the satirically-humorous poems, which Paternu and Slodnjak analyse with precision (such as the poems *New Writing*, *How to Write the Word Porridge*, *When Apelles Exhibits his Painting*).

2.3 Monograph by Anton Slodnjak

In the last chapter, Slodnjak's monograph (which was actually published before those of Kos and Paternu, but I treat it at the end, because Slodnjak's evaluative approach essentially differs from the approach of the other two experts on Prešeren) also gives a clear definition of Prešeren's most artistic texts, namely in the Summary the author selects poems *Farewell to Youth*, *Sonnets of Unhappiness*, *Ghazals*, *A Wreath of Sonnets*, *The Baptism at the Savica*, *The Still Beating Heart* and *A Toast* as the most important texts (Slodnjak, 1964, p. 296). These poems are, according to Slodnjak, “the first pure work of art of our literature” (*Farewell to Youth*), a work of the “first modern poet of the Slovenian nation” (*Sonnets of Unhappiness*), “the most profound poem in the most artistic form known in the literature” (*A Wreath of Sonnets*), “the thematic and expressive synthesis, as was best suited to the Slovenian people and its secular literature” (*The Baptism*) and a “pinnacle of Prešeren's national and general human lyrics”, that also had “among all his poems, the most directly discernible effect on the Slovenians” (*A Toast*). Although this again is the case of prevailing literary historic criteria, it is evident that Slodnjak, contrary to Paternu and Kos, does not emphasize the romanticism of Prešeren's poems from the central period, which can be deciphered from chapter titles that mostly follow the poet's biographical landmarks (such as *A Battle for Legal and Poetical Profession*, *Death of Matija Čop*, *Marriage of Julija Primic* and *The Last Two Years of Friendship with A. Smole*) (ibid., p. 327).

Together with literary-historical evaluation, Slodnjak however includes the experiential one, as clearly evident in those initial and final texts which, according to Paternu and Kos, do not count among Prešeren's highest quality poems. It is noteworthy that all three experts unanimously see a qualitative leap into Prešeren's central creative period in the poem *Farewell to Youth*, however, they strongly disagree in their judgements when this period ends. Kos in his chapter *The Period of Conclusions and Decrease* includes all poems from 1841 onwards (poems *In Farewell, Lost Faith, Commands*, etc.), Paternu in his chapter *Final Years* all poems from 1844 on (*The Unmarried Mother, The Jewish Maid, Of the Iron Road*, etc.), while Slodnjak has the last chapter *Decline in Kranj* (from the end of 1846 on), when Prešeren "could compose only tiny versified puns of erotic and satiric character" (ibid., p. 288). Kos's chapter on Prešeren's poetic "decline" matches Slodnjak's chapter with a significantly different title *A New Poem*.

According to Slodnjak, *The Water Man* is an original and harmonious ballad and a "brilliant answer to the creative initiative" (ibid., p. 28), *The Unmarried Mother* a poem that has "expressive elements in wonderful harmony with the subject-matter" and is "a unique lullaby of the soul, purified in suffering and motherly happiness" (ibid., p. 244), while *Under the Window* is a masterpiece that Prešeren, in spite of the adopted form, depicted "in such a fresh and perfect way as if its self only came into being with its contents" (ibid., p. 251). Slodnjak's experiential approach that gives Prešeren's individual poems an equal value judgement compared to those that comply with stricter literary-historic criteria, is evident in his designation of *Rosamund of Turjak*: "With great artistry, Prešeren depicted three main persons of the romance, so that their characters are clear and the story of their life experience satisfies and convinces us in the aesthetic and ethic aspects." (...) "Here lies the source of the great artistic success of *Rosamund of Turjak*, which we can value no less than a love sonnet." (ibid., p. 75-76).

Beside the fact that Slodnjak evaluates differently Prešeren's initial and final poetic texts, he differs essentially from the already mentioned experts on Prešeren in his evaluation of formally simpler, more folklore-like and with humour or satire tinted Prešeren poems. Similarly to Levstik and Stritar, in a simple form of a poem that is easier to understand, he sees a true lyrical expression, absolutely equal to the demanding, more skilful poetic forms. In the poems *Commands* and *The Unmarried Mother*, he marks elements of "pure lyrics" and, in his opinion, the poem *The Minstrel* possesses "classically simple and indisputably convincing form". In the case of the poem *Cure for Love*, to which Paternu and Kos attribute considerable significance, he even writes: "In compliance with this structure (...) is its natural, in comparison to sonnets, prose word rhythm and particularly its composition that imitates, with deep intuition, a

tripartite form of folk narrative pieces of art, deepening and broadening it with a sensitive artistic skill" (ibid., p. 204).

Slodnjak's evaluation of humour becomes even more clearly evident, especially in relation to Kos's evaluation criteria. In designation of the poem *The Daughter's Advice*, Slodnjak not only writes that an insignificant motif "shone in the light of realistic, typically Slovene humour" (ibid., p. 47) or that in his opinion the sonnet *Apelles and the Shoemaker*, a "brilliant application of Plini's tale" possesses "humorous width, coupled with stunning satirical sarcasm" (ibid., p. 60), when discussing the poem *New Writing*, that Kos designates as a "well-known and popular Prešeren's text" (Kos, 1966, p. 142), but does not interpret it, Slodnjak quite explicitly explains his own view of important elements such as humour or satire in terms of experiencing with the following words: "This would reveal the completeness of his (i.e. Prešeren's, note by. Z. B.) nature in which the realistic and critical side were developed as harmoniously as the idealistic and idolizing side." (...) "If, for example, in our satire and also in other youthful poems, the humorist and satirical components of his nature become more exposed, this is nothing ephemeral or even inferior to the tragedy of *A Wreath of Sonnets* or *The Baptism*" (ibid., p. 64-66). Slodnjak's principle that acknowledges artistic value also to the comic quality (naturally, if connected with wit and drama), is confirmed in his designation of Prešeren's *New Writing*: "All this he presented in dramatically agitated dispute between the Scribe and the Student, intertwined with humour and roguish caricaturing of illogical and absurd views of both opponents" (ibid., p. 61); "Because of this, the dialogue between the Scribe and the Student is more animated and dramatic than in Alfieri's text. The Student is more lively, intolerant, ironic and, we could say, more roguish and undoubtedly more evil than Alfieri's poet" (ibid., p. 64).

3 Evaluation in the light of reception theory

At this point, generalizing the above-stated findings, it can be stated that Paternu divides Prešeren's poems into those of higher and lower value, to higher quality and lower quality poems, Kos to worthy and unworthy, to high quality and inferior quality, while for Slodnjak, all of them are worthy and high quality, they only differ from the point of view of a literary history and experiential aspect. Or, considering these relationships evolutionary: Slodnjak puts equal value to the literary-historic and experiential aspects, Kos considers exclusively the literary-historic one, while Paternu treats the literary-historic one and partly the experiential one, considering the experiential evaluation less important than the literary-historic one. In view of Schmidt's empirical literary science, an interpretation of literary text that looks for its "original" meaning cannot be a scientific procedure, however, it "does not exclude intersubjectively verifiable

literary communications, but they have to be explicit in the sense that the interpreter explains what he is interested in at reception, the referential frames of the reception and criteria of selection" (Dovič, 2004, p. 57-58). Moreover, the interpreter has to take care not to mix the three declaration types (description, justification and evaluation), since chaos with declaration types is typical of the interpretative practice. An analysis of three monographs showed that this is the exact situation in Slovenian literary history.

To better understand the differences in the evaluations of literary historians and secondary school students, I decided to study what the modern reception theory can tell us about the problems of experiencing and evaluating literary texts. Differentiating between more highly valued tragic and less valued comic is typical of literary history and has stretched back from at least the now lost second part of Aristotle's *Poetics* onwards, while from the point of view of reception aesthetics, the primary levels of the aesthetic experience are equal: "But together with Adorno to deduct that catharsis /.../ has always been meant to preserve a dictator's interests (p. 345, here Hans Robert Jauss polemizes with the aesthetic negativity, as developed in his work *Aesthetic Theory* by Theodor W. Adorno) means, to dispose of the husks together with the grain and not to understand the communicative competence of the arts at the level of primary identifications, such as admiration, emotions, contagious laugh and sympathetic cry, which only aesthetic snobbism can take for vulgar." (Jauss, 1998, p. 35). A similar quotation from another place: "Speechless amazement, shock, admiration, emotion, sympathetic cry, contagious laugh, astonishment make the scale of such primary levels of aesthetic experience implied by the text during a performance or reading" (ibid., p. 147).

Jauss's position therefore completely matches Slodnjak's belief that humour is not inferior to tragedy. The difference between the evaluative approach of Slodnjak and Kos (according to the analysis so far, Paternu is somewhere in between the other two experts on Prešeren) may best be illustrated with Goethe's aphorism that Jauss quotes as a terse approximation to the modern theory of art: "There are three kinds of readers: one who enjoys without judging; a third who judges without enjoying; and another in the middle, who judges while enjoying and enjoys while judging. The last class truly reproduces a work of art." (ibid., p. 57; from Goethe's letter, dated 13th June 1819, to J. F. Rochlitz).

The modern reception theory namely connects an aesthetic experience directly to enjoyment in reading, since "literary communication preserves the nature of the aesthetic experience in all its functional relations only as long as the poetic, aesthetic or cathartic activity remains in the sphere of enjoyment" (ibid., p. 57). Jauss explains this connection more in detail in the case of the experiential lyrics of the 19th century: "This may be illustrated with the famous motto of

Goethe's *Trilogy of Passion: When man had ceased to utter his lament,/ A god then let me tell my tale of sorrow*. A productive ability of aesthetic experience and its cathartic effect are joined here: the poet who changes his experience into poetic creation finds, while enjoying completion of his work, relaxation of his inner self, in which his addressee can participate. 19th century experiential lyrics lifted such aesthetic experience into the very paradigm of artistic grandeur;" (ibid., p. 28). According to Jauss's criteria, also in his humorous and satirical texts (such as *The Water Man, New Writings, Apelles and the Shoemaker, Rozamund of Turjak*, etc.) Prešeren told "the tales of sorrow".

Considering the fact that it is experiential lyrics that provide identification (According to Jauss, even before romanticism, this was required in the 18th century by the "programmers of bourgeois drama" Diderot and Lessing, ibid., p. 35) and consequently reading pleasure to the reader ("Reading becomes enjoyable only when our productivity is important, i.e. when texts offer reader a possibility to include their own abilities in the play", Iser, 2001, p. 173), while the analysis so far demonstrated that Kos uplifts Prešeren's reflective lyrics at the expense of the experiential one, and Slodnjak detects high artistic quality also in non-reflective poems, Goethe's thought about the three kinds of readers could be understood as follows: readers who enjoy without judgement are secondary school students (more on this in the continuation of this discussion); the reader who judges without enjoyment is Janko Kos (in his evening interview at TV Slovenija 1 on 4th May 2008 - interview led by journalist Lado Ambrožič- Janko Kos declared that as a scientist, he didn't evaluate Prešeren in his monographs. This declaration is, of course, contestable); the reader who judges while enjoying and enjoys while judging, is Anton Slodnjak (and partly also Boris Paternu).

Certainly, this is only a view through "scientific spectacles" of the reception theory: it has to be borne in mind that understanding the nature of aesthetic experience can be completely different, as it was exactly enjoyment that used to justify engagement in the arts, "while today the aesthetic experience is most often considered genuine only if it has got rid of the pleasure and is raised to the level of aesthetic reflection" (ibid., p. 51). If this is true, then from the point of view of prevailing orientation in literary science, Kos's evaluation is the most advanced, Slodnjak's the most conservative, and Paternu's somewhere in between.

For the sake of comparison with students' literary tastes, in the end we have to identify those Prešeren poems that present the undisputable artistic peak, according to the opinions of all three experts on Prešeren. These poems are *Farewell to Youth, Sonnets of Unhappiness, A Wreath of Sonnets, The Baptism at the Savica* and *A Toast*. With Slodnjak and Paternu also the poem *The Still Beating Heart* is included. Slodnjak is the only one who puts *Ghazals* at the same level, only Paternu does the same with *To the Poet* (Slodnjak does not explicitly

evaluate this Prešeren poem, Kos designates it as “one of the last important poetic texts that concludes Prešeren's thirties”, while for Paternu *To the Poet* represents “the height of Prešeren's existential and poetic lyricism, key text, that opens perspectives backward and forward, across all stages in the development of Prešeren's life view and also his expressive capacity” (Paternu, 1977, p. 153). This high evaluation was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that in 1960 Paternu dedicated an exceptionally long discussion to this relatively short poem) and only Kos with the poem *In the Memory of Andrej Smole*.

Variety in evaluating Prešeren's *Ghazals* is not only a consequence of a subjective evaluation criteria, but a phenomenon that is also relatively frequent in other literatures. Wolfgang Iser refers to an instructive example of different evaluations of a famous John Milton epic, namely in the polemics between C. S. Lewis and F. R. Leavis: “The turning point of this dispute Lewis formulated with the following words: 'It is not that [Leavis] and I see different things when we look at *Paradise Lost*. He sees and hates the very same that I see and love' (Lewis, 1960: 134). Lewis and Leavis deal with characteristics that serve as a basis for their estimation, as objective facts /.../; it is obvious that the mere act of comprehending Milton's epic is intersubjective, since they both responded to same issues” (Iser, 2001: 48).

To Slodnjak, *Ghazals* represents a “subtle love song” and a “new and higher form of Prešeren's love poem”, justifying its high artistic value as a cycle of poems “in which every word and line is subordinated to the leading thought”, while the adopted elements “merged the idea and appropriate word into a single unit” (Slodnjak, 1964, p. 124). Kos, however, is rather critical towards *Ghazals*: in his opinion “the elements of a new erotic idea still appear in a form that is not always ultimately defined or at least regulated”. His evaluation is based on awareness that “the whole that serves as their frame is not placed on a unique foundation which would define their inner measure” and “it is exactly for this reason that they grow in their own directions, half isolated from each other, disproportionate or even excessively emphasized” (Kos, 1966, p. 95-96). In this case, Kos and Slodnjak see completely different features in *Ghazals*; there is a similar case with some other poems, such as *Commands*, where a completely opposite definition of literary type occurs. According to Slodnjak, *Commands* are an elegiac poem “with simple, but clear lyrical wording” (ibid.: 248), while according to Kos it is a poem in which “evidently decreased importance of lyricism” (...) “gives way to epic enumeration” (ibid., p. 217).

4 Evaluation by second year grammar school students

The evaluation criteria of second year grammar school students were studied empirically with the second and third test questionnaire as part of a pedagogical

experiment in four grammar schools of the Severna Primorska region. The following text systematically presents the evaluation criteria established with the second task in the Questionnaire II (using Prešeren's poems that were treated in classes). The findings were confirmed with the third task in the same questionnaire (the task checked the evaluation of Prešeren's poems that students read independently), and with the second task in the Questionnaire III, which checked the poems which were kept in long-term memory. Since in this case I was not interested in the effects of the experimental factor, I observed classifications in both, the experimental and control groups together.

The second task of the Questionnaire II required that students classify the poems that were treated in classes according to whether they are thematically or formally interesting, easy or difficult to understand, boring, optimistic or pessimistic, and their significance for the Slovenians. The tables first give the part of the task in which understanding and experiential response were checked. They are followed by the second and third part that verify experiencing and evaluating. Reception categories were purposely mixed in the task, in order to obtain answers which were as independent as possible.

4.1 Understanding and experiencing

It is typical that students find it toughest to understand Prešeren's poems which are of greater length and have, above all, the demanding poetic form of a sonnet or some other complex classical strophes, such as octaves (eight-line stanza). On the first three positions are poems which the experimental group treated together with prosified forms of the poems, which confirms my assumption that these three texts are exactly those with the strongest reception problem (in the interpretation of the results, one has to bear in mind that the added prosification of poems considerably facilitates understanding on one hand, while on the other hand it tangibly strengthens the impression of texts that are hard to grasp), so that it requires a didactic aid to facilitate understanding.

THE POEM MOST DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND		THE MOST BORING POEM	
<i>A Wreath of Sonnets</i>	55	<i>To the Poet</i>	39
<i>Sonnets of Unhappiness</i>	37	<i>Farewell to Youth</i>	31
<i>The Baptism at the Savica</i>	30	<i>Sonnets of Unhappiness</i>	30
<i>The Still Beating Heart</i>	20	<i>A Wreath of Sonnets</i>	25
<i>To the Poet</i>	17	<i>The Baptism at the Savica</i>	21
<i>Farewell to Youth</i>	16	<i>The Daughter's Advice</i>	16
<i>The Daughter's Advice</i>	7	<i>The Unmarried Mother</i>	16

<i>The Unmarried Mother</i>	3	<i>The Still Beating Heart</i>	9
<i>A Toast</i>	2	<i>A Toast</i>	3
THE MOST OPTIMISTIC POEM		THE MOST PESSIMISTIC POEM	
<i>A Toast</i>	88	<i>Sonnets of Unhappiness</i>	104
<i>The Daughter's Advice</i>	57	<i>Farewell to Youth</i>	30
<i>The Unmarried Mother</i>	10	<i>To the Poet</i>	20
<i>Farewell to Youth</i>	9	<i>The Unmarried Mother</i>	13
<i>To the Poet</i>	8	<i>A Wreath of Sonnets</i>	8
<i>The Baptism at the Savica</i>	7	<i>The Still Beating Heart</i>	7
<i>The Still Beating Heart</i>	4	<i>The Baptism at the Savica</i>	3
<i>A Wreath of Sonnets</i>	3	<i>The Daughter's Advice</i>	2
<i>Sonnets of Unhappiness</i>	1	<i>A Toast</i>	1

In the fourth place was the ballad *The Still Beating Heart* which, although it is written in classical four-line stanzas, contains a very unusual course of events and relatively demanding poetic language. With this poem, a large majority of points were contributed by experimental group students, who had to check understanding as their home assignment. As expected, among the easiest to understand were the poems *The Daughter's Advice* and *The Unmarried Mother*, as poems of simple form and poetic language, as well as *A Toast* which, according to general belief, is not a very easy poem, however, in the students' reception it has a special position on account that its seventh stanza is the Slovenian national anthem.

Classification of poems under the heading "The most boring poem" shows a high correlation with a poem's clarity of meaning and its relation to reality. The first four poems on the scale are in the top position as the most pessimistic ones (*Sonnets of Unhappiness*, *Farewell to Youth* and *To the Poet*) and as the most difficult to understand (*A Wreath of Sonnets* and *Sonnets of Unhappiness*). And the opposite, the last four poems on the scale (except *The Still Bearing Heart*) are at the top as the most optimistic (*A Toast*, *The Daughter's Advice* and *The Unmarried Mother*) and at the bottom of the list of the most difficult to understand (the same three poems). Another noticeable characteristic of this heading is the fact that students classify, as the most boring, pure lyrical poems without epic elements, and among the least boring, *A Toast* excepted, poems with a distinctive story, i.e. an epic element that allows identification.

4.2 Experiencing and evaluating

POEM WITH THE MOST INTERESTING CONTENT	
<i>The Baptism at the Savica</i>	68
<i>The Still Beating Heart</i>	36
<i>The Daughter's Advice</i>	26
<i>A Toast</i>	25
<i>The Unmarried Mother</i>	12
<i>Sonnets of Unhappiness</i>	10
<i>Farewell to Youth</i>	7
<i>A Wreath of Sonnets</i>	4
<i>To the Poet</i>	2

Previous findings that students' evaluation is directly connected to understanding and, above all, to experiencing, confirm classification of poems that complies with the attractiveness of its content. In this case, too, the top four positions are taken by poems with explicit story elements (*The Baptism*, *The Still Beating Heart* and *The Daughter's Advice*)¹ or *A Toast* with its specific status, while the last four positions are occupied by poems of pure personal expression with a complex form and a predominantly pessimistic attitude towards reality. It is already Mahnič who referred to, as experientially strongest and thus dangerous for the youth, Prešeren's poems from the initial and final creative period: "Read his *To Girls*, *The Unmarried Mother*, *The Daughter's Advice*, *The Still Beating Heart* etc., and you will see if soon your young blood will boil, your imagination fill with seducing images, your heart drink unattainable ideals, longing for which is destined to push a man into unhappiness and despair" (1887, p. 176).

POEM WITH THE MOST INTERESTING FORM		THE MOST RELEVANT FOR SLOVENIANS	
<i>A Toast</i>	84	<i>A Toast</i>	168
<i>A Wreath of Sonnets</i>	66	<i>A Wreath of Sonnets</i>	13
<i>To the Poet</i>	18	<i>The Baptism at the Savica</i>	9
<i>The Baptism at the Savica</i>	9	<i>Farewell to Youth</i>	1

<i>Sonnets of Unhappiness</i>	5	<i>To the Poet</i>	0
<i>The Still Beating Heart</i>	2	<i>The Daughter's Advice</i>	0
<i>The Daughter's Advice</i>	1	<i>The Unmarried Mother</i>	0
<i>The Unmarried Mother</i>	1	<i>The Still Beating Heart</i>	0
<i>Farewell to Youth</i>	1	<i>Sonnets of Unhappiness</i>	0

The last two headings (interesting form and relevance for Slovenians) testify to the highest influence of school on the evaluation of second year grammar school students, naturally, with certain peculiarities. For students, the most interesting three poems regarding the form are *A Toast*, *A Wreath of Sonnets* and *To the Poet*. According to literary historians, they typically have a very intricate form or construction, a fact that Slovene language teachers usually emphasize in classes. Previous statements about the specific position of *A Toast* as a cult poem are confirmed by this classification, as the poem should be at the third place, after *A Wreath of Sonnets* and *To the Poet*, according to the evaluation criteria of literary historians. Evidently, more than with the extremely complex intertwining of sonnets in the *A Wreath* and the vocal orchestration in the poem *To the Poet*, *A Toast* attracts as a carmen figuratum, i.e. its visualization of the content.

There is a similarity in students' evaluation that the poems most relevant for Slovenians are *A Toast*, *A Wreath of Sonnets* and *The Baptism at the Savica*. Even if they experienced *A Wreath of Sonnets* as the most difficult poem to understand, as a relatively boring one and as a poem with extremely uninteresting content, in compliance with the school doctrine they, however, attributed considerable relevance to it, probably following the well-known thesis "With his works of art (*A Wreath of Sonnets* being at the top of the list), Prešeren raised Slovenian poetry to the European level". This heading may even more distinctly show the specific position of *A Toast* as the actual Slovenian anthem or the influence of its current social status on the reception of secondary school students. Literary history (that includes all three Prešeren specialists: Slodnjak, Kos and Paternu) undisputedly classifies *A Toast* as to its importance for Slovenians after both "great" poems, *The Baptism* and *A Wreath*.

4.3 Additional test of grammar school students' evaluation criteria

The third task in the Questionnaire II that required quoting independently read Prešeren's poems and their evaluation was meant to establish the degree to which the school treatment of Prešeren motivates students to spontaneously read his poems, and whether such a task can refute or confirm previous findings on the evaluation criteria of second year grammar school students. Out of the Prešeren poems they read at home by themselves, students had to name those

three they liked best. Considering the fact that there were no significant differences (students of the experimental group had altogether 97 mentions of Prešeren's poems, students of the control group had 87 mentions, and on the first six places stand the same poems in both groups) between the experimental and control groups, the results are given for both groups together:

<i>The Water Man</i>	51	<i>Ghazals</i>	13	<i>The Song of the Fair Vida</i>	3	<i>Lost Faith</i>	2
<i>Rosamund of Turjak</i>	38	<i>Whither?</i>	11	<i>Memento mori</i>	3	<i>Lenora</i>	1
<i>Apelles and the Shoemaker</i>	33	<i>To Girls</i>	3	<i>Under the Window</i>	3	<i>Commands</i>	1
<i>Gloss</i>	16	<i>The Jewish Maid</i>	3	<i>To the Strings</i>	2	<i>The Abandoned One</i>	1

Questionnaire II was completed by a total of 191 students, which means that 573 mentions of Prešeren's poems were possible, if each student put down three of those poems that they read independently of classes. The total sum of 184 references (i.e. 32 %) proves that, on average, only every third student in the second year read Prešeren's poetry at home, therefore school selection of Prešeren's poems and their whole interpretation at school do not motivate enough for independent reading, which is one of the main goals of teaching literature. It can be concluded that all teachers, when treating Prešeren in class, do not practice speech presentations (reciting poems), as in such a case (assuming that students themselves select poems they experience more intimately, so they memorize them better) results would certainly be better.

The mention of the first three poems stands out (*The Water Man*, *Rosamund of Turjak* and *Apelles and the Shoemaker*). Typical for them is their more epic than lyric character and the fact that they belong to the more accessible of Prešeren's poems, which undoubtedly confirms our previous findings regarding secondary school students' evaluation criteria. The problem lies in the fact that the first five top ranking poems are exclusively the poems that were treated in the elementary school, as foreseen by the curriculum, so in reality Prešeren's poems may not have been read independently at home, but were only the titles that students remembered from their elementary school.

Finally, the results can be tested with the second task in the Questionnaire III (checking durability of the acquired knowledge) if the results of recognizing the poems treated in classes are given for both groups together:

<i>The Still Beating Heart</i>	142	<i>Farewell to Youth</i>	53
<i>A Toast</i>	124	<i>The Baptism at the Savica</i>	44
<i>The Baptism at the Savica</i>	98	<i>A Wreath of Sonnets</i>	41
<i>The Daughter's Advice</i>	71	<i>Sonnets of Unhappiness</i>	37
<i>To the Poet</i>	68	<i>The Unmarried Mother</i>	34

With the assumption that students better remembered the poems that offered them a stronger experience (and are thus, of course, more highly valued) it can be confirmed that students of secondary schools favour those poems of Prešeren that have distinctive epic elements (with *A Toast* again as the exception), while they evaluate much lower pure lyrical poems, particularly so, if they are harder to understand and of pessimistic character.

5 Conclusions

In the conclusion of this chapter, it is first necessary to emphasize that the evaluation criteria of literary historians and secondary school students largely differ regarding Prešeren's poems. Although in judging artistic form and relevance of a particular poem for Slovenians, students show the influence of treating Prešeren at school (the latter, in spite of personal affinities of a particular teacher, usually follow the trusted findings and criteria of literary history), it is very clear that non-reception criteria (the position of a text in an author's work and literary history, its stylistic clarity and unique form) prevail, while basic evaluation criteria for students are clarity of meaning and experiential potential. Already in the 19th century, completely different, explicitly reception-related criteria were accessible to compilers of literary anthologies. For example, Razlag's book of poems from 1868 publishes 11 Prešeren poems, namely *The Soldier's Poem*, *In the Memory of Valentin Vodnik*, *To the Strings*, *Under the Window*, *Comments*, *The Power of Memory*, *Lost Faith*, *In Farewell*, *The Sailor*, *Whither?* and *A Toast*. The majority of these poems were created in the last period of Prešeren's romanticism (according to Paternu's division in periods) or after 1841; most of them have a simple form (not a single sonnet is included!), less demanding poetic language and enable a full emotional response.

The problem of difference between elite and mass literature readers is actually no novelty, since even at end of the 19th century Fran Grivec, a contemporary of representatives of modernism, evaluated the literary attitudes of students at that time as follows: "Our average school mates found authors (Gogolj, Tolstoj, Dostojevski, etc.) somewhat alien and boring. This was our criterion to distinguish who had sense and understanding for the artistic side of

literature and who was only attracted by skilful narration and fine stories" (Prijetelj, 1952, p. VII-VIII).

With the modern mass reader, who has gathered ten years of experience with literary reading, studies reveal a negative attitude towards formally and receptively demanding literary text, too. Meta Grosman, for example, illustrates the present situation with answers to a survey given by students who successfully passed matura: "Not even one is interested in form-related aspects of artistic texts, while many of them think that literature is not interesting at all. Those who find reading interesting, as a rule, explain the fact with a personal response to a text and its educational content, but adding that this is true only for the texts of their own choice and not for compulsory readings!" (ibid., s. 253-254).

Thus it is reasonable to believe that the European society of the last two centuries consists of two parallel evaluation systems: the exclusive literary historic system where the general reader is in the background, and that of mass reception, where the general reader is in the foreground. Schmidt (quoted from Dovič, 2004, p. 74) explains the emergence of such dualism as follows: "Schiller and Goethe divide work and criticism from other factors (market, readers), writing and critique become a literary imminent activities, thus making art autonomous and depoliticized. Criticism is no longer interested in whether a literary work pleases (the public) in general, but whether it complies with elite-oriented highest artistic requirements." The first prevail in public, preserving, through the school system, their privileged position of canonized authors and texts, while the second prevail in private life. Future curricula and didactic materials should, with a new selection of Prešeren's poems (as documented previously, the existing grammar school selection almost completely follows the literary-historic criteria of Boris Paternu or his monograph *France Prešeren in njegovo pesniško delo I-II.*), create an appropriate synthesis of both evaluation approaches (here, I rely on positions of empirical literary science regarding teaching literature at schools: "Since literary socialization is crucial for general socialization, literary curriculum is always subject to ideological discussions and disagreements, so that it raises questions about the concepts of literature, literary canon and literary values. First, a distinction has to be made between literary science and literary didactics: the latter is understood by Schmidt as an independent integrated science, connected to literary science, pedagogics, psychology and sociology, that needs to develop its own concept of literary socialization during education at the theoretical level as well" - Dovič, 2004, p. 85), founded on the latest findings of the Slovenian literature didactics. In this context Krakar refers to "the principle of reception-oriented selection of literary works in their "pure" form as the most important at the initial stages of literary

teaching, (...) later, with increased reading experiences, personal development, interests and with intensifying general educational goals, the reception principle becomes a complementary inherent part of other aspects of the selection and classification process" (2004, p. 62).

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Appendix

Questionnaire II (after the experiment)

SCHOOL: CLASS:
 GENDER: M F
 FATHER'S EDUCATION: elementary secondary higher
 MOTHER'S EDUCATION: elementary secondary higher

2. You discussed the following poems in the classroom: To the Poet, The Daughter's Advice, The Unmarried Mother, Farewell to My Youth, The Still Beating Heart, The Toast, Sonnets of Unhappiness, A Wreath of Sonnets, and The Baptism at the Savica.

Among the poems discussed during class, select and quote the poem that

You found the most interesting for its contents
 You found the most interesting for its form
 You found the most difficult to understand
 You found the most boring
 You think is the most optimistic.....
 You think is the most pessimistic.....
 Is the most significant for Slovenians.....

3. If you have read other Prešeren's poems besides the poems discussed at school, complete the sentence.

Out of those I read independently, I liked the following three poems the most:

.....

Questionnaire III (at the end of the school year)

SCHOOL: CLASS:
 GENDER: M F

2. Determine which Prešeren's poems that you discussed in classes the following verses belong to.

<i>Na tleh leže slovenstva stebri stari, v domačih šegah utrjene postave;</i>	<i>Vremena bodo Kranjcem se zjasnile, jim milši zvezde kakor zdej sijale;</i>
<i>Al' ko si je zvolila mladenčca družega, iz prs nobena njemu ni pesem več prišla;</i>	<i>Modrost, pravičnost, učenost, device brez dot žal'vati videl sem, samice;</i>
<i>Življenje je ječa, čas v nji rabelj hudi, skrb vsak dan mu pomlajena nevesta;</i>	<i>Meni nebo odprto se zdi, kadar se v tvoje ozrem oči;</i>
<i>V sovražnike 'z oblakov rodu naj našga trešči grom;</i>	<i>Odkrila se bo tebi onstran groba ljubezni moje čistost in zvestoba;</i>
<i>Kako bit hočeš poet in ti pretežko je v prsih nosit' al pekel al nebo!</i>	<i>Ljubice pod okno dragi pride marsiktero noč;</i>

