

# THE LINKS BETWEEN LOUIS ADAMIČ AND SLOVENE JOURNALISTS AND LITERARY FIGURES (1921–1941)<sup>1</sup>

France Adamič

On 24 December 1913 Lojze Adamič disembarked at Long Island, New York. By 1916, at the age of 18, the young man had advanced from being an employee in the mail room of the newspaper *Glas naroda* to becoming assistant to the chief editor. He wrote news items and short features in Slovene, including *Stari cerkovnik* (The Old Verger), a recollection of his youthful experiences and also a reflection of his homesickness. He was caught up in the dilemma of how to immerse himself as rapidly as possible in the American way of life. He therefore had to break off with the past as soon as he could and acquire American citizenship. In 1917, as the volunteer 'Louis Adamič', he enlisted with the American army for a three-year service period which, on account of the First World War and the crisis that followed it, was extended to six years.

For Adamič this was a period of growing maturity, self-education and improvements to his formal education, and also of coming to master American literature, with the aim of himself becoming an American writer. The path towards this aim was full of trials, endeavours, failures and achievements. All his energies were directed towards writing short news reports, feature articles and personal accounts. On 24 December 1921 the journal *Living Age* published his translation of Cankar's short story *Simple Martin* (*Idiot Martin*) which, according to literary historians, is the first known translation of Cankar's works to be printed in English. This translation appeared only three years after Cankar's death.

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Over the years to follow Adamič published around thirty translations, mostly of Cankar, Finžgar, Prežih, Kraigher, Novačan, and Pugelj; he also translated from Croatian and Serbian literature and wrote his own compositions.

We do not have any reliable information on the links between Louis Adamič and Slovene emigré organisations during the early years of his maturing. He does, however, mention that he personally asked the secretary of the library of the Slovene Socialist Club if he could borrow the books *Hlapec Jernej* (Jernej the Farmhand) and *Iz naših krajev* (From Our Parts). In another letter, from 1924, he wrote: 'I would love to come by for some of Cankar's books, if you could let me borrow them for a few weeks.' Adamič most likely also borrowed books by other Slovene writers whom he was to translate during the 1920s.

After the publication of his translation of Cankar's *Hlapec Jernej* (*Yerney's Justice*, 1926), Adamič came to the notice of editors of Slovene journals in the United States, followed by journalists, reporters and writers. The first review appeared in the daily *Prosveta* (Chicago, September 1926), written by the editor Ivan Molek, who helped Adamič with editorial and business contacts with Slovene writers in America. Molek stressed the fact that Adamič's translations were of great importance for Slovenes who, throughout the States, were reading journals both in Slovene and English.

Shortly after, in the journal *Jutro* (Ljubljana, 1926, 216), the critic Josip Vidmar – in an article entitled 'Hlapec Jernej v angleščini' – published a scathing critique: 'The translation is incomplete, the more complex sentences are omitted – particularly those which are not to the translator's liking.' Nonetheless, Vidmar did acknowledge that the essence of the work had remained intact. In Adamič's defence, it must be recognised that he was grappling with important and responsible work. It was precisely because of this that it was necessary to advise the translator to carry out this important work, and this responsible task, with greater attentiveness, intense searching and conscientiousness.

As a consequence of these reviews, Adamič became (partly) recognised, but also concerned: he realised that there were some who did not appreciate his work. He sent a cutting from the journal *Čas* (The Times, Cleveland) to his sister, Tončka, in which the editor Fank Kerže wrote that the translation of *Hlapec Jernej* read more smoothly in English than in the original, although he feared that Americans might not receive Cankar with especial enthusiasm. 'In America, the system of masters and hired labourers is disappearing, and it is being replaced by corporations, presidents, foremen, workers – and all are earning money.

We are truly grateful now to have the first English translation of a major work from our literature.'

During this period, at a time when Adamič was beginning to make contact with Slovene journalists and writers, it was important that Josip Vidmar was drawing attention to Adamič's work in the Slovene press in Slovenia for the first time. I do not know why, during Adamič's first visit to his homeland in 1932/33, he and Vidmar did not meet; the reason may have been the contact and collaboration between Adamič and Juš Kozak, who was engaged in a dispute with Vidmar (see Vidmar's *Obrazi*). On the occasion of his second visit, however, Vidmar and Adamič held long conversations together, both in Ljubljana and Tržič.

For several years afterwards Louis Adamič's name was even less frequently mentioned. It was only in 1931 – when his book *Dynamite* appeared, followed in 1932 by his second book *Laughing in the Jungle* – that a number of members of the Slovene cultural community began to take an interest in him.

The first to do so was the poet Mile Klopčič (1903–1986), who from 1929 was a correspondent for *Prosveta*. On the basis of sources from *Prosveta*, Klopčič published a review of *Dynamite* in the Ljubljana journal *Jutro* (14 April 1931) and, through Molek, came into contact with Adamič by letter. Adamič sent Klopčič four copies of his book, and informed him that he was writing a longer novel which would be called *Laughing in the Jungle* (*Smeh v džungli*), and that he was planning to visit the old country the following year (1932). After this, Adamič and Klopčič exchanged several more letters, and by the end of 1933 had exchanged a further seven pieces of correspondence, including letters, various reviews and critiques, and other items of information which had appeared in Slovenia or the US. In 1931 Klopčič brought Adamič into contact with the writer Juš Kozak (1892–1964), who was editor of several literary collections for the Tiskovna zadruga publishing society in Ljubljana. Adamič sent him four sketches which, in a translation by Anton Debeljak, Kozak published in a separate booklet entitled *Kriza v Ameriki* (Crisis in America, 1932) in the *Slovenske poti* collection. At the same time, one of Adamič's short stories, 'Enigma' (*Uganka*), appeared in the *Ljubljanski zvon* review (it had already been published in the US in 1930), and also the sketch *Žena iz Dalmacije* (A Bohunk Woman) in a translation by Griša Koritnik.

The Harper publishing house and literary club had proposed *Laughing in the Jungle* to the awards committee of the Guggenheim Foundation, and in spring 1932 Adamič was awaiting the decision and the presentation of the award. Fol-

lowing the presentation, Louis and Stella boarded the *Saturnia* and from the boat sent a telegram to Mile Klopčič and Adamič's mother announcing that they would be in the Union Hotel in Ljubljana on 14 May. As early as the third day Klopčič organised a meeting with leading Slovene literary figures at Čad restaurant in the park below Rožnik hill in Ljubljana. Those present included Oton Župančič, Juš Kozak, Fran Albreht, Anton Melik, Stanko Leben, and Ludvik Mrzel. In this agreeable atmosphere they chiefly discussed the translation of American literature into Slovene, and Slovene literature into English, including the most recent works. After this, almost the same group met up for the first of the 'evening entertainment[s] of a leading Slovene writer, a grammar school teacher, editor, publisher, and brilliant man.' Two similar 'evenings' followed: the first at the home of the most eminent contemporary Slovene poet, and the second with the editor of the oldest Slovene literary review. The hosts were Juš Kozak, Oton Zupančič and Fran Albrecht. Finally, in Praproče on 22 May, Adamič's mother prepared a banquet for her 'lost son'. All those whom Adamič had come to know during the first week were present, together with their wives, relatives and neighbours; guests included Uncle Miha, uncles Johan and Jože Rus and the Škulj aunts, as well as Anton, Emil, Ernest and Karel Adamič, who brought Louis their publications, papers, notes and verses.

At both the social and working meetings, Adamič made the acquaintance of the geographer Anton Melik, a member of the Ljubljana PEN Club; together they discussed the great expansiveness of the New World, which Melik planned to visit personally during the coming years, with the intention of also making contact with the leading geographers and geologists in the United States. During the visit to Praproče, Melik was mainly interested in the manor-house and in the consequences of the earthquake in 1895, which is why he examined the living quarters and out-buildings in detail, and took photographs which he reproduced in his extensive work *Slovenija II*. Other photographs from the 'banquet' were taken by Melik's laboratory assistant Zidar (?).

Up until the end of May, Louis and Stella remained in Ljubljana, where they held conversations with acquaintances and new friends. They had planned to complete the plan of a new book, *The Darkened Plain (Potemnela ravan)*, by autumn. For a few days they typed in the granary at home but could get no peace and quiet there. At least twice a day they would be interrupted by restless Uncle Miha. Several journalists had come to Blato from Zagreb, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Split and other parts of the country. This is why Juš Kozak proposed that Louis

move to Bled or Bohinj, where many Slovene writers and artists spent the summer: Oton Župančič, Fran Albreht and Josip Vidmar were in Bled, and Juš and Ferdo Kozak, Fran S. Finžgar and others in Bohinj.

At first the couple stayed at Pension Rudnica, and later at the Hotel Sv. Janez, where one day in July a group of leading literary figures gathered. On this occasion, Adamič also met two students, Božo and Bače (better known later as Dr Božo Revnihar and Dr Andrej O. Župančič, director of the Institute of Oncology and Academy member respectively). During the summer Juš Kozak concerned himself with the translation and publication of *Laughing in the Jungle*. He tried to interest the publishers Modra knjiga and Slovenska matica – but to no avail. On account of the general economic crisis between 1929 and 1935, there had been a sharp decline in the number of readers and subscribers. He held discussions with the translators: Vladimir Levstik was translating *War and Peace* at the time, and Stanko Leben was heavily engaged in teaching. In the end, Kozak finally succeeded in having the book included in the publication programme for 1933; meanwhile, during the winter of 1932/33, Leben had succeeded in completing the translation, and the book appeared on 21 March 1933, just before Adamič's departure for America. From Autumn 1933 to March 1934 *Posveta* serialised the entire text of *Laughing in the Jungle* in eighty-eight parts.

Meanwhile, during the second half of 1932, several translations and articles had appeared. Griša Koritnik published a discussion on 'The Crisis of American Individualism' (*Kriza ameriškega individualizma*, 1932), and Oton Župančič wrote an essay entitled *Adamič in slovenstvo* (Adamič and Sloveneness) for the journal *Ljubljanski zvon* (1932), which divided the Slovene cultural public. A new review had emerged – *Sodobnost* (Contemporary Times) – containing critical articles by a number of nationally involved writers. This adversely affected Župančič and Adamič, for it also caused a crisis for *Ljubljanski zvon*, i.e. a dispute between the owners of the Tiskovna zadruga publishing association and the editors of *Zvon*. The new editorial board was headed by Anton Seliškar, a poet and writer of short stories and books for children. Both in writing and in person, he invited Adamič to become an associate contributor, asking him to decide and let them know what he could submit for the next issue. The following year, 1935, the editorship of *Zvon* was taken over by Juš Kozak. Meanwhile, Olga Škrlič-Grahor had published a translation of 'Love in America' (*Ljubezem v Ameriki*), a chapter from the typescript of *The Darkened Plain* (later *Grandsons/Vnuki*, 1935).

Louis and Stella were in Rogaška Slatina from July to mid-August; it was there that the pilgrimage of the Darkened Plain ended. Before they left for the health spa, Mile Klopčič had mentioned the Rogaška glassworks, where his compatriot Beno Jugovar was working. It was he who introduced Adamič to the professor and member of the Academy, France Kidrič, and to his son, later to be president of the Slovene government and vice-president of the Yugoslav government, Boris Kidrič. Staying in Rogaška at that time, amongst the prominent figures from social life in Yugoslavia, was also the former mayor of Ljubljana, later to be the ambassador of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to Prague, and a sitting member of the Yugoslav senate, Mr Ivan Hribar, with his family. Hribar congratulated Adamič on the work he was doing in America. They exchanged publications: Adamič presented two works (in English), *Dynamite* and *Laughing in the Jungle*; in return, Hribar gave him *Moji spomini* (I & II) (My Recollections). As a dedication to Adamič's mother, Hribar also wrote: 'Lojzek (Little Louis) was Yours, Lojze was his own man, and Louis is for all of us.' At Hribar's invitation, Louis and Stella visited the family estate at Cerklje pri Kranju, and on the Feast of the Assumption, Hribar returned the visit by going to Preproče. He came with his former secretary, the writer Ivan Lah. Hribar was interested in farming, particularly in the rearing of pigs, for – together with his father Anton – he recalled the opposition candidates from Grosuplje at the elections to the Carniolan regional assembly at the end of the 1880s. Later, in 1934, Hribar was to reproach Adamič for having condemned, in his book *The Native's Return*, the dictatorship in Yugoslavia.

Amongst the many friends of Mile Klopčič who took an interest in Adamič was the poet of the mining regions, Ludvik Mrzel, who in 1932 published his impressions in the book *Luči ob cesti* (Lights by the Wayside). Mrzel was editor of the journal *Svobodna mladina* (Free Youth), and also contributed to several other newspapers and reviews. In 1931, in the journal *Jugoslovan*, he had published an article entitled *Slovenec – ameriški pisatelj* (A Slovene – An American Writer), and in 1932 two articles on the meeting with Adamič in *Posveta*, as well as a report in *Jutro* (1933). In addition to other guests, Mrzel was also with Klopčič at Čad restaurant, in Paproče and on other occasions. For several more years they continued to exchange letters, and Adamič also sent him selected reviews and press cuttings.

A more fruitful meeting was that between Adamič and the journalist, writer and stage-director Bratko Kreft, who in 1932 was preparing to set up the journal

*Književnost* (Literature) and invited Adamič to collaborate. In his letter of 10 October 1932 he mentions that he is considerably isolated 'amongst the literati', and that his companions are Marxists. *Književnost* had to be ranked among (or rather, smuggled into) the order of established reviews such as *Ljubljanski zvon* and *Dom in svet*; he agreed with Župančič's criticism of the Slovene literary situation (our 'deep-resentfulness' and critical justifications). Župančič did not want to have whatever was being fostered by the 'Yugoslavs' gathered around *Jutro*. It would have been quite out of place for Adamič, too, to be involved in this dispute.

In *Književnost* Kreft published Adamič's article 'Slovenian Peasants Pray for the Mexican Church', taken from *Dynamite*, and two other pieces: the short chapter 'Sacco and Vanzetti', and details on the origin of Mayday. Bratko Kreft kept Adamič informed of the position of political prisoners in Yugoslavia (in the Glavnjača prison in Belgrade, and in the Sremska Mitrovica, Požarevac and Maribor penitentiaries) and about the torture of communists, agrarian reformists and other opponents of the regime. He also provided him with material collected from Rajko Jovanović describing Glavnjača prison. On the basis of this information, a letter protesting against torture in Yugoslav prisons ('Torture in Belgrade') was published; it was signed by forty-two of the most eminent American public figures, who included writers, critics, university professors and other members of the International Committee for the Protection of Political Detainees. The protest letter was delivered to the Yugoslav ambassador in Washington, Dr Leonid Pitamic.

Bratko Kreft had written a novel about school and student life, *Človek mrtvaških glav* (The Man of Skulls). The book was impounded and the author given a six-month suspended prison sentence. Kreft was more successful as an essayist, and was also, after Cankar, the most successful dramatist. He brought Adamič into contact with the group of the organised left: Kermauner, Seliškar and other contributors to *Književnost*.

When he arrived for his visit in 1932, Adamič sought to establish links with those writers whose works he had translated and published in English during the 1920s. The writer Ivan Zorec came by train to visit him in Paproče. Adamič was interested in the problem of the 'green cadre', and particularly in the way Zorec had described it in his story. Adamič had already been interested in this issue during the period in which he was preparing his selection of *Yugoslav Stories* (1935).

Through the auspices of Juš Kozak, Adamič came into contact with Anton Novačan and Lojze Kraigher, without having any written documentation. The meeting with Fran S. Finžgar was arranged by Ludvik Klakočer, who later told me that Adamič had apologised to Finžgar for not having been able to find a publisher for the translation he had done of the author's work *Pod svobodnim soncem* (Under a Free Sun).

In 1923 Adamič had published a translation of the novelettes of Lovro Kuhar (nom-de-plume Prežihov Voranc), under the title *Dežela lakote* (Land of Hunger). From Kuhar's letter of 5 May 1935 we may conclude that the two had already earlier been in contact: Kuhar thanks Adamič for his letter of 2 May '...which, as always when I receive anything from you, gave me great delight (...) and also for your assurance that you will give assistance to the Amnesty Campaign (...) The Amnesty Committee will be sending you some material which you could use.'

In this letter from 1935, Kuhar also added a brief personal history. He began writing as a teenager, and formed himself as a Christian, nationalist, revolutionary and social democrat. In 1920 he joined the Communist Party; in 1930, he was sentenced in absentia to eight years' imprisonment by the state protection court in Belgrade, and so lived as an emigrant in Austria and Switzerland; he managed to make his living by writing. It was not until 1949 that he and Adamič met in person.

The closer circle of the PEN Club also included the chief editor of *Ljubljanski zvon*, the writer and critic Fran Albreht, brother-in-law of the poet Oton Župančič. In 1932 Albreht published translations of Adamič's 'Enigma' (*Uganka*), 'The Man with a Soul' (*Človek z dušo*), 'The Crusader' (*Križar*), 'A Bohunk Woman' (*Žena iz Dalmacije*) and others in *Zvon*. Two of Albreht's letters remain in which he deals with the arrangement of the translations, which were done by Olga Škerl-Grahor, who visited Adamič two or three times in Ljubljana and Bohinj. Following the publication of Župančič's essay *Adamič in slovenstvo* (Adamič and Sloveneness), Albreht wrote: 'You have become caught up in a local dispute, like Pilate with the creed!' Adamič and Albreht had also met several times in Ljubljana, Blato and Bohinj.

Another person who was also present at several of the meetings between Adamič and Slovene literary figures was the assistant editor of the review *Dom in svet* (Home and the World) and also columnist, Ludvik Klakočer, who in 1931 had presented Adamič and his book *Dynamite* in the review, followed in 1932 by



*Laughing in the Jungle*. On 22 May 1932 Klakočar was the only member of the centre-right party to take part in the meeting in Praproče. Following the dispute between left- and right-oriented writers in the second half of 1932, the right wing took an oppositional stance towards Adamič. Their champion was the art critic Rajko Ložar who, in *Dom in svet*, published a 'polemic' in his article *Kaj bi bilo, če bi bilo* (What Would Happen If It Happened).

In 1932 and 1933 Adamič visited Belgrade at least three times, where he had meetings with American embassy staff, the minister Ivan Pucelj, the writer Slavko Savinšek, the sculptor Lojze Dolinar, and Tone Potokar. He did not leave any written records of these meetings and conversations, simply classing them under the 'mass' of journalists and writers who came and went or followed him about the country. In the Serbian press and reviews (printed in cyrillic), the journalist and translator Tone Potokar published five reports on Adamič's visits to Belgrade and Dubrovnik, a review of the essays *Crisis in America* and a translation of 'The Bohunk Woman' (*Žena iz Dalmacije*). Potokar was interested in Adamič, not just in his own capacity as a reporter and Belgrade-based journalist for the Slovene and Croatian press, but also because he was a younger fellow-countryman of Adamič's – he was from the same region, Dolenjska (Lower Carniola).

One of the main translators of Adamič's works and reports in Slovene papers and reviews was Olga Škerl-Grahor, who first presented Adamič in *Ljubljanski zvon* (January 1932), and also undertook the revision of *Laughing in the Jungle* (1933), *Thirty Million New Americans* (1937) and *My America* (1939). The translation of *Laughing in the Jungle* was done by Stanko Leben (1933), and two reviews were written by Vito Kraigher.

During the inter-war period, the academy painter Božidar Jakac visited the United States (1929 and 1931), after which, in collaboration with Miran Jarc, he published a book entitled *Odmevi iz rdeče zemlje* (Resonances from the Red Land). In the spring of 1932 Jakac presented Adamič with a book, with the suggestion that he should assess it and publish his review. At the first meeting, Adamič said that it was a courageous act to write a book after such a short visit. Adamič sent his assessment to the editor of the *Ljubljanski zvon*; however, because of the crisis at *Zvon*, the editor at the time, Fran Albrecht, chose to publish the review in *Sodobnost* (1933, 1, 32–33) instead.

At the end of the 1930s Adamič was maintaining contact mainly with Juž Kozak and Mile Klopčič. From this time until the outbreak of the Second World

War, he wrote a further six books: *Grandsons* (1935), *Cradle of Life* (1936), *The House in Antigua* (1937), *My America* (1938), *From Many Lands* (1940), and *Two-Way Passage* (1941).

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#### POVZETEK

### **STIKI LOUISA ADAMIČA S SLOVENSKIMI ČASNIKARJI IN KNJIŽEVNIKI (1921–1941)**

France Adamič

*Louis Adamič je prve stike s slovenskimi izseljenci navezal kot delavec in sourednik dnevnika Glas naroda v New Yorku. Po nekajletni službi v ameriški armadi je poiskal stike z upravniki slovenskih knjižnic in si pri njih izposodil literarna dela slovenskih in drugih jugoslovanskih pisateljev ter njihove kratke povesti prevajal in v prevodu objavljajl v ameriškem tisku. Prevedel je nad trideset novel, črtic in odlomkov iz romanov, največ iz del Ivana Cankarja, Frana*

*Saleškega Finžgarja, Kraigherja, Novačana; nato je objavil prevod Cankarjevega Hlapca Jerneja, kar je zbudilo pozornost publicistov v Sloveniji. Josip Vidmar je opozoril Adamiča na nekatere pomanjkljivosti prevoda, ameriški Slovenci pa so bili ponosni na Cankarja v angleščini.*

*Po objavi knjig Dinamit in Smeh v džungli so se slovenski časnikarji in književniki začeli bolj zanimati za Adamiča. Dopisnik Prosvete (Chicago) Mile Klopčič je prvi pisal Adamiču ter nato objavil podatke in obširno poročal o ameriškem slovenskem pisatelju, uredniki literarnih revij pa so že leta 1931 objavili posamezne prevode, odlomke iz obeh knjig.*

*Ob obisku v domovini leta 1932 se je Louis Adamič osebno seznanil z vodilnimi pisci, med njimi so bili pisatelja Juš in Ferdo Kozak, pesnik slovenske moderne Oton Župančič, pesnik rudarskih revirjev Ludvik Mrzel, urednik Zvona Fran Albreht, urednik revije Književnost Bratko Krefc, geograf Anton Melik, sourednik revije Dom in svet Ludvik Klakočar ter drugi literati in umetniki. Spoznal se je tudi s prevajalci kot so bili Griša Koritnik, Stanko Leben, Olga Škerl - Grahor, Anton Debeljak.*

*V Bohinju se je seznanil s pisateljem Franom Saleškim Finžgarjem, v Rogaški Slatini se je srečal z jugoslovanskim senatorjem Ivanom Hribarjem in literarnim zgodovinarjem Francetom Kidričem in njegovim sinom, kasnejšim jugoslovanskim politikom Borisom Kidričem, v Beogradu pa z ministrom Ivanom Pucljem, pisateljem Slavkom Savinškom, kiparjem Lojzetom Dolinarjem in publicistom Tonetom Potokarjem.*

*Potem ko je Oton Župančič objavil esej 'Adamič in slovenstvo', je prišlo do ločitve med naprednimi književniki. V tem sporu je bilo neprizadetemu Adamiču neprijetno, toda z večino znancev je Adamič vzdrževal stike do leta 1941, ob obisku leta 1949 pa je stike prijateljsko obnovil.*