

Diplomacy in a Geocentered overview of *The Rainbow Beyond the Soul*

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ABSTRACT

The specialists in Literary Spatial Studies and Geo-informational sciences are well informed about the existence of a new literary approach in reading fictional settings in which plots take place. Geocriticism has been coined as a term by Bertrand Westphal, a French literary critic who, since 2000, aims to revert the historic perspective of reading literature by inviting readers to focus on the spatiality of a book. The departure point of anyone who tends to apply the geocentered approach is to start reading a novel by narrowing its perspective to the places where different chapters and narrative moments take place. This article aims to focus on the fictional geography of Milan Jazbec's first novel on diplomacy entitled *The Rainbow Beyond the Soul* and to examine the overall dynamics of the narration through the places used as settings for the different episodes of the plot. This way, the geocentered analysis of this novel tends to take a closer look at the complexity of the story and the characters and to better understand the style of Jazbec's narration.

KEY WORDS: spatial studies, geocriticism, literary geography, literary cartography, diplomacy, *The rainbow beyond the soul*

POVZETEK

Poznavalci literarno-prostorskih študij in geo-informacijskih znanosti se dobro zavedajo obstoja novega literarnega pristopa pri proučevanju fiktivnega okvirja, v katerem se dogaja zgodba. Geokritika je termin, ki ga je ustvaril Bertrand Westphal, francoski literarni kritik, ki od leta 2000 skuša spremeniti zgodovinsko perspektivo branja literature, da bralce spodbuja, da se osredotočajo na prostor, ki ga uprizarja knjiga. Izhodišče za vsakega, ki namerava uporabiti geocentrični pristop, je, da prične brati roman tako, da zoža svoj pogled na prostor, kjer se dogajajo posamezna poglavja in narativni trenutki. Članek se osredotoča na fiktivno geografijo v prvem romanu o diplomaciji Milana Jazbca Mavrica izza duše z namenom proučiti vsestransko dinamiko naracije skozi kraje, ki jih uporablja kot okvir v različnih epizodah zgodbe. Na ta način geocentrični analiza tega romana teži k temu, da ustvari bližnji vpogled v kompleksnost zgodbe ter likov in da s tem bolje razume stil Jazbečeve naracije.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: prostorske študije, geokritika, literarna geografija, literarna kartografija, diplomacija, *Mavrica izza duše*

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INTRODUCTION

Milan Jazbec is both, a diplomat and a writer. These roles, when translated into spatial terms, give a first clue to the binary opposition in which his first novel is set: on the one hand, his home country, also at the roots of his artistic inspiration and, on the other hand, the whole world, visited by and lived through the eyes of an official representative of his country. Thus, the characters of the novel seem to be mere reflections of the spaces they have lived in and they continue to inhabit and, therefore, space can be considered as one of the protagonistic elements of the novel. Furthermore, the accent given to the setting appears since the first line: *The Rainbow Beyond the Soul* has been dedicated to the author's native place, Pohanca, or more precisely, the novel has been written for the 760th anniversary of this small Slovenian village.

The novel narrates the story of a diplomat who is, at the same time, a writer. In both roles, the main protagonist uses words as his strongest weapon: with words, he illustrates his vision of the world, his desires, his talents, and especially as a diplomat, his existential and professional illusions and delusions. The plot has a circular structure: it starts with the nomination of the protagonist for the Nobel Prize in literature and it is concluded with the ceremony in which the writer obtains the most important literary recognition. Between these two moments, however, the structure of the plot is complex. It constantly moves through memories and present episodes, through places without a precise referentiality and those with exact waypoints and names. The complexity of the spatio-temporal structure of the novel can be explained by the fact that next to the first level of narration, which addresses the diplomatic world, there appears a second topic that unravels a love story between the protagonist and a woman who is his lifelong muse. Therefore, the fictional geography of the novel comprehends lived spaces but also daydreamed and imagined spaces that give a peek into a love story lived in absence which holds its own specific spatial trajectory. As a result, both the character and his personal geography often appear difficult to grasp as real: we follow closely the thoughts, emotions, and reflections of the protagonist without being always informed about the precise place where the narration is set. What predominates in the narration are the struggles of a writer, translated into philosophical debates and further invitations to think and to reflect upon topics that concern everyman's life. This is what makes Jazbec's

main character a typical modern protagonist, inept and at the margins of 'real' life, present more in his stream of consciousness than in the outer diplomatic reality.

From a spatial viewpoint, the interior monologue's geography often blends with the real, outside world, oftentimes rendering difficult for the reader to recognize the boundary between the two worlds. This is why, even though a geocentered approach can be applied to the analysis of the geography of the novel, a spatial analysis of Jazbec's book cannot completely leave out the phenomenological aspect of the settings. The novel can be read through its geography only if the fictional spaces are addressed in both, their consistency and their lack of consistency, or in their appearance as cognitive settings, as mental wanderings of the character who is never fully present in the place where he is. To understand better this technique, which allows that personal spaces are continuously merged with social surroundings and that flashbacks blend with realist settings, this article examines the novel's geography through three spatial categories: the homeland, the locations of diplomatic missions, and the city of Stockholm.

SPACE, PLACE AND THE GEOCRITICAL INTEREST IN TODAY'S LITERARY STUDIES

Space and place in the literary and cultural studies of the 20th century came to the forefront with the so-called spatial turn. As noticed by one of the major critics in the field of geocriticism, Robert T. Tally Jr. (2013), this moment of shift in perspective coincides with a profound worldwide transformation in the perception of space: the new esthetic postmodern sensibility enhances new ways of approaching our lived spaces, changed by the globalization, by the post-colonialism, by the demographic changes and migrations, phenomena which took place after the Second World War. Westphal (2009), another essential name in the world of the spatial studies, puts in this precise moment also the rise of multiple new interests such as imagology, xenology, geopoetics, ecoculture and ecocentrism, all fields that are inextricably related to the spatiality, to the territories and their relationships with one's personal experience with the new, globalized reality.

Within the field of humanistic studies, new methodologies concerning space and place enriched the interdisciplinary outlook on literature. Starting from the *Atlas of the European Novel (1800-1900)* by Franco Moretti (1997), the idea of approaching a geographical area

where a certain plot is set was addressed as an opportunity to gain an insight into how we can draw maps and literary cartographies from the fictional worlds where our favorite characters operate, as well as use these maps to question more complex problems, such as the idea of borders, liminality and the Western literary canon when inserted in a global literary framework. Moretti's interdisciplinary project paved the way to numerous 'translations' of literary places into cartographic signs, through a process of transcription of literary places into geo-referenced databases.

The idea of a writer as a mapmaker and the fictional world as a mappable world inspired many literary critics to study fiction through these literary maps. Geocriticism, one of the crucial new literary approaches that stem from this new interest towards space and place, defines this relationship as one that operates in two directions. Notably, storytelling always involves mapping in the way in which every map tells a different story. It is precisely at this interconnectedness between space and writing where we place the rise and the success of the geocentered approach. Literary geography became a new way to read literature, giving priority to the settings where the plots unfold and anchoring the literary analysis in the places inhabited by the characters. As a result, today we have numerous cartographic projects that prioritize mapping as an essential tool in reading and comprehending the fictional worlds. Among the most successful projects, there are *A Literary Atlas of Europe*,² *Mapping the Lakes: A Literary GIS*,³ *Mapping the Republic of Letters*,⁴ *Digital Literary Atlas of Ireland*,⁵ etc.

This article aims to focus on the main spatial categories present in the Milan Jazbec's first novel of his trilogy on diplomacy, *The Rainbow Beyond the Soul*. Using a geocentered approach, the analysis will focus on the representations of specific places concerning the character, as well as to the overall development of the plot. The aspect which will be mostly underlined concerns the metamorphosis of some of the settings that, by constantly oscillating between their referentiality and the protagonist's perceptions, render the geography of the novel an interesting case for a geocentered reflection. Therefore, real places will be studied in their intersections with the character's sense of a

2 <http://www.literaturatlas.eu/en/>

3 <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/mappingthelakes/>

4 <http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/>

5 <http://www.tcd.ie/longroomhub/digital-atlas/>

place, both as geographical locations, easily identifiable on maps and stations of his stream of consciousness, semantically designating past experiences, longings and daydreams of the protagonist.

POHANCA: THE HOMELAND OF J.

The splitting or the co-existence of the diplomat-writer in one character, when translated into geographical terms, becomes a division between the modern and the rustical, the metropolis and the small village in a distant land, the ambition for conquering the world and the urge to go back to one's own roots to question his identity. One of the main traits of the protagonist is the fact that his name remains hidden behind the initial J. He is pictured in different stages of his life and in different places of his career as a diplomat, but the deprivation of a clear identity seems to be compensated with the recurrent flashbacks of his home place. Interestingly enough, the homeland, one of the main settings of Jazbec's novel is never a real setting and, nevertheless, it appears as one of the places which are more semantically charged. The modern and noisy city, a typical modernist setting where the diplomat carries out his professional assignments is opposed to the rich, rural landscape of Slovenia where different life, values, and rules are to be found. Therefore, the homeland, even though presented as a place that can be accessed only by the cognitive traveling of the character, stands for the place that holds the truth, the land that represents the focal point of his inner geography. Therefore, the diplomat and the writer, the wide open world and Slovenia are along all the narration very closely interconnected:

“I went to countless receptions, cocktail parties, dinners, luncheons, played golf so many times that I do not remember, jogged with ministers, presidents – mostly because I wanted all that, I wanted it because I liked it, because I later on enjoyed it, I achieved things because I decided to achieve them, like a project, I planned it, consciously. And I managed to do all of it, though it hardly was as easy as it sounds. Above all, it went slowly, like a never-ending marathon... Yet what do I have, here and now, from all of that? Would I not be happier, would I not be less appeased if I had truly herded cows on the abandoned lowlands of my Kozjansko homeland, written books, enjoyed solitude, and communicated with most people only through a secure, impersonal, and reliable screen?” (Jazbec, 2019, p.19)

The nostalgic wanderings related to his distant village appear for the

first time during his walks in Central Park, New York causing in this way a clear split between the realist geography, America, and the childhood place left overseas. The trigger is a song played somewhere in the distance in the park, a melody which merges with the waves of the water, bringing up lost memories. The music of the present, that 'old rock music gone for half a century' (Ibid., p. 18) blends with a sound from the past, with the music typical for his origins and with the image of his mother:

"He thought of his mother and a similar song she had listened to in her youth, about a child sitting on his parents' laps, asking them, what about tomorrow, what about the day after, what about when I grow up, what about whenever. And again, the same revelation." (Ibid., p. 18)

The remembered landscapes superimpose themselves upon the realist settings and the boundary between them is often blurred. Another example of this intertwining of the settings into one single complex space is present in the fifth chapter, named *Unter den Linden*. Another flashback opens the chapter and once again, the diplomatic location seems to be only a trigger point for recalling a distant memory:

"His memory took him to his previous diplomatic location: how interesting that was, he said to himself as he was finishing his walk down the *Unter den Linden* avenue. He threw a glance along the never-ending green line of rich treetops. He enjoyed walking there, it almost seemed to him as though he was not in the midst of big city commotion. Sometimes, he even had the impression that he was breathing and growing with these trees, that he was part of them. That they have accepted him as one of their own. How friendly and cosy. Just like that linden tree in the middle of the village, which he and a friend from the earliest childhood climbed often, and the tea of which they drank in the winter to make breathing easier." (Ibid., p.33)

Similarly to the first memory, images of homeland appear as oasis in the middle of a big city giving the chance to the protagonist to go back to his roots and reflect. Natural landscapes are opposed to the big streets and the crowds and present themselves as spaces of freedom from the frenetic lifestyle of the diplomat, from the constant mobility through new cities, cocktails, airports and meetings. Home symbolizes a forgotten stability and peace, nowhere to be found in the real, adult life. The reflection of one's own roots comes along with the relentless

need of the protagonist to explore and travel the faraway lands, to surmount the limits of his first micro-cosmos, and to discover the world. His craving to return to the point where everything started becomes the only way to give sense to his wanderings:

“Oh, what an interview, when will she publish it, he was wondering on the airplane as he was heading home, heading towards memory, that first, primal, strongest of all memories. You always press forward and forward, but in reality you want to go back, back where you came from, to the place you left behind. He felt this desire, growing stronger and stronger, to go back, to go to the place he had left behind – if only he had left. The further he went ahead, the more he wanted to go back; we always want to go back, to the starting point, to the place where everything began and where things were best. And when we have reached the end, it really seems that we are finally at the start again, that we are back at the place we wanted to return to, despite having headed forward relentlessly. A person is actually his own memory, he said to himself again.” (Ibid., p. 69)

The importance of the ‘home’, understood as both, a physical and as an emotional station for the protagonist, is better understood in the chapter entitled *The Door to the Graveyard*. This chapter, describing the urge to take the long way home, is also the chapter that is set in an airplane which, by definition, is one of Auge’s (2008) modern non-spaces: it exists in the air, above the earth, everywhere and, at the same time, nowhere. Therefore, the reflection on one’s origins and homeland far from the ground can be read as an ultimate metaphor of the lack of protagonist’s roots. His home seems to be the only place that can be opposed to a life without an anchor, typically practiced by someone who has a lot of ‘mobile houses’ and no permanent. The fleeing, thus related to the element of air, is diametrically opposed by one of Foucault’s (1994) heterotopic places, the graveyard, that symbolizes the only possible return to the lost authenticity and identity:

“The graveyard. That would be my first stop, as usual, already a ritual, a strong part of me, a sparse ritual, though for that all the more intense and powerful. It really could be different – he could not help it, he nearly lost all rational control over his thoughts and emotions – I could stay at home, at least longer, if not forever (a stroke of the rational – it would not work, not really, not in today’s world) – so, what to do? If anything at all? (...) I always wanted to be buried here, at home, in this

forgotten but all the more precious place, where I will find rest and peace, far from everything, forgotten, since I hardly know anyone around here and those who know me, know me from some fleeting newspaper article or some online column.”(Jazbec, 2019, p.70-71)

The return of the anti-hero coincides with death, which is the only way allowed to the character to embrace his starting point. Only the return seems to equate with the end of his life and therefore, the last chapter can be read as the ending of the many wanderings of the diplomat-writer, whose heart, even in the moment of the biggest achievement, winning the Nobel Prize, recalls the landscapes of his homeland. Set next to the King of Sweden and all the diplomatic corps, the modern winner is absent, lost in thoughts about his home. This serves as the perfect closure of the numerous relentless and scattered movements of the main character. Therefore, the final setting, which will be discussed in the 3rd part of this contribution, has nothing to do with the Arlanda airport from which the protagonist departs, and has everything to do with his final trip to his homeland, the essence of which can be grasped only in that “long-expected end” where “the heavens open up among the clouds” and where “everything else becomes so light, so calm, so relaxed”, “ (...) into the rainbow. Beyond the soul.” (Ibid., p. 93)

THE INNER WORLD OF A WRITER AMID DIPLOMATIC SURROUNDINGS

To understand how the inner world of the main protagonist constantly interacts with his outer, formal surroundings, we can reflect more closely on the ways in which settings are constructed in the third chapter of the novel. Emblematically entitled *Hope untouched*, it is in this part of Jazbec’s book where the spatial prism unifies the two guiding principles that coalesce in the character. It is also the only chapter that represents a diplomatic session and it is one of the rare parts of the book where the places of the diplomatic world are described in detail. On the one hand, the circular structure and the well-defined shape of the conference hall symbolize the oppression and the rigidity of the surroundings in which diplomats operate:

“It was a large sitting arrangement, as all fifteen delegations gathered around the table with ease: five permanent members and ten non-permanent ones, from which five were replaced one year and the other five in the following. This brought additional dynamics into an alre-

ady difficult balance of relations between delegations, their heads, diplomatic staff, Secretariat, of course the Secretary General and his closest aides, special guests, representatives, and others who always came to the sessions to present their reports; it seemed that all of it was a large, uninterrupted river. (...) And everything has influence, he added another thought. Everyone had to sit around this table, see one another, hear one another, listen to one another and recognize one another. There had to be enough space for all of them, here, at the top. When you looked into the hall from the tribune, which had in its first section additional seats for delegations of the member states and in its second section, behind a nicely decorated fence, seats for the public, the large table was before you like the palm of your hand.” (Ibid., p.22)

On the other hand, the constant allusions to the oil on canvas on the wall and the lady that takes away the attention of the protagonist, underlines his artistic nature, his need for expression in the middle of that hermetically closed universe in which he spends his days. Once the realist setting in which the session takes place is introduced, the spatial accent is given to the only decoration of this surrounding, the only element that ignites the artistic part of the diplomat:

“At the back, behind the presiding member, a large painting hung on the wall: oil on canvas, a gift by a Norwegian painter – the first Secretary General was from there, after all – which represented hope for a better future with a rising phoenix in the center and the progression of dark colours into light colours. On the right side of the large bird, at the same height, there stood she: a lady of soft and tender looks, who simply and effectively radiated serenity and power. With her hands stretched out, slightly spread apart, her soft face, she stood alone and there was a strange magnetism about her. He had set eyes on her immediately and she stayed inside him. Hope, faith, and solidarity, everything that this dynamic, colourful Norwegian masterpiece symbolized, was personified in this diva. Because of her, no part of the agenda was too demanding, no discussion too bothersome, no goal unreachable and every polemic dialogue became a diplomatic challenge and passion. She was a mute, silent witness and a great support.” (Ibid., p.22)

The modernist aspects of the novel are more explicitly shown in this particular setting. The continuous wanderings of the character through his interior landscape split the scene into two realities: the session

of the diplomats unravels along with the constant intimate dialogue that the protagonist develops with the lady from the painting. Therefore, the slow and sterile atmosphere characterized by the exactly defined structure, in which is held the meeting among the diplomats, finds its contrast in the painting, the key element of the setting, an abstract space in which the protagonist finds a way out of his reality. This is why, the third chapter seems to be also the most significant when it comes to understanding the complexity of the character: his double nature, his concrete, tangible life of a diplomat and his rich inner self, constantly lost in wanderings through memories and thoughts, is more closely depicted through these 'polytopic' places. The voices of the representatives and the members present at the session are intrusive, penetrating steadily in the writer's relationship with a lady in the painting that soon becomes the muse of his novels, the "symbol of the inaccessible, despite being almost always nearby, right here, by his side." (Ibid., p. 24).

It follows that, unlike the descriptions of Slovenia and the landscapes found in the childhood memories, in *The Rainbow Beyond the Soul*, the diplomatic settings are endowed with negative traits. The world of diplomacy, a micro-cosmos with numerous rules and internal logic known to only those who are part of it, is tackled in a very analytical way and it is depicted through its cold settings. Thus, places which are part of one's career are left without any further explanation, they exist as mere locations that diplomats visit throughout their professional lives. Furthermore, the episodes that narrate encounters and relationships from a diplomatic viewpoint are narrowed to exact facts, relationships and strict rules of behavior and communication. They are all set in big cities that, even though they appear as referentially identifiable, are never really described as authentic, real spaces. Berlin, Bern, Paris, New York and Canberra all appear as background 'stations' to the story of the protagonist, as places where the plot is set, but that appear superficial and easily interchangeable. Therefore, they exist more as settings which welcome the character's inclination to think and develop his poetic nature and their realistic consistency almost always dissipates after their initial introduction.

Even though more tangible in the third chapter, this relationship between the inner and the outer reality, the fantastic world of the writer immersed in the exact world of diplomats, is present in almost all spatial stations of the novel. It is the case of Central Park, a recurrent

location in *The Rainbow Beyond the Soul*, a place that, however, obtains its value as an authentic setting once the protagonist distances himself from the real world to continue with his lonely, thoughtful wanderings:

“A walk had always done him good. As he lost himself among the trees, the paths, and the walkers in the always breathing Central Park, he remembered his jogging at home: over the grass, past the stream and around the lake. It was raining, a pleasant summer rain washed his path and warmed him, he was content, almost happy, it seems, now that he looks back. He had been at the start of the road, enthusiastic after his first experiences and his counterparts; everything was so bright, promising and friendly. A career.” (Ibid., p. 20)

As in the case of the continuous interactions between the inner and the outer in the third chapter, Central Park, which is at the beginning presented as one of the many diplomat’s ‘new homes’, obtains its real value only when introduced as another emotional spot in the inner geography of the character. In the case of the conference hall and the painting, the diplomatic surrounding is veiled with the lifelong inspiration of the character that doubles the scene and that, in the middle of the realist setting, introduces a glimpse of the soul of the protagonist. Thus, in the 11th chapter, Central Park stops being a diplomatic location in order to grow into another place, where appears the ‘lady’, an interchangeable female character that appears through different important women of the protagonist’s life, this time incarnated in Zarja:

“To: jmočnik@varietymail.com
 From: mzarja@mit-edu.com
 Subject: Take joy with you as you go
 Date: 21 November / 22:49:44 PM

J.,

Just be what you’ve always been.

I’ll be watching the broadcast online, I can’t wait. In spite of everything, don’t forget our annual Christmas walk in Central Park, this year, too.

Well, before that, you’ll have to show me the diploma, I’ve got to hold this recognition you’re about to receive in my hands.

I’m sure you still remember the tale I used to know by heart in my childhood, what were the words to bid farewell in the end:

goodbye and good luck To you.

And, once again, take care.

Z.

PS: Make sure to check if that kindergarten is still on the other side of the street, opposite the old house.” (Ibid., p. 60)

The same analogy is repeated when Berlin becomes the main setting. Even though it is a place that obtains its first introduction and meaning as one of the stops of the diplomatic journey of J., soon it is transformed into a place where the relationship with another female character is recounted and, thus, into a setting that distances itself from the official diplomatic location. As already underlined, the fifth chapter, *Unter den Linden*, begins with a flashback that takes the protagonist from his realist setting, America, to his previous diplomatic location: Berlin. Similarly to the experience of New York and of Central Park, his memory does not go back to any episode set in the metropolitan experience, but to the walk down the Unter den Linden avenue, and to the first image that comes to the mind of the protagonist: “the never-ending green line of rich treetops.” (Ibid., p.33) Another lonely place amid the crowded urban dimension and another analogy with the nature of his homeland, that soon introduces a female representative of “her”, the lady at the bottom of his reflections and writings. Jessica, described as a calm and stable woman, a colleague in one of the first experiences of the protagonist, has the same role as the lady in the painting and as Zarja in Central Park, of becoming the incarnation of the artist’s muse, an idealized, “close to perfection” (Ibid., p. 35) female character. The contours of Berlin fade away to give space to the mnemonic trip of the character that, as in the other two examples, is interwoven with an emotional relationship. Soon enough, just as in the cases of the conference hall and Central Park, the walk in Berlin becomes a walk in the past of the protagonist. Therefore, the diplomatic station is once again purported as a pretext that introduces a wider reflection, hosting the interior monologue of the writer and his reflections on love, intimacy, and connection:

“Maybe they were driven together by her need to talk to someone who both expects or demands nothing from her, absolutely nothing. Perhaps. And what was it about her that attracted him? Who knows, of all things? He probably did not object either that she did not expect any great debates or information from him or that she did not need any comments on what both of them did, both in their separate orbits

which, as much as work was concerned, were far apart – though not without a few common points – and what both tried to achieve – as the poets would say, to win the blessed bread.” (Ibid., p. 35)

This is why, even when the fictional geography of the novel is familiar and belongs to our real world, soon, it becomes a place, lacking of any meaningful consistency or relationship with the life of the diplomat. Instead, it is depicted as a stop to reflect and to nourish the aspiration of the writer to face some of the most important existential dilemmas.

STOCKHOLM

A special spatial accent is given to the only city that stands out from the rest of the fictional geography of the novel: Stockholm. Many aspects render this one a more complex literary setting when compared to the others: it is the place where the narration begins and it is also the place that hosts the last chapters of the book. Therefore, it is the central space where the first and the main motif of the story takes place: the nomination of the diplomat-writer for the award takes off from the address of the Nobel Foundation, Sturegatan, No. 14, and it finishes with the ceremony, where the award is given to the protagonist. Beside the fact that it has a protagonistic role in the fictional geography of the novel concerning the main motif of the plot, what singles out Stockholm as a special setting in the overall geography of the novel is the fact that it is also the only chapter where the narration is entrusted to a different narrator. When all the other chapters, set in different parts of the world, assume the viewpoint of the diplomat-writer, it is in a diplomat office of the *Ambassadrice* in Stockholm where the perspective is reverted. The narrator of the eighth chapter, entitled Stockholm, is a woman. She is the most important one in the mosaic of female characters, the ‘lady’ that, finally, becomes a real character, instead of a fantasized muse. This chapter gives us an insight into her inner world and, especially, presents her surprise and excitement when she discovers that her old friend is going to be awarded with the most important literary award. Thus, it is Stockholm that is the city where the plot reaches its climax, where the focus is being placed upon the stream of consciousness of a female character:

“She held the most recent copy of Svenska Dagbladet in her hand, today’s issue, and she had just put down the Dagens Nyheter. Both main Swedish dailies, just as all other media, were reporting in detail about

the Nobel laureates, publishing their photographs, data, quotes, everything in excess. Why not – after all, it was the week of the Nobel Prizes, the first full week of October, here, in the center of the action, when each day the name of one laureate was announced. And today, on Thursday, literature was on the agenda. She was looking, trying to read, but it did not go well, since she became utterly absorbed in the letters, in the photo, in him. Despite everything, she could hardly believe it, how beautiful and intensely pleasing it was, so – so just, she said to herself. She kept repeating it, how just, although she felt almost ridiculous, a bit childish.” (Ibid., p.45)

Just as this woman who from a daydreamed illusion becomes depicted as a real person, Stockholm, unlike the other cities mentioned only as a background of the cognitive wanderings of the character, appears as a real place. In the fictional geography of *The Rainbow Beyond the Soul*, this city becomes a concrete place where characters and events are no longer presented as ghosts from a distant memory or longings toward an uncertain future. This is evident in the way in which the motif of the love story, that co-exists with the nomination, and the award-winning of the protagonist overlap in Stockholm. The 14th chapter, *The eyes of Strindberg*, narrates the reunion of the two lovers who, until this point of the plot, remain separated. It is also the chapter where the love story is finally unfolded and where the reader gets the chance to learn more about the past of the two lovers, their beginnings, distance, separation and reunion. What makes this part of the book differ from the others, however, consists of a corporal, instead of a cognitive movement, which comprehends another representation of a narrative space and time as well. From a spatial viewpoint, the stroll of the two lovers that opens the chapter obtains its sense of reality by inserting Stockholm in a very precise referential framework: after the dinner at the Prinsen Restaurant on Master Samuelsgatan 4, they start their long walk through the city in Biblioteksgatan, carry on on the Drottningsgatan, Apelbergsgatan and again Drottningsgatan. It is at this point where “the white letters⁶ on black asphalt: Strindberg” (Ibid., p. 76) appear and they de-

6 It is interesting to notice how Stockholm appears both as a realistically depicted place and a city filtrated through the personal perception of the protagonist, when we pay attention to the ‘polisensoriality’ of the space, or to the different ways in which the space obtains a multi-layered description. The “white letters” as perceived by the protagonist are, actually, yellow, but the author’s specific perception of the colors, and its translation in the character’s ways of describing it, are linked to the personal trait of the author himself, who has difficulty in differentiating the nuances of the primary colours. It follows that this experience, even implicitly, enriches the subjective dimension imprinted in the main setting of the novel. The difference in colours was brought to the author’s attention by the author of the Foreword to the English edition, the retired Ambassador of Sweden to Slovenia John Hagard, being a personal friend of the author. (Told to the author of this contribution by the author of the novel.)

cide to continue this “mystical journey” (Ibid., p. 77) uphill, towards the Strindberg Museet in Tegnérsgatan, number 85. Along this realistic description of the romantic walk of the two lovers in the cold night of December follows a long reflection on time, on that exact moment where the protagonist steps outside of his reflections and inside the present moment:

“Oh, memories go away, leave me alone; move on and give space to the present, give a chance to this moment, let this one night last forever, for it is necessary to forget about the morning and all those thousands of mornings still to come, and it is necessary to forget about tomorrow and all the coming tomorrows, how many of them are still waiting to come. Right now, we are only this here, and memories please leave, allow this moment to grow beyond the chasm of life and outgrow everything that had been and that could still be; memories, come on, only now, just this here, never again, just this once...” (Ibid., p. 78)

Stockholm, thus, appears as the only setting where the different spatial and temporal plans, as well as the main protagonists, meet. It is the core space of the novel because it becomes the point where the different motifs of the novel interfere, where the separated characters finally meet, where the longings, daydreams and memories overlap with the present events. The love story unfolds with the writer's award winning, the offices of the diplomatic world interact with the stage where different laureates are being awarded with the prestigious nominations and awards and the *Ambassadrice*, finally, becomes a real character. The two poles in the plot constantly oscillate and at the end of the novel intersect at one focal point. This is why, in Stockholm, instead of being witnesses to the stream of consciousness of the main character, we become inserted in the thoughts, feelings and reflections of both characters, as well as in a very tangible, realistic setting where the plot concludes. The narrative voices begin to interact, the two ‘orbits’ finally coalesce and the writer-diplomat, until this point presented as being torn between the two aspects of his being, when awarded the Nobel Prize finally attains his completion as a mature character. It is especially in the 16th chapter, where Stockholm becomes the place of a union of all the different spatio-temporal axis. During the ceremonial dinner, the rigidity of the diplomatic world, depicted through the precise seating order system, meets the artistic soul of the protagonist. Among the formalities of the meeting, he distinguishes a particular object: the “murmuring and radiating blue colour” (Ibid.,

p. 87) fountain; where thoughts of Zarja, his daughter, meet with his favorite poet Prešeren and where the ceremony speech interconnects with a flashback from distant high school episodes. The past and the present interact in the same way in which the different settings, the outer and the inner, encounter in the same city, the only one which is, among the different diplomatic locations, called 'home'. Its importance in the geography of the novel is also accentuated with the conclusion of the novel, since it is Stockholm where the final departure of the protagonist takes place, taking him back into that rainbow that gives the title to Jazbec's novel.

CONCLUSION

The first novel on diplomacy by Milan Jazbec is only apparently a novel on diplomacy. The diplomatic world is used as a mere pretext to address existential questions and to reflect on the wanderings of one's desires, unfulfilled and experienced love stories, illusions and delusions, formal and informal friendships, family relationships, truth and lies. It is a novel that, behind the formal diplomatic surroundings, questions the essence of art, the need for expression of one's feelings and the torments of the modern man, divided between his homeland and different parts of the world, lacking an anchor, an identity and a place he can call home.

This is why the novel, even though characterized by a complex structure, narrates a simple movement, both inward and outward: it is a long journey backwards as a quest of the starting point of J's life. Even though presented through scattered pieces of his diplomatic career and private affairs, the main philosophical question is what represents "home". What is home for someone who is constantly moving and if home can be found in a person, in a family's past, in an award that brings national pride or in a specific geographic spot. This is why, every toponym hides a feeling and every city becomes a reflection of an inner geography, where places lose their real consistency to give room to the geography of the interior monologue.

Finally, the outer world of the diplomat constantly mirrors the inner struggles of the writer, endowing in this way to the fictional geography of *The Rainbow Beyond the Soul* a complex modernist dimension.

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