



# PORÓWNANIA

COMPARISONS | СРАВНЕНИЯ | POROVNÁNÍ | VERGLEICHE



No. 2 (27), 2020

ISSN 1733-165X



# PORÓWNIANIA

COMPARISONS | СРАВНЕНИЯ | POROVNÁNÍ | VERGLEICHE

Contemporary  
Central-European Literature



JOURNAL ON  
COMPARATIVE  
LITERATURE AND  
INTERDISCIPLINARY  
STUDIES

POZNAŃ 2020

nr 2 (27), 2020

ISSN 1733-165X



# PORÓWNANIA

COMPARISONS | СРАВНЕНИЯ | POROVNÁNÍ | VERGLEICHE

Contemporary  
Central-European Literature



CZASOPISMO  
POŚWIĘCONE  
ZAGADNIENIOM  
KOMPARATYSTYKI  
LITERACKIEJ  
ORAZ STUDIOM  
INTERDYSCYPLINARNYM

POZNAŃ 2020

## Spis treści

Wstęp. Literatura Europy Środkowej w nowym tysiącleciu • 10

### | KULTURY PAMIĘCI

BOGUSŁAW BAKUŁA

1956, 1968, 1981 – oblicza środkowoeuropejskiej pamięci.

Uwagi w perspektywie postkolonialnej • 25

TAMÁS KISANTAL

Poza pobojowiskami pamięci. Historyczne traumy

i literatura węgierska • 47

ALENA ŠIDÁKOVÁ FIALOVÁ

Powrót do przeszłości. Niemcy jako trauma historyczna we współczesnej

literaturze czeskiej • 59

VĽADIMÍR BARBORÍK

Pamięć i historia. Ujęcia przeszłości w słowackiej prozie po 2000 r. • 77

# Contents

Foreword. Literature of Central Europe in the New Millennium • 11

## | MEMORY CULTURES

BOGUSŁAW BAKUŁA

1956, 1968, 1981: The Faces of Central-European Memory:  
A Postcolonial Perspective • 25

TAMÁS KISANTAL

Beyond the Battlefields of Memory: Historical Traumas and Hungarian  
Literature • 47

ALENA ŠIDÁKOVÁ FIALOVÁ

Returning to the Past: The Germans as a Historical Trauma in Contemporary  
Czech Prose • 59

VLADIMÍR BARBORÍK

Memory and History: A Comparison of the Past in Slovak Prose  
of the Post-2000 Period • 77

ALEŠ MERENUS, MAREK LOLLOK

Obraz czeskiej przeszłości we współczesnych sztukach teatralnych typu „dokudrama” • 101

IMRE JÓZSEF BALÁZS

Węgierskie historie o zmianie ustroju. Głosy i perspektywy • 127

## | TERYTORIALNOŚĆ

PRZEMYSŁAW CZAPLIŃSKI

Literatura i geografia • 143

LUKÁŠ PĚCHULA

Konstruowanie polskiego heteroimage'u w międzywojennych powieściach z regionu Ostrawy. Czesko-niemieckie studium imagologiczne • 167

RADEK MALÝ

Figura Ofelii w poezji ekspresjonistycznej. Niemiecko-czeskie porównanie • 197

ZSUZSANNA VARGA

*Sieci święcenia* – droga Magdy Szabó i László Krasznahorkaiego do międzynarodowej popularności • 219

ÁGNES GYÖRKE

Współczesne węgierskie pisarstwo kobiece i kosmopolityzm • 235

KLÁRA KUDLOVÁ

Kości, kaci i madonny. Symbole i figury Europy Środkowej w twórczości Jáchyma Topola ostatnich 25 lat • 247

## | TECHNOLOGIA I SPOŁECZEŃSTWO

KAREL PIORECKÝ, VOJTĚCH MALÍNEK

Czeska kultura literacka w erze (post)cyfrowej • 267

ELŻBIETA WINIECKA

Literacki Internet. Uwagi o krytyce i komunikacji literackiej w Sieci • 289

ALEŠ MERENUS, MAREK LOLLOK

The Image of the Czech Past in the Contemporary Docudrama • 101

IMRE JÓZSEF BALÁZS

Hungarian Stories of the Regime Change: Voices and Perspectives • 127

## | TERRITORIALITY

PRZEMYSŁAW CZAPLIŃSKI

Literature and Geography • 143

LUKÁŠ PĚCHULA

Das Bild der Polen als Heterokonstruktion in Zwischenkriegsromanen der Region Ostravsko: Tschechisch-deutsche imagologische Untersuchung • 167

RADEK MALÝ

The Figure of Ophelia in Expressionist Poetry: German and Czech Comparison • 197

ZSUZSANNA VARGA

*The Networks of Consecration: The Journey of Magda Szabó and László Krasznahorkai's International Reputation* • 219

ÁGNES GYÖRKE

Contemporary Hungarian Women's Writing and Cosmopolitanism • 235

KLÁRA KUDLOVÁ

On Fields of Bones, Headsmen and Madonnas: The Symbols and Figures of Central Europe in the Past 25 Years of Jáchym Topol's Writing • 247

## | TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

KAREL PÍORECKÝ, VOJTĚCH MALÍNEK

Czech Literary Culture in the Post-Digital Era • 267

ELŻBIETA WINIECKA

Literary Internet: Online Criticism and Literary Communication • 289

IVANA HOSTOVÁ

Temporalności – technologie – transgresje. O współczesnej poezji słowackiej • 313

MARKÉTA KITTLOVÁ

Zmienić świat przez poezję. Wyznania, wiersze i banery  
Adama Borziča • 325



IVANA HOSTOVÁ

Temporalities—Technologies—Transgressions: On Contemporary Slovak Poetry • 313

MARKÉTA KITTLVÁ

Changing the World Through Poetry: Confessions, Poems and Banners of Adam Borzič • 325

## Wstęp. Literatura Europy Środkowej w nowym tysiącleciu

Dzień 26 kwietnia 1984 r. okazał się kamieniem milowym w badaniach nad literaturą Europy Środkowej. Tego dnia „The New York Review of Books” opublikował esej Milana Kundery *Zachód porwany albo tragedia Europy Środkowej*, przetłumaczony z francuskiego oryginału z „Le Débat” (*Un occident kidnappé*, 1983), do dziś nieustannie cytowany i dyskutowany. W okresie przejściowym na arenie międzynarodowej ponownie ożywiły się dyskusje na temat pojęcia Europy Środkowej, które stało się przedmiotem rozważań zarówno w regionie, jak i poza nim. Zainteresowanie to pozostało żywe aż do akcesji pierwszej grupy krajów „Nowej Europy” do Unii Europejskiej w 2004 r. Obfitujące w tak wiele wydarzeń lata dziewięćdziesiąte upłynęły pod znakiem prób ustanowienia ponadnarodowego kanonu reprezentatywnych tekstów z Europy Środkowej, w skład którego wchodziłyby zarówno eseje polityczne, jak i beletrystyka lokalnych autorów, takich jak István Bibó, Jerzy Kłoczkowski, György Konrád, Josef Kroutvor lub Czesław Miłosz, przez pisarzy reprezentujących szeroko rozumianą literaturę posthabsburską, czyli Claudio Magrisa i Danilo Kiša, aż po zachodnich orędowników idei Europy Środkowej, takich jak Timothy Garton Ash. Oprócz antologii wielu wydawców inaugurowało cykle tematyczne na temat Europy Środkowej (np. projekt *Arany Közép Európa (Złota Europa Środkowa)* węgierskiego wydawnictwa Osiris-Századvég, serie polskiego Wydawnictwa Czarne). Pomimo narastającego nacjonalizmu istniała wciąż

## Foreword. Literature of Central Europe in the New Millennium

April 26, 1984 became a milestone for Central European Studies. Ever since *The New York Review of Books* had published Milan Kundera's essay, *The Stolen West or The Tragedy of Central Europe*, translated from the French original in *Le Débat* (*Un occident kidnappé*, 1983), it has been tirelessly quoted and debated in the field. Reflections on the term Central Europe revived on an international level and featured as a main theme in public discussions within and beyond the region amidst the transition period, an interest that remained vivid up until the integration of the first set of countries from the "New Europe" into the European Union in 2004. The long 1990s was marked by attempts to establish a transnational canon of representative Central European texts that included both political essays and fiction by local authors like István Bibó, Jerzy Kłoczkowski, György Konrád, Josef Kroutvor or Czesław Miłosz, by writers representing the wider post-Habsburg realm like Claudio Magris and Danilo Kiš, and such Western harbingers of the Central European case as Timothy Garton Ash. Apart of anthologies a number of publishers launched thematic series on Central Europe (e.g. the Golden Central Europe project by the Hungarian Osiris-Századvég; or series by the Czarne Publishing House). Despite growing nationalism, there was a certain hope in closer cooperation not only in economic but also in cultural terms. Some examples for cultural cooperation include the Central European Initiative formed in 1989; the Visegrad Group

nadzieja na ściślejszą współpracę pod względem nie tylko gospodarczym, ale także kulturowym. Przykładami takiego połączenia sił mogą być Inicjatywa Środkowoeuropejska utworzona w 1989 r., Grupa Wyszehradzka założona w 1991 r., Fundusz Wyszehradzki powstały w 2000 r., Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury w Krakowie założone w 1991 r. oraz wiele innych ważnych inicjatyw o mniejszym zasięgu, takich jak np. polski Ośrodek „Pogranicze – sztuk, kultur, narodów” utworzony w 1991 r. Głównym animatorem współpracy i dialogu na temat regionu był prywatny Uniwersytet Środkowoeuropejski założony w 1991 r., w którym kształciło się wielu studentów z całej Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej.

Koncepcja Europy Środkowej była szeroko krytykowana jako narzędzie polityczne, mające służyć krajom wyszehradzkim do odcięcia się od pozostałych państw leżących „pomiędzy” Niemcami a Rosją. Istotnie, debaty w zdecydowanej większości wyczerpały się w połowie 2000 r. Badacze, którzy uznali tę koncepcję za użyteczne narzędzie analityczne, dążyli do powiązania refleksji najważniejszych postaci myśli środkowoeuropejskiej z bieżącymi zagadnieniami (np. Csaba Gy. Kiss, Jan Křen, Martin C. Putna, Ziemowit Szczerek, Andrzej Stasiuk, Simona Škrabec i Jiří Trávniček). Dokonywali tego, podkreślając podobieństwa czasów przeszłych i obecnych albo wyrażając, często w sposób ironiczny, dystans i sceptycyzm wobec tej koncepcji. Idea wyszehradzka zachowała jednak swój urok i, co nie jest bez znaczenia, finansowanie publiczne. Wymiana literacka pomiędzy językami Europy Środkowej jest stosunkowo bogata i żywa, reprezentują ją np.: tłumaczenia publikowane w pięciu językach i dostępne na portalu literackim Europy Środkowej ([www.visegradliterature.net](http://www.visegradliterature.net)), wydana w pięciu językach *Antologia literacka państw wyszehradzkich (Literary Anthology of Visegrad 4 Countries)* oraz trzypięciotomowa kolekcja *Visegrad Drama* w języku angielskim. Jednocześnie realizowana jest również szerzej zakrojona środkowoeuropejska współpraca. Najlepszym tego przykładem jest Inicjatywa Trójmorza (Three Seas Initiative), założona w 2016 r., która przecina dawną żelazną kurtynę i granice Związku Radzieckiego. Programy i inicjatywy Unii Europejskiej są formalnie otwarte dla krajów postsocjalistycznych, ale nadal dyskutowane jest to, w jakim stopniu kultura i literatura tych krajów mogłyby zostać skutecznie zaprezentowane za ich pomocą. W Europie Środkowej, podobnie jak w pozostałych formacjach, których wzajemne relacje opierają się na zasadzie niewyłączności, współpraca wydaje się nadal niezbędna, aby przeciwdziałać nierównościom gospodarczym i kulturowym w Unii Europejskiej.

W tym numerze wydawanego dwa razy w roku czasopisma „Porównania” autorzy zajmujący się literaturami czeską, polską, słowacką i węgierską dokonują

founded in 1991 and Visegrad Fund set up in 2000; Krakow Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury (International Cultural Centre) founded in 1991; and many other smaller important initiatives, such as the Polish Ośrodek “Pogranicze – sztuki, kultur, narodów” (“The Borderland—of arts, cultures, nations” centre) formed in 1991. A major animator of cooperation and discussions about the region was the private Central European University established in 1991, that brought together many students from all over Eastern Europe.

The concept of Central Europe has been widely criticized as a political tool of the Visegrad countries to dissociate themselves from other lands “in between” Germany and Russia. Indeed, debates largely exhausted by the mid-2000s. Those scholars from the Humanities who kept an interest in the concept as an analytical tool aspired to relate reflections of former icons of Central European thought to current matters (e.g. Csaba Gy. Kiss, Jan Křen, Martin C. Putna, Ziemowit Szczerek, Andrzej Stasiuk, Simona Škrabec and Jiří Trávniček), either by emphasizing the similarities and parallels of past and contemporary situations or by expressing, often ironically, their distance and scepticism towards the very concept they employ. The Visegrad idea, however, still kept some of its appeal and, significantly, public funding. Literary exchanges between Central European languages have been relatively varied and extensive, f.e.: translations published in five languages are accessible for instance on the Central European literary portal ([www.visegradliterature.net](http://www.visegradliterature.net)); a *Literary Anthology of Visegrad 4 Countries* was published in five languages, and a three volume collection represents the “Visegrad Drama” to an English audience. At the same time, such Central European cooperations continue within wider and more inclusive frames, for instance as part of the Three Seas Initiative, founded in 2016, that cuts across the former Iron Curtain and the former borders of the Soviet Union. The programs and initiatives of the European Union are formally open to post-socialist countries, but it has been debated at what extent the culture and literatures of these countries could effectively represent themselves via such programs and platforms. In any case, Central European collaboration, along with other cooperative formations on a non-exclusivist basis, seems to remain necessary to counter economic and cultural inequality within the EU.

This issue of the 6-monthly journal *Porównania* (*Comparisons*) brings together a collective of authors working on Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak literatures to initiate an assessment of the present status of literature in Central Europe in the 21st century—which is, in many sense, a “post-Central European” epoch.

One of the major concerns of the thematic issue is collective memory as represented or reflected in contemporary literature, especially with regard

przeglądu ich stanu w XXI w., który pod wieloma względami uznać można za epokę „postśrodkowoeuropejską”.

Jedną z głównych kwestii poruszanych w niniejszym tomie jest pamięć zbiorowa. Jej obecność w literaturze współczesnej daje się zauważyć szczególnie w odniesieniu do najważniejszych wydarzeń XX w., które ukształtowały sposób, w jaki państwa Europy Środkowej postrzegają swoją tożsamość i historię. Bogusław Bakuła w studium zatytułowanym *1956, 1968, 1981 – oblicza środkowoeuropejskiej pamięci. Uwagi w perspektywie postkolonialnej* (1956, 1968, 1981: *The Faces of Central-European Memory: A Postcolonial Perspective*) wprowadza trójdzielny system kategorii: pamięci wspólnej, pamięci odrębnej i nie-pamięci. Służy on przede wszystkim rozróżnieniu praktyk pamięciowych w literaturze Europy Środkowej. Autor dochodzi do wniosku, że efektem kondycji postkolonialnej tego obszaru jest dominacja nie-pamięci (znaczącej luki w podejmowaniu szczególnie trudnych tematów historycznych) i pamięci odrębnej (która wzmacnia istniejące już narracje narodowe). Niełatwe zadanie podjęcia dyskusji na temat wspólnej pamięci wciąż pozostaje wyzwaniem. Z kolei Tamás Kisantal w artykule *Poza pobjowiskami pamięci. Historyczne traumy i literatura węgierska* (*Beyond the Battlefields of Memory: Historical Traumas and Hungarian Literature*) analizuje współczesną literaturę węgierską przez pryzmat zupełnie innego zestawu pojęć, zapożyczonych od Michaela Rothberga. Mimo to wnioski obu badaczy są podobne. Kisantal twierdzi, że pamięć rywalizacyjna w sferze publicznej przyczyniła się do względnego zaniedbania we współczesnej literaturze opisu traumatycznych wydarzeń. Ma jednak nadzieję, powołując się na kilka obiecujących przykładów, że pamięć wielokierunkowa może pomóc w zmianie sposobu myślenia, zwłaszcza dzięki wyłaniającemu się nowemu nurtowi literackiemu, jakim jest powieść historyczna (*historical fiction*).

Podobny nowy trend opisuje Alena Šidáková Fialová w tekście *Powrót do przeszłości. Niemcy jako trauma historyczna we współczesnej literaturze czeskiej* (*Returning to the Past: The Germans as a Historical Trauma in Contemporary Czech Prose*). Na podstawie analizy najnowszej literatury czeskiej przedstawia skomplikowaną relację pomiędzy Czechami a Niemcami. Przyglądając się obecnej we współczesnej beletryście refleksji dotyczącej traumy historycznej związanej z kwestią niemiecką, Autorka zauważa, że posługiwanie się gatunkiem sagi rodzinnej oraz celowe zacieranie granic pomiędzy fikcją i reportażem często służą podważaniu ram zastanych konwencji literackich. Vladimír Barborík w artykule *Pamięć i historia. Ujęcia przeszłości w słowackiej prozie po 2000 r.* (*Memory and History: A Comparison of the Past in Slovak Prose of the Post-2000 Period*) odnotowuje ponowne zainteresowanie historią

outstanding events of the twentieth century that have shaped national self-perceptions in Central Europe. In his study entitled *1956, 1968, 1981: The Faces of Central-European Memory: A Postcolonial Perspective* Bogusław Bakula introduces the tripartite category system of shared memory, separate memory and non-memory in order to differentiate between various memory practices articulated through literature written in Central Europe. He concludes that as a result of the postcolonial condition non-memory (that is a striking absence in addressing certain historical themes) and separate memory (that reinforces existing national narratives) prevail. The difficult task of negotiating shared memories remains a so far unachieved ideal. Tamás Kisantal in his *Beyond the Battlefields of Memory: Historical Traumas and Hungarian Literature* approaches contemporary Hungarian literature with a different set of concepts borrowed from Michael Rothberg, but with very similar results. Kisantal asserts that competitive memory in the public sphere greatly contributed to the relative negligence of traumatic events in contemporary literature. Drawing on a few promising examples he nevertheless hopes that multidirectional memory has a chance to change directions precisely through an emerging new trend of historical fiction.

A similar new trend is described by Alena Šidáková Fialová in her paper *Returning to the Past: The Germans as a Historical Trauma in Contemporary Czech Prose* in which she surveys the struggle with the complicated relationship of Czechs and Germans as represented in recent Czech literature. Tracing German-related historical trauma in contemporary fiction she points at the importance of family saga and the playful blur of fiction and documentative prose in challenging previous modes of writing. Vladimír Barborík in *Memory and History: A Comparison of the Past in Slovak Prose of the Post-2000 Period* also senses a renewed interest in history in the most recent Slovak prose, and just as in the Czech and Hungarian cases the documentative turn seems to taking shape—an impression that is reinforced by the analysis of new type of genre in Aleš Merenus's and Marek Lollok's *The Image of the Czech Past in the Contemporary Docudrama*. In Barborík's analysis, he focuses on how autobiographical writing affected the style of fictional biographies, a new trend in Slovakia that he traces back to Silvester Lavrík's prose. Writing on the 1989 political turn in Hungarian literature in Romania, Imre József Balázs (*Hungarian Stories of the Regime Change: Voices and Perspectives*) attributes a similar paradigm-changing role to Ádám Bodor, a native of Transylvania who repatriated to Hungary in the 1980s. In contrast of literary critics' often voiced expectation that the regime change should be depicted in some kind of grand narrative and in a broad panorama, Bodor's own indirect tackling of the topic challenged the possibility of a master

najnowszą w prozie słowackiej. W swojej analizie Barborík koncentruje się na tym, jak pisanie autobiograficzne wpłynęło na styl fikcyjnych biografii, nowego trendu na Słowacji, który nawiązuje do prozy Silvestra Lavríka. Podobnie jak w przypadku Czech i Węgier okazuje się, że dominuje tutaj i nabiera kształtu zwrot dokumentacyjny. Wrażenie to potwierdza analiza nowoczesnej odmiany gatunkowej autorstwa Aleša Merenusa i Marka Lolloka w artykule *Obraz czeskiej przeszłości we współczesnych sztukach teatralnych typu „dokudrama”* (*The Image of the Czech Past in the Contemporary Docudrama*). Pisząc o zwrotach politycznych z 1989 r. w literaturze węgierskiej z Rumunii, Imre József Balázs (*Węgierskie historie o zmianie ustroju. Głosy i perspektywy – Hungarian Stories of the Regime Change: Voices and Perspectives*) przypisuje podobną, zmieniającą paradygmat rolę Ádámowi Bodorowi, rodakowi z Transylwanii, który w latach osiemdziesiątych xx w. powrócił na Węgry. Krytycy literaccy często wyrażali opinię, że zmianę ustrojową należy przedstawić za pomocą wielkiej narracji czy szerokiej panoramy, a pośrednie zajęcie się tym tematem przez Bodora podważyło możliwość zaistnienia takiej narracji. W jego ślady poszła również grupa młodszych autorów. Otwarcie na wiele interpretacji skupiali się na drobnych, prywatnych doświadczeniach, a nie na ważnych wydarzeniach historycznych.

Podkreślając znaczenie literatury mniejszościowej, z istoty przyjmującej bardziej złożony punkt widzenia niż kultura narodowa, Balázs wskazuje na znaczenie terytorialności w beletrystyce pamięciowej. Ten temat rozwija Przemysław Czapliński w pracy *Literatura i geografia (Literature and Geography)*. Przygląda się procesowi zmiany wyobraźni geograficznej w literaturze polskiej w latach 1986–2016. Śledzi stopniową samoizolację, która wynika z coraz większego nacisku na sprawy lokalne i kurczenie się przestrzeni literackiej we współczesnej beletrystyce. Znaczenie opracowywania problematyki prozy wielokulturowych regionów literackich podkreśla Lukáš Pěchula w artykule zatytułowanym *Konstruowanie polskiego heteroimage’u w międzywojennych powieściach z regionu Ostrawy. Czesko-niemieckie studium imagologiczne (Das Bild der Polen als Heterokonstruktion in Zwischenkriegsromanen der Region Ostravsko: Tschechisch-deutsche imagologische Untersuchung)*. Bada on, w jaki sposób obrazy polskiej heterogeniczności kulturowej zostały skonstruowane w powieściach międzywojennych autorstwa czeskich i niemieckich pisarzy z obszaru Moraw i Śląska, którego centrum, a jednocześnie głównym celem polskiej emigracji była wówczas Ostrawa. Ze względu na różnorodność kulturową wynikającą z zamieszkiwania na tym obszarze Polaków, Czechów, Niemców i Żydów oraz dominującą obecność elementu czeskiego po II wojnie światowej stanowi ona przykład dobrze znanej drogi homogenizacji kulturowej w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej. Radek Mały z kolei osadza czeskich poetów w szerszych, ale nie



narrative. In his footsteps, a cohort of younger authors employ playful narratives from below open to multiple interpretations and focus on small-scale private experiences rather than major events.

By stressing the importance of minority literatures in the region that tend to have a broader view than a single culture by definition, Balázs pointed at the significance of territoriality in memory fiction. This is what concerns Przemysław Czapliński in *Literature and Geography* that follows the process of how geographical imagination changed in Polish literature between 1986 and 2016. Czapliński identifies a gradual self-isolation by an increased focus on the domestic and a shrinking of literary space in fiction. The importance of mapping the fiction of multicultural literary regions is stressed by Lukáš Pěchula in his study *Constructing Polish Heteroimage in the Interwar Novels of the Wider Ostrava Region (Das Bild der Polen als Heterokonstruktion in Zwischenkriegsromanen der Region Ostravsko: Tschechisch-deutsche imagologische Untersuchung)*. He explores how Polish hetero images were constructed in interwar novels by Czech and German writers in Moravia-Silesia with Ostrava in its center that was a primary target of Polish immigration in the epoch and notable of its cultural heterogeneity with Poles, Czechs, Germans and Jews living in the area—just to become predominantly Czech after the Second World War, which is an all too well-know East Central European trajectory of cultural homogenization. Radek Malý's paper embeds Czech poets in a wider, but not less multicultural framework. *The Figure of Ophelia in Expressionist Poetry: German and Czech Comparison* employs the classic toolkit of the comparatist to show the intimate affinity of European literatures. Malý traces a single figure originated in English literature that was rewritten by German Expressionists and Czech modernists: Ophelia, and revisits the multiple uses of this figure in the light of the Ophelia complex as defined by Gaston Bachelard.

Czapliński wonders in his mentioned paper on *Literature and Geography* whether new narratives will be developed that interconnect Poland with its neighbouring countries and thus situate Poland better on a European cultural map remains a question for the future. The process of how a Central European literature can affirm its place in the new world literary scene is also a preoccupation of Zsuzsanna Varga in *The Networks of Consecration: The Journey of Magda Szabó and László Krasznahorkai's International Reputation*. Focusing on the few outstanding Hungarian literary success-stories in the past decades, she highlights the importance of human agency. Challenging views that overemphasize the significance of international literary prizes and positive reviews in prestigious periodicals, she stresses the invisible personal investment of a network of translators and cultural mediators fluent in multiple languages

mniej wielokulturowych ramach – w tekście *Figura Ofelii w poezji ekspresjonistycznej. Niemiecko-czeskie porównanie* (*The Figure of Ophelia in Expressionist Poetry: German and Czech Comparison*) wykorzystuje klasyczny zestaw narzędzi komparatystycznych, aby ukazać bliskie powinowactwa literatur europejskich. Mały, przyglądając się postaci pochodzącej z literatury angielskiej i przepisanej przez niemieckich ekspresjonistów oraz czeskich modernistów, odwołuje się do wielu zastosowań tej postaci w świetle kompleksu Ofelii zdefiniowanego przez Gastona Bachelarda.

Czapliński we wspomnianym już artykule *Literatura i geografia* zastanawia się nad tym, czy powstaną nowe narracje, które połączą Polskę z krajami sąsiadującymi i tym samym pozwolą jej na zajęcie odpowiedniego miejsca na europejskiej mapie kulturowej. Proces, w którym literatura Europy Środkowej stara się potwierdzić swoją obecność na nowej światowej scenie literackiej, jest również przedmiotem zainteresowania Zsuzsanny Vargi w studium *Sieci święcenia – droga Magdy Szabó i László Krasznahorkaiego do międzynarodowej popularności* (*The Networks of Consecration: The Journey of Magda Szabó and László Krasznahorkai's International Reputation*). Skupiając się na kilku wybitnych sukcesach literatury węgierskiej ostatnich dziesięcioleci, podkreśla ona znaczenie konkretnych działań części całego procesu. Podaje w wątpliwość przywiązywanie zbyt dużej wagi do międzynarodowych nagród literackich i pozytywnych recenzji w prestiżowych periodykach, jednocześnie zwracając uwagę na osobiste zaangażowanie sieci tłumaczy i mediatorów kultury biegle posługujących się wieloma językami, co jest równie istotne w promowaniu autorów nie tylko w Europie, ale i na całym świecie.

Tematem badań Ágnes Györke w artykule *Współczesne węgierskie piarstwo kobiece i kosmopolityzm* (*Contemporary Hungarian Women's Writing and Cosmopolitanism*) jest odtwarzanie przestrzeni i przekraczanie granic, choć w mniej praktycznym i literackim sensie. Skupiając się na trzech przedstawicielkach gender-conscious („świadomości płci”), istotnego trendu w literaturze węgierskiej po 2000 r., podważających patriarchalne normy pisania literatury, Györke pokazuje, w jaki sposób autorki te „zglobiają ideę przekonującą, że kobiety muszą wykroczyć poza przypisaną im przestrzeń” i wejść w stałą świadomość swojego ciała i interakcję z przestrzenią miejską. Przypisuje ona omawiane utwory kosmopolitycznemu feminizmowi, wskazując na to, jak duże może mieć on znaczenie w przewyciężeniu ściśle tradycyjnego spojrzenia na literaturę w całym regionie. Testowanie granic tradycji narodowej jest jednym z tematów pojawiających się również w pracy Kláry Kudlovej. W przeciwieństwie do większości autorów z tego zbioru Kudlová skupia się na interpretacji utworów jednego autora, Jáchyma Topola, dążąc do pokazania w jego dorobku

as equally crucial factors in bringing authors to the fore in a European and global cultural space.

Recreating space and crossing borders: this is the topic of Ágnes Györke's study, *Contemporary Hungarian Women's Writing and Cosmopolitanism*, though in a less practical and more literary sense. Focusing on three representatives of a significant gender-conscious trend of post-2000 Hungarian literature that challenged the patriarchal norms on how to write literature, Györke shows the ways these authors "explore the idea that women need to go beyond their designated space" in a constant awareness of their body and interaction with mundane environments of the city. She positions this kind of fiction in the realm of cosmopolitan feminism pointing out its relevance to overcoming the rigidly traditionalist literary field in the entire region. Testing the limits of the national tradition is one of the themes that appear in Klára Kudlová's paper. In contrast to most articles in this collection, Kudlová provides an interpretation of a single author, Jáchym Topol, but through his writing she provides an example of how to reframe a national literary tradition in a broader Central European system of references. *On Fields of Bones, Headsmen and Madonnas. The Symbols and Figures of Central Europe in the Past 25 Years of Jáchym Topol's Writing* shows how the three tropes in the title of her article become symbols of a common Central European space in the Czech writer's drama and fiction.

The papers addressing contemporary poetry also raise the question of redefining relations to traditions. In her essay *Temporalities—Technologies—Transgressions: On Contemporary Slovak Poetry*, Ivana Hostová drawing on an approach taken from Peter Osborne (according to which, only post-conceptual poetry makes sense at present) she concludes that the trans- and inter-cultural spaces being created in Slovak poetry of the past three decades give some hope that the intensifying globalising tendencies of the present will at least partially be slowed down. Markéta Kittlová in *Changing the World Through Poetry: Confessions, Poems and Banners of Adam Borzič* features Adam Borzič as a contemporary poet reconsidering the social role of poetry as envisioned by T.S. Eliot and how it might reshape reality.

One of the major changes in the literary field since 2000 has been the emergence of the Internet and the social media. Karel Piorecký and Vojtěch Malínek (*Czech Literary Culture in the Post-Digital Era*) argues based on Czech examples that the new media changed the book market and assigned a renewed agency on the reader. Based on the analysis of the Polish online literary scene Elżbieta Winiecka goes on to claim that literary criticism and literature are developing into hybrid forms between the art of writing and audio-visual media. In *Literary Internet: Online Criticism and Literary Communication* she nevertheless alerts for the dangers of far-fetched interpretations.

przykładu przeformułowania narodowej tradycji literackiej w szerszym środkowo-europejskim systemie odniesień. W tekście *Kości, kaci i madonny. Symbole i figury Europy Środkowej w twórczości Jáchyma Topola ostatnich 25 lat (On Fields of Bones, Headsmen and Madonnas. The Symbols and Figures of Central Europe in the Past 25 Years of Jáchym Topol's Writing)* udowadnia, jak wymienione tropy stają się symbolami wspólnej przestrzeni Europy w dramacie i beletryście czeskiego pisarza.

Artykuły dotyczące współczesnej poezji poruszają także kwestię przededefiniowania podejścia do tradycji. W eseju *Temporalności – technologie – transgresje. O współczesnej poezji słowackiej (Temporalities – Technologies – Transgressions: On Contemporary Slovak Poetry)* Ivana Hostová, czerpiąc z analiz Petera Osborne'a (zgodnie z którymi sens ma obecnie tylko poezja postkonceptualna), dochodzi do wniosku, że trans- i interkulturowe przestrzenie tworzone w słowackiej poezji ostatnich trzech dekad dają nadzieję na przynajmniej częściowe spowolnienie nasilających się tendencji globalizacyjnych. Markéta Kittlová w tekście *Zmienić świat przez poezję. Wyznania, wiersze i banery Adama Borziča (Changing the World Through Poetry: Confessions, Poems and Banners of Adam Borzič)* przedstawia czeskiego twórcę jako współczesnego poetę, zastanawiającego się nad społeczną rolą poezji, o której pisał T.S. Eliot, i nad tym, w jaki sposób może ona przekształcić rzeczywistość.

Jedną z głównych zmian, jakie dotknęły literaturę po 2000 r., było pojawienie się Internetu i mediów społecznościowych. Karel Piorecký i Vojtěch Malínek (*Czeska kultura literacka erze (post)cyfrowej – Czech Literary Culture in the Post-Digital Era*) dowodzą na przykładach z kultury czeskiej i słowackiej, że nowe media zmieniły rynek książki i przywróciły czytelnikowi sprawczość. Na podstawie analizy polskiej internetowej sceny literackiej Elżbieta Winiecka twierdzi, że krytyka literacka i literatura stają się hybrydowymi formami pomiędzy sztuką pisania a mediami audiowizualnymi. W studium *Literacki Internet. Uwagi o krytyce i komunikacji literackiej w Sieci (Literary Internet: Online Criticism and Literary Communication)* ostrzega jednak przed niebezpieczeństwami, jakie niosą tak daleko idące interpretacje.

Kategoria obywatelstwa ma bezsprzecznie długi rodowód w Europie Środkowej. Społeczeństwo obywatelskie musi jednak nieustannie negocjować swój *modus vivendi* między oczekiwaniami Zachodu (czasem kierującymi się podwójnymi standardami i często opartymi na pobieżnie odczytanych informacjach), tendencjami autorytarnymi w lokalnej polityce i globalnymi wyzwaniem, takimi jak kryzys uchodźczy w 2015 r. i obecna pandemia. Przykładowymi wskaźnikami statusu społeczeństwa obywatelskiego są: jego związek z własną przeszłością i wyobrażenia na temat przyszłości. Przyjrzenie się głównym

Civility has, arguably, considerable traditions in Central Europe, civil society, however, needs to constantly negotiate its *modus vivendi* between Western expectations (sometimes driven by double-standards and often based on half-digested information), authoritarian tendencies in local politics, and global challenges such as the 2015 refugee crisis and the current Coronavirus pandemic. One of the possible indicators of a civil society's status is its relation to its own past and its imagination of its future. A look at major trends and tendencies in literature might not only reveal how approaches, themes and poetics change, but also help us to understand our societies' efforts to tackle an increasingly diversified cultural landscape.

*Alena Šidáková Fialová*

*(guest editor of papers on Czech literature)*

*Tamás Scheibner*

*(guest editor of papers on Hungarian literature)*

*Lenka Németh Vítová*

*(editor of papers on Polish literature)*

*The editorial board would like to thank Radoslav Passia, PhD for his assistance in editing the articles dealing with Slovak literature.*

trendom i tendencjom w literaturze może nie tylko ujawnić, w jaki sposób zmieniają się podejścia, wątki i poetyki, ale także pomóc zrozumieć wysiłki podejmowane przez społeczeństwa, by stawić czoła coraz bardziej zróżnicowanemu krajobrazowi kulturowemu.

*Alena Šidáková Fialová*

*(redaktor gościnny artykułów na temat literatury czeskiej)*

*Tamás Scheibner*

*(redaktor gościnny artykułów na temat literatury węgierskiej)*

*Lenka Németh Vítová*

*(redaktor artykułów na temat literatury polskiej)*

*Redakcja pragnie podziękować dr. Radoslawowi Passii za pomoc podczas redakcji artykułów dotyczących literatury słowackiej.*

# Memory Cultures

| KULTURY PAMIĘCI





BOGUSŁAW BAKUŁA

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

## 1956, 1968, 1981: The Faces of Central-European Memory: A Postcolonial Perspective<sup>1</sup>

### 1. History and Memory

If we imagine the culture of Central Europe as a system of separate but interacting collective memories of the past,<sup>2</sup> it will probably be a truism to state that this situation is not only a matter of factography, but largely of **axiology**. Researchers dealing with this issue understand, especially with regard to the intercultural and inter-ethnic aspect, that collective memory stems from the fact that next to **shared places** (we will define this notion as communities of positive memory) there are equally important, or perhaps even more important, **separate places**, which we can refer to as communities of negative memory. This is especially well known to researchers (imagologists) who deal with images of otherness in a given culture, and also to writers, politicians and specialists in historical politics. The collective memory of the past is also shaped by a phenomenon that we can call non-memory. It is a rarely opened gravesite, into which communities cast everything that they do not want to know, remember, individually

1 This text was delivered during an international conference organized in the Hungarian Parliament in April of 2018: *A Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága és a Kelet- és Közép-Európa Kutatásáért és Képzéséért Alapítvány konferenciát szervez VISEGRÁD – KÖZÖS EMLÉKEZET? 1956 – 1968 – 1981 címmel.*

2 This is what Barbara Szacka calls memory. Her work in the Polish field has been considered fundamental since the 1970s. See Barbara Szacka, *Czas przeszły: pamięć – mit.*

or collectively, and watch over this state of affairs for as long as they need to. Collective memory of the past, writes Polish researcher Barbara Szacka,

is an image of a communal past constructed by individuals from the information they remembered, according to the rules discovered by psychologists, which stem from various sources and which reach them through various channels. They are understood, selected and transformed in accordance with their own cultural standards and beliefs (44).

Collective memory introduces the past to the world of subjective values and rules that are shared by a given community, thus defining the community's self-image as well as its status. Although it may result from recorded history, memory can also exist independently of it, fueled, for example, by spoken history, family stories, social legends, tales of a mythical nature, etc. If we approach history as a separate, institutionally sanctioned narrative in writing (dictated by pragmatic, objectified rules of a given period), then memory becomes its competitor, as it presents a slightly different, sometimes even a completely different, version of the past. History and memory compete with each other, although they emerge from one another and need one another. The carrier of history is writing (*logos*), while the carrier of collective memory is consciousness (*psyche*). Collective memory primarily preserves emotionally and axiologically selected components of the past. There are societies devoid of institutional history, but with enormously complex mechanisms of collective memory that are based on moral, mythical, clan, religious and other principles.

It should come as no surprise that there is a discrepancy between memory and recorded history, which has been extracted from archives and written according to established principles. These are two different, though related, levels of collective remembering; it is enough to recall what history and what communities say about, e.g. the crime in Jedwabne or the so-called "cursed soldiers" in Poland, about the Slovak participation in the attack on Poland on September 1, 1939, about the attitude of the Ukrainian society to the Volhynia crime and about many other issues that inflame the historical imagination in Central Europe. There may be cases where history and memory overlap. Usually, this occurs when the collective *psyche* is not able to construct knowledge on account of it being separated from internal and external sources of information and of its limited scope of control. Then, it often relies on a recorded and imposed image of the past. This image is a rather theoretical construction, which is why it is usually presented in literature as a negative utopia, where the past is reduced to one doctrinal interpretation, and the community suffers from real or just imposed

amnesia. This is a feature of totalitarian (political and religious) systems, where control extends not only to recorded sources, but also to our awareness by way of doctrinal education. Differences between collective memory and historical memory, researched, among others, by Jacques Le Goff, Maurice Halbwachs, Paul Ricoeur, Pierre Nora, Jan Assman and Aleida Assman, and in Poland by Barbara Szacka, Andrzej Szpociński and Marian Golka, are still not easy to precisely define. Most historians and sociologists consider collective memory as a type of error-laden knowledge, subjective, incomplete, with undetermined, fluid boundaries.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, memory in a given community is one of the basic mechanisms of collective functioning, without which there would be no way to discuss nation, class or regional identity. Halbwachs would add that every social group (especially national), as well as an individual, has different types of memory, which is associated with belonging to specific communities. This also applies to generations and families.<sup>4</sup>

In this statement, I emphasize the role of collective memory, distinct from history, as a sphere that remains only marginally utilized by institutions of power. Memory enters into relationships with written history, because history is one of its sources (and conversely), but at the same time it contains what history does not want or cannot collect; for example, the emotional and spontaneous side of collective experience, the private and family events that escape the narrative of power (history written in textbooks is also an instrument of power). If we assume that history is conventionalized writing, through which a specific power model is implemented, and memory is a dynamic psychological process (discontinuous, nodal, non-holistic), we can accept another assumption that results from the axiological essence of memory. It is related to the aforementioned **shared memory** (the community of positive memory) and **separate memory** (the community of negative memory). It is not particularly revealing to say that memory can divide and that which is shared always causes a reaction in the sphere of experienced separateness. This is an important psychological mechanism that functions in social space, but is also sometimes used politically.

3 In summarizing this difficult issue, Krzysztof Malicki (2012) states the following: “Examining the social memory of the past (collective memory), we are examining to a certain extent historical consciousness understood as a state of knowledge about the past its appropriate valorization. Szacka also emphasizes that historical knowledge, which contributes to collective memory (social), is subject to selection and distortions in line with the demands of collective memory. In such a memory there is no place for ambivalent stances, and the figures and events are either good or bad.” Quoted in K. Malicki. *Pamięć przeszłości pokolenia transformacji*. Warszawa: Scholar, 2012.

4 See Maurice Halbwachs’s *Społeczne ramy pamięci*.

Shared memory will contain connecting elements, mutual relations and the same or similar events, which are evaluated in a similar way. It is different from separate memory on account of its axiological aspect. In the first case, there is a focus on searching for possible areas of dialogue. Shared memory includes the voices of Others. In the case of separate memory, it is important to emphasize one's otherness, disbelief towards others, which are not always completely other, reproducing narratives about one's own singular experience, about its untranslatability, uniqueness and other commonly known assessments. It should be once again emphasized that shared and separate memory are, therefore, **axiological categories**. At this point, we can talk about their retroactive effect as a process of continuous valorization of the past in the consciousness of the nation or a social class. This valorization takes place through ongoing collective debates, but also as a result of the pressure exerted by historical events, as a result of collective religious experiences, and, in an extreme case, it can be imposed by a dominant political force (what is recorded will become history). Certainly, this valorization also results from the structure of a given society, its internal dynamics and openness, or, conversely, from the dominance of a closed, static attitude, characterized by a kind of collective catatonia caused by historical traumas.

What remains outside shared memory will here be referred to as separate memory. These include cherished images of the past that, for various reasons, are not negotiated. Shared memory (spontaneous as well as planned) usually functions in the sphere of **inclusive** activities. By contrast, separate memory functions in the sphere of **exclusive** events. Memory works inclusively when it absorbs and merges various memories and intentions into a construct acceptable to many entities. The purpose of this activity is to reach an agreement, even in basic matters related to a past that connects the interested parties. Exclusivity of memory works only when it excludes, separates, when it emphasizes separateness, and also when it marginalizes, segregates, stamps out the attitudes, facts or opinions that are regarded undesirable from the collective point of view. Generally speaking, memory works in both aspects (shared and separate) and on both levels simultaneously (inclusive and exclusive), and takes into account purposefulness and spontaneity in a multi-subject system. **Non-memory**, in turn, is an equally important mechanism with which both of the previously mentioned types of memory reject what, at a certain historical stage, lies beyond the reach of rational criticism, and thus becomes taboo, a closed world, unverifiable, traumatic, because a given community, for reasons that it understands or not, attempts to push particular information out of the discourse or hide it effectively enough that it does not participate in the creation of both shared

and separate memory. It is impossible, however, to say that this information is not there, since we do not know what resides in non-memory.

The above outline demonstrates that collective memory is a very complex mechanism of repeating, saving, transforming and concealing information constituting the collective identity. Specific problems in the sphere of shared and separate memory as well as non-memory in Central Europe result from the thousand-year-old relationships with many neighboring nations, which have abounded in various systems of domination and subordination, but also in long-term alliances and cooperation. Shared memory is not a panacea for the trauma of nations and individuals, although it can give an illusory sense of alleviating them. Separate memory does not entail declarations of war, nor does it mitigate the solitary experience of trauma, when Others do not understand or do not want to understand what we have experienced and how these experiences are rooted in our collective and individual consciousness, and probably also the subconscious. The final result of forming shared-separate memory will not be the relief of attaining objectified (being the result of conscious work) truth (because it will not be found), but a subjectively created identity, both collective and individual. This identity will be based on inclusion and acceptance or on exclusion and negation. Usually, both forms function in parallel, though unevenly, so one should assume that they may operate simultaneously, though disproportionately. Separate memory usually dominates, but its role can be seen only in the context of what we call shared memory. In other words, memory is not only a specific type of knowledge, but also a way of experiencing it. This gives rise to people assuming specific attitudes and often making very extreme assessments; it gives rise to forms of sanctifying the past, to personal, family and social rituals, to means of communication through acceptance or negation.

In addition to the mechanisms of maintaining or duplicating, which are called memory, we understandably encounter forms of intentional non-remembering. We do not remember what is shared. And we do not remember what is separate. Non-memory can refer to history as well as to the spontaneous, collective memory of the past. It is important to once again emphasize that separate memory is primary for each national community, because thanks to it nations take shape and function alongside others. In turn, shared memory, which goes beyond the limits imposed by ethnicity, is a margin that is useful as long as it does not constitute an internal problem. Shared memory is an instrumental bridge used to communicate with the Other. It can be created and it is more flexible than separate memory. In its aura, it is also easier to reach the sphere of non-memory.

Shared memory can be expanded and made into a strong unifying argument in terms that transcend ethnicity. There is after all such a concept as the international community of memory. The memory of the international community has the same features as “internal” collective memory, but is more the result of negotiations. Its existence (in a positive or negative variant) is contingent on an adopted consensus; however, the memory of the international community is not merely a planned construct; it is also, to a certain extent, spontaneous. The short history of the European Union is built on the negotiated area of shared memory and it is a history that is also not indifferent to matters that could not be negotiated, which proves how far it can be disrupted by activated factors of separate memory.

During World War II, Central and Eastern European countries were in different political constellations; they also had divergent territorial, economic and national (national) interests. Their common framework was more or less clearly dependent on one or two hegemons: the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. At the same time, the Poles were fighting against Nazism and communism; Ukrainians from Galicia against communism and the Poles, but under the command of the Third Reich; The Slovaks and Hungarians were fighting against communism while under the protectorate of the Third Reich, as were the Romanians, but at the same time they were essentially conflicted with each other, burdened as they were by the recent memory of mutual exclusions, aggression and annexation. The Slovaks were divided into a pro- (anti-Hitler and pro-Soviet Slovak National Uprising) and an anti-communist faction, while being decidedly opposed to Hungary’s policy towards parts of Slovak lands. The Czechs ideologically stood against Nazism and Germany, counting on the helping hand from the Soviets and Western Allies, while simultaneously partially cooperating with the Third Reich; this put them in a state of mental war with Poland, which after the fall of Czechoslovakia occupied Zaolzie and was already involved in a growing conflict with the Third Reich. Such various engagements intertwined, creating a unique situation in the region. The shared (in terms of similarities and differences) history of Central European countries during World War II does not determine shared memory (community of positive memory), but rather draws out separate memory, if not the memory of conflicts (community of negative memory). Thus, everything that has been discarded from memory, either successfully or not by means of distorting the past, still remains a topic of inquiry and is shocking when brought to light.

Some will simply say that Central Europe is extremely divided in terms of history, but above all memory, and there is an abundance of evidence in support of this claim. Their search might take them to the nineteenth century, when

radically different assessments regarding the revolution of 1848–1849 can be found, and to the twentieth century, when there were differences regarding the relationship of Central European nations and states to the Versailles order (including the Treaty of Trianon) and the post-Yalta order, and then the issue of Central European countries' participation in World War I and II, the degree of their involvement in the Holocaust, their participation in establishing communism, and then its demolition, etc. Historical problems and proportions are to some extent leveled after 1948, when all of Central Europe, together with a part of Germany, was united into a communist dependency system, and various contentious issues were suspended in the name of the communist friendship of nations. The artificially created shared history of the “socialist nations” had a clearly ideological character and was devoid of any conflicts (which did not mean that they were suddenly overcome). Attempts to bring the communist vision of history to fruition and build a shared memory based on this vision ultimately failed. The collapse of this “community” after 1989 almost immediately resulted in the appearance of history and separate memory. In the 1990s and at the beginning of the current century, instead of socialism, we there appeared more or less artificial projects committed to creating a politically and economically unified Central Europe (the Visegrád Group). Today, we can see that they have also not been successful.

In Central Europe, therefore, we have a shared history, recorded in one ideological convention or another, which is not always accepted in the less institutionalized spaces of collective life. This is why for many social groups, a separate, spontaneous memory, one that is not associated with the institutions of power, became an alternative with definite moral character. What is more, it is separate memory that, in the opinion of the Central European nations, testifies more to identity than a shared history and the so-called shared memory (sometimes considered a manipulated memorial community). It is enough to look closely at Slovak-Hungarian or Polish-Ukrainian relations. Slovak memory and the identity it helped to create are still shaped in spontaneous accounts as anti-Hungarian (against the Hungarian historical narrative and memory), and Ukrainian identity is presented as anti-Polish (similarly directed against Polish interpretations of mutual historical relationships and cultivating a radically separate memory and is clear proof for the existence of non-memory). This situation should not completely destroy the status of shared memory that aims to build close and positive relationships, but we will admit that in the present era, separate memory plays a more constitutive role. Of course, theoretically the best situation is to strike a balance between both types of memory and thus achieve a harmonized, non-antagonistic attitude to history.

When approaching the shared memory of events in Central Europe from 1956, 1968, and 1981, we must be aware of all the events and mechanisms listed here that occur synchronously, although disproportionately (in every society differently) in history. Therefore, we must ask whether we mean shared history (textbooks, monographs, and political integration campaigns, etc.) or shared memory (social memory and also art in a broad sense) or about other, less significant “memory” phenomena (e.g. mythicization in artistic fields) that can be distinguished. It is also worth asking why we do it? Are we really interested in writing a shared story or communicating in a shared memory?

Someone may first ask if we even need a shared memory in a broader, international sense. Is it not better to remember separately (for example nationally) and act together when possible through specialized institutions? Others will say that we can remember together if possible, but must act separately, sovereignly, and form pragmatic alliances. And they will also find support. In Central Europe, all “memory” phenomena are still intentionally complicated, morally undefined, requiring a number of concessions and the acceptance of hitherto unaccepted positions. Therefore, I will state the bold thesis that there is no such thing as shared memory (community of positive memory) in Central Europe and there is little indication that this state of affairs will change. Of course, there is a whole set of key words, slogans, anecdotes or even wider narratives that display the category of shared Central European memory. Usually, however, this happens in the specialized, narrow corridors of culture and includes a small portion of collective memory. The word “shared” is key here, as it relates to intentions and the possibility of implementing them. Although we know that theoretically the possibilities in this field are considerable, the practical implementation of inclusiveness has proven that these possibilities are in fact quite modest. However, because total inactivity in the area of shared memory threatens to render each long-term activity dysfunctional, separate memory and non-memory do not always have to entail exclusivity. For pragmatic aims (somehow you have to function with one another) and nostalgic aims (the past is always morally better than the present), the image of a Central European memorial community has for years been presented as a beautiful, though lost, order. Thousands of books have already been written on this subject. However, not one was written which synthetically presents history in a way that would not trigger any protests from other nations and states. This demonstrates the difficulties in practicing so-called shared memory in Central Europe or, more broadly, in Central and Eastern Europe.



## 2. What are we talking about?

The years 1956, 1968, and 1981, being as they are important milestones in the experience of four Central European nations, provide us with a good excuse to reflect in a conciliatory manner on inclusivity and memory. What comes to the fore is what the nations of our region celebrate the most, when commemorating the tragic events of their own past. The most important factor in constituting a community is the cult of victimhood; centuries of cultivating traumas resulting from the loss of independence. Victimhood culture reaches its heights in this region, as does literature that is infused with victim mentality, although the Czechs managed to some extent to break free of this complex in the twentieth century and relieved this tension in a literature that demythologized the imposed *k. und k.* monarchy. Sometimes, however, doing so is not possible for objective reasons, and then the conviction remains that whoever has it worse is nobler, better and even smarter. Before our eyes unfolds a spectacle of publically (internationally) displaying our suffering. In most cases, this suffering is genuine and terrible. The years marked by disaster 1939, 1956, 1968, and 1981 are ineludible to Central Europe, although, certainly in terms of development, three other years are more important, more widely extended, and treated as processes: 1918–1920, 1944–1945, and 1989–1991. They mark state-forming events, while the former denoting the destruction of the emerging order. Even 1945, which marks the beginning of a new occupation, seems better than 1939, because the end of World War II will be considered a better time to live than its beginning.

The years 1956, 1968, and 1981 denote specific moments in the internal history of Central Europe. They represent an attempt to change the existing system, though, it would seem, without radically undermining its foundations (reforms); armed invasion of reforming countries; large casualties, followed by even greater ones on account of prolonged repressions. The collective memory includes the following: the armed, heroic resistance of the Hungarians, the crushed gentleness of the Prague Spring, the pervasiveness of change being sought in Poland. On the other hand, to this day, part of the Hungarian and Czech society remembers the Polish strikes of 1980 and 1981 as it was presented by propaganda as idleness for which others would have to pay; some Poles saw in the Czechoslovakian reforms of 1968 as a continuation of imposed socialism (thus as an uprising which only sought to improve the content of the plate), and they would continue to remind the Hungarians of their cooperation with the Third Reich, which was meant to “explain” the ruthless behavior of the Soviet occupiers in 1956. At the same time, Poles supported the Hungarian Revolution of 1956: blood was donated to the injured Hungarians and planes were sent

to Budapest with supplies. The telling silence of the Slovaks with respect to the Hungarian uprising will be compared with the positive interest the Hungarian society expressed in the transformation plans in Czechoslovakia in 1968. However, what the people remembered is in no way connected with the findings of historians and does not always appear as a memorial community that is understood in a positive way.

Anniversaries can be celebrated, visits paid, monuments erected, but these are signs of internal memory, not shared memory in the strict sense. What exists in the internal national discourse of each of the Central European national communities is, therefore, very diverse. National holidays in some countries will incite protests of others, as is the case in Slovak-Hungarian or Polish-Ukrainian relations. Therefore, it can be said that history extracted from prejudices has more positive arguments in favor of building an image of a positive community, while memory does not offer solid reasons to build an international community. It would seem that there are no better reasons to create it than these dates. Surprised at what I have arrived, I would like to react to this thesis by recalling the perspective in which the various experiences of enslaved peoples are investigated—the postcolonial perspective.

### 3. Postcolonial Perspective

Perhaps postcolonial theory will help us understand some issues related to memory. This theory provides tools for studying the processes that occur in societies of the so-called former subalterns and compradors, (terms used by leading Western researchers of this trend, such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ewa Thompson), or the subordinated and collaborators, in a world where the memory of different forms of enslavement still persists and where the acquired reflexes of opposition or resentment, which are the heritage of trauma, act spontaneously. The difference between a subaltern and a comprador is that the former resembles more a slave (despite himself), while the latter is usually a member of the local elite in charge of the machinery of enslavement (a minion, a *poputczik*, a volunteer). The arrangement between them, even after the formal collapse of colonization, i.e. the system of mutual control and even further enslavement, may still resemble a colonial structure, though without a foreign factor. A comprador takes over some of the functions of a hegemon and strengthens its position, because he knows how to govern. It will take some time for people outside the circle of former compradors to come to power and shape history. The position of the subaltern and comprador towards the hegemon (colonizer), along with the political, social, cultural relations between system

members, constitutes a starting point for any consideration of colonial and then postcolonial frameworks. Subordinated and desubjectified after the departure of the colonizer, they experience a phase of violent opposition to the colonial past, and then move on to phases of diverse, mutual political, economic and cultural relations. Their elites are beginning to intermingle, creating a shared environment of the new government. Shared memory, therefore, would be, in these conditions, a memory that inherits the remains of various historical and political addictions, which is why it is built on the basis of a momentary consensus (some will use the term “rotten compromise”).

Western postcolonial thought emphasizes the issue of domination and violence, taking aim at actions that legitimize these practices. Much has already been written about dependence in culture, economy and politics. Another aspect of this dependence is related to the active ideology of victimhood of Central European subaltern (martyrdom), combined with the nation's or class's conviction of their unique mission. This is accompanied by continuous existential traumas and various forms of accentuating martyrdom that result from past suffering; a strong nationalism emerges. Researchers say that these beliefs in the postcolonial world are the foundations of collective memory and, therefore, of identity. This also affects the possibilities of the task of shared memory as well as its assessment. It is not certain that the postcolonial hybrid personality, which is a product of one's own culture and that of the colonizer, will be the depository and the representative of shared memory. Most often it is the other way around.

Of course, we are discussing here mass processes, and not individual attitudes that are manifested in literature exposing postcolonial complexes, e.g. Salman Rushdie's novels. In Central Europe, examples of a postcolonial discussion in which the issues raised above are important can be found in the literary works of Witold Gombrowicz, Sándor Márai, Milan Kundera, and Ladislav Mňačko. It is not surprising that these writers are immigrants living after the Second World War in a free world, away from local dependencies.

In the context of postcolonial studies, four aspects of collective memory appear to be important, as they have an impact on the creation of shared/separate memory. It is **ressentiment**, recollection resulting from the regret of the defeated and **unremembering**, which is the result of guilt, a manifestation of a desire to partially forget. Part of the memory functions here as a whole, displacing uncomfortable elements due to regret or shame. On the other hand, planned activities, such as **historical politics**, whose essence is adaptation and the pragmatic selection of the past, appears as a component of memory; **aesthetization**, i.e. the desire to change the pragmatic code of memory into a symbolic

code, e.g. literary, theatrical, etc. Aesthetization means shifting the discussion from the issue of responsibility to that of beauty of expression and metaphors, broadly encompassing the human condition. Distinguishing “shared memory,” symbolized in Central Europe by the selected years 1956, 1968 and 1981, takes shape in the four aspects as an inclusive and exclusive process, and, at the same time, one that is politically pragmatic and spontaneous.

#### 4. Postcolonial Morphology of Shared Places

Let us begin with resentment, which has acquired a significant body of research in the fields of philosophy, ethics and psychology. Suffice it to mention such works as Friedrich Nietzsche’s *From the Genealogy of Morals* and Max Scheler’s *Ressentiment and Morality*. Resentment describes the creation of false values and moral assessments in compensation for one’s own weaknesses and limitations. It is a kind of symbolic revenge on the hegemon. The essence of resentment can be described as reminiscing and commemorating on lost causes, which are then refashioned as victories, exalting defeat and sacrifice, and celebrating the moral fall of the hegemon. Nietzsche wrote that resentment is a feature of slave morality. Developing the concept of resentment based on ethics and axiology, Scheler claimed that, “The basic starting point in resentment is the reflex of vengeance” based on powerlessness and manifested in symbolic gestures. Vengeance is an axiological illusion, an “illusory falsification of values,” which means that “man lives in a false world of appearances.” Resentment is “spiritual poison.”<sup>5</sup> “Resentment is born when we are humiliated by our own impotence,” (Bartos) adds the Polish philosopher Tadeusz Bartoś. Resentment played a large role in the assessment of the events that took place in 1956, 1968, and 1981 (similarly to the assessment of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 or the Slovak National Uprising). In addition, resentment meant that it was possible to draw analogies between rebellions, build ideological and moral bridges between the dissenters, and assess the crimes committed by the hegemon. This was made possible by the silence of the neighboring countries, which for the most part passively observed the Soviet invasion of Hungary. These countries did not respond to the Soviet invasion in 1968 (and even participated in it) and they also supported martial law in Poland in 1981. Everyone resented someone for something and it was difficult for anyone to speak about overcoming the resultant prejudices and barriers.

5 See Max Scheler’s *Resentyment i moralność*. All the quotes are from the first chapter titled “Przyczynek do fenomenologii i socjologii resentymentu” (31–32).

Ressentiment incites strong emotions, while unremembering is an attempt to extinguish this fire. Unremembering means recalling the past, but without its historical structure, details and meaning. In the world of resentment, the past hurts, but in unremembering it makes sense to blunt the pain, deny it, replace it with a milder attitude, expressed by a playful relation with the colonizer, by using Aesopian language, rejecting the attitude of open rebellion, because “you need to live somehow” and “heal wounds.” We read the past here from the point of view of the current state of affairs, which is adapted to the existing circumstances. The past is, therefore, recognized as an important general experience, one that imposes itself as an essential exponent.

There is ample evidence that the mechanisms of memory described here exist and that they are related to specific events in history. Resentment will suggest that the national uprisings of 1956 (the Polish uprising in Poznań and the Hungarian in Budapest) were suppressed by the invaders, but also by collaborators and traitors. In Poznań, it was not the demonic Soviets, but Poles who shot at the protesting children and workers. However, not much is said about them, as such details do not conform to the narrative of national solidarity that appears there. The mechanism of unremembering will probably stave off the fact that the attempt to revise Stalinism in Hungary was initiated by a faction of the communist party. The communist Imre Nagy defended his homeland not only from the Soviets, but from members of the communist party, because he wanted another kind of communism. He was murdered in retaliation. Director Márta Mészáros commemorated Nagy in the film *A temetetlen halott* (*The Unburied Man*, 2004), but the issue of rehabilitating a murdered communist sparked opposition in Hungary. Just as we are certain that the cult of victimhood exists and that Nagy was more of a patriot than a communist, we are also almost certain that Hungarian cooperation called “goulash communism,” which was caused by repressions, and the Polish “little stabilization,” which was the result of the defeated ideals of the “thaw” and the shock following the Poznań repressions, will not fully enter into the canon of collective memory. Resentment screams, while unremembering insists on silence.

Although little is still known in Central Europe about the Polish “solidarity” of 1981 and its end, i.e. martial law, there is an ongoing dispute in Poland that is important for the emerging shared memory. The problem concerns the identity of many leadership groups who would like to, in one way or another, take administrative control over memory of that period. Here, it is difficult even to form an internal shared memory. Thus, the mechanisms of unremembering prevail, altering hierarchies and roles. Behind the dramatic disputes, there also lurks the abyss of non-memory, which is convenient for newer power groups

that historically do not have much in common with the first Solidarity movement and resistance during martial law. There are those who, at the beginning of the transformation, did miss the chance to enter the great political circles and take part in international life. For this reason, the kind of resistance that looks best both in terms of historical politics and aesthetics is one that is reduced to sacrifice—preferably anonymous. The collective memory of Poles faces a difficult task of valorizing the birth and fall of the first Solidarity movement and the emergence of a collective resistance in the 1980s. This period has not yet been noticed and understood in Central Europe. Today, we still bear witness to its deformation by separate memory.

We remember 1968 as the end of the illusions Czechs and Slovaks had about socialism with a human face. This time this was a joint external invasion. The subalterns, willing or not, attacked one of their own in an attempt to silence a country as it tried to change the rules binding it to the hegemon. The invasion resulted in failed reforms and “normalization,” during which the majority of Czechoslovak society accepted the so-called “dumpling communism.” In exchange for a raised standard of living, they silently turned a blind eye to the repression of dissenters. Is there even the issue of shame for the silence of Central European societies in the face of such overt violations of international law and norms? In Poland, only two writers objected openly: Sławomir Mrożek and Jerzy Andrzejewski. Most Poles at that time supported the authorities’ anti-Semitic internal policy and Czechoslovak affairs were relegated to the background. The intermittent embarrassment stemming from those attitudes will have difficult access to shared memory. And in this case, too, there will be an inevitable unremembering of certain events or aspects of the past, allowing this outline of shared memory to create at least a semblance of comfort.

The joint invasion of Czechoslovakia led to, among other things, the division of the country, which on October 28, 1968, became a federation. The division was created by Slovak communists, to whom the Soviet hegemon conferred power, as it distrusted the rebellious Czechs. In 1993, this facilitated an almost instant division into two organisms and the emergence of a sovereign Slovakia. Is it possible, therefore, to consider such collaborators as Gustáv Husák, Vasil Biľak, or even the communist Alexander Dubček, regarded in his time as a hero (of course also Leonid Brezhnev and his Kremlin companions), as unwitting forefathers of today’s Slovak independence? There are voices commenting on the paradoxicality of history. Post-communists will keep this in mind when (if!) they come to power one day. Mentioning the paradoxical role of Husák, Biľak and others may be an obvious mistake, but it can also prompt a discussion of what will be remembered of the “normalization” period. This discussion does

not have to conform perfectly to the concept of a mandatorily decommunized Slovakia and a decommunized shared memory. That is why we will be more willing to unremember this story and base our shared memory on resentment which directs our attention towards the brutality of the invasion, the heroic response and the incurred sacrifice.

Poland experienced the year 1968 and what was left in the aftermath; it was torn between student protests, writers defending free speech and an unleashed, vulgar anti-Semitism, which led to the expulsion of several thousand Polish intellectuals of Jewish origin. What aspects of this difficult moment will pass into shared memory? Will it contain the student rebellion and the struggle of several dozen writers for free speech in a world of primitive violence? Perhaps some regret will remain over the unjust expulsion of people, many of whom were authority figures and world-class intellectuals. Yet, the anti-Semitism of most of the society was unremembered, decomposed, erased from a sense of responsibility. The feeling of shame about these events will probably not enter the shared memory of the Visegrad countries. Everyone knows that when you look for a speck in your brother's eye you will end up with a plank in your own. The postcolonial perspective shows different layers of the past and memory, and their integrity as a community can be put to the test.

In Central Europe, the German term "historical politics" has gained currency. One of the definitions of the term states that it is "[a] conscious effort on the part of the political class to shape the scope and nature of collective historical memory" (Wolff-Powęska 3), we should add, with the intention of consolidating views, thereby allowing the authorities to legitimize controversial goals. Practicing historical politics began to have a real and negative impact on entities that were once in difficult relations of dependence, and today are building new relations. Buttressing the shared memory of Central European countries on the events of 1956, 1968, and 1981, which have been emotionally constructed by resentment and unremembering, may bring it closer (though not necessarily) to a pragmatic historical politics, which are in service to the current goals of the institution, especially the state. There are many other important dates and many other memories. Every country and nation has the right to emphasize its own history, but we know from experience that actions motivated by historical politics can also have repercussions for shared memory. Such repercussions were caused by the amendment to the Act on the Polish Institute of National Remembrance adopted at the beginning of 2018. The amendment, which was concerned with the criminal consequences of defaming the Polish nation with spurious accusations of Polish crimes against other nations, raised the issue of this "lying" as an excessively broad category. This kind of legislation by Polish



parliament caused consternation in Western and Eastern Europe, upsetting Polish-Israeli, Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-German relations, and probably also others. Its purpose was to unremember history and its ideas in order to build a better, shared memory. Meanwhile, the opposite happened. Its creators, under the pressure of international opinion, had to remove sections of the legislation that reeked of manipulative historical politics.

Aesthetics opposes the failures and successes of historical politics, which is essentially spontaneous, in much the same way a work of art can be spontaneous. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Homi Bhabha warned against aestheticization as an illusory process of alleviating traumas. However, it must be admitted that aestheticization is an activity that works relatively best among the memorial techniques shown here. An excellent example in Polish literature is the so-called borderland prose, which is unparalleled by any other literary trend due to the diversity of the displayed historical inter-ethnic relationships, as well as the richness of the presented **memorial space**,<sup>6</sup> referring primarily to the history of Poles. However, what is Polish and what is the most valuable element for national memory are (can be) regarded as an antithetical value in other national discourses.<sup>7</sup> That is why idealization is elsewhere unmasked, aestheticization, as its received, succumbs to narrowly understood political pragmatization, and dialogue provokes exclusion; and these are mutual reactions, often appearing from several directions at the same time. It is rare for artistic works to actually create a shared space of memory, which is why accomplishing this feat by other documents is all the rarer. There is much in Polish literature about 1956, more often about the revolution in Budapest than in Poznań.

The post-Stalin “thaw” turned out to be a theme almost unnoticed by Czech and Slovak literature, because it did not exist in reality. Delaying the Czechoslovak thaw by a decade changed its character, purpose and meaning. It also enabled this cold history to be captured in terms of a sophisticated irony. This was the only way to overcome the inertia of memory and the void of resentments, as well as political manipulations. Milan Kundera was one of the few who succeeded doing this in the novel *Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí* (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*) (1984). The works of such writers as Péter Esterházy, György Spiró, Pavol Rankov, Lajos Grendel, Paweł Huelle, Jerzy Pilch also contain

6 One can imagine that certain poetics, topics, moods, and interpretations interweave, excluding others, which creates a certain type of *memorial space*.

7 Later, others will say that the attractiveness of borderland narratives is accompanied by falsification, stemming from an incomplete, fragmented and paternalistic approach to issues outside the Polish purview.



examples of irony that refashion the history of subalterned individuals or nations into an aesthetic object, somewhat putting in parentheses the horrors of the past. Irony can neutralize memory and history in a political or nationalist sense. It opposes resentment and historical politics. However, it proves useless in relation to the Holocaust, because no common literary (artistic) language has been invented which, by means of irony, would allow us to come to terms with the deaths of millions, or to understand it as a fact that is completely unexplainable artistically, although it does have its literary representation. Regardless of these shortcomings of irony, the internally conflicted memorial community that has been created in art is certainly accepted. Here, it is possible to say that Hungarians and Poles, together with the Soviets and Eastern Germans, invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. We would prefer not to talk about this shared history in such a tone, although it would not be easy to unremember this fact and there is no such need. The deep irony of Kundera and Rankov in the novel *Stalo sa prvého septembra (alebo inokedy)* (*It Happened on September First (or Whenever)*) (2001), the playful grotesque tale about Hungarian-Slovak relations in Grendel's novel *Nálunk New Hontban (In Our New Hont)* (2001) as well as the grotesque, though unfortunately unsuccessful, ridiculous film *Operacja Dunaj (Operation Danube)* (dir. Jacek Głomb, 2009) about the Polish participation in the invasion of Czechoslovakia (it is a pity that Poles were not able to produce a more interesting reaction), all support the construction of various areas of shared memory and manage to show other aspects that are not pathetic or tragic. Literature transcends resentment, unremembering and historical politics and moves towards empathy and symbolic descriptions that can be treated more universally.

##### 5. Shared places of Memory: Essence, Value, Consequences

The purpose of this text was not to draw comparisons between the Central European events of 1956, 1968, and 1981 with other important national experiences in Central and Eastern Europe. What I attempted was to expose that they are characterized by changeability and elusiveness, not by granite durability. The titular events have many things in common: rebellion of the enslaved; invasion from the outside, supported internally by local compradors, traitors and collaborators; mass victims whose memory was almost erased or the significance of their sacrifice diminished with respect to the identities of the defeated and colonized. The rebellion narrative also includes some of the Polish intelligentsia protesting and the authorities brutally pacifying the protest in March 1968. Brutal "internal invasions" are a Polish specialty, if we recall the years 1956, 1970, 1976, and 1981.

What kind of shared memory and identity will emerge from the processes between postcolonial resentment, unremembering, historical politics and aestheticization in such a diverse area as Central and Eastern Europe after 1956? The shared consequences of events include the following: Hungarian, Czechoslovak and Polish societies resigning from further attempts to incite a mass rebellion; consent to “goulash” and “dumpling” communism; a diverse underground resistance, repressions of agents of this resistance; emigration of some citizens, and expulsion of some Poles of Jewish origin from Poland. The memorial, and thus moral, value of these events is presented in various forms and aspects of memory, in the tragedy of many people sacrificing their lives in the name of freedom, and in the impulses of liberty, which gave rise to a mounting resistance against totalitarianism in increasingly more social and national groups.

It is obvious that this memorial community will include heroic rebellions, victims, and a democratic opposition movement against totalitarianism. Collaboration with the system, expulsions and racism, and ambiguous attitudes will be excluded. And yet they constitute an inherent element of the presented events in which Central European subalterns were the participants. The postcolonial perspective reveals what is unwillingly seen in places of shared memory, but what can also be obscured if there was such a will. This is made possible by unremembering and historical politics. At the same time, there is no doubt that we are living in times of frustration and vague ethical messages. That is why shared memory can only emerge in a broader context, one that goes beyond the years 1956, 1968, and 1981.

The question that constantly recurs is what is created and what is omitted by building a shared memory of Central and Eastern Europe; what do we want to exclude from it? An attempt to answer this question would exceed the conceivable scope of this discussion; hence, it seems to me that a vast amount of unarticulated but deeply rooted problems constitute the peculiar contours of “shared” memory of Central and Eastern Europe, which cannot be a full memory of consent and rejection, as it also evokes the unknown areas of non-memory. This is neither surprising nor unique in the postcolonial world. Various distinguished memory and non-memory can change places (this was the case during the communist era) and then what is shared becomes unambiguous. However, then problems with memory start anew.

*Translated by Marcin Tereszewski*

## | References

- Bartoś, Tadeusz. "Nienawidzę, więc jestem, czyli skąd się biorą resentymenty", <https://tinyurl.com/y88bxwdo>. Accessed 10 August 2018.
- Chmel, Rudolf. *Slovenská otázka v 20. storočí*. Bratislava: Kaligram 1997.
- Gyáni, Gábor. *A történelem mint emlék(mű)*. Budapest: Kaligram, 2016.
- Gyáni, Gábor. *Relatív történelem*. Budapest: Typotext, 2007.
- Holbwachs, Maurice. *Společne ramy paměti*. Trans. Marcin Król. Warszawa: PIW, 1969.
- Lužný, Dušan. "Kulturní paměť jako koncept sociálních věd." *Studia Philosophica* 2.61 (2014): 3–18.
- Malicki, Krzysztof. *Pamięć przeszłości pokolenia transformacji*. Warszawa: Scholar, 2012.
- Olšáková Doubravka, Kaiserová Kristina, eds. *Višegradská paměť či višegradské paměti? Paměť většiny a paměti menšin. Čítanka textů*. Ústí nad Labem: Ústav slovansko-germánských studií FF UJEP, 2014.
- Scheler, Max. *Resentiment i moralność*. Trans. Jan Garewicz. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1997.
- Švaříčková-Slabáková, Radmila. "O paměti, historii, vědomí a nevědomí. Současná bádání v paměťových studiích." *Dějiny – Teorie – Kritika* 2 (2007): 323–255.
- Szacka, Barbara. *Czas przeszły: pamięć – mit*. Warszawa: Scholar, 2006.
- Tomášek, Marcel and Šubrt, Jiří. "Jak se vyrovnáváme s naší minulostí? České a československé nedávné dějiny prizmatem teorie kolektivní paměti a kvalitativní metodologie (focus groups)." *Sociológia* 46.1 (2014): 88–114.
- Wolff-Powęska, Anna. "Polskie spory o historię i pamięć. Polityka historyczna." *Przegląd Zachodni* 1 (2007): 3–44.

## | Abstrakt

BOGUSŁAW BAKUŁA

1956, 1968, 1981 – oblicza środkowoeuropejskiej pamięci.

Uwagi w perspektywie postkolonialnej

Artykuł dotyczy dwóch zagadnień. Pierwsze to problem zbiorowej pamięci przeszłości, w której obrębie autor wyodrębnia pamięć wspólną, pamięć odrębną i nie-pamięć. Pamięć wspólna odgrywa w Europie Środkowej mniejszą rolę niż pamięć odrębna, stanowiąca rdzeń tożsamości narodowej i społecznej. Pamięć

wspólna jest raczej nieosiągalnym ideałem zgłaszanym przez niektórych polityków i badaczy kultury. Ważną funkcję pełni nie-pamięć, czyli przestrzeń czasowego unicestwienia trudnych spraw związanych z przeszłością. Historia i zbiorowa pamięć są w Europie Środkowej konkurencyjnymi drogami utrwalania przeszłości. Wynika to z faktu wielowiekowych konfliktów, zmieniających się form ustrojowych, zmiany granic i przede wszystkim odebrania wielu narodom suwerenności. Ta sytuacja spowodowała, że problem dominacji i podległości stał się zasadniczym problemem historii i pamięci zbiorowej.

Druga część artykułu jest poświęcona postkolonialnym aspektom zbiorowej pamięci, w jej ramach zwłaszcza podejściu do wydarzeń i dat 1956, 1968, 1981, związanych z militarną reakcją komunistycznego systemu na próby jego zreformowania. Wydarzenia te, przy wszystkich różnicach, są spowodowane przez przemoc zewnętrzną (1956, 1968) lub przemoc wewnętrzną wywołaną naciskiem z zewnątrz (1981). Poprzez stosunek do wybranych elementów przeszłości społeczeństwa Europy Środkowej kształtują też wzajemne relacje. Autor ukazuje problem nieoczywistości wspólnej pamięci wewnętrznej i międzynarodowej przez analizę czterech aspektów: resentymentu, odpamiętywania, polityki historycznej i estetyzacji.

Prezentacja wydarzeń lat 1956, 1968, 1981 w perspektywie wskazanych czterech aspektów postkolonialnej pamięci pokazuje słabe istnienie wspólnych obszarów, nad którymi przeważają pamięć odrębna, deformująca realia historyczne, oraz nie-pamięć. Dowodzi to, że wyjście poza hasła i ogólne deklaracje jest dla społeczeństw Europy Środkowej trudne. Prawdziwa wspólna pamięć to zadanie przyszłości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Europa Środkowa; 1956; 1968; 1981; pamięć wspólna; pamięć odrębna; nie-pamięć; teoria postkolonialna; resentyment; odpamiętywanie; polityka historyczna; estetyzacja

## | Abstract

BOGUSŁAW BAKUŁA

### 1956, 1968, 1981: The Faces of Central-European Memory: A Postcolonial Perspective

This article deals with two issues. The first concerns the problem of collective memory of the past, which is divided here into shared memory, separate memory and non-memory. Shared memory plays a lesser role in Central Europe than separate memory, the latter being the core of national and social identity. Shared memory

is an unattainable ideal proposed by some politicians and cultural researchers. A significant role is played by non-memory, which temporarily annihilates difficult matters related to the past. History vies with collective memory in Central Europe as a means of preserving the past. This is the result of centuries-old conflicts, changing political systems, shifting borders and, above all, many nations losing their sovereignty. This situation made the problem of domination and subordination a fundamental problem of history and collective memory.

For this reason, the second part of the article focuses on the postcolonial aspects of collective memory, and in particular on its relation to the events of 1956, 1968, and 1981 connected with the military reaction of the communist system to attempts at reform. These events, with all their historical differences, are caused by external violence (1956, 1968) or by internal violence caused by external pressure (1981). Central European societies also shape mutual relations through their attitudes to selected elements of the past. The author of the article depicts the inconspicuous aspects of shared internal and international memory by means of an analysis of four aspects: resentment, unremembering, historical politics and aesthetisation.

An analysis of the events that took place in 1956, 1968, and 1981 in the context of these four aspects of postcolonial memory reveals the fragile (moderately strong) existence of common areas. These areas are dominated by non-memory and separate memory, which deform historical realities. This proves that it is difficult for Central European societies to move beyond slogans and general declarations. True shared memory is the task for the future.

**Keywords:** Central Europe; 1956; 1968; 1981; common memory; separate memory; non-memory; postcolonial theory; resentment; retrieval memory; historical policy; aesthetisation

## | About the Author

**Bogusław Bakula** is Professor in the Institute of Polish Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Polish and Slavonic philologist. He deals with post-colonial criticism, among other academic interests. Published work: *Skrzydło Dedala. Szkice, rozmowy o poezji i kulturze ukraińskiej lat 50.–90. XX wieku*. Poznań: WiS, 1999; *Historia i komparatystyka. Szkice o literaturze i kulturze Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XX wieku*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo „Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne”, 2000; *Eine parallele Welt. Beiträge zur unabhängigen Kultur in Polen 1976–1989*. Bielefeld: Societas Pars Mundi Publishing, 2018; *Nie zależności. Przypadki literatury i kultury poza cenzurą 1976–1989*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo „Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne”, 2020.

Edited: *Slovník polských spisovatelů*. Praha: Libri, 2000; *Transformacja w kulturze i literaturze polskiej 1989–2004*. Poznań: Bonami, 2007; *Drogi do wolności w kulturze Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej 1956–2006*. Poznań: KdE, 2007; *Comparisons and Texts. Essays on Literature and Culture of Central-Eastern Europe*. Poznań: Bonami, 2015; *Dyskurs postkolonialny we współczesnej literaturze i kulturze Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej*. Poznań: Bonami, 2015.

E-mail: bakula.boguslaw@gmail.com

TAMÁS KISANTAL  
Pécsi Tudományegyetem

## Beyond the Battlefields of Memory: Historical Traumas and Hungarian Literature

The aim of this essay is to outline some strategies of representing the past in Hungarian narrative fiction after the 2000s. My basic premise is that some tendencies of Hungarian literature can be described as forms of memory or, more precisely, as methods or strategies that both represent and shape the collective memory of society. In the following, I focus only on those trends, tendencies and authors representing the rich texture of contemporary Hungarian literature that seem to be important from this memory-centered viewpoint.

At first, I will distinguish two versions of recent attitudes to the past or more closely to some significant historical events of the twentieth century in Hungary. These approaches can be described with terms developed by Michael Rothberg (2009), who has distinguished two possible forms of remembering and representing traumatic events of the recent past, calling them competitive and multidirectional memory. While the first interprets the act of remembering and the ground of collective memory as a kind of battlefield where some type of remembrances and some kind of past events need to be highlighted and others to be repressed, the second understands the various traumatic events as a kind of network in which the memories of some happenings do not repress others but help to shape appropriate remembrance strategies to them. I will argue that these types of memory have some political implications, and certain literary forms and strategies can be connected closely to these political viewpoints. Finally, I will analyze some narrative and thematic aspects of literary works pre-

senting certain traumatic events of the twentieth century. After the postmodern metafictional trend, a significant wave of new realism appeared in Hungarian literature in the past two decades. One can understand better the cultural and political causes and consequences of this “realist turn” by analyzing different strategies of remembering the past in contemporary literature.

### 1. Collective Remembrance in Hungary After 1989

The history of Hungarian collective remembrance appears to be a battle of interpretations of traumatic historical events of the twentieth century. I use the term ‘traumatic event’ in the sense of Jeffrey C. Alexander’s model of socially constructed trauma emphasizing that these events are not a priori traumatic but are fashioned and interpreted by a given society as significant, shocking, and disastrous. Thus, constructing a cultural trauma is a significant act of collective self-understanding, since a society creates a special attitude to the given historical event by which it interprets its present situation. According to Alexander,

[e]vents are one thing; representations of these events are quite another. Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of collectivity’s sense of its own identity. Collective actors ‘decide’ to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go. (Alexander 15)

Consequently, traumatic events are shaped by collective remembering, and certain cultural factors, especially art and literature, have a distinguished role in constructing them.

The historical events in Hungarian collective memory that can be called traumatic in this sense include the following: the peace treaty of Trianon in 1920, when the Hungarian state, defeated in WWI, lost the two thirds of its historical territories; the Hungarian Holocaust in which about six hundred thousand Hungarian Jews and gypsies were executed; the occupation of the state by the Soviet Army in 1945; the communist dictatorship; and the suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956. Of course, memories of these events labeled traumatic have been constructed in various ways, but all of them were more or less suppressed during state socialism.<sup>1</sup> After the regime change in 1989,

1 Some recent historians started to challenge the “myth of silence” of Holocaust discourse in the socialist period, emphasizing that instead of the total suppression



the modes of remembrance of these events were conditioned by political attitudes and deeply politicized interpretations of the Hungarian history. In general, one can distinguish two basic directions dealing with traumatic events that are considered symbolic. The first, a mostly right-wing narrative placed Trianon in the focus of Hungarian history which was understood as a victim story of a “glorious nation” that was mortally wounded, firstly by Western European states who decided to truncate the body of the country and later by a Sovietized regime that repressed and terrorized Hungarian people (see Feischmidt 2014; Kovács 2015). Such nationalist interpretations of Hungarian history usually did not include the Hungarian Holocaust as a traumatic event, or if they did then its role in the metanarrative was subordinate and negligible. The second, leftist or liberal type of narrative represented twentieth Hungarian history as a story of victims and perpetrators as well, but it focused mostly on the Holocaust and the atrocities of a socialist regime. The importance of Trianon was less stressed in this narrative, mostly because its commemorative practices and symbols were monopolized by the first, right-wing strategy of remembrance. The memory of the socialist period became significant for both directions but with a different level of significance. While the first, right-wing narrative underlined primarily the foreign suppression of the nation, the second focused basically on the atrocities against human rights and freedom.

It should be emphasized that these two strategies function here mostly as ideal types, since their history and discursive operations are much more complex. But in general, the strategies of collective memory in Hungarian discourse after 1989 can be considered as characteristically competitive. The competitive memory, as Rothberg pointed out, functions as a kind of zero-sum game where different memorial communities build up their own identity by marking some past events as substantial, and by emphasizing the significance of remembering *these* events. As he stressed:

Fundamental the conception of competitive memory is a notion of the public sphere as a pre-given, limited space in which already-established groups engage in a life-and-death struggle.... As I struggle to achieve recognition of *my* memories and *my* identity, I necessarily exclude the memories and identities of others. (Rothberg 2009: 5)

certain patterns of interpretation and representation were used in connection with the Holocaust. See in more details the essays by Tamás Scheibner, Máté Zombory, Richard B. Esbnehade, Tímea Jablonczay, and Balázs Varga in *Múltunk*, 15. (2019).

In other words, competitive memory needs to identify some events as exclusive and thus other events that might be similarly significant for a different group are overshadowed. This strategy often focus on questions like “why does one represent or commemorate the Holocaust, and why not other atrocities, which, according to this opinion, are fundamentally underrepresented?” Such a mindset treats acts of commemorating the Holocaust equivalent to rendering other traumatic events into oblivion (e.g. Trianon or the mass murders of communism).

Competitive memory with its (in Bakhtin’s terms) monological and explicitly political attitude cannot be effectively served by literary representations that are multilayered and complex. It does not mean that certain literary works would have *a priori* competitive or monological character. Rather, this competition-based memory politics has a kind of interpretative attitude that helps to select its authors, works and literary canon, read them in monological ways and exclude other possible understandings of the texts and the past in general. In Hungary, the current right-wing literary canon has been transformed radically in the last two decades. After the 2000s, it came to highlight authors from the 1930s and 1940s instead of contemporary writers or authors from the recent past. Writers like Albert Wass, József Nyírő or Cécile Tormay have been interpreted as representing a romanticized vision of a unified country and nation before the Trianon peace treaty or a nostalgic view of the lost unity and greatness. The literary significance of these authors is varied. They were banned in the socialist period mostly due to their nationalist (or sometimes anti-Semitic or proto-fascist) views, but their importance has gradually grown mostly because one can easily connect to their works a nostalgic view on the nation’s past greatness, which was destroyed by the division of the state after the Trianon treaty. This strategy of memory can be described with Svetlana Boym’s term as retroactive nostalgia that “does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition,” and its main aim is “a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home” (Boym 2001, xviii). Thus, memory strategies supported by the nostalgic literary canon of this discourse depict the Hungarian history in twentieth century as a kind of “paradise lost”-story. However, some traumatic events are not compatible with this narrative, especially the Hungarian Holocaust in which citizens of the nation were deported by other Hungarian citizens. Consequently, these events are necessarily regarded as competitors and potential opponents of their “adequate” strategy of memory.

The aim of this very brief (and unavoidably simplified) survey was to show the background from which another form of memory, represented by contemporary literature, crystallized. However, an analysis of recent trends in literature

with stakes in memory politics requires a glance at the literary representation of history before the millennium in Hungary.

## 2. From Text to Context, or New Directions of the Hungarian Historical Fiction After 2000

The historical fiction in Hungarian literature regained currency in the 1990s. It has been regarded by critics as a second wave of the so-called “prose turn” (*prózafordulat*) of Hungarian fiction, a trend that emerged in the 1970s and was linked predominantly to the influential writer, Péter Esterházy. According to the critical consensus, this turn, associated with the emergence of a supposed Hungarian postmodernism, renewed the Hungarian fiction by keeping distance of the “real” or “historical” world and challenging such concepts (see Kulcsár Szabó 1993). Emphasizing the language oriented, intertextual and self-centered character of postmodernism was a political act in itself in the 1980s, when official Marxist literary criticism favored realism over any other approach. The historical fiction in the 1990s—represented mostly by the second generation of Hungarian postmodernism (László Márton, László Darvasi, János Háy, Zsolt Láng)—can be compared with the so-called ‘historiographical metafiction’ of Western literature (see Hutcheon 1988). These writers hardly ever represented twentieth century events, but usually depicted the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in a manner reminiscent of nineteenth century Hungarian classic historical novels. This afforded them better opportunities to reflect the textual and linguistically conditioned character of historical knowledge.

There were two significant literary events in the early 2000s that can be considered as symbolic from our viewpoint. Both were connected to the traumatic historical events of twentieth-century Hungarian history. Péter Esterházy’s *Javított kiadás (Corrected Version)* (2002) was often considered as a continuation of his 2001 magnum opus, *Harmonia caelestis (Celestial Harmonies)*. This latter novel is arguably a culminating (or end-)point of Hungarian postmodern fiction that surveys centuries of Hungarian history and the narrator’s personal family story with a multiplied figure of a metaphorical “father” in the center. *Corrected Version*, in contrast, focuses on more personal stories of the author/narrator. When the writer Esterházy had been working on the *Celestial Harmonies* and did research in archives on his family, he realized that his (real) father was a secret agent and informer in the socialist period. Thus, the second novel connects personal traumas to historical ones and introduces to the Hungarian cultural discourse an important problem of the fathers’ generation involvement in the socialist dictatorship. The same year *Corrected Version* appeared, Imre

Kertész won the Nobel Prize. His masterpiece *Sorstalanság* (*Fateless*) (1975) represented the Holocaust from a viewpoint of a teenage boy. Although Kertész's work had already been known by literary critics, the wider public became acquainted with them only after the prize. Both events received great attention by the press and contributed to the start of a wider public debate on chapters in the recent past of Hungary that were by many regarded as uncomfortable. Such debates, however, relatively quickly had to face an abrupt end, as the earlier mentioned competitive character of Hungarian collective memory polarized sides and prevented society-wide reflection. The competitive memory was set to work on both political sides, even though there was a difference of degrees. For example, winning the Noble Prize created a scandal on the far-right, and politicians and publicists emphasized that there were much more important topics and traumas of Hungarian history than the Holocaust. In the leftist and liberal press, a smaller scale dispute emerged that also presented traits of competitive memory: when Kertész stated that his novel metaphorically reflects state socialism as much as Nazism and hinted at the role of ordinary people in dictatorships, some critics raised their voice against such a view and considered the Holocaust-centered reading as the sole adequate opinion (see also Royer 2017, 322–327).

One may consider these events as symptoms of a literary and social process in which the cultural function of literature and the stake of representation of some historical events of recent past increased. After the early 2000s, more and more novels were published in Hungary on traumatic events in history or on some longer processes of the recent past. I would highlight two significant directions in fiction here without any claim for exclusivity: two trends that are interlinked with each other.

First, one can single out a series of literary works that present traumatic events of Hungarian history, whose memory was suppressed or silenced in earlier periods. Even though such sensitive issues as the Hungarian role in the history of the Holocaust, the historical dimensions of the 1940s, or the role of ordinary people in Nazi and communist dictatorships have occasionally been on the agenda in the public sphere in the past decades, these disputes took place rarely and were scattered. In Hungary, *Historikerstreit*-type exchanges were not held, instead, simplified narratives and explanations dominated public discourse, including museum spaces or memorials. This simplification has worked on two levels. Firstly, one of the main strategies has been to create a more or less unified narrative of victimization, where both the Holocaust and the socialist period were narrated as tragic stories of the nation conquered by an alien power. A remarkable example of this tendency is the officially erected

monument of the German occupation (2014), the iconography of which refers directly to this kind of victim narrative: the nation symbolized by an angel figure is attacked by an eagle, the allegorical representation of the Nazi Germany (see also Horváth 2014). The other tendency, linked closely to the first, is also a unifying strategy that emphasizes the similarity of the Nazi and the socialist periods from a simplified interpretation of totalitarianism. It is represented by the conception of the Budapest House of Terror that declared itself a museum of the Nazi and the communist regimes' victims, but it is hardly more than a spectacular, multimedial representation of the continuity and similarity of two dictatorships (see also Apor 2014). However, one can notice that these two strategies are means to the aim of "competitive victimization" (Rothberg 2009: 313), since they emphasize the unified character of the regimes and usually represent the Holocaust as a relatively short stage of a collective passion story. Sometimes the contemporary governmental strategy to define the literary canon serves also this goal. The digital legacy of Imre Kertész, for instance, was acquired by an institute directed by the outspokenly pro-government historian, Mária Schmidt, who also serves as the manager of the House of Terror. The officially propagated interpretation of Kertész's oeuvre aims to monopolize the memory of the author and legitimize the regime's conception of totalitarianism by the writer's authority.

Given such aspirations, a closing public sphere and increasing political pressure on the press, it seems that literature might regain a significant role in addressing complicated or traumatic historical issues. A common feature of new literary works that choose their topic from this realm is that they emphasize not a collective, social or class-oriented experience like classic historical or realist novels, but concentrate on the personal level and try to present the individual situations and subjective viewpoints of the past. One can connect this strategy to some relatively new historiographical directions which appeared in Hungarian historical discipline after the 1990s, such as oral history and microhistory. No coincidence that some of the authors in the 2000s came from social sciences. For example, Pál Závada is a sociologist and his novels almost systematically present some important but basically underrepresented or suppressed periods and events of Hungarian history. His books, including *Idegen testünk (Our Foreign Body)* (2008) and *Természetes fény (Natural Light)* (2014), show the personal experiences of ordinary people from different cultural, social and racial background before, during and after the Second World War by voices of multiplied narrators. Another book, *Egy piaci nap (A Market Day)* (2016), narrates a relatively forgotten, shameful event of Hungarian history, an anti-Jewish pogrom that occurred in a Hungarian large-village, Kunmadaras

in May 1946. Judit Kovács came from social sciences as well, she is actually an oral historian, and her novels, *Megtagadva (Denied)* (2012), *Elszakítva (Detached)* (2015), and *Hazátlanok (Homelesses)* (2019), were crystallized from personal accounts of women who actually lived through similar tragic events after the war.<sup>2</sup> A widely discussed novel with captivating imagery and scenes was *Orgia (Orgy)* (2016) by Gábor Zoltán; it represented one of the most brutal months of Hungarian history: the period when the Hungarian Nazis, the Arrow Cross Party, took power. The story is set in Budapest at the end of December 1944, and it narrates how ordinary people become implicated in the most cruel rapes, tortures and massacres. The novel got mixed reviews mostly due to its graphic violence that, according to some critics, transformed the actual historical situation into a horror-like dance macabre but the *Orgy* undoubtedly initiates an important debate about an underrepresented topic.

The increasing interest in everyday life under dictatorship rule is a clear trend in recent Hungarian fiction. One of the most important and internationally successful authors of the middle generation, the Târgu Mureş-born György Dragomán's two novels, *A fehér király (The White King)* (2005) and *Máglya (The Bone Fire)* (2014), presents the Romanian communist period from the viewpoints of child protagonists. The novels describe not only the actual historical situations (the first is about the 1980s and the second concentrates on the aftermath of the Romanian revolution), but represent a general, metaphorical state of how to grow up in a dictatorship or, more universally, in a world that is fundamentally based on violence and oppression. Krisztina Tóth's novel the *Akvárium (Aquarium)* (2013) similarly represents a plethora of personal life stories and viewpoints and narrates daily experiences of Hungarian socialism through the story of a family, with the shadow of Holocaust in the distant background. A larger scale family story is Imre Oravecz's trilogy *A rög gyermekei (Children of the Clod)* (2007–2018) that follows and continues the earlier mentioned sociographic tradition telling the story of a peasant family from the middle of the nineteenth century to 1956.

The novels of Andrea Tompa, *Fejtől s lábtól: Kettő orvos Erdélyben (From Head and from Leg: Two Doctors in Transylvania)* (2013) and *Omerta: Hallgatások könyve (Omerta: Book of Silences)* (2017), depict the life of the Transylvanian Hungarian minorities after Trianon, and deserve special mention, for these are interesting attempts at representing the traumatic event of Trianon

2 It is important to mention that there is a long tradition of sociographic and anthropological semi-literary accounts of peasants and workers that started in 1930s and relived in 1970s. Závada can be connected primarily to this tradition.

without the earlier mentioned idealizing narrative strategies. *From Head and from Leg* is about the period between the two world wars from the viewpoints of two narrators, a male and female physician whose personal lives are closely connected to the history of Hungary and Romania. The other novel, *Omerta*, tells the history of Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca in the 1950s by four narrators with different social statuses and gender positions—a Szekler peasant woman, an intellectual man, a middle-class bourgeois woman, and a nun. Through their voices a variety of possibilities emerge by which Hungarian minorities in Romania could live during a communist dictatorship. Individual responses to great political events and state oppression are not represented as part of any wide-scale historical perspective or grandiose allegory; instead, the choices and hardships of minority persons are handled on a personal level.

### 3. Conclusion: Towards a Multidirectional Conception of Memory

No doubt, the novels mentioned above are just a few examples reflecting my personal taste in the absence of critical consensus, but it still allows us to draw two basic conclusions that I think remain valid for the entire contemporary Hungarian literary culture. Firstly, it seems that after the postmodernist turn of the late-twentieth century, Hungarian literature has been turning towards a direction that favors more mimetic narrative techniques and documentary historicism. Also, literary works increasingly have social stakes. Some critics call this a realist turn but, according to them, this “realism” means not a simple return to the “old,” nineteenth style methods of representation but a style that incorporates and reflects experiences of postmodernism, minimalism and literary trends of the recent past with strong social emphases (see Takáts 2019). This tendency also manifests itself in another important literary topic or direction that represents the outcasts and the destitute of our society, people whose voices were repressed till now. The authors of this trend (Szilárd Borbély, Tibor Noé Kiss, László Szilasi, Edina Szvoren, etc.) followed partly the sociographic movement of Hungarian literature, and their novels sometimes depict some historical traumas as well. The most spectacular example is Szilárd Borbély’s very influential novel, the *Nincstelenek (The Dispossessed)* (2013), concentrating on the life of some inhabitants in a poor Hungarian village, and, through the voice of a child narrator, the question of Jewishness becomes one of the most important problems. Therefore, narrating traumatic historical events can join the tendency of representing poor people who were hardly present in recent literature and in public discourse. Thus, this post-postmodern new realism has a moral ambition to discuss some barely disputed questions of society.



We have seen that competitive memory defines public discourse, and various literary trends are subverting it. These tendencies in contemporary Hungarian fiction could be linked to another strategy of memory suggested by Rothberg: multidirectional memory. This is a model of collective memory of traumatic events that is not necessarily competitive, that considers diverse remembrances of different groups not as a “zero-sum game”-type battle but as a network where the memory of one event can reinforce other ones, creating a dialogue among these groups and memories. In the Hungarian literary field the multidirectional conception of memory can operate on thematic and narrative levels as well. These novels represent some traumatic events and aspects of the past from Trianon through the Holocaust to the socialist period with a strong moral commitment attached to their new realist style. By dialogical representation of some personal views of the past, these works can challenge some generally established or officially asserted preconceptions (e.g. sharp lines can separate the victims, perpetrators and bystanders) and induce wider social debates about these historical occurrences. Undoubtedly, these social debates are only partial now, at best, and there is almost no dialogue between what we may call representatives of competitive and multidirectional memories. The fact that more and more literary works perform the task of starting significant historical and cultural debates in Hungary, however, renders such dialogue harder to avoid day-by-day.

## | References

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. *Trauma. A Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.
- Apor, Péter. “An Epistemology of the Spectacle? Arcane Knowledge, Memory and Evidence in the Budapest House of Terror.” *Rethinking History* 18 (2014): 328–344.
- Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
- Feischmidt, Margit. “Populáris emlékezetpolitikák és az újnacionalizmus: a Trianon-kultusz Magyarországon.” (Popular Memory Policies and the New Nationalism: the Cult of Trianon in Hungary.) Ed. Margit Feischmidt. *Nemzet a mindennapokban: az újnacionalizmus populáris kultúrája*. Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2014. 51–81.
- Horváth, Sándor. “Goodbye Historikerstreit, Hello Budapest City of Angels; The Debate about the Monument to the German Occupation.” *Cultures of History Forum*, <https://doi.org/10.25626/0037>. Accessed 4 December 2015.



- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*. London and New York, Routledge, 1988.
- Kovács, Éva. "Trianon, avagy a 'traumatikus fordulat' a magyar történetírásban." (Trianon, or the 'Traumatic Turn' in Hungarian Historiography). *Korall* 59 (2015): 82–107.
- Kulcsár Szabó, Ernő. *A Magyar irodalom története 1945–1991. (The History of Hungarian Literature 1945–1991.)* Budapest: Akadémiai, 1993.
- Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonialization*. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2009.
- Royer, Clara. *Imre Kertész: "L'histoire de mes morts."* Arles: Actes Sud, 2017.
- Takáts, József. "Az inga visszaleng – Elbeszélő próza a kétezres években." (The Pendulum Swings Back: Narratives After Millenium). *Helikon* 59 (2018): 336–347.

## | Abstrakt

TAMÁS KISANTAL

### Poza pobjowiskami pamięci. Historyczne traumy i literatura węgierska

Współczesną węgierską pamięć zbiorową można opisać jako pole interpretacyjne kilku traumatycznych wydarzeń historycznych XX w. Artykuł ma na celu wskazanie ważnych tendencji w reprezentacji literackiej tych wydarzeń w nowym tysiącleciu. Na początku autor szkicuje konteksty społeczne i polityczne utworów literackich. Następnie przedstawia współczesną kulturę węgierską jako przeciwieństwo dwóch strategii pamięci, posługując się terminologią Michaela Rothberga – rywalizacyjnej i wielokierunkowej. Takie podejście do przeszłości wiąże się z różnymi implikacjami ideologicznymi, jak również kanonami literackimi. Wreszcie, wraz ze wskazaniem wybranych najnowszych powieści, autor pokazuje kilka sposobów reprezentacji wielokierunkowego podejścia do przeszłości w węgierskiej literackiej prozie nowego tysiąclecia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pamięć kolektywna; wydarzenia traumatyczne; pamięć rywalizująca i wielokierunkowa; współczesna proza historyczna; nowy realizm

**| Abstract**

TAMÁS KISANTAL

**Beyond the Battlefields of Memory: Historical Traumas and Hungarian Literature**

One can describe the contemporary Hungarian collective memory as an interpretational field of some traumatic historical events of the twentieth century. The essay aims to sketch some important tendencies of the literary representation of these events after the millennium. At first, it outlines the wider social and political contexts of these literary works. Secondly, it models the current Hungarian cultural field as an opposition between two strategies of memory labeling them in Michael Rothberg's terminology as competitive and multidirectional ones. These approaches to the past are also associated with different ideological implications and literary canons. Finally, with a brief overview of some recent novels, the essay demonstrates some pathways of representing multidirectional attitudes to the past in the Hungarian literary fiction of the 2000s.

**Keywords:** collective memory; traumatic events; competitive and multidirectional memory; contemporary historical fiction; new realism

**| About the Author**

**Tamás Kisantal** is an associate professor at the University of Pécs, Institute of Hungarian Language and Literature, Hungary. His main fields include narrative problems of historiography, contemporary theories of history, and literary representation of the Holocaust. He is an author of three books, more than 150 essays and reviews, and editor of seven volumes. His next monograph on representational strategies of the Holocaust in the postwar Hungarian literary discourse will be published soon. E-mail: [kisantal.tamas@pte.hu](mailto:kisantal.tamas@pte.hu)

ALENA ŠIDÁKOVÁ FIALOVÁ  
Akademie věd České republiky

## Returning to the Past: The Germans as a Historical Trauma in Contemporary Czech Prose<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary Czech literature, i.e. output since the start of the new millennium, has only changed slowly since the 1989 watershed and the 1990s: debts have slowly been repayed, as books that were prohibited under the Communists have finally been published, prose works on private human dramas and relationship problems have also been published, as have the prominent older and younger generation authors with distinctive poetics (Jáchym Topol, Miloš Urban, Ludvík Vaculík, Ivan Klíma and the like). Although we have seen a boom in bizarre ludic postmodern prose works, these postmodern elements have come to be unsurprising in individual literary styles. The retreat from stories of unbridled fantasy has opened up a greater space for works focusing on specific times and places.

Contemporary Czech Literature has also slowly begun to focus on neighbours both near and far. A minority of work of this kind focused on the quest for oneself within Europe, primarily Western Europe, in which the characters

1 This study has resulted from the Academic Prize awarded to Pavel Janoušek by the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and from long-term support for conceptual development of a research institution; registration number 68378068.

This work required usage of Czech Literary Bibliography research infrastructure resources (<http://clb.ucl.cas.cz>).

deal with more or less the same issues in similarly civilized environments. A much stronger trend focused on the exotic, which had previously remained distinct. Hence, Petra Hůlová achieved great popularity (in her Mongolian family saga *Paměť mojí babičce* (*All This Belongs to Me*) (2002), as did *Cesty na Sibiř* (*Journeys to Siberia*) (2008) by Martin Ryšavý, Hana Androniková's novel *Nebe nemá dno* (*Heaven Has no Floor*) (2010) with its quest for a medicine and the meaning of life in the primeval forests of South America, and Josef Pánek's "Indian" novella *Láska v době globálních klimatických změn* (*Love in the Time of Global Climatic Change*) (2017).

Reflections of Czech prose on the last decade or two indicate that the civilized West has its attractions for Czech writers, but not as much as the exotic East and South, though they do not find our close neighbours in Central Europe to be such an attractive topic.<sup>2</sup> In line with older traditions, Czech literature more or less fails to reflect on the issues surrounding Poland, Hungary or the nearest neighbour Slovakia—and their Central European links. This is not only due to Czech society's (self)imposed isolation (or its simple absorption in its own problems), which has always looked up more to the West and the South, particularly to French culture; it is particularly due to the age-old intense confrontation with the German population. On the other hand, the subject of the Germans and their crucial influence on the history of Czechoslovakia has very often been present, its attraction being constant if not actually trending upwards since the beginning of the new millennium.

Central Europe has never been clearly defined, particularly in the case of its boundaries and areas of transition, whereas the states that formed what used to be the Austro-Hungarian Empire are more or less automatically included, and Germany is often given all sorts of positions inside and outside it. However, it is not only Czech literature that tells us that the symbolic "heart" of Europe is fatefully tied to the Germans, Germany and its history-creating political role in the twentieth century.

2 On the other hand, specialist literature has repeatedly broached the subject of Central Europe in recent years: in addition to contemporary historians and politologists literary historians and theorists have also dealt with this subject: important developments include the publication of the anthology *V kleštích dějin. Střední Evropa jako pojem a problém* (*In the Pincers of History: Central Europe as a Concept and a Problem*) (2009), compiled by Jiří Trávníček, which summarizes the most important texts dealing at the cultural and political level with the concept of Central Europe, as well as a study by Martin C. Putna published in *Obrazy z kulturních dějin Střední Evropy* (*Images from the Cultural History of Central Europe*) (2018).

The subject of Germany came to be a prime element in the most prominent stream of Czech prose to emerge during the new millennium, i.e. those works focusing thematically on contemporary history. Works of this kind achieved broad popularity as well as positive critical acclaim and the recognition of the experts. They offered a strong, often painfully reflected plot full of fateful twists and painful reflection, a hero who has to bear real-life hardships and deal with such serious ethical issues as guilt, punishment, forgiveness and the like. The attraction of these plots for readers was bolstered not only by the factography of historical events and the inspiration of real-life figures and their actions, but also by a story revealing the fictional family secrets of the protagonists, primarily brought about by the cruelty of impersonal history and moral dilemmas translated into family relations, as well as romantic and parental twists and turns over several generations. All of this is intensified by the fact that the subject of macrohistory and its impact on the microworld of the family constantly resonated with the passed-down family memories of a large proportion of Czech readers, in spite of the distance in time from the events depicted.

Works of this kind had been coming out sporadically in the 1990s, but it was only the advent of the new millennium (associated inter alia with natural generational replacement of the writers and the passage of time since the fall of the Communist regime) that brought about a quantitative leap. This was closely associated with society reflecting on the legacy left behind by the twentieth century, which made itself felt in the literary output, thanks in particular to prestigious literary prizes awarded to such books (the State Award for Literature, Magnesia litera and Book of the Year in a *Lidové noviny* pre-Christmas poll), extensive literary-critical reflections and the subsequent drama and film adaptations of works on this subject.<sup>3</sup>

3 The fact that the subject of traumatic (primarily) wartime and immediately postwar Czech history was a much broader social phenomenon is confirmed by other artistic output: film works in particular were made in close association with contemporary prose works. Květa Legátová's *Želary* and in particular her *Jozova Hanule* (*Joza's Hanule*) were taken as the basis for the epic film *Želary* (2003) by Ondřej Trojan set during the German occupation, *Habermannův mlýn* (*Habermann's Mill*) (2010) by Juraj Herz on the violence and lawlessness at the end of the war was based on a book by Josef Urban published in 2001. The filmscript for *Krev zmizelého* (*Blood of the Disappeared*, directed by Milan Cieslar, 2005), dealt with wartime and postwar traumas, again reflecting the cruelty of Czech-German relations. It was published the following year as a novel by Vladimír Körner. The subject of Germanness and old injustices from the end of the war has also emerged in Jaroslav Rudiš's fiction, which served as the ba-

### 1. Changing Reflections of the German Issue and Historical Traumas

The Second World War, the postwar expulsion of the Germans, the Communist takeover and their most brutal period during the 1950s, i.e. the events in which most of the violence, cruelty, traumas and injustices was concentrated, have traditionally been seen as the fateful milestones in twentieth century Czech and Czechoslovak history, while their literary depiction at various times has involved narrative schemes and methods of portraying often stereotypical literary figures that were popular at the time.

Socialist realism and the Communist interpretation of history as presented not only by the history textbooks of the time but also by the literature and film of the era explained the national and ultimately the political dimension of the Czech-German conflict in unambiguous terms: this exposition attributed the role of culprits to the Germans, who fully deserved their fate and postwar expulsion from the country. This expulsion was the natural and logical outcome of political and ideological changes in society, even though it was not dealt with in any greater detail. The subsequent colonization of the border areas was supposed to have completed these changes in society, as the Sudetenland turned into the place where the historical injustice was expiated, and which together with its new population awaiting the birth of a new social order. Nationality here was not problematized in any way, and the polarization of the victor, i.e. the honest working Czech versus the defeated, i.e. the perfidious Nazi German, was not complicated and served to strengthen national self-confidence and the political line that had just been laid down.

Post-1989 literary output came out strongly against this paradigm, as characterized by efforts to disrupt such schemas; for example, one of the first to do so was a novel by Zdeněk Šmíd entitled *Cejch (Brand)*, which reassessed and at the same time de-tabooized the hushed-up events of Czechoslovak history.

The prose work of the new millennium often began to create opposing schemas on the subject of wartime and postwar history. Negative Communist characters, often with a collaborationist past, repeatedly made appearances, as did Germans who, despite the prevailing Nazism, retained their humanity and morality. The depiction of the torture and suffering endured by the Czech population was thus superseded by an image of the Germans' suffering.

Whereas at the beginning of the period under review, i.e. in the first few years of the new millennium, works came out that more prominently reflected the early period of Communist Czechoslovakia, specifically the political repres-

sis for films by David Ondříček (*Grandhotel*, 2006) and Tomáš Luňák (*Alois Nebel*, 2011), while 2011 saw the production of *Lidice*, a film directed by Petr Nikolaev.

sions, imprisonments and collectivization, as well as the “disorderly” expulsion of the Germans, with the emphasis on the cruelty committed on the Germans by the Czechs, in the last decade attention has shifted rather more frequently to the Second World War and the Second Republic, the Munich trauma and, in particular, the fate of the border areas and their inhabitants. The Holocaust consistently emerges as a subject, appearing most frequently as part of a broadly branching multigenerational story within a family saga, as we shall subsequently point out in detail.

Prose works dealing with modern history, the issue of the Germans and Germany, and the advent of Communism can be characterized generally and classified by their genre and narrative method: at one pole we can place works aiming to narrate an actual life and to present a personal witness and the methods used by an individual to cope with his/her own existence in the forced circumstances of the ruling totalitarian regime. Authors most frequently published such works in diary or memoir form. After 2000 we encounter more frequently “memoiromania,” a work situated on the boundary between fiction and documentary, dealing with both personal and historical fact from a distinctly reflective standpoint (particularly in works by the older generation of authors such as Ivan Klíma, Pavel Kohout and Ota Filip). However, the prose works that we shall deal with in the following review, which make up most of the output on this subject, are actually located at the opposite pole, where we can place social and social-historical novels, whose protagonists are normally characters from life, whose main function is to demonstrate the historical traumas and the confrontations between micro- and macro-history. These are typified by the family chronicle genre and the social novel, often with detective elements.

As regards the artistic value and demands on the readers, on an axis from lowbrow popular genres to highbrow elite literature, we can most frequently categorize these works somewhere in the middle, in the “literary mainstream.” It is not by chance that several of them are among the most commercially successful bestsellers (typically books by female authors, who combine historical subjects with family histories, such as Kateřina Tučková and Alena Mornštajnová).

Only a few stories of personal/textbook history have utilized the postmodern legacy, making use of such elements as the unreliable narrator, bizarre and fantastic motifs, original intertextual allusions and the like (Pavel Brycz, Jáchym Topol). The great majority of authors who reflect on modern Czech history recognize the traditional realist story format, spiced up at most by merging time levels, retrospective passages and perhaps some anticipatory insertions by the personal narrator who knows how “everything ended up,” as well as repeated leaps in time to keep the reader in suspense.

## 2. Nationality as a Central European Issue

The basic question of prose works in which the protagonists remark upon the fact that they are from Central Europe—a place formed by nations that throughout history have had to struggle for their independence and stand up against the great powers—is the issue of identification with a nationality (and thus state citizenship). Here, nationality involves a status which hitherto, in the politically quiescent years, did not appear to be essential, because along with the character of the particular individual, what was more important was to belong to a particular place. The traditional Czech-German confrontation is only reflected in fiction in connection with the aggravation of the situation following the arrival of Adolf Hitler and in particular the outbreak of the Second World War, i.e. at times of historical upheavals: it is then more important what an individual is formally and officially registered as, whether voluntarily or otherwise.

In Czech literature, this set of stories concerning the paradoxes behind private and public history, and the effects of the Second World War in particular on individual human fates, sees its beginnings and culmination in the works of Ota Filip from the 1960s and 1970s—*Cesta ke hřbitovu* (*Road to the Cemetery*) (1968) and *Nanebevstoupení Lojzka Lapáčka ze Slezské Ostravy* (*The Ascension of Lojzek Lapáček from Silesian Ostrava*) (1974–1975)—i.e. at the time the original Socialist Realist idea of the way Czech history was to be interpreted no longer held sway. This story of an ordinary person embroiled in the maelstrom of history through no fault of his own plays out characteristically in the border area between Czechoslovakia and Poland, which has always been one of the most socially and ethnically complex regions in the entire country.<sup>4</sup> However, the cohabitation of the Czechs and Silesians, Poles, Germans and Jews is forever disrupted by the Second World War; and the violence and murders, revenge and punishments do not impact the protagonists due to their actual deeds, but in accordance with the official political decisions and the official documents determining their nationality.

In contemporary literary prose that has aroused readers' and critics' interest and won prestigious literary awards, such history and national identifications passed down through the generations mould the Ukrainian-German-Czech

4 A similar position on the border of several Central European states and cultures was also chosen by Petr Čichoň as the setting for his *Slezský román* (*Silesian Novel*) in 2011, although the subject of the Germans and Central Europe within the tumult of history recedes to the level of an attractive historical backdrop that only serves as a formal space for free storytelling, which was not received too well by the critics.



family in the State Prize for Literature winning novel by Pavel Brycz *Patriarchátu dávno zašlá sláva* (*The Long Lost Glory of the Patriarchy*) (2003). The male descendants seek their role in the family and the world at large, but their complex multiethnic origins doom them to wasted lives of suffering (“Roland had renounced the world, as he did not want to leave with the Germans or stay with the Czechs, and like a rabid dog struggling with its collar he struggled with his surname Berezinko, which his grandfather had brought with him from Ozer in Ukraine”; Brycz 49). German nationality also takes on fateful importance for a Jewish woman who comes back from a concentration camp in the novel *Peníze od Hitlera* (*Money from Hitler*) (2006)<sup>5</sup> by Radka Denemarková. Just because the chief protagonist is officially a German, she almost loses her life in liberated Czechoslovakia, in her native village inhabited by “ordinary people,” the unobtrusive citizenry in times of war but now cruel avengers. She devotes the last part of her life to an attempt to build a memorial to her murdered father and thus to erase this historic injustice, even though the novel’s conclusion shows that evidently it had all happened in a completely different way.

Bizarre, almost comical, complications are caused towards the end of the war in Germany and Bohemia by the unclear ethnicity of two friends, the chief protagonists of a novel by Josef Moník *Schweik it easy* (2011): these native sons of German-Czech Karlovy Vary/Carlsbad are officially Germans (according to the narrator “due to an unfortunate start, caused by his father, when he signed a Volkslist and became a German”; Moník 13), so they have to enlist and eventually end up in a POW camp, where, because of the similarity of their native Czech to Russian, they are selected for collaboration with the victorious Soviets. Hence, all their conduct is constantly confronted with misunderstandings and official directives that do not take into account the complexity and fragility of something as obvious (from a remote, non-Central European viewpoint) as nationality and state citizenship. Emancipation from the vexed question of nationality and citizenship in the eternally fluctuating and insecure area of Central Europe normally involves emigration to another continent, most frequently America, where such differences are erased.

Kateřina Tučková’s novel *Vyhnání Gerty Schnirch* (*The Expulsion of Gerta Schnirch*) (2009) was published to great acclaim: its protagonist is half-German by descent, but in her native Brno she feels herself to be more Czech after her beloved mother. At the end of the war, she is caught up in the disorderly expulsion of Germans from Brno and has to take part in the “death march” from Brno

5 English edition: *Money from Hitler*. Trans. Andrew Oakland. Toronto: Women’s Press, 2009.

to a village on the Czech-Austrian border, during which she witnesses violence and brutality committed primarily upon innocent German women and children. Although she is eventually permitted to stay in Czechoslovakia, she can never get rid of her stigma and status as a victim, remaining a passive figure until her old age (i.e. the present), accepting what fate and history have had in store for them. Here, hope is represented by her daughter, who gets involved in an organization that commemorates the forgotten injustices and endeavours to attain a Czech-German settlement, with an apology from the Czechs and forgiveness from the Germans. As in the case of Radka Denemarková's prose work, this is not just a matter of raising the visibility of long-past events, but of acknowledging Czech guilt and undermining certain stereotypes in the perception of the Czech past.<sup>6</sup>

Shifts in space and in nationality are also of decisive importance for the characters in Jakub Katalpa's novel *Němci* (*The Germans*): the chief protagonist, Reichsdeutsch Klára, goes off to teach in a Sudeten village, but in the disarray at the end of the war she finds herself without documentation, thus for a time ceasing to exist for the authorities and for "history at large." This release from the system subsequently enables her to save her newborn child (by giving him to a Czech family), whom she thereby ultimately loses, as Europe is subsequently divided by the Iron Curtain. The resultant trauma again envelops several generations, which goes to prove that this is still a real and painful subject despite the distance in time.

The search for old family secrets and a meditation on them by a member of the subsequent generation is also a key narrative line in the novels of writer Alena Mornštajnová, who has gained considerable popularity among the reading public in recent times. Popular elements from "women's reading" such as the motifs of love, betrayal, infidelity and passion, children born in and out of wedlock, fateful meetings and partings combine here with the traumas of war and the Communist state, both at the level of the storytelling, in the choice of motifs, figures and plot twists, and at the compositional level: the chapter introductions often provide a clear summary of the known textbook facts and their impact on the population, followed by a depiction of the individual characters' private sufferings. For example, the fifth chapter of her novel *Slepá mapa* (*Blind Map*) (2013), which is mostly set in the border region, where his-

6 In numerous literary critical responses, however, we find reservations towards the almost unnatural stereotyping, particularly of the title character, the contrasting vision of the world and the schematic reflection of the historical events, see e.g. Jiří Peňás: "Her Gerta in the novel never acquires any more convincing contours and remains more of an abstract symbol of fate, whom the author does not succeed in fleshing out" (Peňás 29).

tory has given individual fates a particularly good shuffle, begins with a lyrical depiction of the surroundings: “The woods in the hills surrounding the little town were just as dense and impenetrable, despite the efforts of the owners supplying timber to the local sawmill; the mountains were steep and mysterious, the stream was cold and sparkling, but in the air there hung a tension that did not augur well” (24).

Thereupon, the narrator presents a brief sketch of the situation during the First Republic: “People remembered the First World War very well, many forty-year-olds and fifty-year-olds had fought in it, while it had robbed others of their friends and those close to them, so that together they had lived through the difficult years of scarcity in the 1920s and 1930s, whose aftermath they had felt ever since, though at that time they were brought together by a common fear and by the hope of change. “But then suddenly it was as if the world had been enshrouded in a haze of circumspection, which when inhaled made it no longer important whether people were good or bad, but what was important was whether they were Czechs, Jews or Germans.” which is then dealt with for the rest of the chapter: “Even indifferent Alžběta, determined to be happy in life whatever might happen, could not fail to notice the weight coming down from the western mountains. Just like everything else, however, she refused to give it a single thought” (Mornštajnová 2013: 73).

Characteristically, the author has chosen those characters and places that clearly illustrate the historical twists and turns, ideally at a level that matches the anticipated reader’s average “school” knowledge of Czech history. Her story is thus set in a small Sudeten town in which the Czechs, Germans and Jews live side by side, but then suddenly they have to leave their homes, depending on which regime is in power. Hence, the narrator follows the fortunes of a poor seamstress, who works her way up through her own industriousness, but then loses her husband during an air raid and after the Communist putsch in 1948 the new ruling class takes over her well-established tailor’s salon. She also follows her sister, a Czech, who marries a German and so after the war prefers to leave her homeland, as she can guess what fate would await her; a resistance fighter, who after all the horrors he has lived through idealistically wants to build a new society in a new Socialist state, but is ultimately condemned as a traitor in a show trial; and a German, who answered the call of adventure and volunteered for the army and the front, where he came up against the harsh reality of the war; as well as another German, at first glance a decent one, who loses his mind when as a guard in a concentration camp he bears witness to, and is forced to participate in, bestial murders; as well as their other relatives and friends, as all of these characters are simultaneously interconnected by family, romantic and

marital ties, which do not so much give rise to the usual relationship conflicts as the cruel interventions of the higher spheres of “history with a capital H.”

It is hard to assess whether this was just a calculation made by the author as she attempted to extract some freshness from a topic that has already received ample literary treatment or an overall social shift, but it is interesting that just as in Mornštajnová’s latest and so far most successful novel, *Hana* (2017), *Blind Map* highlights the prewar and wartime events from a different standpoint to that of her previous work. The author no longer deals with the expulsion and the injustices committed by the Czechs on the Germans, but describes in detail the events of the late 1930s, i.e. the injustices committed by the Germans on the Czechs, which have hitherto only received minimal literary treatment. As an example, let us quote the beginning of the seventh chapter, which reflects the events following the Munich Agreement:

Over the last few days of October the worst forecasts came true. The mist hanging over the border area turned into darkness, which fell on the land to cast out the intruders from the little town for many long years. The alleged intruders were rather surprised and confused, because many of them had spent their whole lives in the mining town, as had their parents and grandparents, and considered it to be their home. (Mornštajnová 2013: 137)

The issue of the Sudetenland and the borderland in general also cropped up at the start of the new millennium in a group of smaller, more intimate prose works in which the original German inhabitants are present more in legends, recollections and the memory of a place that will now always be abandoned and empty, as it is being populated by people who have not integrated with the country. The Sudeten area, perceived as no man’s land, and its dark mysteries are reflected in the novel *Grandhotel* (2006) and the three-part comics entitled *Alois Nebel* (published as a collection, 2006) by Jaroslav Rudiš, the novel *Aussiger* (2004) and the novella *Anděl odešel* (*The Angel Has Gone*) (2008) by North Bohemian writer Martin Fibiger, *Poslední promítač ze Sudet* (*The Last Projectionist from the Sudetenland*) (2010) by Dalibor Funda, *Jizvy* (*Scars*) (2007) by Evita Naušová and *Cukrový klaun* (*Sugar Clown*) (2007) by Martin Sichinger. On the other hand a more humorous tone can be found in a collection of short stories about the inhabitants of a former German village entitled *Lesk a bída Čekání* (*The Splendour and Misery of Čekání*) (2001) by Zdeněk Šmíd.<sup>7</sup>

7 The Sudetenland and in particular three prose works dealing with this area (*Grandhotel* by Jaroslav Rudiš, *Money from Hitler* by Radka Denemarková, *Habermann’s Mill*

### 3. Jews, Germans and Central Europe

“No other part of the world has been so deeply affected by the influence of the Jewish genius. Foreigners everywhere yet at home everywhere too, the Jews were the primary cosmopolitan, integrating element in Central Europe during the twentieth century,” Milan Kundera wrote in his famous essay from the 1980s “A Kidnapped West,” thus highlighting one of the characteristic features of Central Europe.<sup>8</sup> The Holocaust, which from a modern historical perspective is a constant theme in postwar Czech literature, tells us more about the setting of Czechia within Central Europe than the (missing) reflections of our immediate neighbours. Much like the Germans, the Jews are also associated with the issue of national (or religious) identification, violent expulsions and thus the transformation of what was once a jointly inhabited space. Whereas Jewish secondary characters and references to their fate commonly appear in post-1989 prose work, only several large novels with a primary focus on the Holocaust have come out. Paradoxically, it is only here that we come across the thematization of the “East,” with reference to the Terezín transports, primarily to Nazi extermination camps. Everything that is even just allusively Central European here is again perceived through the prism of German activities and German influence in this area.

In 2001 Hana Androniková attracted attention with her family saga *Zvuk slunečních hodin* (*Sound of the Sundial*) with its story of characters whose fortunes form and interweave in prewar Czechoslovakia, India, wartime Terezín and postwar America. In 2006 Magdalena Platzová based her narrative in *Aaronův skok* (*Aaron's Leap*) on a depiction of the fortunes of two female protagonists from the 1920s to the 1940s, fatefully disrupted by one of their deaths in the Holocaust. This merges with the search for old family secrets by the granddaughter of one of them. This representative of the youngest, contemporary generation is here again the one who after all those years is finally going to uncover and understand them, and thus to let ancient guilt and traumas dissipate. In his novel *Sidra Noach* (2010), David Jan Novotný follows several male Jewish characters who meet in a Prague apartment during the great flood of 2002. Whatever they talk about, whatever they remember and however they assess it, they are always referring to the Holocaust as the pivotal event that has formed their view of the world, a fateful mark that can never be eluded.

by Josef Urban) were analysed in detail by Lenka Németh Vítová in her study “Odkrywanie na nowo ‘Kraju Sudeckiego’ w czeskiej literaturze po roku 1989.” (Re-discovering the Sudetenland in Czech Literature after 1989).

8 The text from 1983 was published several times in various languages and periodicals and is quoted here from Jiří Trávníček’s “Zrození střední Evropy z ducha ...” (278).

A family saga spanning several generations, but this time more focused on one particular fate, namely that of a Jewish girl who survived Terezín and Auschwitz (as well as a typhoid epidemic in the city of her birth during the 1950s, which killed almost all of her surviving family), was published in 2017 by the aforementioned Alena Mornštajnová under the title *Hana*. What moves the story along towards the tragic twists and turns in the plot is a combination of fateful coincidences (that stem from the women's feelings and emotions) and the interventions of "history with a capital H," political decisions and the inalterable family origins:

When four years later Elsa Helerová and her parents were staggering in front of the trench they had dug, which was already almost full of the bodies of those who had stood in that place before them, she closed her eyes firmly and thought that it was fate that had set this test for her. But it was Hana, who at the end of 1938 had changed fate, deciding she would do everything to put off her departure till as late as possible, for Hana had not done what her mother had asked of her. (Mornštajnová 2017: 161)

One special case outside all genre restrictions, contrasting with emotive and emotion-inducing stories of female protagonists, is the work of one of the most prominent authors over the last thirty years, Jáchym Topol. His image of the Terezín ghetto both in his earlier novel *Sestra* (Sister, 1993), and in the novella *Chladnou zemí* (*The Devil's Workshop*) (2009)<sup>9</sup> does not fit into traditional story formats, but becomes more of a bizarre human tragic-comedy, a breakneck postmodern tour around the incomprehensibility of human actions and history. Exceptionally, *The Devil's Workshop* has a setting that is not Czech (or Czech-German), but based in the lands of the former Soviet Union, particularly Belarus. In spite of the generally declared incomprehensibility of Central Europe, Topol's protagonists here, the "searcher," who are looking for traces left over from Nazi and Communist atrocities, vainly seek the "East," while everyone tells them they are still in Central Europe:

Where is the actual East?, I ask, because all the Slovaks tell me I've blundered in my search, as they're not in Eastern but in Central Europe, just like, alas, those stupid Czechs a bit further on, not to mention the Hungarians, who don't even live in Europe..., though when

9 English edition: *The Devil's Workshop*. Trans. Alex Zucker. London: Portobello, 2014.

I insisted, they admitted that real Eastern Europe starts just a short way away from Slovakia, but I had to get out there among the wolves and bears of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, aha, the Carpathians, have a look at the map and off you go, said Sára ... but in Subcarpathian Ruthenia the people get annoyed when they hear they're supposed to be in the East, they consider that to be nonsense ... and they send you off to the real East, to Galicia! (Topol 2009: 42–43)

In another text, in which he describes travels through Galicia and Transcarpathian Ukraine (in the collection *Supermarket sovětských hrdinů* (*A Supermarket of Soviet Heroes*) (2007)) Topol comes out with a quote that actually characterizes Central Europe in terms of the historical atrocities that have been committed there: “Central European death is death in the prisons and the camps, mass death, Massenmord, purges” (Topol 2007: 39).

#### 4. Line of Resistance

Apart from the output on the Germans and the Second World War, focusing on the Holocaust, the expulsion, the Sudetenland and the issues surrounding nationality and citizenry (i.e. subjects in which a fundamental role is played by space, the movements within it, and its abandonment), there another trend that should be mentioned, as it particularly resonates within the latest output, namely, the treatment of the anti-Nazi resistance, especially the most significant event of the Protectorate period, the assassination of Acting Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich. This appeared to involve a different line of writing, in which emotions and passions are replaced by action, tension, plot and a thrilling detective investigation into how things really happened. The uncertainties over the inhabited space or inherited ethnicity no longer play a role in these works: the enemy is clearly identified (German, Nazi) and the questions raised by this type of work are different: what was the point of the resistance action? Should one resort to violence, giving rise to further violence? How strong was the conviction behind the fight against a tyrant even at the cost of the sacrifice of lives and the like?

The gripping drama of the anti-Nazi and anti-Communist resistance was presented by Jan Novák in his novel *Zatím dobrý* (*So Far So Good*) (2004), which tells the story of the resistance activities carried out by the Mašín family, a father and his sons, with the first part focusing on the bravery of the father, Josef Mašín Snr. during the Second World War, and the second part focusing on the dramatic escape by his sons, Ctirad and Josef, from Communist Czechoslovakia. A more self-reflexive and documentary stance is provided



by the untraditional narrator of Marek Toman's novel *Chvála oportunismu* (*In Praise of Opportunism*) (2016), namely the Černín Palace, the seat of the key state authorities, which keeps coming back periodically to memories of its most important inhabitants, Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich and the postwar Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk (whose previously unresolved death provides a link to various considerations of the political regimes involved and an attempt at an investigation to find the culprit). In Arnošt Lustig's *Příběh Marie Navarové* (*The Story of Marie Navarová*) (2010), an individual from real life, who gave the injured Heydrich first aid in a purely humane way as a healthcare worker, despite her activities in the domestic resistance, and was sentenced after the war to several years in prison). Lustig deals only in a marginal manner with his usual subject of the Holocaust, focusing instead on the issues surrounding the resistance, collaboration and historical injustices, moving from one inhuman regime to another. A more lyrical and intimate note was sounded in the story of the assassins by Czech-American author Mark Slouka in his novel *Viditelný svět* (*The Visible World*) (2008): he added to the famous story of the hidden assassins the fictional character of another person from the group, who only escapes their tragic end by chance—but he cannot bear life in his dead friends' shadow and so voluntarily puts an end to it. Several other works are on the borderline between fiction and non-fiction.<sup>10</sup>

Another fateful milestone in Czech history was 1948 and the Communist takeover, judicial murders, imprisonment of innocent people, ruined lives, confiscated property, collectivization and other resettlements of the population from their original homes. These traumas are perceived in contemporary fiction to be a purely Czech issue, while the influence of other powers, in this case primarily the Soviet Union and not Germany any more, is basically mediated. This is a problem that we have brought upon ourselves: not the tragedy of history writ large, but warped characters and the urge for power have led to the greatest demoralization and downfall of the nation in its history. A deeper analysis of neighbouring literatures is required to determine whether or not this is a perception of the entire shared Central European space, or just a specifically Czech characteristic.

*Translated by Melvyn Clarke*

<sup>10</sup> In 2007 Jiří Šulc's novel *Dva proti Říši* (*Two Against the Reich*) achieved great success among readers, followed three years later by a French author Laurent Binet's work *HHhH*, but in 2017 Lubomír Kubík's prose work *Proč Gabčík nestřílel?* (*Why Didn't Gabčík Shoot?*) (2017) attracted attention, but did not achieve the popularity of the previous two works. A large number of contemporary works deal with the subject from a purely factological standpoint.



## | References

## PRIMARY SOURCES

- Androniková, Hana. *Zvuk slunečních hodin*. Praha: Knižní klub, 2001.
- Berka, Jiří. *Ve znamení ryb*. Brno: Petrov, 2004.
- Binet, Laurent. *HHH*. Praha: Argo, 2010.
- Brycz, Pavel. *Patriarchátu dávno zašlá sláva*. Brno: Host and Most: Hněvín, 2003.
- Čichoň, Petr. *Slezský román*. Brno: Host, 2011.
- Denemarková, Radka. *Peníze od Hitlera*. Brno: Host, 2006.
- Fibiger, Martin. *Aussiger*. Olomouc: Votobia, 2004.
- . *Anděl odešel*. Brno: Weles, 2008.
- Filip, Ota. *Cesta ke hřbitovu*. Ostrava: Profil, 1968.
- . *Nanebevstoupení Lojzka Lapáčka ze Slezské Ostravy*. Köln: Index, 1974–1975.
- . *Osmý čili Nedokončený životopis*. Brno: Host, 2007.
- Funda, Dalibor. *Poslední promítač ze Sudet*. Praha: Prostor, 2010.
- Katalpa, Jakuba. *Němci*. Brno: Host, 2012.
- Körner, Vladimír. *Krev zmizelého*. Praha: Dauphin, 2005.
- Kubík, Lubomír. *Proč Gabčík nestřílel*. Praha: Prostor, 2006.
- Legátová, Květa. *Jozova Hanule*. Praha: Paseka, 2002.
- Lustig, Arnošt. *Případ Marie Navarové*. Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2010.
- Moník, Josef. *Schweik it easy*. Praha: Argo, 2011.
- Mornštajnová, Alena. *Slepá mapa*. Brno: Host, 2013.
- . *Hana*. Brno: Host, 2017.
- Naušová, Evita. *Jizvy*. Praha and Litomyšl: Paseka, 2007.
- Novák, Jan. *Zatím dobrý*. Brno: Petrov, 2004.
- Novotný, David Jan. *Sidra Noach*. Praha: Knižní klub, 2010.
- Platzová, Magdalena. *Aaronův skok*. Praha: Torst, 2006.
- Rudiš, Jaroslav. *Alois Nebel*. Praha: Labyrint, 2006a.
- . *Grandhotel*. Praha: Labyrint, 2006b.
- Sichinger. *Cukrový klaun*. Praha: Knižní klub, 2008.
- Slouka, Mark. *Viditelný svět*. Praha and Litomyšl: Paseka, 2008.
- Škvorecký, Josef. *Obyčejné životy*. Praha: Ivo Železný, 2004.
- Šmíd, Zdeněk. *Cejch*. Prague: Knižní klub, 1992.
- . *Lesk a bída Čekání*. Praha: Formát, Hart, 2001.
- Šulc, Jiří. *Dva proti říši*. Praha: Knižní klub, 2007.
- Toman, Marek. *Chvála oportunistu*. Praha: Torst, 2016.
- Topol, Jáchym. *Supermarket sovětských hrdinů*. Praha: Torst, 2007.
- . *Chladnou zemí*. Praha: Torst, 2009.
- Tučková, Kateřina. *Vyhánění Gerty Schnirch*. Brno: Host, 2009.

---. *Žítkovské bohyně*. Brno: Host, 2012.

Urban, Josef. *Habermannův mlýn*. Opava: Grafis, 2001.

#### SECONDARY SOURCES

Fialová, Alena, ed. *V souřadnicích mnohosti. Česká literatura první dekády jednadvacátého století v souvislostech a interpretacích*. Praha: Academia, 2014.

Holý, Jiří, Sladovnicková, Šárka. "Čtyřikrát o holokaustu." *Slovo a smysl* 23 (2015): 66–79.

Janoušek, Pavel. "Od idylly k tragédii a morytátu aneb Trauma, nebo Definitivní vítězství?" *Tvar* 9 (2015): 14.

Klíčová, Eva. "Historický román v současné české literatuře versus téma dějin v české próze (po roce 2000)," <https://tinyurl.com/yd86vsdt>. Accessed 20 February 2019.

Lollok, Marek. "Němci včera a dnes." *iLiteratura*, <https://tinyurl.com/y7axv97x>. Accessed 20 February 2019.

Machala, Lubomír, Kožušníková, Petra, eds. *Cenová bilance 2013. Nad literárními díly oceněnými i neoceněnými v roce 2013*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2014.

Németh Vítová, Lenka. "Odkrywanie na nowo 'Kraju Sudeckiego' w czeskiej literaturze po roku 1989." *Porównania* 17 (2015): 55–66. (English edition: "Re-discovering the Sudetenland in Czech Literature after 1989". *Comparisons and Discourses. Essays on Comparative Literature and Theory*. Ed. Emilia Kledzik. Poznań: Wydawnictwo "Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne," 2017. 81–109).

Peňás, Jiří. "Mladá žena a tzv. odsun." *Lidové noviny* 25 (2010), *Orientace* supplement. 29.

Říha, Ivo. "Topolovo hledání Východu." *iLiteratura*, <https://tinyurl.com/y72afed3>. Accessed 20 February 2019.

Trávníček, Jiří. "Zrození střední Evropy z ducha ...", in *V kleštích dějin. Střední Evropa jako pojem a problém*. Ed. Jiří Trávníček. Brno: Host, 2009. 243–304.

| **Abstrakt**

ALENA ŠIDÁKOVÁ FIALOVÁ

**Powrót do przeszłości. Niemcy jako trauma historyczna we współczesnej literaturze czeskiej**

Artykuł przedstawia zawarte we współczesnej czeskiej prozie odbicia traum związanych z II wojną światową i wydarzeniami powojennymi, uwzględniając problematykę Europy Środkowej, w której tradycyjnie dominuje konfrontacja czeskiego żywiołu z niemieckim. Autorka podsumowuje rozwój refleksji nad tematyką Niemców i Niemiec, II wojny światowej oraz następującego po niej przesiedlenia w prozie nowego tysiąclecia, a jako zagadnienia wspólne wskazuje kwestie niejednoznacznej identyfikacji narodowej bohaterów literackich, detabuizację przemilczanych wcześniej tematów oraz Zagładę Żydów (szczególnie w odniesieniu do gatunku sagi rodzinnej). Zwraca uwagę także na utwory dotyczące antyniemieckiego ruchu oporu (książki z elementami powieści kryminalnej i z pogranicza literatury pięknej i literatury faktu).

**Keywords:** współczesna proza czeska; historia najnowsza; II wojna światowa; wysiedlenie Niemców; Zagłada Żydów; zamach na Reinharda Heydricha

| **Abstract**

ALENA ŠIDÁKOVÁ FIALOVÁ

**Returning to the Past: The Germans as a Historical Trauma in Contemporary Czech Prose**

This study describes reflections of wartime and postwar historical trauma in contemporary Czech prose, taking into account the issues surrounding Central Europe, which entirely overlap with the traditional confrontation between the Czechs and Germans. It also includes the changing reflections on Germany and the Germans, the Second World War and the subsequent expulsion found in the prose work of the new millennium, the unifying topic being deemed to be the issue of the ambiguous national identification of the protagonists, the detabooization of previously hushed-up subjects and the subject of the Holocaust, particularly in the family saga genre. It also takes into account groups of texts focusing on reflections of anti-German resistance activities, both in the genre of the novel

(with detective elements) and in output on the boundaries between fiction and factographic prose.

**Keywords:** contemporary Czech prose; reflections of modern history; Second World War; expulsion of the Germans; Holocaust; Heydrich assassination

### | About the Author

**Alena Šidáková Fialová**, Ph.D. works at the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences. She deals with post-war literature (monograph *Poučení z krizového vývoje. Poválečná česká společnost v reflexi normalizační prózy*, 2014), and participates in the forthcoming History of Czech Literature in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

E-mail: [fialova@ucl.cas.cz](mailto:fialova@ucl.cas.cz)

VLADIMÍR BARBORÍK  
Slovenská akadémia vied

## Memory and History: A Comparison of the Past in Slovak Prose of the Post-2000 Period

“Bože, ako ja nenávidím dejiny, ten vlastný životopis ľudstva!”  
(God, how I hate history, the autobiography of humankind!)

Pavel Vilikovský (2005: 195)

We find a certain legitimising gesture in writing about the past. It may concern an individual or a society. The first case concerns subjective memory, the second concerns history as a different, impersonal type of memory. The present is always involved, as it determines the relation to what was and no longer is. The awareness of reality may be the source of *sadness*: the flow and the unstoppable nature of time, it may cause melancholy and futility. The opposite is a *relief* that what was has passed. Either mode is based on the insurmountable barrier between the past and present. However, the past may be perceived differently, as an understanding of the present as something that existed to enable what is now. This understanding of the past as the *prehistory* of the present was highlighted in Georg Lukács's book on the historical novel (Lukács 57).

Personal memory appears in different autobiographical genres and stylised biographical fiction draws on them. History is a domain of a historical genre,<sup>1</sup> particularly the novel. These are two approaches which are both employed in a section Slovak prose of the past two decades.

Social demand articulated outside of the literary field inadvertently authenticates the legitimacy potential of prose depicting the past. After 1989, the social position of writers in Slovakia radically changed. While writers

1 René Bílik used this complex term in his book: *Historický žánr v slovenskej próze*.

freed themselves of state control, literature was losing prestige and its social role. Literature was free but nobody demanded anything of it. The situation has remained virtually unchanged until the present time. If there are demands on literature coming from the public space, these mainly concern critical moments in Slovak history.<sup>2</sup> This paper examines the questions: What are the possibilities and particularly what are the outcomes of such an approach to the past, and what are the alternatives of portraying the past in Slovak prose of the past two decades?

### 1. Beginnings: The 1990s

Compared to the current situation, literature of the 1990s focused largely on the present conditions shortly after changes in the social set-up, on the literary nature of writing and on the potential dispute in its authenticity or originality of the narrative. This was related to the incentives of postmodernism, which offered an agile ideological base attractive through its declared independence on ideology and which partly filled the ideological void after Marxism as an obligatory ideology. The focus of literature on itself was caused by external circumstances. Its loss of social prestige related to the break-up of structures through which the pre-1989 regime secured production of literature and a certain reputation of its authors and also the fact that after 1989 some non-literary functions were taken over by independent media or unregulated historical research. In this situation of disinterest in literature, the various interpretations of postmodernism, particularly in its popular version of “postmodernism as explained to children,” attracted upcoming writers. The slogan about “the end of the grand narratives” was one of popular interpretations, and these “grand” narratives suddenly lost their legitimising function and subsequently their legitimacy.<sup>3</sup> In this situation, there is no interest in an immediate rendering

2 An interview of the journalist Róbert Kotian with the prose writer Pavol Rankov is an example of this. The so-called normalisation and the period following the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 are regarded as periods noteworthy of literary depiction. Rankov highlights the cultivating and educational role of literature which was rejected after 1989 when he requires “representative writing that would show how it was during normalisation” (Kotian).

3 Jiří Pechar’s introduction to the Czech translation of canonical texts by Jean-François Lyotard on postmodernism: “A current intellectual can only take a perspective devoid of piety towards the big stories whose main role is to deprive an individual of the right to narrate or act in the stories” is an apt reflection on the contemporary intellectual from countries which joined Europe towards the end of the 1980s (Pechar).

of the past requiring broader legitimacy (immediacy or authenticity were perceived as constructs). Instead of writing that attempts to portray the past in new ways, writers produce prose showing the constructed nature of past writing. This prose is intertextual in nature, written in a form of parody, it does not reflect on the past, more on established literary and cultural forms articulating the past in the consciousness and subconsciousness of the society. The most notable prose of this kind is Peter Pišťanek's (1960–2015) novel *Mladý Dôňč* (*Young Dôňč*).<sup>4</sup> It subversively refers to several strata of Slovak literary tradition (critical realism of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the production novel as a representative genre of social realism or using the traditional cultural opposition of the city and village). It put a spotlight on past and present cultural and mental stereotypes, and it deconstructed the national myth using linguistic and literary techniques which contributed to forming this myth. The story is situated in the past but not within a particular historical period. The imaginary time in Pišťanek's story feels mythical or rather pseudo-mythical and forms a bizarre tangle of the archaic and the modern. It does not reflect the reality of the past but of literature.

Compared to Pišťanek, Igor Otčenáš (1956) took a seemingly reverse approach. In his book entitled *Keby (If) ...* with subtitle *Rýchle dejiny budúcnosti Slovenska* (*A Quick History of the Future of Slovakia*) (1998), he turns towards a specific historical period but only to contest it. The book aims to reflect on reality, not to learn from the past but to warn against it. The graphics and the style of narrative of *If ...* resemble textbooks of history; however, this format and use of alternative historical techniques are only means to parody and discredit the nationalistic historiography of the time. The amusing aspect of the narrative lies not only in the contrast between the historical reality and the author's mystification but also in the fact that reality and mystification can be expressed in the same way, stylistically and rhetorically. Pišťanek's and Otčenáš's questioning of historicism represents the typical perspective on history of the 1990s. This was not just the pre-1989 history most relevant Slovak prose writers distanced themselves from, but these were also historicising concepts which made claims for universal validity. The rift with history at the turn of the millennium was reflected in a trend towards portraying the past through personal and biographical memory. It followed from earlier motivations, which came to the pre-1989 Slovak literature from the periphery of the current literary field.

4 It was published under the same title as part of a collection of shorter prosaic pieces.

## 2. The Past Formed Through Memory

Contesting historicity of the 1990s was also related to returning to the topic of an individual against history or placing him/herself outside history. This subject was reflected in various forms of autobiographical writing, and in fiction it appeared as biographical stylisation. In comparison to the Czech literary context, this approach did not have a substantive tradition in Slovak literature, and before 1989 was used only by a small circle of dissidents outside of the official cultural production. The most notable of them was Dominik Tatarka (1913–1989), who was banned from publishing from 1970 as he opposed the 1968 occupation. He thus gave up on traditional fiction and wrote a series of autobiographical texts which he called “scribbles.” The last of these he wrote was entitled *Navrávačky (Recordings)*. At the turn of the 1980s, Tatarka posthumously returned to the public space.<sup>5</sup> His work brought a new, open form of autobiographical narrating as a dialogue with oneself and one’s past, which was not traditional in Slovakia and introduced a subject which disputed history. Tatarka’s writing was important in that it established this form of writing as equal to the more traditional forms of writing.

The past reflected through memoir sources was also used in writings which were not explicitly autobiographical. Although the authors of these were not equally narrators in the sense of autobiographical writing, the biographical principal was used through different techniques, such using publicly known aspects of the author’s biography used within the fictional narrative. The fact that the framework of *the entirety of life* of a character was used was more significant for constituting the biographical line of writing. This technique is typical of a section of Pavel Vilikovský’s (1941) prose. Vilikovský was an important Slovak writer of the turn of the 1980s. His writing combined two significant periods in Slovak prose writing: reestablishment of modernism in the 1960s associated with bringing back a subject which was “nationalised” by social realism of the previous decade and the Slovak version of the postmodern turn at the beginning of the 1990s. Both these periods are typically ahistorical personified by a character who stands outside of history or is its victim. Vilik-

5 *Navrávačky (Recordings)* were first published as samizdat in 1987 in Prague, in 1988 in Cologne by a West German publisher in exile and in Slovakia only after the author’s death in *Slovenské pohľady (Slovak Perspectives)* journal (Tatarka). The text was written as an edited and authorised transcript of a tape-recorded interview based on an autobiographical memoir (the title refers to an oral form of telling stories, not always truthful). There are two published versions of *Navrávačky*. For more detail on this, please refer to: Matejov.



ovský comes to terms with history as a collective narrative through grotesquely hyperbolic narrative, e.g. *Večne je zelený ... (Ever Green Is ...)* (1989, written in the 1970s). Personal memory situated within a family context is his alternative to history. This is nothing obvious; the author knows that what survived in this way is of rhapsodic, fragmented and uncertain nature. Vilikovský's first prose of the biographical cycle<sup>6</sup> entitled *Kôň na poschodí, slepec vo Vrábľoch (A Horse Upstairs, a Blind Person in Vráble)*, published in a journal in 1988 and as a book in 1989) talks about a son who looks after his mother suffering from dementia, and shows memory as unreliable and deficient. In Vilikovský's prose, the past is connected with the narrator's biography, as somebody born at the beginning of the 1940s (his first glimpses of memory reflect the end of the Second World War, then formative experiences of his boyhood and growing up). His past consists of a relatively small and steady group of his closest people, family (mother, prematurely dead father, older brother and housemaid). Vilikovský's characters represent the past through connecting with those who are no longer alive. The need for the past is motivated by emotions, a rational approach, and a need for accuracy and authenticity become irrelevant. Imagination and fantasy (which move on the boundary between reality and fiction) able to fill in void spaces in memory have a legitimate place in this type of reminiscing. Reading the correspondence of his parents before they were married, he imagines meeting his late father in a café as his contemporary.<sup>7</sup> His reminiscing is constantly

6 This cycle is unique among Vilikovský's prose in that certain constant features which repeat and vary, particularly in terms of the setting and characters (e.g. fatherless family), and also that it adopts the reminiscing mode of narrative. This writing cannot even be classified as biographical, as certain features can be identified in shorter prose together with short stories of different kind on different topics and of different nature. The first in this cycle is the novelette *Kôň na poschodí, slepec vo Vrábľoch* (published in journal in 1988 and in 1989 as a book), his latest so far is *RAJC je preč (The Paradise is Gone)*, 2018). There are other short stories which belong to this cycle, such as "Všetko, čo viem o stredoeurópanstve" (All I Know about Central-Europeanness) from a book entitled *Krutý strojvodca (A Cruel Train Driver)*, 1996), "Gašpar, Melichar a Baltazárová" a "Pán spomienok" (The Master of Memories) from a book entitled *Čarovný papagáj a iné gýče (A Magical Parrot and Other Kitsch)* (2004) and partly a novelette "Na ľavom brehu pamäti" (On the Left Bank of Memory) from a book entitled *Prvá a posledná láska (The First and Last Love)* (2013).

7 "I had to be careful, fantasy stumbled ... The problem was not even in that I could not have imagined him at twenty seven ... I could not imagine myself at twenty seven which was worse" (Vilikovský 2004b: 77–78.)

interrupted by his older brother's specifying and correcting comments.<sup>8</sup> Appropriating the past becomes a defence against interference with it. Compared to history as a collective and "nationalised" past after 1948, Vilikovský's characters "privatise" their past and do not want to share it with anybody and do not allow "editing" it by others.<sup>9</sup> Corresponding memories with "reality" is not that crucial here, rather their uniqueness. This is compared to collective history requiring a more collective consensus, and power mechanisms and manipulation (an older person having a greater say) come to play. Reminiscence as a constituting element of the one reminiscing cannot become a subject of negotiation.

Vilikovský does not present extensive evocations of the past full of sense; he narrates about mechanisms which constitute the past as a defence of certain kind of memory. He adopts a reflective and problematising relation to the past and memory as its medium, which is uncertain and is not always just his own. Márius Kopcsay (1968) is the most notable upcoming writer of the turn of the 1990s,<sup>10</sup> and has a slightly different attitude to the past than Vilikovský. He similarly writes about the past mediated through personal memory, particularly of his childhood and growing up. A typical character of Kopcsay's writing is an outsider. He experienced his childhood and youth during normalisation of the 1970s and 80s and was not able to seize the opportunities presented after 1989. Kopcsay managed to capture life experiences of an individual typifying a generation who found himself in between two eras and periods of life: childhood (which will not come back) and adulthood (the demands of which he cannot cope, accept or come to terms with). He consistently preserves a child's perspective in relation to the past: respects the mental horizon of his character, does not amend it, and he does not use expressions and conceptualisations which would be inappropriate to the age of a child (when describing the period,

8 "The truth is that I have always felt deficient compared to my brother. Father was, of course, mutual but he spent more time with him ... I could live with that, not everybody can have it the same way. What annoyed me was that my brother always corrected me. I had only very few memories, three or four, as when father died, I was still young. **And somebody kept crossing out and erasing even out of those ...** there was always something that needed correcting" [emphasis added] (Vilikovský 2004b: 67).

9 "This was a memory, finally, finally a memory which belonged just to me. My own, I was its master, exclusive, supreme. I did not need to have it stamped off by anybody else" (Vilikovský 2004b: 87).

10 In this period, he published four books which determined the style of his subsequent writing. These include the novel *Domov (Home)* (2005) and a cycle of freely connected books of short stories *Kritický deň (The Critical Day)* (1998), *Stratené roky (Lost Years)* (2004), *Zbytočný život (Pointless Life)* (2006).

he does not use terms such as totalitarianism or normalisation). He evokes life through a mosaic of concrete details typical of a period captured in a child's consciousness. These include means of transport (makes of cars—the Trabant, types of buses or trains<sup>11</sup>), names of places, objects of everyday use, and brands of products which were in limited supply. When describing the reality of the time, he avoids judgements of the regime. The adolescent character views “social realism” critically not because it deprives people of freedom and human rights but views it from a perspective of a consumer. He knows that products from the “capitalist” West, which are hard to get,<sup>12</sup> are better than those he can buy in his country; he identifies with foreign, not local pop stars.<sup>13</sup> Kopcsay portrays the past as if it is current, alive. Compared with Vilikovský's character who seeks “his own,” unique memories, Kopcsay's character is rather a victim of an obsessive dominance of images supplied by his memory.

Neither Vilikovský's, nor Kopcsay's past is a lost paradise; it does not portray an idyllic space where their characters were once happy. In situations where the author preserves a child's perspective, where the past is portrayed as the present, the childhood for the one who lives through it is no less problematic than any other stage of life. Regardless of this, the past as a *memory* takes on a certain idyllic aura resulting from current knowledge of the ignorance of that time. An adult knows what he, as a child, did not, could not, did not need or was forbidden to know about the world that surrounded him. The fact that his parents knew this on his behalf was enough.<sup>14</sup> The option of not knowing is a privilege that, in the consciousness of others who are condemned to knowledge and cannot afford not to know, retrospectively adds an idyllic touch to

11 “They will be pulled by a diesel engine, there are only a few steam engines left ... They buy tickets, firm, small, square-shaped.” (Kopcsay 161).

12 “He puts a Maxell cassette into its case ...” (Kopcsay 27).

13 “He longed to look like Roger Hodgson or Rick Davies from the band Supertramp but, at that age, his beard did not start growing .... He felt like one of the Supertramp band members in their double album photo cover from their concert” (Kopcsay 18, 26).

14 Compared to the 1950, during the Czechoslovak normalisation period, forgetting and erasing certain historical facts and personalities from the society's memory was preferable to a direct repression. The August 1968 occupation was one such erased event. Kopcsay's young hero's indifference to the occupation and presence of the Soviet Army in Czechoslovakia is not symptomatic in terms of values (morality) within the events of Kopcsay's piece but has a different characterisation function in relation to the era: “Do you know what they [Soviet soldiers] did in sixty eight? ... I do not know, as I was only born then, said Umelček. But your parents told you about it, said Rišo. No, they have not, said Umelček” (Kopcsay 24).

a child's past. The not knowing is a perquisite of the completeness of a child's world, which disappears during adolescence.<sup>15</sup> The option of not being in history is also a part of this privilege.

Three posthumous publications by Ján Rozner (1922–2006): *Sedem dní do pohrebu* (*Seven Days before the Funeral*) (2009), *Noc po fronte* (*Night after the Front*) (2010) a *Výlet na Devín* (*A Trip to Devín*) (2011) painted the most complex picture of the past in Slovak post-1989 literature.<sup>16</sup> The author who emigrated in mid-1970s and lived in Munich as if belatedly returned to Slovak literature and culture, as his past presence was disputed. Between 1945 and the end of 1960s, he worked as a journalist, literary, theatre and film critic, translator, playwright and later as a scholar but not a prose writer. Similarly to many other Slovak writers and intellectuals, he was made unemployed and was banned from publishing at the beginning of the normalisation period, due to his critique of the August 1968 occupation. He belonged to the left-leaning intellectuals who supported communism after the Second World War (wwii) and contributed to establishing the Stalinist model in culture of the turn of the 1940s; and he joined those who favoured the liberalisation of the regime in the 1960s. His views were shared by many Slovak intellectuals two decade after the end of wwii. Rozner however differed from the majority because of his background (his mother was German and his father Jewish), and his desire to “belong” was viewed with suspicion by others. The Slovak cultural milieu where, despite the proclaimed “internationalism,” the issue of nationality remained important, has never accepted him as their own. His identity was decided on by his father in the interwar period when he enrolled him into Slovak schools (his mother preferred German schools), but his difference blighted his entire life: “And so

15 Czech screen writer, director, playwright and prose writer Pavel Juráček (1935–1989), one of the founders of the Czechoslovak New Wave in film of the 1960s, who lost his job and was banned from writing during normalisation, noted down an interesting remark in his diary concerning childhood: “I cannot say whether I was happy then. I mean the typical talk about ‘the escapes into carefree, happy world of the childhood years’ in memoirs of classics. I have a feeling that I was not happy. One thing was certain however—I was hundred percent. I will never be as complete as then. My constant orientation towards childhood, my dependence on it, are therefore a longing for a lost completeness. I lived in a complete harmony with my dreams and imagination.” (Juráček 333). Juráček's perspective of childhood corresponds with Kopcsay's. A certain degree of idyll can be ascribed to childhood, on condition that not happiness but completeness is regarded as its constitutive part.

16 Rozner wrote these books between the 1970s and his death. He published some parts of them in journals as shorter prosas at the beginning of the 1990s.

I became a Slovak, my father thought. Most people in my life were not of that view. Let's say, unfortunately, but such is life" (Rozner 2010: 85). This position required a certain distance, with all his engagement in society at certain times of his life and represented a biographical prerequisite of a specific form of observation, which paid off in his prosaic work.

All three of Rozner's books of reminiscences can be read through two codes: as reminiscences which turn into memoirs in parts, as subjective testimonies and thus sources of information (which can be checked through other sources and open to corrections), and also as autonomous fiction of a particular genre (such as a novel, short story or sketch). The composition of each book is adapted to the basic characteristics of storytelling, reminiscing. What is important is not only the content of these reminiscences but also the mechanisms related to the process of reminiscing, i.e. the motivation of the reminiscing act.

Rozner's high level of literariness does not contradict the authenticity of his writing, but rather reinforces it. In his novel *Seven Days before the Funeral*, he employs the typological potential of the genre. The starting point of the novel—death of the wife and circumstances of her funeral—initiates a *socio-critical* reflection on the era. Rozner and his wife Zora Jesenská<sup>17</sup> belonged to the fairly large number of intellectuals banned by the regime in the early 1970s. The novel develops an ancient motive, revived by normalisation—the relation of the regime to its dead opponents, and its fear of these opponents. Zora Jesenská's funeral at the state cemetery in Martin was rather undignified. Many of her friends and acquaintances were scared to attend, the burial was conducted under the supervision of State Security, the officials did not want the funeral to turn

17 Zora Jesenská was a seminal personality of Slovak translation, particularly of Russian and Soviet literature. She was banned from publishing, including translations, for her public rejection of the August 1968 occupation and of normalisation. Her family and cultural background was significant in her relationship with Rozner. She originates from Martin, which was the centre of Slovak national and cultural movement from the mid-nineteenth century and she was the niece of Janko Jesenský, a classic of the interwar and pre-regime change Slovak literature. Compared to Rozner, she had very strong Slovak roots. Their relationship was also impacted by social inequality; Rozner was unacceptable for Jesenská's parents. These differences also reflect in the relations between both characters' home towns. Martin was a traditional national centre. Bratislava was multinational and became fully Slovak only after WWII. Only then Bratislava became a cultural centre and Martin became "yesterday's world." Jesenská and Rozner also personify the conflict between the modern and traditional which shaped the development of Slovakia in the twentieth century.

into an anti-regime demonstration.<sup>18</sup> The book integrates several types of novel. It is an unconventional *romantic* novel through its outline of the characters' relationship. The autobiographical line of the narrative form a *didactic* novel, it is a story of a character shaped by circumstances and despite them: a story of growing up without a father, generationally symptomatic enchantment by avant-garde, story of ambitions which collide with adversity of the time, misfortune and also own limits.<sup>19</sup>

All three Rozner's books persuasively describe the space in which they are situated. The reminiscing is supported by places, particularly a town—interwar multicultural Bratislava lost its character after 1945. Rozner's prose exceptionally enriches the tradition, not particularly strong in Slovak literature, of "literarisation" of this town. This way, Rozner integrated the genre of *geographically-cultural sketch* in his reminiscing narrative and extended the effect of the memory function. It does not only relate to the subject but also the space as was defined by Aleida Assmann (see Assmanová)—the space of memories.

Rozner's reminiscing prose critiques historicity—it is paradoxical, from a perspective of somebody who once put his trust in history (he refers to History, clearly with irony). With a detached view he reliably reconstructs the post-war developments similar for many Central European intellectuals who put their trust in history at the cost of their own independence and integrity.<sup>20</sup> Rozner

18 Jozef Felix, the leading Slovak literary critic and Romanist (translator of Dante), made a speech at the funeral. A member of the Secret Police asked to see the speech before it was made. Felix refused to give it to him. Felix was subsequently banned from teaching at university.

19 Rozner could not study during the war, as his Aryan origin was doubted. Together with his brother he was taken into a detention camp (which was a staging post on the way to a concentration camp). Their German mother, however, managed to get them out. After the war, he managed to save his mother from expulsion to Germany through his left-wing connections. His enchantment with the avant-garde, which he was intensely interested in from his secondary school years resulted in a piece which was possibly the first Slovak attempt at structural theory of film. The manuscript got lost at his Prague publisher in the post-war chaos. He long struggled with alcoholism, and went to a rehab a few times. The biggest rival to his artistic ambitions was his own indifference to himself.

20 There is one important objection to be made against Rozner's reminiscing; he pays most attention to parts of his life when he was a victim, times when he: "co-created History by chatting or rather discussing and sometimes writing ..." (Rozner 2011: 81).

He remembers the first half of the 1950s with embarrassment and only selectively and in passing.

is unique in that he was the first in Slovak literature who narrated this story in its complexity and literary persuasiveness. This includes motives which lead him to history, the need of a lonely person on the edge of society to belong somewhere.<sup>21</sup>

Rozner is close to Vilikovský in his aversion to history but differs in that he once wanted to be a part of it. The time that he reminisces about in his prose (mid-1930s to early 1970s) is the most dynamic part of modern Slovak history, which is up until now perceived as “live” and controversial. These external circumstances have contributed to the exceptional popularity of Rozner’s books. They were read as first-class literature and also as testimonies. Personal memory perishes with those who held them, and the content of these reminiscences becomes a thematic repertoire of prosaic fiction for new generations of writers. They are left with what personal memory rejects and what is disputed by it—social conceptualisations of the past through history. Fictionalisation of more modern Slovak history in prose has been on the rise over the past few years and the quality of this prose is uneven.

21 “I did not want to get under the wheels of History once again, to scuttle off and jump away from them, so that they did not knock me down and crush me, or did not leave me, behind with disinterest, as if I did not exist, as if I was not even worth crushing, they would happily be without me, and those on the train would look back at me with piercing, mocking, scornful sneers, which I once felt with my entire body at the top of the castle, an alien element ... unseen and unknown ... luckily something struck me back then and I agreed with History ... when looking at History as proven inevitability, I understood, it eventually struck me that my place is among a large hoard ... and so I mixed with it, attempted to keep pace with it, pushed to the front, just for god’s sake not to stay behind, somewhere at the back and on the side where the whips lashed and dogs barked ... piles of dust were rising, I happily saw in the mirror that even I was covered in dust, the features of my face could barely be distinguished, I only uttered words and sentences started by others, I carefully instilled even the diction and intonation, I shouted those words and sentences so that others learnt them from me ...” (Rozner 2011: 90–91). Rozner’s post-war engagement was motivated by what he had experienced during the war, his feeling that “History” saved him was justified. For him, the arrival of the Red Army really meant a salvation, a transition into a “new world” associated with adulthood and taking over responsibility. The History he called for arrived even in Bratislava, as the first Soviet soldiers got into the city in the spring of 1945: “I saw History in action, I saw history through from the fifth floor through my own eyes, the six to eight men who appeared from the murky dawn or fog rising up from the Danube, they were real and as though the only conquerors of this city, because I followed them with my own eyes ...” (Rozner 2010: 181).



### 3. Return into History

In parallel with individual memory, the second source of rendering the past in literature is internalised historical memory of the society—history. This is rewriting of in some ways articulated, historicised past. This is a source of topics for epic fabulation. Slovak prose of the past decade attempts to make the past more attractive through this type of narrative, and to achieve this, it sometimes uses the means of adventure writing and this way comes closer to genre production. When fictionalising the past, it draws on the current historical memory. This socially acceptable, “politically correct” rendering of the past adjusted to the current range of values reinforces and legitimises the past.

Such an approach is typical of a part of Pavol Rankov’s (1964) novel writing. He takes a perspective based on current values, he perceives the past as a space defined by time with the timeless good and evil fighting each other. The constructed nature of such writing where all aspects of the writing are adjusted to a set of ideals is prominent in Rankov’s first novel of this kind, entitled *Stalo sa prvého septembra (alebo inokedy)* (*It Happened on the First of September (or Whenever)*) (2008). This is obvious in the choice of main characters when each represents one nationality (Slovak, Czech, Hungarian and Jewish). This is an approach which emphasises the value of multiculturalism in Central Europe, highlights it as being natural and positive. The novel’s composition is based on a simple principle (each chapter relates to one year between 1938 and 1968), but this leads the author to overcomplicate the story. The semantic tension in the narrative benefits from the contrast between the ordinary and historical, the contrast between characters’ relationships and the era which prevented those relationships from developing further. The life stories of Rankov’s characters are so determined by history that they lose autonomy and serve only as prompts for outlining the most spectacular socio-political milestones. It is hard not to find an event which happened in Czechoslovakia and surrounding Central European countries during the given period of the 1930s that would not have affected the life of at least one of the characters.<sup>22</sup>

It is symptomatic for Rankov’s interpretation of the past that the image of swimming baths on September 1, 1938,<sup>23</sup> at the beginning of the book has

22 I remind readers only of the best known: Arbitration in Vienna, Hitler’s satellites taking part in the Russian campaign, Slovak National Uprising (SNP), the extermination of Jews during the War, post-war expulsion of Hungarians, February 1948, the political processes of the 1950s, Budapest of 1956, building of the Berlin Wall, gradual liberalisation of the regime in the 1960s ending with August 1968.

23 This was a period of a few weeks before the Munich Agreement which was the first step in breaking up of the Czechoslovak Republic and an important prelude to WWII.



an idyllic feel. It relates to a positive re-evaluation of the image of the interwar Czechoslovakia until 1989. It was supposed to be a space where an individual human existence could develop its full potential. This perception implicitly builds a connection to the image of the “golden era,” the existence of something “pre-historical” or “without history” which ceases to exist when the bad history starts.<sup>24</sup> According to Georg Lukasz, the historical novel is based on conscious continuity (the past is the *pre-history* of the present); this is pseudo-historicism (Lukács 30). Rankov and other Slovak prose writers of the last decade construct the period between the end of the 1930s and end of 1980s as years of *contrast* to the ideal, as a “deviation,” “historical error,” in its effect legitimising the present.

Rankov’s novel *Legenda o jazyku* (*The Legend of Language*) (2018) from the beginning of the 1970s follows on his book *Stalo sa ...* (*It Happened ...*), which finishes in 1968. The narrative is based on a parallel between the Middle Ages and normalisation developed through relation of a world power to religion and church. To express this simple analogy, the author uses a complicated fabulation. At the beginning of the 1970s, after a few days at university, four young non-conformist students of history realise that the official interpretation of the legend of the Saint John of Nepomuk is used by the regime as atheist propaganda. Attempting to find out the truth, they start their own investigation but the State Security gets involved and the story has a tragic ending—during interrogations, one of the students gets killed in the presence of his friend, who has a nervous breakdown as a result. The narrative is situated within the realm of the miracle, in terms of its genre and ideology, the novel is a hagiography—reinforced through the current social evaluation of the depicted period.

The historicising approach to a more modern past is not unusual in Slovak prose. An extensive attempt at a novel by Peter Krišťúfek entitled *Dom hluchého* (*The House of the Deaf Man*) (2012) differs from Rankov’s books in the narrator’s perspective and reminiscing mode but is similar in one significant aspect: the current view of the past and trust in its social justification. The narrated situation reminiscing motivated by coming back home and re-evaluation—should bring the novel closer to prose based on personal memories. This stylisation is not employed in a trustworthy and consistent manner, as similar to Rankov, a historicising, detached perspective is used to express the conflict between memory and history. Both writers have selected a relatively long, almost identical period (Krišťúfek from mid-1930s to the 1970s, with cross-over to the present); both of them approached the functional relation between the characters and era

24 This is an approach where the question “When does history start?” is interchangeable with “When things started getting worse?” without a change of meaning.

in a similar manner. Both resolved the dilemma of whether to give preference to people or history by giving preference to history. Krištúfek's book and both Rankov's books are, at one level, a product of the so-called documentary research writing, a result of research across a range of sources (archives, newspapers from the time, internet, memoirs and others) and their subsequent fictionalisation. Both authors contrast the tragic history with the pre-historic "Golden Era" (interwar Czechoslovakia). Similar to Rankov, Krištúfek highlights the multi-ethnic nature of the then world. Books of both the authors are also related through their declared educational function: "Our national disease is a severe loss of memory," (Krištúfek 498) says Krištúfek's narrator, and the author seems to have the ambition to cure this disease. Prose about the past becomes an accessible means of balancing the information deficit concerning the past. Depicting the past through narrative is not original. It is fictionalisation of fantasy and related values which after 1989 became mainstream. This process concerned detachment from the past, self-legitimisation of new elites through distancing themselves from the past, which is typical of every radical social change. This gesture of distance is echoed in the historicising line of the current Slovak prose as a gesture legitimising the present.<sup>25</sup>

Rankov's and Krištúfek's narratives refer to but do not create; they refer to representations which have asserted themselves in the social conscience. They present a pre-established version of reality and with political correctness keep to a valid whole-of-society agreement about how things were. Both authors have made attempts at an extensive historical panorama stretched over a period of several decades. This attempt at complexity resulted in over-complex fabulation by Rankov and neutralisation of a personal perspective by Krištúfek. Silvester Lavrík (1964) took a different approach in his book *Nedelné šachy s Tiso* (*Sunday chess with Tiso*) (2016), which is the most convincing historical novel

25 When G. Lukács talks about the crisis of historical prose after 1848, he mentions authors who run away from the "unbearable present" and disconnect it from the past: "The past, history does not organically relate to the present., it forms its motionless opposite" (Lukács 240–241). This can also be related to Rankov's and Krištúfek's work, but their motivation is reverse to what Lukács talks about. He describes a part of Slovak prose as "intolerably" selected part of the past and contrasts them with the present and thus legitimises it. Lukács's understanding does not relate to historical prose, as the understanding of continuity as an important part of historical consciousness is missing and for their authors as "for writers after 1948 their continuity with the society's pre-history and the time they live and work in is not an immediate experience" (Lukács 250).

in Slovak literature of the last few years. He focused on a shorter period and observed his chosen personal perspective; he was able to look at history from below, through the eyes of a non-historical, intellectually impaired character.

Compared to historiography, the prosaic discourse about the past is situated within fiction. This is not an area without obligations, but its truth has a different, not factual nature, its trustworthiness and persuasiveness are developed by different means. A person is the subject and the starting point of fictional narrative; it does not start from history but with the subject. In the novel *Sunday Chess with Tiso*, Lavrík managed to create the main character and narrator as a mediator of a journey into the past. The setting is similar to that of *Plechový bubienok (The Tin Drum)* by Günter Grass; the past is interpreted through the memories of the participant in the events who is interned in a psychiatric ward. Her mental disability prevents her from understanding events in the same way as most people understand them; she “does not understand” the conventional, agreed interpretation of events or does not want to understand them but remembers: “I did not understand much back then but I remembered everything” (Lavrík 145). The author effectively used one approach typical of modern prose, particularly a perspective of a narrator who is in some ways ruined or socially inferior (a child, mentally retarded, a mad person, eccentric or socially excluded person). These are people who are unable to work with agreed forms of understanding of reality, or they are able to step over or avoid it.<sup>26</sup> The character coincidentally becomes the secretary to the wartime Slovak president (1939–1945), Jozef Tiso, one of the most controversial and discussed figures of more modern Slovak history, who up until now polarises society. Her depiction of the president is not an evaluation, just a convincing, situation “reproduction” of what she has seen and heard. The events are described

26 This approach was highlighted Franz K. Stanzel in relation to his theory of narrative: “The number of outsiders, doomed or disregarded who are being given this role in the modern novel (the role of a narrator, note by V. Barborík)—let’s remind ourselves of Leopold Bloom, Josef K., Biberkopf, Meursault—is remarkably high. The focus on a perspective and feelings of a mentally ill or demented person—such as Benjy in Faulkner’s novel *The Sound and the Fury* or chief Bromden in Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*—should be viewed as a follow-on on the trend in using extreme means of representation. In all these cases the novelty effect is in moving the novel’s perspective to that of an outsider; and this makes the reader see a known reality through different eyes” (Stanzel 20). The similarity between Lavrík’s novel and *The Tin Drum* can be found even in the way it rejects the pressure of the surroundings: Grass’s Oskár Matzerath by shouting and drumming, Lavrík’s heroine by bouts of aggression and swearing.

by a person who is not taken seriously by those who surround her. But this is exactly why she sees and hears what should have stayed hidden from the public. She perceives the world and statements literally, naively like a child, and this way she subverts the rhetorical dimension of the discourses of that period.

The linguistic side of the piece is an exceptional stylistic achievement within the context of current Slovak prose. The language is suited to the narrator, her exceptional memory and her inability to comprehend. The language mixes archaisms, regionalisms (words and also idioms), quotes and paraphrases of the ideological language of the propaganda, synthetic defects and clear child-like ability to depict what the society excludes. Lavrík's novel evokes also the setting in a trustworthy manner. A small town was then typical of the Slovak society of the era; it is based in Bánovce nad Bebravou.<sup>27</sup> The visual part of the book further helps to set it in local reality. There is a map of the town from the era on the flyover of the book; the book contains photographs and copies of historical documents. The primary role of these sources is not documentary but subversive, as they are adapted to the fictional world of narrative.

In *Sunday Chess with Tiso*, a historical figure (the President of the Slovak Republic as a "historical subject") meets a character which is absent from history but gains the privilege of reminiscing as the narrator. Historical memory is not a starting point for *fabulation* about the past but a subject of a *confrontation* with personal memory. There is an encounter of these two types of memory also in Denisa Fulmeková's (1967) novel *Konvália. Zakázaná láska Rudolfa Dilonga* (Konvalia: The Forbidden Love of Rudolf Dilong) (2016). The narrative utilises real events from the war-time Slovak state, of which the public are partly aware. This is a love story between a poet, a Catholic priest Rudolf Dilong and a Jewish girl at a time when anti-Jewish laws in Slovakia had taken effect. *Konvália* is a type of prose about the past which combines memoir sources and fabulation. The novel uses personal, family history (the main characters were the author's grandparents). The narrative consists of two layers: factual, which uses documents from family, and official archives,<sup>28</sup> which are based on

27 Jozef Tiso was a Catholic priest and dean of the Bánovce parish. During his presidency, he regularly returned here from Bratislava to look after the parish and conduct his religious duties.

28 Dilong's letters to his daughter and mother of his child from exile are the most interesting. Rudolf Dilong was a leading figure of Catholic modernism, a line of interwar Slovak poetry which combined Christian spirituality and modern poetic expression. He was very productive; just between 1931 and 1945, he published 24 collections of poems of varied nature. Some were close to the avant-garde poetry of the time; some

historical research, and fabulation, which make use of the romantic and adventurous potential of the reconstructed events. Although this is not fictional prose, the author employs methods which are typical of fiction, and this relates to her autobiographical approach. Her personal interest in the topic reflects in the literariness of the narrative, as she shapes the family history as a so-called powerful story, where she uses some conventional literary methods, tried and tested through tradition (such as the story is based on the topic of “forbidden love” at an unfavourable time). The book is situated on a boundary by its riven relation to the two mentioned types of memory: historical and personal. She does not draw a demarcation line between the past reflected through personal memory and societal memory, there is no direct rejection like with Vilikovský and Rozner. The poet Dilong, as one of the main characters, is already a part of history, literary history, and the author attempts to secure the same position for his partner, the author’s grandmother, in the same literary-historical discourse. The author credits two collections from the beginning of the 1940s, which were published under a female pseudonym Ria Valé and which are up until now regarded as Dilong’s collections, to his partner. This is a contrary gesture to what is typical of Rozner’s and Vilikovský’s rendering of the past. While Rozner resigns from history and Vilikovský wants to avoid it, Fulmeková attempts to historicise her heroine and make her a part of the collective memory.

Every subjective portrayal of the past is a combination of inconsistent sources and different forms of mediation. Personal memory and historical memory are not the only two approaches to reflecting the past, rather opposite ends with a variety of their combination in between. The reason this author defined them as opposites when covering his particular topic was a need for a unifying starting point which would mark out the space for reflection and enable a coherent distinction between varied and imbalanced (in terms of their values) prosaic depictions of the past and help clarify their relations.

In the past 10 to 15 years, Slovak prose came back to depicting the past through history that was the object of manipulation until 1989 and forced out or rejected in the 1990s. This is not a full come-back to the traditional histor-

expressed the author’s identification with the totalitarian regime of the wartime Slovak state. The poet’s relationship with a Jewish girl was complicated by his being a Catholic priest and serving the totalitarian regime which declared its antisemitism (as a clergyman, he served in the Slovak Army which fought on the German side at the Eastern front). He knew the political elites of the time and through his interventions, he possibly saved his daughter and her mother from deportation to a concentration camp. After the war, he emigrated to South America via Italy, and later lived in the USA.

ical novel and its functions; however, one important feature, legitimisation, is present in this writing: the negotiation of the representation of the past which would be acceptable according to present standards still takes place. This is even in the cases where the prosaic return to the past is in the form of a novel, and is based on active fabulation, so the result is a *retrospective* rather than a historical novel.<sup>29</sup> A problematic presence of the past in personal or social memory is typical of this style of writing. The periods of history which the Slovak society is still coming to terms with and which are traumatic attract greatest interest. Slovak prose thus focuses on the more modern Slovak history of the twentieth century, particularly the period between the end of the 1930s and 1989. Despite the fact that access to this period is limited to mediation, developing a personal relationship to the subject is possible. An emotional connection is developed particularly in cases where personal family past is concerned.

In Slovak prose of the past twenty years, several basic approaches can be distinguished based on the relation between personal and historical memory. The past concerns exclusively subjective memory for Pavel Vilikovský and Mária Kopcsay. Historicising novels of Pavol Rankov and Peter Krištúfek represent the opposite pole; they exploit historical consciousness and thus fulfil the requirements of social order. This results in unsurprising, predictable outcomes, as these are included in the task. The author does not have to question what things looked like (e.g. What was normalisation like? related to a “normalisation” novel). The answer is known; he just needs to paint a picture which as closely as possible copies the current historical consciousness held in society.<sup>30</sup> Such a taken-for-granted approach to the past is challenged in Ján

29 “A retrospective novel is a transitional form between a novel about the present and a historical novel. Although the novel depicts the past, the content is a part of the author’s individual memory and the memory of the society (an ideal boundary between a historical and retrospective novel seems to be a gap of approximately 60 years, as beyond that span, the content becomes a closed history for the society)” (Mocná, Janáčková). Many of the novels the present author has discussed here are situated in a period more than sixty years ago, as is discussed in the above definition. The year 1938 was key for the majority of them, as a transition between a history-free idyll and tragic history. Although this is more than 80 years, this is still not a “closed past” and remains to be actively present in the societal and family memory as an open problem. It remains a subject of politicisation to the present day.

30 This approach does not exclude success; on the contrary, it is possibly a prerequisite for current literature. A Polish translation of Rankov’s *Stalo sa prvého septembra (alebo inokedy)* (It happened on the first of September (or whenever)) was awarded the Central European Angelus prize for literature in 2014.

Rozner's and Silvester Lavrik's prose. Despite their use of different foundations (autobiography vs fiction), their prose is connected through their perception of the past as a conflict between personal biography and history. The significance of Rozner's reminiscing prose was influenced by the author's circumstances; he was "part of history" for a while but was subsequently expelled from it—similar to Tatarka who viewed history from that perspective in his novel *Recordings*. This is different for Vilikovský and Kopcsay who are younger and did not make it into history.

Memory, whether personal in the form of reminiscences, or social in the form of history, is a means of making the past more accessible and bringing the past into the present. This form of mediation may either be accentuated or suppressed in prosaic interpretation. In the first case, the topic is not just the past but also the act of reminiscing, reflected as an uncertain and problematic undertaking closely connected with the opposite function of memory, forgetting. If personal memory is unreliable, the narrator who refers to it cannot be any different. At the end of the novel *Seven Days before the Funeral*, the only thing that connects the character to the past—the prerequisite of the narrative itself—is contested: "His own memory has betrayed him ... The memory which fabricates something or changes something in what it tries to remember ... something manipulates what it tries to recollect" (Rozner 307). The past which awaits us is uncertain; however this uncertainty may be a blessing for literature.

*Translated by Pat Mertova*

## | References

- Assmanová, Aleida. *Prostory vzpomínání. Podoby a proměny kulturní paměti*. (Translated from the German: *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*). Trans. Jakub Flanderka, Světlana Ondroušková a Jiří Soukup. Praha: Karolinum, 2018.
- Bílik, René. *Historický žánr v slovenskej próze*. Bratislava: Kalligram – Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, 2008.
- Chmel, Rudolf, ed. *Slovník diel slovenskej literatúry 20. storočia*. Bratislava: Kalligram – Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, 2006.
- Fulmeková, Denisa. *Konvália. Zakázaná láska Rudolfa Dilonga*. Bratislava: Slovart, 2016.



- Juráček, Pavel. *Deník (1959–1974)*. Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2003.
- Kopcsay, Márius. *Stratené roky*. Bratislava: L.C.A., 2004.
- Kotian, Róbert “Mám rád nedôveryhodného rozprávača.” Rozhovor s Pavlom Rankovom (*An Interview with Pavol Rankov*). *Magazín o knihách* 3.12 (2018): 8–9.
- Krištúfek, Peter. *Dom hluchého*. Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2012.
- Lavřík, Silvester. *Nedelné šachy s Tisom*. Bratislava: Dixit, 2016.
- Lukács, György. *Historický roman*. (Translated from the German: *Historische Roman*). Trans. Július Albrecht. Bratislava: Tatran, 1976.
- Matejov, Fedor “Navrávačky.” *Slovník diel slovenskej literatúry 20. storočia*. Ed. Rudolf Chmel. Bratislava: Kalligram, Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, 2006. 445–449.
- Mocná Dagmar, Janáčková Jaroslava. “Historický román” (Historical Novel). *Encyklopedie literárnych žánrů. (Encyclopedia of Literary Genres)*. Eds. Mocná Dagmar, Josef Peterka et al. Praha – Litomyšl: Paseka, 2004. 240.
- Otčenáš, Igor. *Keby...: Rýchle dejiny budúcnosti Slovenska*. Bratislava: L.C.A., 1998.
- Pechar, Jiří. “O postmodernismu, smyslu umění a právu na vlastní příběh.” Lyotard, Jean-François. *O postmodernismu: Postmoderno vysvětlované dětem. Postmoderní situace*. (Translated from the French: *Le Post-Moderne expliqué aux enfants. La Condition postmoderne*). Trans. Jiří Pechar. Praha: Filosofický ústav AV ČR, 1993. 5–11.
- Pišťanek, Peter. “Mladý Dôňč.” *Mladý Dôňč*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1993. 39–92.
- Rankov, Pavol. *Stalo sa prvého septembra (alebo inokedy)*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2008.
- . *Legenda o jazyku*. Bratislava: Sloart, 2018.
- Rozner, Ján. *Sedem dní do pohrebu*. Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2009.
- . *Noc po fronte*. Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2010.
- . *Výlet na Devín*. Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2011.
- Stanzel, Franz K. *Teorie vyprávění*. (Translated from the German: *Theorie des Erzählens*). Trans. Jiří Stromšík. Praha: Odeon, 1988.
- Tatarka, Dominik. “Navrávačky.” *Slovenské pohľady* 105:17 (1989): 19–43; 106: 3 (1990): 6–37.
- Vilikovský, Pavel. *Kôň na poschodí, slepec vo Vrábľoch*. Bratislava: Smena, 1989a.
- . *Večne je zelený ...* Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1989b.
- . “Gašpar, Melichar a Baltazárová.” *Čarovný papagáj a iné gýče*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 2004a. 20–33.
- . “Pán spomienok.” *Čarovný papagáj a iné gýče*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 2004b. 65–87.



- . "Všetko, čo viem o stredoeurópanstve." *Prózy*. Bratislava: Kalligram – Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, 2005. 191–197.
- . "Na ľavom brehu pamäti." *Prvá a posledná láska*. Bratislava: Slovart, 2013. 5–135.
- . *RAJC je preč*. Bratislava: Petrus, 2018.

## | Abstrakt

VLADIMÍR BARBORÍK

### Pamieť i historia. Ujęcia przeszłości w słowackiej prozie po 2000 r.

Artykuł poświęcony jest sposobom, w jakich dwie podstawowe formy pamięci – historyczna i indywidualna – przejawiają się w części słowackiej prozy ostatnich dwóch dziesięcioleci. Pamięć indywidualna stanowi podstawę różnych odmian autobiografii oraz nawiązującej do tego gatunku prozy stylizowanej na biografię. Pamięć historyczna zaś cechuje gatunki historyczne, przede wszystkim powieść. W latach dziewięćdziesiątych XX w. dominowały opisy współczesności, a historyzujące ujęcia przeszłości były poddawane radykalnej subwersji parodyzującej w prozach Petera Pišťanka i Igora Otčenáša. Na początku nowego tysiąclecia ponownie pojawia się proza obrazująca i komentująca przeszłość. Bardziej sugestywne okazuje się pisanie o pamięci, które opiera się na jednostce znajdującej się wewnątrz historii lub poza nią. Znalazło ono zastosowanie w różnych formach pisarstwa autobiograficznego, w ramach literatury pięknej przyjęło zaś postać stylizacji biograficznej (np. Vili-kovský, Kopcsay i Rozner). W ostatnich dziesięciu–piętnastu latach w literaturze słowackiej pojawiło się ponowne zainteresowanie historią, głównie tą sprzed roku 1989 (np. Rankov, Krišťúfek i Lavrík), fałszowanej w literaturze sprzed 1989 r. i pomijanej lub wypieranej w latach dziewięćdziesiątych XX w. W tym czasie pamięć historyczna wychodziła naprzeciw oczekiwaniom społecznym. Wyjątkiem był Silvester Lavrík, który w swojej twórczości łączył dwa podstawowe podejścia do przeszłości (indywidualne i historyczne) w formie ich dialogu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** słowacka proza po 2000 r.; pamięć; historia; powieść historyczna; biografia; legitymizacja

## | Abstract

VLADIMÍR BARBORÍK

**Memory and History: A Comparison of the Past in Slovak Prose of the Post-2000 Period**

This study focuses on how two kinds of memory: historical and personal are reflected in a section of Slovak literature of the past two decades. A variety of autobiographical genres and biographically-stylised fictional prose draw on personal memory, and history, is the domain of historical genres, particularly the novel. After the 1990s, the present was deemed important and historical presentations of the past were parodied in the prose of Peter Pišťanek and Igor Otčenáš. At the beginning of the new millennium, however, prose portraying and reflecting on the past reappeared. Memory-based writing which is concerned with an individual situated within history, or outside of it, is more persuasive. Memory-based writing is used in different forms of autobiographical writing: within fiction it takes a form of biographical stylisation (e.g. Viličkovský, Kopcsay and Rozner). In the past ten to fifteen years, there has been a renewed interest in history in Slovak literature, mainly in pre-1989 history (e.g. Rankov, Krištúfek and Lavrík), which had been mistreated in pre-1989 Slovak literature, and later there was no interest in it or it was even rejected in the 1990s.

During that time, historical memory was exploited to meet societal requirement. Silvester Lavrík was an exception—he was able to marry the two basic approaches to the past (personal history and historical) in a form of a dispute between them.

**Keywords:** Slovak prose after 2000; memory; history; historic genre; biography; legitimisation

## | About the Author

**Vladimír Barborík** is Associate Professor; he graduated from the Faculty of Education in Nitra in 1992 (in Slovak Literature and Philosophy). Since 1992, he has worked at the Institute of Slovak Literature, Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. His research focuses on interwar and post-war Slovak literature (published monographs: *Pavel Hružík*, 2000; *Prozaik Gejza Vámoš*, 2006 and *Hľadanie rozprávača: Prózy Vincenta Šikulu*, 2014 and post-war literary life (with P. Darovec *Mladá tvorba 1956–1970–1996*; *Časopis po čase*, 1996 and V. Petřík *Pohyb k nehybnosti. Literárny život od začiatku 60. do konca 70. rokov objektívom Antona Šmotláka*, 2018). He co-authored several books such as interviews

with V. Petřík *Hľadanie minulého času* (2009). He was the editor of literary and cultural journals *Dotyky*, *Kultúrny život*, *RAK* a *Slovenská literatúra*. From 2008, he also teaches Slovak literature at the Catholic University in Ružomberok. E-mail: vladimir.barborik@savba.sk



ALEŠ MERENUS, MAREK LOLLOK  
Akademie věd České republiky

## The Image of the Czech Past in the Contemporary Docudrama<sup>1</sup>

Czech drama output in the new millennium shows a clear trend towards the documentary, which is increasing in strength as it progressively influences an ever larger group of authors, and over the last few years it has had a fundamental effect on the form of Czech drama as such. Hence instead of purely fictional plots and invented characters, contemporary plays like to resort to historical material and real-life figures from Czech history, whose example authors can use to interpret Czech national identity and thus together recreate it.<sup>2</sup> Hence it would appear that after many years in which literature has been under the sway of “imaginative” lines of creativity influenced by postmodernism, Czech writing to a large extent is again turning to “authentic” texts, as promoted by literary

1 This study has resulted from the Academic Prize awarded prof. Pavel Janoušek by the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and from long-term support for conceptual development of a research institution; registration number 68378068.

This work required the use of Czech Literary Bibliography research infrastructure resources (<http://clb.ucl.cas.cz>).

2 It is also worth mentioning that the increase in interest in twentieth century history, as well as in its reevaluation, is also a trend within contemporary Czech prose, e.g. see the novels *Peníze od Hitlera* (2006) by Radka Denemarková, *Vyhnání Gerty Schnirch* (2009) by Kateřina Tučková, *Všechno je jenom dvakrát* by Michal Příbáň and others.

critic Jan Lopatka and his successors, and based on the personal testimony of an author who usually takes on the role of a kind of guarantor of the veracity of his or her deposition.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the 1990s, however, the current wave of drama has substantially changed its poetics, so that instead of the author's personal testimony, it allows paraphrases or direct quotations from period documents, which often disrupt and modify the traditional dramatic form, to be inserted into the structure of the dramatic works.

This outlined trend, which can be observed in the latest Czech drama texts, goes along hand in hand with theatrical and theatrological trends. The most characteristic aspect in this respect is the development in German-language regions, where considerable attention was being paid to the issue of the "theatre of the real"<sup>4</sup> in connection with existing theatrical practice (see Barton, Irmer et al.). The significant features of this kind of theatre, harking back in some cases to the Piscatorian and Brechtian tradition, include the use of various documentary techniques (including using one's own investigations and research), programmatic bolstering of authenticity, the "truthfulness" and specificity of communication and the political and community dimension of productions; at the same time one speaks of the reaction to the "crisis in mimetic representation," indeed of the social and political turn (Malzacher 11). As a rule, the authors' aim is to go beyond the boundaries of art and to more resolutely enter the public arena, which they believe to be co-determined inter alia by theatrical activities and events.

Together with the repeated trend towards realism, these new Czech plays naturally keep coming back to key sensitive Central European motifs, primarily

3 See Lopatka 1991 and Lopatka 1995.

4 A term that has now caught on in Western European theatrical reflections was used in 2013 by Carol Martin as the title of her monograph. She explains it as follows: "I prefer the phrase 'theatre of the real,' as it both includes and exceeds documentary theatre. The former depends upon verbatim quotation whereas 'theatre of the real' is a larger category and encompasses both theatre about real events and the way real events are conceptualised using diverse means, including fiction clearly identified as such, in the service of non-fiction. Theatre of the real is where the procedures of society are tested, where the role of the artist is to create an aesthetic laboratory for ideas and actions, where the outside world is inside the theatre, and where the role of the spectator is one of a critical analyst assessing the potential of a new and accepted wisdom for the greatest good" (Martin 2015: 42). Elsewhere in the same study Martin adds that "[t]heatre of the real has many names: documentary theatre, verbatim theatre, reality-based theatre, theatre-of-fact, theatre of witness, tribunal theatre, investigative theatre, non-fiction theatre, restored village performances, war and battle re-enactments, and autobiographical and biographical theatre" (Martin 2015: 33).

reinstating and reviving the polarity within them between history with a capital H and history with a small h, as the “textbook” historical events inscribe themselves indelibly into the lives of individuals. This polarity is then projected onto the ideological axis of the plays, re-actualizing the conflict based on the social division of “us and them,” and in some cases involving an “own/other” dichotomy. Unlike in the past, they no longer just recall historical events from the Nazi occupation and the Communist era, in which totalitarian regime stalwarts stood on one side and resistance fighters or dissidents on the other, but they highlight the more controversial moments, such as the events just after the war associated with the “disorderly” expulsion of the Germans. Hence the ideological axis has suddenly changed to a considerable extent, as the image built up over the years of the peace-loving Czechs finding a just reckoning for the Nazi criminals gradually gives way to a perspective in which the Sudeten Germans take on the role of victims of unjustifiably brutal violence.<sup>5</sup> The territory of Central Europe as a place between the West and the East, i.e. a multiethnic space where the spheres of influence of two world powers come together, again comes to the centre of attention as it once more becomes primary thematic material in a number of plays.<sup>6</sup>

Czech identity—often set in, and systematically compared with, this Central European context—is thus an object of contemporary literary, theatrolgical, and artistic reflection, as over the last few years the specific features of the national character have again started to be considered with great interest. Interest has also focused on the question of heroism, which might be summed up as follows:

- 5 On the other hand, continuity is shown by the image of the Jews, who continue to be perceived as the obvious victims of Nazi and Communist power. In this connection we might e.g. recall the production of *Archa naděje*, which premiered (in 2015) at the South Bohemian Theatre in České Budějovice. The playwright Martin Vačkář was inspired here by the diary of a direct participant in the exodus of Jews from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in 1940.
- 6 The term Central Europe is of course ambiguous—never neutral and if anything “slippery,” not only from a geographical, but also from a historical, political, ethnic and cultural etc. standpoint (see Trávníček 243–244); see also the annotated bibliography on the issues surrounding Central Europe). Hence, from a historical perspective one speaks more of various “conceptions of Central Europe,” whereas at the most general, rather idealistic level, it was evidently demarcated by Jan Ulrich as “a mental space within changeable borders” (Ulrich 13). With respect to our subject, Jacques Rupnik’s retrospectively-based conception of Central Europe is apposite, laconically expressed as it is in the metaphorical title of his book on this territory and the role of the Czech nation within it—*Central Europe is like a bird with eyes in the back of its head: on the Czech past and present* (2018).

Does the Czech nation, which has never set great store by heroes, have a supply of heroic individuals who might be made the subject of art works?<sup>7</sup> And if we do have any heroes at all, what kind of people were they? What do they share and how do they differ from everybody else?

And let us keep going with some more specific questions: So who are these Czech heroes in contemporary Czech drama? Are they the “founding fathers” led by dear old Masaryk,<sup>8</sup> the former dissidents around Václav Havel (e.g. Olga Havlová and Věra Čáslavská), or more probably the resistance fighters during the Nazi occupation and under Communist totalitarianism (the Mašín brothers)?<sup>9</sup> Or could it be that the consensual hero who is really worth following does not actually exist? After all, Czech drama also offers countless repulsive anti-heroes who are characteristic of their circumstances (e.g. the first Communist President Klement Gottwald). Such (at least implicit) soul-searching into the Czech past is considered, for example, by Marta Ljubková, editor of an extensive collection of contemporary Czechoslovak dramas *Hry na hrdiny* (Playing Heroes) to be proof of the revitalized *engagement* of art and drama as such, which after many years is coming back to politically topical subjects, evoking them by utilizing period documentary material: “Authors are beginning to be inspired by real political events, constructing their plays with authentic material (cf. Iva Klestilová’s *Má vlast* (My Homeland)). From there it is just a small step towards looking for positive heroes, who are only on offer in exceptional cases by contemporary public life. Moreover, the theatre seems to have rediscovered its erstwhile objective: to comment upon current affairs. The effort to address audiences through topical stories, whose relevance to the present day is undeniable and quite natural, has been a kind of reaction to the marginalization of the theatre and culture in general ...” (Ljubková 12).

7 Heroes in Czech drama, contemporary and otherwise, are dealt with in detail by Jaroslav Vostrý and Zuzana Sílová in their monograph *České drama a český hrdina* (Czech Drama and the Czech Hero) published in 2017.

8 Over the last few years, particularly in connection with the centenary of the establishment of the Republic, productions dealing with figures from the First Republic have been appearing on the stages of several Czech theatres, including Peter Pavlač’s *Masaryk/Štefánek*, which has simultaneously become part of the repertoire at two theatres: *Městské divadlo* in Zlín and *Divadlo Aréna* in Bratislava (premiered 2018).

9 The story of the Mašín brothers, which still provokes passionate reactions in Czech circles many years after the fall of Communism, has been dealt with by prose writer Jan Novák in his docu-novel *Zatím dobrý* (So Far So Good), for which he received the top award in the prestigious Magnesia Litera competition in 2005, as well as by the director Jiří Havelka in his dramatic text *Já, hrdina* (I, Hero, premiered 2011).



Of course, docudramas cannot replace real documentaries. Their objective is primarily to recall and reinterpret previous events and historical figures, whose stories are to be experienced, as it were, by readers and audiences, who are then to process them both emotionally and rationally. The documentary material involved in the dramatic structure is meant to give the recipients a sense of authenticity, or in the words of Roland Barthes, to create a “realistic effect” (Barthes 78–81) that is meant to bolster the aesthetic experience and perhaps even the appeal of the message overall. However, this work basically remains fictional, and in most cases this is openly acknowledged, as it “only” adds period documentary elements to its material, including them in its own fictional testimony of the real world. Here we see that inescapable paradox in the relationship between fiction and reality, which can never merge, but only get nearer to or further away from each other, the paradox that broader social changes are interpreted in specific examples, and it is through the fictional testimony that a certain message about the state and the form of the real world is formulated. It is on the basis of this very paradox that the unique genre of the “docudrama” is developing at present.<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, reality gets into the plays in many and varied ways. This always depends on the techniques chosen by dramatists for their texts. In order to briefly sketch out the entire issue in the following pages we shall present several prominent drama works from the recent past, which we shall use to demonstrate the procedures involved in inserting into a drama (i.e. a projected stage fiction) documentary materials, whose task it is to link a fictional testimony to the reader’s/audience’s world experience and thus ultimately to make it look plausible to the recipient.<sup>11</sup> This exposition will lead from the format

10 “There are various designations for the documentary ‘genre’ too: the older term is drama of fact, and more recently docudrama, tribunal drama (a kind of court trial drama) and verbatim drama; the term ‘documentary’ drama also overlaps with the concept of the political play, as well as other ‘new dramatics’ genres.... However, it differs from them in its rejection of fiction, its emphasis on factuality and facts and the relatively large para-dramatic element (in this case by accepting phenomena from reality and their inclusion within a dramatic or theatrical framework)” (Jungmannová 36).

11 “Like the creators of realist drama, the creators of ‘documentary’ plays endeavour to come as close as possible to reality, or to utilize the situation to make the reality speak for itself, so that they create their plays in the same way as they undertake precise research: seeking out various real-life material, recording opinions, memories and experiences on a dictaphone, including media announcements and the results of various sociological procedures, such as interpreted communications and texts from social networks and the like. Hence, a ‘documentary’ play tends to be journalistic or investi-

of the traditional autobiographical play with elements of situation comedy (*Zázrak v černém domě*, *Miracle at the Black House*) and biographically-based dramas (*Olga, Věra*), texts simulating trials (“tribunal drama”: *Horáková–Gottwald*, *Horáková vs Gottwald*, *S nadějí i bez ní*, *With and Without Hope*), to montages and collages (*Hvězdy nad Baltimore*, *Stars over Baltimore*, *Palubní deník Zikmunda a Hanzelky*, *Zikmund and Hanzelka’s Logbook*) and a formally very loose dramatic form, the stage libretto inspired by postwar events (*Porta Apostolorum*). We believe that this approach will best help to present the broad range of docudramas about the Czech past, both in all their thematic variety (the occupation, expulsion and normalization) and in their heterogeneity of form (analytical play, tribunal drama and the like).<sup>12</sup>

Before we proceed to the actual analysis of the selected dramas, we first need to consider the two key aspects of the issue. In the given context it is primarily necessary to clarify the relations between the docudrama and the historical play genre, as these are mutually permeable genre categories with a broad overlap. This can only be done because each of them is based on a different principle—the historical drama is a thematic genre, whose basic material is historical, whereas the docudrama is a formally-based genre, which includes—to a substantial extent and in various ways—material of a documentary nature within its own structure (mostly direct quotations of written historical sources). For this reason, too, biographical plays written from the contemporary perspective of authors from a generation that could not itself have lived through the events depicted, can be described as historical dramas that work with documentary techniques. Hence, these are historical plays of a documentary nature. On the other hand, one should bear in mind that not all historical plays can automatically be classified under the docudrama genre, just as documentary, authentication procedures are not just restricted to plays that deal with historical material.

Another aspect that is worth mentioning at this point is the actual character of the dramatic text as such. Based on the premise that a drama is a distinct literary genre, its uniqueness consists in the dual nature of its existence—on the one hand, as a literary work intended for reading, but on the other hand, in contrast

gative by nature, referring to a social dimension within which it employs anti-illusive and montage dramatic devices” (Jungmannová 36).

12 We are aware that our selection of plays to be analysed is by necessity reductive, but it is not possible within the space of a short study to present a comprehensive picture of any phenomenon, let alone a phenomenon that is as multiaspectual as the contemporary documentary drama. Hence, our study focuses on the selected types, which are meant to illustrate the basic developmental trends that docudramas follow.

to the lyric and the epic, it is potentially also meant to serve as the basis for theatre productions. This study focuses on drama primarily as a literary work, while only taking a marginal interest in the theatrical context, i.e. the actual stage production(s). In the case of such texts as Bambuška's *Porta Apostolorum*, however, these are clearly not standard classic dramas for reading, but dramatic texts to be used primarily as instructions by stage directors, on the assumption that they would only be completed on stage. Taking this into account, we can ultimately divide the dramatic texts analysed here into two groups: plays in the literary sense, e.g. *Zázrak v černém domě* (Miracle at the Black House), which were adapted for book publication and whose existence is not just limited to one specific theatre performance, but also anticipates the possibility that they may become part of the theatre repertoire on several stages at the same time. And then there are texts that have never come out in book form, and are so closely associated with a particular theatre ensemble that it is practically impossible to consider their potential transfer to another stage. It turns out that in their case the documentary elements got into the texts in a much easier and more flexible way than in the case of regular dramas—these are not neglected in this study, primarily in order to show that the documentary “wave” has had a strong effect on dramatic texts in all their forms, and that in this respect it is of no substantial importance whether a text is intended more (or exclusively) for the internal needs of the production team or is freely available to the broader reading community.<sup>13</sup>

### 1. Miracle at the Black House: Personal Memory as a Documentary Record of the Period

Milan Uhde's play *Zázrak v černém domě* (Miracle at the Black House, published 2005, premiered 2007) represents a dramatic line that is based on the author's own unmediated life experience.<sup>14</sup> In this, it basically differs from the majority of present-day documentary-based dramas, whose authors were not and could

13 It might also be possible, of course, to look at the issue of the documentary element from the opposite perspective, i.e. from the standpoint of theatre productions, and to consider the critical response or to examine the direction procedures, artistic stage designs and the like. However, this would undoubtedly lead us far away from the sphere of literature and thus from dramatic texts as literary creations, which we are primarily dealing with here.

14 Moreover, the authenticity of the text in the Brno staging of the play (premiered 2018) was supported by the use of a short film from Uhde's family archive, which is shown to the audience right at the beginning of the entire performance. Uhde had earlier

not have been direct participants or contemporary witnesses of the events dealt with in their plays. Hence, Uhde's autobiographically conceived drama proceeds along two traditional genre lines: a) tying in with post-1989 drama on life under Communist (and Nazi) totalitarianism, and b) reviving the "analytical drama" genre made famous by Ibsen in his plays from the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The documentary (in the true sense) nature of the text is thus minimal in this case, involving the story (inspired by real life) of one family, who after years of rowing meet up in the family house, so its members can try to iron out some ancient injustices and clarify their property relations—primarily regarding the issue of inheriting the family home. We can primarily follow the biographical elements in the drama in the character of Dušan, a former dissident and minister, who arrives together with his wife in order to come to an agreement over the inheritance of the functionalist villa for his mentally ill sister Šárka and to settle his long-troubled relations with his father, who during the normalization period had preferred to disinherit Dušan, as well as with his brother Ivan, who informed on him under the previous regime. Hence, the text of the play embodies the memory of one family clan that acts as a kind of synecdoche of twentieth century Czech history. Furthermore, history is also directly embodied in the text in the guise of the black house, which plays an active role in the play, as it acts symbolically at certain times—twice it tries to flood its own premises with water or suddenly opens the doors of wardrobes that for years have not been possible to unlock, surprisingly revealing that they do not conceal the entrance to a secret room, where family legend has it, their uncle was supposed to have hidden away from the transport to the concentration camp. Moreover, *Miracle at the Black House* clearly highlights the dividing lines between "us and them," which pass directly through the centre of the middle-class Pompe family—with Dušan standing on the ideological axis as a representative of the dissident, contrasting with his brother Ivan who is a collaborator with the previous regime. However, the text also highlights the ethnic axis in the case of the father, who compelled his wife to renounce her own Jewish-heritage parents during the Nazi occupation for fear of losing his property. Characteristically, all the family traumas and mutual injustices that were never subsequently followed by an effective apology or atonement are something that prevents the family from living a normal life, as can apply to Czech society as a whole, which the author believes in many respects has not come to terms with the legacy of two consecutive totalitarian eras.

provided a dramatic treatment of his own family history in the radio play *Velice tiché Ave* (Very Quiet Ave, manuscript 1981, premiered 1990).

## 2. Olga: A Portrait of the Great Wife of a Famous Man

A biographically conceived narrative, albeit in this case not drawing from the author's personal memory, is offered by Anna Saavedra's play *Olga* (*Horror z Hrádečku*), (*Olga*, Horror Stories from Hrádeček, premiered 2016),<sup>15</sup> who, as in the case, for example, of *Velvet Havel* (premiered and published 2014) by Miloš Orson Štědroň and *Havel v zemi čeledínů* (*Havel in the Land of the Stable Boys*, premiered 2015) by Martin Františák, deals with the life of this icon of Czech dissent and the first post-revolutionary President, Václav Havel. Unlike most plays about Václav Havel, however, *Olga* focuses primarily upon Havel's life partner and first wife Olga, whereas Václav Havel himself is only assigned a place as one of the secondary characters in the play. However, Olga's life is naturally so intertwined with the fortunes of her life partner that even here scenes are played out that went down in history with a capital H, such as the one about the President's short trousers. On the other hand, however, the figure of the prominent statesman in the text plays more of an auxiliary role, when at the same time (as the text prescribes) he is to be played by some three actors so as to clearly and much more obviously highlight Olga's difficult life role as the wife of the persecuted dissident. The documentary elements in the text get into the very dialogues—for example, some of the rejoinders involve recognized variations on Havel's *Letters to Olga*.<sup>16</sup> The play also includes references to film documentaries (e.g. *The Hrádeček Phenomenon*, or: *Ghosts Beneath Břečtejn*, a documentary directed by Andrej Krob) and magazine interviews (e.g. an interview with Olga Stankovičová from *Revolver revue*) and the like. In this way the entire testimony, otherwise clearly theatrical and self-avowedly fictional, with the actors alternating in roles as need dictates, is seemingly made credible and realistic. As a result, *Olga* is ultimately a fictional testimony about a real woman and in a general sense the testimony of a person who stood in the shadow of her husband all the while, but who in many respects rose above him in human terms, and if it had not been for her, Václav Havel would never have become what he finally came to be.

15 We are working with a previously unpublished text provided by the creator of this production.

16 References to sources are given in the text, as they are in specialist texts and footnotes, which is another of the features that underline the authenticity of the entire testimony: "But I am even less afraid of sci-fi phenomena; some animals, a marten, badger or the like—if they suddenly launch into dialogue with me then I am ill at ease ..." (Saavedra 10).

### 3. *Věra*: The Spiritual Path of a Hero Tested by Fate

*Věra* (premiered 2018)<sup>17</sup> by Simona Petrů is another of these biographical-based dramas; it endeavours to present the life and character of the once world-famous and exceptionally successful Czech athlete and gymnast Věra Čáslavská. Here, too, reality combines with fiction, and facts combine with “author’s licence” in a very specific way.<sup>18</sup> The key principle is pithily expressed in the author’s declaration revealing her detachment from a biographical and thus historiographical role:

I’d rather leave biographies to historians and documentarists, that is, to those who are more competent, educated and, ideally in my view, objective. If I write a play about living individuals, then I use their life as a more general metaphor for a subject that I want to deal with. And just as when I am writing, it is my desire to present and defend their attitudes, so likewise it is my desire to present and defend my own view of things. I do not want to, and cannot, be impartial, but I just point out my own angle. (*Věra production programme* 10)

This acknowledged selectivity and subjectivity in her view of the real Věra Čáslavská is conspicuously reflected in her focus on the mental state (and development) of the character, which in relation to the reality is by its very nature an unverifiable phenomenon that is scarcely demonstrable from a documentary standpoint. This is not a case of the complex psychologizing that we know from traditional realist-psychological dramas, but attention is focused primarily on the protagonist’s “inner” resources and the positive qualities behind all her thinking and actions. In line with the author’s ambition to set out inspiring national models,<sup>19</sup> here we find characteristics that are highlighted

17 We are working with a previously unpublished text provided by the creator of this production.

18 This is immediately evident from a glance at the dramatis personae: apart from the female protagonist, real names are also borne by her colleague (Eva Bosáková), husband (Josef Odložil) and children (Martin and Radka Odložilová), as well as the presidents that Věra comes into contact with (Ludvík Svoboda and Václav Havel), while on the other hand generalizations are used in the case of the main competitor (the Soviet gymnast), the trainers (Male Trainer and Female Trainer) and other secondary characters (Journalist, Agent, Chairman, Man in Crowd, Woman in Crowd, and likewise Japanese Master and Old Samurai).

19 See her statement: “And again it is important for me to recall, to continually recall such figures from our nation. We have someone and something to be proud of, we

in a quite schematic and almost hagiographic manner, such as the ambition, uprightness, persistence and dedication that Věra possesses to an extraordinary degree. Although all these virtues could “only” be demonstrated by presenting the specific situations and historical moments that Čáslavská lived through (e.g. signing the 2000 Words Manifesto in 1968 and her silent protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia on the Olympic medal-winners’ podium in Mexico, refusal to collaborate with the Communist regime and the like), the author also chooses a rather more “literary” method, i.e. a comparison of and confrontation between Čáslavská’s cv and the traditional Japanese teaching of Samurai philosophy. This authorial gesture, whose logic is based on the real popularity that endures to this day of the three-time winner at the Winter Olympic Games in Tokyo 1964, as well as on her appreciation for this culture, enables her to productively and (within the docudrama context) uniquely comment on important events in the gymnast’s turbulent life and in Czech history through the prism of a coherent and firmly anchored concept (the chief source of inspiration, which is even quoted in the play’s motto, is Taira Shigesuke’s *Bushido: The Code of the Samurai*). For the Czech (and Central European) reader this approach is made attractive not only thanks to its cultural exoticness, but also due to its ethical universality: it shows the protagonist to be a woman setting

have someone to relate to, we have these figures of admirable greatness, and we need not keep crying over our lot as small and subjugated. It is enough not to forget those who show us great ideals, great gestures and above all great actions” (*Věra production programme* 26). Likewise, the text of *Tichý Tarzan (zcizené deníky fantoma erotické fotografie)* (Quiet Tarzan (Stolen diaries from the phantom of erotic photography)) is a biographically based play by this author (premiered 2012, published. 2014) on the life of photographer Miroslav Tichý. Moreover, this play also makes a fine demonstration of links between fiction and reality as it takes place in a court, while the presentation of the text at the *Divadlo Husa na provázku* in Brno was judicially challenged by Tichý’s neighbour and former housekeeper.” Tichý’s former neighbour and housekeeper Jana Hebnarová, presented in the play as the woman next door (played by Gabriela Štefanová), demanded that some parts of the production with the subtitle “Stolen diaries from the phantom of erotic photography” should disappear from the work. There are certain passages in it that directly describe his neighbour in a quite brutal manner, so she defended herself with an action for the protection of personal rights, confirmed Hebnarová’s lawyer František Vyskočil. Hebnarová took offence at scenes in which as one of the characters in the play she has affairs with another key figure in Tichý’s life, Swiss-Czech Roman Buxbaum (the Curator in the production—Vladimír Hauser), who made the photographer famous worldwide (see Pokorný).



out on the path of personal growth from a Samurai novice to a grandmaster.<sup>20</sup> Fateful blows both to her personally and to society as a whole (the occupation, denial of training opportunities, alcoholism and the aggression of a husband who reproached Vera for her pertinacity, as well as her son's patricide) can thus be seen not as the cruel chance of this world, but as tests to verify the extent of the protagonist's understanding and assimilation of these oriental doctrines.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. *Horáková vs. Gottwald: The Staging of this Show Trial as an Indictment Against the Past*

Another set of texts that we aim to deal with is a special genre called the tribunal drama, i.e. texts offering a fictional (re)construction of a real trial or similar proceedings. Karel Steigerwald's play *Horáková–Gottwald* (premiered 2006, published 2007) is based on the theatre within the theatre principle, working with the epic approaches that we know from Brecht's plays. In the text the past is brought back to life by means of a deliberately staged theatrical image, whereby the drama highlights the theatrical nature of the Communist-manipulated trial,<sup>22</sup>

20 Processuality is also evoked compositionally when, instead of individual images, the designation "Level" is used a total of fourteen times in the play.

21 A biographically-based play on an often extraordinary female chief protagonist that is comparable to a large extent is *Vitka* (published and premiered 2018) by Kateřina Tučková. The prototype for this titular heroine is Vítězslava Kaprálová, a world-famous composer and conductor, who died young. Amongst others, she was a friend and pupil of the famous Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů. Even in this traditionally structured drama, historical authenticity is evoked by a number of thematic and formal devices, such as the use of the entire names of real-life historical figures, the precise dating of some images and the factually-based author's introduction, which is relatively extensive for book production from 2018, as well as an expert postscript by musicologist Miloš Štědroň, a bibliography and an illustrated supplement showing the real-life counterparts of the dramatis personae. Paradoxically, the "authenticity" of the play is, alas, not based on a direct examination of the sources and primary sources, but on detailed research into the extensive secondary specialist literature and a literary version of Kaprálová's fate written by her former husband Jiří Mucha, as well as a novelized version by Jindřich Uher.

22 We can also find a similar approach in a play by Jan Jirků and Adéla Balzerová *Vajgl* (Fag End, 2010), which centres around the prisoners' uprising in Bory jail in the 1950s. "The historical level of the trial intermeshes with the fictional level in several places and motifs, time loses its linearity (so the outcome is anticipated), and time loops provide an insight into the absurdity of developments at that time" (Ljubková 16).



the direction of this play within a play being taken on by Emil, described as an entertainer and an artist, intended to be the fictional counterpart of director Emil František Burian, who wrote his own notorious drama about the Milada Horáková trial *Pařeniště* (Hothouse). This revue-style play does not present the story in a linear fashion, but the *syuzhet* jumps about from one time level to another, until it finally comes to the anticipated conclusion, the moment of Milada Horáková's execution, which Emil thought would be just "make-believe" like at the theatre. Hence, the text is a clear indictment of the previous regime, particularly the 1950s show trial period, in which a number of pro-regime artists were also involved, at least at a moral level. The actual inclusion of the sources and other period documentary records in the text is very precisely characterized by Lenka Jungmannová in her book *V souřadnicích mnohosti* (Within the Coordinates of Abundance):

Steigerwald chose a collage form for his testimony, including in the text not only the imprints of authentic events (although he replaced some historical facts with fictions, e.g. in contrast to the reality, Burian shoots himself here), but also documentary records in the form of songs (Stalin's favourite *Sulika*, Burian's songs *Má panna je v Panama sama* (My Love is Alone in Panama) and *Magnetová hora* (Magnetic Mountain), the Soviet battle song *Svatá válka* (Holy War)—*Vstavai strana ogromnaya*, etc.), poetry (Nezval's *Zpěv míru*, Song of Peace), newspaper article snippets, samples from Burian's play *Pařeniště* (Hothouse) and excerpts from Horáková's actual defence speech. In the notes the author also requires a recording of an authentic radio speech made by Lenin in 1919 and a radio recording of the verdict being read out from the trial in question. (qtd. in Fialová 714–715)

Using the theatre within a theatre technique, the Horáková vs. Gottwald stage revue reconstructs and interprets a now clearly petrified image of the past, in which the heroes of the anti-Communist resistance, personified here in the figure of Milada Horáková, stand against the comically caricatured lackeys of evil, who like grinning clowns "revolve around history," sowing discord. Hence, in the very title the hero has her obvious counterpart, who is truly antagonistic, in the figure of former President Klement Gottwald, who ultimately comes to be her murderer.

## 5. With and Without Hope: Painful Personal Reminiscences Evoked Ex Post

Another of these “tribunal dramas” is a play by Tomáš Vůjtek *S nadějí i bez ní* (With and Without Hope, published 2009, premiered 2012).<sup>23</sup> It is somewhat in the nature of a commemorative cabaret, where selected passages from the life of Josefa Slánská, wife of the Czechoslovak Communist politician who was executed following the Moscow-directed show trials in the 1950s, are played out before the audience within the formal framework of a police investigation. Hence, this drama also deals with the inevitable Czech (Central European) conflict between “us and them,” which in this particular case is made especially ironic by the obviously expedient and absurd fact that Rudolf Slánský and Josefa Slánská, who were persecuted by the Communists, had been stalwart supporters of Communism for several years at the time. It is historically based upon Josefa Slánská’s memoirs *Zpráva o mém muži*, (Report on my Husband) and a set of interviews with Karel Bartošek *Český vězeň* (Czech Prisoner) and the book *Proces s vedením protistátního spikleneckého centra v čele s Rudolfem Slánským* (The Trial of the Anti-state Conspiracy Centre Headed by Rudolf Slánský). Additionally, the play includes quotations from the period press and literature. In his introductory note the author says that: “The quotations are as literal as possible, so that the chief protagonists’ utterances retain their ideational authenticity to the greatest possible extent” (Ljubková 561). On the other hand, we should not overlook the fact that in some of his choices he veers distinctly away from strictly documentary procedures (apart from work with factographical material and literal quotations, the real life dates and names of historical figures and the like are often used), thus making Josefa Slánská’s biography to a large extent literary and theatrical, specifically, for example, by not giving the chief protagonist the name of her antecedent in real life, but the universal She (her real name only occurs in responses that the protagonist herself gives to her interrogators), just as all the other roles are only embodied in two other *dramatis personae* designated First and Second, who are flexible

23 The author inclines towards biographical dramatic forms in a number of his other plays, such as *Slyšení* (Hearing, premiered 2015), where using the tribunal format—with a staged court trial actualizing the past and the psychological make-up of the chief protagonist, in this case the man behind the Nazi genocide Adolf Eichmann; Vůjtek’s other plays about notable figures in Czech history, using authentic materials to a substantial extent, include *Spolu* (Together, premiered 2015), *Škoda!* (Pity! premiered 2015) and *Slávek Novák aneb Příběh opravdového herce* (Slávek Novák, or: A Tale of a True Actor, premiered 2018).

onstage. The anti-illusory nature of the dramatic text, which can thus be understood as a kind of complement to its documentary nature, is underlined by the frequently used epic approaches, often presented by the two idiosyncratic co-narrators and commentators on the action, who basically adopt the role of “omniscient,” sadistically malicious Communist inquisitors, as well as occasionally representing Rudolf Slánský, Klement Gottwald and other episodic characters in the play.<sup>24</sup> The same effect is also provided by the play’s paratheatrical nature: in front of the audience a specific trial with the chief protagonist is being played out, in which on the basis of the original memoir and other documentary records they reconstruct (renarrate and record) the decisive moments in her life, and by extension in the life of her family. In spite of this framework, however, Josefa Slánská’s fortunes are only objectivized to a relative degree, and we still look at them through the protagonist’s eyes, or in some places even as if in a dream, beyond reality.

## 6. Stars Above Baltimore: A Collage Rehabilitating a Previously Proscribed King of Comedians

Another—particular—type of documentary drama involves texts that work in a more focused manner with the (originally artistic) collage or montage technique. Clearly, the montage of motivational elements in the broader sense basically occurs in all docudramas that integrate historically authentic material into their structure one way or another. However, another part of the study focuses on a narrower set, i.e. on those cases in which montage (or collage) techniques become a prominent, indeed a decisive factor in the construction of the play and by extension in its aesthetic effect. Again, we shall select biographically-based plays as examples from the most recent dramatic output to represent this field, specifically *Hvězdy nad Baltimore* (Stars Above Baltimore)

24 The function of First and Second is aptly named by Ljubková: “First and Second present Her with Her fate in life: first they begin to read it (and She comments on it), then even perform it in front of Her. Hence, the interrogation is just a kind of starting point for the situation which then broadly develops. The staccato interrogation merges with the narrative epic passages; hence, the author transfers the role of the (unknowing) interrogators onto the recipients, because the assumed investigators know the story, move it on, and help Her, as they are more like guides to Her fate, seconds who turn into characters in Her life story. Sometimes, Her memories literally take Her along, and she has to appropriate them again. They see further, and they even admonish: “Karel, don’t jump the gun” (Ljubková 20–21).

by Luboš Balák and *Palubní deník Zikmunda a Hanzelky* (Zikmund and Hanzelka's Logbook) by Vladimír Fekar.

*Hvězdy nad Baltimore* (published and premiered 2004) shows how it happened that just after the Second World War the much-loved interwar “king of comedians” Vlasta Burian turned into an outcast who brought down on himself total social condemnation and disgrace (after the Second World War the Communists confiscated Burian's assets, only allowed him to perform menial manual jobs, forbade him to make public performances and so forth). This story clearly depicts how the postwar social and political polarity reversal, so common in Central Europe, was able to bring about the as yet incomplete settlement of collective and personal accounts, as well as crushing reprisals; at a general level it is not just the comedian's abrupt fall from social grace that is highlighted, but also the way human envy of the gifted and successful individual can turn so easily and quickly into spiteful and inflammatory aggression—all it needs is that shift in the fulcrum of power, while the author displays his familiarity with the period context, as well as a detailed knowledge of Burian's professional and private life, undoubtedly assisted in creating the play by the already extensive, well-written secondary literature, particularly a monograph on Burian by Vladimír Just, who on the basis of a detailed study, description and new interpretation of archive material made substantial efforts to clear Burian's stigmatized name prior to 1989.<sup>25</sup> The rehabilitation of Burian, who was repeatedly accused of pro-Nazi collaboration, is also attempted in a way by Balák. While following this rather “non-artistic” objective, the author does not launch into dryly objective evidence-gathering, but quite the reverse, he seems to use such strictly “exact” techniques with considerable restraint: even though the situations and dialogues that he integrates into the play are generally plausible, in the stylization that Balák offers it is obvious that in this form they cannot not be invented or to a large extent speculated over. Characteristically for a docudrama (or tribunal/verbatim drama), it includes the normally audience-friendly “figure” of a judicial investigation or trial, but even here no attempt is made at maximally realistic (literal and conforming to protocol) actualization of court cases, but rather a focused vivid recapitulation of the main arguments on both sides (the investigating judges responding to society's demands and the political pressure versus Vlasta Burian and his faithful wife Nina, defending themselves and explaining away the serious accusations). As befits the Communist regime, the proceedings are properly prepared, while the main points recur in a varied manner; hence, the course of Burian's trial is to a large extent just

25 See particularly Just 1991 and 1993.

a formality, a kind of ostentatious arm-wrestling that has been fixed in advance. The method of fragmentary and not entirely linear treatment of the material using the “selected chapters” technique loosens the structure (of what is regular), but thereby actually tends to strengthen the fictional “concept of authenticity.” Hence, Burian’s life drama does not strive for catharsis or a surprising punchline, as in a number of other documentary plays. Provided they are not built in an explicitly contrafactual manner, the basis of their message or their overall effect is not a convincing or definitive answer to the question “how did it turn out?,” but rather a quest for how the events (probably) took place and how those affected perceived and experienced them.

### 7. Zikmund and Hanzelka’s Logbook: A Historical-Biographical Set

Another biographical play *Palubní deník Zikmunda a Hanzelky* (Zikmund and Hanzelka’s Logbook, published 2012, premiered 2013) also makes substantial use of historical material, presenting successful and generally popular figures from twentieth century Czech history, as in the case of *Hvězdy nad Baltimore* (as well as *Věra* and other plays), while the text is remarkable for its even greater compositional looseness than that of Balák’s play; again we might refer to a stage collage, or even a kind of set with motifs from the lives of real-life historical figures, stringing together records from the travellers’ expeditions in formal dialogue form, articles from the period press, as well as words from other period media (particularly film weeklies and radio):<sup>26</sup>

Zikmund 2: The world need not only be seen from behind a car wind-screen, but also, for example,...

Zikmund 1: From on top of a pyramid ...

Music, arrival of a pyramid. The god RA on top, still in nocturnal form.

Projection of the pyramid in the background.

Hanzelka 1: At 19.40 the ascent commenced.

Zikmund 1: Then came night.

Hanzelka 1: Our night on the pyramid.

Zikmund 1: Within a few hours the fascinating theatre beneath the pyramid had completely changed. The garlands of lights over Cairo

26 Again the author’s clear statement is inserted in the dramatic text: “The text includes or paraphrases quotations from correspondence, travel diary entries, the travellers’ testimonies in television documentaries, speeches, forums and other available material” (Ljubková 527).

had thinned out, as the red glow of Bedouin fires turned into fading sparks.

Hanzelka 1: The stirring melody of Arabic song faded and the distant howls of jackals grew quiet.

Zikmund 1: Somewhere in the distance the roar of aircraft engines could be heard. A dark shadow floated up to the Great Pyramid and immediately swung over its apex, slowly disappearing into the distance, interspersed by the blinking of red and white will-o'-the-wisps merging in with the stars.

Hanzelka 1: Only the occasional flurry of bats' wings disturbed the deep silence of the night. (Ljubková 541)

Clearly, here too it is not the author's ambition to create a coherent, regular dramatic structure, but rather the suggestivity of authentic experiences, as embodied in period documentary records, that are meant to be preserved. Although it is not only real-life figures, who demonstrably met or at least might theoretically have met, who interact here, but also entirely literary figures (apart from older and younger versions of the protagonists, the dialogue also includes, for example, the Angel and the Devil, Czechoslovakia personified, the Egyptian god RA, a choir and others), it is clear that even at the risk of weakening the dramatic effect the author attempts to honour well-known and less well-known facts about the lives of these popular travellers, or to be more precise, despite some fantasy and clearly invented elements, he does not want to get into a conflict with these facts. History literally jumps at the feet of the protagonists and holds back their ascent even in this play. As a result of the Nazis closing higher education establishments, their commercial engineering course is postponed for quite some time, and the adventurers have to literally wrest their first journey from the authorities through sheer obstinacy (going right up to Gottwald himself, whom they catch on the toilet); the protagonists are also compelled to agree to their books being censored, and naturally enough their incisive, critical analysis of conditions in the Soviet Union does not go down well in Communist circles, particularly since they present it as non-party members and so forth. However, the watershed moment is the Prague Spring, when both travellers became politically engaged to such an extent that one of them was considered as a presidential candidate. But then all that was cut short by the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies, which is an anticipated moment within the context of the play, as Hanzelka's and Zikmund's protest against the occupation is prefigured in the prologue. A record is also made of the subsequent liaison between the now persecuted travellers and dissident Ludvík Vaculík, who published

another of their books in a minimum print-run in his samizdat series, when they were officially proscribed, after which the careers of the travelling partners are followed in the epilogue up to Jiří Hanzelka's death in 2003.

To summarize, here we again see the inevitable structure of numerous Czech biographical documentary plays on figures who lived (chiefly) in the twentieth century, particularly those who willingly or unwillingly came into conflict with one of the totalitarian regimes in Central Europe during this period: this structure, already observable previously in *Věra* and *Hvězdy nad Baltimore*, might be characterized as follows: success, celebrity; incurring the wrath of those in power; punishment, fall; (optional) partial rehabilitation and satisfaction (albeit sometimes “not in this world”).

### 8. *Porta Apostolorum*: Libretto on the Disorderly Postwar Expulsion

The expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from Postoloprty in Northern Bohemia is the main subject in Miroslav Bambušek's dramatic text *Porta Apostolorum* (published 2004, premiered 2005).<sup>27</sup> This play has a relatively loose format with a minimum of stage notes, so that it is sometimes quite difficult for the reader to follow the movement of the characters on the stage, to clearly distinguish individual dramatic situations and to differentiate the realist level from dream-based passages. Hence, instead of a firmly established stage project this text only offers raw material to be rounded off and completed onstage.

The play's structure is that of a collage, which speaks volumes about the unusual interpretational openness of the work. However, the author was also working with deconstruction techniques when he created the relatively heterogeneous *syuzhet*, comprising two intertwining plot lines, which ultimately emerge at a third level (including the view of the plot from a contemporary perspective). (Just qtd. in Fialová 679–680)

The overall situation on which the play is based is the eighteenth birthday celebrations of the son of a fairly wealthy German family taking place several weeks after the end of the war, to which the current mayor and other Czech neighbours are invited. The celebrations, which initially take place in a peaceful and amicable atmosphere, gradually turn into a ghastly event; however,

<sup>27</sup> The subject of the postwar expulsion of the Germans also appeared, e.g. in a play by Jiří Havelka and Karel František Tománek: *Dechovka* (Brass Band, premiered 2013).



due to the quantity of alcohol drunk, inter alia, the celebration culminates in murder in the final scene. The second plot line then presents a love triangle between the now adult Fritz, a German girl Kati and her persistent suitor Pavel. The atmosphere of lurking bloody revenge and slowly increasing horror imbue the play with elements of tension and mystery. The text is thus basically a clear indictment of Czech society for the massacre in June 1945, when some 800 German civilians lost their lives in Postoloprty. The play itself is introduced by an authentic report on the investigation into this mass murder by the Ministry of National Defence in 1947.<sup>28</sup> Unexpectedly, the play also includes quotations from Patrik Ouředník's *Europeana*, Lenin's *Brief Biography* and normalization period magazines (e.g. *Pionýr*). Moreover, at several points during the awful game of Hitler, which the mayor plays with the German family, they recall the utterances of the former Nazi leader. The authenticity of the story, which does not actually reconstruct any real event, but metaphorically represents, actualizes and reinterprets the bloody postwar events, was then also underlined in Bamušek's plays by the fact that they include "a staged reading of reports from the investigating committee proceedings ... and a procession around the concealed, overgrown and unmarked locations of the greatest postwar mass murders in Bohemia ..." (Just qtd. in Fialová 679). On the other hand, because the author does not work with particular historical figures in the text, the play cannot be considered to be purely documentary, as here history only

28 "On April 25, 1947, a letter was delivered to the Ministry of National Defence, as was a letter with the same content on April 30 to the Interior Ministry, signed by Otto Osfald, Postellberg, Leninova ulice No. 1345/67, in which the writer referred tot the post-revolutionary events in Postellberg in May and June 1945. The same letter was also delivered to the Ministry of Justice, which sent a copy on May 27, 1947, to the Interior Ministry. On June 12, 1947, the Office of the President of the Republic sent a letter it had received to the Interior Ministry, referring to these events and signed by Marie Osfaldová in Postellberg, Stalinova ulice No. 342. As a result, the Ministry of National Defence preliminarily had the case investigated by its officer. On May 30, 1947, and June 17,1947, the Interior Ministry then ordered the regional State Security Office in Most to confidentially investigate the case with dispatch. According to a further report from this office dated August 25, 1947, both letter writers were anonymous, because the persons named were unknown at that location. No further, more detailed investigation was made, because a UMS Security Commission Investigation Committee had been established, and it was not desirable for the Committee investigation to be encumbered by a preliminary investigation by security or military bodies. Hence, the Ministry of National Defence and the Interior Ministry present this preliminary report on events in Postellberg om May and June 1945" (Bamušek 2).



comes into the text as a source of inspiration, as the main thematic area which the author primarily took up for clearly ideological reasons, since his objective was to retroactively rehabilitate the victims of postwar violence. Hence, *Porta Apostolorum* presents a historical event recast as a unique fictional story. From this point of view, Bambušek's experimental text, if the extent of its documentary nature could somehow be measured, is about as "weakly" documentary as, for example, Uhdě's formally traditional *Zázrak v černém domě*.

### 9. Docudrama as a Way to Create Collective Memory

Clearly, it is the ambition of docudrama creators to go substantially beyond the field of literary (dramatic) work, i.e. the aesthetic dimension. Moreover, any shift towards factuality considerably bolsters the persuasiveness of the depicted events and actions (or, in other words, invokes the impression of "authenticity," which is so often valued in art); hence, the persuasive function, as well as sometimes the educational function, is applied to a substantial extent in these works. The attention that is devoted in these plays to the issues surrounding the correctness or the reprehensibility of particular actions and behaviour as a whole has a considerable ethical dimension.

The authors of documentary plays in the Czech context, who regularly focus their attention on the recent or not so recent past, often wish to take an active part in forming social memory. In contrast to the generalizing and abstracting historiographical expositions, however, by the very nature of the matter, i.e. due to the nature of artistic creativity, they tend towards a concrete, subjective and inductive viewpoint. Whether they are presenting a conception that is pretty much in line with contemporary national historiography or actually revising it, and whether their intention and tone are "celebratory" or "demythologizing,"<sup>29</sup> there is also always a particular reflection of society, a contribution that co-creates its collective consciousness and a sense of solidarity. This is also the reason why our exposition left out documentary-style political satires lampooning contemporary political representatives, such as the work of Iva Klestilová *Standa má problém* (Standa Has a Problem, published and premiered 2006) and Petr Čtvrtníček's *Ivánku, kamaráde, můžeš mluvit? aneb To mi ho tedy vyndej* (Ivan, Buddy, Can You Speak? Or: Take It Out For Me Then, premiered 2005, published. 2006), where the distance in time from what is depicted is currently still too short, even though this is potentially historical material. On the other hand, we

29 "Monumentalizing" or working with competing alternatives of the previous (mainstream) exposition of history (see Erll 249–276).

have focused on relatively new and not publicly well-known controversial views of events and protagonists in twentieth century Czech history. In addition to describing the various documentary forms in dramatic texts, it has also been our aim to point out and present specific examples of theatre plays attempting in a more or less non-conformist manner to elucidate several episodes from Czech history and in numerous cases to also rehabilitate particular historical figures and thus also to profile the collective memory and Czech national identity, which is inseparable from the Central European cultural space.

*Translated by Pat Mertova*

## | References

### PRIMARY SOURCES

- Bambušek, Miroslav. *Porta Apostolorum* (unpublished).
- Balák, Luboš. *Hvězdy nad Baltimore. Hry na hrdiny*. Ed. Marta Ljubková. Brno: Větrné mlýny, 2014. 317–462.
- Fekar, Vladimír. *Palubní deník Zikmunda a Hanzelky. Hry na hrdiny*. Ed. Marta Ljubková. Brno: Větrné mlýny, 2014. 525–594.
- Petrů, Simon. *Věra* (unpublished).
- Saavedra, Anna. *Olga – Horror z Hrádečku* (unpublished).
- Steigerwald, Karel. “Horáková–Gottwald.” *Hry na hrdiny*. Ed. Marta Ljubková. Brno: Větrné mlýny, 2014. 215–258.
- Uhde, Milan. *Zázrak v černém domě: komedie o dvou dílech*. Brno: Větrné mlýny pro občanské sdružení Centrum pro kulturu a společnost, 2012.
- Vůjtek, Tomáš. “S nadějí i bez ní.” *Hry na hrdiny*. Ed. Marta Ljubková. Brno: Větrné mlýny 2014. 259–316.

### SECONDARY SOURCES

- Barthes, Roland. “Efekt reálného.” Trans. Tomáš Jirsa. *Aluze* 3 (2006): 78–81.
- Barton, Brian. *Das Dokumentartheater*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987.
- Bartošek, Karel. *Český vězeň: svědectví politických vězeňkyň a vězňů let padesátých, šedesátých a sedmdesátých*. Prague: Paseka, 2001.
- Erl, Astrid. “Literatur als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnisse.” *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft. Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven*. Eds. Astrid Erl and A. Nünning. Berlin, 2005.
- Fialová, Alena, ed. *V souřadnicích mnohosti: česká literatura první dekády jednadvacátého století v souvislostech a interpretacích*. Prague: Academia, 2014.

- Irmer, Thomas. "A Search for New Realities. Documentary Theatre in Germany." *The Drama Review* 3 (2006): 16–28.
- Jungmannová, Lenka. *Příběhy obyčejných šílenství: "nová vlna" české dramatiky po roce 1989*. Prague: Filip Tomáš–Akropolis, 2014.
- Just, Vladimír. *Věc: Vlasta Burian. Díl 1*. Prague: Rozmluvy, 1991.
- . *Vlasta Burian: Mystérium smíchu: Život a dílo krále komiků*. Prague: Academia, 1993.
- Lopatka, Jan. *Předpoklady tvorby*. Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1991.
- . *Šifra lidské existence*. Prague: Torst, 1995.
- Ljubková, Marta. "Za hrdiny se nestydíme." *Hry na hrdiny*. Ed. Marta Ljubková. Brno: Větrné mlýny, 2014. 11–33.
- Malzacher, Florian, ed. *Not Just a Mirror. Looking for the Political Theatre of Today*. Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2015.
- Martin, Carol. "History and Politics on Stage. The Theatre of the Real." *Not Just a Mirror. Looking for the Political Theatre of Today*. Ed. Florian Malzacher. Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2015. 32–43.
- Martin, Carol. *Theatre of the Real*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Mucha, Jiří. *Podivné lásky*. Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1988.
- Pokorný, Marek. "Tichý Tarzan před soud." *Divadelní noviny*, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/y95mvdzu>. Accessed 1 August 2019.
- Proces s vedením protistátního spikleneckého centra v čele s Rudolfem Slánským*. Prague: Orbis, 1953.
- Putna, Martin, C. *Obrazy z kulturních dějin Střední Evropy*. Prague: Vyšehrad, 2018.
- Rupnik, Jacques. *Střední Evropa je jako pták s očima vzadu: o české minulosti a přítomnosti*. Prague: Novela bohémica, 2018.
- Taira, Šigesuke. *Bušidó: cesta samuraje*. Adamov: Temple, 2002.
- Trávníček, Jiří. *V kleštích dějin: střední Evropa jako pojem a problém*. Brno: Host, 2009.
- Uher, Jindřich. *Ona a Martinů*. Prague: Sursum, Český spisovatel, 2002.
- Ulrich, Jan. *Úvod. Střední Evropa*, Vol. 1, 1984.
- Věra (program k inscenaci)*. Národní divadlo: Brno, 2018.
- Vostrý, Jaroslav and Zuzana Sílová. *České drama a český hrdina*. Prague: AMU, Kant, 2017.

## | Abstrakt

ALEŠ MERENUS, MAREK LOLLOK

**Obraz czeskiej przeszłości we współczesnych sztukach teatralnych typu „dokudrama”**

Artykuł ma na celu uchwycenie, opis i analizę sposobów przenikania materiałów dokumentalnych do struktury, a tym samym również do świata fikcyjnego współczesnych tekstów dramatycznych. Na wybranych przykładach przedstawia kilka typów czeskiego „dokudramatu”, od sztuk o charakterze biograficznym, poprzez tzw. *tribunal drama* aż po kolaże sceniczne. Wspólnym mianownikiem tych tekstów jest zamiar autora, by wywołać u odbiorcy wrażenie autentyczności, celem zaś nowa interpretacja wydarzeń historycznych, ewentualnie przedstawienie lub rehabilitacja określonej postaci historycznej. Ambicją twórców jest kształtowanie na nowo pamięci zbiorowej i czeskiej tożsamości narodowej w obrębie środkowo-europejskiej przestrzeni kulturowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sztuka teatralna; *docudrama*; *tribunal drama*; współczesny teatr czeski; tożsamość narodowa; Europa Środkowa

## | Abstract

ALEŠ MERENUS, MAREK LOLLOK

**The Image of the Czech Past in the Contemporary Docudrama**

This study attempts to depict, describe and analyse the intersection of documentary material with the structure and, by extension, the fictional worlds of current drama texts. On the basis of selected examples, it presents several types of Czech docudrama, from biographically-based plays and “tribunal dramas” to stage collages. The common denominator behind these texts is their attempt to create an impression of authenticity among recipients, as well as “faithfulness” to reality. Their main objective is to provide a fresh interpretation of a historical event or to present or rehabilitate particular historical figures and, not least, also to recreate collective memory and the Czech national identity within the framework of the Central European cultural space.

**Keywords:** documentary drama (*docudrama*); tribunal drama; current Czech drama; national identity; Central Europe

## | About the Authors

**Marek Lollok:** Mgr., Ph.D., is a member of the Modern Czech Theatre Research Team at the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 20th Century and Contemporary Literature Department; he currently works as an assistant professor at the Masaryk University Faculty of Education, Czech Language and Literature Department in Brno. His particular areas of interest include literary and theatre criticism, 20th century Czech drama and literary studies stylistics. For example, he has co-authored the collective monograph *Czech in Motion* (Minářová, E., Tušková, J.M. (eds.), *Czech in Motion. Chapters on Research into its State and Changing Face*. Brno: Masaryk University, 2015), and at present he is a member of a team working on a lexicographical project entitled *Modern Czech Drama (1896–1989); Between the Text and the Production (Encyclopedia of Works)*.  
E-mail: lollok@ucl.cas.cz

**Aleš Merenus:** Mgr., Ph.D., is head of the Modern Czech Theatre Research Team at the 20th Century and Contemporary Literature Department within the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences. His main research interests include theatre and drama theory, the theory of the dramatization of literary works, narratology, the theory of fictional worlds and 20th century Czech prose and drama, and he has published several studies on these subjects, (e.g. *Two drama texts and a planned stage director* (2012), *Much Ado About Heterocosmica, or: Several notes on the fictional worlds of theatre productions* (2012); *The Theatrical Anabasis of Hašek's Fateful Adventure, or: Every age requires its Švejk* (2016); *Emigrants, or: Seeking the soul of a nation in Blatný's drama* (2017). He is currently compiling an anthology of expressionist plays entitled *The Expressionist Play from the Czech Lands*, and he is editor-in-chief of the forthcoming encyclopedia *Modern Czech Drama (1896–1989); Between the Text and the Production (Encyclopedia of Works)*.  
E-mail: merenus@ucl.cas.cz



IMRE JÓZSEF BALÁZS  
Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai

## Hungarian Stories of the Regime Change: Voices and Perspectives

Around 2010, two decades after the regime changes in East Central Europe, discussion of the political and social changes reached an important psychological landmark: a generation with no personal memories of the Communist period entered the public space and began to give voice to the post-communist agenda of its own. Intergenerational dialogue gained increasing importance and, along with the “archival boom” in the region, provoked established approaches to the recent past. In Romania and Hungary, access to the secret police archives was delayed and limited, but when they eventually were opened new documents profoundly transformed the perceptions of the cultural field under Communism and the related narratives of the older generations from the 2000s onwards. Competing narratives of the regime change have now emerged that are also conditioned by a great variety of social trajectories: many enjoyed the benefits of the new political environment, but there were many whose social status decreased and had to face serious difficulties. All these made an impact on how one tells the story of the regime change and, in the field of literature, influenced what kind of narrative voices have emerged and how recent literary texts are scaled. In this paper, I will focus on Hungarian literature written in Romania to demonstrate that dealing with the recent past became a way of articulating a wider range of issues in this area, including power relations, individual responsibilities, and failed attempts to understand and to communicate.

There are certain traits of contemporary Hungarian fiction dealing with the past that let literary scholar Edit Zsadányi identify a specific type of narrative that has recently emerged: one that reinterpreted established stories of the regime change, stories that were legitimized by political authorities in various ways. Reflecting a widespread focalization strategy she pointed out that authors like László Garaczi, Endre Kukorelly, György Dragomán, Ferenc Barnás and Szilárd Borbély, who narrate the past from a child's perspective, give voice to the 'subaltern' and this gives wider credibility to the narrative, additionally allowing to associate the postcolonial mindset with postcommunist experiences. This may result in a methodology that approaches Eastern European postcommunist experiences in a wider, planetary context instead of a historicized and localized analysis (Zsadányi 175).

The above mentioned focalization strategy is present also within a more specific corpus of Hungarian literature—in texts written by Hungarian minority authors living in Romania and dealing with the regime change of December 1989. The key difference between Hungarian literary works dealing with the regime change in Hungary results from the difference between the two political shifts. While the regime change became a central topic for a new generation of Hungarian writers in Romania, it was not the case in literature written in Hungary. In the latter case, the soft dictatorship of János Kádár allowed authors to represent political changes only as a background that is, in the final account, secondary to the story of their transition from adolescence to the life of a grown-up person, see the prose of László Garaczi as a good example. It is instructive that contributors to a 2009 conference on the literature of 1989 concluded that "the" novel of the regime change still awaits to be written. In contrast to the by-and-large peaceful changes in Hungary, Romania witnessed a sudden change perceived by the population as a "revolution." There were fights on the streets, and many of the anti-communist protesters were killed during the events. The sense of a violent ending of the regime was highlighted also by the much-debated execution of the leaders of the totalitarian regime, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu. This is why for authors belonging to the Hungarian ethnic minority from Romania (of approximately 1.5 million people at that time), discussing the events of the regime change became a primary opportunity to voice a set of experiences that include the sense of claustrophobia, liberation, grief, hope and disillusionment. In literary narratives of Romania's Hungarian authors, the contrast between the shifting realities and regimes tends to be sharp and occupies the central stage, the historical clash being more dramatic.

Hungarian novels of the postcommunist era frequently address the theme of fluid and dislocated identities. Such identities are partly the results of a con-



frontation with the “other” and with a number of alternative narratives. As a part of identity construction, territoriality also becomes a relative and fictional notion throughout these stories and this is an aspect that results in an increasingly reflexive character of these narratives, a character that questions its potential to engender fixed, stable and atemporal identities.

Within the multilingual literary scene in Romania, where Romanian, Hungarian and German language literary cultures coexist, Deleuze and Guattari’s perspective of “minor literatures” provides a particularly fruitful approach.<sup>1</sup> In Hungarian and German literature from Romania, the “regime change” transcends precise territorialities: these literatures are intimately linked to the wider context of Hungarian and German cultures and texts are often constructed with a wider East European system of reference in mind, or in an even more abstract way that allows readers to approach such novels and short stories as “planetary” phenomena. The German-language writer originally from the Banat region, Herta Müller, for instance, or the major Hungarian author Ádám Bodor from Transylvania, who both left Ceaușescu’s Romania in the 1980s, are just two outstanding examples of writers who augmented the relevance of minority perspectives in their attempt to challenge the totalizing and totalitarian narratives in the context of the Communist regime of Romania, and in fact, they pointed out the relevance of “minor” approaches in a broader context. On a world scale, all identities become fluid, following the pattern of minor literatures. As Jing Tsu suggests, all future literary studies should take into account this multitude of perspectives:

Whether the present new scale of literary studies can reach its purported audiences, be they distant cultures, minor literary traditions, or parallel world histories, depends on what the “world” means. The sum of its parts, as a spatial setting, a global genre, a new connectivity, an open process of discovery, or the latest contender in canon making, world literature refracts a variety of desires for the agenda of future literary studies. (158)

This could be a vision that records the nonlinearity of history, a vision that is ready to address a literature organized under the form of nodes and networks with changing configurations (Cooppan 196), and also a vision of dialogue between different generations or different East Central European cultures.

1 See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Discussions about the representations of regime change in Hungarian literature highlighted the question of great expectations and disillusionment, and also some normative approaches expecting broad, panoramic descriptions within the literary texts. These approaches missed, however, precisely the new, emerging types of “minor” narratives that offered a view from below, as a microhistorical representation of events.

In what follows, I will provide a brief analysis of the narrative strategies of three Hungarian novels that were published around the twentieth anniversary of the regime change. All three—Andrea Tompa’s *A hóhér háza* (The Hangman’s House), Sándor Zsigmond Papp’s *Semmi kis életek* (Little Lives), and Zsolt Láng’s *A föld állatai* (Animals of the Earth)—are connected to the Romanian events but have been influential in the entire Hungarian literary scene. The analysis focuses primarily on the perspectives these books offer on social and political changes. The three novels are not only thematically linked: I claim that they form part of a literary paradigm that originates in a trilogy of eminent Hungarian author, Ádám Bodor.

Bodor’s *Sinistra körzet* (1992; translated to English as *The Sinistra Zone*) was a major success in the 1990s both in Hungary and in the Hungarian literary field in Romania, followed by *Az érsek látogatása* (1999; *The Visit of the Archbishop*) and *Verhovina madarai* (2011; *The Birds of Verkhovina*). These novels’ literary style that combine grotesque minimalism and magical realism deeply influenced a cohort of younger authors like György Dragomán, Sándor Zsigmond Papp, or Gábor Vida, so much so that some critics identified a “post-Bodorian” literary current (Bányai 95–102). Although Bodor’s novels systematically dismantle simplistically direct, referential readings, they provide undoubtedly relevant guidance for the interpretation of recent decades in Eastern Europe. The novel sequence provides insight to the regime change through a precise and distanced description of the evolution of power relations. While the power structure in *The Sinistra Zone* is direct and evident, possessing a military nature (that corresponds to the power formation of the period immediately preceding the regime change), *The Visit of the Archbishop* refers to a process of power transfer where the changes are superficial, non-essential, and the hierarchy of power has not changed in a profound manner; to this, *The Birds of Verkhovina* adds a completely contemporary, diffuse form of power, which is elusive, partly economic, but sometimes also functioning at a declarative, unsupervised level, as in the case of Anatol Korkodus’s “Water Brigade.” In *Verkhovina*, power lies somewhere far away, in the background—and yet its presence is manifest. Because of its distance, the rebellion against local power structures is hopeless: if the source of power cannot be located, it cannot be targeted. This experience

corresponds broadly to the one connected to contemporary, transnational, intercontinental power structures. Freedom is delusive in this context—there seem to be no obstacles, but it is quite difficult for the characters to make the necessary moves to experience it. Bodor thus creates a sort of anthropology of the regime change, discussing also the unwanted continuities of the process.

The novels of Tompa and Láng, in contrast, do not extend far beyond the turning point of the regime change; the *Little Lives* by Papp is an exception among the three in this respect. But all three adopt a perspective close to Bodor's *Verkhovina*. The differences between the narratives do not result, therefore, exclusively from the choice of the location for the backward glance, but also from the way these novels deal with the “latent” knowledge about the postcommunist decades.

### 1. The Hangman's House: Stories from the Golden Age

In 2009, Romanian screenwriter and director Cristian Mungiu released a series of short films, *Amintiri din Epoca de Aur* (Memories of the Golden Age). The “golden age” syntagma was originally used by Ceaușescu with reference to the last 15 years of his regime and it appears in the subtitle of Tompa's novel as well. Both Tompa and Mungiu belong to a generation born at the turn of the 1970s, who have heavily invested in capturing the world before the regime change. Mungiu's films are based on urban legends and oral histories that circulated in Romania in various versions. Some pieces are anecdotal, others set in a mythical tone. Similarly, other artists and writers depict the “golden age” in great variety: some use a minimalist style, others create ironic distance, sometimes the style is casually direct, sometimes shocking. However, there is a recurring feature that links the works of arts of this generation: they all are “histories from below.” Tompa's novel is not an exception.

*The Hangman's House* depicts life in a major city in Romania, Cluj-Napoca. The protagonist is a teenage girl who has a “fresh” perspective on the absurdities happening in the 1970s and 1980s. Through the story of a single family, it opens windows to Romanian society, but since the emphasis is placed on the revolutionary events, this novel becomes indeed a book of the regime change, rather than simply a book about everyday life during Romanian Communism. Flashbacks of family history are framed in the context of Christmas Eve of 1989; this structural choice suggests that there is hope. There are also small, irrational miracles within the story—the demolition of the old buildings in Cluj-Napoca spares the Dohány Street family house, which plays an important role in the narrative. The house remains a safe place where the protagonist may return to at

any moment. Vitality flows from the story, obviously connected to the main character in the book, a teenage girl situated in the midst of exploring the world, when everything seems possible. Alcoholic men, demolished houses, dismantled small communities, broken marriages bring balance into the narrative.

The structure of the book is fragmentary: the short chapters try to capture a single small theme, figure, or phenomenon by jumping back and forth between the decades of the twentieth century. Each chapter consists of one single long sentence that gives special dynamics to the text. Zooming in on each of the figures, events and relationships, results in the second half of the book invoking in the reader a sense of familiarity with regards to the created world of the characters coming from different regions of Transylvania. Through individual stories, Tompa offers an intriguing description of the power structures and of the possibilities to move within the field of power.

The interior and exterior connections of the family portrayed in the novel have many aspects: the family is connected to power, but not quite strongly (within the family there are secretaries of local Party branches, but also “class enemies”), they occupy a variety of power ranks, and the father’s “decadence” means decadence in the social sense as well. The family knows the world inside and outside the counters of socialist shops (the mother is the manager of the central store), and is confronted with identity problems (the more conservative Szekler family line is combined with a socially mobile Jewish identity). The girl of outstanding talent and literary sensitivity must be able to resist the shift to a Romanian school environment and must be at the same time an insider of adult games and of teenage rituals. Teachers, actors, poets and family members are also involved in processes that lead from forms of “resistance through culture” (such as jazz culture, alternative theatre performances) to actual political dissidence (carrying messages to and from pre-revolutionary Timisoara). Sexuality remains in this context rather a source of unquantified desire and energy, instead of a materialized event.

Andrea Tompa’s novel connects the outside and inside worlds, explains and interprets these in floating sentences, and presents the basic stories that determined the existence of average people in Cluj, from the twenties and thirties to the regime change in 1989. The novel connects the inexperienced character of a teenage girl to historical events, and through this focus gives voice to a type of subaltern people in the Romanian Communist regime.

## 2. Little Lives

“I want to tell the story of a place, not a person,” reads the motto of the novel by Sándor Zsigmond Papp, taken from Gide. For Papp, space is a metaphor for representing human relationships, and apartment houses are paradoxical places of co-existence: complete intimacy and seclusion is impossible within such spaces. Secrets cannot be kept, and obscure details of everyday life provoke the curiosity of the neighbours. This spatiality recreates in fact the atmosphere of Communist everyday life where agents of the secret police had access to the details of “little lives,” and secrets tended to become political in the sense that they could be used for political purposes by the power structures. A main character of the novel, one of the winners of the regime change, for instance, is a former secret police officer. He becomes a smart entrepreneur who takes part in the postcommunist everyday life under a different name. The story of the “turn” is accessible through such characters’ lives. In this respect, in *Little Lives* representations of the regime change are more direct, non-metaphorical as compared to Bodor’s trilogy.

The main point of the book seems to be that the desires of liberation were not strong enough within the society. In this respect, Papp’s novel to a greater extent remains in the realms of Bodor’s world than *The Hangman’s House*. In this world one needs to accept the rules of the game and avoid confrontation. At the same time, the anti-heroes of Papp’s novel have more glamor and hedonism in their lives than Bodor’s characters. Papp’s humorous but sometimes bloody episodes can be situated somewhere in the vicinity of Hrabal’s stories.

For entire generations, freedom came “too late,” as the novel suggests. Jani Rot, the mentioned secret police officer, still in power, says most sensitively, “there are those for whom the freedom came too late.... Freedom ... They don’t even know who to hate” (Papp 301). Obviously, this is the motive of the “failed regime change.” But it is important that Papp does not transfer this failure to “others,” but rather concentrates on individual responsibility: the novel repeatedly refers to the power of will, desire, and diagnoses an attitude that is unable to transcend the trap of not wanting to remember, but unable to forget. This means that within the world of the novel, the regime change should occur first of all within the minds of the characters, and the tragedy of these anti-heroes is that they are unable to actively deal with the past.

The novel directly addresses the issue of rival narratives about the regime change, contrasting mainstream Western discourses with local experience. The Western approach is represented by a German film crew wanting to produce a documentary film about the 1989 Romanian events. The memory politics of transition is reflected through the dialogues between the film crew and

Kalcsek, a tenant in the apartment house. Kalcsek identifies romanticizing and colonizing expectations manifested in the questions of the director:

It was difficult to decide whether or not to talk about this at all, but the director ... was so eager to preach the German people's interest in the story, as if all Germans had already been knocking at the door of Kalcsek.... But you are expecting theory, not answers, he finally told the interpreter. (Papp 261–262)

According to Kalcsek (and through him, according to the novel), the story of the regime change cannot be cut short (there are only forty minutes at the disposal of the filmmakers), because it is precisely the micro-details that are the most important. So the “real” regime change movie is the novel itself, with its own little stories. What the director can show through the movie will, of course, have a much different, more compact effect: we can see here that the positive image of the regime change fits in with the expectations of some kind of Western propaganda machine. The market-expanding logic of the West in the novel tries to shape the narrative according to its own interests.

In Kalcsek's version, the German film crew members have freedom in their blood, but they are also incapable of actually connecting to those who are trying to imagine and mobilize their freedom. Their questions are simplistic and sensational, and they are waiting for confirmations of their preconceptions and previously elaborated versions. Kalcsek and the others, on the other hand, do not want to be involved in legitimizing such narratives. They search for alternative versions that are much harder to describe, and that remain fragmentary, despite the four hundred pages of the novel. Thus, incompleteness itself, together with the richness of the episodes, is the answer that Papp offers in his novel to the question of narrating the regime change through his poetics and reflexivity. It is in this precise episode that the ‘subaltern’ narrative directly challenges the dominant, politically legitimized plot of a master narrative.

### 3. Animals of the Earth

*Animals of the Earth* appeared as the fourth and closing sequence of Zsolt Láng's novel series *Bestiarium Transylvaniae* in 2011. It is located at an intersectional point of the oeuvre. The earlier volumes of the series dealt with events that had occurred much earlier, but Láng had a small novel entitled *Perényi's Liberation*, which dealt with workings of the Evil in the world in the days of the Romanian

revolution, and also with the myth of pure conception. The figure of comrade Dunea/Dulea, the local Party secretary also connects the two novels.

If, in the previous volumes of the trilogy, the temporal distance separating us from the narrated events allowed us to read them as historical novels (or pseudo-historical novels), for *Animals of the Earth*, the essence of provocation is precisely whether we can accept the narration of the recent past as a historical novel. The former *Bestiary* volumes were evidently linked to the meta-historical line of the prose of magical realism, but in the case of the recent past, it is necessary to create a distance, a level of reflection that can produce similar effects.

The novel achieves this effect by operating a specific mirror structure: the stories of the individual characters in the novel intersect and reflect on each other, and render each other's validity uncertain. We hear the voices of many potential narrators, and we get access to their thoughts—sometimes a high school student named Bori, sometimes a rat of extraordinary size and intelligence, sometimes another animal, and sometimes an officer of the secret police takes on the narrative voice. Stories and perspectives relativize each other, even though Bori's perspective fits the story in a more decisive way.

The animal figures “say” that some of the characters in the novel are projections of Bori's dreams (“On the roof, there stood a white dove with a human face, and she barely looked up, he knew somebody in the house was dreaming about this white dove”). The main character, as she says, is not interested in the truth of the statements, but in the overall interplay of the statements.

The term “animals of the earth” here does not refer so much to animals that live on the earth, but literally to animals that live in the ground or underground—in canals, basements, underground cavities. The underground world can be read in the novel as the projection of the subconscious, the inverse or mirror image of the above world, from which the intelligent rat observes the context of the order of the human world, easily seeing through rational human logic. Bori is “immersed” in this underground world twice, and in both cases returns to a transformed order when she emerges. On the first occasion, she enters the basement of her school where she finds historical objects, while, by contrast, what happens on the surface is arbitrarily rewritten history, a class that has nothing to do with factual history of the country. On her second descent, Bori walks through the city's sewerage system and faces a completely changed world when she comes to the surface—she witnesses the revolutionary transformation itself. The whole scene is “unbelievable” for her in some way, but Zsolt Láng's representation of the regime change is also reminiscent of the strategy of *Little Lives*: to approach abstractions from the perspective of the ordinary, the material.



The peculiarity of Láng's novel is that it attaches great importance to imagination, which enables the creation of its own alternative (even underground) worlds, while also reproducing the same imaginative games in a parodistic register when anyone (the rat or the secret police officer) can be a creator of alternative worlds. The novel leaves open the possibility that we read a blue-haired rat's novel about the regime change.

The novel ends with a reflection on the nature of "acting in the name of eternal change" or "resilient immobility," on the other hand, and shows the superficial, temporary nature of change. At the same time, the text does not wish to become a novel of post-totalitarian depression, and considers returning to the "three days underground" immediately preceding the regime change, in order to find the need for rebirth. Although the final volume of the *Bestiary* series is only remotely connected to the earlier volumes, the title of the series still inserts this change of political narrative into a broader discussion of history and the nature of stories. In this way, Láng also claims what Tompa does: the nature of the historical turns cannot be understood without their history. In Láng's text, moreover, this becomes a meta-circumscription, where storytelling itself is relativized by the multiplication of storytelling modes. The phrase Bori thinks of as she walks through the city is probably the most memorable phrase in the novel: "Where does this present grow from, if no one knows its past" (Láng 219). The structure of the trilogy suggests that history is a constantly reconfiguring narration, and the more recent the narrated events are, the more uncanny the uncertainty referring to past events can be.

Láng's novel offers its own response strategy to the unfamiliarity of the past, as do the novels by Andrea Tompa and Sándor Zsigmond Papp, when they look back and forth in time from the perspective of posteriority. Their point of view is broadly in line with what I referred to as the Bodor paradigm, but at the same time, all three authors are extremely conscious of where they cut the threads of their stories, creating different effects of optimism and of disillusionment through simple narrative techniques.

Based on the overview of the three novels, I would argue that the type of narrative that configures "histories from below" in the postcommunist period is present also within the spectrum of Hungarian literature from Romania, but it tends to gain a specific functionality. Papp's novel, as I have shown, highlights the individual capabilities for freedom, and therefore individual responsibility. Láng and Tompa end their stories when they reach a moment of hope, of liberation, suggesting that all posterior lines of events are concentrated within those moments. Those inner, mental states serve as models for all future attempts for liberation, and the subsequent decades cannot overrule those individual



potentialities. This point seems essential also within the intergenerational communication context that I described in the opening paragraph of my paper. Communicating the unfamiliar set of experiences to another generation needs to start, as it seems, from a point where these experiences are unfamiliar also for the narrative I—this is how a child's or a teenager's perspective becomes functional through such narrations.

The conclusion of my investigation goes in line with Papp's novel: history in the novels of East Central Europe is not to be created along major narrative lines. Official, politically promoted interpretations of Eastern European regime changes began to show their weaknesses during the last decades, their lack of a universal value. The possibility of literature lies in the fact that it is capable of telling stories that are not master narratives of a whole age, but through their relativizing narrative techniques they can create alternative interpretations that move closer to everyday, individual experience.

## | References

- Bányai, Éva. "The Space Concepts as Intercultural Experience in Contemporary Hungarian Prose." *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica* 3.1 (2011): 95–102.
- Bodor, Ádám. *Sinistra körzet*. Budapest: Magvető, 1992.
- Bodor, Ádám. *Az érsek látogatása*. Budapest: Magvető, 1999.
- Bodor, Ádám. *Verhovina madarai*. Budapest: Magvető, 2011.
- Cooppan, Vilashini. "World Literature between History and Theory." *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. Eds. Theo Dhaen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Láng, Zsolt. *Bestiárium Transylvaniae IV, A föld állatai*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2011.
- Papp, Sándor Zsigmond. *Semmi kis életek*. Budapest: Libri, 2011.
- Tompa, Andrea. *A hóhér háza*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2010.
- Tsu, Jing. "World Literature and National Literature(s)." *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. Eds. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Zsadányi, Edit. "Voicing the Subaltern by Narrating the Communist Past through the Focalization of a Child in Gábor Németh's 'Are You a Jew?' and Endre Kukorelly's 'The Fairy Valley.'" *Postcolonial Europe? Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures*. Eds. Dobrota Pucherová and Róbert Gáfrik. Leiden/Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2015.

| **Abstrakt**

IMRE JÓZSEF BALÁZS

**Węgierskie historie o zmianie ustroju. Głosy i perspektywy**

Narracje o zmianie ustroju w literaturze węgierskiej zyskały nowy charakter około 2010 r., po dwóch dziesięcioleciach postkomunizmu. Artykuł analizuje strategie narracyjne powieści przedstawiających ten temat, pokazując ich tendencję do przyjmowania mikrohistorycznego punktu widzenia. Omówione zostały również powieści napisane przez autorów wywodzących się z mniejszości etnicznych, takich jak Ádám Bodor, Andrea Tompa, Sándor Zsigmond Papp, Zsolt Láng, którzy w swojej prozie opisują dramatyczną zmianę ustroju, jaka miała miejsce w Rumunii w 1989 r.

**Słowa kluczowe:** mikrohistoria; mniejszość; postkomunizm; zmiana ustroju; *subaltern*

| **Abstract**

IMRE JÓZSEF BALÁZS

**Hungarian Stories of the Regime Change: Voices and Perspectives**

Regime change narratives in Hungarian literature gained a new type of consistency around 2010, after two decades of postcommunism. The article analyses narrative strategies of novels written about the regime change, showing their tendency towards a microhistorical approach. The discussed novels include works by such minority authors as Ádám Bodor, Andrea Tompa, Sándor Zsigmond Papp, Zsolt Láng, who represent in their novels the dramatic regime change that took place in Romania in 1989.

**Keywords:** microhistory; minority; postcommunism; regime change; subaltern

| **About the Author**

Imre József Balázs is an Associate Professor at the Department of Hungarian Literature at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj, and editor of the cultural review *Korunk*. His research interests include twentieth-century and contemporary Hungarian literature, minority cultures, avant-garde and socialist realism. In 2006 he was awarded

the Arany János Prize for Young Scholars by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His major publications include: *The Avant-garde in Transylvanian Hungarian Literature* (2006, 2009), *The New Centre: Tendencies in Contemporary Literature* (2012). He has recently completed a monograph on the early works of Tibor Déry (2019). E-mail: [lutraro@yahoo.com](mailto:lutraro@yahoo.com)



# Territoriality

| TERYTORIALNOŚĆ



PRZEMYSŁAW CZAPLIŃSKI  
Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

## Literature and Geography

We have found ourselves at the frontier of the imagination, marked not merely by the limits of the current developmental model, but by the limits of its ability to conceive the next stage of development.

Disintegration of Polish democracy, along with the serious turmoil in international relations has thrust us into this unique place. We have also been pushed to the limits of thinking by such external processes as the crisis of the European Union, Brexit, waves of migrants reaching Europe, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the civil war in Ukraine, changes in global capitalism, etc. As a result of all these processes taking place on the border of law and lawlessness, rationality and resentment, we are overcome by a prevailing sense of uncertainty: we do not know what the future of Poland holds, what will happen to the European Union, how the Union's relations with Great Britain and the United States will develop. We know, however, that the future will not be defined by a welfare state or a neoliberal state, i.e. by the two systemic solutions to the problem of how to coexist with global capitalism. It is also difficult to accept that introducing national capitalism to our country would be a long-term solution; it would restore social rights, while curtailing civil liberties and isolating Poland from the world. It is as if the present is severing contact with history, and nationalist egoisms have become detached from geography. In this situation, not only are the current developmental concepts disintegrating, but also thinking itself.

We do not know how to expand our thinking in order to understand the current process. And these are the limits of the imagination.

The task that I have set for myself in this text will be to describe the path that has led us to these frontiers, and also to analyze the conditions that exist there. The material that I will draw on for my conclusions come from Polish literature of the last quarter century. To those who question the value of analyzing literary texts at a time when the foundations of global order are crumbling, I propose a simple answer: if I am right in thinking that we are at the edge of the imagination, then literature has an equal stake in the debate about reality with other discourses; perhaps, it is even a participant deserving of attention, since it is the most efficient in using the imagination.

Of the many frontiers, only one will be discussed here—the geographical.<sup>1</sup> This frontier is determined by an unprecedented process of cartographic change, as a result of which today's Poland is not where it used to be.

Cartographical shifts do not, of course, only mean changes in physical coordinates, but indicate that existing relationships with neighboring countries have been gradually loosened, violated and broken down. In effect, we now find ourselves in the process of an unprecedented departure from the previous map, undertaken for an unknown purpose and in an unknown direction. Poland is “somewhere else” not because its position has changed, but because our presence in the larger structures to which we once belonged is radically changing.

After 1989, one could see the process of becoming rooted in four such entities, which have been determined, for the sake of argument, by geographical directions. These were the following: the European Union from the west, Central Europe from the south, the Lithuania-Belarus-Ukraine belt in the east and Scandinavia in the north. These entities have different entities and degrees of institutional connection, so when we talk about them, we need to imagine not so much permanent systems of states, but rather gravitational fields with different strengths of attraction, depending on the bodies that create them and the connections between them. Their historical permanence is not identical, as well as our presence in each of them. Although this presence has been uneven, it should be noted that the attempt to simultaneously take root in four different, in addition harmonious, entities is unprecedented in Polish history.

1 In this article I will make use of conclusions from the following book: Przemysław Czaplinski's *Poruszona mapa. Wyobrażenia geograficzno-kulturowa polskiej literatury przełomu XX i XXI wieku*.



### 1. The East: Borderlands, or Decolonization

The Giedroyc project began to be implemented with a focus on the East and consisted in creating good relations with Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania, and in strengthening their statehood. This concept was, in fact, a political translation of the Polish literary heritage of “small homelands,” which includes one of the most important and valuable collections of works created in exile. Literature of “small homelands” appeared in the 1950s, and its core texts included the following: Florian Czarnyszewicz *Nadberezyńcy* (*Berezina People*) (1942), Józef Wittlin *Mój Lwów* (*My Lwów*) (1946), Czesław Miłosz *Dolina Issy* (*The Issa Valley*) (1955), Zygmunt Haupt *Pierścień z papieru* (*Paper Ring*) (1963), Andrzej Chciuk *Atlantyda* (1969), Jerzy Stempowski *Ziemia berneńska* (*The Bernese Land*) (1954), as well as the trilogy of Stanisław Vincenz *Na wysokiej połoninie* (*On a High Polonyna*) (part 1: 1938; part 2: 1970; part 3: 1979). These works changed the perception of the Eastern Borderlands, giving eastern areas cultural autonomy and independence from postwar attempts at Polonization. The act of retroactive liberation from Polish domination consisted in presenting equal but ethnically diverse communities living in the eastern lands (Polish, Jewish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, German, Belarusian, Tatar, etc.). This expanded representation led to the conclusion that the Borderlands did not belong to any nation exclusively, and that the moment when nationalistic aspirations for dominance appeared was the beginning of the end of that world.

Juliusz Mieroszewski’s essay, “Rosyjski kompleks polski i obszar ULB” (The Russia’s Polish Complex and the ULB area), published in 1974, offered a political summary of the cultural equality project, laid out earlier by the literature of “small homelands” (Mieroszewski). The author argued that, after the Second World War, Polish claims against Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine became “a notebook from ‘the house of the dead’” (9): the imperial attitude of Poland in the interwar period hindered the development of good relations between neighbors and it served to legitimize Russian imperialism: “This is a two-way process, Poles who are patiently waiting for a moment of retaliation and restoration of the ‘bulwark’ intensively fuel Russian imperialism” (14). As Mieroszewski wrote, such claims to the eastern lands must be abandoned; doing so would equip Polish foreign policy with a moral mission and geopolitical significance and it would strengthen our roots in Europe, allowing us to shape our relations with Russia differently. In this concept, independent and stable democracies in the Eastern Belt were the path to a more stable Poland.<sup>2</sup>

2 “We have to look for connections and an understanding with Russians who are ready to grant Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus full independence, and, what is equally impor-

After 1989, the Giedroyc's concept gained influence. In the early 1990s, the governments of the Third Polish Republic recognized the independence of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania; a decade later (2004–2005), President Kwaśniewski urged Western governments to support Ukraine and created a political alliance with Valdas Adamkus and Javier Solana to integrate the Eastern Belt with the rest of Europe. Also, in 2005, that is, at the start of our membership in the Union, Poland initiated the “Eastern Partnership” program, which defined the Union's eastern policy. During the 3rd National Eucharistic Congress in Warsaw in June 2005, there was a symbolic rapprochement and a gesture of Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation; soon thereafter presidents Kwaśniewski and Yushchenko opened the restored Cemetery of the Defenders of Lwów. Public support for Ukrainian democratic and pro-EU aspirations also increased, as evidenced by the various initiatives organized in Poland and by politicians visiting Ukraine during the Orange Revolution (2004–2005) and during Euromaidan (2013–2014).

But from the very beginning of the new period, Giedroyc had an old-new opponent—Henryk Sienkiewicz. His legacy made it easier to dismantle relationships rather than to forge new ones. At the end of the 1990s, Lithuania was caught up in a dispute regarding the Polish minority population. Belarus, as evidenced by the termination of Belsat satellite television,<sup>3</sup> which had been financed by the Polish government and legally constituted part of Polish Television, is left to fall deeper into Lukashenko's power, who is trying to establish conditions for neocolonial exploitation.<sup>4</sup> Ukraine, which is strategically the most important

tant, we must once and for all renounce all claims to Vilnius, Lviv and withdraw from any politics or plans that would aim to establish in a more favorable conditions our dominance over the East at the expense of the aforementioned nation... Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus must be granted full independence, as this is demanded by the Polish-Russian national interest” (Mieroszewski 12).

- 3 The founder and director of the independent station established in 2007 was Agnieszka Guzy-Romaszewska; in December 2016, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed her that her budget had been reduced and that the station has to switch to the Polish language. “According to unverified information, to which Romaszewska refers, Ministry of Foreign Affairs has cut financing for television from 17 million to 5 million zlotych” (Poczobut).
- 4 The PiS government is expanding its cooperation with Belarus, thereby relativizing and legitimizing the regime in power there. This cooperation is in itself significant, as it includes, e.g. plans for the purchase of atomic energy and land for wind power stations (something which PiS is opposing in Poland, calling it a sign of German colonization). “According to plans, the sales between Minsk and Warsaw are to increase four-

country, is increasingly being pushed away, as relations are governed by historical politics, identity politics and Polish claims to innocence, not by pragmatic calculations. Even in 2013, when a liberal government, Civil Platform (PO), was in power, the Sejm adopted a political declaration about Volhynia, defining the UPA crimes as “ethnic cleansing with signs of genocide,” which the ruling right-wing party, Law and Justice (PiS), later changed to simply “genocide” in 2016, marking July 11 as the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Genocide perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalists on citizens of the Second Republic of Poland during WWII.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Poland expects, as if under Sienkiewicz’s dictation, that Ukraine forever accept its role as that of a criminal, that it renounce its “cursed soldiers” and concede to Polish civilizational superiority.<sup>6</sup> To this we might also add the scant legal and social protection offered to the million Ukrainians working in Poland.<sup>7</sup> Such works as the film *Wołyń* (Volhynia; Hatred), which is commonly taken as presenting evidence for Ukrainian crime and Polish martyrdom, also strengthens reluctance and a sense of moral superiority.<sup>8</sup>

Over the past ten years, foreign policy towards Ukraine has, therefore, radically changed, and state propaganda has transformed the image of “Ukraine

fold. In October, we were able to pass an agreement regarding local border traffic, and the PKP (Polish Railways) celebrated this fact by introducing more connections from Kraków–Warsaw–Grodno. Interestingly, at approximately the same time the connections between Wrocław–Dresden and Wrocław–Berlin were eliminated” (Witkowski).

- 5 July 11, 1943, UPA units attacked approximately 100 Polish villages in Volhynia.
- 6 “Some time ago I talked to president Poroshenko and told him directly: you won’t enter Europe with Banderites; you’ll have to choose between integration with the West, which means giving up UPA or the East and everything that is connected to it” (Kaczyński).
- 7 Taking advantage of the economic crisis, Poland is draining Ukraine of its work force: The majority of these immigrants are doing what Poles do in the West: picking fruit, sorting fish, construction work, serving dinner and lunch. The minority is to fill the holes left by emigrating doctors, nurses and computer programmers, without whom the workforce cannot regenerate and the economy cannot develop” (Witkowski). Furthermore, the growing (and exacerbated by PiS) anti-Ukrainian sentiment prevents the development of an alliance between Polish and Ukrainian workers.
- 8 “Last year the Sejm passed an act concerning the Volhynia crime and almost simultaneously president Petro Poroshenko, kneeling before the monument of Polish victims of Volhynia. The film *Wołyń* (Volhynia; Hatred), based on the simplest stereotypes in describing the complex Polish-Ukrainian history, was called a gesture of reconciliation between the nations. In Polish eastern policy is slowly being taken over by an National Democratic, nationalistic narrative, and Giedroyc’s ideas about a Polish-Ukrainian alliance have become nothing more than a pipe-dream” (Smoleński).

aspiring to be in Europe” into the image of “Ukraine worshiping Banderites.” Highlighting UPA, the Volhynia crime and the allegedly widespread support for Bandera in Ukraine affects Polish attitudes to Ukrainians residing in Poland: acts of verbal aggression against individuals are multiplying, as well as physical assaults during cultural events or even during religious processions. Emphasizing the “unfairness” of the Giedroyc doctrine has already entered official political discourse,<sup>9</sup> just as it has become the norm to deny the Ukrainian minority additional state subsidies.<sup>10</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the cultural depiction of Ukraine aligned with the political discourse. Both underlined the similarities between the two countries, societies and cultures. Analogies served to work through the colonial heritage, that is, to understand that Poles were present in the Ukrainian lands from the seventeenth to the twentieth century in the role of a hegemon that impeded the developmental opportunities of the native society and relegated Ukrainians to the position of slaves. In this context, it seems remarkable that the Ukrainians were the ones to begin renewing Sarmatism—in a folk and postcolonial spirit—as a culture common to societies living in the former areas of the noble Polish Republic (see Pollack).

As part of the narrative of similarity, the writers also highlighted the key significance of dignity in the history of both societies and pointed out that Poland underwent a capitalist transformation largely facilitated by the West (this is help that in the twenty-first century Ukraine more urgently needs). In the context of Polish literature on Ukraine, “neighborhood” began to mean that Poles ask more than instruct, create a common language rather than use another language of domination.

Texts that aimed to decolonize the Polish memory of the Borderlands played a key role in this process. Examples of such roguish books are the following: Daniel de Beauvois’s *Ukrainian Triangle. The nobility, Tsarism and People*

9 “Many politicians are thoughtlessly clinging to an outdated and compromised myth of Jerzy Giedroyc. Regardless of what Giedroyc had in mind, his spiritual pupils, e.g. Adam Michnik, Henryk Wujec, Tomasz Nałęcz or Paweł Kowal, interpret his ideas thus: for the good of our relations with independent Ukraine, atrocities committed by UPA ought to be forgotten” (Isakowicz-Zaleski).

10 Cutting funding for organizations representing minority groups in 2017 (granted on the basis of the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities passed by the Ministry of Interior and Administration): Association of Ukrainians in Poland has not received any funding for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of deportations that took place as part of the “Wisła” initiative in 2017; no funding was granted for the Ukrainian language website Proştir. pl. In all, seven projects proposed by the Association of Ukrainians in Poland were rejected (in preceding years at most 1–3 were rejected).

in *Volhynia, Podolia and Kiev Region 1793–1914* (2005), Józef Obrębski's *Polesie* (published in 2007, containing analyzes from the 1930s), Jan Sowa's *The King's Phantom Body* (2010). All three authors analyzed the centuries-old colonial conditions created by Poles in the Borderlands. Ziemowit Szczerek's *Mordor Will Come and Eat Us* (2013) provided journalistic evidence for the current relevance of this postcolonial attitude. The author presented the Borderland language "in action," or Polish cultural awareness—full of stereotypes, prejudices and a sense of superiority in relation to Ukraine, acting like a machine that brings colonial relations to tourism. Polish tourists bring with them this border discourse to Ukraine: it manifests itself in words, behaviors, selected routes, visited sites, and even in the patterns of affected behavior towards monuments and ruins. The re-Polonized and reactivated borderland discourse is strengthened by the Polish tourist industry: travel agencies, guidebooks and albums produce ample evidence of the superiority of Polish culture over Ukrainian barbarism. The world presented in the reportage is not Ukraine, but contemporary Polish soft-colonialism, which no longer has the power to conquer foreign lands, but can, to a limited degree, stop history. Polish tourists looking for traces of Polishness in Ukraine are paying residents to maintain signs of their former colonial dependence.

Other books have also crossed this decolonization threshold: Małgorzata Szejnert's reportage, *Raising Mountains: True Life Stories from Polesie (Usypać góry. Historie z Polesia)* (2015) and Olga Tokarczuk's novel, *The Books of Jakob (Księgi Jakubowe)* (2015). They share a common feature of presenting the Borderlands in different languages and from different perspectives: from the point of view of a Pole and a Ukrainian (Belarusian, Lithuanian, Jew...), from the point of view of a nobleman and a peasant, owner and owned, the free and the enslaved. Therefore, these writers have learned to read the Borderlands in much the same way as a sociologist would; in order to understand the ethnic and economic relations in those lands, one must, first of all, learn to listen to someone else's stories.

The political discourse of the second decade of the twenty-first century radically departs from this concept. In opposition to the narrative of similarity and critical decolonization that have developed in literature, the language of politics primarily relies on the rhetoric of hierarchical difference. This rhetoric is connected not only to the celebrations of tragic events in Volhynia, which are used as the strongest argument against Giedroyc's doctrine<sup>11</sup> and the bloodiest

11 In 2013 activists of Poland's fringe right-wing movement "reconstructed" the Volhynia massacre in Radymno. Seven wooden houses were burned down in front of 5,000 spectators, and recordings of this "happening" were circulated on the Internet. Com-

evidence of the victims' moral superiority, but also to public declarations to the effect that Poland represents civilization and Ukraine is backward, that all permanence and value (churches, manor houses) were created by Poles, and Ukrainians have only themselves to blame for everything that is associated with clutter, backwardness and destruction, and finally, that Poland belongs to Europe and Ukraine still only aspires to it.

Thus, Giedroyc's concept is fulfilled in today's Polish foreign policy in its clumsiest variant: the government is separating Poland from Russia not so much by strengthening its eastern neighbors, but by provoking symbolic wars with them. This is done not in the name of a long-term program of international relations, but because of the inability to overcome its own complexes. That is why, although it is difficult to define the goal of Polish Eastern policy, it is not difficult to point to Sienkiewicz as its source.

## 2. The South: Central Europe, or Isolation

The second, southern direction gained prominence in the 1980s, when, thanks to Milan Kundera's famous essay "The Kidnapped West, or the tragedy of Central Europe" (Kundera), Polish culture began to rebuild its place in Central Europe. This text, which was quickly translated into many languages and was met with many enthusiastic comments and polemics, was intended as a challenge to Cold War geopolitics. The writer stated that Poland, Czechoslovakia<sup>12</sup> and Hungary became hostages of the Yalta peace treaty, as Western Europe gave Soviet Russia three of our countries in exchange for its own security. The best evidence that the Center did not agree with this decision were the uprisings that erupted in the following decades against totalitarian power—in 1956 (Hungary, Poland), in 1968 (Czechoslovakia, Poland), in 1970, 1976 and 1980 (Poland).

This rebellious attitude stemmed from the fact that Central Europe—the wealth of nations, cultures, faiths and languages—was not familiar (in the view of Kundera) with violent resolutions of conflicts; this area existed according to the following rule: "maximum diversity on a minimum of space" (Kundera 18). "How could we not be terrified of Russia which was building

menting the necessity of staging such "reconstructions," one participant stated proudly that it is "connected not only to preserving memory," but to rejecting "the outdated and discredited Giedroyc myth" (qtd. in Portnov).

12 Kundera consistently uses the name "Czechoslovakia" in the text, though he is referring to the Czech Republic (since he is referring to exclusively Czech and to cities, which are also exclusively Czech).

its might on the opposite logic: minimum diversity on a maximum of space?” (Kundera 18). By building this opposition and basing it on the idealized image of Central Europe and the terrifying image of Russia, the writer accomplished an extraordinary feat: he distinguished Central Europe from all the countries of the Soviet bloc, making it an internally coherent creation, with its own traditions; he introduced into the pan-European debate the image of a specific area in which culture retains its authenticity; he proposed a cultural (not political!) narrative that became the basis for the supranational language of resistance to the Soviet Union. He also justified the restitutionary attitude towards the West. In this approach, Soviet Russia was recast as a colonizer of culturally alien spaces, while Western Europe was seen as a traitor who, in exchange for security and prosperity, abandoned her younger sister.<sup>13</sup> Despite these simplifications (or maybe thanks to them?), Kundera transformed geopolitics into geopoetics. Throughout the post-war period, the map of Europe was held hostage by ideology. Alliances were based on the recognition of the integrity of borders, and thus the integrity of the narrative. The essay on Central Europe triggered the imagination and the map came to be seen as a derivative of the story, not of political systems.

The history of the first and second decades after 1989 saw the prognostications in Kundera’s essay come to fruition: The Visegrad Group, i.e. the alliance formed in 1991 between Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (since 1993, with the Czech Republic and Slovakia) was an attempt to establish new relations between states on the common tradition described by Kundera. CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement), created by the same countries in 1992, was meant to deepen the bond between these countries. This was, incidentally, the first international alliance which used the term “Central Europe” as a full-fledged political category. These agreements were meant to confirm the cultural unity of Central Europe and, at the same time, to help accelerate admission into the United Europe. That is why it is perhaps no exaggeration to claim that Kundera’s essay can be considered a key text for the first transformation of the map; the thinking that the Czech writer popularized allowed Central European politicians to transform geopolitics into geopoetics, i.e. they transformed the map in accordance with the narrative.

The membership application submitted in 1994 began the process of institutional integration of Central Europe into United Europe, which was completed

13 This term, which appears in Kundera’s essay, refers to Jerzy Kłoczowski’s monogram *Młodsza Europa. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w kręgu cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej średniowiecza.*



with the signing of the accession treaty in 2003. Integration and, therefore, disappearance. The accession of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary to Europe took place at the cost of the Center being dispersed into separate, though united in a different whole, countries that weaken cooperation and mutual alliances in favor of cooperating with the Union. Failure to cultivate the narratives of the Center is what proved fatal. Polish politics still seems to be trapped in the logic of Kundera's essay, while reality has sided with Andrzej Stasiuk.

In the memorable essay "Dziennik okrętowy," included in the volume *Moja Europa* (My Europe) (2000) and written together with Yurii Andrukhovych (Jurij Andruchowycz), Andrzej Stasiuk extended the map of Central Europe to include eastern and southern regions, thus annexing the areas of Ukraine, Romania, former Yugoslavia and Albania. This allowed Stasiuk to display the kind of cultural strangeness that is incomprehensible to the West, civilizational backwardness, poverty and a peculiar passive activity that can transform life into intense expectation. According to the writer, the countries of the Center perceive unification with the West, which is based on the transfer of money and new technologies in exchange for getting rid of cultural identity, as yet another form of colonization. Against this, Stasiuk orientalized the Center, presenting passivity as a strategy of waiting for the next stage of history in an attempt to preserve one's own culture.

In subsequent books, *Zima* (Winter) (2001), *Jadąc do Babadag* (Driving to Babadag) (2004), *Fado* (2006), *Dojczland* (2007) and *Dziennik pisany później* (A Diary Written Later) (2010), Stasiuk consistently upheld this depiction, turning himself into a kind of anti-Kundera of the unification discourse. Whereas Kundera attributed Western features to Central Europe, Stasiuk gave these areas an oriental character. For Kundera, Central Europe was an area betrayed by the West, whereas for Stasiuk it was an area betrayed by the elegant concept of Central Europe smoothly and seamlessly joining the West at the price of forgetting the Balkans, Romania and Albania. For Kundera it was a reservoir of beautiful monuments, whereas for Stasiuk it is a rusty warehouse of socialist industry and a kiosk with counterfeit Western goods. For György Konrád, Czesław Miłosz or Danilo Kiš, it was primarily a bourgeois area, for Stasiuk, just like for his great predecessors Josef Kroutvor or Joseph Roth, it is plebeian territory. Supporters of integration regarded Central Europe as an intermediate stage, while Stasiuk treats it as an impassable stage. According to Stasiuk, Central Europe (extended to the Balkans) is a distorted mirror of the West: the people of the Center will never reach the civilizational level of the West, and the only gift that the West can offer as part of the exchange is a parody of modernity. Central



Europe mocks the West, because it unintentionally exposes the fact that these unification myths make it possible for the West to renew its civilization mission and that this mission is a technically advanced version of the petty bourgeoisie.

We do not have to believe Stasiuk and we do not have to regard his texts as a reflection of the truth. It is important, however, that they made it possible to understand how dangerous it was to recognize the narrative of unification as the end of history. The side effects included eagerly forgetting the South, that is, in effect there was no significant difference between Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, on the one hand, and Romania or Albania, on the other. Selected post-communist states were admitted to the Union not because of their past achievements, but in the name of solidarity and in order to achieve the goal of unification. However, successive Polish governments took admission to Europe for granted, which prevented them from thinking about solidarity towards other participants in history. As long as no events disturbed the new order, a sense of Poland's permanent presence in Europe was conducive to this forgetfulness. The rapid influx of war refugees to Europe in 2015 became a critical test of the historiosophical and solidarity narrative represented by the Central European nations. It then became clear that the tradition of tolerance, attachment to European culture and a sense of solidarity are merely illusory values. As a result, the first wave of migrants washed Central Europe off the map and undermined Poland's presence in a united Europe.

In 2015, three nations regarded by Kundera as exclusive representatives of Central Europe agreed that they would not accept refugees. However, there was no unity in this concerted reaction: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were not refusing to accept migrants in the name of solidarity with each other (which would be a perverted version of solidarity), but because they had entered Europe as victims and wanted to remain victims deserving of constant assistance. Closing its borders to immigrants meant that Central Europe was made up of separate states interested in a selfish isolational policy. And because egoists, even when alike, remain apart, so Central Europe crumbled before our eyes. Polish foreign policy focused on an alliance with Hungary or the Czech Republic or Romania in an effort to recreate Central Europe is a result of treating the specter of Kundera's essay as reality. Only a specter remains after Central Europe. Ziemowit Szczerek traverses this land in his novel *Międzymorze* (2017), which reveals a simple mechanism that breaks down every alliance of Central European nations; these societies feel different from Western ones; hence, their predilection for Art Nouveau; at the same time, this feeling of separateness in relation to other Central European nations is understood more as uniqueness and thus contributes to further isolation.

### 3. The West: Germany, or Europe

In a travel essay entitled *Dojczland* (2007), Andrzej Stasiuk stated that Germany and Russia have been determining the fate of Central and Eastern Europe for centuries. They are like two arms of a vice, which grabbed the middle regions and, on account of their location, delivered a geopolitical innocent verdict. For two centuries, Poland either ceased to exist due to the actions of both neighbors or had to adapt its development to them; then, after World War II, it was afraid of the East, and looked to the West with toxic adoration. Germany as an object of desire has always been too far away, Russia as a source of fear too close, so the Polish strategy of survival was based on a civilizational shift towards the West and a cultural shift away from the East.

To move towards Germany meant to imitate. In *Dojczland*, Stasiuk argued that Poles—producers of underdeveloped and impermanent forms—imitate Germans not because they fell in love with perfection, but because their Eastern neighbor threatens Poland with formlessness. The opposition (between Eastern formlessness and German perfection) can be used to formulate another hypothesis: running away from Russia and imitating Germany is combined in the search for one's own form. This form should allow one to achieve (or at least to understand) conditions of equality in shaping one's location on the East-West axis. However, this requires relinquishing claims to superiority and overcoming complexes. In other words, it is necessary to find replacements for the kind of ideas formulated by Stasiuk.

A full discussion of this search for replacements in relation to literature would require the inclusion of several hundred texts. The scope of this essay requires radical shortcuts. Therefore, let us establish the beginning of the accelerated exchange of imagination roughly in the mid-1980s. Andrzej Szczypiorski's novel *The Beginning* (1986) was met with instant acclaim; it was extensively reviewed and after 1989 found its way onto the high school reading list. This novel provoked a shift in affect in that negative emotions were now focused on Russia, leaving Germany as a potential civilizational ally. Stefan Chwin's novel *Hanemann* (1995), published almost a decade later, drew on the heritage of melancholy<sup>14</sup> and pointed to its weakness in redefining the opportunity for Polish-German relations. The spatial protagonist of the novel, i.e. the city

14 Chwin rekindled the interest in melancholy. See Bałus's *Mundus melancholicus. Melancholiczny świat w zwierciadle sztuki* (*Mundus Melancholicus: The Melancholy World in the Mirror of Art*); Bieńczyk's *Melancholia. O tych, co nigdy nie odnajdą straty* (*Melancholy: Those Who Never Recover Loss*); Kuczyńska's *Piękny stan melancholii. Filozofia niedosytu i sztuka* (*The Beautiful State of Melancholy: The Philosophy of Insatiability and Art*),

of Gdańsk, was described by the writer as a model example of a “small homeland”, which (like all such spaces throughout Central Europe) experienced ethnic cleansing after 1945. However, Chwin did not write a historical novel; he presented his story to readers who were immersed in the 90s, i.e. in a period of re-establishing small homelands and redefining identity. It was to these readers that the author addressed the only possible foundational message: the need to stand on the side of people deprived of their homeland. Acceptance of the Other requires the melancholic abandonment of strength and the recognition that weakness is a necessary basis for co-existence. Polish-German relations, and in a broader sense Europe, cannot exist without melancholy. If Szczypiorski denazified Germans, Chwin demilitarized them; *The Beginning* introduced the figure of the good German to social emotions, whereas *Hanemann* introduced the figure of the fascinating German; the first hero became the object of sympathy, the second the object of longing.

Along with *Hanemann* came a pronounced shift of emphasis in the representation of the war and post-war years: an increasingly important role was attributed to the civilian population and its fate, as well as its forced displacements. From this perspective, Polish literature from the turn of the twenty-first centuries has carried out a double exchange: first of its horrors, then of its homelands. The first exchange consisted of a gradually completing a more comprehensive image of war and occupation: the dominant image represented the horrific suffering of Poles persecuted by the Germans.

The subsequent texts made it clear that German civilians suffered a great deal in the aftermath of the war. Edmund Nowak was perhaps the first to describe this suffering in his study *Cień Łambinowic (Shadow of Łambinowice)* (Nowak 1991). It dealt the labor camp in Łambinowice,<sup>15</sup> which existed 1945–1946 and which held around six to eight thousand people: they were German soldiers and civilians, Silesians, Opole Germans, as well as people who were deemed disagreeable by the new authorities or were accidentally arrested. The proportion of victims who died of hunger, illness, torture, and rape is estimated between 1/3 and 4/5. The first commandant of the camp, Czesław Gęborski, and his deputy, Ignacy Szypuła, were brought to justice in 1958 and later acquitted. An outstanding Polish prose writer, Janusz Rudnicki, got a hold of the court files and created a fictitious confession of the deputy commandant (Rudnicki). The sadist says dispassionately:

15 The first description of Łambinowice in German literature can be found in a book written by a camp doctor, Heinz Esser in *Die Hölle von Lamsdorf (The Hell of Lamsdorff)*.

We shot people in the trees as if they were monkeys, we shot people in the restrooms as if they were flies.... We beat and killed.... One shoemaker from Bielce, 58, jumped on my back until he died. His buddy from the same village, 65, had a brain, so I smashed his skull with the butt.... We shot a woman in the ninth month of pregnancy, and then shot her little daughter as she laid flowers on her grave.... We buried those who only fainted. They woke up as the sand fell on them. Darla was possessed, the gravediggers buried them at an accelerated pace. If someone asks me today if I can hear these screams, I can't hear them. I do not regret my sins. (Rudnicki 290–291)

Rudnicki presented a sincere confession of a murderer who feels no guilt. The author, testing the boundaries of communication, created a symmetrical portrait to that of the figure of the Nazi (at one of the hearings, the commander admitted that in the camp he used the regulations of the Nazi camps, because, as a former prisoner of one, he did not know other regulations). Thanks to the ghostly symmetry, the story introduced a mutual hindrance to Polish-German relations: Poles can no longer claim that they were only innocent victims, and the Germans must recognize that they created a pattern of persecution that was faithfully reproduced by the victims.

At the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, Marek Łuszczyna wrote a follow-up report on *Mała zbrodnia* (*Little Crime*) about Polish post-war concentration camps (Łuszczyna). Based on the collected materials, the author compacted the map:

Between 1945 and 1950, 206 forced labor camps and concentration camps operated in Poland, in which Germans, Ukrainians, Lemkos and Poles were detained. Intact Nazi infrastructure abandoned by the retreating German crews was used to create them.... Bunks in places where the greatest crime in the history of humanity took place, already a few weeks or even a few days (as in the case of Auschwitz II-Birkenau) after their liberation were filled with new prisoners—enemies of the people's power. (9)

Had the Polish authorities taken over the Nazi concentration camp infrastructure, Poland would have become an area of nationalist retaliation reproducing Nazi methods. The shocking reportage by Łuszczyna argues that this was prevented by the resettlement of Germans outside Poland.

In this way we come to another exchange—displaced persons. In the *Hanemann*, the parents of the main narrator, Mr. and Mrs. C., came to Gdańsk just after several hundred thousand Germans fled the city. They were also displaced persons: she escaped from burning Warsaw and he from Vilnius, which was occupied by the Russians. This makes us aware that in the years 1945–1948 a parallel exodus continued: the displacement of Poles from the Borderlands took place at the same time as the displacement of Germans from former East Prussia and Silesia.<sup>16</sup> In 2006, Jan Klata (born 1973), one of the most important theater directors of the twenty-first century, staged the play *Transfer*; he invited Polish and German displaced persons to the performance, who alternately went on stage and talked about their lives during the war and during the resettlement. It was a synchronic history unprecedented for Polish and German cultures, equalizing the experience of civilians of both nationalities: Germans displaced from Silesia and Poles expelled from the East (see Ciesiołkiewicz).

As a result of this process, the main post-war subject, i.e. the nation that is recapturing its lands, gave way to migrants. However, the issue of migrants brought with it problems: acquiring a (new) homeland in this case was associated with the loss of the (former) one; continuity was replaced by a fractured history that constantly has to start anew, and the soldier's agency and independence gave way to an almost disgraceful passivity and susceptibility to objectification (civilians are a deindividualized collective body to be loaded into cattle cars, deported, raped, forced to work, killed). What is more, thanks to the migrants, the definition of the homeland changed: it was no longer a culturally inhabited area, inherited from ancestors or (in the heroic version) reclaimed from enemies. The homeland understood as heritage became something that could be taken away from everyone and anyone. The new definition, which gave hope for a future life, required an understanding that a homeland is a space that nobody recognizes as exclusive property and which can be lent to strangers when they arrive.

16 “Out of around 12 million Germans who fled or were expelled from Eastern Europe after the war, the majority were from Czechoslovakia (3.5 million) and from Poland (7.8 million). The large part of the second group lived in the areas that were taken from the defeated Germans and given to Poland by the Allies”; “By the end of 1944, 6 million Germans fled from the Red Army; it is then when the majority of the 600,000 casualties were killed. Many of them found themselves trapped between the two opposing armies; some were intentionally massacred by Soviet soldiers or died in Soviet camps. The Czechs and the Poles also committed murders. A part of the responsibility for the deaths of these people lies at the feet of Hitler, as the Germans did not organize the evacuation in time” (Snyder).

These exchanges, related to realizing the symmetry of the tragedies experienced by the civilian population, the mass resettlement and the new homeland, resulted in another modification. It concerned ethnic identity after the borders were abolished.<sup>17</sup>

Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz regarded the fear implicit in the issue as serious. In his autobiographical, digressive, historiosophical essay *Kinderszenen*, the writer returned to the times of the occupation and the Warsaw Uprising (which coincided with his childhood); considerations entwined around a distinct thesis: “The Warsaw Uprising was the greatest event in Polish history. In our entire history there was (and probably never will be) a greater event” (Rymkiewicz 140). The greatness of the Uprising resulted not only from the fact that it was incited (despite a huge disparity in strength), but also from the scale of the victims. To describe it, the author recalled, with remarkable vividness, the German crimes of that time. And he polemically referred to the formal address Polish bishops gave in 1965 to German bishops, containing the epochal sentence: “we forgive and ask for forgiveness.”<sup>18</sup> Rymkiewicz writes:

It seems that we have forgiven the Germans too quickly and too easily. There are things in history that you never forgive—never, because there is no reason to forgive. The church and prime ministers of subsequent Polish governments should not forget about this—to forgive, one must have authorization; not from God, because God has nothing to do with it, but from Poles, and no one has ever given anyone such permission. (Rymkiewicz 156)

17 A discussion of changes in Polish identity should include literature written by Polish writers living in Germany. However, the large scale of this output would require a separate monograph. I will limit myself to the following list: Dariusz Muszer’s *Wolność pachnie wanilią* (Freedom Smells Like Vanilla) (German edition 1999, Polish 2008), Krzysztof Niewrzęda’s *Poszukiwanie całości* (In Search of Wholeness) (1999), Jurek Zielonek’s *Tadzio* (2000), Brygida Helbig’s *Anioły i świnię. W Berlinie!* (2005), Wojciech Stamm’s *Czarna Matka* (Black Mother) (2008) and Krzysztof Maria Załuski’s *Wypędzeni do raju* (Expelled to Heaven) (2010). This list should also include Janusz Rudnicki’s work, *Można żyć* (It’s a Living) 1993; *Cholerny świat* (Damned World) 1996; *Tam i z powrotem po tęczy* (There and Back on the Rainbow) 1997; *Męka kartoflana* (Potato Pangs) 2000; *Mój Wehrmacht* (My Wehrmacht) 2004; *Śmierć czeskiego psa* (Death of the Czech Dog), 2009.

18 For the historical significance of the bishops’ letter see: Pflüger, Lipscher, Holzer, Madajczyk, Kalicki.

Rymkiewicz opposes his bishops because his position is based on faith in the national absolute (that is why “God has nothing to do with it”). However, the nation exists not because it suffered casualties during the war, but because it did not forgive (the bishops forgave without asking others for their opinion). If the nation had forgiven, the only (separating) link between Poles and Germany, i.e. war, would have disappeared. After forgiveness, the author argues, Germany owes nothing to the Polish people; however, this moral debt that Poles are owed is what funds the existence of a collective subject. Therefore, if the collective subject refuses to forgive, stops the process of getting rid of identity and accepting developmental patterns of others, it regains control over its own historicity and strengthens the Polish “we.” Because in Rymkiewicz’s view Polish identity is based on nothing else but remembering the threat of complete annihilation, Poles can shape their history only on the basis of a refusal to forgive.

Another “we” was described by Włodzimierz Nowak in his collection of reportages entitled *Obwód głowy* (2007), one of the most important books for understanding the process of revising the Polish-German map. One of the reportages presents the present cities of Gubin and Guben located on both sides of the Nysa border. After 2004, Poles and Germans began to talk about one city. At the beginning, joint trade and transport appeared, then came the first bilingual school, shared sports competitions, shared holidays and games, a bridge going to the midriver island from Poland and Germany. Each solution had its side effects: car theft, sex tourism, drug trafficking; during a handball match, girls from both teams threw insults at each other (Polish pigs, Nazis). But the good results prevailed and they pointed to new possibilities: for example, a shared sewage treatment plant.

The process of the two cities merging will never be completed, and new problems will constantly force us to redefine “us.”<sup>19</sup> However, it will already be a postnational “us,” thinking in terms of *polis*. The mentioned purification plant has symbolic significance in this process. Rymkiewicz wanted Polish and German blood to remain unchangeable in the economy of salvation; And Guben-Gubin is “the only place in the world where German and Polish sh ... intermingle” (Nowak 2007: 54). Blood is a sacrifice of the body—pure and heroic; shit is body secretion—dirty and inevitable. The example of the Polish-German

19 The mayor of Gubin, Czesław Fiedorowicz, said: “In a few years the right and the left shore of Eurocity will be governed by one mayor, once a Pole, once a German, elected by a shared parliament. The government headquarters does not need to be built, because the city hall already stands on the Polish side.... One Employment Office, integrated schools with Polish and German languages” (Nowak 2007: 49–50).



border town proves that without ceasing to ask from whom spilt blood separates us, we may start asking with whom our excrements connect us.

Revising the map begins with the imagination. Instead of an image of past great events (wars, uprisings), everyday life appears; instead of permanent and partitioned territories, we have mutability. From these two poles, Nowak's revolutionary bourgeois narrative is born: it includes the image of the Polish-German borderland as an area of communal everyday life. Schools, kindergartens, workplaces, means of communication, bridges, pipes, roads—this is a bourgeois list of infrastructure for the transfer of everything (people, goods, information, dirt), which will move both ways. Revolution is about recognizing mutability as a challenge and opportunity. In response to a mutable history, Rymkiewicz wants to restore the solid consistency of collective identity. The inhabitants of Gubin are building an infrastructure for a mutable reality—a network of roads, canals, pipes, relay stations, and mixing and treatment plants. They know that this infrastructure that they have built will attract people looking for work and criminals, legally bought and stolen goods, things that are necessary and threatening. In the face of these threats, they make no attempt to return to the old borders, but instead they try to incorporate control mechanism to the mutable infrastructure. For Rymkiewicz, the differences between Poland and Germany should never disappear, because without them Poles will lose their identity. For inhabitants of Gubin, cultural differences are primarily communication differences, for which an exchange network can be created.

Nowak's report is complementary to *Kinderszenen*. Both authors agree that there is no historical plan. History must be created. For Rymkiewicz, this means "to win," for Nowak it means "to work out." *Kinderszenen* depicts the history (of a nation) as a unidimensional history, in which expressing past trauma revives Polish identity, whereas *Obwód głowy* suggests a multidimensional history, in which expressing divisive Polish-German issues is a condition for the emergence of a new communal identity. Rymkiewicz writes about a community that should never change under the threat of annihilation, whereas Nowak presents a community that should constantly change under the threat of annihilation. Rymkiewicz chose the more noble task: conversing with the dead, whereas Nowak chose the more difficult task: listening to the living.

The last of these differences refers to the role of literature. According to Rymkiewicz, this role is to resurrect the dead, so that they could help us recreate the old map. According to Nowak, literature exists to say everything<sup>20</sup>—from in-

20 I am alluding here to Lipski's *Powiedzieć sobie wszystko: Eseje o sąsiedztwie polsko-niemieckim* (To Tell Each Other Everything: Essays on Polish-German Relations).



sults, which preserve borders, to ideas, which create the future. New cartography is not a clearly defined task. However, if there is to be any real reason to revise the Polish-German map, then it must include creating communal everyday life.

The above discussion of the most important works on Polish-German relations can be summarized in the following way. On the Polish-German map in the last thirty years, wartime cartography was the first to give way to civilian cartography (Szczypiorski, Chwin), followed by descriptions of places where of mass arrests of civilians (Rudnicki, Nowak, Łuszczyna), then the resettlement routes were marked (Chwin, Klata) and migration (Muszer, Helbig, Niewrzęda and others). Today, the old cartography of displacements has taken the form of a mutable map of communal everyday life (Nowak). From the point of view of time, this literature was first retrospective in nature (addressing the war and its aftermath), then it was asynchronous (emphasizing the eternal “backwardness” of the migrant), and finally it took the form of a reportage that considers the social construction of a relation network.

The mutable state of the Polish-German map that emerges from literature indicates that the western direction has lost some of its causative power.<sup>21</sup> It can be cautiously claimed that it has opened itself up to interdependence. However, fusing the infrastructure in such a way seems to be unacceptable to politicians. They work to create a vision of Poland as a country with a semi-permeable western border: EU subsidies may flow through this border, but European legal solutions may not, and especially not EU problems.

#### 4. The North: Scandinavia, or an Alternative to the West

A different process leads to political isolation from the North. After the collapse of communism, Polish literature<sup>22</sup> has presented Scandinavia as an alternative

21 The increased role of mutable infrastructure means that no connections results in exclusion. This is made clear by the, Northern Pipeline, which is very disadvantageous for Poland (established in 2012), which runs from Russia to Germany (1,222 km) on the bottom of the Baltic Sea, avoiding the obvious transit countries (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia). The Northern Pipeline, contrary to its name, weakens the North (especially Norway as a supplier of gas) and strengthens the East-West axis. Twenty-first-century history, as it follows, requires attention to mutable infrastructures, and not only to stable identities.

22 A list of the most important titles: Zbigniew Kruszyński, *Szwedenkrauter* (1995); Bronisław Świdorski, *Słowa obcego* (The Words of a Stranger) (1998) oraz *Asystent śmierci* (Death Assistant) (2007); Manuela Gretkowska, *Polka* (Polish Woman) (2001); Dorota Masłowska, *Paw królowej* (The Queen's Peacock) (2005); Grażyna Plebanek,

to the West. In this alternative, the North, unlike the West, combined social prosperity with a welfare state and freedom with equality. Literature supported this view of the North, but added some important reservations. These narratives undermined the naive belief that Scandinavian modernity can simply be copied, recognizing that this was not a stable model, but a system open to continuous correction. However, not even this system can be imported to Poland by sea, because the modernity based on continuous correction functions on the basis of social trust and the basic principle of equality. In order to achieve similar effects as the Scandinavians, we would have to define the foundations of inequality in Poland, introduce systemic mechanisms aimed at eliminating them, and come up with social practices that are conducive to trust. A society that does not trust each other, its laws and its authorities, will neither be able to join the North, nor develop its own modernity.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, politicians still supported the “Scandinavian dream,” although they reduced it to the belief that social trust will rise along with increased GDP. However, in the second decade, right-wing propaganda introduced into the mass media the image of the North as “modernity that has gone too far.” Too far in terms of accepting refugees, as their excessive numbers deprive native people of their right to self-determination; too far in terms of child protection, as a simple spanking leads to parents losing custody of their children;<sup>23</sup> too far in terms of protecting women’s rights, as “normal” groping of breasts or buttocks can result in the offender being fired; too far in terms of sexual equality, as it accords “perverts” the same rights as normal people.

## 5. The Status of the Map

To sum up, we are isolated from the East by the specter of the Republic of Nobles, from the South by the specter of Central Europe, from the West by sovereignty understood as ideological integrity, and from the North by the anxious protection of Polish customs against equality (which includes also domestic violence, misogyny and homophobia). This four-fold disengagement characterizes the strange condition of contemporary Poland, which, as part of an

*Przystupa* (2007); Maciej Zaremba, *Polski hydraulik i inne opowieści ze Szwecji* (Polish Plumber and Other Stories from Sweden) (2008).

23 For a comprehensive account of the problems connected to child care and government intervention in parenting see: Marcin Czarnecki’s *Dzieci Norwegii. O państwie (nad)opiekuńczym* (Children of Norway: An (Over)Protective Nation).

unprecedented shift, is changing its location. Poland is entering a state of intra-continental drift, or inertial tide, initiated in the name of an unknown destination and taking place in an unknown direction.

To change this state, one would have to come up with a kind of sovereignty that integrates, i.e. we would have to abandon nationalism separating us from our eastern neighbors, work out a new narrative about Central Europe, look at the mutable infrastructure in the West and follow the model of the North, work on social trust as the basis of modernity. Four sides of the Polish world have become the conditions of the geography of late modernity. By defining these conditions, literature makes it clear that isolation is impossible today: it is impossible to speak of a separate Poland, if it is to exist at all, but it cannot exist without renewing its narrative connections. Narratives that expose Poland's total separateness from the East, narratives about Poland's obvious place in Christian Europe, about the possibility of stopping the emancipation process, or about Polish self-sufficiency are useless. However, to draw this new map, one needs to imagine a different future.

*Translated by Marcin Tereszewski*

## | References

- Bałus, Wojciech. *Mundus melancholicus. Melancholiczny świat w zwierciadle sztuki*. Kraków: Universitas, 1996.
- Bieńczyk, Marek. *Melancholia. O tych, co nigdy nie odnajdą straty*. Warszawa: Sic!, 1998.
- Ciesiołkiewicz, Paweł. *Pamięć zbiorowa w dyskursie publicznym. Analiza polskiej debaty na temat wypędzenia Niemców po drugiej wojnie światowej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Sedno, 2012.
- Czapliński, Przemysław. *Poruszona mapa. Wyobrażenia geograficzno-kulturowa polskiej literatury przełomu XX i XXI wieku*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2016.
- Czarnecki, Marcin. *Dzieci Norwegii. O państwie (nad)opiekuńczym*. Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2016.
- Esser, Heinz. *Die Hölle von Lamsdorf*. Dülmen: Laumann-Verl.-Ges, 1969.
- Isakowicz-Zaleski, Fr. Interview by Jacek Gądek. "Polityka zakłamywania historii niczego nie daje." *onet.wiadomości* from 07.20.2013, <https://tinyurl.com/ydg2v54p>. Accessed 12 October 2013.

- Kaczyński, Jarosław. Interview by Katarzyna Gójska-Hejke and Tomasz Sakiewicz. "Przystąpmy do obrony atomowej". *Gazeta Polska*, <https://tinyurl.com/y7ud42dr>. Accessed 2 August 2017.
- Kalicki, Włodzimierz. "Długie pojednanie." *Ostatni jeniec wielkiej wojny. Polacy i Niemcy po 1945 roku*. Ed. Włodzimierz Kalicki. Warszawa: W.A.B. i Fundacja im. Friedricha Eberta, Przedstawicielstwo w Polsce, 2002.
- Kłoczowski, Jerzy. *Młodsza Europa. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w kręgu cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej średniowiecza*. Warszawa: PIW, 1998.
- Kuczyńska, Alicja. *Piękny stan melancholii. Filozofia niedosytu i sztuka*. Warszawa: Wydział Filozofii i Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1999.
- Kundera, Milan. "Zachód porwany albo tragedia Europy Środkowej." Trans. M.L. [Maryla Laurent?]. *Zeszyty Literackie* 5 (1984).
- Lipski, Jan Józef. *Powiedzieć sobie wszystko ... Eseje o sąsiedztwie polsko-niemieckim* Ed. Georg Ziegler. Gliwice, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Polsko-Niemieckie, 1996.
- Łuszczyna, Marek. *Mała zbrodnia. Polskie obozy koncentracyjne*. Kraków: Znak, 2017.
- Madajczyk, Piotr. *Na drodze do pojednania. Wokół orędzia do biskupów niemieckich z 1965 roku*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994.
- Mieroszewski, Juliusz, "Rosyjski 'kompleks polski' i obszar ULB." *Kultura (paryska)* 9 (1974): 3–14.
- Nowak, Edmund. *Cień Łambinowic. Próba rekonstrukcji dziejów obozu pracy w Łambinowicach 1945–1946*. Opole: Centralne Muzeum Jeńców Wojennych w Łambinowicach, Opole, 1991.
- Nowak, Włodzimierz. *Obwód głowy*. Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2007.
- Pflüger Friedbert, Lipscher Winfried and Holzer, Jerzy, eds. *Od nienawiści do przyjaźni. O problemach polsko-niemieckiego sąsiedztwa*. Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1994.
- Poczobut, Andrzej. "Bielsat do zamknięcia?" *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <https://tinyurl.com/ycfpxgq2>. Accessed 18 December 2016.
- Pollack, Martin, ed. *Sarmackie krajobrazy. Głosy z Litwy, Białorusi, Ukrainy, Niemiec i Polski*. Wołowiec: Czarne, 2006.
- Portnov, Andriy. "Class of Victimhoods." *Dziennik Opinii – Krytyka Polityczna*, <https://tinyurl.com/y7ap05ur>. Accessed 29 December 2016.
- Rudnicki, Janusz. "Spowiedź mordercy Ignacego Szypuły zanim wypadł przez balkon i zabił się." *Krytyka Polityczna* 7.8 (2005).
- Rymkiewicz, Jarosław Marek. *Kinderszenen*, Warszawa: Sic!, 2008.
- Smoleński, Paweł. "Zniszczono cmentarz w Hucie Pieniackiej. Gdzie dwóch się kłóci, tam Rosja korzysta." *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <https://tinyurl.com/y8gvdm24>. Accessed 1 October 2017.

Snyder, Timothy. "Holocaust: Ignorowana rzeczywistość." *Res Publica Nova* 7 (2009).

Witkowski, Przemysław. "Jakie czasy, taki Piłsudski." *Dziennik Opinii – Krytyka Polityczna*, <https://tinyurl.com/ybx53ax3>. Accessed 1 November 2017.

## | Abstrakt

PRZEMYSŁAW CZAPLIŃSKI

### Literatura i geografia

Artykuł stanowi propozycję potraktowania literatury jako matrycy wyobraźni zbiorowej. Podstawą omówienia jest proza polska okresu 1986–2016, a teza główna mówi, że kultura polska dotarła do krańców wyobraźni geograficznej. Jest to rezultatem wyprowadzki z dotychczasowych większych całości, do których Polska należała bądź do których dążyła (osłabienie obecności w Unii Europejskiej, zniknięcie Europy Środkowej, zahamowanie procesu orientowania się na skandynawski model państwa i kultury obywatelskiej, kryzys w stosunkach z Litwą, Białorusią i Ukrainą). Osłabianie bądź zrywanie więzi z państwami sąsiedzkimi prowadzi do czterostronnej izolacji – czyli wspomnianych krańców wyobraźni geograficznej. Wyjście z impasu byłoby możliwe pod warunkiem wypracowania nowych narracji łączących Polskę z kulturami sąsiedzkimi i osadzających nasz kraj na europejskiej mapie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** krańce; mapa; wyobraźnia geograficzno-kulturowa; wyobraźnia polityczno-kulturowa; Europa Środkowa; Skandynawia

## | Abstract

PRZEMYSŁAW CZAPLIŃSKI

### Literature and Geography

This article proposes to treat literature as a template of the collective imagination. The basis for discussion is Polish prose from 1986–2016, with the main thesis being that Polish culture has reached the limits of geographical imagination. This is the result of Poland withdrawing from the larger structures to which it once belonged or to which it aspired (its diminishing presence in the European Union, the disappearance of Central Europe, delayed efforts to pursue the Scandinavian

model of the state and civic culture, the destruction of relations with Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine). Weakening or breaking ties with neighboring countries has led to isolation from all four sides. In order to get out of this impasse, it is necessary to develop new narratives that would link Poland with the neighboring cultures and would once again put our country back on the European map.

**Keywords:** borderland; map; geographical and cultural imagination; political and cultural imagination; Central Europe; Scandinavia

### | About the Author

**Przemysław Czaplinski** is a Professor, historian of Polish and European literature, essayist, translator, literary critic, co-founder of the Department of Anthropology of Literature (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland), member of Polish Academy of Sciences, director of Open Humanities Center. Author of more than ten books, most recently: *Polska do wymiany. Późna nowoczesność i nasze wielkie narracje* (Poland to exchange. Late modernity and our grand narratives) (Warsaw, 2009), *The Remnants of Modernity. Two Essays on Sarmatism and Utopia* (Frankfurt am Main 2015), *Poruszona mapa. Wyobrażenia geograficzno-kulturowa polskiej literatury przełomu XX i XXI wieku* (Kraków 2016); *Literatura i jej natury* (Poznań 2017). Fields of interest: the history of literature of the twentieth and twenty-first century, sociology and anthropology of literature, Holocaust, oral literature, aesthetics. Visiting professor in Heidelberg (2015), visiting lecturer at Berlin's Humboldt University, Harvard University in Boston, Université Libre in Brussels, as well as in Regensburg, Dresden, Potsdam, Munich, Budapest, Illinois, Tübingen, Munich, Florence, Bologna and Pisa. Winner of the Medal of Young Art (1996), the Award of International Circle of Literary Critics (1997), the Kościelski's Award (1998), Prime Minister's Prize (1999), Kazimierz Wyka Prize (2004), Jan Długosz Prize (2016).  
E-mail: czaple@amu.edu.pl

LUKÁŠ PĚCHULA  
Ostravská univerzita

## Das Bild der Polen als Heterokonstruktion in Zwischenkriegsromanen der Region Ostravsko: *Tschechisch-deutsche imagologische Untersuchung*<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Einleitung

Ostrau und das Umland der Stadt stellen vor allem aufgrund der Grenznähe ein interessantes Feld für die imagologische Forschung dar, ebenso jedoch aufgrund der industriellen Entwicklung und weiterer historischer Ereignisse, auf deren Grundlage es hier zur Vermengung zahlreicher Ethnien kam, wie zum Beispiel der polnischen, deutschen, tschechischen, jüdischen, aber ebenso derjenigen der Roma. Konkret rücken bei der vorliegenden vergleichenden Studie die Heterobilder der Polen in der Romanprosa in der größeren Region Ostravsko<sup>2</sup> zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen ins Zentrum des Interesses. Es werden die Romane untersucht, die während dieser Zeitperiode geschrieben, modifiziert oder herausgegeben wurden.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 Diese Studie wurde durch das SGS-Projekt (SGS02/FF/2020 *Hranice a kulturní transfery. Příspěvky k literární komparatistice/ SGS02/FF/2020 Grenzen und Kulturtransfers. Beiträge zur literarischen Komparatistik*) an der Universität Ostrau unterstützt.
- 2 Mit dem Begriff ist das Gebiet der Periodenbezeichnung *Moravskoostravská župa* gemeint (auf der Grundlage des sogenannten *župního zákona/Gaugesetzes* 1920). Das Gebiet wurde 1927 in *Moravskoslezská země* umbenannt und *Těšínská župa* wurde ebenfalls daran angegliedert. Es geht um das Gebiet von Nord- und Nordostmähren und einen Teil des tschechischen Schlesiens. Weiterführend in Malíř, Marek 2005: 400–402.
- 3 Romane von Sokol-Tůma wurden schon anfangs des 20. Jahrhunderts geschrieben, trotzdem sind sie erst in den 1920er Jahren herausgegeben und reflektiert worden, bis

Um den Rahmen der Studie nicht zu sprengen, wurde das verwendete Material durch einige Kriterien eingegrenzt. Zunächst ist dies die regionale Verankerung; es wird versucht, eine Entwicklungslinie des künstlerischen Konzepts des Bildes im Rahmen der untersuchten Region herauszuarbeiten, weshalb Autoren ausgewählt wurden, die direkt mit der Region im Zusammenhang stehen und eventuell ihr Werk in engem Kontakt mit ihr verfasst haben.

Neben der Zeitspanne wird der Forschungsgegenstand ebenso hinsichtlich des Genres eingegrenzt. Der Fokus liegt auf Romanwerken, die als primäre Themen sozialkritische Gedanken aufnehmen und sich eventuell mit der Frage nach Ethnie oder Rassenzugehörigkeit befassen. Die Präferenz liegt hierbei auf den Genres des Bauern-, Sozial-, Gesellschafts- oder Grenzlandromans.

Die Studie ist ein Teil einer umfangreicheren Forschung, die sich mit der Konstruktion von Auto- und Hetero-Bildern in den Romanen der oben erwähnten Zeitspanne und Region befasst. Die Forschung beschäftigt sich eingehend mit den Werken tschechischer Autoren (František Sokol-Tůma, Vojtěch Martínek, Ludmila Hořká, Ladislav Třenecký, A.C. Nor, Karel Dvořáček, Jarmila Glazarová) und vergleicht deren Konstruktion der Bilder mit dem Bildaufbau in Werken deutscher Schriftsteller der gleichen Epoche (Ernst Wolfgang Freissler, Maria Stona, Gottfried Rothacker, August Scholtis).

Die hier vorgestellte Studie stellt das Bild der Polen und seine Entwicklung in den Mittelpunkt des Interesses, die anderen Themen wie z.B. die Rolle des Genres, Konstruktion Auto- oder Hetero-bilder der anderen Ethnien wurden im Rahmen vorangehender Studien bearbeitet. Aus dem ganzen Spektrum werden nur die Autoren vorgestellt, die die Entwicklung des Polenbildes charakterisieren. Zunächst wird versucht, die komplexeste Bildkonstruktion im Werk von Sokol-Tůma und August Scholtis zu analysieren. Bei den anderen Autoren, die kein komplexes Bild konstruieren, werden zumindest einzelne Fragmente beschrieben.

## 2. Theorie und Methode der Imagologie

Aktuell ist die Imagologie eine breite und interdisziplinäre Disziplin, deren Ziel es ist, literarische Bilder und ihre Konstruktionen im literarischen Text verständlich zu machen. Lenka Adámková betont, dass es erforderlich ist,

zu diesem Zeitpunkt überarbeitete Sokol-Tůma seine Texte mehrmals. Der Roman *František chce být spravedlivý* von Karel Dvořáček wurde am Ende der 1930er Jahre vollendet, aber wegen der Zensur erst in den 1960er Jahren herausgegeben. Es werden also die Texte jener Zeitperiode analysiert, die von der kulturellen und sozialen Atmosphäre der Tschechoslowakei in der Zwischenkriegszeit beeinflusst wurden.



auch die Rahmenbedingungen zu untersuchen, welche die Bildkonstruktion beeinflussen konnten:

Die personellen und institutionellen Elemente, zu denen auch politische und kulturpolitische Rahmenbedingungen zählen, die dem System nicht angehören, es aber in seiner Entstehung, Wahrnehmbarkeit und Wahrnehmung beeinflussen, bezeichnen wir als seine transgredienten Grundlagen. Wenn sich Imagologie als interdisziplinäre Literaturwissenschaft versteht, muss sie ihren Blickwinkel vom literarischen Text auf diese transgredienten Grundlagen imagotyper Systeme ausweiten (Adámková 2011: 12).

Im Mittelpunkt der Disziplin stehen selbstverständlich die Begriffe „Bild“ und „Image“, welche in imagologischen Studien sehr oft synonymisch<sup>4</sup> benutzt werden. Aus sprachlichen Gründen wird in dieser Studie, mit Hinblick auf die untersuchten Autoren sowie die Zeit, der Begriff „Bild“ bevorzugt, wodurch an eine Begrifflichkeitslinie der Imagologie angeknüpft wird, die von Autorinnen und Autoren wie Hugo Dyserinck,<sup>5</sup> Michaela Voltrová, Elke Mehnert, Lenka Adámková,<sup>6</sup> Gabrielle Schubert<sup>7</sup> u. a. präsentiert wird.

Im Einklang mit der sogenannten Chemnitzer literarischen Schule wird „Bild“ als ein System<sup>8</sup> verstanden. In diesem Zusammenhang benutzt Mehnert den Terminus „das imagotype System“:

[Das imagotype System ist] Gesamtheit der imagotypen Elemente in ihrer jeweiligen Struktur. Das imagotype System existiert auf verschiedenen Textebenen (Der Erzählinstanz, des Figurenensembles, der

4 „Der Begriff Image (image) ist abgeleitet vom lateinischen Wort imago, dass in der deutschen Sprache Bild bedeutet. So ist es nicht überraschend, dass (wie auf den nächsten Seiten demonstriert wird) die Termini Image und Bild in der komparatistischen Imagologie parallel angewandt werden und fast identische Phänomene bezeichnen.“ (Voltrová 2015: 37). Die Phänomene sind „fast“ identisch, der konkrete Unterschied wird in dieser Studie wie folgend verstanden. „Image“ ist im Deutschen eher der theoretische und allgemeine Begriff, bezogen auf die imaginäre Vorstellungswelt; „Bild“ ist die konkrete, bildhafte Vorstellungswelt.

5 Siehe weiterführend Dyserinck 2002, uns 2015.

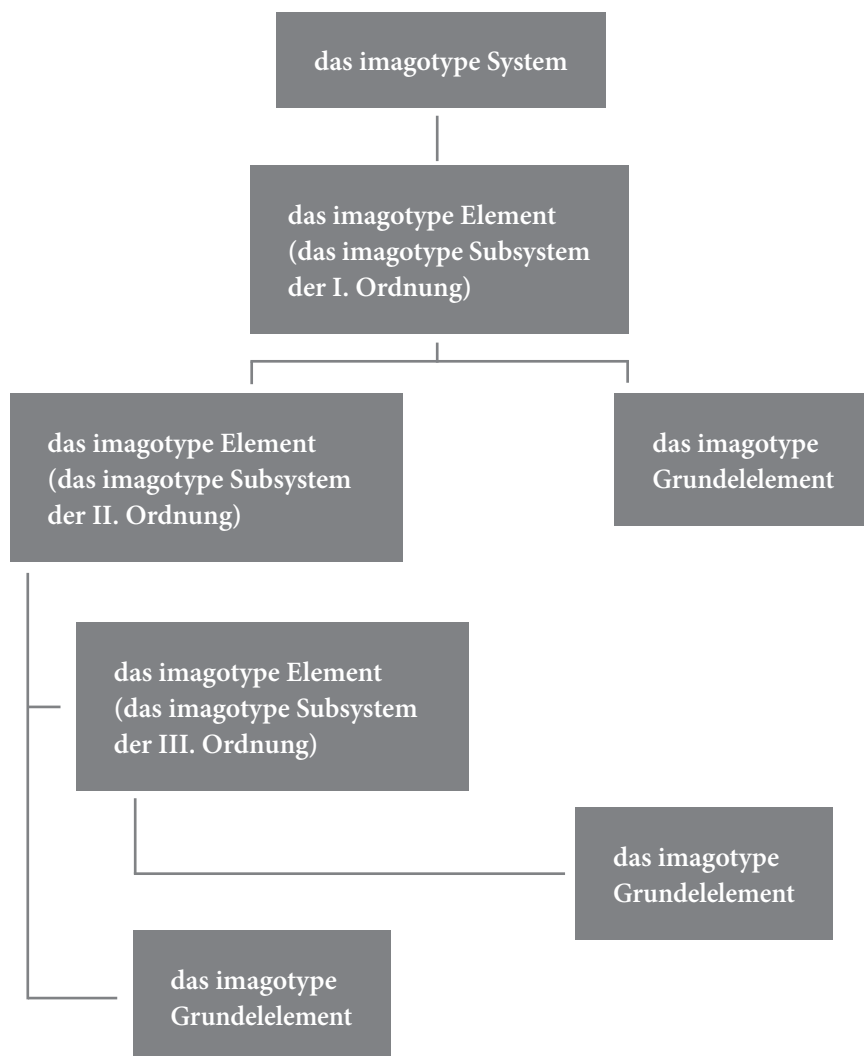
6 Siehe weiterführend Adámková 2011.

7 Siehe weiterführend Schubert 2003.

8 „[System wird verstanden als] Mengen von Elementen, zwischen denen Wechselbeziehungen bestehen. Alles, was nicht Element des Systems ist, was nicht dazu gehört, ist dessen Umwelt.“ (Becker in Votrová 2015: 60).

Motivik, Symbolik ...) [...] Imagotype Elemente können ihrerseits als imagotype Subsysteme mit eigener Binnenstruktur betrachtet werden (Mehnert in Voltrová 2015: 58).

Das imagotype System kann ikonisch wie folgt dargestellt werden:



Ab. 1: Systematische Darstellung des imagotypen Systems (Voltrová 2015: 62)

Für die moderne Imagologie mit Entwicklungen zum Beispiel in den Niederlanden ist hier einer der wesentlichen Vertreter Joep Leerssen, der in seiner Studie *Imagology: On using ethnicity to make sense of the world* (2016) betont, dass neben den allgemeinen Imagotypen noch sogenannte Ethnotypen existieren, also Darstellungen eines ethnischen Charakters, der eine Ethnie von einer anderen trennt. Die Ethnotypen selbst müssen laut Leerssen (Leerssen 2016: 17–18) in Abhängigkeit von ihrer Zeit und ihrem Kontext interpretiert werden.

Der Ethnotyp wird innerhalb des Werks aus den Positionen der sogenannten „Auto-“ und „Heteroperspektive“ geformt. Die Perspektiven bestimmen den Ursprung des Blicks auf die eigene wie die fremde Ethnie; darauf beruhen „Autobilder“ oder „Heterobilder“. Es handelt sich um Sichtweisen auf eine Realität, die mit der Wirklichkeit selbst keinesfalls übereinstimmen müssen. Während Auto- folglich auf die Sichtweise des Einzelnen hinweist, der innerhalb der eigenen sozialen Gruppe/Erscheinung existiert, bestimmt das Präfix Hetero- immer den Blick von außen auf die jeweilige andere Gruppe.<sup>9</sup>

Elke Mehnert (Vertreterin der sogenannten Chemnitzer imagologischen Schule) nennt diesen Kontext der Entstehung von Bildern, der nicht direkter Bestandteil des untersuchten Bildes ist, sondern dessen „Umfeld“, als die „transgrediente Grundlage“ (Mehnert 1997: 44). Der Begriff umfasst die biologischen, sozialen, historischen und politischen Faktoren,<sup>10</sup> die den Autor während der Entstehung eines künstlerischen Textes beeinflusst haben. Mehnert betont, dass diese Elemente, wenn die Imagologie als interdisziplinäre Literaturwissenschaft verstanden werden soll, in imagologische Studien einbezogen werden müssen.<sup>11</sup>

Es wird immer versucht, die Elemente des polnischen Bildes komplex und umfassend zu interpretieren (in der Verbindung zum ganzen Text), um die „*intentio operis*“ und damit auch „*intentio auctoris*“ ersichtlich zu machen. Laut Jan Mukařovský ist die Absicht die Stärke, die: „die einzelnen Teile und Komponenten des Werks verbindet, und damit dem Text Sinn gibt“.<sup>12</sup> Besonders wichtig ist die Formation des polnischen Bildes im Rahmen des vereinheitlichen Aufbaus des Werkes, die durch eine Analyse der Handlung, des Themas, anhand der Häufigkeit des Auftretens einzelner Elemente eröffnet wird.

9 Siehe weiterführend Voltrová 2015: 28–29.

10 Siehe weiterführend Mehnert 2016

11 Siehe weiterführend Mehnert 1997: 44.

12 Mukařovský, verfügbar [online], [zit. 2019–03–16], unter: <https://tinyurl.com/y24c7oup>.

### 3. Textanalyse

#### 3.1. František Sokol-Tůma

Aus chronologischer Perspektive ist es erforderlich, die Textanalyse mit dem ältesten Autor zu beginnen. Sokol-Tůma<sup>13</sup> wurde bereits 1855 geboren, weshalb er den Ausgangspunkt für die Literatur der Zwischenkriegszeit in der Region Ostravsko bildet. Vojtěch Martínek betont, dass die Texte Sokol-Tůmas in ihrer Zeit nicht nur ästhetische und künstlerische Interessen darstellten, sondern von den Lesern auch als Beschreibung der Gegenwart verstanden wurden. Tůma hebt die Verbindung seiner Texte mit der realen Welt in den Fußnoten selbst hervor. Jene Anwesenheit der Fußnoten, die sich sehr oft in seinen Romanen befinden, ist für ihn sehr charakteristisch. Martinek erwähnt konkret:

[texty od Sokola-Tůmy vykazují] poučující a uvědomovací poslání. Neboť František Sokol-Tůma nikdy nechtěl, aby jeho děje byly pouze výmyslem a projevem tvůrčí fantazie. Zdůrazňoval vždy, že chce podati ve svém díle odlesk skutečnosti.<sup>14</sup> (Martínek 1926: 15).

*Černé království*<sup>15</sup> stellt einen Zyklus relativ umfangreicher, engagierter Romane dar. Die Entwürfe der ersten zwei Teile entstanden laut Martínek bereits zwischen 1900 und 1904<sup>16</sup> (Martínek 1926: 42–43), damit würden die Texte nicht in die Zeitspanne dieser Studie fallen, aber laut Martínek arbeitete

13 (1855 Benešov – 1925 in Mährisch Ostrau). Schriftsteller, Schauspieler, Rezitator, Journalist. Tätigkeit in Ostrau, Valašské Meziříčí. Arbeit bei den Zeitschriften *Ostravský obzor* (1897–1901), *Ostravan* (1901–1912), *Horník* (1910–1923). Seine Werke konzentrieren sich auf die Walachei und die Region Ostravsko, die Figuren stammen häufig aus dem Arbeiter- oder Bergbaumilieu. Die Texte sind stark engagiert, antideutsch. Sein Werk ist von Schemenhaftigkeit durchzogen, bezüglich der Imagologie sind nur einige grundlegende Muster zu erkennen, die in späteren Werken weiterhin zum Tragen kommen.

14 „[Die Texte Sokol-Tůmas weisen] eine belehrende und bewusstmachende Mission auf. Denn František Sokol-Tůma wollte nie, dass seine Werke nur Fiktion sind und Ausdruck schöpferischer Fantasie. Er betonte stets, dass er seinem Werk einen Abglanz der Wirklichkeit beifügen möchte.“ (Soweit nicht anders vermerkt, stammen alle Übersetzungen vom Verfasser)

15 Die Trilogie besteht aus folgenden Romanen: *V záři milionů*, *Na šachtě*, *Pan závodní*.

16 Hier muss darauf hingewiesen werden, dass der erste Teil des Romans, unter dem Titel *E'Geschäftsmann*, veröffentlicht in Zeitschriften, nicht die Ankunft Chaims in Ostrau widerspiegelte. Die Einführungsteile des Romans über das Aufwachsen Chaims veröffentlicht der Autor erst in der chronologischen Buchüberarbeitung. Angaben entnommen aus (Borovička, Strobach 2017). Die Zeitschriftenausgaben der Vorkriegszeit sind

Sokol-Tůma jedoch weiterhin an den Texten. Konkret wurde der erste Teil neu überarbeitet und bis 1914 erweitert, dann wurde er dem Verleger Alois Zelinek angeboten und erst 1922 veröffentlicht. Die Romane beeinflussen also das literarische Spektrum maßgeblich vor allem in den 1920er Jahren, wo sie ebenfalls reflektiert werden.

Als Hauptquelle imagologischer Muster wurde der Roman *V záři miliónů* ausgewählt, der ursprünglich den Titel *E'Geschäftsmann* tragen sollte. *V záři miliónů* kann auch als Text verstanden werden, der das komplexeste Spektrum der Heterobilder darstellt. Es können Bilder von Juden, Deutschen und ebenfalls das Autobild des „slawischen Elements“<sup>17</sup> gefunden werden.

Ein charakteristischer Zug des Romans von Sokol-Tůma ist die Konstruktion des Bildes der Slawen. Bei keinem der Autoren, die nach ihm folgen, ist die Bemühung um die Darstellung eines so einheitlichen slawischen Bildes zu finden, stattdessen zerfällt das komplexe Slawentum in Teilbilder. Das von Sokol-Tůma untersuchte Element heißt das „slawische Element“,<sup>18</sup> das sich vor allem aus den Tschechen (Mähren) und Polen zusammensetzt. Sokol-Tůma ist unter den tschechischen Autoren hinsichtlich der Darstellung des polnischen Bildes sehr spezifisch, da eben hierbei in den folgenden Generationen auf tschechischer Seite ein deutlich vermindertes Interesse verzeichnet werden kann.<sup>19</sup>

Bei näherer Betrachtung des Bildes des slawischen Elements stellen wir fest, dass die Struktur eine bedeutende Rolle bei der engagierten Gesamtkonstruktion des Werks spielt. D.h. es geht hier um den Versuch, slawische Nationen (Tschechen und Polen) zu verbinden und Germanisierung sowohl als auch jede Formen des Radikalismus abzulehnen, die die Position der tschechischen Nation in ihrem eigenen Land destabilisieren können.

Hinsichtlich das ganze Bild des slawischen Elements stimmt die Darstellung von Tschechen, und Polen (aus Galizien bzw. Schlesien) in den Romanen von Sokol-Tůma in großem Maße damit überein, wie der gegebene Zustand durch die moderne Geschichtsschreibung geschildert wird, insbesondere in Bezug auf die Migrationsfrage.

nicht Gegenstand dieser Studie, das Gesamtwerk wird erst thematisiert, wenn es auf das komplexe Bild verweist.

17 Vgl. mit der Tendenz Sokol-Tůmas zu der Verbindung von Slawen zu einem einzigen „slawischen Element“, genauer erörtert weiter unten.

18 Im Orig. „Slovanský živel“.

19 Polen wird vor allen Dingen auch auf deutscher Seite thematisiert, konkret in der Überlieferung von z. B. Scholtis, allerdings nimmt auch hier die Konstruktion des polnischen Bildes keine primäre Rolle ein.

Der Erzähler verbindet den ersten Migrationsschub mit Galizien, was auch ein realer Fakt war. Im Jahre 1900 hatte das sich rasch entwickelnde Mährisch Ostrau die folgenden Bevölkerungsanteile in Bezug auf die Migrationsherkunft: 41% Morawaner, 23,4% Schlesier, 4,4% Tschechen, 26,6% Immigranten aus Galizien (Gawrecká 2014: 99). Über die Emigrationsprozesse aus dem galizischen Gebiet gibt es relativ umfangreiche Literatur,<sup>20</sup> es zogen im 19. Jahrhundert von dort aus etwa 8 Millionen Menschen nach Europa und Amerika (Gawrecká 2014: 101), zu den Hauptursachen dieses Prozesses werden ein unzureichendes Maß an fruchtbarem Boden gezählt, wirtschaftliche sowie soziale Rückständigkeit,<sup>21</sup> aggressive Auseinandersetzungen zwischen polnischen und russischen Galiziern, der polnische Aufstand in Galizien 1846 u. ä.

Hinsichtlich der imagologischen Interpretation der Beziehung zwischen dem Bild der Polen und Tschechen ist vor allem die Darstellung der „slawischen Wechselseitigkeit“ bedeutend, die faktisch eine manipulative Komponente im Aufbau des Werks darstellt, da die Bedrohung des Slawentums durch die Deutschen für alle Slawen gültig ist. Diese müssten sich laut Erzähler verbünden, aus dem Schlaf erwachen und den sie umgebenden radikalen Tendenzen die Stirn bieten, wobei hier die größte Gefahr das Deutschtum und dessen Instrument, die Germanisierung, darstellen. Die Herkunft der Slawen ist hier also direkt mit dem universalen<sup>22</sup> Unrecht verknüpft. Das slawische Volk wird laut Erzähler herabgesetzt, bestohlen und seine Erniedrigung gerate zu oft in Vergessenheit:

Největší kletbou lidu slovanského a původem všeho neštěstí je, že lehko zapomíná a odpouští. Je to snad křesťanské, ale je to národním neštěstím, poněvadž v tomto odpouštění a zapomínání je hrob naší politické, národní i hospodářské samostatnosti. V tom, že lížeme slinu, jíž jsme byli poplváni a neumíme se rozehnat proti nepříteli tu či jinde, jenž nás bije tím či oním způsobem, kotví neúspěch všech národů slovanských, neúspěch nejen politický, ale i národní a národohospodářský... Jen se rozehnat k obraně jako ten polský ‚chlop‘ a šlo

20 Z.B. Pilch *Trendy migracji zarobkowej ludności Galicji w XIX i XX w. (do 1918 r.)* oder Bobińska *Mechanizmy polskich migracji zarobkowych* u. a.

21 Die Wahrnehmung der Region Ostravsko durch die Polen wird auch von Michał Przeperski in seiner Monographie *Nieznośny ciężar braterstwa* festgehalten. Aus dem Zitat der Zeitschrift *Swiat Słowiański* aus dem Jahr 1910 wird ersichtlich, dass die zeitgenössische Presse sogar die sog. Saisonmigration in die Region Ostravsko-Karwin für die Arbeit in der Schwerindustrie unterstützt hat (Przeperski 2016: 53).

22 Das Unrecht ist „universal“, denn es ist für alle Slawen gültig. Alle sind bedroht.

by to. Či nemá už lid slovanský ani odvahy, ani síly...“<sup>23</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1935, Teil 1.–2.: 97).

Sokol-Tůma fordert also zum aktiven Kampf gegen den Unterdrücker auf, den Deutsche und radikalisierte Juden (als manipuliertes Instrument der Deutschen) darstellen. Es wird vermutet, dass genau in dem oben angeführten Auszug die Verbindung aller genannten Subsysteme deutlich erkennbar ist, wodurch die gesamte Intention des Werks gekennzeichnet ist.

Interessant ist auch das Subsystem, das die gemeinsamen menschlichen Züge darstellt. Die Tschechen verbindet Brüderlichkeit mit den Polen, wie in dem nachfolgenden Auszug erkennbar wird, wo sich der Erzähler als Tscheche stilisiert und den Polen als seinen Bruder bezeichnet:

Že nebývá ‚inteligence‘ tato, ucpávající přítomností svou u nás vzniklé mezery, vždycky nejvybranější, není vinou bratří Poláků, jichž také nikterak neobviňuji.<sup>24</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1935, Teil 1.–2.: 135).

Hier sind allerdings evidente Unterschiede zwischen Tschechen und Polen zu erkennen, z.B. haben die Tschechen eine deutlich bessere Ausbildung genossen und verfügen über bessere Sprachkenntnisse (Sokol-Tůma 1935, Teil 1.–2.: 182). Dies stimmt mit den Informationen über die damalige Situation in der Region Ostravsko überein. Die aus Galizien stammenden Bewohner waren größtenteils Analphabeten.<sup>25</sup> Es ist zu betonen, dass das Bild der Polen im Werk zum großen Teil gerade durch die Migrations- bzw. Galizienkomponente der Bevölkerung geformt wird. Es wird eine der grundlegenden Säulen für

23 „Der größte Fluch des slawischen Volks und der Ursprung allen Unglücks ist es, dass leicht vergessen und verziehen wird. Es ist wohl christlich, aber ein nationales Unglück, da in dieser Vergebung und diesem Vergessen das Grab unserer politischen, nationalen und wirtschaftlichen Eigenständigkeit liegt. Indem wir Speichel lecken, sind wir bereits bespuckt worden und können nicht gegen den Feind hier oder anderswo ausholen, der uns auf eben jene Art und Weise schlägt, hier ankert der Misserfolg aller slawischer Nationen, nicht nur politischer Misserfolg, sondern auch nationaler und national-wirtschaftlicher Misserfolg... Nur zur Verteidigung ausholen wie der polnische ‚Bursche‘, und es ginge. Oder das slawische Volk hat weder Mut noch Kraft ...“.

24 „Dass nicht ‚Intelligenz‘ jene zu sein pflegt, die die Gegenwart der bei uns entstandenen Lücken verstopft, stets in höchstem Maße erlesen, ist dies nicht die Schuld polnischer Brüder, die ich auch keinesfalls beschuldige.“

25 Analphabetismus: Männer über 6 Jahren zu 52% Analphabeten, Frauen über 6 Jahren zu 60%, übernommen aus (Gawrecká 2014, S. 99).

die Darstellung der „polnischen Dummheit“ geformt, die später von weiteren tschechischen Autoren übernommen wird.

Die nationale Zerrissenheit zeigt sich in allen Subsystemen, die die menschlichen Figuren umfassen. Sowohl Polen als auch Tschechen werden in eine höhere und eine niedrigere gesellschaftliche Schicht untergliedert. Während die tschechische Intelligenz wesentliche Züge der Modernisierung<sup>26</sup> trägt, ist dies bei der polnischen keinesfalls auszumachen. Der Erzähler führt wiederholt vor allen Dingen die Grundelemente des polnischen antisemitischen Adels an, der sich in Bezug auf Besitz und sogar in genetischer Hinsicht im absoluten Zerfall befindet (Sokol-Tůma 1935, Teil 4.–5.: 457). Im Laufe der Handlung wurden der polnische Adel und seine Anhänger zu einer Gruppe von Radikalen, die de facto eine polnische Analogie zur zweiten jüdischen Generation bildet,<sup>27</sup> da die radikalisierten Polen dem Feind für Besitz alles verraten, auch den eigenen Namen. Eben dieser Gedanke, in späteren Texten Sokol-Tůmas genauer erörtert, spielt in der weiteren Entwicklung des Bildes der Polen eine wesentliche Rolle.<sup>28</sup>

Ein Spezifikum des Bildes von den Slawen sind nach Auffassung von Sokol-Tůma auch Darstellungen von Frauen als Trägerinnen des Ethnischen. Die Beschreibungen der Frauen sind stark sexualisiert, indem z.B. ihre runden Gesichter und üppigen Körper hervorgehoben werden. Dabei werden zugleich typische ethnische Merkmale definiert. Voller Staunen konzentriert sich der Erzähler systematisch auf die polnischen Frauen, während er bei den tschechischen Frauen weiche Züge, Üppigkeit (Sokol-Tůma 1935, Teil 1.–2.: 171), Lebensfreude und Schönheit (Sokol-Tůma 1935, Teil 3.: 149) nur beiläufig feststellt.

Als wahrhaftig schön werden im Werk vor allem die Polinnen dargestellt, womit sich Sokol-Tůma sowohl gegenüber deutsch als auch tschechisch schreibenden Autoren abgrenzt. Hier sei zum Beispiel die schöne Helena erwähnt,

26 Multikulturelle und tolerante Gesinnung usw.

27 Die sog. zweite jüdische Generation im Werk Sokol-Tůmas ist die Generation von Juden, die ihre eigene Religion und kollektiven Identität verleugnete, wenn es für sie von Vorteil war und sie daraus Profit schlagen konnten.

28 Die Erzählung fokussiert auf die Wiederholung der Darstellung des polnischen Adels, der sich selbst verkauft und verrät, dies ist ein Beleg für den engagierten Aufbau des Werks, das auf das zeitgenössische Element des unbestimmten Verständnisses von nationaler und regionaler Identität der reichen Schicht der polnischen Bevölkerung aufmerksam machen will. Zbigniew Greń verzeichnet diese Problematik vor allem in Großstädten, wie in Krakau, woher sich diese unsichere Wahrnehmung in die Region Teschen u. ä. verbreitet. Im Orig.: „Natomiaś warstwıy wższe były mieszanę, kosmopolityczne, o niejednolitej świadości etnicznej (genetycznej, państwowej, regionalnej)“ (Greń 2000: 19).



eine Polin, mit der Chaim „gesündigt“ hat, die Heldin des ersten Teils der Trilogie *Černé království*:

Jediná děvucha tu byla, jež mu vzdorovala. Byla mladá, ale krásná. Její postava neobyčejné souměrnosti. Obličej, pravý typ čistokrevné Polky, neporušené rasy slovanské. Plavé vlasy, modré oči – ale chudá byla.<sup>29</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1935, Teil 1.–2.: 62).

Der Typ der rein slawischen, schönen blonden Frauen durchzieht das gesamte Werk und kontrastiert sogar mit der semitischen Schönheit Deborahs an ihrem Hochzeitstag:

Vedle ní, Polky – družičky se svými pravidelnými obličejí, se svojí zvláštní živostí obličejí, plavými vlasy, v bílých úborech, plných oné jásavé živosti, jíž nemá žádný druhý slovanský národ – snad zacláněly svojí slovanskou krásou, krásu Debořinu. Byly na pohled i krásnější, nikoliv postavou a stavbou těla, ale pravidelností obličejí, leč právě tou svojí nepravidelností byl obličej Debořin, tak nesmírně zajímavý, každého uchvacující. Byla to nepravidelná formace orientálského typu.<sup>30</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1935, Teil 4.–5.: 441–442).

Die Trilogie *Černé království* wäre jedoch selbst nicht imstande, die komplexe Entwicklung des Bildes der Polen im Werk Sokol-Tůmas als Ganzes zu erfassen. Das „Slawische Element“ wird in späteren Romanen zur sog. schlesischen Identität modifiziert. Bei Tschechen, Deutschen, Juden kommt es im Gegensatz dazu nicht zu einer grundlegenden Entwicklung des Bildes. Sokol-Tůma geht in späteren Werken nach den gleichen Schemata wie in der untersuchten Pentalogie vor. Einerseits ist das Bild der Deutschen zu finden,

29 „Es gab nur ein einziges Weib, das mir trotzte. Sie war jung, aber schön. Ihre Statur war von ungewöhnlicher Ebenmäßigkeit. Das Gesicht, das einer reinblütigen Polin, von ungetrübter slawischer Rasse. Blondes Haar, blaue Augen – aber sie war arm.“

30 „Neben ihr überdeckten die Polinnen – Brautjungfern mit ihren gewöhnlichen Gesichtern, mit ihrer besonderen Lebendigkeit des Gesichts, blondem Haar, in weißen Gewändern, voll von ihrer strahlenden Lebendigkeit, die keine andere slawische Nation besitzt – wohl mit ihrer slawischen Schönheit die Schönheit Deborahs. Sie waren beim Anblick auch schöner, nicht in Statur und Körperbau, aber in der Ebenmäßigkeit des Gesichts, außer dass eben diese Unebenmäßigkeit in Deborahs Gesicht, so unendlich interessant, jeden fesselte. Es war eine unebenmäßige Formation des orientalischen Typs.“

welches unverändert ist, getrennt und manipulativ, und dessen natürliches Gegengewicht eine Variation des slawischen Elements bildet, also konkret z. B. das schlesische Bild, das sich aus zwei wesentlichen Komponenten zusammensetzt, der tschechischen und der polnischen. Eine solche Entwicklung kann im fünfteiligen Roman *Na kresách* beobachtet werden, wo die Darstellung des Bildes der Polen vollendet wird.

Die Auswahl des Werks ist nicht willkürlich, da bereits Vojtěch Martínek die Verbindung zwischen den Werken *V záři miliónů* und *Na kresách* wahrnimmt, was auf das Vorhandensein gemeinsamer Ziele und Schnittstellen hinweist, die im engagierten Aufbau des Werks gründen. Es geht um ein nationales Erwachen und eine wirtschaftliche Agitation. Um diese Verbindung deutlich zu machen, wird aus Gründen der Vollständigkeit die folgende Beschreibung der Entwicklung des polnischen Bildes in der Zeit bis zu seiner Stabilisierung hinzugefügt:

Vysoko vyzdvihl [Sokol Tůma] učitelskou buditelskou práci, mravní hodnoty a rozvahu lidového pracovníka. Ale ukazoval ještě na jednu věc: na potřebu hospodářského posílení, jak o tom naléhavě psal již v románu *V záři miliónů*. Věří, že nová hospodářská obroda ve Slezsku rozvíří i nový národní ruch, rozlítí pokleslé národní uvědomění, napřímí nahnuté páteře.<sup>31</sup> (Martínek 1957: 92).

Das Werk *Na kresách* erschien tatsächlich erst im Jahre 1922 in Ostrau, obwohl die nicht umgesetzte Heftausgabe aus dem Jahr 1912 erwähnt wird (Martínek 1957: 88). Auch hier müssen die aktive Tätigkeit Sokol-Tůmas und die aktualisierenden Eingriffe des Autors mit einbezogen werden, die von einer Bearbeitung des Werks bis Anfang der 1920er Jahre zeugen (Martínek 1957: 88). Die Situation ist also die gleiche wie beim ersten Teil der Romantrilogie *Černé království*, mit dem der angeführte fünfteilige Roman auch den Typ des Erzählers verbindet, der, wenn auch scheinbar im Hintergrund, mit seinen Ansichten aktiv in die Handlung einschreitet und den Leser manipuliert.

Die Interpretation des Romans *Na kresách* ist jedoch eine andere. Martínek spricht über eine ausgeprägte Schematisierung des Werks, die in der Verein-

31 „Er [Sokol-Tůma] hob die lehrende erweckende Arbeit, moralische Werte und die Überlegung des menschlichen Arbeiters stark hervor. Aber er verwies auch auf eine Sache: auf den Bedarf an wirtschaftlicher Stärkung, wie er bereits eindringlich im Roman *V záři miliónů* beschrieben wurde. Er glaubt, dass die neue wirtschaftliche Wiedergeburt in Schlesien auch ein neues nationales Leben entfacht, das gesunkene nationale Bewusstsein erleuchtet, die gebeugten Rücken aufrichtet.“

fachung der Thematik und in einfachen Gegensätzen auszumachen sei. Das Werk werde dadurch nicht mehr als glaubwürdig wahrgenommen (Martínek 1957: 89–91).

Hinsichtlich des Genres besteht bei *Na kresách* eine deutliche Nähe zum deutschen Grenzlandroman. Die gemeinsamen Züge sind vor allem bei einer der Hauptfiguren erkennbar, dem Lehrer Divoký,<sup>32</sup> der nach Teschen fuhr, um dort mit seiner Tätigkeit aktiv zur Erweckung der Nation beizutragen, dabei die Liebe fand und nach zahlreichen Eskapaden und verlorenen Schlachten den Kampf gegen Klerikalismus, Vorurteile, die „polnische Dummheit“ sowie Germanisierung gewann.

Tatsächlich unterscheidet sich der Roman jedoch durch die primäre Botschaft hinsichtlich der Imagologie keinesfalls von seinen Vorgängern. Das grundlegende Muster ist identisch, die Deutschen bringen eine Germanisierung mit sich und diese ist der Feind alles Slawischen. Während in *V záři miliónů* die Juden ein Instrument der Germanisierung waren, sind es in *Na kresách* die Polen, die zu einfältig sind, um sich ihrer Taten bewusst zu sein. Entsprechend dieser Feststellung werden alle Subsysteme erstellt. Weshalb plötzlich einige Polen zum Feind werden, wird erst im zeitlichen Kontext deutlich.

Obwohl der Roman in seinen Grundzügen bereits früher existiert haben muss, wird er in der Zeit des sogenannten tschechoslowakisch-polnischen Konflikts um Teschen zur Veröffentlichung vorbereitet, der (mit unterschiedlicher Intensität) zwischen 1918 und 1958 geführt wurde,<sup>33</sup> wobei als einer der beiden Höhepunkte eben der Beginn der 1920er Jahre gesehen wird.<sup>34</sup> Der

32 Der wandernde Lehrer ist eine traditionelle Figur im sog. Grenzlandroman, vgl. mit dem Lehrer Ortwin bei Rothacker im Werk *Das Dorf an der Grenze*.

33 Als Ende des Konflikts wird hier das Jahr 1958 gesehen, da hier der tschechoslowakisch-polnische Vertrag unterzeichnet wurde.

34 Es bestand eine Neigung zur Umsetzung des sog. „plebiscyt na Śląsku Cieszyńskim“, also dem Plebiszit in Teschen, als durch eine Form des Referendums über den Anschluss des Gebiets an den entsprechenden Staat entschieden werden sollte. Obwohl die Tschechoslowakei ursprünglich das Plebiszit ablehnte, ahnte man, dass ein Großteil der Bevölkerung für einen Anschluss an Polen stimmen würde. Letztendlich wurde dieser akzeptiert, um Angriffe der ungünstigen Tissi-Linie zu verhindern. Am Ende kam es nicht zu dem Plebiszit. Die Situation spitzte sich erst im Jahre 1938 merklich zu, als es zu einem weiteren Referendum kommen sollte, welches aber ebenfalls nicht ausgeführt wurde, da Polen am 21.09.1938 die Freigabe des umstrittenen Gebiets als Ergebnis der Sudetenkrise forderte. Folglich wurde entlang der Grenze des umstrittenen Gebiets eine Militäreinheit positioniert und ein zwanzigstündiges Ultimatum ausgesprochen. Angesichts der ausweglosen Situation nahm die Tschechoslowakei das Ultimatum an und das Gebiet wurde geräumt. Information übernommen

Roman muss also in seiner Zeit aktuell gewirkt haben, und dies nicht nur aufgrund des sogenannten *Siebentagekriegs*.<sup>35</sup> Als Ergebnis dieser politischen Veränderungen sieht der Erzähler eine neue Form der Unterdrückung der tschechischen Nation.

Der Aufbau des Werks enthüllt die Idee, dass Polen durch die aktive Manipulation seitens des größten Feindes, der Deutschen, beeinflusst werden. Somit erhält das Bild der Polen seine bestimmenden Züge.

Der Erzähler vermittelt im Schlussteil der gesamten Pentalogie *Na kresách* den wichtigsten Gedanken, als sich eine der Hauptfiguren, der Lehrer Divoký, nach Prag begibt, um Investitionskapital für die Entwicklung der Region bereitzustellen:

Jel do Prahy. On, laik, bez jména, jel dobývati veliké peněžní ústavy, aby ve Slezsku investováním kapitálu posílily nejen český kraj a lid [...] Neurovanané poměry mezi slovanskými kmeny na Slezsku byly základem pro dynamitové podkopy českých obcí. Skutečnost odpovídala, že za nimi přijdou – ba již jdou – na řadu obce polské. Nenáviděl škorpení obou kmenů, českého i polského, poznávaje, že ve spojení jich k obraně leží společný úspěch.<sup>36</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1929: 147).

Vom Standpunkt des Erzählers aus betrachtet ist klar ersichtlich, dass der Zerfall der slawischen Stämme, und somit auch des slawischen Elements allgemein, nicht erstrebenswert ist und den Slawen weder Ruhe noch Entwicklung

aus (Gawrecká 2004: 89–91). Erst nach dem Krieg wurde die territoriale Situation von der Zeit vor der Besetzung Polens wiederhergestellt.

35 Militärischer, bewaffneter Konflikt zwischen Polen und der Tschechoslowakei von 1919 wegen des Gebiets Teschen. Nach vergeblichem Protest der Tschechoslowakei gegen die Nichteinhaltung des vorläufigen Abkommens, die Überführung der Teschener Bevölkerung in die polnische Armee und gegen die Durchführung von Wahlen im polnischen Sejm griffen die tschechoslowakischen Einheiten an, der Angriff wurde unmittelbar darauf durch die Macht des sog. Dreibunds eingestellt (Klímek 2000: 44).

36 „Er fuhr nach Prag. Er, Laie, ohne Namen, fuhr, um große Geldinstitute zu gewinnen, damit sie in Schlesien durch die Investition von Kapital nicht nur die tschechische Region und das Volk stärken [...] Ungeordnete Verhältnisse zwischen den slawischen Stämmen in Schlesien waren der Grund, warum die tschechischen Gemeinden durch Dynamit untergraben worden sind. Die Wirklichkeit war, dass sie kommen würden – ja, bereits kamen –, in einer Reihe der polnischen Gemeinde. Er hasste das Zanken der beiden Stämme, des tschechischen und polnischen, und erkannte, dass in ihrer Verbindung zum Schutze der gemeinsame Erfolg lag.“

bringt. Auch wenn die Romanhandlung etwa 1900 spielt,<sup>37</sup> so ist der Text vorwiegend auf die vernichtenden Bemühungen der Deutschen konzentriert, Tschechen und Polen zu manipulieren (Sokol-Tůma 1929: 172).<sup>38</sup> Die Entwicklung des Bildes der Polen ist im Rahmen des Aufbaus des Werks in dieser Schaffenszeit Sokol-Tůmas vollkommen durch die Vermittlung jener angeblich polnischen Eigenschaften bedingt, die es den Deutschen ermöglichen, die Polen gegen die Tschechen auszuspielen. Eben aus diesen Eigenschaften werden dann die stereotypen Figuren der radikalen, germanisierten polnischen Priester geformt, oder anderer germanisierter Polen. Es kommt somit zu einer Festigung des dargestellten Bildes in einer stereotypen, endgültigen Form.

Im Roman *Na kresách* wird das Subsystem der Religion auf programmatische Weise entwickelt.<sup>39</sup> Die Polen, die auf dem dargestellten Gebiet leben, sind häufig tief gläubig und gleichzeitig praktisch orientierte Menschen, in ihrer Einfachheit zweifeln sie jedoch nie an der Autorität der Kirche, die umso mächtiger wird und eine wesentliche Rolle spielt. Der Lehrer Divoký nimmt dies sehr deutlich wahr:

„Tenkrát! – uchopil se opět slova Divoký, žil tento lid životem vlastním. Byl sice sevřen robotou tělesnou. Dnes žije u větší bídě tělesné a horší obránců světovládých snah církve, bojovníků z uplatnění osobních choutek, ani bojovníků kaplanů obránců světovládých stran církve, bojovníků za práva papežova [...], při čemž víra zpravidla pochodí nejhůře, ježto v tomto boji se o víru ani nejedná, pouze o nadvládu buď germánskou, nebo polskou a tomu slouží církev katolická jako evangelická, česká jako polská.“<sup>40</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1927, Teil 3.: 18).

37 Sokol-Tůma belegt dies selbst in der Fußnote im fünften Teil der Pentalogie (Sokol-Tůma 1929: 227).

38 Auch Przeperski widmet sich der Problematik der Germanisierung in der untersuchten Region. Es ist klar, dass die von Sokol-Tůma empfundene Germanisierung tatsächlich auf beiden Seiten zwischen Tschechen und Polen erlebt wurde (Przeperski 2016: 47). Przeperski spricht sogar über Sympathie von Tschechen gegenüber den Polen, die die Germanisierung erleben (Przeperski 2016: 53).

39 Das Subsystem der Religion der Polen ist in der Überlieferung Sokol-Tůmas stark vereinfacht. Es liegen Studien vor, die grundlegende Unterschiede zwischen Katholiken, Protestanten und ihrer Wahrnehmung der Germanisierung u. ä. belegen. Weiterführend siehe MORYS-TWAROWSKI 2018.

40 „Diesmal! – begriff Divoký die Worte, lebte dieses Volk ein eigenes Leben. Es war allerdings fest in der Umklammerung körperlicher Arbeit. Heute lebt es in größerer körperlicher Not und unter schlimmeren Verfechtern der Weltherrschaftsbestrebu-

Eben die oben angeführten Worte verschieben die Kirche mit ihrer Macht vom Subsystem der Religion in die Richtung des Subsystems gemeinsamer menschlicher Züge, denn der Erzähler erörtert de facto im Werk nicht die Glaubensfrage, sondern weltliche Fragen der Überlegenheit einer Nation über eine andere.

Das Subsystem universaler menschlicher Züge durchlief einen grundlegenden Wandel. Es ist interessant, dass es Züge angenommen hat, die Sokol-Tůma ansonsten ausschließlich mit den Juden verbindet, Polen kamen logischerweise in die gleiche Position wie die radikale jüdische Generation.<sup>41</sup> Sie werden im Werk als Unterdrücker alles Tschechischen dargestellt und dies zu eigenen Nutzen und aufgrund eigener Dummheit: „Obce propadají jedna za druhou do rukou polských nebo německých. Němci používají Poláků jako berana pro utloukání českých obcí, aby je potom snadněji dostali do své moci.“<sup>42</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1929: 79). Erst im Schlussteil des fünften Teils der Pentalogie beginnen die Polen langsam, sich ihres Fehlers und ihrer Position als bloße Vorhut der Deutschen bewusst zu werden. Plötzlich dämmert ihnen die Tatsache, dass auch sie im Geiste des „Drangs nach Osten“ letztlich gleichermaßen hinweggefegt werden. Konkret wird dieser Gedanke dann gezeigt, als der örtliche Pfarrer, der die deutsche Sache unterstützt hatte, den Befehl erhält, Deutsch als Amtssprache einzuführen: „Podepsaný úřad oznamuje, že obecní zastupitelstvo se usneslo, aby úřední řečí zavedena byla němčina“ (Sokol-Tůma 1929: 200).<sup>43</sup>

ngen der Kirche, Streiter für die Geltung persönlicher Gelüste, Streiter von Kaplanen der Verfechter von Weltherrschaftslagern der Kirche, Streiter für die päpstlichen Rechte [...], wobei der Glaube meist leer ausgeht, da es in diesem Kampf nicht um Glauben geht, nur um Herrschaft, entweder die germanische oder die polnische und dem dient sowohl die katholische als auch die evangelische Kirche, die tschechische wie die polnische.“

41 Juden, die ihre eigene Nation, ethnische sowie kulturelle Identität zugunsten des „Mammons“, also der Macht des Geldes, verloren hatten, wobei sie dem Autobild der Tschechen schaden.

42 „Die Dörfer fallen eines nach dem anderen in die Hände von Polen oder Deutschen. Die Deutschen benutzen die Polen als Sündenbock für die Zerschlagen tschechischer Gemeinden, um sie danach schneller in ihre Macht zu bringen.“

43 „Die unterzeichnete Behörde gibt bekannt, dass die Gemeindevertretung beschlossen hat, Deutsch als Amtssprache einzuführen“. Sokol-Tůma selbst zeigt den Gedanken, dass Polen von Deutschen bedroht werden, ebenso wie die Tschechen. Außerhalb des Bereichs des Erzählers in der Fußnote ist von dem Verlust der Möglichkeit die Rede, eine Ausbildung in der Muttersprache zu erhalten: „Stalo se na Slezsku, že v obci zvítězili Němci a rázem prohlásili na celé škole dosud ultraquistické – jako všechny školy ve Slezsku – vyučovací jazyk německý.“ (dt. „Es geschah in Schlesien, dass in der

In der Komposition des Werks wird die Darstellung der „polnischen Dummheit“ weiterhin ausgearbeitet; sie kann bereits früher in der Trilogie *Černé království* ausgemacht werden, jetzt jedoch erlangt sie wesentliche Ausmaße, da sie hinsichtlich der polnischen Verbindung mit den Deutschen und ihrem Bild eine entscheidende Rolle spielt.

Im Spektrum der deutschen Eigenschaften ist das Element des „Missbrauchs von Nationen“ zu finden, dessen zentraler Inhalt die Germanisierung ist, auf subelementarer Ebene sind dann einzelne Formen auszumachen, durch die sich die Germanisierung zeigt. Mit dieser sind die folgenden Subelemente verbunden: Kolonialisierung, Manipulation, Polonisierung, germanisierte Kirche.

Außer der bereits erwähnten Verbindung mit dem deutschen Heterobild wiederholt dann der Erzähler, dass aus Polen allgemein fast nichts Gutes komme: „Tam daleko, z Polska, vycházelo slunce, jasné, zlaté slunce červencové. – To jediné, co odtamtud přichází dobrého –.“<sup>44</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1927, Teil 3.: 124).

Der Gesamtaufbau des Werks beinhaltet Elemente, die Polen auf die Ebene der radikalisierten Juden stellen, und dies vorrangig aus Sicht der Kolonialisierung, im Sinne der Besetzung neuer Gebiete, der eigenen Expansion. Dies zeigt die Sprache des Lehrers Divoký:

[získané území] za nějž nemusil by se stydět ani Srukl Bauchbrenner z Ostravy – není-li jeho vlastnictvím. Pozemky zde skupují nepozorovaně cizí lidé. [...] A náš lid směje se a vtipkuje po straně, že napálil ,cuzáka'. Je i rád, že se podobné neúrodné půdy zbavil. A tito kupující nejsou nic jiného, než zřízenci závodů uhelných, nejčastěji židé nebo Poláci. [...] Tímto způsobem je množství jiter půdy kolem Doloplaz dnes již v rukou cizích a původní majitelé, nevědoucí o účelu, k jakému se děje toto zakupování, byli už o tisíce připraveni. Toto je novodobé loupení starých loupežných rytířů.<sup>45</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1927, Teil 3.: 106).

Gemeinde die Deutschen siegten und sogleich in der gesamten Schule, die bis dahin utraquistisch waren – wie alle Schulen in Schlesien –, Deutsch zur Unterrichtssprache erklärten.“) (Sokol-Tůma 1929: 200).

44 „Dort in der Ferne, aus Polen, ging die Sonne auf, eine helle, goldene Julisonne. – Das einzige, was von dorther Gutes kommt–.“

45 „[besetztes Gebiet] für das sich nicht einmal Srukl Bauchbrenner aus Ostrau schämen musste – wenn es nicht sein Eigentum ist. Hier kaufen unbeobachtete fremde Leute Grund und Boden. [...] Und unser Volk lacht und scherzt nebenbei, dass es den ,Zugereisten' überlistet hätte. Auch ist es froh, sich derlei unfruchtbaren Bodens zu entledigen. Und diese Käufer sind nichts anderes als Angestellte von Kohlebetrieben, meist Juden oder Polen. [...] Somit ist ein Großteil des Ackerlands um Doloplazy

Der Erzähler betont auch die Dummheit, das Unverständnis gegenüber der Tatsache, dass die Slawen nur gemeinsam den großen deutschen Feind bezwingen können. Es wird die Aufgabe von Zeitungen und Propaganda hervorgehoben, einfache, unkritische Leute zu beeinflussen:

Polské noviny zaujaly jakési štvavé stanovisko proti farári, že Poláci v Záhlubku byli skoro vybízení zprostit se sami faráře za každou cenu. Různí lidé sem přicházeli, různé řeči vedli. Hospody po výplatě obsadili a vykládali, jak Poláci jsou utiskováni od Čechů, že lepší Němec ,bo Niemec nieuciská Polaka, ale Čech psiakrev bestia hromská kradze dzieci polske na Šlonsku, kradzie polskie dusze i wszystko Takové rozpravy byly vedeny. Tímto směrem a jak obecním výborem, tak tiskem polským rozdmychované, ba i hmotně podporované.<sup>46</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1929: 234).

Der Roman *Na kresách* beschreibt die polnische Ethnie als Zusammenschluss von Einzelnen, die sich in fester Umklammerung durch die Kirche befinden. Diese wird jedoch nicht mehr als Institution beschrieben, die sich um das Seelenheil der Menschen sorgt, sondern als Vereinigung radikaler Priester, die das Volk in die deutsche Hegemonie führen. In dem Auszug ist ebenfalls die Gegenwart des Juden in der stereotypisierten Form zu finden, eine Figur, die für die abschließende Schaffensphase Sokol-Tůmas charakteristisch ist:

Polští kněží, ať katoličtí nebo evangeličtí, postupovali útočně proti všemu českému, hlásajíce vyhlazovací válku všude tam, kde mohli rozdmychat požár odporu. Polský negramotný lid věří svým kněžím, že ,Šlonsk ojezyzna polská jest‘ a podporován štvavým tiskem polských novin, jakož i knížkami a spisky, falešně dějiny Slezska kreslícími, stával

heute schon in den Händen Fremder und die ursprünglichen Besitzer, ahnungslos, zu welchem Zwecke das Kaufen betrieben wird, wurden bereits um Tausende gebracht. Dies ist die neuzeitliche Jagd alter Raubritter.“

- 46 „Die polnische Zeitungen nahmen einen hetzerischen Standpunkt gegen Pfarrer ein, dass die Polen in Záhlubek fast dazu aufgefordert wurden, den Pfarrer um jeden Preis loszuwerden. Verschiedene Leute kamen hierher, sie hatten unterschiedliche Ansichten. Die Wirtshäuser waren voll belegt und erklärten, wie Polen von Tschechen unterdrückt werden, dass der bessere Deutsche, denn der Deutsche unterdrückt keinen Polen, aber der Tscheche ,psiakrev‘, die Bestie stiehlt die Kinder in Schlesien, stiehlt die polnischen Seelen und alles.“ Solcherlei Debatten wurden geführt. Durch diese Richtung und sowohl durch den Gemeinderat als auch durch die polnische Presse entflammt, ja sogar massenweise unterstützt.“



se úporným nepřitelem všeho českého. Stalo se, že přijel do Záhlabku kočár, v němž byli dva, tři páni. Pili v hospodě u žida Himmelbeina nebo Scheinduta a za chvíli tam bylo veselo. Pil, kdo přišel, Páni platili.<sup>47</sup> (Sokol-Tůma 1927, Teil 4.: 134).

### 3.2. August Scholtis

August Scholtis wird als weiterer bedeutender Autor von Romanen der Zwischenkriegszeit in der Region Ostravsko erachtet.<sup>48</sup> Sein Werk *Das Eisenwerk* (1939), in der tschechischen Übersetzung *Železářny* (1940), stellt für diese Untersuchung eine einzigartige Synthese künstlerischer und autobiografischer Züge dar. Vor allem die frühen Jahre Scholtis' werden mit der Bewunderung Prusks und dem Gefühl der Verbundenheit mit ihm verknüpft, da er während einer Volksabstimmung 1920 für die dauerhafte Eingliederung Oberschlesiens in das deutsche Land stimmte. Die Sympathie mit Prusk, zweifelsohne verbunden mit den Erfahrungen am Adelshof Karl Max von Lichnowskys, kann somit einen neuen Blickwinkel auf die Formung des polnischen Heterobildes während der Zwischenkriegszeit eröffnen.

Dieses wird umso bunter und facettenreicher, als Scholtis, übrigens wegen seiner Weigerung, während des Dritten Reiches in die *Reichsschrifttumskammer*

47 „Die polnischen Priester, ob katholisch oder evangelisch, gingen aggressiv gegen alles Tschechische vor, riefen einen Krieg der Ausrottung überall dort aus, wo sie das Feuer der Abneigung entfachen konnten. Das polnische Volk, das weder lesen noch schreiben konnte, glaubt seinen Priestern, dass ‚Schlesien immer polnisch war‘. Es wird zum hartnäckigen Feind alles Tschechischen durch die hetzerische Presse der polnischen Zeitungen, sowie durch Bücher und Schriften, die die falsche Geschichtsschreibung Schlesiens gezeichnet haben. Es geschah, dass eine Kutsche nach Zählubek kam, darin waren zwei, drei Herren. Sie tranken im Wirtshaus beim Juden Himmelbein oder Scheindut und nach einer Weile ging es dort fröhlich zu. Es trank, wer kam, die Herren zahlten.“

48 August Scholtis (1901, Bolatice (Hultschiner Ländchen) – 1969, Berlin) ist ein Autor, der bereits als Kind eine enge Bindung zum Hultschiner Ländchen hatte. Er beschäftigte sich mit der Verdrängung der Mehrsprachigkeitskultur in der Region Ostravsko sowie mit sozialen Themen. Während der Zwischenkriegszeit trugen seine Werke einen mythologisierenden Charakter, dennoch erhielt er nach Beginn des Dritten Reiches ein Publikationsverbot. Weiterführend siehe *Deutsche Literatur der Zwischenkriegszeit im tschechischen Schlesien. 1918–1938* (2002). Für weitere Informationen siehe neuere Literatur in *Český a německý sedlák v zrcadle krásné literatury 1848–1948* (2014), oder *Historik a literát v provincii* (2018).

einzutreten, ein Publikationsverbot erhielt<sup>49</sup>, womit er sich von dem anderen regionalen deutschen Schriftsteller Gottfried Rothacker unterscheidet.<sup>50</sup>

Das polnische Heterobild scheint bei Scholtis stark unstrukturiert, da das Werk keine konkreten polnischen Figuren beinhaltet. Somit ist das Heterobild zur ausschließlichen Wahrnehmung „von außen“ verurteilt. Die Abwesenheit polnischer Figuren verursacht ebenso die Unfähigkeit dieses Bildes mit dem komplexen Aufbau des Werkes tiefer zu interagieren, denn es gibt hier keine Figuren, die alle erwähnten Stereotypen stören können. Das Bild der Polen tritt daher nur auf der Ebene sprachlicher Stereotypen und petrifizierter Fragmente auf, über die im Aufbau des Werks nicht verhandelt wird.

Es handelt sich um ein äußerst deformiertes und stark manipulatives Bild. Das einzige neutrale Element in der gesamten Struktur des Bildes ist die Darstellung einer geheimnisvollen Region / eines Landes, die der Erzähler ausschließlich zur Beschreibung eines geografischen Gebiets als „das polnische Geheimnis“ nutzt (Scholtis 1939: 65).

Die übrigen Subsysteme und Elemente sind durchgehend negativ, mit Verweisen auf Schmutz und Niedrigkeit, wie z.B. „Dreck“ (Scholtis 1939: 100). Referenzen gegenüber dem namenlosen Polen werden ausschließlich auf der Ebene der Ausgestaltung polnischer Dummheit konstatiert: „Ein Pole quatscht und weiß nicht, was er quatscht“ (Scholtis 1939: 104), wobei ähnliche Äußerungen von deutschen sowie tschechischen Figuren gemacht werden.

Das Bild Polens ist ebenso mit der Angst vor der Gefahr verbunden, da die Polen laut Erzähler den industriellen Fortschritt bedrohen würden, den im Roman die Deutschen repräsentieren:

Es hieß, drüben im Halizischen, im Russisch-Polnischen gäre es. Die Polen seien mit ihrem Schicksal unzufrieden und ihre Unzufriedenheit drohe hinüberzuspringen in den planenden, arbeitenden, industriellen Westen. (Scholtis 1939: 352).

Die Mehrheit negativer Elemente kulminiert vor allem in den Dialogen der Figuren sowohl deutschen als auch tschechischen Ursprungs, allerdings sind auch im Bereich des Erzählers auf wahrscheinlich unbewusster Ebene kompo-

49 Vgl. und weiterführend siehe: *Deutsche Literatur der Zwischenkriegszeit im tschechischen Schlesien. 1918–1938* (2002).

50 Es kann also vorausgesetzt werden, dass seine Gestaltung des polnischen Bildes von der stark ideologischen Auffassung radikaler nationaler Sozialisten auf interessante Weise abgegrenzt werden kann.

nierte stereotype Parallelen zu finden. Es kann der Vergleich von Zbytkovice (es handelt sich im Buch um eine Überarbeitung der realen Vorlage Vítkovice) mit einer polnischen Frau beobachtet werden. Der Autor betont die Schwäche des ursprünglich bedeutungslosen Städtchens, das seine anschließende Entwicklung den Deutschen verdankt:

Von ihm liegt Bitkowitz, die wachsende Stadt. Sie hebt sich aus der Ebene, eine unförmige Frau, barfuß, mit schmutzigen Füßen von den polnischen Bergen pilgernd zu den Deutschen, die ihr ein Kleid antun, ein Seidenkleid. Eines Tages wird aus dieser Frau etwas geworden sein. (Scholtis 1939: 272).

Scholtis' Werk verbindet die Konstruktion des Bildes der Polen mit dem Bild einer schwachen Frau, die nicht ohne deutsche Hilfe auskommt. Diese Darstellung von Polen ist auch anderen untersuchten Autoren eigen, weshalb hier deutlich wird, dass es sich um ein charakteristisches Konstruktionselement des Heterobildes der Polen in Romanwerken der entsprechenden Periode handelt.

#### 4. Fragmentarische Darstellung

Für die vollständige Abbildung des komplexen Kontexts der Periode in Bezug auf das untersuchte Gebiet ist es ratsam, die Problematik anderer Werke auszuführen, in denen das Bild Polens behandelt wird. Im Verlauf der Untersuchung hat sich gezeigt, dass die Konstruktion dieses Bildes für andere Autoren nicht programmatisch ist. Das Bild Polens taucht somit bei den folgenden Schriftstellern nur auf fragmentarischer Ebene auf, nicht in einem ausgearbeiteten System, wie dies in den oben untersuchten Werken der Fall war. Bei einigen Autoren fehlt es gänzlich und auch diese Feststellung wird als bedeutsam angesehen, und es wird versucht, sie aus dem Kontext heraus zu begründen.

##### 4.1. Tschechische Fragmente

Vojtěch Martínek<sup>51</sup> verfasste in der Zwischenkriegszeit eines der eindrucksvollsten Werke seines gesamten literarischen Schaffens; es handelt sich um die

51 (1884 Brušperku – 1960 Ostrau). Er stammte aus einer armen Familie und besuchte das Gymnasium in Ostrau. Er veröffentlichte z.B. in der Zeitung *Ostravský deník*. Den Mittelpunkt seines Schaffens bilden Werke mit sozialer Thematik. Weiterführend in *Literární slovník severní Moravy a Slezska* (2001).

Trilogie *Černá země* (1932). Die einzelnen Romane dieses Zyklus heißen *Jakub Oberva* (1926), *Plameny* (1929) und *Země duní* (1932). Gerade durch die Auswahl der genannten Trilogie bietet sich die einzigartige Gelegenheit, die Ausgestaltung des Heterobildes über die Zeit hinweg zu betrachten. Wenn ebenfalls die Entstehungszeit des Romans berücksichtigt wird, wird die Entwicklung von Anfang der 1920er Jahre bis in die frühen 1930er Jahre betrachtet.

In der Trilogie *Černá země* befindet sich hinsichtlich der Häufigkeit des Auftretens das umfangreichste Heterobild der Deutschen. Außerdem ist noch ein relativ klar strukturiertes Heterobild der Juden erkennbar. Roma und Polen sind im Werk ausschließlich in Form von unstrukturierten Stereotypen zu finden.<sup>52</sup>

Die polnischen Fragmente verweisen vor allem auf Motive der „Unreinheit, Hässlichkeit“. Das Bild der Polen weist keine systematischen Elemente auf, es sind zufällige Erwähnungen über hässliche polnische Frauen (Martínek 1965, *Jakub Oberva*: 46, 69) und möglicherweise zeitweise vorkommende, unsystematische und negative Anspielungen auf Polen im Bereich der Figuren vorzufinden: „[...] Ale Polaci, [...] Tuž co – pšakrev, zatracene hovada.“<sup>53</sup> (Martínek 1965 – *Země duní*: 79).

Ende der 1930er Jahre wurde das Bild der Polen noch flüchtig von Karel Dvořáček angesprochen. Das vom Autor<sup>54</sup> mehrfach überarbeitete Werk *František chce býtí spravedlivý* entstand bereits ab der zweiten Hälfte der 1930er Jahre. Die damalige Zensur und die fortwährende Anpassung, die das Werk im Laufe einiger Jahre durchlief, führten dazu, dass der Roman zu einem Umbruchspunkt für die Darstellung des Bildes bei Dvořáček wurde. Diese Veränderung in der Struktur jenes erwähnten Werkes spiegelt sich bereits in zeitgenössischen Kritiken wider. Es ist von einer Veränderung vom sozialen Roman zur „neutralen“

52 Noch stärker imagologisch intakte Texte stellen die Romane von Ludmila Hořká dar (geb. als Marie Šindelářová, 1892 Dvořisko - 1966 Troppau, Hultschiner Ländchen). Aufgrund des Schaffens in Troppau kam die Autorin jedoch nicht mit der galizischen Migrationswelle in Berührung. Ihr autobiografisch gefärbtes Schaffen, die Romane *Doma* (1943) und *Řeka* (1946), fallen in die untersuchte Zeit, und beinhalten außer dem Schmuggel (Hořká 1946: 21) keine ethnotypischen Systeme oder Fragmente.

53 „[...] Aber Polen, [...] Stählt etwas – pšakrev, verdammte Rindviecher.“

54 In diesem Teil wird Dvořáček als Autor ausgewählt, der die Tendenzwelle vertritt, die sich gar nicht mit der Darstellung eines Heterobildes beschäftigt. Aufgrund des Umfangs werden weiterhin weder Glazarová noch Třenecký betrachtet, die ebenfalls keine Bilder formen, es kann bei ihnen vielmehr von Imagotypen gesprochen werden, und dies vor allem aufgrund des Charakters ihrer ausgewählten Prosa, die in das ausgewählte Material fällt (Erinnerungs- und Bilanzcharakter bei Glazarová und der schematisch-soziale Charakter der Romane von Třenecký).

idealisierten Erzählung die Rede, wobei sich Dvořáček von der Erörterung im breiteren gesellschaftlichen Kontext abwendet (Durčák 1966).

Deshalb ist im Roman vorrangig das Bild einer unbestimmten sozialen Gemeinschaft zu finden, deren Darstellung an der konzeptuellen Grenze der Begriffe Imagotyp / Ethnotyp schwankt.

Auf den Begriff Ethnotyp wird erst bei der Darstellung der Heteroelemente der unterschiedlichen Ethnien innerhalb von Dvořáčeks Konzeption der Multikulturalität der Region Ostravsko eingegangen. Dvořáček formt also nicht konkret das Bild von Polen, sondern wählt ein unstrukturiertes sekundäres Element. Es geht zum Beispiel um die wiederholte Darstellung eines einfältigen, sehr hässlichen polnischen Mädchens (Dvořáček 196: 173–174). Dvořáčeks Erzähler betont die polnische Herkunft des Mädchens und kehrt wiederholt zu ihr zurück (Dvořáček 1966, S. 225), obwohl sie in der Erzählung keine bedeutungstragende Rolle spielt, sie wird als Maschine beschrieben, als Prostituierte, bezahlt mit wertlosen Eisenringen, sie steht also weit unter der gesellschaftlichen Position der tschechischen Prostituierten. Weshalb dies so ist, geht allerdings aus dem Werk nicht hervor.

#### 4.2. Deutsche Fragmente

Maria Stona<sup>55</sup> ist neben Ilse Weber und Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, deren Werk nicht dem Genre, den territorialen oder thematischen Kriterien dieser Studie entspricht, die bedeutendste deutsche Schriftstellerin der Zwischenkriegsliteratur in der größeren Region Ostravsko.<sup>56</sup> Ihr Roman *Vor dem Sturz* (1934) wurde auch ins Tschechische übersetzt (*Před pádem* 1935).

Das Thema der Untreue und des Sturzes einer Frau und ihrer Familie wird aus der Perspektive der Hauptheldin mit autobiografischen Elementen erzählt. Im Hinblick auf die Imagologie ist der Text vollständig intakt. Im Roman finden wir nur eine Darstellung des allgemeinen Imagotyps der hohen sozialen Schicht und der Aristokratie, zu der die Hauptfigur am Anfang auch gehört.

55 (1861 Schloss Triebitz – 1944 ebenda) wuchs seit ihrer Kindheit in einem Schloss auf. Sie ist Autorin von Romanen und Erzählungen mit sozialen und Gender-Themen, ihre Gedichte konzentrierten sich auf das private Leiden des Einzelwesens in der Gesellschaft.

56 Neben Maria Stona kann auch Ernst Wolfgang Freissler (1884 in Troppau – 1937 Olbersdorf) erwähnt werden. Er schrieb jedoch in Troppau, wo er keine starke Migrationswelle aus Galizien miterleben konnte. Sein Roman *Junge Triebe* (1922) ist stark transnational orientiert. Es hat sich gezeigt, dass Freissler nur das Autobild der Deutschen in seinem Werk konstruiert.

Jünger als Maria Stona ist Gottfried Rothacker.<sup>57</sup> Das Werk dieses Autors wurde stark ideologisch motiviert. Sein bekanntestes Werk, *Das Dorf an der Grenze* (1936), das Ende der 1930er Jahre zum Bestseller wurde, ist ein autobiografisch gefärbter Roman, da Rothacker selbst als Lehrer in kleinen sudetendeutschen Dörfern auftritt.

Das zentrale Thema des Werks ist die Darstellung des mährisch-schlesischen Dorfes Skopolnica / Schatzdorf, der Bewohner, ihrer national-sozialen Probleme in Wechselwirkung mit der Ankunft des jungen Lehrers Ortwin Hartmichel.

Bei diesem konkreten Autor darf ebenfalls nicht der spezifische literarische Kontext des auf Deutsch verfassten Schaffens übersehen werden, das stark durch die „Blut-und-Boden-Literatur“ sowie das Genre des Grenzlandromans<sup>58</sup> u. a. beeinflusst ist. Hier kann eine starke ideologische Färbung angenommen werden,<sup>59</sup> da sich in der auf Deutsch verfassten Literatur der 1930er Jahre u. a. ein ideologischer Schreib- und Denkstil herausbildet, der eng mit den Studien von Adalbert Schmidts *Sudetendeutsche Dichtung der Gegenwart* (1938) zusammenhängt.

Die Hauptintention des Autors zeigt sich durch den Aufbau des Autobildes von Deutschen. Es wurde die Gefahr dargestellt, der die in Grenzgebieten lebenden Deutschen trotzen müssen. Da die Gefahr ausschließlich von Tschechen ausgeht, wird im Roman kein Bild der Polen konstruiert.

## 5. Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende imagologische Analyse erarbeitete einige grundlegende Aspekte, die für die Ausrichtung der imagologischen Forschung in manipulativen

57 Geboren als Bruno Nowak (1901 Troppau – 1940 Berlin). Er trat bereits 1926 in die NSDAP ein. Die deutsche Autorenenzyklopädie führt auch eine Liste von Termini an, die maßgeblich die Auslegung seines Werks bestimmen: „Auslandsdeutschtum“, „Grenzlandkampf“ und „Heldenverehrung“. Weiterführend siehe *Deutsche biographische Enzyklopädie & Deutscher biographischer Index* 2001:568. Rothacker war in der Zeit des sog. Dritten Reichs ein sehr beliebter und geschätzter Autor; er wurde z. B. mit dem Hans-Schemm-Preis ausgezeichnet.

58 Der Grenzlandroman selbst kann dann nach Rinas in drei Typen unterteilt werden: a) der Grenzlandroman aus der Perspektive des Grenzgebiets b) der Grenzlandroman als Form, die den Konflikt zweier Sprachen auf einem Gebiet thematisiert c) der Grenzlandroman als Genre mit der Thematik des nationalen Konflikts. (Rinas in Becher 2017:307-308).

59 Konkret im Zusammenhang mit dem Stil des Autors spricht Budňák von der sog. „statischen Erzählung“ (Budňák 2007:185).

und primär ideologischen Strukturen wertvoll sind. Der Fokus lag vor allem auf der Enthüllung grundlegender Stereotypen der Darstellung von Heterobildern der Polen in ausgewählten Werken der tschechischen und deutschen Literatur der Zwischenkriegszeit aus der näher definierten Region Ostravsko derselben Periode. Es stellte sich heraus, dass die zeitliche Eingrenzung auf die Periode von 1918 bis 1939 für das literarische Werk nicht gänzlich bestimmend ist, weshalb diese Problematik näher abgesteckt wurde und es zu bestimmten Überlappungen kam, die weiter oben beschrieben wurden.

Das Bild der Polen ist in der Romanprosa nur äußerst sporadisch vertreten. Auf tschechischer Seite kann zunächst eine komplexe Darstellung des Heterobildes der Polen bei František Šolc-Tůma verzeichnet werden, die sich durch einen persuasiven Charakter auszeichnet und die Einheit des Slawentums propagiert, und eben diese wird im späteren Werk durch die Elemente gestört, die auf die deutsche Manipulation mit Polen hinweisen.

Die Autoren sind in ihren Konstruktionen des polnischen Heterobildes nicht in der Lage, sich von den Elementen der „Dummheit“ und „Rückständigkeit“ zu lösen, wie aus mehreren Quellen hervorgeht. Einerseits geht es um den Analphabetismus der Bevölkerung der primär dargestellten Gebiete (Immigranten aus Galizien und angrenzender Gebiete), „Dummheit“ ist ebenso mit rassenideologisch motiviertem Antisemitismus verbunden sowie mit der vermeintlichen polnischen Rolle hinsichtlich der Germanisierungsfrage. Die Polen werden somit, insbesondere im Werk von Šolc-Tůma, zu aktiven Helfern der Deutschen in der Unterdrückung der Nationen. Dieser Gedanke findet auch im zeitgenössischen lyrischen Schaffen der Region seine Resonanz, z.B. bei Petr Bezruč, auf den Šolc-Tůma sich im Werk *Na Kresách* sogar beruft. In der deutschen Literatur sind die Furcht vor polnischen Vorurteilen sowie die Bemühungen zu finden, den industriellen Fortschritt umzukehren, den die Deutschen in die Region Schlesiens bringen.

Die Darstellung der „polnischen Schwäche“ ist ein weiteres grundlegendes Phänomen, verbunden mit der Metapher der sexualisierten Darstellung des weiblichen Geschlechts, das unter den Autoren männlichen Geschlechts stereotyp genau mit der geschwächten Position der Polen verbunden wird. Diese Metapher hat diesen Untersuchungen zufolge auf tschechischer Seite ihren Ursprung in historischen Umständen, während sie auf deutscher Seite von der Vorstellung einer industriellen Überlegenheit vor allem der ursprünglich preußischen Bevölkerung herrührt (im Werk von A. Scholtis).

Die komplexe Strukturiertheit des Polenbildes geht in den folgenden Jahren zugunsten einer fragmentarischen, stereotypen Darstellung von Unreinheit, Dummheit und Hässlichkeit in den Werken weiterer tschechischer Autoren

zurück (K. Dvořáček, V. Martínek). Sofern tschechisch schreibende Autoren das Bild der Polen überhaupt reflektierten, so geht es lediglich um eine verengte Darstellung, die sich auf galizische Polen konzentriert. Weitere deutsch schreibende Autoren formen in den untersuchten Werken das Polenbild nicht einmal auf fragmentarischer Ebene. Bei älteren Autoren (M. Stona, E.W. Freissler) liegt der Grund in der supranationalen Motivation der Werke sowie der primären Darstellung sozialer und geschlechterbezogener Imagotypen, während bei dem jüngeren Autor Rothacker das Desinteresse am Bild der Polen durch die ideologische Struktur des Werks zu begründen ist, das vor allem zum Kampf gegen alles Tschechische auffordert.

Maßgeblich scheint ebenso die konkrete territoriale Zugehörigkeit des Autors / der Autorin, also die regionale Grundlage seines / ihres Schaffens. Somit kann geschlussfolgert werden, dass die weitere Region Ostravsko hinsichtlich der Ausformung des Polenbildes in zwei eigenständige Bereiche unterteilt werden muss. Zunächst geht es um Ostrau und die angrenzenden östlichen Gebiete (z. B. Teschen), wo sich die galizische Migration in vollem Umfang bemerkbar machte, wodurch die oben beschriebenen Stereotypen aktiviert wurden. An zweiter Stelle wird zwischen Galizien und Troppau unterschieden, wo sich vor allem die deutschen Autoren konzentrierten, die das Bild der Polen aus den oben angeführten Gründen nicht thematisieren, aber auch, da die Migrationswelle dieses Gebiet nicht betraf. Die einzige Ausnahme bildet August Scholtis, der allerdings notwendigerweise eine petrifizierte Form des Bildes präsentiert.

## | Quellen

### PRIMÄRQUELLEN

- Dvořáček, Karel: *František chce býti spravedlivý*. Ostrava: Profil, 1966.  
 Hořká, Ludmila. *Doma*. Praha: Vyšehrad, 1943.  
 Hořká, Ludmila. *Řeka*. Praha: Vyšehrad, 1946.  
 Martínek, Vojtěch. *Černá země: Jakub Oberva*. Ostrava: Profil, 1965.  
 Martínek, Vojtěch. *Černá země: Plameny*. Ostrava: Profil, 1965.  
 Martínek, Vojtěch. *Černá země: Země duní*. Ostrava: Profil, 1965.  
 Rothacker, Gottfried: *Das Dorf an der Grenze*. München: Albert Langen/Georg Müller, 1936.  
 Stona, Maria. *Před pádem*. Ostrava: Příloha Posledního ostravského deníku, 1935.  
 Stona, Maria: *Vor dem Sturz*. Wien: Europ. Verl. 1934.  
 Scholtis, August. *Das Eisenwerk*. Berlin: Wolfgang Krüger Verlag, 1939.



- Scholtis, August. *Železářny*. Brno: Fr. Borový, 1940.
- Sokol-Tůma, František. *Na kresách* – díl 1.–3. Mor. Ostrava: Al. Zelinka, 1922.
- Sokol-Tůma, František. *Na kresách* – díl 3. Praha: Julius Albert, 1927.
- Sokol-Tůma, František. *Na kresách* – díl 4. Praha: Julius Albert, 1927.
- Sokol-Tůma, František. *V záři milionů* – díl 1.–2. Praha: Julius Albert, 1935.
- Sokol-Tůma, František. *V záři milionů* – díl 3. Praha: Julius Albert, 1935.
- Sokol-Tůma, František. *V záři milionů* – díl 4.–5. Praha: Julius Albert, 1935.

## SEKUNDÄRQUELLEN

- Adámková, Lenka. (2011): „... schrecklich fremd, dennoch anziehend“ (Škvorecký): *zum Bild des Rotarmisten in ausgewählten Texten der tschechischen und (ost) deutschen Literatur nach 1945*. New York: Peter Lang, 2011.
- Becher, Peter, Steffen Höhne, Jörg Krappmann a Manfred Weinberg, ed. *Handbuch der deutschen Literatur Prags und der Böhmisches Länder*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 2017.
- Beller, Manfred. *Imagology: the cultural construction and literary representation of national characters : a critical study*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.
- Borovička, Lukáš, Strobach, Vít. Jak na (literární) antisemitismus?: Modelová studie: antisemitské reprezentace u Františka Sokola-Tůmy. *Dějiny – teorie – kritika*. 14(1). S. 43–77.
- Budňák, Jan. *Das Bild der Tschechen in der deutschen Literatur aus Böhmen und Mähren*. Dissertation, 2007.
- Černá země: časopis lidově výchovný. 1936, 12(4–5).
- Corbineau-hoffmann, Angelika. *Einführung in die Komparatistik*. 2., überarb. u. erw. Aufl. Berlin: Schmidt, 2000.
- Durčák, J. Cesta Karla Dvořáčka. In: *Těšínsko. Český Těšín*, 1966, 10(1).
- Dyserinck, Hugo. *Ausgewählte Schriften zur Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2015.
- Dyserinck, Hugo. *Von Ethnopsychologie zu Ethnoimagologie. Über Entwicklung und mögliche Endbestimmung eines Schwerpunktes des ehemaligen Aachener Komparatistikprogramms*, in: *Neohelicon* 29.1 (2002), s. 57–74.
- Gawrecká, Marie. *Československé Slezsko mezi světovými válkami 1918–1938*. Troppau: Schlesische Universität, 2004.
- Gawrecká, Marie. *Středoevropské migrace v 19. století a jejich národnostní a kulturní aspekty*. Troppau: Schlesische Universität, 2014.
- Greń, Zbigniew. *Śląsk Cieszyński: dziedzictwo językowe*. Warszawa: Sławistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy, 2000.
- Klímeček, Antonín. *Velké dějiny země Koruny české*. Svazek XIII. Prag: Paseka, 2000.
- Leerssen, Joseph, Theodor. *Imagology: On using ethnicity to make sense of the world*. *Iberic@l, Revue d'études ibériques et ibéro-américaines*. 2016, (10), s. 13–31. [zit. 2018–04–11]. Erreichbar: <https://tinyurl.com/y6k2nlkc>.

- Malíř, Jiří. Pavel Marek. *Politické strany: vývoj politických stran a hnutí v českých zemích a Československu 1861–2004*. Brno: Doplněk, 2005.
- Martínek, Vojtěch. *František Sokol Tůma člověk a dílo*. Brünn: Moravské kolo spisovatelů, 1926.
- Martínek, Vojtěch. *František Sokol Tůma život a dílo*. Ostrau: Krajské nakladatelství v Ostravě, 1957.
- Mehnert, Elke. *Vademekum der Imagologie*. Chemnitz, 1997.
- Mehnert, Elke. Grenzüberschreitungen. Zum Problem der Transgredienz in der Imagologie. In *Deutsch an der Grenze*. Pilsen: Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, 2016. s. 15–23.
- Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexikon*, Bund 1–25, GrosHe, Mannheim, Wien, Zürich, 1971–1979, s. 629
- Morys-Twarowski, Michael. The Relationship Between Religion, Language and Nationality Using the Example of Village Mayors in Cieszyn Silesia in 1864–1918. *History, Issues, Problems*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta, 2018, 17(2), 149–161.
- Mukařovský, Jan. Záměrnost a nezáměrnost v umění. In: *Strukturalistická knihovna*, Sv. 4., Brno 2000, s. 353–388, [online], [zit. 2019–03–16], unter: <https://tinyurl.com/y24c7oup>.
- Nünning, Ansgar, Jiří Trávníček a Jiří Holý, ed. *Lexikon teorie literatury a kultury: koncepce – osobnosti – základní pojmy*. Brünn: Host, 2006.
- Przeperski, Michał. *Nieznośny ciężar braterstwa: konflikty polsko-czeskie w xx wieku*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2016.
- Schubert, Gabriella. Wolfgang. Dahmen. *Bilder vom Eigenen und Fremden aus dem Donau-Balkan-Raum: Analysen literarischer und anderer Texte*. München: Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 2003.
- Slovník české literatury po roce 1945* [online]. 2006 [zit. 2018–07–26], unter: <https://tinyurl.com/y22vcaa5>.
- Swiderska, Malgorzata. *Theorie und Methode einer literaturwissenschaftlichen Imagologie Dargestellt Am Beispiel Russlands in Literarischen Werken Heimito Von Doderers*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2013.
- Ullrich, Josef. *Das Heim der Dichterin Maria Stona*. In: *Deutschmährische Heimat*. Brünn, 1926, 11–12, s. 145–150. [online], [zit. 2019–03–16], unter: <https://tinyurl.com/y2vypzp2>.
- Veberová, Veronika a David Skalický, ed. *Jazyky reprezentace*. Prag: Akropolis, 2014.
- Veberová, Veronika a David Skalický, ed. *Jazyky reprezentace 2*. Prag: Akropolis, 2014.
- Voltrová, Michaela (2015): *Studien zur komparatistischen Imagologie*. Berlin: Frank and Timme.

## | Abstract

LUKÁŠ PĚCHULA

**Das Bild der Polen als Heterokonstruktion in Zwischenkriegsromanen der Region Ostravsko: Tschechisch-deutsche imagologische Untersuchung**

Die vorliegende Studie zielt darauf ab, die Strukturen des Heterobildes der Polen in den Romanen der größeren Region Ostravsko zwischen zwei Weltkriegen zu entschlüsseln. Es geht um eine komparative Analyse, die polnische Ethnotypen in den Werken deutscher und tschechischer Autoren dieser Zeit darstellt. Die Region Ostravsko war in der Vergangenheit ein Ziel der polnischen Einwanderung, aber besonders Ostrau war ein multikultureller Ort, an dem die polnische, tschechische, deutsche und jüdische Bevölkerung nebeneinander lebte. Vor allem diese Besonderheiten bilden eine interessante Grundlage für die vorliegende Untersuchung.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Polen; Bild; Heterobild; Imago; Ethnotyp

## | Abstract

LUKÁŠ PĚCHULA

**Constructing Polish Heteroimage in the Interwar Novels of the Wider Ostrava Region: A Comparative Czech-German Study**

This analysis aims to examine the construction of the Polish heteroimages in novels written between two World wars in the broader region Ostravsko. It is a comparative study which reflects Polish ethnotypes in a wide range of Czech and German authors. Broader Moravian-Silesian region was the target of Polish immigration, but especially Ostrava was also a multicultural center where Polish, Czech, German and Jewish People lived side by side. It is these specifics that create space for the interesting development of all ethnotypes which are the basis of this research.

**Keywords:** Pole; image; heteroimage; imago; ethnotype

| **About the Author**

**Mgr. Lukáš Pěchula, Ph.D.** currently finished his studies for a Doctorate at the Department of Czech Literature and Literary Criticism, Faculty of Arts, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic. His main fields of interest are imagology and gender studies related to the interwar period of German and Czech literature.

E-mail: [lukaspechula@seznam.cz](mailto:lukaspechula@seznam.cz)

RADEK MALÝ  
Univerzita Karlova

## The Figure of Ophelia in Expressionist Poetry: German and Czech Comparison

### 1. Introduction

There are motifs in art history that represent such an integral part of a certain art movement or epoch that they co-define it. Since antiquity, European culture has known the motif of a beautiful drowned young woman. Having been transformed throughout centuries, this motif has fulfilled various functions based on the period aesthetic canon and the general cultural perception of women and womanhood.<sup>1</sup> The nineteenth century saw a major escalation of the motif of the drowned beauty<sup>2</sup> and its substantial re-interpretation in connection with the arrival of modern art movements. It could even be seen as a cult of the young drowned woman which found one of its climaxes in German Expressionist poetry in the early twentieth century. Another possible peak of the use of this motif can be seen in the frequency and diversity of the appearance of the figure of the “Unknown Woman of the Seine” (*L’Inconnue de la Seine* in French) in literature (including the Czech one).<sup>3</sup>

1 For more detail, see Bronfen 2004.

2 This would be the English equivalent of the German term “schöne Wasserleiche.”

3 A young woman who drowned in the Seine in the late 1880s, who has not been identified to this day and whose death mask inspired many twentieth-century artworks. For more detail, see Malý 2007.

In the context of European art, the motif of the drowned beauty was re-discovered by Symbolism, including the artistic rendering of the character of Ophelia from William Shakespeare's drama *Hamlet*. In the play, Ophelia is a young woman who loses her sanity after her beloved Hamlet, who rejects her, unknowingly kills her father. She then drowns, rather by mischance than of her own will. Her figure became a clear projection of the motif outlined above.<sup>4</sup> Symbolist painters reveled in the figure of drowned Ophelia. While early on, it was rendered rather as an illustration to Shakespeare's drama, later the motif emancipated itself into images with a broad range of possible interpretations, with the most renowned visual renditions including Ophelia by British Pre-Raphaelite John Everett Millais from 1891 and Ophelia by Czech painter Jan Konůpek from 1906.<sup>5</sup>

In the field of literature, one of the renditions that is most remarkable for its modern and initiatory character is the poem "Ophélie" (Ophelia) written in 1870 by Jean Arthur Rimbaud. With its nine four-verse stanzas, the poem is a typical representative of Rimbaud's early stage (it even has a textual precursor in Latin) written in a strict metrical form in the spirit of Symbolism. Some researchers even point out that the poem is partially derived from some of the poems written by Parnassianist Théodore de Banville (1823–1891), a conventional romanticizing poet, who is considered the discoverer of Rimbaud's talent (Bayer 218).

Nevertheless, the poem shows clear signs of Rimbaud's idiosyncratic style: it develops motifs of the aesthetics of ugliness, known since Charles Baudelaire, while other symptomatic aspects include a radical use of the poetic image leaning towards an absolute metaphor, and a striking, often surreal colourfulness transcending to synaesthesia. While the poem contains elements from the play *Hamlet* (the name of the female figure in the poem's title, an allusion to a "handsome pale knight" —i.e. Hamlet—in the seventh stanza, some scenery, and the mention of the "great mountains of Norway" in the fifth stanza), the figure of Ophelia is rid of all other individual features. In the first stanza, the figure is embedded in the setting of idyllic nature, with the comparison to a white lily reappearing in the last stanza and thus constituting a certain

4 In his study *L'Eau et les rêves. Essai sur l'imagination de la matière* published in 1942, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes water as an exclusively melancholic element related exclusively to female death and coins the term of the "Ophelia complex" in this context.

5 The rendition of the biblical figure of Salome received similar attention; however, unlike the dead, and thus "harmless" Ophelia, Salome represents the prototype of dangerous female seductiveness.

framework of the poem. The second stanza relocates the figure into a certain mythical timelessness. In the second part of the poem, Ophelia is addressed by the poetic subject that becomes the object of the poem in the last stanza which constitutes the separate third part of the poem. Let me quote the first two stanzas and the last stanza from the original poem:<sup>6</sup>

Sur l'onde calme et noire où dorment les étoiles  
 La blanche Ophélie flotte comme un grand lys,  
 Flotte très lentement, couchée en ses longs voiles ...  
 -- On entend dans les bois lointains des hallalis.  
 Voici plus de mille ans que la triste Ophélie  
 Passe, fantôme blanc, sur le long fleuve noir;  
 Voici plus de mille ans que sa douce folie  
 Murmure sa romance à la brise du soir.  
 .....  
 -- Et le poète dit qu'aux rayons des étoiles  
 Tu viens chercher, la nuit, les fleurs que tu cueillis,  
 Et qu'il a vu sur l'eau, couchée en ses longs voiles,  
 La blanche Ophélie flotter, comme un grand lys. (Rimbaud 188)

In English translation:

On the calm black water where the stars are sleeping  
 White Ophelia floats like a great lily;  
 Floats very slowly, lying in her long veils ...  
 – In the far-off woods you can hear them sound the mort.  
 For more than a thousand years sad Ophelia  
 Has passed, a white phantom, down the long black river.  
 For more than a thousand years her sweet madness  
 Has murmured its ballad to the evening breeze.  
 .....  
 – And the poet says that by starlight  
 You come seeking, in the night, the flowers that you picked  
 And that he has seen on the water, lying in her long veils  
 White Ophelia floating, like a great lily. (Rimbaud, Poetry Nook)

6 Due to the extensive length of most of the poems discussed, only excerpts from the original versions and their English translations will be stated here.

Rimbaud's Ophelia is a dreaming visionary, one that is similar to Rimbaud's description of the poet and his newly defined poetics in the renowned "letters of the seer." However, the burden of this utopian vision kills the figure; she does not have the power to carry it. She becomes a general type of a beautiful drowned young woman who is at the same time the poet's muse in between worlds; she is the connection between our world and the other world. She is worth the poet's attention for she escapes the ever less graspable reality in two ways: by insanity and by death.

However, returning back to reality from this journey is impossible, and so is rendering it in words. The contrast between Ophelia's silence and its poetic reflection is voiced in the first verse of the third part, i.e. in the last stanza: *Et le poète dit* (*And the poet speaks (says)*). As if Rimbaud alluded to his later silence: at the age of nineteen, the poet fell silent in a way that represents an essential gesture of modern poetry from today's perspective. Here already, he anticipates the deep crisis of modern poetry as later formulated by Hugo von Hofmannsthal in his famous fictional *Brief des Lord Chandos* (*The Letter of Lord Chandos*) due to his scepticism concerning the possibility of capturing the world through the language of poetry.

## 2. German Expressionism

Rimbaud's poem "Ophelia" as well as the perception of his complete work and life had a significant impact on the poetry of German Expressionism. What was in the beginning of this relationship was the German translation of Rimbaud's poems by Karl Klammer (1879–1959), a Vienna native who was a colonel of the Austrian army in his civilian life. The key year of 1907 saw the publication entitled *Arthur Rimbaud. Leben und Dichtung* (*Arthur Rimbaud. Life and Work*), an anthology of the work of Arthur Rimbaud including approximately a half of his works and prefaced by an extensive biographical study by Stefan Zweig. The book was published under the translator's transparent pseudonym K.L. Ammer.

Through his distinctive Rimbaud translations, K.L. Ammer initiated a remarkable offshoot of the entire literary epoch—that of German Expressionism. This offshoot drew on Symbolism, which was practically reduced to the specific work of Stefan George and Rainer Maria Rilke in the field of German poetry, as well as on the sentiments stemming from the Decadents. Klammer's book of Arthur Rimbaud's translations gave rise to the poetics of several German poets. Three of them, previously often perceived as pre-Expressionists by literary history, are now rightly interpreted as fundamental figures of modern German poetry: Germans Georg Heym and Gottfried Benn and Austrian Georg Trakl.



For all three, the turning point in the formation or transformation of their poetics came approximately in the year 1910, which is now seen as the beginning of the Expressionist decade. All three of them, yet not only them, addressed the motif of a drowned young woman in their work in some way.

Especially to Georg Heym (1887–1912), a poet of the turbulently developing city of Berlin, water was a fundamental element, often appearing as the cool, eternal, clear blue in his poetry. The influence of Rimbaud's "Ophelia" is most distinct in Georg Heym's work, assuming very particular features. Heym addressed this topic in two of his longer poems from 1910, *Tote im Wasser* (*The Dead Girl in the Water*) and *Ophelie* (*Ophelia*). Heym's "Ophelia" is one of the first treatments of the motif that is based secondarily on Rimbaud's poem rather than Shakespeare's drama. The twelve-stanza composition was written in October 2010 and shows all the key features of Heym's mature poetic style: contrary to the broken form, which is otherwise very common in Expressionism, it is written in a strict metrical form with iambic metre and enclosed rhyme (alternate rhyme in two stanzas), consisting of two parts of different length (four and eight stanzas).

Unlike Rimbaud's text, Heym's "Ophelia" underwent the experience of the Decadence on which Expressionism partly draws to paradoxically imbue it with new life; in Expressionism, the aesthetics of ugliness is taken to the extreme, as shown by Gottfried Benn (see below). The motif of death is intensified and the passages capturing the transition from beauty to ugliness are accentuated. What is characteristic in this respect is the contrast between the title, raising certain expectations and the first verse which goes: "Im Haar ein Nest von jungen Wasserratten" (In Her Hair a Nest of Young Water Rats). This unexpected sharp cut is so intense that the following stanzas, rather static and descriptive, still carry on in the spirit of its imagery and paradoxical vitality. While in Rimbaud's "Ophelia," the nest resounds with the flapping of birds' wings, in Heym's "Ophelia," water rats live in Ophelia's hair. While the bosom of Rimbaud's Ophelia is kissed by the wind, a long white eel creeps across the breast of Heym's Ophelia. Remarkably, the space of the poem is brought to life by many particular animals (rats, eel, a firefly, bats, swans) and plants (jungles, fern, reeds, willow, rye). As if these living organisms were to create a counterbalance to the expectable process decomposition, pointing out the new life of the dead body. This process of animalization corresponds with the fact that the name of Ophelia only appears in the title of Heym's poem, while in Rimbaud's poem, Ophelia is also addressed in the text.

In the second part, the ductus of the poem changes significantly. The dynamic character is reinforced, especially by accentuating the movement down

the river and the repetition of the adverb *vorbei*, *vorbei* (passing, passing) at the beginning of the seventh and eleventh stanza. Moreover, there is a typical Heymian scenery of a demonically anthropomorphized metropolis from which Ophelia is moving away: the cry of machines and primarily a giant crane completely dominating the ninth stanza:

Mit schwarzer Stirn, ein mächtiger Tyrann,  
Ein Moloch, drum die schwarzen Knechte knien.  
Last schwerer Brücken, die darüber ziehn  
Wie Ketten auf dem Strom, und harter Bann. (Heym 161)

in English translation:

A mighty tyrant, black, perverse,  
A moloch worshipped by his dour knaves.  
The weight of bridges resting on the waves  
Like heavy chains, and everlasting curse. (Heym, Steinmann)

Heym's Ophelia, put in a completely contemporary setting, distances herself from the city not only in space but also in time: for the adverb "vorbei" encompasses the temporal meaning as well. This temporal tendency towards eternity, to Rimbaudian "timelessness," dominates the final stanza with an apocalyptic tone:

Der Strom trägt weit sie fort, die untertaucht,  
Durch manchen Winters trauervollen Port.  
Die Zeit hinab. Durch Ewigkeiten fort,  
Davon der Horizont wie Feuer raucht. (Heym 162)

In English translation:

The waters carry her, as she sinks down,  
Through mournful ports of many winter nights.  
Through time, and through eternity, that lights  
The vast horizon like a burning crown. (Heym, Steinmann)

What is also remarkable is a certain sacralization of the space inhabited by Ophelia: the second stanza includes the noun "Schrein" (a shrine), the twelfth stanza includes the verb "weihen" (to consecrate, sacred day). This corresponds

to the earlier depictions of the drowned young woman in fine arts where she is portrayed as Mary or as a saint.

Georg Trakl (1887–1914) is traditionally labelled as Heym's Austrian contemporary and lyrical doppelgänger. However, if we take a closer look at this poet, who is traditionally acclaimed as a distinctive representative of Expressionism with an original poetic spirit who significantly influenced Austrian as well as Czech poetry, we will be surprised to find out that Klammer's translations of Rimbaud's poems not only initiate the originality of Trakl's talent but even enter brand new, unexpected contexts through dozens of literal as well as loose quotations within Trakl's poetic work, thus taking further effect. It is only due to Trakl's poetic genius that he managed to transform the influence of other poets on his poetry into a unique synthesis of original interpretations of derived inspirations—which were in no way hidden by the poet yet unsuspected by his contemporary readers—thus introducing the denial of the traditional requirement of poetic originality into modern poetry for the first time in such a compact form, while relativizing this requirement to the maximum degree possible.

Rimbaud's influence on Trakl was noted already in 1925, i.e. rather soon, by Adolf Meschendörfer, who found primarily literal quotations from Klammer's translations in Georg Trakl's work; the list is exhaustive (Meschendörfer 93). The deeper connections between Rimbaud and Trakl, or rather Klammer's Rimbaud translations and Trakl, were noticed by Reinhold Grimm, who was also the first to point out the significance of Klammer's translations in German poetry (Grimm 1959: 288–315 and Grimm 1982: 124–145). Ophelia even makes a fleeting appearance in Georg Trakl's poetry—in the first version of the poem "Wind, weiße Stimme ..." (Wind, white voice ...) which was probably written in late 1912 and remained unpublished during Trakl's lifetime. Let me quote the first stanza and the poem's ending.

Wind, weiße Stimme, die an des Schläfers Schläfe flüstert  
 In morschem Geäst hockt das Dunkle in seinem purpurnen Haar  
 Lange Abendglocke, versunken im Schlamm des Teichs  
 Und darüber neigen sich die gelben Blumen des Sommers.  
 Konzert von Hummeln und blauen Fliegen in Wildgras und  
     [Einsamkeit,  
 Wo mit rührenden Schritten ehdem Ophelia ging  
 Sanftes Gehaben des Wahnsinns. Ängstlich wogt das Grün im Rohr  
 Und die gelben Blätter der Wasserrosen, zerfällt ein Aas in heißen  
     [Nesseln

Erwachend umflattern den Schläfer kindliche Sonnenblumen.  
 .....

O Tod! Der kranken Seele verfallener Bogen Schweigen und  
 [Kindheit.

Aufflattern mit irren Gesichtern die Fledermäuse. (Trakl 180)

In English translation:

Wind, white voice that whispers near the temple of the sleeper  
 In rotten branches the darkness crouches in his purple hair  
 Long evening bell, sunk in the mud of the pond  
 And over it the yellow flowers of the summer bend.  
 Concert of bumblebees and blue flies in wild grass and loneliness,  
 Where once Ophelia went with stirring steps  
 Soft behavior of insanity. Anxiously the green surges in the reeds  
 And the yellow leaves of the water lilies, a carcass molders in hot  
 [nettles

Awaking childish sunflowers flutter around the sleeper.  
 .....

O death! The ill soul's decayed arch silence and childhood.  
 With mad faces the bats flutter up. (Trakl, Literaturnische)

The poem, written in free verse, anticipates the later stage of Trakl's work and is characteristic in many respects: the verses are arranged without any significant syntactic connections, making the impression of isolated images; while these images are mostly known from Trakl's other texts, the only thing that changes is the context into which they are embedded. The separation of the last verse into an individual stanza is typical as well.

Images of idyllic nature abounding in summer flowers and buzzing insects are disturbed by negative visions of darkness in rotten branches (verse two), a carcass (verse eight) and finally an ill soul and death (verse seventeen). These images of destruction and decay are associated with the figure of Ophelia who is again connoted with the phrase of "soft madness" analysed above. In Trakl's poems, too, Ophelia constitutes a link—though its contours are rather blurred—between our world and the "other" world, rather than a mere representation of a literary figure. However, remarkably, Ophelia does not appear in the second preserved version of this poem.

The most radical treatment of the theme of a drowned young woman (though she is not named Ophelia) can be found in the poetry of Berlin poet

(and doctor) Gottfried Benn (1886–1956). His literary debut, a notebook with nine poems entitled *Morgue und andere Gedichte* (Morgue and Other Poems)<sup>7</sup> was published in March 1912, two months after Heym's drowning, in Berlin in 500 copies. Against the author's will, this thin collection caused a literary and social scandal, securing him a leading position among the Expressionists. Gottfried Benn recollects the circumstances of the origin of this cycle in his memoir *Lebensweg eines Intellektualisten* (The Way of an Intellectualist) from 1934:

Als ich "Morgue" schrieb, mit der ich begann und die später in so viele Sprachen übersetzt wurde, war es abends, ich wohnte im Nordwesten von Berlin und hatte im Moabiter Krankenhaus einen Sektionskurs gehabt. Es war ein Zyklus von sechs Gedichten, die alle in der gleichen Stunde aufstiegen, sich herauswarfen, da waren, vorher war nichts von ihnen da; als der Dämmerzustand endete, war ich leer, hungrig, taumelnd und stieg schwierig hervor aus dem großen Verfall. (Benn IV: 177)

When I wrote "Morgue," with which I began and which was later translated into so many languages, it was evening, I was living in the northwest of Berlin and attending a dissection course at Moabit Hospital. It was a cycle of six poems, which all came to me in the same hour, flung themselves up from below, where previously nothing had been. When my semiconscious state ended, I was empty, hungry, dizzy and climbed with difficulty out of the great decay. (Huysen 84–117)

The Morgue<sup>8</sup> cycle includes a brief poem entitled "Schöne Jugend" (Beautiful Youth):

Der Mund eines Mädchens, das lange im Schilf gelegen hatte  
sah so angeknabbert aus.  
Als man die Brust aufbrach  
war die Speiseröhre so löcherig.  
Schließlich, in einer Laube unter dem Zwerchfell

7 The inspiring character of this morbid theme is proved by the fact that Georg Heym and Rainer Maria Rilke each wrote a poem with an identical title in the same time period.

8 The term originally designated the Paris morgue which displayed dead bodies for the purpose of their identification. Later on, the term was broadened to similar institutions in other big cities including Berlin.

fand man ein Nest von jungen Ratten.  
 Ein kleines Schwesterchen lag tot.  
 Die anderen lebten von Leber und Niere,  
 tranken das kalte Blut und hatten  
 hier eine schöne Jugend verlebt.  
 Und schön und schnell kam auch ihr Tod:  
 Man warf sie allesamt ins Wasser.  
 Ach, wie die kleinen Schnauzen quietschen! (Benn I: 24)

The mouth of the girl who had lain long in the rushes  
 looked so nibbled.  
 When they opened her chest, her esophagus was so holey.  
 Finally in a bower under the diaphragm  
 they found a nest of young rats.  
 One little thing lay dead.  
 The others were living off kidneys and liver  
 drinking the cold blood and had  
 had themselves a beautiful youth.  
 And just as beautiful and quick was their death:  
 the lot of them were thrown into the water.  
 Ah, will you hearken at the little muzzles' oinks! (Benn, Hofmann)

In the context of the author's biography, it is obvious that Benn was familiar with the figure of a drowned young woman in the particular form of a common working day rather than a literary symbol of its time. However, already in the 1950s, researcher Bernhard Blume termed this poem as a "waste product of Rimbaud's Ophelia" (Blume 113); interestingly though, Gottfried Benn claims to only have delved into Rimbaud's poetry much later.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, leaving aside the pioneering matter-of-factness, which is still shocking today, and the thorough treatment of the topic in its macabreness, one can find very convincing links between this poem and the poetic style of Heym and Trakl. Benn's poem, too, addresses the general Expressionist theme of decay, and similarly to Heym's poem, it portrays the drowned young woman as disfigured by water rats. However, the depiction is substantially different from the one of Heym, as Benn's poem dehumanizes the figure of the drowned young woman, depriving it of all aesthetic features and turning it into a vessel in which water rats survive.

9 This was Benn's sceptical response to the attempts of literary historians to categorize his poem as one of the poems directly inspired by Rimbaud's "Ophelia" (Benn IV: 380).

Benn commits a total destruction of what is traditionally perceived as aesthetic. This is one of the reasons to be cautious when considering an ironical reading, which would only ridicule something that is, something that exists. While the effect of shocking the bourgeois cannot be denied (this aspect is generally strong especially in early Berlin Expressionism), what is more prominent here is an extreme reaction of the lyrical subject to the complete disillusion of the modern world which cannot be comprehended and grasped by words.

### 3. Expressive Depiction of the Drowned Young Woman in Czech Poetry

Czech poetry, too, abounds in powerful images that are inspired by the vision of the tragic death of a beautiful young woman in connection with the water element; there is a whole range of such texts. However, we will focus on how this motif is represented in selected poems whose expression is the closest to the intensity of depiction in German Expressionism.

In Czech poetry, this motif is most often treated as a balladic narrative of women who commit suicide with various motivations for their act, which already appeared in Czech and Moravian folklore. This is also the case with one of the most renowned poems by Petr Bezruč (1867–1958)—the ballad *Maryčka Magdónova* (*Maryčka Magdonova*). The expressive depiction of Maryčka's suicide in the mountain creek explicitly mentions the girl's hair, although this time it is not floating on the surface but caught on the rocks:

Maryčko, po straně ostré jsou skály,  
podle nich kypí a utíká k Frydku  
šumivá, divoká Ostravice.  
Slyšíš ji, rozumíš, děvuchu z hor?

Jeden skok nalevo, po všem je, po všem.  
Černé tvé vlasy se na skále chytly,  
bílé tvé ruce se zbarvily krví,  
sbohem buď, Maryčko Magdónova! (Bezruč 74)

In English translation:

Steep, Maryčka, steep the rocks rise  
Where the Ostravice wild and foaming  
hurls its torrents down to Frýdek.  
Do you hear, do you see, lass of the hills?





the readers out of all the three suicide stories in *Homecoming*. Holan's allusion to the motif of a beautiful drowned woman meets the balladic element known from folklore, forming a massive stream of associations linked to tragic female death. In Vladimír Holan's poetry, the motivic affinity to Bachelard's Ophelia complex, combined with the folklore tradition, contributes to the constitution of the broader meaning of the poem, confirming the essence of the archetype consisting in its position beyond individual consciousness.

Holan's work from the second half of the 1940s includes a poem whose expressivity and systematically employed aesthetics of ugliness can compete both with French Decadents and German Expressionists:

But Never Doubt I Love

Vodní krysa u prsu utonulé Ofélie,  
rozželená jeho modřinou a předpleťovou vůní,  
kničivě soptí, vzdychá, podupává, mluví nosem  
a spouští tklivá včichnutí  
po kulovitých zkratkách slin  
do kručení žárlivého na proud řeky,  
když náhle spatří na bříše utopenky masařku.  
Ihned tam přebíhá a začíná trhat  
jeho potuchlou, snadno se vzdávající kůži,  
hryže a rve a saje, kousá, loupí a polyká,  
ochutnává ponorné průvany,  
drásá a vyškubává jemnější zakřiknuté žíly,  
prohloďává se křížem krážem  
a zapíjí to crkavě z tůněk,  
které tam zatajily stonavé cáry, krhavé vrapy  
a drzé mraky mázder a blan,  
zářících jako její mlaskání,  
cpe maso zpředu do všech konců vědomí  
a celá houstne a těžkne při svém vysedlém olysání ...  
Ale jak uraženě znedůvěří  
a číhavě zasklívá své levé oko,  
když se jí v tom rozryvném vyšklebení života  
ukáže dětské tílko ... (Holan 2000: 102)

In English translation:

A water rat, at the breast of drowned Ophelia,  
 grieving over the bruises and the scent void of any  
 complexion,  
 squeals, sighs, kicks up its heels, talks through its nose,  
 and drops down its touching snuffles  
 along the globular acronyms of spit  
 to its rumble, jealous of the stream of the river,  
 when, suddenly, it sees a bluebottle at the belly of the  
 drowned.  
 Immediately, it runs there, and begins to tear  
 the musty skin, which gives up easily;  
 it gnaws and tears and sucks; it bites, robs and gobbles;  
 it tastes the submersible draughts;  
 it mauls and plucks up some  
 finer sheepish veins;  
 it eats through, criss-cross,  
 and, dribbling, it rinses down from little pools  
 concealed there by sickly rags, scrubby wraps  
 and shameless clouds of tissues and membranes,  
 aglow as its smacking;  
 it crams the flesh from the front into all the ends  
 of consciousness,  
 and it thickens all around and turns heavy in its bulbous  
 baldness ...  
 But, look, how it turns offensively distrustful,  
 and, watchful, glazes its left eye,  
 as, in that dissected maw of life,  
 a little body of a baby appears ... (Holan, *Yet There Is Music*)

The poem “But Never Doubt I Love” was only published in book form in Holan’s poetry collection *Na postupu (On the Advance)* in 1964; however, prior to that, it had been published in magazine form in the second edition of the Blok revue in early 1947; which rather modifies the observation made by literary critic and Holan’s editor Michael Špirit who claimed that Holan was only strongly fascinated by Shakespeare later (Špirit 153). The poem’s title is a quotation from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*; in particular, of the fourth verse from the rhymed poem in Hamlet’s letter to Ophelia in which he declares his love for her and which is read by Polonius to Gertrude:

Doubt thou the stars are fire,  
 Doubt that the sun doth move,  
 Doubt truth to be a liar,  
 But never doubt I love. (Shakespeare 74)

In his study examining multilinguality in Vladimír Holan's poetry, Petr Mareš formulates a thesis concerning this poem, which I can only agree with, saying that by using this element, Holan evokes the figure of Ophelia, who is the theme of the poem, on the one hand, while "creating an ironic contrast between an excerpt from Hamlet's love letter and the drastic images of a dead body" (Färber 2006: 121) on the other hand. The graphic images in the depiction of a dead body will undoubtedly stir an essential impression in the readers. They are images of an intense, expressive poetic based on an almost baroque ornamentality and evocation of contradictions as well as on the aesthetic of ugliness in which German Expressionism revealed.

These two connections were also noticed by Italian Bohemist Mario Ripellino (1923–1978), who translated Holan's poetry and who mentioned "But Never Doubt I Love" in his introduction to the collection of Vladimír Holan's poetry in Italian: "In Holan's work, the Baroque often merges with the stylistic methods of Expressionism.... The lyrical poem "But Never Doubt I Love," with its repulsive description of a rat gnawing and tearing at the skin of drowned Ophelia, is close to two compositions by German Expressionists: Georg Heym's "Ophelia," where the drowned woman has "a nest of young rats in her hair," and the poem *Schöne Jugend* where Gottfried Benn describes how a dissection reveals a nest of "young mice" feeding on the girl's liver and kidneys" (Ripellino 1968: 33).

Holan himself was rather sceptical about looking for connections between his work and European poetry, as proved by his ironic remark in an interview with Jaroslav Deweter from 1959: "Italian Slavist A.M. Ripellino, who once translated some of my handwritten poems, dedicated a very interesting study to me, according to which my poetry was influenced by two authors: Khlebnikov and Elizabethan poet John Donne. What a pity that I don't speak English. I believe that looking for influences is always very problematic" (Holan 2006: 501). However, the affinity between his poem and the poetics of early Expressionists is surprising and requires a more detailed insight than that of Ripellino's fleeting observation.

The degree of alienation is absolute both in the case of Holan and Benn: the anonymous drowned young woman has nothing in common with Ophelia

as the poet's muse. Any transcendence is brutally negated and the boundary between the outside world and the lyrical subject is definitively determined as one that cannot be crossed: words can no longer express reality, which is why Benn reaches for such extreme means. The seemingly indifferent perspective of the lyrical subjects contains a latent disgust at the world without a spiritual dimension. Holan, however, employs different means: an ornamental Baroque style, the use of phonic configuration and a refined vocabulary. Unlike Benn, who deliberately deaestheticizes the text (with minor exceptions), Vladimír Holan employs means that are perceived as traditionally aesthetic in poetry. Yet the effect is shocking in a similar manner.

In the work of Jiří Orten (1919–1941), the poet of tragic love, the motif of a drowned young woman appears repeatedly, which is not surprising. In the poem “Utonulá” (The Drowned One) from the collection *Čítanka jaro* (*Reader of Spring*) published in 1939, the motif had an emblematic form:

Za líc své něhy  
plula jsi na potocích  
mezi ztracenými břehy  
do krajin noci  
za líc své něhy

Nespatřená a bludná  
zachytila ses krajů  
potopených u dna  
v záplavě tmy v záplavě bez okrajů  
nespatřená a bludná

Milenky konci za zábradlím  
tam neznáme tam něhy líc  
je roztržštěna tím co kradly  
ubohé vlny kráse smrtelnic

Ale ty prý ses dala  
jediným rozevřením klína  
vodníkům kterým bylo zima

Almužna lásky třeba malá  
ti ke smrti pomáhala (Orten 32)

In English translation:

For the face of your warmth  
 you flew along every brook  
 between banks you have lost  
 to dark lands you mistook  
 for the face of your warmth

Unseen and troublesome  
 you've been grasping the ground  
 at the bottom with awesome  
 darkness floating around  
 unseen and troublesome

Lovers hide behind parapets  
 where unknown is the face of grace  
 smashed by  
 what  
 they took by stealth  
 from mortal beauty of poor waves

But one hears you gave it all  
 to shivering water-sprites  
 just by opening your thighs

Love's pittance even so small  
 assists you to bear death's toll (Orten, Selected Poems)

The drowned young woman floating on the flowing water definitely evokes Ophelia. Moreover, what is thematized here is not the process of drowning (as it would in a folk ballad for instance) but only its aestheticized result. Eroticism ("opening your thighs") combined with tragedy in the form of a prematurely ended life is more or less typical for Orten; however, what stands out here is the connection of these two aspects and the water element.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Expressionist poems show that the role of Ophelia as the successor of the muse was only temporary and instrumental. It actually represents a sim-

ilarly mysterious type of a figure as that of Trakl's sister or Rilke's angel: a deliberately built bridge to transcendence. Thus, Ophelia was destined to first lose her name and later become the object of irony, which is a certain reaction to Nietzschean nihilism. The development of this motif represents a very illustrative example of the disintegration of a world which could be described by words. The figure of Ophelia, or the drowned young woman in the space of Czech poetry by Petr Bezruč, Vladimír Holan and Jiří Orten equals the international renderings in its degree of expressivity.

## | References

### PRIMARY SOURCES

- Benn, Gottfried. "Beautiful Youth." Trans. Michael Hofmann. *Poetry Foundation*, <https://tinyurl.com/y9rhneeo>. Accessed 4 November 2019.
- . *Gesammelte Werke I. Gedichte I*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1989a.
- . *Gesammelte Werke IV. Autobiographische und vermischte Schriften*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1989b.
- Bezruč, Petr. "Marycka Magdonova." *Waymarking*. Trans. Ian Milner, <https://tinyurl.com/yc9mxv6g>. Accessed 4 November 2019.
- . *Slezské písně*. Opava: Slezské zemské muzeum, 2017.
- Heym, Georg. *Dichtungen und Schriften. Band 1: Lyrik*. Hamburg und München: Verlag Heinrich Ellermann, 1964.
- . "Ophelia." Trans. Wolfgang Steinmann. *BrinDin Press*, <http://www.brindinpress.com/pgvb6836.htm>. Accessed 4 November 2019.
- Holan, Vladimír. "But Never Doubt I Love." Trans. Josef Tomáš. *Vladimír Holan, Yet There Is Music*, <https://tinyurl.com/ycuhxwen>. Accessed 4 November 2019.
- . *Lamento. Spisy 3*. Prague: Paseka, 2000.
- . "Homecoming." Trans. Josef Tomáš and Katarina Tomas. *Vladimír Holan, Narrative Poems*, <https://tinyurl.com/y79rk82n>. Accessed 4 November 2019.
- . *Na celé ticho. Spisy 4*. Prague: Paseka, 2001.
- . *Příběhy. Spisy 7*. Prague: Paseka, 2002.
- . *Nokturnál. Spisy 8*. Prague: Paseka, 2003.
- Orten, Jiří. *Knihy veršů*. Prague: Český spisovatel, 1995.
- . "The Drowned One." *Jiří Orten, Selected Poems*, <https://tinyurl.com/y8lmdzkq>. Accessed 4 November 2019.
- Rimbaud, Jean Arthur. *Poésies—Une saison en enfer, Illuminations, Oeuvres diverses*. Paris: Presses Pocket, 1981.

- . "Ophelia." *Poetry Nook*, <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/ophelia-o>. Accessed 4 November 2019.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark / Hamlet, princ dánský*. Prague: Romeo, 1999.
- Trakl, Georg. *Das dichterische Werk*. München: Dtv, 1998.
- . "Wind, white voice ..." *Werschs Literaturnische*, <https://tinyurl.com/yattrklo>. Accessed 4 November 2019.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

- Bachelard, Gaston. *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Trans. Edith R. Farrell. Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1983.
- Bayer, Frauke. *Mythos Ophelia: Zur Literatur - und Bild-Geschichte einer Weiblichkeitsimagination zwischen Romantik und Gegenwart*. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2009.
- Blažiček, Přemysl. *Sebeuvědomění poezie (Nad básněmi V. Holana)*. Pardubice/Prague: Akcent/Ústav pro českou a světovou literaturu AV ČR, 1991.
- Blume, Bernhard. "Das ertrunkene Mädchen. Rimbauds Ophélie und die deutsche Literatur." In *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter 35 (1954): 108–119.
- Bronfen, Elisabeth. *Nur über ihre Leiche: Tod, Weiblichkeit und Ästhetik*. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2004.
- Camden, Carroll. "On Ophelia's Madness." *Shakespeare Quarterly—Folger Shakespeare Library* 15.2 (1964): 247–255.
- Galmiche, Xavier. *Vladimír Holan, bibliotékář Boha (Praha 1905–1980)*. Prague: Akropolis, 2012.
- Grimm, Reinhold. "Ein Wegbereiter." *Strukturen. Essays zur deutschen Literatur*. Göttingen: Sachse und Pohl, 1982. 124–145.
- Grimm, Reinhold. "Georg Trakls Verhältnis zu Rimbaud." *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 9.2 (1959): 288–315.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Kindler, Simone. *Ophelia: Der Wandel von Frauenbild und Bildmotiv*. Berlin: Reimer, 2004.
- Křivánek, Vladimír. *Vladimír Holan básník*. Prague: Aleš Prstek, 2010.
- Malý, Radek. *Motiv utonulé dívky v poezii německého expresionismu*. *Svět literatury* 54 (2016): 75–89.
- Malý, Radek. "Tři podoby Ofélie v poezii Vladimíra Holana." *Česká literatura* 4 (2018): 489–503.
- Menschendorfer, Adolf. "Trakl und Rimbaud." *Klingsohr II* 13.4 (1925): 93–99.

- Opelík, Jiří. *Holanovské nápovědy*. Prague: Thyrusus, 2004.
- Owen, Ruth J. "Voicing the Drowned Girl: Poems by Hilde Domin, Ulla Hahn, Sarah Kirsch, and Barbara Köhler in the German Tradition of Representing Ophelia." *The Modern Language Review* 3.102 (2007): 781–792.
- Phillips, David. "In Search of an Unknown Woman: L'Inconnue de la Seine." *Neophilologus* 66.4 (1982): 321–327.
- Ripellino, Angelo Maria. "Úvod k Vladimíru Holanovi." *Host do domu* 15.2 (1968) 31–37.
- Saliot, Anne-Gaëlle. *The Drowned Muse: Casting the Unknown Woman of the Seine Across the Tides of Modernity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Špirit, Michael. "Poezie a komentář Vladimír Holan a jeho souputníci. Sborník příspěvků z III. kongresu světové literárněvědné bohemistiky, sv. 2. Ed. Vratislav Färber. Praha: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2006. 151–157.
- Würffel, Stefan Bodo. *Ophelia: Figur und Entfremdung*. Bern: A. Francke, 1985.

## | Abstrakt

RADEK MALÝ

### Figura Ofelii w poezji ekspresjonistycznej. Niemiecko-czeskie porównanie

Artykuł dotyczy interpretacji postaci Ofelii w czeskiej poezji współczesnej w porównaniu z poezją europejskiego ekspresjonizmu. Estetyka obrazu śmierci Ofelii z dramatu *Hamlet* Szekspira wpłynęła na literaturę tego okresu i ją zainspirowała. Wpływ ten wyraziście odzwierciedlił się w poezji ekspresjonizmu niemieckiego, szczególnie w twórczości Georga Heyma, Gottfrieda Benna i Georga Trakla. Czescy poeci, którzy prezentowali to zjawisko w duchu ekspresjonizmu, to Jan Skácel, Vladimír Holan i Jiří Orten. Studium rozpatruje tę twórczość z punktu widzenia kompleksu Ofelii zdefiniowanego przez Gastona Bachelarda.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Ofelia; tonąca piękność; ekspresjonizm czeski; ekspresjonizm niemiecki



## | Abstract

RADEK MALÝ

**The Figure of Ophelia in Expressionist Poetry: German and Czech Comparison**

The study deals with the rendition of the figure of Ophelia in Czech modern poetry in comparison with the poetry of European Expressionism. The image of Ophelia's aesthetic death from Shakespeare's drama *Hamlet* has influenced and inspired a whole range of artworks. It strongly reverberated in German Expressionist poetry, especially that by Georg Heym, Gottfried Benn and Georg Trakl. The Czech poets who approached this topic in the spirit of Expressionism include Jan Skácel, Vladimír Holan and Jiří Orten. The study further addresses these works in the light of the Ophelia complex as defined by Bachelard.

**Keywords:** Ophelia; drowned beauty; Czech Expressionism;  
German Expressionism

## | About the Author

Radek Malý graduated from the Faculty of Arts at Palacký University Olomouc (MA 2001) and finished his doctoral studies there (PhD 2005). He was awarded the degree of associate professor in theory of literature in 2013. He works as associate professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University in Prague and at the Faculty of Arts at Palacký University in Olomouc. He deals with Czech-German literary relations, translatology (with a focus on artistic translation of poetry), literary Expressionism and literature for children and young adults. He has edited and translated poetry anthologies featuring modern German and Austrian poets (e.g. Stefan George, Georg Trakl, Paul Celan, R.M. Rilke and others). Besides a number of expert studies, he has published books on Georg Trakl (*Spásná trhlina*, 2006), Paul Celan (*Domovem v jazyce*, 2012) and the collection of studies *Příběhy básní a jejich překladů* (2014).

E-mail: radek.maly@fsv.cuni.cz



ZSUZSANNA VARGA  
University of Glasgow

## *The Networks of Consecration: The Journey of Magda Szabó and László Krasznahorkai's International Reputation*

One of the supposedly unquestionable verities in studies that address the reputation of contemporary Hungarian literature abroad is that they are created in two different language environments: aesthetic reputations are created by the German literary environment, while commercial success is initiated and maintained by publishing in English. Most recently, it was suggested by Adam Levy that “[m]any of the writers still active—Nádas, Esterházy, Krasznahorkai, Kertész and Konrád—have close ties to Germany, the region’s seat of literary consecration, which has given momentum to their popular rise in English” (Levy 19). This brief description presents a rather convincing model, but does it have general applicability to all kinds of literature irrespective of genre, and does it still reflect the current state of affairs? And what contributes to the rise of reputations? Generalisations of this nature often simplify our perception of Hungarian literature’s circulation, in the company of complaints that Hungarian literature is largely unknown on the international circuit, and if it is, it is simply due the emergence of new, post-2000 understandings of “world literature.” This chapter sets out to investigate the avenues and methods of literary consecration through the examination of the literary reputations of two very different writers: the immensely popular, widely translated and prizewinning Magda Szabó and the cultic, fêted author László Krasznahorkai. Whilst examining the methods of consecration—the award of acclaimed literary prizes and favourable reviews

of the works in good translations published by reputed publishers—this chapter will suggest that chance encounters and carefully nurtured personal networks play an important and perceptible role in shaping the authors' presence and reputation in the international book market.

### 1. Magda Szabó: The Journey of the Domestic Novelist

Magda Szabó's (1917–2007) career spanned 60 years, and she continues to be the best-known Hungarian author abroad, whose work has been more frequently translated into foreign languages than any other Hungarian writer. Her first novel, *Freskó* (*Fresco*) appeared in 1958, in the company of another novel *Mondják meg Zsófikának* (*Tell Sally*), while the third one *Az őz* (*The Fawn*) came out in 1959, and she continued to publish well into her eighties. Her three early novels were written during the cultural Stalinism of the Rákosi years, when Szabó was effectively banned from publication. During the early years of the post-1956 Kádár consolidation, her work was beginning to be classified as “tolerated,” thus belonging to a middling territory between works expressly “banned” (outspokenly hostile to the communist cause), or “supported” (espousing communist ideals). Though with some unease, the nomenclature of the Kádár regime now allowed the representation of the lost world of the cultured Central European middle class, which Szabó's strongly autobiographical fiction depicted. After *Katalin utca* (*Katalin Street*, 1969), *Abigél* (*Abigail*, 1970), and *A szemlélők* (*Observers*, 1973), Szabó's work was increasingly deemed to be worthy of “support”; a move that was more a reflection of the regime's changing literary preferences rather than a shift in Szabó's thematic choices. Szabó herself, although never denying her Western outlook and essentially bourgeois values, made sure that she maintained amicable ties with the cultural nomenclature of the regime, thus—in a bid to guarantee her own participation and success in the state socialist world of publishing—undertaking the role of the “adjusting [or adapting] writer” (Kiss 25). The success of this complex manoeuvring is best shown by the events of 1977–78: in 1977, she published the multigenerational family novel *Régimódi történet* (*Old-Fashioned Story*), which monumentalised the late nineteenth early twentieth cultured provincial middle class, and in 1978, she was awarded the most prominent Hungarian state award, the Kossuth Prize, for her lifetime achievement (Osztovits). In the eighties, she was already largely written off as dated and repetitive, when, in 1987, she unexpectedly published *Az ajtó* (*The Door*), whose success proved that readers were still hungry for psychologically motivated realistic novels. At the age of 85, she published her final family novel under the title *Für Elise* (2002) (Osztovits). For her most appreciative critics, the two earliest

novels, *An Old-Fashioned Story*, and her late fiction *The Door* and *A pillanat* (*The Moment*) count as the best of her oeuvre (Kabdebó).

The travels of Szabó's work started with the publication of her novels in Germany, in which her personal connections played a significant role. Her entry was tinged with a degree of political subversion, if not radicalism. *Fresco*, already translated into German by the noted translator Mirza von Schüchling (1896–1967), who lived in Budapest and was married to the prominent translator Géza Engl (1894–1988), was smuggled out of Kádár's Hungary for the attention of the Nobel Prize winning German author Hermann Hesse (Morgenstern). Hesse knew nothing about Szabó but he knew Schüchling, and wasted no time alerting his publisher the Fischer Verlag to the value of his new discovery of the unknown novelist. As he put it, "I have caught a goldfish for you, don't let it escape." (Rérolle) Schüchling's translation (1960) paved the way for Szabó's German reception and several of Szabó's works came out in German in quick succession: *Das Fresko* (*The Fresco*) in 1960 by the Württemberg-based Insel Verlag (10 editions between 1960 and 1964), *Die Danaida* (*A danaida*) (6 editions between 1963 and 1965) *Die andere Ester* (*Az őz*, 5 editions between 1961 and 1963) and others. The balancing act behind Szabó's presence in the German language area was similar to the manoeuvres described above: her work was actively championed abroad by the Hungarian government's Copyright Protection Office (Szerzői Jogvédő Hivatal, 1953–1996, also known as Artisjus), whose remit covered promoting the international career of favoured Hungarian writers, but it was also the beneficiary of the patronage offered by the émigré Swiss-Hungarian literary critic and translator Éva Haldimann, with whom she started a correspondence in 1970 (Kiss 26). Haldimann, through her reviews in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, set the tone for the responses to the Hungarian work: in 1977, she had already reported about Imre Kertész, and she had also translated *Katalin Street* into German (1971). She reviewed each of Szabó's works in the periodical, and the story of the affectionate ties between the two women is now available in the volume *Drága Kumacs!* (Kiss 26). In the late 1980s, Henning Paetzke continued the Schüchling's work by rendering *An Old-Fashioned Story* (*Eine altmodische Geschichte*, 1987) and *The Door* (*Hinter der Tür*, 1992, 2010) into German. Though Szabó received no prestigious literary prizes in Germany, the continued translation of her oeuvre, the regular reviews in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, and the frequent republishing of her work under West German market conditions suggests an unbroken popularity with the readers.

In contrast with the German journey, the early French reception of her work followed a model rather characteristic of the general export of Hungar-

ian letters: the earliest translations were supplied by Hungarian émigré literati, often with the assistance of a target language native speaker. Ladislav Gara (*Le faon/The Fawn*, 1962) and Georges Kassai (*Fresque/Fresco*, 1963) provided decent translations for the Parisian Éditions Seuil, a highly regarded house with a reputation for publishing radical works of the “literature of commitment” such as Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), but also bringing out foreign work yet to become global classics such as Günther Grass’s *Tin Drum* (1959) and Ingeborg Bachmann’s *La trentième année* (1963). Szabó’s work fell under the latter category, though there is no obvious trace of any reception in the 1960s. The critical indifference was continued after the regime change in 1989 when her realist fiction seemed too dated and traditional for the suddenly curious Western reader, expecting aesthetic innovation or political subversion in beyond Iron-Curtain literature.

The efforts of a tireless émigré academic played an important role in grounding Szabó’s work in the French literary world, when the French-born Germanist Chantal Philippe picked up the torch in the 1990s. Attracted to Hungarian for its sonorous sounds and intriguing grammar, Philippe began to study with the Hungarian-born professor of linguistics Tamás Szende at the Parisian INALCO (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales), who encouraged her to try her hand at translating László Németh’s short novel *Gyász* (*Mourning*). She came to translating Szabó’s *The Door* (*La porte*) out of personal interest, but Éditions Seuil rejected her submission. The text lay in her drawer for several years until the moment when Viviane Hamy, a publisher with an established history of introducing Frigyes Karinthy’s and Dezső Kosztolányi’s work in the early 1990s, approached her with a tentative enquiry about working on Szabó. To Hamy’s surprise, the translation was already complete, and this coincidence cemented their relationship and also marked out Chantal Philippe as the chief translator of Szabó into French (Grebot).

The award of the prestigious French “Prix Femina Étranger” for *The Door* in 2003 only affirmed Hamy’s faith in Szabó’s exceptional qualities (Balassi). The prize, which is awarded by an exclusively female jury to male or female foreign writers of fiction, was not only the first international prize awarded to Szabó, but Szabó’s work is the only Hungarian book to receive this honour to date. In 2007, Philippe’s translation of another Szabó novel *Katalin Street* was awarded the “Prix Cévennes” for the best European novel published in that year in French translation, honoured for its outstanding contribution to the cultural diversity of Europe.

Szabó’s reputation in the English-speaking world started with her work being noticed in international journals of book reviews, which was, just as in the case

of Gara and Kassai, the labour of love for mid-twentieth century Hungarian émigrés, searching for the treasures of Hungarian literature. Her work was occasionally mentioned in *Books Abroad* (1927–1977) and its successor *World Literature Today* (1977–2019), where George Gömöri and Clara Györgyey conscientiously reported on works yet untranslated. These reports are framed by theme and politics: Gömöri praises *Mózes 1, 22* (Gömöri 1967: 294–295) for reflecting on generational conflict and reporting on social malaise; *Old-Fashioned Story* (Gömöri 1978: 499) is praised for its sharp-eyed realism in the dissection of family drama. Györgyey, in 2003, commends the strongly autobiographical *Für Elise* for its psychological realism (Györgyey 103–104). This recognition, though doing little to increase readership directly, contributed much to the general awareness of Hungarian fiction's existence and merits.

The Anglophone publishing scene was similar to the French in the sense that it showed interest in translations only after the 1989 political changes. Earlier publications went practically unnoticed, no matter whether they were published by the Budapest-based Corvina Publishing House, tasked with publishing Hungarian work in foreign languages by state socialist cultural authorities, or by international publishers such as Cape of London. The first full work to be brought out after 1989 was Stefan Draughton's translation of *The Door* (1995), followed by Agnes Farkas Smith's rendering of *Katalin Street* (2008), while the prize-winning versatile translator and poet George Szirtes contributed *Iza's Ballad* (*Pilátus*, 2012). It was the Rhodesian-born, England-based Len Rix's passionate commitment to translating Szabó's work into English that secured its critical reputation in the English-speaking world. In 2006, his version of *The Door* (2005), published by the Harvill Secker Press, was awarded the Oxford Weidenfeld Translation Prize, which also paved the way for the New York Times Best Book Prize in 2015. Rix's translation of *Katalin Street* was awarded the PEN Translation Prize in 2018, and his translation of *Abigail* is due to be published by Penguin in 2020. An analysis of the film version of *The Door* 2012 (dir. István Szabó) and the public appeal of such a transmedial reworking is beyond my scope in the present, but suffice to say that the very existence of the film—the international cooperation led by the Oscar-winning Hungarian director, starring the Oscar winning Helen Mirren—attests to the prestigious status of Szabó's fiction in Britain.

Literary reportage and analysis are often devoted to translated works only when these books attain a headline-worthy award, but the reviews of Szabó's work largely reacted to the publication of Rix's translations, and some early reviews focus on the incorporation of East Central European history into a domestic drama (Kurdi 94–95). Already in 2005, Liam McIlvanney's long review in *The London Review of Books* suggested that *The Door* was “a superbly con-

trolled and involving work of art... One of Szabó's triumphs is to have written a profound political novel that is rooted in the domestic.... Ultimately, the text is a tranquil memento, a piece of irrefutable poetry, a bizarre counterpart to our universal betrayal—out of love” (McIlvanney 7–8). Reviews, appearing in great numbers after the reissue of Rix's text by New York Books Classics in 2016, captured the thematic dimension and the psychological dynamics of the novel: this dark domestic tale is “subtle, intellectual, and if not exactly unflinching then certainly told with bone-scraping honesty” (Temple). Deborah Eisenberg's refers to the “white-knuckled experience” when describing the effects of the book's psychological precision (Eisenberg). Other reviews go beyond the domestic dimension of the novel, and point at the underlying mythological narrative of “Fates” in the story (Messud), while Cynthia Zarin sees a “parable” in the book, understanding its conflict not in terms of psychology, but as a human infringement upon the moral order set by the (Greek) gods (Zarin).

Indeed, Szabó frequently expressed her surprise about her international reputation, as she saw her work as firmly embedded in Hungarian past and presence. But these perceptive reviews suggest that the local/political and the universal are dialectical (rather than dichotomous) categories, and the ostensibly domestic plotline is just the most apparent layer of fiction whose use of the universals does have a significant appeal to the global audience.

## 2. László Krasznahorkai: The Journey of the Cult Writer

While the Calvinist Presbyterian Szabó used the patterns of Greek mythology to understand human action, the universe of László Krasznahorkai has been interpreted by eschatological categories such as apocalypse, doom and revelation ever since its appearance. The author of puzzling, postmodern fiction of a dystopian human condition is separated from Szabó not only by an entirely different aesthetic but also by a generation; a difference that shapes and structures his relationship to the processes of mediation in reaching international audiences. Krasznahorkai, born in 1954 and bursting into the high-intensity Hungarian literary scene in 1985, published *Sátántangó* (*Satantango*, 1985), *Kegyelmi viszonyok* (*Relations of Grace*, short stories, 1986) and *Ellenállás melankoliája* (*Melancholy of Resistance*, 1989) in quick succession. He quickly established the reputation as a writer of fiction that is intellectually stimulating and intensively demanding, but also immensely depressing for its depiction of a world beyond salvation, and his cult-like status began to form in the mid-1980s.

The international circulation of Krasznahorkai's work was started off by the award of the German Academic Exchange (DAAD) Berlin Writer Fellowship



in 1987. Introduced in a bid to break down the intellectual isolation of West Berlin, these fellowships were designed to attract an international body of authors, but it was only Poland and Hungary in the communist bloc that allowed their citizens to participate (Dalos). By the mid-1980s, several Hungarian contributors to samizdats or authors associated with the emerging democratic opposition were the recipients of the fellowship. Krasznahorkai's stay in West Berlin resulted in Hans Skirecki's brave attempt at translating *Relations of grace/Gnadenverhältnisse* in 1988. With the sudden and fast collapse of communism, apocalyptic and trauma narratives from East Central Europe suddenly met with an avid interest, and Krasznahorkai, aided by Skirecki's dedication to rendering his oeuvre into German, became firmly established in the German literary scene. *Satantango* came out in 1990, and after the 1992 publication of *Melancholy of Resistance/Melancholie des Widerstands*, the latter volume was awarded the Best Book of the Year award (Bestenliste-Preis, 1993). Perhaps inevitably, critics were initially inclined to read political allegories into the works, though most reviews were much more universal in scope (Zsadányi 210). After Skirecki's death, his work was continued by the Swiss-Hungarian Christina Viragh, providing a flow of translations in German. Reception and response to Krasznahorkai's work is thus continued by the next generation of translators. *Satantango* has also had an almost separate life as an arthouse "slow film" based on the novel directed by the Hungarian director Béla Tarr (1994), with a circulation in a very specific segment of the international market, making Krasznahorkai's name internationally known before his books were translated (IMDB).

A very deliberate and planned effort on the émigré scholar Tamás Szende's part led to the translation of Krasznahorkai's work into French, after Szende encouraged his student Joëlle Dufeully to explore Krasznahorkai's work. Dufeully was still a "traductrice débutante" when she approached a number of publishers with her finished *Tango de Satan* by the writer unknown in France. She was rather surprised to be accepted by Gallimard (Grelle). We can only speculate about the editors' familiarity with the German or English presence of the novel, or the effect of the arthouse movie. In any case, Gallimard brought out *Satantango* in 2000, followed by another six titles. A self-reflexive writer, Dufeully stresses, "the immense responsibility of the translator ... especially when it comes to French, which is the second most commonly used target language of translation. Many authors would never be read if they were not translated into French." Her working relationship with Krasznahorkai, which she describes as that of an "old couple," resulted in the appearance of all his major novels and attracted several major translation prizes, including the "Grand Prix de la Société des gens de lettres" for *Guerre et guerre* in 2014 (Dufeully).

Similarly to the presence of Szabó and other Hungarian writers, *World Literature Today* was immensely useful in familiarising the Anglophone reader with Krasznahorkai's name. When George Gömöri commented on the recently published and yet untranslated *Satantango* in 1986, he already called Krasznahorkai a "talent to watch" and praised his work for its psychopathological characters, the post-avant-garde Kafkaesque world, and the instability of an interpretive mode, by which he meant that the novel is "too concrete for a parable and too abstract for a critically observed slice" (Gömöri 1986: 341). Though the connection between these reviews and later market presence is rather tenuous, short reviews of this nature should be acknowledged for keeping the international world aware of the existence of literature still behind the Iron Curtain.

Krasznahorkai's unchallenged international status is inextricably linked to George Szirtes's versatile and established rendering of his work into English. It was Krasznahorkai himself who requested hiring Szirtes to translate *The Melancholy of Resistance*, Krasznahorkai's first novel in English, which eventually came out ten years after the German translation (1998). *The Melancholy of Resistance* has enjoyed another four editions in London and New York, followed by *War and War* in 2006 and, in 2012, *Satantango*, the novel most commonly associated with Krasznahorkai's name, also appeared after a long gestation period (Krasznahorkai). It was on Szirtes's recommendation that Otilie Mulzet was commissioned to translate *Seiobo there below* (2013). Szirtes's assessment of Mulzet's abilities proved correct when his own *Satantango* (2013) and Mulzet's *Seiobo* (2014) won the University of Rochester's *Three Percent Best Translated Book Award* (University of Rochester). Thus, Krasznahorkai's work was awarded this prize two years in a row. The Man Booker International Prize in 2015 was thus based on four existing titles in English, and it rewarded one author's "continued creativity, development and overall contribution to fiction on the world stage," rather than one particular title. Though not a translation prize *per se*, the nature of the prize is that it is shared by the author and his two translators, George Szirtes and Otilie Mulzet (Flood).

In the early reviews, references to the associations with Kafka, Faulkner, Dostoyevsky dominate, accompanied by the description of obvious formal elements; George Szirtes refers to his prose as "a slow lava-flow of narrative, a vast black river of type," and the terms like "visionary," "manic" and "obsessive" frequently appear. A more incisive analysis in term of postmodernism did not come until around 2012, when Anglophone critics began their systematic interrogations. Jacob Silverman, in a long essay, suggests that in Krasznahorkai's work, the attainability of knowledge is questioned as allegories promising interpretation are demolished, and "[i]t is often hard to know exactly what

Krasznahorkai's characters are thinking, because his fictional world teeters on the edge of a revelation that never quite comes." Krasznahorkai returns to this idea in *The Melancholy of Resistance*, where he speaks of "the realization that knowledge led either to wholesale illusion or to irrational depression" (Silverman). Auerbach, trained in postmodernist theory, in a similar tone suggests that Krasznahorkai's major concern is the process of making meaning in a world where psychology and rationality are no longer serviceable tools of interpretation. The abundance of incisive reviews suggests that critics, now able to consult much of Krasznahorkai's work in high quality translation, are able to begin building a critical vocabulary to address the work. While aspiring to a mass readership would be futile, this notoriously difficult writer now has a faithful cult of followers.

### 3. Conclusions

Having surveyed the international careers of two of the very small group of Hungarian writers of fiction to be noted on the international circuit, the critic is left with some important and perhaps unexpected conclusions. It is indeed notable that the loosely understood term "international circulation" still depends on the judgement "French, German or English-speaking arbiters of literary taste" (Chitnis 3) and currently we have no significant knowledge of the processes of at work in popularising Hungarian literature in other large reader groups (e.g. Russian, Spanish or Chinese), nor do we know much about those informal channels between the different editorial houses in charge of commissioning translations. But the dichotomy between the "aesthetic" and the "popular" success (and the "momentum" the former gives to the latter) could be given a more nuanced understanding if "stages of circulation" stood in the focus. In this process, Germany plays a particularly important role as the entry point—the first language area with an international publishing industry—to a work's international journey, and this role applies even when critics are not raving and prizes are not forthcoming. Indeed, both Szabó and Krasznahorkai received more prestigious prizes elsewhere; hence, prize-based consecration is not directly associated with Germany. Presence in the French-language textual universe and the award of French prizes should, on the other hand, be more vocally acknowledged: as Szabó's example illustrates, gender, genre, and a sense of building a European collective textual self are highly prized and passionately sought qualities amongst French critics. British publications play a third type of important role in the reception of these texts, partly for the transatlantic publishing potential. Literary consecration, therefore, is not specifically re-

lated to favourable reviews or prestigious prizes, but can easily be understood as the complex work of transmitting information and influences between important actors in the international language arenas in conjunction with the writers and other Hungarian agents. The influence and impact of adapting fiction to the screen—which happened both in the case of Szabó and Krasznahorkai, and which arguably contributed significantly to the circulation of their names—and cinematic impact on sales figures of the texts should be pursued in a separate study.

But what is not to be forgotten in the discussions of these influences is the human agency behind enabling, creating, and reproducing these influences. The role of the literati from the Hungarian language community (frequently, though not necessarily émigré) appears to play an indispensable and hitherto unacknowledged role in literary transmission. These manifold roles—reporting in trade journals, training translators or encouraging the wider acknowledgement of Hungarian writing in translation—have shown to be indispensable for establishing the reputation of Hungarian work abroad.

## | References

### PRIMARY SOURCES

Krasznahorkai's works in Hungarian

Krasznahorkai, László. *Sátántangó*. Budapest: Magvető, 1985.

---. *Kegyelmi viszonyok*. Budapest: Magvető, 1986.

---. *Az ellenállás melankóliája*. Budapest: Magvető, 1989.

---. *Háború és háború*. Budapest: Magvető, 1999.

---. *Báró Wenckheim hazatér*. Budapest: Magvető, 2017.

Krasznahorkai's works in German

Krasznahorkai, László. *Gnadenverhältnisse*. Trans. Hans Skirecki and Juliane Brandt. Berlin: Literarisches Colloquium Berlin, 1988.

---. *Satanstango*. Trans. Hans Skirecki. Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1990.

---. *Melancholie des Widerstands*. Trans. Hans Skirecki. Zürich: Ammann, 1992.

---. *Im Norden ein Berg, im Süden ein See, im Westen Wege, im Osten ein Fluss*. Berlin: Fischer, 2005.

---. *Baron Wenckheims Rückkehr*. Berlin: Fischer, 2018.

## Krasznahorkai's works English translations

- Krasznahorkai, László. *Melancholy of Resistance*. Trans. George Szirtes. London: Quarter Books, 1998.
- . *War and War*. Trans. George Szirtes. London: New Directions, 2006.
- . *Satantango*. Trans. George Szirtes. New York: New Directions, 2012.

## Krasznahorkai's works French translations

- Krasznahorkai, László. *La mélancolie de résistance*. Trans. Joëlle Dufeuilly. Paris: Gallimard, 2006.
- . *Guerre et guerre*. Trans. by Joëlle Dufeuilly. Arles: Actes Sud, 2015.
- . *Tango de Satan*. Trans. Joëlle Dufeuilly. Paris: Gallimard, 2017.

## Szabó's works in Hungarian

- Szabó, Magda. *Freskó*. Budapest: Magvető, 1958a.
- . *Mondják meg Zsófikának*. Budapest: Budapest Magvető, 1958b.
- . *Az őz*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1959.
- . *A danaida*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1964.
- . *Mózes 1, 22*. Budapest: Magvető, 1967.
- . *Katalin utca*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969.
- . *Abigél*. Budapest: Móra, 1970.
- . *A szemlélők*. Budapest: Magvető, 1973.
- . *Régimódi történet*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1977.
- . *Az ajtó*. Budapest: Európa, 1987.
- . *A pillanat*. Budapest: Magvető, 1990.
- . *Für Elise*. Budapest: Európa, 2002.

## Szabó's works in English translation

- Szabó, Magda. *The Fawn*. Trans. Kathleen Szasz. London: Cape 1963a.
- . *Tell Sally*. Trans. Ursula McLean. Budapest: Corvina, 1963b.
- . *An Old-Fashioned Story*. Trans. Boris Jancsó. Budapest: Centre Hongrois, 1978.
- . *The Door*. Trans. Stefan Draughon. Boulder: East European Monographs, 1995.
- . *The Door*. Trans. Len Rix. London: Harvill-Secker, 2005.
- . *Katalin Street*. Trans. Agnes Farkas Smith. Kids 4 kids Press, 2008.
- . *Iza's Ballad*. Trans. George Szirtes. London: Harvill-Secker, 2014.
- . *Katalin Street*. Trans. Len Rix. London: Penguin, 2017.

## Szabó's works in German translation

- Szabó, Magda. *Das Fresko*. Trans. Mirza Schüching. Wiesbaden: Insel, 1960.
- . *Das andere Esther*. Trans. Mirza Schüching. Frankfurt-am-Main: Insel, 1961.
- . *Die Danaida*. Trans. Mirza Schüching. Frankfurt-am-Main: Insel, 1965.

---. *Eine altmodische Geschichte*. Trans. Henning Paetzke. Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1987.

---. *Hinter der Tür*. Trans. Henning Paetzke. Frankfurt-am-Main: Insel, 1992.

#### Szabó's works in French translation

Szabó, Magda. *Fresque*. Trans. Georges Kassai, adapted by Roger Richard. Paris: Seuil, 1963.

---. *Le faon*. Trans. Monique Fougerousse and Ladislav Gara. Paris: Seuil, 1962.

---. *La porte*. Trans. Chantal Philippe. Paris: Hamy, 2003.

---. *Rue Katalin*. Trans. Chantal Philippe. Paris: Hamy, 2006.

#### Secondary sources

Auerbach, David. "The Mythology of Laszlo Krasznahorkai." *Quarterlyconversation*, <https://tinyurl.com/yxax4xr7>. Accessed 7 June 2010.

Balassi Institute, Paris. "Soirée littéraire Autour Magda Szabó," <https://tinyurl.com/y4wouuoo>. Accessed 12 December 2017.

Burger, Anikó. "Szabó Magda világsikere," <https://tinyurl.com/y6p5nzpa>. Accessed 12 December 2017.

Chitnis, Rajendra. "Translating the Literatures of Smaller European Nations: A Picture from the UK, 2014–2016," <https://tinyurl.com/yc9algl7>. Accessed 12 December 2017.

Dalos, György. Email communication via József Havasréti, 6 September 2019.

Dufeully, Joëlle. "Recontre avec Joëlle Dufeully," <https://tinyurl.com/y4wabg7o>. Accessed 11 November 2014.

Eisenberg, Deborah. "A blinding need for each other. *The Door* by Magda Szabó." *New York Review of Books*, <https://tinyurl.com/y683nc3p>. Accessed 7 April 2016.

Flood, Alison. "Man Booker International Prize 2015 won by 'visionary' László Krasznahorkai." *The Guardian*, <https://tinyurl.com/leumz23>. Accessed 15 May 2015.

Gömöri, George. "Mózes egy, huszonkettő." *Books Abroad* 43. 2. (1969): 294–295.

Gömöri, George. "Sátántangó by László Krasznahorkai." *World Literature Today* 60.2 (1986): 340–341.

Gömöri, George. "Régimódi történet' by Magda Szabó." *World Literature Today* 52.3 (1978): 499.

Grebot, Agnes. "PRIX Nicole Bagarry-Karatson 2004: Chantal Philippe." <https://tinyurl.com/y6hptmmn>. Accessed 15 May 2015.

Grelle, Martine and Floriane Laurichesse. "Traduire László Krasznahorkai: entretien avec Joëlle Dufeully." *Balises: Le magazine de la Bpi*. <https://tinyurl.com/y4u6gdob>. Accessed 4 April 2018.

- Györgyey, Clara. "Für Elise by Magda Szabó." *World Literature Today* 77. 3-4 (2003): 103-104.
- Satantango, <https://tinyurl.com/y36ltd35>. Accessed 4 May 2020.
- Kabdebó, Loránt. "Szabó Magda, az író és irodalomtörténész." *Irodalomtörténet* 3 (1977).  
<https://tinyurl.com/y9jtkuf6>. Accessed 4 April 2018.
- Kiss, Noémi. "Nem tudom, mit kezdjek magammal." *Szabó Magda száz éve*. Budapest: Orpheusz, 2019. 24-29
- Krasznahorkai, László. "My hero: Geoge Szirtes and my other Translators." *The Guardian*, <https://tinyurl.com/ombau85>. Accessed 23 May 2015.
- Kurdi, Mária. "Az ajtó fogadtatása az angol nyelvű országokban." *Szabó Magda száz éve*. Budapest: Orpheusz, 2019. 9-104.
- Levy, Adam. "The Immediacy of Influence." *World Literature Today* Jan-Feb (2013): 18-19.
- McIlvanney, Liam. "That Time." *London Review of Books*, 27.24. (2005): 7-8.
- Messud, Claire. "The Door by Magda Szabó." *New York Times*, <https://tinyurl.com/laolkz4>. Accessed 6 February 2015.
- Morgenstern, Ulf. *Bürgergeist und Familiensinn: Die liberale Gelehrtenfamilie Schüchling im 19. Und im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012.
- Osztovits, Ágnes. "A Szabó Magda talány." *Válasz*, <https://tinyurl.com/y6eqouyb>. Accessed 28 June 2017.
- Rérolle, Raphaëlle. "Magda Szabo, romancière hongroise." *Le Monde*, <https://tinyurl.com/y9vavncc>. Accessed 22 November 2007.
- Silverman, Jacob. "The devil they know: Laszlo Krasznahorkai's 'Satantango.'" *New York Times*, <https://tinyurl.com/ybnep5f3>. Accessed 16 March 2012.
- Szabó, Magda. *Drága Kumacs! levelek Haldimann Évának*. Budapest: Európa, 2010.
- Tempe, Emily in *Flavorwire* quoted in: <https://tinyurl.com/y3j4y858>. Accessed 4 April 2018.
- Zarin, Cynthia. "The Hungarian Despair of Magda Szabó's *The Door*." *The New Yorker*, <https://tinyurl.com/gufxfjs>. Accessed 19 April 2016.

#### FILMOGRAPHY

- Satantango*. Dir. Béla Tarr, 1994.
- The Door*. Dir. István Szabó, 2012.

| **Abstrakt**

ZSUZSANNA VARGA

***Sieci święcenia – droga Magdy Szabó i László Krasznahorkaiego do międzynarodowej popularności***

Artykuł porusza temat międzynarodowej popularności dwojga węgierskich powieściopisarzy końca XX i początku XXI w., recepcji powieści Magdy Szabó i László Krasznahorkaiego w niemieckim, francuskim i angielskim kręgu literackim. Pomimo że są to autorzy różniący się podejściem do samego gatunku i estetyki powieści, należą oni do niewielkiej grupy pisarzy, których twórczość wzbudziła zainteresowanie za granicami ich ojczyzny. Artykuł dowodzi, że zaistnienie tych autorów na polu międzynarodowym, recepcja i popularność są wyraźnie związane z intensywną działalnością tłumaczy i innych pośredników kulturowych, działających na międzynarodowym rynku literatury.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Magda Szabó; László Krasznahorkai; literatura węgierska; popularność międzynarodowa

| **Abstract**

ZSUZSANNA VARGA

***The Networks of Consecration: The Journey of Magda Szabó and László Krasznahorkai's International Reputation***

This chapter focuses on the international reputation of the work of two Hungarian novelists the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: the reception of the novels of Magda Szabó and László Krasznahorkai in German, French and English literary cultures. Though different in novelistic approach, genre and aesthetics, they belong to a small group of Hungarian writers whose work found resonance with the international readership. The chapter argues that their international circulation, reception and popularity are much entwined with very tangible processes of mediation through networks of translators and other cultural agents active in the international economy of letters.

**Keywords:** Magda Szabó; László Krasznahorkai; Hungarian literature; international reputation



**| About the Author**

**Zsuzsanna Varga** studied English, Hungarian and Portuguese at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. She took her PhD in Victorian English literature at the University of Edinburgh. Since 2008, she has taught Hungarian Studies at the University of Glasgow. Her research interests include reception studies, travel writing and digital humanities. Her publications include *Worlds of Hungarian Writing* (Fairleigh Dickinson, 2016, co-edited), *Popular Cinemas in East Central Europe* (IB Tauris, 2017, co-edited), and *Reflections in the library: Antal Szerb's selected literary essays 1926–1944* (Legenda-MHRA, 2017).

E-mail: [zsuzsanna.varga@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:zsuzsanna.varga@glasgow.ac.uk)



ÁGNES GYÖRKE  
Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem

## Contemporary Hungarian Women's Writing and Cosmopolitanism

### 1. Feminism and Women's Writing in Hungary

Although more and more female writers have appeared on the Hungarian literary scene, scholarly writing about contemporary Hungarian women's fiction is rather scarce, especially in English. Compared to the enthusiastic critical response to Anglophone women's writings, the novels of Zadie Smith, Monica Ali, and Bernardine Evaristo,<sup>1</sup> for instance, the difference is rather stunning, and it cannot be explained by the relatively small size of the Hungarian literary establishment alone. After the publication of *Night Time Zoo* (2005), an outspoken anthology that explores female sexuality,<sup>2</sup> a number of writers complained that their work is not taken seriously in Hungary,<sup>3</sup> and feminist critics repeatedly called attention to the structural inequalities that characterise the institutions

1 Salman Rushdie called Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* an "astonishingly assured debut" (Jackson), while Bernardine Evaristo was the first black woman who won the Booker Prize in 2019. Both *White Teeth* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* were hailed as exemplary novels that illustrate "why postcolonial frameworks continue to be relevant when discussing 'black British literature'" (Upstone 333).

2 Out of the 33 pieces the volume includes, 30 are written by contemporary writers.

3 For a detailed analysis of feminist criticism in Hungary see, for instance, Séllei (2007), Várnagy (2011), Horváth (2014) (in Hungarian).

of the Hungarian academic world and publishing industry.<sup>4</sup> This is partly due to the fact that feminist literary and cultural criticism appeared in the country after the regime change in 1989 (Séllei 148), which was already the threshold of third wave feminism in Western Europe and the United States. Hungarian feminism has been called “belated” for this reason (Várnagyi 24–25, 29; Séllei 140), along with many other approaches such as cultural studies and postcolonial theory.<sup>5</sup>

It is not only the institutional inequalities that hinder the emergence of a strong tradition of women’s writing in East-Central Europe, however, but the interiorized stigma of the very category:

many women writers resisted being labelled as ‘female writers’ because of the generally derogatory connotations in most of these cultures: the stereotypical view of Czech women’s writing as ‘low-brow,’ or Polish critics’ dismissal of its ‘sentimental and mawkish,’ are typical of the whole region (Hawkesworth 200).

In Hungary, too, some critics do not acknowledge women’s writing as a distinct literary category: in his review of Noémi Kiss’s *Trans*, for instance, a volume I explore later in this article, Péter Rácz claimed that, though the book is an interesting and genuine contribution to contemporary literature, it is burdened by the constant repetition of the assertion: “I am a woman”; “I am a woman writer” (Rácz 2007).

In other words, the lack of enthusiasm concerning women’s writing in Hungary cannot be understood without being aware of the stigmatization of feminism in the region. This is partly due to the fact that feminist literary criticism does not solely evaluate the significance of literary works on the basis of aesthetic categories, similarly to postcolonial criticism, cultural studies, and many other

4 Andrea Pető, however, argues that all main book distribution network companies were headed by women in the 1990s: “Of some 25 publishing companies concerned with literature, five are owned by women (Liget, Széphalom, Seneca, Nap, Kortárs)” (Pető 250).

5 The belatedness model, however, cannot adequately map the situation of women’s writing in the region, as it is unable to explain the specific genealogy of feminism in Central and Eastern Europe. As Pető points out, “[a]fter 1989, with the democratization of the country, space for women writers opened up. But then, as the subsidised publishing system collapsed, women writers lost their advantage of positive discrimination. The decline of subsidized publishing also meant that edition sizes—usually between 30,000 and 100,000 before 1989—shrank to the 2,000 copies which is the norm today” (Pető 250).

approaches foreground the role cultural and social contexts plays in interpretation.<sup>6</sup> The insistence on a supposedly pure aesthetic judgement is no doubt a response to the crudely ideological readings produced under state socialism in this region: after the Second World War, advocating the Stalinist dogma offered new opportunities for writers regardless of artistic quality. On the other hand, feminist criticism is often regarded as an instance of “positive discrimination,” an assumption which, apart from being a crude simplification, is also burdened by the communist legacy: references to the ways in which positive discrimination was used under communism is often enough to dismiss the need to redefine this principle after the regime change. Due to this stigmatization, Hungarian women writers often do not identify as feminist publicly or refuse to put their work into the (derogatory) category of “women’s writing.” Though Zsuzsa Bruria Forgács, the main editor of the *Night Time Zoo* anthologies was very clear about the purpose of the series,<sup>7</sup> which was to represent women’s perspectives in Hungarian literature (Lennert; Szilva 2), Agáta Gordon, her co-editor contended that “[w]e do not mention that we are feminist not because we are ashamed of being feminists, but because we do not want to have a stigma which hinders us in achieving our aim... We are of course feminists, but we do not use this word in Hungary” (Szilva 25).<sup>8</sup> Noémi Szécsi, whose work I discuss later in this essay, even protested against the category of women’s writing in a 2010 interview:

I don’t know why establishing the notion of “women’s literature” is good for feminism. It is a disadvantage for me, as I feel excluded from “the great tradition.” It is important for women writers to gain more space—this is needed by the overwhelmingly female readerships as well—but it would be silly to divide readers into two groups. (Farkas 2010, qtd. in Várnagy 28–29)

6 For an excellent summary in Hungarian see Györgyi Horváth’s *Utazó elméletek (Travelling Theories)* (2014).

7 The anthology was followed by three other volumes that transformed this publication into a major feminist series called *Uncovered Psyché*. All latter volumes of the series address topics relevant for female writers and readers such as the female body (*Thirsty Oasis: Anthology on the Female Body*), mother-daughter relationship (*Jungle in the Heart: Daughters’ and Mothers’ Anthology*), and father-daughter relationship (*The Dog of the Heart: Daughters’ and Fathers’ Anthology*).

8 As Katalin Fábíán points out, women’s groups in Hungary often refuse to label themselves in political terms, mainly due to the confines conventional definitions of politics relies on (17–18). Nóra Séllei has also explored the resistance against feminism in the country, which she compared to the fear of wolves (Séllei 11, in Hungarian).

Nevertheless, Szécsi still located her work in a transnational female literary tradition two years later:

I used to read mainly Hungarian literature up until the age of 18, but as soon as I could read in English and in Finnish I was mesmerised by British and Scandinavian women writers. So as a “conscious reader” I looked for different attitudes from our very political, masculine, “heavy” literary tradition. (Orzóy)

Perhaps this changing attitude suggests that despite the apparent risk of exclusion, women writers are becoming more vocal about their position and voice?<sup>9</sup>

Though it would be overly ambitious to offer an in-depth analysis of the current literary scene in Hungary in this short essay, my paper aims to map some of the key themes contemporary women’s writers engage with. I would claim, not unlike Márta Várnagy, that although not all women’s writings are feminist by definition, the analysis of these texts nevertheless foregrounds issues significant for feminist criticism in its different local contexts. The literary works I touch upon in the next section are Noémi Szécsi’s *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire*, Noémi Kiss’s *Trans* and Virág Erdős’s *Luminous Bodies: 100 Little Budapest*,<sup>10</sup> which I read as examples of cosmopolitan feminist engagement with city life.

## 2. Cosmopolitan Feminist Visions: Noémi Szécsi, Noémi Kiss and Virág Erdős

Cosmopolitan feminism is characterised by the twofold desire to cross conventional borders and limits yet locate the phenomena explored in a “grounded” urban environment. Some of these issues are not entirely new, of course; the idea of women going beyond their designated space is perhaps one of the most significant themes women writers have dealt with ever since the first wave of feminism, aiming to counteract “the fundamental kinetopia” that characterizes traditional constructions of femininity (Shands 3). The focus on the particular and the embodied also has a long tradition in feminist discourse: as Adrienne Rich has

9 Another very self-conscious feminist intervention in the past few years has been the launching of the online blog called *Literary Centrifuge* (*Irodalmi centrifuga*), founded in 2008, which aims to advocate women’s perspectives and values <https://centrifuga.blog.hu/>

10 Other examples would include Andrea Tompa, Edina Szvoren, Krisztina Tóth, among other female writers.

famously put it, mapping our place in the world begins “not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in—the body” (Rich 212). A cosmopolitan feminist approach, then, cannot be anything but subversive and grounded. As opposed to the Kantian concept of cosmopolitanism, which has been critiqued for failing to take the experiences of particular social groups and geographical regions into account (Vieta 3; Fitzgerald 80), cosmopolitan feminism focuses on the local and the embodied, offering insights into “the ways in which ideas of the domestic, familial and intimate can configure [cosmopolitan] spaces” (Fitzgerald 81). As I hope to show in this essay, the texts I discuss explore various crossings both on the level of form and content, while they engage with the mundane, affective aspects of everyday life in an emphatically urban environment. Apart from foregrounding women’s experience, these narratives challenge “heavy” national literary traditions and point towards a distinct feminist aesthetics in contemporary Hungarian literature.<sup>11</sup>

Published in 2002,<sup>12</sup> *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* problematizes received national traditions, offering a view of East-Central Europe as an unbarred, culturally hybrid space.<sup>13</sup> As Tibor Fischer argues, since vampirism is associated with Hungary and Transylvania in the Anglo-Saxon world, Szécsi’s novel is “a clever satire on the whole notion of Hungarian-ness, nationalism and the stereotypes of Eastern Europe” (Fischer 2012). *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* is, however, by no means a conventional vampire story: instead of bloodletting and

11 Szécsi refuses both Hungarian and cosmopolitan identities, claiming that “I don’t like getting involved in causes, communities and movements, I don’t like building Hungarian and cosmopolitan identities for myself, because I insist on moving freely between categories, on keeping every door and window open. This is my “notion of freedom as a writer” (Orzóy 2012). The idea of cosmopolitan feminism, however, is based on the refusal to identify both with heavy-handed national traditions and Westcentric cosmopolitanism: the position this approach delineates is akin to her notion of artistic freedom.

12 The novel was published in English in 2012 by Stork Press, a small publishing house founded in 2011 and active till 2016.

13 According to Dávid Szolláth, contemporary Hungarian novels that depict the historical past of Central Europe tend to portray the country as a borderland of cultural hybridity (461). His analysis is based on the works of four male authors, Ádám Bodor, László Darvasi, Zoltán Láng and Miklós Mészöly, which demonstrate that the specific Central European experience is often narrated in a magic realistic framework, just like Latin American stories. Central Europe appears as a peripheral transit zone in these writings, which is “characterized by cultural hybridity and ethnical and religious heterogeneity” (Szolláth 462) and is expressed through the portrayal of places such as Transdanubia (Pannonia) and the historical Transylvania.

scary scenes, the *Bildung* of the narrator is in the centre of attention, as Szécsi herself points out (Orzóy 2012). The novel depicts two very different vampires: grandma, the mighty Finno-Ugrian predator allegorizes a cultural heritage based on stereotypes, while Jerne, the narrator of the novel, resists this very tradition. The difference between the two vampires is clear from the very beginning of the novel: while grandma is a *femme fatale*, for instance, it never turns out whether Jerne is male or female in the original text (though in the English translation she is clearly gendered as a woman).<sup>14</sup> The narrative destabilizes readers in their beliefs concerning established traditions and gender norms: *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* depicts East-Central Europe as a heterogeneous and cosmopolitan space, while it also offers a critique of national stereotypes.

The very first sentence of the novel reveals an interest in cosmopolitanism: “I could call my grandmother cosmopolitan, since she has visited virtually every corner of the globe and everywhere felt immediately at home” (Szécsi 1). Furthermore, grandma is not simply a Hungarian vampire, but a worldly Finno-Ugrian predator, as she is not satisfied with the parochial national label (Finno-Ugrian refers to the group of languages in the Uralic language family including Hungarian, Finnish and Estonian, among others). Her resistance to being called a Hungarian vampire is very telling: “What a vulgar notion! Just think how some arrogant Anglo-Saxon vampire would react if I presented myself as a Hungarian vampire.... But Finno-Ugrian: that arouses instant respect and lends me an aura of the exotic” (Szécsi 23). However, it quickly turns out that grandma is a nationalist at heart: unlike her, “not every citizen of the world is likely to use a china tooth mug decorated with a map of Great Hungary and the irredentist slogan ‘Transylvania is Ours!’” (Szécsi 1). The map on her mug depicts Hungary at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, suggesting that she is nostalgic of national greatness and her cosmopolitan identity is only for show. Jerne’s intellectual and subversive cosmopolitanism, however, critiques this very tradition: due to the education she receives in England, she learns to swear in French, and often repeats the names of prominent intellectuals to express her disdain: “‘what a load of Lacan; ‘a positive pack of Derrida’ [and]

14 Szécsi employed this trick since she considered it “fun”: “I remember reading a short story by Rosa Liksom, a Finnish writer where the gender of the narrator wasn’t clear until the very end, and I remember thinking, ‘well, it’s fun.’ It’s much more difficult to create a novel based on this idea, but with the help of our language you can at least play with it” (Orzóy 2012). In the translation, this ambiguity is inevitable lost, she is female: she was already a woman in the 2005 Polish translation, Peter Sherwood only followed this in the English text (Orzóy 2012).



'Foucault!'" (Szécsi 14). Her "repertoire" is based on a very Western intellectual tradition, whereas grandma often dreams of the classical Hungarian writer, Mór Jókai (Szécsi 21), which, taken out of context, is immediately subverted in her ironical tale. While grandma's nationalist cosmopolitanism is grandiose yet empty, then, Jerne's "vampirism" and the very narrative she tells offer a more subversive and "grounded" cosmopolitan tale, which I read as example of cosmopolitan feminism.

*The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* showcases the myriad details of everyday life in contemporary Budapest. Instead of a Gothic castle, which is the proper location of vampires, Jerne and her grandma live in a mundane two-roomed flat in the city:

So, giving the lie to those vaunted vampire legends, we don't live in some ruined castle.... The house where we have a top floor flat has every modern convenience and is in excellent condition, thanks to the house representative's contacts and string-pulling. (Szécsi 6)

Far from evoking a Gothic world populated by stereotypical characters, Jerne's narrative engages with the mundane aspects of everyday life. Urban places are depicted in the novel at different scales, ranging from domestic interiors (the bathroom, a small attic room, the stairwell, etc.) to mainstream sights of Budapest such as City Park, where grandma lives, and Old Buda Castle, where a nightclub reminds her of "unforgettable blood sucking memories" (Szécsi 6). Jerne's tale offers a glimpse into contemporary public issues such as the dominance of the informal "old boys' networks" in the country, among many others. Her hesitant "vampirism" literally triumphs over grandiosity at the end of the novel: grandma is murdered in a small hotel room in Tallin, Estonia, by Jerne's gay friend, Uncle Oscar. This triumph might also be read as the victory of a more timid yet subversive cosmopolitanism over grandiose national stereotypes.

Noémi Kiss's collection of short stories, *Trans*, published in 2006, also explores the mundane aspects of everyday life, yet most of the stories in the volume are set outside the borders of Hungary. *Trans* thematises all kinds of border crossings including geographical, emotional and sexual: it shows the psychological drama of everyday interactions, offering sensitive visions of female subjectivity. The most memorable story in the collection is perhaps the first one entitled "Trans: Passage to a Detour," which has been published in English by *Hungarian Literature Online*.<sup>15</sup> The short story is set in Berlin, where the narra-

<sup>15</sup> See <https://tinyurl.com/y5rrwaw3>.

tor, in transit, ends up witnessing a murder committed in a gay bar. “Trans” is the story of initiation and loneliness, while the city, as if it were another character we get to know for a short while, witnesses the suffering of the flesh and blood characters; this is a central theme in Kiss’s novel, *Ikeranya (Mother of Twins)*, as well. The focus on the embodied visions and experiences of women, as well as the obstacles and barriers to these visions, reveals a cosmopolitan feminist interest. As the narrator walks to the bar along the inert roads in “Trans,” she registers the desolate cityscapes as a *flaneuse*<sup>16</sup> par excellence:

The sidewalk along which we proceeded was a long strip into infinity. There was no point looking to the right or left, all you could see were tubes and barrels, iron girders and two high walls. No, this road doesn’t lead to infinity, for our glance always bumps into one wall or another. I had never seen a street so emblematic of solitude as that one. (Kiss 2008)

This is a vision of radical openness framed and constrained, not unlike the very text itself (the narrator struggles to register the events she witnesses), which is a theme that recurs in many other stories as well, following close behind the transgressions characters perform in the volume.

The city has also inspired contemporary Hungarian poetry and the arts, as Erdős Virág’s recent volume *Illuminated Bodies: 100 Little Budapest* (2016) shows.<sup>17</sup> Erdős is a truly versatile artist who illuminated her own volume with minimalistic photographs of Budapest and set some of her poems to music.<sup>18</sup> As the very title suggests, the volume offers apparently insignificant (“little”) and embodied visions of the metropolis in a truly cosmopolitan feminist fashion, which is both a thematic and a formal feature of this collection. The photographs in this volume do not simply illustrate the poems: the association between text and image is often latent, the only thing that seems to be certain is that both comment on various aspects of city life. The collection, on the one hand, reveals the impossibility to “capture” the capital except in such incomplete and

16 For gendered readings of *flânerie* see Debora Parson’s *Streetwalking the Metropolis* (2000) and Elizabeth Wilson’s *The Sphinx in the City* (1992) and *Contradictions of Culture* (2001), among many others.

17 Other well-known female poets include Anna Szabó T, Krisztina Tóth and Orsolya Karafiáth, among others.

18 For instance, “Szuvenír” (Souvenir) <https://tinyurl.com/y3k5psal>; “Az én vétkem” (Mea culpa) <https://tinyurl.com/y6swor8j>.

often contradictory snapshots, while, on the other, it nonetheless undermines conventional ways of reading and expands the concept of literary and artistic genres. The speaker of the poems is a flâneuse who registers sense impression from an emphatically peripheral angle, similar to the photographer, yet her gaze never controls the spectacles described. Images of red, white and green plastic cans illuminate a poem titled “the purity of our revolution,” for instance, which portrays a tram stop near Corvin Alley, an important location of the 1956 Revolution, and ends with the image of a woman greeting passengers and asking for money. Found objects abound in the volume (a shoe on top of a pillar, torn advertisements, ashtrays full of stubs, etc.) as well as bricks, leaves, plants framed and constrained by bricks. These glimpses into everyday life framed by the city, not unlike the camera frames the photographs, reveal colourful, creative, and socially responsible views of the capital.

### 3. Conclusion

As I have argued in this essay, Szécsi's, Kiss's and Erdős's writings do not only explore the idea that women need to go beyond their designated space, but also engage with the mundane, affective aspects of everyday life. This interest in the embodied, hesitant and peripheral facets of city life is a feature of cosmopolitan feminism, which is characterised by the twofold desire to cross conventional limits, yet locate this experience in a “grounded” urban environment. Furthermore, as Jerne's narrative reveals, cosmopolitan feminism might offer an alternative to masculine and “heavy” national literary traditions in the East-Central European region. Far from only exposing all-too-intimate insights into women's experience, then, these texts point towards a distinct feminist aesthetics.

### | References

- Erdős, Virág. *Világító testek: 100 kis Budapest*. Budapest: Magvető, 2016.
- Fábián, Katalin. *Contemporary Women's Movements in Hungary: Globalization, Democracy, and Gender Equality*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 2009.
- Farkas Anita. “Irodalmi nemek.” *Demokrata* 17 February 2010, <https://tinyurl.com/y5zexons>. Accessed 18 August 2019.
- Fischer, Tibor. “*The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* by Noémi Szécsi.” *The Guardian* 12 October 2012, <https://tinyurl.com/y74xrhw9>. Accessed 18 August 2019.

- Fischer, Tibor. *Under the Frog*. London: Penguin, 1993.
- Fitzgerald, Ruth P. and Maila Stevens. "Editorial for Special Section 'Gendering Cosmopolitanisms: Recognition, Belonging and Difference,' Women's Studies International Forum." *Women's Studies International Forum* 67 (2018): 80–84.
- Forgács, Zsuzsa Bruria, Agáta Gordon and Bódis Kriszta. *Night Time Zoo: Anthology about Female Sexuality*. Budapest: Jonathan Miller, 2005.
- Hawkesworth, Celia, ed. *A History of Central European Women's Writing*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.
- Horváth, Györgyi. *Utazó elméletek: Angolszász politizáló elméletei kelet-európai kontextusban*. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2014.
- Jackson, Kevin. "The Next Generational Zadie Smith." *The New Yorker*, 18 October 1999, <https://tinyurl.com/ybpzzdpz>. Accessed 30 January 2020.
- Kiss, Noémi. *Ikeranya*. Budapest: Magvető, 2013.
- Kiss, Noémi. *Trans*. Budapest: Magvető, 2006.
- Kiss, Noémi. "Passage to a Detour." *Hungarian Literature Online*, <https://tinyurl.com/y5rrwaw3>. Accessed 6 September 2019.
- Lennert, Tímea. "A Kitakart Psyché utóéletei." *Irodalmi Jelen*, 11 May 2012, <https://tinyurl.com/yakg47ng>. Accessed 18 August 2019.
- Nádas, Péter. "A kettős látás dicsérete: Zsuzsa Bánk írt egy velejéig magyar regényt németül." *Élet és Irodalom* 15 Nov, 2002. Online.
- Orzós, Ágnes. "'I Like Being an Outsider': Interview with Noémi Szécsi." *Hungarian Literature Online*, 10 Dec. 2012, <https://tinyurl.com/y2eobfcq>. Accessed 18 August 2019.
- Parsons, Deborah. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, City and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Pető, Andrea. "Hungarian Women's Writing 1945–95." *A History of Central European Women's Writing*. Ed. Celia Hawksworth. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. 240–255.
- Rácz, Péter. "Ex Libris." *Élet és Irodalom* 51.6 (2007), <https://tinyurl.com/y6kktm25>. Accessed 6 September 2019.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Notes towards a Politics of Location (1984)." *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979–1985*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986. 210–231.
- Shands, Kerston W. *Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse*. London: Greenwood, 1999.
- Séllei, Nóra. *Miért félünk a farkastól? Feminista irodalomszemlélet itt és most*. Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2007.
- Szécsi, Noémi. *Finnugor vámpír*. Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 2002.
- Szécsi, Noémi. *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire*. Trans. Peter Sherwood. London: Stork Press, 2012.

- Szilva, Eszter. "A Women's Turn in Literature? Women's Literature in Hungary in the Last Decade and its Connections to Feminist Politics." MA Thesis, Central European University, 2011.
- Szolláth, Dávid. "Inventory of Magical Textual Constructions of the Unnatural in Hungarian Postmodern Fiction." *Neohelicon* 45 (2018): 461–477.
- Upstone, Sarah. "'Same Old, Same Old': Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 43.3 (2007): 336–349.
- Várnagy, Márta. "A női irodalom és a feminist irodalomkritika Magyarországon: Hangok és visszhangok." *Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya Interdiszciplináris eFolyóirat* 1.1 (2011): 23–35.
- Vieten, Ulrike M. *Gender and Cosmopolitanism in Europe: A Feminist Perspective*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. *The Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women*. London: SAGE, 2001.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*. London: Harvest, 1966.

## | Abstrakt

ÁGNES GYÖRKE

### Współczesne węgierskie pisarstwo kobiece i kosmopolityzm

Artykuł bada współczesne węgierskie pisarstwo kobiece w kontekście kosmopolitycznego feminizmu. Analizie poddano trzy utwory: *Finnugor vampire* Noémi Szécsi, *Trans* Noémi Kiss oraz *Világító testek: 100 kis Budapest* Erdős Virág. Utwory te czytam jako przykłady zaangażowania kosmopolitycznego feminizmu w przestrzeń miejską. W przeciwieństwie do kantowskiej koncepcji kosmopolityzmu, krytykowanej za nieuwzględnianie doświadczeń poszczególnych grup społecznych i regionów geograficznych, kosmopolityczny feminizm koncentruje się na tym, co lokalne i ucieleśnione. Omawiane dzieła dotyczą przekraczania granic pod względem zarówno formy, jak i treści, a jednocześnie angażują się w powszednie, afektywne aspekty codziennego życia w przestrzeni miejskiej. Ów kosmopolityczny feminizm kwestionuje zaściankowe, ciężkie, narodowe tradycje literackie i wskazuje na wyraźną linię estetyki feministycznej we współczesnej literaturze węgierskiej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Węgry; literatura współczesna; pisarstwo kobiece; kosmopolityczny feminizm; przestrzeń miejska

## | Abstract

ÁGNES GYÖRKE

**Contemporary Hungarian Women's Writing and Cosmopolitanism**

This article investigates contemporary Hungarian women's writing in the context of cosmopolitan feminism. The literary works explored are Noémi Szécsi's *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire*, Noémi Kiss's *Trans* and Virág Erdős's *Luminous Bodies: 100 Little Budapest*, which I read as examples of a cosmopolitan feminist engagement with urban space. As opposed to the Kantian concept of cosmopolitanism, which has been critiqued for failing to take the experiences of particular social groups and geographical regions into account, cosmopolitan feminism focuses on the local and the embodied. The discussed texts thematise border crossing both on the level of form and content, while they engage with the mundane, affective aspects of everyday life in an emphatically urban setting. This cosmopolitan feminism challenges parochial, heavy, national literary traditions and points towards a distinct feminist aesthetics in contemporary Hungarian literature.

**Keywords:** Hungary; contemporary literature; women's writing; cosmopolitan feminism; urban space

## | About the Author

Ágnes Györke is Associate Professor of English at Károli Gáspár University's Institute of English Studies, Budapest, Hungary. She was a Visiting Scholar at Indiana University (2002–2003), the University of Bristol (January 2015), King's College London (June 2015), the University of Leeds (June–October 2016) and a Research Fellow at Central European University's Institute for Advanced Study (2012–2013). Her recent publications include "Doris Lessing's *London Observed* and the Limits of Empathy," *Etudes Anglaises* 70.1 (2017): 63–77 and "Stories from Elsewhere: The City as a Transnational Place in Doris Lessing's Fiction," *From Transnational to Translational: Literature, Gender, Translation*, ed. Sibelan Forrester, Jasmina Lukic and Borbála Faragó. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2019. Her edited volume entitled *Geographies of Affect in Contemporary Literature and Visual Culture: Central Europe and the West* is to be published by Brill in 2020 (co-editor: Imola Bülgözdí).

E-mail: gyorke.agnes@kre.hu

KLÁRA KUDLOVÁ  
Akademie věd České republiky

## On Fields of Bones, Headsmen and Madonnas: The Symbols and Figures of Central Europe in the Past 25 Years of Jáchym Topol's Writing<sup>1</sup>

The term Central Europe in the very title of this article calls for a preliminary explanation. The definition ought to be a simple and unambiguous one, and it should correspond with the topographical space fictively featured in Topol's work. I believe that one of the simple and useful ways of defining Central Europe for this purpose is to derive its existence from the 1335 Visegrád alliance. The complex and often difficult history of the Visegrád area from 1335 up to 1991 confirmed the precognition of the medieval parties of the alliance. Throughout the centuries, mutual relationships have been dependent on the actions and gestures which promoted (or unfortunately opposed), mutual respect and shared values in the area. After 1991, some radical voices denounced the newly formed Visegrád alliance as "a posthumous child" of the former strong bonds between the dissent circles of the member countries. The aphorism about those bonds being swept away by the first wave of pragmatic capitalism (Dolejší) were precocious, but clearly, the term Central Europe required redefining, because

1 This study has resulted from the Academic Prize awarded to Pavel Janoušek by the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and from long-term support for conceptual development of a research institution; registration number 68378068.

This work required usage of Czech Literary Bibliography research infrastructure resources (<http://clb.ucl.cas.cz>).

its character was rapidly changing. The authors of the monograph on Central Europe, *V kleštích dějin* (2009) came with the following proposition: “If Central Europe is to be redeemed, it has to be translated into the cultural mode; because in this form it made its intellectual career.” (Trávníček 300; translation mine) Some of the literary activities of writers in Central-European countries contribute to such a career in a substantial way. They translate the conflicting interpretations of Central-European-ness into literary images which have the capacity to facilitate a deeper, spiritual and imaginative understanding of the ontology of the area. The following study examines three such images related to the theme of Central Europe in works of Jáchym Topol.

### 1. Forming a Perspective: Brief Biography of Jáchym Topol

While in the case of some writers, the personal history of the writer and his or her work are relatively independent of each other, in the case of Jáchym Topol, the work and life are deeply correlated. In the early 1980s, Jáchym Topol (\*1962) joined Prague underground circles, became active in the *České děti* (Czech Children) group. He started publishing in *samizdat* editions and magazines (*Violit* and from 1985 the review *Revolver Revue*, originally named *Jednou nohou*). For the members of Czech and Slovak underground, Poland and Hungary were substantial political and cultural partners: this was true especially about Poland, which was fascinating for the Czechoslovaks both due to its stout anti-communist resistance and due to the relatively low limitations on the cultural scene. Also, the cultural censorship in Hungary was much more liberal than the one in Czechoslovakia, and young intellectuals often travelled to Budapest in order to see films or to buy recordings of rock bands not available in their home country. The dissent and underground circles in the Central European countries were not only active in various ways of cultural exchange,<sup>2</sup> but also put significant effort into activities leading to the reconstruction of twentieth century history of the region which the official communist and socialist interpretations tried to suppress and obliterate.

Part of the *samizdat* editions which Jáchym Topol and his circle co-produced in 1980s were thus memoirs and interviews dealing with the theme of the Holocaust in Europe (e.g. Marek Edelman’s interview with Hanna Krall about

2 In 1986 Topol’s political activity intensified; he signed Charter 77 and developed stronger contacts to the Polish underground, and he was caught smuggling printed material into Poland. Due to this activity, he was shortly imprisoned (per chance, amnesty celebrating 70 years of Czechoslovakia took place briefly afterwards).



the Warsaw Ghetto uprising). Due to the anti-Semitic elements of the communist doctrine, the officials tried to suppress even such testimonies. Other themes which the members of dissent were trying to bring forth were the true picture of the political and military events of the Second World War and the history of resistance against the Nazi and Soviet political expansiveness.<sup>3</sup>

In 1990s, Jáchym Topol capitalised on his knowledge of these themes as a reportage journalist. Alongside his journalistic activities, he also became one of the most recognised Czech novelists as well as a cultural and political campaigner. Not only Topol's journalism, but also his prose and drama of the past 25 years are truly obsessed with the history and character of Central Europe. Of course, literary reflection of politics and history does not re-construct it, but by creating a fictional world<sup>4</sup> it facilitates an intuitive, symbolic or even spiritual understanding of it and enhances the personal perspective. In the following part of the article, several of the symbolic keys employed in Topol's writing in relation to Central-European themes are examined.

## 2. The Holocaust Arc in Topol's Novels and the Incorporation of the Theme of Soviet Gulags

When rummaging through Topol's works written and published around the turn of the millennium, the sense of thematic continuity is really striking. Some of the themes, motifs and figures which reappear in Topol's writing relate to the sphere of the private (such as the absent, alcoholic mother and the crippled brother), some express the author's fascination with particular literary phenomena, such as myths of North American aborigines, the writings of Jaroslav Hašek, or the work of Czesław Miłosz.

In the meantime, a significant number of recurrent motifs and themes are related to Central-European history and to its present reality.

The matrix of those themes can actually be found already in Topol's first novel, *Sestra (City Sister Silver)* (1994). In retrospect, the work reflects the dismal atmosphere of the 1980s in Prague, and then pictures an impressive, fantastic and frantic "outburst" of business, political, social and religious activities which followed the fall of the communist regime in 1989. The structure of the novel is extremely complex, and it was justly labelled "a puzzle, a kaleidoscope ... an

3 Events such as the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, Budapest Uprising in 1956, Warsaw June in 1956 and Prague Spring in 1968.

4 To be more precise, in the case of Topol's literary appropriation of history, it is more accurate to introduce the term *counterfactual historical fiction*. (Doležel)

encyclopaedia of post-communist life, written in a very unconventional epic manner” (Kaptayn 267). Within this kaleidoscopic structure, a surprisingly compatible and monothematic section appears, the 25-page-long chapter on Auschwitz (Topol 2000: 95).

Substantial attention has been paid to the chapter itself, to its dichotomic structure and intertextual bonds, and to the way it presents the theme of the Holocaust (Holý 2007; Holý 2011; Jürgensová, Marszałková; Ibler; Chew). In the following paragraphs, I would, however, like to prove that—on a particular level—the Auschwitz chapter is not related only to the catastrophe of the Holocaust, but to all of the (Central) European history.

The striking symbol employed throughout the “Auschwitz chapter,” and recurring in later Topol’s writing, is the symbol of the field or pile of bones. The protagonist of *City Sister Silver* and a group of his friends are transported to a vast field of bones covering the area of extermination camp and they willy-nilly take part in a tour guided by a skeleton. The image of the field of bones is intertextually bonded with the Old Testament book of prophet Ezekiel and his vision in chapter 37. Here, the bones are later joined together, covered with meat and brought back to life. In *City Sister Silver*, the bones and skulls seem to be talking to the protagonist and his friends. As Jiří Holý underlines, the “hundreds of thousands of skulls on the field of death” shout at the protagonists purposely misquoting the text from Matthew 27, 25: “Our blood on *you* and *your* children!” (Holý 2011: 60). Holý interprets this part as underlining the co-responsibility of the Czechs for the genocide of Jews. It is possible to further this observation. Jewish victims in Topol’s Auschwitz come “from Pest ... or from Košice,” but the Nazi officers and their helpers come—ironically—from the same cities. The members of the group of friends who are (in a dream) taken on this tour through Auschwitz, represent the various strata of contemporary European society as well as its religions, Judaism and Christianity, and none of them, significantly, are able to walk on the bones. All are drowning in the bones. Thus, the novel indicates that both the open collaboration and the structural, “blind” collaboration with the Nazi extermination of the Jews is the problem of all of (Central) Europe, including even some of the members of the Jewish community itself.

The field of bones image returns yet in another dream in *City Sister Silver*. This time it is related to the character of the French symbolist poet Rimbaud, in the novel misspelled as Rimbow. In a dream, Rimbow escapes Europe so as to “walk on the firm rock” and to get a chance of writing. He escapes not only because of his dread of superficial life (he wants to “turn his back to the carnival”), but because of his desire to write: his deepest reason is the fact

that “Earth hurt his feet.... Sharp bones jutted out all over the Earth, lacerating him.... Deserting to Ceylon, he made his way through the rain forests and up to the mountains so he could get firm rock underfoot instead of a mass grave” (Topol 2000: 213). In this single image, Europe is presented as a society walking on the past graves, on former military attacks, murders and individual crimes. The symbol of the sharp bones relates fictionally to the previous centuries of European history and presents the Holocaust as its tragic culmination. In the fictional realm of Topol’s work, it is clearly implied that the will to exterminate certain religious groups, political communities or even nations is deeply set in the genetic code of Europe and that it still lingers in present-day Europe.

### 3. Mass Graves as a Thematic Arc in Topol’s Novels and Dramas

In a 2013 interview with Alex Zucker in *The Quarterly Conversation* (Zucker), Topol suggests that the theme of mass graves actually forms a thematic “arc” in his writing. He speaks about his “journey around the scars of Central or Eastern Europe,” about “dozens, hundreds of trips around the ruins of Soviet empire, with prolonged stays in Slovakia, Poland, and Ukraine, a fifteen-year journey that led . . . , ultimately, to the graves of Belarus.” This “arc” begins in *City Sister Silver*, and finishes in *Chladnou zemí (The Devil’s Workshop)* (2009).

The image of walking on or amongst piles or fields of bones returns again in Topol’s post-apocalyptic drama *Cesta do Bugulmy* (2006) (*Journey to Bugulma*).<sup>5</sup> In it, Europe is devastated by the Third World War. Its last inhabitants flee to the Soviet town of Bugulma hoping to find a rescue there. The only witness of Bugulma’s past is “comrade Jerochymová” (the name alluding to “Comrade Jerochymov” in Hašek’s renowned prose *Velitelem města Bugulmy (Commanding officer, Town of Bugulma)* (1921), and she finally reveals the real purpose this (fictitious) Soviet working camp has had. The formerly arctic conditions are changing, snow is melting and what previously seemed to be hills and mountains covered by snow, gradually turn out to be hills and hills of frozen dead bodies of Soviet prisoners. The present refugees were—unknowingly—walking on them.

The image of the piles of bones returns again in the fictional world of the “Theresien-Khatyn” novel *Chladnou zemí (The Devil’s Workshop)* (2009). The novel often refers to historical events, but merges these references with contra-factual narration. In the opening, the novel depicts the moment when Terezín concentration camp is being freed from the Nazis at the end of World War II. The I-narrator’s father serves as a drummer and while his troop is freeing

5 The text has not been translated into English so far.

Terezín, he finds a young girl still alive in a pile of corpses. The naked Jewess rising from a pile of corpses may be seen as a symbol of the partial resurrection of European Jews after the war.

In parallel to the actual history of the fortress town of Terezín (which began to disintegrate after the departure of soldiers in the 1990s), the now adult I-narrator and his uncle Lebo are portrayed trying to preserve the Terezín ghetto by starting a commune. In the counter-factual narration about the commune, the novel portrays particular types of people attracted by former ghettos and mass graves. The narrator's lover in the commune, Sára, is one of those "bunk seekers," those European (or American) young who go "digging through the damp ruins of Poland, Lithuania, Russia—in short, everywhere mass graves were common" (Topol 2013: 32) and who are actually trying to deal in this way with their own hurt or loss of direction. Sára and the I-narrator narrowly escape a modern "pogrom" in Prague, led by an armed group of youth and clearly supported by the present-day inhabitants of the city (this pogrom being primarily directed against the Romas, but it is obvious that Jews and other groups are also potentiality in danger).

Soon after this incident, the novel, in its wild narrative manner, shifts to the Belarusian sites of mass killings, to Minsk and later to Khatyn or Chatyń.<sup>6</sup> Especially here, the image of piles of bones is semantically furthered. The bones dug out by a sectarian group in Minsk represent the individual "layers of crimes" of the twentieth century in Central and Eastern Europe. The impression of universal culpability and general onus is immensely strong in those passages. This applies even more in the retrospective narration about Oktyabrsk. In it, German scientists, despite all the scientific methods available to them, remain clueless as to the identity of hundreds and hundreds of dead bodies found in the mass graves they examine.

Was it Soviets killing Soviets, or Germans murdering Soviets and Jews, or Germans and Soviets killing other Soviets? Then on top of that, consider that here they were divided into Belarusians and Russians

6 Belarusian Khatyn near Minsk was a one of the hundreds of Belarusian villages which were burned to the ground, including all of their inhabitants. The perpetrators here were the soldiers of the Schutzmannschaft Battalion 118, a battalion formed in 1942 in Kiev, mostly of Soviet prisoner-of-war volunteers, Ukrainian collaborators and deserters. (Not to be mistaken with the Katyn near Smolensk and the Katyn Forrest massacre which took place in 1940; here, thousands of Polish officers were murdered by the Soviet secret police, the NKVD.)

and Ukrainians and Ruthenians, and then of course there were also Poles and Balts ... (Topol 2013: 154).

Both in the fictional Terezín and in Minsk and Khatyn, the attempts to dig up—literally and metaphorically—the bones, and to preserve them, are portrayed not only as an appropriate search for the historical truth about Central and Eastern Europe, but also as an activity which can be abused in many ways. Ironically, both the Belarusian president (a dictator) and his political antagonists are supporting the creation of a new museum of mass graves, both seeking the propagandist potential of such findings.<sup>7</sup> The Belarusian commune gathered around the museum named “the Devil’s Workshop” in Khatyn are socially and morally perverted people, and the narration gradually turns into a horror story. While the fictional pogrom in present-day Prague presents a relatively minor event, in Minsk, the I-narrator witnesses a police-provoked anti-Semitic riot which resembles the prelude to the Kristallnacht in November 1938. The terrible experiences of the past decades (and centuries) were not enough, the threat of aggression is present in present-day society. In the closing of the novel, a German scientist sums up: “the time to uncover the fields of bones still has not come yet. ‘And you know why? Because the devil’s still active as hell here!’” (Topol 2013: 157).

#### 4. The Good-Hearted Headmen: Topol’s Typical Czechs

While the symbol of the fields of bones represents both the history of crimes committed in Europe and the present-day attitudes which might lead to their repetition, the Auschwitz chapter in *City Sister Silver* introduces yet another figure developed in Topol’s later works and related to the treatment of Central European themes as such.

It is a particular character which—in allusion to the renown literary character authored by Jaroslav Hašek—may be named “the good headman.” Hašek’s iconic “good soldier” Josef Švejk is often perceived as a typical Czech under the Habsburg monarchy: meticulously obedient and seemingly naïve, lacking ambitions, capable of ignoring the cruelty of war and subverting many situations against his superiors, he represents the stereotypes of Czechness.

7 “The president has an interest in utilizing the burial sites and developing tourism, as do the opposition leaders... Khatyn will be home to the Devil’s Workshop, a museum for Europe, for the world.” (Topol 2013: 114)

In *City Sister Silver*, Topol introduces a character in many aspects resembling Josef Švejk, but situated further on into the fictionalised twentieth century. It is his “Josef Novák from Žižkov.” While Josef Švejk willingly enters the service in the Austrian army, Josef Novák decides to pretend to be a Jew and ends up in Auschwitz. In parallel to Švejk’s faithful service to Lieutenant Lukáš, Novák faithfully serves the pervert Nazi torturer, Oberst Prochaska, becoming thus a “good headsman.” Ironically, the narration indicates again and again that he is a typical Czech.<sup>8</sup> It is not just due to his speaking name (equivalent to John Doe in English), but also due to his patriotic love for the “little mother” (*matička*, the city of Prague) and his die-hard conviction that Czechs always get along with each other. Alongside those qualities, Josef Novák displays an amazing capacity to demean himself for the sake of survival,<sup>9</sup> and to kowtow to the Nazis. He is happy with his superior and good-heartedly speaks of assisting his atrocities ... he even admits taking part in the torment of children.<sup>10</sup> On one occasion, however, the appalling good-heartedness takes on the likeness of mercy, overcoming the New Testament parable of the Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16, 19–31). After death, Novák visits Oberst Prochaska in hell. Unlike Lazarus who would not go and give water to the rich man in hell, Novák does go and does give drink of water to “that ole swine Oberst a mine.”

In the mixture of mercy and cruelty displayed in this scene one may find the prelude to some of the scenes from Topol’s “loveless” drama, published ten years after *Sestra*. The text of *Uvařeno* (*Cooked and Ready*) was published in the Czech literary magazine *A2* in 2005, and has not been translated into English yet. The protagonists of the drama are three murderers, Soňa (Sonia, Czech feminine given name), Stařík (Old Man) and Omyl (Mistake), all of them incarcerated in prison and pondering their previous lives.

Stařík is a completely numb man; he only feels pity when remembering his childhood in the Soviet concentration camp in Perm, where he eventually learnt the “art of hanging.” After this, WWII took Stařík eastwards (perhaps suggesting

8 The fact that this “anti-hero,” is a typical representative of Czech nation is underlined also by references to other Czech prisoners and their capacity to “adapt to” the horrific situations in concentration camp. Novák recounts for example the collaboration of the famous Czech writer Karel Poláček with the prison system in Theresienstadt.

9 “An so I raise my right hand an go: Heil Hitler, meine officieren und docktoren an scholars. Ich bin eine kleine tschechische schweine, geboren aus Žižkov, howdy do, Novák from Prague here. Greetins, everyone, and long live the Führer and the Thousand-Year Reich! Hip hip hooray!” (Topol 2000: 103).

10 The description of Novák’s treatment of the children (“nippers”) in “Prochaska’s kindergarten” (Topol 2000: 112–113).

that he was one of the “sons of the regiment”), to Prague. In Prague, Stařík worked as a headsmen under all of the regimes which ruled the country. After Havel abolished capital punishment, Stařík lost his job. Jobless and frustrated, one day he exterminated all of the people in gardeners’ colony in Podbaba. In his monologue, Stařík feels no remorse for this event, but he keeps returning to “Mrs. Milada,”<sup>11</sup> a convict he had executed. The figure of this old man headsmen in *Cooked and Ready* resembles in many ways the character of Josef Novák in *Sestra*. Executing or killing other people becomes a matter-of-fact issue for him; he is sentimental only when remembering his childhood. While Novák dies some time before the end of WWII in Auschwitz, Stařík’s life of a good headsmen “represents” the story of the Czech nation under the political establishments of the second half of the twentieth century. Stařík recalls executing members of Vlasov’s Russian Liberation Army, executing the Germans, executing the Czech collaborators of Nazis, and executing the “civilians” sentenced to death under Czechoslovak socialist regime. Similarly to Josef Novák, he is incapable of discerning the difference between the political and human context of those various deaths. To him, there are no victims and no heroes, with one exception: Mrs. Milada (allusion to the famous Czech victim of communism, Milada Horáková). In Stařík’s perception, she was a heroine, not humbled by death, not afraid of it. The mad headsmen wants to follow her example, and ironically does so by committing suicide in the prison.

In 2007, the Torst publishing house issued a collection of Topol’s shorter prose and theatre texts named *Supermarket sovětských hrdinů*.<sup>12</sup> Besides the re-publication of *Cooked and Ready*, the book contained also a new drama, *Journey to Bugulma*. The character of a good-hearted headsmen is present in this dramatic text, too. The “journey to Bugulma” is a journey of a family of three Czech headsmen (grandfather, father, and son), who want to reunite with the mother sent to Bugulma with a specialised NATO troop. The grandfather dies, but the father and the young son of the family, Jeník, do reach Bugulma. In retrospect, the drama recounts the story of the family. The father lost his job as a headsmen under Havel and he takes a forced parental leave with his son, caring for him with surprising tenderness. Presently, the only thing the father

11 Historically, Dr. Milada Horáková was a lawyer, a member of anti-Nazi resistance, and later one of the most renowned Czech opponents of communism, a strong believer, mother to a teenage daughter. She was executed in a fabricated process in 1950 at the age of 48 years.

12 The collection was published in Polish prior to the first Czech publication (Topol, Jáchym. *Supermarket bohaterów radzieckich*. Wołowiec: Czarne 2005).



is afraid of is the emasculation brought by democracy, tolerance, free market and by the loss of tradition and values in the EU. He desires his son to become a warrior, a fighter against the unidentified terrorists who started the Third World War. The son, an urban type of a young man addicted to drugs, is however obviously incapable of such heroism.

In Topol's next novel, *The Devil's Workshop* (2009), presented in this article in relation to the symbolic fields of bones, the figure of a good-hearted, or polite headsman also plays two minor roles. The I-narrator of the novel is imprisoned for more or less accidentally killing his father. In prison, he comes to know a sensitive, well-educated headsman, Mr. Mára. Mr. Mára was incarcerated after a fabricated process with "cyberneticists, traitors of the people," though he was innocent. The prison administration, however, recognized his skills and he ended up as the executioner. In his own words, even in prison, "socialist cybernetics remained his passion" (Topol 2013: 12). Mr. Mára chooses the I-narrator to be his assistant: the I-narrator is preparing the convicts for executions and walks them down to the execution chamber. He has an outstanding capacity to calm the convicts down and to help them accept their fate, thus becoming a good-hearted headsman himself. After the fall of communism, Mr. Mára moves to the United States of America and earns a fortune for a computer game which he programmed while in prison. The breed of the good-hearted headsmen, these "typical Czechs" of Topol's works, enters the new millennium here, and—ironically—their fate now follows the American dream. The ironic image of a cyberneticist socialist headsman who later successfully works in the US is underscored by the reference to Wernher von Braun (Topol 2013: 131) in the book. It is not just "the typical Czechs" who are thus identified as being turncoats.

### 5. The Images of Madonna in Topol's Fictional Worlds

The strategies of fictionalising Central Europe in Topol's works could be illustrated by a set of other character types, for example the "son of the regiment" type, "false relative" or "false Russian relative" type, "the tankist" and many others. All of these, however, belong to the same fictional realm as the character of the good-hearted headsman.

There is, nevertheless, one more level on which the search for symbols and figures of Central Europe in Jáchym Topol's writing can be carried out. It is the level which Jan Assmann denotes as "Gegenwelten."

In his study on the counterworlds in the Greek and Roman cultures "Gegenwelten zu den Kulturen Griechenlands und Roms in der Antike" (2000), Assmann argues that human beings lead a triple life: one taking place in their



physical environment, “Umwelt,” one in the comprehensible world, “Welt” and one related to a counterworld, “Gegenwelt.” Assmann claims that counterworlds, composed with regard to the concept of the “other side” (Jenseit), communicate various “pictures of the ideal” (Feinbildern) and therefore relate to the questions of purpose and meaning in life and death. Counterworlds are therefore chief sources of human identity, and—as Assmann shows—literature participates in their transmission.

The search for depictions of counterworlds in Topol’s writing should, once again, start with his novelistic debut, *City Sister Silver*. Here, the quest for “the sister” is not aimed at finding just a lover or soul-mate. This quest incorporates the transcendental dimension, too. The sisters from a religious order, though possibly just delusions of ill Jícha, represent this dimension. Moreover, “the sister” who the narrator looks for definitely alludes to the Black Madonna. Though the character of the Black Madonna is at moments open to ambivalence, its prevalent meaning is related to the counterworld of Christianity. While the novel is chiefly set in fictional Prague, the Black Madonna is not the Prague Black Madonna. As Leszek Engelking shows in his study “V mládí jsem občas chtěl být Polák...,” the metal image of patron saint which Jícha touches on his breast, is the image of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa.<sup>13</sup> It is out of the metallic image of this Black Madonna that Jícha makes a bullet with which he (possibly) shoots the Devil in the novel. While the Black Madonna in *City Sister Silver* grants protection, God is depicted as “the Face” and his message to the protagonist is the appalling vision of Messiah killed among the Jewish children in Auschwitz. The death of the child means loss of salvation for humankind and also the death of time, and God/the Face immerses in deep silence.

In the following novel, *Anděl (Angel Station)* (1995), set again in fictional Prague, the character of the counterworld is derived from the triangle of women who symbolically represent three cardinal virtues of Christianity (Věra—Faith, Nadě—Hope, and Ljuba—Love). The fates and characters of the ladies in the novel are to a degree contradicting their Christian names. The brave, loving and understanding Ljuba (Love) may be seen as a representation or incarnation of a Czech Madonna. She is almost a martyr of femininity, she loses her child, and almost dies in maternity hospital. A typical Czech Madonna of the 1990s, she is a Madonna stripped of the traditional faith.

The image of Madonna in European culture is usually the image of a guardian or of patron saint to the individual nations and cities. In the novel *Kloktat*

13 Possible reference to the uniform of Polish officers who wore the plaquette with the Black Madonna.

*dehet* (*Gargling with Tar*) (2005), such an image is distantly evoked in the picture of Čechie, a legendary patroness of Bohemia, a fraud character made-up by Czech writers of the nineteenth century. Čechie is not a historical figure or historical saint, and Czechs in the novel, therefore, seem to be uneducated people who follow a cluster of fraud stories rather than a substantial creed.

After the completion of the “Holocaust arc,” Topol sets up a cluster of new motifs and images in his long-awaited novel *Citlivý člověk* (2017).<sup>14</sup> Here, contemporary Bohemia and Europe are once again reflected fictionally, this time from a beat and bastardized, yet visionary, point of view.

The burlesque, unpolished novel depicts, among other significant themes (such as the danger of Russian political interference), the potential abuse of (Christian, or any other) faith. In the opening part of the novel, the narrator visits a sectarian monastery in fictional Ajvaristan. He is told that it is the monastery of “Madonna of War, mother of the native country” (Topol 2017: 60) and that alongside with the countrymen, the monks here formed a (fictional) Russian Orthodox Army. The abuse of religious symbols and feelings which occurred so many times in European history is represented by the terrible oxymoronic image of “Madonna of War.”

While in the first part of *Citlivý člověk*, it is this horrific Madonna of War who protects the Russian Orthodox monastery, in the second part of the novel (taking part in the surroundings of Czech river Sázava), a new image of Madonna is introduced, the image of Czech Madonna of Poříčí. Her picture has—tellingly—long been lost, but the river brought it to a fisherman. It is a (fictional) Madonna of a small town, guardian of the bastardized Czechs living on the outskirts of the European and Czech society. Her picture escapes not only water but also fire in the fisherman’s hut, and eventually saves the fisherman’s life. The introduction of this “active” and “protective” Czech Madonna into the fictional Bohemia is symptomatic of the new dimension which the fictional world in the novel accommodates. Alongside the presence of this miraculous picture, it is also the pregnancy and maternity of some of the key female characters in the closing scene that signals a turn in the symbolic depiction of present-day Bohemia and Central Europe. Even though the Czechs in it are a nation of outcasts, prostitutes, alcoholics, frauds and homeless, the atmosphere of the novel is no more a doomed one. The counterworld of Christian faith has once again been conquered and made their own. The long-lost Czech Madonna creates a connection to the positive aspects of European history

14 At the moment of writing this study, Alex Zucker was preparing the English translation of *Citlivý člověk* for the Yale University Press tentatively titled *A Sensitive Person*.

and brings—as a guardian to the primitive village people—glimpse of hope to the present and the future.

## 6. Conclusion

The three symbols or figures of Jáchym Topol's chosen for closer observation in this paper relate to Central European history, to its human character and to its spiritual code or, in Jan Assmann's words, to its counterworld dimension. The image of the field of bones is related to the catastrophe of Holocaust and beyond it to all of the layers of crimes in (Central) European history, but also to the present European situation and the dangers hidden in it.

The figure of a good-hearted headsman embodies the ambivalent character which both Czechs and other Central European nations displayed under historical pressure. It is not a flattering image. By employing it, Topol tries to confront the tragic failures and weaknesses of human character in an artistic manner. The drastic humour and the hyperbolic depiction related to this character nevertheless also indicate that the often-repeated phrase about the Švejkian character of our nation is no longer plausible. In the context of the twentieth century history, the good soldier would have to become a good headsman. Eventually, Josef Novák needs to be redeemed from his unacceptable position, and Topol's novels and dramas present an artistic search for such redemption.

As shown in the third part of the study, the counterworld dimensions of Topol's works which are related to feminine sensitivity and to feminine aspects of the spiritual seem to offer such redemption. The line of various Madonnas in Topol's novels depict the gradual development towards a new and deeper acceptance of spiritual, fruitful and positive aspects of European history.

## | References:

- Assmann, Jan. "Ägypten als Gegenwelt." *Gegenwelten zu den Kulturen Griechenlands und Roms in der Antike*. Ed. Tonio Hölscher. München: De Gruyter, 2000. 67–83.
- Chew, Geoffrey. "'Dissidence' in Holocaust Memorials in Literature: Jáchym Topol's Devil's Workshop (Chladnou zemí)." *Central Europe* 15 (2015), <https://tinyurl.com/yagpahyh>. Accessed 12 April 2015.
- Dolejší, Karel. "Milan Kundera a tragédie střední Evropy." *Britské listy*, 15 October 2006, <https://legacy.blisty.cz/art/43224.html>. Accessed 12 December 2019.

- Doležel, Lubomír. *Heterocosmica II: Fikční světy postmoderní české prózy*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2014.
- Engelking, Leszek. "V mládí jsem občas chtěl být Polák... .Polsko, polština a Poláci v románu *Sestra Jáchyma Topola*." *Otevřený rány: vybrané studie o díle Jáchyma Topola*. Ed. Ivo Říha. Praha: Torst, 2013. 77–88.
- Hašek, Jaroslav. *Velitelem města Bugulmy*. Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1966.
- . "Commanding Officer, Town of Bugulma." *Behind the Lines. Bugulma and other stories*. Trans. Mark Corner. Praha: Karolinum, 2012. 7–21.
- Holý, Jiří, et al. *Holocaust—Šoa—Zagłada v české, slovenské a polské literatuře*. Praha: Karolinum, 2007.
- , ed. *Šoa v české literatuře a kulturní paměti*. Praha: Akropolis 2011.
- Júrgensová, Zuzana and Marszałková, Magdalena. "Svědci a dědicové dějin: holocaust v české literatuře." *Otevřený rány. Vybrané studie o díle Jáchyma Topola*. Ed. Ivo Říha, Praha: Torst, 2013. 263–275.
- Kaptayn, Valentina. "Another Way to Remember. Jáchym Topol's Works *Sestra* (1994) and *Chladnou zemí* (2009) in the Context of Czech Cultural Memory of the Holocaust." *The Holocaust in Central European Literatures and Cultures since 1989*. Ed. Reinhard Ibler. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2014. 263–274.
- Topol, Jáchym. *Sestra*. Brno: Atlantis, 1994.
- . *Anděl*. Praha: Hynek, 1995.
- . *City Sister Silver*. Trans. Alex Zucker. North Haven: Catbird Press, 2000.
- . "Uvařeno." *A2* 2 (2005): 1, 25–26, <https://tinyurl.com/y784hq8q>. Accessed 12 April 2015.
- . *Kloktat dehet*. Praha: Torst, 2005.
- . *Supermarket sovětských hrdinů*. Praha: Torst, 2007.
- . *Gargling With Tar*. Trans. David Short. London: Portobello, 2010.
- . *The Devil's Workshop*. Trans. Alex Zucker. London: Portobello, 2013.
- . *Angel Station*. Trans. Alex Zucker. Victoria, TX: Dalkey Archive Press, 2017a.
- . *Citlivý člověk*. Praha: Torst, 2017b.
- Trávníček, Jiří, ed. *V kleštích dějin. Střední Evropa jako pojem a problém*. Brno: Host, 2009.
- Zucker, Alex. "The Jáchym Topol Interview." *The Quarterly Conversation* 33 (2013). 2 September 2013, <https://tinyurl.com/kwcutw>. Accessed 12 April 2020.

## | Abstrakt

KLÁRA KUDLOVÁ

**Kości, kaci i madonny. Symbole i figury Europy Środkowej w twórczości Jáchyma Topola ostatnich 25 lat**

Na czeskiej scenie literackiej Jáchym Topol uchodzi za autora najbardziej zainteresowanego Europą Środkową, nieustannie rozszyfrowującego przekaz zapisany w jej bliznach i zmarszczkach. Jego stosunek do tematów środkowoeuropejskich w tekstach fikcyjnych jest zawsze oparty na pogłębionym zapoznaniu się z historią i współczesnością tego obszaru. Topol nie jest jednak historykiem: tworząc fikcję, wykorzystuje złożoną, poetycką perspektywę i osiąga autorski typ ekspresji artystycznej. Określone, powracające symbole i figury zdają się w zagadkowy sposób odpowiadać na współczesne pytania Europy Środkowej. Pierwszy z tych symboli to biblijny obraz doliny suchych kości. Reprezentuje on zarówno metodyczną przemoc w historii środkowoeuropejskiej, jak i uniwersalną odpowiedzialność. Drugi to typ postaci występującej w wielu utworach Topola: dobry kat. Uosabia on ambiwalencję czeskiego charakteru narodowego, ale również jego strategię przetrwania. Postać dobrego kata intertekstualnie łączy się z twórczością Jaroslava Haška – przyjęte powszechnie przekonanie, że „Czesi są narodem Szwejków”, zostaje doprowadzone do absurdu. Trzecim symbolem pojawiającym się w twórczości Topola jest postać Madonny, reprezentującej duchowy wymiar środkowoeuropejskiej tradycji związanej z chrześcijaństwem. Madonny – polska Matka Boska Częstochowska, wojenna Madonna w fikcyjnej współczesnej Rosji, czeska Madonna z Poříčí – tworzą chrześcijańskie „przeciw-światy”. Madonny sygnalizują niezastąpioną rolę duchowości w Europie Środkowej, jej rozwój i stałą obecność. W ostatniej powieści Topola, *Citlivý člověk* (wyd. polskie *Wrażliwy człowiek*, 2019), dzięki postaci Madonny dyskurs uzyskuje nową perspektywę.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Jáchym Topol (1962); Europa Środkowa w literaturze; Visegrád; *Sestra* (1994); dolina suchych kości; Holokaust w literaturze; *Chladnou zemi* (2009); *Cesta do Bugulmy* (2006); *Velitelem města Bugulmy* (1921); *Uvařeno* (2005); postać dobrego kata; Jaroslav Hašek; Jan Assmann; Gegenwelt; Madonna w literaturze; kulturowy wymiar; duchowy wymiar

## | Abstract

KLÁRA KUDLOVÁ

**On Fields of Bones, Headsmen and Madonnas: The Symbols and Figures of Central Europe in the Past 25 Years of Jáchym Topol's Writing**

In the Czech literary scene, it is Jáchym Topol who may justly be labelled the author most consumed with Central Europe, one who is constantly attempting to decrypt the message encoded in its scars and wrinkles. His fictional treatment of Central-European themes is preceded by thorough knowledge of both the history and present state of the region. However, Topol is not merely a historian; in his fictionalising he uses a poetic, complex perspective, and arrives thus at a unique expression. Particular recurring figures in his literary work seem to answer in a riddle the questions of present-day Central Europe. First one of those is the biblical image of the field or of the pile of bones. In Topol's writing, it represents both the systematic violence in Central-European history, and universal onus. The second recurring figure is the figure of a good-hearted headsman. In Topol's prosaic and dramatic texts, the headsman embodies the ambivalence of the Czech national character, but also its survival strategies. It is intertextually linked to the works of Jaroslav Hašek, and brings the notion "Czechs are a Švejk-like nation" to its absurd, augmented consequences. The third figure which keeps returning in Topol's work combines the features of a character and of a symbol. It is the figure of Madonna, representing the spiritual dimension of Central European tradition, bound to Christianity. The various Madonnas—the Polish Madonna of Częstochowa, the War Madonna in fictionalised modern-day Russia and eventually the Czech Madonna of Poříčí create the Christian counterworld in Topol's novels, and signalize the persistent role and presence of spirituality in the region. In Topol's novel *Citlivý člověk* it is actually thanks to this Madonna that the whole discourse opens to a new type of perspective.

**Keywords:** Jáchym Topol (1962); Central Europe in literature; Visegrád; *City Sister Silver* (2000); the field of bones; the Holocaust in literature; *The Devil's Workshop* (2013); *Cesta do Bugulmy* (2006); the figure of good headsman; Jaroslav Hašek; *Commanding officer*; *Town of Bugulma* (2012); *Uvaženo* (2005); Jan Assmann; Gegenwelt; Madonna in literature; cultural mode; spiritual mode

**| About the Author**

**Klára Kudlová** is a Czech literary historian. She studied English, American and Czech philology at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University in Prague (Ph.D. 2011). She presently works as a post-doctoral researcher in the Department for Research into 20th Century and Contemporary Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences and lectures on modern literature at the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University.

E-mail: kudlova@ucl.cas.cz





# Technology and Society

| TECHNOLOGIA I SPOŁECZEŃSTWO



KAREL PÍORECKÝ, VOJTĚCH MALÍNEK  
Akademie věd České republiky

## Czech Literary Culture in the Post-Digital Era<sup>1</sup>

The first decade of the new millennium has not started with a revolutionary turn for the Czech society and literature like the decade before. Thus, the year 2000 (or 2001) is not such a milestone—it does not mean the end or the beginning of anything within Czech literature. Nevertheless, the first years of the new millennium did represent a change within Czech literature, which can be compared to the post-Velvet Revolution transformation of Czech literature. This change was not revolutionary but rather evolutionary; it was less striking, and for that reason perhaps more significant. An important (although not the only) aspect of this change was the gradual increase in the use of the Internet in public communication and the subsequent restructuring of discourse within the media, including literary discourse. Since the digital revolution of the turn of the 1990s, literary culture has subsumed the principles of the so-called post-digital culture,

1 This study was written as a result of “Czech Literary Bibliography—Czech Literary Internet: data, analyses, research” project implementation (Nr. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16\_013/0001743), which is financed by the European Union through European Structural and Investment Funds within the Research, Development and Education Operational Programme.

This work required the use of Czech Literary Bibliography research infrastructure resources (<http://clb.ucl.cas.cz>).

where digital media are no longer treated as something novel and curious but as an everyday “humanised” part of this culture (Cramer 2014). Which areas of literature does this remediation process affect and how is it reflected in those areas? Which other processes have changed Czech literature since the beginning of the millennium? Are there similarities or differences between the way Czech literature evolved compared to other neighbouring Central European cultures? These are the key questions posed by this study, which mainly concern the basic aspects of the literary system, and thus this study refers to one of the theoretical systemic literary models—a model proposed by Siegfried J. Schmidt. This is a model that has paid attention to the mediated nature of the literary process and the change of media discourse and is the main initiator of the investigated changes. The term literary system used here essentially means “social literary system” proposed by Siegfried J. Schmidt to label a systemic structure formed by four roles of action: production, mediation, reception and processing phenomena regarded as literary (Schmidt 2008). The interpretation that follows is structured according to these roles of action.

### 1. Production

Production (if understood in a narrow sense as a genesis of literary texts) is a component of the literary system, which was marginally affected by the examined changes within Czech literature. This is the first feature unique to Czech literary culture in the post-digital era, as other Central European literatures have undergone transformations, be it partial, even in production, thanks to some literary figures or groups working in the field of electronic literature (e-lit). Slovak literature has contributed significantly to developing the genre of digital poetry thanks to the work of Zuzana Husárová. Electronic literature in Poland has developed to an even greater extent thanks to writers (such as Romana Brombosz, Sławomir Shuty, Leszek Onak and Łukasz Podgórní) or groups (such as Perfokarta and Rozdzielczość Chleba). Austrian literature has some excellent examples, such as Jörg Piringer; and there are examples of hypertexts written by Hungarian authors, such as Péter Farkas.

As far as the writing technology is concerned, the post millennium period does not differ much from the preceding period—the shift from manual or type-writer writing to text-editor assisted writing has occurred in the preceding decade. However, the fact that, in the new millennium, computers stop being “better type-writers” and become boundaries of network-shared data and interactions even in the writers’ offices, did have an impact on the genesis of literary texts. The Internet has created relatively high expectations among

literary publicists, not primarily among writers. In 2001, Czech literary journals have carried out several questionnaires among writers, asking them about their views on the Internet and what prospects this medium held for contemporary literature. The topic of “Internet literature” was in the air, and it was coming from abroad. The questionnaires nevertheless showed that the majority of the surveyed writers were largely unaware of this trend. When asked by *Literární noviny* monthly, “What do you think of the Internet literature?”, Daniela Hodrová answered saying “I am not familiar with the Internet literature; not that I am avoiding it but I do not have the Internet at home and do not intend to get it.” The only one who found this question a bit easier was Ondřej Neff, an Internet enthusiast and editor of an electronic paper entitled *Neviditelný pes* (The Invisible Dog). He said that he: “discovered an intimate human space instead of something technically cold ... I find a continuous stream of a kind of anonymous folk storytelling” (Hodrová et al. 2001: 10).

The current reception of the Internet ranged in views widely—between scepticism and fear around the fading interest in books and reading to enthusiastic visionary perspectives of the future, new literary world. The Internet has not been utilised in the Czech context in terms of some of the genres of electronic literature (apart from a few attempts at the end of 1990s). The only area where there was a partial shift in production mechanisms was in popular literature where the net medium motivated authors to increase interactions with their reader communities and engage them in producing literary texts. This happened particularly within the genre of novel series, which was revitalised thanks to freely available online blogging utilities. Readers were engaged in the process of writing through questionnaires regarding their preferred development of the stories, through debates related to individual episodes of the novels or direct involvement in the emerging text where readers could create the following episodes. Michal Viewegh used the last form in his project *Blogový román* (Blog novel), which ran on the Internet pages of the Czech daily *Mladá fronta Dnes* (<http://blogovyroman.idnes.cz/>, accessed 10 April 2019) between August and December 2009 and Viewegh invited the readers join him in writing a novel to be continued. He wrote the first chapter, outlined the nature of his characters and invited readers to join in writing the following chapters of the novel. This prose of ten chapters was written via competition where an established author shares the authorship with his readers. This way, Viewegh formed an illusion of eliminating the distance between the author and readers and created seeming intimacy (referring to his promise of personal emails to participants of the competition). This is a clear example of shifting boundaries between the author and reader, which were brought into literary communication by the Internet.

This is also a clear example of the digital medium being used for marketing purposes (for the benefit of the commercial author, sponsor of the competition and newspaper website which published the Blog novel).

There were similar projects in other Central European countries, for instance *Slovensko píše román* (Slovakia Writes a Novel) project which took place between May and October 2009. It was edited by a commercially successful prose writer Evita Urbaníková, who wrote the introductory and final chapters and selected chapters sent in by readers, which eventually became part of the published novel. The competition was sponsored by an online book store Martinus.sk.

Such collective production activities were further instigated by social networks. The marketing aspect is fairly insignificant here, as this is a form of entertainment within communities interested in creative writing. Since December 2014, a Facebook group called *Povídky ze zdi (společné tvůrčí psaní)* (Short Stories from the Wall (Collective Creative Writing)) has been operating, the aim of which is also a collective, resp. community creation of shorter narratives. Here the competitive aspect of collaborative writing is eliminated, and it is dominated by a community principle of collaboration and communication. Compared to similar Twitter projects, such as *Twitteropsaní s Jaroslavem Rudišem* (Twitter Writing with Jaroslav Rudiš) or *Píšeme román* (We are Writing a Novel) found on [www.twitter.com/piseme\\_roman](http://www.twitter.com/piseme_roman), setting a word limit does not play much of a role—writers are only advised that their piece be between one to three standard pages. The community's (group's) founder and administrator, Zuzana Dostálová, plays a key role. It is the group administrator who sets the topic and writes the introduction to each short story. The administrator also publishes weekly schedules with group member name for every day, and each day the given member publishes their section through the comment box. The next day a selected co-author adds their episode. The comment box thus holds a mixture of individual episodes and comments by other co-authors and readers or other group members. The text without comments is published in the Collection section. Despite its relatively short period of existence, the group is fairly large—on 15 March 2019, it had 777 members. What is also unique about this group is that unestablished authors take part in it alongside established writers and personalities from other fields of culture (journalist Renata Kalenská, Romanist Alena Scheinostová, prose writer Kateřina Tučková, radio editor Pavla Horáková, prose writer Bianca Bellová, poet Olga Stehlíková and others).

Apart from collective creative works, social networks bring other global literary trends into Czech literary culture. These are situated in between production and mediation and have a unique intermedia character. Instagram

poetry (instapoetry) has become the phenomenon of the past few years—this is a form of amateur literary production which is a natural fit with social media. Compared to the contributions to amateur literary fora, with instapoetry, the text component plays only a partial role in the final form, as a distinct visual component—whether this is typography (with frequent imitations of type-writing or photographs of type-writing, e.g. receipt@type\_written), a key connection between a drawing and text (e.g. Poem 29 cycle on a receipt mxre\_cxtu) or spatial installation of text through a camera (e.g. on receipt poezievmezije [poetryisaliveinthecity], where receipts with poems are photographed in Prague streets). Textual poetry production is de facto transformed into production of a painting distributed via a visually-focused social network, and the final form is a multimedia combination of textual and visual components, where the visual aspect frequently dominates disproportionately.

There is a smaller, however from an artistic and critical angle, more significant field of literary text production, where particularly the creation of a poem is automated using artificial networks of neurons. A rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) brought automated generation of poems virtually to all developed literary cultures, including the Central European (the Czech culture is not an exception). A Czech example of successful use of AI is a project of an automated poet carried out by a programmer, maths linguist and former head of development department for the seznam.cz server, Jiří Materna. This approach to literary text production is unique through its significantly diminishing role of a human actor in the genesis of the text—a human plays more of a role of an operator and organiser of the creative process, but not a subject, as creation of a text of a poem is automated through statistical generation inside a network of neurons trained on a large corpus of poems. Materna trained his network of neurons using 80,000 poems drawn from an amateur literary forum *Písmák.cz*. His project resulted in a collection entitled *Poezie umělého světa* (Poetry of an Artificial World) (2016, can be downloaded for free at kosmas.cz; Materna 2016). The quality of these poems very closely resembles their online prototypes. Materna's collection not only documents the functionality of the applied algorithm but is also (inadvertent but compelling) critique of the standard of the poems published at *Písmák*: the poems are typically structured in primitive stanzas, fleeting reflections of current feelings, banality of thought or romantic confessions.

The factors which influenced the production of early millennial literary texts were given by the general characteristics of open online platforms: these are (a) unrestricted publishing space which motivates production of texts through openness and accessibility and (b) a radically democratised concept

of authorship, where there are no barriers traditionally caused by actors operating between the production and mediation of texts (such as publisher, editor or proof-reader etc.). The fact that this change is paradigmatic and might be reflected not only in online production can be statistically proven using data showing an increase in literary production among Czech population. Czech literary bibliography data (<https://clb.ucl.cas.cz/>) show that literary active people share per population over the past twenty years has virtually increased by nearly 50%. In the 1990s, the proportion of literary active individuals per 10,000 people was slightly above 10%; over the past decade, the number increased to nearly 15% (see Figure 1 below). By “literary active” we mean individuals who published at least one text (an article, study or book) recorded in Czech literary bibliography in the past year with known biographic data, that means it is proven that given identity is not a pseudonym.<sup>2</sup>

### Proportion of literary active individuals per population of 10,000 in a year

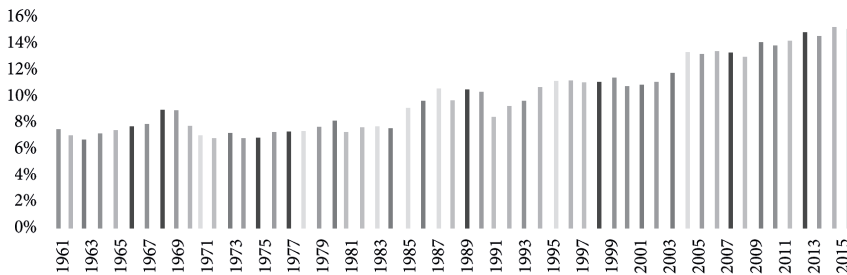


Figure 1

- 2 The input data originate from August 2018 and cover the 1961 to 2015 period, and were processed according to the uniform excerpting norm as secondary bibliography (excerpts record texts concerning Czech literature, not imprints of fiction—these are recorded only for currently processed bibliographies of Czech literary samizdat and Czech online literature). Due to changes in the scope of excerpts and limited available biographical data on the latest authors and potential related misrepresentation, data after 2016 are not included. The data also roughly reflect only the part of the excerpted material for the ongoing Czech online literature project; when it is completed (2021), the data can be analysed in a greater detail. In general, a shift in absolute numbers not so much in trends can be anticipated.



A similar increase is observed in absolute numbers. While in the 1990s, Czech literary bibliography recorded on average around 1100 individuals who published at least one article per year, after 2010 this increased to around 1600 (see Figure 2 below).

### **Number of literary active per population (at least one publication recorded in Czech literary bibliography in current year)**

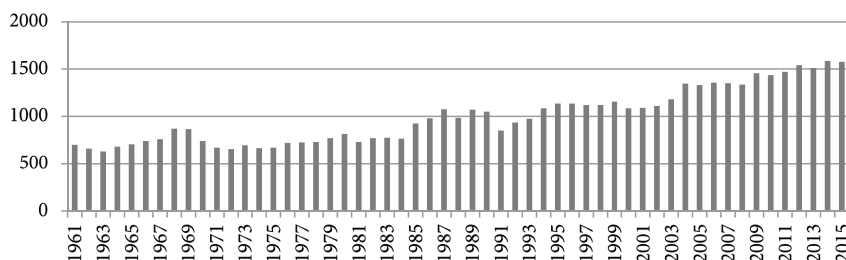


Figure 2

This change in the production paradigm clearly must have fairly significantly impacted on mediation of literature including the book market.

## **2. Mediation**

Free, open publishing platforms available on the Internet: blogs and in the Czech context very popular literary fora (known slightly confusingly as “literary servers”) brought a significant change in mediation of literary texts. Established and novice Czech writers started using these platforms already in the second half of the 1990s. The first literary server was launched in 1997; however, the boom in their use came in the first decade of the 2000s (thanks to the improvement in Internet accessibility even for households). After 2000, there were more than twenty websites of this kind (some of them still exist) available on the Czech Internet.

Písmák, launched in 1997, is one the oldest and most frequently used literary servers; in 1999, the literary server Totem was launched; and in the following years, many other servers appeared (e.g. LiTerra, Liter.

cz, Blue World and Epika). The growth in interest in literary servers can be documented by the growth in visits of the [www.pismak.cz](http://www.pismak.cz) website—in 2000, 400 people visited the site daily and then it has grown sharply to 2,800 per day in 2011.

Publishing platforms of this kind have appeared and do appear globally, but there is a uniquely Czech aspect to this. It is the number of users and contributors. For instance, in January 2009, 35,675 users were registered on the *Písmák* forum, and according to the owner of the website, Roman Plojhar, 8,000 were active contributors (see Košínská, 2009: 26). In 2011, 2,800 users logged into the site daily. In 2009, the Totem forum had around 30,000 registered users and offered 265,000 contributions. The only other literary site which has more users than Czech literary fora is *poetry.com* website, which counts seven million users.

It is the numbers that distinguish the Czech literary fora as unique and atypical in an international context. For instance, the German literary forum *Leselupe.de* with 4,744 registered users presents itself as a large or one of the largest German literary fora. Its numbers are only a fraction of the user numbers for the Czech *Písmák* or *Totem* fora, and yet *Leselupe* users come from a significantly larger language population. Not even the Anglophone *deepundergroundpoetry.com* site with 16,071 registered users can match the numbers for the Czech literary fora. Even the number of contributions is significantly higher—in 2009, *Totem* had 265,000 contributions, while *Leselupe* had around 70,000 in the same year. What is interesting about the German site are the numbers who visit the site—the number of visits per month is around 150,000 (2009 data), which is around 5,000 visits a day, and this is significantly higher than the number of registered users in that year (around 4,000). *Písmák* reached its peak in the number of visits in 2011 with 2,800 visits per day. Therefore, one of the differences between the Czech websites and *Leselupe* is possibly in the presence of readers (“lurkers”) among the website users, who only read on the website. Such a group is almost non-existent on the Czech literary fora, certainly not in such numbers (it is 1,000 “pure” readers a day). This is possibly one of the unique features of the Czech literary fora. Another unique feature of the Czech literary internet is the language component of its content—there is not an insignificant number of contributions in the Slovak language, for the largest fora, the proportion of Slovak contributions is around 20% (21% for *Písmák*, 16% for the second largest Totem forum).<sup>3</sup> Thus, literary fora also mediate Czech-Slovak literary relations which develop a lot more broadly within

3 Data was collected for the Corpus of current poetry project.

this open space than, e.g. in the traditional print media, journals and book production (where there is not as much space and Slovak texts also tend to be translated into Czech).

This type of media eliminates institutional actors from the mediation process and publishing becomes the matter of purely the author's personal choice. The author's role is strengthened in such a communication process and the imaginary line between production and mediation of literary texts becomes blurred (the author has control over his/her text even after it is published, can edit it, expand it or delete it later). The authorship itself has been transformed, radically democratised. Publishing is perceived as a right, not just as an opportunity. Such opinions are not confined within the space of online publishing but have expanded into the sphere of book culture.

Publishers based on the print on demand (POD) principle have developed direct links with open publishing platforms (literary fora). There is such a link between, e.g. *Epika* literary forum which is also a publisher holding the same name; or *Liter.cz* connected with the POD publisher *Nová forma*. Contributors to literary fora are economically advantaged in such cases compared to other clients (contributors receive discounts) or they are rewarded for publishing a book (e.g. get access to comments and assessment of contributions). These business projects are based on a premise that publishing a book and entering the sphere of print media is the aim and reward for the contributors to literary fora. Combining the POD publisher with a literary forum is aimed to secure a large enough customer base for publishing services. *Knihovnička.cz* is one of the most popular providers of such services, and towards the end of 2000s, *Dokořán* or *Knihy pro radost* also offered such services. In 2008, the *A2* weekly stated that: "Thanks to the services offered by the PODs, everybody has the opportunity to fulfil their writer's dream" (Růžička 2008: 26). It is therefore not difficult to guess what were the consequences of such radically democratic processes of mediating the book market, which were enabled by changes in mediation but also by pure economics. Book publishing has become technologically very easy. It is therefore no surprise that the numbers of published books coming on the Czech book market has grown year on year to such an extent that the amount of books has started to paralyse the market and it made knowing the current book production complicated for the readers.<sup>4</sup> This had

4 There was no consensus around the negative impact of the growing number of books being published—an expert on readership, Jiří Trávníček, has repeatedly claimed that the country is over-filled with books and that readers are unable to make choices among such a wide range of books. Vladimír Pistorius, on the other hand, noted that

a negative consequence in that new books quickly became old and their sale stagnated just a few weeks after they first came on the market.<sup>5</sup>

The number of registered publishing businesses has grown rapidly, too. In 2001, there were 3,136 (their number grew by 238 every year), however, only 1,196 of them were active (published at least one book in that year). By the year 2017, the number of registered publishers has grown to 6,986, with 2,151 active businesses; but only fewer than 100 published 30 or more books a year. Since 2001, the number of published books in the Czech Republic started rising sharply—the National Library recorded 14,321 in that year (and 12,557 of those were published for the first time), which was 2,356 more than in the previous year. Czech book production reached its peak in 2008, with 18,520 books published (and 16,386 of those published for the first time). Currently (in 2017), the number of published books per year stands at around 15,300. The proportion of fiction in the overall book production after 2000 is around 20%, and its share has steadily declined—in the first half of the 1990s, fiction made up a third of the entire volume of published books. In 2001, there were 3,426 books of fiction published; its production reached its peak in 2016, when 5,559 books were published. There were 575 books of children's fiction published in 2001, and by 2016 their number increased to 2,157.

It is likely that other Central European countries have experienced a similar boom. Jaroslav Šrank analysed Slovakian literary culture after 1989 and found that from 400 publishers in 1990, their number has grown to 1,155 in 2006 and went on increasing further year on year. In 2010, there were 1,500 registered publishing businesses in Slovakia. The trend in the published books in Slovakia has followed the Czech trend: in the second half of the 1990s, Slovakian publishers published around 4,500 books a year; in 2008, it was 9,171 and in 2014, 12,734 (see Šrank 2019: 59). Contrary to expectations, there was no significant share of e-books playing a part in the book market. They came on the Czech book market gradually, at the end of the 2000s, later than was the case in Western Europe and the USA.

the Czech book market is not unique in this respect in the international context and saw this trend of a larger book production as positive, stating that: "A larger number of published books only increases the supply. And which reader could possibly mind this?" (Trávníček, 2008: 42).

- 5 Jaroslav Císař interpreted the increase in published books as an attempt of the Czech publishers to capitalise on decreasing average expenses on publishing a book and holding their turn over at the same level. See Císař, <https://tinyurl.com/y3q7zwcw>. The current information on the Czech book market is found in a report by the Federation of Czech Booksellers and Publishers: <https://tinyurl.com/yx9nrswy>

The democratic ethos which was brought by web 2.0 not only satisfied authoring but also publishing ambitions. Apart from the expansion in the number of publishers, the number of literary journals has also expanded. In 2000, several new periodicals appeared, which adopted only a digital format as a sufficient form of existence and no longer appeared in a printed format (the oldest Czech online literary journal *Texty* (Texts) has been published since 1995). In 2000, a monthly entitled *Dobrá adresa* started being published in a pdf format and every number looked like a base for a print journal; however, its full colour printed version would have been very expensive. The journal was comparable to printed literary periodicals, including the staffing of its editorial office (its staff included editors from established literary journals, such as Radim Kopáč, Vladimír Novotný, Kateřina Rudčenková and Jakub Šofar).

The *iLiteratura.cz* journal, which was also established in 2000, on the other hand, adopted a format of a webpage. The journal dropped the traditional periodicity principle and is constantly updated at article level. The journal focuses on reviewing current Czech and translated book production. Compared to the majority of Czech literary journals, *iLiteratura* monitors current literature in its broadest scope of covering language regions including marginal areas (such as Bosnian, Persian or Icelandic literature), and reviews even books which were not yet published in Czech translation.

Apart from professionally conceived and edited journals, there were a number of journals which were conceived on an amateur basis after 2000, established through enthusiasm and with lower ambitions than *Dobrá adresa* or *iLiteratura*, and a number of them are no longer published now (these were e.g. *Tramvaj načerno*, *Obšťastník*, *Poetikon* and *Wagon*). Some printed periodicals also followed the example of the online journals for financial reasons in that they moved purely online (e.g. *Clinamen* and *Aluze*). Some publishers have taken the opportunity of the relative ease and low cost of publishing online and have re-introduced several old journals, not published for many years (e.g. *Divoké víno*, re-introduced in 2002, and is one of the publishing platforms for authors compromised by their writing during the so-called normalisation period of the communist era).

### 3. Reception

The remediation process is manifested particularly strongly in reception. Initial concerns about the future of reading and traditional habits of book readers have not eventuated. Statistical research of readership in the Czech Republic (which is conducted by Jiří Trávniček since 2007) has shown that in the Czech literary

culture (similar to other literary cultures), the Internet has not become the rival of reading that would take readers away from books and literature, but rather a supporter that opened up other spheres of reception where readers could share their opinions, suggestions and discussions, and made the distribution of literary texts easier. Czech research statistics (but also Polish) show that readers (who read at least one book a year) are also frequent Internet users, while non-readers spend less time reading books but also using the Internet (this varies according to age groups, for more detail see Trávníček 2011: 83). However, it cannot be argued that the arrival of the Internet has not impacted the reading culture and habits. Jiří Trávníček is of the view that the Internet has impacted readers' capabilities to absorb more extensive texts; however, he adds that this trend has not appeared with the Internet but the Internet has accelerated it. The interactive nature of the new medium was an aspect which impacted a change in reception more significantly. It made boundaries between roles (in behaviour) more relative in terms of reception—production and reception—mediation. Firstly, reception ceased to be “invisible” and started leaving more traces behind.

The reader takes on a greater and more active role thanks to the interactive nature of the digital media. The reader has the opportunity to directly comment on texts which s/he has just read (through comments via e.g. blogs where the literary text was published or they can choose some other place on the Internet). The reader can participate in collective production of a piece or can contribute to decisions made concerning its future development (e.g. online novels to be continued, such as *Renčina červená knihovna* (Renata's Chick-Flicks)). In hypertexts, the reader shapes the text through selecting one of the given alternatives. The reader can also fairly easily strike a conversation with an author of a literary text.

However, remediation is not the only instigator of new developments in reception. The book market situation, its boom, has accelerated the developments in reception. Literary awards are an example of an institutionalised reception phenomenon of its kind, which apart from indicating prestige, also aids the reader's choice in an extensive range of new books on offer. The trend of an expansion within the literary system and of literary phenomena has affected even literary awards. In the 2000s, 74 literary awards (including prizes for literary competitions) were given out in the Czech Republic, 28 new awards were introduced and only two were abolished.<sup>6</sup> Only some of these awards more

6 The data was drawn from the *Literární ceny* (Literary Awards) database maintained by the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences (online: <http://>

substantially impacted the Czech literary culture. The impact can be “measured” by the professional kudos of the award, through its ability to capture the interest of the mass media and also promote current fiction to wide audiences. There were essentially two awards which had this potential: Státní cena za literaturu (The State Award for Literature) and Magnesia Litera.

The reception processes have not only undergone a quantitative but also a qualitative change. Compared to the last decade of the twentieth century, after 2000, the reception of Czech literature abroad has improved significantly. Literary festivals were a key medium,<sup>7</sup> which played a significant part in this. The change in the way events organised by Martin Pluháček were arranged are an important example—in the 1990s, he organised closed meetings of poets at the Bítov castle, and in the new millennium he organised international festivals “Poetry without Borders.” He no longer gathered poets at castles, making them more accessible to the general public in the university town of Olomouc. The first year was organised in October 2001, and apart from Czech poets, poets from France, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, the USA and Great Britain took part in the festival.

The Prague Writers’ Festival has developed into an event of a European significance; its reputation was built on attendance of international authors awarded one of the prestigious literary awards (such as, Nadine Gordimer, Gao Xingjian, Margaret Atwood and William Styron). The literary festival Měsíc autorského čtení (The Month of Author Reading) has also grown into an event of international proportion—it was first organised by the Větrné mlýny publisher in Brno in 2000 and has gradually expanded into other cities (such as Košice, Ostrava, Wrocław and Lviv). Apart from the organising countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland), one of the world literatures takes part in the festival and has a status of a Czech guest (e.g. Canadian, French, Belarusian or Austrian).

The expansion of the reception horizon overseas has caused another wave of reception events. Some of the literary community compared the state and

[www.ucl.cas.cz/ceny/](http://www.ucl.cas.cz/ceny/)). The increase in the number of literary awards is not an isolated phenomenon, it corresponds with a long-term international trend described by James F. English in his 2011 book entitled *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*.

7 The Literary festival is a part of mediation; however, here the concern is not so much about its existence as a form of literary communication but more about the change in contextualising national literature (i.e. about the reception consequences of this form of mediation), which has not undergone a significant change (compared to other media).



standard of current Czech and international literature and judged the Czech literary production as being in a critical and unsatisfactory state. This opinion started an extensive literary debate triggered by an article written by Štefan Švec “Krise české literatury” (Czech Literature in Crisis), published in March 2008 in the *A2* journal. The main focus of this provocative article was the lack of interest in current Czech literary production among the general public. Drawing on current reader opinion polls, Švec argued that the Czech general public are relatively keen on reading and he saw the cause of the lack of interest in new Czech fiction itself. He stated that: “The only thing that the public do not read is current Czech “fine” fiction. And rightly so. It lives a life of its own, it is isolated from readers almost like literary science from literature. It is unable to bring in [current] topics” (Švec 2008: 1, 16–17). Švec’s critique of current Czech literature is a comparison with other national literatures in which he values the quality of artistic rendition of current topics (including controversial ones, such as the Balkan war or disintegration the so-called western culture) and the ability to draw in readers. In line with the sub-title of his article “A Bit of Superficial Marketing Rubbish,” he called for a much more active attempt to draw readers’ attention and was ironic about those who claimed that literature can live in a voluntary ghetto and that books are published for the future or even for eternity.

Švec’s provocative claims prompted many reactions and separated writers into two groups. One group was of the view that literature should react to current events in culture and the society and should seek suitable ways of presenting itself in the context of current society and media. Others, on the other hand, denied that there was a crisis and rejected the idea that they should consider the readers and select topics reflecting current events. Some literary critics accepted Švec’s provocative claims as a challenge to return to the socio-critical role of literature, e.g. Jakub Vaníček in his essay “Krise? Kritika? Dějiny?” (Crisis? Critique? History?). The reception phenomenon of “crisis” has smoothly moved onto the next significant phenomenon of the end of 2010s—the articulation of requirements and expectations of the return to politically-engaged literature, particularly poetry. This has instigated another extensive debate in literary journals. The engaged literature in fact represented a particularly paradoxical form of a reception process, as there was not perception of present literary phenomena (as with the phenomenon of the “crisis”) but the absence of literature associated with the current social and political context. Re-evaluation of deliberately being apolitical was an important part of the process which was adopted in the literary discourse immediately following the Velvet Revolution (these autonomist views were reflected in the views of the prose writer Jiří Kratochvíl in the early



1990s who claimed that “nothing was further apart than politics and literature” (Kratochvíl 1993: 1). The editor-in-chief of the literary journal *Host*, Miroslav Balašítk, referred to this view as an “aesthetics trap,” which causes contempt for the reader and has, according to him, become the attitude of the current literary world: “By dropping the reflection of currency and being guarded by non-aesthetic functions, fiction lost many knowledgeable readers” (Kratochvíl 1993: 1). The outlined reception process revealed also generational differences inside the literary scene and helped define the position of the young generation (particularly poets). The older generation who have gone through most of their literary careers in the communist era perceived the voices calling for new engagement as a danger of bringing in simplification and ideology into literature (e.g. Eva Kantůrková and Petr Král). The new generation of poets treated the topic of engagement without this historical baggage and viewed it in quite an open and broad sense, not just in terms of politics (e.g. Adam Borzič, a member of the *Fantasia* group of poets, defined engagement as a sensual captivation, harmony and compassion).

Czech literature was not the only one attempting to re-establish the connection between literature and politics. Similar tendencies can be observed in other Central European literatures and also elsewhere in the world. A similar debate went on in Poland in 2007 in the *Tygodnik Powszechny* journal, which was initiated by Igor Stokfiszewski in his article “Poezja a demokracja” (Poetry and Democracy); in Hungary there was a renewed interest in engaged literature when Viktor Orbán came to power in 2010, e.g. a popular anthology by Édes Hazám, *Moje zlatá vlast* (My golden country, 2012). Current information about sales of poetry growing year on year in Britain (which is apparently caused by an increasing interest in politics and poetry among the millennials; Ferguson 2019) illustrates the causal link between bringing politics into poetry, increase in readership and growing market success.

#### 4. Processing

The last component of the Schmidt model of literary system is processing the phenomena regarded as literary. Its change caused by the remediation process in relation to the changes in reception was discussed earlier. In interactive media, it is hard to separate these changes from further processing of literary texts.<sup>8</sup> These changes are clearly reflected in the state and forms of literary

8 This is not the only difference: the classical literary model was built on this and it started disappearing in the post-digital era. In fan fiction (i.e. an active engagement

criticism, which was rated particularly badly after 2000 as part of occasional meta-critiques. The critical state of Czech literary criticism was caused not just by the media. One of the other causes was the blurring of the distinction between criticism and commercial promotion. A growing practice of recycling publishing advert annotations which, in some cases, appeared on review pages of Czech periodicals in only slightly adjusted form was regarded as a symptom of a crisis. It was felt that the key problem of current literary criticism was to be located in a staffing crisis. The texts by literary critics, who managed to build their reputation and respect in the previous decade (e.g. Martin C. Putna, Jan Lukeš or Pavel Janáček either reduced or stopped writing their literary critiques), formed only a small part of review sections.

The discontent with the state of Czech literary criticism culminated between the years 2008 and 2019. Many established literary critics and scientists (such as Petr A. Bílek, Ivo Harák and others) have expressed their opinions on this and it was on the agendas of literary institutions (e.g. the professional organisation, the Writers' Community organised a symposium focused on the topic). Further, there was a public dispute between the poet and critic Petr Král and the literary critic and theorist Jiří Trávníček; there was a clash of arguments between them: one endorsed the exclusive nature of literature and the other promoted openness of literature to the readers. Even the alleged "tasking" of authors by literary criticism was discussed publicly.<sup>9</sup>

The role of literary criticism and its prestige changed through the media of communication. Together with the evolution of the Internet from an expert to a social medium, where the content is largely developed by its users, the communication base of new literature was also changing. Alongside printed and online literary periodicals, an ever wider public space for informing readers and lay reviews was opening. At the turn of the investigated period, literary-focused websites built on a social network principle (e.g. BookFan.eu where literary criticism is fully replaced by reader recommendations based on personal preferences) are not an exception. The space for reader reviews was not just provided by specialised thematic social networks but also by online publishers

of readers in a popular narrative), even the distinction between production and processing is challenged. This adaptation form of processing has developed in Czech literature (similarly to other literatures) particularly thanks to open publishing platforms on the Internet where communities of readers can share their processing and elaborate well-known stories (e.g. Harry Potter).

9 For example, Petr Král's "Mluvíme o tomtěž?" (Are We Talking About the Same Thing?).

(e.g. [bux.cz](http://bux.cz), <http://knihy.vltava.cz>, <http://knihy.abz.cz>), and also numerous apps and community websites via the global social network Facebook, e.g. *Co čteme* group (What We Read) started being used for mutual book recommendations. It became difficult to distinguish between a critical reflection on current literature and a virtual advert, and it can be even argued that a new (virtual) form of literary criticism was established.

In 2010s, virtual criticism was introduced even into the audiovisual content of social media—similarly to other national cultures, a fast expanding community of booktubers (i.e. readers who publish their reflections on their reading experiences particularly on youtube) started getting involved in reflecting on the current book production also in the Czech literary culture. Gradually, a particular genre structure of these literary meta-texts is developed: such as, Book Haul (videos informing about a purchased or otherwise acquired book), *Wrap Up* (videos about books a booktuber has just read) or TBR/to be read (videos about books a booktuber is planning to read). A discussion usually develops among members of these communities where tagging or inviting particular subscribers to join discussions. Similar to other areas of youtubering, here amateur authors of video-content are interconnected with commercial subjects operating in the particular section of the market. Booktuber contributions are not only products of passionate readership but tend to also be a part of an advertising campaign. This commercial aspect of booktuber contributions may remain hidden but often is revealed, e.g. through the video being made specifically for a publisher's channel. The connection between a critical reflection on a literary piece with its commercial presence, which was often rejected by the Czech press in the 2000s, is established as a legitimate approach, even a principle. The traditional literary criticism is pushed aside to the position of an intellectually demanding, hard to understand and an elitist reflection on current literature. The number views of the most successful Czech booktubers range in many thousands (e.g. the author of the *Radši knihu* (Prefer a Book) channel has regularly three to five thousand viewings of her videos). The traditional literary reviews published in literary journals, which have the circulation of a maximum of 1,000, can never achieve such an impact. And the impact, or its commodification, is the key feature of the new forms of processing of literary phenomena.

Among the actors of literary communication, new actors who are referred to as “book influences” (booktubers belong to this group too but it also covers literary-engaged users of other media) appeared with the social media boom. The book influencer, Lucie Zelinková, is a good example of interconnecting meta-literary activities with commercial interests. This influencer publishes

reader posts on the Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/luciezel/>), and currently has 73,200 followers. She is also a product manager of one of the large online book stores, Martinus.cz. What seems to be an authentic and subjective expression of a reader's interest equally represents a commercial interest of an institutional actor on the book market, which is mediated by an influential user of social network.

## 5. Conclusion

The research described in this paper has shown that Czech literary culture after 2000 has gone through changes which have affected all areas (or roles of action) forming the traditional model of literary system proposed by Siegfried J. Schmidt. Remediation appears the strongest instigator of these changes, one that has brought a range of new literary phenomena and has accelerated more substantive changes in literary discourse. In production, it brought new literary techniques requiring the interactive and algorithmic features of digital media and particularly expanding the publishing space and democratisation of the access to it. This caused an increase in literary production among the general public and also an increase in the number of texts available in the public space. A similar trend soon affected processing, particularly through the expansion of the book market and an increase in the numbers of literary periodicals available. A crisis in reception followed, as the book market boom found an extension in a growing number of public and formative reception acts (e.g. number of literary awards) and their partial devaluation. A qualitative change in reception towards internationalisation has further exacerbated this critical situation, as it caused scepticism concerning the current state of Czech literature and its current social role and prestige among a section of literary public. A partial solution to this situation was, similarly to other European countries, sought in the renewal or strengthening of the role of social criticism and engagement of literature. The systemic change in processing literary phenomena was most clearly reflected in the change in the literary criticism discourse. Even here the main object of changes—the process of remediation—was reflected in the redistribution of roles between individual and institutional actors of literary communication. Review sections of literary journals and opinions of literary critics have started competing with new forms of reflection on current literature, which started happening horizontally among individual readers and within their communities, thanks to the architecture of social networks. Literary criticism distributed via print media could not compete with content spread virtually (supported by commercial institutional actors) in terms of its reach and impact. On the one

hand, the role of institutions in literary communication (e.g. publishers and criticism) weakened, on the other hand, some institutions have returned through the back door and joined in forming ideas about literature/literary image represented by individual amateur actors in the literary process.

Given that the process of remediation is transnational in nature, the mentioned processes in Czech literary culture happened in parallel with other Central European and other literatures. In the Czech context, the tendency to domesticate literary communication was stronger than in the neighbouring literatures—even elite (e.g. experimental) ways of using digital media were introduced. It can certainly be argued that the evolutionary change in the literary system, which is happening in the post-digital era, is so extensive that the model of literary system formed in the pre-digital era is becoming inadequate for describing particular aspects. The distribution of the roles of action is much more complex in the current times; these roles intersect and the boundaries between them are frequently blurred.

*Translated by Melvyn Clarke*

## | References

- Bílek, Patr. A. “Udělej si sám. O sebeukájení dnešních literárních kritiků” (Do it yourself: on self-gratification of current literary critics) *A2* 5 (2008): 7.
- Císař, Jaroslav. “Základní fakta o knižní produkci ČR v roce 2001.” (Key facts on the book production in the Czech republic in 2001), 2019, <http://www.sckn.cz/index.php?p=fakta2001>. Accessed 10 April 2019.
- Cramer, Florian. “What is ‘Post-digital?’” *APRJA* 3.1 (2014), <http://www.aprja.net/?p=1318>. Accessed 10 April 2019.
- Hodrová Daniela, Stránský Jiří, Vajchr Marek, Neff Ondřej, Štampach, Odilo Ivan, Dvořák Joachim, Pavelka Zdenko. “Dvě otázky.” (Two questions). *Literární noviny* 12.39 (2001): 10.
- Ferguson, Donna “Poetry Sales Soar as Political Millennials Search for Clarity,” <https://tinyurl.com/y8ongd39>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2019.
- Harák, Ivo. “Fikční světy kritiky aneb ...” (Fictional world of criticism ...). *Dokořán* 13.51 (2009): 40–46.
- Košinská, Eva. *Čtenáři v internetových komunitách (zaměřených na literaturu)*. (Readers in Internet communities (focused on literature)), diplomová práce (MA Thesis). Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Filozofická fakulta, 2009.

- Král, Jiří T. "Kopání do mrtvoly." (Kicking a corpse). *A2* 13 (2008): 8.
- Kratochvíl, Jiří. "Česká literatura a politik." (Czech literature and politics). *Tvar*, 4: 27/28 (1993): 1.
- Křivánek, Vladimír. "Hradecké sympozium o kritice." (Hradec symposium on criticism). *Dokořán* 13.51 (2009): 38–40.
- Král, Petr. "Mluvíme o tomtéž?" (Are we talking about the same thing?). *Tvar* 19.10 (2009): 6–7.
- Materna, Jiří. *Poezie umělého světa*. (Poetry of an artificial world). Brno: Backstage Books, 2016.
- Povídky Ze Zdi (Společné Tvůrčí Psaní)* (Short Stories from the Wall (Community Creative Writing), <https://tinyurl.com/yahy4wgg>. Accessed 10 April 2019.
- Příběhy Na Padesát Slov*. (Stories of Fifty Words), <http://pribehynapadesatslov.cz>. Accessed 10 April 2019.
- Renčina Červená Knihovna*. (Renata's Chick Flicks), <http://www.cervenaknihovna.com/>. Accessed 10 April 2019.
- Růžička, Jiří G. "Anarchie v nakladatelském průmyslu." (Anarchy in the Publishing Industry). *A2* 26 (2008), <https://tinyurl.com/y8d8oxoj>. Accessed 10 April 2019.
- Schmidt, Siegfried J. *Přesahování literatury* (Crossovers of Literature). Trans. Zuzana Adamová. Praha: ÚČL AV ČR, 2008.
- Slovensko Píše Román*. (Slovakia is Writing a Novel), <http://slovenskopiseroman.sk>. Accessed 10 April 2019.
- Šrank, Jaroslav. *Aktéři a tendencie literárnej kultúry na Slovensku po roku 1989*. (The Actors and Trends in Slovakian Literary Culture after 1989). Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, 2019.
- Švec, Štefan P. B. "Krise české literatury. Pár povrchních marketingových keců" (Czech Literature in Crisis: A Bit of Superficial Marketing Rubbish). *A2* 4.13 (2008): 1, 16–17.
- Trávníček, Jiří. "Nakladatelé a knihkupci jsou velmi žárliví na poskytování informací. Rozhovor s Vladimírem Pistoriem o tom, jak funguje knižní trh." (Publishers and Booksellers are Jealous about Giving out Information, Interview with Vladimír Pistorius about How the Book Market Operates). *Host* 7 (2008): 41–46.
- Trávníček, Jiří. *Čtenáři a internauti. Obyvatelé České republiky a jejich vztah ke čtení*. (Readers and Internauts: Czech Population and their Attitudes to Reading). Brno: Host, 2011.
- Viewegh, Michal. *Blogový román* (Blog Novel), <http://blogovyroman.idnes.cz>. Accessed 10 April 2019.

| **Abstrakt**

KAREL PIORECKÝ, VOJTĚCH MALÍNEK

**Czeska kultura literacka w erze (post)cyfrowej**

Studium poświęcone jest zmianom następującym w czeskiej kulturze literackiej po 2000 r. i związanym z rozwojem mediów internetowych. Metodologiczny punkt wyjścia stanowi analiza modelu systemu literackiego o strukturze zaproponowanej przez Siegfrieda J. Schmidta. Zwrócono uwagę na nowe metody twórcze, posługujące się specyficznymi możliwościami interaktywnych mediów sieciowych, oraz wpływ publicznie dostępnych portali wydawniczych na wzrost aktywności literackiej części populacji. W tekście analizowane są zarówno możliwości publikacji w sieci internetowej, wykorzystywane głównie przez pisarzy amatorów, jak również komplementarne zjawiska występujące w produkcji drukowanej oraz wpływ innowacji na dynamikę rynku książki. Procesy recepcji rozpatrywane są przede wszystkim w związku ze wzrostem znaczenia roli czytelnika w mediach interaktywnych, a szczególną uwagę poświęca się jakościowej zmianie ram recepcji (ponadnarodowa i pozaliteracka kontekstualizacja). Podejście do zjawisk literackich jest w dużej mierze związane z refleksją nad złym stanem współczesnej krytyki literackiej i nowych, wirtualnych form oceniania literatury. Artykuł zawiera konkluzję, że zmiana ewolucyjna, którą ze sobą niesie rozpowszechnienie się mediów cyfrowych w komunikacji literackiej, była tak zasadnicza, iż Schmidowski model systemu literackiego okazał się niewystarczający do jej opisu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kultura literacka; system literacki; rynek książki; media cyfrowe; Internet; sieci społecznościowe

| **Abstract**

KAREL PIORECKÝ, VOJTĚCH MALÍNEK

**Czech Literary Culture in the Post-Digital Era**

This study examines the changes within Czech literary culture since 2000 in relation to the process of remediation. The starting methodological point is in examining a structure of a literary system within a model proposed by Siegfried J. Schmidt. The impact of new creative approaches which utilise interactive network media and also of available publishing platforms are observed in terms of the increase in the size of the literary active group of the population. The study further investigates publishing options via the Internet used mainly by amateur authors, complementary

phenomena in print production, as well as the impact of these innovative forms on the dynamics of the book market. The ways in which texts are received are examined particularly from the point of enhancing the role of the reader within interactive media and attention is paid to the qualitative changes within the reception frameworks (transnational and non-literary contexts). And finally, the ways in which literary phenomena are handled is largely related to the reflection of the critical state of the current literary criticism and new virtual formats of critiquing literature. The study shows that the evolutionary changes which were brought about by extending the use of digital media within literary communication have been so extensive that the Schmidt model of analysis has proven insufficient.

**Keywords:** literary culture; literary system; book market; digital media; the Internet; social networks

### | About the Authors

**Karel Piorecký**, PhD has graduated in Czech and German (Faculty of Education, Charles University, Prague), and undertaken postgraduate studies in Modern Czech Literature at Faculty of Arts at University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (Czech Republic). He currently conducts research at the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Department of Research on the 20th Century and Contemporary Literature. His focus is particularly on the history of modern Czech poetry and connection between literature and new media. He published a monograph entitled *Česká poezie v postmoderní situaci* (Czech Poetry in a Postmodern Situation) (2011) and *Česká literatura a nová média* (Czech Literature and New Media) (2016). E-mail: piorecky@ucl.cas.cz

**Vojtěch Malínek**, PhD specialises in Czech Literature and Literary Theory and conducts research at the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences. He is the coordinator of Czech Literary Bibliography Research Infrastructure and co-chair of Bibliographical Data Working Group within the DARIAH-ERIC Consortium. His areas of research include: literary bibliographies, data analysis and digital humanities. He is the chief investigator on several infrastructure research projects such as: Digitising of Retrospective Bibliography of Czech Literature 1770–1945 (2009–2011), Czech Literary Bibliography 1945–1960 (2012–2015), Czech Literary Bibliography Research Infrastructure I (2016–2019), Czech Literary Internet (2017–2021) and Czech Literary Bibliography Research Infrastructure II (2020–2022). E-mail: malinek@ucl.cas.cz



ELŻBIETA WINIECKA

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

## Literary Internet: Online Criticism and Literary Communication

The advent of the Internet in Poland dates back to 1991.<sup>1</sup> The past three decades have shown that the cultural changes initiated by this new medium have affected literary criticism more than literature. We are witnessing a spectacular decline in the status and authority of critics, whose role and influence in the digitized environment has been reduced to almost zero. Five years ago, Krzysztof Hoffman reassured literary critics that they “do not have to adapt to the new digital world (not yet), although accelerating changes in cultural circulation will oblige them to take a position” (Hoffman 64). It seems that the moment has arrived when critics have to consider the digital media; otherwise their voice will cease to be heard. Hoffman rightly observes that: “The institution of literary criticism is directly connected to the institution of literature and its ...<sup>2</sup> medium. In other words, literary criticism as we know it belongs to print culture ...”

This is a very important observation, because each medium determines the form communication takes. The Internet is changing its specificity in a rad-

1 A detailed history of the Internet in Poland is presented by Dariusz Baran in “Internet w Polsce.”

2 An ellipsis was used here by the author as a way to build tension. I have replaced it with an ellipsis in parentheses to indicate that I have omitted this punctuation mark, which greatly alters the tone of the comment.

ical way. However, the second part of Hoffman's statement about critical literary blogs seems too general:

blogs in this perspective are not literary criticism, because their environment is not printing, but digital reality. If we are witnessing the dethronement of paper books and the ascent of e-books..., new forms of participation in the conversation about literature should emerge with them.

Firstly, it is hard to agree with the author's contention that e-books will replace the printed book. Secondly, Hoffman incorrectly defines the essence of media transformation. The problem is not digitized literature that is read from the screen (i.e. the mentioned e-books), because it poses no threat to the printed book at all. The medium from which we read literature (whether it is a page in a book or a screen on an e-reader) does not affect the ontology of the literary text as long as it is only a vehicle for transferring words, although it undoubtedly transforms our perception. What is important is the fact that the medium determines the shape of literature, affects its form (structure) and its ontology (what a literary work is and how it exists), and thus significantly changes the entire model of literary communication. Therefore, though Hoffman rightly observes the need to develop new forms of critical literature dealing with online media, he incorrectly indicates the source of this need. Literary critics have to accept the Internet not because we read more e-books, but because the Internet has become an area in which a literary scholar finds a transformed, sometimes unrecognizable, subject of his research. This is also where a critic will encounter completely new readers who are still interested in literature. Therefore, it is not about deciding whether a blog is or is not a form of literary criticism (in my opinion it may be), but about drawing conclusions from the fact that it is a much more effective form of contact with the reader than the columns of a literary magazine. These are becoming a rapidly depopulating reserve of experts, visited only occasionally by readers.

We have to accept that the new reader, brought up in multimedia culture, reads differently. This is well illustrated by the reaction to Przemysław Czapliński's one literary critique published in 2014 on *lubimyczytac.pl* about Paweł Huelle's *Sing the Gardens*. In addition to a few voices praising Czapliński's interpretative mastery (obviously expressed by representatives of the older generation, as evidenced by their enthusiastic comments: "Hats off! ... To the young readers of this website—read and learn :)"), one can find the following com-

ments: "I can't write like this and I wouldn't like to be able to," "If I were interested in reading a review of this book and if this was the only one on the whole Internet... I wouldn't read it. I wouldn't have enough time. Neither would I want to" (Czapliński). The quoted statements illustrate the total disparity between the expectations and needs of Internet users and readers of traditional literary criticism. Such categories as the economy, clarity and unambiguity of the message are also the criteria by which we can ascertain the usefulness of internet criticism, which is not only meant to clearly present and justify the strong points and flaws of a work of art, but to provide a clear answer to the question of whether a book is worth reading. If typical readers (amateurs who read books in their spare time), that is, the majority of readers, find time to read books, they will certainly not devote any of it to reading such expert opinions. There is no time and inclination.

The irreversibility of the changes described above is a foregone conclusion. Cultural, social and psychological changes that have already taken place and which will undoubtedly continue under the influence of the Internet are not conducive to in-depth analysis and reflection. Perhaps, therefore, we have to come to terms with the fact that literary criticism has become the metalanguage of experts without much social significance and influence.

However the fate of traditional criticism unfolds, it is impossible not to notice that a vibrant area of online literary activity is taking shape alongside it. Literature is developing outside the print medium, with which it is mainly associated. If we agree that the invention of printing in the fifteenth century revolutionized the development of literature, by making the production of books cheap and accessible, it will not take a great leap to acknowledge that a medium as ubiquitous as the Internet, where most of the content is free of charge, has had an even greater influence on the shape of literature, its production, dissemination and reception. Today, the Internet, which is ontologically on par with offline reality, has provided a space where new hyper-, quasi-, para- and post-literary writing practices are rapidly developing.

When writing about literary communication on the Internet, I have in mind very diverse and often unexpected ways of referring to the category of literariness. For the purpose of these considerations, I would like to adopt a fairly general understanding of literature as a practice of utilizing language, one that, intentionally or not, goes beyond its purely functional use. Such a definition inevitably invites an association with Jakobson's category of poetic function as an ordering principle of surplus signification. Unlike formalistic and essentialist assumptions, the approach proposed here, despite superficial analogies, is definitely closer to the relational position (neopragmatic, especially post-con-

structivist), reflecting more adequately the situation of online literature, where often the complex context and the reader's attitude determine the literary status of a given statement. Refining this definition any further would require referring to methodological issues, which I am trying to avoid in these considerations. Given their diversity, it is difficult to find a set of characteristics that would encompass all the practices connected to the terms *literary Internet* and *online literary communication*. Some of them are quite traditional narrative forms, such as fan-fiction or Facebook stories, others are writing practices that verge on literature, journalism and metacritical reflection (like some blogs), while others are avant-garde experiments that are self-aware and sometimes present very radical attempts at redefining literature. They often cross the boundaries of literature towards hybrid and multimedia forms and are created thanks to the advanced use of digital technology. They create a rich and diverse area of electronic literature that is constantly developing and diversifying. However, this does not fit into the field of my interest concerning so-called digitized literature, i.e. electronic versions of printed works (e-books, PDFs) or of works whose properties (ontological, epistemological, pragmatic) would not change after printing.

All the mentioned cases are connected by the fact that they arose in a digital medium and are realized in this altered site of communication, thus opening up new developmental perspectives for literature. Thanks to the Internet, writing and reading are no longer the same.

This text is largely a collection of questions and doubts that I ask myself when thinking about online literature and online literary communication, and, above all, about the competences and possibilities of literary criticism, which should keep pace with the changes in culture and literature. I would like to present an abbreviated account of them in an attempt to constructively outline a new way to analyze the kind of literature that is developing online. It should also be mentioned that I will not attempt to reconstruct the state of Western research, which is much more advanced than in Poland in terms of both theoretical and critical literary reflection as well as creative activities. I will focus instead on the state of Polish research and on the main areas of interest of digital literary scholars, who, of course, draw on the findings of Western researchers (e.g. Jay David Bolter, Aspen Aeresth, Richard Grusin, Katherina Hayle, John Cayley, Alan Sondheim, Stephanie Strickland, Rita Raley, Matthew Kirschenbaum and many others), but adapt their research to their native realities and possibilities. These digital literary scholars, who are incidentally also often creators and authors in their own right, are dedicated to promoting electronic literature and explaining its properties and specificity.

Lev Manovich's<sup>3</sup> classic definition of digital media allows us to indicate the main differences between printed literature and digital literature (electronic, online). Manovich considered **numerical representation, modularity, automation, variation and cultural transcoding** to be the features of new media. What this means is that every digital object is written in a mathematical language and can be subjected to algorithmic processing. Digital objects are created using programs, templates and scripts. They also propose a kind of matrix that defines the limits of a writer's and recipient's freedom, as they are always dependent to some extent on the programmer's project. That is why digital works are more often created as collaborative works, co-created by computer science, graphic artists and writers. In the West, the author is usually also a programmer, and in Poland digital authors are increasingly also specialists in digital technologies. Because the digital object (hypertext, animated poetry, generative poetry, etc.) gives the reader a wide range of possibilities in how it can be brought to life (course of action) in the act of reading, the number of possible versions of such a "concretization" is sometimes very large, which makes the digital object appear to be fluid and infinitely variable. Of course, the reader/user only seemingly has unlimited freedom to decide on the shape of the work; in fact, it is the author who decides how much creative freedom to give the reader. A digital object is a kind of musical notation, which materializes in various versions with each interaction. It is also important that thanks to digital media the narrative, considered until recently a natural cognitive structure, has gained a rival method of organizing information—the database. It has become an independent cultural form, one that creates a new model of the world and human experience, while also transforming perception. This is worth remembering, because multimedia structures also affect literary communication. And finally, last but not least, we are dealing with two layers with regards to digital objects: computer and culture. The former, based on mathematical rules, influences the latter, which under the influence of digital ontology, epistemology and pragmatics, develops new genres, new organization of content and new content. Discrete signals (bits of information) of no significance in themselves, decide on the properties of the cultural layer available to the user. This is an extremely important fact for the researcher of digital literature, although they are reluctantly taken into account by humanities scholars, mainly due to insufficient competence in the field of information technology.

In the field of literary studies, poststructuralism questioned the essentialist definitions of literariness, and in the deconstructive approach, the text

3 See Lev Manovich's *Język nowych mediów*.

is viewed as an unstable network of sense-productive signs. The appearance of the Internet, according to many, has brought about a radical blurring of the margins of literature and other forms of non-verbal communication. For this reason, the term “post-literature” is used to define it, a term which, on the one hand, indicates its roots, but on the other, embeds it in the context of contemporary problems of defining phenomena, arts and disciplines. The Internet, as a hypertextual multimedial, dematerializes products which were previously composed of various substances. Because it is digital, it can combine objects previously belonging to different codes into one message. In addition to verbal language, images, sounds, movement have become part of literary communication. Also, if we consider the visual-sound component of language to be a basic building block of literary communication, then in digital works, each such elementary signifier (phoneme, morpheme or meme) is founded on an invisible digital substructure, numerous bites constituting a basic unit of information, an amount so immense that it defies negotiation and interpretation. Whatever it is we are looking at on the screen is written in binary code. In other words, every sign on the Internet has its cultural and technological dimension. Usually, when we look at the screen, we focus on the external, cultural layer of the content: words, images, sounds, their connections, relationships, and references. We interpret what appears on the computer screen in accordance with literary and critical standards, paying due attention to every detail. As humanities scholars, we focus not on system activities but on the semiotics of the message. What constitutes the foundation of the visible, its hidden mechanisms, remains invisible to us.

By not addressing computer technology as the foundation of modern communication, including literary communication, we are, perhaps deliberately, evading the important problem of online literature. We are hiding from view the uncomfortable, unknown, and incomprehensible. Omitting the programmable layer of content obscures our knowledge about the work, rendering it incomplete and perhaps even false. However, accessing code requires familiarity with programming language (such as html), which remains rare among humanities scholars and literary critics. Unfortunately, without knowledge of design software, HTML, and rudimentary technical principles of the Internet, a literary scholar finds oneself in the world of digital texts much like an early twentieth century anthropologist in the Amazon jungle. Here, perhaps, lies the reason why conservative lovers of literature are so suspicious of new literary developments. Ignorance of the mechanisms responsible for the creation and existence of e-literature bars critics from going beyond the cultural layer of a communicated idea, thus risking a superficial reading, one that is at odds with the inherent rules

of the work and misses the essence of such developments; or it can encourage the critics to develop their competence to include the basics of programming.

All the features of the digital work briefly discussed above redefine the role and place of the reader. Researchers typically point to interactivity as a feature that distinguishes electronic literature from printed literature. It seems useful to make a distinction between *interactivity* (*interaktywności*) and *interaction* (*interakcyjności*). The first is a feature of an electronic object and consists in the user receiving information and responding to it. This is how all computer games work, requiring the player's activity to start and operate. A significant part of electronic literature is interactive: without particular actions on the part of the reader (clicking on a link, entering a command, selecting one of several possible options) it remains unavailable. However, interactivity is a feature of a digital object, i.e. a program, electronic equipment, and applies to human-machine relations. To describe the interactions and reactions of people participating in the type of communication enabled by digital devices, I would use the term *interaction*. Thus, social media and the attendant writing practices are based on *interaction*, that is, on the mutual, dialogical interaction of the sender and the recipient via the medium. The sender posting a comment, meme, GIF or tweet awaits the reactions of the recipients. The appearance of new information is treated as an invitation to comment and exchange thoughts, often reconfiguring this information in a creative fashion. In this way, the model of virtual communication based on *interaction* is realized.

The beginnings of electronic literature date back to the 1960s, when computer-programmed poetry appeared in the United States. It was followed by literary hypertexts, first created in special programs (StorySpace) and saved on floppy disks, and then on CDs. The next stages of the development of hypertextual literature, available online since the 1990s, brought with them hybrid multimedia forms created using more advanced graphic programs, including simple animations, voices and sounds in the narrative. In Poland, the first hypertext appeared in 2002 (Sławomir Shute's *Block*), and in the twenty-first century came the development of other forms of e-literature that had appeared in the West a dozen or so years ago. On the Electronic Literature Organization website, operating since 1999, one can find a fairly comprehensive list of various electronic literary work, such as the following:

- hypertextual fiction and poetry, available both offline and online,
- kinetic poetry created in Flash or another program,
- computer installations that require the recipient to read or contain other literary aspects,

- bots, known as computer persona capable of conducting conversations with the user,
- interactive fiction,
- literary applications,
- text, email and blog novels,
- poems and prose generated by the computer, often interactive,
- collaborative work, enabling readers to co-create the text,
- literary online performances that develop new ways of writing.

This list is constantly expanding with new genres, which are published in subsequent volumes of online e-literature. Even now to this list we can add code electronic literature, which combines computer code with the natural language. E-literary genres also include e-mail novels, cell phone novels, geonarratives (i.e. GPS narratives assigned to places), literature for mobile devices, which combines real space and virtual narratives, and interactive drama, also available in the online version. Most of these genres are not known in Poland, and some of them only appeared a few years ago, mostly thanks to Mariusz Pisarski, a writer and promoter of e-literature in Poland. Promoting this type of Polish creativity are poets from the Poznań group Perfokarta with Roman Bromboszcz at the forefront, the group Cichy Nabiau and Resolution Chleb, which included Leszek Onak, Piotr Puldzian Płucienniczak, Łukasz Podgórn and which, after seven years of activity, ceased operations by the end of 2018.

The latest, third volume of ELO from 2016 includes for the first time four Polish works: Zenon Fajfer's *Ars poetica*, Józef Żuk Piwkowski's *Księga Słów Wszystkich* (The Book of All Words), Katarzyna Giełżyńska's *C(n) du it*, as well as *Tiger's Eyes*—a digital adaptation of Tytus Czyżewski's poetry by Urszula Pawlicka and Łukasz Podgórn. Electronic literature requires from its creators a considerable degree of literary awareness and technological competence; it tends to be experimental in form and many of its achievements are referred to as cyber-avant-garde. It is impossible not to notice that this work occupies a niche in Poland, with its low level of popularity resulting from it being difficult, demanding, and incomprehensible. Literary scholars have been reluctant to venture into digital literature, preferring rather to cultivate their attachment to the printed medium, thereby demonstrating that the criteria they use to assess the value of a literary work remain unchanged; however, the reason why digital literature today is cognitively attractive is primarily because it broadens the field of literature by introducing a technological aspect, previously unknown to literary scholars, and disciplinary; electronic literature is what film was a hundred years ago, an interdisciplinary and intermedial phenomenon.



Because these works are dynamic, impermanent and multi-variant, they require a process-based approach. This exposes the inadequacy of classic textual theories in approaching work that is not an object but an event. Entangled in a network of various social and technological conditions, these works appear as a dynamic weave of many variable factors, as a network of relations and contingencies, rather than a ready-made text that can be critically reviewed. They gain meaning in interaction, i.e. when interacting with devices, recipients, but also with the cultural environment in which they are received.

In addition to electronic literature, many new, though still traditional, writing practices are being developed online. They are based on building a narrative, they use clear references to printed works, often imitating traditional conventions and using proven techniques of constructing characters and plots taken from literature.

Social media is credited with giving rise to numerous, though not easily classifiable, genres, some of which have gained a large (measured by the number of likes and the number of observers) group of loyal readers, who follow and comment on subsequent entries. These works are based on collective activities and the interaction of users of websites and digital platforms, who influence the shape of the work being created. Here you can find blogs that flourished before the age of Internet 2.0, as well as Facebook literature, tweeterature, fan-fiction; these are accompanied by a new form of literary criticism, prevalent in the Polish fan community, practiced by amateurs on websites called *analizatornie*. The latter are developing as a new form of critical and creative reading and writing.

While the two earlier categories can easily be identified as developing from the literary tradition, the next one includes liminal forms derived from various semiotic codes. This is where we can find memes, GIFS, copy-pastes, i.e. liminal forms, referred to as logo-visual literature. These are multimedia expressions that have developed in cyberspace, though they are very often also found in the literary tradition. They refer to this tradition and from it they draw their power to generate meaning and critically comment on events. What makes these forms different from electronic literature is their immersion in cyberspace and functional communication, much greater adaptability and no clear declaration about the author's literary intentions. This classification is imposed against the intentions of the creators, who simply play with the possibilities of software, comment on current events, and inadvertently involve in these communication experiments language that becomes one of the means of artistic expression. For these hybrid uses of literary language, which combine functional language and visual messages, we should reserve the term post-literature.

Internet literature, in its various transformations and variations, is developing independently of offline literary life, which is controlled by the market, over which one can exercise some measure of institutional control on account of existing publishing laws. The new media reality entails new possibilities, a new sensitivity and new expectations with respect to the offered content and to those who comment on it. That is why, next to writers who publish books (more often also in the form of an e-book), a great number of amateur authors begin writing without feeling the need to enter into the models of literary life established during the printing era. The publication of a book, a volume, or a collection of stories is no longer something that elevates the status of an author, at least that is what they claim. Although the symbolic status of a printed book still signifies that one is publishing “real” literature, there is a new tradition of literary production that breaks with the institutions and values of the era of print. The world of cyber-literature exists on its own terms and does not need analog culture. Therefore, it does not depend on expert opinions; it rejects the authority of critics. However, let us not forget that critics repay them with the same *désintéressement*. Having determined that what is digital is less important and less valuable in artistic terms, critics choose not to venture into the abyss of the Internet. What is striking in the statements literary scholars have made about Internet literature is the remarkable conservatism and the inadequacy of their interpretive apparatus (descriptive categories, criteria of analysis) used in relation to these new literary developments. The medium is not only a medium that provides the recipient with text, but also technology that affects the structure of the work and the communication situation, which literary scholars do not always want to remember. Here the apparently conservative attachment of literature studies to the printed book is revealed.

From the beginning, the Internet has been a medium with literary potential. Some scholars even believe that its nature is fundamentally literary. This is interestingly demonstrated in Sandy Baldwin’s book, *The Internet Unconscious. On the Subject of Electronic Literature*. Applying a psychoanalytic lens, she shows how electronic literature, which includes all Internet users without exception, is conducive to the emergence of new writing practices. Due to the properties of this medium, the communicative situation, in which we participate every time we write an e-mail, tweet, create a status on Facebook, or even log in to a website to gain access to information, has outstanding literary potential. Baldwin defines literariness very broadly, in the spirit of deconstructionism, as openness to the experience of mystery, encounters with the unknown, unexpected and unpredictable. What is more, the desire for this encounter is inscribed in the forms of activity we undertake, and the uncertainty as to the identity of our

interlocutor only intensifies the creative potential of this medium. It is worth appreciating the value of this concept, which exposes the status of a logged-in subject actively participating in cyberspace. Psychoanalysis allows us not only to describe the structuring of fantasy (unconsciousness) and the identity (auto) creation games of virtual entities, but also to answer the fundamental question of the humanities: the condition and anthropological status of an active network user, entangled in the complex dependencies of the programmable medium, of its recipients and of the creators behind it.

The perspective proposed by Baldwin is one of the many from which online literary communication is today critically reviewed. There is no doubt that the medium, which is little over a quarter century old, has created a new environment, and not just for literary experiments. Literature has undergone a profound transformation in the digital environment; moreover, its subject is not identical to that of analog literature. Literary phenomena developing online are the result of a deep ontological transformation, obviously related not only to technological changes but also the following: cultural, anthropological and sociological. The traditional roles of the author, reader, critic, editor have been transformed, and sometimes destroyed. Amateurs are not only creators, but also editors, proofreaders and publishers of their work, which for obvious reasons affects its quality. It should also be remembered that creators and recipients using the Internet have also been influenced by it: their perception, sensitivity, and ability to think critically and reflectively have changed. It is worth bearing in mind this ubiquity of these transformations. For the record, let us add that this metamorphosis concerns not only literature, but the status of all art, to such an extent that it seems difficult to maintain the definition of literature as a monomedium, i.e. a message created in a verbal language. Therefore, if even the word as an unquestionable criterion for recognizing literature has ceased to be its determinant, is it still possible to distinguish literary works from, on the one hand, net art and, on the other, ephemeral functional texts? And are the distinctions and categories (also genological) used in the world of analogue texts applicable to online literature?

The above remarks lead to the separation of two separate but related phenomena. We are observing changes in the condition of literary criticism that are taking place as a result of cultural changes, with the Internet being the main impulse. However, at the same time, changes have taken place in the nature of literature itself, which has expanded to include various e-literary projects available online, as well as forms of writing activity practiced on social networks. At the same time, its ontological clarity has weakened, because literature 2.0 should not be associated solely with words.

In the publication announcement of *The Digital Critic. Literary Culture Online* (edited by Houman Barekat, Robert Barry, David Winters<sup>4</sup>), which was published at the end of 2017, the model of traditional literary criticism was cited to illustrate the specificity of online literary culture. At the end of the twentieth century, this traditional model was still going strong: it developed within a paradigm characterized, according to the publishers of OR Books, by several permanent determinants: it was embedded on the foundation of knowledge, objectivity, understood as absolute impartiality and withdrawal of the author, who formulated opinions with due diligence. At a time when the computer served as a typewriter, traditional literary criticism had a largely institutionalized, professional, expert character and occupied an important place in literary life, influencing its canon, its readership, and, indirectly, the tastes of its readers. This brief description of these good times ends with a rather dramatic sentence about its potential: “And then the Internet happened.” The development of the Internet rapidly transformed global communication and, as such, exerted influence on literary communication.

It is worth adding that *The Digital Critic* was published less than three years after a discussion on literary criticism in the era of literature 2.0 was held in London in February 2015. The organizers invited everyone interested to celebrate the “boom of online criticism,” and, through the public nature of the event, wanted to encourage “readers to engage in the development of digital literary culture” (“Literature 2.0”). By introducing the concept of digital criticism, they also drew attention to the different way literary criticism approaches online literature. The book, which summarized the history of the literary internet and collected various points of view, both of skeptics and of the creators involved in its development, indicated one thing: that the future will bring further changes in the shape and status of literary criticism, including the risk of its total collapse in the era of Facebook likes, Twitter wars for instant replies and 1,000 character reviews on Amazon.

The organizers of the London panel were well aware of something that is only now slowly reaching the consciousness of Polish literary scholars: that the culture of the Internet, also in its literary aspect, is the domain of cooperation, commitment and co-creation. Readers are not passive recipients (in the sense

4 The list of contributors and editors of the volume does not represent the academic world; they are editors of online literary journals: “Review 31” exists since 2011, the editor-in-chief is Houman Barekat, and Robert Barry is the editor of the technology and digital culture department; “3: AM Magazine” has been in existence since 2000, with David Winters as its the editor-in-chief.

that their activity is not limited to reading and interpreting unchanging works of literature), but are co-authors in the sense that they interact with the author and/or work: they read, comment, share impressions, and the authors willingly engage in a dialogue with them. These authors are well aware of the fact that without committed readers giving them likes, sharing their entries, often conducting inspiring discussions, online work, which has a tendency to rapidly disappear under the flood of new contributions, has no chance for a longer life. This is simply due to the nature of social network sites, where information appears quickly and access to it is fleeting. The popularity of Wattpad testifies to the significance of amateur online creativity. The Polish version of the website states that it is “the largest community in the world for readers and writers.” You can post your work there without any restrictions and read what others have written and posted. The popularity of this type of writing service, as well as such social media sites as Facebook and Twitter, which are also sites of literary creativity, shows how diverse this amateur literary creativity is in terms of genres, but, at the same time, how conventional and predictable it is; nonetheless, it is developing extremely dynamically thanks to the possibilities offered by the Internet. This is happening without the help of experts, critics and editors. The readers are the reviewers. This concept of new communication is clearly visible on fan-fiction websites, where communities of specialized experts gather to continue, reconfigure and develop their favorite works of fiction.

Genres such as blogs, fan pages are disregarded from the perspective of printed criticism. Serious researchers do not read the opinions expressed there, and it is also rare that a literary scholar runs a critical literary blog (exceptions include younger and middle aged critics, such as Bernardetta Darska, Jarosław Czechowicz, Paulina Małochleb, and Justyna Sobolewska). Digital forms are still regarded as inferior, less valuable. A printed publication, with its system of editorial-publishing-reviewing procedures, is a guarantee of quality. As a result, a widening gap between the two circulations can be observed: print circulation and the world of online communication (also literary) that is composed of numerous independent communities, located ahierarchically, often vertically. The Internet is replete with websites dedicated to books, where anyone can share their opinion and review the text. Institutional and technical barriers and restrictions have disappeared. For this reason, the world of literary criticism is increasingly moving away from the realities of online culture, which is a culture of sharing and exchanging texts, opinions and values.

The clash of these two types of sensitivities, these two models of literature and two incompatible ways of talking about literature can be illustrated with the example of two statements. The first is from an article “Co słyhać?” by

Zofia Król, published in *dwutygodnik.pl*, a peculiar cornerstone of traditional literature studies and academic criticism on the Internet. Zofia Król, its founder and editor-in-chief, doctor of philosophy, researcher of culture and literature, uses analytical tools taken from classical poetics and narratology to describe new phenomena, including Facebook literature. The second is from Konrad Janczura's op-ed, mockingly reacting to her article, published in the online Ha!art as part of the satirical series *Trendy srendy* (Janczura). The author is a graduate of the Literary and Art Criticism at the Jagiellonian University, but above all he is the editor of "Popmoderna," a blogger, and a passionate opponent of the existing shape of literary culture.

Zofia Król wrote an article about the new literary genres developing on Facebook. In this article, she lists and characterizes these works, among which are stories about everyday events that authors post on their walls—fairly regular, short, witty posts, usually ending with a surprising conclusion. The author is usually the narrator (Łukasz Najder, Adelajda Truscińska, Grzegorz Wysocki), but the uniqueness lies in the constructed hero, who enchants with folk wisdom, surprising both the narrator and the readers. It is not uncommon, especially when written by professional writers, that they "build up their literariness" and dazzle with linguistic inventiveness (Agnieszka Wolny-Hamkało, Julia Fiedorczyk). Another characteristic element of Facebook mentioned by the researcher is the Facebook article, whose appeal is explained not by topic or style, but by the appeal of the author, who is the main reason why readers follow and like the posts. Król observes that literary columns (Piotr Czerski, Ziemowit Szczerek) often appear first as blog entries, and only then are linked to Facebook. In this case, the blog should be treated as the main platform for the author's statements, while social media provide additional information and serve as self-promotion tools, ensuring that the published content quickly reaches a significant number of readers. However, the opposite is also true: the author first publishes on Facebook, and then moves to blog entries. It also happens that the original Internet publications appear in print, like Julia Szychowiak's *Całe życie z moim ojcem*, published in 2016, consisting of short, surprising dialogues with her father, known well to her followers on Facebook. Collected in the book, they became a record of epiphanies, but not because of the uniqueness of the dialogues, but because of the communicative situation. Short scenes posted on the empty page of the book astound with the brilliance of the phrases used in the dialogues, which gain depth that is easy to overlook on the Facebook wall.

This transmediality is a characteristic feature of the Internet, which creates spaces through which specific types of creativity can pass endlessly. Someone

who has a blog simultaneously communicates with an audience through other channels, and very often these take the form of supporting and promoting traditional, printed literature, which in some circles still legitimizes the artist. An interesting and probably the most well-known example of Facebook art is Łukasz Podgórní's *Cichy nabiau*, where the author posts his mocking comments, metamems, which are understandable to a group of initiated members familiar with his conventions. Król mentions this page in her article, but she does it in a way that invites Janczura's mockery, who accuses her of failing to understand new communication. It should be emphasized that Król meticulously notes the characteristic features of new literary practices on social media, but does so with sincerity: the fact that character limits often affect language inventiveness, and that they result in interesting stylistic effects. The absence of Polish characters, punctuation and inflectional endings, irritating as they may be to conservatives, can have poetic potential. Other features of this new literature are that it is short-lived and transient in nature, it quickly becomes outdated, and it focuses on events happening here and now. The author is also aware that by describing Facebook literature in such a way, she is working against the nature of the medium, and in spite of the expectations of the interested parties themselves:

In any case, it should be remembered that analyzing Facebook posts as literature, arranging them into a series and trying to pick out certain regularities, we are acting against the medium itself. The medium, however, takes its revenge by making us scroll forever to find literature from last year. (Król)

A note about scrolling, i.e. perusing through posts, which Facebook arranges in chronological order; this complicates accessing older entries, which emphasizes their short lifespan and is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century episodic publications in weekly newspapers. The analogy is distant, but it allows us to clearly make the point that each medium influences the content and the cultural practices that it shapes. The author concludes her analysis on the interaction of printed and Facebook literature with an important conclusion that is worth quoting in full:

The medium eliminates the criteria for critical evaluation and the very need for them, though these criteria already find themselves in a deplorable state, as well as traditional literature. At the same time, Facebook posts do a good job at loosing the framework for thinking about



literature, something which is much needed in public conversation; they also lend themselves well to promoting literature. They demonstrate that the distance between the everyday world, the status of, say, a hard-boiled egg and sausages for breakfast, and the literary statement depends only on the given context. “What’s up?” asks the medium, and the answer to this question may already be literature. (Król)

A response to this matter-of-fact text, written from a perspective that is external to the world of social media, is provided by a scathing article by Janczura, who, as he says frankly, “mocking the biweekly is in his blood.” The critic attempts, unfortunately without any substantive arguments, to prove the inadequacy of the researcher’s tools and how little can be said about Facebook posts if one does not accept the users’ perspective and way of thinking. The object of mockery is primarily the “linguistic buffoonery” used by the authors of the online magazine, the so-called “language of discourse.” The young author, who had in the past engaged in literary criticism, mainly in the recently defunct magazine *Popmoderna*, now practices op-ed criticism: subjective, personal, often extraneous. One can, however, extract from his article several characteristic features of the new consciousness shaped by the culture of the Internet. In his polemic with Zofia Król, he assumes that the author behaves like an “uncle at the holiday table” who “blathers on a subject about which he has no clue.” Further, the criticism is even more aggressive:

Suddenly the elite critic extends a gesture of mercy towards this lower form of art mushrooming on Facebook. She discovered that a status update can also be considered literature, since it is a genre cultivated by ‘real writers,’ yes, the real ones, meaning those published in print. (Janczura)

It is possible to see here the oft-repeated criticism leveled at institutionalized literature, which depreciates the fledging on-line literature, grants awards to authors of analogue literature, who often have a much smaller group of readers than online authors. Further allegations verge on being abusive. Janczura accuses Król of being ignorant as to the existence of electronic literature and the studies that have been done on it, although Król did deal with the former, but described a particular section of Facebook literature, which, although uses the possibilities of the digital medium, is not the same as e-literature.

Janczura is annoyed by the traditional hierarchical literary system based on artistic value, identifying it with elitism and thus injustice. Formal language



and the hermetic nature of literary criticism reveal a lack of understanding of spontaneous Internet creativity, which should be written in a “more normal,” less sophisticated, and therefore more sincere language. First of all, he emphasizes that Internet creators do not aspire to be published authors in the traditional sense, as they create their own alternative literary circulation, their own communities, and a system of communication (like meme makers, which for the initiated are a multilevel meta-conscious games).

In addition, Janczura juxtaposes Facebook creativity with the alleged passivity of readers of printed literature, whose only activity is to comment on what others have written. On the Internet, every reader is at the same time a creator, copying, pasting, processing, commenting, adding—and this activity is both a way of communicating with others and a form of the most sincere and authentic criticism of culture, one that is based on mutual understanding and sharing. Janczura also criticizes Król for referring to examples of authors who had already been elevated by a book publication, and thus have the status of “real” writers, and for describing Facebook literature in a language that is so at odds with its spirit:

you just have to write, it's what you ought to do, because it is serious humanities. There is no semblance of science there, but literary studies by a capital “L,” which should in no way be associated with ass kissing. But, Ms. Zofia, why do you respect only real writers on Facebook: Fiedorzuk, Wolny-Hamkało, Najder, Szczerk or Klicka, if, for example, Ola Radomiak from Piotrków Trybunalski is doing so well on Facebook? Ola has not yet published a book, but has collected over 50,000 likes for her efforts. (Janczura)

The confrontation of these two points of view shows that the community of Internet creators, represented here by Janczura, ostentatiously dissociates itself from the official institutions of literary life, along with the hierarchies and assessments they legitimate. It creates a new, ahierarchical space of communication, in which the publication of a book is not a status symbol (though Janczura's own path from online publication to his own printed novel seems to belie such an approach), while the voices of analog critics are treated as evidence of anachronism and lack of understanding of the elementary differences between the world of the Internet (in which lively, dynamic, interactive literature develops) and the world of print, which preserves the old model of writing that is incompatible with the sensitivity and needs of new generations of Internet users.

The short polemic summarized above exposes the greatest weaknesses of online writers, who create a closed subculture that does not recognize voices other than those from other users. Social media has brought about changes in the mindset of readers of literature. They are now characterized by much greater candor, spontaneity, and the belief that immediate contact between the author and the reader is natural and desirable. In turn, the lesson for researchers and critics trying to reflect on the world of digital literature is that traditional criteria for analyzing and interpreting a work must be extended to include knowledge of the media history and theory and mediology. It is worth suspending judgment and approaching these new forms of literary practice without prejudice, because the sociological and psychological dimensions of these practices are as important as the linguistic exploits in recognizing the new position of online literature. There is no doubt that, from the perspective of the time-honored aesthetic canon, most of the works created online are much less mature and artistically inferior to a standard printed book. However, this should not be stated in the research on online literature. The cognitive dimension of these studies is important. The idea is to better understand the essence of the changes taking place in culture, communication and literature. A thorough and comprehensive description of these developments will yield interesting revelations and insight: also about the condition of literature in the Internet era. Internet literature is not, much like analogue literature, an isolated artistic field, but part of social life. It serves to share views, emotions, and to inspire to action. In this sense, life and literature intertwine intensely, and the classic categories of fiction and originality cease to fulfill the function of organizing and categorizing the different categories of writing. There are quite a few tools to choose from: those developed by psychoanalysis, allowing you to say something about the subject, cultural studies tools, showing cultural changes through the activities of e-literature creators. Mediology raises questions about the role of the medium, which is not only a carrier and a transmitter, but an important part of our communication, changing it and us. Sociology provides empirical data about the number and specificity of online communities, although research is quite difficult here because of the anonymity and dynamics of the Internet. Phenomenology, semiology, anthropology, reception aesthetics; all these disciplines and methods can now be reflected in a new mirror and their usefulness can be rediscovered. The sociology of science practiced by post-constructivists offers ready-made tools, among which the concept of the author-network (ANT-theory) has already found its application in the study of networks.<sup>5</sup>

5 See Bruno Latour's *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*.

Digital literary projects are an answer to cultural changes. The print medium—static, flat, unchanging, presuming passivity and subordination—is no longer able to compete with the new possibilities of digital technologies. That is why literature is not so much dying as it is adapting to the new reality. Digital literature is emerging in much the same way as the *avant-garde*, which had once tested the limits of expression and communication; today digital literature tests the endurance and competence of readers.

Many of the comments made here are regarded as obvious in the world of digital humanities, but, nonetheless, still merit repeating. With the development of e-literature, there is a noticeably widening division between literary scholars into analog literature researchers and those who recognize the Internet as a new medium of literary practice, one that is significant, inspiring and brimming with important innovations for literary scholarship. Engaging in digital literature requires a literary scholar to abandon many fundamental assumptions about literary research, such as the stability and material permanence of the subject of this research, which has been replaced by the dynamism of digital objects; copyright protection from outside interference, which has largely been annulled by interactivity and a readers' interference into the work as a condition for its existence; perception and understanding of information technology, text-forming mechanisms functioning behind the literary work, which repeatedly exclude a hermeneutic focus on the semantic layer of the message and interpretation as the main cognitive goal; structural continuity, which has been replaced by modularity, etc.

Furthermore, when researching these new phenomena, it is difficult to clearly draw the boundary between a historical and critical literary perspective. The online literary communication that we are interested in is little more than twenty years old in Poland, and as such it is part of modern day life. It is, however, worth remembering that digital literature, on account of its dependence on rapidly developing technologies (new software entail new possibilities), makes it more susceptible to obsolescence than is the case with analog literature. In addition, but also in connection with this, most critics following these new literary developments preserve and recall the historical perspective as a necessary means to explain the specificity of e-literature. This means that we are still approaching these developments from a dual perspective: as those that design the future of literature, culture and civilization (although it is difficult to say that it is the future of literature—contrary to skeptics, it cannot be said that analog literature will be replaced by digital literature), while, at the same time, they talk a lot about the tradition they come from, which they often negate, transform, but never ignore, because the innovations presented as literary

necessarily evoke the context of printed literature. Each digital work exists for a literary scholar by reference to a model of analogue culture and literature. This position of the commentator, which is external to the literary Internet as it exists for its users, is obviously a major flaw. Unlike clearly defined and separated roles in the analog world, an e-literature researcher and critic is very often also its co-creator and culture animator.

Mariusz Pisarski, a researcher, creator, commentator, and digital humanist, is an excellent example of a critic who has followed the transformation of e-literature. Another researcher from the youngest generation, Urszula Pawlicka, has adopted a very similar strategy of managing literary life. We should also add Piotr Marecki to this list, the most experienced animator of digital literary culture, editor-in-chief of "Ha!Art." Literature scholars who approach these new developments from a perspective of cultural and literature history are also precursors of electronic literature research: Maryla Hopfinger and Ewa Szczęsna, Małgorzata Janusiewicz, Agnieszka Karpowicz, Agnieszka Przybyszewska, Dorota Sikora, Monika Górską-Olesińska, and Anna Gumkowska. These researchers do not have critical literary aspirations. It is not difficult to notice that cultural studies play a dominant role in the research on media transformations: Ryszard Kluszczyński, Wiesław Godzic, Mirosław Filiciak, Marek Krajewski, Piotr Celiński, and Tadeusz Miczko. This is explained by the extraordinary popularity of culture sciences, which is largely due to the transdisciplinary or even post-disciplinary nature of contemporary humanities. Cultural experts, as opposed to literary scholars, tend to be much more open to new digital developments in the world of culture.

That is why one of the more known and respected American critics and researchers of electronic literature, Katherine Hayles,<sup>6</sup> believes that there is a need to establish research teams that will critically explore the cognitive, aesthetic, ontological, functional, communicative, sociological, anthropological, perceptive, economic, cultural and all other consequences resulting from the emergence and development of programmable hybrid literary practices in the digital medium. Entering the posthumanist space of cooperation between people and machines still remains in Poland a future perspective.

*Translated by Marcin Tereszewski*

6 See Katherine Hayles' *How we Became Posthuman. Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*.

## | References

- Baldwin, Sandy, *The Internet Unconscious: On the Subject of Electronic Literature*. Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.
- Baran, Dariusz. "Internet w Polsce." *Polski system medialny 1989–2011*. Ed. Katarzyna Pokorna-Ignatowicz. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM, 2013. 75–92.
- Barekat, Houman, Robert Barry, David Winters, eds. *The Digital Critic. Literary Culture Online*. New York: OR Books, 2017.
- Czapliński, Przemysław. "Ekstaza i przemoc." *lubimyczytać.pl*, <https://tinyurl.com/y8enj9k3>. Accessed 25 September 2017.
- Fajfer, Zenon. *Ars poetica*, <https://tinyurl.com/y9bkb4bu>. Accessed 28 September 2017.
- Giełżyńska, Katarzyna. *C(n) du it*, <https://tinyurl.com/yaylobtw>. Accessed 28 September 2017.
- Hayles, Katherine N. *How we Became Posthuman. Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*. Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Hoffman, Krszysztof. "Hejtuję litblogi? Blogi o literaturze a krytyka literacka," *Literatura w mediach III. Nowe wizerunki*. Eds. K. Taborska, W. Kuska. Gorzów Wielkopolski: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWSZ w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim, 2014.
- Janczura, Konrad. *Trendy srendy (4): Witamy w dwutygodniku*, <https://tinyurl.com/ybjkf83k>. Accessed 28 September 2017.
- Król, Zofia. "Co słychać?" *dwutygodnik.com*, <https://tinyurl.com/yc8uwlts>. Accessed 28 September 2017.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.
- "Literature 2.0: Criticism in the Digital Age," <https://tinyurl.com/yde5nu83>. Accessed 28 September 2017.
- Manowich, Lev. *Język nowych mediów*. Trans. P. Cypryjański, Warszawa: WAiP, 2006.
- Piwkowski, Józefa Żuk. *Księga Słów Wszystkich*, <https://tinyurl.com/y9aaxd8e>. Accessed 28 September 2017.
- Pawlicka, Urszula, Łukasz Podgórn. *Oczy tygrysa*, <https://tinyurl.com/ycpz64al>. Accessed 28 September 2017.
- Szychowiak, Julia. *Całe życie z moim ojcem*. Poznań: WBPiCAK, 2016.

| **Abstrakt**

ELŻBIETA WINIECKA

**Literacki Internet. Uwagi o krytyce i komunikacji literackiej w Sieci**

Artykuł poświęcony jest przemianom komunikacji literackiej w Internecie. Autorka opisuje, jak zmienia się krytyka literacka i jej rola w medium wirtualnym, wskazuje na głębokie zmiany kulturowe będące efektem rozwoju form komunikacji w mediach społecznościowych. Charakteryzuje również przekształcenia literatury, którym podlega ona w Internecie. Za sprawą nowych mediów narodziły się i rozwijają nowe gatunki literackie, ale również sama literatura zmienia swój status, przybierając często charakter hybrydyczny, lokując się na pograniczu sztuki słowa i mediów audiowizualnych. Zachodzące przemiany nie stanowią przy tym zagrożenia dla literatury drukowanej, są natomiast wyrazem siły oddziaływania Internetu na komunikację literacką oraz jej uczestników. Niezbędne są rezygnacja z łatwego wartościowania zachodzących procesów i skupienie się na ich rzetelnym opisie, analizie i interpretacji jako nowej, mało znanej części poszerzającego się pola literackiego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** literatura elektroniczna; komunikacja literacka online; Internet; życie literackie w Internecie; media literackie

| **Abstract**

ELŻBIETA WINIECKA

**Literary Internet: Online Criticism and Literary Communication**

This article is devoted to the transformations that literary communication has undergone on the Internet. The author describes how literary criticism and its role in the digital medium has changed, indicates the deep cultural changes resulting from the development of forms of communication in social media, and characterizes how the Internet has transformed literature. New media has given rise to new literary genres; it has also altered literature itself, recasting it in a hybrid form on the border between the literature and audiovisual media. The ongoing changes do not pose a threat to printed literature, but are an expression of the strength of the Internet's impact on literary communication and its participants. It is necessary to refrain from easy evaluations of the ongoing processes and to focus on accurately describing, analyzing and interpreting them as a new and relatively unknown part of the expanding literary field.

**Keywords:** Electronic literature; online literary communication; the Internet; literary life on the Internet; literature media

### | About the Author

**Elżbieta Winięcka** is Professor in the Institute of Polish Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Currently, her research interests involve literature in the context of culture, philosophy and the media. She is interested in the relationship between technology and literature, especially in relation to the Internet, remedialization and intermediality of literature. She is the author of the following books: *Białoszewski sylleptyczny* (Poznań 2006), *Z wnętrza dystansu. Leśmian – Karpowicz – Białoszewski – Miłobędzka* (Poznań 2012). She is the editor of “Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka.”

E-mail: e.winięcka@wp.pl





IVANA HOSTOVÁ  
Prešovská univerzita v Prešove

## Temporalities—Technologies—Transgressions: Notes On Contemporary Slovak Poetry<sup>1</sup>

### 1. No Time Like the Present

When it comes to defining zones and mechanisms of centrality and peripherality, both theories of globalisation (Huebner et al., LeBel, Rosa) and models of world literary processes (Casanova, Moretti) consider temporal differences between locales crucial. Indeed, “being in the now” is perhaps the single most important prerequisite for ‘going global’—not in the sense of an emergence of a hypothetical global monoculture, but in the sense of a culture becoming an active participant in planetary communication. For today, even an imagined return to essentialising ideals of “roots”—which are nevertheless always already woven from multitudes of (re)translations and (re)interpretations—is always in one way or another a demonstration of global events.

The current situation of global interconnectedness has been theorised by Peter Osborne as historical contemporaneity, “a coming together of different but equally ‘present’ times” (Osborne 2013: 22). In this view, there is no alternative to globalisation, since the developments in the world, especially the increased geographical mobility and the travelling of information, “have rendered the twin geopolitical imaginary of a culturalist postcolonial nationalism and a metropol-

1 This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract No 18–0043.

itan multiculturalism at best problematic and at worse redundant” (Osborne 2018: 33). For Osborne (2013: 27), it is art that “is a privileged cultural carrier of contemporaneity, as it was of previous forms of modernity” and it is solely postconceptual art that is able to have a claim on the present.

But where—in the complex relationships of contemporaneity and its artistic (re)presentation—can the poetry I intend to speak about here be positioned? In Casanova’s (86) view, literature, because of its deeper involvement of language and, by extension, cultural history and the construction of identity, “remains the most conservative of the arts, which is to say the one that is the most subject to traditional conventions and norms of representation.” It is also true that, as Skrebowski asserts, literature, unlike art, never underwent a full conceptual mutation and it is usually “good writing” as craft combined with a topical theme that dominates the discussions and directs the flow of symbolic (and monetary) capital. However, on turning to poetry, one encounters much stronger elements dragging the field away from the gravitational pull of traditional aesthetic criteria. Poetry in its visual, concrete, sound, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E and other radically innovative varieties, including the most recent one—(post)conceptual writing—much more readily resonates with Osborne’s outline of postconceptual contemporaneity and the position of art(s) within it. This poetry, it seems, does not interact with the present through the medium of what is commonly understood as literature. Depending on the definition of literature with respect to its (non)conservatism, there are basically two extreme positions to which this line of thought can lead us: either (radically innovative) poetry is not literature and thus approaches the status of “not literature” as poetry and its works are generic instances of art and are not divided into visual, literary, etc.,<sup>2</sup> or such writing is *the* literature in the sense of being the best representative of the art in question as opposed to writing that adheres to conservative, conventional, traditional norms.<sup>3</sup> It is not my aim to make any argument in favour of either view, since both enable me to extract the poetry I would like to discuss in the following from the restricting dependence on the sociological and aesthetics-related aspects of (ordinary) literature and conceptualise it in terms of the globalised present of contemporaneity. The position of this poetry—as either the best representative of literature and an example to be followed or a generic instance of contemporary art which, in Osborne’s view, can only be postconceptual—is

2 Here I draw on Skrebowski’s understanding of conceptual art as “not music,” “not cinema,” “not dance,” etc. as art.

3 Here I draw on Douglas Robinson and his discussion of literary translation.

therefore, like art, defined by its direct relationship with contemporaneity and the postconceptual condition:

[T]he idea of a postconceptual condition is double-coded. It is determined at once as an artistic situation and that which conditions it—primarily, that interplay of communications technologies and new forms of spatial relations that constitute the cultural and political medium of economic processes of globalization, the experience of which (when successful) it artistically condenses, reflects and expresses. (Osborne 2018: 21)

Postconceptual art is then determined and enabled by the *interplay of communications technologies and new forms of spatial relations* and, at the same time, it is “construed in such a way as to register the fundamental mutation of the ontology of the artwork carried by [the legacy of conceptual art]” (2018: 20) while “inter- and transnational characteristics of an art space have become the primary markers of its contemporaneity” (Osborne 2013: 27). While the first three aspects of postconceptual art can with no hesitation be transplanted onto thinking on postconceptual poetry,<sup>4</sup> it is the fourth one that needs to be addressed with greater caution, for two reasons. First, a hypothetical inter- or transnational poetry space has to be differentiated from the more traditional views of world literature (Ďurišín) or of the international literary space (Casanova xii). For, if a truly inter- and transnational space exists, it has to be the primary context in which the value of the work is created, unmediated by the constructions of national literature. Second, the barrier created by the deeper immersion of poetry in language also has to be taken into account. The language of a hypothetical genuine transnational poetry space then has to be global (i.e. it has to be English), and while it is true that the worldwide festivalisation and the strong presence of internet-based publishers, poetry magazines and other digital exhibition places and practices do contribute to the creation of such a space, it is not as developed as in the arts and, as a result, not all contemporary postconceptual poetry is necessarily at home in the transnational space.

With that said, let us move to Slovak poetry’s jump into contemporaneity in the 1990s and the subsequent consolidation and differentiation of its “now” in the first two decades of the new century.

4 In using the term postconceptual, I draw on Osborne as well as Skrebowski.

## 2. The Prequel

“Nowadays, more than ever before, time is crumbling, hand in hand with reality,” noted the prominent contemporary Slovak poet Michal Habaj (Habaj, Belková 4) after the end of the decade that brought radical changes to all spheres of social and individual existence.<sup>5</sup> From Osborne’s outline (2013: 18–22), it follows that of the three periodisations of contemporary art—art after 1945, art since the 1960s and art after 1989—the third is most relevant from the global perspective and from the perspective of Central and Eastern Europe specifically. However, while conceptualisations of contemporary Slovak literature, typically understood as post-1989 literature, partially address the global tendencies that make up the contemporary as Osborne sees it, they more intensely focus on local events and inflections. With respect to the first decade after the fall of state socialism (and stepping into Osbornian contemporaneity), narratives of literature in Slovakia mainly underscore its “hindered plurality” (Zajac 76), i.e. the internal social and cultural schizophrenia resulting from the co-existence (most markedly from 1993 to 1998) of both the newly-re-gained artistic freedom *and* discriminatory nationalist cultural politics. And there is a good reason for focusing on the local politics in this respect—the situation it created clouded and distorted the re-entry of the cultural space into global relations. But as the observation made by Habaj together with the poetry of the period confirms, some of the factors mentioned by Osborne did make their way into poetry. The most significant of these was the massive influx of mass media discourses as carriers of capitalism marked by quite alien temporality. The combination of the local political situation and the global trends resulted in peculiar forms of re-creating the autonomous literary space recovering from the totalitarian regime and its further hybridising existence. One of them is the fact that a central position in this process was held by a strong current of radically innovative poetry in the modernist and avant-garde tradition, inspired by conceptual art and labelled as the text generation (Šrank 2000). The explicit subversiveness of their poetic practices was, in part, a result of the paradoxical political and cultural situation of the 1990s: although one was suddenly free to found a small press and print virtually whatever one wished, state funding was reserved for the chosen, ideologically suitable few (Šrank 2015: 30–31). The near monopolisation of the public communication space by the newly-emergent commercial mass media affected the poetry interested in participating in the present and, combined with inspirations found in poetry, arts and post-structuralist philosophy, resulted in the specific forms

5 Unless stated otherwise, all translations from Slovak are mine.

that the outlined subversiveness took. The flooding of the verbal and visual public (and private) spaces by mediated contents brought a de-realisation of reality that resulted in a departure from the use of “natural speech” similar to the shift in North American poetry in the 1970s observed by Marjorie Perloff. As she argued, the mass media had become the main source of “natural language,” and “common speech” had therefore come to be “always already mediated by a third voice, the voice of the media” (47), which prompted the advance of a poetry that “emphasizes its medium as being constructed, rule governed” (Bernstein 40). A sudden distrust of the authentic that built up during the 1990s in the Slovak cultural space led to a comparable use of radically innovative practices in the poetry of the text generation. Its prominent participation in the re-establishment of the autonomous literary field resulted in its acquiring a substantial amount of cultural capital, which to a great extent shaped the landscape of Slovak poetry in the first two decades of the new millennium.

### 3. The Now

A look at the poetry scene in Slovakia suggests that contemporaneity, with its new forms of spatial relationships and speed of information, people and capital flow, was more robustly acknowledged by Slovak poetry in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Mass computerisation and internetisation, increased personal mobility and a growing number of Slovak speakers of English resulted in a more intimate involvement of poetry in globally distributed news, fashions, tastes and attitudes, which were less and less curated by local media agents (see Šrank 2015). This, combined with the increasingly festival-based promotion and reception of poetry and the growing degree of European political integration that systematically supports cultural exchanges via various EU-funded programmes, prompted the gradual appearance of Central European inter- and transcultural poetry space(s). Thanks to the combination of local and international developments in poetry, most of the poets who in one way or another work with temporal differences and participate in new forms of poetry production and circulation also take into account—albeit to varying degrees—the conceptual mutation. However, other poetries, less concerned with the contemporary, have co-existed along with these contemporary poetic practices, in Osborne’s (2013, 2018) sense of contemporaneity. The sum of poetry that has enjoyed the greatest amount of critical attention has been analysed in greatest complexity by Jaroslav Šrank:

Most works from around the turn of the millennium can be delineated along four lines of development that convey the differences and similarities between the activities of poets and poetics since around the end of the 80s. The first two, the poetry of non-conformist individualism and the poetry of the private, were still formed under the conditions of the Communist regime. In the 90s, another two strains were born: first spiritual poetry, and then the experimental-deconstructive avant-garde. (2015)

It is the last of the four tendencies that acknowledged contemporaneity. In the following outline, I will take a look at its forms.

The reintroduction of non-traditional literary practices in the 1990s was at first met with mixed critical reaction, but later it was widely—though by some only reluctantly and retrospectively—acknowledged as “the only tendency that truly was a product of the epoch” (Šrank 2013: 54) and gained a substantial amount of symbolic capital. Nevertheless, in the new century, conventional literary forces have been continually making an effort to drag postconceptual poetry back to the territory of literature and historicise it by discursively marking all conceptual procedures—regardless of their form and innovative or interpretive potential—as dated. An important factor in this respect was the reinstating of state patronage (Lefevre) to virtually all writing, which effectively meant that state cultural politics and contemporary poetry were brought much closer together and started influencing each other. With some minor exceptions, these partial factors led to a higher degree of referentiality and a keener interest in local identity and history in that part of poetry that made sure it would succeed in receiving book grants, or, alternatively, to a search of other sources of funding and legitimisation in those strands of poetry that were not willing to comply and (still) insisted on radical attacks on the defining limits and/or the (identity-representing, population-educating) functionality of literature.<sup>6</sup> These poetics shifted either towards stronger forms of postconceptualism with institutional critique and an exploration of possibilities of escaping literature as institution at their core or towards radical inter- and transmediality, fully conversant with digital and electronic writing and concerned with the aesthetic remainder.

The trajectories of the oeuvres of individual authors like Michal Habaj (b. 1974) and Katarína Kucbelová (b. 1979), marked by a gradual increase in referentiality and interest in relations between social spaces endowed with different

6 This mostly, but not exclusively, concerned the younger poets.

temporalities, are to a great extent coincident with the overall movement of post-2000 Slovak poetry as literature. The urge to (re)present the now as a paradoxical disjunctive unity of incongruous layers of temporalities, carrying in themselves separate but interconnected sets of identities, values and (self)definitions, can be glimpsed in texts like Kucbelová's (2016) "A Greenhouse Poem," in which

environments on the huge screen mingle  
and fill the house with tropical perfumes and flavours  
.....  
the indoor vegetation rises into the heights and creeps  
up the heaps of useless things  
.....  
outside, the dry land blends with the grey-brown roughcast  
but only for a little less than a second

The mediated *tropical* virtual realities—perhaps a wildlife documentary, an advertisement using exotic imagery or, more generally, any footage bearing alien temporalities—flow into a space marked by remnants of the socialist era, most explicitly signified by the reference to a local type of *roughcast*. The realities mix and hybridise in the overgrowth of *indoor vegetation* and the image of the absent but fathomable viewer—the inhabitant of the house full of *useless things*, a human remnant of socialism who lets himself/herself be forgotten in the spectacle media engineered for him/her. Temporalities are unified, but at the same time irreconcilable—blended *only for a little less than a second*. With its overflow of the sensual stimuli, the poem also illustrates the way this line of writing works with the aesthetic remainder—parodying the aestheticisation, but at the same time using its effects. By being contemporary and respecting literary values, this poetry also aspires to a more central position in the Casanovian world literary field and attracts a plethora of emerging authors, most of whom, however, fail to account for the conceptual mutation and fully adhere to the model of poetry as (lyrical) literature instead (see Želinský).

By abandoning the restricting and conventionalising literary values, the more strongly postconceptual poetry and the poetry exploring various (non-)materialities often risk having to look for financing from sources other than the government. That, however, need not be a disadvantage—the writing that intensely engages with the digital and explores the aesthetic remainder in inter- and transmedial projects gains a stronger motivation to abandon the (Slovak) language and is able to more readily gain recognition in inter- and transcultural poetry spaces. This is most notably the case with Zuzana Husárová

(b. 1983), whose performances and (often collaborative) projects have elicited interest not only at the European but also at the transatlantic level (Peková).

The works that are little interested in the aesthetic remainder and conventional literariness, and whose authors have not embraced the performative and self-promoting dimension of the contemporary poetry scene either, find themselves in a different position. Instead of negotiating for a space with conventional literariness or finding audiences through digitally absorbing performances, this poetry concentrates on challenging recipients' interpretive limitations and insists on its thorough perpetual self-reinvention, conceptual exploratory nature and critical attitude. This line of poetry, represented by authors like Peter Macsovszky (b. 1966) and Nóra Ružičková (b. 1977), possesses perhaps the greatest potential to innovate, subvert and paradigmatically change literature and its institutions—not least by preventing poetry from ignoring the conceptual mutation. One of the strongest recurring motives in it is the critique of institutions.

To briefly illustrate this, I will turn to Ružičková's more recent projects, at times co-authored with Marianna Mlynářčiková (b. 1971). They are often concerned with the critique of the institution of exclusion and explore media-manufactured images and naming as a demonstration of power. Ružičková and Mlynářčiková's latest collaborative book project, <-abc-> (2018), investigates the relationships between the visual culture, power and logo- and anthropocentric capitalist mechanisms of commodification, fragmentation and objectification of the always already mediated experience of the world. Appropriated textual fragments are montaged into a kind of de-visualised Debordian film—a series of lighter and darker textual synapses that make visible the commonly invisible structural violence:

All rooms must be numbered with the number displayed on the door from the outside. Every room must contain an inventory. Make sure the stitches are placed evenly, the surface of the pattern has to be velvety smooth. Ask the model to slowly open and close his or her eyes so that you can inspect the shape of the eyelids. Weeding the winter crop has to be done before the stalks start to sprout, the latest time to weed the spring crop is when the stalks begin to form. (Mlynářčiková, Ružičková 2018)

In <-abc->'s dust jacket paratext, institutional critique, in its narrow sense, merges with the critique of the institution of exclusion: the blurb, which is usually used for promotional purposes and authored by personalities whose



names might increase selling rates, was written by Dana Snopková, a not very well-known actor from the Theatre from the Passage—a theatre employing intellectually disabled performers.

#### 4. The Afterwards

General cultural determinants that influenced the post-2000 Slovak literary field included such fundamental shifts in day-to-day reality as internetisation, unprecedented general geographical mobility and the re-establishment of state patronage for small presses.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the changing socio-cultural conditions made the experience of the “global” more synchronic and intense, with world events feeling intimately connected with local ones. The peculiarities of the social, economic and political developments of the 1990s strongly formed the character of the literary field in the 1990s. In result, that part of currently published Slovak poetry that has a claim on the present is inevitably postconceptual. Its modulations seem to spring mainly from the constellation and hierarchisation of the aspects of the present it chooses to accentuate, attitudes towards conventional understandings of literature, degrees of interest in the aesthetic remainder and the emphasis placed on attracting readerships. The complexities of the development of Slovak poetry after the fall of state socialism show that globalisation forces are seldom straightforward and target locales are never simply passive recipients of the formats and contents that are catered to them; while there is no denying that literary devices, genres and tastes have generally travelled in waves—to use Moretti’s imagery—flowing from the dominant cultures to the peripheries, the emerging trans- and intercultural communication spaces promise to at least partially disrupt these mechanisms. Contemporary (Slovak) poetry gives hope for resistance.

7 By state patronage I mean financing from public funds that—although distributed according to various sets of rules and rulings by various committees—ultimately come from the government. As Lefevre puts it, “[p]atrons try to regulate the relationship between the literary system and the other systems [and] operate by means of institutions set up to regulate, if not the writing of literature, at least its distribution: academies, censorship bureaus, critical journals, and ... the educational establishment” (15). While it would not be right to speak about the government’s or state’s direct political interference in regulating literature in Slovakia in the past two decades (especially since 2015 when the new Slovak Arts Council was established), the key according to which committees make their decisions is necessarily derived from such things as current notions of public interest or the reasonably wide reach of audiences.

## | References

- Andreasi, Carlo. "Border is not a line but a depth." *Place: Relinking, Relating, Relaying*. 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/yxve88sn>. Accessed 8 February 2019.
- Bernstein, Charles. *Content's Dream*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001.
- Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Trans. by M.B. Debevoise. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Ďurišin, Dionýz. *Theory of Literary Comparatistics*. Trans. Jessie Kocmanová. Bratislava: VEDA, 1984.
- Habaj Michal, Belková Zuzana. "Neviditeľná cestička úteku." *Kultúrny život* 42 (2001): 4–5.
- Hanson, Louise. "Is Concrete Poetry Literature?" *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* xxxiii (2009): 78–106.
- Huebener, Paul et al. "Exploring the Intersection of Time and Globalization." *Globalizations* 13.3 (2015): 243–255.
- Husárová, Zuzana. "Slovenská elektronická literatúra." *World Literature Studies* 8.3 (2016): 57–77.
- Kucbelová, Katarína. "A Greenhouse Poem." Trans. Ivana Hostová. *Poem* 4.2 (2016): 269.
- Lebel, Sabine. "Fast Machines, Slow Violence: ICTs, Planned Obsolescence, and E-waste." *Globalizations* 13.3 (2015): 1–10.
- Lefevere, André. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Mlynárčiková, Marianna – Ružičková, Nóra. <-abc->. Kordíky: Skalná ruža, 2018.
- Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature." *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54–68.
- Osborne, Peter. *The Postconceptual Condition*. London and New York: Verso Books, 2018.
- . *Anywhere or Not at All*. London: Verso Books, 2013.
- Peková, Olga. "Intermedia & the posthuman." *VĽAK* 4 (2012): 388–391.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *Radical Artifice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Robinson, Douglas. "What kind of literature is a literary translation?" *Target* 29.3 (2017): 440–463.
- Rosa, Hartmut. "Social Acceleration: Ethical and Political Consequences of a Desynchronized High-Speed Society." *Article in Constellations* 10.1 (2003): 3–33.
- Skrebowski, Luke. "Approaching the Contemporary. On (Post-)Conceptual Writing." *Amodern* 6 (2016), <https://tinyurl.com/y6zddxe8>. Accessed 8 February 2019.

Šrank, Jaroslav. "Poéme fatal (text generation-zvodcovia zmyslu)." *Romboid* 35.6 (2000): 19–30.

---. *Individualizovaná literatúra*. Bratislava: Cathedra, 2013.

---. *Aktéri a tendencie literárnej kultúry na Slovensku po roku 1989*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, 2015.

---. "Field Notes: New Developments in Slovakian Poetry." Trans. Lena Dorn and Max Oravin. *Samplekanon*. 2015, <https://samplekanon.com/p3238>. Accessed 7 March 2019.

Zajac, Peter. "Prelomové či svoje?" *OS* 1 (1999): 74–77.

Želinský, Dominik. "Dve tváre novej generácie." *Kapitál* 3.2 (2019): 26–27.

## | Abstrakt

IVANA HOSTOVÁ

### Temporalności – technologie – transgresje. O współczesnej poezji słowackiej

W ciągu ostatnich trzech dziesięcioleci, naznaczonych w krajach Europy Środkowej ich nagłym przemieszczeniem na mapie geopolitycznej, słowackie przestrzenie społeczne i kulturowe w wielkim pośpiechu i chaosie weszły w uwarunkowaną lokalnie relację z postmodernizmem i, mniej więcej w tym samym czasie, wkroczyły do współczesności. Przeskok do terażniejszości wywołał nieodzownie transkulturowe sposoby istnienia, w których globalny obieg informacji, mód i stylów buduje istotną część indywidualnych tożsamości. Na podstawie koncepcji historycznej współczesności autorstwa Petera Osborne'a (2013, 2018) artykuł pokrótce wymienia zmiany, które część słowackiej poezji, charakteryzowaną przez osborniańską współczesność, dotknęły w ostatnich trzydziestu latach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** poezja słowacka; współczesność; poezja postkonceptualna

## | Abstract

IVANA HOSTOVÁ

### Temporalities—Technologies—Transgressions: On Contemporary Slovak Poetry

In the course of the past three decades, marked in post-communist Central European countries by their sudden repositioning on the geopolitical map,

Slovak social and cultural spaces, in great haste and chaos, got to locale-specific grips with postmodernism and, more or less simultaneously, entered contemporaneity. The leap to the present has created inherently transcultural modes of existence, in which global news, fashions and tastes form a relevant part of individuals' identities. Through the prism of Peter Osborne's (2013, 2018) concept of historical contemporaneity, this essay briefly outlines modifications that the segment of Slovak poetry marked by Osbornian contemporaneity has undergone in the past three decades.

**Keywords:** Slovak poetry; contemporaneity; postconceptual poetry

### | About the Author

**Ivana Hostová** is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Slovak and Media Studies in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Prešov, Slovakia. She has written numerous reviews and papers on contemporary Slovak poetry and translation and has authored, edited and co-edited several volumes on literature and translation, the latest one being *Identity and Translation Trouble* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2017). Her other activities include translating poetry from English into Slovak and *vice versa*. E-mail: [ivana.hostova@unipo.sk](mailto:ivana.hostova@unipo.sk)

MARKÉTA KITTLOVÁ  
Univerzita Karlova

## Changing the World Through Poetry: Confessions, Poems and Banners of Adam Borzič<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The Return of Poetry into the Public Space

In his book entitled *Tváře ve stínu (Faces in the Shadow)*, which outlines the lives and works of several Czech writers of the first half of the twentieth century, the poet and historian Zdeněk Kalista reminisces about the effect of the first public reading of Vladimir Majakovsky in the early twentieth-century Czechoslovakia: “The public stomped their feet with excitement over the verses of the Left March” (Kalista 136). Although something like this is hard to imagine in the current Czech poetry scene,<sup>2</sup> literary scientists, critics and poets themselves concur that Czech poetry is more and more boldly breaking into the public sphere. In a 2008 publication entitled *V souřadnicích volnosti (Within the Coordinates*

1 This study has resulted from the Academic Prize awarded to Pavel Janoušek by the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and from long-term support for conceptual development of a research institution; registration number 68378068.

This work required usage of Czech Literary Bibliography research infrastructure resources (<http://clb.ucl.cas.cz>).

2 In comparison, in the Ukraine, for instance, current poets address audiences in sold-out theatres. See an article: Pazdiorová, Helena. “Jenom psát nestačí. Podoby současné ukrajinské poezie” (Just Writing is not Enough: the Forms of Current Ukrainian Poetry). *A27* (2019): 6.

of *Freedom*), which maps out Czech literary production of the 1990s, Jiří Zizler talks about how in the post-Velvet Revolution era, Czech poets, after many years of following the main ideology and adjusting their work accordingly, or moving into the unofficial literary realm, “the era of the explicitly engaged tone in poetry and its striking social pathos was over. The only certainty and a common horizon lay in the freedom of creation” (Zizler 18).

Over the first few years of the new millennium the situation is gradually but significantly changing. Karel Piorecký describes the key feature of literature produced during that period as follows: “The majority consensus of literature being apolitical, which was agreed shortly after the so-called Velvet Revolution and determined the subsequent literary discourse” (48) has disappeared. According to him, the social function of poetry is starting to come back and is realised particularly through a direct contact with the readers. “Attempts to find attractive ways of addressing the readers have thus become one of the characteristic features of the noughties” (47). This quest is motivated by an endeavour to become more visible or even more successful—poetry as though takes the criterion of success to measure the quality of life in the current market-driven world, including marketing mechanisms which this world is built on.

The return of poetry into the public space is realised particularly through a significant increase in the number and popularity of author readings and other forms of public literary events, where a poem may have a direct effect on a larger number of audiences (including those who normally do not read poetry), and thus influence them effortlessly. It is the effect of a poem that constitutes a significant moment when poetry can open itself up to the wider society. Making poetry more visible and effective, an attempt to have as many people as possible hear it—these are just the first steps on a journey which T.S. Eliot outlines in his essay “The Social Function of Poetry” as follows:

We can say that the role of a poet is to serve his nation only indirectly. His immediate responsibility is to serve his own language: firstly, to preserve it and secondly, to cultivate and perfect it. When he expresses what other people feel, he also transforms feelings, as he makes them more conscious. He makes people more aware of what they feel and so he tells them something about themselves.... As our language is constantly changing, our way of life changes under the pressures of various material changes in our surroundings, and if we did not have several personalities who combine exceptional sensibility with an exceptional mastery of the word, our ability to express emotions would wither

and our capacity to feel with it—we would be left with just the most primitive feelings. (Eliot 78–79)

In a situation where even poets themselves proclaim that “printed poetry is being pushed aside as a relic due to its definitive, closed nature and intimacy of the reader’s experience” (Stehlíková 101), author readings are probably the most effective way poetry can make the most significant impact. Using means borrowed from other forms of art and media, they can awaken in people a sensitivity to poetry, and thus, by extension, to the world. The poet Adam Borzič sees the boom in author readings as a hope not only for poets, but also for the entire society:

The fact that, at present, poetry is possibly more listened to than read shows the direction which to take. This is clearly a sign of an era ... that this interest in live readings corresponds with a societal question about how to enliven, repopulate and humanise public space, corresponds with the ability to live more communally. (Borzič 2015)

## 2. Care for the Current World

Care for the world is intrinsic to poetry. The poet always relates to the world sensitively, as he attempts to comprehend the world in some way and record the outcome or process of that understanding. The end of the 2000s was a period of searching in poetry, when poetry was finding its place in the real world. In 2008, the *Fantasía* group, who articulated the relation between poetry and the world in their anthology entitled *Fantasía* (which outlined their programme), responded to this need. The three members of the group, poets Adam Borzič, Kamil Bouška and Petr Řehák, have made several explicit and clear points pronouncing a conception of poetry which allows for a poet’s active participation, “engagement”<sup>3</sup> in the world: “The experience of poetry results in an engaged being, engagement in the world, as a reluctance to stand up for something compromises poetry. A poet engages in the world with the intensity of an entire

3 These poets understand engagement differently, more broadly than merely voicing political and social issues in poetry. They are more concerned with individual responsibility, personal responsibility for the written word. Engaged poetry, in its more narrow sense, such as critique of the current social situation, is relatively frequent in the current Czech poetry, but it does not form any coherent stream or a clearly defined group. Poets representing this type of poetry include Milan Kozelka and Jan Těsnohlídek, Jr.

being” (Borzič, Bouška and Řehák 1). In the programme of the so-called “new pathos” which is desirable precisely because it excludes itself from the indifference and aims to awaken sensibility to the world and its ills through poetry, these authors expressed their conviction that when somebody reads a poem and understands it, s/he can understand him/herself and others a bit better.

The Russian literary theorist and philosopher, Boris Groys, who wrote a book entitled *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Rozpolcená kultura v Sovětském svazu* (*Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. The Riven Soviet Culture*) where he focuses on the Russian between-war avantgarde, characterises the avant-garde art as follows: “The essential pathos [art of the classical avantgarde] lies in the demand to move from description to transformation (Groys 41). In their anthology, the Fantasia group talk about the “new pathos” which “brings poetry which advocates co-responsibility for the state of the world” (Borzič, Bouška and Řehák 1). Advocating co-responsibility for the state of the world means wanting to change it, if it is not satisfactory. Kamil Bouška explicitly expressed the need and desire to change the world in an interview for the A2 cultural journal:

I believe that poetry will closely resemble the human voice and will become indistinguishable from it. Poetry will blend in with behaviour and this behaviour will come out of a certain intensification and refinement of consciousness. It will not be motivated by individual gain but will be characterised by an acute awareness of belonging in the wider world. It will become clear that the way that one relates to the world and his/her surroundings will have to change. And it is possible that it will be the poets who will prove to be the best architects of the changing society and new collective ways. (Bouška 2019: 20)

This claim is pure avant-garde through its provocative and utopian nature, as its historical and societal context is very different from that of Groys’s. The Russian avant-garde of the 1920s aimed to hold back the overly technical world by returning to the original, reduced, pure forms which the new world could be based on Malevich’s *Černý čtverec, zaumný jazyk V. Chlebnikova* (*Black Square: The Beyonsense Language of V. Chlebnikov*). The current avant-garde wants to revitalise the world where everything is measured by money, numbers and success, where “the living are ruled by dead objects” through poetry which awakens sensitivity and the sense of belonging with others. In an epilogue to the yearbook entitled *Nejlepší české básně 2014* (*The Best Czech Poetry of 2014*),<sup>4</sup>

4 The publisher Host started publishing the anthology entitled *The Best Czech Poems* annually in 2009. It was inspired by the us annual anthology *The Best American Poetry*.



the poet Olga Stehlíková talks about a conceptual line in the current Czech poetry,<sup>5</sup> which she defines as avant-garde. In the light of Groy's understanding of the avant-garde art, it may be argued that the current avant-garde poetry is not satisfied with descriptions of the current world through its own means, as this would mean remaining within its limits, but attempts to change it. "As you do not just evoke the demise, / decay, lean years through lean steps, / as you will not stop the decay, you will not escape from prison, / by just describing its walls," as written in Adam Borzič's poem entitled „In illo tempore” in his collection *Orfické linie* (*The Orphic Lines*). And it is the Fantasia group who require the move from portraying the world to transforming it in its programme.

### 3. Heart, Head, Hand and Mouth

Empathy with the world and personal engagement comes naturally to all the three members of the Fantasia group; however, each of them develops this in their work in a different way. In Kamil Bouška's poems, there is a feeling of being something underneath and its distinctive voice develops gradually through twists and roundabouts. This became most apparent in his third collection entitled *Inventura* (*Stocktaking*, 2018), where the voice was most intensive and sounded at its deepest and highest levels. In Petr Řehák's collection *Násobit ruce* (*Multiplying Hands*, 2014), we need to reconstruct and to get an understanding out of a relatively complicated composition of verses. The poetry of Adam Borzič declares and manifests his passionate personal fascination with the world through a direct, revealing and captivating form, and his poems exude an acute desire to change the world. Borzič's gesture is rather extensive than intensive, but easily accessible, even catchy. The following sections will attempt to capture Adam Borzič's poetry through this gesture, which spans between a conviction that the world is at a turning point, and an avant-garde desire to change it through poetry. In Borzič's four collections written so far, this gesture takes delicately intimate, acutely physical and even gigantically all-embracing positions, and is realised through the motives of the heart, head, hand and mouth. The following sections will attempt to capture how this gesture changes from one collection to another and evaluate this development in the light

5 Stehlíková refers to the works of authors contributing to the journal *Psí víno* which was published since 1997 and its last print version was published in the autumn of 2018. She refers to the works of these authors (e.g. Ondřej Buddeus, Olga Pek) as experimental poetry. Among other features, this type of poetry is enriched by methods used in other art forms (e.g. sound poetry) or inclination towards collective authorship.

of the above-mentioned perception of the social function of poetry by T.S. Eliot, and in view of the avant-garde desire to change the reality through art.

#### 4. Heart

Borzič's first piece, *Rozevírání* (*Opening Up*, 2011) already clearly shows the importance of his perception that the world is at a turning point, which is depicted as initiating and opening up of a new space. Borzič delineates, measures up and touches the poetic space with enchantment but also the space which opened up through experiencing poetry

I touched a crack which emerged from a quiet heart's glory,  
I felt an intangible opening and everything inside me loosed up,  
creaked, cracked, whimpered. / I called silence and it came.

It entered sun's space naked.  
I drank off its forehead, I drank a drop, I drank its liquid fire,  
I drank a bee, I drank a mountain, a thunder and cloud.  
Then it passed me a nail file and disappeared and I cut the bars –  
my opening up”  
 (“Opening Up”)

This collection already hints, most passionately compared to his following collections, at his love of the world in its two dimensions: physical and spiritual. His poems pulsate with an intensity of the newly discovered or revealed being of a poet, which nevertheless does not belong just to the poet himself but is aimed to serve the world: “My heart is a spark. / An electrical mutiny. / The continents sail through its milk. // My heart is torn up from top to bottom. / My heart is black and white and red. / My heart is life and death and more. // My heart is not mine.” The poem entitled “Básníková pýcha” (The Poet's Pride), which these verses come from, opens not only his collection *Opening Up* but are an introduction to the author's poetics, as several features, which can be observed here, become the constants in his other poems and collections. It is particularly the dominant and strongly accentuated presence of the lyrical subject which is the centre-point of his poems and where all that appears in a poem: every image, association, thought or every glimpsed reality cross paths, mix and integrate. This immodesty and authority (“the poet's pride”) is nevertheless always combined with the sense of responsibility and doubts (the poem starts with a question: “Who am I?”), and this refers to whether it is possible to cope

with this responsibility, including in a physical sense, as the author also feels a physical co-existence with the world: “My heart is torn up from top to bottom.” The heart is not only a metaphor for a relationship to the world but also one of the vital organs which is painfully and intensely impacted by experiencing the world. The world runs through the heart in the same way as blood, and only when the heart is about to burst being completely filled with blood through experiencing the world, can that change happen: “It requires a blow. A clap of the heart. / A sweeping gesture of flying blood... / and then / – then– / you flare up” (poem “Pistolnická modlitba” (A Gunman’s Prayer)). In his poem “Červeň: korida” (Redness: A Bullfight), where the active relation of the poetic *I* to the world peaks and gets concentrated, and this connection is expressed by the red colour, the colour of blood and life which is likened to bullfights: “There always is a bullfight—Our life.”

## 5. Head

Borzič’s gesture, which is intuitively drawn out in his first collection, is rationalised, developed and deepened in his second collection *Počasi v Evropě* (*The Weather in Europe*, 2013).<sup>6</sup> His initial “opening up” to poetry and the world becomes a starting point of his poems in the second collection. The preceding collection defined a certain space, but the question now is what to make of that space. The question “Who am I?” from the first poem of *Opening Up* is replaced by another question “What do you want to take note of?” which the lyrical subject poses itself in the first verse of a poem called “Na výběr” (Having a Choice) in *The Weather in Europe*. This gesture is getting more complicated as the lyrical subject is impacted by problems which trouble the current world. Borzič is more specific in *The Weather in Europe*. He lets current world events enter his poems (reflections of the economic crisis; the mass murder on the Norwegian island of Utøya; demonstrations in Barcelona), which gives the collection an almost a journalistic feel. Although he travels through specific places (e.g. Barcelona, Florence, Croatia or former Yugoslavia and Norway) on his journey, this geographic placement should not be understood as an attempt to portray these various parts of Europe from a tourist’s perspective. Borzič places himself in a role of a citizen of the world, his gesture is all-embracing and he searches for common denominators. He does not perceive Europe in terms of the centre and periphery. The centre for him is everywhere he sees a suffering individual

6 This collection was nominated for the Magnesia Litera prize for poetry. It is one of the most popular literary prizes in the Czech Republic.

with whom he empathises, and he understands Europe as a uniform territory with the same “weather” all across.

That week a Norwegian  
Killed other Norwegians  
From a clear  
And other side  
Hatred

It rained and there was thunder  
That week  
Not only  
In the Croatian  
North. (“Weather in Europe”)

This is despite his reflecting the variety across Europe:

Just my Hungarian/melancholy is here, Slavonia  
is pulling up its stockings  
it is chewing a spicy sausage  
and blows the Baroque clouds.  
Somebody is a Hungarian, somebody a Serb  
somebody even a Czech  
the archbishop is a German  
the Croatian plain is  
hospitable  
 (“Slavonská samota” (The Slavonic Solitude)).

The collection is rationalised through its more refined composition, which is achieved through two overlapping levels of poetic account. The first is the mentioned journalistic and documentary; the other is formed by delicately and bitterly lyrical accounts of the poet’s personal recollections of initiating moments from his childhood and when he was growing up. These two levels intersect in a metaphor of the glass head where the individual experiences mix with the experiences of empathy with the world:

My glass internal head / revealed in Barcelona’s Jupiter mountain!  
My glass head of a painful bolero!  
I open its fourth eye / its sadness devours a crab

a hungry bird / stuck in the colour nets of a cracked TV  
 Europe!  
 Europe!  
 In my glass head!  
 I carry you in a transparent bump  
 heavy and broody  
 heavy and locked  
 heavy and impenetrable  
 your sleepy awkward sadness on the metro.  
 All the locked faces / all the chained-up hearts  
 closed up desires, tied-up dreams / by slimy ropes of adverts  
 (“Barcelonské výkřiky z mé skleněné hlavy” (“Barcelonian Screams  
 From My Glass Head”))

We see two sets of movements: a painful journey through Europe which reminds of: “the live broadcast of twilight / the world how we did not want to know it,” and a journey in time, into own past, where these movements are inseparable and undertaken with the same, devastating captivation. The glass head is interpreted in a similar way as the motive of heart in the first poem of the *Opening Up* collection, figuratively as a space where the reality is played out, experienced and modified, but also as an actual head which may hurt acutely. These two dimensions are inseparable in a similar manner, as it is not possible to separate a head from thoughts and from the body that carries it. The metaphor of the glass head integrates the physicality of experiencing, which is most intense through the use of all the senses and the aspect of rationality which was missing in the previous collection, as the metaphor of heart was more associated with intuition. Compared to the unrestrained nature of the poems in *Opening Up*, the poems in *Weather in Europe* and the whole composition of the collection are tighter and more elaborate.

## 6. Hand

Borzič's third collection *Orfické linie* (*The Orphic Lines*, 2015) is introduced by the question “Whose history is this?” which is also the title of its first poem. The space was defined in the first collection, then was enriched by the individual time, and the third collection introduced history into it: “What you can see are expanses of time. Spaces of beating time. / What you can hear is clucking of hens in small colonies of the big world. / The sun constantly, CONSTANTLY sets, even sometimes starts scramble up, yet / what you can hear is

an explosive mixture, the lithospheric plates of history crackle again, / a cut is coming, at this turning point everything is all over the place, / the head can hardly stand, tossed around by gusts / of the twisted time shattered in its own reflection” (“In illo tempore”). His already multi-layered poetic gesture filled with a sharply emotional individuality, which internalises the reality, expands by another dimension—mixing of historical periods with the present or different cultural and artistic traditions and forms and an attempt to embrace it all. The poems again accentuate the tormenting and particularly physically experienced compassion with a human being, this time represented by the motive of a hand: “I will persist / As these words are not detached from my body / After all I write by hand / The same hand / Which I pass day in day out / To the others ...” The metaphor of a hand brings in the subject’s action into the poems, an appeal, a call to act, as a hand touches and strokes but can also hit. The poems in *The Orphic Lines* primarily turn in concentric circles and from different positions identify an awareness of the turning point where the current twisted world is inevitable heading:

Borders expand.  
 Borders move.  
 Glass shatters.  
 Noise mixes with silence.  
 Hope with murder.  
 What an exciting time.

It is as though it got a bit darker and the change was about to happen, as it has not happened yet: “There is something missing in today’s drawn-out strokes / whirling spirals of time go down and up / the kairos [right] moment is not coming” (“Vlna” (The Wave)).

The common feature of the poems is a reference to the godly singer, Orpheus. Borzič identifies his role as a poet as somebody who was chosen by gods to charm the mortals and change reality, somebody who sings from darkness into the light. Although Borzič’s reinterpretation rather brings light into darkness, in which, according to him, the present is covered: “I can write / Only when I sing into the darkness out of the darkness” (poem “Orfické gesto” (The Orphic Gesture)). The lyrical subject’s position is even more unstable than in the two previous collections, as the way he looks around, we sense even deeper empathy, more uncertainty and questions. Compared to the other collections, Borzič’s third collection contains poems with more questions. At times, these are sarcastic reflections on the declining present; at times, these are genuine questions

of a singer asking whether he is on the right track descending from darkness in order to bring light. Sometimes it is an exasperated scream, screams written in blood on banners which he brings to a demonstration.

## 7. Mouth

In Borzič's last collection *Západo-východní zrcadla* (*Westernly Eastern Mirrors*, 2018), his lavishly constructed gesture calms down. His gigantic, all-embracing and deeply sensitive *I*, which in its various forms dominated the previous collections, takes the back-stage and virtually disappears in *The Mirrors*. The poems' expression is simpler. Instead of unrestrained, imaginative verses carried by a fascinating and captivating whirl layering and flowing over images, we read a narrative led virtually in a prosaic rhythm. It is conceptualised as a collection of fictitious utterances of Renaissance artists and philosophers (e.g. Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael or Botticelli) and Islamic Sufis (Al Ghazali, or Ibn al Arabi) and poems evoking records of humble and loving words mediating wisdom of those who have spoken them. The world imprints itself into the heart, head and hand, which the author dedicated to serve. These motives are reduced to the mouth, which become just a mediator. It does not taste the world, just speaks about it. The didactic tone of the poems derives from the dominant, if constantly doubting, lyrical subject of the previous collections. Passion for the world and awareness of hidden connections between an individual and other people, the present and past do not form an integral part of the poetic expression in *The Mirrors*, but move to the thematic level. This collection expresses the desire to change the world through poetry in the most extensive way among his collections. Borzič accompanied it with a more than 40-page epilogue, where he clarifies the reasons for writing this collection, reveals the thoughts behind its poems and attempts to explain the unspoken. He is concerned about the impression his poems make on the reader; he wants them to be fully understood and make an impact on an individual and, subsequently, also on the world. At the same time, this collection is one that has the least faith in poetry itself. Poetry becomes just one of the many genres, one of the channels, which is aimed to appeal to the reader to change the world. The poet's gesture of internal engagement, which peaked in Borzič's collections *Weather in Europe* and *The Orphic Lines*, is flattened in *Westernly Eastern Mirrors*.

Borzič's fourth collection symbolises the uncertainty surrounding every public presentation, a view determined and conditioned by time, such as the appearance of the Fantasia group more than ten years ago, and was an allegiance of avant-garde groups to the Russian Revolution. It embodies the sensitivity

of a demand for the engaged poetry itself. It also symbolises the admirable effort of its author, which can be appreciated when it is contextualised among other work of the author. Adam Borzič is not only a poet but also the editor-in-chief of the fortnightly *Tvar* (*The Form*), which is one of the most established journals on the Czech literary scene. In its editorials, which accompany every issue, he tirelessly and enthusiastically defends the revival of the present world, which is, according to him, ruined by the exhausting capitalism, supremacy of market mechanisms which impact not only the everyday life of an individual but also his/her character, cynicism and indifference of one person to another. Although this work is not related to poetry, Borzič undertakes it as a poet and in line with his group's programme, which he helped to formulate. If it is true that "the experience of poetry results in a compassionate being" and "engagement in the world" and a poet "engages [in the world] with an intensity of an entire being," Borzič's work including his poetry may be referred to as cultural work, which really does impact and changes the era, and his poems are one of the means of this revival.

*Translated by Pat Mertova*

## | References

- Borzič, Adam. *Rozevírání. (Opening Up)*. Praha: Dauphin, 2011.
- . *Počasi v Evropě. (Weather in Europe)*. Praha: Malvern, 2013.
- . *Orfické linie. (Orphic Lines)*. Praha: Malvern, 2015.
- . "Poezie a přesah." (Poetry Exceeding Its Role). *Deník Referendum (The Referendum Dairy)*. 2 August 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/yxo3u6sd>. Accessed 10 December 2019.
- . *Západo-východní zrcadla. (Westernly Eastern Mirrors)*. Praha: Malvern, 2018.
- Borzič, Adam, Kamil Bouška and Petr Řehák. *Fantasia*. Praha: Dauphin, 2008.
- Bouška, Kamil. "Čekají nás nové avantgardy. S Kamilem Bouškou o literátštině a čtení poezie." (New Avantgarde's Await Us: On the Language of Writing and Poetry with Kamil Bouška). *A2 4* (2019): 20–21.
- Bouška, Kamil. *Inventura. (Stocktaking)*. Praha: Fra, 2018.
- Groys, Boris. *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Rozpolcená kultura v Sovětském svazu. (Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. The Riven Soviet Culture)*. Trans. Martin Ritter, Praha: AVU, 2010.
- Eliot, T.S. *O básnictví a básnících. (On Poetry and Poets)*. Trans. Martin Hilský. Praha: Odeon, 1991.



- Kalista, Zdeněk. *Tváře ve stínu. (Faces in the Shadow)*. Praha: Torst, 2016.
- Pazdiorová, Helena. "Jenom psát nestačí. Podoby současné ukrajinské poezie." (Just Writing Is not Enough: The Forms of Current Ukrainian Poetry). *A2 7* (2019): 9.
- Piorecký, Karel. "Česká literární kultura 2001–2010." (Czech literary culture 2001–2010). *V souřadnicích mnohosti: Česká literatura první dekády 21. století v souvislostech a interpretacích. (Within the Coordinates of Plurality: Czech Literature of the First Decade of the 21st Century in its Context and Interpretations)*. Ed. Alena Fialová. Praha: Academia, 2014. 13–50.
- Řehák, Petr. *Násobit ruce. (Multiplying Hands)*. Praha: Malvern, 2014.
- Stehlíková, Olga. "Toto nové a to staré" (This New and the Old). *Nejlepší české básně 2014 (The Best Czech Poetry of 2014)*. Ed. Petr Hruška and Olga Stehlíková. Brno: Host, 2014. 96–133.
- Zizler, Jiří. "Otevřená dekáda." (An opened decade.) *V souřadnicích volnosti: česká literatura devadesátých let dvacátého století v interpretacích. (Within the Coordinates of Freedom: Czech Literature of the 1990s in Interpretations)*. Ed. Petr Hruška et al. Praha: Academia, 2018. 11–34.

## | Abstrakt

MARKÉTA KITTLOVÁ

### Zmienić świat przez poezję. Wyznania, wiersze i banery Adama Borziča

Artykuł poświęcony został twórczości Adama Borziča, jednego z najbardziej wyrazistych przedstawicieli współczesnej poezji czeskiej. Poza usytuowaniem jego wierszy w kontekście współczesnej poezji czeskiej autorka dąży do zaprezentowania jego działalności artystycznej (i nie tylko) jako *sui generis* dzieła sztuki, mającego cechy awangardowe. Na podstawie czterech wydanych dotąd tomów poezji Borziča pokazane zostały zmiany widoczne w jego twórczości, oscylującej pomiędzy przekonaniem, że świat znajduje się w punkcie zwrotnym, a awangardowym pragnieniem jego zmiany przez poezję. Gest ten przyjmuje w poezji Borziča postać zarówno kruchych, intymnych, w tym fizycznych, jak i obszernych obrazów. Materializuje się on w motywach serca, głowy, ręki i ust.

Borzič należy do wyrazistych osobowości współczesnej czeskiej literatury. Jego poezję charakteryzuje unikalny gest, jednocześnie jednak reprezentuje on jedną z bardziej zauważalnych tendencji poetyckich ostatnich dziesięciu lat – podkreślenie „społecznej funkcji poezji” (T.S. Eliot) i roli poety jako jednostki, która za pośrednictwem twórczości powinna opiekować się światem, a wręcz

zmieniać go. Autorka określa Adama Borziča właśnie jako poetę, dzięki któremu tematy te i powiązane z nimi kwestie nabierają aktualności pod koniec pierwszego dziesięciolecia XXI w.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Adam Borzič; czeska poezja; poezja współczesna; współczesna awangarda

## | Abstract

MARKÉTA KITTLOVÁ

### Changing the World Through Poetry: Confessions, Poems and Banners of Adam Borzič

This study focuses on Adam Borzič, one of the most distinctive contemporary Czech poets. The study contextualises his work within current Czech poetry but also examines his other work that is not strictly classified as art as though it were cultural work with avant-garde features. It investigates four volumes of Borzič's work in terms of the changes in the author's creative gesture, which expands from his conviction that the world is at a turning point and the avant-garde longing to change the world by poetry. In the four volumes of Borzič's poetry (written so far), this gesture is embodied through delicately intimate, acutely physical, or even gigantically all-embracing positions, where he employs motives of the heart, head, hand and mouth. The study attempts to evaluate the change in Borzič's work in the light of T.S. Eliot's understanding of the social role of poetry and avant-garde longing to change reality through art.

The Czech poet, Adam Borzič, is one of the most distinctive figures of the current Czech literary scene. His poetry is distinct because of its unique gesture and also represents a strong current in the poetry production of the past decade with its emphasis on the social function of poetry<sup>7</sup> and the poet's role as somebody who should nurture the world through his/her work or even change it. This study attempts to portray Borzič's work as focused on the mentioned topics and related issues of the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century and renew interest in them, contextualise his work within current Czech poetry but also investigate his other work, which is not strictly artistic but which possesses some avant-garde features.

**Keywords:** Adam Borzič; Czech poetry; contemporary poetry; contemporary avantgarde

7 I refer to T.S. Eliot's essay "The Social Function of Poetry" written in 1945.

**| About the Author**

**Markéta Kittlová** has an MA in Czech and Russian Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Republic. She is currently finalising her PhD on Jiří Weil (Faculty of Arts, Charles University). She works in the Institute of Czech Literature, Czech Academy of Sciences (AV ČR). Her research focus is on the 1920s' and 1930s' Czech literature and current Czech literature. She is a member of the editorial board of *Česká literatura*.

E-mail: [marketa.kittlova@seznam.cz](mailto:marketa.kittlova@seznam.cz)

