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History and Literature in the Historical Novels of Ksaver Šandor Gjalski*

ABSTRACT: Coha Suzana, *History and Literature in the Historical Novels of Ksaver Šandor Gjalski*, "Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne" 24. Poznań 2023. Wydawnictwo "Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne," Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, pp. 253–270. ISSN 2084-3011.

The paper begins by asserting that the historical novels of Ksaver Šandor Gjalski have received special treatment in Croatian literary historiography, which tends to ascribe to them a more a documentary and historiographic rather than literary value. This paper will analyse the Romantic, realist and modernist features of Gjalski's historical novels *Osvit. Slike iz tridesetih godina* (*Dawn. Pictures from the [18]30s*) (1892) and *Za materinsku riječ. Slike iz četrdeset osme godine* (*For the Maternal Word. Pictures from [18]48*) (1906). In the light of theories of histories as stories (narratives), this paper will indicate that their so-called documentary value is attributable to literary strategies that are used to interpret the past they represent in a specific way, and not to record what is assumed to be the authentic past.

KEYWORDS: K.Š. Gjalski; historical novel; history/story; reality; fiction

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One might begin with the question: why should a professional historian bother to read novels?

D. LaCapra, *History & Criticism*

1. The Poetic, genre and value profile of Gjalski's novelistic prose

Although a short-story writer “by vocation” (Nemec, 1999, 199) Ksaver Šandor Gjalski achieved “the greatest thematic span in his novels of all Croatian realists” (Nemec, 1999, 197) as judged by Croatian literary history. Krešimir Nemec believes that Gjalski is one of the most prolific authors of Croatian realism, who satisfied “various tastes and interests, earning him great popularity, both with the broader readership, and among literary critics and experts” (Nemec, 1999, 198). He was considered the most complete, cohesive and synthetic author of Croatian literature after August Šenoa (cf. Nemec, 1999, 198). Read and respected in his time, in terms of reception, Gjalski remained “the most vital writer of Croatian realism” and “traces of his influence” can be seen today (Nemec, 1999, 198). Realistic, as well as post- or neo-realistic generations of Croatian writers may draw inspiration from the patriotic ideas, political and the social motivation of his narratives. On the other hand, as a “direct predecessor of our (Croatian—S.C.) modernists” (Nemec, 1999, 199), he is recognised as “a writer of subdued gesture and emphatically lyrical, impressionist temperament” who “places emphasis on the atmosphere, landscape, descriptions of moods (...), reminiscences and memories” (Nemec, 1999, 199). His novels are close to modernist poetics, since they feature “a relatively weak narrative consistency” and appear as “grouped **pictures** with nothing in common but the main character” (Nemec, 1999, 199). They are therefore filled with “lyrical meditations, country conversations, melancholic moods, nostalgia for ‘the good old times’, descriptions of nature and, in particular, interiors”, depictions of characters and their psychological characterisation to the detriment of narrative elements that motivate a string of events and make the plot dynamic (Nemec, 1999, 199).

Gjalski opens his series of novels with *U novom dvoru* (*In the New Mansion*) (1885), where, under the clear influence of Turgenev, he blended

romance and patriotism. From the perspective of its affiliation to the genre, the novel may be read as some sort of *Erinnerungsgeschichte*, reminiscence, focusing on “characters, their impressions, emotions and psychological nuances” and on the “lyrical principle” (Nemec, 1999, 201). Gjalski combined the patriotic theme and Turgenevian poetics in his second novel, *Na rođenoj grudi* (*On Native Soil*) (1890). This novel is connected to *Janko Borislavić* (1887), his novel of ideas, as well as to *Radmilović* (1894) his *Künstlerroman* by the theme of “spiritual restlessness and search” of Croatian intellectuals (cf. Nemec, 1999, 204). As in the last, the social dimension dominates his novel *Durđica Agićeva* (1889), in which the major character is a progressive female Croatian teacher against whom “the entire primitive provincial community conspires” (Nemec, 1999, 208). In this regard Gjalski follows in the footsteps of Ivan Perkovac (*Stankovačka učiteljica* [*Teacher from Stankovac*], 1871) and August Šenoa (*Branka*, 1881). Of the two political novels that he wrote, *U noći* (*In the Night*) (1886) and *Pronevjereni ideali* (*Betrayed Ideals*) (1925), the first considered his best and one of the best 19th century Croatian novels (Nemec, 1999, 208), whereas the second is held as “artistically worthless” and “journalistically superficial” (Nemec, 1999, 215). Similarly, Gjalski’s three historical novels are considered very uneven in terms of value. On the one hand, *Osvit. Slike iz tridesetih godina* (*Dawn. Pictures from the [18]30s*) (1892), which describes the initial processes articulating the aspirations and objectives of the Croatian National Revival, is occasionally rated positively. On the other hand, *Za materinsku riječ. Slike iz četrdeset osme godine* (*For the Maternal Word. Pictures from [18]4.8*) (1906), the plot of which is set in the year that marks the climax and its final demise of the Revival, and *Dolazak Hrvata* (*The Arrival of the Croats*) (1924) enjoy no great reputation in Croatian literary history. Focusing on *Dawn* and *For the Maternal Word*, this paper will indicate the reasons for their status in literary history and re-examine the possible interpretations for reading them. In doing so, it will consider the relationship between history, truth and politics; poetics and aesthetics in literary work; the relationships involved in the production and reception of literature since its beginnings and which present the central topics of modern literary studies in a special way.

2. Truth, beauty, goodness / history, literature, nation

Gjalski's novels are stratified and heterogeneous in terms of genre, themes, value and generally with regard to their poetics (cf. Nemeč, 1999, 198) and ideology (Nemeč, 1999, 197). Despite this, however, a certain consistency in the principles of their styles and in their ideas is noticeable. The former is based on the realist concept of literature as not only a possible reflection of reality, but also a necessary one. The latter is based on a vision of literature as some kind of agitator and promoter of aspirations for national identification. Gjalski endorsed the former, basically realistic principle in *Radmilović*. This principle is even close to the modernist principle requiring a narrative simulation of a more direct and more precise capturing of reality. The protagonist Radmilović, who is viewed as Gjalski's "spiritual double" (Nemeč, 1999, 207), states this principle explicitly

Sensation kills art, the pivotal purpose of which is to come closer to life and nature if possible and to tread with safe truthful steps, like nature. Art may deviate from nature only as much as is needed by an artificial border *per se*. The life of each phenomenon and each event that is scattered in billions needs to be reduced to a more concise picture that will be coherent to each eye at first sight. Everything else must be the truth, the naked truth, bare life. Such art is beneficial and such art is justified (Nemeč, 1999, 207).

In his article *Naša književnost (Our Literature)* Gjalski highlighted the second principle, that of the national function of literature, which reverts the poetics of realism to its Romantic predecessor. This article, subtitled *A Speech Delivered at the Main Assembly of the Croatian Writers' Society, 15th May 1913*, echoes Šenoa's famous title from 1865 (*Our Literature*). Gjalski's article, published in the magazine *Savremenik (The Contemporary)* almost half a century after Šenoa's programmatic article that indicated the beginning of the proto-realistic period in Croatian literature, reads as follows

The major task of our book, in the first place, is to be the herald of the entire life of our people. We, who must fight for the most elementary

conditions for the life of the people, must seek to ensure that our beautiful book supports us in this struggle and be of service to us. In doing so, the book loses nothing, since it is good, truthful and beautiful only when it is faithful to life, when it seeks and looks for its motifs in the life surrounding it (Nemec, 1999, 198–199).

This understanding of literature as a nationally purposeful, ethical and politically responsible practice is reflected in the poetic features of Gjalski's novels. In these novels one may detect not only Romantic, realist and modernist principles, but also features of both high and trivial literature. This is one of the reasons for their specific status in Croatian literary history.

3. Between *Antiquarian* and *Monumentalist* depictions of the *Entire Life of Our People*: romanticism, realism, modernism

Gjalski's advocating that a faithful, i.e. realist, depiction or reflection of reality are both idealistic in the Platonic sense, due to their identification of the truth, beauty and goodness, and Romanticist in terms of emphasising that literature is nationally determined and indeed subordinated to nation. The implication of a connection between literature and national identity in Gjalski's works is most clearly expressed in his political and historical novels. It is therefore held that Gjalski is accomplished as "a historian of Croatian society" (Savković, 1952) and as a writer who, more than any other Croatian writer, "introduced politics to his art to such an extent" (cf. Nemec, 1999, 208). His aforementioned speech at the Assembly of the Croatian Writers' Society in 1913 is testimony that, to him, national politics, national history and national literature are naturally connected to each other. He stated

There may not be a single moment in the life of our people from Napoleonic days to the present that I have not touched upon in my works. Almost each phenomenon in the life of our people, each objective – each desire – each pain and all the suffering of the people – is reflected in my works (...) (in Šicel, 2003, 141).

If we link this notion of Gjalski to the content of his historical novels, we might conclude that he strove for an insight into the totality of Croatian national life, something that he evidently aspired to, through three historical moments: first, the settlement of the Croats in their Homeland; second, the launch of the Croatian National Revival, and third, the pinnacle and simultaneous announcement of the demise of the Revival. These three specific periods in Croatian history, the first one largely defined as mythical historiographically (cf., e.g., Rapacka, 2002, 41–44), while the remaining two belonging to the Gjalski's "immediate past" (cf. Matanović, 2003, 53), would correspond to two components of the "ethnic myth" as defined by Smith in *Myths and Memories of the Nation: "A Myth of Location and Migration, or Where We Came From and How We Got Here"* and "A Myth of Regeneration, or How to Restore the Golden Age and Renew Our Community as 'in the Days of Old'" (Smith, 1999, 63–64; 67–68). If we compare Smith's paradigm with Gjalski's claim that he was especially interested in the post-Napoleonic era on the one hand and with his historical novels, two of which were dedicated to the Croatian National Revival on the other hand, it may be claimed that Gjalski was especially fascinated by the second myth, "A Myth of Regeneration, or How to Restore the Golden Age and Renew Our Community as 'in the Days of Old'". Gjalski explained his preoccupation with the Revival, the period when the basic cultural and political stronghold of the modern Croatian nation was formed using the facts from his own life. He stressed that his father had been one of the Revival's contemporaries and supporters, and would emphasise

As for his views, my father was a true child of the first half of the 19th century. Above all, he cherished and loved freedom, and was therefore from the very beginning a follower of Gaj and the Illyrian movement. He abhorred and detested Hungarian aspirations for supremacy. He was a patriot through and through. In the early 1830s, as a very young man, he stood on the tower of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna with Gaj, Pavao Štoos and, I believe, Mihanović. There, these young men (...) took an oath that they would help the Slavic word on its path to victory. It is from him that I inherited, from the first moment, an indelible love for everything that is Slavic, and even more so a love for one's native soil—patriotic love (Gjalski, 1962, 348–349).

This *patriotic love*, as Gjalski called it, defined by a resistance to Hungarian supremacy and reinforced by Slavophile principles, is the *spiritus movens* of heroes in his novels depicting the Croatian National Revival. At the same time, this love is a response to the Kheunian and post-Kheunian period in Croatian history, when the novels were written. Gjalski describes the creation of prerequisites for the Revival movement and its execution in *Dawn* and *For the Maternal Word* in the manner of Romantic historical novels, as established in Croatian literature by August Šenoa, accepting the idea that history can (and must) be the *teacher of life* (*magistra vitae*). Gjalski depicts this movement as one of the “great moments” (cf. Nietzsche, 2004, 20) of (national) history, whose *heroes* are gilt with “mythical brilliance” and portrayed as the *role models* of contemporariness (Žmegač, 1991, 59). On the other hand, like Šenoa’s novels and other 19th century novels in the vein of Walter Scott’s work, *Dawn* and *For the Maternal Word* also reflect *antiquarian* tendencies understood in Nietzsche’s sense, which see the past as “a value in itself” (Žmegač, 1991, 59). This is once again a consequence of an ever more pronounced influence of “modern positivist mentality” (Žmegač, 1991, 59) on Romantiscist (*monumental*) historicism. The antiquarian approach, closer to the poetics of realism, features in *Dawn* and *For the Maternal Word* in the structuring of individual episodes that simulate a depiction of events *as they were by themselves* or in the characterisation of individuals who are individually average or even weak. On the other hand, the monumental approach, closer to the poetics of Romanticism, features characters in line with the laws of romance as “the story of the hero who goes through a series of adventures and combats in which he always wins” attempting to achieve “some kind of liberation for himself” (Frye, 1976, 67). The monumental approach in Gjalski’s historical novels also results in structuring episodes on the basis of the teleological principle, one that is purposeful for the nation, with regard to *what* they, as suggested, meant or should mean for the *destiny* of the nation. In this sense, what Gjalski says about his father, an important protagonist in Gjalski’s own private *small stories of individuals*, is indicative, but in the same time is associated with the great names of the Croatian Revival, beacons of the *Great Stories of History* (cf. Milanja, 1996, 110, in Badurina, 2012, 17).

Gjalski inherits fundamental features of the composition and structure from the classic Scott type, or for Croatian literary history specific Šenoian type of Romantic historical novel. They are determined by a combination of momentous historical events and developments in which historically fewer attested or fictitious heroes feature, added to which it is written in the style of a chronicle, with pathos and sentimentalism (Sertić, 1970, 203–204; 253). According to some assessments, Gjalski's historical novels about the Croatian National Revival were realised as a type of “realist social novel” with “a historical background” (Sertić, 1970, 254). From the sentimentalist-Romantic tradition of the Šenoian novel, they inherit the co-existence of narratives belonging to different domains: collective identification, national politics (*history*) and individual stories, romance (*fiction*). They also inherit relics of chivalric romances (e.g. a love triangle or love, the realisation of which is postponed or thwarted by various obstacles that need to be overcome; a code of chivalry...) and pathetic-sentimental didacticism, in particular with regard to promoting the absolute values of humanism, love and patriotism (cf., e.g., Lasić, 1965). Realistic elements are visible in the depiction of social and national-political landscapes using the description of some everyday social situations (*social causerie; political debate; a variety of events, parties, grand style celebrations*, as well as *intimate social meetings* [cf. Sertić, 1970, 238, 240–241]) typical not only of the elite but also of “the life of peasants from Zagorje¹ immediately preceding and during the abolition of serfdom” (Sertić, 1970, 241). The desacralisation of positive heroes (e.g. the character of Kargačević, who is, above all, honest and resolute, however, incompatible with the chivalric ideal of physical beauty, attraction and seductiveness), and the desacralisation of love affairs (e.g. the extramarital love between Ivan Kotromanić and Madlena or Hana's marriage to Mužević) also contribute to the realistic impression of *Dawn*. After she was rejected by Ivan in favour of the seasoned and immoral Berta, Madlena married and became a *femme fatale* lacking a sense of national responsibility and duty. Hana's decision to

1 Hrvatsko zagorje, a region in the north-west of Croatia, predominantly a rural hilly area.

marry the dandy Mužević, rather than Kargačević, a better match for her, not in terms of attractiveness, but in terms of the values they shared in respect to their *Weltanschauung* and characteristics, is an example of giving up one's own ideals and is incongruent with the idea of romantic love presupposing the complete agreement of lovers especially in the case of ethical and political issues, in 19th century Croatian literature.

Another contribution to the realist procedure in the novels is the nuancing and relativising of psycho-emotional traits and ethical and political principles of individual heroes. The aforementioned Mužević, although his character is shallower, therefore deserves Hana's love. The Hungarian Tivadar in *Down* and the *madaron*² Elemir in *For the Maternal Word*, are also, in terms of ethnic affiliation and political options, and as the third parties in love triangles, antagonists and rivals of positive heroes, leaders of the National Revival, such as Ivan (*Dawn*) and Pavao (*For the Maternal Word*). They are nevertheless portrayed not only as outstanding romantic heroes, but also as possessing certain virtues and representing individual progressive ideas. Such co-existence and the simultaneous but incomplete, and to some extent inharmonious, permeation of sentimentalist-Romanticist and realist poetic strategies and elements give the impression that plots in these novels are inconsistent or entirely absent. On the other hand, this may be interpreted as a sign of modernism. Hybrid, sentimentalist-Romanticist, realist and modernist features of *Dawn* and *For the Maternal Word* are visible in their features that allow their classification as works of both high art and trivial art, as suggested by Ana Radin (1987). These novels, however, are written in the modernist period. By blending major historical themes with monumental strokes and sentimental love stories they approach trivial literature, to which they are also linked by means of stratified, but teleologically speaking linear narration and a sentimental-pathetic style. On the other hand, some of their elements, such as static motifs, essayistic and lyrical passages, psychologisation of characters, increasingly authentic stylistic moments and a loosely connected plot consisting of

2 *Madaron*, a pejorative term used to denote members and followers of the Croatian-Hungarian Party founded in Croatia in 1841; they advocated close political and constitutional ties between Hungary and Croatia.

“pictures”, which is the term emphasised in the subtitles of both novels, draw them closer to the requirements of high literature.

These poetic features in Gjalski’s historical novels gave rise to uncertainty in Croatian literary history. On the one hand, there is an awareness of their specificity in “the golden age of the Croatian novel” (Nemec, 1999, 133–238), but, on the other, they are difficult to fit into the black-and-white schemes when distinguishing literature of high artistic value from trivial literature, used to interpret the period of *stratification* of this genre in Croatian literature (Nemec, 1999, 239–253). Some features of the novels that give the impression of being more typical of high literature are used as the main arguments in their unflattering reviews. For example, Nemec states that *For the Maternal Word* is no better than *Dawn* (Nemec, 1999, 213), which he also dislikes, claiming that “in its spirit and implementation, it is closer” to Croatian pre-realist writers “Jarnević and Becić than realism” (Nemec, 1999, 212). With regard to *For the Maternal Word*, he states, “The coherence of the work is weak; it truly breaks up into some loosely connected ‘pictures.’ The plot is diluted, possesses no real drama, and many episodes do not fit into the whole and merely ‘idle.’ Descriptions of various festivities, assemblies, parades, speeches, and decorations take up a lot of space” (Nemec, 1999, 213–214).

If we neglect ideological assumptions for individual assessments of Gjalski’s historical novels (cf. Coha, 2020), the formulae used in attempts to prove their value or lack thereof referred to two sets of arguments: one belonging to literature and aesthetics, the other to historiography and documentation, the latter rated higher. Those who challenged the literary qualities of these novels failed to question their ambitions that could be understood as historiographic. Nemec, for example, therefore emphasised that Gjalski tried “to depict the climate of the time, the political climate and the social processes (Jelačić’s rise, sessions of Parliament, abolition of serfdom, the Croatian-Hungarian War)” in *For the Maternal Word* “much more” than in *Dawn* (Nemec, 1999, 213). If one reads Gjalski’s historical novels from a post-modernist perspective, however, based on Hayden White’s theoretical tenets (1975) and called into question the idea of the historical foundation of any narrative, then these novels remain bereft of this *justification* of their *raison d’être*. One of the most interesting questions that come up is

therefore whether one continues to consider that these narratives contain some sort of literary or historical value, given the doubts with regard to their aesthetic quality and given the challenge of their historical certainty.

4. History in literature, literature on history

At the time *The Arrival of the Croats* (1924) was published, Gjalski prompted discussion about whether his work was historiographic or literary. Natka Badurina claimed he thought of his work as “a war of literature against historiography” (Badurina, 2009, 41). Gjalski responded to suspicions raised in some scholarly circles about the writings of Constantine Porphyrogenitus about the settling of the Croats in Croatia and *accused* “contemporary historiography of working against the national interest” (Badurina, 2009, 42). Challenging those who called Constantine’s report “a story and a fairy tale”, Gjalski wrote attempting “to prove the truth” (Badurina, 2009, 42). What he wrote about the novel testifies to the extent to which he sought to underline the *truthfulness* of his story: “My story has the task and purpose to present the whole truth about the arrival of the Croats”, or

In this struggle for the victory of the truth, I have (...) already taken up my pen and written, as a man of stories and dreams, a historical narrative *The Arrival of the Croats* (...). I am confident that my historical narrative does not narrate illusions and dreams of poetic imagination, but rather truthfully presents the events as they occurred (in Badurina, 2009, 42).

He was criticised even then. Antun Barac, for example, said that “this ‘historical story’ is no story at all (...), even less ‘historical’” (Barac, 1925, in Badurina, 2009, 41). Gjalski’s *The Arrival of the Croats*, although based on myth, was then read just as he had wanted, as a *story* to tell the *truth*. A clear example of this may be found in the afterword of *The Arrival of the Croats* in the 1990s, when war raged in Croatia. Here Nikola Pulić claimed that Gjalski

artistically ennobles historical reality, which is of outstanding importance for the education of young Croats today when the Croatian State, like a phoenix, rises from the sea, emerging from the millennial ashes and spreading its wings (...) (Pulić, 1995, 164–165, in Badurina, 2009, 41).

So Gjalski's *The Arrival of the Croats* and its reception are evidence of the way "mythical speech turns history into ideology" (Badurina, 2009, 45).

Dawn and *For the Maternal Word* did not fit the 1990 context of Croatian politics and culture in the same way as *The Arrival of the Croats*, since they propose Croatian national identification with a heavy reliance on both Southern Slavdom and Slavdom particularly *For the Maternal Word*. In his afore-mentioned afterword, Pulić alluded to this, saying that Gjalski *needed a long time* "like many other Croatian writers, to understand and reject illusions about their 'embrace' with their Eastern 'brethren'" (cf. Badurina, 2009, 41). On the other hand, the two novels, like *The Arrival of the Croats*, were also perceived as *history*, as indicated by Nemeč regarding Gjalski's endeavours to describe "the atmosphere of the time, the political climate and the social processes" in *For the Maternal Word* (Nemeč, 1999, 213). The Croatian historians of literature Ivo Frangeš and of society and culture Nikša Stančić (cf. Frangeš, 1971, 161; Stančić, 1989, 63) used some episodes from *Dawn* as historiographically relevant (more in Frangeš's view than Stančić's) when giving their historiographic interpretation of the Croatian National Revival. They are more legitimate than one might at first assume from the position of contemporary meta-historiography, which emphasises that each narrative, be it literary or historiographic, is equally incapable of reaching the historical truth.

If we analyse Gjalski's historical novels in terms of their presentation of and commentary on the past, about which they evidently cared a great deal, we might claim that, regardless of their literary form and indisputable fictional components, they may be understood as a sort of "historical representation" in the sense of a "thing that is made of language" unlike a description, which is "'pure' language" (Ankersmit, 2002, 13). As such, historical narratives and historical representations are in their essence "metaphorical," but they may be "rationally discussed" (cf. Ankersmit, 2002, 13–17). If read from this perspective, one may claim beyond doubt that all the key aspects of *poetics and politics* of

the Croatian National Revival (cf., e.g., Coha, 2015) found their reflection, articulation and interpretation in *Dawn* and *For the Maternal Word*, especially if viewed as a whole. By means of these accents, Gjalski presents a gradual development of the ideas of the Revival in the post-Josephinian period, their specific formulation and momentum gained with the launch of Gaj's periodicals and all the ambivalence of the year 1848, which sees the climax and realisation and at the same time the collapse of the pivotal demands of the Revival. It is within this framework that Gjalski presents the complexity of relations between the traditional policy of Croatianhood of the Croatian estates, the so-called *natio croatica* (cf., e.g., Rapacka, 2002, 132–134), and the new policy of National Revival. This policy was based on the principles of the *Kulturnation* (cf., e.g., Katunarić, 2003, 140) and laid the foundations for a modern civil society and modern nation. Gjalski also captures the complexity of relations of the Croatian Revival with Vienna and Pest and the *madaroni* movement; with (South) Slavdom; and with a broader (West) European environment. He also touches upon the issue of the position of the Croatian National Revival *vis-à-vis* the Croatian regional, administrative, social, dialectal, cultural and religious heterogeneity at that time. Gjalski's presentations of and comments on individual characters and events in *Dawn* and *For the Maternal Word* clearly correspond to characteristic documented, non-fictional and fictional interpretations and representations of gender and national identities in the Croatian Revival and pertain to representations of the idea of national literature, culture and the social role of literature in general. Bearing these issues in mind, *For the Maternal Word* is a sequel to *Dawn* in terms of content. In terms of meaning and ideology, it is a recapitulation, albeit the artistic performance is poorer. Regardless of the modest artistic value of *For the Maternal Word* and its redundancy in relation to the ideology of *Dawn*, however, without *For the Maternal Word* Gjalski's story about the Revival would be incomplete insofar as it would not cover the year 1848. Gjalski realised that 1848 left its mark on the whole movement. This year represents the essence of the Revival's cultural and political projects, its tendencies and ideals, including all the controversies underlying them. The year 1848 saw the culmination of the Croatian National Revival as the beginning of "the history of modern Croatian culture, reflecting all

the complexity of its old model and announcing its subsequent contrasts and paradoxes" (Rapacka, 2002, 78).

Dawn and *For the Maternal Word*, each in itself and both taken together, are written as romances not just in the literary but also in the historical sense, i.e. as a *modus* which was described by White, who was inspired by Northrop Frye, as "a drama of self-identification symbolised by the hero's transcending the world of experience" (White, 1975, 8). *The true hero* in both novels is the Croatian nation. Unlike the Croatian nation, to which the *Great Story of History* (cf. Milanja, 1996, 110) is subordinated, however, their *main supporting characters* Ivan and Pavao Kotromanić have *small stories of individuals* of their own (Milanja, 1996, 110): in *Dawn*, Ivan gives up his love for a woman in order to be able to serve the homeland. He does so in a grand style and completely in the spirit of the rhetoric of the National Revival and subsequent 19th-century Croatian culture. The happy ending of his private romance is postponed until the next novel, *For the Maternal Word*, where the role of the main character, the leading fighter for the national cause, is taken by his brother Pavao, for whom a love story is of secondary importance. *The Great Story of History* is the only imaginable form of national narrative that rests on the idea of "the unique flow of human developments as a meaningful path towards liberation" (Badurina, 2012, 10). Since he wants to believe in the *meaningfulness of the Croatian path towards liberation*, Gjalski structures his novels as *Great Histories/Stories* led by "the idea of historical progress, the idea of movement towards one objective; towards a point that would soon turn out to be far greater than the one from which the movement began" (Matanović, 2003, 53). On the other hand, the consistency of this and such *Great Histories/Stories* is disrupted by the very thing that should have supported them from within: suggestions that *small stories of individuals* are irrelevant in relation to them. Gjalski begins *small stories of individuals* as typical romances, but does not end them as such. More benevolent readers interested in romance that ends with an idyllic happy-ever-after, would say that they remain incomplete. Those acquainted with the poetics of both the Romantic and neo-Romantic Croatian historical novel will understand that Gjalski's novels fit this poetics by their incomplete private (*small*) stories of individuals. In their own way, they send a message that private (e.g. romantic or family) stories are less

important than *great* (collective, national) history, for which individuals and individual interests should be sacrificed. On the other hand, it is possible to denote a sign of modernity in these novels, as in the words of the decadent *femme fatale* Madlena. Unlike the male heroes who believe in the truth of the past and in the need to reveal, update and follow the truth for the sake of the present and the future, Madlena doubts both the past and the future

The past is a dream, illusion, death; and the future—to whom does it belong? Who knows?—I only know that a human being has no bearing whatsoever on the decision regarding what will happen tomorrow. What is then such future to me? (Gjalski, 1972, 151).

Both Madlena's rebellious and resignation, and *small stories* (romances) of heroes as individuals, which have not been brought to completion, may be read as modernist elements of Gjalski's novels. This is particularly true in light of the fact that "Modernism—the paradigmatic one, Vienna Modernism from the beginning of the (20th—S.C.) century—was the first to face the break-up of great stories and responded with pessimism" (Badurina, 2012, 10).

As a contemporary of the so-called first Croatian Modernism, Gjalski clearly registered and reflected on the signs of doubt about the optimism of *Great Histories/Stories*. As a writer who believed that literature has a mission to contribute to national identification, however, he could not give up *Great Histories/Stories* and therefore silenced the *small stories* and consigned them to the background. In that sense, it was as if he anticipated what Pavao Pavličić (1995) said when motivated by a similar situation, the moment when Croatian literature faced post-modernist destruction of *Great Histories/Stories*

Lucky for them, since we cannot be. We have not come out of history, for us, history is still there. We are not yet individuals, but a community; we are not more important than the ideas covering us, but are their servants; therefore, we continue fervently to perish for the ideas and on account of them. We have not entered post-Modernism or post-history, we are (...) in history up to our neck (...) Our literature matters,

our literature does not belong to the realm of aesthetics, like other European literatures, but rather to the sphere of history (in Badurina, 2012, 14).

Gjalski would undoubtedly second these words, in Pavličić's case somewhat auto-ironic, if we judge by his historical novels which are read more as historical writings, a domain they belong to in terms of genre, but *only partially*, and less as literature, to which they *fully belong*, again in terms of genre. If, however, we do not insist on the separation of history from literature, but rather accept the options that insist on drawing these categories together, like Ankersmit's "metaphors" *proposed* in "historical representations" which may be "rationally discussed" (Ankersmit, 2002, 17) or de Certeau's claim that historians "can write only by combining within their practice 'the other', that moves and misleads them and the real that they can represent only through fiction" (in Blažević, 2008, [10]), then Gjalski's *Dawn* and *For the Maternal Word* may gain a completely new value. This value will not arise from the opposition, comparison or exclusion of the historical (perceived as real) and the fictional (perceived as literary) elements, but rather from the conditions, possibilities and consequences of their integration and mutual conditionality.

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