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Nová poetika a ruská próza začiatku 21. storočia

New poetics and Russian prose of the early 21st century

MÁRIA KUSÁ
IVAN POSOKHIN
(eds.)

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▪ Nová poetika a ruská próza začiatku 21. storočia / New poetics and Russian prose of the early 21st century

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OBSAH / CONTENTS

New poetics and Russian prose of the early 21st century

MÁRIA KUSÁ – IVAN POSOKHIN

The past two decades in Russian literature were marked by several distinctive shifts that reflect transformations in Russia's state ideology, its internal and foreign policies, and, in the end, its conflicting social divide. As researchers, we witness the return to less scandalizing and experimental ways of writing, the reintroduction of "big" historical themes accentuated by "small" personal stories, and the ever-strengthening demarcation between "liberal" and "patriotic" camps of writers, which became even more apparent after February 2022. In order to grasp the variety of study subjects in a more synthetic way, we chose the *new* or *existential poetics* as formulated by Peter Zajac and René Bílik in the volume *Poetika textu a poetika udalosti* (Poetics of the text and the poetics of the event, 2018) as our key methodological framework, because it allows to maximize the scope of the research material and the tools used for its study. For this issue of WORLD LITERATURE STUDIES, our intention was to collect studies that would reflect and understand contemporary Russian prose as broadly as possible and, at the same time, to present a specific "sideways glance" at the subject matter by considering research perspectives of the post-socialist cultural contexts. As a result, we have before us texts of a broader synthesizing and methodologically varied character, focusing on trends and patterns of the contemporary literary process, as well as studies more narrowly focused on specific authors and their key works of the last two decades. The following texts reflect changes in literary paradigms and the emergence of the memory-centered writings, approach traditional categories such as "space" or "plot" within the concepts of poetics, (re)interpret the ways of forming images of the Self and the Other, and consider the reception of Russian prose in the new political context. The selection of authors (Maria Stepanova, Ludmila Ulitskaya, Evgenii/Eugene Vodolazkin, Vladimir Sorokin among them) reflects their weight (figuratively speaking) in the contemporary literary process, above all the fact that almost all of them, as this issue attests, are actively translated, read, and reflected upon beyond Russia's borders (in some cases even more than in "domestic" established literary criticism). Moreover, it should be noted that most of the authors analyzed in this issue have taken a clear anti-war position.

In today's conflicting times, the topic itself may seem "inappropriate", but perhaps it is precisely in such times that it is important to talk about literature and culture that bring (or at least try to bring) humanness to the contemporary warmongering Russian social context.

The Cyrillic transliteration method follows the Library of Congress system (without diacritics). Exceptions have been made in the case of established transliteration variants of names and in the case of transliteration variants used in the cited sources and English translations of the analyzed books.

Postmemorial sincerity in the writing of Sergei Lebedev and Maria Stepanova

JAKUB KAPIČIAK – HELENA ULBRECHTOVÁ

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The works of Russian-language fiction that are most appreciated by readers, critics and scholars are pieces that undermine the state politics of past and memory. These texts remind the audience about the tragic, traumatic, and painful, not the heroic. In this article, we offer a comparative reading of two such books, Maria Stepanova's *Pamiati pamiati* (2018; Eng. trans. *In Memory of Memory*, 2021) and Sergei Lebedev's *Liudi avgusta* (People of August, 2016). So far, at least one comparative analysis of these two authors' literary creations has appeared (see Urupin and Zhukova 2020). However, among Lebedev's novels, his debut *Predel zabveniia* (2010; *Oblivion*, 2016) has received the majority of critical attention from both Russian and Western literary scholars (see Heinritz 2017; Jandl 2020; Lunde 2020, 2022; Novikova 2021; Pčola 2019; Zywert 2020; Zherber and Ertner 2018). As far as we know, *People of August* has very rarely been subjected to academic inquiry.[1] On the other hand, Stepanova's *In Memory of Memory* has been translated into many languages (as is the case with Lebedev's books), and has also been a frequent subject of scholarly reflections both in Russia and abroad (see Hausbacher 2020; Sandomirskaia 2020; Scandura 2018; Tarkowska 2020; Tippner 2019).

Maria Stepanova, born in 1972, is a well-known Russian poet, fiction and non-fiction author, who won the prestigious Andrei Bely Prize for her book of poetry *Fiziologiia i malaia istoriia* (Physiology and private history, 2005). In 2018, *In Memory of Memory* won the Russian literary prizes Bol'shaia kniga and NOS (Novaia slovesnost'), and also reached the shortlist of the 2021 International Booker Prize. The work was widely praised by literary critics, who used such labels as "one of the most important texts written in Russian language in recent years" (Oborin 2017).[2]

Sergei Lebedev, born in 1981, is the author of five works of fiction. He began his literary career with the aforementioned novel *Oblivion* that is part of a loose trilogy, together with the novels *God komety* (2014; Eng. trans. *The Year of the Comet,* 2017) and *People of August*, dedicated to the totalitarian Soviet past and its reflection by a young man immediately before and after the dissolution of the USSR. Two of his other novels, *Gus*' *Fritz* (2018; Eng. trans. *The Goose Fritz*, 2019) and most recently

Debiutant (2020; Eng. trans. *Untraceable*, 2021) deal with the past, too. Lebedev, as well as publishers and critics, underline the biographical fact that he worked on geological expeditions in northern Russia and Central Asia for several years. The most probable reason for stressing this fact is that the motif of travelling to remote places is frequently used in Lebedev's novels and it is intertwined with the issue of bringing the truth about the traumatic past to the surface.[3] Lebedev's novels were twice nominated to the longlist of Bol'shaia kniga, *Oblivion* in 2010/2011 and *The Goose Fritz* in 2017/2018. The novel *People of August* appeared among the final nominees for the prizes NOS and Russkii buker in 2016.

Regarding the issue of Stalinism that plays a major role in both novels, Stepanova and Lebedev represent what Marianne Hirsch in her study of post-Holocaust literature and art has called "the generation of postmemory". This is the generation that has experienced collective trauma mainly "by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (2012, 5). There exists an affective connection between postmemory and actual memory, nevertheless, the main difference lays in the fact that postmemory relates to the past "not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (5). In our inquiry, we will try to scrutinize precisely the "imaginative investment" in the reflection of the traumatic Soviet past in both *In Memory of Memory* and *People of August* (which will also be read in relation to other Lebedev's novels) and how the rhetoric and ethos of sincerity is pursued through such an investment.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Ever since memory has become a widely reflected topic among (mainly cultural) historians in the 1980s, there has been a significant rise in the quantity of scholarly works. The Holocaust remains the most discussed issue, which, of course, does not mean that other significant traumatic events experienced by different nations and communities are not being reflected. For example, the journal *Memory Studies* has prepared many special issues that shed more light on previously overlooked topics and regions, including post-dictatorial Latin America (Andermann 2015) or suppressed memories in Eastern Europe (Tali and Astahovska 2022). The field has also considerably diversified in terms of theory. It has led to a state when we can no longer expect universal methodology or a uniform canon of theoretical works.[4] Many of the key terms of memory studies have transformed as well. For example, where German-speaking scholars think of transgenerational memory, or the memory of the second or third generation, English-speaking theorists are more likely to use the term postmemory.[5] In spite of the major rise in research, the application of memory theories and especially concepts related to trauma in literary studies remains an object of debate (see Erll 2010; Milevski and Wetenkamp 2022; Weinberg 2010). It does not mean that new papers and books that analyze fictional writing devoted to past traumas do not lead to our better understanding of cultural and specifically literary mechanisms of mourning and commemoration. However, in terms of methodology, these works are not homogenous and, on many occasions, intersect with other research fields, such as postcolonial studies (see Uffelmann and Ulbrecht 2017).

In general, conceptualization of the relationship between memory and literature can be divided into two areas.[6] The first one is the so-called memory of literary texts. This area includes approaches that aim at the mnemotechnics and "rewriting" of texts within a certain intertextual continuum. Renate Lachmann was among the first scholars to use this perspective in the inquiry of the bond between memory and literature. Using models based on Cicero's treatise *De oratore*, she pointed at the importance of the connection between forgetting and remembering and also suggested (with reference to the Greek legend of the poet Simonides of Ceos) that death might be the starting point for remembering (Lachmann 1990, 18–27).[7] Lachman's theoretical works (see Lachmann 1990, 2002; Lachmann and Haverkamp 1993) later became a fruitful background for the memory studies research conducted by the Constance school of reception aesthetics.

The second area of literary memory studies is based on historical and cultural-historical approach and aims at national histories and historical events that play significant role in the process of the creation of national identities. These events can be both progressive and regressive, or, in another word, traumatic.

Both approaches are influenced by the reception of research conducted by Aleida and Jan Assmanns. The Assmanns focused on the role of memory in the processes of state and national identity construction (J. Assmann 1997), as well as on the topography of places with traces (both hidden and otherwise) of historical and especially traumatic memory that await revelation (A. Assmann 1999).[8]

The past and memory as topics of contemporary Russian literature and their relationship to the traumatic historical milestones of Russian society have not yet been systematically scrutinized, even though major progress has been made in recent years in the field of Russian-language memory studies (see Barskova and Nicolosi 2017; Epple 2020; Kocheliaeva 2015; Koposov 2011; Ushakin and Trubina 2009; Voronina 2018).[9] In comparison to the Western research of intersections between memory and literature, Russian research has remained underdeveloped for a long time, which is not to say that there has not been any autonomous attempt at all to reflect upon the issue. The case of Yuri Lotman (1985) proves that there exists a Russian-language legacy of cultural-historical thinking about memory. When it comes to the notion of memory of literature, the legacy is even richer, thanks to the research of the Moscow-Tartu semiotic circle.

SINCERITY AND MEMORY IN LITERATURE: FROM PERESTROIKA TO PUTIN'S RUSSIA

The beginning of perestroika and the policy of glasnost (publicity, openness) led to a paradigm shift in Russia's approach to its own past. In the official discourse, the idea of "essentialized anti-Communism" (Lipovetsky 2019, 168) started to prevail. This meant that the public demand for reflection of the traumatic Soviet past was supported by the government. This turn was discursively intertwined with the revived sincerity rhetoric. Remembering and commemoration of the victims of state violence were organically linked to the need of being honest with oneself

in establishing one's identity. That was seen as the essential condition in dealing with the Soviet trauma, which had not been allowed during previous decades. To describe the interweaving relation between different modes of honesty and grasping the past, Ellen Rutten (2017, 89–93, 107–110) used the term "curative sincerity". The concept of sincerity is therefore related to the question of truthfulness, but "the imperative of objective truthfulness" is replaced by "the imperative of a subjective intention to convey only what one personally believes to be true" (Dufner and Kühler 2019, 398). Sincerity is then not only a moral virtue, but can describe attitudes and actions of individuals in relation to themselves and others: Are they living in accordance with their convictions? Are they sharing these convictions and their personal experience with others? In a broader social framework, sincerity can be also a matter of historically preferred social and cultural norms and even state politics, as the case of late Soviet and early post-Soviet years showed.

In this regard, it is not surprising that during the first post-Soviet decade, memoirs, and other genres of (auto)biographical writing that turned toward the past became vastly popular among Russian-language authors and readers.[10] In 1999, the literary-critical journal *Voprosy literatury* even organized a discussion among authors of such works in one of its issues. In their answers, the writers overtly connected the rising popularity of creating and reading memoirs with the experience with the totalitarian state and its systems of repression, propaganda, and censorship. The following quotations highlight different aspects of the rhetoric and ethics of sincerity. The authors claimed that "it wasn't possible to disclose one's attitude without reserves" (Sergeev 1999, 32–33) and that "for more than seven decades the country lived in an imaginary world" (Gandlevskii 1999, 15), because of the "Party's habit of lying" (Retseptor 1999). The dissolution of the USSR appeared to them as an opportunity "to give a testimony of a witness" (Zorin 1999, 21) and "to write about the talented, extraordinary people pushed into the graves, who couldn't speak about themselves and their time" (Borshchagovskii 1999, 12). The authors also emphasized that they do it for the sake of "the new generation, who doesn't even want to think about the whole unlikely Stalinism (stalinshchina), although they are historically under its influence" (Korzhavin 1999, 23).

Such opinions are related to the politics of "remembering as dealing with the past" (A. Assmann 2011) that characterized the Yeltsin era in the 1990s (Koposov 2018, 207–220). However, with the turn of the century, the official political discourse and policies became gradually hostile towards the attempts of commemorating victims of the Soviet regime. In Putin's Russia, the heroic aspects of the past drive the state politics of memory and the past. The key determining historical event is now the "Great Patriotic War", which can be even called the origin myth of post-Soviet Russia (247–259). The contemporary Russian memory laws are in this regard unique in the context of European legislation, because they are indifferent to the victims of state policies: "The Russian legislators were, rather, seeking to protect the memory of the state against that of its victims" (295). The official state memory lacks critical reflection and in terms of cultural semiotics, it can be labelled as a cult of pseudo- or quasi-mnemonic model of the past (see Lachmann and Haverkamp 1993, xxi–

xxii). For literary reflections of history, this means oscillating between falsification and oblivion. After the 2014 events in Ukraine, one should even think of the securitization of the Russian past and memory, since the "defense of traditional Russian spiritual-moral values, culture and *historical memory*" [emphasis added] became vastly discussed in the strategic documents of national security (see Strategiia 2015, 28–31 and especially Strategiia 2021, 34–38). The narrative frame of the origin myth even played a crucial role in the discursive legitimization of the current Russian invasion of Ukraine. In this regard, contemporary nationalist Russian literature employs the schemata that the myth subsumes. However, their employment in literature is not to be understood as a direct result of the state politics. They exist in both discourses simultaneously, as probably best shown in the case of Zakhar Prilepin and his 2006 novel *San'kia* (see Höllwerth 2017). These schemata are very much built upon a more archetypical West/East opposition and their employment culminated in the nationalist literary creations after the Russian annexation of Crimea (see Ulbrechtová 2022, 249–255).

SERGEI LEBEDEV: "THE PAST HAS RETURNED…"

At first glance, *In Memory of Memory* and *People of August* (as well as Lebedev's other novels) do not share any formal features, nor do they have much in common generally, except that both deal with historical trauma and memory. While the nature of Stepanova's text is difficult to define, Lebedev's text can be unambiguously considered a work of fiction with a conventional first-person narrative structure. *People of August*, as well as other novels of the trilogy, are built around the unnamed narrator. In *People of August*, which takes place during the 1990s, the narrator acquires a job as a smuggler thanks to his childhood friend.[11] During one of his illegal operations, he was meant to check an alternative "black route" for diamond trafficking. He had to cross the Ukrainian-Polish border carrying an urn filled with fake dust of his imaginary deceased aunt, who wished to be buried in her motherland. He made up a cover story that she was the daughter of a Polish communist, who had moved with their whole family to the USSR and became a victim of the Great Terror. After a successful mission he decided to spend a day in Lviv, where he met an older man named Kastal'skii, to whom he "disclosed" the story of his life by "uniting own experience and other people's histories" (Lebedev 2016, 94).[12] In the end, Kastal'skii asked him to help him find his father's remains. His father died in Kazakhstan, where he was deported during Stalinism. This is the beginning of the main protagonist's new career as a searcher of missing people, specializing in discovering the fate of the victims of state repressions. Throughout the story, the history of his own family is continuously revealed (including the real identity of his grandfather Mikhail).[13]

Several scholars have interpreted Lebedev's writing using the term "magical historicism" created by Alexander Etkind (see Heinritz 2017; Lunde 2020; Pčola 2019; Urupin and Zhukova 2020). Even though Etkind originally underlined the presence of "magical" elements in such writing, the essence and aim of such literature seems to dwell in delving "into the past in order to contextualize the present" (2015, 105); thus such texts are based on "grasping the power of the past, the haunted nature

of the present, and the impossibility of emancipating one from the other, the present from the past" (105). In a similar manner, Ingunn Lunde interprets the opening scene of *Oblivion*, where the main character stands "at the boundary of Europe" heading "backwards into time and history" (2022, 187). Such a movement and unbreakable bond between the past and present are characteristic of all of Lebedev's writing.

It is in this regard when the imaginative investment comes into play. In Lebedev's case, it is thanks to the metonymical approach to allegorical constructions of reality that takes "parts for the whole" (Etkind 2015, 108), leading to the reenactment of "the catastrophe, distorting all its features but actualizing the most important one – its horror" (108). Nevertheless, Lebedev's novels do not lack the presence of magical or irrational forces. The main character develops a "sixth sense" that helps him to navigate his actions during his searching missions. Staying in Lviv, he "needed to do something illogical" (2016, 93).[14] His intuitive decision to visit an expensive restaurant leads to an encounter with Kastal'skii. Lebedev's book contains many self-revelations about the presence of irrational forces that drive the protagonist's actions. For example, in *The Year of the Comet*, the narrator states: "But I also knew: if what I was seeking, what I needed, was there, then I would be able to re-create the knot. I didn't know the way now, but afterward I would" (2017, 90).

Regarding the allegories that re-enact the horror, in *People of August* the story of the Dog Tsar (Pesii Tsar') seems to be symptomatic.[15] It is a story of a dog specialist, who worked in one of the Soviet labor camps. After the dissolution of the USSR, he started to breed dogs with wolves. With the help of the newly acquired breed of wolfdogs he founded an illegal slave colony on the territory of the former camp he had used to work for before. The narrator's remarks on what he found in the remote forest appears as a perfect allegory of the Soviet regime and of the danger that its legacy represents for the future of the Russian state and society:

> The smell of bread and the spikes of barbed wire as a single whole, which cannot be split; agonizing feeling of a kinship. "That's it, – I thought looking at the colony after overcoming initial lunacy, – that's the Soviet, its very essence and flesh." When the smell of bread drifted in from the side of a colony, we all felt the same, I could tell by the faces. It means that it remains in us. Not the Communist, in which was seen the main danger, but the Soviet sentimental heritage will keep on living even in Musa, Dzhalil and Danil. (2016, 178–179)[16]

After the destruction of the illegal colony and the death of the Dog Tsar, who was accidentally killed by one of his wolfdogs, the narrator continues his previous thoughts: "We destroyed a terrifying nest, however, I couldn't call this action blessed. I felt that we all are tied up by the unexpected death of the lord of the dogs and that our far future is predestined by what we have done here, by what we felt doing it" (190).[17] Significantly, the narrator underlines the role of feelings and not the mere fact of doing something. It is the rationally ungraspable force that would influence the future and not the actions themselves. The narrator sees it as a sign of future development.

The Dog Tsar episode also indicates who the people of August are. The meaning is twofold. On the one hand, they are the hope for the brighter future of the state.

In the prologue, Lebedev uses this expression in his description of those who gathered at the Lubianka square in August 1991 and tore down the sculpture of Feliks Dzerzhinsky.[18] On the other hand, later in the novel, there appears another possible meaning of the expression that is related to the narrator's perception of the Soviet legacy after the Dog Tsar incident. He relates it to the appointment of Vladimir Putin to the position of prime minister in August 1999. Without explicitly naming him, the narrator reflects upon the new political leader with "the surname resembling an operational nickname that ends with 'in', like Lenin and Stalin" (242).[19] After this short remark, he starts reflecting upon how his thinking changed in the new social context and he started to perceive his former buddies with suspicion, reminding him of Stalinism.[20] He concludes with the reference to the Dog Tsar allegory: "And now we were all residents of the little town next to which settled the Dog Tsar: the past has returned, and we are going to live in it" (242).[21]

MARIA STEPANOVA: UNGRASPABLE AND THEREFORE BELOVED

As we have stated before, Stepanova's work seems more difficult to define in terms of genre than Lebedev's. The subtitle of *In Memory of Memory* is "a romance" (Russ. romans), which supports the self-reflectivity of the text. Together with the title, it suggests that we are not about to read traditional memoirs or fiction, but a piece that reflects upon its own nature. Some scholars even call it a meta-novel (Novikova 2020). The text can be called a literary depiction of the process of recollection with a special focus on the possibilities and limits of reconstructing the past. Among the inspirational sources might be Marcel Proust's *À la recherché du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*, 1908–1922). Stepanova refers to Proust's novel on several occasions (see, for example, Stepanova 2018, 120–123; 2021, 168–171). Generally, Stepanova's book might be compared to similar Central European texts that combine autobiographical experience with reflection of literary traditions, which represent solid ground for the narrator's storytelling. The space in which the narration is enacted is usually closely linked to the authorial/narrative subject's life. Such is the case of Austrian essayist and journalist Karl-Markus Gauß (see Ulbrechtová and Ulbrecht 2020). Therefore, the space is fashioned in accordance with cartographic poetics or geopoetics (see Marszałek and Sasse 2010) and does not rely on the work with traumatic places and commemoration of the victims of totalitarian terror, as it appears, for example, in the writing of Martin Pollack (see Ulbrechtová and Ulbrecht 2020).

We may also think of Stepanova's book as an ambitious project of essayist literature combining family history narration with documentary research in archives.[22] The function of fictional elements is absorbed by thoughts about time and different modes of recollections, as well as the narrator's self-identity, family identity, and place in the family history, predominantly in the context of post-Soviet Russia. As in Karl-Markus Gauß, the recollecting subject is the agent of the narration emergence and fusion.

The text consists of three parts that are further divided into chapters. The first part functions as a prologue, as it is mostly devoted to the description of the beginning

of the author's preoccupation with (family) memory, as well as general thoughts about memory and the mechanisms that it is built upon. There appears the awareness of the unreliability of memory that goes through the whole text as a red thread. Initially, the belief of impossibility to reconstruct the past remind the aforementioned distrust toward official document and narratives (essentialized anti-Communism), but the last part shows that Stepanova managed to overcome this "trauma" thanks to her work with academic literature, gathering available facts and creating the picture of family and its everyday life in pre-revolutionary and Soviet Russia.

It is the second part that contains mainly essay-like chapters about art and writing concerned with trauma and memory. We may say that these chapters are preoccupied with cultural memory. An important part of these chapters, as well as of the first part of the book, are the so-called "non-chapters" (Russ. ne-glavy). These consist of family letters inserted into the text in a-chronological order. On the other hand, the chapters of the third part of the book contain documents ordered chronologically. This final part tells stories of Stepanova's family members, while describing her search for the relevant document and personal correspondence and travelling abroad to archives and places, where her ancestors lived or stayed.[23] As we have already stated, the fictional narration is replaced by the authorial subject's reflections and thoughts about her ancestors and by the process of reconstruction of the family history (and memory). Academic texts, essays and literary fiction are used by Stepanova to support her thoughts. She freely retells these sources, recreates them into a new literary form and combines them with her own remarks and ideas.[24]

Let us now return to the book's subtitle. In the chapter devoted to the legacy of the artist Charlotte Salomon, Stepanova uses the term "romance" to point at the lyricism of Salomon's *Leben? oder Theatre?* (*Life? or Theatre?*, 1940–1942). Moreover, she uses it with a reference to Sigmund Freud's short essay *Familienroman der Neurotiker* (*Family Romances*, 1909). This is how Stepanova understands Freud's theory of romance: "In the article, Freud describes a particular stage of development when the child begins to consider how he, such a 'special' child, could be born to such ordinary parents, and so he invents new parents…" (2021, 270)[25] After a brief look at Freud's original text, it is obvious that Stepanova simplifies the theory. Nevertheless, in the context of Stepanova's book, the Freudian subtext seems more than relevant, because both Freud and Stepanova stress the importance of the work of imagination. The key idea of Freud's theory is that imaginative parents "are derived entirely from real recollections of the actual and humble ones", which means that the child glorifies their parents instead of wishing to get rid of them (Freud 1959, 240). For that reason, Freud concludes his elaboration with a statement that the replacement is "only an expression of the child's longing for the happy, vanished days when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men and his mother the dearest and loveliest of women" (241). There is an obvious tendency towards idealization and nostalgia and therefore, the imaginative investment is what matters the most. This is, for example, how Stepanova concludes her notes on Rafael Goldchain's book *I Am My Family* (2008): "The oath of fidelity to family history becomes its destruction, a parody of resurrection of the dead: another is replaced by oneself, the known

world is squeezed out by the invented world" (2021, 212).[26] Imagining and inventing are proper ways to get closer to the family history since Stepanova struggles with the absence of knowledge and actual memory. Knowledge can even turn into an obstacle for embracing family history, as the final sentence of the novel suggests: "Frozen Charlottes, representatives of the population of survivors; they seem like family to me – and the less I can say about them, the closer they come" (500).[27] It shows how Stepanova in the end embraces and accepts the impossibility of getting to the core of family history. Throughout the book, she repeatedly mentions her preoccupation with this issue: "It's all pointless: scoop it all out, to the very bottom of the cup, its tin walls, you can walk into the house of the past, but you can't penetrate it, nor will it enter you, like the chill slick of a ghost that appears out of nowhere in the warm twilight of a July evening" (247).[28] However, closer to the end she is not disappointed that "[e]verything I wasn't able to save is scattering in all directions" (498)[29] and that no "small box of secrets" (499)[30] was hidden at the end of her journey.

Regarding the imaginative potential of remembrance, Stepanova proposes a division of memory into three types: that which is lost, that which has been received, and that which has never been (247). Most importantly, she states that "[t]he object of remembrance can be the same in all cases" (248).[31] As we have already indicated, memory in Stepanova's work is the third type; it is imaginative, inventive, and not based on first-hand recollection, instead relying on different media. Whether these are other people's stories, archival documents (even personal correspondence), or private photos, they are all unreliable sources; memory is grasped as mediatized and therefore unreliable. There is always a gap between the subject and the object, a gap of which Stepanova as well as Lebedev are well aware. For that reason, they both pay such close attention to imagination, intuition, emotional bonds, and experiencing the past through journeys, by visiting places or touching objects. In Stepanova's book, this becomes especially obvious in the fourth chapters of the last part that is fully dedicated to individual family members' stories. She is trying to get closer to them by travelling to places where they lived, despite not always having exact information about the location. Therefore, she spends much time imagining what it would have been like. Moreover, this might be the reason for her to pay so much attention to cultural memory and reflect upon the artworks of other writers and artists; it may help her in a better understanding of the past, the work of memory and her own ancestors.

PROTECTIVE (IN)SINCERITY AND THE ROLE OF A MEDIUM

There is, however, a big difference between the nature of imagination of Stepanova and Lebedev's narrators. While Stepanova's imaginative and emotional investments are unreliable and are likely to fail, for Lebedev they seem to be most of the time a very reliable source, if not the only one. This difference also underlines the difference of genre of each text. While Stepanova's text oscillates between the non-fiction genres of family chronicle or essays and fiction, Lebedev's text is a fiction that turns toward past and its reflections and it might be considered an example of magical historicism as we have proposed before. Therefore, some critics accuse Lebedev's novels

of artificiality or schematism (see Markarian 2017), because they do not fit the expectations of a realist style.

As we have stated, Lebedev's characters always got where they needed using their intuition and imagination. On the contrary, Stepanova is often misled by such extra-rational forces. A short episode about visiting an old house where her great-grandfather should have lived in Saratov seems symptomatic:

> I recognized my great-grandfather's yard unhesitatingly. There was no doubt in my mind, even though I'd never seen it or had it described to me. The wooden slatted palisade with the Rudbeckia growing up against it, the crooked walls with their bricks and wood, and a useless old chair with a broken frame standing by a fence – all of it was mine, all of it instantly part of my family. It seemed to speak to me, saying: here, you needed to come here. […] I seemed to know how it had all been, in this, *our* place, how we had lived and why we had left. (2021, 53, emphasis added)[32]

The week later, she received a call from a colleague, who helped her find the apartment and informed her that "[h]e'd mixed up the address. That street all right, but a different house" (53–54).[33]

The novels also share an interest in family history. Both open up with a discovery of a family member's diary. The nature of these discovered texts reveals why Stepanova and Lebedev have to turn to imagination and cannot take them as reliable evidence about the past. Stepanova and Lebedev understand that these diaries are media and shape the information they communicate. This is what Stepanova writes about her aunt Galya's diary: "It was as if the main task of each and every note, each completed year's diary, was a faithful witnessing of the exterior, and a concealment of the authentic and interior. Show everything. Hide everything. Preserve it forever" (24).[34] In a similar manner, Lebedev sees his grandmother's memoirs: "[I] started to think that granny literally hid behind the family history to avoid telling her own story",[35] and concludes his reflection with the following statement: "I was even struck by the beauty of the idea: hide everything behind the redundancy of the exposed memory" (2016, 20).[36] The attitude of both authors toward these texts is well characterized by another quotation from Lebedev: "It seems like there is so much written, so much is revealed, but in reality, you see only a frame, curtains, because you will never know what was *not* written about" (20, emphasis added).[37] Even though Lebedev's narrator later discovers another diary of his grandmother in which she had talked about her life more openly, he does not learn the whole truth, because even here she kept on hiding the real identity of the father of her son and referred to him only as "M." The narrator must employ his imagination to reach the conclusion that grandfather Mikhail was probably a NKVD agent (this is later confirmed by an archival file). What is even more significant, his grandmother tried to destroy the diary, but could not find it anywhere, because she had put it into a cover of a book by the socialist-realist poet Konstantin Simonov, but did not remember this.

These scenes not only point at the mediatized nature of the past (which the younger generation is fully aware of) but underline the difference between the older and younger generations' attitude toward it. We may identify here a motif of insincerity that could be grasped as a reaction to both personal and collective trauma, if we un-

derstand trauma as "a repeated suffering of the event" as well as "a continual leaving of its site" that leads to the "impossibility of witnessing" (Caruth 1995, 10). It can be therefore called a protective insincerity whose aim is to protect oneself and others. For that reason, lying or at least not telling the whole truth is depicted with compassion and empathy in both analyzed texts. Those who suffered trauma have the status of victims, so their insincerity cannot be the same as the insincerity of the perpetrators (or the state). While for the victims, it is a coping strategy, for the perpetrator, it is an instrument of manipulation. Therefore, we may think of a continuity with the ethos of perestroika and the early post-Soviet rhetoric of sincerity that is intertwined with the essentialized anti-Communism, when (in)sincerity was projected "onto specific sociocultural groups" and "attributing hypocrisy" to the ruling social strata (Rutten 2017, 16; see also 35–77). From this perspective, the older generations cannot be condemned for their insincerity. Their protective insincerity was not a result of their choice, but of the outer circumstances, of the outer repressive political regime, as well as the work of trauma. The political aspect of insincerity is well expressed in Stepanova's chapter dedicated to the case of her great-uncle Liodik who fought in World War II and died during the Siege of Leningrad. Liodik sent letters to his evacuated mother and obviously kept on lying about his current situation:

> It's as if a person wanted desperately to send news but was instead obliged to simply cover the whole surface of a piece of paper with one and the same question. The correspondence is the only way to reach out and touch his beloved family, but at the same time he can't let them know what is actually happening to him. (2021, 322)[38]

In Lebedev's novel, the results of experienced trauma are depicted in the scenes with the narrator's grandmother. Moments before her death, she recites Tatiana's letter to Onegin from Pushkin's "novel in verses". The narrator grasps it as her last attempt to connect with the father of her son, the narrator's grandfather Mikhail. Even though the relationship with this person determined the whole course of his grandmother's life, she could not speak about it even during the last moments of her life. The narrator perceives it with empathy, which is also his attitude towards the whole post-Soviet Russian nation. At first, he looks with anger at those who deny the existence of victims and those who would wish Communism to return (2016, 143–144), but after the Dog Tsar incident, he starts to think differently (187–188).

In the closing paragraphs, we would like to underline that an important question is not only how the younger generation (the generation of postmemory which Stepanova and Lebedev's narrators represent) perceives the insincerity of their predecessors, but also what modality of sincerity they render. In Lebedev's case, the narrator reveals through the process of narration everything he feels, thinks, and knows. However, in his actions and interactions with other characters, he acts like his predecessors, hiding the truth and not telling everything. After finding his grandmother's diary, he does not share it with his father, who spent his whole life without the knowledge of who his father really was. Similarly, the narrator keeps the secret from his girlfriend. Like his predecessors, he is driven by a need to protect others from being hurt (physically and emotionally), as seems natural to him. His philosophy is well expressed in *The Year of the Comet*:

> I imagined that every old thing had an empty space, like that within a porcelain statuette, filled with silence; every person had a space like that. Not swallowed words, not a secret, but silence; it was a silence that did not require the nominative case – who or what? – but the prepositional – about whom or what? (2017, 24)

Lebedev's style adopts some features of confessional writing, as the narrator shares with the readers details from his personal and family life that does not put him into a good light (the smuggling or the death of the Dog Tsar). On the other hand, the repeated scenes, where narrator makes something up or does not mention important information, prove that confessional writing "is poietic not mimetic, it constructs rather than reflects some pre-textual truth" (Gill 2006, 4). This means that there is always space for leaving something out, which only underlines the awareness of the presence of a medium in constructing the utterance.

As we have already stressed several times, the motif of absence, gap, or something being left aside or out appears in Stepanova's book as well. In this regard, the chapter entitled "Things I don't know" (2021, 359–381)[39] describes a letter Stepanova's father sent home from the Kazakh steppe, where he worked as a civilian instructor in 1965. The letter pictured him as "the hero in a Soviet-era 'cheerful-young-men-building-Socialism' film" (372).[40] She states that she "had internalized the logic of ownership" (373)[41] by wishing to quote from the letter without doubting her father's willingness to permit it. After her father told her that he did not wish the letter to be published, Stepanova realized that she acted "like the tyrant's enlightened neighbor, with a landscaped park and a theatre in which his serfs acted and sang" (373)[42] and "was prepared to betray my own living father for the dead text" (375–376).[43] This passage has an evident confessional manner, as Stepanova pleads guilty for having such insensitive thoughts. Moreover, she also acknowledges that her father did not want to be seen as someone whom he thought he had never been. For both Stepanova and her father, the image that the letter created "were stylizations of a sort" (376),[44] but while the father wrote it "to please and entertain his family" (376),[45] Stepanova saw in the text the historicity and medium-dependence of "the language used to describe everyday experience" (375).[46]

CONCLUSION

Regarding the previous paragraphs, we may conclude that excluding something from the book or narration may mean preserving someone's identity and the ways they perceive it. This might be considered as a very interesting finding also in regard to the concept of sincerity. As we have stated before, the concept of sincerity is intertwined with different notions of openness and personal authenticity. The exclusion of something in an utterance or staying silent might seem to be an opposite to the principals of personal honesty and authenticity. Nevertheless, certain modalities of silence may function as a manifestation of authentic experiencing of life. It may be even perceived and interpreted as a sign of understanding and compassion. The inevitability of using language to perform sincerity and authenticity is a question that would need further scrutiny.

Furthermore, we believe that our analysis has proven that subjectivity plays an important role in understanding the concept of sincerity. One crucial factor seems to be the work of individual imagination and projection that is typical for the generations of postmemory (although not only for them). The case with Stepanova's father's letter illustrates it very well: Stepanova presupposed that the letter demonstrates the historicity of language, while the father considered it a joke. Both were sincerely convinced about the truthfulness of their opinions. The latter case points at another topic that requires further consideration: the relationship between documents and sincerity. The question is how documents depicted in literary texts and historical documents, when used to create works of fiction, relate to the concept of sincerity.

NOTES

[1] We managed to find only one scholarly article that cites this Lebedev novel (see Razuvalova 2021).

[2] For a selection of similarly overwhelmed reactions see the unnumbered pages 3–5 in the most recent edition of the novel's English translation (Stepanova 2021).

[3] Moreover, Lebedev's novels are not only filled with geological metaphors, but geological processes also often determine the protagonists' fates. For example, the main character and narrator of *The Year of the Comet* was born during an earthquake. Therefore, he states that "[t]he earthquake was my first impression of being" (2017, 4) and "[m]y feelings, my ability to feel, were fashioned by that underground blow" (6).

[4] Among German-speaking scholars, works of Jan and Aleida Assman and Pierre Nora are considered canonical. Nevertheless, many other works emerged in reaction to the approaches of Nora and both Assmans and there are no real restraints in relying more on these "new" works than on the "original" ones. On the development of memory studies, see Angehrn 2004; Erll 2003; Kansteiner 2004, 122; Kratochvil 2015; or Milevski and Wetenkamp 2022.

[5] One should also keep in mind that today, it is not possible to strictly differentiate between different national academic contexts. Many German and German-based scholars turned toward Hirsch's influential term in their own theoretical explorations; see and compare chapters in Drosihn, Jandl, and Kowollik 2020. Moreover, there are many other concepts that describe transgenerational remembering, for example, "absent memory", "received history" or "haunting legacy"; see Milevski and Wetenkamp 2022, 205.

[6] Astrid Erll (2010) further distinguishes five areas: the art of memory, memory of literature I (intertextuality), memory of literature II (history of literature), memory in literature (modes of literary representations of memory), literature and mediality of memory.

[7] We should also mention Frances Yates, who was the first to pay attention to mnemonic systems transformations in her 1966 monograph *The Art of Memory*.

[8] In the context of literary fiction, such an "archaeological" academic perspective has its parallel, for example, in searching for the crimes of Nazism and Communism, which are usually depicted in connection to the private stories on the background of major historical events. Boris Pasternak's *Doktor Zhivago* (*Doctor Zhivago*, 1957) is usually considered to be a novel that meets these criteria. The memory is here expressed on the meta-level and the novel as such is a lyrical narration of fictional character with autobiographical features. The main topic of the novel is the philosophy of history and rejection of revolution in favor of evolution.

[9] We should underline that most of these works were published by the Moscow-based publishing house Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.

[10] In the post-Soviet period, Russian literature developed a variety of devices for dealing with the past, as shown in the individual chapters of the collective monograph *Russian Literature since 1991*, Dobrenko and Lipovetsky 2015.

[11] One may think of Vavilen Tatarskii, the main protagonist of Viktor Pelevin's cult novel about the Russian 1990s, *Generation "P"* (1999), who also acquired a job in this way and also participated in more or less illegal activities.

[12] "собственный опыт и чужие истории"

[13] The whole Lebedev's trilogy is related to the grandfather figures. The story of the grandfather Mikhail as well as the grandmother's diary appears earlier in *The Year of the Comet*, the second part of the trilogy. In *Oblivion*, the first part of the trilogy, the fact that both his grandfathers are deceased is reflected as well and the whole story is about a man, who replaced the grandfather figures in the family structure and is call "Grandfather 2".

[14] "мне хотелось сделать что-то нелогичное"

[15] This is not the only allegory in the novel. One should keep in mind that they are part of Lebedev's poetics. The novels are often built upon them. In the novel *Oblivion*, the main protagonist is given a blood transfusion by his Grandfather 2. The transfusion saves his life, however, Grandfather 2 dies. It is a "life-giving death" that the protagonist tries to overcome (Lund 2020, 192). This might be read as an attempt to overcome the whole legacy of the Soviet generations, especially when we consider that Grandfather 2 was a former chief commander of a labor camp. In a similar indirect manner, the narrator of *The Year of the Comet* describes the nature of the Soviet regime through the character of his grandmother Mara, who is called "Soviet Power" behind her back for her decisiveness and action that seem "ruthless even in kindness" (Lebedev 2017, 41). This is illustrated by her approach to gardening: "I was amazed that the apple or cherry trees that were alive and full of juice just yesterday, cracking under the blade of the axe, had been burned, and that the old woman was sifting their ashes; but it could be no other way, because of all the grown-ups only Grandmother Mara was capable of deciding without a second thought what would live and what would die; she stood on the border of life and death, ordering one to be chopped and burned in order to fertilize another, more worthy tree" (43). Moreover, the narrator adds that when he followed her orders, "it seemed that we were serving something greater than concern over the harvest; Soviet Power was revealed to me as a life force and the mystery of annihilation simultaneously. Grandmother Mara, despite her lowly public position, was an apostle or at the very least a Soviet zealot in the true, invisible hierarchy" (44).

[16] "Хлебный запах и острия 'колючки' – как одно целое, которого не разложить; щемящее чувство родства. 'Вот это, – подумал я, глядя на колонию, уже отрешившись от наваждения, – и есть советское, его суть, его плоть'. Когда от колонии потянуло хлебом, мы почувствовали одно и то же, я видел это по лицам. Значит, это останется в нас. Не коммунистическое, в котором видели главную опасность, а советское сентиментальное наследство будет жить даже в Мусе, Джалиле и Даниле."

[17] "Мы разрушили жуткое гнездо, но язык не поворачивался назвать это дело благим. Я ощущал, что все мы повязаны нечаянной смертью властителя псов и наше далекое будущее предопределено тем, что мы совершили здесь, тем, что мы почувствовали, совершая."

[18] It is also one of the final scenes in the second novel of the trilogy *The year of the Comet*.

[19] "фамилией, похожей на оперативный псевдоним, заканчивающейся на «ин», как Ленин и Сталин"

[20] We should probably remind that the novel was first published in German translation in 2015 before it appeared in Russian original the next year (Lunde 2022, 180).

[21] "А теперь мы все были как жители поселка, рядом с которым обосновался Песий Царь: прошлое вернулось, и в нем придется жить."

[22] Essays, autobiography and documentation are important part of contemporary literary studies research. According to Reiner Baasler and Maria Zens, these literary genres cannot be excluded from the research of literary fiction, because they also use language to depict something "other" or abstract and mediate specifically subjective view of reality (2005, 21). For further details about this topic see particular concepts in Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019.

[23] Typically, in this kind of memory writing, grandparents and especially grandmothers acquire the role of the family memory holders. See, for example, the works of Victor Erofeev and Martin Pollack, for whom the paternal grandmother plays an important role; see Ulbrechtová 2019.

On the other hand, for Stepanova, the maternal grandmother side seems more significant. In contrast to Erofeyev and Pollack, Stepanova does not attempt to deconstruct the legacy of the representative of state terror, but to reconstruct family memory. Lebedev's case is in this regard peculiar, as his trilogy oscillates between these two positions (deconstruction and reconstruction).

[24] It reminds of Osip Mandelstam's essays, who, by the way, appears as an implicit authority throughout the whole text. One of the chapter's is even dedicated to him; see Stepanova 2018, 163–176; Stepanova 2021, 222–238.

[25] "Речь там идет об определенной стадии развития, когда ребенок перестает верить, что он, такой особенный, мог родиться у своих заурядных родителей, и сочиняет себе новых…" (Stepanova 2018, 199)

[26] "Присяга на верность семейной истории оборачивается ее, истории, уничтожением, пародией на воскрешение мертвых: другой заменяется на себя, знаемое вытесняется воображаемым" (Stepanova 2018, 156).

[27] "Замороженные Шарлотты, представители популяции выживших, кажутся мне родней – и чем меньше я о них могу рассказать, тем ближе они становятся" (Stepanova 2018, 404).

[28] "Бесполезно – и то и это вычерпывается, как ложкой, до дна, до жестяных стенок. В прошлое входишь, не проникая и не проникаясь, как во влажный ледяной столб, откуда-то возникший в июльских сумерках" (Stepanova 2018, 182).

[29] "То, что я не смогла спасти, разлетается во все стороны" (Stepanova 2018, 402)

[30] "коробочка – секретик" (Stepanova 2018, 403)

[31] "Предмет воспоминания при этом может быть один и тот же" (Stepanova 2018, 183).

[32] "Никогда не виданный, никем не описанный двор моего прадеда безошибочно узнавался как тот самый, разночтений не было никаких: и низкий палисадничек с кустом золотых шаров, и кривые стены, их дерево и кирпич, и какой-то, кажется, стул со сбитой перепонкой, стоявший у забора без особой причины, были *свои*, сразу стали мне родственники. Тут, говорили они, тебе сюда. […] до такой степени я вспомнила под этими окнами всё, с таким чувством высокой, природной точности я догадывалась о том, как тут у нас было устроено, как жили здесь и зачем уезжали" (Stepanova 2018, 35–36).

[33] "… перепутал адрес. Улица была та, номер дома другой" (Stepanova 2018, 36).

[34] "Словно главной задачей каждой записи, каждого ежегодно заполняемого тома было именно оставить надежное свидетельство о своей жизни – а жизнь настоящую, внутреннюю, оставить при себе. Все показать. Все скрыть. Хранить вечно" (Stepanova 2018, 16).

[35] "я стал думать о том, что бабушка буквально спряталась за семейную историю, чтобы не рассказывать свою собственную"

[36] "Я даже поразился красоте идеи: скрыть нечто через изобилие предъявленной памяти."

[37] "Кажется, столько написано, столько всего открывается – а на самом деле ты видишь рамки, занавески, потому что никогда не узнаешь, о чем *не* написано."

[38] "Выглядит это, как если бы человек хотел отправить телеграмму, но вместо этого вынужден заполнить все пространство тетрадного листа одним и тем же, неотступно занимающим его вопросом. Переписка оказывается единственным способом прикоснуться к близким; при этом никак нельзя дать им понять, что происходит на самом деле" (Stepanova 2018, 254).

[39] "Чего я не знаю" (Stepanova 2018, 286–304)

[40] "вел себя как герои хорошего советского кино о веселых парнях, работниках социалистического строительства" (Stepanova 2018, 297–298)

[41] "я уже вела себя в логике *владельца*" (Stepanova 2018, 298)

[42] "то его просвещенного соседа с крепостным театриком и прекрасным парком" (Stepnova 2018, 298)

[43] "я почти готова была предать живого папу ради мертвого документа" (Stepanova 2018, 300)

[44] "чем-то вроде стилизации" (Stepanova 2018, 300)

[45] "чтобы развлечь и порадовать родных" (Stepanova 2018, 300)

[46] "язык, которым повседневность говорит о себе" (Stepanova 2018, 300)

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Postmemorial sincerity in the writing of Sergei Lebedev and Maria Stepanova

Cultural memory. Imagination. Memory politics. Politics of the past. Sincerity rhetoric. Post-Soviet Russian novel. Sergei Lebedev. Maria Stepanova.

This article deals with the ways the Russian writers Sergei Lebedev and Maria Stepanova conceptualize memory, remembering, and the past. The special focus is on the presence of sincerity rhetoric and its intertwinement with memory in Lebedev's *Liudi avgusta* (The people of August, 2016) and Stepanova's *Pamiati pamiati* (2018; *In Memory of Memory*, 2021). At first, the study outlines the current position of memory studies within literary theory and the main tendencies of cultural memory development in post-Soviet Russia. Lebedev's and Stepanova's novels are then comparatively read on this cultural-theoretical and cultural-historical background. The crucial aspect can be considered the ethos of "curative sincerity" (Ellen Rutten's concept) that both texts seem to rely on. We approach Lebedev's and Stepanova's texts as examples of postmemorial writing, which does not rely on the first-hand experience with the past it depicts, but encounters the mediatized forms of the past. Therefore, imagination plays an important role for the narrator or authorial subject. The imaginative investment into remembrance accompanies the attempts to sincerely retell the truth about the past, while being aware of the impossibility of retelling the whole truth, which leads to an understanding of predecessors' actions with empathy and compassion.

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Metamodern urban experience in the anthology of topophilic prose *V Pitere zhit'*

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While the multivalent term "postmodernism" is no longer sufficient for an adequate description of contemporary aesthetic and ideological tendencies, the most established of the orismological efforts to characterize contemporaneity (e.g., hypermodernism, post-postmodernism, altermodernism) is the intentionally polysemous term *metamodernism*, as conceptualized by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker (see 2010, 2017; Spivakovskii 2018). The radically deconstructive postmodern skepticism that denies authentic Being-valorizing meanings is outdated, as the contemporary subject seeks to valorize its subjective lived experience: the postmodern ahistorical presentism is replaced with a search for a *new historicity* which, as Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology allows to express, represents a kind of modality of linguistic and temporal experience within which man is "present to himself as a being in history" ([2000] 2004, 60–61). The postmodern *depthlessness* as intentional depth-avoiding superficiality (see Jameson [1984] 1991, 8) is substituted with a search for new *depth* as the all-subverting postmodern cynical pastiche becomes replaced by a *new sincerity*.[1] Whereas *depthlesness* made the "emotional response to the world disappear […]" (Stephanson 1988, 4), the new *affect* mediates to subject an emotional attachment to a perceived object.

However, these constructive inclinations are "hindered" by the parallel affirmation of the postmodern experience as an awareness of the constructed nature of created meanings. Thus, metamodernism, whose "meta" alludes to Plato's *metaxis* (in-betweenness), primarily marks this current oscillation between deconstructive postmodernism as givenness and constructive modernism (in a Blochian sense) as *utopian longing* (Vermeulen and Akker 2017, 30–35); the tension between "a modern desire for *sens* and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all" (Vermeulen and Akker 2010, 6).

This article demonstrates this oscillation in the anthology of topophilic prose *V Pitere zhit': ot Dvortsovoi do Sadovoi, ot Gangutskoi do Shpalernoi. Lichnye istorii* (To live in Petersburg: From Dvortsovaia to Sadovaia, from Gangutskaia to Shpalernaia. Personal stories, 2017). Its commercial success was partly due to the representative inclusion of influential contemporary Russian authors (e.g. Evgenii/Eugene Vodolazkin, Tatiana Tolstaya, Dmitrii Bykov, Elena Chizhova, Elena Kolina, Andrei Astvatsat-

urov, Tatiana Moskvina, Pavel Krusanov, Valerii Popov, and Sergei Nosov). However, it was also the result of its *utmost referentiality* (Zajac 2017, 173) to St. Petersburg as an *existext* (lifeword; Plesník 2018, 40–41), which fulfills the contemporary needs of a metamodern reader. Despite the stylistic plurality of diverse authorial voices, the anthology goes concentrically beyond its textuality and constructs a homogeneous metamodern mode of "existentially valuable" perception/experience of its urban *referential reality* (36–37). Confronting the postmodern vertigo and detachment, the subject is through the topophilic affect concentrically grounded in their contemporary urban space as a signifier of a "valuable" historical temporality that mediates a life-valorizing dialogical experience of subjectivity.

EMANCIPATION OF THE AFFECTING SUBJECT

Andrei Astvatsaturov voices the outdatedness of postmodern thought whilst remembering the 1990s. When referring to an existing philosopher, he repeatedly emphasizes his ideological transfer from the then-current "postmodernism" to the contemporary "neo-Hegelianism" as a non-deconstructive paradigm ("repeated the philosopher-postmodernist", "And at the same time, a Neo-Hegelian philosopher. He was at that time still a 'postmodern philosopher'"; Sokolovskaia and Shubina 2017, 81, 77).[2] Postmodernism is thus indicated as an obsolete matter of the 1990s, as an element of the period "atmosphere" complementary to its other specific constituents such as criminality or corruption.

The thematization of its outdatedness is particularly topical in an anthology that is autobiographical and autofictional (see Gibbons 2017, 186). While the metamodern paradigm responds to postmodern radical anti-anthropomorphism (Jameson 1991, 31) – to the "death of the subject" and complementary neglect of affect and identity ([1988] 1992, 167) – with a contradictory radical turn to the subject (Serbinskaia 2017, 23–29), it is the current increase in production and popularity of autofiction and life writing that represents a characteristic manifestation of this counterreaction (Gibbons 2017). With the "death of the author" obsolete, he or she is centralized and "alive". As the subtitle "Personal Stories" indicates, each prose is narrated by an autobiographical narrator recollecting a (pseudo)autobiographical moment, unified by a dominant subjective "I": "I've shown this monument to many people" (2017, 46); "I saw once" (30); "I thought I would never laugh again" (92); "I am the happy exception" (103); "I went to the 182nd school" (362).[3]

As Alison Gibbons observes on sincerity in contemporary (Anglophone) autofiction, what is pivotal is not the "factuality" of the events described, but their correlation with the author's presented non-ambivalent outlook and their analogous presentation without a radical (postmodern) irony (2017, 183). This paradoxical combination of unreliable authenticity and self-articulating sincerity manifests itself in prose texts with comic undertones.

Sergei Nosov emphasizes the autobiographical nature of his narrator through the textual presence of his colleague (2017, 128) and through self-reference to himself-as-author (131). In contrast to this authenticity-indicating self-referentiality, the extratextual authenticity of the key event described – the comic dialogue with

a local alcoholic – is relativized through the foregoing reference to "carnival" as to a playfully deceptive narrative mode: "The severity of the honors, […], did not at all cancel out in the long run the possibility of carnival moods of readers and admirers" (126).[4] Despite this relativizing device, the sincerity of the author's affect as of expressed affinity for Bol'shaia Moskovskaia Street as a space mirroring (in the Benjaminian sense) the "aura" of Dostoevsky's artistic world, justified by the comic dialogue as an event that "could only happen here" and "only at this place" (132),[5] is not subjected to relativization.

Andrei Astvatsaturov's narrator is addressed by the diminutive of the author's name (Astvatsu, 83) and like the author works as a university lecturer. However, the story evolves into a comic-scatological situation whose extravagance forces one to question its extratextual "truthfulness": a side character threatens the narrator's boss with urinating. The extratextual authenticity of the event is further relativized by the narrator's absence and its presentation as a second-hand story (80–84). Nevertheless, the narrator's concluding topophilic affect – his subjective and highly emotional-corporeal experience of urban space ("I pour myself into this swollen stream of life and feel my arms, legs, and torso fill with a strange new strength, and my head with a silly pleasant goodness", 88)[6] – constitutes a non-ironizing continuation of the foregoing comic scene. The city becomes emotionally-volitionally affirmed as a positive *existext* of poetically comic life.

In line with the metamodern mode, the humor of Nosov and Astvatsaturov, despite its prominent presence, is not deconstructing subjectivity and sentiment and thus is not a postmodern apathetic "end in itself" (Rustad and Schwind 2017, 214). Quite the contrary, it justifies its consequential subjective affect and its "irony is kept in check by sincere undertones and overtones" (Gibbons 2017, 140).

Such I-expressing artistic visualization enables a metamodern inclination towards the *sens*. Contrary to the postmodern anti-anthropomorphic devaluation of Being into an ironic "game", the sentient (affecting) subject and its sincerely presented emotional experience is concentrically affirmed as an object of existential value. The *existext* in the postmodern spirit refutes rational consolidation: "There are so many things, there's no way to grasp it, neither with your mind nor with your eyes" (2017, 88); "The feeling of unreality was so immense that I was ready to believe it was all a dream" (132).[7] However, the affective response to it forms *sens* as a centralized Being-valorizing moment: "I was stunned" (132).[8] But the postmodern pole of metamodern oscillation inhibits this inclination towards the sentient self from eventuating into trans-subjective meanings. "Identity" does not figure as (modernistically) essential, but, despite ascribing value to "personal and interpersonal – including emotional – experiences", it remains "a social category that is constructed by subjects and by larger structures of social power" (Gibbons 2017, 187).

Elena Chizhova's prose is a narrative of self-formation through the social environment. The "I" is consciously constructed out of numerous recollections with Others and its constructedness is emphasized through frequent motifs of "remembering" and "not remembering". The central formative dialogical moment is a game with children in a poor district which thematizes the social constructedness of ethnic be-

longing: "And finally, in the second walkway live the yids. No one plays with their yid. I had no idea that, according to their worldview, I'm also half yid" (2017, 216).[9] The author becomes "writer" – "herself" as a place in society – in the process of incorporation into the collective: "My reputation was finally established and solidified when the backyard folk found out that I could tell stories. […] Before me, this 'vacancy of a poet' in our little backyard area was free. […] Apparently, my deep respect for the power of words grew out of those days" (222).[10] The social environment is portrayed as the primary constituent of self-becoming. It is the change of social space that enables the narrator to lead an "authentic" (intellectual) life, "from which I [author] would probably have diverted if my family had stayed in Kupchino forever" (229).[11]

While all of the texts present the subjective self-becoming as anthropocentrically valuable, there is also a backward movement toward a postmodern relativization of the experienced, most prominently in the opening and closing stories. Tatiana Tolstaya analogizes perception and activity with "dreaming" and marks the urban space as a site of a multitude of subjectivities in which one can only project her subjectivity ("dream") onto surroundings: "No one can be helped in any way, only to live here, see their own dreams and hang them out to dry on the balcony railings in the mornings" (18).[12] The constructedness of subjective projections is emphasized through the juxtaposition of a "dream" as a metonymy for subjectivity with the motif of "constructing": "At school they don't tell a word […] about the construction and multiplication of dreams" (17).[13]

The prose of Vadim Levental', in comparison to the foregoing texts, shows a particularly hectic narration of memories that refutes an attempt at their holistic unification. However, this fragmenting narration correlates with the author's affirmative thematization of the postmodern incomprehensibility of the impenetrable "I", the center of which is

> a grain of impenetrable darkness that I always thought had nothing to do with me; I am arranged around this darkness into which I cannot look – my memory, my hobbies, my history, everything I think (for some reason I want to put that word in brackets) is all rather precariously attached to an area within me that I can only guess about […]; I cannot look into the eyes of whoever sits there – those seem to be the rules of the game. (516)[14]

The rules of this "game" implicitly govern each prose of anthology – the subject affirms their sentient self through affect that allows for construction of a subjective-emotional *sens* in lived experience – through "moments of absolute involvement in life" (517)[15] – but this *sens* never reaches beyond subjective perception as the constitutive moment of the postmodern anti-essential relative self, fluctuating around "non-existing" ("несуществования", 517).

METAMODERN GROUNDING OF A SUBJECT IN DIALOGUE AND HISTORICAL TIME

Due to the desire for self-grounding in a relative world, metamodern autofiction exhibits an emotional attachment to the empirical sites of subjectivity; "an attempt to ground the inner self in an outer reality – in time, space and corporeal being"

(Gibbons 2017, 200). The anthology meets this desire with its concentrated topophilism.[16] While the plot of each prose justifies the author's affective and optimistic experience of St. Petersburg's *existext*, the reader is repeatedly encouraged to share and co-experience such a "self-grounding" topophilic affect.

Elena Kolina concludes her enumeration of numerous experiences in particular spaces with a sentimental affect articulating a sense of belonging to St. Petersburg, as well as with its extension to the reader, for whom St. Petersburg also (through the author's lens) represents a positive topography of a "valuable" emotional being:

> And all of us in St. Petersburg are connected, entangled, befriended, and in every single place I laughed, kissed, married, in Port Moresby […] it wouldn't have been like that. I don't know how to live where I didn't have a laugh in every single place. Maybe that's a good thing, I don't know. I think without Petersburg you feel naked, well, maybe not completely naked, but at least without a cap. (2017, 101)[17]

This "self-into-space" grounding affect is intensified through the dichotomy of "mine – alien", thematized already in the story's opening: "'The world is such a big place, and you, baby, spend your whole life on a patch from Sadovaia to Rubinshtein,' my boyfriend told me" (89).[18] Kolina thus elaborates the theme of "alien world" vs. "my St. Petersburg" conceptualized as a topography of "my" (author's) Being and therewith affectively affirmed as subjectively more valuable ("I think", Rus. "Думаю", [101]).

Equally, Daniil Kotsiubinskii meets the metamodern desire for emotional-spatial grounding of "I" with this dichotomy: "Venice, Rome, Florence? No. Paris? Prague? No. Barcelona, Amsterdam, Tallinn? Also no. There's just 'something old.' And here it's a tremendous city in its entirety. And I only want to live in the center of St. Petersburg" (252).[19] Despite the initial melancholic tonality, the poet and popular historian's prose is not lacking in topophilism, figuring as a complementary part of a solution to the dark emotional scaling. The text opens with a hyperbolic, identity-constituting self-identification with urban topos: "I have no favorite places in St. Petersburg. Nor do I have any 'favorite' places within myself. The city is me and that what made me fascinated and deceived" (241).[20] While the author in accord with postmodern skepticism negates the possibility of a trans-subjective postulate (namely, God), the (meta)modern desire for a valuable Being directs his sentimental affect toward an urban space as that which, though only subjectively, is nonetheless empirically present: "I guess the city was like a god to the faithful. I didn't believe in god. To hell with god. Who saw him? But I saw the city. And I remembered it" (244).[21]

Presenting an experience of existential skepsis, its "sincerity" as a correlation with the author-figure is indicated by Kotsiubinskii's self-referencing as a poet through fragmenting the prosaic text with melancholic poems. Topophilism allows the author to glimpse a positive "meaning" in existence negatively experienced as simulacrum and allowing only to "pretend that you keep on living and loving" (249)[22] as well as to productively confront its meaninglessness.

Significantly, the existential skepsis is resolved not only by grounding the self in space but also in historical time, i.e., by constructing historicity as an emotional modality "in which one can relate past, present, and future (or be in history)" (Akker 2017, 46). The postmodern paradigm conceptualizes ahistorical time distanced from

the legacies of the past; an experience of temporality not as "within" but as "beside" the observed historical time (Jameson 1991, 17–20). For pragmatic, anti-ideological reasons, Kotsiubinskii positively affirms this ahistorical presentism of contemporary experience:

> Joyful – and joyful doubly so, –
> The twentieth century is gone!
> There's no one to unleash hatred,
> No one to come and apologize.
> Time is a thief, space is a thief
> And the city – a thief. (2017, 248)[23]

However, the ahistorical presentism brings not only anti-ideological benefits but also negative consequences. As the last two quoted lines indicate, it breaks the "existential contact" (Jameson 1991, 284) with the "significant" historical time and therewith constitutes "timelessness" and an analogous feeling of existential emptiness: "The farther the city faded into timelessness, the more it resembled a beautiful vampire that you are enchanted to love and who gives you in return only immortal coldness and emptiness" (2017, 248).[24]

The urban topos resolves the "empty timelessness" because it opens to the possibility of its affective and historicizing perception: it enables "an experience of […] present as past and as history", i.e., of emotional situatedness in linear-historical time which the postmodern paradigm excludes (Jameson 1991, 285) because, as a ubiquitous signifier of historical meanings, it invites its historicizing visualization, "suffocates with an unbearable memory that turns to you with its black stone mouth from every window oriel, from every back alley, from every step of every stairwell" (2017, 249).[25] City – the mediator of historicity – opens access to the antinomy of postmodern "timelessness", which Kotsiubinskii within his topophilic affect characterizes as "eternity", i.e., "that" which transcends the subject's postmodern-presentist being: "And it's beautiful. And cozy. And good. Because we are the zombies of St. Petersburg. Slaves of beauty, which we can't save, and which killed us and gave us eternity" (251).[26] The postmodern pole of metamodern oscillation leaves this "eternity" ambivalent, but the narrator's intensely emotional experience of urban history accords it a dimension of historicity. The "I" is grounded in linear-historical time precisely in the affective response to its perceived spatial presence: "What's left to do? Wander the streets. Recite Kharms. Curse the empire and admire its architectonic style" (249).[27]

Alexandr Melikhov also conceptualizes urban space as situating into liner-historical time: as communicating "a message from the past" (174)[28] and linking the subject with the existence-valorizing "eternity": "For each person's precious connection with eternity, it is extraordinarily important to feel that his life takes place in the same setting as the lives of his most significant predecessors" (174).[29] In line with the postmodern pole of metamodern oscillation, neither Kotsiubinskii nor Melikhov clarifies this presented ambivalent "eternity". Though monological interpretation of "being in time" remains unachievable, an optimistic belief in its ontological value comes to the fore, as well as a belief in its attainability through a subjective-emotional

experience of time in historical space, which Melikhov in affect apotheotically marks as "holy" (173).

Correspondingly, Tatiana Mei indicates the literary and historical past as "alive" in current-contemporary space:

> Everything I had read since childhood, all the characters, historical and fictional, their creators with friends and foes, came around from different directions, waved from the windows, passed me in the street. And they were often no less real than the neighbors in my house. (342)[30]

This desire to perceive the past within the present motivates intense and apotheotic intertextuality. For illustration, Valerii Popov's narrator glimpses a Kharms-like grotesqueness in wall sculptures (360), correlates his lonely walk from Nevskii Prospekt with the experience of Bunin's narrator of *Na Nevskom* (361), or alludes to Joseph Brodsky's biographical text (a photo-portrait): "And in those same years, in the Muruzi house, Brodsky looked out from his balcony at the same church" (362).[31]

This "co-being" with the signs of the past conveys a sense of "being in history". The metamodern narrator combines historicizing and emotional perception to experience his spatial contemporaneity as coexistent with Bunin, Brodsky, or Dostoevsky, thus situating himself in a linear, historical and therewith "valuable" urban time:

> At one end of it [the bridge], as Dostoevsky confessed, he experienced the happiest moment of his life when he left Belinskii, who praised him / And I experienced my happiest moment at the other end of the bridge, […] when I saw a pretty girl reading aloud to a boy a funny story from my first book, and them both laughing. (364)[32]

Evgenii Vodolazkin conceptualizes Zhdanovskaia naberezhnaia as a space encompassing historical-linear time primarily through its appearance in Alexei Tolstoy's *Aelita* (1923). His concluding topophilic affect meets the metamodern desire for linear-historical temporality by conceptualizing contemporary space as an intense container of history – the past in it (through the author's lens) "does not disappear":

> Try not to worry when the world is so small. When even on one small promenade so many events – fictional and real, so many people, addresses and times – are connected to each other. Everything is connected in one chain, and one link pulls in another. And nothing disappears. (113)[33]

Desire for self-grounding in historical time-space manifests itself also in the repeated rejection of ahistorical space as its dichotomous opposition. While Melikhov characterizes the presently constructed space as a "bubble without lineage" that "sends us no signals either about our time or country […]" (154),[34] in Pavel Krusanov's prose we read:

> Until space is saturated with the vivid lives, sacrificial deaths, talents, and dreams of its inhabitants, it will not come to life, will not be animated, will remain simply a stone, a street, an object without any metaphysics or inner fire, […] like a random nonsense, like a thing without an eidos. (449)[35]

The history-non-signifying space motivates the metamodern narrator to move into a historical space in which his being valorizes "a haven of swamp demons: the shad-

ows of Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Bely intermingled with the shadows of their characters: the restless chimeras of Karakozov, Perovskaia, Zhelezniak, and Dybenko" (449).[36] This space of "stone spirituality, imperial versatility, and historical memory" (450)[37] mediates a subjective self-experiencing within the historical time and therewith offers (through the author's lens) an anaesthetic for the postmodern feeling of emptiness. However, the postmodern pole of metamodern oscillation hinders this (meta)modern inclination towards *sens* with emphasis that the experience of significance does not transcend beyond the "fantasy" as a metonymy for subjectivity:

> since all beings, having once felt existential terror in their hearts (I am small and insignificant, and the universe is grandiose and totally indifferent to me, my fate is to perish in the cold of its indifference without a trace), run from there [from ahistorical space], trying at least for a while, at least in fantasies to nestle into that which even if does not promises physical immortality, at least offers a longevity of memory. (450)[38]

In opposition to the postmodern anti-hierarchical denial of the "depth" of culturally iconic texts (Jameson 1991, 392), all of the texts in the collection affirm the city's literary heritage as one of eminent existential relevance: For Mei, "[d]ead and eternally alive poets are indeed all over the place" (2017, 348),[39] while Nosov suggests that "[i]t's not like Dostoevsky is 'our everything,' but now he's for us like we ourselves" (125).[40] This numerous apotheotic intertextuality correlates with metamodern empathy for the sentient subject – it directs him toward a subjective *sens* within his in-betweenness between the *sens* and *doubt*.

Pavel Krusanov does not condemn an ahistorical space of a newly built district but employs it to ascribe an existential value to unique lives of individuals who transform a negatively presentist space into a space of historicity: their activity (in the existential sense) constitutes "work on humanization" and fills it with "the newest mythology" (450).[41] His concluding affect "grounds the subject in space" precisely by encouraging an emotional experience of one's participation in their spatial situatedness – in contrast to the postmodern devaluation of the subject, the individual is here conceptualized as valuable because not only the actions of "Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Bely" (449)[42] but also their activity is co-participant in the creation of a spatial *existext* that, in spite of its initial ahistoricity, "has become a generator of new myths, […] a place of attraction for dreams. These palaces and streets are worthy of love and despair – may the power of those who have given them their lifeblood be with them" (458).[43]

Alexandra Iarko appositely points out that the anthology differs from the tradition of the Petersburg text and its characteristic "nonhumanity" by "the utmost humanness" (Iarko 2019, 26). St. Petersburg is simultaneously thematized not only as a city of historical-cultural figures but also as a city of contemporary acting and feeling subjects.

In Tatiana Tolstaya's prose, the "dream" as a metonymy for subjective perception relates equally to iconic classics: "Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Bely, Blok – hung their dreams all over the city" (2017, 12),[44] as well as to every regular inhabitant: "As sleepwalkers are expected to do, St. Petersburg residents walk on the rooftops" (16, also 18).[45] As the narrator declares a dialogic intention to observe the actions resul-

ting from the Other's subjectivity: "I will sit by the window and watch other people's dreams" (14),[46] this dialogue is directed both synchronically to the present Other and diachronically to the figures of the past. The contemporary subject converges with cultural history and represents an active co-creator of an *existext* already valorized by past cultural figures.

Such *existext*-valorizing being within the historical-linear temporality is manifested in the dialogic orientation (both synchronic and diachronic) of Magda Alekseeva's narrator, who emphasizes being as co-being with others through the affirmation of Osip Mandelstam's poem. The author's optimistic life-affinity is justified by the possibility of dialogical co-existence with the historical (with the alluded-to Brodsky, Bulgakov, or Akhmatova, 280–283) as well as the contemporary Other: "But cities are not just streets and houses. They are above all people. When Mandelstam wrote 'I have your telephone numbers', he was referring to people you can call, talk to […] with whom you can share love, work – life" (285).[47] While dialogical co-being represents a sentimental *sens*, the postmodern pole of metamodern oscillation layers this topophilic affect with an explicit rejection of normative monologism. The urban topos as time-space which potentially situates, grounds, and interactively enriches Being, provides *sens* amidst a current world that once again collapses into the weighty meaninglessness of not post- but neo-modernist ideologies: "They [cities], as human beings, help to live in this complex world with its recurring nastiness. Twenty years ago, it seemed that with the Soviets gone was all that was pressing on the soul. And suddenly again – fifth column, foreign agents, 'Crimea is ours', war…" (286)[48]

CONCLUSION

The emancipated feeling subject is grounded in urban space and historical time to initiate a subjectivity-affirming and Being-valorizing dialogue. The intense apotheosis of cultural history does not go beyond conscious subjectivity and does not eventuate into monologisms. The intense intertextuality which correlates with the subject's affect-producing movement in urban space is throughout the anthology reminiscent of labyrinth described in Ilya Boiashov's prose. The author initially grounds himself in a linear-historical time through the emotional experience of the historical chronology of the labyrinth in Peterhof (461–463) as a space that "stops time" ("останавливает время", 461) and thus intensifies self-perception "in history". But Boiashov's labyrinth, analogized with life, has no destination, as life presents "the inexorable wandering through rooms, corridors, and countless labyrinths" (466).[49] The metamodern subject "wanders" through countless "corridors" of meanings, and the moment of existential value (*sens*) is the very act of "wandering" as a performed life activity: "And yet – we are drawn to labyrinths. We can't live without labyrinths. We need labyrinths" (466).[50] This optimistic "wandering" in search for meanings, initiated by the affirmation of a historically situated and feeling subject, overlays the torment of a non-negated postmodern *doubt*: in Levental's prose, humankind fills space (Neva River) with meanings ("ghosts"), "perhaps only because thinking of it as completely void is unspeakably more terrifying" (517).[51]

NOTES

[1] New sincerity is here understood in its broadest sense as an effort to pass on "an earnest message, idea, feeling, or value to the […] audience" (Balliro 2018, 9).

[2] "повторил философ – постмодернист"; "А заодно и философа-неогегельянца. Он тогда был еще 'философом-постмодернистом'." All translations of excerpts from the anthology *V Pitere zhit': ot Dvortsovoi do Sadovoi ot Gangutskoi do Shpalernoi. Lichnye istorii* into English are done by M.D.

[3] "Я многим показывал этот памятник"; "Я однажды увидел"; "Я думала, что никогда не буду смеяться"; "Я – счастливое исключение"; "Я учился в 182-й школе."

[4] "Строгость почестей, […], вовсе не отменяла в перспективе возможность карнавальных настроений читателей и почитателей."

[5] "могла произойти только здесь"; "только на этом месте"

[6] "Я вливаюсь в этот разбухший поток жизни и чувствую, как мои руки, ноги, туловище наполняются новой странной силой, а голова – глупым приятным добродушием."

[7] "Всего так много, это никак не ухватить, ни умом, ни взглядом"; "Ощущение нереальности было столь велико, что я был готов поверить, что это всё сон."

[8] "Я был потрясен."

[9] "И наконец, во второй парадке живут жиды. С их жиденком никто не играет. О том, что согласно их картине мира, я тоже на половину жиденок, я и понятия не имела."

[10] "Окончательно моя репутация сложилась и упрочилась, когда дворовый народ выяснил, что я умею рассказывать истории. […] До меня на нашей маленькой дворовой зоне эта "вакансия поэта" была пуста […] Видимо, мое глубокое уважение к силе слова выросло из тех дней."

[11] "от траектории которой я бы наверняка уклонилась, если бы моя семья навсегда осталась в Купчино"

[12] "Никому ничем нельзя помочь, разве что жить здесь, видеть свои собственные сны и развешивать их по утрам на просушку на балконных перилах."

[13] "В школе не рассказывают ни слова […] о конструировании и размножении снов."

[14] "зерно непроглядной тьмы, которая, как мне всегда казалось, не имеет ко мне отношения; я устроен вокруг этой тьмы, в которую не могу заглянуть, – моя память, мои увлечения, моя история, всё, что я думаю (почему-то это слово хочется взять в кавычки), – всё это довольно ненадежно прикреплено к области внутри меня, о наличии которой я могу только догадываться […]; взглянуть в глаза тому, кто сидит там, я не могу – таковы, кажется, правила игры."

[15] "моменты абсолютного участия в жизни"

[16] For a search for non-ideological and topophilic values in the context of contemporary poetry, see Barkovskaia and Grominova (2016).

[17] "И все мы в Питере связаны, перепутаны, передружены, и в каждом любом месте я смеялась, целовалась, выходила замуж, в Порт-Морсби […] так бы не было. Я не знаю, как жить там, где не в каждом любом месте смеялся, – может быть, и хорошо, я не знаю. Думаю, без Питера чувствуешь себя голым, ну, может быть, не совсем голым, но без шапочки."

[18] "Мир такой большой, а ты – детка, всю жизнь толчешься на пятачке от Садовой до Рубинштейна, – сказал мне приятель."

[19] "Венеция, Рим, Флоренция? Нет. Париж? Прага? Нет. Барселона. Амстердам, Таллин? Тоже нет. Там просто есть 'что-то старенькое'. А здесь – огромный город целиком. И я хочу жить только в центре Петербурга."

[20] "У меня нет любимых петербургских мест. Как нет 'любимых' мест в себе самом. Город – это я, и это то, что меня очаровало и обмануло."

[21] "Наверное, город был для меня чем-то вроде бога для верующих. Я не верил в бога. Да и черт с ним, с богом. Кто его видел? А вот город – я видел. И помнил."

[22] "делать вид, что продолжаешь жить и любить"

[23] "Радостно – и радостно вдвойне / Больше нет / Двадцатого столетья! / Некому обиды раскатать, / Некому прийти и извиниться. / Время – тать, пространство – тать / И город – тать."

[24] "Чем дальше город замирал в безвременье, тем больше напоминал прекрасного вампира, которого ты зачарованно любишь и который дарит тебе в ответ лишь бессмертные холод и пустоту."

[25] “душит невыносимой памятью, которая повернута к тебе каменной черной пастью с каждого эркера, из каждой подворотни, каждой ступени каждого лестничного пролета.”

[26] “И там красиво. И уютно. И хорошо. Потому что мы – петербургские зомби. Рабы красоты, которую не в силах сберечь и которая убила нас и даровала нам вечность.”

[27] “Что остается? Бродить по улицам. Декламировать Хармса. Проклинать империю и любоваться ампиром.”

[28] “послание из прошлого.”

[29] “Для драгоценной для каждого человека связи с вечностью необыкновенно важно ощущать, что его жизнь протекает в тех же декорациях, что и жизнь самых значительных его предшественников.”

[30] “Всё, что я читала с детства, все персонажи, исторические и выдуманные, их творцы с друзьями и врагами – обступали с разных сторон, махали из окон, обгоняли на улице. И оказывались зачастую не менее реальными, чем соседи по дому.”

[31] “И в эти же годы, в доме Мурузи, Бродский смотрел с балкона на эту же церковь.”

[32] “На одном его конце [моста], по признанию Достоевского, он пережил самый счастливый миг жизни, когда вышел от Белинского, который его похвалил. / А я свой самый счастливый момент пережил на другом конце моста, […], когда увидал, как красивая девушка вслух читает парню веселый рассказ из первой моей книги, и оба смеются.”

[33] “Попробуй тут не волноваться, когда мир настолько тесен. Когда даже на одной маленькой набережной друг с другом связано столько событий – литературных и реальных, столько людей, адресов и времен. Все соединено в одну цепочку, и одно звено втягивает за собой другое. И ничто не исчезает.”

[34] “пузырь без роду без племени”; “не посылает нам никаких сигналов ни о времени, ни о стране”

[35] “Пока пространство не напитается яркими жизнями, жертвенными смертями, талантами и мечтами его насельников, оно не оживёт, не одухотворится, останется просто камнем, улицей, предметом без всякой метафизики и внутреннего огня, […] как случайная чепуха, как вещь без эйдоса.”

[36] “прибежище болотных чертей: теней Пушкина, Гоголя, Достоевского, Белого вперемешку с тенями их персонажей: беспокойных химер Каракозова, Перовской, Железняка, Дыбенко.”

[37] “каменной духовности, имперского многообразия и исторической памяти”

[38] “поскольку все живое, хоть раз почувствовавшее в сердце экзистенциальный ужас (я мал и ничтожен, а мироздание грандиозно и совершенно ко мне равнодушно, моя участь – сгинуть в холоде его равнодушия без следа), бежит оттуда, стараясь хотя бы на время, хотя бы в фантазиях приткнуться к тому, что обещает пусть не физическое бессмертие, но долговечность памяти.”

[39] “Мертвые и вечно живые поэты действительно повсюду.”

[40] “Достоевский не то чтобы ‘наше всё’, а теперь он для нас как бы мы сами.”

[41] “работу по одухотворению”; “новейшей мифологией”

[42] “Пушкина, Гоголя, Достоевского, Белого”

[43] “стал генератором новых мифов, […] местом притяжения мечты. Эти дворцы и улицы достойны любви и отчаяния – да пребудет с ними сила тех, кто отдал им свою живицу”

[44] “Пушкин, Гоголь, Достоевский, Белый, Блок – развесили свои сны по всему городу”

[45] “Как и полагается лунатикам, петербуржцы гуляют по крышам.”

[46] “сяду к окну и буду смотреть чужие сны”

[47] “Но города – это не только улицы и дома. Это прежде всего люди. Когда Мандельштам писал: “У меня телефонов твоих номера”, он же как раз имел в виду людей, которым можно позвонить, с которыми можно поговорить […], с которыми можно разделить любовь, работу – жизнь.”

[48] “Они, как люди, помогают жить в этом сложном мире с его то и дело возникающей гнусностью. Двадцать лет назад казалось, что вместе с советской властью ушло то, что так давило душу. И вдруг опять – пятая колонна, иностранные агенты, ‘крымнаш’, война…”

[49] “безвыходное блуждание в комнатах, коридорах и бесчисленных лабиринтах”

[50] "И все-таки – нас тянет в лабиринты. Мы не можем без лабиринтов. Нам нужны лабиринты."
[51] "возможно только потому, что думать о ней как об абсолютно пустой невыразимо страшнее"

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Metamodern urban experience in the anthology of topophilic prose *V Pitere zhit'*

Metamodernism. *V Pitere zhit'*. Topophilic prose. Urban prose. New historicity. New affect.

This article applies metamodernism as a new discursive practice for interpreting contemporaneity to the anthology *V Pitere zhit': ot Dvortsovoi do Sadovoi, ot Gangutskoi do Shpalernoi. Lichnye istorii* (To Live in Petersburg: From Dvortsovaia to Sadovaia, from Gangutskaia to Shpalernaia. Personal stories, 2017) edited by Natalia Sokolovskaia and Elena Shubina. It demonstrates that despite the plurality of authorial styles in the collection, it advocates a homogeneous metamodern mode of urban experience within which postmodern anti-anthropocentrism is substituted by the affirmation of the feeling (affective) subject, and the postmodern ahistorical presentism is replaced by the pursuit of self-situating into the historical time, allowing for a valorization of Being through a subjectivity-affirming dialogue with the historical and contemporary Other.

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The symbolization of the fragmented plot structure in Ludmila Ulitskaya's novels

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The reception of Ludmila Ulitskaya's oeuvre in Russia is ambivalent. While the author's works are extremely popular with readers and sell in huge numbers both in Russia and abroad, Russian literary critics often receive them with a degree of skepticism. A general opinion is expressed by the well-known critic Galina Yuzefovich in connection with *Lestnitsa Iakova* (2015a; Eng. trans. *Jacob's Ladder*, 2019*)*: "it is impossible to escape the impression that you are sitting in the kitchen (well, at most in a café) with your girlfriend, and she is telling you the exciting, colorful, and tragic story of her family. It's a completely harmless pastime, even good for the soul, but somehow unnecessary, or what. It lacks weight. Something that, when seen, makes you feel a little ashamed" (2017, 171).[1] A specific objection often raised about Ulitskaya's novels concerns the excessive complexity and/or fragmentation of the novel form. The time structure of *Zelenyi shater* ([2010] 2015b; Eng. trans. *The Big Green Tent*, 2015c), for example, is judged by Natalia Ivanova to be "a medley, a mush" (2011), while Konstantin Kropotkin says that "the problems of the Kukotskys are unnecessarily stretched out over the course of a whole novel, and *Jacob's Ladder* is markedly heavy and far too long" (2018).

The role and perception of fragmentation and wholeness, as is well known, varies from one cultural period to another:

> In some epochs, the fragmentary formulation of thought testifies to its powerful rationalism – its all-embracing, universal, almost axiomatic character; in other epochs, on the contrary, fragmentation expresses the complete opposite of a universal view of the world, the unknowability of phenomena, the impossibility of coming into possession of a detailed map of a fragmented and disjointed reality […]. (Smirnova 2021, 34)

On this basis, the history of literature can also be described in terms of the alternating dominance of the quest for fragmentation vs. wholeness, and the quest for fragmentation certainly seems to be a prominent trend in 20th century literature.

At the same time, fragmentation and wholeness cannot be thought of as merely opposing, or largely mutually exclusive, principles. Their contradiction can and has been resolved in Yuri Lotman's theoretical works. In his very first pioneering work, *Lektsii po struktural'noi poetike* (Lectures on structural poetics, [1964] 1994), Lot-

man stated that the work of art is a "unified, multifaceted, functioning structure" that recreates reality, "as a both modelling and semiotic phenomenon" (29). The basic premise of Lotman's early works is that the work of art, as a model, replaces reality in a simplified form and can be broken down into levels and smaller units, while functioning semiotically as an iconic sign, i.e., it refers as a whole to the reality with which it has a motivated relationship. This duality of the work of art is reflected in the basic principle of the functioning of culture in the later concept of the semiosphere. Based on the results of brain research, Lotman introduces a system-wide opposition related to the different functioning of the two cerebral hemispheres: the *discrete* (segmented) and the *continuous* information processing/text generating mechanisms. While the two together form a unified system (what Lotman calls personality), in the texts produced by the former (discrete) the meaning is the sum of the separate signals, in the other (continuous) type of texts the meaning cannot be broken down into the separate meanings of the signals (1999, 46). This dual yet unified mechanism becomes the minimum condition of the functioning of culture in Lotman's definition. This mode of operation is the basis for the equivalence of human intellect, text, and culture.

In this context, in principle, any literary work can be described as a simultaneous manifestation of discrete and continuous text generating mechanisms. In what follows, I will attempt to show the simultaneous operation of discrete and continuous text generating mechanisms in the structural features of Ulitskaya's three major novels – *Daniel' Shtain, perevodchik* (2006; Eng. trans. *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, 2011), *The Big Green Tent* and *Jacob's Ladder* – in the context of the Lotman's concept of the semiosphere.

The fragmentary structure of the three novels, consisting of discrete units, is fully in line with the 20th century trend which is manifested in the disintegration of the large prose forms, the fragmentation of the genre of the novel into shorter genres. The above-mentioned critiques essentially reflect on this fragmentary structure and ignore the continuous text-generating mechanism, which is manifested in the symbolic processes that ensure the unity of the plot fragments. These processes also have an important role in Ulitskaya's works, though they are less visible on the surface of the plot. As they have received considerably less attention in criticism and academic literature, I focus primarily on them in my study.

THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE PLOT STRUCTURE

The discrete text generating mechanism works in a similar way in all three works: the articulation of space and time in different ways results in a highly fragmented plot. The most common form of structuring is the alternation of episodes in the life of one hero with events in the lives of many other heroes. This can happen on the same timeline, as in the case of the three central heroes of *The Big Green Tent*, especially in the second half of the plot, when, after finishing school, Ilya, Sanya and Mikha are separated and the events of their lives are described in turn, interspersed with those of several minor characters. In the Jacob novel, the episodes of Nora and Jacob's story unfold on two parallel timelines (first and last thirds of the 20th century), alternating

between the two. In the Daniel novel, the alternation of events in the different life stories is usually accompanied by an alternation of timelines: Daniel's life story is divided into episodes linked to different periods in the lives of characters of different ages. Timelines and their associated locations may alternate within a hero's life, disrupting the linear sequence, or shorter or longer sections may be left out of the linear life story.

The fragmentation is also reinforced by the fact that the protagonist is not a single figure in any of the three novels: Nora is as important a character in *Jacob's Ladder* as Jacob; a minor character becomes the protagonist for the duration of a section of the plot in *The Big Green Tent*,[2] and the actual protagonists often appear only as episodic characters in the lives of other characters, as Daniel Stein, for example, in the life of Ewa Manukyan.

The Daniel novel is a unique phenomenon in terms of fragmentation, insofar as it is not only the result of the articulation of space and time. The plot of the work is composed of a number of non-fiction texts, written in different periods, locations and languages, and belonging to different textual subjects, some of which are linked to specific characters, and others are impersonal quasi-documents. Their juxtaposition mimics the work of a historian trying to reconstruct certain events or the life stories of historical figures from various sources.

In the case of the text types[3] connected to specific persons, interactions such as correspondence and transcripts of recorded conversations predominate, which may form smaller blocks within the plot. However, the text units themselves, typically linking only two persons, are largely isolated from each other: they are not linked at all or only indirectly to other characters not involved. This is even more the case for impersonal documents,[4] which, since their textual subject is not identifiable, can only be loosely connected to the other textual units. The isolation of the different text units that make up each of the plot fragments is reinforced by the lack of a unified narrative perspective and voice; even Ewa Manukyan, who comes close to a narrative role, does not have access to the overwhelming majority of the characters and their texts. All in all, the structure of the plot in this work is a puzzle: the reader has to piece together a picture of the protagonist Daniel Stein from the separate text units.

THE SYMBOLIZATION OF THE PLOT STRUCTURE
DANIEL STEIN, INTERPRETER

The link between the isolated fragments of the plot on the thematic level is, naturally, first and foremost the person of the protagonist, whose life path at certain points directly or indirectly intersects with the life paths of the majority of the characters. The figure of Daniel Stein himself, while his life is divided into discrete units, symbolically represents the principle of continuity: he acts as a mediator and a link not only between languages but also between religions, nationalities and family members, as has been pointed out in academic literature.[5]

The symbolic meaning of continuity can also be identified in the segmentation of the macrostructure: the novel is divided into five large sections, which can be linked to *The General Epistle of James* in the New Testament. Ulitskaya's protagonist

is striving for the revival of James' church, and the structure of the novel with its five large parts represents the fivefold division of James' epistle. As József Goretity puts it in his article:

> It would require a long study of its own to show how Ulitskaya, in the *five* parts of her novel *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, develops, embedded in stories, resurfacing again and again like an underground stream, and shown from different points of view, all the major themes of the *five* parts of the general epistle of James in the New Testament, such as the usefulness of trials, the origin of sin, the impartiality of Christian faith, the worthlessness of faith without action, the sins of the tongue, the primacy of heavenly wisdom over human pseudo-wisdom, the condemnation of partisanship, the caution against conceit and the warning against swearing. […] In other words, Ulitskaya's book is a 21st century novelistic unfolding of James' letter,[6] both in content and structure. (2009, 27)

On the other hand, the fivefold division of the macro-structure of Daniel's novel is symbolized by the work's motto, taken from the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more then ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (1 Cor 14:18–19). In the light of this detail, the five structural units of the novel are given the status of a single word, i.e., the plot fragments that make up each section are treated as symbolically unified.

From the point of view of the duality of the discrete and continuous text-generating mechanisms, it is particularly significant that the context of the excerpt chosen as the novel's motto is the opposition between the individual and the larger unit (the congregation): the language user's appeal to God or to the people. In the case of the former, the individual builds only himself and "speaks in tongues" which are incomprehensible to others, while in the case of the latter, the teaching appeals to reason and reaches people. The significance of this dichotomy is indisputable in Ulitskaya's poetics, but here it is of primary interest as the continuous text-generating mechanism. This endeavor to overcome separation and unify the plot fragments also appears in the symbolization of the structure from the vantage point of the motto.

In addition to the New Testament texts, the fivefold division of the macrostructure is also symbolically linked to the most important part of the Old Testament, the five books of Moses. Using Alexander Men's interpretation of the Old Testament as a starting point, Galina Pavlovna Mikhailova draws formal and thematic parallels between certain parts of the Daniel novel and the relevant books of Moses (2015). In this way, the underlying theme of the work, that is, the close relationship between the Jewish and Christian religions and the idea of continuity and unity, is symbolically encoded in the macro-structure of the novel, which can be interpreted in both Old and New Testament contexts.

THE BIG GREEN TENT

Less radically fragmented than the Daniel novel is the plot of *The Big Green Tent*. It has a narrower space, a less fragmented temporal structure, and a unified narrative voice to ensure the unity of the text. Yet the academic literature on the work

has suggested that it is not a novel but a series of separate short stories.[7] This idea is based on the fact that the chapters, each with its own title, are more or less isolated and self-contained plot fragments, each representing an episode or a stage in the life of a different hero. Most of the characters who temporarily occupy the role of protagonist within the fragments have no connection with the characters in the other fragments, and their story has no bearing on the fate of the three central figures.

The fragmented nature of the plot is counterbalanced by a system of characters structured as a social network. The heroes' relationships form a network that corresponds to the "six degrees of separation" model first proposed in Frigyes Karinthy's story "Láncszemek" ("Chains", 1929) and further developed by Manfred Kochen and Stanley Milgram in the 1960s.[8] According to this model, in the world of the narrative, it is possible to move from one minor character to another or to the central hero in a few steps.[9]

In addition to this type of interconnectedness of the heroes, as in the Daniel novel, the symbolic layer of the macrostructure also functions according to the principle of continuity, ensuring the unity of the plot. The 12th chapter out of 30 in the work is the "The Upper Register", whose location thus coincides with the point of the golden section, and this in itself indicates the prominence of the chapter on the wedding of Liza and Boris.

An identifiable prototype is behind the figure of the bride, Liza, in the person of the still performing Elizaveta Leonskaia (Latynina 2011). In addition to her fame as a pianist, Leonskaia was one of the friends of Joseph Brodsky, and the poet dedicated several poems to her and she was the last person to meet the poet before his death (this is recalled in the last scene of Ulitskaya's novel). The figure of the elderly pianist who performs at the wedding is also linked to a prototype: Maria Yudina, Stalin's favorite pianist, appears in the episode. In one of the most legendary episodes in Yudina's biography, she donated her fee for a Mozart sonata she recorded for Stalin in a single night to a monastery asking them to pray for Stalin's salvation. In this way, the prologue (Stalin's death) and the epilogue (Brodsky's death) of the novel are symbolically linked in the wedding episode through the figures of the two pianists, i.e., structurally the beginning and end point of the section are treated as symbolically unified.

In addition to the symbolic unity of the macrostructure, the individual plot fragments are also organized into smaller structural units. The chapter "The Upper Register", for example, is not only linked to the prologue and the epilogue, but also has a specific reflective relationship with the chapter "King Arthur's Wedding". The latter (which precedes the wedding of Liza and Boris in the order of the chapters) is a travestied representation of the elegant event among the musical elite of the capital, described largely from the point of view of Sanya. The wedding of one of the characters of the episode, nicknamed King Arthur, is seen from the point of view of Ilya and Olga. The setting is a neglected house in a suburban settlement near Moscow; the female figure, named Lisa, is not the bride but the ex-wife who is about to marry her own sister to Arthur; her name, which sounds like a distorted version of Liza, is in fact a nickname she received because of her nose. The physiological details de-

picted in the episode are characteristic of grotesque realism in the Bakhtinian sense, which extend to the depiction of Lisa's emigration.

The grotesque wedding episode, a travestied representation of specific elements of the musician's wedding, is also in parallel with the final chapter of the work. In the chapter entitled "Ende gut", Sanya, like Arthur's Lisa, leaves the country by a sham marriage. The ironic description of the meeting and marriage in Moscow with the "fictitious" American bride Debby is both a counterpoint to the spiritual closeness of Sanya and Liza, the pianist and the literary equivalent of one of the most distinguished musical techniques of Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, the fusion of American jazz sounds with Russian folk melodies.[10] Overall, the symbolization of structure in the novel *The Big Green Tent* acts against the fragmentation of the plot, i.e. the discrete and the continuous text generating mechanisms are both active.

JACOB'S LADDER

The fragmentation in *Jacob's Ladder* is created in part by the two parallel timelines and in part by the omission of major periods within each timeline. This is reflected in the table of contents, which, as in the Daniel novel, uses chapter headings with year numbers to help orient the reader.[11] The fragmentation of the heroes' lives is further reinforced in Jacob's timeline by the alternation of narrative passages written in the first person singular – diary entries and letters – and narrative passages in the third person singular.[12]

The two timelines are linked on several levels. The thematic link is provided by the kinship between the two protagonists, Nora's involvement in the organization of her grandmother's funeral and her only encounter with her grandfather. Structurally, we can speak of a matrioshka formation: the life story of the grandparents, Jacob and Marusya, is described based on the family archives and within the framework of Nora's life. Certain life events of Nora's parents are outlined between the two planes, partly in the archive material and partly in Nora's present. At the same time, Nora herself only becomes acquainted with the letters and documents of her grandparents towards the end of her life's journey, which means that from her point of view – as opposed to the reader's – Jacob's life story appears as a unified whole. As a result, the position of the heroine, who is already looking back on her own life practically from the endpoint, is extremely close to the author's position, which looks at both life paths from the outside and connects them.

The symbolic link between the two planes is provided by a sentence quoted from Shakespeare's *King Lear,* which is also included among the chapter titles. Despite the large number of references to literary works in both timelines of the plot, Shakespeare's tragedy is the only one which both Jacob and Nora reflect on. In 1981, Tengiz proposes to Nora that they stage *King Lear* together. The starting point for Tengiz's interpretation is a line at the climax of Shakespeare's drama in the storm scene: "unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings!" (Ulitskaya 2015a, 199) Tengiz first quotes the excerpt in the original English, and then in Pasternak's transla-

tion. A few chapters later, Jacob reflects on an earlier translation of the same two sentences (which preceded Pasternak's), writing in a letter to Marusya dated 1912 that he had read *King Lear* and offering his own translation of the passage highlighted by Tengiz.

While designing the stage set for the play, Nora also uses the Shakespeare quote to interpret her own life situation, placing particular importance on the stripping down of the "self". In the planned final scene, the stripped-down, "bare man" is depicted through Christian symbolism: the ekphrasis of the stage's final scene represents the canonical elements of the icon of *Preobrazhenie* (Transfiguration): Lear's attendants are identified as disciples of Jesus, and, in the icon-painting tradition, the greatest emphasis is on the "flameless light" that Jesus radiates and that blinds the disciples. "Edgar, the Jester, and Kent watch them from below, like Jesus' disciples at the moment of his Transfiguration. The light is unbearable" (Ulitskaya 2019).[13] In the final chapter of the novel, it is on the feast of Jesus' transfiguration that Nora learns about the dossier on her grandfather kept in the KGB archives and is confronted with her father's actions. On the way home, while listening to the festive hymn in church, she recalls the line from Pasternak's poem "August", evoking the Transfiguration ("As always, a light without flame shines on this day from Mount Tabor…"; Ulitskaya 2019),[14] and it is then that she is inspired to write the novel that Jacob wanted to write. It is the symbolism of the transfiguration that connects the two protagonists of the novel and their respective timelines in the plot structure, and at the same time it reveals the human ideal common to the two protagonists and its sacral-mythical and literary source.

The link between Jacob and Yurik, who do not meet in the "reality" of the world depicted in the work, is specifically related to the symbolization of the macro-structure of the plot. Yet their figures can be set in parallel, since Yurik, too, although in a completely different musical genre, is trained as a musician from childhood, but later, like Jacob, his vocation is not exclusively or primarily music. Yurik also proves to be Jacob's heir in the sense that his son is the "new" Jacob, whose birth follows directly after the chapter that ends with the death of the elder Jacob.

Jacob dies suddenly, and Asya, returning home, finds on his desk several notes and books he has begun, including the score of Händel's *Messiah* oratorio. But Händel's work appears much earlier, at a turning point in Yurik's life. At Yurik's first choral rehearsal at the American music school, the conductor analyzes a part of *Messiah*, the choral movement entitled "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the Sin of the World" (John 1:29). In addition to the symbolic meaning of the sentence (sacrifice, a starting point on the road to redemption) and its context, which can be clearly related to Jacob's life journey, the *Messiah* is also in parallel with the macro-structure of Ulitskaya's novel, as the number of its movements is equal to the number of chapters in the novel. The oratorio's threefold structure is represented by the threefold life story of Jacob – Yurik – "new" Jacob, which thus encompasses the 100-year period of the plot and ensures its openness towards the future (the possibility of redemption).

In addition to the specific connection with the Jacob novel, there are several parallels in Ulitskaya's oeuvre with different aspects of the *Messiah* oratorio. The *Messiah* is the first oratorio that encompassed not only certain episodes in the life of Jesus, but his entire life, which is in itself significant in Ulitskaya's poetics, which treats the life journey as a basic unit of the hero's portrayal. The genre-specific features of the oratorio, with its different musical forms (by mode of performance: solo singing, choir, orchestra, etc., by musical genres: recitativo, chorale, etc.), movements that can stand alone and be performed without any connecting narrative sections,[15] linked by the person of the "hero" on the one hand and by a distinctive musical language on the other, are the closest musical counterpart to the above-described plot structure that Ulitskaya employs in her novel *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*.[16] This is present in a more or less latent way throughout Ulitskaya's oeuvre, but in the Daniel novel a feature that is also characteristic of *Messiah* is of particular significance: the organic interconnection of the worlds of the Old and New Testaments. It is also in the Daniel novel that the ground-breaking characteristic of the *Messiah* is present: namely, that it uses passages exclusively from the Bible, the only authentic source on the subject, to present the sacred story in a profane form for a profane audience.[17] In Ulitskaya's work, on a clearly different level of profanation, questions of theology and church policy related to the protagonist are presented in a markedly profane context, using (quasi-)authentic source texts related to the subject.

CONCLUSION

In summary, Ulitskaya's three novels amply demonstrate the combined operation of the discrete and continuous text-generating mechanisms described by Yuri Lotman. The effect of the former can be observed in the fragmentation of the plot structure, which represents the fragmented nature of the human life journey and the impossibility of grasping its completeness, while it also models a given social intersection through the totality of the life journeys depicted. Less perceptible on the surface of the plot is the continuous text-generating mechanism which, through the application of various cultural codes, biblical, literary, musical, etc. allusions, both symbolizes the fragmentary structure and fuses it into a coherent whole.

Translated from Hungarian by Kristóf Hegedűs

NOTES

[1] Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Russian and Hungarian are by K.H.

[2] See, for example, the chapter "Poor Rabbit" (Ulitskaya 2015c, 370–394), whose protagonist (with a complete biography) is an episode character, the psychiatrist Dulin, who appears nowhere else.

[3] Some examples, selected on the basis of the chapter titles, with no structural or thematic connection (part and chapter number in brackets): "1959–83, Boston. From Isaak Gantman's Notes" (I/3), "September 1965, Haifa. Letter from Hilda Engel to her mother" (II/1), "June 1969, Haifa. Sermon of Brother Daniel at Pentecost" (II/30), "March 1994, Kfar Shaul, Psychiatric Hospital. From a con-

versation between Deborah Shimes and Doctor Freidin" V/3), "14 December 1995, Environs of Qumran. Church of Elijah by the Spring July 2006, Moscow. Letter from Ludmila Ulitskaya to Elena Kostioukovitch" (V/21) (Ulitskaya 2011).

[4] Also some examples: "August 1986, Paris. Letter from Paweł Kociński to Ewa Manukyan. 1956, Lwów. Photocopies from the NKVD archives" (I/11), "1984, Haifa. From 'Readers' Letters', Haifa News" (III/9), "From the Biography of Pope John Paul II" (III/48), "September 1992, Haifa. Wall Newspaper in the Parish House" (IV/29), "Psychiatrist's Conclusion" (V/4, 5) (Ulitskaya 2015c).

[5] Jasmina Vojvodić (2011) sees the essence of Daniel Stein in the fact that the hero is always in a boundary situation, constantly violating the civic, social, political, etc. rules of the outside world, while Benjamin M. Sutcliffe (2009) highlights tolerance as the connecting force in the figure of Daniel Stein.

[6] Here the author refers to the fragmented nature of the plot structure, which he elucidates with the metaphor of "a handful of pearls", following the tradition of interpreting the Epistle of James.

[7] Cf. Daria Evgen'evna Tishchenko: "Structurally, the work resembles a collection of short stories in which the author employs a modern non-linear narrative strategy. *The Big Green Tent* mixes the characteristics of the long and short prose forms, giving the reader the opportunity to decide about the manner of reading" (2014, 190).

[8] See Stanley Milgram's small-world experiment (1967). The concept is also discussed in the novel in relation to the academic Sakharov: "Ilya's circle of friends and acquaintances was enormous. He even boasted a bit about the variety of his connections, and joked that if you didn't include the Chinese, common laborers, and peasants, he knew everyone in the world, either personally or through someone else. That's exactly how it was with Academician Sakharov. A certain Valery, an old acquaintance of Ilya's, worked closely with the academician: both of them were members of the Committee for Human Rights. After a few phone calls back and forth, Sakharov agreed to meet with Ayshe" (Ulitskaya 2015c). "Круг друзей и знакомых Ильи был огромным. Илья даже несколько кичился своими разнообразными связями, посмеивался: если не считать китайцев, рабочих и крестьян, все люди в мире через одного человека знакомы. С академиком Сахаровым оказалось именно так: некий Валерий, давний знакомый Ильи, был тесно связан с академиком, оба входили в Комитет прав человека" (Ulitskaya 2015b, 567). For a detailed analysis of the interconnected system of characters in the work, see Szabó 2022, 34–61.

[9] See, for example, the protagonist of the chapter "Poor Rabbit", Dulin, who is linked to the central heroes by three connections, registered at different points in the plot and not necessarily perceived by the reader: Edvin Vinberg, Dulin's elderly colleague, dies next to Ilya on a plane carrying emigrants to Western Europe, and Vinberg's gastroenterologist wife is Tamara's supervisor. General Nichiporuk, sentenced to compulsory psychiatric care by Dulin, was treated by Liza's army doctor grandfather during World War II, and in the present day of the plot, he returns the general's stolen medals to the family.

[10] For a detailed analysis of the musical aspects of the novel, including the relationship with Rachmaninov's work, see Szabó 2022, 126–147.

[11] See, for example, these successive chapters, "From the Willow Chest–Biysk: Jacob's Letters (1934–1936)", "Letters from the Willow Chest: War (1942–1943)", "Fifth Try (2000–2009)", "Family Secrets (1936–1937)", "Variations on the Theme: Fiddler on the Roof (1992)", "With Mikhoels (1945–1948)" (Ulitskaya 2019, 395–478).

[12] In addition to these, Ulitskaya also uses, albeit in a smaller number, real and fictitious documents from the KGB archives.

[13] "Эдгар, Шут, Кент смотрят на них снизу, как ученики Христа в момент его Преображения. Свет нестерпимый" (Ulitskaya 2015a, 210).

[14] "Обыкновенно свет без пламени исходит в этот день с Фавора..." (Ulitskaya 2015a, 719). On the relationship between Ulitskaya's work and Pasternak's Zhivago poems, see Szabó 2022, 163–177.

[15] Cf.: "what makes this work [Messiah] unique is that all of Handel's other sacred oratorios are narratives. They tell a story: Saul, Belshazzar, Samson, Jephthah. This one doesn't tell a story. What it does is it assumes that the listener already knows the story and invites the listener to join the composer on the librettist in a meditation on light and dark, often referred to life and death" (Gant 2021, 47:34–47:59).

[16] In Ulitskaya's works, it is not uncommon to find a structure organized according to musical principles, either in the macro- or micro-structure of the plot, cf. Szabó 2021.

[17] Cf. "The oratorio is not intended for liturgical use, and it may be performed in both churches and concert halls" (Britannica 2019).

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The symbolization of the fragmented plot structure in Ludmila Ulitskaya's novels

Fragmented plot. Symbolization of structure. Ludmila Ulitskaya. *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*. *The Big Green Tent*. *Jacob's Ladder*.

Ludmila Ulitskaya is considered by many to be a master of short fiction, and her novels are sometimes seen as an unsuccessful attempt to transcend the principles of the short forms. This article argues that *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* (2006; Eng. trans. 2011), *The Big Green Tent* (2010; Eng. trans. 2015) and *Jacob's Ladder* (2015; Eng. trans. 2019) are a special type of novel based on a duality that Yuri Lotman identified as the basic principle of the functioning of the semiosphere. The plot structure of Ulitskaya's novels is, on the one hand, *discrete*, that is, manifestly and strongly fragmented in space and time. On the other hand, however, it is *continuous*, that is, clearly unified through trans-symbolization of the structure, which is less perceptible on the surface. These non-explicit structural connections gain symbolic attributes and play a fundamental role in ensuring the unity of the plot in three of Ulitskaya's works.

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From Kyiv to Brisbane: Evgenii Vodolazkin's reflections on spiritual identity in the context of space

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The Russian novelist Evgenii/Eugene Vodolazkin freely combines popular culture with the best traditions of classic Russian literature, responding to the tastes of the mass audience and satisfying the intellectual needs of the sophisticated reader. He is known for presenting the most burning issues of our times in a balanced way, refraining from journalistic indignation and accusation. The following article will address his work *Brisbane* (2018; Eng. trans. 2022), which touches on the most painful social issue of our times, the relations between Russia and Ukraine. This was already a very sensitive topic when this work first came out in 2018, and today it seems like an excellent point of reference for thinking about the context of the current tragic war and the author's attitude towards it.[1] It also helps to illustrate why a section of the Russian population does not speak out on most important matters, but the present article will focus on the work itself and on the way Vodolazkin uses it to present the issue of identity. These considerations will help to show the general direction of the writer's thoughts and shed light on his position in the current situation.

Vodolazkin's writing style is far from stoic indifference, as he frequently refers to emotions, but he does so in an extremely skillful way, transferring the significance of the work from the present into a timeless context. His own life and professional experiences, and especially his many years of work in researching Old Russian literature and his work under the direction of the prominent medievalist Dmitrii Likhachev, exuding a specific aura of tact and high culture, certainly influenced Vodolazkin's way of looking at the world and the specific choice of his way of speaking.

It is worth noting at the outset that Vodolazkin was born into a mixed Russian-Ukrainian family in Kyiv, where he spent his childhood and graduated from high school, and that he is fluent in Ukrainian with his family contacts, although he has always counted himself as being of the Russian-speaking community of the Ukrainian capital. For the above reasons the author would seem to be particularly predestined to write about Russian-Ukrainian relations with regard to identity. The novel *Brisbane*, in which the writer most clearly uses this part of his

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life experience, includes, among other things, very important events in the history of modern Ukraine, for example the so-called "Revolution of Dignity" (Revoliutsiia hidnosti) in 2014, but also other stories set in many other places, related in some way to the author's biography. The novel in question has repeatedly attracted the attention of researchers dealing with imagological, xenological, and mythopoetic issues (Manchev 2021; Grimova 2020; Nogawica 2019; Sidor 2021). The approach used in the present considerations is different, not because it uses some completely new category, but because it proposes a shift of emphasis that makes it possible to see phenomena on the periphery of other discourses. It concentrates on the personal experience of the individual, on the analysis of the internal, spatially and culturally motivated sense of belonging which exposes the personal sources of modification of certain cultural phenomena, showing a perception of the world in a way that exceeds fixed images, beliefs, or stereotypes. It will present spatial references which transfer difficult reflections on identity into the sphere of spiritual reflection, by means of geopoetic research that traces geographical and cultural relations that reverse the perspectives of literary analyses and combine the discourses of various disciplines (Rybicka 2014, 62–63).

THE GEOPOETIC PERSPECTIVE OF THE HERO'S IDENTITY

The first of the geopoetic categories that will be mentioned here and which deserves a broader explanation is the autobiographical place. This concept, according to its originator Małgorzata Czermińska, combines the biography and the work of a given author, understood "broadly, as a set of all his preserved statements, i.e. works traditionally classified as literature" and refers to "a toponymically defined territory known from the biography of the writer" (2011, 183).[2] Vodolazkin's novel can provide material for study of this phenomenon at various levels of interpretation. First of all, although the author does not exist in the work under his own name and does not suggest a shared identity with the protagonist, he uses authentic autobiographical locations, and the geopoetic approach takes into account such a relationship between the geo-biography of the author and the places depicted in his works. The choice of setting causes the discourse to be saturated with reflections, making it possible to capture identity issues which are particularly important to the writer. In agreement with the geography of autobiographical places of Vodolazkin himself, Kyiv, St. Petersburg (then Leningrad), Hamburg, and several other western cities appear in the book. In the writer's life, these cities undoubtedly have formational significance and are symbols of specific stages of his life journey. It should also be noted from the outset that this list of places associated with the author's biography does not exhaust the geographical scope of the novel's action; in addition to specific locations, the novel also features a rather unspecified airspace as well as the city of Brisbane, mentioned only by name. This kind of departure from a clear biographical schema for justifying the places of action is, however, a starting point for further considerations, and in this sense, it can serve as the proverbial exception which proves the rule, since it shows the need for a broader, mainly cultural, understanding of the category under discussion here. For if an autobiographical place is also understood as a place which the in-

dividual has not experienced physically, yet one with which they feel a deep cultural bond (for example, through identification with literary heroes whose fortunes were set in this space, or a fascination with descriptions of the area recorded in literary monuments), the use of this term in relation to the two examples of space mentioned above (i.e., autobiographical and non-biographical) is indisputable.

Secondly, the work is conceptualized on the principle of a novel within a novel, or more precisely, two forms of prose at the same time, i.e., a biography and a diary in the same novel. For this reason, the non-fictional genres included in the structure of the text clearly indicate the possibility of exploring autobiographical and biographical places. Thus, the genealogical premise for studying autobiographical places complements the content premise.

The life of the main character, Gleb Yanovsky, is shown from two points of view and presented in two independent narratives, the first of which is written as a journal and the second as a commissioned biography by a professional writer. They emphasize the same events but from opposite directions of plot development. Very important to our reflections is the fact that the two complementary stories, both texts or novel forms, are initiated for the same reason – the fear of a serious and incurable illness, the symptoms of which have been diagnosed in Yanovsky. The world-famous guitar virtuoso fears that as the disease progresses, he will lose not only the capability of musical performance which makes him an artist, but also all the memories that define him as a person; this is actually the fear of losing his identity. In this context, it is significant to specify the reasons for commissioning the biography: Yanovsky wants a text that would finally deal with his life:

> A half a dozen books have been published about me, but not a one about the squirrel, I bet. Except for Tales of Belkin. I take the piece of cardboard in two fingers, all set to let it fly. And hesitate. In essence, not a single one about my life, though. They've written about all sorts of things, just not about my life. Hmm, that's something to consider. (Vodolazkin 2022, 16)[3]

In this sense, the meticulous description of the protagonist's path of life is understood as arriving at the very essence of his personality. The narrative created for the above purpose is therefore reminiscent of a hagiographical work, a biography whose name contains a connotation with the kind of approach which defines a human being. In the construction schema of the biographical section of the novel *Brisbane*, rudiments of the construction of a classic medieval life are recognizable, with parts devoted to childhood, youth, the discovery of a vocation, and events in which the protagonist's proximity to the sphere of the sacred was clearly manifested. Of course, the complicated structure of Vodolazkin's text does not directly reflect archaic models of religious writing, because in this contemporary work various elements overlap, displace, or replace each other, creating a kind of palimpsest in which traces of the original writing can still be recognized. It is difficult, for example, to consider Yanovsky a model of an Orthodox saint, considering that a number of his acts are morally questionable, and from the religious point of view, plainly sinful. And yet, looking at the overall work, it becomes apparent that this is a story about striving for

holiness, understood as the final end, where not only two stories by different authors, but also the lives of other characters, and even different realities, meet.

In Yanovsky's initial desire to record the story of his life, it is easy to see the desire to get to know himself, to obtain an external description, and to attempt to confront the two perspectives of viewing his personality: his own and someone else's. At the same time, the artist is writing a journal which is supposed to help the writer in his work and to be a gauge of his self-esteem. In this complicated two-voice narrative on the subject of Yanovsky's identity, the descriptions of the places linked to his fate prove to be extremely important. I will focus here on two of them: the one indicated in the title of this article, and the one marking the beginning and end of the hero's life path: Kyiv and Brisbane.

The Ukrainian capital as Yanovsky's birthplace and at the same time the setting for a description of the mismatched and unhappy relationship of a Russian woman and a Ukrainian man (so symbolic for these times) marks out several of the aspects referencing space and identity shown in the work. This place is associated with a whole range of phenomena that are almost routinely used as material for similar studies, for example, a mythically understood home, a maturing personality, various initiation events (such as learning about evil, death, or sin), an urban space, a geographical space, the Dnieper River and a range of aquatic motifs, Russian-Ukrainian tensions, the "Maidan" as a historical symbol, father-mother discord, and, finally, distinctive elements building cultural space (including emblematic family names), reflections on language and religion, and the like. The saturation of these elements is so powerful that each of them could serve as a separate subject of study, so it will be necessary to mention only some of them here, bearing in mind, however, that they represent much richer and diverse resources.

The protagonist's life is spent on long journeys and at the beginning of the narrative, he is a real modern nomad who has many living spaces well adapted to a comfortable existence, yet does not live anywhere. He spends most of his time at airports, train stations, or in hotels, which, in the words of the contemporary researcher of spaces Marc Augé, can simply be referred to as "non-places" (Augé 2011, 64). Only the first Kyiv apartment in which Yanovsky's childhood was spent is worthy, in his own opinion, of being called home:

> Home. Maybe the only one in his life. Later he had lots of homes – so many that they lost their homelike quality and became residences. But an umbilical cord connected him to this one: home. A small, two-story building on Shevchenko, formerly Bibikovsky, Boulevard. On the second floor – a balcony hidden behind the branches of an old chestnut. (Vodolazkin 2022, 24)[4]

According to the specific philosophy of Vodolazkin's novel both of these types of space, marked by or devoid of properties, form the protagonist, respectively either adding color to his personality, or destroying his personality as a result of indifference. Yanovsky, as a welcome guest in all corners of the globe and a citizen of the world, suddenly begins to feel an axiological emptiness, and his existence loses clear purpose, becoming a sequence of irrelevant displacements. The concert tours, despite the variability of the places visited, become similar to each other and all produce

the same effects: they confirm the virtuoso's fame, but do not have a positive impact on his personality. The example of a casual marital infidelity committed by the protagonist after one of his distant concerts best illustrates the loss of internal balance and a disturbance of the hierarchy of values which Yanovsky experiences. As if contrary to the very definition of travel, his expeditions do not have a clearly defined destination, they are repetitive, predictable, and focused on performing practically identical tasks, degrading the personality. Using Vodolazkin's metaphor, they can collectively be called "hunting over the distance" (5). Guest performances in successive famous concert halls around the world become as it were objects in Yanovsky's collection, but they no longer shape him. In this particular situation, the specter of a debilitating disease is, on the one hand, a harbinger of the loss of identity, and on the other, an opportunity to redefine this identity and somehow preserve it in written form. Contemporary research of the aforementioned phenomenon emphasizes the exceptional significance of its spiritual aspect. Hanna Mamzer maintains that physical space is at the same time a sphere of rooting the identity and also of expressing it (2003, 144). Vodolazkin's protagonist, in writing his journal and commissioning his biography, genuinely tries to newly define who he is. The key role of his childhood in Kyiv in this task is evidenced by the fact that his foundational experiences in Kyiv are treated as orientation points in Yanovsky's renewed attempts at defining himself. Therefore, also in times of his greatest artistic and identity dilemmas, the hero includes Ukrainian folk songs in his repertoire, which symbolize the foundations of his personality.

SPIRITUAL CONSEQUENCES OF SPACIAL EXPERIENCE

Kyiv, then, is his hometown or the autobiographical place of his childhood (Czermińska 2015) in which one finds the only true home of the protagonist fully deserving of the status of a "place", according to the distinction of Yi-Fu Tuan (1987, 173–174). As the protagonist grows, the term "home" expands to include an ever-increasing spatial range – first the family street and frequently traveled routes, and then the entire city with its surroundings and the river flowing through it. It is here that the protagonist experiences a range of initial events: his first love, his first erotic experience, first contact with death, first rebellion against the world, first serious illness, and even a taste of crime. But here, too, he experiences a number of spiritual and artistic revelations, he learns to play the domra, and he discovers the meaning of religion and the beauty of literature. Vodolazkin creates a personal culture map of Kyiv which does not correspond to tourist maps, as the protagonist himself defines the priorities of culturally significant events. His activities recall the method for studying culture proposed by Franco Moretti, who applied a geographical approach to genre issues and showed relationships between specific literary themes and their location, creating original maps, and arranging an atlas from them, reflecting the geographical determinants of novel genre trends of a given period (Moretti 1998). According to the findings of the Italian literary scholar, for example, 19th-century historical novels took place in areas seen as being on the periphery. Using Moretti's method, it can be said that in Vodolazkin's individual imaginary atlas

of 11 centuries of Russian literature, historical works appear mainly in the vicinity of Kyiv. In searching for a context that brings out the uniqueness of the approach to culture and space implemented in the novel *Brisbane*, it is also worth quoting the idea of Roberto Dainotto's positionality and cultural hybridity (1996, 494; 2000,15) as well as Homi Bhabha's third space of enunciation (2010, 22, 84, 112). Belonging to the postcolonial trend of literary studies, these scholars point out the various possibilities of identifying literary texts in relation to places where they are created: from showing the consequences of regionalism to highlighting the ambiguity and effectiveness of cultural mimicry which is marked at the junction of two cultures operating in the same space. Vodolazkin clearly avoids the contemporary discourse showing culture as a field of domination, leverage, and oppression. His work shows acceptance of the idea that the development of literature can be presented in the form of a set of places that define its character, and that each recipient, due to geographical location, understands specific texts differently. The writer clearly shows a certain self-location of the protagonist, which is conditioned by his sensitivity, not only literary but also artistic in general; but he is far from a regionalist approach. Yanovsky appears as the representative of two different territories and the two cities symbolizing them, Kyiv and St. Petersburg. His name, recalling the figure of Nikolai Gogol, clearly emphasizes this double affiliation. Like Gogol, Vodolazkin's protagonist leaves his family space so as to continue with his creativity in the capital of the empire. Yanovsky does not antagonize Russian and Ukrainian culture; according to his cultural map, Kyiv is his city of origin, the city of his literary roots, and the place where the first written words in this cultural circle appeared. Vodolazkin attaches great weight to these beginnings and words, understood virtually religiously: "It's hard to explain. I think music… and painting too, probably… Ultimately, they exist only because the word exists" (2022, 34).[5]

In this sense the history of culture with which the hero identifies belongs to Kyiv and it is completely natural to write about it from the perspective of this city. This statement takes on an even more radical form in Yanovsky's personal opinions: the history of the culture of this part of the world must be written in Kyiv, so any description of the individual life of a Russian cannot omit the tradition of Kyivan Rus. Significant in this context is the pseudonym of the writer to whom the guitar virtuoso commissions his biography. It is Nestor, and thus the heir of the Old Russian historiographer, authorized to write history thanks to his cultural affinity with Kyiv.

In the events from Yanovsky's life re-created by Nestor, one can find many other signs of the guitarist's bond to the tradition of Kyivan Rus. In combination with the writer's pseudonym, Yanovsky's first name, Gleb, is read in connection with the same cultural heritage. As the plot unfolds, a whole sequence of occurrences, symbols, and names continues along this line. There is for example the old man Mefodii (Methodius), a spiritual teacher and mentor in Gleb's process of discovering religion. The very process of pursuing faith can be seen as a repetition of the history of the Christianizing of Rus, with the symbolic act of bringing Gleb to the priest Peter, whose name obviously refers to the first apostle, here signifying the deposit of the wisdom of the Church.

Kyiv is the cradle of Yanovsky's cultural awareness, his specific experience of civilization. William Mitchell asserts that landscape can be treated as a medium of cultural expression (1994, 14), and in this sense a particular setting, whether accompanying our everyday life, or preserved in the form of a work of art, reflects a particular variety of culture. This is clearly Vodolazkin's premise, and everything in the description of Kyiv, and later of St. Petersburg, helps to define the artistic and spiritual character of the protagonist. His ideas on literature, art, creativity, and history originated in Kyiv and allude to the beginnings of Russian literature. As can be seen from an analysis of Nestor's personal notes and biographical sketches, within the conglomeration of categories that make up the concept of identity, Yanovsky especially values belonging to a certain cultural and geographical group. Although contemporary researchers of identity point to the operation of "national landscape ideologies that are charged with affective and symbolic meaning" (Edensor 2004, 59) and argue that "the interconnection of elements of national space creates colloquial and symbolic imaginary geographies that confirm the dominant role of the nation as a spatial entity" (92), such a specific mythologization of the landscape does not signify acknowledgement of a specific national ideology. Identity in the work is not a feeling of connectedness to a concrete state or nation, but first of all a connectedness to a certain physical space and then to a specific culture. The choice of Russianness is for him the absurd choice between father and mother and much more important is his choice of culture, the choice of his medieval Kyiv roots. It is the awareness of these beginnings which set Yanovsky along his further journey, to his youth in St. Petersburg and maturity in the West. The protagonist's approach to identity is perhaps best described in the words of his grandfather: "a man is like a tree, he is from here and nowhere else" (Vodolazkin 2022, 339),[6] which do not mean belonging to a nation so much as to a certain homeland created by a culture, artistic sensitivity, awareness of a wealth of history, and ideological heritage.

It is in Kyiv that Yanovsky first notices contradictions between the Ukrainian and Russian strands of his history. Being raised from birth in a bilingual and bi-national world, he accepts its variety and colorations, but time and again signals come to him that this world is built upon contrasts. The impetus for his first reflections on this topic is an analysis of language differences. It is worth noting that the word which sparked the protagonist's vigilance is one associated with space and fate, "*путь*" [way], understood in a whole host of meanings, becomes a symbol of identity, combining contradictions, as the word itself does, which, depending on the language of communication, can take either masculine or feminine gender (Vodolazkin 2022, 65). Language, then, is a territory of symbolic exchange and replacement of meanings (Rybicka 2014, 47).

The protagonist does not fully accept the need to define himself nationally and believes that he will be able to reconcile both nationalities and both cultures by taking a middle ground. His arrival in Kyiv at the time of the "Revolution of Dignity" is a good illustration of his ideas and aspirations. First of all, he feels "at home"; he crosses himself at the sight of the Lavra, demonstrating an ongoing spiritual affiliation to the space of his ancestors; he walks through an area of special symbolism

and recalls the places of his childhood with sentiment. Secondly, driven by a desire to feel even greater solidarity with his own space, he heads to the Maidan to talk to the protesters. However, the finale of this meeting reveals the naivety of Yanovsky's beliefs, as he is accused of espionage and barely escapes with his life.

Compared to Kyiv, St. Petersburg, in accordance with its established cultural role, is a city opening to the West, a city which has achieved maturity, a city in many respects cruel, ruled by heartless officials, but also where the clarity of Russia's colonizing tendencies fades. An important role in the cultural description of this second capital is played by the fact that it is here that the hero experiences an ideological burden, which – though shown in an ironic code reminiscent of the style of Gogol – strongly influences the overall significance of Leningrad in the novel. This image is softened by a very symbolic meeting in this city with his future wife, whose German origin also clearly defines the cultural tradition of St. Petersburg.

A clear counterbalance to all the places shown in the work is the Australian city of Brisbane, which is almost a mythical destination for Yanovsky's mother's dreams of travel. For the unhappy and love-starved woman, it abides as the embodiment of the mythical Arcadia or earthly paradise. The location of Brisbane corresponds to the belief, encoded in Old Russian culture, which, as we have established, is symbolized in Vodolazkin's book by Kyiv, in the existence of a paradise on the outskirts of the known world. Irina's dreams of a "pilgrimage" to the Australian agglomeration are in fact the equivalent of a longing for the Fortunate Isles, which must be sublimated in the conditions of a socialist state. In a specific belief system based on the culture of Kyivan Rus culture, which forms the whole network of ideology for Yanovsky and those closest to him, Soviet ideology may deny the existence of paradise, but that does not mean that such a place does not exist. Moreover, based on data provided by the Kyiv tradition, it is possible to indicate an explicit location for it. In Yanovsky's later memoirs, his mother leaves, during a period of political transformation, for the city of her dreams and her future husband, a native Australian with the meaningful surname of Cook, who lives there. In this way, associations, intuitions, and allusions complement the cultural map created by Vodolazkin, re-creating and adapting the world of Old Russian traditions, legends and beliefs to the present. The idea of a medieval paradise, supplemented by information from the present day, means a real place, but without losing an aura of mystery and even a certain ephemerality. Indeed, Vodolazkin's heroes mention that serious studies exist which question the reality of Australia's existence (352). Brisbane, as befits the true Old Russian paradise, is far away, has a specific geographical location, guarantees all residents the satisfaction of all needs, spiritual and material; the elimination of all social inequalities; and compensation for harm and misfortune, and at the same time there is no way to definitively prove its existence. Contact with the inhabitants of a city in the Antipodes, for example, cannot be granted the status of evidence, because in the Old Russian tradition the world is inhabited by real and fantastic characters, and contact between them depends only on having a suitable attitude. This characterization of Brisbane is curiously confirmed when it is revealed that the mother of Yanovsky – who regularly mentions that he maintains constant contact with his mother living in Australia – never reached her destination and has been long dead.

This information not only exposes Yanovsky's attitude towards accepting phenomena from the supernatural sphere, but also reveals a change in his approach to dying.

Death, which at first frightens the protagonist, through his realization that he belongs to the world of medieval Kyiv culture and deciphering death from the Old Russian perspective, comes to mean not the loss of identity, but its fulfillment. It is only in the spiritual paradise that a man is truly himself: false, superficial characteristics and all antagonisms cease to have meaning, and words that had previously seemed so important to the hero lose their value. Yanovsky's last summarizing remarks, his last utterance in the novel before a final silence, is therefore a declaration of faith in an earthly, Old Russian paradise. Brisbane is thus the goal of the protagonist's wanderings, a real spiritual homeland, to which everyone is heading, regardless of their place of birth or later spatial repositionings. This connection to a spiritual homeland makes all other intermediate attachments of secondary importance. All life experience, all journeys, and any other feelings of belonging to some space, are only stages in understanding one's true identity, which is a spiritual belonging to paradise.

CONCLUSION

In this way the fate of the protagonist is arranged as a symbolic journey from Kyiv, the city of his childhood, to Brisbane, the city of eternal happiness. The individual sections of this journey, which at the same time are stages in the formation of his identity, determine the successive displacements which are undertaken up until the moment of death, understood at first as the loss of personality but later as its full realization. Both of these places, despite their geographical distance from each other, are stages in which the protagonist's identity is realized. And their embodiment takes place on the principles of Old Russian tradition, originating in Kyiv. In his discourse on space, Vodolazkin encodes the spiritual dimension of culture, which can serve as an ever-living source not only of artistic inspiration, but also of deep analyses and observations concerning the contemporary world. The writer does not provide simple answers to key questions troubling researchers of Russian-Ukrainian identity relations but directs related reflections to issues of spirituality and tradition. He is aware of antagonisms and problems that, as he shows, have a pedigree longer than his protagonist's life, but the perspective he proposes for viewing them is that of Brisbane, that is to say, eternity. For neither the fictitious hero of the novel Yanovsky, nor the writer Vodolazkin, is attached to any of the cities of his biography, and thus neither the countries in which he spends his life, because most of all he is a man heading to his spiritual homeland, distant Brisbane, the eternal paradise.

NOTES

[1] Vodolazkin, as far as the author of this text has been able to determine, refrains from openly commenting on the Russian attack on Ukraine, emphasizing instead the spiritual consequences of the conflict, thinking about the possibilities of spiritual reconciliation.

[2] Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by present author.

[3] "Обо мне издано уже с полдюжины книг, а вот о белке, пожалуй, ни одной. Разве что *Повести Белкина*. Беру кусочек картона двумя пальцами, всё готово для полета. Медлю. В сущности, о моей жизни тоже – ни одной. О чем угодно писали, только не о жизни. М-да, есть о чем подумать…" (2019, 24)

[4] "Дом. Единственный, возможно, в его жизни. Потом домов было много – так много, что они потеряли свое домовое качество и стали местом жительства. А с этим связывала пуповина: Дом. Маленький, двухэтажный, стоял на бульваре Шевченко, бывшем Бибиковском. На втором этаже – балкон, скрытый в ветвях старого каштана" (2019, 33).

[5] "Я думаю, музыка… да и живопись, наверное… В конечном счете они существуют только потому, что существует слово" (2019, 45).

[6] "людина – як дерево, вона звідси і більше ніде" (2019, 399)

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From Kyiv to Brisbane: Evgenii Vodolazkin's reflections on spiritual identity in the context of space

Space. Identity. Geopoetics. Kyivan Rus. Culture. Landscape. Evgenii Vodolazkin.

This article deals with cultural identification and perception of space in the novel *Brisbane* (2018, Eng. trans. 2022) by Evgenii/Eugene Vodolazkin. The writer presents controversial problems of Russian and Ukrainian relations placing the question of cultural identification of the hero in the centre of his reflections. Despite the fact that the novel depicts many important events from the history of today's Ukraine, in some sense showing the author's attitude to them, the core of Vodolazkin's narration is to expose the issue of particular cultural formation, created in the period of medieval Rus, whose spiritual capital was located in Kyiv. Employing the methods of contemporary research in terms of the geopoetics of place, this article scrutinizes many structural elements of the novel, which as an effect of reading in special code opens the field for analyses of such problems as autobiographical place, symbol of the home, opposition of space and place, and descriptions of the landscape. This study makes it possible to conclude that places depicted in Vodolazkin's work define the hero not only in the geographical aspect but mainly in the spiritual one, as a man who belongs to the world of Kyivan Rus culture and who finds signposts for understanding complicated questions of the present in the enduring medieval worldview.

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The image of the Other as a reflection of cultural identity (a case study of Russian postmodern prose and dramaturgy)

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The creation of the image of the Other gains particular topicality during cultural crises, when the situation demands a stronger cultural identity and a revision of existing views on the world and one's own self. The study of such transitory phases makes it possible to educe the characteristics of the particular kind of crisis mentality and to demonstrate the productivity of all kinds of dialogue, both pertinent to a specific culture and intercultural (Bagno 1996; Isupov 2003; Kondakov 2003; Merezhinskaia 2001; Khrenov 2002).

In the literature of the late 20th and early 21st century, writers in many literatures have attempted to create and comprehend the image of the Other. The popularity of this topic has become a productive literary trend for the last decade. In the row of such authors are the American writer Elizabeth Gilbert (*Eat, Pray, Love*, 2006), the Polish prose writers Olga Tokarczuk (*Bieguni*, 2007, Eng. trans. *Flights*, 2018), Andrzej Stasiuk ("Dziennik okrętowy" [Ship's Diary], 2000), the Ukrainian writer Yurii Andrukhovych (*Perverzia*, 1997, Eng. trans. *Perverzion*, 2005; *Dezorientatsia na mistsevosti: Sproby* [Disorientation on Location: Attempts], 1999), etc. For many Russian or Russian-American authors such as Victor Pelevin, Piotr Vail', Aleksandr Genis, Pavel Krusanov this topic has become dominant. The most common strategies for interpreting the Other are revising the traditional landmarks and images and strengthening the philosophical, existential dimension.

The texts discussed in this article have mainly been chosen for their postmodern nature that allows them to solve serious problems in a playful, provocative manner, not in an ideological light. The playful style of the texts tends to involve the readers in the discussion, to make them more active. This pattern may be traced to the tradition of first journeys or religious peregrinations. In Russian literature, it presents at least three dominant strategies. The first presupposes the discovery of the Other in order to create one's Self, essentially reforming the scope of one's own identity. The new generation of authors regard Nikolai Karamzin's *Zapiski russkogo puteshestvennika* (1789–1790; *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, 1976) as an attempt to change the cultural paradigm, the language, and literature (Levental' 2014). The second strategy consists in mythologizing the Other, in emphasizing otherness, oddities,

differences; this is how Ivan Goncharov describes the Japanese in his fictionalized diary *Frigate "Pallada"* (1858). The third strategy aims to demythologize the Other, to reconsider his cultural authority, but at the same time it is an attempt to understand the nature of his attraction for the Self. Exactly in this light Dostoevsky describes Western Europe in his *Zimnie zametki o letnikh vpechatleniiakh* (1863; *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, 1955). The writer tries to go by the tradition of the complimentary image of the western culture loci and sharpen the problem of national cultural identity. Most significantly, that a serious topic is solved in a playful manner. Dostoevsky creates an image of the narrator using self-parody, as a person who is unable to perceive cultural sights in a traditionally enthusiastic manner for a number of reasons (bad mood, illness, bad temper, etc). Thus, the writer forms an atmosphere of provocation for actualizing the dialogue with the reader and the search for landmarks of self-identification. Much later, this tradition of provocation was adopted by postmodern literature.

In contemporary literature, the array of artistic strategies for interpreting the Other grew substantively. Both the East and the West are equally subjected to reflection, exemplifying the intermediate and transitional nature of Russian culture, similar to other frontier cultures of the Caucasus Mountains, the Middle East, the Balkans, and Spain (Grishkovets 2005). These patterns of interpretation bring forth a set of features affecting the images of the Other and the One-of-Us. On the one hand, these lead to the "conceptual ambiguity, and amorphousness, so uncharacteristic of Europe and Western culture" (Kondakov, 2003, 133), and on the other, to a synthesis, amalgamation of different cultural codes, perceived as native or close. Vsevolod Bagno defines the mission of frontier cultures as a connective one (1996, 420). This article aims to define the array of immediate creative strategies for the image of the Other (the West and the East) as a phase in self-knowledge and actualization of a frontier culture. All the texts that are in the main focus of the discussion avoid the documentary base of a travelogue, and even challenging the strategies of the genre, like Evgenii Grishkovets's anti-travelogue *Zapiski russkogo puteshestvennika* (Notes of a Russian traveler, 2001), parody the travelogue's plot structure, like Maria Arbatova's *Po doroge k sebe* ([1992] 1999; Eng. trans. *On the Road to Ourselfs*, 1998), or ironically reframe pre-existing images and myths by revising the philosophical and mystical sides of the culture of the Other, like Vladimir Tuchkov's "Russkii I Tszin" (Russian I Ching, 2009), or Valerii Kislov's "Kratkii kurs u-vei" (A short course on wu wei, 2009). The authors of these texts are not interested in documentary, but rather enter a neo-baroque game of images, theatrically staging the very process of perceiving the Other. The revision is exercised on a symbolic level, it seeks to define the cultural existence of the Other and the One-of-Us, and so aspires to achieve a higher level of artistic convention and generalization.[1]

THE PROVOCATIVE AUTHOR'S POSITION IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE ONE-OF-US

In Grishkovets's *Zapiski russkogo puteshestvennika*, the author's position is provocative, it is an apophatic – proving the necessity of a cultural dialogue

by contradiction – method of interpreting the Other and the One-of-Us. The opportunity to perceive and understand the Other is constantly lost, the focus of the characters is following a vicious circle, comically doubling and falling into itself. For the two characters in Scene II, their visit abroad (in Europe, as a side note informs the reader) does not bring forth a "discovery" of the Other. They get involved into habitual philosophy while drinking beer, and so become a parody of Dostoevsky's "Russian boys" discussing philosophical topics from *The Brothers Karamazov* and Chekhov's "learned neighbor", the philosophizing know-nothing from "Pis'mo k uchionomu sosedu" (1880; "Letter to a Learned Neighbor", 2015). They are resolute to see the world in a new light, but never set their gaze upon the Other and rather speak at great length about the amazing discoveries of humanity like the light bulb, the magnet, and the telephone. The necessity of an extraneous observer, a regard of the Other, is realized not in pondering about a European, but in fantasizing about aliens, so the perspective becomes maximally abstract and the Other is radically defamiliarized: "The first. […] If to glance… you see… through the eyes of an alien… Here we love everything around, birch trees, nature […]. But for an alien, it might be unpleasant… to see. Maybe he would not like birches most of all" (Grishkovets, 2005, 33).[2] The cultural conflict is comically defamiliarized in mentioning the birch as a poetic symbol of Russian culture, representing the One-of-Us and denied by the Other. It suggests that the cognitive object here is not the Other, but the borders, transitional nature, and flaws of the domestic mentality and character. In our view, we may find here a characteristic feature of transitional mentality in inversion, return to the older experience, to one's own self, by passing the Other, who becomes just an excuse for a circular autoreflection.

The same effect may be observed in the other episodes. In particular, the protagonist of Dialogue 5 finds it equally impossible to live in Austria or in Russia. In this context, Austria is provocatively equated to a provincial Chelyabinsk, lacking any cultural sights: "The Second. You know that I don't care about Austria… What is this Austria to me… What if I returned from Chelyabinsk, what would you say then? Would you like to drink with me?" (38)[3] The Second realizes he is uncomfortable both here and there. He feels better in transit, in dreaming about another country or nostalgic thoughts about his own, or in a strange city, devoid of any attachment. The character wanders, as a ghost, through the unfamiliar streets or imagines himself a foreigner in his native city and in so doing revels in freedom to leave at any chosen moment: "I want to travel all the time! Just travel! Or should I say, I want to TRAVEL! Even to Chelyabinsk or Perm or Abakan" (42).[4] Consequently, Grishkovets uses the defamiliarization with comical effects (the incongruity of the situation of a cultural challenge and its answer, foregoing an opportunity to perceive the Other, and inversion) to discuss one of the characteristic features of the frontier mentality, that is "conceptual ambiguity, amorphousness, and uncertainty" (Makovskii 1996, 135). Grishkovets parodies such features of the Russian national character as melancholy (proper for the "superfluous person" – lishniy chelovek), "anxiety, restless urge for change of place" (as Pushkin described Onegin's inner state), and constant soul search-

ing. Setting the Other in the negative, the Grishkovets gains an opportunity for a critical depiction of the One-of-Us.

THE CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN DRAMATIC TRAVELOGUE

Maria Arbatova adopts a different strategy in her travel-play *On the Road to Ourselfs*. The title itself implies the existential problem of the search for identity. In the play, it is solved both in personal stories and in the framework of national images. The central strategy is based on demythologization/remythologization as well as discrediting clichés and outdated models of identity. The image of the Other mirrors the typical behavior of a confused Russian abroad, their illusions and frustrations. The Other is represented by a group of Europeans with both steady and vague self-images. Early on, the Russians who came in "search of the self" behave in an infantile manner. They see Europe as a utopia, a place where their true value may be appreciated, where they may be loved and saved from the chaos of 1990s Russia, but disillusionment follows. The initial failure is caused by the orientation to outmoded models of behavior, extrapolated from books and movies. Tatiana and Evgenii imagine and model themselves on older patterns, and both of them feel like "superfluous people". The names of the characters allude to Pushkin's novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* and raises the problems of the cultural gap between the 19th and 20th centuries and new self-identification landmarks. Evgenii behaves like the frustrated Chatskii from Griboedov's verse comedy *Gore ot uma* (*Woe from Wit*, 1825), his self-representation is one of an unappreciated genius who runs away from the places of his humiliation. At the beginning Europe or America seems to be a happy place, but even though reality breaks all his immature dreams, he tries to play the role of a successful westerner unconsciously travestying the image of the Other. This is just the beginning of numerous internal and external metamorphoses of the emigrant. Tatiana is trying to look as attractive as possible in the eyes of the "foreigner" (whom the notorious and angry Evgenii pretends to be), seeing him as a potential groom. Maria Arbatova parodies the mythology of the mystical marriage between the West and the East. Tatiana creates the image of the One-of-Us by taking Pushkin's Tatiana Larina from the school curriculum as the ideal of an honest, faithful, and beautiful woman with a truly "Russian soul". The comic effect is created by the gap between this ideal and the real situation. In contrast with Pushkin's Tatiana, the main female character is poor and watches her money, but nevertheless she remains a naive person. The combination of moral guides from different cultures enhances the comic effect. Pushkin's role model of a Russian woman has some features of Cinderella (who met a beautiful Western prince) as well as some features of the "pretty woman" from the famous American film. Failures make them change roles and masks: Evgenii's from the conqueror of the West to a sly apprentice, an enamored gigolo, or a servant, and Tatiana's from a naive "bride" to a "mystifying Russian soul", a desperate suicider, a "servant" or "slave", and then to a creative person who discovered the potential to change the world and herself. Note that Arnold J. Toynbee has considered the mask of the "transformed" to be one of the dominants of the transitional thinking. Arbatova leads the heroes through dramatic trials, but universal values save

them from destruction: love, empathy and pity, penance, and the desire to help and share. These are the landmarks that contribute to the growth of the national identity. The change of masks grows comical in effect and so unveils the link to the outdated national images, leading to manipulative opportunities. In the same manner, another Arbatova's female lead the provincial Ukrainian Steshka concocts a story of the Polish princess Stephania, devastated, and traumatized by the Soviet regime. It allows her to marry a gullible Dutchman without being debunked as this image fits perfectly in his stereotypical view of a wild country as well as a fairy-tale plot about a rescued bride:

> Tania: Stefani, what about Mr. Julian, for seven years he has not guessed that you are not a princess, hasn't he?
> Stefani: Come on, he cannot distinguish Uzbekistan from the Baltic states. We are all Russian bears for him. (Arbatova 1999, 717)[5]

The two-way impossibility of a dialogue with the Other is caused by the falsity of images, secondary myths, and stereotypes.

The play also displays the obsolescence of the European self-image. This idea is presented by the German character Anita, who is trying to live up to abstract theories of anthroposophy (travestying Alexander Blok's image of a "dreary German genius") and exhort the "infantile" nations. Evgenii plays the part of a sly apprentice of a naïve mistress. False images of the Other are created by both parties of cultural dialogue. In particular, a German materialist and pragmatist Herbert tries to lecture the Russian and creates the myth of a dangerous country prone to the temptation of idealism, which leads it to the state of permanent turmoil:

> You Russians are like greenhorn children. You don't care whom to believe. You believed Lenin, you believed Stalin, you believed Gorbachev, now you believe Yeltsin. Instead of building a house, you build an idea, live with it and wonder why the rain is dripping and the wind is rushing in. (1999, 722)[6]

Both Anita and Herbert's projects eventually result in failure. Herbert's "house", his family, proves to be frail. And Anita's "creative life" is comically defamiliarized in the sad outcome of her operation supposed to save a parrot from a cat. The author finds an opportunity for a cultural dialogue beyond the images of "master and apprentice", or "pragmatist and idealist", beyond the false myths of the Other, crumbling before the reality of a cultural crisis. The true understanding is achieved in the field of universal human values, beyond national factors. Just as the young cosmopolite Kristof takes Evgenii for a friend, because he helps him and spares no expense, so Kristof is ready to help him in return. Art becomes a unifying factor: the play twice proclaims the power of the modernist project of reforming the world through artistic means. At first, artists color all the gray walls in every country, beginning from China and finishing in Europe, and in so doing symbolically negate all limits and borders. In the end, all the characters join to create a text – a play about washing the grime from the world and so about its renewal. Those new parts provide deep existential basis found by the characters "on the road to Myself": Anita's warm heart, and Tatiana's tender spirituality (hard won and not pretended), Evgenii's translation talent and his

unselfish urge to promote dialogue, Kristof's the inner freedom of the new generation of Europeans. Maria Arbatova in her play *On the Road to Ourselfs* proposes a review of the outdated images of the Other and the One-of-Us in context of the global cultural transformations of the turn of the century and emphasizes unifying instead of distinguishing features of those images, i.e. spirituality, aestheticism, and orientation to change.

THE POSTMODERN GAME WITH A DEEP CULTUROLOGICAL AND EXISTENTIAL SUBTEXT

The last of above mentioned characteristics – the acceptance of the fluidity or its contrasting statics – becomes the basis for the image of the Other in the "Chinese" group of texts. Tuchkov's and Kislov's works are developed as ironic stylizations of sacred oriental texts, a postmodern game with a deep culturological and existential subtext.

In the works of Tuchkov and Kislov, the image of the Other is built by defamiliarizing the philosophic matrix of the Chinese worldview (instead of recording subjective and mundane experiences as it is common for a travelogue). The focus of attention is centered on the deep and essential features of the Other's worldview. In both cases, a paradoxical result is achieved, for the decoding of the conceptual sphere of the Other is carried out by the narrators from a different culture, either naïve or provocatively philosophizing, which means the decoding is either consciously false or pursues another aim.

In Kislov's "Kratkii kurs u-vei", a provocative defamiliarization is applied to the prime principles of Taoism – spontaneity, naturalness, and "doing nothing", which means to undertake "no action contrary to Nature" (Khrenov 2002, 68). According to Huainanzi, as quoted and translated by Joseph Needham, "those who follow the natural order flow in the current of the Tao" (2002, 88). An existentially confused contemporary man wishes to flow in this current and chooses to contemplate passively the ambient chaos of the transition period. Trying on the masks of a master and an apprentice one by one, the narrator remains an admiring fool in discrediting both western and oriental frameworks. The teaching of *wu wei* loses its philosophical basis, the only remaining principle – travestied and hyperbolized – is "doing nothing", which equals to ideological idleness, laziness, and living just for personal pleasure (as illustrated with an old Chinese story about an official eating gingerbread). The western values are hastily rejected in a fashion after the outdated Soviet ideology:

> Don't fuss. Don't hustle […]. Be content not to do your own; others will not do others' […]. Remember: your non-doing ends where the non-doing of others begins. This is the indispensable condition of the so-called liberte (a notion brought to us from outside, together with the so-called cancan and the so-called broadmindedness). (Kislov 2014, 85–86)[7]

The text is dominated by comical modality and travesty, both realized in a variety of ways. First of all, it is rooted in the wordplay with Russian verb *delat'* meaning to do/to make (in different meanings: to cheat, to fail, to show off, etc.) as well as in coining a range of aphorisms based on the same verb to do/to make "Don't make money and it won't make you" (2014, 87),[8] or contamination "You've done the deed,

but you've messed up".[9] Secondly, the aforementioned strategy is realized in remaking Biblical commandments and folk proverbs "Do not consume, and may you not be consumed",[10] "Think seven times, don't do once" (87, 84),[11] and slogans of Soviet foretime: famous "Do with us, do as we do, do better than us"[12] is transformed into "Don't do. Like everyone else. / Don't do like everyone else. / Don't do better than everyone else. / Breathe deeply" (88).[13]

The semantic play in "Kratkii kurs u-vei" deserves a separate consideration. However, it is worth emphasizing that the general atmosphere of travesty discredits even the narrator himself, who is disoriented and does not comprehend the essence of the Other. He loses the mask of *an oriental master* explaining the Taoist wisdom, and under it emerges the archetypical countenance of Oblomov. Traditionally, Goncharov's character is interpreted as the embodiment of a number of negative traits of the national character. Oblomov is completely immersed in his own dreams and reflections, constantly drawing a "pattern" of his life, but he does nothing to implement his plans, moreover, he is afraid of reality or any changes. The basis of his worldview lies in "doing-nothing", in submission to the free flow of life, which seems to be a calm river for him. Goncharov considered such a life program to be a dangerous temptation, a sin, a kind of illness that is a clue feature of the Russian mentality. We can presume that he considered such a "non-doing" to be an oriental feature, that is why Oblomov's eternal attribute is an oriental robe. In the novel, Oblomov is opposed by the Other. The bearer of the contrast mentality is Stolz, who is seen as an embodiment of the Western energy and activity. Stolz, who could combine Russian sincerity and German pragmatism, embodies Goncharov's dream of a positive synthesis and a dialogue of cultures. The image of Oblomov is the result of the author's reflections on the national mentality, the strengths and the weaknesses. This image is perceived as a certain archetype and is actively used in the literature of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, at a new stage of cultural self-determination. The plays by Olga Mikhailova *Russkii son* (1993; *Russian Dream*, 1998), Mikhail Ugarov *Smert' Il'i Il'icha* (Death of Ilya Ilyich, 2001), the novel by Yurii Poliakov *Zamyslil ia pobeg* (I planned to escape, 1999) could be such examples of different interpretations of Oblomov's archetype in the contemporary Russian literature.

In Valerii Kislov's "Kratkii kurs u-vei", Oblomovian inactivity is expanded to the Eastern "not doing" and provocatively brought to an extreme. In addition to stylization and travesty, the author uses a strategy of apophatitism as an attempt to proof of the need for cultural dialogue from the contrary with an aim to demonstrate the failure, "blindness" of the addressee of the teaching. Vladimir Tuchkov employs different strategies in his hypertext "Russkii I Tszin". Still, there is a similar aim: to see one's own self reflected in the Other. In the "Author's Note", readers are presented in an ironic and playful manner a paradoxical algorithm of a cultural dialogue. Tuchkov makes a stylization of the form and the language of *I Ching*. In the Chinese source, however, the hexagrams are perceived as cosmic archetypes or patterns, different realizations of Tao, while Tuchkov's work unveils national archetypes and sets up a problem of their inconstancy. This concept is proved by repetitive similarities of the modern and the classical, bringing forth the idea of cyclic recurrence

of Russian narratives. In this fashion, characters of Dostoevsky's *Demons* gain new guises (a neo-Stavrogin, who is prone to psychological experiments) as well as Chekhov's *Vanka* (a letter home from social and urban hell is written by a town councilor who hankers after the lost existence and rustic harmony). The emphasis is placed on the eternal return of Perov's paintings *Hunters at Rest* (now, the businessmen are boasting of their game), *Tea Party at Mytishchi* (the picture focuses on material – not spiritual values), and *Troika* (with modern children, forced to the periphery of life due to social turmoil of the 1990s).

The new appears to be a travesty of the old. For example, a nouveau riche who gained wealth in the social chaos of the 1990s is introduced as an eternal trickster, punished with anxiety, vanity, and dangers (it is worth noting that all these are unmistakable signs of a false way and misunderstanding of Tao). A ship (lowered in interpretation to a small boat) is used as a symbol of the transitional mentality, emblematizing a mystical change and absorbing an apocalyptical meaning. In European languages, "the words meaning *ship*, *boat*, *receptacle* are often associated with *final judgment*, *condemnation*, *punishment*" (Makovskii 1996, 195). Therefore, the author's interpretation of the image is deeply based in the philosophical subtext and mirrors the reflection of a social and cultural crisis: "You wear a red bathrobe and your beard is sprinkled with sparks like Uncle Ho's sack in which the old rascal hides the unknown. Because you are a billionaire, and your Tao is to run constantly, without stopping, across the river of life, jumping from junk to junk" (Tuchkov 2009, 10).[14] The existential senselessness of such an activity is contrasted with the high social status of the character.

At the same time, as in the other hexagrams, the author proposes a guide for true understanding of the character's way and its correspondence to the flow of Tao (in its national interpretation, a higher mission of the national archetype and historical course). Here, the author is faithful to the spirit of the original *I Ching*, meaning to improve the understanding of the situation and choice: "The Book of Changes contains images whose meaning needs to be revealed; to these are added judgements to be interpreted; happiness and unhappiness are defined here in such a way that a decision can be made" (Isupov 2003, 321).[15]

Therefore, the true pinnacle of life, the right path for an energetic person who has not discovered their calling lies not in symbolic jumping from one boat to another, but a flight in a spaceship (symbolized by *Gagarin*, *wings*, and *light*). In the same fashion, the pinnacles and guidelines for the true path are described in the other fragments. For example, in the hexagram "000 000. The Redemption" a medical doctor caught in the net of small goals and complexes has "forgotten" she was saving warriors' lives in her previous incarnation, felt her calling and knew happiness. The protagonist of "010001. The Difficulty at the beginning", an aggressive teenager, has forgotten his heroism in his previous incarnation. On the other hand, the text unveils a fatal mistake of refusing to listen to the innermost flow of existence. The protagonist of "111 111. The Creation" fragment (which frames the whole work, and so achieved a strong position) accepts the rules and part forced upon him, submits to the pressure of the community. He cannot dare to rebel and so forfeits his talent, doomed

to follow an alien "rut". The vicious "rut" becomes a symbol of a wrong way. An unfulfilled scientist remains an eternal mechanic, locked as a part of a cruel mechanism. Describing each of the "archetypes", Tuchkov discovers possibilities to change the path. He emphasizes the necessity of change instead of the eternal repetition. That concept is proved by the final thesis: "Not yet the end" (43).

CONCLUSION

The actualization of the image of the Other is related to the reception of the global crisis as well as the search for national and cultural identity and existential self-knowledge. The transitional character of Russian culture is reflected in its interest in both the East and the West, reconceiving their frameworks as well as in the process of mythologization. In this article we defined the array of immediate creative strategies for the image of the Other and the One-of-Us on the base of the contemporary travelogues (by Maria Arbatova, Evgenii Grishkovets, Vladimir Tuchkov, Valerii Kislov) as a phase in self-knowledge and actualization of a frontier culture. The chosen texts are focused on a neo-baroque game of images, theatrically staging the very process of perceiving the Other not on a documentary. The image of the Other and the One-of-Us is reviewed, their paradoxical mutual mirroring is replayed, dramatized, and modeled. The essential strategies for creating an image of the Other are as follows: the defamiliarization, the discrediting of the outdated national images, the search for an existential basis (philosophical or mystical) of another culture, the mythologization/demythologization, the creation of the negative position, when the Other appears to be indefinable; and the apophatic proof by contradiction. The self-identification is realized through a wide range of strategies: inversion, transferring of the focus from the Other to one's self, ironic depiction of a reciprocal reception, reviewing the outdated images of the One-of-Us, travestying depiction of the "apprenticeship", stylization, emphasizing the cultural contrasts and similarities. The playful modality, baroque dramatization, and travesty are combined with deep philosophical subtexts. The works share a common intention in existential search and promoting the dialogue with the Other in order to meet the global cultural crisis.

NOTES

[1] As noted earlier, the most important strategy for creation of the image of the Other was found in their "discovery" through actual or imaginary journeys. In such cases, the East was mostly represented by China or Japan, as in Aleksandr Genis' *Bilet v Kitai* (Ticket to China, 2001), Aleksei Aliokhin's *Pis'ma iz Podnebesnoi* (Letters from the Celestial Empire, 1995), Mikhail Bazhenov's *Happy Hour* (2022); Gennadii Novozhilov's *Moskovskii Bisei* (Moscow Bisei, 2006), Aleksei Ustimenko's *Kitaiskie maski Cherubiny de Gabriak* (Chinese masks of Cherubina de Gabriak, 2010) and others (Merezhinskaia 2001). The image of the Other emerges consistently in émigré literature such as Marina Palei's *Long Distance, ili Slavianskii aktsent* (Long distance, or the Slavic accent, 2000) and *Raia i Aad* (Raia and Aad, 2009), or Nikolai Koliada's *Amerikanka* (The American woman, 1991).

[2] "Первый. […] Если взглянуть… понимаешь… глазами инопланетянина… Вот мы любуемся на все вокруг, на березки, на природу […]. А инопланетянину это, может быть, неприятно…

видеть. Вот, может, березы ему не понравились бы больше всего." Unless otherwise stated, all translation from Russian are by O. V.

[3] "Второй. Ты же знаешь, что мне на Австрию…Что мне эта Австрия…А если бы я вернулся из Челябинска, ты что бы тогда сказал? Стал бы пить со мной?"

[4] "Я все время ехать хочу! Просто ехать! Или, лучше сказать – ЕХАТЬ! Даже в Челябинск или Пермь, или Абакан."

[5] "Таня: Стефани, а что господин Джулиан, он за семь лет так и не догадался, что вы не княгиня? Стефани: Да он Узбекистан от Прибалтики не отличает. Для него мы все русские медведи."

[6] "Вы, русские, доверчивы, как дети. Вам все равно, кому верить: Вы верили Ленину, вы верили Сталину, вы верили Горбачеву, теперь вы верите Ельцину. Вы вместо того, чтобы строить дом, строите идею, живете в ней и удивляетесь, почему капает дождь и врывается ветер."

[7] "Не суетись. Не мельтеши […]. Довольствуйся тем, что не делаешь свое; чужое не сделают другие […]. Помни: твое неделание заканчивается там, где начинается неделание других. В этом – непременное условие так называемой liberte (это понятие занесено к нам извне, вместе с так называемым канканом и так называемой широтой взглядов)."

[8] "Не делай деньги, и они тебя не сделают"

[9] "Обделал дельце – уделал рыльце"

[10] "Не потребляй, и да не потреблен будешь"

[11] "Семь раз подумай, ни разу не делай"

[12] "Делай с нами, делай как мы, делай лучше нас"

[13] "Не делай. Как все. / Не делай со всеми. / Не делай лучше всех / Не делай. / Дыши глубоко."

[14] "Ты носишь красный халат, и твоя борода осыпается искрами, словно мешочек дядюшки Хо, в котором старый пройдоха прячет неведомое. Потому что ты – миллиардер, и твое Дао – постоянно, не останавливаясь, бежать через реку жизни, перепрыгивая с джонки на джонку."

[15] "В книге перемен содержатся образы, смысл которых нужно раскрыть; к ним прибавлены суждения, которые следует истолковать; счастье и несчастье получают здесь определение таким образом, чтобы можно было принять решение"

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The image of the Other as a reflection of cultural identity (a case study of Russian postmodern prose and dramaturgy)

Russian literature. Myth. Transitional artistic thinking. The image of the Other. Symbol. Modernism. Postmodernism.

This article examines the strategies for creation of the images of the Other and the One-of-Us as exemplified in postmodern prose and dramaturgy (Evgenii Grishkovets' drama *Zapiski russkogo puteshestvennika* [Notes of a Russian traveler], 2011; Maria Arbatova's dramatic travelogue *Po doroge k sebe* [Eng. trans. *On the Road to Ourselves,* 1998], [1992] 1999; Vladimir Tuchkov's hypertext novel "Russkii I Tszin" [Russian I Ching], 2009; Valerii Kislov's comical treatise "Kratkii kurs u-vei" [A short course on wu wei], 2009). The close attention to the images of the East and the West and emphasis placed on similarities and differences with the Russian worldview is driven by the transitional character of Russian culture and its search for identity. The dominant strategy emerges in reviewing the outdated images of the Other and the One-of-Us. By creating these images, the authors employ a range of strategies: demythologization/mythologization, inversion, and apophatics. The common intention of the works lies in promoting cultural dialogue.

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Transformations in the perception of Russian literature after February 24, 2022

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The following article, as its title suggests, will be neither strictly poetics-oriented nor will it exclusively discuss contemporary Russian prose. By the time it appears, more than a year will have already passed since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, and some of the issues under consideration below could potentially change. However, I believe that it is crucial to consider the changes that have taken place in the representations of Russian literature beyond Russia's borders after February 24, 2022. Moreover, as these events are still unfolding, one also lacks the necessary perspective which is generally achieved with the passing of time. But the watershed character of the transformations that have already happened is evident and needs to be addressed and systematized (at least to the limited extent possible in such an article). I will attempt to outline the key transformations in the discourse that currently surrounds Russian literature (also as a part of the broader idea of Russian culture), predominantly by identifying the main topoi in the public and online media debate on Russia taking place in the Western and Central European (mostly Slovak) context, as well as by examining the opinions of some of the most prominent contemporary Russian authors, including Evgenii/Eugene Vodolazkin, Mikhail Shishkin, Ludmila Ulitskaya, and Maria Stepanova, as actors in this debate. The choice of texts and personalities (compared to the sheer number of texts and opinions available) can certainly be seen as subjective, but even this limited selection may serve as an effective illustration to the unfolding processes. I am also aware that the text has little from a directly Ukrainian perspective, but many of the aspects mentioned here are understood as the direct consequence of that perspective.

LITERATURE OF "THE OTHER"

The way Russian literature is perceived beyond Russia's borders has always been marked by the period-relevant political situation in Russia itself and by its relations with other counterparts,[1] more so in the case of contemporary writings, since the po-

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sition of the classics (Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Bulgakov etc.) seemed to be well-established. That is why research on Russian literature, its image, and its perception in other cultures has been rather fruitful. Moreover, in many cases that research complements and broadens the studies of cultural, political, or even international relations scholars.[2] As a result, a large amount of this research shares common conceptual frameworks, one of which is relying on the Self/Other dichotomy to describe the mutual perception between cultures and the processes of identity formation and strengthening. Within this conceptual framework, individual national cultures have formed their own images of Russian literature (and culture in general),[3] determined by the degree of its exoticism in the host context and the magnitude of the role it played in the self-determination of that particular culture. That said, there are certainly some commonalities in these images, and the following observation by Ekaterina Shapinskaia, who discusses the Russian classics as perceived by the British, can be extended to other host cultural contexts:

> In the field of representation of Russian culture, stereotypes based on traditional binary oppositions like Russia/West, on the one hand, coexist with new forms of representation carried out in the framework of intensive globalization and intercultural communication on the other. […] Western culture is taking a serious interest in the deeper meanings of Russian classical works, in their universal character, in the emotional world of the characters. […] The Other's view of Russian culture prompts reflection on the common and specific element in its texts, on the contextual conditioning of representation and the difference in the perception of the cultural phenomenon as belonging to the Self or to the Other. (2019, 319)[4]

However, there was a radical shift in this clichéd view of Russian literature as the literature of a vast, "mysterious" country of the Other, which, for all its borderline hostile exoticism, still shares some of the universal accepted cultural code that approximates it to an average Westerner. After February 2022, when a country with "great literature" at its cultural core launched a full-scale war in the geographical heart of Europe, this literature (for all its grandeur, mystique, and exoticism) began to be perceived, if not as the direct cause of this turn of events, then certainly as a key contributing factor, and the very place of Russian literature in the host literary contexts is now being questioned.

In their discussion on the *new poetics*, René Bílik and Peter Zajac reflect on the *poetics of the event*, arguing that the latter

> explores the question of the formation and functioning of the literary field, ranging from the manifested power-involving shaping of the field to the shaping of the literary field as latent, hidden morphic resonances. In terms of the poetics of the event, it is a matter of figuring, configuring, and reconfiguring the literary field. (2018, 8)[5]

Within the scope of that poetics, they include the notions of *latency* and *foreclosure*, which can be instrumentalized to describe the various forms of suppression or expulsion from the literary field. Hence, foreclosure in this context is seen as a manifestation of censorship and self-censorship found directly in a work of literature, but I believe it is possible to broaden the use of the term also to the level of the collective perception of literary texts and collective literary practices. At the same

time, on the level of collective identity, latency and foreclosure form a "changing event-related measurement of acceptability and unacceptability of texts in a particular historical situation" (8).[6] Thus, the crisis of *acceptability* of Russian literature during wartime becomes the foundation for the discussions unfolding in the literary and broader cultural milieus, which will be addressed below. The most visible point of tension is seen in the clash of opinions over whether Russian literature deserves to be "cancelled".

TO CANCEL OR NOT TO CANCEL

Discussions on the necessity of "cancelling" Russian culture, Russian literature, and Russia as such (ergo, deeming it unacceptable) or on the contrary, on the excessiveness of this response, can be attributed to the key topoi that entered the public, cultural and media discourses with the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, accusations of Western attempts to "cancel Russia" became a self-victimizing leitmotif of Russian propaganda and one of the tools to legitimize its military aggression. Interestingly, in the latter application, the very notion of a "cancel culture" is also distorted and augmented with new interpretations that are not characteristic to its original Western context, where it is associated primarily with new ethics, the #MeToo movement, the struggle for class and racial equality, etc., or alternatively, is also perceived as a "progressive" phenomenon that "has silenced alternative perspectives, ostracized contrarians, and eviscerated robust intellectual debate" (Norris 2021). Already before the invasion, in the discourse of Russian officialdom, the understanding of "cancel culture" is expanded to include "attempts to rewrite history", "rejection of familiar concepts like 'mother', 'father', 'family' or even 'gender'" (Prezident Rossii 2021),[7] as well as sanctioning Russian athletes and representatives of Russian culture. In March 2022, in his speech on occasion of the "Day of the Cultural Worker", Putin also specifically referred to the "banning of Russian writers and books" which, however, was not illustrated with any examples. But in the context of the widespread use of World War II images to portray Ukraine and the West as the hostile *Other*, he used references to Nazi Germany: "The last time such a massive campaign to destroy unwanted literature was carried out by the Nazis in Germany almost 90 years ago. We know it well, and the newsreels remind us of how books were publicly burned in squares" (Galaida 2022).[8]

As a result, a paradox-filled ideological struggle unfolds, in which real cases of exclusion of Russian culture and literature from public discourse (such as an attempt to cancel a course on Dostoevsky at the University of Milano-Bicocca) are magnified by the Russian side to phantasmagoric proportions, with the real reasons for this reaction (Russian military aggression) being replaced by ideological constructs that victimize Russia. At the same time, statements that speak of the need to preserve Russian culture in a European context are also used for propaganda purposes. A striking example is Italian president Sergio Mattarella's speech at La Scala Theatre before the premiere of *Boris Godunov* in December 2022. In his speech, Mattarella expressed himself as follows: "There are views that I do not share both culturally

and politically. The great Russian culture is an integral part of European culture. It is something that cannot be erased [or cancelled, as it was 'cancellare' in Italian]. While the responsibility for the war should be attributed to the government of that country, it should certainly not be to the Russian people or their culture" (Sky.Tg24 2022).[9] Reacting to these words, one of the Russian patriotic news portals chose to cite only Mattarella's words of support for Russian culture, completely omitting the Italian president's blaming of the Russian government (Pobeda 2022).

Mattarella's reasoning is an example of a *reconciling narrative* about Russian culture in wartime (which Ukrainian politicians, cultural figures, and journalists struggle against). But in general, even in the relatively small corpus of materials devoted to the "cancellation" of Russian culture, one can trace that the degree of radicality of the position expressed in a particular piece is often in direct correlation with the geographical remoteness of the media from Ukraine, as well as the origin of the author of a particular text.

The New York Times, for instance, published an article by Kevin M. F. Platt, which also conveys the aforementioned reconciling narrative. In the article, Platt discusses the boundaries of Russian culture, its dispersed and regional character, citing the non-Russian identity of the texts of contemporary Russian-speaking poets from Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and the Russian-speaking diaspora. Remarkably, the author does not focus on the fact that the very dispersion of Russian-speaking culture is often a consequence of the colonization practices outside Russia and the repressive practices within it. Platt summarizes his text with an observation that can be found in a number of texts with a similar topic.[10] He speaks of the irony contained in the attempts to cancel "everything Russian", which in his view have the opposite effect, playing into the hands of Russian propaganda and Putin's worldview:

> That the world should be amplifying Ukrainian art and culture is clear. This is of the highest priority. Yet support for Ukrainian culture does not entail canceling Russian culture. To adopt such a stance is to support a world of pernicious national antagonisms and closed borders. That is precisely the world that Mr. Putin seeks to create with his war. We, along with right-minded Russians, should be working to resist the reactive canceling of Russian artists and performances, rather than playing along. (2022)

In addition, several Western and even English-language Japanese news outlets published an appeal by Nikita Khrushchev's great-granddaughter, Nina L. Khrushcheva. Her text presents a more *defensive* approach to the issue and expresses her critique towards the "readiness with which the West turned on all things Russian" (2022) while using a rather effective and frequently used argumentative tool of drawing historical parallels. Khrushcheva supports her argumentation by alluding to the times after World War II when "people continued to read Goethe and Thomas Mann" (2022) comparing Russia's actions in Ukraine to those of Nazi Germany.[11] She further elaborates her point of view with the idea of universal importance of Russian literature and it being "a potential source of information about [Putin's] objectives and motivations" (2022). The latter point, albeit not recent, also transforms into one of the key topoi in the discourse surrounding Russian invasion and the role Russian literature did or did not play in it.[12]

A CULPRIT?

Krushcheva's opinions echo those of Tim Brinkhof, who builds his argumentation in an article for *Big Think* around the concept that is generally known as Russian *literaturotsentrizm* (the central role of literature in Russian culture, as well as in social and even political thinking):

> To say Russian literature had a profound effect on the structure of Russian society would be an understatement. Today, Russian school children are introduced to their country's literary canon as early as the fifth grade, where texts are studied for their universal wisdom as well as their contributions to the current understanding of Russia's national identity. […] Just as Russian literature guides the daily lives of ordinary citizens, so too has it informed the worldview of Russian leaders. […] Putin also has professed an appreciation for Russian literature. In various interviews, he has listed Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as some of his favorite authors. (2022)

Brinkhof then continues to conclude that "Putin had chosen Dostoevsky's faith in Russian exceptionalism over Tolstoy's belief in the universality of human experience", continuing that "[i]n light of the invasion of Ukraine and its perceived historical significance for Russians, one might argue Dostoevsky would have chosen Putin as well" (2022). Brinkhof's conclusions correspond to the specific narrative line where Dostoevsky and other Russian writers (and Russian literature in general) almost become an accomplice, a co-culprit to Russia's invasion of Ukraine by providing it with its ideological foundation: "So if you're looking for the roots of Russia's violence against its neighbors, its desire to erase their history, and its rejection of the ideas of liberal democracy, you will find some of the answers on the pages of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Dostoevsky" (Yermolenko 2020). The Slovak literary scholar Adam Bžoch also addresses connections between Russian literature and Russia's "geopolitical phantasmagories". According to him, these phantasmagories, that proved capable of leaving "a trail of blood behind them" and marginalizing the perspective of their victim, were best depicted by Dostoevsky, who approached them "with mild irony (but also with infernal insight)" (2022).[13]

However, not only classic works by 19th century writers are reinterpreted as the source of today's Russian imperialistic and colonial vision, since it is also the authors who are predominantly known as the representatives of the alternative, unofficial, state-opposing literature. In April 2022, *Time* magazine published an article by the Ukrainian professor Yaroslav Hrytsak entitled "Russia's Problems Go Far Beyond Putin" where he makes the following claim in attempting to interpret the current state of Russian culture and society:

> There is something in Russian culture today making most Russians – even highly educated people – incapable of simple manifestations of human solidarity. […] Russian oppositionists believe that the essence of Russia does not lie in its "brainless leaders" but in Bulgakov, Akhmatova, Mandelshtam, Brodsky and other geniuses of Russian culture. Their legacy is everlasting, and in a way, they are the real Russia. That might be so. It's just that it doesn't make much of a difference for Ukrainians, not then and especially not today. (2022)

The strong *othering* that is present in the passage falls in line with yet another revealing topos of the overall discussion around Russian culture and its literature

according to which even those, who are considered to be the "icons" of Russian liberalism and by definition should be antiimperialist, turn out to be deeply marked by the imperialistic essence of Russianness.[14] One of the most widely-discussed names in that respect is Joseph Brodsky and his infamous poem *Na nezavisimost' Ukrainy* (On the independence of Ukraine, 1991–1992). Sergei Medvedev's *Park krymskogo perioda* (Crimean Park, 2017), whose title alludes to *Jurassic Park*, addresses Brodsky's imperialistic ressentiment:

> For all 23 years [by the time of Crimea's annexation] Ukrainian independence has been perceived as a misunderstanding, an anecdote; the word "nezalezhnost'" itself is usually pronounced with ironic connotations in Russia. Russians accepted Moldovan, Tajik, even Belarusian independence calmly, but they could not accept Ukrainian independence, and we are not talking about the imperialists and pochvenniks, but about the broadest strata of the educated class, who looked at Ukraine as a banana republic and simultaneously harbored a deep resentment against the unwise "younger brother" who had boldly denied blood kinship. This resentment turned into genuine hatred in Brodsky's famous poem "On the Independence of Ukraine" […] a dissident and an idol of the liberal intelligentsia, Brodsky here displays the full extent of the bruised great Russian [*velikoderzhavnyi*] consciousness, which he had taken from Russia together with the memory of the imperial grandeur of St. Petersburg. (125)[15]

Brodsky's infamous poem was once again "uncovered" in the spring of 2022, causing further discussion, especially on its final lines: "When it's your turn to be dragged to graveyards, / You'll whisper and wheeze, your deathbed mattress a-pushing, / Not Shevchenko's bullshit but poetry from Pushkin".[16] Stephen Marche has reflected on the poem's resonance with current events: "Brodsky's prophecy has come true, but not in the way he expected. The current war is about whose poetry will ultimately be whispered over all the pointless slaughter" (2022).

DISCUSSIONS IN THE SLOVAK MEDIA

Moving away from the Western-oriented perspective towards the Slovak context (which to a certain extent represents the tendencies found in the broader Visegrad region), it should be pointed that the latter is marked by a higher level of emotional charge and, hence, stronger rhetoric and a higher degree of criticism (effective in both ways, as the support for Russian aggression against Ukraine is prominent in the country).[17] Consequently, although the topoi could be the same as the ones that have been already addressed, the "material envelope" can be very different. For instance, the Russian classics are discussed in an interview with the Ukrainian scholar Feliks Shteinbuk, published by the Slovak newspaper *Denník N* under the provocative title "Russian Classical Literature as a Weapon of Mass Destruction". To the question of whether he supports the boycott of Russian culture, the interviewee provides a rather radical answer according to which that culture is "unnecessary" as its direct influence is responsible for the shelling of Ukrainian cities, the killings in Bucha and other crimes (Vadas 2022). He then elaborates on that idea with an attempt to deconstruct the concepts of "one little tear from one single little tortured child" (as too big of a sacrifice even for a greater cause) and of "non-resistance to evil by force",

that are stereotypically associated with Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's writings respectively. In the following fragment, the understandable emotional charge of the rhetorical questions is amplified by the usage of a peculiar *othering* strategy, which results from the interviewee's special requirement to print the names of the Russian authors and words derived from "Russia" without capital letters.[18]

> Do you think a russian in a military uniform who would rape a 10-year-old girl and then kill her was told about dostoevsky's "child's tear"? Or the russian in a military uniform who first ties the hands of a peaceful Ukrainian behind his back and then shoots his defenseless victim in the back of the head was told about tolstoy's "non-resistance to evil by force"? So, what is this all about anyway? If the russians weren't told about it, then why do we need dostoevsky and tolstoy – after all, the russians themselves don't need them either! (Vadas 2022)[19]

A similar critical viewpoint can be traced in the *Aktuality.sk* interview with the Swiss-Slovak writer Irena Brežná (Hanák 2022), whose stance on Russian colonialism was already manifested in her *Die Wölfinnen von Sernovodsk* (She-Wolves from Sernovodsk, 1997; Slov. trans. *Vlčice zo Sernovodska: Zápisky z rusko-čečenskej vojny*, 2016). In the interview, Brežná approaches the Russian classics through criticism of Russian and Soviet colonial and imperialistic practices and pointing out the perseverance of their heritage in the consciousness of contemporary Russians, who have not gone through decolonization processes (as opposed to England, France, or Germany). She even engages in polemics with such antiregime and antiimperialist Russian writers as Vladimir Sorokin and Viktor Erofeev, who tend to blame the historical Asian ("Mongol") influence for the Russian pyramidally hierarchized state power: "I think one doesn't need to blame it on the Mongol Khan, but finally admit who we are and how we treat other peoples" (2022).[20] One could also follow the *culprit* narrative in Brežná's interpretations of Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's writings, in which she mentions Oksana Zabuzhko's essay "No Guilty People in the World? Reading Russian Literature after the Bucha Massacre" for the British *TLS* (also published in Slovak by *Salon.eu*). Brežná agrees with Zabuzhko that, despite being accepted as "European", Russian literature can be essentially perverse and non-humanistic in its world modelling as it draws the reader's compassion from the victim to the culprit, whose actions then become forgivable, hence, making Russian literature co-responsible for the crimes of the Russian soldiers (Hanák 2022; Zabužko 2022).[21]

There are, however, the elements in the Slovak media debate that could be attributed to the aforementioned reconciling narrative (which is nonetheless still critical in its essence).[22] For instance, in his interview with *Denník N*, one of the most prolific translators from Russian to Slovak, Ján Štrasser (Tódová 2022), urges the need to distinguish between the Russian regime and the authors who are against that regime, including the ones with whom he is in direct contact: Vladimir Sorokin, Mikhail Shishkin, and Guzel Yakhina. That idea can also be traced in his reaction to Zelensky's words that Russian culture died along with the civilians of Bucha. Drawing parallels with World War II and German literature, Štrasser argues that Pushkin (as a collective representative of the Russian classics), unlike Putin, cannot be "liquidated", since that literature contains values which have nothing in common with

the war and some are, in fact, anti-war (2022). At the start of the Russian invasion, Štrasser even performed a symbolic act of protest against the appropriation of Russian culture by the Russian state by rejecting the Pushkin medal which had been awarded to him in 2004 with a certificate signed by Putin: "Unfortunately, Pushkin's medal is also Putin's medal" (*SME* 2022).

Their attitude to Russian literature was expressed not only by scholars and artists, whose work is directly connected to Russia and its culture, but also by the representatives of a broader cultural spectrum in Slovakia. The idea of the *uselessness* of Russian literature found its place in an article by the journalist and theologist Michal Havran in *SME*. Ironically entitled "Russia is not a trustworthy source on Russia" ("Rusko nie je dôveryhodný zdroj o Rusku"), the article develops the topos of the *unsound character* of Russian culture and literature, but rather than stressing what is typical of Russian literature, the author highlights the elements that Russian literature lacks. According to Havran, Russian literature "completely" lacks books that would address and reflect on its imperial and colonial past, "has no books on the murder of its own intelligentsia, on the systematic liquidation of the elite layers of its own society" (2022).[23] This leads to the absence of self-reflection mechanisms and the society's inability to take responsibility for its own mistakes, the author concludes.

Of course, one could argue and provide a list of books and films that deal with the very issues Havran mentions, from Yuri Dombrovsky's *Fakul'tet nenuzhnykh veshchei* (*The Faculty of Useless Knowledge*, 1975) through *Deti Arbata* (*Children of the Arbat*, 1987) by Anatoly Rybakov to the more recent *Zuleikha otkryvaet glaza* (*Zuleikha*, 2015) by Guzel Yakhina or *Aviator* (2016) by Evgenii Vodolazkin. At the time of its release in 1994, even *Utomlennye solntsem* (*Burnt by the Sun*) by Nikita Mikhalkov (who has since turned into one of the most aggressive pro-regime artists) was an important cinematographic statement towards acknowledging the trauma of repressions. In this situation, however, the very fact that this article was published by a major media outlet (rather than its author's level of expertise on the topic) becomes a discursive event by itself, as it functions as a part of a broader transformative process that affects the representations of Russian literature not only in Slovak, but also in different host cultural contexts, since the prevailing narratives and topoi proved to be universal. This conclusion, admittedly, does not concern the "alternative" media scene in Slovakia (and Czechia), which, I believe, could be a separate topic of discussion.

RUSSIAN WRITERS' PERSPECTIVES

Finally, it should be noted that the previously addressed transformations happen not only in the representations of Russian literature channeled through media and critical commentary, but also logically, in the way the writers themselves perceive and narrate the ongoing processes. The reactions by the authors seem to correspond to the ideological and poetological divide that has gradually deepened and radicalized since the start of the 21st century. As Andrew Kahn and the other authors of *A History of Russian Literature* point out, for at least the last decade there have been two parallel literary processes, with one side inclining to the realist and socialist re-

alism traditions and the other gravitating toward modernist/postmodernist aesthetics, and that parallelism has been reproducing "the political split in society between a neo-conservative/nationalist majority and a liberal minority" (2018, 563). However, one could argue that this division certainly cannot be absolutized, since by no means does traditionalism in poetics (for instance, Guzel Yakhina's historical fiction) always signal affiliation to the "antiliberal" camp, while experimentation does not serve as a marker of "liberality" (for example, Mikhail Elizarov's provocative prose, which is almost Sorokinean but antiliberal in its essence). Nevertheless, Russian literature has returned to a politicized state with writers actively engaging in the political life (769).

On the conservative side of the spectrum, the first and most prominent name is undoubtedly the Russian nationalist Zakhar Prilepin, a vocal supporter of Russia's military actions, who himself took part in fighting in the Donetsk region of Ukraine (Rasulov 2017) and signed a contract with the Russian army at the beginning of 2023 to actively participate in the invasion of Ukraine (TASS 2023).[24] Since his novel *San'kia* (Sankya, 2006), which brought him fame, Prilepin has proved to be a suggestive storyteller creating original characters committed to their ideology, who are filled with feelings of historical and social injustice (coincidentally, several chapters of the novel are devoted to a "special operation" in Latvia meant to protest the country's policies towards Russian citizens and the Soviet heritage). With the onset of Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2022, Prilepin, now also a politician, has actively promoted the rhetoric that both victimizes Russian culture and demonizes the image of its external and internal enemies. For the sake of the latter, Prilepin even initiated the creation of GRAD, which stands for "Gruppa po rassledovaniiu antirossiiskoi deiatel'nosti" (The team to investigate anti-Russian activities), "a think tank in the Russian Parliament aimed at excluding from cultural life artists who do not support the war, or 'the special military operation'" (Grynszpan 2018). Hence, for the official Russian culture, Prilepin has gradually become one of those who embodies the return of institutionalized cultural process, one of the "judges" who define the level of acceptability or unacceptability of artists' public behavior and, consequently, their creative work. On the other hand, Prilepin was one of the first Russian public figures to get personally sanctioned less than a week after the start of the invasion, and that experience has been transformed into a rhetorical device in his public speeches. For instance, in his open lecture for secondary school students, he claims to be sanctioned for merely being "a representative of Russian culture", which in his argumentation is presented as a proof of the "collective West's" attempts to cancel Russian culture, which, according to Prilepin, are futile since they will only draw more attention and interest beyond Russia (2022).

In that respect, however, the possibilities of exporting state-approved Russian culture, specifically literature, has become quite limited. Within the sparse activities of such direction, one could mention the conferences organized by MAPRYAL (International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature) in the countries that are more inclined to cooperation with Russia, such as Serbia, Turkey, or Cuba. One of the main faces of these conferences is Evgenii Vodolazkin, who has

been willing to represent Russia and its culture even during wartime. When confronted with questions considering the war or the cancel culture, Vodolazkin tends to communicate in a rather euphemistic way, quite in contrast with the general militant character of today's Russian public discourse:

> [According to Vodolazkin] a writer should not "look around", and bans should not affect their work. "They should mind their own business and what they write will still get through. Circumstances change and it is important to say your word, it is important that it is spoken, and I have the absolute conviction that it will not go unheard." (Arnol'dova 2022)[25]

Interestingly, even despite the "circumstances", an English translation of Vodolazkin's novel *Brisbane* was published in April 2022. With it being strongly marked by contemplations on the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, it was natural for reviewers to point out the newly perceptive perspective: "From the vantage point of 2022, Vodolazkin's choice to portray the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine as a kind of personal annoyance to Gleb [the protagonist] feels like a missed opportunity in the novel. But it also underscores the puzzlement with which many people in Russia to this day view the subject of Ukrainian nationality and identity" (Young 2022). The change in perception is also marked by the translator of the novel, Marian Schwartz: "When I first read *Brisbane*, before this war, I could simply love it as a work of literature. That seems like a long time ago" (2022).[26] In the abovementioned speech, Vodolazkin also touched upon the philosophy of Dostoevsky, which he used as a yardstick in the context of defining the place of Russian culture in pan-European culture: "There is no cancel culture, only a cancellation of culture. […] In his time, Dostoevsky called for European consolidation, to which both Russia and the collective West belong" (Orlov 2022).[27] In his argumentation Vodolazkin oddly uses the same verbal formulas as Putin did in his already cited speech on occasion of the "Day of Cultural Worker" (Galaida, 2022).

Mikhail Shishkin also discusses Dostoevsky and the Russian classics in his article for *The Atlantic*, poignantly entitled "Don't Blame Dostoevsky" (2022). Shishkin, who lives in Switzerland, has been in opposition to the Russian regime for many years, but, as Natalia Ivanova notes, his "art-house" writing (oscillating between realism, modernism, and postmodernism) and his specific "historical pessimism" made him "a stranger – to patriots and liberals alike" (2017, 30).[28] The plots in Shishkin's key novels almost always allude to real historical events, although historicism does not dominate the narrative, as the writer, on the contrary, deconstructs the strict temporal boundaries by connecting the imperial Russian past with its refraction in the present. Mark Lipovetsky even believes that the overarching goal of Shishkin's metanovel is to "rewrite Russian classics, freeing them from the complex of a 'Russian European', the imperial mythology, the 'Russian idea'" (2017, 46).[29] By the complex of a "Russian European" one could understand a paradoxical combination of antiimperialist views with the support for certain imperialist practices. That perspective becomes key for Shishkin's approach to the current context surrounding Russian literature. In terms of its content and the ideas expressed in it, his text on Dostoevsky could be classified as what was previously referred to as a defensive approach in the debate on the status

of Russian literature. Shishkin develops the idea that it is not the nature of Russian literature itself that determines the aggressive expansiveness of Russian culture, but rather the "internal imperialism" of Russia, which has entailed the oppression of its own people, especially its own writers. Therefore, according to Shishkin, "The road to the Bucha massacre leads not through Russian literature, but through its suppression […]. The history of Russian culture is one of desperate resistance, despite crushing defeats, against a criminal state power", and literature itself serves as an "antidote to the poison of the Russian imperialist way of thinking" (2022).[30]

Interestingly, the same metaphor was used by another prominent Russian writer, Ludmila Ulitskaya, in her interview with *Le Monde:* "I realize today how much Pushkin, Tolstoy and Chekhov protected me from the dreary Soviet propaganda. It is the only antidote to propaganda, that has become total in today's world" (Jégo 2022). The writer has a long personal history of opposing the Soviet regime and later the Putin regime, as she has been one of the most active participants in the protest rallies since Putin's presidential comeback in 2011–2012. Ulitskaya shares that dissident nature with her characters: "Her family sagas feature heroines and heroes who display attitudes of freedom in their lifestyle, rather than in their ideological statements or political positions. Their natural liberalism, manifested in free sexuality and dissident activities, pits them against political limits imposed from above" (Kahn et al. 2018, 763). Ulitskaya left Russia days after the start of the invasion and now lives in Berlin, where she has become one of the main voices of Russian intelligentsia abroad, the role she herself did not welcome: "I would much rather have continued to be an observer, which is how I actually define my role as a writer. But life just decided differently for me" (Kieselbach 2022). That role of an observer, which she connects to her Jewish origin, is also crucial to her argumentation perspective, as she stated in her interview for the Czech *Deník N* (also published in Slovak *Denník N*, which is cited here):

> I am Jewish. That allows me to look at the Russian-Ukrainian war sort of from the side. I'm just an observer. And as an observer, I can see that relations between Russians and Ukrainians will not be broken forever. The common past plays too significant a role in the lives of both nations. But what is happening today is a steppingstone to the creation and ultimate self-determination of the Ukrainian nation. (Procházková 2022)[31]

Berlin has also become a place of refuge for the poet and a journalist, Maria Stepanova, whose 2017 novel *Pamiati pamiati* (*In the Memory of Memory*, 2021) became one of the biggest events in contemporary Russian literature and was translated into several languages, described by John Williams in the *New York Times* as a "daring combination of family history and roving cultural analysis" (2021). The synthetic, multimodal, documentary character of the novel and its thematic scope proved to be unique in the Russian context, known for its problematic relationships with its own generational memory – in Sergei Medvedev's (2017, 96) words: "Russia is a country with an unpredictable past".[32] Stepanova was one of the signatories (along with Ulitskaya, Shishkin, Sorokin, Akunin, Glukhovsky and others) of the international anti-war letter (Meduza 2022; Sherwood 2022) focused on the Russian language, which had become hostage to Russian propaganda, and called to fight that propaganda

with that same language. A few weeks later, the *Financial Times* published a large and highly emotional article by Stepanova (2022), in which she argues about the war as a product of Putin's fantasy, driven by "a genuine fear of the existence of an Other, a desperate desire to crush this Other, to reform it, ingest it, draw it in, gulp it down, swallow it", by attempts to rewrite history, to become an author and a "screenwriter" for the new reality. She also ponders the internalized experiences of language change, comparing the wartime language to an "ancient minefield" in which words and phrases that have acquired new meanings or have lost their meaning (like the phrase "a soldier would never hurt a child") become symbolic "mines" (2022).

Finally, Berlin is now also home to Vladimir Sorokin, the writer who is widely believed to have predicted the reinstallation of a medieval authoritarian regime in Russia and its international isolation in his 2006 novel *Den' oprichnika* (*Day of the Oprichnik*, 2010). The very idea of the "new Middle Ages", which Sorokin continued to develop in his other works (*Telluria*, *Manaraga*), also provided him with the necessary interpretational framework to assess the Russian invasion and the hierarchy of the Russian establishment, from the "despotic Tsar" to the new "oprichniks" provided with iPhones (Borisova 2022). While drawing his comparisons, Sorokin goes centuries back, arguing that "in the guise of modern Ukraine, [Putin] is fighting Kievan Rus' as a pro-Western country that, in Putin's view, threatens modern-day Mongolian-Byzantine Russia by the very fact of its existence" (Borisova 2022).[33] At the same time, in his view, today's Russia is losing its civilizational battle, being a country fixated on the past, while Ukraine is looking to the future. In another interview, that was published by the *Financial Times*, the writer also addresses the boycott of Russian culture. Surprisingly, Sorokin takes a rather optimistic stance on the matter, also following the topos of historical parallels with Nazi Germany: "It's natural that culture will have to pay for this carnage. The Germans, too, paid a price after the second world war. […] I think Russian culture will endure. […] It's already part of the world's cultural heritage – hard to do without it" (Chazan 2022).

CONCLUSION

In this text, which is just a preliminary exploration of this unfolding issue, I have tried to present the key transformations affecting the representations of Russian literature and the level of its *acceptability* in the new social and medial context formed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. Having addressed several key topoi (the guilt and innocence of Russian classical literature, the imperialism of Russian liberals, the "uselessness" of Russian literature in the context of war), several narrative lines (cancelling, reconciling, defending), and the perspectives of some of the most prominent contemporary writers, it can be argued that Russian literature as a collective entity has proved to be a tool with enormous argumentative and manipulative power. This tool is used by all parties to the conflict to confirm their ideological position. At the same time, the active use of Russian literature by Russian propaganda seems likely to cause greater marginalization and even more pronounced *othering* in its representations. Such morbidly absurd episodes as covering the bombed ruins of the Mariupol Drama Theatre, after the city was seized by the Russians, with scaffol-

ding featuring portraits of Pushkin, Tolstoy, Gogol, and surprisingly, Taras Shevchenko (Insider 2022; Kamanin 2022) will only increase this marginalization.

NOTES

[1] As this article is mainly about the shifts in the "Western" reception of Russian literature and culture, the contemplations on historical, political, and social aspects will also revolve around Russia's relationships with the countries of today's EU and the USA.

[2] See for instance one of the key Russia-related international relations publications by Iver B. Neumann 1996.

[3] For instance, on Slovakia see Kusá 2017 or on the UK, see Cross 2012.

[4] "В области репрезентации русской культуры соседствуют стереотипы, основанные на традиционных бинарных оппозициях типа Россия/Запад, с одной стороны, и новые формы репрезентации, осуществляемые в рамках интенсивной глобализации и межкультурной коммуникации. […] западная культура проявляет серьезный интерес к глубинным смыслам русских классических произведений, к их общечеловеческому звучанию, к эмоциональному миру героев. […] Взгляд Другого на русскую культуру заставляет задуматься об общем и специфичном элементе в ее текстах, о контекстуальной обусловленности репрезентации и разнице в восприятии культурного феномена как Своего и как Другого." Unless otherwise stated, the translations into English are by present author.

[5] "skúma otázku utvárania a fungovania literárneho poľa v rozpätí od manifestovaného mocenského utvárania poľa po utváranie literárneho poľa ako latentných, skrytých morfických rezonancií. Z hľadiska poetiky udalosti ide o figurovanie, konfigurovanie a rekonfigurovanie literárneho poľa."

[6] "meniacu sa udalostnú mieru prijateľnosti a neprijateľnosti textov v konkrétnej historickej situácii."

[7] "отвергание привычных понятий вроде 'мама', 'папа', 'семья' или даже 'пол'"

[8] "В последний раз такую массовую кампанию по уничтожению неугодной литературы почти 90 лет назад проводили нацисты в Германии. Мы хорошо знаем и помним из кадров кинохроники, как сжигаются книги прямо на площадях."

[9] "Sono posizioni che non condivido sua sul piano culturale sia su quello politico. La grande cultura russa è parte integrante della cultura europea. È un elemento che non si può cancellare. Mentre la responsabilità della guerra va attribuita al governo di quel Paese non certo al popolo russo o alla sua cultura."

[10] See for instance Friedersdorf 2022; Lindsay 2022; Lee 2022.

[11] Another common time period used as a common point of history is the Cold War. Sholto Byrnes states that "not even during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union and its nuclear arsenal posed an existential threat to the West (admittedly, the feeling may have been mutual), did anyone try to 'cancel' Russian culture" (2022), while Gary Saul Morson notes, "Even at the height of the Cold War, no one thought of banning Russian literature, art, or music. Quite the contrary; that is when Russian studies first flourished in America" (2022).

[12] For the most recent illustration see Yermolenko 2022 or Morson and Schapiro 2022. For the general idea of the way imperial heritage functions in contemporary Russian literature see also Ulbrechtová 2015.

[13] "geopolitické fantazmagórie", "s miernou iróniu (ale aj s infernálnym porozumením)"

[14] Of course, as most of the mentioned topoi, this one has also been in circulation long before the current invasion started. For one of the earlier media contexts, see *Obozrevatel*'s longread which discusses, among other topics, Oksana Zabuzhko's commentary on Ludmila Ulitskaya and her "imperialistic" stories about Crimea (Altunian 2017).

[15] "На протяжении всех 23 лет украинская независимость воспринималась как недоразумение, анекдот – само слово 'незалежность' в России обычно произносится с ироничным подтекстом. Молдавскую, таджикскую, даже белорусскую независимость русские воспри-

няли спокойно, а украинскую не смогли, причем речь идет не об имперцах и почвенниках, а о самых широких слоях образованного класса, смотревших на Украину как на банановую республику и одновременно затаивших глубокую обиду на неразумного 'младшего брата', который дерзко отринул кровное родство. Эта обида в известном стихотворении Бродского 'На независимость Украины' превратилась в неподдельную ненависть […] диссидент и кумир либеральной интеллигенции Бродский здесь являет всю полноту уязвленного великодержавного сознания, которое он вывез из России вместе с памятью об имперском величии Петербурга."

[16] "Только когда придет и вам помирать, бугаи, / будете вы хрипеть, царапая край матраса, / строчки из Александра, а не брехню Тараса." Translated by Artem Serebrennikov.

[17] In Slovakia, according to a survey conducted by Globsec, 19% of the responders would welcome Russia's victory, while for 24% it does not matter who wins the war (Hajdu and Slosiarik 2022).

[18] That strategy is, understandably, not exclusive for the interview. In the spring of 2022 it has become widespread in both formal and informal Ukrainian discourses and found its way even into the United Nations' documents written by the Ukrainian representatives, see for instance "Statement by the Delegation of Ukraine at the Open Debate of the UN Security Council on 'New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism'" (2022).

[19] "myslíte si, že rusovi vo vojenskej uniforme, ktorý znásilní 10-ročné dievča a potom ju zabije, povedali o dostojevského 'slze dieťaťa'? Alebo rusovi vo vojenskej uniforme, ktorý najprv zviaže ruky mierumilovnému Ukrajincovi za jeho chrbtom a potom strelí svojej bezbrannej obeti do zátylku, hovorili o tolstého 'neodporovaní zlu násilím'? Tak o čom to vlastne celé je? Ak sa o tom nehovorilo rusom, tak načo potrebujeme dostojevského a tolstého – veď ich nepotrebujú ani samotní rusi!"

[20] "myslím si, že to netreba zhadzovať na mongolského chána, ale konečne si priznať, kto sme a ako sa správame k iným národom."

[21] Logically, it is a topic for a much broader discussion, however, before completely endorsing such an opinion one should also bear in mind the "practical" side of the matter, as nowadays it is highly questionable to what extent any literature can influence a "common man" (according to a 2021 survey, one third of the Russian population have not a read a single book in the previous year (Tadtaev 2021)).

[22] See also the interview with the prominent Czech scholar Tomáš Glanc for *Denník N*, who, on the one hand, sees reasons for excluding Russian culture from international context, but advocates against a total boycott of everything Russian on the other. He is also careful when blaming every Russian classical literature for the war crimes: "To accuse representatives of classical literature of crimes against humanity is simply not possible. Or rather, it is, but only from the point of view of personal trauma, not from the point of view of rational reasoning" (Sudor 2022).

[23] "nemá žiadne knihy o vyvražďovaní vlastnej inteligencie, o systematickej likvidácii elitných vrstiev vlastnej spoločnosti"

[24] It is peculiar to note that many of Prilepin's mentions in the news even fail to present him as an active writer, but rather a "military blogger" (Lister and Tarasova 2022), "Russian TV analyst" (Stanton 2022), "the pro-Kremlin novelist turned politician" (Grynszpan 2022) etc.

[25] "писатель не должен 'смотреть по сторонам' – запреты не должны влиять на его работу. 'Он должен заниматься своим делом и то, что он напишет, все равно прозвучит. Обстоятельства меняются, и важно сказать свое слово, важно, чтобы оно было произнесено, и у меня есть абсолютное убеждение в том, что оно не останется неуслышанным.'"

[26] Schwartz also provides a valuable insight to the future of translation from Russian: "Publishing Russian literature in translation has suddenly become extremely problematic, and for the next generation, possibly, impossible" (2022).

[27] "Нет никакой культуры отмены, есть только отмена культуры. […] Достоевский в свое время призывал к европейской консолидации, к которой принадлежит и Россия, и совокупный Запад."

[28] "Шишкин остается чужим – и для патриотов, и для либералов."

[29] "переписать русскую классику, освобождая ее от комплекса русского европейца, имперской мифологии, 'русской идеи'."

[30] Certainly, the author strategically narrows the scope and omits the whole level of Russian culture, which managed to achieve recognition without existing in open confrontation with Russia's various regimes (with such obvious examples as Tchaikovsky and other famous Russian composers of the 19th century or less obvious examples such as the "village prose" of the second half of the 20th century).

[31] "Som Židovka. To mi umožňuje pozerať sa na rusko-ukrajinskú vojnu tak nejak zo strany. Som iba pozorovateľ. A ako pozorovateľ vidím, že vzťahy Rusov a Ukrajincov nebudú navždy pretrhané. Spoločná minulosť hrá v živote oboch národov príliš významnú rolu. Ale to, čo sa dnes deje, je odrazovým mostíkom na vytvorenie a konečné sebaurčenie ukrajinského národa."

[32] "Россия – страна с непредсказуемым прошлым."

[33] "Путин ведет войну против Украины, в современном образе которой он видит Киевскую Русь. По его понятиям, уже только своим существованием Украина как ориентированное на Запад государство представляет угрозу для России – с ее татаро-монгольским и византийским наследием."

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Transformations in the perception of Russian literature after February 24, 2022

Contemporary Russian literature. Discourse. Russian propaganda. Perception of Russian literature. Cancel culture. War in Ukraine.

This article explores the ongoing transformations in the way Russian literature has been represented and perceived outside Russia since the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022, based on texts from Western and Central European media. It addresses several key topoi (the guilt and innocence of Russian classical literature, the imperialism of Russian liberals, the "uselessness" of Russian literature in the context of war) and several narrative lines (cancelling, reconciling, defending). It then examines the perspectives of some of the most prominent contemporary Russian writers, including Evgenii Vodolazkin, Mikhail Shishkin, Ludmila Ulitskaya, and Maria Stepanova.

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The Central European path to worldliness from the point of view of so-called small literatures

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Current debates on world literature (by Emily Apter, Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Marko Juvan, Franco Moretti, Haun Saussy and others) frequently single out the fact that world literature, or a text aspiring to be designated at such, is closely correlated with the country's prestige (including its size) and the universality of a generally recognized language, determined by global and economic factors rather than purely aesthetic ones. Notwithstanding the indisputable dominance of major literatures in reception and media presentation, world literature also covers "small" literatures (Pospíšil 2020, 103–104) whose "worldliness" is based on the particularity of the "regional" or the "local"; in other words, it is not only the force of extraliterary prominence that matters but the very efficiency of literature to constitute a world through anesthetizing national images. The way to "worldliness" is hampered here, for the authors of "small" literatures cannot neglect the factor of globalization and the extent of a language's distribution. Yet at the same time, they have to accomplish something additional, a kind of added "surplus value" consisting in the presentation of the "national" as a specific stamp of "worldliness". This is what the Czech author Karel Čapek surmised in his essay "Jak se dělá světová literature" (How to write world literature, 1936), when he reflected, like his predecessor Goethe a hundred years earlier, on the potential chances of authors in "small" literatures to achieve world renown. According to Čapek, it can never be "imitating" or "catching up with" great authors, but our conscious identification with the condition that "what we like best about them is just the non-transferable, what is solely theirs, in the vernacular and empirical sense" (10). Admittedly, the status of worldliness may even be attained by texts parading themselves as "fashionable" (enjoying present-day popularity with readers) or maintaining "historical topicality" (universal or socially committed works). Their world status, however, must be most distinguished and most permanent, which is achieved only through "clearly and utterly" national texts that express "the soul and character, the type and life of their country and people" (10). As a young author before the World War I, Čapek realized that the modern concept of nationality cannot be exclusively connected with local themes, like a portrayal of the nation's

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own history (1913, 160); rather it consists of the authorial approach which reacts to the "world" and that can be conveyed by the motto "no lagging behind the moving mankind, but joining it in the frontline" (162).

The following study uses the authors Ivan Horváth, Karel Čapek, Sándor Márai, and Witold Gombrowicz as exemplary of the endeavor (with varying degrees of success) to gain a world readership through their "Central European quality", along with describing the "structural mechanisms" used to fulfill this ideal aim. In order to show more general developments, the authors have purposely chosen Slovak, Czech, Hungarian, and Polish texts which are representative of the Central European area rather than singular literary trends, which may be more important on a national level but are irrelevant within a broader perspective. In terms of time period, our research is focused on the first half of the 20th century, considering it crucial in the development of Central European literatures, as well as the time when individual literatures had been "solidified" in the wake of the National Revival. It was the same period that witnessed the fruitful assimilation of Western literary inspirations, principally of French, English, and German origin. These impetuses were not received mechanically, but enriched and changed by these authors with regard to the specific cultural, social, and political conditions in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, being adapted to the local cultural needs.

This article explores how the original national impulses returned to a wider European context, changing, developing, and transforming in the meantime. Thus, the literary historical development of Central European literatures between the wars drew upon the unified multicultural tradition of the dismembered Habsburg Empire, itself based on national specifics rigorously particularizing themselves and constituting unique aesthetic and thematic structures and phenomena (the grotesque; the absurd, irony, skepticism, etc.). Central European authors were intensely aware that the exceptional proportionality of global "unity" and national "otherness" implied different conditions of intertextual and intercultural transfer which constituted specifically local "mechanisms" important for the perception of world literature. Another contributing factor was the Central European intellectual atmosphere at the intersection of diverse streams of thought, particularly the phenomenon of migration and social mobility in the multilingual empire, which provided fertile ground for polyglossia and heterotopia (Zelenka 2022, 8–9).

While Čapek is attractive because of his universal humanistic ideas reflecting his apprehension over threats from modern civilization, Gombrowicz addresses the modern reader through an intuitive anticipation of the postmodern grotesque, rendering the tension between the external and the internal and demonstrating the tragic disintegration of a human being. Similarly, Márai questions the entropy of traditional Western structures in Central Europe under pressure from the East, and like Horváth, he seeks artistic inspiration for his dreamlike visions in French culture. Despite their genre and thematical differences, and while each of them managed to develop an individual style, these authors are united in their affection for the West which influenced their Central European "destiny", namely respect for cultural diversity and dissimilarity. It is this conception of notional, political, cultural,

and philosophical heterogeneity that along with the openness and multiformity pervading all of their works gives them a "world-class" level of excellence.

Together these authors demonstrate that in the autochthonous "interspace" of values between the West and the East, a "pure" national literature exempt from synthesizing a foreign heterogeneous element does not exist. Metaphorically, each of them appears to be an individual thoroughly mastering the codes, styles, and language of Western culture, someone who can integrate impulses from other backgrounds, incorporating them in their own artistic creations. Moreover, they can offer something unique and attractive from their personalities to fill the empty space, something that will fit in the structure of world literature. Of course, this fragment or fraction of world literature is inadequate to represent the whole of a national literary tradition (Czapliński 2014, 37). This raises the question of what in national literature might be attractive enough to join the international literary circulation: what factors affected the penetration of these ideas and thoughts, and what particularly influenced the process of absorbing these Central European ideas and notions? What resounded enough within world literature in a particular moment to join it permanently, and what remained unnoticed?

For any literary work to align itself with world literature, it must pass through several stages. The Polish scholar Przemysław Czapliński illustrates the sequence of these procedures through the integration of Polish literature into the French literary sphere: it starts with a good French translation, followed by a positive French critical reception, confirmed by a similarly affirmative acceptance among French readers (24–25). Obviously, there are other factors to increase public awareness, such as the book's edition in a prestigious publishing house, positive reviews from scholars and other acclaimed authors, a successful staging of a dramatic text, etc. (Mikołajczak 2021, 401–402). If one of these phases fails, the opportunity is wasted. Only if these essential prerequisites are met, the literary work can enter the French awareness, which naturally does not mean that it will belong to world literature. The same process has to occur collaterally in the French and, above all, English surroundings, so that the text can penetrate into the American literary ambience. In this respect, a remarkable context for our thought is provided by the works of Franz Kafka, the Central European author who obviously became a globally acclaimed writer because he wrote in his native German tongue, even though he lived and worked in the Czech city of Prague. A rather different strategy for penetrating into the international literary process was implemented by Milan Kundera, who, having emigrated to France, consciously shifted to using French as the language of his essays and later fiction, cementing his status as a European and world writer. The Slovenian scholar Marko Juvan, in his monograph *Worlding a Peripheral Literature* (2019), uses the term "worlding" as a free translation for "literature affected, or influenced by the world" (3–4). In order to achieve success, works written in small Central European literatures have to reduce the difference of values between the dominant "center" and the dependent "periphery" both aesthetically and thematically. It was when Central European literatures, or rather their texts, joined the world literary area that they respected the hegemonic centers of political power in the West of their own free

will. Thus, on the one hand, the incorporation into worldliness has been legitimized by criteria derived from the Western canon (Gáfrik 2020, 117–118), and on the other hand, it should be accompanied by a cumulation of subjective criteria such as media publicity, the reader's interest in a particular author or genre, interpretational presentation, a reading tradition, etc. Regardless of Juvan's conclusion that it is necessary to reconcile with the historically-given inequality as a result of the axiological and aesthetic paradigm of world literature (2019, 40; Pokrivčák and Zelenka 2020, 182), there is the proximity of Dionýz Ďurišin's thesis that world literature has its own ideal dimension (1992, 11). That is to say, it presents itself on the one hand subjectively in the process of momentary interpretation, and on the other hand objectively in the form of a historical structure which can be anticipated in every phenomenon of the interliterary process (24).

Out of the four authors, the least internationally known is the Slovak Ivan Horváth (1904–1960), whose works can be classified as avant-garde modernism emulating European, in particular French, influences (Habaj 2005; Kuzmíková 2006). In the 1920s, Horváth ranked among the most cosmopolitan and linguistically skilled Slovak authors drawn to the West; he was intimately familiar with Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and especially Paris, the interwar cradle of the "world republic of letters" (Casanova 2004, 10), which in his own words was "for every foreigner his second home […] the essence of the world" (Rosenbaum 1967, 33). Yet it is impossible to unequivocally determine the ratio of foreign influences in the intricate structure of Horváth's prose because the author's expressionistic themes bear a strong Slovak accent (Tomčík 1979, 33). According to Ján Števček, the simplicity of linguistic and stylistic devices reflects a specific poetization of reality which is deromanticized and civilized (1981, 190), but principally based on expressing "the internal content of the atmosphere created by the setting and characters" (Rosenbaum 1967, 105). Horváth's personal destiny was typical of Central European leftist intellectuals engaged in politics: his diplomatic career was interrupted by arrest in 1950 and the accusation of "bourgeois" nationalism, followed by his premature death and incomplete rehabilitation.

Horváth's most successful texts include five autobiographical novellas inspired by his travels in Europe (mainly Germany and France) published under the umbrella title *Vízum do Európy* (Visa for Europe, 1930) and the essay *Návrat do Paríža* (Return to Paris, completed in 1938 but published in 1947). The focus of his attention is travelling and gaining knowledge through individual "human stories" that are determined by the urban environment and by evoking the unique atmosphere located outside the native Slovak background (Rosenbaum 1987, 10). His "mature view of the world" (Števček 1981, 191) is outlined against the background of expressionist poetics and surrealist techniques (Kuzmíková 2010, 583–584), combining sensuality and emotionality with a sense of social criticism, typical of the early-20th-century Slovak realistic tradition. Suppressing the narrator's function leads to the enhancement of philosophical relativism in the structure of characters who are witnesses rather than agents in an event they find difficult to understand. His strong inclination towards humanism consists in the aptitude to contemplate particular human situations

and reveal the internal moments determining human behavior (Rosenbaum 1967, 170). *Návrat do Paríža* is an emotional declaration of Horváth's love of Paris, which he visited in 1937, and provides an example of the influence of French culture on Slovak prose in the interwar period. It is not a random occurrence that Jana Kuzmíková sees the greatness of Horváth's style in a peculiar discursive style of writing (2010, 583), where a literary work fails to be linked with a portrayal of subjective reality as a result of the poetistic-surrealistic accentuation of the acoustic and formal qualities. At the same time, it has been noted that Horváth formulated his own concept of Central Europeanism, which consisted of admiration for French culture emphasizing not the ethnic basis, but the spiritual cooperation of different nationalities united by a common place of residence and the civil democratic principle. In this idea of a transnational "cultural community" he saw a model example for the emerging coexistence of Czechs and Slovaks after 1918 (Bojničanová 2015, 317).

Slovak literary historiography acknowledges Horváth's "bringing to Slovak culture a modern European atmosphere and the latest artistic streams" (Kuzmíková 2010, 586) based on discursiveness and a psycholinguistic approach. This is what makes him an ideal candidate for "worlding", i.e. a "world affected" author in interwar Slovak literature. Such aspirations, however, are limited by the unfavorable factors resulting from the overall social and literary situation and his lack of translations in world languages. The author's "worldliness" thus remains only in a potential position. Admittedly, the European-oriented Horváth implemented his own original poetics, idiosyncratic concept, and style of writing that aesthetically oscillated between traditional and avant-garde poles, ancient influences, Bergsonism, and Nietzscheanism. Horváth's importance goes beyond the scope of national literature, thanks to his knowledge of modern Western impulses unequivocally supporting the trends that brought Slovak literature to the genesis of lyricized prose, which could be considered one of the artistic climaxes in the interwar period, comparable with European development. His relative lack of readership and the receptional vacuum of his works was not filled by numerous editions after 1989, and his texts did not go through the process of post-textual adaptational establishment, as in the case of Čapek or Gombrowicz. It needs to be emphasized that on the scale from global to specifically national, Horváth distinctly sides with extra-Slovak literary aspirations, his attitude to France being motivated more strongly by the endeavor to "catch up with the French", and to transfer French cultural patterns into the Slovak literary context, without due respect to domestic conditions. Therefore, in the case of this author, the category of "additional integration" (Ďurišin 1995, 44–45) into the world literary space will hardly materialize, unless a more potent globalizing impulse comes in the form of translations or media presentations based on the original interpretation of his works against the background of European development. As we can see, even his efforts to distinguish himself with his democratism, to choose transnational topics and thereby break out of a narrow national framework, are not enough for Horváth to be considered a truly global writer.

The attribute of "worldliness" can be better ascribed to Karel Čapek (1890–1938), whose works entered the world literary process through translation. In the contem-

porary domestic context, his success was frequently identified with thematic "vagueness", with a comprehensible style and easy reception, and especially with "cosmopolitan nationlessness" (Buriánek 1988, 9). Even from the perspective of a "small" Central European literature, Čapek's life and works fully fit in the category of a "world author" capable of diminishing the notional distance between the dominant center and the dependent "peripheries". From the early beginnings of his literary career, he was connected with world culture – chiefly French (which after 1918 was considered the leading exponent of art and literature) and also English. He manifested his appreciation for French culture by a masterly translation of Apollinaire's *Alcools* (1919) and other poetic texts published in the anthology *Francouzská poesie nové doby* (Contemporary French poetry, 1920). The author's skill in capturing the "spirit" of the original through the means of expression used by French Symbolists, Futurists, Unanimists, and avant-garde Spiritualists paved the way to the poetic sensibility of modern Czech poetry, led by Vítězslav Nezval and Jaroslav Seifert. In the interwar period, he became the official representative and cultural ambassador of the first Czechoslovak republic and its humanistic politics personified by the moral prestige of its president Tomáš G. Masaryk. After 1918, within the context of Central European nationalistic or right-wing regimes, the newly-established state of Czechoslovakia represented an oasis of political democracy and civil rights recognized in the Western world. Čapek's close relationship with Masaryk permeated the atmosphere of the "Pátečníci" (Friday men), weekly gatherings established by Čapek that brought together Masaryk and a group of democratically-oriented Czech writers; these sessions were incorporated into his three-volume *Hovory s T. G. Masarykem* (*Talks with T. G. Masaryk*, 1928–1935). Čapek befriended Western writers like George Bernard Shaw, G. K. Chesterton, H. G. Wells, Jules Romains, and Romain Rolland, and in 1925, he was unanimously elected the Chair of the Czech section of the International PEN club, which in the mid-1920s was regarded as an institutionalized pantheon of respected authors awarded the honor of "worldliness".

Čapek's "worldliness" was most obviously supported by his global themes, which in his plays and prose were always based upon a Czech background. The "realistic" implications of his themes stand in relation to the problems of modern civilization, raising philosophical questions of the "practical life" of an individual in reference to the social or national community. Čapek's opinion that genuinely "great literature" should not be "totally timeless, undetermined by time, place and culture" (1912, 104) was consolidated by his skepticism toward the possibility of recognizing the absolute truth, his conviction about its equivocality, the contention of mystery, faith and reason, the confrontation of morals, and the danger of scientific progress. His themes are generally topical and also anchored in contemporary life, which Čapek presented through polydiscursive texts based on updated traditional forms, such as the novel, short story, and other short forms enlivened by his lifelong experience as a journalist. For example, in the foreground of his drama *R. U. R.* (1920) he presents a "real" utopia about the creation of an artificial man-robot misused by mankind for war and slavery. His satirical-humorist novel *Továrna na Absolutno* (*The Absolute at Large*, 1922) is a parable of the potential destruction of human civilization following

the invention of a special drive (carburetor) which breaks coal atoms while liberating "the absolute", i.e. God. Similarly, *Krakatit* (1924) describes the invention of an explosive capable of destroying the world. Its inventor Prokop, getting over a shock, realizes that "doing small things" (Čapek 1958, 290) means fulfilling the original purpose of unselfishly helping mankind (Mukařovský 1958, 324–325). In the drama *Věc Makropulos* (*The Makropulos Affair*, 1922) the author draws on the age-old human desire to defeat death – although the famous opera singer Emilia Marty can apply an elixir of life, she refuses to use it after three hundred years because she understands the wisdom that there is "an end to immortality" (Čapek 1992, 259).

In the 1930s, becoming aware of the imminent political threat of Nazi regime, Čapek's work (both literary and journalistic) took on a pronounced anti-fascist tone. This likely prevented him from being awarded the Nobel Prize, given the Nobel Commettee's unwillingness to offend Hitler's Germany. In his allegorical novel *Válka s mloky* (*War with the Newts*, 1936) he uses the seemingly harmless newts, whose unexpected proliferation leads to the extermination of mankind, as a satire of fascist aspirations for global supremacy. Similarly, in the drama *Bílá nemoc* (*The White Disease*, 1937) the author highlights nationalistic hysteria and mass emotions, together with manipulative dictators' control of the masses, while in *Matka* (*The Mother*, 1938) his humanistic conviction is supported through the symbolic portrayal of the mother summoning up her strength to resist evil even at the cost of losing her last son.

Čapek's resistance to fascism anticipated his tragic death of pneumonia at Christmas 1938, only three months after Czechoslovakia was betrayed by its allies in the Munich agreement, followed by the attacks of the right-wing press in the period of the "second republic". His problematic life, characterized by rises and falls, calculated misunderstanding, and world popularity came to premature end before the age of fifty – his "worldliness" being enhanced by another relevant factor, the post-textual life after the author's physical death in the form of affirmative adaptational sequences (Dović 2017, 98; Helgason 2011, 166–167). The narrative structure of Čapek's texts featuring dialogizing and alterations of the authorial perspective typically required a film version or a television adaptation. The novel *Krakatit* was actually adapted to film twice: once under the same title by the Czech director Otakar Vávra in 1947, and in 1980, under the title *Temné slunce* (Dark Sun). During the author's lifetime, *Věc Makropulos* was set to music by the celebrated composer Leoš Janáček. With the author's approval the libretto was adapted by the composer himself in anticipation of its sensational international success. It premiered in December 1926 on the stage of the National Theatre of Brno and like *Liška Bystrouška* (*The Cunning Little Vixen*, 1924), Janáček's earlier operatic work, was staged in other European theatres. These productions helped Janáček to become the most successful international representative of modern Czech music, just as Čapek was recognized as the most significant interwar Czech (or Czechoslovak) man of letters, whose texts gained a solid footing in the world literary process. With the passing of time and the fading of memory, his external pressures have lost their "dramatic contours" and the "worldliness" of his texts depends on the reader's receptive horizon, particularly on the timeless social commitment of Čapek's humanistic ideas. We can only partly approve

of František Buriánek's thesis that Čapek's "worldliness" rests in his civil commitment, in his protest as an artist against fascism and all forms of colonial oppression (1985, 140). Buriánek points out the interpretational polysemy of Čapek's works, which in our view signals a balance of the "global" and "local" aspects: "The potentiality of double interpretation of a work – in an utterly topical, i.e. specifically political sense on the one hand, and in the timeless, generally human sense – is typical of almost all of Čapek's works" (141).

Another writer whose works synthesize the national and the worldly is Sándor Márai (1900–1989), who was born in a Hungarian bourgeois family with Saxon roots in the heterogeneous city of Košice, which assimilated Hungarian, Slovak, German, and Jewish elements. His earliest publications appeared in Germany, where he completed his studies in journalism, but later, he wrote and published in Hungarian. His fluency in both languages qualified him to produce the first Hungarian translation of Franz Kafka (Pató 2012, 695–699). In the interwar period, Márai shuttled between cultural hubs: Venice, Paris, Prague, Leipzig, Berlin, Vienna, Florence, and Frankfurt. As a contributor to a number of prestigious German journals and dailies, he could monitor cultural and political events in Central and Western Europe alike. Having left Hungary in 1919 as a young and inexperienced man, he returned after nine years as a mature intellectual, shaped by West European streams of thought, mainly by West European modernism. In the two subsequent decades he lived and worked in Hungary, which he left forever in 1948, first for Italy, then for the United States, where he stayed from 1952 until his death in 1989. Márai can be labelled as a cosmopolitan uninhibited by any complex who mingled with the foremost intellectuals of his time and was appreciated for his exceptional brilliance, but thanks to material difficulties he could never feel at home with them.

Konrad Ludwicki is right about Márai connecting what is universal in him and what is intimate, interior, and original: "he assimilates the heritage of literature, modifying it; creating his own form and his own world" (2008, 131), which Ludwicki regards as a quality of prominent, truly "world" authors. It was during his first intense contact with the West that Márai experienced an intensive "worlding", a very fruitful contact with the Western culture, which however did not prevent him from being critical. He did not "melt" his artistic vision in strong artistic currents and dominant fashions, but embraced specificity. His exclusivity among his Central European contemporaries, who were often only imitators of world authors, consists in his ability to absorb the supranational and creatively modify these elements through his perceptivity, sensuality, and unique talent. Márai's *magnum opus* is his *Diaries*, completed over more than half of his long life, between 1943 and his suicide in 1989. These elaborate and carefully edited texts reveal the universal struggle of an individual standing on the edge of society, lonely and misunderstood. They witness a European fighting for his cultural and literary heritage, whose spiritual homeland – not just Hungary, or even Central Europe itself, but the whole of the Western world – was exposed to destructive contact with the predatory pressure from the East. Márai refers to the European memoir tradition, mentioning diaries such as those kept by André Gide or Jules Renard. It was especially Gide to whose ideas and art he felt very close

(Varga 2012, 26–27). This makes Márai not only an admirer but also a successor to the best traditions of memoir literature. The feeling of estrangement passed through all of his works and constitutes the pillar of his artistic orientation. It can be found in his autobiographical prose *Idegen emberek* (Strangers, 1931), part of the three-volume cycle known as *A Garrenek műve* (The Garrens' work), which is a testimony to Márai's personal development as an author. From the classical Bildungsroman Márai proceeded to experimental prose featuring elements like reportage, inner monologue, and essayistic passages. The latter are a multi-level literary recording of the fall of the Habsburg Empire as the end of an epoch. These motives also appear in his travelogues and reportages written from Paris (Zwolińska 2014, 67–68), later exemplified in the abovementioned *Diaries* and the autobiographical prose *Föld, föld!…* (Land, land!…, 1972; Eng. trans. *Memoir of Hungary*, *1944–1948*, 1996).

In his works Márai captured the world on the edge of chaos, the imperceptible bond between the Central European area and the West; he rendered the Central European inclinations for German culture as a permanent link with the Western, not only German but also Italian, French, and English cultures. The protagonist of his works is a Central European intellectual exposed to the incessant pressure of politics and literary fashions, who is not willing to accept any compromise, loyal to the path of his own choice, to his inner voice and his values, although it means living on the social periphery and causing perpetual misunderstanding. There are striking differences between the critical appraisal of Márai's works "in the world" and in his home country. International readers and critics recognize Márai as the author of elegant, sophisticated prose describing the decline of an epoch, whereas Hungarian ones appreciate him as a master of autobiographical prose (Varga 2012, 24). This double vision also reflects the remarkable tension between "worldliness" and belonging to a "small" literature, lending space for new approaches to the analysis of Márai's creations (Sabatos 2013, 35–36). It is Márai's works that perform the synthesis of what is personal and what is universal; what is national and what is worldly. "The author concurrently examines the cultural heritage of prevailingly European values. He attempts to lend them a personal characteristic through existential verification" (Ludwicki 2008, 137). The perspicacity of his creations, his gift of prescience, as well as the knowledge of Western structures, enabled him to remain a detached and trenchant observer. In his works, Márai synthesizes what is peculiar, original, and uniquely his own with the added value of his contact with world literature. Márai's "worldliness" is mainly apparent in his incessantly returning reflections on the developmental orientation of European culture as well as in his in-depth understanding of its structures, together with his premonition as early as the 1940s of the dire threat to Central Europe and the whole West posed by the Soviet Union. His emblematic motifs are the global crisis, a fear of the departure from basic values, and disappointment with contemporary developments.

The Polish prose writer and dramatist Witold Gombrowicz (1904–1969) belongs to the same generation, born in the same year as Ivan Horváth and four years later than Márai. Like his Hungarian counterpart, he wrote diaries of life in exile, first in Argentina after 1939 and in France after 1964. Unlike Márai, he gained world re-

nown a few years before his death, including several nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature between 1966 and 1969. Gombrowicz's literary production shows distinctive features of "worldliness" because he was a successful precursor of certain streams of thought, like the postmodern grotesque. His most popular novel in this genre was *Ferdydurke* (1937) featuring original puns, plays on artistic forms, and linguistic experiments. It contains an expressive reference to mystification and demystification, the entropy of man into face and mask, the issues of human identity facing continuous pressure from the society, culture, and other people (the problem of form), and last but not least, purely philosophical issues surpassing the existential wave of French prose, such as the thematization of futility, the absurdity of human fate and freedom, and the possibility to determine one's fate (Czakon 2015, 134).

Like Márai, Gombrowicz drew on his personal experience as a European and succeeded in elevating the form and content of his works to a universal level. They feature the issues of the Polish inferiority complex toward the West, yet at the same time, what promoted the author to the world rank is his success in portraying characters tangled in a complicated network of social and cultural expectations, enhanced by foreshadowing the orientation of later postmodern discourse. In his *Diaries*, perhaps his greatest literary work (Czakon 2015, 137–138), he thematizes, under the influence of postmodernism, the role of the writer and analyses the literary process evaluating his own works through the use of metaliterary digressions. Another postmodern feature of Gombrowicz's creations is his conviction about the impossibility of comprehensively grasping the world, humankind, or life in its entirety (Fiała 2015). Gombrowicz's writings are a direct reflection of his endeavor to diminish the aesthetic and value differences between what is deemed dominant, central, and what is peripheral, as mentioned above. In contrast to Márai's works, Gombrowicz's can be labelled as "worldly" since they are exceptionally inspirational for other renowned authors. This can be exemplified by Milan Kundera, one of the eminent personalities in world literature, who belongs among the promoters and admirers of Gombrowicz's thought, as is evident from his essays on literature (Soliński 2010). Jakub Češka has emphasized that Gombrowicz, Barthes, and Kundera "share the same thematic orientation (the sign impenetrability; its interpellation; and the thematics of seeming unaffectedness)" (2010, 63). Gombrowicz's texts addressed not only emigrants from Central Europe or Western intellectuals, but were also highly inspirational for Scandinavian authors (Królczyk-Bremer 2012).

Regardless of his status in France as a celebrity whose works were translated and accepted, Gombrowicz did not escape the problems encountered by writers in "small" literatures and exemplifies the failure of one level described above by Przemysław Czapliński. For a representative of "small" literature to join the circle of world authors, his works must have the benefit of illustrious translators. This is where Gombrowicz's attempt partly failed, since inaccurate and ambiguous translations obviously spoiled the further stages of his world reception. A detailed analysis of errors and inaccuracies in French translations of Gombrowicz's dramas is offered by Milena Kusztelska (2007). In extreme cases, translation may result in removing entire passages or even chapters, as was the case of Milan Kundera's novel *Žert* (1967; *The Joke*, 1969).

No wonder his traumatic experience with flawed translations inspired Kundera's obsession with preserving the accuracy of his essays and novels in other languages. The translatological context introduces other substantial findings in regard to worldliness. According to one study dealing with the Arabic translations of Gombrowicz's works, the translator primarily perceives the Polish author as a European and an author representing universal values common to all mankind:

> In the introduction to the Arabic version, the translator qualified the author as a representative of contemporary European drama. Gombrowicz is mentioned alongside Ionesco and Beckett, occupying the pantheon of contemporary theatre avant-garde. Thus the Polish author seeks a way to European culture through Europe, as a European. Though his literary creations display conspicuous marks of Polish culture and mentality, they are perceived, this context notwithstanding, as European, i.e. universal in their own right. (Sławkowa 2010, 232)

The translation issues are among the most intrinsic questions of research on his literary works, as confirmed by an international congress of translators specializing in Gombrowicz (Kongres tłumaczy Gombrowicza) held jointly in France and Poland in 2019, which was evidence not only of the abiding interest of translators but also of the Polish author's increasing acceptance as a world author.

The abovementioned writers penetrating the global literary circulation (including the analysis of the "fruitfulness" of particular criteria), exemplified by four Central European authors, do not contradict the general postulate regarding the importance of a work's language and country. At the same time, they point to the imperative of "added" value with individual texts in "small" literatures. It seems necessary to specify our condition positively against the hegemony of Western political centers and, above all, to reduce the difference between "center" and "periphery", to legitimize national "otherness" through their texts and their "life stories" as a universally recognized value. Individual texts more or less successfully withstand a sophisticated network of "pitfalls" such as the level of translation, media presentation, reception horizon, reading tradition, or subjective interest in the authorial personality and his works. Yet prior to this phase, these texts (within the local context at least) have to canonize their potential to constitute a specific original world and, to a certain extent, even the thematical novelty through the aestheticization of national images. Moreover, in the Central European area, the authors draw on the tradition of metonymic cultural communication based on the respect for cultural variety and diversity (Zelenka 2012, 124). It is exactly this aspect of "Central Europeanism" that suggests semantic and terminological complications in defining the concept of world literature, since it is not possible to precisely specify the mutual ratio of non-literary and literary factors. It emerged from our considerations that the "worldliness" of these Central European writers cannot be measured by external factors such as the size of the country and the importance of the language. On the other hand, even aesthetic criteria such as genre-thematic originality and "progressiveness" of the represented ideas may not indicate "worldliness" if it is not supported by quality translations. The four authors perceive their Central Europeanness with varying intensity as a cultural and mental phenomenon typified by skepticism, a sense of irony, disillusion-

ment, a mistrust of political ideologies, and the interconnection of tragic and comic genre features. Indisputably, this is the "added" value of these texts on their way to literature not only "affected by the world" but to authentic world literature perceived as an ideal symbol of humanity and cultural memory.

Translated from Czech by Jiřina Johanisová

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The Central European path to worldliness from the point of view of so-called small literatures

Central European literature. World literature. Global literature. Karel Čapek. Witold Gombrowicz. Ivan Horváth. Sándor Márai.

Although the acceptance of a text into world literature is directly related to the importance of its country and language of origin, works from so-called small literatures can also become part of the global canon. They establish their "worldliness" not on the power of extraliterary moments, but on the ability to constitute the world using the aestheticization of national images. This article analyzes four literary-historical examples of authors (Ivan Horváth, Karel Čapek, Sandor Márai, and Witold Gombrowicz) attempting to become world authors through their "Central Europeanism". Horváth seeks artistic inspiration for his dreamlike visions in French culture, Čapek attracts readers with the universality of his humanistic ideas, Márai embodies intellectual the nostalgia for the vanished Habsburg Empire, and Gombrowicz intuitively anticipates the postmodern grotesque. Despite their differences in genre and theme, these authors are connected by their inclination towards the West. At the same time, they all demonstrate that in this distinctive and indigenous (in terms of values) "interspace" between the West and the East, there is no "pure" national literature that does not synthesize a diverse foreign element. It is obvious that the way of this aestheticization of local "peripherality" implies their possible paths to "worldliness".

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XXIII International Congress of the AILC-ICLA in Tbilisi

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The XXIII International Congress of the Association internationale de littérature comparée/International Comparative Literature Association (AILC-ICLA) was held July 24–29, 2022, in Tbilisi, Georgia (Zelenka 2021, 104). This gathering of literary scholars from all around the world, considered a prestigious display of new methodological inspirations, was jointly hosted by the Georgian Comparative Literature Association and the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, along with the Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature. The title of the congress, "Re-Imagining Literatures of the World, Global and Local, Mainstreams and Margins", had emerged as one of the major topics at the preceding Congress in Macao in 2019, and now constitutes a dominant line of comparative thought. The innovative approach to world literature from "the margins" instead of the Anglophone "centers" facilitated the inclusion of a great diversity of general and specific topics in critical debates. These subthemes embraced such issues as minor literatures, the position of "small national" literatures within globalization, colonial, post-colonial, de-colonial and neo-colonial experience in literary communication, words and images across literary and critical borders; the relation between film and literature, comics studios and their links with "graphic" genres, gender and sexuality in contemporary literature and culture, the post-Soviet literary area and the world after the Cold War, and digital culture (media, transmedia, and intermedia). Many other subthemes, such as literary and cultural paradigms of the West and the East, gained their own platform, as well as the issues of the global South against the global North. In conjuncture with this congress, Róbert Gáfrik and the present author (Miloš Zelenka) edited a thematic issue of *World Literature Studies* (2/2022), "World Literature from the Perspective of 'Small' Literatures". The editors respected the global theme of the congress and focused their attention on various expressions denoting world literature, which have been tackled repeatedly in intense debates between comparatists (Gáfrik and Zelenka 2022, 3).

In the three-year interval since the 2019 congress, which included the two peak years of the Covid-19 pandemic, the mutual contacts within international academic community had been considerably impaired. This objective hindrance

notwithstanding, the organizers eventually succeeded in hosting a hybrid conference. The overwhelming number of participants (around 1,000) had chosen virtual participation, with only around 400 scholars joining the congress in person. The precariousness of the situation preceding the event was adequately conveyed by the AILC-ICLA's then-incumbent President Sandra L. Bermann (Princeton University) as "a time shadowed by the pandemic, by economic crises, systemic racism and a surfeit of global inequities, but also energized by innovation, change, and hopes for the future" (2021, 3). Nevertheless, what had a noticeable impact on the conference proceedings was the fact that until the last moment, the hosts did not have the faintest idea of the exact proportion of physical and virtual attendance. The constitution of individual panels continuously varied, as within a single panel, some papers were delivered in person and others online, frequently without a moderator. Moreover, on account of the large number of original applications (e.g. the panel entitled "Words and Images Crossing Literary and Critical Borders" had 83 applicants), some panels even spread over three days, which hindered the interconnection of the content and curtailed the discussion. Frequently, for instance, English and French papers were often put together without prior authentication of the presenters' language competence and the potential discussion was inhibited. Despite the outward impression of the congress splitting into single, disconnected gatherings of small groups, it did serve its primary purpose of enabling the participants to establish common intellectual bonds and to frame a common academic debate.

With the first day of the congress reserved for the administrative agenda and registration, the opening ceremony was held on July 25, 2022, in the congress hall of the Radisson Hotel. The introductory program with the keynote papers was hosted by Sandra Bermann with the principal organizer, Irma Ratiani, President of the Georgian Comparative Literature Association. After the official orations, Ratiani delivered the introductory address on "Georgian Literature as Part of World Literary Heritage", examining the current position of Georgian literature in world literature as the lasting constituent of its cultural heritage (although not very extensive, thanks to its long cultural tradition it aspires to the highest aesthetic quality). Georgian literature is hardly in the position to impose the rules for the world literary area, yet it can point to 15 centuries of struggle to remain in the center of dominant cultural processes. This presentation was followed by the Slovenian scholar Marko Juvan's paper "How to Think World Literature from Its Edge?" based on his monograph, *Worlding a Peripheral Literature* (2019). Contrary to this publication, where he defended the concept of world literature as correlated with political-economic power, in his lecture, he placed greater emphasis on the importance of aesthetic-philosophical factors. First he outlined the previous concepts of world literature from Goethe to the models developed by David Damrosch (2009), Franco Moretti (2013), Frederic Jameson (1991), Emily Apter (2013), Pascale Casanova (1991), etc. These were derived from prevailing economic determinants and from the status of English as a universal language, and were reflected in the canonical tradition as well as in establishing various trans-cultural "networks". Furthermore, Juvan positively mentioned Dionýz Ďurišin's theory of interliterariness and its significance for discussions about

the aesthetic peculiarity of Slavic literatures. Determining the terminological difference between "global" and "world", he questioned the common binary opposition of "the center" and "the periphery" alluding to conflicts of values. At the same time, he drew an original outline of potential approaches to the creating and functioning of worldliness: a classical global system based on international literary greats and prestigious publishing houses and a "capillary worlding" which is traditionally perceived as "marginalized" for its minority character, and which occasionally employs or popularizes the activities of minor authors, critics, and translators. This type was exemplified by the initiative of the Austrian Peter Handke, who introduced the Slovenian Florjan Lipuš into world literature through translations into several world languages.

On July 26, Toshika Ellis of Nagoya, Japan, delivered her paper "Voices from the Margin: Poetic Defiance in Japan's Dark Times", which explored the strategies of poetical words and their receptive implications during World War II. Ellis analyzed English translations of five Japanese poets who in various ways, namely by deconstructing the lyrical subject, responded to acts of war and violence, as well as to the disintegration of individual and collective human identity. This was followed on July 27 by Jennifer Wallace of Cambridge University, whose paper "Global Plague, Local Pain: Mourning the Tragedy of Covid" searched for common ground between ancient tragedy and the concept of Raymond Williams, one of the British theoreticians and founding fathers of cultural studies. Similarly ambiguous was the metaphorical comparison between the Covid-19 pandemic and ancient drama in the panel she chaired, "Pandemic Imaginations", which discussed how the paradoxes of the pandemic molded its imaginative sources, and whether these had a positive or negative impact on art and literature.

The regular agenda was pursued in individual panels, among which three special sessions, introduced under the common heading of "Comparative Literature and Social Justice", assumed a unique position in the congress format because they facilitated wide-ranging discussions on literary and textual issues such as the anthropocene, racial segregation, and general linguistic challenges. Altogether, there were 55 thematically aligned team panels, where the most interconnected with the dominant idea of the congress included "East and West Literary and Cultural Paradigms", "Worlds and Images Crossing Literary and Critical Borders", "Colonial, Postcolonial, Decolonial and Neocolonial Experiences: Rewriting Cultural History", "Minor Literature, Small Literatures, Literature in Small Nations", as well as the panels "Comparative Literature and Oriental Literary Theory", "Small and Minority Literatures and Literary Historiography", and "World Literature and National Literature". One of the most original contributions was the latter panel, hosted online by the Hungarian scholar Péter Hajdu of Shenzhen University, China, who raised the issue of world literature's historical development as a discursive, heterogeneous "supersign", frequently profiled as the global canon. At the same rate, it called attention to the overlooked fact that during the Cold War, the circulation of world literature in the Eastern Bloc offered different opportunities from those in the democratic West. Thus in the socialist states, the whole

of literary production was recognized as world literature, with the exception of vernacular literature. Such were the origins of the concept formulating world literature as a collection of texts circulating beyond the boundaries of national literature. A pleasant return to traditional comparative themes could be found in the panel on "Pedagogy of Comparative Literature: Re-imagining", which mapped the teaching of comparative literature in various Asian regions. It also discussed the newly emerging subdiscipline of comparative literature didactics, focusing on the position of world literature in teaching national literature, which contributes to the radical transformation of the viewpoints of literary history.

The program was supplemented by panels that have reappeared frequently at congresses in the last two decades, like synoptic examinations of the current condition of comparative literature in particular countries (China, Japan, South Korea, Georgia, etc.). Still, the overwhelming majority of contributions represented the so-called "binary comparative approach" (synchronical comparison of texts from two national literatures and the issues of mutual influences); translatological studies (an overview of the translations of a major author in "small" literature), or papers on traditional thematology (e.g. the motif of dreams or urban areas in literary texts). For example, the special session on "Translating Difference: The Other in Other Words" asked whether translation is a means of world literature or a retroactive factor impacting national literature. All of the above-mentioned themes were summed up in one of the final panels moderated by Matthew Reynolds of Oxford University, entitled "Futures for Comparative Literary Research", which explored the issues of "minority" and "majority" literatures, media, multilingualism of cultures, the theory of interliterary process, and the concept of translation as a free metaphor in comparative literature. There were also provocatively-worded panels, for example, reflecting on the typological analogies and differences between Iranian and Basque literature, or the British historian Geoffrey Roberts's paper on "Stalin and Comparative Literature". The traditional area of comparative research comprising East-West Studies was innovatively approached by Haun Saussy in "The Differences that Asia Makes", where he highlighted the multiform structural profile of "Asian literature" and stressed the necessity to develop adequate theoretical terminology suitable for comparative study. In his subtle polemic against Claudio Guillén, rather than using synchronous typologies, Saussy preferred simple literary historical description of written, translated, or commented works which need not aspire to the attribute of "masterfulness".

In terms of the nationality of the participants, the trend of previous congresses was confirmed: the continued dominance of Chinese, Japanese, but also Korean comparative studies and a weaker representation of Slavic comparative studies, whose most prominent representative (and essentially their spokesperson) was Marko Juvan. The important position of Korea as a key representative of the Asian comparatist community was underlined by its winning the honor of hosting the XXIV Congress of the AILC-ICLA in Seoul in summer 2025, whose theme will be "Literatures in the Era of Hyperconnectivity: National Literatures, Comparative Literature and Technology".

Younger researchers were treated to a special welcome arranged by the AILC-ICLA Executive Committee, where they could join the discussion with

Sandra L. Bermann, together with Jaba Samushia, rector of the University of Tbilisi. The Early-Career Researcher Development Committee (ECARE), established in Vienna in 2016, had arranged prizes for the best conference paper in the form of financial support for the first book publication. Shortly before the congress started, the winner of the prestigious Anna Balakian Prize for significant achievement in the field of comparative literature was announced: May Hawas's monograph *Politicizing World Literature: Egypt, Between Pedagogy and the Public* (2019). This work explores a corpus of novels and travelogues written in English, French, Arabic, Italian (but also in Czech) that document Egypt's cultural relationship with different parts of the world in the past and present. Criticizing the ideological limits of postcolonial historicism, she analyzes the phenomenon of "reworlding" of Egyptian verbal texts in order to grasp their manifest and hidden inherent plurality and genre-thematic polyphony. The book awarded Honorable Mention, Joseph Cermatori's *Baroque Modernity: An Aesthetics of Theater* (2021), reflects on the function of Baroque theater in the formation of the avant-garde aesthetics of Modernism at the turn of the 20th century. Through a detailed analysis of direct and mediated influences and contacts, the author convincingly documented the baroque inspirations in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, Stephan Mallarmé, Walter Benjamin, and Gertrude Stein.

Several Czech and Slovak comparatists attended the Tbilisi congress, including Josef Hrdlička, Josef Šebek, and Anna Schubertová from Charles University in Prague. Hrdlička presented a paper on the function of dreams in the works of Czech expressionist Richard Weiner, Šebek demonstrated diverse types of "realisms" in the post-Stalinist novels of Ladislav Fuks, and Schubertová drew upon Georg Lukács's concept of socialist realism to evaluate the Czecho-Slovak discussions on this method following the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. In his paper on "The Chinese Dream: National Rejuvenation and Suspension of Political Agency", Johannes D. Kaminski (Institute of World Literature SAS, Bratislava) explored the semantic ambiguity of Chinese political rhetoric based on dream metaphor. The panel "Minor Literatures, Small Literatures in Small Nations" included the joint presentation by Anna Zelenková (Institute of Slavonic Studies CAS, Prague) and Agnieszka Janiec-Nyitrai (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest). Their paper, "The Central European Path to Worldliness of World Literature from the Point of View of So-Called Small Literatures" (published in the present issue of *World Literature Studies*) analyzed the works of four interwar writers (Karel Čapek, Witold Gombrowicz, Ivan Horváth, Sándor Márai) with the aim of documenting their varying attempts at reaching the status of world authors through their "Central European authenticity" and pointed to the "structural" mechanism to achieve this ideal state.

The same section hosted Miloš Zelenka's paper "La littérature mondiale du point de vue des littératures 'mineures' de conception tchèque et slovaque" on the discontinuous dialogue of "minority" and "majority" concepts of world literature, which was published as the opening article in the above-mentioned issue of *World Literature Studies* (2022). In harmony with Marko Juvan's reasoning, the author highlighted the importance of reviving the necessity of these areas of research in Central and

Eastern Europe. Regardless of the other terms being used alongside world literature, such as "literature of the world"; "worldliness"; "world literary system"; "the world republic of letters" etc., the methodological framework of the relevant discussion was most explicitly devised by Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti, and David Damrosch. The concept which emerges from their works is that world literature is as a system which texts enter through "big literatures", i.e. through circulation in a hegemonic language such as English (Gáfrik 2020, 115–116). Even so, the historical experience of Central and East European literatures reveals the fact that methodological discourse does not avail of any method or type of study, in literary research being implemented, by contrast, in different languages and diverse power relations. Theorists in these countries question the notion of such a "network" or standardized canon that would establish inequality as a kind of epistemological framework and the method of presenting the codifying binary antagonism of "developed" and "underdeveloped", or "center" and "periphery." On the other hand, it is impossible to ignore the real force of this hegemony which proclaims itself as universal and represents world literature as a correlate of political and economic power (Pokrivčák and Zelenka 2020, 182). Hence the latest issue, presented at the Congress as the chief contribution of the Czech and Slovak Association of Comparative Literature to its agenda, aimed at reflecting on the relation of "small" literatures to world literatures, while also raising epistemological and ethical questions.

Overall, the Congress raised a number of topics, primarily continuing to explore world literature as a historically and semantically variable category. Despite its limited hybrid format, it brought participants the pleasure of a beautiful meeting place. At the same time, it provided interesting panel discussions and intellectual pleasure from mutual sharing of research activities. We can only hope that further pandemics or other interruptions will not hinder the possibility of developing comparative literature as one of the crowning disciplines of literary studies. This idea was emotionally expressed by Sandra L. Bermann in July 2021, in the "intermediate phase" between congresses: "We aim for a future of deeper, more widespread collegial connections; of ongoing respect and curiosity about our world's diverse literary and cultural expressions; of pleasure in the pluralities of language; and of service to the everyday world and its educational institutions" (2021, 3).

When assessing the overall importance of the XXIII Congress of the AICL-ICLA, it is necessary to point out three aspects which plainly ensued from the themes of the papers as well as from the panel and offstage discussions:

1. *The unavoidable reinterpretation of the model of comparative studies from institutional and thematic perspectives*

Before the congress, Haun Saussy observed that the classical notion of comparative literature, as a field mostly concerned with the theoretical-historical aspect of supranational literary relations, is closely linked with the dysfunctional definition of history as a discipline (Saussy 2019). The demand for methodological, disciplinary and thematic expansion in the direction of related humanities disciplines stems not only from a radical change in the research paradigm, but also from the different social situation at the beginning of the 21st century, which led

to a greater intensity of travel, mutual contacts, and migration, with a deeper "intertwining" of languages and ethnic groups, poetics, ideologies, etc. It is obvious that the theoretical reflection of this complex relationship can enrich the traditional horizons and methods of our comparing. Saussy proposed that the Association establish relations with "friendly" or "allied" researchers who are not primarily perceived as "comparatists" but whose approach necessarily includes a comparative dimension: this is a large group of translators of artistic literature, writers and journalists, dramaturgists and editors, who adapt literary works intertextually for the various needs of the public.

2. *The point of view of so-called "small" national literatures, which create their own idea of world literature*

Following the results from Macau 2019, the Congress definitively confirmed (as was evident in the positive response to Marko Juvan's opening speech) that world literature should be viewed not from the dominant "centers", but also from its edges. Above all, it is a matter of balancing the ratio of extra-literary moments (the size of the country and the degree of universality of the chosen language) and purely aesthetic factors. Texts from so-called small literatures, in order to permanently enter the imaginary "pantheon", must be more intensively prepared to base their "worldliness" on the ability to constitute the world in the form of aestheticizing national conditions. Generally speaking: world literature does not exist as a single and monolithic universal, as it does not manifest itself in literary practice in a general form, but it exists always in its local, areal, regional, national and socio-cultural forms.

3. *The revitalization of the term "national literature", which does not mean the semantic "bracketing" of this traditional category*

Although at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, colonization, global migration, and the emergence of multi-ethnic postcolonial states (especially in South-Eastern Europe and in various parts of the Asian context) destabilized the notion of a national literature derived from both geographical location and language. While in the case of location, national literature represents a multilingual and multicultural conglomerate, i.e. a kind of minimized "world literature", in the second case, a common language classifies the literatures of different nations into one whole. From these premises, which remind us of Ďurišin's contradiction between inter-literary communities and inter-literary centrism (1998, 8), a simple conclusion can be drawn that every national literature is, paradoxically, always world literature.

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Zelenka, Miloš. 2022. "The Concept of World Literature in Czech and Slovak Comparative Literary Studies." *World Literature Studies* 14, 2: 5–30. DOI: https://doi.org/10.31577/WLS.2022.14.2.1.

XXIII International Congress of the AILC-ICLA in Tbilisi

Comparative literature. World literature. "Literature of the world." Theory of translation. Postcolonialism. Intercultural studies.

This article is a report on the XXIII International Congress of the AILC-ICLA, a hybrid event dedicated to researching various aspects of world literature that was held in Tbilisi in July 2022. It evaluates the keynote papers presented by Irma Ratiani (Georgia), Marko Juvan (Slovenia), Toshiko Ellis (Japan) and Jennifer Wallace (UK). The main lecture on Central and East European literatures, Juvan's keynote "How to Think World Literature from its Edge?" examined worldliness as both a global system based on international authorities and prestigious publishing houses and as a capillary worlding that, due to its minority character, popularizes the activities of lesser-known writers. The Congress's viewpoint not from the perspective of the Anglophone "centers", but from its margins, enabled the reflection of a number of other subtopics such as the issue of so-called minor literature, gender, postcolonialism, digital culture, intermediality, interculturality, etc. The general conclusions reached at the Congress can be formulated as follows: 1. the reinterpretation of comparative literature from institutional and thematic perspectives, 2. the point of view of so-called small literatures, and 3. the revitalization of the term "national literature".

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MICHAELA PEŠKOVÁ: Vladimir Sorokin: The Future of Russia

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Vladimir Sorokin is one of the key names in the Russian literary scene of the post-Soviet period. Creating works known for their stylistic and narrative "breakdowns", he has achieved the status of one of the most shocking writers, whose work has elicited a wide range of reactions, ranging from rapture to accusations of pornography and coprophilia. By brutally murdering his characters, forcing them to perform absurd rituals and speak in newspaper clichés, by skillfully simulating different styles of writing, Sorokin actively deconstructed and demythologized hegemonic discourses of the past in his early works. With the rise of authoritarianism in Russia at the beginning of the 21st century, Sorokin's attention shifted from the country's past to its present state, but not in its synchronicity. The present is perceived by the writer as a prerequisite for the future of the country, culture, and language. It is to these "futurological" texts that Michaela Pešková has devoted her English-language monograph *Vladimir Sorokin: The Future of Russia*, published in Pilsen in 2022.

The author of the monograph has focused her attention on four of Sorokin's books which form a kind of "prognostic" cycle: *Den' oprichnika* (2007, *The Day of the Oprichnik*, 2010), *Telluria* (2013), *Manaraga* (2017) and *Doctor Garin* (2021). The choice of the works under analysis is justified because, as the author convincingly argues, all four of them share an ideological connection, through which they form a single fictional space at different fictional times (in the world of comics or fantasy literature, this would be called Sorokin's "universe").

As the title of the monograph implies, the key research aspect for its author is Sorokin's vision of the future of Russia. Therefore, the analysis at the thematic level prevails, but other aspects are also considered. These are first of all the ways and specificity in organization and functioning of literary space and time, as well as the language of the novels. Moreover, the latter is analyzed using rather effective quantitative methods, which, however, do not remain at the level of "dry" figures and are interpreted conjunctly with the analysis of the ideological dimension of the novels. The tables and charts, which contain data about the frequency of the use of relevant place names and examples of the transformation of real motifs into fantasy genre, are particularly useful (23). The author herself defines semiotic method and discourse analysis as her main research methods.

In the introduction and the first part of the monograph, the author introduces the reader to the issues, proposing a number of hypotheses (all of them are confirmed at the end of the book). According to one of the stand-out hypotheses, the starting point for Sorokin's modelling of the future is the idea of Russia becoming extinct. Pešková also argues against the simplistic understanding of Sorokin's novels as a satire on Russia's current political order, since in her view they constitute "a genuine attempt to anticipate where Russia's development is heading", "a projection of general social and technological changes", and are also "metatexts" exploring the nature of utopia and anti-utopia genres (8).

In the first thematic chapter, the author analyzes *The Day of the Oprichnik*, a book many have called prophetic, in terms of how Sorokin reinterprets and reintegrates Russia's medieval past into an imaginary future world, through the transposition of realia, the use

of archaic language, and compositional techniques referring to the bylina genre. It also presents the structure of a fictional post-imperialist, isolationist society with its inherent mechanisms of power, noting that this novel "extends its interpretive potential to any form of totalitarian government, past or present" (48). In the chapter on *Telluria*, the novel with the most intense and extravagant spatial structure, Pešková discusses Sorokin's approach to a subject which is atypical for Russian literature, that of Russia's collapse: "the revival is only possible through diminution" (60). She also highlights the postcolonial character of the fictional micro-states created by Sorokin and the respective hybrid character of fictional languages.

The final chapter, on *Manaraga* and *Doctor Garin*, contains a valuable example of immersion into their novelistic worlds, through which the author has managed to reconstruct the internal chronology between all the novels in the cycle. Pešková notes that for the world of *Manaraga*, Russia as such does not exist, and even the contemplations over the reasons for its disappearance, although still present, are losing their relevance. In the monograph's conclusion, which summarizes and recapitulates the content of the previous parts, one may be interested in a table listing the attributes of "Russianness" contained in the novels and their gradual disappearance from novel to novel (98). It is noteworthy that the last "survivor" in this table turned out to be Russian literature.

Pešková's monograph has no ambition to be an exhaustive resource on Sorokin's body of work, but with its narrowed thematical focus and broader methodological focus, it could be useful for expanding the knowledge of the writer's later work, particularly since the themes raised by Sorokin himself and analyzed in the monograph are more relevant in the present situation than ever. On a critical note, there are a few formal shortcomings, and the lack of translation of quotations from Russian into English seems like a missed opportunity for attracting a broader audience. I think that the monograph is a worthy addition not only to Czech and Slovak "Sorokinology" (among the already existing texts by Tomáš Glanc, Zuzana Močková-Lorková, Helena Ulbrechtová etc.), but also to the international body of analytical texts about this influential Russian writer.

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MARKÉTA KŘÍŽOVÁ – JITKA MALEČKOVÁ (eds.): Central Europe and the Non-European World in the Long 19th Century

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The volume *Central Europe and the Non-European World in the Long 19th Century* edited by Czech historians affiliated with Charles University in Prague, Markéta Křížová and Jitka Malečková, is a contribution to the slowly growing literature on the relationship of the various regions of Central Europe to the non-European world. Although its main thrust is historical, it also contains chapters devoted to art and literature.

There is already quite a substantial research literature on the topic in the regional languages. However, volumes synthesizing the scattered findings under the wider umbrella of Central Europe or a similar supranational term in English are quite rare.

A German volume edited by Robert Born and Sarah Lemmen entitled *Orientalismen in Ostmitteleuropa: Diskurse, Akteure und Disziplinen vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (2014) was, as far as I know, the first significant attempt to bring together scholars researching this topic (for my review of the book see *World Literature Studies* 1/2015). In this regard, I would like to mention that two issues of *World Literature Studies* were exclusively devoted to exploring the images of the non-European world in Central and East European literatures: "Frontier Orientalism in Central and East European literatures" (1/2018), edited by Charles Sabatos and the author of the present review, and "Images of Remote Countries in the Literatures of Central and Eastern Europe" (2/2019), edited by Anton Pokrivčák and Miloš Zelenka.

The volume under review gathers contributions presented on a panel at the Sixth European Congress on World and Global History, which was organized by the European Network in Universal and Global History in Turku, Finland, in June 2021. This is probably one of the reasons that no attempt was made to treat the topic exhaustively. As a consequence, the focus is on the Ottoman Empire and the Turks, and some regions which played an important role in the European imagination of the Orient in the 19th century, such as India, hardly find a mention. The editors, as they write in the introduction, are aware of this limitation and of the problematic character of the term "non-European". They also take a position on other problematic terms used in the title of the volume, "Central Europe" and "the 19th century". Given the temporal context of the long 19th century, they define Central Europe as the region of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In addition, it should be noted that the editors took inspiration especially from (post)colonial studies. As stated by them, the texts collected in the volume show that "the persistent oscillation between the self-perception as those dominating and those being dominated constitutes one of the characteristics of Central European self-fashioning in the modern era" (16).

In the first contribution, Robert Born examines Orientalist/Orientalizing paintings of a number of artists associated with the region of Central Europe. He comes to the conclusion that they were influenced by centers of academic painting in Paris, Munich and Vienna. However, Born also notices differences due to respective national traditions and prevailing political agendas. Jitka Malečková focuses on non-fictional Czech writings about the Ottoman Empire and Bosnia-Herzegovina from the late 19th and early 20th century and searches for an answer to the question whether it reflects colonial ambitions. She concludes that Czechs adopted the Western colonial rhetoric without having previous colonial experiences and calls this kind of colonialism "borrowed colonialism", which is a term originally suggested by Selim Deringil.

In the next chapter, Charles Sabatos turns his attention to literary fiction and explores the impact of the early modern Ottoman invasions on 19th-century Slovak culture. From his analysis it follows that the Slovak writers of the late Habsburg era diverged from the dominant Orientalist rhetoric. Sabatos uses Edward Said's terms "hidden elements of kinship" and "sympathetic identification" to describe their literary adaptations of legends featuring Turks as Romantic heroes. Markéta Křížová focuses on scientific expeditions, museum exhibits, ethnographic shows, and travelogues which originated in the Czech lands of the second half of the 19th and the early 20th century and presented "savages" especially from North America and Africa. She sees Czechs and Germans living in the Czech lands as competitors for political power, wealth, and prestige. Czech and German intellectuals are supposed to have transformed their "defensive nationalism into offensive one, positioning themselves and their fellow citizens alongside the imperial powers of Western Europe" (30). However, the Czechs, according to Křížová, showed some sympathy with those who were

subject of oppression. Bálint Varga explores the activities of Hungarian Catholic missionaries in China and Portuguese Southeast Africa (Mozambique). He comes to the conclusion that their writings and public activities were tinged with colonial concepts and prejudices, despite the fact that they did not come from a colonizing country.

The last chapter of the volume by Barbara Lüthi does not concentrate on any historical, visual, or literary material, but serves rather as a kind of theoretical conclusion. Unfortunately, Lüthi seems to have completely done away with the concept of Orientalism and sees only colonialism in Central Europe, more precisely, a special version of colonialism, "colonialism without colonies". However, in my opinion, we lose a significant insight by abandoning the concept of Orientalism in the discussion of colonialism, especially of one without colonies. Orientalism is not only an aspect of colonialism; it is its very foundation. I do not deny the fact that the concept of "colonialism without colonies" helps to show that even countries without colonies in some way profited from colonialism. Nevertheless, as Lüthi herself states while discussing Ulla Vuorela's concept of "complicit colonialism", there is a danger of "being 'seduced' by universal thinking and practices of domination" (205–206). Isn't the broad application of the concept of "colonialism without colonies" to Central Europe also a case of such a seduction?

Both the editors in the introduction and Barbara Lüthi in her chapter notice that the depictions of the Turks in Slovak literature as discussed by Charles Sabatos are conspicuous by the absence of "the position of strength". The editors also admit that the term "colonialism" "does not exhaust the entire reality of colonial entanglements" (31). I believe that these statements point to the need for developing a concept of intercultural relations that would take into account the operation of power, but at the same go beyond the conceptualization of these relations as power relations. The historian's task is to narrate and interpret the past, thus not only describing but also constructing a world. A question one may ask, therefore, is whether it is possible to improve upon the construction of intercultural relations, including colonial ones, as practices of conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed. Namely, if we conceptualize the relations between the various racial, ethnic or cultural groups predominantly as agonistic, we obliterate their complexity. In my opinion, instead of taking inspiration from (post)colonial studies with their primary concern with power, conflict, and guilt, further research on the imagining of the non-European world in Central Europe would benefit from a conceptual framework based on imagology and intercultural studies. I think that especially the chapters by Robert Born and Charles Sabatos indicate this more nuanced approach.

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MATTHIAS SCHWARTZ – NINA WELLER – HEIKE WINKEL (eds.): After Memory: World War II in Contemporary Eastern European Literatures

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The reviewed collective monograph has been edited by three cultural studies scholars from Germany: Matthias Schwartz of the Leibniz Center for Literary and Cultural Research in Berlin, Nina Weller of the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), and Heike Winkel of the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge in Berlin. The contributing scholars are Slavicists and cultural studies scholars based across Europe (Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Russia, Estonia, Austria, Romania), as well as in the USA, and include well-known names such as Ernst van Alphen, Kris van Heuckelom and Aleksandra Ubertowska.

The transformation of memory studies in recent decades has led to the emergence of new concepts and notions. Memory is no longer identified with a static "archive", but with a dynamic "force field" of individual and collective values, which are constantly subject of discussion, revision and re-evaluation. In addition, postmodern historiography has completely changed the way we think about and re-tell the past, introducing new concepts such as "historiographic metafiction" (Linda Hutcheon), "second degree history" (Pierre Nora), "post-memory" (Marianne Hirsch), or "restorative and reflexive nostalgia" (Svetlana Boym). The book under review enters this discussion with a collection of 16 studies analyzing memory cultures reflecting World War II, with a focus on contemporary literature from "Eastern Europe", which they define as postsocialist European countries.

The central premise of the book is that "The situation in postsocialist Europe as a whole is one 'after memory': until the end of the 1980s, a socialist culture of remembrance with a corresponding pool of collective memory existed, maintained by state institutions and appropriated by people practicing diverse forms of 'warped' mourning. But this collective memory was discarded, destroyed and, in part, has already been forgotten after the breakdown of state socialism" (2). The central question the editors ask is, "What role do literary texts play in this newly configured context after memory?" (2) In other words, the book is interested in literary revisions of the history of World War II after the fall of the communist regimes, when the socialist "master narrative" could be challenged and previously marginalized narratives and taboo topics could be brought out into the open for the first time. The problem this poses is that those private memories had been suppressed and repressed for a long time, because sharing them, even with the closest of family members, was risky. Memories that are not shared, written down, and passed on tend to be forgotten. How, after decades of oblivion, can such silenced, unresolved or unprocessed traumatic past be dealt with in literature? How do contemporary writers from Eastern Europe reconstruct those memories that had not been passed on, how do they write about events they do not remember and memories they cannot access, since their parents or grandparents kept silent about them due to fear, trauma, or both?

The key concept in the book is the transgenerational transmission of traumatic experience, which has been theorized by scholars such as Marianne Hirsch, Sigrid Weigel, or Astrid Erll. The editors ask: "Can trauma be transferred between generations, or should any treatment of the topic be rather called posttraumatic, where 'post' is understood in the sense of 'beyond'?" (10) Marianne Hirsch's term "post-memory" (alternatively postmemory or post memory) describes a situation in which traumatic memories are not transmitted across gener-

ations, or are done so in an encrypted form. The subsequent generation fills in the memory gap with substitute memories (memories of others conveyed through the media) which are either consciously or subconsciously adopted and appropriated. This implies a change of perspective, because now a generation that is not haunted by the past takes over, adopting transmitted images as they see fit. For Schwartz, Weller, and Winkel, this means that "collective traumata or memories of World War II, the Holocaust or the Gulag no longer serve as the constitutive moments of every artistic production but become the subject of imaginary adoptions of the past themselves" (11).

Postmodern literature, drama, and cinema about World War II has been the subject of many contemporary studies that have analyzed the way these artistic forms deal with, reflect and revise the traumatic past. The present book's original contribution to this debate is in its focus on historical fiction's imaginative and affective quality, rather than a historiographic or documentary one. Today, when the debate about World War II has moved to an open public forum that includes anyone who cares to contribute to it, especially in the online space, literature no longer has a pivotal mediating function when it comes to tabooed and marginalized issues. The loss of this communicative function has led to a reinforcement of literature's imaginative quality, its capacity for inventing fictional worlds, responding to readers' demands for escapist virtual realities and often deliberately reflecting on its fabrication. As Matthias Schwarz explains, "historical novels 'after memory' are now increasingly reloading these emotionally extremely charged forms – images or narrations – with completely different, contemporary sentiments and imaginary identifications. In other words, the topicality of the historical novel lies in the fact that its specific form – average heroes, moments of social crisis, unusual perspectives – offers the possibility of staging situations that may have to do with affective and ethical dimensions of the past but which could also treat current popular topics, desires and fashions in quite different ways within the historical garb" (435). Such literature is no longer concerned with how the past affects the present, but focuses on what the present makes out of the past affectively and imaginatively. Such subversions, revisions and reinventions of normalized and ideologized representations maintain a distance from contemporary memory and history discourses and create imaginary alternatives to previous narratives. A representative example of this is post-Soviet speculative fiction that reimagines history in which Nazi Germany won World War II.

The articles in the book are divided into four sections, which are, however, closely related and overlapping. Part I, "Imaginary Adoptions: Family Histories and Personal Legacies", focuses on the social frames of personal and family histories, reconstructed here by third-generation authors who engage with formerly unknown family histories. Among other themes, the essays (by Stephenie Young, Kris van Heuckelom, Dana Mihăilescu and Ernst van Alphen) treat memories of World War II from former Yugoslavia by Angela Courtney Brkic, Russian literary and cinema representations of the Gulag by Dmitrii Bykov or Andrei Zviagintsev, third-generation novels from Poland and Belgium about the Holocaust by Piotr Pazinski and Erwin Mortier, or ghost-written Romanian memoirs of child survivors of extermination camps based on the experiences of Leah Kaufman and Sara Tuvel Bernstein.

Part II, "Revisionist Appropriations: National Belongings and Collective Identities", whose contributors include Roman Dubasevych, Maria Galina, Davor Beganović, Joanna Nizynska, is dedicated to the symbolic and imaginary reinvention of a nation's past. The studies in this part analyze how works of literature can function as pioneering testing grounds to offer new collective identities, to contest and revise normalized narratives. The literary works analyzed in this part are novels such

as the Ukrainian Iurii Vynnychuk's *Tango smerti* (2012; *Tango of Death*, 2019), popular post-soviet speculative fiction such as Viacheslav Shpakov's *Esli by Gitler vzial Moskvu* (If Hitler had captured Moscow, 2009) or Georgii Zotov's *Moskau* (2012), and post-communist Serbian novels such as *Noc generala* (The night of the general, 1994) by Vuk Drashkovic or *Kostantinovo rakrsce* (Constantine's junction, 2010) by Dejan Stojiljkovic. There is also a chapter on Polish memory sites such as the Warsaw Uprising Museum or the Museum of World War II in Gdańsk.

Part III, "Fictional Interventions: Alternative Narratives and Subverted Mythologies", is directly related to the previous section, dealing with literary histories that intervene in the normalized, official narratives of the Holocaust that have been shaped by the political interests of ruling parties in contemporary Russia, Poland and Hungary. The authors in this section (Alexandra Ubertowska, Brigitte Obermayr, Stephan Krause and Nina Weller) discuss for example the novels by the Polish writers Andrzej Bart and Igor Ostachowicz, controversial speculative fiction by the Russian writers Vladimir Sorokin, Andrei Lazarchuk or Andrei Turgenev (pen-name of Viacheslav Kuritsyn), or postmodern historical novels by the Hungarian authors László Martin, Zsuzsa Takács and Pál Závada.

Part IV, "Imaginative Reconfigurations: Average Heroes and Ambivalent Subjectivities", focuses primarily on fictionalized biographies (or autobiographical fictions) that have exceeded and transformed the conventions of trauma memoirs and survivor narratives. The authors (Heike Winkel, Tiina Kirss, Rutt Hinrikus, Madlene Hagemann, Gernot Howanitz and Matthias Schwartz) analyze works that have been published in the 21st century, including novels by the Czech Radka Denemarková and the Polish-Silesian Szczepan Twardoch, a Czech graphic novel by Jaroslav Rudiš and Jaromír Švejdík, and autobiographical fictions by the Estonian and Latvian (female) writers Leelo Tungal, Elin Toona, and Ene Mikhelson.

This collective monograph is an important and original contribution to cultural memory studies. Its depth and breadth is highly impressive, as well as its range of references. Working with some of the most recent theoretical impulses and mapping new literary production from across postsocialist Europe, including experimental postmodern genres such as the graphic novel, speculative fiction, fantasy, and "spectral" or "phantom" narratives, complemented by illustrations, the volume brings fresh insights into cultural memory studies, trauma studies and the study of the postmodern historical novel. The editors are to be commended also for including art in addition to scholarly studies: a poem and images by bellu&bellu, presented as a conceptual work of art that engages with "dominant historiographies and the relations of power, which often remain invisibly inscribed in mundane surroundings" (459). The book will be of high interest to literary and cultural studies scholars and could well be adopted for university courses on World War II literature.

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BERTRAND WESTPHAL: Atlas des égaraments: Études géocritiques [Atlas of bewilderment: geocritical studies]

Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2019. 192 pp. ISBN 978-2707345370

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Bertrand Westphal is a French professor and researcher in comparative literature, which he considers a fragile and fascinating discipline, and he has introduced the term geocriticism, which can be loosely defined as a science of literary spaces. His monograph *Atlas des égarements: Études géocritiques* (Atlas of bewilderment: geocritical studies) is a collection of lectures (given in various places between 2013 and 2018) presenting and citing a wide range of writers, artists, and philosophers. Westphal defines geocriticism as a dynamic discipline studying interactions between real and fictional spaces. Despite the short existence of this discipline, it is becoming increasingly studied in interdisciplinary approaches to literature alongside disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, urbanism, architecture. The publication under review is of an informative nature but at the same time it offers geocritical analyses of chosen phenomena.

In the last century, there has been renewed interest in the study of space in literature, after the so-called spatial turn Westphal writes about in his theory. Westphal reflects on the perception of space in *Atlas des égarements*. But what led the author to use this phrase as the title? At the beginning of the publication, there is an explanation of the title, which is very convenient, as the title itself may be misleading or vague. In dictionaries, *égarement* is a state of being confused or lost, but it also means to turn away from what is right (physically or morally). Westphal provides his own definition: to leave a station/parking lot. For the word *atlas*, he borrows Georges Didi-Huberman's definition, saying that an atlas is a dynamic composition of heterogeneity (17). The word heterogeneity repeatedly appears in the text and represents the essence of the world and one of the principles of the discipline in question.

The book under review starts with an apposite quote: "On dit que la carte n'est pas le territoire" (9; "The map is not the territory", trans. T.G.). Westphal, inspired by Alfred Korzybski's claim on the representation by words and images (a map), agrees that a map does not show the complete reduction of a referent (a territory). In today's world, there is a tendency to believe that a map represents a territory to ensure certainty. However, Korzybski is not the only one to claim that maps do not reproduce the world in its true nature. Throughout the book, variances between the maps and the territories are demonstrated and several different points of view on what the territory is are introduced; e.g. Estrella de Diego's comment that the territory is nothing but a cultural pact. She was perhaps inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's famous terms *déterritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation*. After all, Westphal himself was inspired by the two philosophers when defining the principles of geocriticism.

Referring to the work of French journalist and writer Alain Schifres, Westphal's chapter "Cartographies mobiles" (Mobile cartographies) reflects on the reliability of maps, and depicts the contrast between a real paper map and online tools such as GPS, Google Maps, Google Earth, etc. Although it is believed that a map should be the most exact representation of the world, is it not the most misleading one? He follows up with a question on the stability and seriousness of the world's image presented in maps. Unfortunately, although it desires to reflect reality and the present time, representation is always delayed. In his book *How to Lie with Maps* (1991), the professor of geography and the environment Mark Monmonier says that

a map is just one of countless representations of a situation. If we want to reproduce a three-dimensional world on paper we must deform reality. It is no longer certain what exactly a territory is.

In the next chapter, "La carte pourpre" (The purple map), Westphal refers to the Tibetan writer Tsering Woeser, who published the controversial monograph *Notes sur le Tibet* (Notes on Tibet, 2004), which is no longer available in French, English, or Mandarin. Woeser believes that maps are magic; they give her a sensation of vertigo. She compares them to labyrinths, since they create a feeling of being completely lost. By "traveling" on a map, she says, we can discover an explorer in each of us. After all, a map is a strange object: it is not our experience, but one lived by someone else and as we relive it, we personalize, modify, and bring new subjectivity into it. By creating a map, we reconstruct the world, meaning that it is not stable anymore.

There is more to discover about the constant instability of representations of our planet in the chapter "La dérivés des continents" (Derivation of the continents). The interpretation and description of places will never grasp the world's true substance. Following one of the principles of geocriticism, there is a huge space for subjectivity in understanding the world.

The chapter "La géocritique au cribles des espaces brésiliens" (Geocriticism in the sieves of Brazilian spaces) is divided into ten keywords, each one representing a definition of geocriticism. The first key word, postmodern, reflects on what a map is capable of representing given that the world is an unstable phenomenon. The keywords are interconnected by assenting to this global instability. Through *multifocalisation*, another keyword, we can get multiple perspectives on things – but what and where is the value of these points of view? Westphal reflects on this problem through the example of the classic Brazilian movie *Boca de Ouro*, and explains another keyword, *stratigraphy*, showing that spatial representation is never the same and homogeneous. The Brazilian translator and writer Alberto Mussa's book *O senhor do lado esquerdo* (2011; *The Mystery of Rio*, 2013) imagines research conducted on a quarter in Rio de Janeiro in 1913. He uses the concept of stratigraphy to expose the history of this city from its foundation through the crimes that happened there. It goes without saying that the reception of places and situations differed from person to person. Finally, the abovementioned keyword *déterritorialisation* is defined by João Machado as a space that refuses to adapt itself to a map. Latin-American artists often use maps and cartographic motifs to offer their own vision of the world. Machado grasps the world in his collage *Swimming*, showing a man swimming in the Atlantic, in which the seawater is represented by pieces of maps all around him as if the world had become liquid and decomposed. He liberates the space and makes it unconventional.

It is worth noting that the word *criticism* is featured in the name of the discipline. Westphal criticizes an exhibition at the Centre George-Pompidou and the Grand Halle de la Villette featuring the Congolese sculptor and artist Bodys Isek Kingelez. Although the exhibition's goals were to reunite artists from around the world to sum up the state of contemporary art, it raised questions on how we manifest the world's heterogeneity when the dominant culture is an Occidental one. The title of the chapter, "Kimbembele Ihunga", represents the name of a village (which has not existed on maps since 2015) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as a 1994 work by Kingelez depicting urban life in his home village. Kingelez imagines how his home village could plausibly be. Presented at New York's MOMA, in Parisian exposition halls and elsewhere, he says that he is like a stranger in the Congo, where he is not recognized, and criticizes globalization.

Globalization goes hand in hand with borders. The chapters "Mapas invertidos" and "Hors de la cage ou le Liechtenstein déchainé" (Out of the cage or Liechtenstein

unchained) deal with border phenomena. Long ago, people demarked their space only in relation to nature, and rivers or mountains represented borders, but later, an interdisciplinary shift occurred. European geography went together with geometry and geopolitics, and in the 17th or 18th centuries, debates on geography were mainly political. The French sound poet Bernard Heidsieck claims that most of the time we perceive in maps static representations of a stiff world.

The chapter "Lignes de villes, lignes de vie" (Lines of cities, lines of life) discusses the lines that are present everywhere and their relation to cities, maps and, finally, to life. But lines can also be considered as limits or borders. They introduce the heterogeneity of the world, for example, the lines of a city are wanted by urbanists and city governments and, from the *flaneurs*' or readers' perspective, they can have various representations.

To conclude, *l'espace* (space), city, or map are narratives that are not univocal. Thanks to their ambiguity we can read literary works as a puzzle and perceive them in their decomposed form. The interdisciplinarity of geocriticism allows for the illustration of combined zones where new perceptions are created. The monograph *Atlas des égarements: Études géocritiques* represents a diverse way of applying geocritical analysis to a variety of subjects. Even though Bertrand Westphal's reflections on space do not constitute an extensive theoretical consideration of geocritical theory, the book is interesting to read and very enriching. However, it should be said that prior knowledge of the subject and its sometimes esoteric terminology would be beneficial, if one is to properly understand the book.

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JANA TRUHLÁŘOVÁ: Dlhá cesta k porozumeniu. Émile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant v slovenskej literatúre a kritike [A long way to understanding. Émile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant in Slovak literature and criticism]

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Monografia Jany Truhlářovej *Dlhá ceta k porozumeniu. Émile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant v slovenskej literatúre a kritike* sa venuje, ako už jej názov napovedá, problematike slovenskej recepcie troch najvýznamnejších francúzskych románopiscov druhej polovice 19. storočia. Truhlářová ňou prispieva na jednej strane k aktuálnemu výskumu francúzskej literárnej vedy, starostlivo mapujúcemu ohlasy a vplyvy francúzskych autorov na inonárodné literatúry, na strane druhej k hlbšiemu pochopeniu formovania slovenskej literatúry v období od konca 19. do konca 20. storočia, a to z pohľadu komplexnosti vzťahov, ktoré vznikli medzi domácou tvorbou a impulzmi prichádzajúcimi od spomínaných troch autorov.

Monografia podáva ucelený a podrobný, dá sa povedať vyčerpávajúci, pohľad na dejiny recepcie Émila Zolu, Gustava Flauberta a Guy de Maupassanta v slovenskom kultúrnom a literárnom prostredí, pričom je koncipovaná na základe intenzity polemík, ktoré sprevádzali diskusie okolo jednotlivých spisovateľov – od radikálne zaujatého postoja voči Zolovi, cez menej odmietavú, no podobne problematickú recepciu Flaubertovho diela, až po napohľad najjednoduchšie prijatie Maupassantovej krátkej prózy. Autorka spája

svoje odborné znalosti spoločensko-historických a kultúrno-literárnych súvislostí vývoja francúzskej literatúry, konkrétne francúzskeho románu 19. storočia, s precíznym poznaním a analýzou formovania slovenskej literatúry v kontexte faktorov podmieňujúcich prijímanie inonárodných (najmä západných) literatúr, do ktorého pre potreby porovnania zahŕňa aj prehľad medzinárodnej recepcie diel týchto spisovateľov.

Recepcia akéhokoľvek diela je priamo podmienená nielen literárnym, ale aj spoločensko-politickým kontextom prijímajúcej kultúry. Z tohto dôvodu má dôležité postavenie úvodná štúdia monografie „Slovenská kultúra a francúzska próza 19. storočia", v ktorej autorka načrtáva komplikovanú situáciu, v akej sa nachádzala slovenská kultúra 2. polovice 19. storočia a dáva ju do súvisu s diametrálne odlišnou dobovou atmosférou vo Francúzsku. Po neúspešnom úsilí štúrovskej generácie o presadenie politickej a kultúrnej národnej svojbytnosti a po rakúsko-uhorskom vyrovnaní v roku 1867 nastalo obdobie represívnej maďarizácie. Spisovatelia nadväzujúci na romantickú štúrovskú generáciu teda v akomsi „obrannom mechanizme" upevňovali orientáciu na národné a morálne hodnoty, ktoré mala literatúra presadzovať (16 – 17). Hlavnou autoritou v tomto smere sa stal Svetozár Hurban Vajanský, ktorého postoj, ako ukazuje Truhlářová najmä v súvislosti s takmer až „diabolizáciou" Zolovej tvorby, mal zásadný vplyv na recepciu francúzskych románopiscov v slovenskej literatúre a kultúre. Moralizujúco-idealizujúce požiadavky na literárnu tvorbu totiž boli v absolútnom rozpore s vládnucim duchom pozitivizmu a scientizmu a s ním nastupujúcich realistických a naturalistických tendencií vo francúzskom románe daného obdobia. Diskusia o potrebe realistického zobrazovania skutočnosti však prebiehala od 80. rokov 19. storočia aj v slovenskom kultúrnom prostredí. Autorka analyzuje rozhodujúcu úlohu, ktorú v tejto súvislosti zohral pražský spolok Detvan, kde sa od roku 1882 utváralo nové smerovanie slovenskej literatúry (21 – 22) v rozpore s konzervatívnym a rusofilne orientovaným krídlom intelektuálnych kruhov. Jedným zo zásadných a určujúcich literárnych sporov bol práve tzv. „spor o Émila Zolu", ktorý otvára prvú kapitolu monografie.

Kapitola „Émile Zola alebo pohoršenie" mapuje náročnú a rozporuplnú cestu recepcie tohto románopisca v slovenskom prostredí. Svoju analýzu začína Truhlářová uvedením do problematiky naturalistickej poetiky autora, východísk a metód jeho experimentálneho románu, ako aj nahliadnutím do súčasných zolovských výskumov vo francúzskej literárnej vede. Svoju pozornosť ďalej presúva priamo k dobovej recepcii Zolovej tvorby, pričom dáva do kontrastu situáciu v okolitých krajinách, kde systematicky vychádzali preklady jeho románov už od začiatku 80. rokov 19. storočia, a na Slovensku, kde sa dlho neobjavili žiadne, neskôr len časopisecké a fragmentárne preklady. Dôvodom tejto absencie bol ostrý odmietavý postoj voči Zolovmu dielu, ktorý vo svojich textoch opakovane formulovali dve mienkotvorné autority, Svetozár Hurban Vajanský a Jozef Škultéty. Autorka detailne analyzuje ich vyjadrenia, konštatuje ich moralizátorskú všeobecnosť bez hlbšej znalosti Zolovho diela, ale najmä zhodnocuje ich „ďalekosiahle dôsledky" pre vývoj slovenskej literatúry, keďže „mladá generácia autorov sa až na výnimky neodvážila o Zolovi otvorene písať ani o ňom uvažovať" (63). Takouto výnimkou bol Ladislav Nádaši-Jégé, ktorého autorka vyzdvihuje ako jediného dobového nestranného kritika Zolovej tvorby, najmä v recenzii na román *Peniaze* (1891), a zároveň ako jediného autora slovenskej literatúry, inšpirovaného, hoci nepriznane, naturalizmom aj vo svojom vlastnom diele.

Truhlářová ďalej opisuje recepciu Émila Zolu v 20. storočí, zhodnocuje publikované preklady jeho diela aj kritickú reflexiu jeho tvorby. Ako však autorka uvádza, až do 50. rokov 20. storočia je prítomnosť Zolových diel v slovenských prekladoch a kritike veľmi malá: čiastočne z dôvodu pretrvávajúcej nedôvery, čiastočne z dôvodu zmeny literárnych záujmov. Významnými medz-

níkmi sú práve roky 1951, keď vyšiel prvý knižný preklad románu *Germinal*, a 1958, keď k prekladu románu *Paríž* vyšla recenzia Antona Vantucha. Túto autorka kvalifikuje ako zlomový moment posunu zolovskej recepcie, postavenej na nepredpojatom a hlbšom poznaní románopiscovho diela, ako aj širších literárnohistorických súvislostí (119 – 121). So začiatkom 60. rokov 20. storočia a tzv. „zlatého veku" vydávania zahraničnej literatúry nastal definitívny obrat v prekladovej, kritickej aj bežnej čitateľskej recepcii diel Émila Zolu – bola preložená väčšina jeho románov a tvorbou sa začala zaoberať nová generácia odborníkov a odborníčok na francúzsku literatúru. V závere kapitoly Truhlářová zhodnocuje stav zolovských štúdií na Slovensku v súčasnosti a konštatuje, že napriek dnešnému pozitívnemu vnímaniu Zolovej tvorby dodnes nevyšiel jeho románový cyklus v súbornom vydaní ani žiadne syntetické dielo, ktoré by vo svetle najnovších výskumov zbavilo spisovateľa istých zjednodušujúcich „nálepiek" a venovalo do hĺbky pozornosť špecifikám jeho poetiky.

Druhá kapitola monografie napriek povzbudivému názvu „Gustave Flaubert alebo vzor" ukazuje, že ani cesta k akceptácii tohto románopisca v slovenskom prostredí nebola jednoduchá. Tak ako v prípade Émila Zolu, aj pri recepcii tvorby Gustava Flauberta zohrala prvotnú úlohu spoločenská situácia poslednej tretiny 19. storočia, propagovaná výchovná úloha literatúry a s ňou súvisiace odmietanie „morálne skazenej" západnej, najmä francúzskej literatúry. Flaubertovo meno sa spájalo predovšetkým s románom *Pani Bovaryová* a ako pripomína autorka, jeho vydanie v roku 1857 zaznamenalo okamžitý medzinárodný úspech v podobe prekladov do viacerých jazykov. Na Slovensku sa prvý preklad *Pani Bovaryovej* objavil až začiatkom 20. storočia, no zároveň sa do roku 1963 román dočkal ešte ďalších dvoch prekladov. Ich detailnému hodnoteniu sa Truhlářová venuje v prvej časti kapitoly, pričom objasňuje okolnosti vzniku jednotlivých prekladov, analyzuje hlavné prekladateľské kvality a nedostatky, no najmä zdôrazňuje význam každého z nich z pohľadu vývoja recepcie Flaubertovej tvorby. V tomto kontexte je mimoriadne dôležitý prvý preklad Juraja Slávika spolu s úvodnou štúdiou Pavla Bujnáka z roku 1908 (hoci vydaného až v roku 1928), hodnotený autorkou ako iniciátorský čin odvahy „ukázať vzor našim spisovateľom" (138). Z prekladateľského hľadiska sa autorka zameriava na problematiku ťažko uchopiteľnej špecifickosti Flaubertovho štýlu – od nezrelosti prekladu Juraja Slávika, cez poetickú farebnosť no zároveň prílišnú expresivitu prekladu Zory Jesenskej (1948), až po „civilný jazyk" prekladu Sone Hollej (1963).

V ďalšej časti kapitoly Truhlářová analyzuje vývoj flaubertovského výskumu v literárno-kritickej reflexii. Konštatuje, že na rozdiel od Zolu nebol Flaubert literárnymi vedcami zanedbávaný, hoci prelomovým obdobím nepredpojatého záujmu romanistov sa stali opäť až 60. roky 20. storočia. V tejto súvislosti vyzdvihuje kľúčový prínos dvoch najväčších slovenských romanistov, Jozefa Felixa v doslove k druhému vydaniu prekladu románu *Salambo* z roku 1963, ako aj Antona Vantucha v doslove k prekladu románu *Pani Bovaryová* tiež z roku 1963. Nezabúda však ani na viaceré štúdie Štefana Povchaniča, ktoré analyzujú budovanie deja u Flauberta v jeho dvoch hlavných románoch *Pani Bovaryová* a *Citová výchova*. Napokon v poslednej časti kapitoly autorka obracia pozornosť práve na tvorivú recepciu *Citovej výchovy* v dielach mladých slovenských spisovateľov 60. rokov 20. storočia. Pripomína medzinárodný kontext recepcie tohto románu, ktorý sa stal vzorom neosobného rozprávačského prístupu a jednou z referencií francúzskeho nového románu. V uvoľnenej atmosfére 60. rokov, keď sa medzinárodné literárne diskusie dostali aj na stránky slovenských časopisov, sa tak Flaubertova *Citová výchova* stala predlohou pre tvorbu viacerých debutujúcich spisovateľov (188 – 190). Z nich sa autorka detailne zameriava na Dušana Kužela, Pavla Vilikovského a Vincenta Šikulu, u ktorých analyzuje podoby flaubertovskej „citovej výchovy". Tak ako v prvej kapitole

Truhlářová v závere zhodnocuje stav flaubertovských štúdií na Slovensku v súčasnosti. Aj v prípade Gustava Flauberta však konštatuje, že dodnes býva predmetom zjednodušujúcich a syntetizujúcich interpretácií na úkor skutočnej hĺbkovej znalosti jeho diela.

Posledná kapitola monografie s názvom „Guy de Maupassant alebo ľahké čítanie" ozrejmuje paradoxne bezproblémovú recepciu diela tohto autora, ktorý patrí na Slovensku od začiatku svojej tvorby k čitateľsky úspešným a nepretržite prekladaným francúzskym spisovateľom. Táto skutočnosť má podľa autorky dva hlavné dôvody: prvým je zdanlivá nenáročnosť a vecnosť Maupassantových próz (mnohých z vidieckeho prostredia), vyhovujúca morálnym požiadavkám súdobých literárnych autorít; druhým je „odobrenie" Maupassantovho diela cez Tolstého, ktorý v Rusku redigoval niekoľko súborných vydaní jeho noviel a napísal o ňom viacero štúdií (228). Truhlářová zhodnocuje v podstate nepretržitý záujem o Maupassantovu tvorbu, ktorému zodpovedá intenzívna prekladateľská činnosť, najskôr sprostredkovane z ruštiny, od začiatku 20. storočia už väčšinou priamo z francúzštiny. Na druhej strane však upozorňuje na takmer úplnú absenciu kritickej reflexie, a to až do začiatku 50. rokov 20. storočia, keď sa o spisovateľa začal zaujímať Anton Vantuch. Autorka zdôrazňuje Vantuchovu prelomovú rolu vo vývoji maupassantovských štúdií ako prvého romanistu, ktorý sa podrobne zaoberal poetikou Maupassantových krátkych próz aj románov. Jeho tvorbu zasadil do presných literárnohistorických súvislostí, vymanil ho z naturalistickej estetiky a predovšetkým ho zbavil nálepky autora „ľahkého čítania". V ďalších desaťročiach pokračoval odborný aj čitateľský záujem o Maupassanta v podobe nových prekladov či reedícií, ako aj mnohých televíznych či divadelných adaptácií. Napriek tejto konštantnej popularite však chýbajú, ako hodnotí autorka v závere kapitoly, podrobnejšie informácie o prípadnej inšpirácii slovenských spisovateľov Maupassantovou tvorbou v ich vlastných dielach.

Monografia Jany Truhlářovej, venovaná dejinám recepcie troch najvýznamnejších francúzskych románopiscov druhej polovice 19. storočia, je cenným vkladom tak do romanistickej, ako aj do slovakistickej odbornej diskusie, minuciózne podloženým najnovším výskumom a zároveň napísaným jasným a zrozumiteľným jazykom. Autorka z pohľadu romanistky zúročuje svoj dlhoročný vedecký záujem o tvorbu Émila Zolu, Gustava Flauberta a Guy de Maupassanta, čím sa stavia do priamej línie pokračovateľov Jozefa Felixa či Antona Vantucha. Zároveň otvára otázku širšieho literárnohistorického a kultúrneho kontextu vývoja slovenskej literatúry od konca 19. storočia, ukazujúc na príklade týchto troch spisovateľov, aký môže mať recepcia „vonkajších" literárnych impulzov dosah na formovanie domácej literatúry, často určované menej literárnymi než spoločensko-politickými faktormi. V neposlednom rade je monografia nepochybne prínosom aj v medzinárodnom meradle ako súčasť širšieho výskumu dejín recepcie francúzskej literatúry v európskych a svetových literatúrach.

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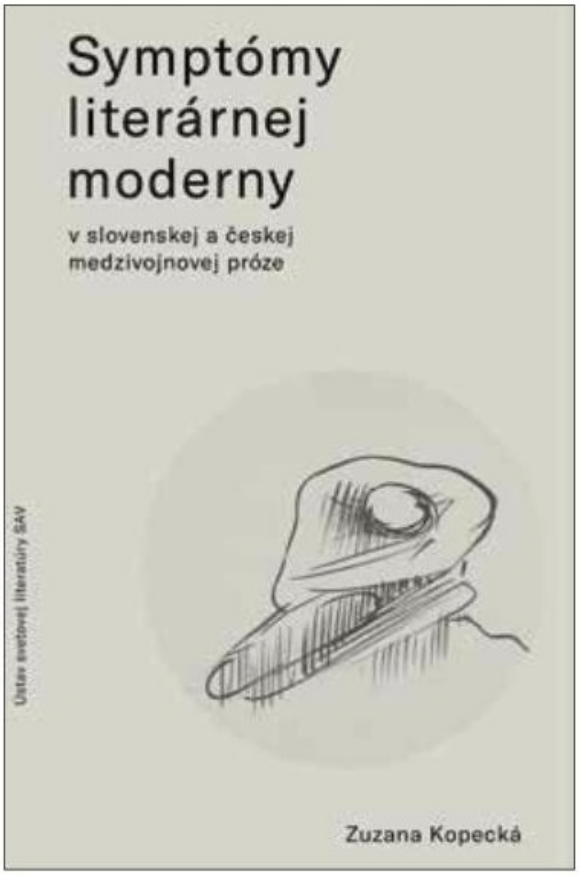
Monografia Zuzany Kopeckej identifikuje symptómy literárnej moderny cez literárnovedný komparatistický výskum s interdisciplinárnymi presahmi. Zvolená metóda sa primárne odvíja od analýzy vybraných literárnych textov. Autorka prekračuje hranice jednotlivých definícií literárnej moderny, ktoré dominujú v súčasných literárnovedných prístupoch, a poukazuje na nemožnosť zaradenia literárnej moderny do chronologického modelu literárnych dejín.

In her monograph *Symptoms of literary modernism in Slovak and Czech interwar prose*, Zuzana Kopecká identifies the symptoms of literary modernism through comparative literary research with interdisciplinary approaches, which is primarily grounded in the analysis of selected literary texts. The author goes beyond the boundaries of the individual definitions of literary modernism that dominate contemporary literary approaches and points out the impossibility of classifying literary modernism within a chronological model of literary history.

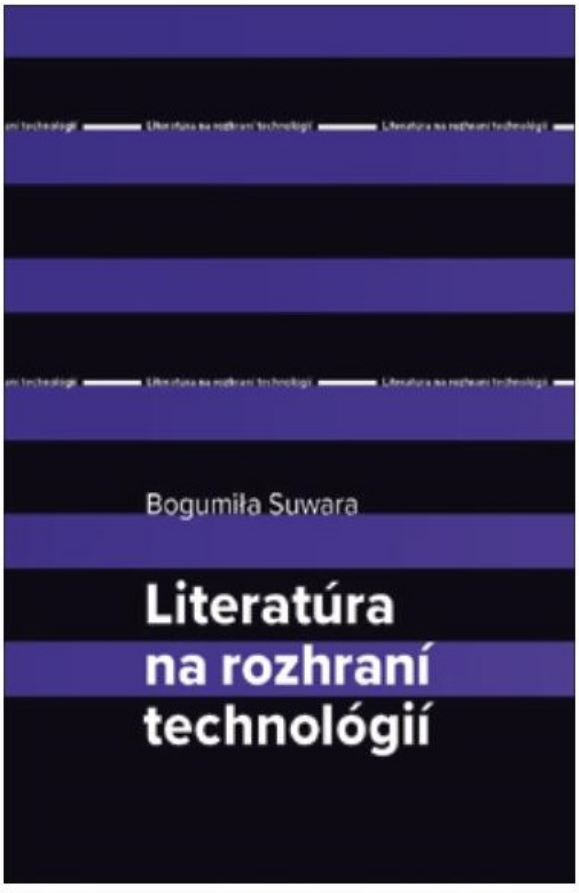
ZUZANA KOPECKÁ: Symptómy literárnej moderny v slovenskej a českej medzivojnovej próze. Bratislava: Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV, v. v. i. – VEDA, vydavateľstvo SAV, 2022. 223 s. ISBN 978-80-224-1969-7
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31577/2022.9788022419697



Kniha Bogumiły Suwary syntetizuje výsledky výskumov zameraných na skúmanie literatúry v kyberpriestore, textu na internete ako javu r@evolúcie kultúry a hypermediálneho artefaktu v postdigitálnej dobe. Zachytáva dobovo vyhranený úsek procesu technologizácie literatúry a s ňou spojených posunov v oblasti kultúrnych praktík, ktoré ovplyvňujú samotný proces literárnej tvorby, jej skúmanie a recepciu. Sleduje posuny spôsobené aplikovaním digitálnych technológií v oblasti literatúry: plastickosť a difúznosť jej hraníc atď.

Bogumiła Suwara's *Literature in the impact zone of technology* synthesizes the results of research focused on the exploration of literature in cyberspace, the text on the Internet as a phenomenon of r@evolution of culture and the hypermedia artifact in the post digital age. The publication captures a temporally distinct section of the process of technologization of literature and the associated shifts in cultural practices that affect the very process of literary production, its exploration and reception. It traces the shifts brought about by applying digital technologies in the field of literature: the plasticity and diffuseness of its boundaries etc.

BOGUMIŁA SUWARA: Literatúra na rozhraní technológií. Bratislava: Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV, v. v. i. – VEDA, vydavateľstvo SAV, 2022. 309 s. ISBN 978-80-224-1974-1
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31577/2022.9788022419741



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Ruská próza začiatku 21. storočia, ako isté útočisko slobody prejavu v militantnom putinovskom Rusku, prešla viacerými poetologickými a tematologickými transformáciami. Texty tohto čísla predstavujú pohľad „zboku“, z pozície postsocialistických kultúrnych priestorov, na kľúčové mená a diela tohto obdobia, pričom reflektujú zmeny literárnych paradigiem, pristupujú k tradičným kategóriám ako umelecký priestor či sujet v intenciách existenciálnej poetiky, (re)interpretujú spôsoby prezentovania vlastnej identity a obrazov Iného, predstavujú recepciu ruskej prózy v nových, vojnových okolnostiach.

Russian prose of the early 21st century, as one of the last refuges for freedom of expression in Putin's militant Russia, has gone through several poetological and thematological transformations. The studies in this issue, originating from the post-socialist cultural spaces, present a "sideways glance" at the key names and works of this period, reflect changes in literary paradigms, approach traditional categories such as literary space or plot in the framework of existential poetics, (re)interpret ways of presenting one's own identity and images of the Other, and present the reception of Russian prose in the current wartime circumstances.