Central European Literary “Escapes” from History
(Vladimir Bartol, Witold Gombrowicz, Sándor Márai)

Aleksandra Helena Tobiasz

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilisation of the European University Institute

Florence, 10 June 2022
Researcher declaration to accompany the submission of written work
Department of History and Civilisation - Doctoral Programme

I Aleksandra Helena Tobiasz certify that I am the author of the work “Central European Literary ‘Escapes’ from History (Vladimir Bartol, Witold Gombrowicz, Sándor Márai)” I have presented for examination for the Ph.D. at the European University Institute. I also certify that this is solely my own original work, other than where I have clearly indicated, in this declaration and in the thesis, that it is the work of others.

I warrant that I have obtained all the permissions required for using any material from other copyrighted publications.

I certify that this work complies with the Code of Ethics in Academic Research issued by the European University Institute (IUE 332/2/10 (CA 297).

The copyright of this work rests with its author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This work may not be reproduced without my prior written consent. This authorisation does not, to the best of my knowledge, infringe the rights of any third party.

I declare that this work consists of 130215 words.

Statement of language correction:
This thesis has been corrected for linguistic and stylistic errors. I certify that I have checked and approved all language corrections, and that these have not affected the content of this work.

Signature and date:

Aleksandra Helena Tobiasz

30.05.2022
Abstract

The dissertation titled “Central European Literary ‘Escapes’ from History (Vladimir Bartol, Witold Gombrowicz, Sándor Márai)” is an outcome of the interdisciplinary research project conducted at the crossroads of literary studies, history, and anthropology. Inspired by contemporary methodology exploring the category of experience, the author aims to provide new insights into the writers’ narrative self-identifications, diaristic practices, and their common background of a Central European community of historical fate. This comparative study attempts to replace geopolitical conceptualisations of Central Europe in terms of regional identity with a geopoetic map of this area focusing on self-identifications of writers and their sensual experiences of this space. Whereas geopolitical Central Europe has been a laboratory of ideologies nourished by modernist dialectical tradition, the geopoetic Central European condition can be articulated in life writing and particularly in a diary. The dissertation’s overarching theme regards the three writers’ attitudes to the History of the twentieth century, its accelerated pace as well as the changeable spatial coordinates of Central Europe and temporary places of stay in exile. The author argues that to the post-war historical circumstances enclosed within the ideologised dialectical thought and thus reverberating with the absurd overtone, Bartol, Gombrowicz and Márai responded with a hermeneutic laboratory of self, explored in diary and exile. They embarked on an exilic odyssey and diaristic writing which allowed them not only to maintain a certain distance from History (with a specific exception for Bartol) but also to reconfigure their experience of time and in the end also self-identifications. The main sources are analysed using the anthropological approach which regards the diaries in terms of practice, existentially crucial for their authors in the process of redefining their selves in the face of rapidly shifting spatiotemporal contexts. The diaristic reconfiguration of time puts the \textit{kairotic} dimension of temporality to the foreground which consequently undermines for a while its chronological, impersonal side.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements...........................................................................................................VI

I. Introduction......................................................................................................................1

II. Diaristic practice: time and narrative self-identification.............................................19

III. Central Europe as the imagined community of historical fate.................................62

IV. Between freedom of improvisation and necessity of fatalism. Particular attitudes towards History in Central Europe (Bartol, Gombrowicz, Márai).................................93

V. Central European escapist responses to History? Exilic self-identifications between homo politicus and homo poeticus.................................................................125

VI. Between Chronos and Kairos – Witold Gombrowicz’s diaristic struggles with time.........................................................................................................................168

VII. “The fringe European” – Sándor Márai, “enthusiastic wanderer” between the East and the West......................................................................................................................199

VIII. Med Vzhodom in Zapadom (“Between the East and the West”). Vladimir Bartol as the main protagonist of his unfinished novel?.........................................................262

IX. Conclusion..................................................................................................................323

X. Bibliography.................................................................................................................331
Acknowledgements

It would not be possible to accomplish this dissertation without support of institutions creating favourable conditions for work and many people who accompanied me during this long intellectual journey. Firstly, I would like to express my profound gratitude to both the European University Institute, Department of History and Civilisation as well as the Polish Ministry of Higher Education for this unique opportunity to conduct the fully funded research in such an intellectually rewarding place. I would like to thank my supervisors Prof. Pavel Kolář and Prof. Alexander Etkind for their assistance during the entire process of writing my PhD, all valuable comments and inspiring discussions. I am especially grateful for the help I received from Prof. Pavel Kolář whose suggestions were of crucial importance in planning and structuring the whole research. I would also like to thank the reviewers of this thesis, Prof. Simona Škrabec and Prof. Paweł Rodak for accepting to evaluate this work and providing me with the insightful remarks. I am also extremely grateful to librarians at the European University Institute for their kind help in getting access to the necessary books even at the distance. Special thanks go to Jiří Vaňkát who always agreed to help me by scanning many texts. I would also like to express my gratitude to the language teachers: Silke Tork and Gaia Pieraccioni whose classes opened to me new linguistic worlds and thus also contributed to enriching this PhD. I am also grateful to the thesis corrector Paul Barrett who patiently answered all my questions concerning the proper English of this dissertation. Moreover, I would like to thank Tibor Mészáros, the caretaker of the legacy of Sándor Márai for his kind help during my research stay in the Sándor Petőfi Museum of Literature in Budapest. With regard to the chapter dedicated to Vladimir Bartol I owe many ideas to communication with Prof. Aleksej Kalc and Prof. Michael Biggins. Furthermore, many thanks go to my fellow EUI PhD researchers for their always supportive company during these several years of doctoral studies: Turkay Gasimova, Daniel Adlerhok, Kamil Karczewski, Tomaž Ivešić, Kalliopi Geronymaki, Ignacio García de Paso, Anca Diana Axinia, Henning Schuler and Gertjan Schutte, Elżbieta Kwiecińska.

PhD is another step on the intellectual way which to great extent was shaped by my former supervisors whom I also would like to thank: Prof. Rafał Stobiecki, Prof. Albin Głowacki and Prof. Stanisław Kosmynka.

Last but not least I am extremely grateful for constant support of my family: my Dad, to whose memory I dedicate this work, my partner Miha Zobec, his parents, my sister, brother-in-law as well as friends: Małgorzata Osicka, Aleksandra Sylburska, Andrzej Janicki and Andrzejb Kobak.
I. Introduction

We who have been hunted through the rapids of life, torn from our former roots, always driven to the end, and obliged to begin again, victims and yet also the willing servants of unknown mysterious powers, we for whom comfort has become an old legend and security, a childish dream, have felt tension from pole to pole of our being, the terror of something always new in every fibre. Every hour of our years was linked to the fate of the world. In sorrow and in joy we have lived through time and history far beyond our own small lives, while they knew nothing beyond themselves.¹

Contrasting images of two generations. Parents immersed in Epicurean “lightness of being” of cultural life distant from politics and great History are followed by their offspring forced to stoically withstand all the hardships of life and the burden of whimsical, excessive historical reality. Continuity of stable and secure life becomes juxtaposed with discontinuity, uprootedness and uncertainty provoked by overwhelming “unknown mysterious powers” equivalent to seductive but at the same time destructive ideologies. While former generations could still lead their lives relatively peacefully because uninterrupted by the public life, their offspring’s existence transcending confinements of tamed privacy was forcefully inscribed within broader and much more cruel, unpredictable frames of “the fate of the world.”

The Austrian writer, Stefan Zweig, author of the above-mentioned words, was writing on behalf of his generation, describing its Stoic fragile existential situation in comparison with an Epicurean stable world of his parents, inhabitants of the late nineteenth-century Habsburg Monarchy. Uninterested in distant historical changes not tackling them personally, they could still feel free from existential dilemmas and tensions. Zweig recalled this particular loose relationship of his parents’ generation with historical context stating that

those disasters that did take place on the periphery of our world did not penetrate the well-lined walls of our secure life. The Boer War, the Russo-Japanese War, even the Balkan Wars did not make any deep impression on my parents' lives. They skimmed all the war reporting in the paper as indifferently as they looked at the sports headlines.²

² Ibid., 47.
People seemed blinded by the promises of progress. General idealism and optimism made them believe in the possibility to “fence in their existence, leaving no gaps at all.” Later this belief would naturally appear to be a mere illusion. The fence, having proved to be permeable, fragile and with many gaps would not protect them and their children from a stronger gust of historical wind demolishing a well-established order of things in the Epicureans’ private “gardens.”

Unlike their ancestors, whose stable rhythm of life was unfolding along the trajectory taken for granted as neatly connecting the past with the future, the life-stories of people born later, on the verge of the Habsburg Empire’s dissolution and the catastrophe of war, were fragmented and abundant in moments of doubt, deepened introspection, and questions without straightforward answers. Zweig described his generation as follows: “We have had to accustom ourselves slowly to living without firm ground beneath our feet, without laws, freedom or security.” The writer’s contemporaries had to endure historical upheavals and thus face radical changes undermining previous ways of living and thinking. Formerly unquestionable values and paradigms shaping seemingly stable frames of “the World of Yesterday,” in constantly new circumstances and under the pressures of the accelerated pace of time, were replaced by their contradictions. Incertitude instead of security, lawlessness in place of order, uprootedness, and estrangement instead of familiarity and homeliness, a necessity to abide by historical fate in place of freedom to safeguard one’s privacy against public life. The line between public and private was crossed. The life of individuals became directly entangled in an unpredictable course of events which destructive side impaired the common belief in progress.

The shift in perceptions and ideas is accompanied by a change in historical experiences and particularly in the ways time is experienced. While the passage of time, as Zweig noticed, could seem to his ancestors slower and more foreseeable, his generation was to experience the accelerated pace of historical change. Linearity of time falls apart and becomes dominated by a fleeting present moment, uprooted from the past and in its evanescence always replaced by a new moment hit et nunc, leading to an unknown future in “the terror of something always new”. The hastened course of events in the twentieth century implied discontinuities and prevented its witnesses from spinning “a long thread” of life. In Zweig’s memories his forebears “[…] lived their lives from one end to the other quietly in a straight, clear line.” The prevailing temporal perspectives in their lives were both retrospective (rootedness in tradition) and prospective (belief in progress, the insurance industry,

---

3 Ibid., 24.
5 Ibid., 48.
long-term planning, confidence in approaching future). The present moment was devoid of haste and abrupt unexpected changes. However, with the outset of the twentieth century, History begins to intrude more persistently into each personal “garden” converting it into ruins and fruit into stones of difficult experience. In direct confrontation with this intrusive, all-embracing, and traumatic side of historical events, a Stoic withdraws and undertakes hermeneutic practices, for instance diaristic writing, intending to protect inner freedom and retain a certain continuity of self in changeable times.

Zweig’s remarks on radically different existential situations defining two generations may serve as a good introduction to reflection on Central European historical experiences expressed in personal writings of Witold Gombrowicz, Sándor Márai and Vladimir Bartol. I argue that Zweig’s experience of historical changes, literally expressed in terms of a shift from Epicurean to Stoic perspective on reality, was shared by other Central European writers of the same generation. The question arising here is about the ways in which these three writers perceived their banishment from Epicurean “garden” of youth, a familiar microcosm of a hometown immersed in an eternal present – the time of memory and their sudden Stoic confinement imposed by a cruel historical macrocosm.

In similarly contrasting terms as those structuring Zweig’s image, the existential situations of different generations and their experiences were depicted by Márai. The Hungarian writer compared the shift from his father’s world (the end of the nineteenth century) to the one he was witnessing in the seventies to a “civilisational leap, which happened when a man left a cave and settled down on an agricultural land.” What is more, according to Márai there was no continuity between these two periods and civilisations. They did not change in a processual way but disintegrated and emerged anew in entirely different forms. Similar discrepancy in two epochs and generational experiences was hinted at by Bartol in his description of the aftermath of the Great War in terms of an “enormous transition in humankind” from the security of old times to the uncertainty and challenges of the new, “stirred-up, chaotic and painful” epoch. With the outbreak of the war “humankind was with just one blow thrown from a secure shelter of a malodorous and false petit-bourgeois self-content on a hard ground and to a roaring storm of new changes” such as the October Revolution in the East and the rapid urbanisation, industrialisation in the West. Gombrowicz also experienced a generational sharp shift. In the opinion of Jerzy Jarzębski, Polish literary scholar –

---

6 Ibid., 47.
and expert on Gombrowicz’s *oeuvre*, the writer perceived this change especially clearly at the end of the 1930s during his trip to Italy and Austria which “disclosed to him the fundamental untranslatability of generational experiences as well as how the differences among generations bring about large-scale cultural transformations.” This travel could incite in him feelings of anxiety and fear about approaching, nightmarish future. Members of a new generation embracing fascism were embodying the destructive potentiality of “wild youth” and thus seemed to him “creatures of another race and different nature.” Later Gombrowicz would explore in his writings a new phenomenon emerging in the interwar societies in Europe, namely the “totalitarian individual” characterised by “wild youth,” a sign of the next generation and the new epoch.\(^9\)

The three writers’ *oeuvres* have been studied extensively, though, in most cases as either apart or in the context of other artists’ biographies and texts. The list of works devoted to the life and literature of Gombrowicz, Márai and Bartol, when discussed separately, is diversified and so abundant that it would exceed the limits of this introduction to mention all of them. For instance scholarship dealing with Gombrowicz is so extensive that it even acquired its own name in Polish “gombrowiczologia.”\(^10\) Whereas the three writers’ literary texts have been thoroughly studied from the point of view of formal aspects such as motives and style, their life writing founded on particular experiences of both time of History and space of Central Europe/exile only recently has been put to the foreground. In this respect scholars inspired by contemporary interdisciplinary methodology (performative turn, turn to experience) focus more and more on writers’ autobiographical projects and personal writings. While such research has been already conducted with regards to the protagonists of this dissertation,\(^11\) it has not embraced three of them simultaneously. Thus, in the following study I would like to take this still unexplored path of focusing on the triad of writers, which should lead to new insights concerning both their historical experiences as narrated in personal writings and their perception of Central European historical fate.

---


\(^10\) It is necessary to mention here the recent publication of another biography of Gombrowicz. This extensive work, exceeding a thousand pages of Polish literary critic, Klementyna Suchanow is a fruit of long-time and thorough study based on rich archivistic material. Klementyna Suchanow, *Gombrowicz. Ja, geniusz*, 2 vols. (Wołowiec, 2017).

\(^11\) Within “gombrowiczologia” see for instance works of Paweł Rodak applying anthropological, performative approach to literature inspired by Philippe Lejeune’s cultural anthropology; in scholarship focused on Márai see the research of Hungarian scholar in comparative literature Zoltán Z. Varga influenced by autobiographical theory; in case of Bartol see the publications of Tomo Virk, Slovene literary critic interested in interconnection between ethics and literature as well as works of Michael Biggins who translated Bartol’s *oeuvre* to English and has been conducting his research on the writer’s diary.
This comparative approach opens an array of research questions that will guide my further interpretations. What were the writers’ hermeneutic responses (similarities/differences) shaping their self-identifications and aimed at taming the historical order of time and collective forces suppressing individuality? What meanings did they attribute to diaristic writing and exile? How could the authors’ perceptions of historical situations in Central Europe and in exile, as well as experiences of changeable spatial contexts shape the poetics of their diaries? Polish literary historian Włodzimierz Bolecki noted that what differed Eastern European modernism in literature from the West was the historical heritage which as “the driving force” for the writers such as Witold Gombrowicz, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, Sándor Márai, Aleksander Wat, Józef Mackiewicz “influenced not only the topics but also the poetics of their works; above all, it determined the particularity of their diaries.”12 Could the three writers’ similar attitudes to historical upheavals and in consequence also their similar narrative responses, diaristic poetics reveal a specific Central European community of historical fate? In this dissertation, I will try to discern the writers’ historical experiences by paying attention to certain narrative strategies of self-identifications and diaristic inscriptions of self which were accompanied by different reconfigurations of temporality. What were the writers’ narratively mediated responses to historical circumstances in Central Europe and in exile in the twentieth century? This general question about the relationship between individual and historical context will guide my study of personal writings of three intellectuals born at the crossroads of both fluid space (marked with frequent changes of borders) and speeding time of modernity.

All the aforementioned research questions revolve around the category of experience, recently widely explored in some social sciences and humanities along two lines: existential (“forms of experiencing the world, being in it”) and epistemological.13 With regard to the dissertation’s methodological frameworks, I will try to follow the existential perspective on an experience and the phenomenological approach applied both to history (David Carr, Frank Ankersmit)14 and space (Tim Ingold). This perspective endows the two categories with an existential dimension which allows one to conceptualise history in terms of individual experience and view space as a place of dwelling or “lifeworld.” One of the main voices advocating for the importance of experience in historiography

is Frank R. Ankersmit who in his critical re-evaluations of the poststructuralist thought has gone beyond the narrativist philosophy of history by exploring the phenomenology of historical experience.

Bartol, Gombrowicz and Márai were narratively problematising their historical experiences in diaries. Diaristic inscriptions of experiences allowed them to open a hermeneutic fissure in the hermetically closed dialectical systems constituted by philosophies of history or by philosophies inherent in their writings. Thus, the category of experience becomes a counterweight to all-encompassing narrativisation, structuralism, and other forms of “ism” understood as dominant aesthetical trends or the twentieth-century realisations of philosophy of history such as historical materialism. Experience of exile, pain (Gombrowicz), “internal passivity” (Márai) or diaristic plays with time are variations of experience present in the writers’ life writings which could let them undermine for a while self-referential narratives or other mediatory instances confining individuality such as tradition, Form, and some social constructions (Gombrowicz’s “interhuman church”). Moreover, by opening dimensions stretching vertically beyond the enclosed conceptual systems or social structures, various articulations of experience could also in consequence entail some other than “in-response-to” ways of self-identification. Polish writer Czesław Miłosz, seeking an answer to a question about where to place this alternative way, called it “a one-on-one relationship with an extra-human world, or even with oneself […].”

Márai’s “internal passivity” can be interpreted as an intuitive openness to a kairotic dimension of time, to moments that decide one’s fate. These “states of passive action” evade common sense, rational arguments and accentuate one’s negative freedom, which is the freedom to abstain from doing something, a denial to go somewhere and remain, a refusal of something. Márai’s “internal passivity” and its negative trait evading the “in-response-to” connotation comes close to a hermeneutic path, distant from dialectics, the path taken also by Gombrowicz. Polish writer introduced the problem of experience of pain as a way out of the self-referential dialectical system

16 I capitalize the word to refer to Gombrowicz’s key concept which is the main category structuring his writings. It embraces the writer’s philosophical, aesthetic, and ethical views. This broad concept denotes all forms of being and thinking imposed by society and culture (language, attitudes, gestures, ideas, social roles, and rituals) which oppose the strong individual will to be in alignment with the self. Jerzy Jarzębski, “Pojęcie ‘Formy’ u Gombrowicza,” Pamiętnik Literacki 4 (1971): 69-96. For the multidimensional analysis of Gombrowicz’s concept of form (form as a sociopsychological concept) see also: Jerzy Jarzębski, “Pojęcie ‘formy’ u Gombrowicza” in Gombrowicz i krytycy, ed. Jan Błoński (Kraków, Wrocław, 1984), 313-346. Józef Olejniczak, Witold Gombrowicz Ja! (Łódź, 2021), 65-66.

17 Czesław Miłosz, Beginning with My Streets: Essays and Recollections, translated by Madeline Levine (New York, 2010), 223.

18 Sándor Márai, Wyznania patrycjusza, translated by Teresa Worowska (Warszawa, 2005), 384-385. “[…] a man stumbles, makes mistakes and uncertainly searches for a way, never knows, what he should do, but sometimes knows for sure what he is not allowed to do…”
of concepts that underpin his literary worlds – “philosophical parables.”19 Different manifestations of experience return not only reality to the textual worlds and restore a direct one-to-one relationship of individual with the world and with oneself but may also show some paths in the search of meaning, understanding of oneself and one’s place in the world.20

According to Ankersmit the experience of time and history is the experience of difference and distance between present and past.21 History emerges in the temporal fissure between past and present caused by a sudden traumatic event responsible for the change from one order of time to another. Ankersmit described this change as “the shift from a three-dimensional to a four-dimensional world.”22 Polish philosopher Marek Szulakiewicz writes about sense as the fourth dimension of time.23 Historical experiences of distance and estrangement are manifestations of an ongoing historical process depriving the concept of time of its cosmological embeddedness. The question arises here whether diaristic practice which implies one’s reflective entanglement in the disruptive history can substitute this lost embeddedness by providing certain contours of sense and continuity as a response to historical discontinuities. I argue that a diaristic inscription of self is an act of endowing the experienced time with some meaning. In my research, I will try to accentuate this third time reconfigured by means of a diary which Paul Ricoeur characterised as “the proper historical time - that mediates between the time lived and the cosmic time.”24

19 Milosz, Beginning, 220, 222-225, 232. Milosz reminded that Gombrowicz’s protagonists seem enmeshed in the net of binary concepts such as maturity and immaturity, fatherland and “sonland,” old age and youth, superiority and inferiority which remain in a dialectical, reciprocal relationship (duel). Not only were the novels’ characters entangled in these closed conceptual systems but also the author himself. Having undermined the legitimacy and verifiability of one’s claim about the existence of any objective order, anything outside consciousness, Gombrowicz at the same time rejected introspective access to one’s own psychological depths and true, the inner self which consequently becomes nothing more but an illusion. The latter one, as the writer claimed, is always socially conditioned and thus created through interactions with other people. A struggle for one’s authentic self in opposition to all possible masks of identity leads a person always in a trap of another Form. Is there any way of escape from the vicious circle of concepts, Forms, and the sphere of consciousness which Milosz, with reference to Gombrowicz, called “automatic trap”? The experience of pain could open a way beyond this self-referential system of contrasting categories. As Milosz claimed, “Gombrowicz, while casting doubt on the existence of anything other than the data of our consciousness, had no doubt about one thing: pain, and this pain of the other returned reality to the world.” Gombrowicz “[...] used to ascribe his distinctness to his sensitivity to pain, which protected him from the folly of writing conceived out of structuralist theory.”

20 Ibid., 232. In this respect, different variations of experience could also, as Milosz claimed about Gombrowicz’s references to pain, suggest the possibility of revival of the objective side of reality. As American literary scholar, Michal Oklot claimed, Gombrowicz regarded pain in metaphysical terms as “the Kantian thing in itself in Schopenhauer’s correction, that is, pure Will”, “the only real thing” and some force emerging beyond consciousness and coming from cosmos. (M. Oklot, “Gombrowicz’s Kronos: The Pornography of Aging,” Slavonica, 19, no. 2 (2013), 116, 117, 118) Moreover, Oklot remarks that “we should also try to situate Gombrowicz’s understanding of pain in the tradition originating in the second half of the seventeenth century when physicians started to develop post-Cartesian decentralized models of pain.” Oklot, op. cit., 117.


22 Ibid., 180.

23 Marek Szulakiewicz, Czas i to, co ludzkie. Szkice z chronozofii i kultury (Toruń, 2011), 18.

24 Paul Ricoeur, Czas i opowieść, vol. 3: Czas opowiadany, translated by Urszula Zbrzeźniak (Kraków, 2008), 143.
The diary as a means of meaningful mediation of the self by reconfiguration of temporality becomes especially important in chaotic and accelerated times enlarging the distance between present and past which projected on individual entails also the distance between former self and the present one. The diary thus can mitigate feelings of defamiliarisation, and alienation intensified by the history of the twentieth century and its hastened pace, thereby laying foundations for modern philosophies of history which, having been put in practice gave way to different forms of ideologies, deeply affecting individual fates. Márai noted in his *Diary*: “I was born in the century of three isms: Nazism, Communism and Americanism. Each was bad […].”^25^ History idealized as an object of philosophical reflections (‘isms’) and perceived in abstract terms as a totality acquired a specific pattern of movement aimed at its meaningful fulfilment. This pattern was dialectics. The twentieth century was the century of ideologies, massive movements, the geopolitics of totalitarian states, collectivities,^26^ and in this sense, it could not serve as a framework for self-identification for intellectuals who were privileging values of individuality and free-thinking. Counter to self-contained and self-fulfilling “hermetic” worldviews rooted in dialectics and framed by geopolitics; hermeneutic perspective accentuates geopoetics as a critical undermining of dominant, collective perceptions and individual questioning, also undertaken by the writers in their diaries.

The hermeneutic way of being manifesting in a narrative reconfiguration of one’s temporality might be understood not only as an attempt of problematisation and redefinition of one’s self-identification. It can also present a liberating response to the all-encompassing dialectical ordering of reality embodied in the twentieth-century totalitarian political systems. This hermeneutic approach might be expressed in a form of being-in-question,^27^ scepticism and resistance to the lures of the “captive mind” (Czeslaw Milosz). Founded on the rejection of ideology as the imposed mental framework of collective thinking and perceiving the world, hermeneutic perspective is characterised by indeterminacy and open-endedness. With regard to this distance to an ideological confining order

---


^27^ Can Karel Kosik’s remarks on the “Czech Question” be transposed to the broader Central European context? In the view of the Czech philosopher “existence in the middle of Europe cannot be rooted in ‘spirit’ or ‘soul,’ but only in questioning. That is because this existence is at stake, in a game, in constant danger – often physically, but most often morally and existentially.” The existential dimension of questioning is important. Hence, being-in-questions entails doubting, continuous scepticism, feelings of anguish, pain, shock. “Every real question is at the same time an exclamation point, a cry, demanding the truth.” Karel Kosik, *The Crisis of Modernity. Essays and Observations from the 1968 Era*, translated and edited by James H. Satterwhite (Maryland, 1995), 148.
of the world, Márai in one of the letters to his friend expressed his unacquaintance of the concept of ideology as follows: “I also do not know what the ‘ideology’ is. In his ‘Impossible Lexicon’ Karinthy had defined it perhaps this way: Synthetic theory carried in the pocket for the progressive intellectuals who are not capable of developing their own opinion.”

Hermeneutic responses such as diaristic practice and “intellectual nomadism” (Kenneth White) reject a stable, impenetrable ground of ideology and imply a constant search of loopholes understood as means of escape from a particular space (exile) or historical order of time (redefinition of temporality in diaristic practice). Consequently, I understand the hermeneutic existential perspective in a Central European context as a specific individual attitude towards History which is founded on double displacement: temporal (narrative reconfigurations of time) and spatial (exile, travelling). Diaristic practice can be viewed as a response to the experience of one’s imprisonment in some undesirable conditions imposed by historical circumstances and foreign places of living. Interestingly, while for Márai these conditions – restraints of individual freedom – were rather of temporal character (war, communist regime), for Gombrowicz they acquired spatial and cultural dimensions (Polish Form). Therefore, the writers’ escapist responses to their undesirable existential situations implied different facets reflected in diaristic practice. Whereas Gombrowicz’s escape from Poland, so from given cultural and social space, puts to the foreground his temporal displacement realized in his complex modes of diaristic writing and reformulations of temporality, Márai’s escape from History led him to exile stretched between Europe and America which entailed numerous travels in search of a proper place where he could feel at home.

Hermeneutic mode of life would hence very often be accompanied by a need for the diaristic “laboratory of self” resulting in changeable self-identifications. Diaristic writing underlain with kairotic time can be also defined as a hermeneutic technique of the self or as a tool needed to take care of oneself. I am referring here to the concepts elaborated by Michel Foucault during his lectures on the hermeneutics of the subject. Focused on the ancient philosophy, he defined the notion of taking care of oneself not only in terms of a certain imperative, awareness or attention devoted to one’s inner self but also as an occupation performed regularly, a technique or a duty (“[…] a whole domain of complex and regular activities”). Following this conceptualisation, I will argue that diaristic writing, viewed in hermeneutic terms, can be interpreted as a cultural and individual

---

28 Sándor Marai and Tibor Simanyi, Lieber Tibor, Briefwechsel, translated by Tibor Simanyi (München, 2002), 149.
30 Ibid., 493.
practice rooted in the need to take care of oneself. Consequently, it can enable a construction, redefinition of the author’s self-identification through an inscription of his self within narratively reconfigured temporality and space.

Concerning the writers’ dislocations in space (journeys, emigration), I will try to draw some inspiration from the spatial turn which, offering specific terminology and understanding of place, can help to reconstruct the author’s self-identifications shaped in connection with space. The term “geopoetics” introduced by Kenneth White in opposition to geopolitics can shed some light on the individual, poetic but at the same time always referring to a concrete place, ways of liberating oneself from arbitrary politics. Instead of the notion of space (with its verbal corollary of occupying, filling the space), which is “the most abstract, the most empty, the most detached from the realities of life and experience,” Ingold prefers to use the concept of “lifeworld” (inhabited) or “meshwork” of knots (places) and different entwining threads-lifelines. He argues that life is not bound to place (“place-bound”) but lived along some paths (“place-binding”), in movement which he calls “wayfaring.” The existential “meshworks” of the dissertation’s writers consisted of different places abandoned, revisited, recalled or discovered, the places where they crossed with divergent lifelines of other people once met and later sought in memory.

Márai’s numerous journeys might be interpreted as a sign of the “place-binding” mode of life concerned about finding some answers in the West to questions that emerged in the East, therefore in some way binding different parts of the “lifeworld.” In the autobiography characterising his family, Márai mentioned that he inherited from one of his grandparents the “proclivity for wandering, sensitivity, Slavic mobility and uncertainty.” In 1947 during one of his travels to the West, still before leaving Hungary for good, the writer noted that “one cannot accustom to anything as easily as to the changes.” Changes in place, time? This is not specified in the diaristic note but one may surmise that both dimensions were interwoven. Bartol’s wayfaring between Trieste and Ljubljana after the war seems worth studying particularly due to its impact on the writer’s self-identification in respect to space, different cultures and various perspectives either from within the minority (Slovenes in Trieste) or the one imposed by the majority (Slovenian Ljubljana). What shape could a decade spent in Trieste where the Iron Curtain fell, in this city between the East and the West, give to Bartol’s self-understanding? The influence of space on Gombrowicz’s oeuvre was

31 Ingold, *Being Alive*, 145.
32 Ibid., 148-149.
33 Márai, *Wyznania*, 86.
equally strong and could manifest in the priority given to the question “where” (self vis-à-vis otherness, exteriority) over essentialising question “what” (who am I?).\textsuperscript{35} Gombrowicz evading each form of rootedness would explore his changeable, situational selves in dispersion and in relation to space. Thus, his writings were to great measure shaped by his exilic experience and places of exilic stay.

Self-identification in connection with space is inherently linked with exile. Literary scholar John Neubauer noted that Central European exilic experiences of the short twentieth century are unique and different from previous periods from the point of view of violence and scale. What is common for various historical experiences of the twentieth century can be the fact that “the Nazis and the communists have produced interrelated exilic forms and experiences.”\textsuperscript{36} What from the methodological perspective seems important in this context and what Neubauer postulates is to rethink them in reciprocal connections, viewing one always in light of the other, and not separately as chronologically ordered historical phenomena. “Studies of concrete exile phenomena may follow the arrow of historical time, but theoretical reflections should point in the opposite direction today.”\textsuperscript{37} While historical narration based on the chronological ordering of time relates to Central European regional identity, a literary perspective problematizing the concept of time may shed some new light on exilic and other forms of Central European individual historical experiences as well as self-identifications.

I would like to go beyond the geopolitically informed concepts of spatialized identity in order to frame my interpretations within a geopoetic approach to Central Europe. Simona Škrabec’s research on Central Europe paves the way for approaching the geopoetic horizon of this research. Slovene literary critic in her book titled “The imagined geography. The concept of Central Europe in the twentieth century” avoids essentialising and generalising ways of defining this region in positive categories. She emphasises the difference between a historical (unifying) and a literary (particularising) view of Central Europe opting for the latter one which in her opinion does not run the risk of distorting the area’s cultural diversity and historical complexity. Importantly, what distinguishes the two perspectives is the conceptualisation of time. While the first one is structured around the chronological linear time and singular identity, the second one tries to accentuate


\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 20.
different temporal dimensions and, by extension, various modes of self-identifications. Referring to Walter Benjamin’s concept of Angel of History, Škrabec raises the question “whether it is possible for history, in place of the angelic glance suspended in the air high above the people and their sufferings, to take some closer perspective from which it will be possible to stop the passage of time and make the burden of life present. Undoubtedly this mission pertains to literature.”

With the appreciation of literature as a source of research, another question of methodological nature emerges when an object of analysis is inscribed within the Central European context. Is a study enclosed within only one national literary canon satisfactory enough? As the French historian Jacques Le Rider claims, “the intercultural area” shaped in Central Europe imposes the need for a comparative approach to the national literature of this region. Le Rider recognizes the importance of such a perspective because it can unveil other dimensions of the concept of Mitteleuropa. A comparative study on Central European literature, overshadowing the geopolitical and economic macro-narratives together with their protagonists representing power, can shed light on the experiences of life as testified in literature. Consequently, “the Central European identity may define itself as an intercultural koine of which some confirm that it is still alive.”

This Central European “intercultural koine” founded on comparative approach hints at a hermeneutic perspective defined by Vattimo as koine, “the common idiom of both philosophy and culture.” Therefore, self-identification understood in terms of “intercultural koine” can be viewed as mediated by literature and framed by both hermeneutics and geopoetics.

To justify the change of perspectives (from the historical to literary one), it is necessary to address the issue of “crisis of historicism,” namely a broad and complex cultural trend of the threshold of the twentieth century preoccupied with the epistemological (is the objective knowledge possible?), axiological (do the absolute values exist?) and ontological (what is a historical constitution of a human being?) concerns. Within historical debates, the main critique was aimed at the linear, teleological concept of time and the excessive interest with the past to the detriment of the commitment to the present moment and its challenges. One of the articulations of this critique was Benjamin’s messianic dimension of time and his nostalgic image of the Angel of History. The “crisis of historicism” from the threshold of centuries leads to another late twentieth–

39 Jacques Le Rider, Mitteleuropa: Posición histórica de Alemania en la Europa Central, translated by Ana García (Barcelona, 2000), 76.
40 Gianni Vattimo, “Hermeneutics as Koine,” Theory, Culture & Society 5, no. 2-3 (1988), 399
41 Allan Megill, “Why was There a Crisis of Historicism,” History and Theory 36, no. 3 (1997), 416-429.
century critics of the modernist concept of history articulated within postmodernism, which with the emphasis on the category of experience in relation to self-identification, to some extent, constitutes the theoretical background of the following research.

Being aware of a certain vagueness of the blurred concept of identity, recently overused in the scholarship, I will recourse to some alternative analytical vocabulary. Concepts accentuating the changeable, active dimension of individuals’ variable engagement with their selves are not only more precise but also do not put at risk the agency of the persons which may disappear behind often arbitrary and reifying labels of “identity”. Here I would like to follow the suggestions of Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper on how to go “beyond identity.” The alternative concepts proposed by the two American scholars are identification, self-identification, categorisation, self-understanding.42 In the dissertation I will try to use this verbal idiom which seems especially appropriate for the analysis of processual writing such as a diary. Avoiding the essentialising discourses on identity, I will accentuate different modes of self-identifications and self-understandings in the hope of providing some insight into broader phenomenon such as the Central European ways of being. Instead of the question: “what is Central Europe?” another one: “how is it like to be Central European?” will guide my research.

This reformulation of the question, directing my view away from a plethora of concepts of Central Europe coined by geographers and historians, could lead me towards anthropological, literary Central Europe understood as an imagined construct founded on shared fate (exile or inner emigration?) created by specific answers (seriousness or laughter, participation, or indifference?) to given historical situations (World War II, Revolutions in 1956, 1968). Such a shift of attention from unifying spatialized regional identity to multifarious narrative self-identifications, only implicitly related to Central European context, emphasises individual fragmentary historical experiences and sensations vis-à-vis particular space as well as diaristic responses to History.

The commonality that influenced my decision to choose Gombrowicz, Márai and Bartol as participants in the polylog on their historical experiences, is their comparable existential choices, of exile and of diaries. They shared the need to narratively inscribe their selves within meaningful diaristic order of time, different from that dictated by History. Their attempt to secure individual freedom on the pages of their diaries may hint at some bond with the previous epoch of their fathers who were content with anonymous life far from engaging with great politics. In this respect, they (especially Márai) could agree with Zweig who remarked that his inclination for privacy was not

related to the epoch of the twentieth century which implied race for titles, honours, privileges, pressure on membership, presidency in different associations, organisations, and parties. The only “secure possession” in these insecure times of the twentieth century, inherited from the previous epoch and their fathers, would be thus “sense of inner freedom” safeguarded while keeping a journal. However, first and foremost, a diaristic practice allowed them to withdraw from the new order of time of the twentieth century with its ideological, revolutionary projects invading privacy and seizing individual freedom for the sake of collective projects such as emancipation of masses.

The dissertation’s writers regarded their right to inner freedom with similar importance. The degree of inwardness, of course, differs in each case. It ranges from a more centripetal attitude of Márai forced to write to a drawer and convinced about the power of text speaking for itself and hence in no need of an accompanying biography or self-promotional attempts, through the artistically isolated but actively participating in the course of events Bartol, to the much more extrovert Gombrowicz whose literary endeavours, as a form of self-fashioning, had to be public and thus performed in a constant dialogue with readers. Notwithstanding these differences, they shared the conviction about the need to remain free from pressures exercised by the historical moment, ideologies as well as both political and artistic dogmatism.

The writers’ literary outputs and especially their diaristic practices express a feeling of being out of tune with the time of the twentieth century. This tone is exceptionally strong in case of Márai’s personal writing. The three intellectuals experienced also double isolation in their outcast existence and role of writer, not fully accepted, recognized neither by compatriots in their homeland and/or in exile nor by a new host society in exile. Stanisław Barańczak, the Polish literary critic, described Gombrowicz in Argentina as “a largely ignored writer from the margins of a marginal literature, as exotic and odd to his émigré compatriots as he was to the Argentinian literary salons.” Due to the avant-garde and complex character of his literature Gombrowicz—the eccentric was neither popular in Poland nor in the new host society in exile where for a long time he remained unknown. He would never identify himself with any place or epoch as this would pose a threat to his eccentric self. Márai experienced a certain marginalisation as a writer before leaving socialist Hungary where he was regarded by communist intellectuals as the bourgeois relict of the past. In this respect, Márai’s

---

44 Stanisław Barańczak, *Breathing under Water and Other East European Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 1990), 95.
disagreement with György Lukács seems worth mentioning. The fate of Bartol, the Slovene writer living in Trieste, on the Slovene-Italian borderland, was analysed by literary scholars in terms of an apparition, spectre emerging due to the lack of full recognition neither by Italians nor by Slovenes.46

Apart from a coincidence in time of the writers’ lives (the same generation), the similar fate of isolation and comparable responses to challenges posed by History (exile, diaristic practice), another common feature is the existentialist background of reciprocal relations between these authors’ lives and their artistic worlds. Jean Wahl, the French philosopher, noticed that “due to existentialism, ‘to be or not to be’ again became a question”47 which, when posed in the context of my research, opens a chain of other questions: ‘to be or not to be’ in these rather than other coordinates of time and space; to remain in the given historical order of time or to escape inwardly, to diaristic, kairotic time. The question “to be or to flee”48 became a fundamental dilemma of many Central European intellectuals of the twentieth century.

Two of the writers examined in this dissertation (Gombrowicz and Márai) decided to emigrate from the places where they would be threatened by “the Hegelian bite” tantamount to a schematic vision of the world (Miłosz, Captive mind) and imposed identities. In exile, they were subjecting their existence to constant critical reflection and problematisation in their narratives. Diaristic practice played an important role here. Márai’s escapist response to the dissonance of temporalities (historical and personal) took the form of diaristic practice, exile, and travel. In one of his diaristic notes, the writer referred directly to this type of attitude towards the historical moment: “‘To emigrate from the epoch,’ exitio de saeculo is one of the slogans of Saint Francis. His attitude was to be a ‘foreign and wanderer’ in this world. More and more I think that this is the only attitude worthy of a man; even if inhuman.”49 Márai’s escapist attitude, which can be understood as a specific inclination to retreat from the imposed necessity of historical being to the chosen freedom of being elsewhere (in imagination and writing), becomes more understandable when practised by a person whose philosophical views converge with Stoicism.

47 Jean Wahl, Krótka historia egzystencjalizmu, translated by Jacek Aleksander Prokopski (Wrocław, 2004), 51. Gombrowicz got to know the French philosopher and discussed with him some philosophical issues. They met in Royaumont, where in the Cistercian abbey (Cercle culturel) Gombrowicz spent a few months in 1964. In one of the letters to his brother, he recalled: “With Jean Wahl I was discussing a bit phenomenology of existence and after this, the old man introduced me to Gabriel Marcel […].” Witold Gombrowicz, Listy do rodziny (Kraków, 2004), 359. For Gombrowicz’s philosophical views see: Francesco M. Cataluccio, Jerzy Illg, eds., Gombrowicz. Filozof (Kraków, 1991).
49 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 110.
Gombrowicz was also eluding life dictated by History and curbed, devised by the ideological order of the present moment. The writer was conscious of “great [...] pressure of seriousness [...] from all sides.” He added: “Today, in today’s raw times, there is no thought or art which does not shout to you in a loud voice: don’t escape, don’t play, don’t poke fun at yourself, don’t run away!”

Faced with this omnipresent advocacy of seriousness brought about by challenges of historical changes reflected in art, the writer chose an opposite way of escape, play and fun. His desertion was a response to History and its threat of imposing certain roles and identities.

In contrast to Márai and Gombrowicz, Bartol was directly engaged in shaping historical reality through his participation in the Slovene partisan fight for national liberation during the Second World War as well as the official function of curator of the South Slavic culture in Trieste after the war. Another differentiating feature is the place of Bartol’s emigration (Belgrade, Ljubljana) at a relatively short distance from his hometown (village of Saint Ivan close to Trieste). Compared with the extra-European places of exile of Márai (San Diego in the USA) and Gombrowicz (Argentina), he was staying very close to his place of origin. What, nevertheless, determined the choice of the Slovene writer to contribute to these reflections on Central European historical experience in the twentieth century was his extensive diaristic practice and, especially important in the context of this thesis, one of its central themes: historical sense (zgodovinski čut).

With regard to the dissertation’s structure, firstly, I will reflect on its main sources, thus the diaristic writing in general. I will try to answer several questions about the diaristic order of time and about the way the journals may be studied. I will follow here anthropological approach to a diary which views it in terms of a diaristic practice rooted in concrete historical situations. I will emphasise one of the important aims of the practice of journal keeping which is the author’s attempt to reconfigure his/her perception of time at the crossroads of two orders of time: the historical one and that of one’s consciousness. In some instances I will also mention the material side of diaristic practice which is important within the anthropological approach to diary. The first chapter will also tackle the methodological issues. In the second chapter, I will ponder different ways of

---

51 Bartol’s archival materials can be found in Ljubljana in the Manuscript Collection of the Slovene National and University Library and in the Manuscript Collection of Vladimir Bartol at the Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Gombrowicz’s manuscripts and typescripts are in the archives of Kultura and the Literary Institute in Maisons-Laffitte as well as in the Beinecke Library (Yale University). The original of Márai’s extensive diaristic practice (18 volumes) is in the Sándor Petőfi Museum of Literature in Budapest. Due to the language barrier I will base my interpretations of Márai’s diary on the Polish translation of Teresa Worowska (five volumes) as well as the German (translated by Paul Kárpáti, Christian Polzin and Hans Skirecki) and in some part also Spanish translations (translated by Eva Cserhati and A.M. Fuentes Gaviño).
conceptualising Central Europe ranging from definitions in positive categories (identity of the region dictated by geopolitics) to a perspective founded on negative terms which views the area as a fragmented and undesired, imagined community of historical fate (self-identification framed by geopoetics). I will not try to characterise what this region is or should be in an attempt based on a belief in the possible delimitation of the area’s boundaries by either including or excluding some countries. My aim will be neither an attempt to delineate the strict borders of Central Europe defining it more geometrico nor the reflection on the region’s identity features, uniqueness, differentia specifica and hence, in the end, the regional identity as well. Instead, I will try to put to the foreground the three writers’ changeable self-identifications shaped by historical experiences, to some extent marked by some patterns of Central European space: excessive History and state of in-betweenness. The third chapter will address particular attitudes towards History in Central Europe based on an interpretation of the personal writings of Márai, Gombrowicz and Bartol. In the next chapter, I will focus on the problem of the writers’ exilic self-identifications. The fifth chapter is devoted to Gombrowicz’s escapist response to the History of the twentieth century which I interpret as a form of temporal displacement realized in the simultaneous two modes of diaristic practice (the public Diary and the private Kronos). The next chapter will address the issue of Márai’s attitude towards History which assumed the shape of spatial displacement accomplished in his numerous journeys comprising a long exilic odyssey. In the last chapter, I will discuss Bartol’s reconfigurations of self-identification in relation to space and time during his 10-year stay in Trieste after the war.
II. Diaristic practice: time and narrative self-identification

1. Introduction: “temporal architecture”

Reflection on a diaristic order of time requires first a few remarks on the highly polysemous concept of time in general. According to Michel de Certeau “for three centuries maybe the objectification of the past has made of time the unreflected category of a discipline […].”¹ However, different existentialist approaches to the past far from objectifying illusion (for instance phenomenological approach while keeping a diary) problematise also the concept of time. Various dimensions of time have been examined in scholarship in different ways depending on disciplinary conventions, changing intellectual trends and individual preferences. For instance, there has been a tendency to juxtapose linearity and one-directionality of Judeo-Christian teleological time with the cyclicity of pagan time.² However, as the cultural theorist Svetlana Boym rightly noted, this opposition does not tell anything about the secularisation of perceptions of time which evolving since the Renaissance has made them more and more devoid of cosmological entrenchment.³ This kind of juxtaposition, therefore, obscures the historical relativity of time and poses a threat of reductionism. German historian Reinhart Koselleck introduces the metaphor of sediment/layer in his description of historical times and elaborates his “multilayered theory of time”/ “a theory of sedimentations of time” in order to avoid this reductionist, dichotomous perspective which in fact contradicts reality and its temporal complexity “because every historical sequence contains linear as well as recurrent elements” and that is why a “cyclical movement is a line directed back into itself.”⁴

Both horizontal, chronological axis of the linear passage of time and the vertical, internal one which characterises the individual recurrent time of memory and consciousness are interrelated. The self-evident triple division of the first concept of time into past, present, and future has its interesting inner counterpart. In the view of Polish philosopher Marek Szulakiewicz “an experience of time is

¹ Michel de Certeau, Heterologies: Discourse on the Other, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 2006), 216. Scholars dealing with the philosophy of history and historical theory, Berber Beverange and Chris Lorenz characterise this common-sense view of time identified with calendars, clocks and traditionally shared by historians as homogenous (each unit of time is the same), linear, directional, and absolute (time independent from space) – Berber Beverange and Chris Lorenz, “An Introduction,” in Breaking up Time. Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future, ed. B. Beverange and Ch. Lorenz (Bristol, 2013), 17.
⁴ Koselleck, Sediments of time, 3-4, 6; Koselleck, Warstwy czasu. Studia z metahistorii, translated by Krystyna Krzemieniowa, Jarosław Merecki (Warszawa, 2012), 14, 17.
the experience of transitoriness, volatility, lability and not of past, presence and future.”\textsuperscript{5} The two concepts of time: historical and individual overlap and, therefore, cannot be perceived in binary opposition. Memories and hopes always interweave with the time of history. Naturally, the chronological axis of time has been widely explored within the traditional positivist paradigm of historical research. Recently, however, memory studies and research aiming at tackling trauma and historical experience provoked many historians and philosophers to historicise time and reflect more carefully on the nature of interrelationships between present, past, and future.\textsuperscript{6}

The concept of time thus should not be taken for granted as commonsense and homogenous. Instead, it shall be always subjected to historicisation. In Koselleck’s view: “Historical time is not simply an empty definition, but rather an entity which alters along with history and from whose changing structure it is possible to deduce the shifting classification of experience and expectation.”\textsuperscript{7} Moreover, historical time is shaped by a diversified political and social life, human action, and experience (“particular acting and suffering human beings”). Consequently, there is no singular order of time but many historical times overlapping one another and characterised by various “temporal rhythms.” Hence, historical times are relative, and their shape always depend on cultural, social, political contexts defined by changeable relationships between past, “space of experience” and future, “horizon of expectation.”\textsuperscript{8}

Different temporal configurations, “cultural time regimes”\textsuperscript{9} entail divergent individual responses and incite various existential attitudes. American historian, Constantin Fasolt expressed this diversity in individual responses to the passage of time depending on both spatial and historical contexts claiming that:

\begin{quote}

different human beings at different times in different places have different attitudes to time. Some focus on the present, some on the past, some on the future. Some view time as a devourer, others as a healer of all wounds. Some believe that the time can be divided into segments, while others treat it as a seamless web. Time can be perceived as moving fast or slow
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{5} Marek Szulakiewicz, \textit{Czas i to, co ludzkie. Szkice z chronozofii i kultury} (Toruń, 2011), 26.
\textsuperscript{6} Beverange and Lorenz, “An Introduction,” 7-35.
\textsuperscript{8} Koselleck, “Time and History,” translated by Kerstin Behnke in \textit{The practice of conceptual history: timing history, spacing concepts}, by Koselleck, translated by Todd Samuel Presner et al. (Stanford, 2002), 110-111, 114. It is possible to identify historical times in the sphere “where time itself occurs or is subjectively enacted in humans as historical beings: in the relationship between past and future, which always constitutes an elusive present.” (111).
or standing still. Time can be likened to an arrow, a river, a circle, a wheel. For some human
beings time is the most elementary reality; for others it is nothing but illusion.10

Inherently relative concept of time embraces thus numerous definitions which change not only in
time, space but also individually. Polish philosopher, Krzysztof Pomian examined various
dimensions of time in his book titled “The Order of Time.” “Multifarious nature of time,” composed
of different overlapping and discordant layers, gives way to a “temporal architecture” characterised
by Pomian as “a multistory and multilayered construction.”11 It has two interwoven sides comprising
of many different layers which originated from succeeding epochs, (shaped by them as well as by
those following them): both objective pertaining to non-human reality, as well as subjective,
characterising individual experiences and perceptions. Moreover, as the division between the
objective side and the subjective one is individually shaped (acquired, performed), and hence, never
present a priori, its sharpness is historically relative and psychologically conditioned.12

Therefore, as Pomian argues, the “temporal architecture” pertains also to individuals who in
consequence can be characterised by a certain temporal construction in which particular stories are
shaped in accordance to phases in biological evolution and history. Nowadays thus, “each or almost
every individual experiences in its own way anew the historical conflict between qualitative time
and quantitative time.”13 Due to impossible accordance and harmony between these times, potential
questions about their definitions and relations are inherent in each “temporal architecture” which is
never perfectly structured. These questions are posed in connection with the experience of time, its
present conceptualisations, and specific common preconceptions.14 All these questions are also
ingrained in diaristic practice which combines various dimensions of temporality in an attempt to
mitigate the conflict between two different “temporal families,” namely qualitative and quantitative
times.15

---

10 Constantin Fasolt, “Breaking up Time – Escaping from Time: Self-Assertion and Knowledge of the Past” in Breaking
up Time. Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future, eds. B. Beverange and Ch. Lorenz (Bristol, 2013),
176, 181-183, 185. The author also dwells on the possible responses to the challenge of some radical changes over time
in respect to individual integrity endangered by “inner tension” or “cognitive dissonance.” There are two main responses:
one of yielding oneself to the experience of time and facing the change of oneself in time by sacrificing one’s old
convictions to the new way of thinking (assuming also responsibility). Another response is far from sacrifice. It implies
an escape from the experience of the passage of time by breaking up time and asserting the distance between oneself in
the present and the past reality through imagination. This also brings a feeling of freedom.
12 Ibid., 314, 318.
13 Ibid., 309.
14 Ibid., 243-244.
15 Ibid., 331, 310.
The qualitative category, as Pomian reminds, embraces psychological, subjective times (plural because individually shaped) directed towards past with memories and towards future with expectations, as well as, imbued with emotions. They are intermingled with collective, equally qualitative times (political, religious, solar). The quantitative time of clocks emerged relatively recently and contrary to interiorized qualitative time is imposed by the mechanisms of industrial world and technology, by machines and clocks, by science. As Koselleck underlined, former orientation in time deeply embedded in seasons, nature and the sphere of human action, founded on “nature-bound, traditional rhythms of time” became replaced by abstraction, modern chronometers such as clocks and “quantified, uniform units of time.” Consequently, chronometry managed “to remove humans from what was naturally pregiven to them” succeeding in “a denaturalisation of the division of time and of the experience of time included in it.”

2. Diaristic order of time

Notwithstanding this general standardisation and uniformisation introduced by modern chronometers, Pomian emphasised that quantitative and hence measurable time, though seemingly identical, is perceived differently. Devoid of natural ways of orientation on one side and clocks on the other, individual perception of time as experienced in everyday life (length of some sections of time) is shaped vis-à-vis witnessed events, their intensity and intricacy. Detachment from both chronometers and other external references serving measurement of time, such as observed events, eliminates a perception of the passage of time provoking disorientation, feeling of loss and sensation of eternity. The link between perception of time and its pace, changeability is important in the context of this dissertation. As Pomian mentioned in reference to Aristotle’s concept of time, it is the movement and change that condition the way time is perceived and “the consciousness of time” regarded as a “fact neither physical nor cosmic, but psychological or even better: placed at the intersection of what is ‘external’ and that what is ‘internal’, perception and introspection [...]” In this context diaristic writing can be regarded as a variation of this intermediary place of interlock

---

16 Ibid., 214-217, 331.
17 Ibid., 219-224, 310, 331.
18 Koselleck, *The practice of conceptual history*, 103-104. This gradual process of “denaturalisation” was regarded both in terms of burden and relief.
20 Stefan Klein, *Czas. Przewodnik użytkowania*, translated by Krzysztof Żak (Warszawa, 2009), 17-26. As an example Klein describes distortions which longer stays in caves (“places beyond time”) may provoke in one’s inner time.
between perceived history and the time experienced, both thusly meaningfully interrelated. Time as “an invisible counterpart of movement” and “some metaphysical intercalation in the middle of physical world,” thus always experienced with regard to historical reality, requires problematisation and meaningful mediation in a diary. Consequently, another, parallel step accompanying perception of history, which turbulent course can overwhelm and perplex not only quantitatively but also when it comes to complicacy, is the act of writing a diary. Keeping a journal problematises and puts some order to the inner time experienced differently depending on spatial-temporal context of individual entanglement in historical circumstances, their changeability and pace.

Pomian in his above-mentioned book “The Order of Time” interestingly defined the origins of time which may also inspire further reflections on possible origins of a diaristic order of time. According to the Polish philosopher, time would emerge out of “a coordination of a certain continuity of facts with changes represented or programmed by some invisible object, which is supposed to give them some sense […]” Pomian added that such time afterwards should be defined with a typology: cyclical, linear or immobile, regressive, or progressive. The origins of time lie, therefore, at the crossroads of two contrasting spheres: one visible where events are perceptible and the other invisible where one shall search for means of explanation and understanding of the facts, their meaning and direction. The sphere of the invisible is broader and thus embraces the visible one which is dependent on the former in its want of meaningful fulfilment. Importantly, “the border between these two areas is moveable, and they themselves are only empty places, filled with contents, which change depending on cultures and epochs […].” Pomian enumerates among “invisible objects” as points of meaningful references: “nature, Providence, fortune, play of individual affections, human spirit or World Spirit, economic or social contradictions, will of power etc.” Time emerged at the crossroads of facts and some “invisible object,” as Pomian remarks, might acquire diverse typologies (cyclical, linear or immobile). They describe relations between different sections of time (remote and recent pasts, present and future) and thus define a particular moment hic et nunc in reference to the entirety, “once justifying hopes, another time – yearnings, and yet another time – fears.”

---

21 Pomian, Porządek, 228. Particularly interesting in the context of the temporal structure of diary seems Aristotle’s concept of movement which, as Pomian reminds, consists of three elements: privation (the past manifestation of phenomena), form which belongs to future and subject which pertains to the present moment and “which being protects identity of thing during changes to which it is subject.”

22 Ibid., 34, 47.
The question worth posing in this context is whether, among these “invisible objects,” mentioned by Pomian as a constitutive element of time, there could be also Koselleck’s universal and collective singular History. Koselleck emphasised that “the experience of modernity is opened up only with the discovery of a history in itself, which is at once its own subject and object.”23 “History in itself” as the “invisible object” which determines a shape of a diaristic poetics and diaristic order of time? This supposition leads to a concept of a diary as an attempt to meaningfully correspond some facts and time experienced with “history in itself.” What is the diaristic order of time which emerges at this crossroads of different temporalities? What is the shape of the time reconfigured in a diary?

Koselleck’s concept of the unitary “history in and for itself”24 brings to mind the universal history and its counterpoise, namely Benjamin’s messianic understanding of historical materialism. What is particularly interesting in the context of this dissertation is Benjamin’s view of the historical process accompanied by different conceptualisations of time both within historicism (universal history) and historical materialism. While the first one is founded on the empty and homogenous linear vision of time filled with historical progress, the second one accentuates temporal “constellations” and the present moment, the role of which is not a mere transition but a gateway undermining and shattering the historical continuum. Whereas the first vision of history intends to introduce the distance between the present and the past (“once upon a time”), the latter one attempts to bridge this distance and approach the past by experiencing it in the present moment.25

Following Benjamin’s remarks on the concept of history, it becomes clear that historicism which aims at reconstructing the universal history, in its additive character is founded on a chronological order of time. A counterweight to this vision of history as continuum and chronology thus is a view of the historical process as discontinuous and in some way comprised in the present moment which, by halting the time, could allow one to experience the past in its fragments. It would be centred on Kairos, individual time of consciousness which also underlies the diaristic practice. Keeping a diary means taking notes always in the present moment. This temporal dimension unique for a journal (its chronotope?) allows its author to shatter the continuity of time and focus on his experiences of being in the world as comprised in the present hic et nunc but concurrently extended towards the past (by rereading the entries of the bygone selves) and towards the future image of the self. Therefore, as

23 Koselleck, Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time, 93.
24 Ibid., 93. “The experience of modernity is opened up only with the discovery of a history in itself, which is at once its own subject and object.”
the French scholar specialising in personal writing Philippe Lejeune remarked, the diarist’s attitude towards time and its passage shall be expressed not in terms of “a struggle against time (pinning down the present, etc.—preserving memory)” but as “a prior yielding to time (which is atomized, exploded, reduced to moments).” In consequence “the diary reflects (but only afterwards, in the reading) at once the most naive (uncontrolled and unwilled) adherence to the present and a sort of surrender.”

Time in the context of keeping a journal seems an overwhelming and uncontrollable force which may only help to guide reflection (imposing a chronological structure) but as experience will never be narratively tamed, unified. Each struggle against this force visible in many attempts of putting some order to chaotic experiences with the help of memory by constructing a narrative identity seems in vain. Every form of continuity emerging on the diary’s pages will remain provisional and temporary, undermined by discontinuous historical processes. Time explodes and evades any narrative attempt to pin it down in some rational way. The only possible attitude becomes “surrender” to the annihilating power of time. Diaristic order of time as atomized and consisting of moments grasped and noted down always at the present moment is underlain with the attitude of “yielding to time” which enables to articulate experiences of one’s being in time comprised in present moments. The diaristic practices of dissertation’s writers could be also regarded as imbued to some extent by an attitude of surrender understood as a sense of loss in the uncontrollable, accelerated passage of time and recognition of the overwhelming presence of historical order of time directly affecting their lives. They witnessed changes brought by the speeding pace of the twentieth century and experienced disintegration of historical realities, the collapse of political regimes which for their ancestors could still appear as unchangeable. The consciousness of one’s inevitable immersion in the discontinuous nature of History of the twentieth century, tearing apart any coherent story of life, could provoke the need to retell it and thus better understand oneself on pages of a diary.

Diarist’s attitude of “yielding to time,” as a manifestation of individual surrender to its overwhelming passage, hints at an important phenomenological dimension of diaristic writing, namely writing form inside or within the time. As Lejeune expressed it metaphorically “keeping a diary is surfing on time. Time is not an objective, continuous thing that the diarist tries to portray from the outside using tiny discontinuous brushstrokes, as a novelist would. He is himself caught up

---

26 Philippe Lejeune, “Composing a Diary,” in On Diary, eds. J. D. Popkin and J. Rak, translated by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu, 2009), 170.
by the movement he is sculpting, moving along with it, emphasizing certain lines and directions, transforming this inescapable drift into a dance.”

“Surfing on time” could indicate an individual’s attempt to remain on the surface of the river of time. Immersed in its currents one recourses to personal writings to prevent oneself from “drowning” in a meaningless chaos of events. In this respect, keeping a diary allows one to change the unpredictable and chaotic historical current into a dance mastered by the author. Diaristic notes, made always at the present moment, do not possess any inherent structure typical for other less personal narratives which can be characterised by a triple frame of introduction, main body, and conclusion. The repetitive character of the beginning of diaristic writing and the incertitude about its end, place this act in a sphere of eternal presence.

Provided that the original note is not corrected, fixed, and changed in any way (“as with watercolors, you cannot retouch it later”), the act of yielding to time and grasping its moments in a journal is rather prospective and open to future (to a reader or to a potential self who sometimes is given a role of diary’s imagined reader). “Contrary to what people say, the diary is the enemy of memory, because it keeps your past from changing!”

Could a diary let shed a burden of memory? In its concentration on the moment here and now and openness to the future, a diary might foster distancing from the past. In this respect, diaristic writing resembles the first draft of a painting designed to lead to a piece of art which, in the context of this dissertation, means an art of being in accordance with the author’s vision and his/her inner order of time. This preliminary stage, however, does not have an end.

The recurrent act of taking diaristic notes would hence be tantamount to safeguarding one’s present moment, as a gateway to kairotic time of consciousness (remembrance and hopes), from very often an intrusive chronological time of History which linearity, when interlocked with inner time, may contort itself in individual experience into a circle of absurdity. Another research question is whether the kairotic temporality and hermeneutic way of being, symbolized by the not entirely close spiral figure of life, may be an answer to the hermetic wheel of absurdity which constituted the social existence in Central Europe in the twentieth century, set in motion by the philosophies of history rooted in dialectical thought. The absurdity of History, enclosed within a vicious circle, reverberated from the plays, stories written by the representatives of the theatre of absurd (Sławomir Mrożek, István Örkény, Václav Havel). This type of artistic expression served both as the means to

---

28 Ibid., 182.
29 Lejeune, “Composing a Diary,” 169.
ridicule the communist reality and search for some meaning. Some artists-dissidents (Havel) combined their artistic activity with personal engagement in political situations. Other Central European intellectuals-emigrants, however, perceiving historical reality also in the category of absurd, chose a different path, distant from political activism, which I would call the hermeneutic laboratory of self, accomplished within a diaristic practice and exilic distance.

As Argentinean writer Ricardo Piglia remarks in reference to Gombrowicz’s *Diary*, diaristic writing, as an open space of questions and “continuous experimentation with experience, form and writing,” remains in close relationship with the exilic condition. 30 Therefore, each diary may be regarded as an inconclusive response to the historical reality which confined within a schematic vision of the world founded on dogmatic answers can reverberate with absurd overtone. Diary may help to bridge an increasing abyss between ever more estranged reality and oneself allowing thus to reconnect life with its adequate expression. The diaristic laboratory of the self becomes a stage of reconfiguring self-identification within shifted historical circumstances and spatial coordinates of life.

The perception of the History of the twentieth century as a source of absurdity is traceable in some of Gombrowicz’s and Márai’s writings. Commenting on one of his polemics with literary critics in 1957 Gombrowicz noted: “The world is an absurdity and a monstrosity to our indestructible need for meaning, justice, love. A simple thought. A sure one….“31 The heroes of Gombrowicz’s plays were very often closed in the circle of absurdity – the signature of a seemingly self-perpetuating hellish combination which could represent the dialectics that would drive the History of the twentieth century. Besides fictitious texts, Gombrowicz also referred to the figure of absurdity (circle) in his diaristic writing where it could designate the shape of his time of consciousness in critical moments of his individual fate. The return to Europe in 1963 made Gombrowicz-diarist inscribe his life within a circle. The writer perceived his existence as no longer escaping from death. During his stay in West Berlin in 1964, he noted: “The cycle was coming to a close. […] I had come across my death in various circumstances but there was always some sort of missing each other that gave a perspective on life, meanwhile in the Tiergarten I came to know death head-on—and from that moment it has not left me.”32 Gombrowicz’s diaristic practice as a hermeneutic, escapist response to the absurdity of the History, which as he stated, was going forward “like drunk and

sleepy,”\textsuperscript{33} can be compared – to refer to the author’s statement from the \textit{Diary} – to “something of a crack in this pitiless homogeneity, something like a door slightly ajar, like some sort of softening…and I could sneak out this way...”\textsuperscript{34} The diaristic practice seems here to denote a slight ajar, an open spiral figure which could characterise a way of being marked with escape from an absurd historical context.

Márai was not only reading literature of the absurd.\textsuperscript{35} His diagnosis of the ridiculously unreasonable and incongruous character of reality could be imbued with his personal experience later narratively framed. In the diary, he inscribed some moments of his life (both in Hungary and exile) within the figure of a circle which can symbolize the feeling of personal enclosure and absurdity. The act of rereading the diary allowed Márai to notice in his life’s two phases (Hungarian and exilic) certain parallel features which, as the elements of his daily routine such as a stroll along a river, either the Hudson River or the Danube, also evoked a similar atmosphere. From the exilic distance of eight years Márai, referring to his diaristic notes taken in 1947 in Hungary noticed that notwithstanding the changed background of his daily routine, the atmosphere accompanying it remained the same.

Every day from two to four a walk along the Hudson River on the Fort Tryon hills’ paths. A floe is drifting on the river. Then I make an extract from the journal entries from the year 1947. And I am reading this: ‘... every day I go for a long walk on Rose Hill, I go down to the Danube, where a floe is drifting, and I feel as if I was walking around a prison stroller.’ Today I was feeling that way as well.\textsuperscript{36}

While in exile in New York, the writer noted in his diary: “Cold autumn. Each morning and early afternoon a stroll. Rather making a circle than stroll. In this way a lifer prisoner circles.”\textsuperscript{37} Márai used the same metaphor while describing his “entirely empty and aimless” life in America just before leaving the continent in 1967.\textsuperscript{38} The figure of the circle as a recurrent motive in some diaristic

\textsuperscript{33} Gombrowicz, \textit{Testament. Rozmowy z Dominique de Roux} (Kraków, 2004), 77.
\textsuperscript{34} Gombrowicz, \textit{Diary}, vol. 3, 646.
\textsuperscript{35} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 2, 493, 494. Beckett’s play and figure of Godot provoked Mária to reflect on the world’s contemporary situation and place of a human being. He identified Godot with waiting which he viewed as the only remaining response a man can give to the new world dominated by masses.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 395-396.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 490.
\textsuperscript{38} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 4, 24.
notes taken by Márai in different historical and spatial contexts, can denote the author’s perception of life both in communist Hungary and later in exile in terms of absurd confinement.39

The writers at the focal point of the dissertation embarked on diaristic writing and an exilic path of life to great measure in response to the overwhelming absurdity of historical reality. While keeping a journal, the time becomes reconfigured in line with a specific typology which attributes present moment with sense. In the diaristic writings of three writers, the typology acquires very often a cyclical shape. This recurrent pattern, inherent in a mere repetitive act of keeping a journal, is visible also in the diarists’ inclination for commenting on anniversaries of some significant events and in the perception of their lives as divided into cycles of seven years. It is important to note, following the remarks of the German philosopher Rüdiger Safranski, the important role of the perception of time in cyclical terms which characterising the organic life and corresponding with biological time, rhythms of the body may serve as a meaningful bridge between one’s inner time and the time of the world. Cyclical structure mitigates anxiety and discomfort provoked by the experience of the limitless linear time, its sequence of fleeting, irreversible and ungraspable moments in which evanescent emergence is undermined by nothingness. Therefore, a cyclical pattern of diaristic order of time may provide feelings of continuity and durability, relieving from a burden of irreversible linearity of chronological time.40 This cyclical typology becomes most evident while (re)reading a diary.

Writing a journal is a process of constant composition of oneself. In the opinion of Lejeune “the diary as it is composed has more modest ambitions. It does not purport to take in all of existence, to resuscitate the past, or read a person’s fate. For brief periods, it carves life as it happens and takes up the challenge of time.”41 The diary can touch upon only fragments of existence because it is not written in accordance with some generic scheme, a narrative structure which would be imposed a posteriori on previous experiences. A diarist “poised at the razor’s edge of the moment”42 writes while surfing with the flow of time and so s/he can only give a momentary shape to the self constantly open to changes. The protean self is being composed of a series of traces of the present

39 Nevertheless, the figure of the circle can acquire another meaning which is an act of return attributed with an important role. Such a return (from America to Europe, Italy) happened in 1967 and for Márai it meant not an accident but something which had to happen. A moment closed and not leading anywhere else: “the circle closed itself,” bringing a feeling of fulnessment. From this perspective the stay in the USA seemed to Márai to be a valuable intermezzo which not only influenced his worldview but most importantly, after his return to Italy, let him ascertain that he was more himself than before. Ibid., 44, 48, 67, 54.
41 Lejeune, “Composing a Diary,” 173.
moments – ebbs and flows of time leaving its evanescent marks on the shore of a diary. However, could this series of ever-changing present moments-beads still “adornment” a diarist with a sensation of continuity of unchanged self?

In respect to the temporal dimension of diaristic writing and distinction introduced by the philosopher Galen Strawson and reflected upon by the literary scholar James L. Battersby between the episodic and diachronic modes of being, another important question which should be posed here is whether diaristic storytelling – so abundant with silence and discontinuities – represents only “an Episodic approach to self-experience, in which the self […] is a ‘now’ phenomenon disconnected from the past and the future.”

Is there any continuity possible to discern in the discontinuous nature of each diary which, in the end, remains a collection of notes, fragmentary pieces of writing? Due to the main temporal axis of a diary centred on the present moment, diaristic writing can certainly deepen the episodic self-understanding but this should not mean an utter rejection of any possibility of the diachronic “style of temporal being.” A diarist could rather experience his/her self both episodically and diachronically. In the background of a series of different temporary selves (each grasped at the present moment of writing), remains the same human being experiencing his/her “surfing on time” and overarching its now-emerging, variable episodic manifestations. However, this distinction is experienced differently by particular diarists who can either emphasise their dispersion in episodic selves or search for a diachronic being.

In this context an interesting contrast emerges between Márai’s belief in diaristic continuity of the self and Gombrowicz’s episodic temporality experienced by various selves in the Diary (unlike Kronos characterised by chronological continuity). Consequently, whereas Márai, who managed to grasp some permanence of the self in time would resemble Parmenides, Gombrowicz’s relativism and scepticism which underpin his changeable self-fashioning and his “elusive personality” in the Diary, would rather come closer to the philosophy of life advocated by Heraclitus. Márai expressed his conviction about the continuity of self, notwithstanding changeability of time, in one of his letters to a friend Tibor Simanyi. Referring to the inevitable process of ageing, which experience also found its reflection on pages of the diary, Márai noticed that even though each day was bringing some changes to his state, his feeling of ‘I’ remained the
same. Emotions, physical states, thoughts were coming and going like an unstable current of the same river or its temporal and changeable sediment on the surface. What was happening to him and bringing some noticeable changes outwardly did not affect his inner self. This situation, as Márai noted, would sometimes seem surprising, astounding to him but all the variations were experienced by the same person. 

The decision to embark oneself on writing a journal can be made on the grounds of a need to gain some sense of persistence in time. In the view of Paul Ricoeur, each episodic “now expresses the correlation between the lived time of the I, with its lived present, and the cosmological time in which events unfold, with its specific moments [...] the invention of the calendar and of calendar time is the instrument for this correlation. The phenomenon of dating is what results.” Accordingly, diaristic writing structured by the act of dating can help in correlating different selves immersed in various temporalities. In other words, precise dates in a diary might indicate author’s attempt to inscribe his/her inner self and phenomenological time within a broader meaningful frame of “cosmological time.” Some literary diaries, however, are devoid of precise dating or even if there are some dates, they might be false. This is a case of Gombrowicz’s Diary which I will examine later. Deprived of precise dates, it indicates the author’s preference for episodic momentary and changeable self-understanding.

The clear discontinuous side of a journal is very often counterweighted by the author’s complementary propensity for grasping some sense of durability. The search for a certain continuity becomes especially visible in different practices of diaristic writing combined with sometimes extraordinary ways of rereading one’s diary. As Lejeune rightly remarked, the mere physical aspect of a diary can indicate the author’s longing for continuity as well. There are of course different ways of writing a journal. Besides the diarists who can easily find their way through growing piles of separate sheets of paper, some people would rather choose a bounded notebook because of an abundance of white pages which can instil a sense of insurance guaranteeing an arrival of future, hence some sort of continuation and fulfilment. Due to such a diary’s definite space, enclosed by covers delimiting the beginning and the end of diaristic notes, it is probably easier for their author to gain a feeling of durability in time.

---

46 Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 231.
48 Ricoeur accentuated the importance of reading in the processes of self-identification. “To read oneself, that is what I will call the refiguration, not only of time, not only of action, but of agent him-or herself through narrative.” Ibid., 225.
According to Lejeune, a notebook, “sewn, glued, stapled, or bound with spiral wires—on which people often write their names, operates at the level of the fantasy that Ricoeur calls ‘narrative identity.’ It promises some minimal measure of unity.” Nevertheless, writing a diary on separate sheets of paper can also entail some sensation of unity of self because each “diary’s discontinuities are organized in series and rewoven into continuities.” How is it possible? Lejeune continues by giving two examples. The answer lays in multiple ways of writing a journal implying its simultaneous and rather surprising (because not linear) rereading. Both authors analysed by the French anthropologist “invented new ways of grasping the continuities of life through the discontinuities of the diary.” They were taking diaristic notes but at the same time also relating them to previous events and experiences from their lives. The reference, however, was made not in chronological order to what happened the day before writing but to what happened the same day, one year or a few years before. Therefore, in this mode of existential storytelling, the horizontal and universal line of chronological time is always crossed by the second vertical line of one’s time of consciousness and memory. On the pages of these diaries, some interesting temporal coordinate systems were emerging each time the authors were writing and rereading their notes. Notes taken in different points of intersection can constitute some sort of a structure which might let the diarists grasp a sensation of continuity, as Lejeune noted, “not only between today and yesterday, but also across the whole span of one’s life. Can it give us access to a fundamental permanence?”

What does this “fundamental permanence” mean? One’s narrative identity? Certainly, the notion’s implications go far beyond an essentialist understanding rooted in a deep-laid, substantial self. In this respect “the diaristic regime of self-identification” could to some extent resemble “the Ancien Régime of identity” structured not around the modern binary categories placing the deep self, understood as a constant instance of authenticity, in opposition to everything else which, as located outside on the surface, was always regarded as artificial. The accelerated pace of modern history uprooted an individual from the ready-made metanarratives guaranteeing meaning and security. Deprived of these given stories, by means of which it was possible to anchor oneself in social and cosmological systems, instances of meaning, one’s selfhood became a task to be first invented and then continuously remade, negotiated in a life-long process of storytelling.

50 Ibid., 179.
51 Ibid., 181.
52 Ibid., 184.
As Ricoeur noted, “the self does not immediately know itself, but only knows itself indirectly by way of the detour through the cultural signs of all sorts.” Narrative self-identification could be understood as a momentary plotting of experiences and events of one’s life, always open to changes. If a self-identification is not given but made, invented and retold, the narrative, which “can serve as an investigative lens to examine core features of complex human experience,” must play a crucial role in this process. One of the modes of this existential storytelling is diaristic writing where both historical account and fictional narrative meet. In Ricoeur’s view, the combination of history and fiction which are tools of poetics of a story, responds to different aporias of the phenomenology of time. The third time reconfigured in a diary and thus meaningful for the author, mediates between the time of consciousness and time of the universe which both silent are awaiting some meaning constructed by the individual. Time of consciousness remains beyond articulation and so when Augustine of Hippo was asked about the definition of time, he realized that although he clearly felt what it was, he could not express it in language. The diaristic practice in its mediatory role can facilitate the convergence of two orders of time which, in the end, can resound with some momentary sensation of meaning. One of Márai’s diaristic notes can be interpreted as such fleeting merging of two orders of time, the author’s momentary grasp of the congruence of silence within the diarist (time of consciousness) and the one around him (time of universe), that is the moment when one can almost hear “the secret tick-tack of the mechanism moving the world.”

3. Diaristic practice and anthropological approach to diary

Besides the diaristic order of time, it is also necessary to reflect on the diary’s role and different approaches in the study of diaristic writing. In this respect, a question arises whether a diary is merely inconsistent, regular recordkeeping, an individualistic and spontaneous act of daily writing or whether it may also reveal some broader cultural implications which could have an impact on collectivities. As I have already demonstrated before, a diary shall not be reduced to a mirror for one’s individual daily encounters with an external world because it also embraces some creative aspects of critical self-examination which contribute to shaping one’s perceptions of time, space and therefore also self-understanding. As Lejeune rightly noticed, “diary is not only some sort of writing,

54 Ricoeur, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 240.
56 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 1, 7.
some text, but also the existential practice, way of living, form of ordering this life.” The French scholar added that “writing a diary is a practice in which we use scripture to guide, control our lives.” It serves to preserve some traces of life in both a reflexive and continuous way which can establish some sense of durability of self in time.

A particular selection of events worth retelling in a diary and choice of style, way to narrate them are the means of sculpting one’s self-identification out of a meaningless and chaotic historical material. Consequently, a diary seems to play the role of some prosthesis or a sieve helping in the everyday, very often unconscious, processes of selection of events, moments, phenomena which are of great importance for a diarist and hence worth retelling. As Lejeune defined it: “Far from being a sorcerer’s mirror, the diary is a filter. Its value lies precisely in its selectivity and discontinuities.” Only a few sorts of grains of sand, being the ossified moments of one’s experiences captured from the flow of time, may come through the empty spaces in this filter. Accordingly, each diarist is very often obsessed with just a few existential problems such as perception of time and History. In that respect, the diary is, as Lejeune claimed, “first and foremost […] a piece of music, meaning an art of repetition and variation.” The recurrent and obsessively rethought issues become the coloured threads most visible in the warp which, with a help of a diarist’s pen working as a shuttle, gives rise to one’s life-web covered with a certain set of repeating patterns.

The diary as a web? Or maybe to emphasise its changeable content and fragile, because underlain with time, structure it would be better to compare it to a spider web or a piece of lacework? If absence, silence, and empty space prevail over the one filled with writing Lejeune may be right in choosing these metaphors adding that “in the tapestry of your life, you follow very specific threads, and only a small number of them.” The rest of it becomes either immersed in the silence of oblivion

58. Ibid., 279.
59. Lejeune, “The Continuous and the Discontinuous,” 179. In the context of the chaotic and continuous passage of historical time, a diarist engaged in his/her fragmentary writing was compared by Lejeune to “a sculptor who gives it form by removing nine-tenths of its material, or a draftsman who draws a silhouette in a sketchbook with three pencil strokes. This work of sifting—separating the real, digesting it, rejecting most of it, and making sense of the rest—is the work of life itself. But the diary takes it to the extreme by laying down the results and building these results into a series.”
60. Ibid., 179.
61. Ibid., 180. The diarist as a composer places his/her person at the centre of the universe and so all the reflections revolve around him/her. She/he becomes a conductor capturing the sounds, voices from the external and internalized worlds, selecting them and composing out of them a piece of music harmonizing with his/her internal rhythms of time, memories and hopes.
62. Ibid., 181.
63. Ibid., 179.
or implicitly present and visible only to the author as constituting an immense sphere of potential, alternative courses of happenings. One of Gombrowicz’s diaristic notes indicates well the prevailing sphere of silence over what can be written in a diary: “[...] Here in the diary I write at about 10 percent, no more. Sapienti sat. And who, after all, is writing this?...Who? Hello, hello! Who is speaking please? I don’t know.”64 Gombrowicz’s reflection opens an array of problems considering formal aspects of literary diary. If the silenced part of the author’s experience prevails over the revealed one, is there any thread left to reconstruct the author’s biography out of the patchwork-like diaristic notes? Who is in fact speaking in a diary? Author, its idealized self, narrator, textual protagonist, or some projected by a reader interlocutor? I will attempt to answer these questions tackling generic features of the diary later in the dissertation focused on Gombrowicz’s diaristic practice.

With regard to possible ways of analysing diaristic writing, Paweł Rodak, the Polish literary scholar studying diaristic practice, distinguished two approaches to a diary: structural/post-structural treating it as a text, discourse and another anthropological one viewing diary as the everyday writing practice. Rodak rightly claims that the first approach centred on categories of text and discourse focuses on a diary’s content and its language. In this respect, it deprives them of their specific practical, communicative dimension of origins. The second perspective, on the other hand, accentuates the multidimensionality of the diary, regarded as a practice that goes beyond the text and embraces issues such as the diary’s functions, performative dimension, and materiality. Applying an anthropological approach to diaries, Rodak puts to the foreground the dynamic, practical, and material side of each text, paying attention to the sphere of action triggered in the process of writing.65 In other words, formal aspects are replaced by “doing” (what an author intended/managed to do by writing), and text is overshadowed by context. Following the anthropological approach to a diary, the British social historian James Hinton associates diaristic writing with the technology of self which in its transformative capacities can be compared for instance to meditation, yoga, letter-writing or photograph album.66 Therefore, a diary should not only be regarded in terms of a final product, a printed text but first and foremost as an ongoing process of reshaping oneself in a dialogue or confrontation with historical reality and an imagined self. Diary, which does not remain enclosed within its abstract literary domain but also embraces

64 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 710.
a more practical sphere, becomes, as Lejeune noted, “both a retreat and a source of energy in each person’s dialectical relationship with the world, which he uses to construct and sustain himself as an individual.”

Márai directly referred to this performative aspect of his writing in one of his diaristic notes taken in 1944. In the situation when his decision to withdraw from the public sphere, provoked by the political situation in Hungary during the Second World War, could be misinterpreted (“creative sabotage”) and politically charged, Márai justified his position with the belief in life and writing as two sides of the same coin. He claimed that, if political circumstances affect social life in such a way as to create unfavourable conditions for free creative writing, then this relationship between writer and society must disappear. Life and writing are deeply interwoven (life writing) and, consequently, each act of writing does not only express but has also a transformative force. “I am not myself when I am writing: this what I am writing, creates me, not only am I creating the work”

The diary for Márai was a retreat, a new narrative bridge between the changed historical circumstances and his inner self remaining in opposition to the new social and historical situation.

The analysis centred on the author’s language of self-expression, perception of time and materiality of a diary can give insight into both individual self-identifications and a broader cultural background. The American historian Jeremy D. Popkin noted that “although the diary is often taken to be a spontaneous expression of individuality, it is in fact a cultural practice that has a history.”

Concerning the importance of placing all personal writings in a broader variable, sociocultural context psychologist scholar Jens Brockmeier remarked that “obviously we are not the only master in our house of stories, and this appears to be particularly true for identity stories or self-narratives. We are never more, and sometimes much less than co-narrators of our own life stories.”

Self-narratives, conceptualised as a practice with its own interpretative, cultural constraints, always stem from historically variable epistemological worlds characterised by given limits of what is conceivable. Abundant with incongruities, omissions, and silence, diaristic writing can be indicative of cognitive and emotional maps shared within some communities and accepted as common in some cultures.

---

67 Lejeune, “The Diary on Trial,” in On Diary, eds. J. D. Popkin and J. Rak, translated by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu, 2009), 164.
68 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 74. “The writer is a nerve fibre in a spiritual organism of the nation and if the entire organism becomes attacked by a disease, the nerve fibre does not receive from the rest of the organism the required blood supply and stops functioning.”
70 Brockmeier, op. cit., 175.
Far from being a subjective reverse of historical circumstances, performative journal-keeping practices mediate the interactions between an individual and his/her social background, a cultural context that always privileges certain ways of expression. In the opinion of the American historian, Barbara H. Rosenwein “even the most seemingly intimate diary can give us only an approximation of the emotional life of its subject. We cannot know for sure (and often neither can the diarist) if the feelings expressed are purely conventional, idealized, manipulative, or deeply felt.” The diaristic practice becomes in this respect a constant negotiation between different selves of a diarist: the conventional one projected by culture, the private one idealized and desired by an author or the public one susceptible to divergent manipulations. Differing ways of self-understanding adapt themselves to some shared cultural values and imagined constructs of prescriptive ways of being accepted within a society but at the same time, these ideas, once appropriated by individuals in their projects of self-identifications, also change.

Another pivotal issue that should be tackled within the anthropological approach to diaries is “narrative agency” linked with the performative dimension of the text regarded as a form of action, act of empowerment and self-determination. As Brockmeier noted, “the focus on narrative as a social practice turns people into protagonists – including oppressed, marginalized, and disadvantaged people who often have their rights and voices denied.” If diaristic writing is perceived as a mode of interacting with one’s temporal selves entangled in networks with other people, ideas and objects, there emerges an important practical sphere of doing facilitated with the use of words. Shall then each interpretation of a diary’s content (what did the author want to say?) be underpinned by the question: what did the author-actant want to do with his/her narrated selves on pages of the diary? The performative character of each personal writing also implies counter-stories which are narrative re-identifications of oneself in the face of imposed identities. A diary, therefore, can be also regarded as a kind of counter-story constantly retold to negotiate different identities dictated by political regimes and historical circumstances.

As far as the anthropological approach to diaries is considered in relation to the perception of time, several questions should be posed. What is the relationship between the diaristic practice and the diarist’s perception of time, his/her time of consciousness? How can this inner subjective time relate to History written with a capital letter so to historical circumstances witnessed by the

---

72 Brockmeier, op. cit., 177.
73 Ibid., 179.
diarist? How can a diaristic sphere in-between (a diarist and the world, a writer and a reader, writing and rereading, privacy and public realm) be conceptualised? An interesting triangle of concepts, which would also structure my further interpretations of diaries, can be discerned here. The three angles represent, first, the subjective time, second, the time of great History and third, the time which is narratively reconfigured and mediates the other two.

Considering diarist’s relation to the historical order of time, in Lejeune’s view, a diary, due to its inherent incompleteness, can “act as a sort of virtual opponent, a saboteur, in the context of a whole series of ideologies or strategies (of knowledge, action, art, God, etc.).”74 A diary’s main function in this respect could be defined as a challenge to closed systems of thinking such as materialist philosophy of history. However, in the historical context of the Cold War, when ideological pressure on individuals was more evident, the question arises whether diarists were necessarily using their diaries to barricade themselves in a defensive act against the ideological ordering of reality and their lives. If not, could they rather regard their diaristic everyday practice as a means to inscribe their lives within an all-encompassing framework of new ideology? Answering the question about the role of a diary for some people who stayed in their countries during the socialist times, can allow to better understand the role of a diary for those who decided to live in exile, thus also for the dissertation’s writers.

The historian, Jochen Hellbeck in his book devoted to the diarists living in the Stalinist Soviet Union, proposes a nuanced way of perceiving a diary that transcends the binary scheme of a journal as a stronghold of privacy and autonomy built in response to the intrusive, totalitarian character of the public sphere. Hellbeck claims that the attempt to project liberal connotations of subjecthood to the Soviet context seems inadequate and “the binary that diarists established was not one of personal vs. extrapersonal, individual vs. social, or private vs. public. On the contrary, they sought to avoid any such binary pattern in their accounts.”75 The protagonists of his book were treating their diaries as an indispensable tool of self-interrogation and introspection, needed to retell their self-understandings so that they echoed with the collectivist narrative propagated by the new political regime. The journals kept in this political context reflect their authors’ attempt to undergo some self-transformation over time to actively participate in the new revolutionary epoch, finally acquiring the desired agency and acting in keeping with the laws of History. “Their diaries were active tools,

74 Lejeune, “The Diary on Trial,” 164.
75 Jochen Hellbeck, Revolution on My Mind. Writing a Diary under Stalin (London, 2006), 88. “Rather than using the dichotomy of private and public, diarists situated their personal and particular existence with respect to the social and general public interest” (Ibid., 96).
deployed to intervene into their selves and align them on the axis of revolutionary time.” The diarists were trying to harmonize two different rhythms of time (one of individual autonomy and the other of internalized historical necessity), thusly reducing tensions and fissures provoked by a discrepancy between their hitherto old self and the new self which was being imposed by the political system.

Hence, a personal writing as the medium of self-transformation may also play a role of a bridge between different selves (old and new, private and public) and two realms (the individual practice of everyday life and ideology of new political system); the bridge which lets the diarists to some extent incorporate the dictated, imagined ways of thinking and being. Hellbeck adds that the diaries he examined “show shared forms of self-expression and ideas of self-realisation, which point beyond the individual cases and suggest a wider cultural significance.” Diaries regarded as a cultural practice can give an insight into collective phenomena such as variable but shared ways of shaping self-identifications in certain historical contexts. The language of self-expression varies with reference to particular socio-cultural circumstances and necessarily depends on historical period and space.

What seems common for the dissertation’s writers and the diarists, whose practices were studied by Hellbeck, is their perception of a diary as an important tool for redefining one’s existential situation and self-identification in the face of changing historical circumstances. A diary is a practice that serves an author to reshape his/her self-understanding either by harmonizing the inner order of time with the one dictated by History or in the distance from alienating historical forces. While Bartol would rather seek some alignment with the historical order of time (during and after the war), both Gombrowicz and Márai, in their strong attachment to inner freedom, were trying to escape any ideological ordering of reality dominant in their countries of origin. Bartol’s diaristic reconfiguration of self, underpinned by a more activist stance, varies from diaristic practices shaped by escapist attitudes of Gombrowicz and Márai. Notwithstanding these differences, for all three writers, the specific temporal structure of a diary served as a tool to reconfigure their perceptions of time and self-identifications vis-à-vis History and changeable places of living.

In the dissertation, I aim to follow the anthropological approach to a diary which goes beyond the emphasis on its textual dimension (diary as a discourse, a literary genre) and views a journal as a practice or a piece of writing which performativity stems from its inevitable inveteracy in cultural

---

76 Ibid., 5.
77 Ibid., 9.
and social contexts. I will attempt to trace the writers’ narrative constructions of time and self-identifications shaped at the diaristic intersection of two orders of time. The diaries played a crucial role in the lives of the dissertation’s writers because they allowed them to reconcile two opposite modes of temporality, the one of chronological time constituting the domain of necessity as imposed by historical circumstances and the unrestrained phenomenological time of consciousness different for each person.

There are of course other types of sources which can give a valuable insight into the construction of self-identification: letters, memoirs, autobiographies, oral histories but, as Hinton emphasised, only free from teleology “fragmentary, raw, experimental, unedited nature of the diary, […] makes it so revealing of the processes by which narratives of selfhood are produced.” 78 The fragmentary nature of diaristic writing suggests even more clearly than any other literary genre that individual fates, far from a mere abstract sphere of speculation, could never entirely follow an imposed scheme of historical development. As Márai noticed: “The vicissitudes of fate do not mean that we are moving towards some deliberately determined goal, but simply that we are living.” 79 Life lived freely according to one’s values, in the world contradicting them, implies rejection to fulfil aims predetermined by others and imposed patterns of living, thinking. Fundamental questions about identity, triggered by a confrontation/negotiation of an individual and his free will with a concrete historical situation, remain unanswered and are often problematised in the diaristic practice. In one of his diacritic notes Márai indirectly suggested the relationship between existential fundamental questions stemming from the consciousness of one’s being in time, mortality and diaristic practice which could provide some answers and thus also self-understanding. Inspired by Maeterlinck’s remark regarding death and imbued with the feeling of impossibility of knowing oneself, Márai compared the Belgian poet’s narrative inquires with his own search for answers to some important questions:

Even if in a different way but I also conduct this private speech day and night. Who am I, what am I, what do I want, what really do I not want? - all this I do not know, man is a terrifying unconscious. Instead of ‘being’ I am just ‘happening’ - sometimes I feel that way. But that is also not true. 80

---

78 Hinton, op. cit., 7.
80 Ibid., 450.
Was it on the pages of his diary that Márai continued this private speech? The diaristic practice could certainly intensify the author’s sensation of immersion in time (“happening” instead of “being”) but at the same time open some perspectives of a “shore” where changeable selves would find stability (narrative self-identification) in continuous and long-term practice. In one diaristic note Márai remarked on such travel from one shore to another when while trying to put some order into his manuscripts, books, documents, and photographs (all the traces of the past) which accompanied him on a trip from America to Salerno, he compared it to moving from one shallow to another. “But this present shallow together with everything is washed by the same wave away.”

Is the wave here a metaphor of time which, tamed by diaristic writing throws the diarist temporarily ashore onto a shallow-narrative self? Keeping a journal played for all three writers an existential role which gave them the possibility of making comparisons of their selves through time, making some recapitulations, inventories and consequently also constructing their self-understandings. The diary allowed them to liberate themselves from the dictate of the present moment by the distance and experience of a relative dimension of time.

Even if the course of events in a particular moment can seem overwhelming and destructive, very often leading to some rash responses, in the hindsight made possible while rereading the journal, it can be tamed and meaningfully projected towards a new diaristic self.

Hermeneutic philosophy can be one of the theoretical frameworks of analysis focused on a diary regarded in anthropological terms as a practice. The hermeneutic perspective, rooted in the question: “how shall I understand what the other is telling me?”, when applied to diaristic writing entails the questions about the author’s understanding of the foreign voice of History and the possibility to bring together a potential feeling of the durability of oneself over time and volatile, multiple episodic selves, voices of otherness. One of the paradoxes of identity explored by Ricoeur seems of great importance in the context of practices of journal-keeping because it is discussed in respect to time. The paradox results from two sides of identity simultaneously operating in each person: a search for an immutable in time sameness of one’s personality (substantial model) and the consciousness of being always affected by time (“model of promise-keeping”).

---

81 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 180.
82 Márai, Kronika Niedzielna, translated by Irena Makarewicz (Warszawa, 2019), 261, 263. The writer was prone to “reflection on the wonderful relativity of human matters, when one orders them in time.”
83 Pawel Dybel, Oblicza hermeneutyki (Kraków, 2012), 8.
84 Ricoeur, Philosophical Anthropology, 244. “On the one hand, idem-identity, despite time, is substantial or structural; on the other, ipse-identity, across time, is memorial and promising.”
resolved paradox can only be lived by posing questions without any definite answer,\textsuperscript{85} by interrogating oneself who I am and who I should be. The ambiguous, inconclusive answers may be found in a diary embracing two interwoven modes of self which are diachronic and episodic.

4. \textit{Egodocumental attitude to sources}

With an aim to “existentialize” history,\textsuperscript{86} to accentuate its phenomenological dimension concerned more with individual responses to history than with history itself, I will complement the anthropological perspective with the egodocumental attitude to sources. This approach is characterised by an attempt to consider the subjective dimension of sources, including those texts which not necessarily can be generically classified as egodocuments.\textsuperscript{87} With the exception of Bartol’s diaristic legacy which, in great part was not published during his life, the diaries examined in the dissertation do not abide the diaristic convention because of their literary character and publishing. Therefore, they cannot be entirely characterised by the generic definition of egodocument coined by the Dutch historian Jacques Presser in the 1950s as a new category of sources within historical research.

Presser’s neologism of egodocument covers autobiographical sources which, intentionally or not, express an author’s ego (by revealing it or hiding), emotions, experiences, reflections, and acts described either in the first (I) or third person. These include autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters.\textsuperscript{88} The intellectual, literary diary which is the focus of my research is, however, a special type of diary combining various genres. The challenge to the generic classification emerges with the diary’s increasing literariness and absence of “autobiographical pact” between author and reader, the concept introduced by Lejeune which defines an autobiographical text via the theory of reception. The “autobiographical pact” established between author and reader is founded on the latter’s presupposition of the unity of three instances (author, narrator, and protagonist of the text),

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 245.
\textsuperscript{86} Ewa Domańska, \textit{Historia egzystencjalna} (Warszawa, 2012), 11-12. Inspired by French existentialism “existential history” is “the research perspective which in the reflections on history, theory of history and history of historiography, undertaken through the prism of authors and their texts, searches for meanders of human condition. It thus directs its interests on existential motives in the texts which reveal this condition.” It can be also defined as a holistic “historical reflection dynamically and engagingly undertaken, which combines analytical, synthetical, methodological and historiosophical considerations.”
which s/he expects to find in autobiographical writing and thus also in a diary. The expectation of the singular voice and the content’s sincerity and truth is a crucial criterion that allows a reader to distinguish autobiographical writing from other genres of literature.89

However, the diaries of the three writers—the dissertation’s protagonists, in their evasion of generic conventions, do not fulfil the autobiographical pact. Gombrowicz’s *Diary* as a stage of the author’s self-fashioning as a writer does not give access to a true self. Thus, Gombrowicz’s *Diary* would be on the opposite side of confession. Similarly, Márai’s diaristic practice, due to its generic ambiguity, thematic diversity, and later publication/editon, serves the author’s artistic project. Even though it was not published as immediately as it happened with Gombrowicz’s *Diary* and so it is predominantly an inner dialogue between the author’s different temporal selves, there are still some voices from outside such as readers’ letters.90 As Hungarian literary scholar, Zoltán Z. Varga notices, not having established any direct autobiographical pact which could clearly indicate writings that were of personal character, Márai would indirectly construct a “phantasmagorical pact” by attributing to some of his fictional texts more autobiographical value than to other writings seemingly more autobiographical. In this manner, all his texts would constitute “an autobiographical space” and thus all of them should be read in close relation to the author’s biography and the rest of his works.91 Similar remarks could describe Bartol’s diary. Not equivalent to confession, it does not reveal the author’s true, intimate self. Convinced that his diary would later contribute to his fame, he had to perceive his diaristic notes as a mediation of his imagined self. Unrecognized as a writer and to great extent ignored or misunderstood, Bartol viewed in diaristic practice a possibility to comment on his literature and to provide “right” interpretations. Bartol, thus, regarded his diary as a potential stage where in repeated acts of noting down some remarks, he could play a drama of his life following a screenplay with roles chosen by him.

Due to the more or less explicit presence of an imagined addressee in the diaries of the dissertation’s writers, they cannot be interpreted in the register of confession and thus in line with Presser’s definition. Bartol while writing his diary was thinking about its future reader. Both Gombrowicz’s and Márai’s diaries were written with the intention to be published. In the period of 38 years (1945-1983) Márai prepared, edited, and published five volumes of his diaristic notes (only

---

90 In one note Márai explicitly refers to and comments a reader’s letter. Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 4, 314. “Other letter. It came from the West. Its author read a note in my diary published several years ago…”
the first volume was published in Hungary). Even though Márai and Bartol were writing their diaries for some audiences, they were not as self-centred and focused on individual identity as the one written by Gombrowicz. Therefore, they also contain more references to historical, social, and political contexts. As Varga notices, for Márai like for some other Hungarian writers, (Gyula Illyés, Lajos Kassák), collective and individual identities were inseparable and of equal importance in their writings. The social layer to which one belongs was important for them in understanding better their lives and identities.

Notwithstanding some references to social and historical context, the intellectual diary treats everyday life only as a pretext for an author’s reflection on more abstract matters and thus it also cannot be interpreted in terms of representation of historical reality. This type of diary does not disregard the external reality but is mediated through a particular literary style and very often author’s intentions to self-fashion. Both Gombrowicz and Márai did not concentrate on everyday life in their diaristic writings. The absence or marginal character of remarks on the private sphere in their public diaries stem from either Gombrowicz’s idea of the Diary as a stage of struggle for fame or from Márai’s attempt to create a moral image of himself as a person faced with historical changes but not in a role of an actor, hero of historical events or those which mark everyday reality. Another divergent factor that influenced the shape of their diaristic writings was the attitude to fame and their presence as writers in public. Unlike Gombrowicz who viewed himself as a “self-made man of literature,” Márai claimed that the true value of artistic expression emanates and resonates without any need of mediators or campaigns of auto-promotion.

Presser introduced the term “egodocument” concerning all textual autobiographical sources which in some way express an author’s personality, emotions, and values. Presser’s generic, broad and vague definition provoked discussion and encouraged further research on various dimensions of egodocumental writing aiming at more precision. One of the participants in this debate was the German historian Winfried Schulze, who drew attention to official documents which, even if generically and formally distant from Presser’s definition of egodocument, can also contain emotional worlds of individuals. Hence, they can also give insight into subjective perceptions and

---

92 Varga mentions Márai’s omission of some of the diaristic notes in the published version of his diary (1945-1957). The writer deleted almost all reflections concerning the Jews because he was afraid that they could have been interpreted as anti-Semitic. What set in motion the process of self-censorship was the attempt to reduce the size of the diary and “ideological reasons” which deprived the published version of the original emotional charge. Ibid., 35-36.
93 Ibid., 25.
94 Ibid., 25.
95 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 236.
attitudes. Schulze emphasised the role of juridical context of some egodocuments which were not created by an author’s own volition but rather obtained by coercion. He emphasised the social background of this type of writing, which should present “the self-perception of a man in his family, community, state, or his social stratum [...].”96 While in Presser’s understanding of egodocument, an author is directly expressing his/her self, Schulze noticed in Selbstzeugnisse (as he renamed “egodocument”) the possibility of the indirect presence of individuality. He was referring to sources such as testimonies or interrogations found in court or police archives which are so often used by microhistorians.97

Following the debate on the category of “egodocument,” in search of its proper application to this research, Dutch historian Rudolf Dekker, rightly noticed that recently there has been an increasing interest in such aspects of egodocuments as the interplay between an author’s private sphere and public sphere and the parallel process of self-fashioning. In the opinion of Dekker, egodocuments can be regarded not as sources but “study objects in themselves” in that instead of providing some answers to given questions, they are more likely to raise new questions.98 Dekker also noticed that egodocuments go beyond the domain of historiography and thus cannot be treated in the same way as other traditional sources for historical writing. “These are texts not so much in need of editing or processing, but accounts which must be read and reread, and whose interpretation will vary over time.”99 Drawing on Dekker’s remarks I will refer to the writers’ egodocuments as multidimensional texts which, due to their complex formal features and performative character, provoke new questions and ways of interpretation.

The generic ambiguity which places the writers’ diaries at the crossroads of literary fiction and diaristic expression/construction of self, makes it problematic when categorizing these sources as egodocuments in Presser’s sense. The dissertation’s sources, going beyond the confines of generic classification and hence not entirely defined as egodocuments encourage their readers instead to explore the egodocumental approach to texts which attempts to consider subjective dimension (emotions, values, personal views) of different writings. Considering this shift of accents, what makes a text egodocument is thus not a given typology but an egodocumental approach the aim of

99 Ibid., 31.
which is to notice and find in the text its author’s imprint. While Presser’s definition can be used to classify sources depending on their generic form, it is worth asking if, in case of the lack of these common internal features, another point of reference might be placed in the external sphere of readers’ and scholars’ expectations. These expectations could for instance manifest in an attempt to discern the subjective world of the author of each studied text.

Whereas the traditional definition of egodocument does not describe well my sources, the egodocumental approach can give an insight into the subjective universe and, therefore, some important dimensions of the diaristic practice as well: the author’s/narrator’s perceptions of the passage of time, attitude towards History, space, and various narrative reconfigurations of temporality. The egodocumental perspective enables also to re-evaluate the genre of diaristic writing by going beyond the exclusive terms in which it was described either as a reflection of reality or as a diarist’s tool of introspection. Contrary to the definition of diary in these binary terms following clear division between disciplines (historiography, literature), the egodocumental approach accompanied by interdisciplinary perspective allows us to notice the dialectical reciprocal relationship between a diarist and his/her reality. What becomes most interesting is neither a detailed analysis of text nor a reconstruction of context but a study of these dialectical interrelations. However, this attempt also requires a further re-evaluation of clear borders between disciplines and some concepts such as the one of truth. The egodocumental approach to reading a diary implies therefore an interdisciplinary study avoiding the traditional view of history, historiography and fiction, literature in opposite terms.

With regard to the concept of truth, within the traditional correspondence theory, one could easily undermine the claim about egodocuments as reliable sources. Some other conceptualisations of truth, however, stem from an analysis of egodocuments and thus legitimize them as unique sources. Rodak, studying diaries of contemporary Polish writers, proposed the concept of “diaristic truth” which consists of an inherent in a diary interplay between the categories of materiality, time, and person. In Rodak’s view, it is possible to distinguish different truths in a diary: “truth of events (historical truth), truth of experience (existential truth) and truth of reality (metaphysical truth).”

This broad concept of truth, encompassing both history and fiction in the sphere of diarist’s imagination rooted in a certain historical, cultural context, transcends the generic frontiers which

---

100 Chorążyczewski, Rosa, op. cit., 13-14.
101 “Personality, mentality, world of values, emotionality are not a feature objectively inherent in these texts, but are found in them by a researcher who desires to notice them.” Ibid., 12.
102 Rodak, Między zapisem a literaturą, 15.
relegate a diary either to a testimony (historical narrative) or confession (literature). In this sense, one shall expect from a diary neither an honest account nor an entirely trustworthy representation of historical reality. Márai refers to this complex diaristic concept of truth on the margins of his encounter with Malraux’s personal writings – “anti-memoirs” reminding of “…a warning that journals promising ‘utter honesty’ cannot be trusted. The truth is more important than honesty, you can honestly lie.”103 Within this nuanced definition of truth and an egodocumental approach, what is placed at the centre of attention is not a diary as a genre but a diarist and his/her changing self-understandings which concurrent with the act of writing are shaped in this practice and in respect to the changeable historical context.

What role did diaristic practice play for Gombrowicz, Márai and Bartol? How did their historical experiences shape the poetics of their writings? Before answering these questions, it seems worth mentioning an important difference in the public recognition of these writers preceding their decision to embark on a diaristic practice. Gombrowicz, who before the exile had just started his career and in Argentina had to face indifference towards his poetic side of life, needed the public Diary to establish his public image as a writer. Bartol found himself in a similar situation of the lack of both desired and deserved recognition. Consequently, in his diary, he played the role of literary critic of his own texts believing that one day his diaristic notes would bring him fame. In contrast to Gombrowicz and Bartol, Márai before embarking on diaristic writing was already an established public figure, well-known in circles of the Hungarian middle class.104 For Gombrowicz – “the eternal debutant,” as one of the Polish literary critics105 described him, exile provided an opportunity of a new existential and literary debut with its most dangerous form which for the writer was the diaristic writing.106 Keeping the public diary (systematically published) gave Gombrowicz a possibility of commenting on himself in the eyes of others-readers and hence a great tool for defining himself as a writer. He commenced this mode of diaristic writing inspired by André Gide’s diary. Interestingly, the same diary of the French writer for Márai was too exhibitionist.107 He

105 Janusz Margański, Gombrowicz – wieczny debiutant (Kraków, 2001), 7.
107 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 317. “Each writer’s journal is created for readers - sometimes for the writer’s contemporaries, sometimes for posterity. But Gide’s journal is never a ‘confession.’ Always only exhibitionism.” In another diaristic note, Márai called Gide a “narcissist exhibitionist” with an “unhealthy mania of self-presentation.” (Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 98). He critically mentioned Gide also later characterizing his notes as: “histrionic, sentimental.” Márai, Dziennik, vol 5, 78. “He only convinces me when he writes about books. When he starts writing about himself, he acts tearfully.”
preferred Julian Green’s extensive diaristic writing which he regarded as much more honest, diversified, and interesting.\(^{108}\)

Regarding the circumstances which nourished the idea of diaristic practice, three writers decided to embark on diaristic writing due to a need to defend the individual voice endangered by different forms of alterity (imposed perspective of national majority, History, or “Form” in Gombrowicz’s sense) and due to a feeling of isolation which had different sources depending on context: a moment in time and place of living. Gombrowicz in Argentina was far away from the familiar context of Polish culture. Devoid of direct contact with other writers and readers, he was feeling a need to gain some recognizability and fame through his public *Diary* written at the request of Jerzy Giedroyc who was publishing it in instalments in his politico-literary émigré journal *Kultura* since 1953 till the end of Gombrowicz’s life. The *Diary’s* origins may be traced in the correspondence between Gombrowicz and Giedroyc. In the letter from 6.08.1952 Gombrowicz wrote to *Kultura*’s editor:

> I am now writing something like a Diary […] I must become my own commentator, even better, my own theatrical director. I have to create Gombrowicz the thinker, Gombrowicz the genius, Gombrowicz the cultural demonologist, and many other necessary Gombrowiczes. […] Gide's *Journal* did not so much inspire me but it showed me the possibility to overcome some of the fundamental difficulties that until now have made the project impossible for me (because I thought the Diary has to be “private,” and he showed me the possibility of a private-public diary).\(^{109}\)

Giedroyc immediately picked up the idea and since that moment the editor was encouraging the writer to send him some fragments of the *Diary* to print them in his magazine in a monthly rhythm. Concurrently, Gombrowicz embarked on writing another diary titled *Kronos* which was emerging out of people’s sight. It was not published during the author’s life. Its existence was merely alluded to in the *Diary* several times. One of these hints Gombrowicz gave in a note about his journey to Europe in 1963 after almost 24 years of his stay in Argentina.

> But how is one to drink of the soup of life with the slotted spoon of these statistics and graphs?

> Bah, one of the suitcases in my cabin contained a briefcase, and that briefcase contained a whole


slew of yellowed sheets with a month-by-month chronology of events in my life—let us look, for example, at what was happening to me exactly ten years ago in April 1953. Bartol commenced writing his diary already in the interwar period when he was 21 years old and he continued it throughout his life. The diary records an overarching diapason of activities ranging from issues of everyday life to more abstract reflections and literary work. The notes taken in the 1930s are abundant in descriptions of Bartol’s meetings in literary circles and his relationships with some intellectuals. In this period, the diary’s main function seems to enable the young author to reflect on his place and role in Slovene literary life. Motivated by a prudent forethought, Bartol did not continue his diaristic writing during the war. Nevertheless, even if not on paper, he was still imaginatively noting down his experiences on a screen of memory. As he remembered: “[…] In the evening, before I fall asleep, I was vividly and knowledgeably engraving in memory [what otherwise would be noted down – A.T.]. Immediately after the liberation I hastened to make up for the lost time and concurrently with the greatest historical attention I followed the newness brought by revolution.” Later Bartol regretted not continuing his diaristic practice during the war. “(I regret, that during the time of occupation I did not write at least a private diary, that I did not prepare at least some notes).” After the war, when the writer returned to diaristic writing, it acquired various functions. Diaristic notes served the author as a support to his memory when he was writing his autobiography but also as a notebook for the first drafts of his novels. Due to the abundance of descriptions of his dreams and their possible interpretations, the diary could also serve as a psychoanalytic tool enabling Bartol to notice some deeper layers of the self and by viewing them in the light of the present moment, to better understand his place in a current situation.

The origins of Márai’s diary are closely related to wartime historical circumstances in Hungary. Deepening isolation which shaped his diaristic writing was provoked by the historical context of fascist and communist Hungary. The proximity of course of events directly affecting the

---

112 Bartol, Romantika in platonika sredi vojne. Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu, vol. 3 (Ljubljana, 2006), 300. „Za časa okupacije iz razumljive previdnosti nisem pisal zapiskov, temveč sem si doživeto in spoznano zvečer, preden sem zaspal, vtiskal v spomin. Takoj po osvoboditvi sem hitel nadomestiti zamujeno in obenem z največ o zgodovinsko pažnjo spremljalo novo, ki ga je prinašala s seboj revolucija.”
114 Bartol, “Balkanijada IX. Trst, Trst, VI. zvezek, sanje od predsimoči (20/21.II),” 22 February 1947, MC, ZRC SAZU. The writer was convinced that a dream is rooted not only in one’s childhood but also refers to the present.
individual-witness of History reverberates in some of Márai’s diaristic notes. He started writing his diary in 1943 when Germany invaded Hungary. This moment caused a rupture in his life replacing the pre-war domesticated way of being with uncertainty and instability. In 1955 Márai recalled the events which he had witnessed in 1943 and expressed their impact on his life as follows: “March 16th Snowstorm, huge snowdrifts. Middle of March. The same snowstorm raged 12 years ago, a few days after German troops entered Budapest, and we left the flat in Buda and moved to the countryside. Then everything that was good, which made sense, and with which I had something in common, was lost.”

In the opinion of Varga, Márai’s deliberate aim while embarking on diaristic writing was to delineate a sphere where his individual voice would be safe from the pressure of public discourse and the historical sphere in general. As Varga notes “[…] the escalating historical trauma had a formative part in the genesis of Márai’s enterprise. The daily practice of writing, in a way, counterbalanced the obtrusive and threatening historical reality. The function of the diary – mainly in the beginning – was to circumscribe an intimate space of reflections and memory, safeguarded from the events of war […]”.

The diary in these circumstances was for Márai the only artistic way which could allow him to defend his individual voice against a muting noise of public discourses. The diaristic practice is, however, very often long-term processual writing and its tones, accents gradually change in time. As Varga argues, with the passage of time Márai would more frequently yield to public collective discourses by commenting more amply on the historical, political reality in his diary. The more directly affected by History, Márai as a witness of historical changes became, the more attention he would devote in his diaristic practice to historical reality and political events. Consequently, as Varga notices, the accent would shift from nostalgically tuned narrative, devoid of any precise temporal specification, to historical order of time as an axis that structured observations of contemporary historical and social changes. Márai would thus also refer more often to collective categories such as the Hungarian nation from which perspective he was interpreting History. The diaristic notes taken later during the war accentuate moral issues of both punishment and responsibility for the war–crimes and more generally for the moral downfall of the Hungarian society. Therefore, over time the diary’s tone became more accusatory and the message acquired a moral character.

115 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 463.
117 Ibid., 28-32
History with all its discontinuities could also bring a feeling of internal disorder, a mismatch between individual and historical context, alienation from the times one is forced to live in. As Márai noted in 1953 so while already being in exile: “The internal order of my life has collapsed. Apparently I live following a set order, but inside I do not have cohesion.” In light of this dissonance I would define the primary aim of Márai’s diaristic practice as an attempt to regain a feeling of inner coherence and continuity which could stem from the writer’s belief in a certain stability (personality, personal fate) beyond articulation and lying “at the bottom of consciousness,” beneath changeable memories and hence time. Was his diaristic practice spanned over the long time of 56 years supposed to discern this deeper pattern of personal fate? The diary, which accompanied Márai’s inner emigration and later his life in exile, could serve to restore some continuity in his life, as well as order and coherence of self. Márai thus was far from Gombrowicz’s attitude of the “eternal debutant.” As the Hungarian writer noted in the diary: “Live and write with such force as if a man were starting from a scratch. This is not difficult but funny and aimless. Live and write with such force as if a man does not resign. This is much more difficult.”

While Gombrowicz was treating his public diary as a tool of self-fashioning in the eyes of his readers; Márai needed his diary as a substitute of journalism which he gave up to avoid any ideological pressures exercised by the changing political powers in Hungary. The diary, therefore, allowed the author to satisfy his need to comment on the current political, intellectual situation and also in this way to give some response to volatile historical circumstances of the twentieth century. Whereas Gombrowicz’s *Diary* was rather increasing a fissure between the author’s diaristic episodic selves and historical order of time, Márai’s diaristic practice in search of a diachronic self was an attempt to bridge different orders of time.

Diaristic practice, representing different forms and roles, was so significant for three writers that it became an indispensable element of their lives. In the hierarchy of his works, Márai placed the diary higher than his novels. At a certain point, the writer stated: “It is possible that this diary takes away from my work some part of strength, attention and internal concentration which I possess – but maybe it is this diary which is my true task and all the rest constitutes just the waste of these forces.” In another note in 1974, he noticed that 30 years after losing the flat in Budapest, he regarded his manuscripts of diary (1943-1973) as the most important, which he also thought required

---

118 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 2, 291.
119 Ibid., 485, 491.
120 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 1, 462.
some form of protection. Everything else was unimportant. The loss of the diary was a grim perspective which both Gombrowicz and Márai wanted to avoid. The private diary *Kronos* was for Gombrowicz one of the most valuable manuscripts and he ordered his partner Rita to save it in case of a fire. Márai similarly emphasised his diary’s importance: “What was I afraid of when the house was burning? I was afraid of L. and Janika. And about this journal. I would, of course, regret other things if they were burned, but I was not afraid of them.” It is clear that when the fire broke out Márai was most afraid of losing persons who were closest to him so his wife (L.), son (Janika) and his diaristic self.

The diaristic practice was also of great importance for Bartol who continued to keep his journal even when in the position of a cultural representative of the Slavic population in Trieste after the war, the increasing number of obligations took him more and more time. Especially in the period following the Second World War, Bartol’s diaristic and autobiographical writing overshadowed other more fictitious texts. The diary’s significant role lies in the performative dimension which changes the act of writing into practice and which is also traceable in the Slovene writer’s journal. Bartol was namely rereading his notes, correcting them, and sometimes also inserting some new remarks in hindsight. His diaristic travels in time hint at the diary’s important role as a practice which allowed his author for certain reconfigurations of his self-understanding depending on a place and a moment in time. Some of the notes resemble a palimpsest of different times and, hence, also of various selves, the bygone self and the present one communicating with one another through time. For example, one note taken 7 March 1930, where Bartol mentioned his public reading of one of his novels which later he also typed down. In brackets there is another short note added 28 years later: “(Vidmar lent me an old, antiquated machine, a remark 2. 7. 1958.).” In his comment on Bartol’s diaristic writing from the period 1930-1933, the Slovene literary critic, Drago Bajt noticed that the writer typed it in 1958 and in the process also added some other remarks like the one cited above. Moreover, in Bajt’s view, Bartol was probably also earlier just before the war, from time to time rereading his diaristic notes from this period.

In an attempt to apply Lejeune’s anthropological approach, I will stress the performative aspect of the diaries. From the perspective of anthropology of narration, each piece of writing (especially

---

122 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 4, 296-297.
124 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 2, 343.
autobiographical) does not simply reflect the author’s worldview or reality but also shapes his/her self-understanding. Consequently, diaristic practice embedded in the author’s perception of time, History and space forms part of the dynamic and changeable process of self-identification. Keeping a journal implies also its later rereadings which result in the different crisscrossing of temporalities. Each diaristic note taken in the present moment of writing is thus temporally extended in two directions. Retrospectively in the form of potential comparisons between the present self and its past variations made in the recurrent act of reading. Prospectively in the form of expectations and hopes regarding a future imagined self. Diaristic practice resembles here a web woven with two threads: one representing the horizontal thread of historical time and another corresponding to a vertical one being the author’s time of consciousness. The Husserlian phenomenological approach to time, which extends the present moment of inner temporality to past (“retention”), and future (“protention”) seems to describe well the temporal dimension of diaristic practice.

5. Márai’s diaristic practice in the light of anthropological approach to diary

Among three types of diaristic writing analysed in the dissertation, Márai’s extensive diary is most abundant in explicit traces of the author’s existential way of treating his writing as a practice. Therefore, I will now briefly present some of them in the light of anthropological perspective which I will also try to apply in the interpretation of other diaries. Márai’s life writing implies symbiotic interconnectedness of physical and intellectual spheres of life. In 1944 while reflecting on the sense of his writing, Márai confessed that there was no separation between his life and work. As the author remarked, the process of his writing, rather than carried out following some previously thought-out plan, was dictated by his existence.\(^{127}\) He emphasised the anthropological dimension of writing, hence a process that was also shaping and changing him as a person and writer. Consequently, writing for Márai, instead of being a one-directional act aimed solely to express thoughts and create a text, was rather a reciprocal process that had a decisive, transformative impact also on the author. Thanks to writing he could transcend his previous self, becoming a different person.\(^ {128}\)

\(^{127}\) Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 1, 57.

\(^{128}\) Márai, *Tagebücher 1943-1944*, 144. Varga also accentuated this existential dimension of Márai’s texts (both more autobiographical and fictional), Varga, op. cit., 26-27. Consequently, Márai (as well as Gide) “[…] conceived of and practised writing as a form of experiencing the human condition. For them, writing itself – as an essential mode of perceiving and reflecting the world or ‘reality’ – became transcendent in comparison to a particular work or genre.” (Ibid., 27).
From some of Márai’s diaristic notes, it becomes clear how the two spheres, physical and intellectual were strongly interwoven, remaining in a reciprocal relationship. Life writing shall be viewed in its twofold influence. The external world of historical experiences naturally inspires and shapes a textual universe and *vice versa*. Literature in its performative dimension has an impact on reality. Besides many other rather descriptive senses of literature (a report on interhuman contacts as well as the relationship between individual and society, external world, and one’s images of the supernatural world), there is also a deeper performative sense which shapes a relationship of people with the world. Márai compared this process to photosynthesis which due to sunshine converts inorganic matter into an organic one. The same power has literature, “this spiritual energy” which renews and animates what was previously a static and stiff knowledge, “words acquire meaning, create concepts, from concepts result decisions [...].”\(^{129}\) In this regard, each choice of a book and the way a given text is interpreted are conditioned by one’s life-story and historical circumstances. As Márai noticed, “with admirable intuition, a man chooses each time the readings which suit his current life situation.”\(^{130}\) Reading notes on humanism taken by Hungarian poet Mihály Babits, Márai remarked: “It does not surprise me that these notes give me answers to the questions matured during the day; I am already used to finding in my readings – just as instinctively as an animal a food – an answer to that which currently preoccupies me.”\(^{131}\)

For the writer, it would be, however, difficult to maintain a balance between reading and writing because he was of course giving precedence to writing. Not only was Márai’s everyday life routine subordinated to writing but also the reality itself sometimes seemed to him as imitating literature. In 1944 the writer noticed that “the life imitates the art. A visionary, appropriate word from mythology or of a poet anticipates the reality.”\(^{132}\) He also applied this idea to his own work claiming that in one of his novels he managed to predict what would happen 20 years later in 1958.\(^{133}\) In letters to his friend Tibor Simanyi, Márai was also referring to his other novel titled *The Court in Canudos* (1970) as a text which somehow announced what would come later. Commenting on the contemporary

---

\(^{129}\) Márai, *Dziennik* vol. 4, 415.

\(^{130}\) Márai, *Tagebücher 1943-1944*, 212.


\(^{132}\) Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 1, 150. In another context when Márai got to know from newspapers and radio about a banker-fraud whom he wanted to depict in his criminal story he noticed: “Life imitates art. Wilde’s aphorism sometimes becomes a terrifying reality.” Reality sometimes surpasses literature in its unpredictability. The writer could not create this character because it gave him the impression of being too exaggerated and improbable but, in reality, he indeed appeared. Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 5, 250. In another place when an event seemed to be the same as the one earlier described in his piece of writing titled “Uninvited guest,” Márai noted that “life imitates literature.” Ibid., 259. He repeated this claim again in the context of re-evaluation of values traced both in reality and in his book. Ibid., 326.

situation in the 1970s in Italy (terrorist attacks, kidnapping, murders) and change of the role of the state, with reference to his book published five years earlier, Márai asked himself: “does the life imitate the art…?,” answering that “unfortunately, it sometimes does this.”

Life writing remains also in close relationship with travelling. Visiting Italy Márai was following either the routes of other writers-diarists (Goethe, Stendhal) or those he had once already chosen. Thus, an inspiration to visit Sorrento came from rereading some of the previous notes of his diary. Márai’s writing inspired by travels represents a new type of travel narrative which, in its personal dimension of self-reflection overriding the impersonality and descriptiveness, becomes a variation of life writing. Contrary to the previous form of travel account focused on factual observation of external reality (landscape, inhabitants, and customs), in the new narrative of the journey what is put to the foreground is the subjective way an author responds to a surrounding changed landscape and cultural context. Therefore, it is an author’s personal experience and not the outside reality that prevails in the new form of travel narrative.

The interconnectedness of the two worlds (one pertaining to the word and the other to reality) enables a deeper understanding of both historical circumstances framing one’s life and one’s personal fate, experiences. Literature opens a new dimension of reality which endows it with some meaning mediated through experiences narrated by an author and interpreted by a reader who in this manner tries to find some answers to the questions posed by the epoch s/he lives in. Márai’s diary is abundant in notes which discuss readings but sometimes also simultaneously comment on the reality. One example may be the reference to Franz Werfel’s book titled Forty days of Musa Dagh about the slaughter of Armenians. The circumstances of war and persecution of Hungarian Jews constituted for Márai some transposition and accomplishment of Werfel’s novel, which plot was supposed to take place in Budapest and every other Hungarian town. While reading Benvenuto Cellini’s Vita, Márai made an analogy between Sacco di Roma (the situation in Rome in the sixteenth century marked with the absence of any authority) and the contemporary situation in Italy/Salerno in the 1970s which, as the writer noticed, could be also similarly characterised by the degree of anarchy due to people’s independence from the state.

---

137 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 3, 71.
138 Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 164-165.
Márai also mentioned Ernst Junger’s book *Jahre der Okkupation*. It inspired him to make a comparison with his own existential situation in Hungary during the war. Márai commented on Junger’s notes describing his life in a town close to Hannover between 1945-1948 as follows: “He lived through the same as we in Leányfalú: robbing Texans, Negros raping women; as we Cossacks and Uzbeks. There are no ‘zones.’ there are only possibilities.”

Literature and personal account are different ways of story-telling of one’s experience which allow to perceive it in a meaningful way, in a plot. They are interwoven to such an extent that the “zones” of different spatial-temporal units of experience disappear. They cease to be separate as the borders between literature and history become fluid. The “zones” which, could have brought separation of a word from reality, when blurred by life writing, open way to opportunities, potentialities of comparable, parallel experiences in different spatial and temporal contexts. This possibility of comparison also enables the one who discerns it, to give another dimension, meaning to his/her experiences even if happening in totally divergent space and epoch.

Márai was convinced that it is impossible to know oneself due to the human immersion in the fluid time and its passage which continuously transforms us. The inaccessible true self, impossible to confront with, is placed somewhere between the “I” of unconsciousness and the superego. The impossibility of grasping one’s image cognitively is, however, compensated by an acceptance of oneself as s/he is. Acceptance of oneself in time extended between the past “sphere of experience” and the future “horizon of expectation” (Koselleck) requires, however, a dialogue with oneself from the past. Márai’s diaristic practice accompanied by other mnemonic tools such as photographs or other objects let the writer maintain a continuous dialogue with the past and in this way, also ascertain continuity of self in time, accept himself. In the search of the traces of the past Márai was driven by a “curiosity of archeologist, as Schliemann when he was pouring the sands of Troy.”

In the diary, Márai described an intriguing coincidence when one old forgotten photo of his father found by accident led him to another diaristic note taken many years before in which he was reflecting on the same photo explaining its fate (when and how it came into Márai’s possession) and describing the person photographed. “Disconcertingly old characters, persons, and then objects, lost

---

139 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 3, 179. Another example is Aristotle’s text on revolutions mentioned in the context of some historical events in Warsaw (a literary club’s closure) as an interpretative framework of reality. (Ibid., 328).
140 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 5, 118.
141 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 4, 234.
142 Ibid., 219.
pieces of the past – emerge all at once, concurrently, as if directed in purpose. [...] All this come from the old times in an inconceivable coincidence.”

The same palpable intermingling of the past with the present happened some years later with a help of a notebook found in a tuxedo’s pocket. It was still at the bottom of the suitcase which 24 years before accompanied on the Márais in their way from Budapest into exile. The notebook itself reminded Márai of the place where he bought it and particular notes – “word-stimulus” of the memory, took the writer back to some scenes and persons with his Budapest from the past in the background. He compared the notes to the “antediluvian fossils of the memories.” Nonetheless, the diary due to its continuity in time played a more important role than photographs in shaping his self-identification. Whereas Márai could not sense anything in common with recollected manifestations of himself from the past, with his episodic self as captured on a photo some decades earlier, what remained unchanged was personality, the true “second self”. The latter self, characterised by Márai as devoid of the face, could be revealed only on the pages of the journal.

Regarding the material side of Márai’s diaristic practice, he was writing his diary on separate pieces of paper which he was keeping in envelopes ordered by years. Diaristic writing when viewed from the anthropological perspective is never reduced to writing only. As Márai noticed: “It is worth keeping a diary only if a person reads it at least as carefully as he writes it.” When preparing his notes for publication, he was rereading, rewriting, and very often erasing them. As he noted, it is the editorial (and existential) task of erasing everything superfluous (in writing as well as in life in general) so that the meaning of the entire text remains unchanged, which exceeds in difficulty the task of writing. In removing all unimportant components, however, one question emerges on “what is ‘important’.” A certain continuity of self in time? Márai’s practice of keeping a diary, besides writing, and editing, implied also other acts such as reflecting, remembering, and summarizing. Almost every year in the diary is topped with a note-balance that summarizes the experiences of the year. There, the author was reflecting upon gains and losses concerning different issues such as politics, health, literature, travels.

143 Ibid., 178-179.
144 Ibid., 219-220.
145 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 135.
146 Ibid., 116.
147 Teresa Worowska, “Świadek entropii” in Dziennik (fragmenty) by Sándor Márai, translated, edited and annotated by Teresa Worowska (Warszawa, 2006), 613.
149 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 235, 357.
150 For instance, the opening and closing notes for the year 1976. Ibid., 373, 416.
Moreover, throughout his diaristic practice Márai was adding some new notes with hindsight which served to emphasize or change the meaning of previously noted statements. For instance, one diaristic note from 1967 is accompanied by such an additional insertion. To the following note: “Mediterranean light which gives sense to everything is a great gift. It is good to experience this light once again,” Márai later added this record: “before it gets dark.”¹⁵¹ Such additional notes hint at the continuous practices inherent in keeping a journal which apart from writing also includes rereading and reflecting on previous experiences in the light of the changeable present moment. The present moment might be also clarified and understood better with reference to previous notes.¹⁵² Therefore, diaristic practice allows for the circulation of meanings that are given either to the past in the light of the present or vice versa and in this way also reshape the diarist’s self-identification.

Due to the diary’s aim to provide the author with a feeling of continuity in volatile historical circumstances, it can be also regarded as a means of constructing some narrative self-identification. Márai, while selecting his diaristic notes taken between 1945-1954 with the intention of later publishing them, noted that “this is an instructive activity. Only now a man sees what a consistent action in his life is. What is an error that he constantly commits, what is a mistake that always returns. There is something permanent in human fate. And the diary shows this specific graphic.”¹⁵³ The diaristic “graphic” symbolizes here a continuous tendency noticeable only in one’s temporal extension practised on the diary’s pages, in retrospective and prospective view. Márai grasped it also in 1953 in the form of a process of change that happened to him between 1945 and 1946. The act of rereading previous notes allowed the author to discern some evolution of his self which he called “the process of purification.” During such times, Márai managed to liberate himself from bad emotions such as anger directed towards his homeland and the Hungarian society which he accused of immorality. The temporal distance let the author relativize his opinions and understand that what conditioned some changes in society and immoral behaviour were historical situations and not Hungarians themselves. Certain inclinations, instead of constituting some immutable essence of the Hungarian soul, were triggered in the course of historical events.¹⁵⁴

The extensive diaristic practice embracing many decades allows for imagined travels in time, confrontation with the bygone selves, examination of conscience and in consequence also reshaping

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 34.
¹⁵² Márai’s remarks on an invasion of ants in his flat in one note taken in 1971 with reference to a previous note from 1948 as follows: “I read in my diary from 1948 that ants and termites will swarm on a rotten human world, maybe it will be our end.” (Ibid., 187).
¹⁵³ Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 381.
¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 317, 318.
of one’s present self-understanding. The notes taken in 1945, as read in retrospect, arose in Márai the question of whether the way he had reacted to the historical situation at that time was appropriate. Even though in minor aspects he might have been wrong, in general terms it seemed to him it was not possible to react differently.

Was I right? In many things, no. The anger with which I was then looking at everyone and everything is certainly wrong. I was wrong in assessing the details, my predictions proved to be in many cases inaccurate and when I reproach Hungarian society I am often wrong and unjust. But as a whole the diary is right. It was impossible to answer justly to what had happened; only with anger and passion.155

In another place Márai commented on his combined acts of rereading the diaristic notes taken between 1945-1952 and writing as follows: “I was wrong in many matters, I am painfully not right in judging some people, for example mother or the Hungarian society but as a ‘whole’ I think I was not wrong: I had to live like that, I could do nothing else, I could not live otherwise. And I do not expect justification.”156 The temporal distance let the author understand and accept his attitudes and emotions experienced in the past.

Working on a selection of notes taken in 1945 Márai openly emphasised the instructive side of the diaristic practice: “How superficially we usually say ‘I have experienced this and that ...’ Now when I am rewriting my notes I feel and see again that to ‘experience’ does not mean ‘to have an experience,’ but always: ‘to understand.’”157 In the act of rereading his diary, it became clear to the author that introspection, accompanied by careful observation of the changing self, is more important than a simple recording of the facts constituting volatile outside reality. Contrary to a chronicle, a diary is always strongly mediated by subjectivity, personal values, and emotions. While reading the notes taken during his stay in Switzerland and Naples between 1948 and 1949, Márai accentuated the central role of the author and his perspective always mediating and thusly also attributing each diaristic writing with meaning. “A lot of ‘observation’ from the world. Little ‘observation’ of oneself. And a diary has sense only when a person keeping the journal observes himself in the world.”158

The diaristic practice was for Márai a way to understand his place in the world. This imperative became even stronger in times of war, massive destruction and self-annihilation which

155 Ibid., 262.
156 Ibid., 276.
157 Ibid., 120.
158 Ibid., 199.
contradicted any belief in sense of historical reality. In 1944 the writer, asking himself what he should do in this world in war, answered that besides everyday tasks, meeting with several honest persons and reading, his response to the challenge posed by historical circumstances should also include writing novels and more personal narratives such as poems or a diary: “Sometimes I try to understand myself and my situation in this world. The world I already cannot understand; a human being destroys himself in the definite gesture of despair. I would like still to write a few poems.”\textsuperscript{159} In its self-centredness the diary let Márai keep the History at safe distance. In retrospect, having read the notes from the previous eight years he remarked that “history was unfolding’ but nothing happened.” No event left a long-lasting imprint on memory as some piece of art would do.\textsuperscript{160}

The historical reality of the twentieth century opposed many witnesses’ attempts of its rational taming. The unpredictable and accelerated course of events did not correspond to previous historical experiences and in this respect went beyond comprehension. The diaristic practice became one of the hermeneutic responses of alienated self to the estranged historical reality, the response which either facilitated to align oneself with historical order of time or to keep the latter at a safe distance from one’s inner freedom. The question emerges here whether this inclination for a diaristic inscription of the self in the twentieth century was not only determined by given historical situations but also conditioned by a place. Was it of the same character and equally strong everywhere? What was the relationship between historical circumstances in Central Europe and diaristic writing? The bond seems the strongest in the case of Márai’s diary which in fact was founded in the author’s experience of the Second World War in Hungary. With regard to the other two writers, this connection is less evident. The question is rather important because a specific conceptualisation of Central Europe as defined by an excess of History and individual (but shared) attitudes towards the passage of time might shed some new light on diaristic practice in general and the writers’ diaries in particular. In the following chapter, I will reflect on Central Europe in relation to hermeneutic responses to History such as exile and diaristic practice.

\textsuperscript{159} Márai, 	extit{Dziennik}, vol. 1, 61.  
\textsuperscript{160} Márai, 	extit{Dziennik}, vol. 4, 381.
III. Central Europe as the imagined community of historical fate

1. Introduction: “Does Central Europe exist?”

“Does Central Europe exist?” The doubt raised by the British historian Timothy Garton Ash in the title of his essay\(^1\) entails numerous questions. Where is Central Europe? On maps or in heads?\(^2\) Changeable historical situations proved the designation of Central Europe to be fluid and thus semantically debatable, highly questionable. French historian, Jacques Le Rider starts his book on *Mitteleuropa* with the statement that a geographical clear delineation of Central Europe does not apply to the historical and geopolitical definition of this term. “In essence it preserves some elastic and changeable contours following the conjunctures.”\(^3\) However, the geographical definitions of the region are also not unanimous. As Polish emigrant historian Piotr Stefan Wandycz remarked referring to arbitrary, geographical origins of the concept of East Central Europe: “The term is borrowed from geography, yet neither geographers nor politicians would agree on the exact contours of the region.”\(^4\) Márai expressed the similar confusion concerning the geographical delineation of Central Europe and more precisely the border between the West and the East. Referring to the identity of “a man from the West,” Márai was asking himself: “But in fact where does ‘a man from the West’ begin? Near Ural? By the eastern border of Hungary? By Leitha?”\(^5\) There is even no consensus with regard to the midpoint of Europe as its location depends on the delineation of the Old Continent’s borders which is not an unproblematic task. Is it for instance possible to determine a frontier between Europe and Asia? Notwithstanding this problem, still, many East Central European countries have claimed a privileged geographical position embracing the centre of Europe. In this general state of confusion, one may ask with reference to the question of the correspondent of the Lithuanian Office of Radio Free Europe Valentinas Mite: “So, in which country does the real

---

2 Referring to Central Europe, Czech philosopher and sociologist Miloš Havelka noted that “this space has never existed as a real or important unit, it was always only ‘in heads.’ Constructions and representations of space through “mental mapping” also create the frames of individual self–identification. M. Havelka, “Střední Evropa: konstrukce – iluze – realizta,” *Svět literatury* 17, vol. 36 (2007): 200-201.
4 Piotr Stefan Wandycz, *The Price of Freedom. A History of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the present* (London and New York, 2001), 1. Thus, different concepts of the region would refer to “the entire area between the Baltic, Adriatic, Aegean, and Black seas (flanked by ethnic German and Russian blocs), or some variations thereof, or to its ‘heartlands,’ to use Timothy Garton Ash’s phrase, that is, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.”
5 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 4, 387.
geographical heart of Europe beat?7 Considering the lack of consensus in this matter one may also ask: Is Central Europe intrinsically polycentric?

The ‘spectre’ of Central Europe ‘haunted’ many authors in their writings who in search of some definition were in fact following an ungraspable, always distancing horizon. In the view of Czech writer Milan Kundera, “the geographic boundaries of Central Europe are vague, changeable, and debatable. [...] Central Europe is polycentral and looks different from different vantage points: Warsaw or Vienna, Budapest, or Ljubljana. [...]”7 Where is Central Europe? The same question about the area’s coordinates returns persistently. Danilo Kiš opened his “Variations on the theme of Central Europe” with problematisation of the region’s location and its resultant ambiguous status. “With no precise borders, with no Centre or rather with several centres, ‘Central Europe’ looks today more and more like the dragon of Alca in the second book of Anatole France’s Penguin Island to which the Symbolist movement was compared: no one who claimed to have seen it could say what it looked like.”8 Central Europe as an area-spectre, devoid of precise frontiers, centre or abundant in the latter’s multiplications, becomes an apparition beyond comprehensive articulation or definition.

If Central Europe does not yield itself easily to a rational act of pinning down in language, could its map be delineated by sensual experiences such as taste or smell? To the question about the region’s location, one may answer that it is traceable rather in the metaphorical universe nourished by particular experience than in a real space. The scholar dealing with the geopolitics of Central Europe, Otilia Dhand, noted that “something is not right with ‘Central Europe’. It is not like Africa or India — something you can outline on a map. It is more like the Orient, or the West.”9 The concept of Central Europe thus, as Dhand emphasised, does not designate a place or a factual state but an idea, a myth or a project of change that conveys specific desires and hopes oriented towards the future.10 Central Europe, therefore, is a notion with little correspondence with reality but with a decisive influence on imagination and identity which in consequence attributes this concept with strong potential to change reality. Instead of denoting a given situation delimited in some precise place and within clear borders, Central Europe would rather refer to an imagined state of how

10 Ibid., 1, 3.
a certain situation or place could develop and look like. Thus, the region’s frontiers are more hypothetical than real.

Conceptual attempts “to map” Central Europe have always provoked many debates and controversies. In the 1960s Karel Kosik, a Czech philosopher engaged in the dissident movement, defined this region as “a space in dispute and the space of a dispute – a dispute over what this space really is.” Dhand used the words such as “fight”, “battle”, “argument”, “struggling” and “competing schemes” to describe the long dispute over what this region has meant to different political actors. However, the notion’s conflictual dimension provokes not only discussions in diplomatic circles but goes deeper into the individual experience and informs mechanisms of self-identification. It very often thus denotes “a clash of various Selves and Others, which will fight for the definition of regional identity that suits their interests.” It implies a struggle between political interests and intellectual ideas, between actors who forcefully project their visions of Central Europe (German Mitteleuropa) and oppose such imposed concepts (dissidents’ cultural “kidnapped West” politically imprisoned in the East). Therefore, as Dhand rightly noted “Central Europe is as often forged with the sword as it is with the pen.”

Only meteorological statements referring to this region seem to be neutral, impartial, and devoid of normative, ambiguous meanings. For the Austrian writer Peter Handke Central Europe could only describe the weather conditions. Meteorology instead of ideology? Distant from normative meanings, meteorological phenomena, which naturally disregard state borders and political divisions, for some Central European intellectuals-dissidents could become a form of compensation for life ideologically shaped during the Cold War. Moreover, meteorological common phenomena trespass not only spatial borders but also divisions in time. Consequently, besides some sensation of liberty in the Soviet confinement, they could also entail temporal translocation and divert one’s attention from the present moment towards its overwhelming shadow of the past.

Slovene writer, Drago Jančar in one of his essays mentioned a moment when he experienced Central Europe in an “exclusively meteorological way,” namely during his visit to one of the Istrian villages, Opertalj, once inhabited by 500 people, though, in the 1970s counting only 17 inhabitants. The mass exodus from the village, like from other places in Istria and Central Europe, was provoked by a change of borders entailing a sudden and brutal interference of politics into people’s everyday life. Trajectories of human lives became entangled in the whirls of History or were cut short under

12 Dhand, op. cit., 12.
13 Ibid., Preface, X, 7.
its blast. What, however, in this village and at that time remained unchanged was a strong and cold wind called bora coming from the North-East and very often present in the karstic, Istrian landscapes. Rampaging along the village’s empty streets and embracing abandoned houses, bora intensified in Jančar a feeling of melancholy (“bittersweet sad mood”). The strong wind incited memories and hypothetical ways of thinking abundant in images of potential events which could have happened in everyday life in some particular places and at some particular time. Meteorological phenomena may intensify not only melancholy but also hopes. Thus, meteorological Central Europe entails not only immersion in the past but also an orientation towards the future. In its negation of national frontiers, it can nourish a utopian image of the borderless region and in consequence also enhance one’s need to trespass these boundaries artificially existing on the maps in a search for a different, better life. In this regard, Jančar tells a tragic story of one family’s unsuccessful attempt to cross the river Mura on the Yugoslav-Austrian border.¹⁴ Meteorological Central Europe in the period of the Cold War was thus very often only an illusion of relief from a political burden and an ideological confinement.

Distancing from defining the region in cultural terms (Milan Kundera’s “kidnapped West”), meteorological variation of Central Europe hints at another trajectory of the area’s conceptualisation, namely the perspective of geopoetics founded on the individual sensual experience of everyday life. There is a difference between geopolitical and geopoetic approaches to Central Europe, “whether one sees Mitteleuropa as a territory to be used, or as a cultural network and repository of memory that needs to be preserved,”¹⁵ or as a sphere of sensual experience.

2. From geopolitics and regional identity to geopoetics and self-identification – a trajectory of conceptualisation of Central Europe?

The highly polysemous term of Central Europe seems ungraspable in one definition only. Behind the plethora of superfluous and inexhaustive concepts, it is, however, possible to discern at least two main models of mapping this area. Both of them are certain generalisations and thus incur the risk of simplification. Notwithstanding this drawback, I treat them as an auxiliary tool in ordering

the chaos of numerous concepts of Central Europe. In the end also these two ways of conceptualising Central Europe hint at relativity and relationality inherent in any attempt of defining the region and confirm the words of the Hungarian historian Peter Hanak, who underlined that the definition of Central Europe would be dependent on the relationship with the East and the West.\textsuperscript{16} It would be, though, also dependent on the point of view from within the region, as Central Europe was conceptualised differently within for instance Polish and Czech imagined geographies.

The first model comprises various geopolitical perspectives on the region shaped according to political interests and international relationships as well as historical experiences. They are either imposed from the outside of the region (the West or the East) or with a centripetal change of vectors, they are based on specific Central European historical experiences. In other words, geopolitical images of Central Europe are different when the area is viewed from outside of its spatial coordinates by other political powers such as Germany, France, Great Britain or from within by Central Europeans themselves.

The images of Central Europe imposed by others should be complemented with a self-perception, ideas that originated inside the region and that are equally diversified. As Le Rider rightly remarked, there are different Central Europes depending on divergent collective historical experiences of states which constitute this region. On the one hand, both Czech and Hungarian collective imaginaries trace the genealogy of Central Europe in the area of the Habsburg Empire. Hence, the region is designated as “the Danubian area.” On the other, within the Polish historical imagination Central Europe denotes a space between the two great powers of Russia and Germany. Central European area excludes Germany but includes Ukraine and the Baltic states.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, in the Polish representation of Central Europe, the religious component (Catholicism) becomes a fundamental characteristic of the regional identity, exposed as a frontier (a sanitary cordon)

\textsuperscript{16} Michael Rutschky, “Mitteleuropa, eine kurzfristige Utopie,” \textit{Merkur} 3, no. 516 (March 1992): 183-199, cited by Le Rider, op. cit., 7, 11-13. In his study on \textit{Mitteleuropa}, Le Rider distinguishes on one side the German, Austrian tradition of thinking about this region. One meaning of \textit{Mitteleuropa} refers to Pan-German ideology shaped at the beginning of the Great War. The second one is encapsulated in the image of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation which converts into a myth, the utopia of a multicultural, multilingual, and harmonious central part of Europe. What these concepts of Central Europe (\textit{Mitteleuropa}) have in common is the belief in the German messianic role capable of putting the end to the chaotic and entangled Central European national situation. Messianism has found its practical realisation also in many projects of the economic integration of Central Europe which would function in favour of German industry and exportation of goods. Le Rider analyses also other than German concepts of Central Europe. Referring to Krzysztof Pomian, French historian states that while the Eastern border of Central Europe is not difficult to delineate (as it would cover the religious and cultural division between catholic, protestant Central Europe and Greek-orthodox “Byzantine Europe”, the division conceptualised by Pomian), considering the Western border it is much more problematic and depends on whether or not Germany is considered to be the part of Central Europe. (11-13)

between the liberal capitalist West and the Orthodox East.\(^ {18}\) To complicate more this picture, Le Rider also added the Ukrainian and Russian perceptions of Central Europe. Ukrainian vision of this region denotes the Habsburg heritage and puts to the foreground the importance of two university towns in the former Galicia and Bukovina: Lviv and Chernivtsi, respectively. The Russian perception of Central Europe refers to the state’s traditional oscillation between the European-oriented politics (since the times of Peter the Great) and the farther withdrawal to the East, “Orient.”\(^ {19}\) In this respect the traditional opposition of two cultural movements fostered by Russian intellectuals (the Westerners and the Slavophiles) could be interpreted as a manifestation of Central European dilemmas in Russia.\(^ {20}\)

Different starting points of reflection on geopolitical Central Europe (viewed from outside or within the region) in the end differentiate also processes of self-identification by changing vectors of othering. What was common for the array of various concepts of Central Europe, was an attempt to build Central European identity in opposition to empires subsumed under the term “Other”: Great Britain, France, Russia. Central Europe was therefore supposed to counterweight their power. Similarly, Central Europe during the Great War became identified by the Allied states: Great Britain and the USA with a threatening “Other.”\(^ {21}\) These two points of view represented by actors, whose aim is to shape the reality, are informed by geopolitics which becomes their common framework. As Dhand claims, the definitions of spatialized identities are not neutral, impartial but always informed by particular interests, aims and geopolitical views. Consequently “conceptualisations of regional identity — in this case, Central Europe — are exercises in geopolitics which, through the definitive discourse of “Self” and “Other,” exert influence upon the behaviour of political actors, thereby impacting the international structure.”\(^ {22}\)

It is important to emphasise, following Dhand’s argument, that the notion of Central Europe is underpinned with geopolitics from the very moment of its coinage.\(^ {23}\) Beyond the plethora of

---

\(^ {18}\) Le Rider, op. cit., 100-101. Wandycz remarked “No wonder that historic Hungary and Poland, bordering on Muscovy and the Ottoman lands, regarded themselves, and were regarded by others, as the bulwark of Christendom (antemurale christianitatis). Their eastern frontiers marked the frontiers of Europe.” Wandycz, op. cit., 3.

\(^ {19}\) Le Rider, op. cit., 101.

\(^ {20}\) As Wandycz remarked, this debate introduced the perception of Europe in dichotomous categories: the West and the East. Before the nineteenth century, division was non-existent. Later it was popularized by historical narratives which presented European history as culturally, religiously divided (Byzantine, Greek, Orthodox East and Germanic, Protestant, Roman Catholic West). Wandycz, op. cit., 2.

\(^ {21}\) Dhand, op. cit., 116, 118, 121.

\(^ {22}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^ {23}\) Ibid., 6-7. “The problem of Central Europe is virtually inscribed into the 'birth certificate' of classical geopolitics in the shape of Sir Halford John Mackinder's enigmatic treatises, The Geographical Pivot of History and Democratic Ideals
various meanings of Central Europe emerging throughout history (changeability which paradoxically becomes their unchanged feature), one element seems stable, namely the concept’s close bond with geopolitics. As Dhand argues: Central Europe’s “most consistent characteristic seems to have been its often unpredictable shape-shifting. Invoked by a whole spectrum of ideological streams, its only firm connection seems to be with classical geopolitics and its realist variants in international relations.”  

24 These concepts, explicitly underpinned with geopolitics, are future-oriented and based on positive terms. German Mitteleuropa and the renaissance of the idea of Central Europe among dissidents in the 1980s are thus two moments within the concept’s legacy which could be inscribed within this first, geopolitical model of perceiving Central Europe.

Concerning the second moment of the re-emergence of the idea of Central Europe, Kundera in his famous essay “The Tragedy of Central Europe” (1984), which in the 1980s reinvigorated the debate on Central Europe and inspired many dissidents, defined the region in terms of a shared historical fate and spiritual community based on humanism. The aim of Kundera’s vision advocating the region’s cultural common heritage was to oppose the dominant geopolitical understanding of Central Europe shaped by other superpowers and who placed this area within the East and the Soviet Union. In that respect, Kundera’s essay paved the way for Central European anti-politics with its emancipative aims.  

25 As a direct response to given circumstances of the Cold War, Kundera’s text was not free from implicit political agenda and in this sense still revolves around a geopolitical understanding of Central Europe.

The attempt to define the region in positive terms was undertaken by many historians and dissidents. Central European intellectuals-dissidents (Václav Havel or György Konrád) were primarily focused on the present situation which was supposed to bring some important political and social changes. Therefore, their historical representations had as a background visions of how the future situation of the region should look like, both from the point of view of political history (national independence) and theoretical frames of discussion about Central Europe (debate emancipated from the all-embracing Sovietology). With the aim of undermining the Cold War

24 Ibid., 8.

25 The term of Central Europe popularized by dissidents, contrary to imperative, Pan-Germanic implications of Mitteleuropa, had an emancipative agenda. As Dhand rightly noticed, the short period of not even one century brought a radical semantical shift to the concept of Central Europe. Dhand contrasts “an idyllic and optimistic picture” of Central Europe re-emerged in the 1980s among dissidents with the negatively qualified origins of the term, expressing opposition to democratic values, pan-Germanic expansionism (Mitteleuropa). As the author claims: “Thus, the puzzle of Central Europe starts to take shape in the contrast between its brilliant contemporary image and its murky past.” (Ibid., 8)
geopolitical division of the world into two ideological systems, many Central European intellectuals were trying to define the central part of the Old Continent in its own right searching for its *differentia specifica* which would enable them to distinguish the central part of Europe from the East. However, at the same time, they were trying to underline the cultural affinity of Central Europe with the West. The well-known example of this way of conceptualizing the area was the idea of Kundera who identified Central Europe with the West (culture) kidnapped by the East (politics) after the Second World War. The search for Central European *differentia specifica* could also follow the path of a “Sonderweg” and hence aim at underlining the distinctiveness of historical, economic, and political processes shaping Central European reality. The search for cultural, historical, economic characteristics which could distinguish Central Europe from other parts of the Old Continent and compose the regional identity is also underpinned with geopolitics.

Among authors who after the Second World War applied the regional approach in search of some categorisations and positive definitions which could distinguish the identity of Central Europe, there were also many historians. Historical narratives, which might be inscribed within the geopolitical way of thinking about the region, have a few features in common: systematic conceptualisations, inclusiveness/exclusiveness (which countries shall be regarded as constituents of Central Europe) and search for cultural, economic continuities. The work of Polish historian, Oskar Halecki was of great importance in the process of establishing Central European studies after the Second World War. Halecki, who emigrated to the United States, was interested in spatial and temporal divisions of European history. In his book titled “The Limits and Divisions of European History” (1962) he introduced the new system of concepts. His Europe was divided into not only three but four regions. The dual central part between the East and the West consisted of East Central Europe and West-Central Europe. Some authors were also trying to apply in their works the core-periphery model or the categories of *longue durée*. The aim was to accentuate the durability of certain characteristics and paths of historical development, for instance the divergence between a culture which was regarded always as a part of the Western system of values and the economic sphere which was of the Eastern character. The Polish historian living in the United States, Piotr Le Rider, op. cit., 16-17. This approach, however, when accompanied with a comparative perspective, introduces a problematic supposition of two different historical paths: one being normal and another one of anomalous character. Le Rider analyses István Bibó’s study *Misère des petits États d’Europe centrale* (1946) applying the term of Sonderweg. Bibó, in Le Rider’s interpretation, would normalize the development of the Western nation-states (France, Great Britain) and perceive as anomalous the processes shaping modern states in Central Europe. Bibó’s analysis also hints at the inclusion of Germans into Central Europe (with the importance of language and *Volk* as the fundamentals of national identities or with perceiving the Habsburg Empire as culpable of some anomalies in the formation of nation-states in Central Europe).
Stefan Wandycz in the book “The Price of Freedom. A History of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present” (1992) outlined a brief history of the region. Within the comparative regional approach, he focused on East Central Europe made of Poland, Bohemia/Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Using the concepts of centre, semi-periphery, and periphery, he emphasised economic differences between the European regions. Braudelian methodology was explicitly implemented in the study conducted by the Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs in his book titled “The Three Historical Regions of Europe” (1985).

The main aim of the aforementioned writers was to discern borders and define Central Europe by inscribing it in broader conceptual entities such as historical evolution, processes of longue durée and cultural currents such as Renaissance, Reformation or Enlightenment. Subjects of their historical narrations are very often abstract and general concepts such as regions, nations, cultural trends, or historical currents. Thus, the voices of individuals, other than those well-known on the political stage, were silenced. However, Central Europe regarded as a laboratory for ideological experiments founded on totalizing philosophies of history, derived from the tradition of dialectical modernity, needs some complementary perspective. Bearing in mind the image of Central Europe as a laboratory of modernist dialectical thought, one shall ask within different theoretical frames (hermeneutics, negative dialectics?) not about the identity of the region but individual self-identifications understood as literary, diaristic articulations of experiences shaped by particular responses to given historical circumstances in the twentieth century.

In this context, it is worth asking whether the same term referring to regional identity could inform also self-identifications of the area’s inhabitants. If the spatialized identity of Central Europe is necessarily normative and geopolitically underpinned, applied by those in power to change reality,

---

27 Wandycz noted that: “[…] East Central European countries became part of the West. They were shaped by and experienced all the great historical currents: Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, the French and Industrial Revolutions.” Wandycz, op. cit., 3

28 The metaphor of laboratory seems to have spread into the historiography devoted to East Central Europe. As Wandycz remarked: “At times East Central Europe has resembled a laboratory in which various systems are being tested. Adam Ulam called the region in the post-Second World War era a ‘laboratory of neo-imperialism.’ In the early 1980s, Poland was described as a laboratory for political change.” Ibid., 9. Political scientist Barbara J. Falk makes a similar argument stating that “East-Central Europe was and remains a laboratory for all the political and economic experiments and disasters of the twentieth century.” Barbara J. Falk, The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher-Kings (Budapest, New York, 2003), 4.

the question arises whether the same concept could be equally desirable among those who instead of shaping, imposing political borders, were forced to experience their shifts in everyday life. In the view of Kundera “[…] Central Europe never was an intentional, desired unit. With the exception of the Hapsburg emperor, his court, and few isolated intellectuals, no Central European desired a Central Europe.” If in the twentieth century the changeable region’s status determined by given historical circumstances was often perceived as not intentional, then its origins implied a certain lack of desire and prediction among Central Europeans. Geopolitical constructs embracing the middle part of Europe, due to their imposed character, were to great extent marked by lack of historical agency and hence made some Central Europeans emigrate. Pomian referred to the concept of Central Europe in the same vein as Kundera. To the question about Central European cultural identity, the Polish philosopher answered negatively. He noted that “there is no cultural union because there is no consciousness of pertaining to one Central Europe.” The above-mentioned statements hint at the undesirable and unintentional dimension of the legacy of the concept of Central Europe. Concurrently, they shed some light on other than the geopolitical side of this notion; its geopoetic, literary image.

The questions drawing attention from un/desirable regional identity to individual self-identifications introduce another model of mapping Central Europe founded on the perception of time, historical experience, and thus also individual, narrative reconfigurations of self. On one side, there are concepts of Central Europe that accentuate continuities, linear time, and definitions in positive, very often normative terms (what Central Europe is or should be). On the other, the second model of conceptualizing the region underscores ruptures, relativity, polysemy, and unintentionality giving way to definitions in negative terms such as absence or difference. As less normative and not so explicitly linked with political circumstances, they accentuate the role of individual experience of everyday life in mapping Central Europe. Instead of the cultural affinities and identity of the region as a whole formulated in response to some otherness, what is put to the fore within geopoetics is Central European way of being and sensual experience of concrete places. This binary of modes of conceptualisation seems in line with the difference between regional identity and individual self-identification. Are they opposite or reciprocal, interrelated?

Dhand in her interpretations framed within critical geopolitics inspired by constructivism underlined two interrelated dimensions of the concept of Central Europe. The political, international

---

side of Central Europe is accompanied by another one that informs self-identification of populations from this region in transitive periods. In uncertain times such as the transition from socialism to Western liberalism, the idea of Central Europe activated an identity mechanism composed of parallel processes of building one’s self (identification with the West) and othering (distancing from the East).\textsuperscript{32} Similarly, Pomian accentuated the negative feature inherent in Central European self-identification understood as a community of fate born in transitive moments of crisis (the period just after the Second World War or at the beginning of the 1980s). In that respect, he referred to a short-term “identity produced by a threat” (German or Russian) and hence dependent on historical circumstances.\textsuperscript{33} Le Rider also mentioned the \textit{ex negativo} way of defining Central Europe in terms of “community of fate in the periods of crisis.” The definition originates inside the region and thus represents the perspective of small Central European nations, going beyond the positive definitions imposed by German thought. Le Rider indicated two critical historical moments when the idea of Central Europe re-emerged, that is the period just after the Second World War, when the central part of Europe became part of the Soviet Union, and several decades later in the 1980s when the discussion about Central Europe was taken up by dissidents and exilic writers, who in this regard followed previous debates on this idea (1933-1945) among emigrants from Central Europe. Le Rider emphasised the role of crisis which triggers discussions (very often nostalgically tinted) about the Central European community and hence underlies Central European identity as well. Consequently, this identity is ephemeral because depending on a feeling of threat. When incertitude and menace are gone, Central European identity also wanes.\textsuperscript{34}

The above-mentioned Central European self-identifications follow the \textit{ex negativo} path and are articulations of some collective mindsets shaped by common historical experiences. They are thus still strongly embedded in a geopolitical context. However, some conceptualisations of Central Europe in negative terms distance themselves from geopolitics. Individual self-identification imbued with Central European historical experience might be shaped in response to a given transitive geopolitical situation, but the resultant idea of self can be founded at a distance from it. Going beyond geopolitics, self-identification aims at geopoetics. Not informed by political, future-oriented agenda which imposes an active engagement with political reality here and now, geopoetics directs the self inwardly, both backwards and forward in time (diaristic, Husserlian temporality).

\textsuperscript{32} Dhand, op. cit., 3-4, 8-9, 11.
\textsuperscript{33} Pomian, “L’Europe centrale,” 16-17.
\textsuperscript{34} Le Rider, op. cit., 15.
Interwoven with travel, exile, and life writing, geopoetics implies a certain transgression, changeability, and search of being elsewhere (hypothetical way of being).

Far from direct engagement intervening in external affairs in order to transform them, geopoetics would rather advocate an inner narrative reformulation of self vis-à-vis the time of History and space (spatialized identity). I distinguish two interrelated geopoetic responses to historical changes in Central Europe in the previous century, namely temporal and spatial forms of displacement. While the first type of displacement refers to literary, diaristic attempts to reconfigure one’s perception of time with regard to historical circumstances, the second form means an exilic odyssey in search of one’s proper place in the world of geopolitically imposed geographical imaginaries.

The geopoetic horizon of self-identification stems from an undesirable status quo in spatial terms of imposed spatialized identity (Central Europe) and temporal sense of ideologized historical context. Instead of an active outward engagement oriented towards some change, this geopoetic response would rather encourage to withdraw inwardly and mitigate possible dissonances between the world and the self through artistic creation and diaristic practice. The writers at the focal point of the dissertation, who could be regarded as following the path of geopoetics, did not elaborate explicitly on Central Europe in their works. They were uninterested in regional identity. As writers-diarists were first and foremost absorbed by their self-identifications expressed in literary worlds and shaped in connection with the reality of the pace of History of the twentieth century and space, changeable places of stay in exile. Some bond with Central Europe, however, remained in an implicit way in form of Central European historical experience which all of them shared by witnessing discontinuities of History and being forced to face an exilic fate. Therefore, it is possible to trace some manifestations of this Central European community of historical fate especially in their autobiographical and diaristic writings.

Different historical circumstances opening and closing the short twentieth century shaped various experiences and thus also narrations regarding the central part of Europe. While Friedrich Naumann’s Mitteleuropa was a geopolitical attempt to define the region in positive and normative terms as a means of rearranging it politically and economically under the German auspices, Kundera’s image underlines an undesirable feature inherent in the idea of Central Europe. The rebirth of this concept at the end of the Cold War, even if its origins were marked by a concrete geopolitical situation (such as Kundera’s famous essay), gave way to Central European self-identifications very often just implicitly indicated in literary texts and constructed in negative terms.
Central Europe at the end of the twentieth century implied an array of individual responses to History raging from active involvement in politics to exile, from still positive definitions of this region (dissident Central Europe) to replacement of such regional identity with self-identification only implicitly and indirectly echoing Central European historical experience.

However, not only can historical experience shape one’s self-identification in relation to a particular space. The self may be also grasped in sensual experiences such as sensations of taste, smell, touch which may establish one’s bond to some place and region. Intellectualism versus sensualism? Elżbieta Rybicka, a Polish anthropologist of literature, signalled the turn from theoretical categories to somatic experiences in defining Central European identity in her interpretation of the book of the Polish journalist and writer Robert Makłowicz titled *Café Museum*. As Rybicka argues, Makłowicz, by delineating in his book a culinary, sensual topography of the region, confirms but concurrently also reformulates the Central European myth. In the opinion of Rybicka, Makłowicz offers an interesting variation of this myth which could be reframed within sensory studies, an interdisciplinary area of studies comprising among others the anthropology of senses, the geography of senses, history, sociology, and literary studies. Hence, it might not only be an abstract sphere of spiritual culture that defines a Central European community but also a sensual experience, such as smell or taste of both common gastronomic specialities and their local varieties, local dishes.

Rybicka briefly presented a change in “ingredients” one can find in a “recipe for a Central European myth.” In the 1980s it was informed by the regional cultural heritage (part of the Western culture), common historical fate (totalitarian regimes) and values (humanism, freedom, democracy, liberalism). The concept’s role (aim and meaning) was shaped by the historical circumstances witnessing its emergence. The designation of Central Europe in this period emphasised the shared cultural heritage and values to approach the idealized West and distance from the demonized East. The discourse on Central Europe was highly politicized and implied parallel acts of othering from the Eastern politics, economy, and an attempt of returning to the West as being its integral part from the point of view of culture. The main ingredient of the “recipe for a Central European myth” was at that time the shared spiritual culture. Nowadays, however, when the globalized, open world replaced the Cold War bipolar tension, the Central European myth becomes also reformulated. As Rybicka notices, the previously dominant feature of Central European myth, namely spiritual

---

35 Elżbieta Rybicka, *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich* (Kraków, 2014), 394.
culture, recently seems to give place to a culture of everyday life, a shift visible and traceable in literature which also indicates new dimensions of the experience of a certain space, sensory experience of a landscape.\footnote{Ibid., 392, 395-396, 404-407.}

Anecdotes \textit{versus} the great History? Rybicka reminds us of some interesting polemics between two Czechs, Josef Kroutvor and Milan Kundera, whose writings were crucial in reinstating the debate on Central Europe at the end of the Cold War. She inscribed Makłowicz’s narrative, as well as other contemporary literary texts, within one of two Central European traditions, namely within the less heroic one represented by Kroutvor and centred on facetious anecdotes, small episodes from everyday life and sensual experiences such as smell as indicators of Central European community. The second strand of reflection on the concept of Central Europe instead accentuates the role of great History and the fateful tragedy of small nations in the region as problematised by Kundera in his essays and literature. Therefore, Central European identity might be condensed both in anecdotes, diaristic notes which allow to distance oneself from a threat of History and in more serious essays, manifestos written in a pathetic tone in response to a pressing historical moment and political situation. The discussion seems to involve both the followers of Švejk and those identifying themselves rather with the legacy of Kafka.\footnote{Ibid., 395-398.}

Furthermore, Rybicka accentuates the motive of journey which, as a new narrative framework, has a great impact on the Central European myth because it emphasises existential experience at the cost of intellectual cognizance. This shift in accents is also visible in the choice of genres. While some decades ago the dominant and privileged genre in the discourse on the idea of Central Europe was the essay, nowadays it is replaced by the hybrid travel narrative.\footnote{Ibid., 398.} The importance of travel in re-evaluating the Central European myth and in shaping one’s self-identification both \textit{vis-à-vis} space and moment in time will be emphasised in the following interpretations of the personal writings of the three writers (Gombrowicz, Márai and Bartol). Travels and exile shaped their diaristic practice and in consequence, also had a great influence on their self-perceptions.

Somatic experiences, which play an important role in constructing one’s self-identification and delineating one’s existential map by establishing bonds with a particular place, are mentioned by Márai, Gombrowicz and Bartol in their diaries and other writings. Senses which apparently refer only to what can be seen, touched, smelled on the surface of perceived reality trigger memories,
emotions and thus engage not only perceptions but also experiences – constituents of the self. In this way, individual senses may have broader and more far-reaching connotations leading to collective memory founded on common historical experiences. For instance, a sense of taste can allude to cuisine characterising the culture of some space and consequently become a carrier of memory. In this context, in one of the diaristic notes, Márai described his wife’s old recipe book in terms of a guidebook leading him to the past experiences, recommendations of previous generations and indirectly also to his lost hometown and culture. Recipes given by many different people hint at their characters, personal fates but also reveal a broader background of some spatial and cultural context. These “cooking smells of a certain culture” are lasting and unchanged by the course of history, hence, they constitute “a reality existing above ideas, manias and fashions.” Márai underlined the passage from individual sense to collective fate mentioning that all the ingredients needed for the dishes mentioned in the recipe book require something more to make the final culinary result feasible, namely first a kitchen, a home and then also a homeland and language.39

Abstraction and experience are two interrelated spheres, thus a tongue in its abstract, linguistic sense (mother tongue) and a somatic tongue covered with receptors of taste are two sides of the same coin. Referring to the Hungarian writer Ferenc Kölcsey, who stated that “nation lives in language,” Márai, after “several decades of fast” due to his distance from Central Europe, realized the palpable, somatic meaning of this remark. When noticing small Spiš sausages with paprika at the shop window of one butchery in Vienna, he realized that “nation lives in a language not only in a linguistic meaning of this word.”40 Taste was important for Márai to re-establish his bond with the lost Central European “World of Yesterday.” In 1973 during his stay in Vienna, the first thing after his arrival was to taste Hungarian dishes. In this regard, the writer noted that “nutrition in Vienna has been always the issue of national importance, such as music.” Hence, “Beisl”, the tavern typical for Vienna, seems “at least to the same degree Viennese as Stephansdom or Josephplatz …” and it ”survived Holy Alliance, Napoleon, Hitler, Russians and remained untouched.”41 The same refers to the atmosphere in Viennese confectioneries where Márai could still sense “a sociable style of the monarchic Vienna: furniture, delicacies, gossiping ladies and men-about-town, everything the same as it could be in 1913.”42 Cuisine is immune to historical changes and thus allows an individual to retain a sensual bond with a place no matter how politically and socially it becomes reconfigured in

40 Ibid., 243.
41 Ibid., 243-244.
42 Ibid., 248.
the course of history. Culinary Vienna opened to Márai a path leading to the Habsburg Monarchy which, as the writer remarked, devoid of “the common language, lives on in a pickled tongue. Eating here is something more than nutrition, gourmandise – it is a national ambition and respect for tradition. Viennese menu card is the same document of Monarchy as Pragmatica Sanctio.”

Besides certain dishes, coffee is another important ingredient of Central European myth. During his stay in Vienna in 1973 Márai underlined the role of literary coffee house characterised by “its specific literary smell” in the intellectual life of Central European cities before the wars. Vienna allowed him to leap over the recent past marked by the two global conflagrations. Thus, to Márai, who last time had visited the city 35 years before, just before the Anschluss, the city seemed a perfect place to enclose a circle connecting the past and the present. In this sense, he described his encounter with some coffee houses in Vienna in terms of the return of Ulysses to Ithaca. “After quarter of century of wandering around the world, again – the café!” His diaristic note reverberates with a sense of relief after having returned home because a café, as Márai believed, was a “true house of all Central European writers, the only refuge – café, where, as Alfred Polgar wrote, the people are sitting who have such a worldview that the world is not worth watching.” Is it because the speeding pace of History attributes the outside reality with an absurd overtone? When History started more palpably intervening in private life, a café in a sense of extraterritorial “true house” of artistic life could provide a safe place of refuge. As a bastion of creative freedom in a world more and more overwhelmed by necessity in form of historical fate, this type of café became to Márai a kind of “comfortable aquarium” where due to diversified international press one could immerse in the news from all over the world but at the same time was secured from the outside reality.

The literary coffee house as a place typical for Central European intellectual life distinguishes this region from other parts of Europe and the world. In Márai’s view “the romantic theory from the beginning of the century,” according to which a writer shall “spend all his life” in a café, was not spread in the West. This type of café, “aquarium of writers” for instance did not exist in London. However, already during the war it gradually became a rarity in Central Europe. Márai noticed at that time in Budapest an interesting shift from a café representing still a slower rhythm of life to a coffee bar which soon became a symbol of new hectic, unstable times marked by the transience of the moment. Imported from Italy and designed for Italian “nervous, carefree souls

---

43 Ibid., 245.
44 Ibid., 242-243.
45 Márai, Kronika Niedzielna, 163-164.
46 Márai, Wyznania, 470.
constantly in motion” interrupted only for a while for a quick sip of coffee, coffee bar in Budapest and thus also more generally in Central Europe seemed to Márai as a foreign, new “species for one quick breath, the blink of an eye, not epic but just a little plasticity.” Small, uncomfortable and dark, with the only purpose being to offer a cup of coffee, this new type of café embodied homelessness and hence a changed spirit of the new speeding time as well. It was devoid of a sociable and cultural dimension characterising an old-style café, this particular “variation of home” or its “artificial substitute” and “family circle.” A coffee bar was not familiar but foreign in the same way as the new post-war times intensified in individual a sense of estrangement.

The sensuous experience of specific landscapes, which shapes one’s self-identification vis-à-vis space, is traceable also in Bartol’s diaristic notes from the time of his return to Trieste just after the Second World War. The important role of such experience of space on the writer’s self-understanding in the Triestine, post-war decade becomes even more evident, given that the Karstic landscape, in Bartol’s eyes, could awake some melancholy and detachment from the present. As the Slovene writer once recalled his and his friends’ susceptibility to “painfully-melancholic emotional mood,” he noted that “the dreary, Karstic landscape with its dry land and its burnt foliage was as if created to give such emotions and such mood a frame.”

Bartol underlined the role of senses of hearing, touch, and smell in mapping his personal Trieste and re-establishing his bond with both the place and the past, the time of his childhood spent in the nearby village, Saint Ivan. Whereas the Proustian protagonist grasped the lost time in the taste of madeleine cake, the Slovene writer, as if unable to trust his eyesight, because blinded by the different appearance of the city, almost unrecognizable after more than two decades of his absence, also mentioned the senses of touch and smell as possible mediations of the past. Everything was spinning around him. Only did some well-known from his childhood and since then not considerably changed reference points such as church by Saint Ivan, hill, factory or streets, these, as the writer called them, “threads of a spider web,” let him “feel his own way to the corners familiar since a long time.” During the first few days of his stay in Trieste, Bartol remembered that he was “wandering

---

47 Márai, Kronika Niedzielnia, 161.
48 Ibid., 160-165.
around as if blinded, similar to a man who was pulled from darkness to shining light.”

His first walks to the places where he grew up assumed a form of reliving his memories-dreams flying “like beaming small arrows,” enlightening the path to his bygone self and facilitating his orientation in the present Trieste. Momentary sensory experiences, the smell of lavender and touch accompanied by sound brought some memories to the surface of the present moment. Interestingly these senses became again activated with Bartol’s return to Trieste. Before while living in Yugoslavia and other places in Europe they were dormant.

It seems that Trieste opened an inward path to Bartol, which lead beyond the present phenomena deep inside his inner self, where he could hear better sounds coming from the bottom of the past life partially lost in oblivion, “all the human depths really right from the bottom.” Memories reverberated in many sounds such as the sea waves but also in a tramway’s “terrible creaking, clattering and rumbling” which as Bartol sensed, could be equivalent to an intensified echo of his fast–beating heart, this “horrendous amplifier” of sounds agitated by an encounter with the past. The writer’s return to Trieste was accompanied by both external and internal sounds. An inner rumbling “as if the rocks are being tossed” was thus echoed in the tramways’ “silenced rumbling”. It was “a wonderful accompaniment of the horrifying depths, which with every centimetre of the way awoke in me. I think, that I came to a trace of horrifying and great hidden parts of myself and of human heart in general.” The way home after more than two decades evoked in Bartol memories and dreams, of which the sudden apparition and accelerated pace prompted in him a comparison to the rockets’ explosion into a plethora of beams and images chasing one another, “as if a barely perceivable hand slipped across a piano’s keyboard. The sounds were following each other in such a hurry that they can no longer erase each other but at the end all resound concurrently

---

51 Ibid., 282. “Prve dni sem taval okrog kakor oslepljen, podoben človeku, ki so ga iz teme potegnili v jarko svetlobo.”
52 Ibid., 284, 282. “Spomini so vstajali v meni, kakor bi se prebujal iz pošastnih sanj. […] Spomini letijo mimo kakor žareče strelce”
55 Bartol, Lipa pred staro cerkvico,” 286, 284. “Peljala sva se s tramvajem in tedaj sem z začušenjem opazil, da tramvaj ni več tako obupno škripal, ropotal in bobnel pod mano kot takrat, ko sem se sam peljal k Sv. Ivanu. ‘To je bilo tvoje srce,’ sem si rekel, ‘ki je kakor pošasten ojačevalc postotjralo sleherni zvok.’”
like a mighty plainchant.” A dominant accompaniment of Bartol’s return to Trieste was underlain by a voice of his inner self, memories, dreams and emotions which amplified other sounds coming from the outside reality. Ultimately, all these divergent tones merged in one melody accompanying Bartol on his way to Trieste which was simultaneously a way down into the depths of his “submerged youth.”

Gombrowicz’s sensual experience of the place was inspired by his concept of the self, described by literary scholar Silvana Mandolessi as split and never coherent because founded on inherent alterity identified with an ambiguous dark sphere of what remains beyond rationality and approached in a transgressive step. Gombrowicz’s non-Cartesian subjectivity replaces knowledge with experience and cogito with a more concrete “concept of being proposed by baroque” which implies an inherent voice of otherness, strangeness echoing the self. This sensation of estrangement was common for all three writers-protagonists of the dissertation. It should be, however, nuanced as it acquired different dimensions within these three so divergent life writings. Whereas Márai expressed his estrangement in a critical moral tone in terms of distance from a caricatured, compromised bourgeois social class he was born to, Bartol experienced linguistic, cultural double isolation, Gombrowicz would associate this sensation of strangeness with aesthetics and his artistic project of the self. Continuously evading social roles and identities imposed by conventions, tradition and regarded as oppressive forms distorting the self, what attracted Gombrowicz’s attention was first and foremost the sphere of formless immaturity and youth. Potentialities of self-identification were for Gombrowicz, no matter how dark and repelling, always of greater importance than a fulfilled, devised by social rules and expectations form of identity.

Seduced by this dark, fluid, and strange side of the self, Gombrowicz was following its traces in different places of his exile, in immature, future-oriented Argentina and later in burdened with History Europe. Having returned from Latin America in 1963 because of the scholarship of the Ford Foundation, Gombrowicz spent one year in Western Berlin. There during a walk in the Tiergarten he could catch “a certain scent, a mixture of herbs, water, stone, wood bark” which not only recalled him of the nearby homeland, Poland and his past, childhood but also of the approaching death. As

58 Bartol, Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu, vol. 1, 12. “Prebliski spominov in sanj se z blazno naglico podijo drug za drugim, kot da bi begotna roka drsela preko tlpk klavirja. S tako naglico se vrstijo zvoki, da ne morejo več drug drugega izbrisati in donijo na koncu vsi hkratu kakor mogočen koral.”
60 For the relation of Gombrowicz’s estrangement with aesthetics see: Ibid., 63-64.
if “the cycle was coming to a close.”61 As Polish literary critic Józef Olejniczak remarked, it is probably the only moment in Gombrowicz’s oeuvre when nostalgic and sentimental feelings are put to the foreground.62 Whereas European maturity and indirectly also his own ageing Gombrowicz grasped at that particular moment with smell, he experienced Argentinean reality more directly, with a sense of touch and with the help of Eros.

In line with the tradition commenced by Hegel, he identified Argentina with a space of immaturity unburdened by History. However, as Mandolessi rightly remarked, he did not view this American “lightness of being,” formless potentiality in negative terms of deficiency of spirit passively awaiting final fulfilment by imitating European values, Form, and maturity. His observations did not entail a normative imperative imposing on the fragmentary and unfulfilled American reality an obligation to imitate mature Europe. Contrariwise, it is American materiality and youth viewed as a value in itself which should inspire and subversively influence the more mature and abstract rest of the world. Latin America under the sign of continuous becoming and imbued with reinvigorating general atmosphere of youth, source of authenticity seemed to Gombrowicz a promise which could enable him to approach the inferior side of his self. Remaining beyond verbalisation and articulation it could be only experienced, grasped in senses and Eros. Mandolessi continues that unlike other European travellers (Ortega y Gasset or Keyserling) in Latin America who directed their attention towards metaphysical depths in an attempt to rationally find a spirit of the place, its cultural identity, Gombrowicz preferred a more superficial view of a tourist attentive to the empiric aspect of his exilic condition. Therefore, he decided to remain on the surface and experiential margins providing an alternative perspective on Latin America. Instead of intellectual debates, not free from stereotypical representations and inspired by “territorial imagination” (territory shaping national identity), about possible essence of the New Continent, he was more absorbed by directly experienced phenomena, the concrete materiality of landscape, objects and carnality of inhabitants.63 As Argentinean writer Juan Jose Saer reminded, no matter how misleading Gombrowicz was in avoiding clear delineations of the self by the continuous change of masks, what remained for him “the only undeniable value of life” was “hot and anonymous body.” Carnality and eroticism were, for him, subversive primordial forces which could undermine any

---

61 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 626.
social hierarchy and hence its underlying system of values as well. It was the material and carnal side of the self that shaped his relation to space delineated within the sphere of sensual experience.

3. Central European “in-betweenness” and excess of History

Due to the region’s ever-changing borders and a plethora of definitions, it is difficult to pin it down to only one concrete historical situation and precise conceptualisation. Geopolitically ungraspable, Central Europe pertains more to the sphere of memory and imagination. The bottom-up, geopoetic approach to Central Europe depicts it as existing metaphorically rather than in reality and expresses a community of historical fate shaped by specific historical experiences and individual responses to the course of events. It is impossible to define the region by delineating some borders on maps because once fixed, they quickly become undermined and changed. Unstable on the maps, frontiers may be only experienced by individuals. Consequently, Márai during one of his first travels to the West, to France in the 1920s, would describe his experience of being on the westward way as follows: “the train crossed this invisible line which is marked neither by a semaphore nor by border signs, crossed the border which name is ‘Central Europe’ in which anthropological and cultural radiation we were born and grew up and which organically links and merges into one with this second Europe, and yet it is so mystically different …”

Imagined, geopoetic and “mystically different” Central Europe, identified with a state of mind or “anthropological and cultural radiation,” embraces also mythical representations. Among the myths which marked collective imaginaries of Central European nations, Slovene sociologist Mitja Velikonja enumerates the Habsburg myth (idealized period of Franz Joseph’s reign), the myth of the cultural nation and the myth of spatial and temporal transience. These myths were articulated by many Central European writers in their works. The first one for instance is very strongly perceptible in Zweig’s recollections of “the World of Yesterday,” already mentioned in the introduction. I will, however, focus on the myth of both spatial and temporal fleetingness in the ways it was understood and expressed by the dissertation’s three main intellectuals.

---

65 Márai, Wyznania patrycusja, 250.
Being in the middle of Europe has more than once decided about the area’s role of the transition sphere both for military troops embodying the march of great History and for the cultural ideas. As the Hungarian literary scholar, Csaba G. Kiss noted, referring to the Hungarian writer Árpád Tőzsér, people in Central Europe were living “in the waist of a sand-timer,” where “it has not been easy to remain upright in Europe’s waist and to hold on tight, while innovations, armies, cultural goods, infections and messianic ideals rushed from one bulb of the timer to the other.”

Following the phenomenological, geopoetic approach to Central Europe a question arises whether the inherent in this area status of “in-betweenness” could be to some extent internalized and existentially imprinted in individual fates. Some of Gombrowicz’s, Márai’s and Bartol’s remarks could give an affirmative answer to this question.

Gombrowicz defined Poland in a similar tone as Tőzsér conceptualised Central Europe. Referring to the tense geopolitical situation in the 1930s, the Polish writer underlined drawbacks of the small country’s geographical location in the middle of Europe, in its “convulsive heart […] sick with all the illnesses that were soon to break out.” Such an unfavourable geopolitical situation had an impact on the individual way of being. In the interview with himself written at the end of his life, Gombrowicz noted: “I was constantly ‘in between,’ not embedded in anything […]. This sense of unreality did not abandon me and now, always ‘in between,’ never in something, I was like a shadow, like a chimera.” The writer accentuated here an interesting intermediary state of ‘in-betweenness’ which opens an oneiric dimension of life devoid of firm roots and stable essential identities. The impossibility of identifying oneself with only one context and form of life makes the latter deficient in a sense of immutable reality.

Central European uncertainty stemming from the continuous oscillation between the West and the East can also acquire a caricatured dimension implied for instance by various attempts of imitation of the West. In the Diary Gombrowicz mentioned “the intermediary Polish situation, thanks to which our country is a little bit of a caricature of the East as well as of the West. The Polish East is an East dying in contact with the West (and vice versa).” The main force shaping Gombrowicz’s existential map seems this ungraspable sensation of in-betweenness. This map consisted not only of Central Europe but also of the western part of the Old Continent and Latin

---

67 Csaba G. Kiss, “Central European Writers on Central Europe,” in In Search of Central Europe, eds. G. Schöpflin, N. Wood (Cambridge, 1989), 129.
70 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 2, 472.
America. As Mandolessi and Gasparini rightly remind, Gombrowicz identified all these parts of the world with either central, mature cultures (French, German, English) or peripheral, immature cultures (represented by countries in Eastern Europe and Latin America). This duality was, however, not unambiguously, clearly delineated. Gombrowicz’s map was a dynamic, heterogeneous space where immature cultures could influence and undermine an established and “crystalized” form of central cultures. Poland, as well as Argentina, seemed to the writer as countries located in an ambiguous sphere in between, being simultaneously within Europe and a European sphere of influence but not entirely and thus being also somehow beyond it. Therefore, the feeling of “in-betweenness,” which consequently also marked his self-identification, the writer linked to both Poland and Argentina.

Gombrowicz understood Central Europe in existentialist terms as a transitory, intermediary sphere representing “the brutalized culture” placed closer to existence. In other words, the writer viewed Central European culture as a space brutalized by the destructive, nihilistic power of excessive History. Gombrowicz noted that Poland “due to its geographical location and its history, was sentenced to perpetual tearing apart.” Of course, this was also the fate of other small nations in Central Europe, the fate designed to great extent by great political powers. Could this “perpetual tearing apart” bring also individual loss in temporalities and crisis of identity? When the accelerated course of history breaks the continuities of the past as a foundation of one’s self-identification, the present moment, which is also the dominant temporal feature of diaristic practice, comes to the foreground as a stage to reformulate one’s self-understanding. Gombrowicz’s preferred temporal realm was the present moment always open to changes and abounding in possibilities of refashioning oneself.

Bartol’s homeland, due to its in-betweenness, was also subjected to the accelerated pace of History, its numerous discontinuities, and ruptures. “In-betweenness” of the writer’s homeland and its broader surroundings, the territory between Trieste, Villach and the Kvarner Gulf was represented by the Istrian writer Milan Rakovac as the only area where “three ethnic oceans of Europe flow one

---

71 Mandolessi, op. cit., 95. Gasparini, op. cit., 53. For analysis of Gombrowicz’s analogies between Polish and Argentinean cultures and literature founded on both countries’ inherent immaturity and nourished by the same tension between reactionist patriotism and uncritical imitation of Europe see: Saer, op. cit., 194.

72 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 1, 15. “Miloš himself once said something like this: the difference between a Western and East European intellectual is that the former has not had a good kick in the a———. In keeping with the thought of this aphorism, our strong point (I include myself in this) would be that we are representatives of a brutalized culture, that is, a culture that is close to life.”

73 Gombrowicz, Testament, 82.
into another. The border between German, Romance and Slavic world is only here.” The complex ethnic composition of the “Adriatic-Alp arch” incites visions of the future but also reminds Rakovac of several Europe of the nineteenth century: Slavic, Romance and German accompanied by two other Europe: “K. u K. Mitteleuropa” and the Hebraic one permeating all the other images of the Old Continent.

Due to this particular location, the region was especially exposed to inimical forces coming from different sides which could inculcate in minds of their inhabitants a feeling of a fateful, fearful, and tragic in-betweenness. The Slovene literary critic Miran Košuta metaphorically compared the Slovene position of encirclement (or suppression) by other more powerful political entities to a stifling embrace by a boa constrictor and the Slovene fragile existential situation to a “jug of pottery in the middle of those made of iron on stormy limes between Teutonism, Romance and Slavic […].” Consequently, Košuta described this region during the Great War as “clamped between a hammer and an anvil of history.” While the hammer would symbolize the Habsburg Empire, where the Slovenes, in vain fighting for national autonomy, during the war were forced to sacrifice their lives in fact in the foreign cause of the monarchy’s existence, the anvil would metaphorically denote an approaching subjection to Italy. After the war Slovenes were torn between the new Kingdom of SCS, Austria and Italy.

Placed on the Italian anvil, the Slovene presence in the Littoral region was suppressed and given such a shape to fit in the new fascist society (abolishment of education in Slovenian or Italianisation of Slovene names and surnames). Under fascism Slovenes from the Littoral, then part of Italy experienced harsh times of persecutions, violence, and denationalisation. Many were forced

---

74 Milan Rakovac, “Če bi se Evropa učila v Istri, bi učinkoviteje reševala svoje težave,” interview by Vesna Humar, Primorske Novice, December 20, 2019, 13, available at https://www.primorske.si/2019/12/milan-rakovac-ce-bi-se-evropa-ucl-a-v-istri-bi-uci (retrieved 25 August 2021); Rakovac, “Hostaria Histria,” Razpotja, no. 15 (2014): 74. Here the writer denotes the “New Europe” as enclosed within Trieste, Koper, Pula, Rijeka, Klagenfurt and Udine. (74) His “a bit hyperbolized mega-Istria,” a borderland area between the West and the East, due to its post-war cultural openness towards neighbours, the writer describes as some “equilibrium” which emanates “good vibrations all the way to the Carinthia, Prekmurje and Medimurje to the Friuli Venaia Giulia and Veneto, to Dalmatia; this Karstic-Adriatic area is today the most European demos at all and represents the core of future one and unique Europe. In this area European oceans are flowing harmoniously one into another: German, Romance and Slavic. Right here, as hardly anywhere in the world.” (75) The territory between Trieste, Villach and the Kvarner Gulf represented for Rakovac a future “New Europe” (“Istria, experimental garden of Europe”) and European identity because of its complex cultural character. M. Rakovac, “Hostaria Histria,” 74.

75 Rakovac, “Hostaria Histria,” 74.


to emigrate. Among them were also Bartol and members of his family. The protagonist of Košuta’s article, the Slovene poet Srečko Kosovel shared with Bartol a similar exilic fate in Ljubljana. Košuta described Kosovel as a student who “became overnight an emigrant in his own homeland, foreigner on domestic grounds, ‘mistaken’ Slovene.”\(^{78}\) Coming from the same borderland area, Bartol could experience his new existential situation of emigrant in a similar way. Referring to the period between the wars, Košuta expressed Kosovel’s situation as again caught between the two foreign forces. “While the chopping block remained the same, the hammer changed its master: now it was not Austrian anymore, but Yugoslav, who beat the Sloveneness with its distrustfulness and indifference to suffering of the neighbouring Littoral.”\(^{79}\) The dreadful situation of finding oneself between two foreign political powers, cultural forces and opposite perspectives (the one of minority and another one imposed by majority), was similarly internalized by Bartol and consequently also expressed in his literary texts.

In Bartol’s collection of novels titled “Al Araf,” Košuta distinguished a reference to the political situation of Slovenia in the interwar period and the image of the country which as a part of the Kingdom of SCS was caught in “a vise of Serbian unitarianism and hence compliant towards the rising European totalitarianisms.”\(^{80}\) Košuta in his interpretation of Bartol’s literature besides eternal ontological questions (considering for instance time, existence, human being), psychological, epistemological and ethical problems (viewed as an ultimate source of creativity), emphasised the role of historical circumstances which influenced (to great extent in an unconscious way as the author himself would notice) the choice of artistic themes. Interpreting Bartol’s main oeuvre “Alamut” in terms of a metaphor, Košuta followed the interpretative suggestions of the author himself who compared his novel to allegory which through the prism of the medieval Iranian world allowed him to speak about the interwar European situation dominated by dictatorships.\(^{81}\)

In the foreword to the second edition of “Alamut” Bartol referred to historical experience of a specific in-betweeness shared by Slovenes in the interwar period whose precarious situation at that time the writer compared to encirclement by foreign forces (Nazis threatening from the North, fascists from the West and Soviets from the East).\(^{82}\) The interwar predicament of Slovenes was

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 42. Srečko Kosovel je “[...] čez noč postal izseljenec v lastni domovini, tujec na domačih tleh, ‘zgrešeni’ Slovenec.”

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 45. “Če je tnalo ostalo isto, je kladivo zamenjalo gospodarja: zdaj ni bil več Avstrijec, ampak Jugoslovan, ki je bil po slovenstvu s svojo nezauplivostjo in brezbrižnostjo do trpljenja zamejskega Primorja.”

\(^{80}\) Košuta, Slovenica, 39.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., 42 – 44, 47. Bartol, “Po dvajsetih letih. Opombe k drugi izdaji Alamuta” in Alamut, by Bartol (Trieste, 1958), II-III.

\(^{82}\) Bartol, “Po dvajsetih letih. Opombe k drugi izdaji Alamuta,” II.
marked by a feeling of confinement posed by the borders approaching from all sides. After thousand years lived in “a safe calmness of the old stepmother Austria,” Slovenes were suddenly “during a night exposed” to more powerful neighbours: “greedy Italians in the west”, who with the Rapallo Treaty would take control over the Slovene Littoral and around one-third of entire Slovene population, Austrians in the north who after a plebiscite would capture the Carinthia. Only the southern border due to the vicinity of Croats and Serbs was more distant from the lands inhabited by Slovenes. As Bartol argued, in this context when suddenly after thousand years (with the exception of Reformation) Slovenes “came in a direct and equal contact with a world outside […], with neighbouring and other nations,” they realized the necessity to “assume a part of responsibility for the fateful decisions.”

Košuta also interestingly remarked on a possible common generational response to this situation of sudden exposure to threat and feeling of confinement linked with Slovenes’ predicament of in-betweenness. This response would be founded on ethics and an imperative of a continuous transcendence of one’s confinements, weaknesses, borders. Namely, the vitalistic and Nietzschean philosophy which shaped worldviews of many Slovene intellectuals, including Kosovel and Bartol, and which paved the way for artistic vanguards, was a common form of personal and intimate response to this, as Košuta called it, “history’s barbarianism” in the interwar period. Was it an individual transposition of on both sides confining physical borders into an inner self in order to inwardly overcome them? Was such internalisation a way to regain some feeling of self-determination and an active stance in a situation of hopeless individual attempts to undermine the imposed physical borders?

The condition of Central-European-in-betweenness was also shared by Márai. He defined Hungarian role in terms of a “buffer”, “passage” and “mediator” in comparative perspective as follows: “Between China and Japan – Korea; as Armenian between the Kingdom of Parthians and Greeks, as between Germans and Russians: Hungary. Always the passage; always the buffer, always the target. But also, always a mediator: between the two cultures, two languages, two worldviews.”

Central European being-in-between, as described by Márai, refers to the location, geography which consequently also triggers a certain geopolitical situation. The writer pays less attention to its impact

---

84 Košuta, Slovenica, 48. “Prekositit samego sebe, lastne človeške, umetniške in nacionalne meje je tako postal etični imperativ vsakega takratnega slovenskega intelektualca. Bil je to intimen in oseben odgovor na barbarstvo zgodovine.”
on individual perceptions and subjectivity which, as Gombrowicz claimed, could assume the shape of the oneiric way of being. However, some of Márai’s remarks suggest that a particular image of Central Europe, related to the geopolitical situation of small countries in this area, is also interwoven with a specific perception of History and thus also an existential condition of the individual.

In one diaristic note taken in 1968, Márai expressed explicitly his exhaustion with excessive History in Central Europe in the context of the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring. While listening to the radio reporting on this repeated, as Márai called it, “Hungarian drama […] in Czech conditions,” the writer remarked: “And when I listen to this, I suddenly feel, that it is ‘too much.’ All of this which happened to us in the twentieth century; too much, it is not for people. For the first time I feel tired with history.” Similar feelings of weariness provoked by overwhelming History reverberated from a note taken in 1974 during a visit to New York. Observing a neon line of news shown all day and night at the Times Square Tower, this, as Márai defined it, “canned history, fate shrunk to one sentence news of the day”, the writer reflected upon the passage from a myth to History which for a man started with a written word and with memory. History shrunk to the neon news of everyday life and, to Márai, seemed unchanged in content. Always the same unpredictable and excessive mass of facts provoking queasiness.

Interestingly, contrary to this Central European and Western obsession with History, both the present moment and the recent past, “a man of the East,” in the opinion of Márai in a “dreamlike” way would rather leap over smaller sections of time and space. He would replace them with a greater scale of thousand years which enables him both to embrace with memory a remote past and concurrently direct his attention to the distant future. This perception of time would be marked with indifference or even contempt towards historiography and political history which would hence be overshadowed in importance by the cultural history. Based on European and Central European experience of excess of History, and thus also at risk of exaggeration, Márai would conclude that “this history of China is interesting if only because it does not exist; historiography in the European sense of the word is for Chinese an unknown and primitive enterprise deserving a contempt because the true mirror of the life of a nation is for Chinese only the history of culture.”

86 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 82.
87 Ibid., 342.
88 Márai, Kronika Niedzielna, 145-146. For the writer, this large-scale perception also manifested itself in the Japanese idea in 1940 to make a documentary film about the way of life in these times intended for the generation which is supposed to come in thousand years. The film was planned to be shown in the year 2940, thus for Márai it resembled “the post in the bottle thrown to the one thousand–year–old sea of time.” Ibid., 147.
89 Ibid., 145.
In Márai’s view, the region’s location in the middle of Europe was sinister to its small countries, which in the twentieth century were being constantly inundated by historical waves coming either from the West or the East. The writer, observing how Budapest was passed from hands to hands, from Germans to Russians, reflected on this inconvenient position of in-betweenness in 1946 as follows: “This country resembles a funfair which has been rented for one historical season by some group of interest: recently it was rented by fascists, now by communists.” The ideological differences become erased and cease to play any significant role in the struggle for power. In 1948 the writer commented on a paradoxical phenomenon of both members of Arrow Cross and Bolsheviks (becoming rightists) as possibly shaking hands in a gesture of agreement. While the initial direction was clearly different (rightist, leftist), both political movements were, as Márai argued, evolving in such a way that they could meet in the end at the same point of equal degree of suppression of individual freedoms. In another place, several decades later, the writer added that “in reality everything has been turning in a circle for centuries.”

Moreover, the experience of “in-betweenness,” finding oneself between the West and the East, turned out for Márai to become a source of the increasing feeling of strangeness, which consequently intensified complex processes of self-identification. Their mechanisms differed depending on whether the writer was within the domesticated Budapest and its surroundings or outside, in foreign contexts changing while travelling. Applying the concepts of the German anthropologist Gerd Baumann, Márai’s “grammar of identity/alterity,” which is a ground for a particular, reciprocal “process of selfing/othering,” could be described to some extent as being founded on the orientalist opposition. Referring to Edward Said’s concept of orientalism, Baumann underlines that this opposition is not binary but always reversal and thus based not on the exclusion of otherness but on the double-edged act of mirroring oneself in the alterity enabling a self-critique. Therefore, Márai’s identification with the lost European humanism, the Western culture was shaped in the act of mirroring oneself in the communist otherness. This confrontation with alterity enabled not only the identification with the West but also its later critique for the loss of some values.

---

90 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 310.
91 Ibid., 414-415.
92 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 43.
94 Ibid., 19.
95 Ibid., 20-21. “What we find in the grammar of orientalizing the other is thus an operation of reverse mirror-imaging: selfing and othering condition each other in that both positive and negative characteristics are made to mirror each other in reverse” (Ibid., 21).
The mechanism of the “orientalizing grammar of identity” could be easily set into motion during the Siege of Budapest due to Márai’s enforced coexistence with the Soviet soldiers which lasted for some months. They moved to the Márais’ house in Leanyfalu, a village relatively close to Budapest, where the writer and his wife had found a shelter before the siege, when Hungary was occupied by Germans at the end of March 1944. This extraordinary cohabitation allowed Márai to make several observations on the nature of the East and it also shaped his own self-understanding. The writer compared the Soviet soldiers to children and viewed their behaviour as highly unpredictable. In his “Memoir of Hungary, 1944-1948,” he mentioned many misdeeds committed by them such as acts of looting (with confiscation of watches), rapes and in general the arbitrary misbehaviour. Relating some stories of his neighbours’ encounters with the Soviet soldiers, Márai noted: “This was different from what we expected, so completely different and surprising that I became cautious, like someone who has lost his way in the dark and is unable to find the road sign. What kind of people are they? […] We began to suspect that there was something astounding in the Russians.”

Having experienced the feverish pace of historical changes, to great extent due to Hungary’s in-betweenness, Márai perceived the course of history as an unexpected loss of previous points of reference and Hungary as an area permeated with pessimism closely linked with fatalism. In his eyes it represented an abandoned and destined to solitude area, funfair or a place marked with an atmosphere which after the war he compared to a combination of the one experienced in a concentration camp and a madhouse. In 1947 he took an interesting diaristic note indicating a characteristic feature of Hungary which is the excessive presence of History and its immoral manifestations. “Fortunate nations have no history…Hungary unfortunately has one. Occasionally it seems as if what happens at present was not history at all but a Chronique scandaleuse.”

The assumption about the inconvenient situation of Central European in-betweenness accompanied by excessive historical changes problematizing one’s self-identification can be

---

96 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 65.
97 Ibid., 289.
98 Márai, Memoir of Hungary 1944-1948, translated by Albert Tezla (Budapest, 1996), 37. Recalling his coexistence with the soldiers of the Red Army the writer emphasized the general atmosphere of unpredictability, arbitrariness and anxiety: “They entered the house night and day without ringing or knocking. During the first days and nights, we were sometimes taken aback when, at the most unexpected moment, a Russian with a submachine gun stood before our bed or beside our table.”
99 Ibid., 42.
101 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 416.
102 Marai, Tagebücher 1945-1957, 58.
traceable in some works of Gombrowicz, Márai and Bartol. In this manner, they follow other Central European artists and writers who in their works of art and literature reflect on an intensive course of events in the region as creating a community of historical fate (regional identity of Central Europe) and affecting individual self-understanding in relation both to space and time (definition in negative terms). Some remarks of Gombrowicz and Márai indicate that this Central European community of fate could be characterised by oneirism and uprootedness from a reality provoked by the latter’s dispersion in one’s perception of historical discontinuities. Moreover, life in Central Europe in the twentieth century emanated an atmosphere of fatalism and solitude caused by the abrupt, unpredictable, and arbitrary nature of historical changes. The three writers’ responses to the changeable geopolitical and imposed identity of Central Europe followed a geopoetic path of literary and diaristic reconfigurations of self in relation to the accelerated pace of historical time and different places of life in exile.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the writers’ attitudes towards the twentieth-century historical order of time and its influence on their strategies of self-identification. History is significant not only in defining a Central European community of fate but also a certain Central European being and in consequence also particular fates of individuals born and grown up within these intermediary spatial coordinates. American historian Lonnie R. Johnson emphasises the role of “haunting” history and the continuous past’s presence as the significant attributes of Central Europe. Although he defines Central Europe as a historical region graspable through several criteria, he also mentions the importance of “subjective dimensions” of this area such as the narrated historical experience of people living in this region also including stories about neighbours. The historian’s remark on the complexity of time as it could be experienced by the inhabitants of Central Europe provides an inspiring insight and encourages to check its applicability in the case of the three writers and their diaries as well as other autobiographical texts. Johnson notes that in Central Europe “the past consists of inexcusable transgressions and missed opportunities; the present is filled with unfinished business from the past; and the future is a chance finally to rectify a historical record that has been inauspicious at best and unjust at worst.”

What were the three writers’ perceptions of the historical order of time in the Central European context?

IV. Between freedom of improvisation and necessity of fatalism. Particular attitudes towards History in Central Europe (Bartol, Gombrowicz, Márai)

Central European in-betweenness when regarded in phenomenological terms, from the point of view of the individual is nourished by the experience of excessive historical changes. Czech literary scholar Jiří Trávníček noted that everything fundamental in Central Europe “happens in reference to history, against it, in conflict with, under its weight or in its grip.”\(^1\) If Central Europe in the twentieth century is defined by the significant role of history, “the same rules of historical grammar”\(^2\) and a specific historical awareness, it is worth asking about the shape of its particular epiphenomena. What were different individual attitudes towards historical changes in the region and more generally what were individual perceptions of time understood as the fourth dimension of space\(^3\) (in this case Central Europe) which were subjected to different literary/diaristic reconfigurations? The issue of individual perceptions of the passage of time in the Central European context opens an array of other questions. Was the course of events in Central Europe perceived as an incumbent necessity, painful and burdensome memory or as a challenge posed by the present situation, a sphere where individual freedom should be accomplished? Was History viewed in terms of an obstacle preventing the free expression of oneself or as a well-worn track along which identity could unfold?

Trávníček suggests a twofold answer based on the ambiguous perceptions of history in Central Europe. In the form of a curse and obsession, “an essential element of all substantial traumas and nostalgias,” history in this area was, in the opinion of the Czech scholar, experienced both as a “contemporary Central European disease and medical cure, fever and aspirin.”\(^4\) History in excess is certainly evoked in nostalgic yearnings for the great past or mythical justifications of the present emancipative aims. It would then become a cure palliating painful, unsatisfactory social and political present situation or the foundations for political interests to be pursued. History in this area has been a decisive ingredient of both nostalgias, myths, and traumas. Therefore, the state of a certain obsession with history, accompanied by a desire to re-establish the lost continuity in time, was supposed to bring more and more discontinuities. History could be at the same time attractive as

---

2. Csaba G. Kiss, Wczorajsy Kraków (z moich wspomnień), translated by Elżbieta Cygielska in Powinowactwa wyszehradzkie, by Kiss (Warszawa, 2016), 56.
a cure and repellent as a gloomy forecast or memory continually opening the wounds. Ambiguous roles and perceptions of History entailed also different individual responses to its course.

The course of events of the twentieth century in Central Europe “slipped its chains” (Jerzy Stempowski) and acquired a tangible dimension intervening in everyday life and thus becoming an intrinsic background of individual life-stories. As Márai noted in 1944, accentuating the concurrence of great History with a personal story: “Every day, which I am at present living through, one day will be regarded as one of the most hideous chapters in the Hungarian history.”\(^5\) In respect to his perception of the accelerated pace of the twentieth century, Bartol remarked: “It is not difficult to be aware of historical developments when a wheel of history rattles with a rumbling clatter through humanity, in the noise of wars and revolutions. Here a historical sense speaks to many, who otherwise are historically deaf and warns them of great, generally important historical twists.”\(^6\)

The History had a direct impact on the everyday life of individuals and encompassed certain individual responses. The course of events perceived as a challenge or a burden provoked different attitudes which, risking some generalisation, could range from an active engagement in politics, search for a safe distance in exile and a need to narratively retell one’s historical experience (for instance in diaristic writing). While a commitment to political activity is still underpinned with geopolitical stance, the latter two responses to History (exile and writing) seem to be informed by geopoetics. At one end, there was a group of writers-dissidents who regarded History as a challenge and thus felt obliged to assume responsibility for its course by political activism. At the other, for some intellectuals-emigrants the accelerated pace of events honed individual historical awareness inciting diaristic practice (Bartol) and History would lose its solemnity in order to be relegated to the role of a story, anecdote and diaristic note (Gombrowicz, Márai). Their diaries could serve to tame the painful side of the volatile and accelerated course of events as well as give a valuable insight into individual immersion in a broader historical context and thus also sharpen one’s historical awareness. The desire to keep a journal becomes even stronger in hectic times marked by the speeding History which, as Bartol noticed, can also in some people awake a historical sense.

Significantly, the Slovene writer explicitly associated the hastened pace of History with diaristic practice. “Those, who are more sensitive write in such times diaries, Dedijer, Čolakovski,

---

\(^5\) Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 78.

Kocbek and others. In the same way during the Second World War an engineer and architect Omahen, who was living in the same house as me, at Levstikova 25 street, was also writing his diary. Bartol’s diaristic practice, as underlain by the experience of accelerated “wheel of history” and feeling of individual loss in the whirls of turbulent times of the twentieth century, could be also viewed as an expression of yearning for some continuity in discontinuous epoch, some stable hold amid general incertitude. Such a hold Bartol could find not only in regular record keeping but also in the particular perception of time and history (zgodovinski čut).

In the view of Polish literary scholar Bogusław Zieliński, who conceptualised Central Europe in cultural terms, this area for many dissidents such as Havel, Miłosz, Konrád meant Atlantis. Following this conceptualisation, at the end of the Cold War, the dissidents established an underground ‘imagined community’ which could be compared to Atlantis, a symbol of a lost civilisation, in this context, under the communist wave. This community was strongly ethically underpinned and founded on moral politics (anti-politics), values of truth and freedom. The attempts to find some meaning lost in everyday life had as a background the idealist philosophy and modernist tradition which concurrently legitimized political aims of dissidents such as Václav Havel.

Zieliński mentioned also different paths of escape from the dictate of History chosen by some Central European writers-emigrants: “Miłosz (poetry and moral values as a participation in the absolute reality), Brodsky (poetry and language), Kundera (“sacral” understanding of literature and culture), Eliade (experiencing the world in the perspective of sacrum).” The ways of defending one’s freedom from the unpredictable and troublesome political history in Central Europe were numerous, diversified and not necessarily classifiable in separate categories. Trávníček suggests that “one of the typical historical features of Central Europe is its attempt to escape from history, hide in the immobile systems of thought and transcendental formula.” The escapist attitude could be practised not only within the systems of transcendental ideas (such as those mentioned by the Czech literary scholar – Freud’s psychoanalysis or Husserl’s phenomenology) but also within sharpened sensitivity of one’s immersion in the historical time and awareness of historical changes which, giving way to diaristic practice problematises individual being at the moment here and now. Escape from discontinuous History realized on diary’s pages means the recurrent act of inscribing oneself

---

7 Ibid. “Tisti, ki so tenkoslušnejši pišejo v takih časih dnevnikle, Dedijer, Čolakovski, Kocbek in drugi. Tako je pisal dnevnik tudi ing. arh. Omahen v drugi svet. vojni, ki je stanoval v isti hiši kot jaz, v Levstikovi 25.”
9 Ibid., 54.
within a diaristic continuity of time. Keeping a journal allows an author to meaningfully comment and understand his/her immersion in the flow of historical time. In this respect, a diary can constitute another imaginative and performative way of keeping History (its absurd, overwhelming dimension) at a safe distance and let escape from the direct engagement in its course.

Whereas dissidents such as Havel searched for their personal accomplishment in a stance directed towards the course of events (political activism underpinned by dialectics), Gombrowicz and Márai opted for the hermeneutic escapist attitude towards History which combined exile and diaristic practice. Perceiving History as a burden, they would not choose active engagement which could contribute to direct political, social changes in their countries. Márai’s remarks on possible readings of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s writings, which he considered to be imbued with an irrational vision of the world and individual, can indicate some potential individual responses to the twentieth-century historical reality not devoid of irrationality, “the reality which from Dostoevsky’s writings came to life.” These escapist responses to History, convergent with possible ways of interpreting Fyodor Dostoevsky’s texts and evading a direct opposition, would go beyond dissidents’ dialectical stance taken always in relationship with some opponent.

According to Márai, with regard to Dostoevsky and interpretation of his literature, there is no place for resistance and dialectical third way of discussion with the writer. Therefore, possible readers’ responses to the author’s writings, far from direct opposition, would rather imply either acceptance or escape. In the same vein, individual attitudes to historical circumstances in the previous century, if not following a path of resistance, could embrace stances ranging from conformism to escape. Direct resistance rooted in dialectics understood as “a contradictory process between opposing sides” and thus always in connection with some addressee, would only confirm the opposed political establishment as the latter justifies the existence of the former. Contrariwise, subversive conformism or emigration, in their disregard for active engagement with the political, historical situation, could even, also if unintentionally, contribute to this situation’s gradual undermining. The dissertation’s protagonists followed this escapist path of exile and diaristic inscription of self. Its trajectory naturally differed in each case approaching more or less the parallel

---

11 Márai regarded Dostoevsky’s writings as distressing, exhausting, outrageous due to their “Russianness.” As the writer reasoned in continuation, even when the communists disappear, Russian would remain. The Russian nation is a dangerous one due to its “feeling of guilt” which can make Russians do what they wish. Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 147-148. In another note, Márai characterised a “Russian man” as unbearable, “horrifying and repugnant. The man who did not experience neither Renaissance nor Reformation.” Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 73.

12 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 15.

path of political activism. However, what was common for them was the choice of distance instead of dialectics.

The inclination for escapism accompanied Márai from an early age and expressed his need to distance himself from his familiar and social background as well as roles, situations dictated by this heritage. This urge for distance would never disappear and in consequence make the writer embark on a path without any particular destination, journeying from one place to another, provoking a continuous feeling of homelessness which becomes perceived as a normal state. In the interwar period young Márai as the aspiring journalist travelling/escaping and exploring his “personal Europe” in the Western countries noted: “I live in this way till today, between two trains, two escapes, two retreats; as someone who never knows to which dangerous inner adventure will wake up.”

Bartol’s attitude to political history and ideologies changed in time but his response to historical events, in general, differed from those represented by Márai and Gombrowicz because during the war and in its aftermath the Slovene writer approached the activist stance. In his autobiography, he remembered his preoccupation with the situation of the Julian March, the Slovene Littoral which with the Rapallo Treaty was annexed to fascist Italy and underwent a forceful Italianisation. As Bartol remarked, the fate of the one-third Slovene population that was constantly being persecuted in the Julian March was ignored by the general public abroad which was rather more interested in Mussolini. This political situation forced the writer to face “all the more concrete confrontation and more direct reaction.” In that regard he did not join Gombrowicz and Márai on the above-mentioned path of negative dialectics which would be founded on an attempt to gain some distance towards the political sphere.

Bartol’s engagement with politics, however, evolved in time. While rereading in 1948 his diaristic notes taken in the interwar period, the writer noticed that at that time he had not identified with any ideology and thus had been indifferent to clearly defined political affiliations. Bartol’s diary from the period between the wars seems more self-centred and instead of discussing the contemporary political situation, it focuses on the author’s role in literary life. As the writer noted:

Some days ago, when I took some notes in Ljubljana, I was browsing my old notebooks (from the year 36 till the war). Along numerous, very subjective notes, along interesting registrations of literary life and personalities, I noticed a very instructive fact: I had neither unified worldview

14 Márai, Wyznania patrycjusza, 201, 194, 196-197.
15 Bartol, Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu, vol. 1, 341.
– because some years ago I wrote that considering this I leave myself an open way for the future
– nor any precisely discerned political orientation (because I have never neither de facto, nor in consensus formed part of any political generation), and so these notes seemed to me, when I was now reading them, tattered and I in them as a leaf fluttering in the wind.16

This fragment, besides a decisive change in Bartol’s attitude to politics, exposes well the character and role attributed by the author to his diaristic practice. While noting down new thoughts and experiences from the time recently passed, the writer was simultaneously “travelling” into more remote times by rereading his previous notes taken some years before. He was thusly not only examining his past self but also comparing a person he was with his being in the present. Therefore, the diaristic practice had also an instructive dimension for Bartol. He was treating it as a mirror which offering many reflections of the bygone selves, could simultaneously shed some new light on the present self. Burdened with wartime experiences of direct involvement in historical events by participating in the partisan movement, Bartol in a retrospective view, perceived his bygone self as devoid of any clear political ideas which could place him more firmly at some definite side of the political scene. Concentrated on his literary career, he did not feel a need to take roots in the political background of the interwar period. In continuation of the same diaristic note Bartol, a passionate entomologist, compared his study of different philosophies and doctrines, this continuous search, to a butterfly’s flight interrupted by short-stops on different flowers. He also confessed that in fear of an anchorage both within imaginary and real worlds, he wanted to go beyond precisely defined ideas, political and philosophical stances. Before taking any decision (always postponed), the writer preferred to thoroughly examine and experience some attitudes which, no matter how seemingly stable and long-standing, in the end, turned out to be short-lived and disappearing as quickly as “soap bubbles.”17

Nevertheless, the carefree butterfly flight from one idea to another was interrupted by the outbreak of the war. Was there any place for indifference, some safe enclave in the whirls of History? Bartol depicted the passage from the Epicurean freedom of his cultural endeavours to Stoic necessity to face historical challenges in terms of a loss of his self-consciousness which deprived of certainty

16 Bartol, “Med Vzhodom in Zapadom. [Balkanijada], Trst 8.I.1948,” MC, ZRC SAZU. “Pred nekaj dnevi, ko sem v Ljubl. zabeležil nekaj zapiskov, sem brskal po svojih starih beležnicah (od l. 36 do vojne). Poleg številnih, zelo subjektivnih beležk, poleg zanimivih registracij o literarnem življenju in osebnostih, sem opazil zelo poučno dejstvo: nisem imel niti enotnega svetovnega nazora – saj sem pred nekaj leti zapisal, da si puščam glede tega odprto pot za bodočnost -, niti nisem imel nobene točno orisane politične orientacije (saj nisem nikoli ne de facto, niti in consensus pripadal nobeni politični generaciji), in tako so se mi zdeli ti zapiski, ko sem jih zdaj bral, raztrgani in jaz v njih kot frfrtajoče list v vetru.”
17 Ibid.
about its immunity to historical changes becomes burdened by collective historical fate and awareness of mortality, fragility. Consequently, the lighthearted flight ceases with a painful fall on the ground. Bartol described this change as follows: “When you are conscious that nothing can happen to you, you are floating in the air, in void; and if only for a moment you lose your self-consciousness, you have to quickly shelter yourself on the hard ground. My absolute conviction that nothing can happen to me, that I am deathless and immortal, I lost when the war was for us in front of the door.”

It was the outbreak of the Great War that suddenly linked Bartol with a broader context by “an all the more intimate contact with happening in the great world.”

The Slovene writer described the interwar period as marked with a tense atmosphere of social struggles, new political phenomena of socialist state and fascism, as well as fast technological development. For Slovenes and South Slavs in comparison to the Western countries such as France or Switzerland, this period was “especially sharply historically delineated with two distinct fractures: with national liberation after the First World War and with a rise of socialism after the second.”

Faced with these two historical discontinuities accompanied by overwhelming and quickly unfolding historical events, Bartol was forced to make a decision and take a stance. He responded with engagement. Ultimately, he joined the partisan movement and described his attitude during the war as follows: “My position from the very start of our fight was clear and pure. Not even for a while did I doubt in greatness of our fight; my heart was trembling from the inner fire […]”

Interestingly, after the war Bartol viewed himself in hindsight as a prophet who in his main work “Alamut” predicted the direction which the historical current would take. While as he believed he discerned the way, the communists provided it with the aim. “I knew that I have already given the psychological foundations how to reach some discerned aim, this aim I have not given – communists gave it to us. They showed the aim, I the way to it. I was proud because I predicted and showed many things […]” Two years later, in 1947, among his clear predictions Bartol mentioned also “political outcome of this war and – already third – penetration of the East to the West, victory

---

18 Bartol, “Balkanijada IX. Trst, Trst, VI. zvezek, 5.III.” MC, ZRC SAZU. “Ko se zavedaš, da se ti ne more nič zgoditi, plavaš po zraku, v praznem; a če samo za hip izgubiš svojo samozavest, se moraš bliskovito zateči na trdna tla. Svoje absolutno prepričanje, da se mi ne more nič zgoditi, da sem nesmrten in neumrljiv, sem izgubil, ko je bila vojna za nas pred vrati.”
20 Ibid., 303.
21 Bartol, “XZY1 Balkanijada, 13.VI.1945.” MC, ZRC SAZU. “Moje stališče od vsega početka naše borbe je bilo jasno in čisto: Niti trenutek nisem podvomil v veličastnost naše borbe; srce mi je vztrepetavalo od notranjega ognja, da, že tisti prvi atentati v Ljubljani, ki niso bili utelešenja iz Alamuta!”
22 Ibid. “Vedel sem, da sem jaz že podal psihološke temelje, kako se doseže neki začrtani cilj, tega cilja jaz nisem podal – dali so ga nam komunisti. Oni so pokazali cilj, jaz pot do njega. Bil sem ponosen na to, da sem mnogo stvari predvidel in nakazal.”
of collectivism, victory of ‘theory’ (communism) over ‘system’ (catholic church).” He added that assured of the victory of the East, he “oriented himself in the collective social order.”

Unlike exilic writers such as Gombrowicz or Márai who needed to keep the communist system at the safe distance to safeguard their artistic freedom, Bartol with his choice to stay in Yugoslavia and take some official positions in cultural institutions, thus agreed to become part of the new socialist order.

However, even though Bartol submitted an application for membership in the communist party (in the end turned down), he would never identify himself entirely and blindly with the socialist doctrine. After the war, in a diaristic reference to discussion with two other persons: “a communist of old sort” and another one close to “the most modern doctrine of Leninism and Stalinism,” Bartol called himself “some nationalist-democrat of a literary sort.”

Far from straightforward identification with political ideology, he confessed that he was almost unconsciously approaching Slavko’s Leninism and Stalinism. They shared opinions mainly concerning the national question. Bartol was also in favour of some ideas shared by communists such as the nationalisation of industry and economy. Moreover, he approved of the post-war Yugoslav regime’s territorial demands (Trieste, The Slovene Littoral, Carinthia with Klagenfurt). Although in some places Bartol expressed Marxist ideas (materialism, belief in progress, conviction that “base” defines “superstructure” and thus literature is a mirror of social life and historical reality), he was far from aesthetic or political dogmatism. Naturally, his inspirations with psychoanalysis and Nietzscheanism were in dissonance with the official aesthetic doctrine of social realism. As the writer remarked: “In opposition to social realism I put: universal realism. Realism in everything; in all phenomena: in psychological, sociological, material, moral. In observation, in ideology, in dialectics.”

Consequently, instead of an outright identification with a specific political ideology, Bartol was only approaching it in some aspects. As he underlined in one of the diaristic notes from 1945: “I need for myself to be always


a bit ‘below,’ ‘in the background,’ that I have always still a top in front of me. Full recognition, I am afraid, could mean my standstill, standstill of my creative force.”

Bartol had to be conscious about threats of full identification with a doctrine, threats such as blind fanaticism, faith and “enslaved mind” confined within some totalitarian ideology. He would not let politics silence his creative forces and free artistic imagination. For Bartol only those ideas which could directly express a real world seemed acceptable. “The more a doctrine approaches life and the more it takes directly from it and from the given circumstances, the more appealing it becomes to me. This is a good way – everywhere!” In opposition to different forms of derivativeness, he was critical of an attempt to follow at all costs “the spirit of time” embodied in the most modern contemporary trends in different fields such as for instance aesthetics and politics. Naive imitation brings a threat of forgetting about one’s own creative original capacities. It also means a necessity of subjugating one’s own inner world and creativity to politics and a dictate of a changeable present moment.

Bartol’s view of history shared some commonalities with the philosophy of history which, founded on the belief in genius and other inborn, extraordinary attributes, comes close to the great man theory. Historical sense which, in the opinion of the Slovene writer, unifies past, present, and future, is consequently most developed by certain intellectuals, writers, artists as well as “great statesmen and creators of history.” Could this perception of history be to some extent explained with Bartol’s features of personality? The Slovene writer namely perceived himself as weaker than others, passive, fatalistic and entirely committed to fate. He was not satisfied with his own “position in the world.” Withdrawal to nature and solitude, imbued with dreams of an alternative image of self, were his two ways to mitigate a feeling of lack of self-sufficiency. Another form of compensation for his fatalism was his admiration of great and active men characterised by strong will and capable of influencing the course of events. Bartol’s attitude towards History shaped by his decision to stay in Yugoslavia, his participation in the war and later work as a state official representative in the field of South Slavic culture in Trieste, cannot be conceptualised in terms of escape. Being directly involved in the war-time events and later forming part of the new socialist

---


28 Ibid., “Čim bolj se doktrina približuje življenju in čim več črpa neposredno iz njega in iz danih prilik, tem simpatičnejša mi postaja. To je prava pot – povsod!”

29 Ibid.

30 Bartol, Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu, vol. 1, 313.

31 Bartol, Romantika, 50-51.
post-war order, his escapism could regard a personal distance to any political ambitions because his main existential task remained always literature.

Gombrowicz and Márai articulated their escapist responses to History in many references to historical reality and time in their writings. Gombrowicz defined his attitude to History in terms of revolt. It was underpinned by a strong emancipative need because historical being meant for him always some deformation of his artistic self if not a denial of his individuality. Referring to the main Polish statesman of the Second Polish Republic Józef Piłsudski and his death, Gombrowicz noted:

In today’s tempestuous era everyone has had their share of historic moments, myself included. After all, I’d been present at the end of the First World War, the rebirth of Poland, the battle for Warsaw, the May Coup, and so on. But at such times, I always felt something like a revolt against history, and couldn’t reconcile myself to the fact that I was nothing, a piece of straw blown in the wind, and that everything was taking place outside of me. The writer expressed his distrust in respect to History as follows: “I base my value on my dissatisfaction with myself as a historical product. In which case my history becomes the history of my deformity and I turn against it—thus freeing myself from it.”

The smaller burden posed by History meant for Gombrowicz the greater opportunities for individual growth and artistic freedom. “The smaller the ballast, the smaller the hereditary burden, the less history, tradition, custom, and thereby more freedom of movement and greater possibility for choice; it is easier then to keep up with history.” Gombrowicz opted for a life not restrained by the past and floating on the waves of temporariness. The French writer Dominique de Roux, in one of the letters sent to Gombrowicz compared his literature with “[…] the only means of release from the huge, crushing weight of the past.” History for Gombrowicz posed a threat to his need for self-determination and creativity. He expressed the urge for a transgressive re-evaluation of one’s immersion in the historical world by treating it in terms of an adversary. “Seeing our value not in what we are but in what we are capable of overcoming in ourselves, our current form, we could

---

33 Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 2, 303.
34 Ibid., 410.
35 Dominique de Roux, “Letter to Gombrowicz (15 March 1968),” in *Gombrowicz - walka o sławę. Korespondencja Witolda Gombrowicza z Konstantym A. Jeleńskim, François Bondym, Dominikiem de Roux*, ed. J. Jarzębski, vol. 2 (Kraków, 1998), 261. In the *Diary* Gombrowicz noticed: “I felt that I should come up with something but I didn’t know what, with some…First of all, I didn’t know what sort of burden I was carrying. Was I heavy? Or light?” Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 3, 539 “I want to be a balloon, but one with ballast; an antenna, but one that is grounded.” Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 1, 42.
relate to history as an enemy. I am the result of my history. But this result in no way pleases me.”

The existentialist, transgressive trait of self, marked with incompleteness entails a particular desire to escape from the historical moment in order to live elsewhere and at other times, to inscribe one’s existence within not real but imagined, hypothetical coordinates of time and space which correspond better with the needs of the inner self.

In contrast to Márai’s fatalistic view, History for Gombrowicz seemed “the Great Improvisation […] As always at historic moments, nothing was clear and no one had any idea what was going on. History treats people not just cruelly, but mockingly.” This is how Gombrowicz commented on the May upheavals led by Piłsudski in 1926 which he witnessed from his flat in Warsaw. Suspicious about collective ideas and opting for a life in isolation on the sidelines of society, Gombrowicz was resistant to the outbursts of political enthusiasm either of support or denial of the new regime. “I was still unable – and this inability was more powerful than I – to live the Polish collective life, either in politics or in culture. I watched from the sidelines, sometimes with interest, sometimes with passion – but to take part? No. Absolutely not.” Mockery and joke guaranteed the necessary distance saving Gombrowicz from the seriousness of involvement in the events of the present moment. He explained this personal reluctance to take part in History referring to a derivative and secondary character of the Polish culture. The writer argued that the Polish state independent just since 1918 was culturally immature and backward. Trying to catch up with the West it was, however, always staying in the second rank and hence instead of direct contact with reality and life (the only condition of originality), the Polish culture was imitating dominant cultures.

Gombrowicz’s desire to oppose the fatalistic force of History manifested in the ideas regarding revision of Polish history. Distancing himself from the line of historical thinking which revolves around the categories of state and nation, the writer accentuated another view of history analysed from the vantage point of an ordinary man. Gombrowicz claimed that what served the independence and prosperity of the state and what has been widely discussed in historiography does not necessarily contribute to the personal growth of the individual. This re-evaluation of historical thinking, in Gombrowicz’s view, could let Poles “get at least one foot out of history…and thereby regain our

---

36 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 2, 303.
37 Gombrowicz, Polish Memories, 51.
38 Ibid., 51.
39 Ibid., 92-93.
footing, we who are so swiftly borne under by the vortices of our past.” What kind of regained stable position would it be? As there is no place for a firm ground of identity in Gombrowicz’s *Diary* and oeuvre in general, I would compare the mentioned “footing” to some temporary dams which could briefly stop streams of the past, allowing immersion in the raised waters of the present moment and forcing the time to seek other beds. The writer explained the importance of these obstacles by “our wanting to begin our life from the beginning and our ceasing to be only a consequence of the past.” There should be, according to Gombrowicz, no necessity of adapting oneself to the heritage of the past. The act of constant reinterpretation could allow one to extricate oneself both from the distant past and the current history as a means of judging them from the perspective of the present moment and in the name of “ordinary humanity.”

In the same vein and similarly to Gombrowicz, Márai juxtaposed two types of history noting that “petite histoire is always truer than this second one, with capital letter.” The Hungarian writer put to the foreground the role of an anonymous individual who instead of allowing others (politicians, diplomats, poets, historians) to speak on his/her behalf, shall assume responsibility and intervene in the course of events by expressing his/her opinion on certain matters. In the midst of the global conflict, it seemed that it was high time an individual was given a voice. As an example of such desirable re-evaluation of decision-making subjects of History, namely the shift from diplomatic sphere embodying a state’s interests to an ordinary citizen, Márai mentioned an initiative of an unknown Dutch citizen – Pless-Schmidt who in 1940 devised and presented a peace treaty. It was for Márai “a revolutionary innovation”, a new “very meaningful style”, “a new chapter in history” which finally could be written by a private person. The reason why such change is necessary lies in a different perception of history which cannot be reduced to a superficial layer of documents and treaties, diplomacy, and political history. History means much more, namely historical being, personal experience of ordinary people, life, and death. Political, public sphere as a prolongation of the private life of the individual? In a time of war, Márai was asking himself whether a solution to chaos culminating in global conflagrations provoked by experts and politicians could be greater

---

40 Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 2, 302.
41 Ibid., 303.
42 Ibid., 303.
43 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 5, 61. Later he mentioned his “perfect indifference to all ‘world events.’ Focused attention on everything that is close and human.” Ibid., 146. Close family and experience of pain are also more important than History. When Márai got to know that his brother had an accident and spent two months in hospital, he noted: “How ridiculously irrelevant to such information is everything that is called ‘history.’” Ibid., 175.
participation of amateurs, anonymous persons in the public life that is nothing more but the extension of their privacy.44

Gombrowicz’s attitude to History assumes not only the emancipative tone which is aesthetically required for his artistic aims but it also has a deeper existential meaning. He defined his position in historical reality in negative terms as devoid of seriousness or the need for engagement. In one of the letters written from exile to another exilic Polish writer Józef Wittlin, Gombrowicz emphasised that what he longed for was some sort of alleviation from the seriousness of man and life, the seriousness which would derive from an attempt to fulfil some expectations posed by the historical moment.45 Gombrowicz defined his attitude to History in opposition to Simone Weil’s active engagement. “A heroic existence such as Simone Weil’s seems to be from another planet, a pole opposite from mine: whereas I constantly elude life, she takes it on fully, elle s’engage, she is the antithesis of my desertion.”46

In the attempt to keep himself at a safe distance from any distortive Form, Gombrowicz was eluding life and escaping the challenges posed by historical moments which dictated possible, expected roles and identities. In some situations, however, it seems that he was also trying to narratively elicit the historical realm but only to confirm his belief in the privileged role of an individual and his/her personal, protean self-identification. As if he were trying to engage History-adversary in a duel which, in the situation of the enemy’s absence, would immediately, before even starting, bring victory to the writer who thusly could again prove the superiority of individual over masses, self-identification over imposed collective categories of identity and personal story over history. It happened during Gombrowicz’s travel to Italy and Austria in the late 1930s. Leaving aside the fact that the writer recalled this travel in slightly divergent terms at different moments (in retrospect revealing more knowledge of international relations of the moment),47 it may shed some light on his attitude towards History. Assuming the role of a journalist, Gombrowicz wanted to describe people’s reactions to a given historical situation and the atmosphere in Vienna in 1938 surrounding the important historical moment, in this case Anschluss. The writer tried to grasp some traces of History in everyday situations because as he noticed “it is sometimes better to observe

44 Márai, Kronika Niedzielnna, 156-159.
46 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 1, 212.
History from the places more common than the hall of the Reichstag.”

This is how he commented on his failure to get inside the parliament where the Austrian chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg gave his speech.

The search for “a whiff of history” was, however, in vain. It was to great measure doomed to failure because of Gombrowicz’s stance, which as the Polish literary critic, Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk defined it, resembled an “attitude of a tourist satisfied with the observation of only the surface of life” and thus abstaining from any clear ethical stance. He preferred to become an observer because it gave him more flexibility and freedom than the confining roles/masks of a defender, supporter, judge or critic of some social, political phenomena which posed a threat of the necessity of his own attitude’s clarification. This cautious perspective full of reservation accompanied Gombrowicz in Austria and Italy where he was more engaged with his own self than with encountered people and the motivations behind some of their reactions to particular historical moments. Kowalczyk also adds that Gombrowicz’s indifference to both the international politics and internal affairs of the authoritarian, fascist states was reinforced by the general tone of friendship that characterised diplomatic relations between Poland and Italy at the time just before the Second World War.

In disregard of a deeper analysis of the historical situation and thus taking into account just superficial phenomena, the young journalist could not encounter in people’s everyday life on the streets any significant sign indicating that what was occurring this day (Schuschnigg’s speech) could be perceived as an event of great importance. Having read some news in the press he was expecting to feel some fear, enthusiasm, and excitement in the air in general and in people’s behaviour. However, he did not find in everyday life any confirmation of the seriousness of the historical moment. Instead of an expected fervent exchange of ideas, violent reactions as well as disputes about politics and the country’s future, the writer would rather notice indifference, discretion, and withdrawal which he interpreted either as a sign of anxiety, intimidation, or recklessness in disregard of the real danger. Just before Schuschnigg’s speech “a notorious smile of Vienna, although not having subsided, became maybe not so much historical but hysterical.” Nevertheless, a short light wave of excitement was to ebb immediately.

49 Kowalczyk, op. cit., 213.
50 Ibid., 211-214.
The narrator was surprised with the people’s general acceptance of fate, “horrifying affability of this city towards the fate.”\(^{52}\) It seemed to him as if all the crucial decisions shaping the country’s future were made somewhere above and at distance, which would cause the general ignorance and apathy among the people who were discouraged in this situation from any political commitment. The narrator found himself in a strange situation marked by a reciprocal relationship between particular acts, opinions and a “Mass,” understood by the author in terms of History, imposing ideas and subjugating individuals but also at the same time constituted and opposed by them. The collectivity and individuals remained in a state of interdependence without any final solution which, in the end, resulted in a “common terrible anti-historic procrastination.”\(^{53}\) In conclusion what surprised the narrator most was a short time needed to convert the individual anti-historical, indolent attitude into the unidimensional and driven by instincts massive historical wave, will of the nation speaking with one voice.\(^{54}\) Gombrowicz’s remarks on the relationship between the individual and “Mass” remind of Elias Canetti’s later study of different types of crowds and power (Crowds and Power, 1960). In Canetti’s study, a crowd brings a sense of relief to a detached individual who constantly fears “being touched” by alterity. It also promises freedom to individuals by overcoming distance and transcending boundaries.\(^{55}\)

The narrator of the reportage from Austria found himself in a strange liminal sphere between anti-historical subjectivity and historical massive processes which still during his stay did not manage to overshadow and dominate individuality. Vienna was just one of the places visited by Gombrowicz-the journalist during his travel undertaken at the end of the 1930s. Just before the outbreak of the war (1938) he also spent some time in Italy. In the reportage from there, the narrator was attracted by the “magic of fascism”\(^{56}\) which was represented as an emanation of “Youth” rather than as a historical phenomenon of that time. Gombrowicz often elaborated on the category of youth in his writings, treating it as a counterforce of History and other Forms that petrify life and pose a threat of distortion to the inner self. What consequently fascinated the narrator most in Italy was a “myth of youth”\(^{57}\) and the historical order of time in the fascist country which was prospective and centred on the future.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 116.  
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 116.  
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 118.  
\(^{56}\) Gombrowicz, “Wjazd do krainy włoskiej (Wspomnienia z podróży)” in Varia, vol. 1, 119-120.  
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 120.
In the Eternal City, the narrator, who was viewing himself there as a provincial writer, seemed resistant to the atmosphere of great History of a thousand years which had laid foundations of the present European civilisation. Faced with this overwhelming heritage, he could not formulate any great historical thought. On the Trajan’s Forum, Gombrowicz presented himself as incapable of any deep reflection, adequate to the long history which traces he could easily encounter in Rome. The narrator argued that the places laden with rich historical heritage and monuments reverberate in “anti-historical” way in an individual, no matter how much pathos the latter would try to express. Moreover, inhabitants of such places (in this case Italians), due to familiarity with the presence of remnants of the glorious past, seemed to him uninterested in history.

The narrator’s attitude, one of a tourist, shaped the observed reality depriving it of any stable character, an essence which could also justify one’s clear stance against or in favour of a given situation. The political circumstances became relational and changeable in a way a tourist’s perspective shifts depending on the context. According to the narrator a specific “attitude of spirit” puts to the foreground some neutral in origin situations, images which only later, in line with this attitude, become excessively emphasised and ideologically marked. One notices what he or she wants to notice, and the result of deduction must coincide with the starting point of a line of thought which consequently assumes a circular shape. While foreigners of antifascist inclinations would interpret their observations in Italy in antifascist terms; those closer to the fascist ideology would embellish a witnessed reality adequately to their convictions. Gombrowicz’s idea of the “interhuman church” means that a person’s behaviour, beliefs and thoughts are conditioned by other human beings and not by the world of objectively existing ideas, rules, and principles. The world of essences becomes replaced by horizontal play of representations between people and the constructed character of the social reality. Consequently, in Gombrowicz’s view, similarly to the relational social world, also historical phenomena are conditioned by individual worldviews. In other words, the narrator claimed that Italy was fascist, not due to given features inherent in the fascist political regime, but because of the way of perceiving the inner situation in the country by foreigners. Therefore, fascism such as other political and historical phenomena, should be understood not as

---

58 Ibid., 120, 122.
60 Kowalczyk, op. cit., 213-214.
62 Ibid., 127.
some reality founded in a deep-seated nature but always as a social construct varying depending on the individual mental framework, political views, and ideology.

Unlike Gombrowicz, who viewed historical reality as a social construct shaped by individual “spiritual attitude” (always possible to change), Márai was rather convinced about a given form of historical situations and thus also more pessimistic about the role of the individual, who could only accept the imposed historical fate. To some degree, this difference in perceptions might be also caused by various objects of analysis. While Gombrowicz was referring to Italy as a foreigner, Márai was reflecting on his homeland. The Hungarian writer described the response that Hungarians chose when faced with the undesirable position in Central Europe and the History of the twentieth century as follows: “With its fate, its good and bad characteristics, a people was left tragically on its own between the East and the West. […] Then, because they could not do anything else, they set about fashioning order in the loneliness.”63 However, Márai believed that the historical loneliness, founded on the feeling of foreignness and isolation fomented by the political circumstances (communism) and the experience of the indifference of the West,64 could provide “a source of strength, an oasis in the European desert.”65

Could this conviction of strength make Márai’s later inner emigration and future exile endurable? In order to understand this paradox of loneliness and isolation as the sources of strength, it is worth referring to one of Hannah Arendt’s essays (On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing) where, reflecting on the phenomenon of inner emigration, she explained the distinction between strength and power. The first one pertains to individuals, the latter to collectivities. There is no balance between them and in the confrontation of both sides, the one representing power will dominate. The escape from the public sphere might provide strength only when the reality is not forsaken.66 Diaristic writing allows such an escape. Even though a journal provides an author with some distance from historical happenings and the public sphere, the diaristic order of time is intrinsically interwoven with historical reality and thus the latter is never renounced.

---

63 Márai, Memoir, 319.
64 Ibid., 284-285. During his travel to the West, Márai could have realized (or as he observed it later) that this part of Europe after the Second World War broke its bonds with the central part of the continent. “What could we Hungarians expect from this West which falsehood had so thoroughly contaminated? Never help and solidarity. There was no help for us, collectively or individually, only time.” In another place, he added: “(I returned from the West, and I brought home in my nostrils and nerves that benumbing lethargy, impudent hostility, and arrogant superiority with which the West viewed the fate of Eastern Europe.),” 318.
65 Ibid., 319.
Diaristic writing as an attempt of inscription of the self within narratively reconfigured temporality (a bridge linking historical order of time with author’s time of consciousness), can give an insight into this escapist attitude to the world. This inscription, practised for instance by Márai-Stoic did not, however, imply indifference to the reality or lack of action. Defending his intellectual independence from the overwhelming politics, Márai, nevertheless, did not disregard the political reality in his country and more broadly in Europe, in the world. Even if not directly witnessing, he was following contemporary political events. Both his diary and correspondence are abundant in comments on changes on the political global scene. In the diary the writer was commenting on historical context, the changeable situation on the fronts during the Second World War, bombardments, offensives\(^{67}\) and later in exile also on many other events such as Hungarian revolution.

Nevertheless, Márai agreed with Edward Gibbon’s definition of History which “[…] in its entirety is nothing else than the sum of misdeeds, murders, and cruelties.”\(^ {68}\) This rather gloomy perspective does not encourage to take part in the historical realm which, in its excessive form for instance during the war, may even provoke in an individual a feeling of boredom. In this context, the evacuation of inhabitants of two cities: Hamburg and Berlin appeared to Márai as a realisation of a novel of Herbert George Wells and it seemed to him as if “in these days the nomads’ Europe comes to life.” Just after this short reference to the historical situation, Márai added: “But here it comes to my mind now that at the end of the fourth year of the war, in the very middle of bombardments of Rome and Berlin, I am bored to death.”\(^ {69}\) Commenting briefly and in brackets on the bombardments of Berlin, in the next sentence he stated: “Oh, lucky those indifferent!”\(^ {70}\) In 1944 he remarked that “at the bottom of everything boredom and expectation lurk. This tension can be discharged only by delight or work. But the bewilderment after the injection of delight is transitory. And the real sense of work – belief that one can in a rational way help people – was taken away from me and destroyed.”\(^ {71}\) Consequently two possible cures for the boredom: work and delight were ineffective, delight because of its transitory character and work due to overwhelming feeling of individual helplessness in the circumstances of war. The feeling of boredom with History did not accompany Márai only in Hungary. In exile, he was also referring to the course of events as

\(^{67}\) Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 29.  
\(^{68}\) Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 232.  
\(^{69}\) Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 33.  
\(^{70}\) Ibid., 37. Commenting on the closure of ghetto in Pest, Márai noted: “And I do not care about life anymore. I have in me total indifference and readiness to accept everything what fate may still bring me.” (78)  
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 90.
monotonous and tiring.\textsuperscript{72} The everyday life abundant in recurrent acts such as moving from one place of living to another made Márai remark that “a ‘petit histoire’ is just as monotonous as another, the great.”\textsuperscript{73}

In the situation of oscillation between boredom with the present moment and expectation about the future, Márai chose the non-participatory attitude towards the historical realm by embarking on diaristic practice. He did not commit himself to the historical order of time by siding with some political party or movement. Neither did he choose open rebellion. In 1944 the writer stated:

Socialists, reds, communists, Nazis, wild, free troops of liberal democrats, resentful and omitted, tortured, and excluded, all of them demand reckoning and desire revenge, each pulls me to himself and wants to cut off from me, demands from me to make an oath, and concurrently to voluntarily step on some just prepared stake. Everything is undoubtedly tragic. But also undoubtedly boring.\textsuperscript{74}

In the same year of 1944, Márai noted that he was situated between two sides of the barricade. “I live pressed between Jews and Christians, knowing the spiritual construction of persecuted and persecutors alike, listening to both sides with equal lack of hope…Yes, one has to continue this, as long as possible. But if some bomb hit me, I would not protest.”\textsuperscript{75} He was convinced that in Hungary, where the society lost its unity and social life became marked by a class struggle, “the writer inevitably must emigrate to solitude, to the most dense, entirely conscious solitude. Who will not do this, one day will find himself on the barricade or – what is probably even worse – in a literary café.”\textsuperscript{76}

Márai’s non-engagement could have its origins in the myth of the Habsburg Monarchy according to which art would be favoured over political matters and thus also the Austrian writers would focus on artistic life and disregard the politics. As Márai remarked: “The art in Austria was always an issue more important than politics. Austrian writers never, in no epoch were ‘engaged.’ Readers did not expect this from them, what is more, they treated the engaged authors with distrust.”\textsuperscript{77} In this regard, the only type of artist’s engagement acceptable for Márai meant an attempt to reveal in reality some form of eternity, an idea, a magical and holy element. Therefore, an artist should not venture outside reality to realistically reflect said reality in the role of advocate for some

\textsuperscript{72} Márai, Simanyi, op. cit, 164, 184.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{74} Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 58.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{77} Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 397.
common interests of a group of people. Distancing himself from the correspondence theory of truth, Márai believed that the reality for an artist shall represent a window through which it is possible to see another world.\textsuperscript{78} In this context, one’s excessive engagement with historical reality could close this window and thus prevent access to another more important world beyond.

Márai opted for the attitude of solitary inner resistance\textsuperscript{79} to remain faithful to himself and fulfil an obligation, the task he had as a writer. The circumstances should not hinder and weaken his will to work persistently and write, the task which he perceived in existential terms as the only means of his survival in Hungary during the war. Márai defined his imperative as a writer as an obligation

\[
\text{[\ldots] to work with all strength, with all the effort of will; to work to a drawer, long, for entire years but to work, not for the sake of work and not for the country, not even for this ill European, but only to work, as the drowning man who is hitting the water with arms, though his eyes are covered by fog, he loses the strength and already does not see the shore…} \textsuperscript{80}
\]

One of the terms Márai used most often in his writings concerning individual immersion in the historical realm was the concept of fate which he identified with a person’s entanglement in time and defined as “measured by clock’s hands possibility of acting between Birth and Death.”\textsuperscript{81} In his autobiography he mentioned both the material and inevitable spiritual destiny of a person.\textsuperscript{82} The writer also believed that History and fate in the world privileging Systems over a Man would be substituted by statistics.\textsuperscript{83} The war brought some “impersonal, foreign fate” which not only deprived individuals of the possibility to decide freely about their unique paths of life but also converted them into statistical data.\textsuperscript{84}

Márai’s more fatalistic stance on History, shaped by the perspective of a witness and thus from ‘inside’ the events, made him rather sceptical about any possibility of individual liberation or at least a distance from the community of historical fate. In 1943 in Budapest, faced with the continuous radio announcements of the planned bombardments of the city, Márai was asking himself whether a human being could oppose fate or shape it in a planned way. His answer was negative. The only response possible to the fact of being born on the threshold of centuries and life in turbulent

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 285.
\textsuperscript{79} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 1, 79. Doubting whether he would still be able to finish in short time his books, Márai noted: “I have little time left, I feel that the force which so far I have had – the force of inner resistance – starts disappearing, passing.”
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{81} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 2, 396.
\textsuperscript{82} Márai, \textit{Wyznania patrycjusza}, 283.
\textsuperscript{83} Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 243.
\textsuperscript{84} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 1, 45.
circumstances such as war was for him modesty. In the same circumstances in 1943, commenting on his physical state after a three-month disease, Márai noted that the pain, no matter how strong, was not the worst as the body would forget it. He interpreted his disease in terms of his body’s protest and identified it with a sailors’ rebellion on a ship. What seemed worst to Márai was his personal fate getting out of his control: “[…] my own fate starts slipping from my hands. It is not my soul deciding about it…something is happening with me, some big forces, without sinister intentions, rather indifferently, start playing with my body and soul. This was the worst; probably worse than death.”

In the diary, Márai was often identifying these big forces with nature and natural phenomena such as earthquakes. This always stronger, natural “enormous brother” makes an individual defenceless. Were these great forces also a synonym of History? In one of the letters to his friend Márai stated that “[…] what a man calls history is not dependent on the treaties, it happens. Where and how? As if independent from the human will, it would happen as the tectonic earth moving, as from bottom-up acting forces.” This comparison of History with natural forces in the correspondence could originate from the information about the earthquake which took place in southern Italy. Márai, who was at that time already in America, succumbed to self-accusations, feeling of responsibility and shame due to the departure from Italy before the catastrophe, which in consequence could be interpreted as the unintentional escape from the common, sinister fate. Nevertheless, as Márai emphasised, “[…] a man cannot run away from the fate […]” which “[…] knows no distance and reaches a man everywhere, because as Euripides in the final word of Iphigenie says: ‘the fate is stronger than gods.’”

In the diary in 1968 in the context of concurrence of student protests with spring and season marked by awakening nature, Márai remarked that “this, what is called history, is at least in the same degree a natural phenomenon as its rational, mental effect,” adding that the French historian Ferdinand Braudel perceived Mediterranean history in the same way.

History compared with natural forces and phenomena such as earthquakes, in all its unpredictability and hostility, is devoid of any logic. It is equivalent to facts that do not have any

85 Ibid., 43.
86 Ibid., 13.
87 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5. 88.
88 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1. 18.
89 Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 124.
90 Ibid., 206.
92 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4., 63.
meaning. Márai was asking himself whether the world and historical events have any sense or aim. His answer was negative. He noted that “the world has neither purpose nor sense.”

In the context of the twentieth anniversary of the revolution in Budapest Márai remarked: “History does not have ‘sense’. It only happens.” Devoid of meaningful structure, this chaotic happening also escapes any categorisation, classification and thus also rational taming which could lead to some comprehension. The world, as represented in the media, seemed to Márai not anymore defined by concepts which could put some order to the chaotic reality, the concepts such as imperialism, revolution, or war. In the 1980s they became “out of fashion. What ‘happens’ is no longer history, but a natural process without rules and logic. Has history developed beyond people?”

Following on from this question, it seems that History in the twentieth century, due to its accelerated pace, indeed acquired an overwhelming tone going beyond the control of the individual who became defenceless when faced with this aimless course of events. The Hungarian writer added that “it is as if the decisions were taken not by humans any longer but by forces of nature. As something yesterday in Columbia, the day before yesterday in Mexico… [reference to the earthquakes, A.T.]. In all this there is no ‘logic,’ there are only facts.”

Another diaristic note taken in 1947 can be interpreted as a comparison of fate with another natural phenomenon, the snow. Márai, who woke up after a restless night with the feeling of heaviness, regarded the protection against a heavy snowfall given by a house as only illusionary. In the same way, historical events could be perceived as occurring in a direct presence of individual-witness deprived of any means of prevention, protection against the experienced side of History which consists of emotions such as pain, surprise, traumas. In turbulent times there is no protection against historical earthquakes which uninterrupted can only differ in character or intensity. At the end of the diaristic note, Márai remarked: “Our fate is unchanged. It only dressed up itself” and nobody can hide or escape it.

Márai was convinced of the almost impossible escape from the dictates of fate understood in both individual and collective terms. Any change of place and travel abroad would not provide one a distance from the common fate of Hungarians. In this respect, Marais’ trip to his mother town Kassa/Košice during the war was not an escape. The writer’s decision to visit his hometown was

---

93 Márai, Tagebücher 1976-1983, translated by Hans Skirecki (Berlin, 2001), 134. “There remains the Platonic hope, the idea which mirrors reality ... so the hope for a world consciousness. Maybe there is a world consciousness. But human consciousness is bound to matter.”
94 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 410.
96 Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 276.
97 Márai, Tagebücher 1945-1957, 76.
made from practical reasons with the intention of rescuing some clothes and objects of everyday use from bombardments in Budapest. Any attempt to flee was for the writer senseless due to the impossibility of rescuing one’s own life if everything lies in fate’s hands (“if fate so decrees”). Márai wanted to travel for a short time but the voice of solidarity was stronger. He was convinced to go back to Budapest, “in order to, together with others, wait for bombs and inevitable fate.” The writer explained his feeling of getting used to the announcements of bombardments in 1943 in Budapest also referring to the concept of fate which as an active force with overwhelming power converts an individual into a passive object: “Indifferent fate is holding me on its hand. I am indifferent too.”

Also later after the war, the exilic distance from communist Hungary did not undermine the strong bond which Márai felt with the existential situation of his compatriots. In one diaristic note, moved by his mother’s letter describing the terrible situation in the country, Márai emphasised the collective nature of fate which he as an emigrant was sharing with his compatriots in the country. “Naturally, we who live abroad will be annihilated along with them, those remaining in the country. There is no separate fate.”

Márai would not share Gombrowicz’s impression with regard to his exilic experience in Argentina which he defined as “twenty-four years of this liberation from history.” Barbara Zwolińska in her book devoted to Márai’s life writing characterised his oeuvre as “strongly embedded in history” and thus reflecting “many anxieties of the Eastern man. One of them is this, so characteristic for people from the East Central Europe, immersion in historical time, memory of the past casting a shadow on the present.” Márai considered time to be “the biggest director” shaping both historical play and individual roles, “this wonderful element” which although undermines and dissolves everything, at the same time with the help of hindsight, displays everything “in its true sense.” Teresa Worowska, the translator of his texts to Polish described the writer as a person who “was always saying that the most important hero of his books was time and that how it shapes the heroes.”

98 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 34, 42.
100 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 627.
101 Barbara Zwolińska, Pisać to znaczy żyć. Szkice o prozie Sándora Máraia (Gdańsk, 2011), 21-22.
103 Márai, Kronika Niedzielna, 261.
Sensitivity to the passage of time made Márai not only embark on diaristic writing but also earlier in his student life forced him to become a journalist. Journalism and time contemporary to the journalist-witness of the events were seen as equivalent by Márai. The aim of the journalistic work was for him to reveal “the mystery of life”, the omnipresent “raw material”, facts, correlation of phenomena, this secret material which connects people with each other.”\(^\text{105}\) Time permeates all aspects of reality, shapes individual and thus “[…] it is impossible not to notice the time, whatever happens is equally important and interesting, entire and simultaneous, worth publishing.”\(^\text{106}\) Time was the main hero of Márai’s novels but also the main fabric out of which he was narratively building his self-identification. In the note made in 1948, the diarist emphasised: “The true task is not to survive the time, but to live time within oneself.”\(^\text{107}\) This short statement can indicate the author’s will to experience the passage of time deeply within himself to better understand his immersion in the historical moment and to give it some meaning through the diaristic practice.

Historical changes in the previous century in Central Europe, as perceived by intellectuals inclined to constant self-reflection such as Gombrowicz, Márai and Bartol, deepened the fracture between the two orders of time: one chronologically dictated by a chain of events and the other concerning individual consciousness. Gombrowicz expressed this fracture which led to his desertion from History as follows:

You say: coward, deserter. In one of these, here is more wounding truth than you can imagine.
No one can imagine the boundlessness of my desertion. The ending of *Ferdydurke* is not gratuitous: “I fled, my face in my hands.” Am I not cut out for the epoch, which unfurled the banner of heroism, seriousness, and responsibility? (Weil, on the other hand, is the most perfect expression of all the moralities of contemporary Europe: Catholic, Marxist, and existentialist.).\(^\text{108}\)

Gombrowicz, who was “not cut out for the epoch,” was asking himself about his place in the History of the twentieth century: “My time was bloody and raw, […]. War, revolution, emigration. But why had I chosen this time (when I was being born in 1904 in Małoszyce)?”\(^\text{109}\) In one of the letters to Polish writer Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Gombrowicz wrote: “If I had more pathos and impetus in me, I would probably have endured the uncomfortable situation of a man who was born not in time. But

\(^{105}\) Márai, *Wyznania patrycjusza*, 272.
\(^{106}\) Ibid., 272.
\(^{107}\) Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 1, 412.
\(^{108}\) Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 1, 215.
\(^{109}\) Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 3, 713.
all that I do, I do as if on the margin of my hopeless laziness.”

Unable to identify in himself these two features of character (pathos, impetus), which founding vita activa can make an individual confrontation with historical moments more endurable, Gombrowicz chose the diaristic path “on the margin” to deal with this unparallel flow of temporalities.

Márai could not feel any sense of belonging to the twentieth century which not only put an end to the social sphere in which he grew up but also to the entire world of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which was the political background of his childhood and youth. In that respect, his voice echoed Zweig. Brought up in the Habsburg Monarchy and faced with the turbulent History of the twentieth century, they shared the fate of many Central European intellectuals, exiled not only from their already non-existent homelands but also the social sphere they were born to and previous ways of living as well as worldviews and perceptions of time. In one of the diaristic notes in 1944 Márai introduced an interesting caesura of 1910 writing about “a true historical experience” preceding this date and the following, disquieting period marked with falseness. This passage may indicate that History understood in modern terms as some forces getting out of human control could commence for the writer in the second decade of the twentieth century and with the outbreak of the First World War. “There is nothing more false and deeply distressing as history or that which we call ‘historical time.’ In 1910 to think something and in perfect form express what made the world more reasonable: this is the true historical experience. The rest is dirt, disorder, blood, suffering, stupidity.”

Therefore, this “true historical experience,” which in previous centuries could still express some harmony between the time of History and individual inner time, became replaced by disorderly speeding historical circumstances of the twentieth century underpinned by stupidity and accompanied by suffering.

This new time was, as Márai remarked, “constantly interfering in our private life, in our habits, in our fate, and thus in everything personal and temporary in our lives; but it also interferes in our work [...].” The individual was pushed on the desks of world theatre and was directly faced with the kaleidoscopically changeable scenes of an historical drama. The relationship between the arbitrary director, History and actor became much closer. The latter was given specific roles, very often not in keeping with those dictated by individual consciousness. The more History intervenes into private lives and the two orders of time interweave, the stronger becomes an alienating discordance between the historical order of time and the individual time of consciousness. Márai

---

111 Márai, Tagebücher 1943-1944, 132.
112 Márai, Kronika Niedzielna, 264.
expressed it in form of a question, which as he believed, was posed by historical circumstances to all intellectuals: “What to do, when a man does not have internally anything anymore in common with the epoch he lives in?” In 1944 Márai asked himself a similar question but in more precise terms referring more directly to the historical situation he had to face: “[…] Does anything still links me with all this? With this flat? With the work, to which and for which I have been living here for sixteen years?”

The discordance between the inner order of time and the one regulated by History implies alienation and can also entail the perception of historical events in terms of performance which an individual would prefer to watch rather than participate. Márai referred to this image while noting down his experiences from the war. “In Budapest. Alarm. I am in restaurant, they force to go to the building’s cellar. In the shelter the rows of chairs set as in the cinema in the suburb. Audience, coming from house and street, occupies seats in the rows of chairs and in the patient silence awaits the beginning of the performance.” In the same year 1944, the writer remarked that a play might possibly be “the deepest sense of life […], the truest content of life” while the Earth with its four constituent elements forms the scene for this short play performed by a man. Márai characterised this human performance as sometimes “a horrifying play; however always a bit funny. And besides all this, there is still this shiver, great pathos when a man meets with God, art or death.” It is possible to trace a similar experience of History unfolding in terms of a drama in Gombrowicz’s writings as well. Commenting on a particular distance of his “un-awoken” generation (referring to other intellectuals) to the Polish reality (provoked by the excessive speed of the changes in the interwar period and their fast domestication), the writer noted that: “It still seemed to us that we were outside of history. We watched it all as if it were taking place on a stage; the play entertained us, made us laugh, at times even moved us, but not for one moment did it incorporate itself permanently into our lives” Thus, paradoxically, the more intensive and accelerated the pace of History became, the more distant and alienated it seemed to both writers. In a state of bewilderment with the excessive and overwhelming course of events, performed on a global stage, they could not find a proper role in its scenario and thus decided to form part of the observing audience.

113 Márai, W podróży, 117.
114 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 85.
115 Ibid., 83.
116 Ibid., 84.
117 Gombrowicz, Polish Memories, 92.
Márai, being born in 1900 coincided with the beginning of the new century and called himself “the child of the century,”118 experienced a radical mismatching with the epoch he lived in. The similar sensation of being out of tune with the historical time is visible in some of Gombrowicz’s texts as well. In the context of increasing national tensions and stiffening ideological forms in the 1930s, opposing his inclination towards their loosening, a Polish writer described his being on the margins of the general atmosphere of the period by posing the following question: “Wasn’t I, however, in contradiction with my time?”119

Some of Márai’s diaristic remarks, especially from the time of war, indicate an increasing abyss between the historical order of the twentieth century and his inner world which sometimes seem to be the opposite realms. While the first one is elusive and due to its fragility resembles a house made of cards, the second one acquires a firm and stable character. As if the writer-Stoic with his withdrawal from the public life managed to find an anchorage in his inner self. During the war in 1943, in the moments of a more intensive course of events posing a constant threat to life, Márai noticed that his existence lost its embeddedness in reality. He compared his life under the burden of historical experience to a mist, some dreamlike evanescent reality floating in the air or to a mirage.120 “Houses are no longer standing decisively and firmly in their places, it seems as if everything is floating above the ground, at this moment it is still here but just a moment later it will not be here anymore. It resembles driving a car in a dense as a pea puree mist: this is how we are living.”121 Whereas the external world seemed to Márai unreal, similar to a nightmare and possible to forget for a while, the perception he had of his own situation in the historical context was far from unreality. While reading Charles Baudelaire he noted:

I totally forget that there is the war, that I do not have influence on my own fate, that in the morning one has to begin everything from the start, expecting the bombs, infelicitous struggle with brutish senselessness, that each moment threatens with danger and all this enormous and cruel hopelessness is completely real, as my hair or this table…122

In Budapest, where the anti-aircraft alarms and threat of raids became part of everyday life, Márai experienced the state of being lost and “the feeling of complete aimlessness.”123 As Worowska underlines, the year 1944 became an important caesura in his existence. The favourable pre-war

---

120 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 85. „[…] everything trembles in the blue July sun as a mirage.” – Budapest in 1944.
121 Ibid., 45.
122 Ibid., 60.
123 Ibid., 85.
circumstances framing his literary career suddenly disappeared and the altered political situation in Hungary forced the writer and journalist to withdraw from the public sphere. In 1943 after his lecture about Marc Aurelio, Márai decided not to appear more in public. The writer justified his decision as follows: “In Hungary it is already impossible to live otherwise than in a state of inner emigration. To turn entirely inwardly towards my works. To emigrate to my own works. And to die in this exotic land, among the manuscripts.”

How difficult this shift from the open journalistic way of self-expression to the centripetal diaristic one could be becomes evident with reference to one diaristic note. In 1967, having renounced further cooperation with Radio Free Europe, Márai remarked that journalism, which he practised his entire life, was the genre closest to him. Nevertheless, in a situation when the addressee is not known, it is better to remain silent. In 1943 he decided not to publish any longer in press and embarked on diaristic writing which he continued till the end of his life. Márai explained the reasons for his renouncement of journalism also in the diary. In the context of the war, depriving journalists of freedom of expression, any cooperation with a press would be accompanied by unacceptable for Márai necessity of compromise and in the end also, as he expressed it, by “deep humiliation.”

“But now I have to become silent, take refuge in this diary, in novels, in writings, which are dictated by my fate, conscience, dignity of written word. I cannot do other thing.” From that time Márai ceased to be present in public. However, this withdrawal was not definite. What is more, the writer’s occasional returns to the public sphere put his life in peril. His appeal about the role of French people (spiritual leadership instead of imperialism) in Europe was published in French newspapers in 1944. In this context, Márai confessed his hope that one day Hungarians would understand this text and learn from its message which conveyed the necessity to privilege quality over quantity and mediocrity in order to remain a part of Europe. He also mentioned that publishing

---

124 Ibid., 48.
125 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4., 51.
126 In March 1944 after the Nazi invasion of Hungary the wave of persecutions began (affecting political opponents, academics, journalists, and Jewish population), “the still relatively free press was banned and only a few newspapers propagating National Socialist aims allowed to appear.” In these circumstances, Márai chose silence and absence in the press. Jörg K. Hoensch, A History of Modern Hungary 1867-1986, translated by Kim Traynor (London and New York, 1988), 156.
128 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 23.
129 Ibid., 23.
130 Ibid., 21. He commented on the implications of this situation stating that everywhere he went, he encountered people who were staring at him “with open mouths as if on a ghost. It seems that I have been already buried and now all are indignant that I am alive.”
of this text posed a risk to his life as the Arrow Crosses, at that time the leading political force in Hungary, did not approve of this stance.\textsuperscript{131}

In one of the diaristic notes taken in exile, Márai, the “coeval”\textsuperscript{132} of the twentieth century, expressed his feeling of mismatching with History very concisely: “I have had to live in the century I was not prepared for. I was shaped for the nineteenth century. I am probably funny.”\textsuperscript{133} Born on the threshold of the centuries and having experienced as a child the aftermath of the nineteenth century, Márai, however, interestingly did not feel any nostalgia for the \textit{belle epoque}. The main difference between the centuries was for the Hungarian writer, the pace of History accompanied by its immediacy. While in the nineteenth century the changes were taking place “at a snail’s pace” and experienced as a delicate “breeze,” later they were much faster,\textsuperscript{134} culminating in “a hurricane of the world war.”\textsuperscript{135} History in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries could be still observed through “theater binoculars.” Later due to the interference of History in the everyday life such a distance was not possible anymore.\textsuperscript{136} While in the previous epochs “time still did not have to hurry”, the History of the twentieth century made the time a “terrible element […] which in our age gallops just like the stick of a crazy devil's reel” and which accelerated pace became uncontrollable. Forced to participate in the “race against time,” in which hectic flow provokes dizziness, Márai was always late. He could not keep pace with this speeding new world experienced as “an unsurpassed, incomprehensible phenomenon.” During the Second World War, unable to keep pace with the new time, he gave up his role of the “roving journalist.”\textsuperscript{137} Soon he would embark on diaristic writing to explore his self in time.

Shift in worldviews, experiences (from the unity of life to its fragmentation) and perceptions of time is also indicated by the ways of its measurement. In Márai’s view, contrary to the chronometers used in the past, which could still evoke some feeling of “fullness of life,” later clocks, due to their more detailed mechanisms and thus also an indication of time, could only allude to division and fragmentation. In the past, there were still some “general estimates” or “big intervals,” “general, loose concepts of time” dictating its passage such as four or five-year periods between Olympic Games in ancient Greece. However, in the contemporary epoch when thanks to the modern

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{132} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 4, 413.
\textsuperscript{133} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 2, 406.
\textsuperscript{134} Márai, \textit{Simanyi}, \textit{op. cit.}, 252-253. What seems to speak in favour of the nineteenth century was the role of art and literature which later was to be undermined.
\textsuperscript{135} Márai, \textit{Kronika Niedzielna}, 262.
\textsuperscript{136} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 5., 33.
\textsuperscript{137} Márai, \textit{Kronika Niedzielna}, 211, 212, 268, 246.
physics it became clear that “time is also a dimension,” its passage became an overwhelming flow impossible to tame even with more and more detailed ways of measurement. Márai described the contemporary “perception of time of a man of a culture that ossifies into civilisation” as “more and more restless, petty; the desire for a record feels and measures already in seconds and with the help of stopwatches.”

Any attempt to influence the speeding time of the twentieth century was in vain. Márai expressed it with the words of the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno who compared such endeavour to adjustment of the indicator of barometer with the aim of changing the weather. Referencing the conference of the G7, Márai remarked on the impossibility of influencing the course of History. “In the age of masses, the extreme forms of energy and the fateful accelerated sequence of events a statesman cannot influence the course of history anymore. […]. Maybe it is the dead load of the ‘history’ that today directs the events, regardless of the plans of the statesman.”

The passage of time accelerated considerably. What once required a century to undergo some changes, in the twentieth century needed several decades. Following a comment from the French scholar, André Siegfried, the writer noticed that a person born in the twentieth century can recollect his childhood similarly to a way a person born in the nineteenth century thinks of the eighteenth century. In this regard, Márai noted that when recollecting his childhood from the beginning of the century, conditions of life and morality of this epoch, the way he viewed himself and this period resembled his father’s perception of Europe from the times of his grandfather.

Moreover, while in the times proceeding the twentieth century, due to the greater role of individuality, it was still possible to live one own’s life, later it was a history that was lived and experienced. Whereas in the past, human consciousness in the course of events was still discernible, later history would mean only the sum of information.

Perception of the course of events and time varies not only within particular epochs but also individually depending on age. In this respect, Márai experienced both wars in different ways. Whereas in the interwar period he confessed that the Great War did not leave him many memories, the Second World War affected him more directly. In the 1930s he noted in his autobiography: “All epochs of my life fell out of my memory without a trace. I also experienced the war and revolutions

\[138\] Ibid., 211-212.
\[139\] Márai, Tagebücher 1976-1983, 57.
\[140\] Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 85.
\[141\] Ibid., 32.
\[142\] Ibid., 113.
in my childish way; but this historically interesting time sifted through me, leaving no memory behind; probably I did not have anything in common with it, I was assuredly thinking then about something else.”\textsuperscript{143} The writer’s memory of this period was fragmentary, unclear and reduced to some details, faces, figures. It was probably due to youthful expectations that the aspiring journalist after the First World War embraced prospective view heading for future. The main aim was to distance oneself and liberate from the burden of war as soon as possible. Even though Márai remembered some moments from his recruitment, disease, revolution, all these memories seem to belong to the observer and not the actor of the events. As the writer recalled: “Then we were observing the revolution and waiting for a proper moment to go abroad...Undoubtedly I also lived in the ‘historical times’; but my memories from ‘historical’ period of the war and revolution concentrate on a few faces, from these days emerges only a figure of some gambler, a poet and doctor-morphinist...Assuredly always and all people experience doubly the world history; I regard mine as more important than the latter one which cast a fatal shadow on my life.”\textsuperscript{144} The Second World War would bring a more burdensome shadow on Márai’s life. Its outbreak made the writer’s existential mismatching with the epoch he lived in even more perceptible introducing a fissure in the hitherto way of living.

Diaristic writing and exile enabled Márai, Gombrowicz and Bartol to mitigate the discordance between their inner personal orders of time and the one dictated by History. Diaristic practice, which results in continuity and reconfiguration of temporality, according to Ricoeur, can bridge two distant orders of time (phenomenological and historical). Besides diaristic reconfiguration of time, journeys and finally exile allowed the writers to replace the imposed historical order of time (source of the aforementioned discordance) with those encountered in new places of temporary stay. Before focusing on Márai’s journeys (spatial displacement), Gombrowicz’s struggles with time (temporal displacement) and Bartol’s self-understanding in the Triestine post-war context, I will try to compare their exilic self-identifications. The writers shared the same exilic fate which can be interpreted as the direct manifestation of escape from History, but the ways they experienced it and narratively exploited were different.

\textsuperscript{143} Márai, Wyznania patrycjusza, 328.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 328-329.
V. Central European escapist responses to History? Exilic self-identifications between *homo politicus* and *homo poeticus*

1. *Introduction: Central European dilemma: “to be or to flee?”*

Faced with History’s disruptive force, the dissertation’s protagonists were asking themselves: to be or to flee? While Bartol decided to stay in Yugoslavia, both Gombrowicz and Márai chose the second path of escape which extended far away from their homelands towards the Western hemisphere. Therefore, their self-identification combined both national and continental perspectives.¹ They were feeling a strong need not only to abandon their homelands but also to flee any imposed by the historical moment confining forms of being and identities (such as dissident, emigrant nostalgist). The diaristic practice allowed all of them to construct their self-identifications in accordance with the reconfigured temporalities and retain some feeling of continuity not only in discontinuous historical time but also in changeable places of stay in exile. The writers’ diaristic inscriptions of self were underpinned either by the distance towards hometowns (Márai, Gombrowicz) or by the oscillation between birthplace and exile (Bartol). Consequently, their exilic condition requires further interpretation.

In this chapter I will be guided by the following questions: What were the writers’ existential situations and starting points, conditions leading either to departure (Gombrowicz, Márai) or return (Bartol)? How could Márai, Gombrowicz and Bartol perceive the spatial distance in temporal terms? How did exile (Márai, Gombrowicz) and homecoming (Bartol), provoked by given political circumstances (just before and after the Second World War) in Central Europe, shape the diaristic poetics and in consequence also the narrative modes of self-identification? The three writers represent the same generation, and their paths of life were to some extent parallel yet still divergent. Their fates are comparable in factual terms of exile or often change of addresses, yet different in phenomenological terms of perceiving the exilic condition and relation to space. Thus, their diaries and diaristic poetics varied as well. With the aim of discussing the writers’ spatially and temporally split self-identifications, I will focus on their responses to the exilic situation (or the one found in a hometown) addressing issues such as reasons of departure, relation with emigrants-compatriots and their general attitude towards homelands or previous place of stay. I will also examine the

---

¹ Olejniczak refers to “instability” of Gombrowicz’s identity, his both “continental” and “national” belonging. Olejniczak, op. cit., 152.
temporal aspect of the exilic condition as perceived by Gombrowicz and Márai as well as the temporal character of Bartol’s return to his homeland.

The phenomenological approach, which I would like to follow, endows the categories of time, space, and distance (exile) with existential dimension. The distance acquired in exile when interpreted in these qualitative terms ceases to be an unsurpassable gap since it allowed the writers in the dissertation’s focal point to diaristically reframe and bridge their fractured self-understandings. In this sense exilic condition, instead of entailing an unbridgeable split, introduces oscillation and non-delineation of the self, problematised, and negotiated not only in relation to changeable space but also temporality and divergent cultural orders of time characterising different places. The exile, as Polish-American writer Eva Hoffman noticed, can become “a powerful narrative shaper; it creates chiaroscuro contrasts, a stark sense of biographical drama,” inciting the need to rewrite one’s self-identification and hence give some meaning to one’s personal drama and the divided self.

First of all, in this context, it seems important to underline the difference between Bartol’s refusal to leave Yugoslavia before and after the Second World War and both Gombrowicz’s and Márai’s choice to live in distant places abroad at that time. I will argue that while exilic condition, loss and foreignness strongly marked the poetics of their diaries, it was Bartol’s engagement in the course of events and return to his homeland after the war which to great extent shaped his autobiographical self. Even though in the 1930s he was thinking about travelling to the Near and Middle East with the aim of gathering some material for the next part of the planned trilogy (“Alamut” would have been the first volume), in the end he decided to remain in Yugoslavia. In 1938, when he finished his novel “Alamut,” he noted in the diary that “a time to travel” must come in order to provide him with required sources, new experiences, inspiration and a spirit of adventure necessary for further work. “But the two fascist dictators threatened with war and thus ‘I was not allowed to go away,’” because it would be shameful, that a Slovene writer would leave his nation

---

2 Matías Silva Rojas, Julio Armijo Nuñez and Gonzalo Nuñez Erices, “Philosophical and Psychopathological Perspective of Exile: On Time and Space Experiences” Frontiers in Psychiatry 6, May 27, 2015, available at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4445217/, (retrieved 31 March 2018). Referring to Eugène Minkowski, a psychiatrist with phenomenological inclinations, the authors of the article explain that: “Phenomenological distance is completely different from the geometric distance and cannot be overlooked by the exiled because his temporality is always moving with him. This sort of distance connects rather than separates; neither grows nor decreases with being away from objects; and has no boundaries. Thus, while geometric or quantitative distance is affected in exile, qualitative distance does not. Indeed, the latter may be considered as a space to be developed or enhanced; a meeting place with others.”

when it is in danger.”⁴ Having abandoned the idea of embarking on a long trip outside Europe, Bartol made a “writer’s compromise” which resulted in his return to Kamnik, a small town near Ljubljana where before he had been working on “Alamut” and where he started writing another novel Čudež na vasi (“Miracle in the Village”). What is more, as he had not been called up to the army, he thought it was due to changes of place of stay and lack of permanent address. Consequently, he contacted a military command himself and participated in military preparations three times. During the last service, he was caught by the “the maelstrom of war” in Bosna, in Bosanski Brod. He noticed that he went to war as “each, average earthling.” Faced with the situation of double occupation (Kamnik was under Nazi control and the nearby Ljubljana was occupied by fascists),⁵ Bartol was in a state of depression “like every conscious citizen.”⁶

During the Slovenian fight for liberation, Bartol was, as he named it, “an average cultural activist” and was thus devoid of any political ambitions. His main aim, which he regarded as a calling, remained an attentive observation of the unfolding events around him, their explanation, revision, widening of historical knowledge, sense and later also hopefully when the war would be over, communication of his perceptions to the wider public. As he concluded: “I doubt that I would have been able to write my essays about typology of the epoch and historical sense as well as some other essays from Razgledi, if I had not been actively linked with the Liberation Front, and also not these memories.”⁷ Unable to leave his compatriots just before the war, after the conflict Bartol chose a path of a compromise and interpreted his participation in History in terms of some nourishment of his “historical sense” which later was supposed to bear fruit in form of his autobiographical writing.

2. Exilic self-identifications between homo politicus and homo poeticus

One of my questions in this chapter is whether the three writers’ exilic subjectivities can be viewed in a state of balance between the two faces of homo duplex: homo politicus and homo poeticus. I am referring here to the conceptual distinction introduced by Yugoslav novelist Danilo

---

⁴ Bartol, Romantika, 284. “Toda fašistična diktatorja sta grozila z vojno in zato ‘nisem smel oditi,’ ker bi bilo sramotno, da bi slovenski pisatelj zapustil svoj narod, ko je ta v nevarnosti.”
⁶ Bartol, Romantika, 284, 295.
⁷ Ibid., 298. “Dvomim, da bi bil mogel svoje eseje o tipologiji dobe in zgodovinskem čutu ter neke druge iz Razgledov napisati, če bi ne bil aktivno povezan z Osvobodilno fronto, a prav tako ne pričujočih spominov.”
Kiš in one of his essays titled “Homo Poeticus, Regardless” (1980). In the opinion of Kiš, expatriate himself (in 1979 he left Belgrade to live in Paris), the balance between these two sides of life, devoted to art but not devoid of political inclinations, is not easy to maintain. It was particularly difficult in the eyes of the rest of the world (the West) prepared to hear from the writers coming from Yugoslavia and the East only some “politico-exotico-Communistski themes.”\(^8\) While the Western writers, according to Kiš, were free to problematise and express their multifaceted experience ranging from metaphysics to politics, the intellectual life of small nations on the other side of the Iron Curtain was rather \textit{a priori} relegated to obsessions with recent history and thus circumscribed to political issues (nationalisms) overshadowing literature of universal aspirations.

However, the political and artistic dimensions of life are just ideally two opposite spheres. In reality, they are always intermingled. Following the remark of cultural critic Edward Said, who noticed that “[…] the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel’s dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other,”\(^9\) it becomes clear that these two positions of \textit{homo politicus} and \textit{homo poeticus} should not be perceived as opposite, exclusive terms. On the contrary, they are interrelated and complementary. One’s detachment in exile and estrangement would not be perceptible (becoming a source of artistic creation) without the previous feeling of belonging to a given culture (language) or community (nationality, social group). The exilic displacement (in space and time) accompanied by its artistic representation always implies a separation from a background that once had been put to the fore.

As John K. Cox, an intellectual historian interested in Central European intersections of literature and history, suggests in his study on the \textit{oeuvre} of Kiš, a text even if devoid of an overtly political message (and thus not subjugating artistic values to political), often originates in disagreement with political \textit{status quo} of the present moment and a geopolitical situation having an impact on culture and mentality. Therefore, the text, no matter how seemingly artistic and abstract, is very often written with intention to contribute to a change in the public sphere concerning a leading interpretation of history (debates shaping collective memory)\(^10\) or a revision of (self-)

\(^10\) John K. Cox, “Pannonia Imperilled: Why Danilo Kiš Still Matters,” \textit{History. The Journal of the Historical Association} 98, no. 328 (2012): 596, 598-599. In this manner, John K. Cox, historian, and translator of Kiš’s novels, described the writer’s intentions lying behind “A Tomb for Boris Davidovich” devised “to be a wake-up call to French intellectuals in denial about the true nature of Stalinism. This is, then, a product of a quest for truth but it is certainly political in its conception.”(599). Cox interestingly tries to re-evaluate and recontextualize the image of Kiš widely perceived as the apolitical and anti-nationalistic writer. He brings together Kiš’s two faces of the artist and a person not indifferent to political situation (communism, ethnic Serbian nationalism represented by Slobodan Milošević) who rejecting the ethnic nationalism retained the linguistic, cultural, Serbo-Croatian identity and hence an important aspect of national framing.
perception of Central European nations. In this context, some manifestations of the demand for alteration of the predominant ways of thinking regarding national communities could be Márai’s, already mentioned before, appeal about the role of French people published during the war, Gombrowicz’s attacks on Polish parochialism and Bartol’s criticism of a complex of a small nation such as Slovene.

Bartol’s activism marked by his participation in the Liberation Front during the Second World War and his later occupation as a cultural representative of communist Yugoslavia in the Free Territory of Trieste makes the analysis of his oscillation between homo politicus and homo poeticus, a complex task. In his autobiography in one place the writer called himself “a political ignorant.”

Identifying himself with a free artist and an “average and good citizen,” he confessed that he had never been neither a member nor a supporter of any political party. He recalled that the way he had reacted to the assassination of the king of Yugoslavia in 1934 was human, similar to the female perspective and thus opposed to a political reaction which he viewed as characteristic for most of the masculine population. He experienced equally strongly two deaths of the assassinated and assassin.

As Bartol confessed, even though he was characteristically unpractical, far from entrepreneurial, and thus inclined towards passive roles of chronicle, observer or somebody who studies and artistically shapes various spheres of life such as politics, in the circumstances of war he decided to take the path of activist. As he noticed: “inter arma silent musae and it would be shameful for a man if he avoided that, which every, average patriot did.” Faced with the spirit of the twentieth century embodied in dictatorships suppressing individuality, he disapproved of the politics of indifference and intentional blindness to the course of events. Even though some of his acquaintances thought that as members of the small Slovene nation they should pretend not to notice the unfolding History in the hope of not being seen, Bartol chose the opposite path of being always prepared to take part. In the end, he joined partisan forces fighting with German and Italian invaders and this participation, as he remembered, would open him a perspective of the future and give a “moral force” necessary to face the extraordinary circumstances of war. He subjected himself to directives of the communist party which he regarded as the only universal and progressive force of the self. He identified himself as a Montenegrin Serb, Yugoslav embracing “South Slavic identity” (596). As Cox argues “although Kiš was thus, like Milan Kundera, a robust defender of the right of ‘minor’ literatures to be evaluated organically rather than geopolitically, this does not mean that he himself was apolitical or that his works are devoid of political content.” (598)

Bartol, Romantika, 293.

Ibid., 241.
capable of overcoming national and religious divisions, so numerous and sharp in the Balkan area. Moreover, he considered communism to be some sort of announcement of the future followed by many of his friends.13

Slovene writer living in Trieste, Boris Pahor described Bartol’s post-war cultural activity in terms of a contrast between his youthful admiration of great individuals and his later, enforced by circumstances, the position of “an obedient member of a collective”14 framed by a totalitarian ideology. In the post-war situation of the cultural life’s subjugation to politics, Pahor viewed Bartol as “de facto trapped in a world” which would seem to him as “distant as a sun from the earth.” Bartol was incapable of abandoning the country, the act which could be interpreted as a sign of open rejection of the totalitarian worldview. Instead, he opted for complying with orders of those responsible for cultural politics, who in Pahor’s view abused him only with the aim of legitimizing their politics by referring to the person of an important writer. Pahor continues with a remark on Bartol’s ironic attitude to this “miserable situation” as a way out of its inconveniences and confines. Considering individual attitudes towards politics in the twentieth century in the Slovene context, Pahor contrasts himself with Bartol. He contraposed his and other Triestine writers’ (Alojz Rebula, Pavle Merkù) rejection of totalitarian ideology with Bartol’s adjustment.15

Interestingly in Bartol’s diary from the Triestine period, it is possible to find some confirmation of Pahor’s remarks on the writer’s feelings of marginalisation and isolation which he confessed to him after his departure from Trieste and during his stay in Ljubljana. Bartol’s description of his meeting with Pahor illustrates well the writers’ different attitudes towards the dominant communist ideology. In this context, Bartol tried in vain to persuade Pahor to mitigate his stubborn rejection of the Yugoslav political system.16

---


15 Ibid., 358.

16 In one of the diaristic notes Bartol made a reference to his meeting with Pahor when the wife of the latter lost her job due to the husband’s opposition to the political system (as he “was writing against FLRJ”). Bartol mentioned conversation he had with Pahor during which they also tackled Pahor’s support to Edvard Kocbek, Slovene Christian socialist writer who during the communist times was marginalized and isolated. “Prvič sva šla v fundamente njegovega začetnega ‘štrajka’ ob Kocbeku. Rekel sem mu, da se ne strinja z njegovo taktiko. […] On, ne in ne. ‘Ti si predobr, preveč popustljiv.’ Jaz njemu, naj mi opristi, le da se mi zdi, da ga daje kraška trma. (Povedal sem mu bil namreč, da imam sam veliko odklonjenih rokopisov). […] Rekel sem mu, da je njegova reakcija z umaknutvijo rokopisev razumljiva, čeprav spat izraz iste trme. […] Pokazal sem mu izhod: naj pove Ravberju in Dragu Šegi, da umakne svoj umik in da bo povsod sodeloval. (V Marib. bi mu izdali novele. V Kopru so ga vabili na sodelovanje v Novi Reviji, založba mu tudi obljublja kaj izdati, itd.) Nekako srečno se je nasmehnil. ‘A kaj bi s tem dosegel? Ali mi bodo vzel ženo nazaj?’ Jaz: ‘Ne vem, nimam pojma.’ On: ‘No, zakaj bi se pa potem uklonil, čemu bi šel v Canosso?’ Jaz: ‘Saj bi ne šel v Canosso. Pusti tudi drugim, da imajo kdaj svoj prav. Čemu bi moral prav ti imeti vselej zadnjo besedo? (Kot
Gombrowicz and Márai in contrast to Bartol refused any conformity with the communist system in their countries of origin. However, one nuance shall be introduced here. Whereas Márai’s refusal seems most unrelenting, Gombrowicz at some point in the 1950s considered also publishing his texts in Poland in the communist press. Notwithstanding this slight difference, certainly, both writers were far from any direct engagement in politics. They were defending their artistic freedom and values from the external political programs and ideologies imposing collective identities. However, while keeping an exilic distance towards Central European politics and History, naturally, they could not be entirely apolitical or ahistorical. Avoiding explicit references to the political situation, their texts were, nevertheless, having an indirect influence on the public sphere, shaping the readers’ views in their countries (and not only). For instance, one of Márai’s poems (“Funeral speech”) in the early 1950s spread in the underground literary production, became a precursor of the samizdat literature in Hungary.

Márai’s existential movement between two positions of homo politicus and homo poeticus differed from the paths followed by Gombrowicz and Bartol due to divergent circumstances of his exile and historical experience shared with other Hungarians. Some diaristic notes concerning Márai’s stance taken towards the historical situation he had to face, may seem contradictory. For instance, describing the desperate situation of the Jewish population in Hungary during the Second World War, Márai noted: “But still: the one who among these wickednesses cannot maintain in soul a certain dose of indifference, cannot remain just, therefore is not able to help neither himself nor the others.”

On the other hand, there are many remarks in the diary indicating that Márai’s position was far from indifferent to what was happening around him when he was still in Hungary (for instance persecution of Jews) and later in exile. He was commenting on the changing political situation and some notes also suggest that he was acting in hope of helping other people. In 1944 Márai noted: “X was deported to Poland. The official, whom I asked in the letter not to send this seventy-seven-year-old man, to let him stay in ghetto, answered me in a few lines that he could not do anything. Why won’t he then resign from his post?”

Teresa Worowska clarifies that X was...
Márai’s father-in-law. In the same year 1944 the writer noted: “For six months […] I have been going on foot and driving in a crowd by tram in the bombed city in my and others’ matters.”

In 36-degree heat in Budapest. I drag myself in matters of different people in crowded trams, firmly convinced that all my actions are hopeless or maybe even unnecessary because one cannot help the people. Nevertheless, I shamble on the languishing, faint, bombed streets of Pest, in the sticking dirt of canicule.

Worowska also mentions that Márai during the “dark times” was hiding Jews, saving his wife and her cousin with the daughter. Márai’s interest in political affairs after the war while already living in exile manifests in his numerous comments on the changeable political situation not only in Hungary. He also subscribed to many foreign magazines such as “Time”, “Foreign Affairs”, “U.S. News and World Report” as well as “Times Literary Supplement.”

With regard to Gombrowicz’s exilic self-identification oscillating between homo politicus and homo poeticus, it is important to emphasise his indifference towards politics and reluctance to comment on the political affairs, let alone to get involved in them. Jerzy Giedroyc described Gombrowicz as “a man who cared relatively little about politics.” As Polish literary scholar Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk rightly remarked: “Gombrowicz was not interested in politics, neither as an intellectual project nor as a social practice. For him, it was a domain of insincerity and false pretenses, a subtopic that he found futile.”

Politics, equivalent to imposed schematic worldviews and the imperative of engagement, seemed to the writer as posing a threat to sincerity and freedom of life writing independent from the pressure of the outside world. The political sphere was thus both artistically and socially (in practice) uninteresting for him. Gombrowicz, who defended subjectivity at all costs, opposed dominant ideologies which either in a political or aesthetical sense could silence his individual voice. Instead of open rejection or support of a given political situation, he would thus choose a path of non-engagement and distance. Considering Gombrowicz’s attitude

---

20 Worowska, “Świadek entropii,” 618.
21 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 98.
22 Ibid., 88.
24 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 224.
25 “Gombrowicz was a man who cared relatively little about politics, although ‘Trans-Atlantyk’ is a very political book.” Jerzy Giedroyc, Autobiografia na cztery ręce (Warszawa, 2006), 184. Consequently, notwithstanding Giedroyc’s considerable role in influencing topics discussed by Gombrowicz in his Diary (by providing him with literature), he would not respond to Giedroyc’s request to write a contribution to “Kultura” which would tackle the tenth anniversary of Stalin’s death. Olejniczak, op. cit., 142, 174.
26 Kowalczyk, op. cit., 212.
towards political elites in Poland in the interwar period, Polish literary scholar Agnieszka Stawiarska classified him as a loyalist choosing this political path “out of comfort and reluctance to ‘engaging’.” As Olejniczak reminded, in the interwar period Gombrowicz did not engage in discussions on the unstable political situation in Europe destabilized by Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany and Spain. He was also immune to the general atmosphere in Poland and more broadly in other European countries at that time, namely to the widespread nationalism and antisemitism. To the same degree, he remained indifferent to artistic tendencies and aesthetic fashions of the time such as formalism (predecessor of structuralism) which widely applied in literary criticism could also pose a threat to subjectivity. To the young writer, who refuted each form of the superiority of system and ideology over individuality, each instance of dogmatic thinking in political or aesthetical terms was unacceptable.

Gombrowicz was in favour neither of pure art nor of its opposite extreme (journalism). He was warning against utilitarian art which converts life into ideology. In this respect, he underlined that his “literature must remain that which it is. Especially that something which does not fit into politics and does not want to serve it.” The only acceptable politics for Gombrowicz was just his own as he regarded himself as “a separate state.” In the name of art and individualism Gombrowicz distanced himself from the open anti-communist position which in his view would mean a threat of schematic and collective thinking. In that respect, the writer was convinced that “one page of Montaigne, a single Verlaine poem, or one sentence by Proust is far more anti-Communist [...] They are free and therefore they are liberating.” Rejecting any form of fanatic conviction such as communism or nationalism, Gombrowicz preferred to remain on a fragile ground of relativism and scepticism. Consequently, he abstained from taking a clear stand either in favour or against ideologies, collective social movements, and totalitarian regimes which in the tense interwar period and later enforced many artists to do so.

Gombrowicz’s attitude towards politics and current history was shaped by his esthetical choices and geography, namely his exile in Latin America. As Kowalczyk remarked, the writer again “applied the strategy of a politically ignorant ‘tourist’ in his early years in South America”

---

27 Agnieszka Stawiarska, *Gombrowicz w przedwojennej Polsce* (Kraków, 2001), 207.
28 Olejniczak, op. cit., 43-45, 142-143.
29 “One must be careful that the life beneath our pen not become transformed into politics, philosophy, or aesthetics.” (Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 1, 70). “I cultivate just one politics: my own. I am a separate state.” Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 2, 315.
30 Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 1, 22.
31 Kowalczyk, op. cit., 212-213.
where the general tone of indifference among Argentineans towards European historical context of war and the post-war situation also to some extent influenced the writer’s attitude and his rather superficial knowledge about the wartime events. 

In the Diary in 1960 Gombrowicz noted: “1939–1959. A little history? Polish history? I follow it so little, I seek it so feebly (it peeks in at me)—I look at it from afar, as at a chain of mountains. Should I speak of it? But history is—after all—precisely a viewing from afar!” Life in Argentina allowed the writer to view European History and political events in Central Europe from a safe “chilling distance of years and kilometers.” From there he was observing the situation in his homeland “as if through a telescope” which enabled a view in “only the most general contours [...]” In contrast Gombrowicz described the writers who stayed in Poland as “entangled, so embedded in their own history, steeped in it up to their ears, they, the actors in this play—how were they to go about acquiring distance?”

The decision to leave Europe in 1939 let Gombrowicz, “outsider” distance himself from laud and disturbing cacophony of History, “the feverish din of European radio speakers, [...] the wartime roar of newspapers.”

Argentina itself, populated by immigrants and thus evoking a specific spirit of remoteness to one’s homeland and foreignness towards a new home in Latin America, might seem a place perfectly in tune with Gombrowicz’s need for distance. American writer and literary critic Alicia Borinsky in her interpretation of Gombrowicz’s exilic fate in Buenos Aires against a backdrop of tango and particular genius loci of the city/country emphasised the role of hiatus between hopes and accomplishment which reverberates not only in tango but more general in Argentinean landscape and architecture. Gombrowicz could harmonize well his escapist attitude towards a Form (History, Polish historical, cultural heritage) and a resultant loss of bonds with mother tongue and community of Polish readers, with an atmosphere in “a city of departures” where “that very scepticism about its own roots is a unique source of identity.” Gombrowicz as “a thinker of distance” was, in the opinion of Borinsky, born during his long stay in Argentina. His exilic self-identification built on distance was not devoid of contradictions and tensions which comprised his need of aloofness expressed in public and his desire for recognition opposed by a mistrust of any form of national appreciation of art, its elevation to a national canon.

32 Ibid., 214, 217, 220. The state’s official stance of sympathy towards Nazi Germany during Juan Peron’s rule (1946-1955) is also worth mentioning in this context.
33 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 2, 444, 293, 452.
34 Gombrowicz, Testament, 72.
35 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 626.
Gombrowicz’s exilic distance entailed ambiguity in his attitude to political affairs in Europe in the period of the Cold War. Polish literary scholar, Klementyna Suchanow explained the writer’s attempts at the end of the war to cooperate with people representing different political sides (emigrants and communists) referring to his political indifference. To be more precise, what motivated Gombrowicz’s decisions were pragmatic reasons and not political affiliation. Due to financial problems, he was for some time trying to cooperate simultaneously with the émigré journal *Kultura* and with some journals, publishing houses in communist Poland. Naturally, the latter could not print his texts such as the *Diary* without changes in original version because of the censorship. Gombrowicz’s ambiguous attitude interrupted for some time his cooperation with *Kultura*. In the end, however, the writer remained by Giedroyc’s side and apart from a short period of thaw in Poland (1956), when some of his novels were published (*Ferdydurke, Ślub*), his texts were officially banned. Suchanow explained Gombrowicz’s ambiguous actions referring to the writer’s “fatigue caused by casual work, as well as political indifference, lack of engagement and desire to remain independent.”

One important feature of Gombrowicz’s more personal texts, as Stawiarska rightly noticed, is the lack of political issues (for instance the internal policy of Pilsudski’s regime), usually discussed by other intellectuals in this period. Notwithstanding this lack of explicit analysis of political affairs of the epoch Gombrowicz witnessed, there are still some references to the historical background both in his diaristic writing and novels which manifest the writer’s interest in History. For instance, in *Pornography*, similarly to other texts, as literary scholar Agnieszka Dauksza remarks, Gombrowicz made numerous allusions to the Second World War. Even if this novel’s historical context was to great extent fictionalized and imagined (due to the author’s non-participation in the war), his motivations for this reference to the recent past seem worth mentioning.

As Dauksza argues, it was Gombrowicz’s consciousness of his absence during this traumatic period in Poland accompanied by “probably painful complex of ‘deserter’ and ‘fugitive’,’” feeling of helplessness in the face of overwhelming History and the need to recuperate an active stance, that made him return to this period in the novel. Gombrowicz’s aim while writing this text was, however, as Dauksza continues, not only to face his personal fate but could have also some broader implications. His more farsighted aim would be to trigger in his readers and in Polish society, in general, a critical and ethical self-reflection (an examination of conscience), needed to consciously

---

37 Klementyna Suchanow, *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza* (Kraków, 2005), 80.
38 Stawiarska, op. cit., 207-208.
work out the recent events in order to acquire a distance towards them as well as to re-evaluate the attitudes and old forms of perception in keeping with recent historical experiences.\textsuperscript{39}

With the intention of shedding a new light on Gombrowicz’s oscillation between the two faces of exilic self-identification: \textit{homo poeticus} and \textit{homo politicus}, I will briefly analyse the discussion between him and Milosz for whom the category of poet’s responsibility and thus some ethical burden was an important counterbalance to pure aestheticism.\textsuperscript{40} This dialogue will hopefully clarify Gombrowicz’s stance which remained closer to the aesthetic pole. Divergent philosophical inclinations of Gombrowicz and Milosz did not pose an obstacle to establishing strong bonds of friendship facilitated also by the common experience of exile.\textsuperscript{41} Milosz explained their long philosophical dispute referring to their divergent temperaments which concurrently, as the poet remarked, “probably delimit a fundamental divide in the history of human thought.” Milosz defined it in terms of a clash between the world of ideas, essences, objective rules of reality which fascinated him and Gombrowicz’s claim about the social, psychological character of these same ideas which would exist only as representations and volatile images of consciousness.\textsuperscript{42}

The polemics between Milosz and Gombrowicz concerned personal attitudes to a historical moment, namely communist Central Europe, and the role of a contemporary writer. Already in the \textit{Diary} Gombrowicz called Milosz “an expert on Poland and Communism” and “the official informant on the East,” whose main role was “to quicken our pulse so that we can keep up with the epoch. […]”.\textsuperscript{43} In the same vein, in one of the letters, Gombrowicz accused Milosz of his excessive sensitivity to the course of events attaching to him “the role of reporter in charge of East-Central Europe.”\textsuperscript{44} Milosz was indeed one of the strongest voices in the debate on Central Europe in the Cold War period postulating the region’s identity based on some \textit{differentia specifica}, which understood as a community of historical fate could distinguish this part of Europe from the Soviet

\begin{footnotes}
\item[41] One of Polish intellectuals in exile, the strongest promoter of Gombrowicz’s literature abroad, Konstanty A. Jeleński described this paradox as follows: “While fates of both writers seem parallel, their creativeness differs fundamentally and it is possible to multiply the oppositions between the baroque, structural and atheistic Gombrowicz and classical, metaphysical Milosz, who was sensitive to History.” Konstanty A. Jeleński, “Miłosz i Gombrowicz” in \textit{Konfrontacje}, W. Gombrowicz; Cz. Milosz (Warszawa, 2015), 276.
\item[42] Milosz, \textit{Beginning with My Streets: Essays and Recollections} (New York, 2010), 232.
\item[43] Gombrowicz, \textit{Diary}, vol. 1, 20. The writer described his friend as follows: “Gradually he turned out to be almost the official informant on the subject the East, at least, the Polish informant; all of the prose he has written to date is devoted to this subject.” Gombrowicz, \textit{Diary}, vol. 2, 471.
\end{footnotes}
East. The discussion on Central Europe at that time was supposed to undermine the Cold War division into two blocs and accentuate the spiritual and historical community of small nations in the middle of Europe (Miłosz’s “Native Realm”) by emphasizing their cultural bonds and values shared with the West (Kundera’s “kidnapped West”). Moreover, as Saer rightly remarked, whereas Miłosz followed Kundera’s and other Central European emigrants’ path in identifying themselves with the West in clear opposition to the East, Gombrowicz in his yearning for “immaturity” remained suspicious about any such explicit bond with the “mature” Western world. This type of identification with the West, traditionally also a source of Poland’s “cultural colonisation,” due to its underpinning with the geopolitical situation, would pose a threat to the creative freedom entailed in defining the self in geopoetic terms. Distance acquired or radicalized thanks to Argentinean exile allowed Gombrowicz to cultivate his indifference towards any such clear affiliation not devoid of geopolitical overtone. His “perspective from outside,” characteristic also for Argentinean culture’s approach towards the Western tradition, could be thus opposed with “the excessively Polish, inner perspective” represented by Miłosz.

While Gombrowicz was trying to write as far as possible from politics, Miłosz was focused on the recent course of events aiming at more explicit articulation and problematisation of the historical moment he was living in. In the letter to Zbigniew Herbert written in 1967, Miłosz compared Gombrowicz to other Polish writers, accentuating his “off-hand manner of disengagement.” Milosz did not define this expression, but it could imply some reluctance to be personally engaged in the course of events in fear of deforming masks of political convictions (rightist, leftist), some more or less stable and predictable forms of identity. Gombrowicz in his constant duel with a Form had to choose the path of “dis-engagement.” The moment which could commence this path was the year 1920, the battle of Warsaw against the Bolsheviks. For the young 16-year-old Gombrowicz, the perspective of military service killing each sign of individuality seemed a nightmare. He remembered this year as it was supposed to detach him from the rest of the Polish society overwhelmed with a patriotic atmosphere. Since that moment, the writer-individualist would place his life on the margins of society and other forms of collectivity. Evading collective threats posed to individuality (nation, native land), Gombrowicz could later define himself as

---

46 Juan José Saer, op. cit., 192-193, 195.
47 “I want to write as far away as I can from politics…” (Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 639).
“a Pole brought to extremities by History.” To the extreme opposite of what would be expected from him as imposed by the Polish tradition shaped over time (heroic death, martyrdom).

In response to Gombrowicz’s remarks on his book Captive Mind and the accusations of being too susceptible to the accelerated pace of contemporary History, Miłosz noted in 1953:

I recognize in Gombrowicz a dangerous inclination, and I know it, because the same one is in me. It is the tendency to search for the second bank of history. I know well, how drying, how fatal, how degrading in the long run the service to historicity (historicité) may be. But I know as well what emptiness, what impotence, what muteness is caused by the renunciation of this service.

Miłosz reflected on his ambiguous feelings embracing the need to be deeply immersed in a present moment (which “hollows out a man from inside, so that what remains is just a shell like with a dried crab”) and at the same time a certain longing for a distance favouring metaphysical considerations. He also experienced the oscillation between homo politicus and homo poeticus. How can one unravel the existential dilemma of being both a political writer, “expert on communism” and the lyrical poet beyond historical time? How may one resolve the “dispute between the urge for historicity and the intention of its evaluation”? Miłosz claimed that the position of absolute values and pure art may be reached only through the initial immersion in historicity. The metaphysical position resembles the horizon visible only from the historical reality because “there is no second bank of history” which could mean an absolute realm existing in itself separately from history. “To be historical, it is necessary to be transhistorical. But this sentence, reverse, is also true […]”.

In this regard, Miłosz’s convictions concerning the sphere of values are to some extent parallel with those held by Márai. While for Gombrowicz the exilic disengagement from History was important from an esthetical point of view as a condition required by the poetic side of his life, the exilic fate for Márai meant an ethical choice and the only resource left in political situation denying values he believed in. If the immersion in historicity may open a way to some

---

49 Gombrowicz, Polish Memories, 18-22. Comparing the Polish tradition with the image of individuality in Western literature (especially French), Gombrowicz noted that the individual in the latter was much more significant. “There, a person and that person’s existence are a serious matter, perhaps more important than the fates of states and nations” (22) while the “human life in Poland is cheap” (21-22).

50 Miłosz, “Gombrowiczowi” (1953), in Konfrontacje, 65.

51 Ibid., 66-68.

52 Interestingly, Varga mentioned an important ethical dimension of Márai’s autobiographical writings which depict “a moral portrait of their author” and are based on the perception of writing “as a form of action.” Varga, op. cit., 25, 26. It could be interpreted as an action of reformulating one’s both personal and collective identities in the changing historical circumstances.
absolutisations and transcendental sphere of values (Miłosz, Márai), Gombrowicz’s “disengagement” regards History as a way of deepening his subjective relativisation and a pretext to continue his narrative self-fashioning in the Diary. Miłosz finally asked Gombrowicz-deserter who was continuously eluding various forms of consistent identity expected and constructed by others: “May we, however, define ourselves through this self-defence all the time?”53 This question will guide me in the next chapter devoted to Gombrowicz’s diaristic practice which consists of two modes of self-narration (public and private). I will argue that while in the Diary Gombrowicz was fleeing the identities in which readers would like to catch him, in the secret Kronos, the author did not need this self-defensive tone anymore.

Considering the decision to leave the homelands or return to the place of origin (Bartol), the writers’ motivations, their political circumstances and time of emigration differed. While Gombrowicz embarked on a ship heading for Argentina in August 1939 so just on the eve of the Second World War, Márai decided to leave Hungary in 1948, thus having experienced atrocities of the war and witnessed the changing political regimes in Hungary shifting from fascism to communism. Bartol came back to Trieste just after the Second World War to take some official posts within South Slavic cultural life in the city.

The question which has been many times raised in the studies on Gombrowicz’s life and work is whether the writer’s stay in Argentina was merely the result of some favourable coincidence or was it earlier planned. In other words, was Gombrowicz’s exilic fate accidental or intentional? Was his decision to leave Europe spontaneous or deliberate? Stawiarska mentions Gombrowicz’s prophetic awareness of the upcoming events which proved to be noticed in the interwar period by other writers forming the literary circle of café Ziemiańska in Warsaw. Polish writer Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, later in exile as well, recalled one of his meetings with Gombrowicz as follows: “On a bench in Aleje Ujazdowskie he gave me such a lesson of political pessimism (today it should be called: clairvoyance) in connection with the onset of the war, that only at dawn I returned half-conscious to my room in Żelazna from a lonely wandering around Warsaw.”54 In the opinion of Kiss, the 1930s was the period when the atmosphere of being “between two mill wheels” (expression of Hungarian writer László Németh) commenced in being perceptible among the inhabitants of Central Europe.55 The three protagonists of the dissertation were not immune to this common spirit and it had to influence Gombrowicz’ decisions regarding exile as well.

---

53 Miłosz, “Gombrowiczowi” (1953), 67.
55 Kiss, Polska tragedia w oczach Węgrów, translated by Jerzy Snopek, in Powinowactwa, by Kiss, 94.
His impressions from his travel to Vienna at the time of Anschluss and to fascist Italy, express anxiety about Europe’s future. This travel could give him already an inkling of how the political situation would evolve in Europe and thus could also entail his “preparations for the escape” from the Old Continent. Gombrowicz’s intimate diary Kronos, in the part written retrospectively about the period of the late 1930s, abounds with short statements revealing the writer’s increasing anxiety and tension. Already under the year of 1936 Gombrowicz wrote: “and I was already pestered with fear of the war” adding under the date of 1937: “fear of the war increases.” Under the year 1938, the writer noted: “Great fear […] fear forces me to beg for a poison […] fear, to escape.” Gombrowicz described the beginning of the year 1939 as follows: “The New Year probably in Adria (this new dance, which seemed to me a dance of death.” The writer’s presumption of the possible outcome of the unstable political situation at the end of the 1930s could make him plan his escape from Europe.

Gombrowicz’s travel to Argentina was thus an instinctive escape “driven by a very strong premonition of the disaster.” Suchanow added that the writer’s decision was influenced by the general perception of the situation in Europe as unpredictable and insecure. Moreover, the information about the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact of non-aggression signed at the end of August 1939 reached him in Argentina. During the voyage passengers were well informed about the political situation in the world and in Poland as there was a radio connection with the country. Furthermore, many Poles living abroad, who established contact with passengers during some stops in particular harbours (Buenos Aires, Montevideo), tried to convince them not to go back to Europe because of the approaching conflict.

Was Gombrowicz also influenced by these voices?

Even though the escape from Europe could be planned earlier, still the decision to stay in Argentina was not easy, at least according to memories of a person witnessing the writer’s hesitation in the harbour in Buenos Aires on the day of departure. Jeremi Stempowski, the representative of Gdynia-America Ocean line also organizing Chrobry’s inaugural voyage, in which Gombrowicz took part, recalled (hence to some extent mythologising as well) the scene when the writer, having

---

56 Olejniczak, op. cit., 59, 73. Memories of Gombrowicz’s contemporaries prove the writer’s earlier planned departure from Europe to Argentina.
58 Suchanow, Argentyńskie przygody, 27.
59 Ibid., 30.
already embarked, left the deck just before the ship set sail to Europe. In the end Gombrowicz, unwilling to be engaged in the approaching avalanche of historical events in Europe, decided to stay in Latin America. His Argentinean friend, Miguel Grinberg could thus describe the writer as “an acrobat balancing on a line stretched over the world, which with unimaginable precision was crashing into ruins on its way.” The atmosphere of increasing anxiety in respect to the Polish and European future influenced Gombrowicz’s decision not to return to Poland. While Márai needed 18 months since his return to Budapest from the short travel to the West to make the final decision about leaving his home country for good, Gombrowicz needed several days to make up his mind during his stay in Buenos Aires from August 20 until the ship’s departure to Europe scheduled for August 25.

Unlike Gombrowicz who took advantage of the coincidence of his travel to Argentina and the outbreak of the war, Márai’s decision to return to Hungary was made, notwithstanding the political circumstances, both before and after the war when he had the chance to stay in the West during his travels. Márai’s burden of wartime experiences and his long inner struggle whether he should flee or stay in the country stand in striking contrast to Gombrowicz’s anxiety stemming more from the grim predictions about the European future than hardships of the present moment. Even though the war trapped Márai in Hungary and Budapest – this “burning house,” in the end, having openly reflected on the chance of real escape, he rejected it. Márai recalled one meeting offering such possibility as follows: “One lady visits me and makes a proposal: the following day I could be in Cairo – with plane of the Red Cross, with secret help of gestapo – if I pay six hundred thousand pengő or find somebody who pays million pengő and gets with me in a passenger cabin.” Márai thanked for the proposal but refused to accept it not due to the lack of money which in this case did not pose an insurmountable obstacle. As the writer claimed, in the end it would be possible to find a rich person who could help him. What stopped Márai was his need to remain faithful to his main task as the writer. Furthermore, he believed in a common fate which he would not be able to influence in any considerable way. “I do not want to leave from here. I do not think, that I would be

---

63 Suchanow, Argentyńskie przygody, 14, 25-30.
64 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 80.
wrong, I know precisely what will happen. But one needs to withstand this. I have to finish book, then to live or die, as the fate will decide.”

In his articles in the interwar period, Márai expressed the same conviction about impossibility and inappropriateness of escape from the common fate, from challenges posed by the historical moment and the obligation to take responsibility for one’s actions and epoch s/he lives in. On the one hand in 1926, on his way to the Near East, the young journalist felt a momentary “compulsion to flee” from people and European problems, politics (press) as well as a need to rescue oneself by chameleonlike assimilation to the new cultural background and oblivion of his former self. On the other hand, he was also convinced that, similar to the unavoidable transience of individual life, everything he would like to evade was still always accompanying him. Travel compared with a dream could not guarantee distance and thus any hope of escape was naïve because one will always wake up back in the previous state and situation.

Márai did not want to become a “secret islander.” He criticised an omnipresent in everyday situations escapist attitude manifesting in inclination for dodge, self-enclosure in invisible hideouts underpinned with “crisis of conscience” or “resentment towards the world.” Such insular attitude became even more explicit in the widespread phenomenon of massive purchase of islands near the English coast (“such a great demand for islands deserves to come under historiographer’s pen”) and those more secluded existing “beyond dangerous fields of history, somewhat on the Moon or in such a nook of the Pacific Ocean where European uproar, hitting in waves of time and distance, refracts […].” The escape is in vain because “desires and troubles, responsibility and worries will follow a man even to the eternal silence of the Pacific Ocean.” In Márai’s view, it was the continuous transformation in time and space but also some internal, spiritual change unfolding in the human being that made any attempt to escape the common fate doomed to failure. Is this ceaseless change in its both external and inner variations a metaphor for the immediacy of History and the strengthened interwovenness of a man in the course of events of the twentieth century?

Convinced about the inevitability of individual, unavoidable entanglement in common fate Márai at first after the Second World War decided to stay in Hungary where he experienced increasing isolation imposed by the communist regime which viewed him as an undesirable, outmoded trace of the bourgeois past. In 1948, in the Diary, he mentioned some criticisms of his work made by the communist literary critic (György Lukács). At the same time, Márai sensed some

---

65 Ibid., 77.
66 Márai Śładami bogów, translated by Irena Makarewicz (Warszawa, 2021), 11-12, 18-19.
67 Márai, Kronika Niedzielna, 102, 54-60; 101-105.
loss of artistic exterritoriality caused by readers’ letters which were critical in tone and excessively direct in addressing the author. Moreover, Márai in the end faced what he feared most, namely his publisher’s nationalisation. This was one of the most decisive incentives to finally leave the country.\textsuperscript{68}

However, what was still keeping Márai in Hungary was a certain fear that he would be identified with other Hungarian emigrants fleeing the country for political reasons. As he emphasised: “I have nothing in common neither with fascists nor with the later emigration. If I emigrate I will do it alone, similarly as in the country where I live and will die alone.”\textsuperscript{69} Márai also maintained the distance towards the organized groups of Hungarian emigrants while living abroad.\textsuperscript{70} In response to his friend (also emigrant), who mentioned some difficult contacts with other Hungarians abroad, Marai remarked that it would rather constitute a broader problem of all emigrants and their relationships within particular ethnic groups abroad. Instead of solidarity or readiness to help, these groups should be characterised by envy and suspicion.\textsuperscript{71} In the first place of his exilic life in Geneva Marai noticed that even though there were many Hungarians around him, he should not establish any relationships with them.\textsuperscript{72} Later already in the USA he remarked: “Here, nothing connects me with anyone and anything (and least of all with Hungarian emigration) – and this is a terrible but clear situation.” While staying in New York Márai commented on one meeting with Hungarian immigrants as follows: “What is it that on the occasion of such meetings turns out to be almost unbearable for me? Probably the fact that such survivors like us personify even more everything that could not be tolerated in the country.” In America Márai mentioned his need to deal with two “serious dangers”: climate and Hungarians. Consequently, one of his tasks as the exiled writer was to maintain an independent position between the postures of immigrant and emigrant.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{68} Márai, 	extit{Dziennik}, vol. 1, 421, 424, 430. Márai recalled the moment of the farewell with his publisher as one of the most important days in his life when the task of vocation was replaced by the task of existence.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 419.

\textsuperscript{70} Zeltner in his biography of Márai mentioned the writer’s isolation during his last stage of exile in the USA. Márai maintained distance towards Hungarian emigrants who could either have some relations with the Horthy’s regime (going abroad in 1945) or coming later in 1948 could have contacts with communists. Not only did he refuse contact with other emigrants. Asked for participation in official meetings and events he was turning down invitations for lectures and conferences. Zeltner, Sándor Márai, 184.

\textsuperscript{71} Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 156.

\textsuperscript{72} Márai, 	extit{Dziennik}, vol. 1,  457. “Now it still happens to me that I am happy hearing the Hungarian language, I look at this direction if I see a familiar face. I must disaccustom from this. One needs to sympathize, help, if possible, but one cannot make acquaintances.” “It is not allowed to maintain any contacts with Hungarian emigration, at best it is possible to show nursing assistance in illness. But the fact is that in an infectious hospital – and emigration is such an infectious hospital – nurses are just as sick as patients.” (Márai, 	extit{Dziennik}, vol. 2, 296)

\textsuperscript{73} Márai, 	extit{Dziennik}, vol. 2, 305, 369, 222, 371. “It is possible that the Hungarians will soon take away from me this existence related to work for the radio. They fight here like angry wolves.” (222). “I will always be a debtor of Hungarianness, but in no sense would I ever want to depend on Hungarians.” (224)
Gombrowicz chose the similar solitary path of avoiding Polish emigrants’ organisations which he was criticising for their excessive immersion in the past, idealisation of the Polish culture and national history. From the beginning of his stay in Argentina the misunderstandings between Gombrowicz and his compatriots (representing the Polish emigrant institutions), whose patriotic feelings were incited by the outbreak of the war, caused the writer’s non-existence as an artist in the Polish emigrant circles and their press (until the 1950s). His grotesque novel “Trans-Atlantyk,” in which he ridiculed the closed Polish diaspora and Polish national myths, was received with great indignation among his compatriots abroad who viewed the author as a scandalous proponent of anti-patriotism and immorality. Alejandro Rússovich, one of Gombrowicz’s closest Argentinean friends, recalled a change in the writer’s behaviour when confronted with Poles. In these interactions Gombrowicz “[…] started to be tense. One had the impression that the situation suddenly surpasses the real frames of the meeting. […] The presence of Poles was reminding him of the problems of ‘Polishness,’ so acute in his life and work. One sensed, that he was making a painful effort in order to stand up to the task of all this.”

Gombrowicz with his radical individualism could not be easily accepted by either the Polish emigrant environment or by the Polish communist circles. He remained foreign to both sides. Jarzębski noted that while for the emigrants Gombrowicz seemed to be “virtually ‘a traitor’ or in the best case a blasphemer-jester whose attitude was not in harmony with the seriousness of the historical moment, for the other, a representative of the decadent bourgeois art that did not suit the vision of a socialist culture of the future; for both – a dangerous individualist, not appropriate to be politically used.”

What differed Márai, Gombrowicz and Bartol as emigrants were not only the time of going abroad and the place of exile but also the aims which the emigrant condition was supposed to fulfil. The latter aspect was interrelated with the choice of place but also with differences in temperament. In this respect, whereas Argentina, which offered Gombrowicz the second youth, immaturity, and the opportunity to make his next debut meant to him a leap to the unknown in a spirit of defamiliarisation, Italy for Márai was a place to some extent familiar because like Hungary it was deeply touched by historical changes brought by the war. He was not searching for immaturity devoid of the burden of History.

74 Suchanow, Argentyńskie przygody, 46.
75 Alejandro Rússovich in Gombrowicz w Argentynie, R. Gombrowicz, 151.
Furthermore, Márai perceived Italy as a place breathing with its ancient past and humanism. The country did not seem to him to be under threat of the dehumanizing post-war Systems equivalent to the Eastern communism imbued with “Historical Role” and the Western capitalism founded on the “dogma of Development.”\textsuperscript{77} Fascism and bolshevism represented to him two the same forms of “antihumanism” and “rebellions” against the “liberal, bourgeois, humanist heritage” which rooted in the Renaissance came to the foreground during the French Revolution. In the twentieth century, this heritage was undermined by the two ideologies.\textsuperscript{78} Notwithstanding some hopes for better future, manifesting in assumption of possible return to the “liberal-bourgeois-humanistic culture”\textsuperscript{79} and its continuation, Márai’s view of the upcoming times was not optimistic. The writer noted in his diary: “[…] I have a vision of the future. Two collectivist superpowers, America, and the Soviets, will naturally grind the peoples of Europe making out of them collectivist states. Life on the human scale will last the longest here, on the western coast of the Mediterranean. That is why one has to live here.”\textsuperscript{80} In another note he described Italy as a mysterious place imbued with “a wise attitude, full of resignation and readiness to make one’s life independent from the History’s assassinations.”\textsuperscript{81} Life in Italy thus meant for Márai both Stoicism (“resignation”) and distance from the whimsical History which endangered individuality.

For Márai the present moment in Italy somehow naturally inhabited the remaining traces of the distant past, it “organically grew into the past” (“in the ruins of Caesar’s palace a cote stands, […] in the cellar of Cicero’s house they grow truffle”\textsuperscript{82}). The continuity in time and some coexistence of the present life with the past could be important for a person coming from a place marked with historical discontinuities where the present moment swept all traces of the past times. In this context, Márai presented his stroll in the neighbourhood of Cuma, where one thousand years BC the Greek settlement brought to Europe the seeds of culture, as important mental preparation for his travel from Italy to America, thus from a place burdened by numerous layers of the past to a place dominated by a fleeting present moment. The sites in close distance from Naples symbolized for him a larger homeland: a European culture that also embraced Hungary.\textsuperscript{83} This continuity in time imbued with creative forces inherent in tradition was also one of the things Márai noted after his

\textsuperscript{77} Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 326.
\textsuperscript{78} Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 131.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 131. Still, Márai hoped that after the collapse of communism, the next generation in Hungary, nostalgic about what was taken from them, would restore the bond with this heritage and continue it making it more perfect.
\textsuperscript{80} Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 194.
\textsuperscript{81} Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 321.
\textsuperscript{82} Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 17.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 146.
return to Italy in 1967. He characterised the faces and gestures of people encountered in Naples as having originated hundreds of thousands of years ago. In the countryside in Campania, he found a “primeval way of life.” A waiter in an old café seemed to him as “somebody, who remained here from the settecento” and who once could also serve Giacomo Casanova. He opposed the communist identification of conservatism with inertia. “Conservatism, which takes strength from the battery of tradition is a creative energy. In Naples, this conservative force is perceptible in everything.”

Continuity is accompanied by stability. Salerno, Naples, and southern Italy seemed to Márai unchanged and the same when he came there for the first time and the second time after the American intermezzo.

With regard to Bartol’s motivations for returning to his hometown after the Second World War, in his autobiography he mentioned several dimensions of his stay in Trieste: public, private, and intimate. As a public person, he was an “average cultural activist” whose task was to contribute to rebuilding the fundaments of Slovene national culture once flourishing in Trieste and destroyed by fascists. Privately, he came to Trieste because he regarded himself as an “inveterate chronicler of his time.” There was also an intimate aspect of his decision to return to the homeland which was a need to find his “submerged youth.” The last personal aim of his stay in Trieste resulted in autobiographical fragments being published during a decade in the Slovene literary journal titled Razgledi and in his further diaristic reflections on “historical sense” (zgodovinski čut).

Argentina, with its connotations of youth, immaturity, and lack of historical burden, was aesthetically important and exploited by Gombrowicz struggling for fame as a writer. Italy was appropriate for Márai (besides financial aspects of lower than in America costs of living) from the ethical point of view as a place where people were forced by History to make ethical choices and where life was still lived in alignment with human values. In Naples, as Márai commented in the diary, he managed to find some refuge and solidarity of poor people who with their optimistic attitude were reminding him of being more trustful in life which in its depths possess some miraculous dimension. Interestingly, while already being in the USA Márai expressed a longing for “the other South” (Florida, the West India Islands, Spain, Jamaica or Cuba) which could bring

84 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 27-28, 43, 44.
85 Ibid., 42. “Something stable, which chains people here – the local as well as foreigners who get lost here, leave, and then come back. Everything here is on its place.”
86 Bartol, Romantika, 302. “Ko sem prišel v Trst kot kateri koli povprečni kulturni aktivist pomagat pri gradnji po fašistih porušenih temeljev naše nekoč cvetoče narodne kulture (kot nepoboljšljivi kronist svoje dobe sem prišel v Trst samo kot privatnik, intimno pa sem prišel iskat svojo potopljeno mladost) […]”
him relief from the American merchant, industrial and protestant culture. However, it was not a presumption of some lesser degree of historicity, inherent in Gombrowicz’s image of Argentina, that nourished Márai’s yearning for new places in the sunny South. It could be rather incited by his memories of time spent in Italy and bond with a culture founded on Catholicism. Bartol’s stay in Trieste was of both professional and personal character combining official function with personal interest to rediscover his youth and the bygone epoch. In contrast to the motivations of Gombrowicz and Márai, Bartol’s emigration from Ljubljana—a return to his hometown—, was enabled by his approval of the new post-war political, social order in Yugoslavia. Consequently, the temporal dimension of Bartol’s stay in Trieste implied an interesting coexistence of the engagement in the present moment (perspective of an official fulfilling the communist agenda in cultural matters) and the nostalgic immersion in the past (perspective of a child and youth).

In the opinion of Said, the life of exiled writers is stretched between a home of origin with its cultural heritage, language, and newly adopted home abroad, between familiarity and unknown. He called this sphere in-between “the perilous territory of not-belonging […]” It could be both a perilous and schizophrenic state because, as Márai expressed it metaphorically, it resembles standing in front of the closed doors, either on the side of life or on another one of death, without knowing where. Later in another place he remarked: “An emigrant, like a cosmonaut, finds out that he has no fixed point to lean on. He is equally at ease with homeliness and homelessness.” Márai expressed his feeling of not-belonging several times in his Diary particularly often in the beginning of his exile. Some weeks after his arrival in Naples in 1948 he noted: “I still do not live here but I already do not live in the country.” In another note from the same year Márai noticed:

All exiles – whether voluntary or not – stay overnight and not dwell. I comfort myself that somewhere not far away from here Ovid was staying. And for some time on one of the opposite islands Ulysses was living when he had escaped from the embraces of Circe and sirens. […] All, who were not born here, ‘dwell’ in this way, not even on the earth, but between earth, sky, and water, somehow in the wind.

Referring to the travel from Budapest to Geneva which commenced his exilic fate Márai noted: “This travel […] is not even ‘the leap to darkness,’ but darkness itself. Some kind of self-

---

88 Ibid, 354.
89 Said, Reflections on Exile, 177.
90 Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 129.
91 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 165.
92 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 477.
93 Ibid., 474.
annihilation.” The exilic condition meant to Márai uprooting, transitoriness (fleeing like the wind) and darkness, self-annihilation. It implied some openness which imposed a double movement: one of approaching something unknown ahead and the other of distancing oneself from everything left behind. Márai compared this openness to an abyss on which steep edge he was finding himself each morning.

Bartol’s exilic condition of in-betweenness, embracing simultaneous experiences of estrangement and familiarity, acquired an additional dimension of changeable perspectives of the minority (life in Trieste) and the majority (exile in Ljubljana). His exilic self-identification was stretched between Trieste and Ljubljana but also between hometown and foreign places outside Yugoslavia. His emigrant fate commenced after the Great War when together with his family he moved to Ljubljana. As he remarked in the diary in 1946:

[...] In fact I have never been conscious that I am an emigrant, apart from the first two years, when I was attending the 7. and 8. class of gymnasium in Ljubljana and all were calling me ‘a refugee’. And, however, I was the emigrant and I was behaving accordingly. All my life up till now has been in fact “tragedy of emigrant”.

Emigrant fate of uprootedness was in Bartol’s view marked with schizophrenia (“a typical emigrant disease”) and adventurousness. As he remarked, even if his personality was not of an adventurous nature, it was a life that pushed him into “adventurous situations.” Life was to uproot him from his hometown and as he noticed, a schizophrenic becomes adventurous when s/he is deprived of a home. Besides factually following the emigrant path of adventure, Bartol lived the exilic condition out also in his literature abundant in adventurous heroes.

In his further reflections on schizophrenia and adventurousness characteristic for emigrants, Bartol placed the roots of these phenomena in two factors of objective and subjective nature. This analysis of the relationship between the emigrant and the new host society seems worth mentioning
as it could allow the author to recognize himself to some degree in its conclusions. Bartol described the subjective dimension of the emigrant condition as follows:

A man is taken from his surrounding and floats somehow in the air. He is no longer anchored anywhere, all the world seems to him open. He is freed from all bonds. He acquires a taste for adventure, for risking his life (somehow the same way as workers!). He acquires bravery. He has nothing to lose.\(^{100}\)

The objective aspects of the exilic condition direct attention to the way an emigrant is treated by a new, host society. “Society perceives an emigrant – foreigner to be an intruder. It does not welcome him, closes door into its houses […]. Here he must struggle to gain an entrance.”\(^{101}\) An emigrant, who brings something new with him/her has to fight with a new society and fate. A newcomer is neither accepted nor understood by the locals who are afraid of him/her and disorder s/he can provoke. In the same way, Bartol perceived himself as not accepted and not understood by other Slovene writers such as Juš and Ferdo Kozaks as well as Josip Vidmar.\(^{102}\)

Bartol argued that in the peaceful times an adventurous man triggers disorder because “when there is a peace, an adventurous-emigrant-artist is a storm, or helps to sow it,”\(^{103}\) as if he were a wind which only in a full swing finds its fulfilment and peace. However, in the hectic and stormy moments, the emigrant calms down. As an example, Bartol recalled his colleague’s (Slovene poet, Anton Vodnik) testimony of his behaviour. “Tone Vodnik could not forget how in winter 1931, in the middle of the storm of elections, when all people were rushing from the café Union here and there, I was peacefully and calmly at some table writing ‘Lopež’ [drama debut published in 1932, A. T.]. The storm is for an adventurous man a normal state, he calms down in it.”\(^{104}\) The more hectic the political atmosphere was, the calmer its observer became as if the excessive vivacity of his inner self were projected into the outside world.

---

\(^{100}\) Ibid., “[…] človek je iztrgan iz svoje sredine in plava nekako v zraku. Nikjer ni več zasidran, ves svet se mu zdi odprt. Razvezan je vseh vezi. Dobi okus za avanturo, za tvregnov življenje. (Enako nekako delavci!) Pridobi na pogum. Nima česa izgubiti.”

\(^{101}\) Ibid. “Družba občuti emigranta – tujca kot vsiljivca. Otepa se ga, zapre mu duri v svoje domove, v družbo. Tu si mora priboriti vstop.”

\(^{102}\) Ibid.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., “Ko je mir, je pustolovec-emigrant-umetnik vihar, ali ga pomaga sejati.”

3. *Cultural orders of time in exile, temporal, and linguistic aspects of exilic self-identification*

The dual estrangement experienced in the exilic present, equivalent to simultaneous uprooting from a place of origin, one’s past and otherness of host country, clearly combines the spatial component, namely distance in space and cultural dimension. The latter is more interesting since it implies a phenomenon less explicit but particularly important in building one’s narrative self-identification, which is the issue of temporality. The temporal aspect embraces here an order of time predominant within specific cultures encountered in a place of exile and individual perception of time as well as their reciprocal relations.

The exilic condition marked by temporal in-betweenness implies a certain oscillation between detached past and unknown future which cannot stem from the present rooted in the past. Contrary to the perception of time in terms of linear continuity, time in exile seems to undergo a contraction to *hic et nunc* which can gravitate either more to the past (nostalgia) or to the future (hope). Time in exile ceases to flow steadily and does not succumb easily to attempts of order (planning). In 1954 Márai, “engulfed” by time in emigration, noticed that “time devours our plans. Time has never seemed as voracious as it is now.” The question here should be raised about the ways in which Gombrowicz, Márai and Bartol managed to domesticate the ambiguous, temporal dimension of the exilic condition of in-betweenness manifesting in the individual suspension between distant past and foreign future. All of them as emigrants-diarists were immersed in an unknown and fragile present, being in a constant diaristic search for some temporary delineation of the self. Where did they seek for a comforting voice, in memories of the past, in hopes about the future or in a fleeting moment equivalent to this ever more increasing abyss between “sphere of experiences” and “horizon of expectations” (Koselleck)? The temporal dimension of exile understood as the present moment imbued with nostalgia and hope, should be nuanced, and problematised considering the intensity of these affective states which varied in each case depending on the authors’ historical experiences, worldviews, and expectations. The exilic self-understandings

---

105 Silva Rojas, Armijo Nuñez and Nuñez Erices, “Philosophical and Psychopathological Perspective of Exile.” Referring to the reflections of José Solanes (psychiatrist and intellectual living in exile and reflecting on exilic condition) the article’s authors problematise the experience of exile in terms of time: “The linear conception of time in which past, present, and future are interpreted as continuity becomes obsolete in exile; it seems that is something only possible in the homeland: the originary own space. Therefore, it may be said that in the temporal condition of the exiled, time stands still. Looking at the past with nostalgia and future with hope.”

106 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 2, 373. “Time devours everything, engulfs me in this emigration. We still think that we are ‘patient’, but in reality, we are not patient, only volitionless” (374).
of Gombrowicz, Márai and Bartol embraced different configurations of simultaneously present future and past, hopes and memories, prospective view, and nostalgia.

Gombrowicz pondered on the issue of temporality in respect to exilic self-identification several times in the Diary. How to find the old self? Is it possible to annihilate the temporal distance of many years and to make contact with oneself from the past? Is the restoration of the lost continuity in time and personal integrity feasible? Some diaristic notes are literary negative answers to these questions. The irreversible flow of time made each endeavour to find a bygone self inevitably doomed to failure. The simultaneous fluidity of two temporal rivers (“double is the flowing, double the movement […]”\textsuperscript{107}), one flowing inside the Diary’s narrator and the second one constituting the world outside him, undermined every attempt to restore the identity by comparing the present self in exile with the past one at home. Being in time precludes integrity. The sensation of the double, concurrent flows breaks the impression of a seemingly unitary self, due to the contradictory, simultaneous emotions: a sense of loss and desire for entirety.

Yet is this entirety of oneself at all accessible and desirable? Is the past reality an indispensable foundation of personal identity and thus worth seeking, reliving? If not, how could a different attitude to the past shape one’s self-identification? In one place the Diary’s narrator asks himself: “Perhaps there is some sort of love of the past which rivets me?” He gives a categorical answer: “No, I have made a specialty of freedom and the school of exile strengthened that which was in me from birth, the bitter joy of separating from that which separates itself from me.”\textsuperscript{108} The two temporal shores of alterity (past and present), incessantly diverging and outstripping the individual need of familiarity, compels him to separate and observe the flow of time at a distance. For Gombrowicz’s diaristic self the only endurable past was the one perceived as something left behind and thus giving him more freedom. As a newcomer to Argentina, he could view himself as “one of the many disinherited deprived of even a longing for the past that the pampa was receiving.”\textsuperscript{109} Trying to sum up his previous experience and define his emotional relation to Argentina during the journey to Europe, the writer/narrator admitted his inclination for the distance in time accompanied by the one gained in space. “Yes, and one can love one’s past from a distance,

\textsuperscript{107} “To look from solid ground onto moving water, yes, this can be done. But why should one moving river look at another? Double is the flowing, double the movement and double the noise…” Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 533-534.
\textsuperscript{108} Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 1, 236
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 171.
as I am being removed not just in time but in space…carried away, subject to the uninterrupted process of growing more distant, of tearing away […]”

Instead of being a promise of the integrity of one’s personality, the past reality becomes a threat of its deformity. Recalling the interwar period in Poland from the exilic distance in Argentina Gombrowicz noted:

Today I am devoting a little time to revisiting those years—of independence. To destroy them.

My present dire predicament demands this. If I agree inwardly that they were the way they were supposed to be—blossoming, healthy plants on fertile soil while I am something dying in a desert, a cripple cast onto an alien shore, without a homeland, etc.,…an exile, astray, lost…what would be left except to resign from all meaning? Therefore: I have to mobilize all the strong points of my situation thereby showing that I can live better and more authentically.

The writer contraposed here the image of a nostalgic emigrant and his mythologising trait of memory which overestimates the past (“good, old times”) to the detriment of the present situation with the individual search for meaning realized always in the present. The Diary’s narrator was looking backwards not to save his past from oblivion and inscribe it within his narrative identity but to destroy history and liberate himself from its burden. He was suspicious about the restorative capacities of memory as a source of meaning for the present self. The past perceived in terms of a burden threatening originality and individuality was rather an obstacle for self-determination.

In several diaristic notes, Márai made an interesting comparison between two phases of his life before and after the departure from Budapest with reference to divergent rhythms of temporality and his two different attitudes towards the passage of time. Still in Hungary in a growing hurry to leave the country he sensed that time was flowing faster towards some aim and better future. Impatiently looking forward to a change he was “hastening the time.” Afterwards, however, in exile, the time seemed to him as devoid of an awaiting promise of change. Its rhythm thus slowed down and did not encourage a prospective attitude anymore. Consequently, in exile Márai ceased to head for the future focusing instead on the “interlude” of the present moment which as a dominant temporal plane of life writing meant a shift from journalism to diaristic practice. The writer juxtaposed rhythms of time, changeable depending on spatial-temporal coordinates of his life. These

110 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 596.
111 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 1, 196.
112 For more on temporal aspect of Gombrowicz’s Diary see: Katarzyna Chmielewska, Strategie podmiotu. Dziennik Witolda Gombrowicza (Łódź, 2010), 113-116.
divergent paces of time were accompanied by interrelated, similarly changeable individual attitudes towards its passage.

When I was departing from the country, in spirit I was hastening days and weeks, heading for the unknown aim, ‘change’, ‘solution’, I was hastening the time—and now I live according to totally different rhythm, slower, more drowsily, I would like to hold back the time as if I felt and knew that it is not worth hurrying up towards ‘change’; this interlude is the best what we can expect.113

In his homeland, Márai was perceiving the passage of time as a continuous flow hurriedly heading for future and change. In exile on the contrary the time was marked by loss. The writer did not perceive it in terms of a promise of an upcoming experience but rather in terms of relief from the hopeless present. What became important from the point of view of the present moment was not what would happen the next day but the fact that yesterday is already behind.

When in the morning I turn the calendar page, I always think: ‘One less.’ Formerly, I was not thinking that way. Formerly – when? – formerly I was hurrying up every morning to turn a piece of paper, I was hurrying together with time to something new, good, to some change. I was wasting my time. Today I feel that a day passed irreversibly and this is more important; not that tomorrow will be the next day but that the one yesterday passed.114

One of the interpretations of this change in perception of time might be of course the process of ageing. In one of the notes taken in 1943 Márai expressed this prospective view of young people oriented always towards the future and the alternative attitude towards time acquired in older age and focused on the present as follows:

To run towards the future because otherwise they will miss it. Only with the passage of time do we learn that in life there is something more exciting than the future. It is the present. The present is a gift for an ageing man. When a man discovers it, he becomes suddenly the rich. And nobody is able to take this wealth from him.115

However, another explanation of this privileged role of the present moment puts to the foreground the role of History and its discontinuities which deeply affected Márai’s perception of time in the country during the war and later in exile shaping also his diaristic practice. During the long exilic odyssey and before in times of the Second World War the present moment replaced the future-

114 Ibid., 359.
115 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 18.
oriented perspective becoming the predominant and the most important temporal plane of the writer’s existence ("everyone is living the moment"\textsuperscript{116}).

The present time came to the foreground also due to a hassle triggered by the new situation of exile which first required some adaptation in the moment \textit{hic et nunc} and thus, at least in the beginning, did not allow for nostalgia. As Márai noted: “I do not feel ‘nostalgia for the country.’ Only somehow ‘there is no me.’ I get up, lie down, read. It is possible to live without a homeland. But it is not a real life.” Márai was emphasizing the unreality of the exilic condition as subject to some kind of self-annihilation. Moreover, he pointed out that in exile there was no time for nostalgia. “Exile – both forced and voluntary – as each situation, transforms itself in the obligatory task of everyday life. After three weeks the left homeland does not hurt […] there is only reality, the present, permission of stay, housing problems, financial concerns, and letter which we await in vain. The rest is a haze, a cloud of water vapor.”\textsuperscript{117} The present moment in exile abundant in everyday affairs and preoccupations did not leave time for an excessive fixation on the past.

Moreover, in exile, the passage of time assumed a cyclical rhythm for Márai. In new circumstances of exile, on his birthday in 1949, the writer divided the time of his life into seven-year cycles. It enabled him to distinguish the worst last cycle which embraced the time of war and the ensuing communist period. He described this most recent cycle of his life (1942-1949) revolving around the recurring category of loss as follows: “If it is true that seven-year cycles exist in life, so the last seven years were for me an entire, absolute annihilation. I lost everything: home, homeland, culture […] flat, publisher, work and source of income, everything. After my forties I became a beggar whom I have never been in my life.”\textsuperscript{118}

The diaristic practice allowed Márai to reconfigure his inner temporality which was not following the historical order of time dictated by political circumstances and “cultural regimes of historicity” encountered in places of exile. He experienced some dissonance in terms of temporality in America where the order of time seemed to him devoid of the past and focused only on the present moment. Even though the writer tried to focus all his attention and energy on the moment \textit{hic et nunc} (and thusly become in line with the predominant American order of time?), he could not escape from the “phantoms” of the past and the future. In the general spirit of the newness of the fleeting present moment, the Cloisters Museum in New York, which has on display a rich collection of Medieval art, provided Márai with a feeling of historical \textit{longue durée} and served as a treatment for

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 45.  
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 466.  
\textsuperscript{118} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 2, 31.
his nostalgia towards Europe. Márai’s sensation of dissonance stemming from his inability to follow the American order of time also meant impossibility of déjà vu. Whereas in Europe he could experience it very often, in the USA such a feeling of familiarity in places unknown before or within new situations was inaccessible.

Not only did Márai perceive the American “regime of historicity” as confined to the present moment but also the passage of time was for him too slow there. “The American ‘rhythm of life’ seems to me rather slow. I came from Europe, so I am in a hurry, because I have an innate sense of threat. Take your time mode is not my rhythm. I am not sure that I will have enough time – because I came from Europe.” In other note, however, taken in 1958 Márai commented on his wife’s (Ilona Matzner) perception of time in America, which for her was passing faster than in Europe, as follows:

Could here function another measure of time since there are different measures of length and volume here? Maybe the local hour does not have sixty but only forty eight minutes, the same way as a meter has here only ninety centimetres and a liter eight and a half deciliters? It is possible. From my time – in secret – a few units were taken out because time is money.

In America both the perception of time and the resultant everyday life preoccupations (self-confidence undermined by neurosis, comfort eroded by uncertainty about job, its loss) seemed alien to Márai. The writer coming from Europe, where he was faced with situations posing threat to his life, perceived preoccupations of Americans as not so serious. On the other shore of the Atlantic, he was more concerned about already familiar to him issue of survival than with the predominant in America matter of making a living.

With regard to the retrospective plane of perception and its intensiveness Márai certainly surpassed Gombrowicz. While still in Hungary, he directed his view towards the past to find the strength to emigrate and to face the present moment marked by the war, the siege of Budapest and its immediate aftermath. In the “Memoir,” Márai recalled his walks in the ruined Budapest which constituted his daily routine. He was visiting familiar places, once inhabited by him or another

---

119 Ibid., 367, 459. “All our watches brought from Europe function here wrong and show the hours they want,” 234. “These imported French medieval stones live here in the same extraterritorial absence of all references as all Europeans. As me,” 332.
120 Ibid., 219.
121 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 3, 64.
122 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 211.
123 Márai’s extraordinary way of preparation to exile was a search for the texts of some not well-known Hungarian writers who, if not preserved in his memory before leaving the country, might have fallen into oblivion. The Hungarian literature became the equipment that Márai needed to cross the Hungarian border for good. Márai, Memoir of Hungary 1944-1948 (Budapest, 1996).
great Hungarian writer – Dezső Kosztolányi, which even if turned into rubble were still imbued with the past and thus inciting memories. Witnessing the destruction and fragility of the material world he was concurrently trying to preserve the continuity of life no matter how hostile the circumstances could be. This attempt was facilitated by some well-known places-destinations of routine walks in Budapest which before the war Márai was visiting regularly. There the writer could encounter the same type of people as before the war. Breaks during the strolls in the ruined city made either in the same café or the same bath seemed particularly important because they served to reconstitute the broken ties with the past.

In exile, Márai was attentive to Hungarian traces which could help his imagination and memory in materializing the lost spatiotemporal coordinates of his past life. Furthermore, he also expressed in his diaristic writing some nostalgia directed towards Hungary and Europe. However, instead of a sentimental tone, this nostalgic feeling was articulated in terms of responsibility for the common fate. During his exile, Márai admitted that he was thinking about Hungary almost all the time but always in terms of responsibility, solidarity and not in a sentimental, nostalgic way. Moreover, it was nostalgia for a homeland understood not in territorial terms but in a spiritual way. Therefore, during his stay in Austria, he could not share other Hungarian emigrants’ need for “melodramatic trips” towards the border from where it would be possible to see a piece of Hungarian land. The writer was offered to participate in such a trip, but he refused because he did not identify the mined and guarded borderland with Hungary and his homeland.

Márai – the emigrant who most of his life spent abroad defined his homeland as something portable, a collection of various elements such as a brochure, a feuilleton, a novel, “a poem, a porch, a face, a landscape.” In the letters to his friend, Márai confessed that a received brochure about the Tatra Mountains evoked in him for the first time in 30 years some emotion resembling homesickness. While reading the brochure he recalled one trip to the mountains in which he had participated as a child in 1914. Márai devoured this book comparing it to a parcel with food sent from home to a relative in a concentration camp. The brochure thus provided the writer with a necessary ‘nourishment’ that reinvigorated him in his struggles with the exilic condition. In another letter he also mentioned that being generally resistant to homesickness, he was, nevertheless,

---

125 Márai in 1943 notes: “The first time since a year and a half in the steam room. This is one of the eternal sceneries: nothing changes here. In the hot water people, who can be as well tatters or sages or candidates for suicides, are bathing. […] it is the stable audience of such eternal places, irrespective of the epoch: tatters, sages and candidates for suicides.” Ibid., 88.
126 Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 200.
susceptible to this emotional state evoking the past and the lost homeland, while reading or listening to feuilletons written by Austrian journalist Alfred Polgar. Furthermore, in one of the diaristic notes inspired by a novel of the Hungarian writer, Gyula Krúdy, Márai wrote: “Suddenly, I painfully miss the bath, café, pub, Hungarian literature. I am a cripple and I am dying of hunger and thirst on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean, in America.” Consequently, the atmosphere of the homeland was not perceptible for Márai in Hungary because historical discontinuities implied uprootedness and rupture of bonds with familiar places. Homeland thus ceased to be associated with a feeling of belonging stemming from some roots or imposed by a place of birth, nationality. On the contrary, the reconfigured sense of belonging, devoid of this stable “essence” of roots emerged in new fragile circumstances of exile. The diversified mosaic of various elements which comprised “the homeland packed in a travel bag” accompanied Márai on the exilic path of life during his many travels.

What evoked the atmosphere of home to the Hungarian writer were not the spatial contexts themselves, but diversified elements and details as experienced in everyday life in some places which resurfacing in the present moment brought memories and feelings of nostalgia. In the 1980s while already living in America, Márai emphasised that he was not susceptible to homesickness neither in respect to his hometown (Kassa) nor to Salerno (one of the previous places of living in exile). Referencing Salerno, he accentuated that being incapable of longing anymore, what he could do at the most was to recall certain details, places (such as roof terrace), views and other dimensions of the past everyday life such as the company of Italian acquaintances. Consequently, during his exilic phase of life Márai was not prone to mythologising traits of memory accompanied by a nostalgic yearning for restoring some more or less unified vision of the past. Instead, he was continuously reformulating his self in connection with a dispersed past by recalling once familiar to him details and fragments of the bygone everyday life.

One explanation of Márai’s resistance to yearning for the homeland identified both with Kassa and Hungary were the recent political and social changes during the Second World War and its aftermath which deeply affected these places and thus as a result also an individual relationship with them. After the war, Kassa was again annexed by Czechoslovakia and Hungary became a satellite country of Soviet Russia. Hungary was undergoing quick social transformations which alienated

---

127 Ibid., 208. Márai appreciated this genre considering it to be “a superfluity which was lending the necessity a taste, smell and different meaning.”
129 Márai, Dziennik, vol 5, 71.
131 Ibid., 218.
Márai even more from his homeland. The post-war society hostile towards the bourgeois traces of the past made him also aware of the country’s interwar caricatural image. In the diary, he remarked: “During the past twenty years I have never missed the homeland. (Very bad memories of the so-called ‘lordly Hungary’ remained). Sometimes I think about Kassa and its surroundings, about forests. About Budapest hardly ever.”

Márai could not accept these changes. One of the manifestations of his disapproval of the recent political transformations was his reaction to the way his hometown was presented in a volume of photos “Košice” published in Slovakia. It was depicted merely as Czech and Slovak without any reference to the earlier presence of Hungarians and Saxons whose important contribution to the development of this town was silenced. There was no remark about the significant role played by Hungarian middle class in the process of erecting the main buildings and thus in fact constructing the town. Neither Hungarian writers coming from Kassa were mentioned nor the fact that the town was one of the centres of the Hungarian fight for freedom. Márai called the book presenting such an image of his hometown as “the characteristic example of the cynical counterfeiting of history” undertaken by the Czech propaganda active since 1919. Márai’s refusal of the recent geopolitical reconfigurations surfaced again while listening to a Czech tourist, who called Košice the easternmost city of Czechoslovakia disregarding the Hungarian character of the city and its surroundings retained for centuries. This encounter provoked Márai to comment on a reality deceived by propaganda and compare Košice’s foreignness in Czechoslovakia (understood as a country united “with the help of violence and historical falsehoods”) to “a Christian prisoner among the Moors.”

Márai’s disapproval of the recent post-war political and social changes in Central Europe could intensify his yearning for the Habsburg Monarchy which he also idealized. Consequently, the writer would call his trip to Vienna in 1973 as a “Proustian roaming in search of the lost time […]” consisting of familiar subtle traces of the past such as culture, “tone, behaviour, customs.” These echoes of the Danubian Monarchy still reverberated in some places such as hotels, cafés, confectionaries, or Spanish Riding School. During his stay in Vienna, Márai compared himself to an archaeologist “who conducts excavations on the historical terrain where there are still visible traces of the former culture covered by a dust of time.” Márai-the archaeologist visited many places which had been familiar to him in the past. For instance, he found the house inhabited by relatives of his mother. It reminded him of the house where together with his family he had to move during

132 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 84.
133 Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 83.
134 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 304, 256.
the Great War due to the front line approaching his hometown – Kassa. He also found the hotel which once constituted “scenery of the romantic period” of his life. Visiting its interiors, he stated: “everything on its place, as in Pompeii.”

In Vienna, everything seemed to Márai permeated with the “Habsburg line” extending from “Madrid, through Vienna and Budapest to Warsaw, line of catholic Renaissance and baroque.” Márai’s stay in the capital of the bygone Austro-Hungarian Empire and visit of Hofburg’s Kaisерapartaments incited him also to reflect on his personal bond with the Habsburg dynasty established by his ancestors who served the emperor as captains of his bodyguard. What is more, during the visit, Marais realized that one day their ancestors could meet. On one side, there was Márai’s great grandfather’s brother, uncle Zsiga who as a person responsible for introducing visitors to the emperor, accepted the uncle of Márai’s wife on the other side, who was granted an audience. In retrospect the writer remarked that thanks to the trip to Austria he could recover from “the Central European nostalgia.”

Márai’s nostalgic feelings were thus reoriented from Hungary or Kassa towards a wider homeland understood as Central European community under the Habsburg rule. The writer idealized life in the Habsburg Monarchy emphasizing that even though the existence of this multicultural political entity was endangered by the linguistic diversity, it was at the same time marked by both administrative and economic harmony. In another diaristic note, Márai referred to the Dual Monarchy in a more explicitly nostalgic tone defining it as “an organic and healthy Danubian community.” Critical of the successful Czech attempts to create an “artificial national state” in 1918 with the help of “deceptive propaganda and aggression,” 50 years later in the context of the Prague Spring, Márai did not feel sorry for the Czechs because of their contribution to the ruin of his “World of Yesterday.” Moreover, Márai remarked that if the “Danubian community” had survived, Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Russia would have never cooperated and in the long run, also Czechs would have never experienced both German and Soviet occupations.

Gombrowicz expressed his view on exile literature and exilic condition in general in the response given in 1953 to Emil Cioran’s article titled “Conveniences and inconveniences of exile.” In the view of Cioran, a French philosopher born in Romania, an intellectual in exile should not

135 Ibid., 248. “[…] even the horses reveal reflexes of knowledge of ritual, culture transferred to animal, timeless elegance: all this […] expresses some feeling of life, celebration and ceremonial. This is baroque: disciplined, catholic, rhythmical equine counterpoint. These horses are catholic.” Ibid., 251, 252, 254, 253.
136 Ibid., 243-246.
137 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 6.
138 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 247, 90.
resign or withdraw due to the perception of a new situation in terms of failure. On the contrary, the more is at stake and under threat of loss, the more affirmative the attitude of an expatriate should become. Gombrowicz also emphasised the desirable aspects of exile compared to “an exceptional opportunity” and “the moment everyone has dreamed of.” He perceived exilic distance in terms of great stimulation, inspiration, and spiritual freedom. Being beyond the culture of origin gives an artist a distance and thus provides a valuable vantage point from outside. Paradoxically thus the seemingly inconvenient situation of absence of all the factors that could facilitate each writer’s career and fame such as contact with readers and publishers, becomes, in Gombrowicz’s eyes, an incredibly convenient situation. “All bonds burst. One can be more of oneself. In the general din all the forms that have existed until now loosen up and one can move toward the future in a more ruthless way.” Even though Márai also perceived the exilic disappearance of all bonds as some source of euphoria and change, which brings not only loss but also a promise of something new such as a fertile ground for artistic fruit, Gombrowicz, liberating himself from the past, embraced a more prospective view than Márai.

Gombrowicz mentioned two possible responses a writer may give to an exilic situation. Either he continues playing the role of the voice of the national affairs abroad which strength would stem from both fixation on the past and hopes about the future (return) or he focuses on the present moment and his self. Gombrowicz was first and foremost preoccupied with the present moment and his self as an artist. Márai on the contrary was closer to the national culture and political affairs. Although he also put to the foreground his individuality (diaristic practice as a hermeneutics of the self) and task as a writer, he was deeply moved by the political situation in his homeland and Europe. For instance, summing up in his diary the passing year 1956, which took away more than it gave, Márai mentioned his wife’s disease and the suppression of the Hungarian revolution. He expressed a feeling of finitude and a resultant increasing indifference. Political situation in Hungary was thus deeply affecting Márai’s state of mind and daily routine, notwithstanding the exilic distance.

A multifaceted state of detachment (linguistic, spatial) provided a prolific ground for Gombrowicz. The distance from the familiar environment of his homeland was a desirable fate which he willingly embraced (at least in theory as in practice he had to face financial insecurity).

140 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 1, 50.
141 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 17, 5.
142 Ibid., 504.
Márai on the contrary was more prone to view negative aspects of exile. He perceived exilic homelessness as a hopeless situation and a manifestation of adverse fate which brings drought of life sources as well as attenuation of reality and life. Consequently, emotions fade, anger turns into reluctance and enthusiasm becomes an increasing apathy. Nevertheless, it is possible to adapt oneself to new circumstances. Márai mentioned several stages of the process of increasing assimilation and indifference to a new situation once provoking rebellion, the process which differs depending on the emigrant’s subjectivity.

First year: rebellion. (‘I was trapped’ etc.) Second year: escape plans. (‘In Chile is better’ etc.)
Third year: collapse, resignation. (‘I will visit the local cemetery where I will be buried’ etc.)
And then comes the fourth year, when the emigrant wakes up in a foreign country, stretches his limbs, yawns, rubs his eyes and thinks indifferently: is it really so bad here?

Márai added that as a person of big faith and if health let him, he would be also able to live in exile although he described this life in terms of a half-human and half-animal vegetation, the same way as he portrayed his previous life in the communist Hungary.

In this respect, some important differences between the two writers emerge concerning the experience of the exilic condition and attitude towards the mother tongue. While Gombrowicz perceived exile as a deliberate immersion in foreignness and otherness in the act of abandonment of the familiar atmosphere at home, Márai embraced the exilic condition preceded by his inner emigration as a response to increasing defamiliarisation and isolation experienced in communist Hungary. This might explain Márai’s more retrospective inclinations, attentiveness to Hungarian traces encountered abroad or his return to Europe due to the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution in 1956 (during his short stay in Munich each day he had broadcasts addressed to Hungarians and in Rome he had an audience with the Pope asking him for help to Hungarian writers and intellectuals). At that time, he was also considering his return to Hungary and when it was already too late, he regretted having abandoned his compatriots explaining his decision about exile in terms of “a great mistake.”

Another significant difference, closely related with narrative reconfigurations of self, regards both writers’ attitudes towards their mother tongues and languages used by the host societies in new

---

143 Ibid., 41, 312.
144 Ibid., 449.
145 Ibid., 5.
146 Among the Hungarian traces found abroad Márai mentioned the monument of Ronsard in the French Institute library in New York. Noticing it the writer had to add that Ronsard was of Hungarian origin. The presence of this monument provoked a feeling of familiarity in Márai. Ibid., 222, 359, 498, 503.
places of exile. Whereas both Márai and Gombrowicz were writing in Hungarian and Polish respectively, their relations with these languages differed. While Márai perceived his mother tongue as a necessary mediation of his self and thus retained strong bonds with the Hungarian language throughout the entire period of his exile, Gombrowicz preferred to gain a distance towards his mother tongue, at least in the beginning of his stay in Argentina. At that time, he was more absorbed by his immersion in the new environment organizing his new discussion group gathered by the same coffee table and trying to find his own way in the Argentinean literary circles. Even though he was asking for support both from the members of the Polish diaspora and the Argentinean literary establishment, he was more focused on his place in the host society trying to apply his ideas, literature on new ground. Therefore, instead of immediately attempting to publish his writings in the Polish emigrant press, he started learning Spanish and then also writing in this language. At some point, he also decided to translate his *Ferdydurke* into Spanish. Thus, for a long time, he was not writing his literary texts in Polish.  

Argentinean writer Ricardo Piglia described Gombrowicz’s relation to his mother tongue as a tense combination of contradictory emotions of reluctance and nostalgia. Piglia added that Gombrowicz was quickly attracted by Spanish as a “language of exclusion” and “condition of great literature.” Even though French could help Gombrowicz in approaching the Argentinean literary circles as a common ground of communication, Spanish, notwithstanding his weak command of this language, seemed more seductive to the Polish writer. However, he ultimately remained an outsider and was never accepted by the Argentinean elite. Gombrowicz chose Spanish as a language in which he gave his famous speech in 1947 titled “Against poets.” It was a conscious decision made based on his identification of Spanish with marginalisation and the sphere of immaturity and inferiority so desirable by the author in Argentina. In the view of the newcomer from Central Europe, this apparently unfavourable situation of lack of fluency in Spanish and anonymity became an asset.  

Another example of Gombrowicz’s transcultural flexibility, which evaded the confining nature of

---

147 Olejniczak, op. cit., 95, 100-103, 145-146. As Olejniczak remarks, Gombrowicz became more interested in establishing stable bonds with Polish emigrant circles when the inner situation in Argentina changed. In the regime of Juan Domingo Peron, he could see a mirror image of the situation witnessed in the 1930s both in Italy and Austria. As Olejniczak continues, the uncertain atmosphere imbued with the increasing threat posed to artistic freedom encouraged Gombrowicz to divert his attention from Argentina to find some way of publishing his texts either in Poland or in the Polish emigrant press. Refusing cooperation with authorities of communist Poland, he was uninterested in the idea of becoming a cultural attaché of the Polish legation in Argentina. Soon he would establish stable cooperation with the Polish emigrant review “Kultura” of Giedroyc.


identification with mother tongue is the collective translation of his famous *Ferdydurke* from Polish to Spanish in Argentina. The translation would become a new book. His poor knowledge of Spanish and his friends’ unfamiliarity with the Polish language did not pose an obstacle to their endeavours in translation which were accomplished with the mediation of French as a linguistic common ground.©

Márai, on the other hand, was much stronger rooted in the Hungarian linguistic universe throughout his exile. His mother tongue could mean to him an anchor facilitating some stability amid an uncertain and long exilic odyssey, the anchor which to Gombrowicz’s preference for some lightness of being could only pose a threat of unbearable weight – a confining identity. For Márai, the word hungarianess did not designate a people, a landscape, or a city but the Hungarian literature and language, as well as thinking and being silent in Hungarian (also while using other languages in certain contexts).© In exile, Márai gave great importance to a six-volume “Dictionary of Hungarian language” which allowed him to imaginatively return to his homeland. Devoid of the lively atmosphere of the mother tongue at home, he was one of the emigrants-writers who had to count on such “linguistic stores” – dictionary, in the same way as an astronaut in cosmos would rely on oxygen bottles.©

Bartol, despite his identification with *Weltliteratur* and critical stance towards Slovene literature, was also a voice of the Slovene nation. As Košuta rightly noted, the relativistic attitude towards nationality should not be understood as an attempt to refute all bonds with the Slovene nation, to uproot oneself from the national community. Instead of a mere negation, the critical stance towards one’s national heritage is an attempt to redefine and re-evaluate it by overcoming its elements perceived as a burden and experienced as a threat© (of assimilation for instance). Bartol by critically tackling the issue of the Slovene complex of smallness as a source of the tendency to imitate other more recognized personalities and cultural phenomena was not refuting his bonds with the Slovene nation. On the contrary, he was feeling obliged to engage himself in these problems revolving around nationality. “I voluntarily took upon myself obligations towards my nation. But I pertain to all the nations of the world, I am a part of Weltgeist, I pertain to ‘Weltliteratur’.”©

---

152 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 4, 313, 288, 305, 360.

163
though Bartol was identifying himself with the spirit of *Weltliteratur*, he was writing in the Slovene language. No matter how big was the distance he wanted to preserve towards the national label by calling himself a part of the universe, a seed, or a trace of “a universal spirit,”155 his critical discussions of Slovene national character and literature manifest his engagement with the issue of nationality.

There is also an interesting difference between Gombrowicz’s and Bartol’s perceptions of the exilic situation which is worth remarking upon. While Gombrowicz regarded foreignness in terms of an inspiring challenge and found his interlocutors in cafés, Bartol considered some new places of stay to be an obstacle impeding his writing which success depended on the presence of Slovene audience. To that end, Bartol noted in his autobiography that in Belgrade he had to change the background while writing. No longer capable of concentrating on his work in cafés where he used to write, suddenly he preferred the solitary atmosphere of his room. Only there he could retain some imagined contact with Slovenes. Outside, a foreign audience would distract him and prevent him from writing. While in Slovenia many people around him in some public places implied a better outcome of his work, the opposite was true abroad. In Slovenia he considered himself to be closely and directly linked with the audience in a form of “some accumulator, condenser and distributor of mental or biological energies which were coming out of a crowd.”156 This accumulator did not function abroad, where he was thus not in search of foreignness but his more distant native culture possible to approach in solitude.

4. Conclusion

The three writers managed to narratively exploit their emigration in different ways. While Gombrowicz was more avant-garde and future-oriented in his attempt to immerse himself in a reinvigorated Argentinean youthfulness, Márai could not break all the bonds with his homeland, the Hungarian culture, and the language also taught to Janos, the Márais’ son. Bartol’s return to

155 Ibid., “seme vesoljnega duha,” “drobec vesoljnega duha,” “glasnik vesoljnega duha.”
Trieste was accompanied by regular visits to Ljubljana where he had family and friends. The Triestine decade was dominated by the writer’s recollections of the past which paved the way for his autobiography. Gombrowicz left the country alone accompanied during the travel by a friend, writer Czesław Straszewicz. Márai on the contrary fled with his wife and their small, adopted child Janos. Bartol went to Trieste alone leaving his family in Ljubljana. Presence of the family imposed on Márai and Bartol some obligations which were non-existent to Gombrowicz for whom the exile meant not only spiritual but also erotic freedom. Whereas exile for Gombrowicz was a desirable condition that should enable the upward movement in terms of artistic production, Márai compared his position and work in exile to a radiotelegraphist who, as the plane is falling, calmly reports the situation approaching catastrophe. The writers chose divergent paths to domesticate the exilic distance not only due to different characters and values (Márai’s more traditional worldview\footnote{Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 476, 387, 315. \textit{“It does not bother me if somebody is non-religious, but I cannot accept that there are people who do not believe in God.”} In another note Márai interpreted the geopolitical situation in religious terms: \textit{“It is possible that this great process in the world takes place – now and through history – not between communists and non-communists, but between people who believe in God and who do not believe in Him.”} In one note taken in 1967, he confessed his agnosticism. Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4., 52. \textit{“[…] I am agnostic, I do not believe in anything, but I also do not exclude anything.”}} but also because the moment of departure (before or after the war) and political circumstances they left were not the same.

The last and recapitulating question related to the issue of exilic self-identification is whether the loss of previous self together with homeland poses a challenge to work out, reconfigure one’s selfhood by inscribing it within a new host culture or whether this loss is rather deepened by acting out the experienced past in form of nostalgia. Literary scholar George Z. Gasyna, in his study of the exilic identities of two writers (Joseph Conrad, Witold Gombrowicz) discerned two main responses to expatriation: centripetal and centrifugal. The first reaction embraces nostalgia and melancholy forcing to relive the abandoned past. It is also marked by a strong need to remain within specific linguistic or ethnic realms defining the lost home and thus it implies an attitude of self-defence, and self-preservation. This response can be traced to some extent in Bartol’s nostalgia and his search for the lost time in Trieste as well as in Márai’s melancholy, strong attachment to his mother tongue and to Hungarian literature. The second, centrifugal reaction to the state of loss of previous home and self implies the perception of the exilic situation as a challenge opening new ways of fabricating self-understanding in constant dialogue with a new host culture.\footnote{George Z. Gasyna, \textit{Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise: Exilic Discourse in Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz} (London, 2011), 22.} Gombrowicz was closer to this response viewing in a seemingly unfavourable situation of exile (lack of established networks,
readers) the desirable circumstances which can provide new insights, an opportunity to reinforce one’s convictions and in the end also reconfigure one’s self. Double isolation and foreignness regarded by him as a source of strength became a flourishing ground of his new self. He constructed his exilic self-identification through the immersion into the Argentinean world of youthfulness, encounters with young interlocutors in cafés in Buenos Aires and narrative confrontations with the readers of his public *Diary*.

---

159 Hochman, op. cit., 147-148, 154; Piglia, op. cit., 176; Gasparini, op. cit., 21-25.
VI. Between Chronos and Kairos – Witold Gombrowicz’s diaristic struggles with time

1. Introduction: “Escaping Gombrowicz” in a hermeneutic diaristic fissure?

Gombrowicz’s temporal displacement I will try to frame within the hermeneutic weak ontology following in this attempt Polish literary scholar Andrzej Zawadzki who interpreted Gombrowicz’s oeuvre applying Gianni Vattimo’s theory of weak thought. From this perspective, Gombrowicz-diary was marked with some fragility (some “awful weakness toward life”\(^1\)) understood not only as a sign of his ageing body. The sensation of weakness would be related both to the experience of time (“Oh, how the present moment was sucking me dry, how it was weakening me!”\(^2\)) and the art. Therefore, weakness and infirmity would refer to a deeper ontological level of being which as imbued with temporality and fleetingness, is not stable but always wavering and incomplete. To some extent, this ontologically inherent incompleteness would be caused by the lack of permanent spatiotemporal coordinates and uprooting that characterise life in exile.

Sensitivity to the passage of time becomes stronger with change in space becoming primarily a journey in time. Thus, Gombrowicz’s journey from Argentina to Europe took place not only on a map but also within himself. The writer described his transcontinental travel in space in terms of time as follows: “What is this journey if not a trip into death?...people of a certain age should not move at all, space is too tied up with time, rousing space provokes time, this whole ocean is made more of time than of boundless distances, this is infinite space that calls itself: death. What the heck.” The return to Europe in 1963 was experienced by Gombrowicz as a farewell bidden to youth and a presage of death. The writer as the “ahistorical newcomer” in Berlin, in “a place that is more bespattered with history than ever” found himself trapped in historical being again.\(^3\)

The main sources in the chapter will be Gombrowicz’s two diaries, which analysed together in interrelation, may shed some light on the author’s temporal displacement in the History of the twentieth century. In the context of the above-mentioned methodological frameworks, the Diary of

---

\(^1\) Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 2, 311.
\(^2\) Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 597. The roots of art, in the view of Gombrowicz, would lie not in health but sickness.
\(^3\) Ibid., 660. “The journey was taken twice: once on the map, and the second time within me,” 591. “Why didn’t I understand that Europe meant my death?”, 633, 627, 626. For the discussion of Gombrowicz’s diaristic response to this sudden confrontation with History in Berlin, which contrary to his earlier literary strategy of “ahistorical writer” based on independence from each form of collective identity entailed for instance his identification with an imposed, expected role of Pole in Germany just after the Second World War, see: Magdalena Kowalska, “Gombrowicz w Berlinie, czyli Gombrowicz uwikłany w historię,” Pamiętnik Literacki 4, 2004: 93-110.
the writer who described himself as “eaten away by time and space,” was compared by Zawadzki to “an extension of the weak existence, its ‘epidermis,’ the place, where it comes to contact with the external reality, which also loses its ‘strong,’ clearly defined character.”

Having abandoned Argentina for good, Gombrowicz, “the enfeebled” recognized in himself lack of “the strength to overcome the stony foreignness of Europe,” understanding his diaristic writing as a place of encounter of this double insufficiency and incompleteness, originated inwardly and in the outside reality. While still living in Argentina, he identified himself with Europe (remaining “loyal”), however, having returned, the Old Continent seemed to him foreign “like a pyramid, Sphinx, and an alien planet, like a fata morgana,” unrecognizable and unrecoverable neither in time nor in space. He felt lost in the face of another alterity which did not allow to be possessed. Europe lacked clear spatiotemporal coordinates; in the same way, his self was deprived of such stable points of reference. “This diary was also just the encounter of my impaired, sickly existence—with the existence of Europe; and my feebleness, my fatigue, must have infected…Oh! In vain did I challenge youth in order to extract myself from my inadequately existing existence, from my insufficiently real reality.”

Existential feebleness shapes outside reality depriving it of stable foundations and vice versa. “Insufficiently real” world undermines unity and coherence of self which in consequence becomes marked by a particular feeling of inadequacy of being on the margins of reality. In the continuation I will try to follow the changeable contours of Gombrowicz’s self-identification, volatile because emerging at the crossroads of two orders of time (historical and diaristic), this focal point where fragility and transitoriness of both historical reality and inner self met.

The weak thought manifests also in Gombrowicz’s narrative strategy of always incomplete delineation of self in confrontation with schematic ways of thinking and being. The need for loosening the “Form” made the writer identify himself with a “blunted thought, a being of median temperatures, a spirit in a certain state of relaxation: I am he who relieves tension. I am like aspirin, which, if one is to believe the advertisement, rids one of excessive cramps.” This existential-narrative strategy is not a path of the positive dialectics which through counterarguments and oppositions leads to some new synthesis. Gombrowicz was undermining each final form of identity.

---

5 Andrzej Zawadzki, “Gombrowicz a myśl słaba,” in Witold Gombrowicz nas współczesny, ed. J. Jarzębski (Kraków, 2010), 133.
7 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 1, 112.
with the consciousness of its existential and always temporary character. He was asking himself in the *Diary*: “Isn’t it true that one cannot undermine form by opposing it with another form, but only by laxity in one’s very attitude toward it?” Consequently, I view Gombrowicz’s escapist response to History as a hermeneutic wandering in a sphere between clearly defined identities, in a sphere “weakening” each Form by a parody or by – as the writer expressed it himself – “compromising all extremeness but only after exhausting it”⁸ (not by overcoming it which would characterise dialectics).

Not only does weak thought prove inspiring in shaping the methodological background of this research but also psychoanalysis. Polish literary critic Michał Paweł Markowski interpreted Gombrowicz’s life and literature through the prism of Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalysis. While commenting on the passage from Gombrowicz’s one of the most well-known novels “Ferdydurke” (“get out, get out, as soon as possible”), Markowski made an interesting statement: “Indeed, this topic is for a separate study under the title “Escaping Gombrowicz,” which, of course, would be the study of unbearable loneliness, which – like boredom – is a dominion of the Same.”⁹ What could “the dominion of the Same” mean? The sensation of absurdity provoked by the History which in Central Europe in the twentieth century, to put it metaphorically, was repeating itself along a circumference of wheel hermetically closed by totalizing philosophies of history? Could a way out of this encirclement – a form of escape – represent a hermeneutic fissure in a form of inner time mediated in a diary and inscribed in this manner in the cosmic time of sense? (P. Ricoeur)

While following a path of one’s existence, different attitudes to life, its various conceptualisations lead to divergent modes of life writing. Polish literary critic Grzegorz Jankowicz in his “Essay about form of life” analyses Gombrowicz’s double diaristic writing with reference to the fundamental relationship between life and text accompanied by two possible textual approaches to life. Intending to frame Gombrowicz’s “two ways of writing about life,”¹⁰ Jankowicz draws on opposite categories describing life, derived from the culture of ancient Greece and discussed by many intellectuals (Hannah Arendt and later also Giorgio Agamben): *bios* and *zoe*. While the first term *bios* designates a finite life of a concrete individual, a personality with identity, personal history and form of life, the second term *zoe* refers to an infinite existence of all species in general, a succession of generations, bare life without properties. Jankowicz understands Gombrowicz’s two diaries as two different ways of struggle with an overwhelming, formless chaotic existence. While

---

⁸ Ibid., 45, 218.
⁹ Michał Paweł Markowski, *Czarny nurt. Gombrowicz, świat, literatura* (Kraków 2004), 119.
the *Diary* refers to *bios*, life captured in words, sculptured in some form, sense, *Kronos* on the other hand, as an enumeration of facts devoid of narrative, elaborate structure, contains all the rest which escaped a form and should be placed closer to *zoe*. As Jankowicz argues, *Kronos*, not identical with *zoe* approaches it and shall be conceptualised “in a point of clash of antinomic forces and orders of life (between *zoe* and *bios*). . . . [ . . . ] in a point, in which life and form meet.” Consequently, whereas in the *Diary* life tamed by form (*bios*) managed to silence a formless bare existence (*zoe*), *Kronos* consists of both Gombrowicz’s attempts to keep *zoe* at some distance and the moments of the predominance of the latter.

As Jankowicz reminds, the relationship between the two poles of conceptual juxtaposition which designates different attitudes to life, was also graphically represented by Hannah Arendt with two figures: a line (finite life, *bios*) and a circle (*zoe* and recurrent existence). This differentiation echoes two dimensions of time, linear and circular which are present in each struggle with life and its different narrative manifestations, also in Gombrowicz’s diaristic practice. In the following remarks focused on Gombrowicz’s temporal displacement in the History of the twentieth century, I will try to present the dialogue between the author’s two diaristic selves. One in the *Diary* which escaping masks fabricated for the needs of historical being in linear time, embraces some narrative, abstract form (*bios*) and the other one in *Kronos* which yielding to the calendar linearity in search for some continuity in time, aims to tame and escape the chaotic existence (*zoe*).

2. *Autobiographical attitude, temporality, and the Diary’s negative dialectics*

Gombrowicz, who once declared that all his writings must always follow the path of his existence and not be dictated by a historical moment, was narrating his life simultaneously in two different diaristic modes (public and private). The first type of Gombrowicz’s diaristic narration (self-fashioning) takes place in the *Diary* which, written with the intention of immediate publication, was designed for a reader. Concurrently, however, the writer was absorbed by the second, secret diaristic writing (*Kronos*). One question which inevitably arises here is whether these parallel modes of diaristic practice are opposite or to some degree complementary.

---

11 Ibid., 69-73, 103-105. In Kronos Gombrowicz “does not describe, but notes down, does not create a story, but inscription, does not construct a form of life but mediates the latter,” 103.
12 Ibid., 98, 105, 108-109, 138. *Kronos* “does not pertain to form but retains its traces in the form of singular formulations. It is also neither entirely immersed in a current of bare life, even though it approaches it all the time,” 98.
13 Ibid., 72.
Gombrowicz’s diaristic writing (Diary) presents his consciousness of necessity to problematise some fundamental concepts such as subject, identity and truth vis-à-vis the condition of a modern man shaped by exile and alienation which he also experienced. In this respect, commenting on Simone Weil’s views, Gombrowicz expressed his (and his generation’s) distrust of the metaphysical concepts, which criticism nourished the condition of the modern man:

We, the grandchildren of Kierkegaard, can no longer digest the reasoned God of Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, or Kant. My generation’s relationship with abstraction is completely in ruins or, rather, has coarsened because we evidence a completely peasant distrust of it and, from the heights of the twentieth century, all of metaphysical dialectics appears to me to be the same thing it was to the simple-souled gentry of the past who considered Kant a swindler.14

In this context, the Diary’s author assumed the role of a relentless master of suspicion who never entirely identified himself with any theory (existentialism, structuralism, psychoanalysis) and would continuously multiply his selves. Instead of integrity and uniformity, he was in search of contradictoriness. In this sense, he refused a mask of “literal man” becoming “an elusive man.” “After the period in which art, philosophy, and politics looked for the integral, uniform, concrete, and literal man, the need for an elusive man who is a play of contradictions, a fountain of gushing antinomies and a system of infinite compensation, is growing.”15 Conversely, the question posed here is whether the act of constant problematisation of some concepts and theories undertaken by Gombrowicz-master of suspicion could be existentially satisfactory enough for the author. This elusive way of being, always evading any stable form of self-identification which, when uprooted evaporates in the dispersion of multiple selves, may lead to an overwhelming feeling of loss. Is there any compensation for this negative path of delineating the self which would not pose a threat of another form?

Isn’t such threat the constant negation, this act of intermittent undermining of dominant discourses and forms of thinking? Isn’t the mask of “elusive man” another form, in this context, a form of the writer always eluding a form? Gombrowicz expressed his sense of becoming trapped in a form, which lured in each attempt of avoiding it while summarizing his œuvre in his last book “Testament.” He remarked that paradoxically all his “attacks on form” led him to form itself, which imposed on him a specific definition. Consequently, private Gombrowicz, a person of flesh and blood became “a servant of this official Gombrowicz” – the writer and author of the Diary whose

---

14 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 1, 211-212.
15 Ibid., 37
main theme was form. He was asking himself whether another rebellion against his own confining “crust” of the established writer, its “tyranny” was still possible. Was this act of defiance performed on the pages of the secret Kronos? Consequently, would the first voice of debunking and polemics that was reverberating in the Diary and paradoxically leading to another form need a complementary unsettling echo in the second diaristic narration? Could the deconstruction of Diary’s many Gombrowiczs constructed in the mirror of the otherness lead in Kronos towards a reassurance of the self in Chronos? May Kronos be interpreted as an alternative project of the self, devised, and fulfilled parallelly to the negative inclination of undermining any ready-made forms of identity visible in the Diary?

The ambiguous and thus differently interpreted title Kronos could indicate some answer. Kronos may denote here both Cronus, a Titan from Greek mythology devouring his sons and Chronos – a personification of time. As Olejniczak remarks, the title’s choice was not accidental or erroneous and described Gombrowicz’s strategy based on the deconstruction of public selves constructed on the Diary’s pages as follows: “I create/breed a monster (autobiographical subject of the author of novels and diary), simultaneously destroying it/swallowing…” in the intimate diary Kronos. The chapter’s main aim will be an attempt to reflect on Gombrowicz’s temporal displacement understood as an oscillation between different understandings of time, between Chronos and Kairos, both explored in double diaristic practice. The writer’s escape from History evoking a sensation of absurdity resulted in diaristic struggles with time which implied some narrative reconfiguration of temporality and in the end also reframing of self-identification.

Could Gombrowicz’s diaristic selves be interpreted as extended from Chronos (the self in relation to calendar time) to Kairos (self of the inner time, expressed in a literary way)? Were his self-identifications revolving around both narrative and episodic understandings of time? As literary scholar Daniel Pratt claims, Gombrowicz’s central concept of Form entails a self-construction alternative to the predominant narrative and episodic ways of self-understanding which instead would be rather “a present-oriented striving toward self-creation […] emphasizing the present over any unknowable future or inalterable past.” The present moment is the main temporal axis of each diaristic practice which involves different acts (rereading, recalling, reflection) and combines both the “sphere of experiences” and the “horizon of expectations,” hence both the past and the future.

17 Olejniczak, op. cit., 197-198, 212.
The temporal dimension of Gombrowicz’s diaristic practice can be analysed at various levels. The first fictitious level is constituted by the text of the *Diary* and regards the narrator’s relations to time. The second one can be characterised by the relationship between the author immersed in linear, calendar time and his intimate diaristic writing (*Kronos*). Thirdly, there is a more general interrelation between diaristic practice and the concept of time. I will start with the last context so with the broadest perspective of autobiographical writing as such and its temporal dimension referring to the ideas of French philospher Georges Gusdorf. Then I will analyse narrative temporality reconfigured by Gombrowicz in his *Diary* and the one emerging at the junction of the text (*Kronos*) and the reality (historical context).

Gusdorf described the cultural conditions of autobiography with reference to history and anthropology. He inscribed autobiographical genres within a particular historical context and discussed them in connection with the concept of modern Western subjectivity. In the opinion of Gusdorf, an autobiographical attitude expressed in the consciousness of oneself as an individual and the resultant honed look towards interiority was a Western concern about meaningful narrative unity of one’s existence. This autobiographical inclination, rooted in the linear concept of time is thus associated with distressing consciousness of its accelerated passage accompanied by an increasing abyss between the present and the past. Therefore, autobiographical genres would emerge together with the perception of historical time as a force uprooting an individual from the mythical frames of being. The lack of earlier given *a priori* patterns of identity (social class, religion) required a search for some new mediations of self-identification such as autobiographical forms which would allow one to reconstruct the coherence of one’s life and continuity in time. The narrative communication with oneself enabled by autobiography was supposed to build one’s self-knowledge and allow a change from being in oneself to being for oneself.\(^\text{19}\)

Gusdorf accentuated both the autobiographical character of literature and the artistic, literary status of each autobiography transcending in this way a simple opposition of truth and falsity. Accordingly, autobiography’s performative dimension and artistic function dominate over its mimetic, referential aspect. The person of an author, emerging between the lines of autobiographical text, assumes imagined, intentional character and thus is far from an image that could be

\(^\text{19}\) G. Gusdorf, “Warunki i ograniczenia autobiografii,” translated by Janusz Barczyński in *Autobiografia*, ed. M. Czernińska (Gdańsk, 2009), 20. Other authors, historians of ideas (Jacob Burckhardt, Wilhelm Dilthey, George Misch) were claiming that the roots of individualism and, therefore, the writings classified as egodocuments should be placed already in the Middle Ages. Misch also considered classical antiquity. Recently, however, the chronological-teleological view on the history of autobiographical writing which was linked with the growing individualism has been critically revised. Dekker, *Introduction*, 10, 12-15.
reconstructed based on his/her behaviour observed from outside. A reader can see a person-author “not as he was and is, but the one he thinks he is and wants to be.” These remarks are important in the context of further reflections on formal aspects of Gombrowicz’s *Diary* because they will help in framing my interpretations of the reconfigurations of temporality in the text.

Due to the clear intention of publishing and the *Diary*’s intrinsic artistic dimension it represents a literary type of journal. It is thus deprived of the level of intimate confession required from a classical diary. Both concepts of intimacy and privacy are re-evaluated and reconfigured on the pages of the *Diary*. As Piglia underlined, Gombrowicz understood privacy in terms of “a space of tension with the world built on anti-sentimental ideal of personal life.” This tension was shaped and maintained by distance accompanied by observation of oneself and others as well as “emotions taken in quotation marks.”

French literary critic Jean-Pierre Salgas noted that Gombrowicz’s *Diary* “is not ‘intimate’ – not only because it is written with the thought of its immediate publication. It is about deconstructing the mere idea of intimacy (through biofiction).” Biofiction means an act of describing changing variations of the fictitious self which sometimes could also assume a mask of the authentic self. If the true self is also a narrative construction, the act of its exposure, very often expected from a classical diary, must be replaced by the literary process of assuming various masks never fitting the author. The literary *Diary* as a biofiction and not biography gives place to the author’s creation and not representation. It thus constitutes “a biographical space of the autofiction.”

Gombrowicz’s numerous masks will always mislead the classificatory minds of his readers who would like to label the author with some unambiguous definitions such as existentialist, structuralist or anti-communist.

With regard to readership and thus reception in its relation to genres (their indication), the literary *Diary*, highly diversified in structure and content, does not abide the autobiographical pact introduced by Lejeune. This autobiographical pact is made with a reader who would normally

---

21 Literary scholar, Alex Kurczaba in his comparative study of the diaries of Gombrowicz and Max Frisch mentions a few features which characterise a literary diary. One of which is their a-fictionality (where the boundary between fiction and non-fiction is blurred). Alex Kurczaba, *Gombrowicz and Frisch. Aspects of the Literary Diary* (Bonn, 1980), 6, 9.
22 Piglia, “Pisarz jako czytelnik,” 184.
24 Ibid., 158.
25 Gombrowicz’s *Diary* should be placed far from the classical diary because it combines different types of literary statements (essay, diatribe, sermon, speech, parergon, paralipomenon) normally not expected from the diarists. Michał Glowiński, *Gombrowicz i nadliteratura* (Kraków, 2002), 184-222.
expect from this type of writing sincerity and truth. Gombrowicz in his Diary, however, instead of making and then confirming the pact with his readers, is continuously toying with them by betraying their faith in truthfulness and verisimilitude. Those who expect a credible tone of confession must be surprised by the polemical style of narration. Those who search for observations of non-textual reality and the political situation are equally disenchanted by the dominant and strong voice of the author’s ego, which silences the historical context. Consequently, Gombrowicz’s Diary is neither a realistic representation of the historical moment witnessed by the writer (testimony) nor a psychological introspection of the author expressing some deep self and true personality (confession). As Saer remarked, in respect to the complex formal aspect of the Diary, instead of a mimetic reference to the outside reality, it rather poses some problems as well as the expression of true self is replaced by silencing or even mystification. Therefore, “Gombrowicz’s Diary is not a pretext for introspection but analysis, reflection and polemics.” The Diary’s sincerity means not a trustworthy mirroring of historical context but the original way the author faces specific problems and reflects on them.27

The only reliable confession which the author could make regards not the positive definition of his self but its absence. Thus, the Diary, instead of articulating and exposing a given solid self-consciousness becomes an improvisation of the relational and changeable self, a performance of self-fashioning aimed at creating oneself vis-à-vis others and different forms of foreignness such as History. This aim, however, as a continuously escaping horizon, remains always beyond fulfilment in the dispersion of an author’s various voices which cannot articulate/fictionalize in a literary way his entire experience. The predominant rest is silenced. Gombrowicz disappears behind overlapping voices and masks. Confusion about who in fact is speaking in the Diary (author, narrator?) is intensified by the shift in grammatical forms of expression. Gombrowicz was writing both in the first and the third person singular. Fragments written in the third person are printed in italics and put in quotation marks. They give an impression of voice coming from outside and commenting on the author’s internal life from a distance which could also enable some degree of impartiality.28

In the Diary Gombrowicz continuously escapes readers’ simplifying categories and identities imposed by the historical moment. The escape would not be possible without previous confrontation

---

27 Saer, op. cit., 197-198.
28 “The only thing he could manage for the time being was the introduction of a ‘second voice’ into the Diary—the voice of a commentator and biographer—which allowed him to speak of himself as ‘Gombrowicz,’ through someone else’s lips. [...] what wealth to be able to speak about oneself in the first and third persons simultaneously! For he who speaks of himself with ‘I’ must, of necessity, lie a lot and leave much unsaid—while he who speaks of himself with ‘he’ and tries to describe himself from the outside will also be wielding only a partial truth.” Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 2, 408.
with a view coming from outside. As Argentinean writer, Cesar Aira emphasised, Gombrowicz needed an interlocutor in life and his work.29 The author’s inclination for polemics constituted the diaristic defensive strategy. Far from soliloquy, the Diary is a dialogue and duel with others and different forms of alterity for oneself. Considering the best tactics, one should take in confrontation with Gombrowicz, Miłosz noted that the writer in his play with different masks and roles was unbeatable due to his effective ability to escape all the arbitrary definitions one would use as a weapon against him. “Faithful to his rule necessary to preserve his subjectivity at all costs, that is to say not to let a foreign look apprise and immobilize us, he – being attacked, was assuming different shape, was disappearing and somewhere from the lest expected side was shouting: ‘here I am, peek-a-boo!’”30 Gombrowicz was constantly alert to his potential adversaries trying to catch him in a net of misshaping formulas of identity. His strength lay in multiplying narrative selves, changeable because depending on potential deformations coming from the outside world such as the imposed, expected roles of Polish-patriot or emigrant-nostalgist.31 The writer opposed an ideal, normative image of himself dictating the way he should behave.

Therefore, the Diary resembles a project of negative dialectics which implies a fragile, ephemeral, and apophatic self-identification always evading any potential deformation. The constant narrative defence of I in the face of possessive forms of foreignness is not founded on a pre-given stable self and thus does not aim at revealing an unchangeable (true) layer of personality. An attempt to remain in alignment with oneself does not imply or require either a stable starting point or concluding fulfilment. This willingness of existential consonance with oneself seems the only firm feature of otherwise inherently unstable self in the Diary.

This “I want to be me” is the whole secret of personality, this will, this desire, defines our attitude toward deformation and results in the fact that deformation begins to hurt. And even if external forces crush me like a wax figurine, I will remain myself as long as I agonize over it, protest against it. Our authentic form is contained in the protest against deformation.32

30 Miłosz, “Pięćdziesiąt lat później,” in Konfrontacje, 246.
31 What are the expectations of the intellectual emigrant? Gombrowicz responded: “When they throw you out of your home, what are you supposed to do? (1) Moan and groan. (2) Reminisce. (3) Inveigh against others. (4) Proclaim your innocence.” Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 2, 447.
32 Ibid., 503.
Gombrowicz’s *Diary* constitutes a confrontation with foreign instrumentalizing discourses, a duel undertook with the aim to be the only instance capable of giving meanings to oneself and the world. One of the foreign voices, treated by Gombrowicz as a threat of deformation to his self, was the one coming from tradition, the past reality and time in general. Its continuity and linear irreversibility impose not only a distressing sensation of burden but also very often unbearable responsibility for collective identities earmarked by History. Gombrowicz was escaping such threats of any enforced self-clarification and self-confinement. The inconsistency which led him to a detour from the well-trodden, traditional paths of identity was his preferred existential realm. Bearing in mind the formal complexity of the *Diary*, I will try to tackle the narrator’s relations to time and its various narrative reconfigurations. Nevertheless, viewing literature in anthropological terms, I will argue that these representations of time are not just a mere literary elaboration but have some roots in the author’s personal experience. Artistic worlds are not entirely separated from a concrete experience shaped by a spatiotemporal context. Gombrowicz also mentioned the impact of broader social background on his writing in the *Diary*: “My independence, self-sufficiency, or even frivolous impudence, my taking potshots at everyone, universal provocation and exclusive reliance on myself—all of this was a result of my social and geographical situation.”

What are the configurations of temporality in Gombrowicz’s diaristic writing? Since the *Diary* and *Kronos* played different roles for the author, their structure and thus also the ways of inscribing self within the diaristic order of time varied considerably. In the literary *Diary*, the historical time did not play an important role. Most often it was treated as a pretext to reflect on some philosophical issues or in other words as a springboard enabling imaginary floating in the sky of speculation and abstraction. *Kronos*, however, brings Gombrowicz back to the ground, carnality, and materiality of being. The author of this private diary is subjected to a tension between increasing fame and inevitable ageing, freedom of spirit and necessity of fate. While in the *Diary* Gombrowicz was reckless about any clear specifications of time, in *Kronos* he was persistently and assiduously structuring his narration within the order of the calendar time.

Unlike *Kronos*, born in many years’ act of noting the facts from everyday life, the *Diary* is not founded on the calendar continuity in time. Among the aspects expected by the readers and betrayed by Gombrowicz’s rejection of the convention of the diaristic genre is also the construction of temporality. Not only is the *Diary* devoid of continuity but also the author’s self which does not unfold along with a narrative identity. The reconfigurations of temporality in the *Diary* certainly do

---

33 Ibid., 314.
not follow the traditional scheme according to which the past is shaped by the present moment and vice versa. Neither the present moment gives meaningful frames to the past nor the latter leads directly and unproblematically to the present moment. In the Diary there is no trace of genealogy and continuity in time. The construction of temporality does not abide by the typical, linear, and retrospective procedure of capturing the reflections of one’s old self in the diaristic mirror of the present moment. The present recording the past and at the same time endowing it with some meaning does not play an important role in the Diary. thirty-four There is no clear chronological rhythm structuring the diaristic writing. The notes were not taken regularly and most often they were not preceded by any temporal specification. In most cases, there are only days of the week, but these were also often imagined and changed before publishing. For instance, in the letter to Giedroyć, Gombrowicz asked the editor to change some of the days in his Diary before printing just for the aesthetical reasons: “I would ask for the following thing: in the last fragment of the diary I did not write ‘Tuesday,’ ‘Wednesday’ as usual – and now I see that it is better to keep it. So I ask politely that the Editor would insert there the days of the week (any) and eliminate the stars […]”. thirty-five Only in the third volume would Gombrowicz sometimes precede his notes with more precise dates. He announced the new tendency by this remark: “6.X. 62 (the Week Has Seven Days; They Have Bored Me Stiff).” thirty-six

Concerning the chronological time, almost absent in Gombrowicz’s public Diary, the writer’s earlier literary attempt within this genre is worth mentioning. In contrast to the Diary written for “Kultura,” the prior “Diary from Rio Ceballos,” even though also planned to be published, would clearly follow the chronological order of time. It was written in November 1944 and as the narrator emphasised in the beginning, he could hardly find any interesting topic to write about: “I am supposed to write down my ‘impressions’ for the journal ‘Oceano,’ but I am asking myself: what to write about?” thirty-seven Was the absence of an interesting theme worth mentioning in the diary provoked by the places themselves (Cordoba and Rio Ceballos) and their slower rhythm of time? Rio Ceballos is a relatively small town in central Argentina located in the mountains and when Gombrowicz stayed there it was still not animated by the time of the touristic season. Besides the considerably lower intensity of life in the isolated town, another reason for the lack of an interesting topic to tackle in the diary could be also the uneasy necessity to follow the daily routine of diaristic writing. In the case of this diary, Gombrowicz was not only forced to focus on the external reality but also to yield

---

34 Chmielewska, op. cit., 113-116.
35 Giedroyć, Gombrowicz, Listy, 137.
36 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 564.
to the time of *Chronos*. In this situation, he was attentive to everyday life and various details of microcosm which hopefully would lead him to more general, universal remarks considering the macrocosm. Departing from small details he tried to reflect in a comparative way on Europe and Latin America. Still, forced daily to report on some occurrences in small Argentinean towns, he could not escape the sense of emptiness surrounding him in everyday situations.\(^{38}\) Gombrowicz’s experience with “Diary from Rio Ceballos” raises the question of whether the inward look exploring the *kairotic* time of self in the *Diary* could be devised as a means of filling in the voidness opened by the attention excessively focused on the external reality ordered by *Chronos*. In this respect, the later public *Diary* could be regarded as a counterweight to “Diary from Rio Ceballos” as far as reconfigurations of temporality are concerned.

As Polish literary scholar Katarzyna Chmielewska notes, the same distance towards continuity in time manifests also in Gombrowicz’s attitude towards his personal history. He opted for self-irony undermining any excessive attachment to origins that could define his identity too clearly. Even if the young Gombrowicz, not free from snobbism, accompanied his older brother in his research on the genealogy of their family, it was nothing more than the next mask of the complex and contradictory personality.\(^{39}\) In fact, similarly to Márai’s critical attitude to his own social background, Gombrowicz was feeling hampered by the “familial form” and the social class of gentry he came from. For the young author of the “*Illustrissimae familiae Gombrovici*”\(^{40}\) his own genealogy acquired a caricatured and burdensome shape of artificial form. The genealogical continuity normally serves to root oneself in the past reality and tradition, and thusly also attributing one’s present situation with a meaningful bond with the past generations. In Gombrowicz’s view, however, this simple identification with tradition could entail a threat of consistency and responsibility posed to his protean self. Any anchorage in the past which implied an inscription of oneself within its continuity might have hindered Gombrowicz from endowing his existence with individually constructed meanings.\(^{41}\) Struggling constantly for at least the negative freedom, Gombrowicz did not choose this shortcut of positive identification in terms of belonging. He was opposing any tight bonds with both private history and another one of more general collective character.

---

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 129, 131.

\(^{39}\) Chmielewska, op. cit., 150-155.

\(^{40}\) Gombrowicz, *Polish Memories*, 23.

\(^{41}\) Chmielewska, op. cit., 150-155.
Miłosz also emphasised Gombrowicz’s focus on the present moment as a feature distinguishing him from other masters of suspicion such as Sigmund Freud or Karl Marx. In his reflection on the idea of “interhuman church” and social conditioning of each individual manifestation, Gombrowicz shared their attempts to undermine the faith in one’s independent self by emphasizing different types of determinants (subconsciousness or social class) of individual way of thinking and behaving. Nevertheless, as Miłosz rightly noticed, what differed him from Freudians or Marxists was his rejection of historical dimension and focus on the moment *hic et nunc*. As Miłosz expressed it, Gombrowicz’s difference from Freud or Marx lies in the fact “that they establish causal ties that reach into the past (the history of illness, the history of societies), whereas he specializes in the now, which is to say, in the phantasmagoria created in the mind by its exposure to the interhuman, by constant role-playing.”

The fragmentary nature of traces left by the past reality cannot lead to any satisfactory reconstruction in the present. Despite all the renewed efforts to capture the “ardently desired” but irretrievable time in order to make contact with himself from the past, the *Diary*’s narrator had to admit his failure. Wandering through thick layers of overlapping temporalities he was always losing his way. “I spend a lot of time reconstructing my past: I diligently establish a chronology and stretch my memory to its limits, looking for myself the way Proust did, but to no avail. The past is bottomless and Proust lies. Nothing, one can do absolutely nothing.”

Indeed nothing? Still, some reflections of the bottomless past appear on the surface of the present moment. Directing his thoughts backwards, the narrator reveals concurrently a predilection for a tangible representation of the past time, for its embodiment in a concrete face of a child or a young man with whom it would be possible to initiate a conversation. This communication was also resumed in hopes of finding an agreement between “I in prediction” and “I in the aftermath.” Immered in the impenetrable multitude of temporal variations of oneself (“faces in a dream, a combination of haunting faces, two different faces, one overlapping, one masking the other”), the present Gombrowicz accused himself of not supporting his past “self.” Clearly, this could be feasible only in an impossible situation of certainty in premonition.

You poor, poor boy! Why hadn’t I been at your side then, why couldn’t I have walked into that drawing room and stood right behind you, so that you could have been fortified with the later

---

43 Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 1, 92.
44 Ibid., 115.
sense of your life. But I—your fulfillment—I was—I am—a thousand miles and many years away from you and I sat—I sit—here, on the American shore, so bitterly overdue.45

The Diary’s narrator was to no avail seeking clarification of his present self in the “double vision” (backwards and inward), the look stimulated not only by some external phenomena (gusts of wind) but also by previous experiences and the fact of staying in the same spatial coordinates. For instance, a sudden abundant flow of pastness struck him in a spa in the Cordoba Mountains, which he had visited ten years before. With the abrupt rise of a curtain of the present moment and fleeting disappearance of the temporal distance, the narrator did not attempt to dominate the past by domesticating it. He was convinced about its alienating force, not susceptible to assimilation by the present moment. In an attempt to establish symmetrical relations between the past and the present, he summoned his bygone self to the same coffee table in hopes of achieving an agreement. Gombrowicz described this imagined meeting as follows:

All this has the character of secret information, communicated to that other one ten years ago, and he acts as if I were being seen by him. All the same, I see him, when he sat here, maybe at the same table. Hence the awfulness of double vision, which I feel as the bursting of reality, something unbearable, as if I were looking myself in the eyes.46

Gombrowicz’s description of the journey from Argentina to Europe in 1963 evokes a similar state of an internal split between the narrator’s present self and the past one. During this spatiotemporal journey, close to the Canary Islands, he would “encounter” young Gombrowicz approaching on a phantasmagorical ship from the opposite side immersed in the past of the pre-war times. On its board emerged “something like a lost brotherhood, like a killed brother, dead brother, mute brother, a brother lost forever and indifferent…”47 Interestingly, Márai in his diary mentioned the same overlapping of different layers of time and sudden incursions of the pastness into the present moment with the help of dreams which enabled him some fleeting meetings with his bygone self. He recalled one such encounter as follows: “At night a dream: I see myself in my youth and I am dissatisfied.”48

The past seemingly lost, and mute was yet not so irrevocably dissolved in oblivion. Evoked by a need of some meaningful symmetry in existence, it suddenly came out on a surface of the present moment which due to its ephemerality and contingency faded and became a mere apparition

45 Ibid., 93.
46 Ibid., 116.
47 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 600.
48 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 49.
in comparison to a vivid trace of the past. Gombrowicz described this shift in perspectives as follows: “Finally I thought about myself on that deck—and that for him over there, I am probably the same sort of phenomenon as he is for me.”

A thin ray of presence, always overshadowed by absence, brings to light some moments from the past depending on the present existential needs of an individual. The *Diary*’s narrator was making surprising analogies and following parallel paths of events in order to imaginatively fabricate them and discern some architecture of the self. A “cathedral” built out of his own life and founded on exceptional momentary encounters of the past with the present, was supposed to evoke a meaningful design. It was, however, at the same time yielded to an immediate erasure by the narrator’s consciousness of his work’s illusionary character. “Illusions! Mirages! False ties! No order, no architecture, the darkness in my life from which not even one real element of form emerges.”

Diaristic attempts to reconcile spatiotemporal coordinates and inscribe the self within some narrative “architecture” in the end fail due to the whimsical nature of time and changes it introduces both in the outside reality and in the self. In this regard, the question arises whether any consistent trajectory of life is possible. Instead of going straight ahead along one path, passing its consecutive stages marked by memories, hopes and aspirations, the *Diary*’s narrator would rather detour all the time, go back, and turn around in one place. There are no points of departure and arrival and thus no clear stages enhancing the narrator’s self-reliance in time and space which could confirm his identity. Volatile, spatiotemporal frames of experience undermine any representation, which is a repeated appearance of oneself enabling an assurance within one formula of the self. Representation strongly influenced by the rational side of personality and thus underpinned with stability gives way to fluid sensual experience.

In this respect, the *Diary*’s narrator would be rather subjected to specific disappearance in line with negative dialectics activated in an experience of synaesthesia, thus by the overwhelming simultaneous presence of various sensual impressions. Gombrowicz described this fleeting sensation of overlapping sensual experiences as follows: “Listening to new whispers, breathing strange air, deciphering a strange system of sounds, smells, lights. When I spoke with them, these

---

49 Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 3, 600.

50 “In 1931…and how could I have known then that Argentina would be my destiny? The word never gave me the least hint. But I did write a short story at the time entitled ‘Incidents on the H.M.S. *Banbury.*’ In this story I sail to South America.” Ibid., 599.

51 Ibid., 599-600. “Architecture. A cathedral built without respite…I build this edifice and build…I cannot catch a glimpse of it. Sometimes, at exceptional moments…it is as if I were discerning something in a flash …the joints of vaults, arches, some element of symmetry…mere appearances?” (599). “I immediately confiscated this memory because I noticed that I was fabricating it, as we have already mentioned, for architectonic reasons” (600).
details were crawling all over me, like insects, and made me practically absent.” It seems, to express it metaphorically, that the multitude of ever-changing sensations was penetrating the narrator’s resonance box-consciousness which had been abandoned by the owner (stable self). Only a melody composed in an accidental game of sounds, images and scents could come out of it. These transitory impressions, almost entirely dependent on the external reality, would make their recipient absent, invisible, and inaudible.

In order to withstand the immersion in these hardly differentiated but sensually experienced overlapping temporalities, the Diary’s narrator was grasping some dates and numbers which constitute the kairotic order of time. They were the landmarks, which repetition could give the impression of predictability and thus contribute to restoring some sense of constancy. In the Diary the narrator noted: “Today, the twenty-second, I touched European soil, I have long known that two twos are my number. I also touched Argentine soil for the first time on the twenty-second (of August). Hail, magic! The analogy of numbers, eloquence of dates…you miserable creature, if you can’t catch yourself in anything else, at least try this.” In another place, the narrator manifested his attention to dates as follows: “My growing sensitivity to the calendar. Dates. Anniversaries. Periods. With what diligence I now surrender myself to this tallying of dates.” Still, the Diary’s narrator claimed that his being in time could not be enclosed in any detailed description of events. Incapable of catching up with all the facts, “devoured” by them, he would rather search his self in dispersion somewhere between the recorded facts which played a crucial role in Kronos. While the Diary’s narrator noticed that the systematic recording of his own existence, made day by day, would not assure a firm ground under his feet constantly undermined by the flow of time, the author of Kronos did not resign his endeavour to bring some order to his immersion in the chaotic reality by inscribing oneself within the continuity of facts.

---

52 Ibid., 535.
53 Ibid., 601.
55 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 597. “...a pleiad of facts, facts were hatching, a swarm of events were attacking me like locusts as I retreated, I could not simply detach myself from facts, and thereby their enraged abundance led to some sort of furious degradation of them, nothing could exist seriously because the other was at its heels, I was never devoured by facts to such an extent.”
3. Diaristic, imagined travels in calendar order of time and positive dialectics in Kronos

*Kronos*, Gombrowicz’s second journal, unpublished while being kept, was located beyond interference from readers. To great extent it takes place off the stage, in the author’s memory. In the opinion of Rita Gombrowicz, the first editor of *Kronos*, the writer started his notes at the end of 1952 or the beginning of 1953. From this moment he tried to reconstruct his past life year by year, month by month since the interwar period in Poland (starting in 1922), not forgetting in the beginning to add the date of his birth (August 1904) and even earlier the probable date of his conception (December 1903). Naturally, the earliest recalled period of life spent in Poland before the Second World War, due to the temporal distance, abounds in silence which prevails over the remembered facts. Moreover, reconstruction opens the way to invention. As American literary scholar, Michal Oklot remarks, 30 reconstructed years (1922-1952) in *Kronos* are far from a mere reflection of reality. The pre-war years in Gombrowicz’s intimate diary are especially rich in erotic adventures. In this sense, Oklot underlines that the writer’s “intimate enumerations-revelations were not innocent, matter-of-fact recordings of empirical life events. They should rather be read as a grotesque transformation of his memories.” Oklot discerns a contrast between the first reconstructed part excessively marked by Eros and the second part recorded following the unfolding time and resembling a document of an ageing body and pain.

The retrospective view is necessarily and inevitably accompanied by some degree of confabulation and mythologisation. As Oklot underlines, *Kronos* was not just a laboratory required by works of art but being part of an artistic project, it possessed an element of self-fashioning and creation as a response to annihilating forces of pain and overwhelming dissolution. In that respect, it is underpinned by Gombrowicz’s existentialist ideas. Notwithstanding the important role of invention undermining the mimetic dimension of *Kronos*, this journal still permitted the author to note some facts from his everyday life which due to their excessive intimacy were not appropriate for the public *Diary*. It is particularly visible in the erotic sphere which silenced in the *Diary* was openly tackled in the intimate journal. *Kronos* is abundant in many, different themes which are interwoven and articulated in the same form of short statements. None of them is given priority. All

---

57 Oklot, op. cit., 120.
58 Ibid., 119. The contrast which in fact implied a “rule of construction”: “the monstrosity of non-procreative vitality is rhymed with the monstrosity of bodily inertia” (120).
59 Ibid., 125.
various issues such as economic affairs (receipts and expenses), political situation, erotic life, health problems and growing fame as a writer are intermingled. References to the course of events, made in the same form of short comments, indicate that Gombrowicz was not entirely indifferent to the political situation of his time.60

While the literary *Diary*, centred on various intellectual debates (Marxism, existentialism, art, literature), allowed its author to float in the abstract sphere of speculations and polemics, *Kronos* is rooted in Gombrowicz’s everyday life. Even though all the themes in this intimate diary are treated in the same way, a leading tone pertains to bodily expression and thus to health. Oklot called *Kronos* “an autobiographical pornography”, “pornography of ageing” and viewed the journal as “(almost) strictly physiological; it is, first of all, an account of the adventures of Gombrowicz’s body.”61 Pain and ageing underlining *Kronos*, according to Oklot, reflected the writer’s modernist dilemma of being between a dethroned Cartesian subjectivity and an autonomized carnality that undermines Western metaphysics.62 The pain, becoming almost incessant since his return to Europe and its psychological corollary: feelings of hopelessness, boredom and finally suicidal thoughts, reverberate from the pages of *Kronos* and incarnate Gombrowicz. The author of this intimate diary, who was constantly practising vivisections on his body and commenting on his physical state (enumerating various diseases, treatments, visits to doctors), resembles a fragile person made of flesh and blood, struggling predominantly with life as a human being and only later also engaged in the quest for fame as a writer.

The structure of *Kronos* imposed by the calendar offers a specific continuity in time. Oklot distinguishes in the diary two parallel but opposite trajectories: a descending line of ageing which expresses bodily decomposition and another ascending one of “vertical transcendence”63 which reflects Gombrowicz’s increasing fame as a writer (there are numerous notes in *Kronos* regarding translations and publications of his works).64 In *Kronos*, this “topological figure of the interplay of

---

60 In October 1956 Gombrowicz noted: “Gomulka in Poland. Revolution in Hungary. Saturday Raúl – Hungarian procession – Plaza Retiro. Interest with politics. Invasion of Suez.” (Gombrowicz, *Kronos*, 200.) One year earlier in June 1955 with the note “16 Revolution” Gombrowicz also mentioned the “Revolución Libertadora” which put an end to the regime of Juan D. Perón. In July of the same year, Gombrowicz would again emphasize “interest with the interior politics” (Ibid., 183). In the summary of that year, the author called it the year of the double liberation: from the bank where he worked as a clerk and from Peronism (Ibid., 190-191).

61 Oklot, op.cit., 107, 108.

62 Ibid., 109, 110, 111. “*Kronos* and *Diary* represent the two poles of tension — the body and the person (the creator) — out of which the bastard intermediary — his art, especially *Pornografía* — emerged.” (110)

63 Ibid., 120, 124.

64 Ibid, 110, 111, 119, 123. “We can distinguish, then, two trajectories in *Kronos*: the physiological descent and the artistic ascent” (111). “However, the balance sheets of *Kronos* also show that Gombrowicz cultivated very meticulously the growth of fame, prestige, and recognition, as if trying to outbalance the desolation of his body” (122). “Reading
façade and lining,” somatic experience of a person destined to finitude is complemented with an artistic tone of the author struggling for recognition.65 The question that should be posed here is whether the private diary (part of Gombrowicz’s artistic project?) was also written with the intention of later publication. Considering the writer’s instruction about the proper interpretation of his works which should go beyond text and thus concentrate on the author’s experience, Oklot responds that Kronos could be written with such intention. In the view of the American scholar, Gombrowicz could view the later public revelation of Kronos, this bodily expression as a peculiar delivery of corpse complementing corpus of his texts or in other words as an empirical ground of his literature necessary for its adequate understanding.66 On the other hand, as Jankowicz rightly remarks, the author of Kronos did not accompany his writing with any comment, legend or “instruction of use” to interpret this “map of life.” Consequently, Gombrowicz could write his intimate journal without any intention of its later publication.67

Leaving this ambiguity aside, it is important to ask about the role Gombrowicz could give to these persistent attempts to reconstruct his past life (year by year, month by month). Was Kronos important for the author due to its existential role inherent in diaristic regular practice which includes acts of writing and rereading? In this respect, Kronos could be interpreted as an exercise of memory and an attempt to give some meaningful structure to a bare senseless existence. However, the diary’s importance for the author was not confined as merely a way of recollecting the past. What role could the aesthetic function play in this intimate journal? If Kronos is regarded as a part of the author’s artistic project of the self, it shall be considered in connection with other writings and thus also the Diary. Kronos as a chronological skeleton and database used sometimes while writing the Diary? As an enumeration of succinct notes, Kronos resembles a record of existence, a raw material that

---

66 Ibid., 106-110., 115, 125. “If we believe the words of Rita Gombrowicz regarding the importance of Kronos for Gombrowicz, he treated his auto-physiological project with full seriousness; we may therefore assume that he indirectly provoked its posthumous publication, obliged us to read it, and in close connection with his artistic prose. Gombrowicz was no reluctant or modest diarist, writing for the drawer, leaving publication to accident. He wanted us to read his journal many years after his death, in the full splendour of literary promotion and discussion” (108). “Autobiographical pornography, when contrived as skilfully as Kronos, can be raised to the status of an almost tangible somatic presence, thus closing Gombrowicz’s modernist corpus by engaging the experience of the body (or the corpse)” (108). “Alongside these, however, there are fascinating facsimiles of the manuscript pages with sketches and plans of Kronos, which advances the hypothesis that it was more than just an innocent intimate balance sheet, but was, in fact, artistically contrived” (121).
67 Jankowicz, op. cit., 43.
could then be partially subjected to narrativisation in the *Diary*. It is, however, impossible to discern any direct projection of the notes and thoughts constituting *Kronos* into the *Diary* and its final shape.

Probably both aspects of *Kronos*: existential and aesthetic were equally important for the author. The first side particularly hints at the diary’s anthropological role. In this regard, Jankowicz rightly remarked that *Kronos* served the writer not only to reconstruct his biography and to grasp his entanglement in time by imagined travels along the chronological line (analysed later in the chapter) but also to understand his self and life as devoid of the public “diaristic cuirass” used in his struggle for fame.\(^68\) Jankowicz argues that besides Gombrowicz’s need to leave some trace of details from everyday life, which otherwise would be forgotten, *Kronos* was underpinned by the writer’s will to include in his notes as many phenomena and experiences as possible. In this respect, the intimate journal is a manifestation of “the necessity of management of his own existence as a remedy for the continuous falls into the depths of formless being.”\(^69\) Consequently Jankowicz defined *Kronos* as a “biopolitical note,” “biozoopolitical tool” which, as Gombrówicz wished, would help him to reveal some contours of his life, more authentic because not identical with an imposed social or artistic form. This diaristic tool aimed at ordering the chaotic existence in the end, however, failed as the experience proves to be unmanageable.\(^70\)

The *Diary* and *Kronos* could be viewed as two stages of Gombrowicz’s gradual retreat leading him closer to the somatic, empirical lining, from the hermeneutic *Diary* to the hermetic *Kronos* which hints at mute experience not yielding itself to any meaningful form. In that respect, as Oklot remarked, Gombrowicz’s diaristic practice reminds an interplay between the empiric lining and artistic façade. Guiding his readers in the workshop of his writing, “to the backstage of his being” (*Diary*), Gombrówicz descended still deeper towards more remote inner layers, following the steps leading from writing and conscious being towards his bodily experience.\(^71\) In the opinion of Jankowicz, *Kronos* should be given a more important role than a mere ritual of regular pinning down of experiences and impressions. The two different modes of diaristic practice can be viewed as two stages of Gombrowicz’s “wrestling” with life, which chaotic, formless nature he was trying to grasp in a diaristic form. The passage from the *Diary* to *Kronos* is thus the one leading towards a more visible experience and less intense form. *Kronos* contains all the manifestations of experience which went beyond the diaristic form and could not constitute the *Diary*. Even if these fragments of

---

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 44-45.
\(^{69}\) Ibid., 104.
\(^{70}\) Ibid., 103-105, 138.
\(^{71}\) Oklot, op. cit., 109.
experience remained dark, unintelligible, and hermetic, they were noted down and by inscribing them in words, they became in some sense tamed, controlled. Jankowicz sums up his remarks as follows: “At one end the Diary, so the laboratory of self-analysis and factory of forms, at the other – Kronos, so inscription, elementary mediation of life events, which could not be grasped in any other (linguistic or textual) net. Under them, around them and above them: the element of existence.”

Another important issue regards reconfigurations of temporality inherent in Gombrowicz’s diaristic practice. Oklot distinguished in these two modes of diaristic writing “Gombrowicz measured by [Ch]ronos (the lining) and ‘Gombrowicz’ redeemed, flickering in a-temporal breaches, Kairos (the artistic/messianic façade); in short, Kronos and the Diary.” Arguing about the interplay which connects these two types of diaristic writing, Oklot concurrently accentuated the important temporal axis structuring this diaristic practice that was founded on the oscillation between Chronos and Kairos. Already the title of the private journal evokes the Greek personification of time (Khronos) and consequently indicates the diary’s main problem understood as the author’s entanglement in historical time. In this multifaceted intimate diary, Gombrowicz’s relation to the passage of time constitutes the most significant dimension which unifies all extremely succinct and diversified notes.

Chronology, almost absent in communication with readers of the published Diary, became of primary importance for the hidden communication with Gombrowicz’s bygone selves in Kronos. The strict structure introduced by the objective time of the calendar may indicate the writer’s need to endow his life, “running through fingers,” with some rhythm. First, he imposed the calendar frame, the constructive axis of the list of dates. Then he was abiding by this timeline in his patient attempts to reconstruct his life by gathering fleeting traces of memory and facts. Jarzębski noted that the events remembered from the period between 1939 to 1952 were written in the special column of years and months. Some of the places had to remain blank due to the incapacity of reminding oneself of what happened dozens of years ago. Closer to 1953, so the moment when Gombrowicz probably started to write Kronos, more detailed and filled with events the journal becomes. Continuity and chronology, undesired in the Diary, were in Kronos put to the foreground as foundations of the

72 Jankowicz, op. cit, 59.
73 Oklot, op. cit., 109.
74 Jarzębski emphasized this issue: “Is there therefore anything which would make Kronos not only a valuable text, but in its formula unique? I assume, this feature most specific for Kronos is – in accordance with the title – the author’s relations to time.” Jerzy Jarzębski, “Afterword” in Kronos, by Gombrowicz, 420.
75 Ibid., 422.
author’s being in time. Gombrowicz in his intimate journal was constantly subjecting his self to the calendar, carefully recording the destructive power of time experienced on his own skin and observed around him. *Kronos* first, allowed him to some extent to reconstruct his life and then to reread his own fate.\(^{76}\)

The private journal’s material aspect is also significant as it may shed some light on the author’s relationship with time. Like the *Diary*, *Kronos* was also written on separate sheets of paper. The main difference, however, lies in the later stages and forms of the manuscripts depending on their purposes. The *Diary* emerged as a piece of literature, it was edited and changed many times. Therefore, the manuscript, typescript and the book are sometimes very different. *Kronos*, however, was not written in order to be published (immediately?). It thus resembled the draft which even though subjected to some changes (depending on the work of the memory) was not supposed to assume the form of typescript – the next step in the literary processing leading to a book.\(^{77}\) The choice of sheets of paper instead of a notebook is of great importance here because if not accidental, it may hint at some of the author’s convictions and attitudes in respect to time. While a notebook manifests a certain belief in a given continuity, the sheets of unbound paper entail more effort on the author’s side to put the dispersed notes together in narration. This choice can also imply the diarist’s assumption of impossible access to a permanent unity of oneself. Writing a diary on separate sheets of paper, instead of filling empty pages of a notebook promising some fulfilment, would mean a changing variation on oneself depending on present needs and memory resources depleting over time. The choice of a notebook for a diary may stem from a belief in the possibility of managing and taming the passage of time. Conversely, the preference for separate sheets of paper indicates a presumption of the annihilating forces of time devouring each narrative attempt to halt its flow. This form allows also to add some information emerging from the shadows of oblivion while writing and rereading. It gives thus the author more freedom in his drifting along the calendar time and his time of consciousness.

The material form of *Kronos* could also to some extent shape Gombrowicz’s diaristic practice by facilitating the act of rereading which resulted in the author’s interesting, imagined movement in time. The steps made by the writer in his repeated journeys in time could be smaller

---

\(^{76}\) Jarzębski accentuated that *Kronos* let the author reconstruct his biography and read his own fate. Ibid., 425.

\(^{77}\) Rodak, *Między zapisem a literaturą*, 405-494.

190
or bigger, depending on his needs and whims of memory. Commenting on the events of the present or previous month, he could at the same moment add something to some other periods, check what happened to him the same month but a few years ago or compare the yearly balances of his life. These balances were the short summaries-evaluations of each year which, not entirely devoid of an emotional component, consisted of financial, erotic, health, and literary issues. They could allow Gombrowicz to make some comparisons of his bygone selves over time.

On the pages of Kronos, it is possible to find some traces evoking the author’s recurrent journeys in time. I understand these signs as constituents of a deeper kairotic time emerging at the diaristic crossroads of the objective order of calendar time and the inner experienced time. Kairos as a qualitative aspect of temporality indicates the individual need for some meaning of his/her being in historical time. The kairotic dimension of temporality, marked by the recurrence of memory and dates, opens other than linear forms of experiencing time. Here, Kairos also means proper timing and consists of crucial existential moments revealing some individual sense which undermines for a while the power of Chronos. In this respect, as the Polish contemporary writer Olga Tokarczuk remarked, Kairos as a “god of occasion, passing moment, uncommon possibility” refers to “extraordinary, decisive moment which changes everything” and thus in contrast to fate or a chronological order of time, it depends on the individual decision and readiness to notice a promise of “change, shift of the trajectory of fate.” The traces of Gombrowicz’s imagined travels in time, which attribute Kronos with some elements of Kairos, can be found for instance in the comparisons between the past and the present made in the act of rereading the diaristic records. This repeated reading sometimes resulted also in the comments which added in the hindsight changed the original meaning of the previous notes.

These journeys in time realized on the pages of Kronos were facilitated by Gombrowicz’s sensitivity to numbers and temporal recurrence in form of anniversaries. It seems that the most important one was the anniversary of his abandonment of Banco Polaco, the bank in Buenos Aires where Gombrowicz was employed for several years. The post of a clerk being just a cog in the bureaucratic machinery was certainly not existentially satisfactory for the writer and his exuberant individuality. His continuous delays and secret writing during the work hours made quarrels with the boss imminent, manifesting the post’s inappropriateness for his literary aspirations.

---

78 There are numerous question marks beside some facts which Gombrowicz tried to recall from the distant past before the Second World War. Several times he also admitted defeat in his struggles with oblivion: “I do not remember… I do not remember…” (Gombrowicz, Kronos, 35 – notes from 1936).
79 Olga Tokarczuk, Czuly narrator (Kraków, 2020), 24-25.
After he had left the office (May 10, 195580) Gombrowicz was each year celebrating the anniversary of this “liberation” of his self from senseless (because not flowing out of his needs) tasks, mechanically performed, and intellectually not rewarding at all. Finally, he could entirely devote himself to literature. This became possible due to his contacts with Giedroyc, established in 1950, and his émigré review “Kultura.” The contacts later converted into a stable cooperation and resulted in the publishing of his famous Diary as well as other literary texts.81 Moreover at that time he could also count on scholarships of Radio Free Europe and Koestler Fund.82

Moreover, Gombrowicz’s conspicuous cult of numbers 22 or 2 is worth mentioning. The events happening 22nd acquired for the writer automatically some deeper meaning. Even though in reality some of them happened earlier or later, due to the significance given to the number, in retrospection, they had to take place 22nd. This was the case with the arrival in Argentina which contrary to what Gombrowicz claimed (22.08.) in fact took place two days earlier.83 The writer’s cult of the number 2 can be also noticed in the correspondence with his family, precisely in one of the letters sent to his brother Janusz. Suffering at that moment from severe flu and confined to bed for around two months, Gombrowicz confessed: “More than once I ascertained myself that 2 has significance in my life. So when I came to this sanatorium, I looked at the calendar on the wall: 22 II 1964. The sum 1964 gives 2. This can happen only once in 10 years.”84

Gombrowicz perceived numbers 22 and 2 as a premonition of good moments, liberation, the youthfulness of Argentina and bad moments, disease, approaching death in Europe, respectively. In Kronos in the summary of 1964 Gombrowicz noted: “this year, which sum of its numbers gives 20, was so far the worst. I was feeling fatally since January. Since 15 II – disease – flu. 22 II 1964 (only 2) to sanatorium Hygiea, to my misfortune.”85 In the same summary the writer mentioned that Rita received the keys to their flat on 22nd.86 The cult of the numbers 22 and 2 allowed Gombrowicz to discern some parallel paths and erect bridges connecting the present moment with the past and the future. While in the Diary this sensitivity to numbers, as subjected to literary elaboration, is less

---

80 In May 1955 Gombrowicz noted: “Tuesday – today, i.e. 10th, I left bank after 7 years 6 months 10 days.” Gombrowicz, Kronos, 181.
82 Olejniczak, op. cit., 107.
83 Suchanow, Argentyńskie przygody, 61.
84 Gombrowicz, Listy do rodziny, 355.
85 Gombrowicz, Kronos, 324. This year was so hard that next to the date of the following year Gombrowicz added in brackets and with question marks the word “ost.” Is it the abbreviation of the Polish word ostatni meaning the last?
86 Ibid., 325.
visible, in Kronos it acquires a greater, more direct, and explicit role which could to some extent also shape a rhythm of the writer’s everyday life.

Even though the traces of Gombrowicz’s act of rereading his intimate diary are not numerous, it does not mean that the writer was not using Kronos to move within his inner time (between memories and predictions, hopes) more often with the aim of reconstructing and understanding his fate. One of the traces is a note which Gombrowicz made in retrospection in Vence. To the information about leaving the post in the bank recorded in May 1955, Gombrowicz after many years added: “in 10 years Vence.”\(^{87}\) This later note was added just between the statement: “Tuesday – today, i.e. 10th, I left bank after 7 years 6 months 10 days” and the question “for good or for bad?” Originally the latter hesitation referred to the author’s decision about leaving the bank. However, in the new context created by the added information about Vence, the question might also refer to the writer’s later fate after his return to Europe. Was it a good decision to leave Argentina? This dilemma accompanied Gombrowicz for some time after his return to Europe and manifested in the writer’s plans to go back to Latin America. However, they were thwarted by Gombrowicz’s deteriorating health.

Interestingly, the diaristic notes made in hindsight show how Gombrowicz was communicating with his bygone selves. This communication over time sometimes acquired a supportive tone in which the present self was injecting some cheer or comfort into its past counterparts. In this spirit, Gombrowicz commented on the note taken in June 1955 which reverberates with preoccupation about his state of finances. In 1959 he added this comment: “Do not be afraid.”\(^{88}\) Apart from the comforting tone, on the pages of Kronos, a voice also appeared expressing hopelessness. In April 1964 in Germany, still ailing after the long flu, the writer started thinking about suicide. He remarked: “strangely I accustom myself to the thought about suicide.”\(^{89}\) His health state would never be stable again. Feeling a bit better Gombrowicz moved to Southern France. In July 1964, the writer noted that he tried some other kinds of treatment and asked his friends to find poison in case of aggravating pain. One month later, on August 29, Gombrowicz added to the previous note: “I want to do nothing.”\(^{90}\) This remark made in hindsight could indicate

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 181. The statements added by Gombrowicz in hindsight are printed in bold.

\(^{88}\) Ibid., 182. The latter comment is preceded (and evoked?) by the information about Gombrowicz’s uncertain incomes: “The first conversation with Nowiński – I bargained 14 thousand. The second they pay 12880. Disillusionment. Today the third I have in total 23340 pesos. For how long?”

\(^{89}\) Ibid., 309.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 314 (“nie chce mi się”).
the author’s growing apathy and indifference accompanying deteriorating physical state and painful consciousness of impossible return to Argentina.

Gombrowicz’s complex diaristic practice is marked by the tension between the desire to reread his life and the assumption that all the attempts to grasp some continuity of his selves in time must be doomed to failure. In this context, the Diary’s narrator was asking himself: “Why didn’t I write down something every single day from the moment I learned to write? Today I would have many volumes filled with notes, and I would know what I did twenty-seven years ago at this exact hour. What for?” What could such attentive, obsessive noting down of the entire life serve for? Faced with these questions the Diary’s narrator replied: “Life escapes through dates, just as water runs through one’s fingers. But at least something would have remained…some trace…”91 However, the meticulous act of inscribing oneself within the continuity of calendar time, in the end, betrays the diarist and his aim to find his true face in the notes. In Kronos structured by the calendar the author several times had to admit his defeat in favour of oblivion. A certain failure inherent in each diaristic endeavour is caused not only by imperfect memory but also by the volatile nature of time which makes it impossible to recognize oneself in records from the past.

4. Conclusion

Argentinean writer Miguel Grinberg, Gombrowicz’s friend, compared the writer to a drifting iceberg which never accessible in its entirety will always provoke questions about the prevailing hidden part. The overwhelming major part under the surface will remain an interpretative challenge for readers and researchers dealing with the writer’s oeuvre.92 Gombrowicz’s “way of living that was difficult to describe—a too-complicated system of masks,”93 makes him undoubtedly one of the most misleading writers who will always escape any classificatory remarks and definitions. The defensive strategy he chose in the Diary to defend his protean self from all kinds of deformations, entailed the escapist attitude towards the History of the twentieth century which was the abundant source of political and ideological masks. Gombrowicz was escaping the confines of classificatory

---

92 Grinberg, Wspominając Gombrowicza, 11.
schemes, intellectual forms and political masks which imposed a burden of responsibility for a consistency of the self, identified for instance with the bard of emigration, anti-communist, or nationalist.

Gombrowicz was asking himself: “To allow that historical energy to permeate me. To join them. Why do you hesitate?” The writer would not join, explaining his “dis-engagement” in History with his indefatigable willingness to be himself. Whom exactly? An episodic, inconclusive self always in the act of becoming and in relentless opposition to all possessive, crystallized identities. “He—the protean and open and obvious opposite of the monoliths, he—a gambler.”

The artistic lightness of being allowed him to throw off the burden of History. However, this lightness – at some point unbearable – also required some form of a counterweight. Gombrowicz’s diaristic practice thus has two sides. While the Diary is a multiplication of selves of the author-impostor, Kronos enabled Gombrowicz to view his life from one vantage point only which is the order of the calendar time promising some continuity of self.

Different roles of the two diaries resulted in various reconfigurations of time. In the Diary temporality is subjected to Gombrowicz’s artistic needs and literariness of the text which makes the calendar time invisible. In Kronos, however, only the facts themselves are speaking. The chronological time is here the only voice that seems to be given the role of articulating the author’s life. The ungraspable phenomenological time of consciousness, in the Diary confined to episodes, in Kronos was explored along the line of the calendar. While for the protean subject of the Diary the only point of reference, which could restore a feeling of being aligned with something in this spatiotemporal absurd boundlessness, were the hands of a random person, the author of Kronos grabbed hold of the calendar. The parallel writing of the diaries could allow the author to maintain some balance between the outward historical, social being vis-à-vis others and the inward being for oneself.

Central Europe and the History of the twentieth century were those spatiotemporal coordinates that forced many intellectuals to problematise their own being in time and all the related questions such as freedom or exile. The historical time privileging collectivity had to seem senseless and tasteless for the intellectuals overwhelmed with their individuality. Diaristic writing focused on the exploration of the self (selves), helped in finding some relief from the depersonalizing History.

94 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 1, 239
95 Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 3, 575.
96 Sensitivity to the hands of other people manifested several times in the Diary. “And why am I clinging to his hand like a drowning man—I’m not drowning, am I?” Gombrowicz, Diary, vol. 2, 440.
of the twentieth century. A diarist, besides being immersed in his own time of consciousness, can also travel within realms of temporalities constructed by other diarists. In Gombrowicz’s *Diary*, there are some traces of this inter-diaristic intertextuality.  

I am a passionate reader of diaries, the cavern of someone else’s life draws me in, even if it is embroidered or fabricated—but this way or that, it is a broth made of the taste of reality and I like knowing, for example, that on 3 May 1942 Bobkowski was teaching his wife to ride a bike in the Vincennes forest. And I? What was I doing on that day?

Gombrowicz’s interest in reading other intellectuals’ diaries can be explained by his search for some “synchronisation of existences,” their interconnections which could help him in finding his own proper place in a desynchronised world of the twentieth century. Gombrowicz mentioned in the *Diary* an intriguing “new science” which emerging in a distant future of several hundred years will delineate “the connections between various people in time and then it will be plain that what happens to one is not without connection to what has happened to someone else…And this synchronisation of existences will open new perspectives, but enough…”

New perspectives could be opened by different questions enabling a comparative approach. How did other diarists manage to silence some dissonances produced by different paces and rhythms of temporality pertaining both to the historical order of time and the individual one of consciousness? What were the differences in diarists’ experiences of particular epochs they witnessed? The similar interest in intellectual diaries, possibly leading their reader to the above-mentioned questions, was shared by Márai convinced that “everything overlaps in time and space.”

Immersed in the diary of English politician Samuel Pepys, he compared his reading to travelling in a time machine over 300 years which allowed him to experience the historical reality of the world of the seventeenth century. These times seemed to Márai more human than the twentieth century. Encounter with a diary of another author, nineteenth-century Hungarian writer Zsigmond Justh inspired Márai to make a similar

---

97 Magdalena Marszałek, *Życie i papier. Autobiograficzny projekt Zofii Nałkowskiej: “Dzienniki” 1899 – 1954* (Kraków, 2004), 102. In the study of Zofia Nałkowska’s “Diaries” Marszałek analysed different aspects of interdiaristic intertextuality. Nałkowska was not only referring to other diaries in her writing but also inscribing them into the text of her life (such as the diary of the painter and sculptor Maria Baszkirczew) following traces of other writers while travelling or feeling emotionally close to their strategies of self-construction. “The possibility of such deep interferences is the consequence of performative character of autobiographical writing – the diaristic care for ‘I’ is the complex activity, which does not confine only to the act of recording” (105).


99 Ibid., 364.

100 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 4, 369.

101 Ibid., 361.
comparison between two epochs, this time between the end of the twentieth century and the *belle epoque*. Márai transposed the diary’s permeating tone of “historical pessimism” and the spirit of farewell to his epoch and reflected on a possible balance of losses and gains to evaluate the twentieth century. Naturally, besides Gombrowicz’s twofold diaristic practice, which can be viewed as an example of temporal displacement, there were many other narrative responses to History of the twentieth century in the context of Central Europe. In further reflections, I will focus on Márai’s diaristic practice understood in terms of spatial displacement and Bartol’s autobiographical project of the self, developed in the post-war Trieste, in the place between the West and the East.

---

VII. “The fringe European” – Sándor Márai, “enthusiastic wanderer” between the East and the West

1. Introduction: Spatial displacement as a response to temporal dissonances?

One February evening in 1947, the Hungarian writer Sándor Márai was roaming the Parisian streets. Memories of his youth led him to Montparnasse, this “quarantine of the homeless in the world” where in one of the cafés, regularly visited 25 years before, in need of a quick “pick-me-up,” he ordered a glass of brandy. A sip of alcohol curbed disorderly floating thoughts and directed them to formulate the set of questions: “Where do I belong? In the burned-out, stupidly lying West? Or shall I go back to Hungary?” The writer recalled that night to be the moment “[…] when, without any personal compelling, urgent motive but with ‘historical perspective,’” he was forced “to decide whether to return to Budapest from the West or not.” Márai faced a similar dilemma almost 20 years before, in 1928 when after ten years spent abroad in the Western countries he had to decide whether to go back to Budapest or not. In 1947 he suddenly found himself again at the crossroads which compelled him to choose between two paths: one leading back to Hungary and another one stretching in the opposite Western direction.

In these two moments, the Hungarian writer made the same choice which was to great extent influenced by his travel experiences and observation of the Western “unbearable lightness of being” immune to the burden of memory and responsibility. During his numerous travels, Márai perceived in the Western world a certain detachment from historical reality. In the visitor coming from the East overwhelmed with the memory of the recent events, such a distance towards the past had to incite feelings of alienation and disillusionment which, in the end, proved also decisive when choosing the next stage of his life-travel. The recurrent moment of finding oneself at the crossroads evokes Central European in-betweenness and more precisely a fragile condition full of doubts, contradictions embodied in the fate of Márai, this “free-floating intellectual of looser Central European identity” as well as many other Central European writers, who due to whims of History and continuously shifting borders, experienced the crisis of sense of belonging. Finding oneself in

---

1 Márai, Wyznania, 404.
2 Márai, Memoir, 285.
3 Ibid., 279.
a state of homelessness, stemming not only from a direct impact of the war but also from a deeper culture’s crisis, Márai comes close to other Central European intellectuals such as Czesław Miłosz, Andrzej Bobkowski, Józef Wittlin. Disillusioned with the post-war political order, which negatively affected the spiritual atmosphere to the detriment of freedom of speech and pluralism of thought, they decided to abandon Europe.

In the circumstances following two global conflagrations, Márai was asking himself what bonds he could still have with this foreign to him Europe. He was torn between yearning for Western Europe, its idealized or expected image and the urge to return to his homeland intensified by disappointment with the West and articulated in a critical tone towards the latter. February 1947 seems an important moment in Márai’s life worth signalling because it allows both to shed some light on what preceded it and what happened later, thus on different phases and facets of Márai’s self-identification as a “fringe European” reformulated in respect to changeable historical circumstances as well as divergent places and cultures. Considering the performative dimension of life writing, it becomes clear that Márai’s dilemma which direction to go, whether to the West or to the East, thus the choice of place was at the same time a choice of self. In Márai’s decision about a future place of living, collective categories such as nation, country, “Native Land” did not play an important role. Rather, what was at stake was “personal, sole, and irredeemable reality, […] individual destiny.”

Certain places play an especially important role in the process of self-identification, in its problematisation when they are transformed into stages of turbulent History which due to its immediacy becomes a personal experience. Márai’s “sense of place” came to the foreground in the borderlands, for instance, while passing by border towns such as Komárom. There, the restless and nervous writer was faced with a geopolitical reshuffling of space, History’s imprint in particular places, namely the new map of Hungary shaped with the Treaty of Trianon. He could not accept the new borders asking himself: “But what can I do when the sense of place is a part of me?” What to do when “the sense of place” is still part of one’s self whereas a sense of time imposed by History

---

6 Feliks Netz, who was dealing with Márai’s oeuvre and started translating his texts to Polish, made some interesting remarks about the writer’s homelessness. Netz noted that “after the first war his [Márai’s, A. T.] home in Kassa was taken away, together with his hometown. The second war took away from him the home at Mikó street. Europe decided to inscribe the Hungarian Sándor Márai to the register of homeless men.” Feliks Netz, Ćwiczenia z wygnania (Mikołów, 2008), 21.

7 Ibid., 24-25.

8 Márai, Memoir, 285. “I did not believe that the ‘Native Land’ was waiting for me.”

9 Ibid., 279.

becomes increasingly alien? “The sense of place” seems even more exposed and crucial in reframing the self when the two orders of time: the personal inner time and the historical order of time, mismatch. Their different flows and rhythms provoke feelings of estrangement and foreignness in an apparently familiar environment. Their mismatching brings to the forefront the need to withdraw to one’s inner self and/or to abandon some spatial context in search for another one ruled by a divergent order of time that could be more harmonious with one’s self. Therefore, Márai’s answer to the above-mentioned question could be “still to write a few poems” as well as “to understand oneself and one’s situation in this world”11 and when this world becomes incomprehensible – to travel.

The writer who read Odyssey’s story several times also followed into the ancient hero’s footsteps.12 This “enthusiastic wanderer,” as Márai called himself in the preface written in 1937 to the travel narrative from his journey to the Near East undertaken in 1926,13 spent most of his life abroad, travelling and in the end also choosing exile. In 1981 Márai noted down this remark: “Today, thirty-three years have passed since our departure from Budapest. Without eight years, that’s half of our life. The decision was right. When I add the years spent in Paris, Berlin and other countries to this, it turns out that I spent most of my life abroad.”14 In 1978 on the thirtieth anniversary of the departure from Budapest and the beginning of exilic life, Márai remarked that he never regretted his decision to leave the country.15 While looking retrospectively at his life in 1972, Márai described his 25-year exile in terms of “vagabondage in the world.”16 For the writer, who combined in his person “the curiosity of the Faustian man, as well as the mobility of the Odyssey man,”17 travel (imagined and in reality) remained throughout his entire life his only true passion,18 the way of satisfying his curiosity of the world and an important tool of self-examination. Márai compared his exilic life to an odyssey, a journey on a ship. While already living in California, his last place of...

11 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 61.
13 Márai Śladami, 6.
14 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 171.
15 Ibid., 70.
16 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 218.
18 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 259.
exile, he described several times his books, manuscripts, letters, and other belongings – “testimonies
of memory” in terms of chests saved from a ship which ran aground.19

Márai’s propensity for travel was similarly strong in the youth and later in life. In 1959 during
preparations for the trip to Mexico, the writer noticed that he was filled with excitement which,
provoked by the prospect of change and aimlessness of travel, also constituted the leading tone of
his youth.20 Both factors, internal and external, restlessness, curiosity as well as historical context,
political changes in Hungary pushed Márai to embark on a lifelong journey. Among the first inner
traits which shaped the writer’s personality and propelled him along this journey was a specific
propensity for “a complicated infidelity” or in other words a betrayal of the environment which even
if before reverberating with some familiarity had to be abandoned. The writer defined this inclination
as a strong irresistible “internal compulsion” to constantly change the surrounding landscapes,
“cities, rivers and mountains” as well as places of stay which as a result became only temporary.21
Travelling is equivalent to a passing life compared by Márai to “a quiet, constant, permanent, well-
mannered leave-taking.”22 The perception of life as a path and belief in existential aim which is the
imperative of approaching the knowledge of one’s inner self, could also shape Márai’s inclination
to wander.23 In this respect, the need to change places of living was motivated not only by external
factors but also by inner predispositions.

Márai’s travelling, accompanied by feelings of “anxiety, disappointment and nervous
expectation,”24 as one of the responses (besides diaristic practice) to the accelerated course of
History and overall atmosphere of loss will be put to the foreground in this chapter. I will focus on
the Hungarian writer’s movement in space (imagined and in reality), his “wayfaring” and the
accompanying self-identifications of the anxious traveller. I will argue that in the state of being
continuously elsewhere, thus while travelling, Márai tried not only to find some answers to
challenges of the epoch in the crisis he witnessed but also to meaningfully frame his self within
volatile historical and spatial, cultural contexts. Hungarian writer, András Zoltán Bán, described
Márai as “a traveller out of inevitable necessity […] a wanderer, a fugitive persecuted by

---

19 Ibid., 143, 146-147, 151, 169, 240., 6.03
21 Márai, Wyznania, 440. Márai, W podróży, 94.
23 Márai, Księga ziół, translated by Feliks Netz (Warszawa, 2009), 16-17. “You are a wanderer and each day you must
go further. You cannot know how long you will live and if at all there will be time for you to reach a final destination
of your way, knowledge of your own soul and that which is divine?”
unfathomable fate.” Márai’s travels were thus not only motivated by insatiable curiosity, search for adventure or the need to follow in the footsteps of other intellectuals who used to embark on the educational Grand Tour but also by the historical fate. Whereas the aforementioned self-initiated factors such as inquisitiveness about the world and adventures were of great importance for young Márai during his first voluntary emigration in the interwar period, later on, it was the “unfathomable fate,” shaped by the dictates of History, which made him follow the exilic path of life. Therefore, the “inevitable necessity” replaced freedom of choice. As Polish writer and translator of Márai’s text, Feliks Netz remarked, Europe destined him “to the register of the Expatriates and Wanderers.”

Where would a literary thread of life writing underpinned with travelling lead the writer in the world compared by him to a “labyrinth, which does not have neither a central point nor an exit”?

2. Márai’s nomadism and life writing

Grasped in the whirls of the speeding course of events in the twentieth century in Central Europe, many times arbitrarily reshuffling borders and identities, Márai experienced strong mismatching with the epoch he lived in. Apart from diaristic practice, travelling, understood as a search for answers to fundamental existential questions, also presented for the writer a certain mitigation of this temporal dimension of estrangement. The question which shall be posed here is whether his nomadism, understood as a spatial displacement, was a response to temporal displacement. In other words, was the writer’s continuous movement in space also an attempt to meaningfully bridge the unparallel orders of time, the one pertaining to History and another one constituting the self? Márai’s nomadism emerged as a consequence of the personal experience of the unstable and disruptive History of the twentieth century. Transitional, uncertain times such as the war problematise one’s self-identification by bringing to the forefront ethical questions which require an individual to give some answer. As Bán emphasised, Márai experienced a “considerable unease over his own identity” which throughout his life was spurring a few fundamental existential questions about his place in the world and his self in the mirror of other: “Who he himself was, what business he had here in the world and, specifically, in Europe […] what does it mean to be

26 Netz, op. cit., 21.
a Hungarian abroad and, in particular, a Hungarian in Western Europe? How does a Hungarian appear to people of other nationalities?"^{28}

These questions accompanied Márai while travelling which was treated as a tool that made one open to changes in self-perception. Being on a way he could revise his self-understanding by redimensioning it in the changeable mirrors of cultural otherness encountered in various places. Therefore, his numerous journeys allowed him not only to confront different cultures representing divergent traditions, values, and orders of time but as the Polish translator of Márai’s texts, Teresa Worowska reminds, they encouraged him to reflect on his “own moral context” and make “examination of conscience."^{29} His travel experiences and observations, which gave rise to a plethora of travelogues, as accompanied by ethical reflection, played an important existential role for the writer. As Imre Kertesz remarked, Márai’s exile was underpinned by ethical questions and shared guilt for the fateful changes to the European spirit. His accusatory tone was directed not only towards the West but also towards himself. He did not accept to assume the lamenting voice in the role of the victim of communism but the critical and accusatory one of penitent and witness of the decline of humanism.^{30}

Márai’s numerous journeys shall be viewed against the backdrop of generational changes, shifts in ways of expression, genres (popular travel narrative) and the interrelated issue of altering travel culture. The writer’s intermittent urge to travel forms part of the broader image of a generational abyss in worldviews opened by the outbreak of the Great War and a rebellion against the older generation of parents because of their responsibility for the loss of homeland, this “axis mundi” providing some sense of stability.^{31} As Irena Makarewicz, Polish translator of Hungarian literature argues, Márai when faced with radically different spatiotemporal circumstances after the war and identity crisis felt the need to re-examine his self in the new post-war situation and post-Trianon place in Europe.^{32} As a member of “the generation of the wanderer years,”^{33} sharing the general atmosphere of both curiosity and fear as well as “nervous hunger for discernment,”^{34} Márai

---

29 Teresa Worowska, “Niepokojąca wieloznaczność” in W podróży, 201.
32 Irena Makarewicz, “U bram wielkiej literatury” in Śladami, 208-209.
33 Németh Ákos, “In Search of Lost Cultures: Sándor Márai, a Central European Post-War Traveller in the East,” AIC 2, no. 18 (2016): 51. The term was coined by Antal Szerb (1901-1945), the Hungarian writer and member of this generation. Makarewicz, op. cit., 209.
34 Makarewicz, op. cit., 208.
decided to embark on a journey in hopes of finding some answers to the questions about the new self-identification.

Following the remarks of Hungarian literary scholar, Németh Ákos, the considerable shift in the Western travel culture in the aftermath of the Great War was parallel to differing generational historical experiences, accompanied by mismatching mental frameworks (from parents’ general optimism and belief in progress to their offspring’s pessimism and disillusionment with life in critical times). As Ákos underlines, with the shift in general atmosphere in Europe after the Great War, the meaning of different concepts and phenomena such as travel also changed, reshaping travellers’ individual experiences. Whereas for Márai’s forebears travel still very often meant only a routine educational journey of precise duration, the writer and his contemporaries perceived it in autotelic terms as “a lifestyle and an important way of self-examination and social analysis, providing experiences of transition in time, space and culture.”

After the Second World War, travel acquired again new meanings. What once was a formative, individual and aimless wandering accompanied by “fervor enthusiasm” and equivalent to a form of art, “sensual cognition”, after the war became mass tourism, “crazy change of places of stay.” The deep experience (fear, enchantment), which facilitated a traveller to approach the world, was replaced by superficial and short impressions. Destinations after the war could be only visited, seen but not experienced. Travel “in the Odyssean sense of the word” disappeared. Mass tourism is devoid of a real “sense of travel” which consists of unexpected and unplanned impressions provoked by a specific place, “loose form, this wandering around, […] wayward discovering of spirit and style of life of some nation.” There is no place for a “sentimental journey” anymore, that is the journey attentive to experiences gained during the way and then written down for a reader. Contemporary traveller does not have time for such observations and readers are not so interested in them. “Travel and the genre of travel-writing are wilted. What remained is a change of place.”

---

35 Ákos, op. cit., 50.
37 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 259.
38 Márai, Kronika Niedzielna, 178, 177-181.
40 Márai, “Western Patrol,” 92.
Even if the concept of travel gained different meanings in the course of history, it remained important for Márai throughout his life because he understood it in anthropological, existential terms. Furthermore, some part of his life writing could express a certain philosophy of travel which George Santayana defined in his essay by posing the question: “What is life but a form of motion and a journey through a foreign world?” American philosopher grounded his reasoning in particular constitution of a human being who in the process of evolution was granted a “forward-and-back” dimension which, added to “the up-and-down and inwards-and-outwards known to the plant,” became “a distinction possible only to travellers.” The need to travel as a realisation of peripatetic philosophy is embedded not only in the human physical constitution but also in its psychological corollary (unrest, restlessness, idiosyncrasy, passion, curiosity, thirst for meaning) and becomes triggered by historical circumstances (dissatisfaction with the situation in homeland and pursuit for an ideal).

With regard to the issue of self-identification in relation to changeable space, the significance of each journey depends not on places of short stay, points of departure or arrival but on travelling itself as an open-ended process that allows one to go beyond the previous, domesticated ways of being and thinking. The writer emphasised in his travelogue novel written in 1936 that “if there is a point to the journey it is, and can only be, this slow pace, this taking stock: it is the pointlessness itself that is the point.” In one of the diaristic notes, after having seen some advertisements of air-lines, Márai remarked on a “yearning for travel,” travel without any preferred aim, for the sake of the experience of travel. As the writer recollected: “[…] a change of place was not important, not even arrival, not when a train is departing and what its destination is, but solely what sets out within us during a journey.” Therefore, each movement in space, if only a traveller is attentive and open to new experiences, may reshape his self-understanding. In one of his interwar reportages Márai – the young journalist often on the way, noticed that “travelling […] means partly to die for whom we were and be born without a rank and title to whom we are heading for,” to abandon previous very often restraining confines of the self in favour of a new horizon recognized in alterity. The two moments of departure and arrival, the moment of abandoning some familiar context and reaching

42 Ibid., 7.
43 Ibid., 7-10, 12-13, 15. (“[…] it is the possibility of travel that lends a meaning to the images of the eye and the mind, which otherwise would be mere feelings and a dull state of oneself.” Ibid., 8).
44 Márai, “Western Patrol,” 86.
45 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 4, 84.
a new destination are of different importance for each traveller depending on the moment in life and the passage of time. They journey is, of course, experienced differently in the youth and later in life. For Márai the accents shifted from “a travel towards” to “a travel from.” While in the youth the most significant and exciting part of travelling was for him the moment of arrival at an unknown place, later the destination became indifferent and what instead gained more importance was the moment of departure promising some distance from a routine.\(^\text{47}\)

One of the moments that considerably influenced the direction of Márai’s Odyssean path, and his later fate was the decision made that February evening 1947, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. The decision becomes understandable in the light of what preceded it: Márai’s travel in the West after the war, his experiences of the war, the siege of Budapest and previous journeys in the interwar period. Therefore, before focusing on that night in the café Dôme in Paris, retrospectively described by the author as revealing some contours of his destiny,\(^\text{48}\) it is important to mention Márai’s earlier travels and existential struggles during the war and the siege of Budapest.

Márai’s life was framed by continuous movement in space. Already in his early years during the interwar period, he was travelling a lot as a student and aspiring journalist in a carefree atmosphere of “unboundedness”, very often in response to some impulse “with light luggage, without money and without perspectives [...].”\(^\text{49}\) At that time he could not imagine himself other life than “only in a hotel room, among suitcases [...].”\(^\text{50}\) As a journalist cooperating with reputable “Frankfurter Zeitung” and other German, Austrian as well as Hungarian newspapers, young Márai visited many places in Europe and beyond. He was living for longer periods, from 1919 to 1923 in Germany (Leipzig, Berlin, Frankfurt) and later till 1928 in France (Paris) from where he was regularly visiting London. He also spent some time in Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, Greece. In 1926 he departed farther to the Near and Middle East (Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey)\(^\text{51}\) where he spent several months (March-July).\(^\text{52}\)

---

\(^{47}\) Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 5, 44-45, 81. The writer believed that later in life what becomes more important than discovering new places is to reencounter some familiar surroundings which always bring disappointment and, in the end, undermine the value of travelling. Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 4, 103.

\(^{48}\) Márai, *Memoir*, 279.

\(^{49}\) Márai, *Wyznania*, 390.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 469.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 294; Teresa Worowska, “Wielki nieznajomy,” in *Wyznania*. 498. Márai would later revisit some places in the Near East and recall: “[...] I was travelling along Nil till Sudan, I was in Khartoum, I was bored in Jerusalem, I was getting lost in the hills of Lebanon [...]” Márai, *Wyznania*, 439.

In the 1930s, Márai as a “city writer,” who in many writings explored his experience of particular urban spaces (through “anthropomorphisation” and “the sensory sensitisation”), remarked: “I have always had an inclination for such ‘aimless’ sojourns in foreign cities, for an outside observer incomprehensible and seemingly impossible to justify.” Márai’s sojourns in different cities and countries were marked by a journalistic openness to the world. As a fulfilment of “internal freedom,” “internal momentum,” “unlimited freedom of movement” and “the inner unconcern and lightness,” his long stays in various cities were imbued with a feeling of exterritoriality. It was, however, soon undermined by the overwhelming and invading each instance of privacy historical wave. Márai’s Epicurean carefree wandering on his own volition framed by journalistic openness was replaced by a forced emigration and the Stoic diaristic withdrawal. The wandering mode of life, after the war underpinned by a strong feeling of homelessness, assumed the shape of an exilic odyssey extending between two continents.

Márai’s nomadism was, to great extent, conditioned by turbulent historical circumstances accompanied by political and social changes which among others manifested in the bourgeoisie’s loss of its previous important role in society. Márai’s experience of uprootedness from both his close family and the social layer he belonged to emerged in his early years and was parallel to the gradual decline of the bourgeoisie and its former considerable influence in society. In this context, Márai’s feeling of isolation from his social class nourished by the new post-war circumstances was to some extent shared by Gombrowicz who also early in his life started perceiving his social background as part of the gentry in terms of artificial, grotesque, and distorting form. Olejniczak emphasised that changes in social structure in the beginning of the twentieth century (revolution in 1905 and the Great War) provoked Gombrowicz’s “multi-layered identity split – social, sexual, ethnic” accompanied by his “fascination with dark sides of existence, eroticism, suspicious districts of cities.”

Both writers’ relationship with the social groups they were born to was contradictory. Gombrowicz’s feeling of estrangement from the artificial form of gentry resulted in numerous comments on his supposed aristocratic heritage made, however, in a satirical tone. Thus, he always maintained the distance towards his roots. Even though Márai identified himself with the patriciate

54 Márai, Wyznania, 374.
55 Ibid., 385, 389-390.
57 Olejniczak, op. cit., 24-25.
from the viewpoint of its important role, tasks\textsuperscript{58} and lifestyle encouraging social progress and development\textsuperscript{59} (“bourgeoisie […] in only two centuries created the ‘modern’ Hungary”\textsuperscript{60}) at the same time, he would not bear its caricatured image confining individual freedom. Márai was also critical of the morality of the Hungarian middle class in the interwar period which, indifferent to the pursuit of knowledge and effort of intellectual development, was more interested in the hasty building of careers on the grounds of familial bonds, ancestry, and privileges.\textsuperscript{61}

Therefore, from his early years, Márai would feel some inclination for anarchy.\textsuperscript{62} His transgressive identification, not fully in line with the expected social form, Bán characterised as follows: “Márai’s bourgeois-ness was neither of spotless conscience nor entirely self-assured—there always lurked within it the possibility of revolt, of turning everything topsy-turvy, the fatal leap into certain uncertainty.”\textsuperscript{63} Bán suggests that one of Márai’s alter egos, his master – the novelist and bohemian Gyula Krúdy was the figure whose image seduced him to follow his path which was so distant from the bourgeois form.\textsuperscript{64} Márai recalled that his feeling of non-belonging to any social group and community appeared when, as a 14-year-old boy, he embarked on his own “path leading nowhere”\textsuperscript{65} or to the margins of the community towards a minority.\textsuperscript{66} The similar offbeat way of being on the margins but defined in terms of immaturity and inferiority seduced Gombrowicz.

The first global conflagration, which broke out when Márai was 14 years old, implied uprooting from the old world, engendering, as the writer later recalled, “an insatiable desire to belong, to adhere to something. ‘Leftism’ was this utopian homeland to which ‘one could belong.’”\textsuperscript{67} Márai shared the fate of homelessness and in his youth, he would embrace leftist ideas which at that time, just after the Great War, appeared to him as a response to this general feeling of loss, disillusionment, lack of self-confidence and yearning for adherence.\textsuperscript{68} Márai’s first 10-year voluntary emigration was underpinned by the general tone of his generation, namely the feeling of

\textsuperscript{58} Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 273-274.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 250.
\textsuperscript{60} Márai, Diarios 1984-1989, 166. “All the Hungarian culture during this millennium of attempts has been always the bourgeois culture.” Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{62} Márai, Wyznania, 198-199.
\textsuperscript{63} Bán, “Closing Time,” The Hungarian Quarterly, no. 186, 2007, 82.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 82. “Márai’s bourgeois mode was a kind of one-man way of life, and presumably one with a guilty conscience, longing in secret, in the absence of a Hungarian avant-garde, for the lifestyle of a Krúdy (much as later his exile turned out to be a one-man affair).”
\textsuperscript{65} Márai, Wyznania, 198-200. The “path leading nowhere” or at least for a few moments leading inwardly towards his self and other groups of people with whom he could share a common fate.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 152-153.
\textsuperscript{67} Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 91.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 91.
loss in changeable and transient interwar times. Interestingly, the ideological backgrounds of the writer’s two phases of emigrant life were opposite. Whereas the first departure to the West after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, was concurrently also a form of escape from the nationalistic new regime in the country and thus potential consequences of Márai’s contributions to the communist press, the second emigration was an escape from communism.

The atmosphere accompanying Márai along his westward itinerary differed depending on the historical moment either of the aftermath of the Great War or the period following the Second World War. As the writer recalled the change, it was “no longer an easy, youthful setting forth. It is not like seeing the world as a young man, going on an unlimited hike to nowhere in particular.”69 Unrestrained freedom of “old light-hearted selves” underlying the first period of emigration was curbed by bonds to the homeland which Márai strengthened since his return to Hungary in 1928. Nevertheless, these ties would remain “diffident” never ossifying in a “patriotic nostalgia” (most detestable by the writer). Therefore, he still felt a stranger also at home, living “between two worlds” which precluding a “direct access” did not accept him entirely.70 Did these two incompatible worlds pertain to two different historical periods as well as political and social contexts? Some traces of the past of pre-war Hungary and Europe could be still perceptible in the present context of the post-Trianon Hungary and the interwar Europe of the next, estranged generation to which Márai also belonged. The abyss between these two worlds became ever greater with the passage of time, rise of nationalism, change of borders and gradual restraint of freedoms under the pressure of totalitarian ideologies.

In the context of travel nourished by the mismatching of two orders of time, it is worth mentioning the dominant temporal perspective of the writer’s consecutive periods of emigration which slightly differed (from retrospective to more prospective) depending on the historical moment. Márai’s first emigration in the 1920s was underpinned by the need to grasp the last traces of the old world and European form of life. Witnessing the social transformations and the decline of the once leading role of the bourgeoisie, he felt obliged (it was “an urgent task”) to capture for the successors the old face of his civilisation “in ‘an original state’ before a terrifying, unknown change occurs.”71 At that time young Márai was led by “yearning for adventure”72 but also by the need to belong which, exacerbated by the war and the speeding, disruptive course of events, made his

---

70 Ibid., 89.
journeys extend also to the past in search of some familiar traces and bonds. This retrospective longing for familiarity was intensified by the atmosphere of permanent incertitude in the interwar period which only certainty was the upcoming next war.\textsuperscript{73} Over time, however, changes seemed irreversible and demanded a deeper, more thorough, careful survey focused on the present moment. Consequently, later, during the next travel to the West in the 1930s, Márai directed his attention from the past to the present by taking the role of “the soldier on a sentry duty”\textsuperscript{74} who felt compelled to examine the condition of rapidly changing Europe which at that time, in his view, underwent a split in two sides: “the fascist and democratic versions.”\textsuperscript{75} Suddenly trapped between them, Márai felt responsible for guarding his personal, old, united Europe which was, however, undergoing changes rushing “at an amazing pace.”\textsuperscript{76} The tensions between these two manifestations of Europe were increasing and the writer was asking himself whether the direction of the changes really was on a downward trajectory. Unable “to guess the extent of the decline from this distance”\textsuperscript{77}, from the Hungarian capital, Márai embarked on a “Western patrol in the lands of the declining sun” as he titled his travelogue novel (1936), to survey the present situation.

While Márai’s first wandering in the West in the 1920s was to a certain degree also a search for the traces of the past, his next travel in the westward direction just before the Second World War was an analysis of the present moment which was supposed to either confirm or refute some theories of the crisis of the Western culture. Whereas Márai’s first emigration was triggered by an impulse, a fear of losing “something indescribably important and precious,”\textsuperscript{78} namely the last bonds with the old Europe, his next travel aimed to compare theory (Oscar Spengler’s \textit{Decline of the West}) as well as “dubious and worrying rumours”\textsuperscript{79} about the condition of the West with the real state. Identifying himself with “a sentry on guard,” he felt compelled to carefully examine the changeable panorama of Western Europe and confront its image of twilight as proclaimed in theory with his own observations and experiences.\textsuperscript{80} The aim of Márai’s next journey in the 1930s was thus the attentive survey of the liveliness of Western culture and values which constituted a familiar and dear to him European form of life. The writer “on patrol” undertook this examination “as if inspecting family

\textsuperscript{73} Márai, “Western Patrol,” 93-94.
\textsuperscript{74} Bán, “Closing Time,” 83-84.
\textsuperscript{75} Márai, “Western Patrol,” 94.
\textsuperscript{76} Márai, \textit{Wyznania}, 274.
\textsuperscript{77} Márai, “Western Patrol,” 86-87.
\textsuperscript{78} Márai, \textit{Wyznania}, 275. “I knew that I was afraid. […] I was afraid as a young animal fears the earthquake. I have neither read Spengler yet nor collected ‘theories.’”
\textsuperscript{79} Márai, “Western Patrol,” 103.
property.” Later when the theory of decline was experienced in real life and when so many Europeans shared the fate of disinheritance from this cultural “family property,” Márai headed again westwards, this time to examine how Western Europe faced the challenges of the present, post-war moment. Therefore, the writer’s next journey just after the Second World War mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, acquired a rather future-oriented time perspective.

What varied also was the pace of Márai’s journeys. The first decade of his aimless wandering was marked by constant change (“betrayal”) of places. The young journalist, driven by “an urgent task” to capture as many traces of the old world as possible, was rushing from one destination to another, as if in fear of running out of time. He was racing against a time of radical social transformations. Later, however, Márai slowed down opting for a “dawdling pace, full of stops along the way […]” because “there is nothing urgent.” He followed here Spengler’s remark concerning different perceptions of time as a criterion distinguishing culture (unawareness or contempt in respect to time) from its ossified manifestation namely “an atrophied civilisation” (“time-panic”). Even though his next visit to the West was shorter (six weeks), Márai as a guard of his old Europe had to remain faithful to the image of the Old Continent as a culture and so he was also forced to decelerate his travel. He aimed to counterpose this “slow and anachronistic” journey with the modernity, “all-modern-conveniences means of travel” as well as culture and the past with civilisation of the present moment. Márai’s intention was “to travel slowly, aimlessly, dawdling through the Gardens of the Declining West […]” As if for the last moment before the catastrophe, which would convert these “gardens” into ruins and him into Stoic, he still wished to embark on “the journey that tastes of freedom.” As if the writer longed for the last careless saunter in the “gardens” of European culture to grasp a “taste of world.” At least for a short period, he would again become Epicurean “treading the lawns of freedom one last time by way of farewell.”

Contrary to the first, youthful and Epicurean phase of travelling, Márai’s second emigration was to great extent framed by the Stoic worldview which emerged during the Second World War. His life overshadowed by the Stoic perspective was imbued with feelings of solitude, confinement, and a sense of being lost (“where to go?”) which were also the emotional origins of his journal. Previous unboundedness of always widening horizons, unrelentingly pursued by the restless traveller, was drastically reduced. As Márai noted in 1943 in Budapest which became the aim of air raids: “Our own, suddenly shrunken fate we are carrying as if in a handbag which we take in left

---

81 Márai, “Western Patrol,” 87, 103.
82 Ibid., 86-87, 91, 103.
hand, wherever we go.” During the war, the Márais were forced to change their place of living due to hardships of the moment. They moved from the city of Budapest and found a shelter in the nearby village Leanyfalu. With the outbreak of the war, “a seven-year captivity in the country” commenced for Márai. Especially during the war, the feeling of hopeless enclosure, which entailed no other possibility of escape than death, was strong. The only suitcase, which had to be always at hand at those extremely hard times, was a small bag for a shelter in case of another bombardment. As the writer remarked: “There is no chance of departure. And chance of death is still one step away. The yellow leather bag which I prepared for shelter, day and night stands next to my bed, there are underwear for a change and my manuscripts inside. Maybe one can depart with it even further than one goes by train.”

However, the wartime confinement to the limited area of Budapest and the capital’s nearby countryside did not quench Márai’s inclination for going beyond domesticated places of living and his need to travel.

Enforced withdrawal from the public life of a journalist to the inner life of a diarist during the Second World War was accompanied by the extension of horizons and imagined movement beyond the imposed confinement in time and space. Trapped in the country immersed in the war, Márai could only dream about foreign European destinations of his previous travels such as Paris. Some of his diaristic notes from the time of war are permeated with a yearning for travelling and leaving the atmosphere of restraining and paralyzing fear in Hungary. In 1944 Márai noticed that it had been already five years since his last time abroad. Five years passed in the unchanged background of the same streets and decorations which trapped the writer together with his compatriots in the common hopeless fate.

Touched by the feeling of the irreversibility of time and transience (“world is going away, youth is passing”), Márai was wondering whether he would ever see again the sea and that what remained from the Western cities such as Florence and Paris. There was still hope for escape and travel. It would be possible only if any evil ‘force’ (enemy, bomb, disease) did not sentence him to enclosure in Budapest “[…] in this fate, on these several streets, in this environment.” The crossing of the mined Danube separating Budapest from Leanyfalu was the only possible modest substitute for a longer trip. In 1944 the writer noticed: “these short trips by ship on the mined Danube, between Budapest and Leanyfalu […] this is what remained to me from the world. But this is a gift which I accept with gratitude.” Furthermore, some short trips to Sopron and Eger or a delivery of a book

---

83 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 85, 18, 326, 62.
84 Ibid., 84
85 Ibid., 61.
coming from Switzerland or Sweden brought some smell of a wider world which could at least temporarily satisfy Márai’s need of travel.86

At the same time during the war, the writer – prisoner of geopolitically shaped spatial and temporal context, was also compensating for the impossibility of going abroad with the imagined travels realized on books’ pages. He defined literature as the “transmigration of souls” or the wandering through time and space of human spirit (its continuous “radiation”) which acquires different voices in particular literary texts.87 One such imagined travel occurred while reading the texts of Goethe who in 1944 led Márai to Venice and southern Italy.88 The same authors (Goethe, Stendhal) accompanied him many years later in the last place of his exilic life, in Californian San Diego where he embarked on the imagined travel to Italy with the help of the writers’ accounts of their explorations of the Italian landscapes and culture.89

A certain existential dialectics, namely a tension between feeling of homelessness and need to retain some bonds with his homeland was inherent in Márai’s exilic fate. The time of his youthful wandering in the interwar period was marked by “aimless traipsing, temporariness of being, entirely hopeless sauntering on the streets […]”. In this early period of life in a state of continuous readiness to go somewhere and explore Europe and the world, the author identified “home” with “a broad and loose concept” but still it referred to cities such as Vienna, Budapest or Kassa and other places in Upper Hungary (today Slovakia), thus to Central Europe.90 Even though some places could reverberate with a familiar tone and invite for a longer stay, the need to betray and abandon them was stronger. During Márai’s stay in Vienna in 1973, where he felt as if he returned to his family house, he was still thinking about leaving. He presented himself as an anxious traveller who unnoticed by the hosts was secretly checking the schedule to catch the next train. Life “on a different

86 Ibid., 84, 61.
87 Márai, Tagebücher 1976-1983, 127-128. In the contemporary period, however, instead of “wandering of the souls” the literature reminded Márai of “an epidemiological poverty of souls.” “An die Stelle der Seelenwanderung ist die epidemiische Seelenarmut getreten.” Ibid., 141. The dialogue does not refer only to authors but also readers. In this sense, Márai expressed his will to enter into a conversation, “silent polemic” with another unknown reader who left some traces in a book borrowed from a library. Such a dialogue with an unknown, invisible reader of clear opinions might be, according to the writer, even more intriguing than a conversation face to face. Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 196.
88 Imaginatively spending some time with Goethe while travelling/reading, Márai noted that in Venice he could not share Goethe’s artistic preferences (especially his exaggerated attention dedicated to Palladio and too little to Gothic style) and in Naples, he could not approve of the fact that Goethe spent so much time in Rome with Germans, especially with the painter Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein (Márai, Tagebücher 1943-1944, 174-175, 177).
89 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 148-156. “After Stendhal’s Italian notes, once again, once again, Goethe’s Italienische Reise. Two travellers lead me once again through landscapes that I will never see again.” Ibid., 152. “Thirty-five years ago, when we came to Italy, I began a long journey with these two Baedekers. And now I am finishing it with them.” Ibid., 153.
90 Márai, Wyznania, 374, 380, 460.
‘scale’” in foreign places in exile, when interrupted by a short stay in a familiar place known from childhood or youth (“some variation of the lost homeland”) still incited a feeling of having “grown out of familiarity and homeliness.” Passage of time continuously reshapes one’s self-identification by modifying spatial frames of existence which very often become unrecognizable and inadequate for the inscription of the transformed self. External and internal flows of time are parallel but never correspond and therefore Márai could not recognize himself in the places once called home.

Even if the need to travel or escape subsided with the passage of years, the feeling of homelessness in its different shades, seems to have accompanied Márai throughout his life. In 1943 while working in a café in his hometown Kassa, the writer noticed that he used to do this only in youth, thus a long time ago when he was equally homeless, adding that in future he might become even more homeless. Later, referring to the historical reality of 1944, Márai reflected on the gradual loss of constituents of his hitherto familiar environment and the farewell he was forced to bid to different domesticated places such as flat and aspects of his life (work). At the end of this chain of loss, a nomadic fate was awaiting him. As the writer noticed, he had to “live in a saddle like former Hungarians.” More than two decades later, while reflecting on the next anniversary of the German occupation of Hungary and the Márais’ abandonment of their flat in Budapest in 1944, the writer noted: “During these twenty four years we have never and nowhere felt to be ‘at home,’ always only ‘living quarters’ – now as well.” Instead of house or other property, more useful in the

91 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 256, 262.
92 Ibid., 273. In 1973 in Salerno, wondering whether he should move to some other place characterised by a more moderate climate, the writer noticed: “But there is not even a single place where I would like to go.” Ibid., 311. Later, commenting on the deteriorating political and economic situation in Italy Márai remarked: “And there is nowhere to escape; and this because we already no longer feel like escaping anywhere. History has taught us that what counts is not a danger but inconvenience.” Ibid., 357. In 1976 the writer realized that with passports and money together with his wife they could travel wherever they wished. However, he concluded that there were no places or persons – potential destinations. The explanation of this stance might be either old age or the absence of “this charm which was a radiation of culture.” Ibid., 412. Later in the 1980s, the decision to move from Europe to America for good, Márai did not call neither emigration nor return but the “ordinary change of place of stay.” Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 108. In 1983 Márai refused invitations from abroad (Europe and Australia) stating that he did not like being a guest and that he did not believe “in the sense of the change of place because in the modern conditions it is no more an experience, rather a routine, or actually turning around in a place at speed of thousand km per hour.” Ibid., 216.
93 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 34.
94 Ibid., 66.
95 Márai’s name day on 18th of March 1944 celebrated at home at the Mikó street in Budapest, just before the abandonment of the city, is remembered very often throughout the diary because it constituted an important existential caesura which reminded the author not only of the lost place but also of close persons dear to him and gradually disappearing over time. Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 195, Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 272-273, 463, Márai, Dziennik, vol. 3, 265, 331, Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 17, 64, 194, 348; Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 20, 153, 252. Similarly, the writer was often remembering the anniversary of the death of his son Kristof.
96 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 64.
nomadic way of life were for Márai a few suitcases and moveables. His uprooted life consisted of several “temporary gypsy halts” and each change of place of living he compared to Robinson’s departure from the island. Exilic temporary places of stay designated the writer’s insular lonely life.

The nomadic existence precludes stable address and the possibility of taking roots in one place called home. In 1967, having returned to Italy from the USA where the Márais had been living 15 years, the writer referred to his flat as follows: “Now it looks like home. Which one already? And for how long?” While preparing for the departure from Salerno and the way back to the USA in 1979, Márai remarked that next time instead of buying another flat, it would have more sense to pitch a tent. Enumerating all the apartments he lived in, he confessed that they did not entail any “memories of home.” When commenting on his four-month stay in a hotel in California and his long fate of wanderer who spent already 30 years in exile, the writer remarked: “For me, the concept of ‘home’ is just like a memory flowing in half a dream.” Both flats in Salerno and San Diego he did not call home but a refuge or “a roof over the head.” What is more, he declined in calling his family house home because he escaped from there. In the dialectics between homelessness and search for home or uprootedness and yearning for roots, I would argue that Márai’s nostalgia for a lost homeland was overshadowed by a curiosity of the world that, in the end, also underpinned his emigration and long exilic odyssey. Among the two emigrants crossing the border and described by the writer: one saying – “awful, I have lost a world” and another one at the same time remarking – “peculiar, I have found a world,” Márai would be closer to the latter one.

---

97 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 494. Commenting on Liszt’s reflections, Márai compared his way of life to Gypsy nomadism. The writer confessed also a specific tension between “a great desire to ‘feel some bond,’ be affectionately attached to the country, society, and even just to the flat, and at the same time constant preparations: get out of here, give up this situation for some unknown Gypsy fate.” Ibid., 436-437. Later, in 1976 Márai noted with reference to the Romani people: “I have always liked them, I am also such a homeless Gypsy.” Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 375.

98 Devoid of any desire to possess property, the writer noticed that the only thing which in future he could need and thus also buy would not be a house but a few suitcases (Márai, Memoir, 364).

99 In the USA, in the 1980s, the last place of his exilic life, Márai commented on his friend’s acquisition of a new flat as follows: “[…] I myself already a long time ago decided in favour of the movables instead of property.” Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 244.

100 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5., 60.

101 Ibid., 117.

102 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 45.

103 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 93, 146, 104, 116, 133, 82.

3. Between the West and the East. Márai’s self in the mirror of the cultural other

Márai – *homo viator*, with his insatiable necessity to go beyond the domesticated, but concurrently estranged by historical circumstances, Hungarian environment, comes close to “intellectual nomadism,” a characteristic used by the Scottish poet and literary scholar Kenneth White to describe his geopoetics as opposed to geopolitics.\(^{105}\) Geopoetics in overshadowing *homo politicus* accentuates the second side of *homo duplex* which as *homo poeticus* was always close to Márai. I am referring here to geopoetics not as the international movement (established just recently in the last decade of the twentieth century) but as the worldview shared by many writers (Arthur Rimbaud, Friedrich Nietzsche, Patrick Geddes, Henry Thoreau). It consists of the critical approach to Western civilisation and the cult of Reason similar to the one developed by philosophers representing the Frankfurt School.\(^{106}\) In this attempt, geopoetics acts as a counterpoise of modernity founded on the belief of progress which has been distancing a human being from reality, technologically more advanced and at the same time more dehumanized.

Geopoetics as a criticism of geopolitics is centred on the individual relationship with the world which should avoid a political intermediary. Márai, convinced about the *Realpolitik*’s meaningfulness,\(^{107}\) chose other than a political response to reality. He embarked on hermeneutic geopoetics, namely life writing in search of some answers to existential questions regarding his place and self in certain historical situations. These questions arose to Márai and his contemporaries amid the historical hectic unfolding of the twentieth century. The writer tried to formulate his own answers not only with the help of diaristic practice but also while being on a way that enabled him to contrast his responses with others’ attitudes encountered in different cultural contexts.

Márai’s inclination for travelling, counterweighted by a simultaneous desire to belong somewhere and maintain some bonds (with place, culture), seems to be nurtured by a curiosity about others’ responses to the shifting political situation in Europe and the world. Another motivation was

---


\(^{106}\) White, “What is Geopoetics?,” available at http://www.geopoetics.org.uk/what-is-geopoetics/, (retrieved 12 January 2018). Geopoetics instead promotes holistic thinking centred on the relationship of human beings with the universe and advocates a new way of perceiving the world, space approached not only intellectually but also emotionally. It promotes the integrity of knowledge united by poetics which emphasizes the inseparable link between individual and natural world.

\(^{107}\) In the letter to his friend Márai referred to Thucydides and his view on *Realpolitik*: “The Peloponnesian War took 28 years and the old wise Greek noticed at the end of his book that ‘this war did not have any sense.’” Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 115.
the need to meaningfully inscribe his self within a specific historical context with the help of the mirror posed by the “Other.” In this regard, Márai’s many journeys, which in the end also problematised his self-identification with the Old Continent, can be understood in existential terms as an attempt to find his place in certain historical circumstances and search for some answers to the challenges posed by the modern History. The writer perceived the relationship of individuals and groups with historical realms in terms of dialogue. While History is raising questions, tasks and problems, a person, or a group such as a nation should react in some way towards them. Life in the twentieth century as a member of generation devoid of illusions for Márai was “not a state but a task […],” imposed by a particular moment in time which demands from individual to engage and find a meaningful solution.

In one of the letters to his friend, Márai commented on collective answers given by some nations to historical changes defined as “the great examination” which revealed

the loss of roles in life of nations and individuals. In this century, the examination went on ahead faster than in the past centuries. The nation which answered well is rare: the English answered in a sporting manner, the French with the temporary stiff cramp of grandeur, Italians raging […], Austrians with resigned Gemütlichkeit. The Germans answered with a bookkeeping thoroughness […].

The examination was imposed by History or to be more precise by the modern conceptualisation of the historical process in terms of acceleration and progress, the History which was strongly permeated with personal experiences and interwoven with individual stories. Márai’s description of an individual’s relationship with the world in terms of a ‘cruel duel’ could be also projected to the historical world which, within the context of twentieth–century Europe, was constantly challenging for a duel and probing one’s moral stance in certain historical situations.

---

108 Márai, Kronika Niedzielna, 237.
109 Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 275. Interestingly, in the opinion of Márai, just like individuals and nations confronted with historical changes were supposed to lose their former roles, the same process would also apply to genres and literature which has been received with increasing indifference. Ibid., 282.
110 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 53. Some historical situations could seem to Márai similar to challenging exams, impossible to be separated from circumstances of every-day life. In 1944 mentioning two inconveniences concurrent in time, one coming from the historical context and another one of personal nature (an anti-aircraft alarm and nicotine intoxication), he wrote: “It is possible to withstand everything what fate brings us, however, it is not allowed additionally – for instance with such a nicotine intoxication – to make more difficult – difficult enough without this – exams with which history faces us.”
111 Márai, Tagebücher 1943-1944, 153.
Márai’s both emigrations were imbued with a search for a “personal Europe” and were motivated by “the striving towards ‘Europeanness,’ or more precisely, West Europeanness,”\(^{112}\) considering the fact that the writer identified Europe with the West.\(^{113}\) While the first period of aimless wandering was still propelled by youthful inquisitiveness of the world and belief in the “European patriotism,”\(^{114}\) the second one due to bitter experiences of war and the post-war period, revealed disappointment with the emptiness of the European idea. However, already in the interwar period, while searching for some traces of the desired old Europe, Márai was disillusioned with the Western countries’ responses to the recent events and historical challenges posed by the war and its aftermath. Expectations did not meet reality and in 1926 he decided to leave the Old Continent heading for the Near East which seemed to him to “have some sort of bearing on Europe.”\(^{115}\) In that respect, the young journalist was attracted by another civilisation in hopes of finding some meaningful solution that could possibly reinvigorate the post-war ruined Europe marked with a traumatic past. The Near East as a spiritual cradle of Europe allured Márai with some promise of response to the present problems of the Old Continent (disenchanting cult of ideas and “isms” such as bolshevism, capitalism),\(^{116}\) the promise hidden in the Asian mystical roots and the past.

Márai as “indignant […] contemporary witness of the passed mad decade,” while departing from Europe, where he felt deceived and robbed, had a momentary sensation of returning to Asia and oneself. He still did not bid farewell to Europe, with which he will tear his bonds later, after the next war. With this temporary distance in the interwar period, he expected to redefine himself as European yielding to “this great eastern dream – dream about homeland” once abandoned.\(^{117}\) In this respect, as Ákos remarked, “[…] the myth of the Orient has a further meaning for the disillusioned Hungarian traveller, referring to the Eastern origin of his nation. Travelling to the East appears in Márai’s travelogue as a chance of a return to the roots, after the failed trial of Western modernisation […].”\(^{118}\) Disappointed with the Western linear philosophy of history which, with time, would transform values of Enlightenment into anti-values, rationality in the madness of global conflagrations and individuality into herd instinct, Márai tried to leap over the recent modern epoch in order to reach in another civilisation its remote past. There he hoped to find roots of the present

\(^{112}\) Bán, “A Sentimental Education,” 50.
\(^{113}\) Ibid., 50.
\(^{114}\) Márai, Wyznania, 289.
\(^{116}\) Makarewicz, op. cit., 211-212.
\(^{117}\) Márai Śladami, 18.
\(^{118}\) Ákos, op. cit., 53.
moment and the cradle of European culture, thus origins of Hungarian community as well as his own as a Hungarian and European writer. Márai’s journey in the eastward direction interpreted as the return to roots was motivated by the disillusionment with the disenchanted, modern European world and thus at the same time could express the writer’s attempt to find in the expected “authentic” Orient an incentive to reinvigorate ruined and spiritually void post-war Europe.

In the mythologised Near East, “among the deities of the ancient Orient he seeks answers to the questions haunting Europe after the nightmare of the First World War: do the ancient gods survive in any manner, do they have any relevance for the generations to come?”119 Polish translator and expert on Márai’s oeuvre, Worowska adds another question possibly accompanying Márai during his travel: “[…] Can changing Europe benefit from the ancient experiences by confronting various options which set the direction of its development with the world of old traditions?”120 In search of some responses to these questions the writer embarked on a three-month journey which long itinerary had not been yet followed by any Hungarian journalist,121 visiting among other places: Cairo, Haifa, Jaffa, Alexandria, Beirut and Damascus. Desired by Márai authentic and untouched traces of the old civilisation, not distorted by foreigners, were, in fact, hardly visible due to the European influence (“bureaucratic machine and European capital”).122 The Near East, where elements of tradition and modernity co-existed in everyday life, represented to the writer a confusing combination of contradictions: “[…] half wild, half modern cities and miserable villages with mud huts, immense wealth and unimaginable poverty […] sultans and slaves, Ford cars and people facing Mecca kneeling and praying at the tram stops, harem and whiskey […].”123 Critical of French colonial aspirations in Syria and European imperialism in general in the region, Márai could not “make any sense at all, of the things we Europeans do in this world.”124

Following the remarks of Makarewicz and Worowska, in the interwar period Márai still believed in a future world imbued with transcendence, removed from Eurocentrism, and finally ruled by the principle of equality of cultures.125 He was convinced about the loss of authority of the West. Thus, in the end, he did not see any chance for its decayed culture to find a reinvigorating inspiration and force in the prolific Near East.126 Concurrently, however, as literary scholar Barbara Zwolińska

120 Worowska, Niepokojąca wieloznaczność, 201.
121 Makarewicz, op. cit., 209.
126 Worowska, Niepokojąca wieloznaczność, 202.
reminds, Márai encountered in the Near East an interlocking of two spheres that was direct and present in everyday life: one of the sacrum and another belonging to profaneness, the interwovenness in which he found some solution to European problems, “an opportunity to renew the face of old Europe.”

However, the promise of a new, regenerated image of Europe, which Márai could sense in the Near East, was soon replaced by its grotesque caricature. In the late 1930s with the rise of the nationalistic tensions in Europe, Márai noted that “European spirit”, “European Idea” in which he was born, and which gave to Europe “the only pretext and sense of its existence” disappeared and what remained was a mere continent. A mere continent devoid of belief in its own “mission,” “vocation” and “role,” “form of life” which convert existence into a committing, purposeful and conscious life. During and after the Second World War the general tone of life in Europe changed. For Márai the shift imposed more responsibility and restrained previously free exchange of ideas and carefree, creative life by a “programme.”

In the context of the Cold War, this “programme,” because it was ultimately more ideological, acquired even more confining contours and consequently converted the writer’s short travels into a life-long exilic path. Notwithstanding all the historical, political changes which deprived Europe of its unifying idea, Márai continued his life-journey still in hope to find his “personal Europe” but first and foremost driven by the need to reconfigure his self-understanding in the changeable spatiotemporal contexts.

Márai’s philosophy of travel would incite him to treat each change of place as a spur for reflection and a way to embark on a vertical journey towards his inner self. Therefore, the writer’s wandering in this viewpoint had a “noetic dimension” which allowed him to broaden and deepen his self-understanding. In 1977 Márai noted that “journey has sense only when a man together with a change of place at the same time travels towards his interior.” While reading accounts from journeys in Europe, Márai remarked that a traveller’s reflections inspired by some place are always more important from what they saw, thus from a mere depiction of the place which may be found in each Baedeker.

In another point, referring to Goethe’s experiences as a traveller, the writer remarked that the wanderer’s main aim is not to meet the world but to encounter oneself. Following

_____

131 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 35.
Goethe’s choice to travel incognito, Márai also noted that since the moment of departure from Hungary, he and his wife aimed to remain alone.\textsuperscript{132} He thus did not socialize with other Hungarians in exile by for instance participating in emigrant associations and was rather reluctant to accept journalists’ requests for interviews. The writer preferred to safeguard his independence in loneliness and anonymity which formed the background not only of his wandering but also of the journal keeping.

Márai’s displacement in the exterior reality was accompanied by a mental shift and changing attitudes towards Europe and his self as European, which in the end also influenced the decision made later in Paris in 1947 in respect to his future path of life. This decision was preceded by a chain of mediations of the self in the face of otherness. For the attentive traveller, each itinerary abounds in mirrors emerging in the form of differing cultures and unexpected encounters in which it is possible to see multifarious reflections of one’s self. Travelling like reading resembles “a walk among crooked mirrors in a panopticon” which reminds one that “[…] we are not only as we are, but also as they see us; especially when they see as in a crooked mirror.”\textsuperscript{133} Márai-Central European had at disposal at least three spatial and cultural mirrors which revealed to him some new dimensions of his self. Whereas two of them he sought voluntarily during his travels in Western Europe and America, the third one came from the opposite direction and was imposed by the historical circumstances of the Siege of Budapest and its aftermath.

The question about the East and communism as the embodiment of some alterity and History’s “great examination” emerged to Márai during his first direct encounter with a Soviet soldier at the end of 1944 in Budapest. The author recalled this moment as follows: “[…] on this particular night, when a warrior from the East entered a dark Hungarian village […] I felt in my bones that this young Soviet soldier had brought a question to Europe with him.”\textsuperscript{134} It forced the writer to undertake, as he named it, “the great examination, the process of question and answer, the assessment of the Communist and non-Communist worlds; but this examination commenced simultaneously in the Western world as well.”\textsuperscript{135}

The Second World War, which in Hungary swept away former political and social order, can be regarded as a critical moment, a beginning of a new story and a turning point when contours of something new emerge from the ruins. The general atmosphere of alleviation was matched by the

\textsuperscript{132} Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 154-155.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 255. Márai made this comparison in the context of what he could read about himself in the press.
\textsuperscript{134} Márai, Memoir, 33.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 33.
expectation for a new more democratic social and political order which could replace the previous social structure. Nevertheless, there remained incertitude regarding the future. The complex Hungarian past marked by rapid ideological shifts from the communist (Bela Kun’s regime in 1919) to fascist states and its memory shared by Hungarians impinged on their expectations which combined contradictory feelings of relief, optimism, and anxiety. On the one hand, there was a largely shared will to modernize the country by breaking the remaining ties with Miklós Horthy’s past but on the other, due to memories of the communist experiment most people were not in favour of another socialist takeover of power. The ambiguous attitudes towards the Red Army’s presence within Hungarian borders and its prospects were also caused by the traditional, among Hungarians, inclination to view Slavs and especially Russians with contempt or as a threat. The denigrative view was shaped by anti-Soviet propaganda present in Horthy’s nationalist state.

While characterising Márai’s view of communism, his attitude towards the Red Army and his parallel self-identification vis-à-vis the East, it is important to remember that the writer was a member of the society which at the concrete, a historical moment shared a certain imaginary of beliefs, memories, and expectations. As the literary scholar Polanco Izquierdo remarks, Márai’s personal observations shall be framed within a wider image of the Hungarian national tradition which in the interwar period was marked with discussions over a definition of the Hungarian spirit. It would be a defensive character shaped in the face of supposed dangers coming from the Orient. Márai was not free from this general tone of suspicion and defence against historical challenges announced in different variations by the East and the most recent one by the Soviet soldiers who posed a threat to the old bourgeois world, spirit and its most important component which was internal freedom.

Márai, however, as Varga claims, in the very beginning of the Soviet occupation was not its relentless opponent. His milder attitude, not devoid of hope, towards the Soviet soldiers was probably nourished by his absolute repudiation of the past and the need to rearticulate his identity in the new historical circumstances. As the historian László Kontler described the change in Hungary brought by the war, which to some extent could also affect Márai’s initial attitude to socialism: “The failure in the war was largely that of the anachronistic, semi-feudal social and

---

137 Peter Kenez, Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: the Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944-1948 (New York, 2006), 38. “Those Hungarians who had not been personally subjected to Nazi terror had far more friendly feelings for the ‘civilized’ Germans than for Russians.”
138 Polanco Izquierdo, op. cit., 127-128.
139 Varga, op. cit., 33-34.
political order, which collapsed into ashes at the turn of 1944-1945.”

For Márai it was a relieving transformation. He was critical of the interwar regime in Hungary describing it in terms of “a feudal enterprise – plutocratic and fascist-like of the officials – descendents of the nobility without lands.” Márai’s relief after abandoning the caricatured image of himself as the middle-class writer can be viewed as a variation of a collective relief provoked by the end of the war and shared by the majority.

Yet, having formerly and briefly accepted socialism as a possible new way of reorganizing Hungarian (and not only) political life, it was only after 1947 that, in a state of increasing pessimism and disenchantment, he viewed communism in terms of the imperialistic Slavic enterprise. The writer perceived Russians dangerous not because of their ideological adherence to bolshevism but because of their Slavic provenience and “projects of panslavic imperialism.” Therefore, it was the Slavic encirclement and “absorption capacity” which posed the greatest threat to “small Hungary” and not bolshevism itself which Márai at that time still did not condemn and regarded as “a great organisational economic and social experiment which true meaning has not yet shaped […]”

The end of the war and the Siege of Budapest brought an unimaginable loss in its both material and spiritual dimensions. The latter designates an end of a specific form of life characterising the spiritual universe of the old world, Márai’s homeland. At that moment, the writer experienced a decisive existential caesura which had torn his biography apart and undermined his hitherto self-understanding. Polanco Izquierdo characterised Márai’s identity as bifurcated and reminded the writer’s reflection on the dual structure of the self, stretched between the real side of the subject and his caricature, the two sides which are not separate but always coexist. Parallel to radical historical changes were also Márai’s reformulations of his self-identification which at that moment of the end of the war seemed to him as distorted, falsified and in consequence, as Polanco Izquierdo remarked, trapped in a simulacrum of “archetypal bourgeois,” a caricature which, however, was an integral part of his self. As Varga adds “the loss of his belief in a collective

140 László Kontler, *A History of Hungary. Millennium in Central Europe* (New York, 2002), 388. The Hungarian historian noted that from the perspective of Hungary’s future, destruction brought by the war could have entailed desirable, democratic changes if only the geopolitical situation had been different and thus the country’s sovereignty had not been limited.


142 Naturally with the exception of the Nazi Germans still present in the country and their Hungarian supporters. Kenez, op. cit, 38.

143 Varga, op. cit., 33-34.

144 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 1, 287-288. “Slavs have patient, persistent, feminine strength, their absorption capacity is slower but more dangerous than the similar ability of the Germans.” Ibid., 288.

145 Polanco Izquierdo, op. cit., 130-132.
identity goes together with a serious personal identity crisis.\textsuperscript{146} Historical events of the twentieth century eroded Márai’s identification with both collective categories such as the European culture, the Hungarian middle-class and with their individual, internalized side of the established writer. The moment when Márai suddenly and most palpably realized the loss of his hitherto existential role of the influential writer was when he encountered the debris of his flat in Budapest. The crisis of this role was accompanied by the loss of his home, library and was equivalent to the destruction of his previous way of life.\textsuperscript{147}

Márai’s crisis of identity shall be inscribed within a broader image of the Hungarian social situation at that moment. Some remarks of Peter Kenez, the historian of Hungarian origin who experienced the Siege of Budapest as a young boy, may also provide a broader context to Márai’s reflections concerning this period, the Red Army, and his personal experiences. Kenez depicts the image of the Soviet soldier shared by the Hungarian population just after the war as follows:

At the time, the image of the Soviet soldiers in the Hungarian mind was one of someone dangerous, ill disciplined, primitive, and drunk. It was a well-founded notion that Russians could not resist the lure of alcohol. They looted wine cellars and even confiscated perfume bottles to drink. The sight of drunken Russian soldiers on the streets behaving badly and capriciously was a regular occurrence.\textsuperscript{148}

Nevertheless, the image was still ambiguous due to the unpredictability of the Soviet soldiers’ behaviour (contrary to the Germans) embracing also merciful and warm gestures towards children.\textsuperscript{149} Márai referred to some of these aforementioned features and especially to the capricious character of the Soviet soldiers whom he also compared to children.\textsuperscript{150}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Varga, op. cit., 33.
\item Ibid., 37.
\item Kenez, op. cit., 42. The author explains the hostility of the Soviet soldiers in Hungary referring to the type of command (not being able to discipline the soldiers), the vengeance as well as “a higher standard of living and evidence of a Western European style of life […]” which they encountered in Hungary. Ibid., 40.
\item Ibid., 42-43.
\item Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 289. Interestingly, the same negative connotations were ascribed to the Chetniks and the Cossacks collaborating with the Nazis. While fleeing from the approaching Red Army at the end of the Second World War, they passed through the Julian March and towns such as Gorizia, hence Vladimir Bartol’s borderland region. Their cruel and unpredictable behaviour which, due to extreme extraordinary, arbitrary violence remained beyond capacities of comprehension, shocked the local population (also of Slavic origin) who in consequence compared them to irrational, wild barbarians. They formed the image of Other (“unknown and terrifying”) associated with only negative traits (“absolute evil”) and thus totally different, alien from the local community. Their presence left traumatic memories. Even though just like Nazi troops, they were also invaders, the Germans in this comparison, notwithstanding their cruel acts, seemed to the inhabitants of Gorizia civilized, due to their discipline and more predictable way of being. Alessandro Cattunar, “Memorie di confine e identità plurime. Il confine italo-jugoslavo nei racconti di vita dei testimoni: 1943-47,” Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea, no. 1 (2009): 7- 10, available at http://www.studistorici.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/CATTUNAR_Dossier_1_2009.pdf (retrieved 29 August 2021).
\end{thebibliography}
The concept of crisis, considering its etymology, means a turning point and a decisive juncture forcing one to choose, respond in some way to a new challenge of fate. In such uncertain but crucial critical moments one existential chapter is coming to an end but at the same time, a new one shall begin. When Márai’s identification with the European community of values and with the pre-war Hungarian bourgeois became undermined, he embarked simultaneously on diaristic writing (a narrative struggle for a reconfigured self in changed historical circumstances) and exilic odyssey (mirroring the Self in the cultural Other).

When an opportunity to go abroad came at the end of 1946 in the form of a group invitation, Márai decided to accept it not without hope “to find his own, personal Europe”\textsuperscript{151} and to meaningfully inscribe his self within this modified, post-war historical context. The writer embarked on the journey to the Western countries just after the war, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in order to become acquainted with their responses to the new examination born in this particular, historical moment when the Eastern power, embodied in the Red Army, was “capturing” the central part of the continent. While, in Márai’s view, Europe has already managed to give cultural responses (the Renaissance and the Reformation) to previous encounters with otherness identified with both Arabs and Turks, he was wondering what Europe’s next answer to this new manifestation of cultural alterity would be. “How will my world, the Western world, respond to this young Russian soldier who today arrived from the East and asked me, an unknown European writer: ‘Who are you?’”\textsuperscript{152} The question was thus posed not only to Western Europe but also directed to him personally.

In his encounter with the East embodied by the enforced cohabitation with the Soviet soldiers during the Siege of Budapest, Márai accentuated his identification with the West. He emphasised the respect shown to him as a writer by his unexpected guests. “This was my first lengthy conversation with Soviet men, and I again saw that the ‘writer’ is a magical notion among Russians. At the moment when I said I am a writer, they looked at me with great respect and attentiveness, as if I were some extraordinary being.”\textsuperscript{153} Hungarian historian Krisztán Ungváry in the book devoted to the Siege of Budapest mentioned the same feature of the Soviet soldiers’ behaviour. “The soldiers had tremendous respect for doctors and – because of their supposed political influence – writers.”\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{151} Márai, \textit{Memoir}, 252.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 34-35, 256.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 39.
Articulating his doubts and questions in the binary scheme, Márai clearly followed the well-trodden path of identifying Europe (and thus also himself as European) in contrast, as faced with some kind of alterity. Italian cultural historian Luisa Passerini noted that the construction of the other has been inherent in attempts to define European identity. The category of otherness has embraced either images of continents (Asia, Africa, America) or some people (Russians, Turks, Chinese). Therefore, this European identity founded on opposition has always been accompanied by an array of different articulations of orientalism and occidentalism.\(^{155}\)

Márai’s perception of the East was not free from ideological, stereotypical connotations that shaped by tradition (European narrative of Orient, Western Orientalism) and culture (the Russian literature, Dostoevsky) were confronted and problematised during his travels, in observation and through historical experience. Thus, the Near East when viewed from the European, Western perspective was for Márai – the young journalist a mythologised and dreamlike Orient, however, not entirely immune to criticism.\(^{156}\) In respect to another manifestation of the East, Russia, the writer linked the madness (viewed as a reverse side of holiness) emanating from Dostoevsky’s writings with Russian messianism and irrationality. In the opinion of Márai, this array of features imbued not only the literary sphere but also, as their accomplishment, the historical reality of the twentieth century. By contrast, he identified himself with the European sense of measurement and cartography as opposed to the infinitude of the human being, the perspective present in Dostoevsky’s texts.\(^{157}\)

Already during his travel to the Near East, Márai contraposed the Western rationality with the Eastern irrational mysticism, civilisation with religion. There he also juxtaposed the East identified with “absolute faith,” “the vitality,” “the sheer intensity, the danger” of life with the Western civilisation of reason. Whereas the Easterner is “a man at prayer,” the Westerner, “a man holding a book” is mainly characterised by his “cerebral cognitions and his doubts.” There is, at one end, the Western hectic life in a hurry and, at the other “[…] the busy idleness, the brisk lethargy bustling to and fro the whole day lest it betray the fact that it has nothing to do.” In contrast to the Western sense of measurement sharpened by a stopwatch, “the oriental mind” is characterised by

\(^{155}\) Luisa Passerini, “Europe and Its Others: Is There a European Identity?” in *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History*, ed. D. Stone (Oxford, 2012), 120. “For centuries, forms of European identity were built up through contrasts and oppositions, creating various forms of orientalism and occidentalism.”

\(^{156}\) Ákos, op. cit., 52, 54.

\(^{157}\) Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 1, 15. The similar path of defining oneself and Central Europe in opposition to Russia equalled with communism would be later taken by Milan Kundera. The Czech writer’s binary perspective of Western Europe (including its central part) and the alien Russian East provoked a polemic with Josip Brodsky.
“its tendency to laxness and taking the long view.”158 Whereas on a small European scale, where time seems to be compressed to minutes and seconds, one would be more focused on details and short view, in the Near East the boundless spaces broaden the perspective.

Márai’s feelings of disorientation and estrangement evoked in confrontation with the Soviet soldiers had an important temporal dimension. With the entrance of the Red Army to Budapest, the writer, surprised by the Soviet soldiers’ passion for collecting clocks, attempted to explain it referring to their perception of time as opposed to the way time is viewed in Western Europe. Therefore, he again juxtaposed the West with the East. Referring to reflections of philosopher Walter Schubart, Márai defined people from the East, living in large areas as “optimistic” and indifferent to the passage of time in chronometric terms. As if the excess of space compensated for the lack of time or in other words its slower pace which would also contribute to the Easterners’ greater optimism. Drawing on this reasoning, people from the East, as still not uprooted from the circular time of nature, would be unfamiliar with anxiety provoked by discontinuity of time and life confined within some small units of time such as minutes or seconds. While reading the book of American journalist, Elizabeth Pond, who wrote down her impressions from a Trans-Siberian route, Márai noted that “[…] the perception of time of Eastern people is slow, similar to an hourglass. The Western man measures the history with a stopwatch in hand, the Russians react slowly.”159

Márai identified the Russian perception of time with the one which, following Spengler, characterised the ancient cultures such as Greek, Latin, Assyrian, Chinese, regarded as insensitive to the passage of time and thus also not in need of time measurement. This state of timelessness in the East, according to Márai, lasted until the Russian people were enforced to adapt themselves to mechanized civilisation and the resultant pessimistic atmosphere of life. Industrialisation also entailed a change in perception of time which previously had occurred in the West. Márai described this transformation in connection with the chronometric dimension of time (tools for time measurement, demands for new records) and its psychological corollary so the consequent consciousness of risk, danger and anxious atmosphere permeating the “pessimistic,” Western cultures.160

158 Márai, “In the Footsteps of the Gods,” 56, 57, 61, 63. “[…] the vitality of the East—the busy idleness, the brisk lethargy bustling to and fro the whole day lest it betray the fact that it has nothing to do—and the spontaneous delight in colours, the cheerful ostentation of gaudy rags, in which the camel driver and the rich equally take pleasure.”


Interestingly, this binary mechanism of self-identification was activated in confrontation not only with the East embodied by the Soviet soldiers or earlier by the Near East but also with the West during Márai’s first emigration in the interwar period in the Western European countries and later during his exile in America. He spent six years in Paris living among the French people and not with them as he remarked retrospectively. Thus, Márai always felt alien, not entirely assimilated, and accepted by French society. However, the writer recalled that faced with the impossibility of learning the French way of being, he understood what made him foreign among French people and consequently also what constituted his self.  

Márai also recollected another form of alterity shedding some new light on his self, namely the atmosphere of London permeated with boredom and “tranquility of a sanatorium” which in this anxious traveller coming from a “panic-stricken continent” could provoke feelings of relief and calm. What seemed to the visitor from the central part of the continent strikingly different on the English island was its overall calm and boring atmosphere, devoid of any trace of life “in this restless, Central European sense which defined life as performances lasting from morning till evening […].” Life in England made an impression as unfolding at a slower pace, ordered and sterile like in a museum. Therefore, “[…] a man even felt as if his own life was placed in the window, and he looked at it as at an exhibition item that must not be touched.” Furthermore, another dissonance regarded the perception of time. A visitor coming from Central Europe, the region so strongly marked with discontinuity and changeability, was surprised by centuries-long historical continuity perceptible in English traditions and everyday life. Márai perceived this “invisible, historical terror” as unbearable in the same way he viewed English “grotesque freedom” and “legal security.” The latter was desired by a person coming from the continent but also seemed too confining (“straitjacket and prison regulations”).  

In an encounter with a reserved Englishmen, Márai had a sensation of belonging to some other race or as if he were a child among adults. In comparison with Englishmen, these “trained and fearful of their own doubts citizens of the world,” Márai – the young journalist felt more confident, in possession of more life experience and, hence, of broader knowledge on existential matters as well. An overall tone of “solitude in a general foreignness” perceptible by an outlander in England could bring a sense of relief. The insular English world respecting extraterritoriality of private life seemed a cure for “uninvited familiarity and intimate directness,” immediacy of History forcefully

161 Márai, Wyznania, 434-435.  
162 Ibid., 445-446, 448-449, 453, 454-455.
experienced on the continent. Even though in general, as Márai claimed, a foreigner would feel alien and solitary among Englishmen, visitors suffering from complex of inferiority, excessively vainglorious and proud would become more confident and secure in England. “London is a true clinic for those who carry in themselves Central European Minderwertigkeitskomplex.”

Similarly, the later American phase of exilic life provided Márai with another reflection of his self in alterity, thus an additional opportunity of reshaping his self-understanding with regard to the Other. In Márai’s view, American everyday life, institutions, and people embodied otherness in a similar way as the communist East did. He was asking himself who he could be as European and Hungarian in the eyes of Americans, the same way as he was looking for an image of his self in a mirror of Eastern and Western Europe. The writer remarked that because American landscapes as well as social and political life have been already discovered, thoroughly explored and described by different Europeans such as Alexis de Tocqueville, Charles Dickens or François-René de Chateaubriand, what remained for a person coming from the Old Continent is to embark on a “cognitive journey” but directed inwardly with the aim of discovering oneself. The questions which he posed in the American context about the perception of his person by others were even more intriguing due to the population’s ethnic mixture. Márai could have there a feeling of being on “the factory tape” in a long line of representatives of other races and ethnic groups, trying to recognize his self in the “investigative mirror whose indifferent glass eye judges us newcomers with the objectivity of an impartial observer. This mirror is America.” Who was he as a Hungarian newcomer and how was he (dis)similar to others? To what degree was he a European and to what extent an Asian or maybe American? These were the questions which Márai was asking himself in front of this ethnically diversified American mirror.

4. “The fringe European” between the West (Italian light) and the East (shadow of History)

The reconstruction of Márai’s “geopoetics,” comprising his numerous travels, can shed some light on the writer’s self-identification which, depending on the context and direction of his journeys, remained relational and changeable. In this section, I will focus on Márai’s “Memoir of Hungary, 1944-1948” which contains his recollection of the journey to the West mentioned in the beginning.

163 Ibid., 448-449.
164 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 486.
of the chapter. As Zwolińska rightly noted, “Memoir” is structured around the “motive of journey – this real one through the city (Budapest) and Europe and the metaphorical one, focused on the overview of spiritual state of the post-war Europe made from the standpoint of Hungarian Ulysses longing for familiar Ithaca, so for Hungary, Budapest and Kassa, which soon he will abandon forever.” The “Memoir” embraces four years (from the end of 1944 to the summer of 1948) of Márai’s wandering in the real space of Budapest and Western Europe as well as a parallel journey in the realm of memory and imagination. I will also refer to Márai’s diary which accompanied him everywhere he went since 1943. The two sources can give slightly different views on the same historical situations since they were written from different temporal perspectives. While the journal was kept regularly and in almost immediate response to historical changeable reality, the “Memoir” was written in the hindsight.

Before following Márai on his route to the West, it is important to briefly mention the history of one of the sources which will serve to trace consecutive stages of the writer’s journey. “Memoir” was first published in 1972 in Hungarian under the title Föld, Föld!... (Land, land!). This book, which was the most often translated version, is a greatly modified variation of the manuscript written in 1949. It was adapted for the foreign audience by omitting the part dedicated to the period from 1938 to 1944 which directly addressed the Hungarian issues (such as responsibility for the decay of society, reasons of indifference towards the war crimes). According to the author, this part first, would not be interesting for a foreign readership and second, at that time, could be too compromising to the Hungarian society.

Apart from the deliberate and substantial changes in the content, what to great extent shaped the narration was the author’s temporal standpoint (retrospection, teleology). The passage of time played here an important role and, as Varga underlines, contributed to different representations of History in the journal kept under the pressure of the moment and in the “Memoir” written from the temporal distance. In the comparative study of two discourses and two ways of representing the past, Varga concluded that while the diary is permeated with an emotional and accusatory tone, the

---

167 Zwolińska, Pisać to znaczy żyć, 308.
168 Judit Papp, “Beyond and behind the Iron Curtain: Sándor Márai crossing the borders between 1946 and 1948,” Journal of European Studies 46, no. 3/4, (2016), 261-263, 267. For the parts (encompassing the period from March 12, 1938 until August 31, 1948, hence from Anschluss to the writer’s departure from Hungary), which Márai omitted, and which were later published posthumously in a separate book see: Márai, Lo que no quise decir, translated by M. Szijj, J. M. Glez Trevejo (Barcelona, 2016).
“Memoir”, due to the temporal distance and retrospection, discusses historical events in a more rational and reserved way.169

Different concepts of time present in these two types of Márai’s autobiographical writing seem particularly interesting in the dissertation’s context. Varga contraposed the diaristic immediacy of the hero’s experience of historical changes with the “synoptic” vision of time developed in the “Memoir”. Concerning the latter, the structure of the first parts of narration is founded on the invariability of the place of events and their changing time. Therefore, the Buda Castle remains the same scene of historical events (the Anschluss, German invasion of Hungary in 1944 and withdrawal of German troops from Budapest in 1945). As Varga remarked, this spatiotemporal narrative structure introduces the circular concept of the historical process, which can be interpreted in two ways: either that nothing new can happen in history or that the historical process is repetitive. The second interpretation, in the opinion of Varga, might be viewed as imposing on both the narrator and a reader the obligation to remember what happened. It would also imply the moral duty to accept the aftermath of historical changes.170

Not only was Márai writing the “Memoir” with retrospection so with the knowledge of what happened later (bipolar political scene during the Cold War, historical events such as the Hungarian revolution and its memory),171 but also preparing the text for publication (the diary was also edited with the aim of later publishing). He revised the “Memoir” introducing some lexical changes which also inevitably resulted in some slight semantic shifts.172 Notwithstanding the “Memoir”’s literariness and retrospective plane, it still provides a valuable insight into historical context as perceived by the individual, the insight which in some aspects differs from the one present in the diary. Both types of autobiographical writings emphasise different concepts of time: linear and circular. The question here emerges whether Márai’s (diaristic) “wayfaring” and exilic odyssey could enable him to re-evaluate these closed categories of time and reformulate them in geopoetic terms of a spirally open perception of time accompanied by a hermeneutic redefinition of his self in relation to movement in space and diaristic order of time.

169 Varga, op. cit., 30-37.
170 Ibid., 36-37. “[…] I consider the spatial identity of the narrator-hero and the identity of the natural circular time (the seasons, the months) as landmarks for a personal vision of history, an invitation to the narrator (but also, to the reader) to remember, to never forget the weight of history […]”. Ibid., 37.
171 Ibid., 36. In this context, Márai’s changed attitude towards the Soviet soldiers and his ambivalent perception of the beginning and the end of their presence in Hungary seem particularly interesting. While in the Diary the Soviet troops entering the Hungarian territory were perceived with curiosity, in the “Memoir” the image is not so neutral and mild because it was mediated by the memory of the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956. Similarly re-evaluated by the passage of time was Márai’s perception of the departure of Soviet soldiers. Ibid., 38.
172 Judit Papp, op. cit., 261-263, 267.
Written after the Second World War and, hence, founded on the memory of a traumatic experience and a dehumanizing side of the conflict, Márai’s “Memoir” reverberates with the feeling of disinheritance and estrangement from Europe identified with community of values and culture. In his diary, Márai noted: “House, foyer, home was for the European a synonym of culture. I do not have home anymore.” In the same year 1946, he added: “All are homeless. When culture enters the stage of decay, all are unhappy and homeless.” The situation after the war in Hungary, which Márai described as “not even frightening or intriguing, rather humiliating, boring, stupid and inhuman,” was not encouraging to stay in the country. The writer, who in the new communist state was perceived as a bourgeois relic, compared his life at this moment to “a state of internment,” an outcast way of being “out of the parenthesis.” At first, Márai did not take advantage of an opportunity to escape which appeared with an invitation from abroad sent by Rencontres Internationales in Geneva. He rejected it due to the necessity to ask for the passport and the entire procedure which, given that it required pleading and backing as well as official permission for departure, seemed to him too “humiliating”. The writer could not accept this officially imposed refusal of his freedom of movement. “It is impossible to accept that man has to beg for his most elementary rights [...]”\(^{173}\)

However, when another opportunity to leave the country appeared, the writer did not reject it. Still hesitant about the sense of the journey but in “an urgent need for a change of air” and not without hope “to find his own, personal Europe,”\(^{174}\) Márai embarked on the trip at the end of 1946 in the westward direction visiting Switzerland, Italy and in the end reaching Paris.

Before focusing on the consecutive stages of the journey, it is worth tackling the issue of Márai’s border crossing at the time just after the Second World War. Crossing a border implies not only changing places but also times.\(^{175}\) Going abroad means an inevitable encounter with another “cultural time regime”\(^{176}\) ruled by different temporal configurations. Thus, Márai crossing the borders was also forced to find his way in places ruled by divergent memories of the war and relations to time. Among motivations for changing spatial and cultural contexts of exilic existence,\(^{173}\) Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 283, 325, 281, 328-329, 318.

\(^{174}\) Márai, Memoir, 252. The writer’s recollections combine joy and doubts about the sense of the journey. “At the same time, a certain quandary, a sickening ignorance accompanied me on this trip, and never left me along the way: Was it worth setting out once again to tamper with, to disturb that extraordinary indifference, that quietude of several years into which many things that formerly seemed important had already sunk?” (Ibid., 253).


one of the strongest and most decisive was Márai’s feeling of mismatching with the History of the
twentieth century. This feeling resulted in the attempt to reconfigure his inner order of time by
mirroring and reformulating it in the face of foreign orders of time encountered in new cultural
contexts characterised by different politics of memory and historical experiences.

Márai’s self-perception as a border-crosser implies relationality and changeability depending
on the direction of his journey. Moving westward the writer was forced to view himself as the
Easterner, whereas heading for the East he was feeling closer to the Western culture. The change of
vectors in space simultaneously influenced the inward vectors of self-identification shaped in
response to an interlocutor’s perception and behaviour (supercilious, arrogant but also the one of
respect). When Márai was going to the West, the ill-disposed conduct of a Swiss border guard
immediately imposed on him a label of the Easterner. He recalled how his documents were examined
“with very hostile suspicion, as if every traveller coming from that region was a spy, currency
smuggler, Communist agent or drug trafficker. (Or more simply, a disease carrier, and sometimes
there was some truth in this mistrustful supposition.)” Márai experienced a similar attitude of
superiority and arrogance on the next frontier with France. He recollected the moment of the border-
crossing as follows: “I was almost put in jail because the customs officer worriedly undid every
piece of my threadbare clothing and wanted to know whether I was smuggling anything in – but
what? I didn’t know. ”

On his way back, however, the contact with a Soviet soldier and his behaviour, not devoid
of a certain courtesy, brought the writer closer to the West. Márai noticed that the soldier’s power
enabling him to violate, rob, kill would be never great enough to deprive him of dignity. The writer
described his momentary self-identification in response to the soldier’s attitude as follows: “To him
I was a Westerner he will bring to ruin but will not look down on.” In contrast, in parentheses, he
added: “In the West recently, very politely but in some manner, everyone looked down on me, the
Easterner.”

The first stage of Márai’s journey to the West was Switzerland. Roaming around Zurich and
Geneva, the writer did not feel at home. Used to danger and fragility of life under constant threat of
annihilation, Márai was bored. He conveyed his impressions figuratively comparing himself to

177 Judit Papp in the above-mentioned article “Beyond and behind the Iron Curtain” analyses Márai’s changeable self–
identifications during his journey described in the “Memoir.” Papp also emphasises the relationality of the writer’s self,
thus always depending on the mirror posed by otherness.
178 Márai, Memoir, 252, 260.
179 Ibid., 287.
somebody addicted to strong poisons and now being suddenly forced to detoxification. “When a man is not baked on a spit, does not turn on the glowing coals, the man immediately gets bored. I am as a drug-addict used to strong poisons. This peace is for me as if the man undergoes a cure for addiction. Continually something lacks to me. Probably the danger.”

Life in Switzerland marked by purity and order seemed to Márai museal, sterile, and devoid of “Holy Anxiety” providing with impulses of creativity.

Switzerland’s position of neutrality in the past and the lavish abundance characteristic of the present moment had to provoke some dissonance in a person coming from the destitute central part of Europe – an epicentre of historical unfolding. The Hungarian writer noted that “the choleric abundance induced the traveller venturing forth from the ruins of Eastern Europe to retch.” Márai, the Easterner could not feel well in Switzerland which devoid of the burden of historicity seemed to function so flawlessly, perfectly well that it reminded him of a clock mechanism. Coming from the ruined Budapest, where the traces of the past were still tangible in the present, the writer reacted with astonishment to the different order of time in Switzerland. Whereas in the West Márai could sense the forward-looking present moment rapidly distancing itself from the past, as a person leaving behind the country traumatized with the recent war, his attention was fixed more on the past which, materialized in form of ruins, loss, and destruction, was constantly invading the present.

Notwithstanding the wind of progress, Márai, engrossed in melancholy, was looking back towards the ruins left by the course of events. The writer’s dissonance concerning different patterns of historical experiences reverberates also in the diaristic note stating that Geneva’s inhabitants, blinded by affluence and prosperity, would be unable to comprehend his wartime experience marked by loss of home suddenly converted to ruins.

The remarks on the Swiss society of the period just after the Second World War were similar to those made by Márai during one of his journeys in the interwar period. In the reporting from 1922, the writer compared Switzerland to a pure “lady who maintained virginity, remained uncommitted,” standing out against the background of a “lupanar of the prostituted Europe.” After the Second World War the country made a similar impression on Márai of a “lady” untouched by the historical brutal forces. The writer perceived the Swiss order of time as strikingly different also more than 20

---

180 Márai, Tagebücher 1945-1957, 41.
181 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4., 175, 176.
182 Márai, Memoir, 252.
183 Márai, Tagebücher 1945-1957, 42.
184 Márai, W podróży, 159.
years later, during his visit in Bern in 1973. Surrounded by the alpine landscape it seemed to him that the time was passing there at a slower pace or even was brought to a halt as if the high mountains became a barrier against the speeding flow of time protecting the inhabitants from its grasp. Márai was surprised by “a state of entire, eternal immobility. Wars, revolutions, atomic epoch, environment pollution, mass scale, all these phenomena passed at the height of 600 metres without touching the town existing for thousand years in the subalpine climate.”

The writer viewed in the Swiss isolation and neutrality factors that made its society to some degree immune to historical changes, freeing an individual from responsibility for ethical choices which could have been made only in extraordinary historical situations. This Swiss immunity to historical changes also allowed for the preservation of some social structures and a way of life from the past (at least in form of appearances). Therefore, in Bern, Márai could still sense what to him was a pleasant atmosphere of the patriciate, its pride, sense of dignity and a specific way of life, once so familiar to him in his hometown Kassa which he viewed as one of few European cities in Hungary. While walking in Bern along the old streets with patrician, baroque houses, Márai noted: “It was ‘my world,’ of the middle–class character which in the country was destroyed.” Due to these historical traces and cultural heritage still present in everyday life, Calvinistic Bern seemed to him more European and human than catholic Italy.

After the Second World War Márai perceived both the East and the West of Europe as lacking in humanism. Whatever direction he would choose, what in the end he encountered was, in his view, a life measured not by a man but a system (either communism or capitalism). He advocated the defence of the Individual, “a true victim” of the twentieth century and its different manifestations of System. Márai noted: “I saw only Systems everywhere. Switzerland had a precise system. Trains were already running on time in Europe.” In this context, the writer explained his feeling of restraint

---

185 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 277.
186 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 328. It was the preserved democratic spirit of the middle class in Kassa and the entire of Upper Hungary as well as Transylvania, the heritage of “the great generation of Hungarian reformists” which made Márai’s hometown closer to Europe. “It was only there [Upper Hungary and Transylvania, A.T.] that it was suitable to apply a term of ‘bourgeoisie’ in the Western sense.” Unlike other parts of Hungary, in Budapest the members of the middle class were not conscious of their role and thus “not ready to share the social obligations.” In fact, they were not representatives of the middle class but “landowners who decided to lead an urban life.” Márai, Diarios 1984-1989, 28. However, with the Nazi occupation and then the arrival of communists, this bourgeoisie spirit was totally destroyed. “[…] There was educated and ingenious bourgeoisie mainly in the Upper Hungary and Transylvania which was massacred by Beneš and his gravediggers. Now the communists, before the Nazis.” Ibid., 147.
187 Hárai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 278. Bilingual Bolzano reminded Márai of his birthplace as well. “The atmosphere here reminds me of other City, Kassa which was occupied by ‘foreigners’ – this is how Hungarians were living in 1918 in Kassa when Czechs arrived there.” Ibid., 396.
188 Ibid., 383.
and anxiety in Zurich referring to the modern concept of time, the time of clocks, socially constructed to legitimize the industrial, capitalist changes occurring in Western societies. Metaphorically speaking, Márai was caught in hands of a clock ruling the neat, flawless “System” of the Swiss economy and society. He was concurrently considering the return to “chilly, occupied Budapest stagnating in destitution.” This lightness of being encountered in the neutral country where, in the opinion of Márai, “people always lived in a state of historical shortness of breath and moral claustrophobia,” could seem too unbearable to the writer. Yet, he decided to continue his journey leaving the “well-heated, neutral Switzerland for unheated, untidy and defeated Italy.”

It was the next stage of the writer’s route in search of traces of his “personal Europe.”

Italy, the defeated and poor country reverberated with more familiarity and humanity to Márai: “Milan. Everything that welcomed me on the Italian border is familiar to me. Queuing, luggage control, unheated train, miserably looking poor people.” The landscape observed from a train window could give an impression of striking contrast to the Swiss lavishness. Márai could notice derelict buildings, houses without windows and roofs as well as people dressed in worn-out and wretched clothes. Apathy, hopelessness, and suspicion were the constituents of the general atmosphere perceptible during the travel in Italy. People seemed touched deeper by the historical changes and challenged in everyday life by the course of events to take some position and make ethical choices.

Márai’s description of the journey’s Italian phase is abundant in dichotomous categories: innocence is coupled by guilt, light by darkness, truth by lie and good by evil. The moral tone of the general impressions is emphasised by the contrast of Italian light and life in transparency with the East which represents darkness and life in deception. The only bit of conciliation, that Márai had encountered thus far during the travel in the West just after the Second World War was the radiant sunshine in Posillipo which he took with/in him back home “to shine there in the dark times that were to follow.”

The sunlight of Southern Italy would be more sparkling and stimulating than the one experienced in the USA, in Florida which seemed to Márai too heavy. The memory of this phase of the journey could influence his decision to choose Italy as one of the places of his permanent exile commenced in 1948. Márai would retrospectively describe the period spent in Posillipo as

---

189 Márai, Memoir, 257-258.
190 Márai, Tagebücher 1945-1957, 43.
191 Márai, Memoir, 259.
192 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4., 346.
probably the best four years of his life. Southern Italy would become an anchor for the restless traveller who was returning there several times and where he found stability which as a magnet was attracting both locals and foreigners.

Contrary to the Swiss, who due to their distance to the central stages of historical drama, seemed to Márai as having “passed the history examination with distinction,” Italians were compelled to be more involved in the course of events choosing between fascism and resistance. Besides personal commitment in History which inevitably had to entail moral decisions, the Márais also noticed in Italians a certain closeness to life and art. The author opposed Italian direct relationship with everything alive to other nationalities (German, French and Spanish) who first of all live in frames of a society and country. As he assessed, the Italian way of life, not mediated by political, social categories and lived in direct closeness with life, is “better than an odorless deadness of Systems.” The writer felt the same relief triggered by shedding the burden of System on his return from a short stay in Austria to Italy in 1973. While in Austria all areas of life (for instance public transport, post, hotels) functioned as they should, that is to say, perfectly well, in Italy Márai was to face again the reality continuously out of order, where strikes, crimes and kidnappings constituted the tone of everyday life. Notwithstanding all these inconveniences, he still noticed that in Italy he was breathing more freely which he explained with the assumption, “that behind a veil of ‘order,’ a monster, beast hides: System which always – and in each case – is inhuman.”

France was the last stage of Márai’s short journey in the West undertaken just after the Second World War. Otherness which he faced in France and the West in general provoked in him the same dissonance as when in the 1930s, during his journey in the westward direction, he realized how totally different this Europe was from memories of his last stay in the Western countries in the 1920s. Paris after the Second World War did not resemble its interwar image and the atmosphere in the city was divergent from the one which the writer was still bearing in mind due to the important role that the French capital played in his youthful life. In people’s conversations Márai noticed a specific blindness and reluctance to face the post-war reality of the defeated European civilisation.

---

193 Ibid., 365. Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 158.
194 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 42, 89.
195 Márai, Memoir, 259.
196 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4., 73, 88, 257.
197 Márai, “Western Patrol,” 95. “I came here first thirteen years ago but today’s Paris, today’s West, seems to me, in its general mien, in its convictions, its mood, its obligations and agreements, only the faint shadow of a memory. […] Paris has changed more dramatically, in a more startling fashion, in the last decade and a half than it had in the years between the Napoleonic Wars and, yes, from the invention of the train through to the twenties.”
198 Márai, Memoir, 261. “[…] it was in Paris that I underwent everything that was a decisive, essential ‘experience’ in my life.”
Therefore, all the discussions held in an attempt to prove the interlocutors’ innocence were, for Márai, superfluous and missing the point.

In the writer’s eyes, the French post-war atmosphere (in the sense of people’s historical awareness and ethical responsibility) was to some degree similar to the one encountered in Switzerland where a visitor from the East could be surprised by a sensation of the halt of time. Márai complained about the lack of historical consciousness on the West. He added that “in Paris no one and nothing answered or had changed. It seemed as if the great city had survived the war in a state of benumbed lockjaw.” One of Márai’s strongest impressions from the journey was the Western societies’ attempt to leap to the period before the war without a process of working through the recent apocalyptic events, which instead of provoking some ethical response “seemed not to have touched the conscience of the West. Not a trace of moral reckoning was to be found anywhere.”

In this context of a varying degree of the past’s presence, Márai could sense the difference between Western and Eastern Europe. While the latter was obsessed with the recent past constantly acting it out in memory, the former would choose some distance from the burden of History in an attempt to escape from both ethical questions and responsibility for the course of events and political choices.

Márai was struck by the French (and Western in general) blindness to the radically changed, post-war circumstances and the Western naïve conviction regarding the possibility of controlling the situation and guaranteeing security at all costs, by artificially redrawing maps and imposing peace treaties. Nothing changed in the Western consciousness, which seemed to Márai to be immune to the speeding passage of time undermining the previous, pre-war forms of coexistence. The writer claimed that the time was not flowing steadily anymore. In the new post-war order, it was flying like an arrow immediately reaching the future and thus depriving an individual of the time needed to adapt to changes. The belief expressed by French people in re-establishing a new order in Europe sounded to Márai as naïve and helpless echoes from the past. The present, instead of drawing some lessons from the recent past and adapting itself to new challenges emerging on the horizon of future possibilities, was repeating the past.

Márai’s visit to Paris in the aftermath of the Second World War (or to be more precise its later recollection and narrative reconstruction) was more focused on prospectively directed questions about the present moment of Europe than driven by a nostalgically laden search for the bygone time. In Paris, he was “searching not so much for a lost time, the past, as for the present. But

---

199 Ibid., 262.
200 Ibid., 264-265.
this present was pedantic, regressive, illiberal, intractable. And no one mentioned the fact that the future was already knocking on the door and that everything they wanted to resuscitate from the obsessions of the past was pitifully outmoded.”

The image of the present was unsatisfactory and disturbing. Therefore, the writer succumbed also to the lures of the past. One night at the end of his stay in Paris, Márai decided to visit Montparnasse which 25 years before constituted an existential background of his youth. Consequently, this short stay in Paris also acquired a nostalgic tone. Guided by memories, he managed to find the house where he used to live and the café which, regularly visited two decades before, in the new circumstances served as a scenery for the writer’s imagined farewell with his previous self from the past.

The images of the encountered lost time did not, however, provide any sense of consolation or familiarity. The feeling of alienation increased together with the awareness of memory’s delusiveness accompanied by the tendency to idealize the past. Márai realized that the early years of his life spent abroad were not as idyllic as viewed retrospectively. The same would concern beliefs of youth and ways of thinking which even if perceived as significant and only possible at the time when they are practised, after many years, they fade and lose their magnitude. Naming his walk in Montparnasse “a pilgrimage,” Márai seems to take on a mask of sentimental traveller. However, the seemingly familiar appearance of the revisited places did not prevent an increasing strangeness. The ungraspable past self, never yielding itself to an entire recovery desired by the present self, is found only in dispersed and fragmented forms, in sudden flashbacks, scents and sensation of deja vu.

Márai’s search for one of the Parisian cafés he had regularly visited a quarter of a century before, also became a pretext to reflect on the bygone intellectual atmosphere of the interwar French capital and the generation of exiled writers, artists he belonged to. Earlier in his autobiography, Márai described Montparnasse as a quartier “exempted from the power of time” or a place applying different measures to its flow and all the quartier’s visitors as emigrants escaping from the passage of time. The writer commented on this episode of his stay in Paris after the Second World War, focused on the search of the Parisian café, referring to one of Thomas Stearns Eliot’s poems describing a possible encounter of the Timeless with Time. Márai compared his saunter in

---

201 Ibid., 265-266.
202 Ibid., 261, 271. “Looking around, I now felt the sensation that one experiences in the anxiety at the illusion of the Bergsonian deja vu: all this I ‘lived not just once,’ but I am ‘reliving’ it now in the present, in simultaneous reality.”
203 Márai, Wyznania, 404.
Montparnasse to the moment of this strange momentary union of temporality with what remains beyond time, as some edge where one oscillates between life and death, form, and chaos.\textsuperscript{204}

This contradictory state of mind, provoked by awareness of the moment of crisis, could constitute the psychological background of Márai’s travel to the West just after the Second World War. The writer was conscious of the end of the old European order and his old self but was still uncertain about the shape of the new one. What form would the new, post-war circumstances give to the formless self in search for a narratively reconfigured identification? Interestingly, many years later Márai posed a similar question in his diary in connection with the post-war, “formless” times which were neither socialist nor capitalist nor post-industrialist. In the 1970s the writer defined the epoch he witnessed in terms of the prefix “post.” As he remarked, History, which for two thousand years had been European, became post-European and was still awaiting its form.\textsuperscript{205} The form emerged outside Europe, on other continents because “something called ‘History’ abandoned Europe, it does not ‘happen’ here anymore.”\textsuperscript{206}

Márai’s reconnaissance journey to the West just after the Second World War was accompanied by a chain of questions and the answer which he gave to these doubts implied a strong ethical dimension. To the question: “What was it that drew, that bound me here, the fringe European? (And was I truly European, like a Swiss? A Frenchman? A German? (…))” the writer answered:

Perhaps it was the memory of collective crimes – the consciousness that we were all guilty, Europeans, Easterners and Westerners, because we lived here and tolerated, allowed everything to reach the point it did. In this realisation there was also a sense of being an accomplice, more real than every other feeling and illusion; we were guilty because we were Europeans and we tolerated the destruction of “humanism” in the consciousness of European man.\textsuperscript{207}

In Márai’s view, it was humanism, inherent in European identity, which was lacking in the post-war period. In this context, therefore, the writer admitted to the strong feeling of loss of the “human.” “Where did it perish? In the gas chambers at Auschwitz, in the mass grave at Katyn, in the hell of Russian and German prison camps, or in the ruins of Dresden and Coventry, in the thickets of the Maquis?”\textsuperscript{208} The memory of crimes, a consciousness of guilt for the destruction of an old system of values, self-criticism and moral reckoning should constitute the new ground for self-identification

\textsuperscript{204} Márai, \textit{Memoir}, 276.
\textsuperscript{205} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 5, 28.
\textsuperscript{206} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 4, 42.
\textsuperscript{207} Márai, \textit{Memoir}, 255.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 256.
as European. For Márai, however, this ground was not perceptible and not strong enough in the West.

The author suggested in his “Memoir” that it was the moment in the Parisian café, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter when engrossed in some newspaper he decided about the final direction of his journey. It was the post-war geopolitics blatantly clamouring for attention from the newspaper’s pages that determined Márai’s geopoetic response in search of desirable spatial frames of his future self. The article which caught the writer’s attention concerned the contemporary diplomatic affairs and to be more precise, the act of signing the Paris Peace Treaties by representatives of five countries: Hungary, Finland, Bulgaria, Romania, and Italy. Naturally, he was particularly interested in the peace treaty presented to Hungarians. It introduced some changes of borders which again placed the author’s birthplace – Kassa within the territory of Czechoslovakia. Recollecting this moment in the Parisian café, Márai noted that “there are days when everything, personal and worldly, intermeshes. When ‘History’ becomes a private matter, a palpable personal reality.”

February 10, 1947, (as underlined by the writer exactly two years after the agreement in Yalta), became one of these days when Márai could palpably sense History as some order of affairs designed and imposed by the great political powers. The situation after the Second World War seemed to him very similar to the circumstances after the previous global conflict. As the writer noted, “the reality, that these peoples would again not be able to participate in shaping their own fate, doubled back in a quarter of a century turning of a wheel, and everything remained as had come to pass after the First World War.” Márai was referring here to Hungarians living in Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, “these peoples” could be extended to inhabitants of other Central European borderland regions who in the twentieth century, deprived of the right to self-determination, did not have to move anywhere to find themselves on another side of a border and in a different country.

In the rapidly shifting historical circumstances beyond the control of an individual, the Hungarian culture and language seemed to Márai the only safe place of retreat. He defined culture as “the conscious action of forces of morality” which could not be activated neither within communism nor capitalism. In the West the writer, treated always as a foreigner, would only sense

---

209 Ibid., 277.
210 Ibid., 278.
211 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 305.
the continuous lack of something significant, namely an ethical dimension and “sense of mission.”

In the Western countries he also experienced some existential dissonance resulting from the divergent degree of the past’s presence. The possibility of only negative self-identification through loss and absence was not satisfactory to Márai. What at this moment could guarantee a positive way of defining oneself was his attachment to the heritage of Hungarian culture and language, his true homeland which he compared to a “terra firma” and which constituted his only stable bond in the rapidly changing and transient world. Márai confessed: “I must go back to Hungary where no one awaits me, where there is no ‘role’ or ‘mission,’ but where there is something that to me constitutes the only significance of life: the Hungarian language.” The mother tongue played to him such a vital role because only in this medium was it possible to articulate his thoughts. The Hungarian literature seemed to Márai at this moment the only possible sphere of inscription and definition of the self. As the writer emphasised, whereas “the horizontal homeland is unstable and changeable. The vertical homeland is compact and more durable than ore. Sometimes it means only one line of a poem.” Constant travelling could dilute the bond with this “vertical homeland” in which access becomes facilitated within the community of speakers of the mother tongue.

The “historical perspective,” mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, which made Márai decide about the eastward direction of his further journey, was the information about the Paris Peace Treaties introducing some border changes and in consequence also depriving him of his homeland. Disappointed about the answer given by the West to the post-war challenge posed by History, the writer decided to leave Paris, the city which “was not capable of answering a big question.” On the Gare de l’Est, in the cold morning air, Márai could sense and identify himself with a heavy “breath of a Hungarian separated from the West,” the breath present there already for several decades. Surrounded by this overwhelming indifference and misunderstanding of the West towards its eastern neighbours, he held on a cultural and linguistic “umbilical cord,” which provided him with creative forces and also led him back to Hungary.

---

212 Márai, Memoir, 281. (“The notion is pompous. Still, for my generation, too, there was some kind of diluted reality in it; the consciousness that being born in Europe, being a European was not only a physical or political condition but a creed.”)

213 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4., 360.

214 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5., 171.

215 Márai, Memoir, 285. “For I am ‘I’ only when and while I can formulate in Hungarian what I am thinking.”

216 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5., 245.

217 Márai, Tagebücher 1945-1957, 50, 52.

While travelling back to Budapest, in a light sleep on a train, Márai imagined a possible meeting with his youthful, bygone self, who almost 20 years before was also travelling eastward on the way home from the West.

What would I tell a twenty-year-old Márai if he came into my room today? [...] What could I tell him? Does he ask me anything? Do we still understand each other? No, I am tremendously far away from him. And what is it that now I “know” more than when I knew with twenty years? That I will die, tomorrow or some day later, but this is really everything that I certainly “know” more.219

Márai’s sensation of the present intermingling with the past, so impermeably that the two temporal figures of one person can almost shake hands and try to establish some communication, resembles to some extent Gombrowicz’s narration of the similar moment. The Polish writer imagined such a meeting with his self from the past on the way back from Argentina to Europe, when he suddenly discerned his bygone self on a phantasmagorical ship passing by and going in the opposite direction.

“But in Central Europe it is also possible to live.”220 This self-assertion, which Márai ascribed to one of his reportage’s heroines, who in this way was encouraging herself to disembark in Trieste (possibly also after some journey to the West), could accompany him on his way back to Hungary as well. Márai returned to Budapest in February 1947, however, soon he realized that not every way of life was possible there. The political circumstances of socialist Hungary made him withdraw from public life and commence his inner emigration. More than 20 years later Márai would note in his diary that in 1947 it was already known that the new, post-war order was not a temporary situation but “a long and dark tunnel” with an indiscernible end. Yet, at that time the writer still did not wish to leave. He preferred to remain retaining solidarity with the Hungarian language and situation in the country in hopes of possible silencing of this period.221 It would, however, require too much compromise with political powers and the new communist system which for Márai was unacceptable because it posed a threat to something so important to him; freedom of conscience.

Faced with the dilemma – “to express oneself with help of rusting words but freely or rather to make orthopaedic skews and lie in the mother tongue,” Márai chose the first option. In the summer of 1948, 18 months after his return from the short travel to the West, the writer decided to take advantage of the invitation to participate in the meeting Rencontres Internationales in Geneva222

220 Márai, W podróży, 88.
221 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 179.
222 Ibid., 360, 285. “[...] this meeting was a pretext to leave Hungary, where we never came back.”
and together with his close family he fled from the country. They lived in Switzerland, Italy and the USA and would never come back to Hungary.

5. *Across the Ocean and continents.* “Erasmus from Balkans”\(^{223}\) between European “foreign homeliness” and American “familiar strangeness”\(^{224}\)

18\(^{th}\) March 1944 was a crucial moment for Márai tearing his hitherto life apart. As he recalled, everything that before had constituted his self was destroyed: “life, work, Hungary, old order and disorder. Total collapse.”\(^{224}\) The Second World War brought an end to his previous “form of life” which he nevertheless did not regret losing.\(^{225}\) It was the moment when the Márails were forced to flee from Budapest endangered by approaching Nazi Army and then Soviet soldiers. They survived the siege of the capital in the nearby village. Then they sought shelter abroad. In retrospect, the writer perceived 18\(^{th}\) March 1944, which was also his name day, as a crucial *caesura* dividing his life into two separate halves. In the bombed Budapest and communist Hungary Márai left half of his life. What began with the exile in 1948 was “the second round, journey across continents.” The writer viewed his life from retrospect as follows: “Forty years ago, someone I was until then died. And the latter, who I am today, was given the form.”\(^{226}\) Was it a form of restless traveller in search of his proper place and meaningful reformulation of self in radically changed historical circumstances uprooting from a familiar spatial context of life?

Márai’s journeys to the West after the Second World War, underpinned by a specific yearning for “personal Europe,” led him in the end across the Atlantic Ocean to the American shore where, in 1955, he concluded that Europe as a bond and hope ceased to exist to him. In the interwar period, during the war and just afterwards, Márai could still believe in a positive outcome of “the great examination” imposed by History which critical moments would just strengthen European unity and bring “a greater sense of our European identity.” Consequently, he still had faith in European “spiritual reserves,” in “a united Europe”\(^{227}\) as well as in “a new type of a Western European, more decent, more human, bolder and more enthusiastic,” equipped with conscience and responsibility.\(^{228}\) However, Europe’s new post-war face did not meet his expectations. Márai was disappointed with

\(^{223}\) This is the way Márai was called by Hungarian poet, Rónay György. Márai, *Diarios 1984-1989*, 46.

\(^{224}\) Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 5, 252.

\(^{225}\) Márai, *Diarios 1984-1989*, 44.

\(^{226}\) Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 5, 252.

\(^{227}\) Márai, “Western Patrol,” 100, 94, 103.

\(^{228}\) Márai, *Kronika Niedzielna*, 226.
the Paris Peace Treaties, the Western attitude towards the situation of Central Europe after the war and later Western indifference towards the Hungarian uprising in 1956. He was thus convinced that all the traces of his “personal Europe” disappeared. Márai started identifying Europe with its recent, twentieth-century face that for him combined his relatives’ sufferings, destruction of his life as a writer, loss of homeland, surveillance, egoism, lie, cynical self-interest and prance. Consequently, he relegated his own Europe, an image from the past to the sphere of memories which would never again become a reality.229

Márai’s exile after the Second World War, imbued with a tension between a memory of the old Europe, freedoms of the past and their absence in the present moment, was in fact stretched between Italy, Europe from the past and America, the New World of the present. The writer was changing places of his stay many times, going from one shore to another and crossing the Ocean so often that he knew this way in clouds by heart.230 Notwithstanding this intensive wayfaring, the feeling of foreignness could abandon Márai neither in Europe nor in America where not only did the unknown places and new situations seem alien to him but also those already seen and experienced.231

Moreover, considering the fact that the contemporary order of time in America seemed to the writer incongruent with the European one, he could experience in the USA some dissonance in attitudes towards the passage of time. In his view what distinguished America from Europe and at the same time brought closer to Russia, was the lack of two episodes in cultural history, namely Renaissance and Reformation, two worldviews that shaped an inclination to perceive reality as centred on the human being treated as the highest value. Devoid of this historical experience of humanism, both America and Russia would be more likely to suppress individuality in favour of Systems, capitalist and socialist, respectively. In this context, Márai agreed with Alexis de Tocqueville’s vision of two great powers in the twentieth century, namely America and Russia232 and viewed Europe as an area between “the Russian nihilism” and “the Western indifference.”233

Nevertheless, after the Second World War, while Europe was ideologically confined by division in two political blocs, in America Márai could experience a fluidity of lifestyles undermining any ideological deadlock or systemic thinking. In the writer’s view, Americans, in contrast to Europeans, in fear of life converted into a system, felt compelled to change lifestyles and

230 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 345.
231 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 491-492.
everyday routines such as nourishment, time of getting up, falling asleep, relationships, flat.\textsuperscript{234} Moreover, even though the European cultural heritage was always closer to Márai, who in consequence could never take roots and assimilate in America, a certain amount of relief on the New Continent was possible because there the atmosphere was not imbued with “bitter disappointment” and “betrayal” which in Western Europe seemed to him an overwhelming tone of life.\textsuperscript{235}

Notwithstanding his momentary nostalgic feelings for Europe, the writer in the end decided to emigrate to America. The Márais first stayed in New York and then, after European \textit{intermezzo} in Italy, they moved to California, San Diego. Several questions emerge here in the context of the writer’s often changes of places of exilic life. Was it the spatial dimension of Márai’s exilic experience that played a crucial role in these decisions to repeatedly cross the Ocean? Was the writer’s inclination for a nomadic way of life a factor that in the end allowed him to come to terms with the American stages of his exilic path? Interestingly, while being in the USA he identified the spatial openness (ocean, world) with his “other homeland”\textsuperscript{236} and a short boat trip “an illusion of Odyssean return to a homeland. In ocean there is everything, also a homeland.”\textsuperscript{237}

The image which could symbolize the importance given by Márai to the spatial dimension of his exilic fate is depicted in a diaristic note where the author presented himself as a curious person carefully studying a big wall map of the Western hemisphere where at that time he could easily travel. The enormous area in size surpassing Europe drew Márai’s attention. Impatient and curious about unknown places, still waiting to be discovered and in a state of amazement incited by the great size of Americas, Márai concluded: “It is stunning in this world, appealing, and that is why one has to live here.”\textsuperscript{238} The question which shall be posed here is whether in the context of unstable and arbitrary historical circumstances, such reference to cartography could express Márai’s desire to take control over a given space and thus spatially compensate what in terms of the moment of time and the speeding course of events seemed beyond the control of the individual. Could this attention devoted to a map, underpinned by a need to ascertain one’s present place by reminding one of past journeys and helping one imagine future destinations, also contribute to reshaping self-identification related to one’s being in space?\textsuperscript{239}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{234} Márai, \textit{Tagebücher 1958-1967}, 106.
\item \textsuperscript{235} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 3, 65.
\item \textsuperscript{236} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 2, 289. “For me, the world is familiar, not individual places.” (217)
\item \textsuperscript{237} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 5, 260.
\item \textsuperscript{238} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 2, 331.
\item \textsuperscript{239} Elżbieta Kończuk, “Mapa jako metafora w ‘opowieściach przestrzennych’ Andrzeja Stasiuka,” in \textit{Od poetyki przestrzeni do geopoetyki}, eds. Elżbieta Kończuk and Elżbieta Sidoruk (Białystok, 2012), 33-34, 47. This interpretation is suggested by Kończuk in her study of Stasiuk’s “spatial narratives.” “A man leaning over the
Post-war Europe, divided by numerous and various borders (political, ideological, intellectual, customs), did not resemble Europe from the past which consequently ceased to exist to Márai. The writer predicted it much earlier, already in 1943, when he wrote: “But even if I survive, I will not see Europe which I knew.”

Contrary to the post-war, divided European continent, America presented itself to Márai as some unity, where mobility was not restrained by excessive bureaucracy or burdensome border control. In a diaristic note from 1957, the writer described his surprise when passing the border between the USA and Canada, the only thing he had to do was to tell who he was. He commented on his experience of travelling in America as follows: “After European border scenes it suits me very much. Since childhood I have not been travelling from country to country the way that once our fathers were travelling in Europe: with a card and credibility of the spoken word.”

Freedom, which the lack of in Europe incited Márai’s spatial displacement, could be found in one of its important manifestations, which is in the form of unrestrained travel possibilities in America. The extensiveness of the space, yielding itself to be explored by a curious eye of the homo viator, fulfilling his self on the way, had to provide a relieving openness to somebody who was before confined by the borders of small European countries and dictates of History. What attracted Márai to the New World, among other factors and values, was the concept of freedom which as he noticed, in America was understood differently than in Europe, namely as already mentioned possibility of unrestrained movement but also as personal liberty, and in economic terms. Freedom of people did not exist to him, only individual freedom mattered and the readiness “to save one’s individuality at all costs” was the highest value. “Freedom is a private enterprise. There is no institutional freedom. A human being can only achieve freedom – in this or another way – independently and thanks to his own tenacity. And moreover for a short time.” In another place the writer added that “there is nothing like ‘freedom of people.’ There is only individual freedom. People are free only when individuals are free.”

In this context, Márai was asking himself whether the cartographic image of the world has the opportunity – by embracing in his gaze the entirety – to experience the impression of ruling the world” (33-34). “Helpful for a man in determining the right path, in recognizing his whereabouts, the map takes part in the constitution of his identity, the inherent aspect of which is being in space. It also participates in the constitution of identity as a mnemonic tool that preserves the memory of past spatial experiences. The map, especially in the hands of a geographer or traveller, becomes an important reference in the process of describing their own life and giving it meaning” (47).

240 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 1, 35.
241 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 2, 245. “In America there is still America – with a green card I can move anywhere, drive around thirteen million square kilometres, and I am still in America.”
242 Márai, Dziennik (fragmenty), 250.
244 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 181.
freedom understood in this manner could be experienced by the persons coming from the eastern side of the Iron Curtain whose travel was conditioned by permission for visa and stay, passport with limited validity and whose stay abroad was accompanied by foreign exchange restrictions.\textsuperscript{245}

The spatial vastness in its possible impact on lifestyle and mentality, besides positive impression of freedom and release, has also its threats. Sometimes Márai viewed American vast landscapes as too overwhelming for an individual who faced with them becomes only an invisible element of the background. American “tiring and exhausting dimensions. Crowd of people, piles of goods, places of mass stay, flood of information.” New York from retrospect seemed to him as a place where life is unbearable because “mass and massiveness devour everything that has a human dimension.”\textsuperscript{246} This image of America represented to the writer a contradiction of Europe which symbolized for him a plurality on a small scale and where the individual has always been a point of reference for other issues measured according to human needs. When in 1963 Márai came back to America from a short stay in Europe, he noticed that the one thing he missed was the European sense of human measures – “on maps, in institutions, in human enterprises.”\textsuperscript{247}

Even though America gave Márai a feeling of stability (citizenship, work, pension, passport) and independence, it could not provide a cultural bond possible in Europe. The only places reverberating with some familiarity in America, besides “a small bay and a grove Inwood Hill,” were lively libraries, generously equipped and well organized which were for him a substitute of everything valuable in life: home, café, sociable life. The American libraries were not museums or “moldy seminars,” “spiritual kitchens for the poor” but a home where “a spirit argues with a spirit, he can oppose or agree with him.” The writer noted that during his 15-year life in the “cement desert, libraries were oases,” where one could find a shelter against “the mechanical clamour of mass civilisation.” The desert-like, barren, “empty and aimless” general atmosphere was, however, unbearable to Márai whose life in America acquired an absurd tone of “a prisoner who walks around in a yard.”\textsuperscript{249} Europe again lured with the promise of a meaningful frame which in retrospect

\textsuperscript{245} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 4., 328. Márai was, however, not uncritical about the American way of life and its values. He viewed freedom, characteristic of a democratic system encountered in America, as endangered by limitations posed by a crowd. Ibid., 344-345.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid., 336-337, 340.
\textsuperscript{247} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 3, 403.
\textsuperscript{248} Márai, \textit{Dziennik}, vol. 4., 103-104, 175. Márai recalled the 15-year stay in America in terms of continuous formulation of his private “Declaration of Independence,” repeated each day and finished with success. It was impossible for Márai “to feel at home in this foreign world devoid of culture and reflexes instilled by it.”
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 24, 25, 59, 331, 341, 343, 377.
converted a choice of return into something which had to happen and a voluntary action into the necessity of fate.\(^{250}\)

In 1967 Márai finished his work in the Radio Free Europe and after 15 years spent in New York decided to leave America, not without a thought of possible return in future.\(^{251}\) Nothing awaited the Márais in Europe, but all the more nothing bound them to America and so they decided to abandon the New Continent. New York seemed to the writer devoid of a \textit{genius loci}; a myth which distinguishes particular European cities such as London, Rome or Paris and marks personal experience by shaping a specific memory of these places.\(^{252}\) As Márai recalled this long, American period of his exile, he could not get attached to anything in the place where he encountered only hostility. “Total disaster, human and literary.” He could not publish anything in English.\(^{253}\) It was the overwhelming feeling of foreignness, which later devoid the writer of any memories from his stay in America and “a hostile resistance” in many things (people, lifestyle, institutions, climate) which made him leave.\(^{254}\)

In America, Márai discerned two unbearable types of complexes: the complex of inferiority and the complex of money. While the first one would be inherent in democracy (lack of hierarchy expressed in fear of one’s position in society and arrogance), the second one identifies money with a tool of measurement of values. Apart from this general, intolerable atmosphere in America, there was also a financial reason for relocating to Europe. In America Márai did not manage to publish his books in English and life there was much more expensive. The need to find additional work, which besides pension would bring some income, meant for him falling “into the claws of the power of the local system.”\(^{255}\) Yielding oneself to each form of system (capitalist or communist) was a dreadful perspective for the writer.

The return to Europe provoked Márai to compare and juxtapose the two places of his exilic life situated on opposite shores of the Atlantic Ocean. He contrasted life in America, imbued with a feeling of isolation from everything and everyone as well as centred on entertainment instead of happiness, with the atmosphere of his future European destination: Italy or Austria. In Southern

\(^{250}\) Ibid., 44, 46, 48, 67. In the same way, Márai perceived his later return to America which he described as follows: “And there is an inner regularity in all of this: it had to be done and done just in this manner.” Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 134.

\(^{251}\) To this end, the Márais arranged a flat in Massachusetts in America in case they would not find their place in Europe. Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 25. Worowska, “Nowe życie na czas starości,” in Dziennik, by Márai, vol. 4, 418.

\(^{252}\) Ibid., 13, 24, 27, 342-343.


\(^{254}\) Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 30, 42, 48, 343. Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 56. What remained to Márai from the 15-year stay were not concrete memories but numbers and concepts.

\(^{255}\) Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 7, 10, 13, 15, 27, 70.
Italy, in Naples defined by the writer as “the noblest city of Europe” or “the last aristocratic city in Europe,” he could sense “something familiar” permeating everyday life, namely an aristocratic spirit and refinement privileging individuality, differentiation, originality and eccentricity. In this respect, Márai regarded Naples as “the only and probably the last city in Europe, in which all forms of conformity are despised.” Naples and Southern Italy presented to the writer a specific counterweight of the American apotheosis of mass and contemporary democratic system which he criticised for nourishing the omnipresent complex of inferiority triggered by the enforced principle of equality. In Naples he could grasp a human dimension of life embodied in the character of local people (good, trustworthy, devoid of wish to climb in the social hierarchy) and present also in nature, in the familiar Mediterranean Sea contrasted to the “oceanic indifference.” The writer described Salerno in terms of the island and refuge in the adverse world.

Moreover, in Southern Italy, Márai-Stoic could identify himself with the common tone of life which he linked with Stoicism. Commenting on the general reaction to the epidemic of cholera, the writer underlined a pagan feature of society which “suffers blows in silence, the Greek and Roman fatalism is embedded in it deeper than the Christian hope.” Italians following Stoics seemed to him to withstand with humility and patience all forms of adversities of fate such as unpredictable natural phenomena and historical whims. Stoicism which emphasises the importance of inner freedom from both the whimsical historical circumstances and one’s private desires accompanied Márai in exile. In 1967 in Italy, the writer mentioned the Stoic “great gift of independence […] not only from the world but also from one’s own desires.” Notwithstanding the difficult political,

---

256 Ibid., 10, 13, 50, 57, 217, 226, 295. The spirit which he also noted later among elderly people in San Diego in California. Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 54
258 As Márai noted: “It is the worst social system and – as Churchill expressed it – it has only one advantage: there is no better.” Ibid. 233. He also mentioned Vico’s philosophy of history assuming that it might be an accurate one. He recognized its three phases of social development in the contemporary world: theocracy (China), aristocracy (in its technocratic version in Soviet Russia) and chaos (Western democracies). Ibid., 73. Nevertheless, as the writer emphasized, still democracy guarantees freedom of culture which, in the end, also made Athens so different from Sparta where there was an order but no spiritual creativity. This division was somehow also visible in the twentieth century when Sparta, in Márai’s view, was embodied by Soviet Russia, China and Nazi Germany. Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 112.
259 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 32, 37, 42-43, 67, 78-79, 299, 328, 389. “[…] Salerno, flat, Naples, the Amalfi Coast, human dimension of this region […]” (43); “Naples remained one of the most human cities in Europe” (79). “One of the last reserves of humanity is Felix Campania […]” Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 119. “Italians are bastards in a human way, it is nowhere else, everywhere else bastards are inhuman.” Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 389. While feeling nostalgia for the Pacific shore and California, the Mediterranean Sea acquired a term: ‘provincial’ Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 93
260 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 35.
261 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 45, 49, 67. Later in exile, while reading Epictetus and Marco Aurelio the writer resumed other important ideas of Stoicism, namely withdrawal towards the self and the source of happiness. “A man really strong is able to withstand not only the blows but also offences.” Márai, Diarios 1984-1989, 64. According to Stoic philosophy of life, one shall not worry about the things which remain beyond the control of an individual (both the future and the present) and take care only of what may be influenced. Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 107, 140. He mentioned it also later:
social, and economic situation in Italy, which at the beginning of the 1970s seemed to him as leading to a civil war, Márai could sense a certain general “deep calm” in the atmosphere. Among Italians (and probably nowhere else in the world), he would encounter the Stoic, “wise, full of resignation attitude and readiness to make one’s life independent of the attacks of History.”

Stoic philosophy of life is linked with a cyclical concept of time of nature which in Italy was also perceptible to the writer. Nature and history seemed to Márai closely interwoven at the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. In this context, he defined history as “[...] to the same degree a natural phenomenon as its rational, mental effect.” In Southern Italy he experienced Fernand Braudel’s vision of a multi-layered historical process governed by different rhythms of time. Nature and history intermingled harmoniously, existence constituted entirety and thus the human world was not separated from the animal life, but they were united. In Naples Márai encountered a comforting combination of both “aristocratic spirit” and “animal materiality,” a life lived almost unconsciously because so closely intermingled with the rhythm of nature.

Evolution and development, detached from a meaningful entirety of life by modern civilisation, underpinned by the cult of reason and progress, in Southern Italy seemed to the writer as some mere imitation of nature and thus inherent in the cosmic universe. As Zwolińska noted, life in Italy alluded Márai to some harmony with nature marked by a slower rhythm of time, its cyclicity or even the sensation of its halt allowing him to find tranquillity, inner balance and inscribe his life within a meaningful cosmic framework of existence. In contrast, the American landscape shaped by the modern civilisation and hectic way of life dictated by technological progress could not facilitate maintaining this inner sense of harmony.

Notwithstanding all these positive sides of life in Southern Italy, its slower rhythm and Stoic general tone, in 1980, after 13 years spent in Salerno, the Márais went again to America. The dilemma: to stay or to abandon Europe was for the writer one of the most difficult, fateful moments and the decision was not easily made. Another change of place was accepted reluctantly as never before. Although leaving Italy meant for Márai, as he expressed it, “shutting the door to Europe”

---

262 "I am completely desireless. I don’t miss anything, I don’t want to ‘see again’ anything. If the day goes by without a hitch, I feel deep gratitude and want nothing else.” Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 152.
264 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 70.
forever and passing “the threshold of great nothingness,” the writer decided to head again for America.

Among the motivations for this next change of place of stay were personal matters, the Márais’ health but also the unstable political situation at that time in Italy and the writer’s growing indifference towards Europe where he could no longer sense a proper atmosphere or stimuli. While the Old Continent became foreign and meant to him a lost illusion, America, even if not appealing and inhumanly alien, was still some possibility and promise of stability. Whereas in America Márai found foreignness to which he belonged in administrative terms (passport, citizenship), in Europe, familiarity was accompanied by the feeling of lack of anything in common. In other words, the writer noticed that while in American foreignness he could still discover something familiar (spatial openness and possibility of travel?), in European homeliness he experienced only alienation. It seems that at this point the American foreignness reverberated with more familiarity to Márai due to values so dear to him such as personal freedom and the possibility of unrestrained movement in space. Therefore, America appeared to him as more bearable than the caricatured Europe, which distorted and alien present face contradicted values from the past, mismatched the image of Márai’s old, “personal Europe” and intensified his feeling of estrangement.

However, America remained foreign to Márai also in the new, Californian context of the last phase of his exilic fate which lacked in bonds and promise of self-identification in positive terms. Still, the new place of stay was not entirely devoid of aspects which in some way could also enrich the writer’s next stage of exilic wandering by allowing him to reformulate his self in negative terms through absence and distance. On one hand, American spatial vastness, big scale, and mass dimensions can intensify a feeling of loss provoking crisis of identity but on the other, may open new perspectives widening one’s horizons. In this respect, whereas in the past in Hungary, the Márais could embark on an unexpected and short trip realized on a sudden whim only to a nearby village, in the American context, in California, where the border was so close, they could replace the village with another country, Mexico. One may thus surmise that such a change of scales broadens

---

267 Ibid., 63, 75, 78, 101-102, 119. Márai’s attitude to Europe was not of disappointment, but worse – indifference (Ibid., 111) or even “perfect indifference” (Ibid., 63).
268 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 166, 169, 175, 343. In fact, Márai remarked that as a stateless person he was not expecting anything else from America other than citizenship for which he was grateful. Márai accepted American citizenship when the Hungarian revolution of 1956 collapsed and when all his hopes of liberating Hungary from Russian control were gone. Ibid., 408.
horizons enabling to look further and facilitating a distance towards one’s existential situation, its roots and burden of the past.

As Márai noted in retrospect, in America he had lost his previous self, framed by life in Europe. It was not a feeling of alienation that he experienced in the American context but as he described it a “fearsome”, “unpleasant, embarrassing” loss of his former personality. In return, however, he was given “a new horizon of the world” which as he estimated was, per saldo probably a gain.270 In California the new horizon, extending itself thanks to the Pacific Ocean, opened to him a window through which it was possible to see ocean and sky united, “Nothing and Everything” at the same time, “the different great world.”271 The American exile, due to spatial extensiveness, distances and waves of immigrants from different parts of the world, brought some valuable broadening of perspective. In place of Europe Márai could discern a planet with an increasing population. Thanks to the distance the writer could notice “a continental shrinking, not only in the traffic-wise sense but also in a spiritual sense, in cultural perspective.”272 Márai noted that “the measures known from Europe and even from America do not apply here,” also what regards the measure of time. As he remarked: “Time passes here so slowly as if there was no space. As on the Moon. It reminds me of the boundless ocean, nothing to hold onto.”273

Freedom from the European spatial confinement meant also a certain liberation from all anxieties accompanying life on a small scale expressed in the question “to be or not to be” which small, Central European nations in the twentieth century were constantly faced with. The question posed by Schmid about the causes of “misery of small states” to Márai, as somebody already for some time living in America, seemed incomprehensible. The writer expressed his response as follows: “America was not a ‘land’ but a continent. But the ‘small nations’ worry […] about their independence, they fear grandeur complex – they are afraid, in paranoia of greatness, of losing the vertical, moral individuality. It is not enough to live well. Small nations without the consciousness of vocation have their anxieties […]”274 Life in America provided Márai with a relieving distance towards History in Europe and its central part which in the twentieth century was unfolding along determined ideological patterns, Systems. The writer mentioned in one of the letters to his friend that his new place of living in San Diego allowed him to view Europe and Hungary from the safe

---

270 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 339.
271 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 47, 53.
272 Márai, Simanyi, op. cit., 221-222.
273 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 49, 47.
distance, “as the astronaut may see from the spaceship the Earth.” From the shore of the Pacific Ocean, Europe once so close to him was hardly visible.

Márai noted that unlike Thomas Mann, who came back to Switzerland from America “to be closer to Europe,” he went to America at the same age “to be closer to something, which in Europe” he could not find. What was missing in Europe for the writer at that time? Márai explained it indirectly referring to the geopolitical situation and the role of Europe at the end of the 1970s as follows: “Europe is a corridor between the East and the West – Americans are withdrawing, Russians are moving forward – Finlandisation has begun and Europe has already become just a political slogan, not a historical activity.” Instead of remaining an actor with a historical mission, Europe accepted the role of a passive political player, a puppet in foreign hands. Márai assumed that not only Europe would become subject to this process of gradual loss of sovereignty. Other continents and regions such as South America, Africa and the Far East were also in the sphere of potential Soviet control. Hence, America, in this context, seemed to the writer as the last bulwark of freedom not endangered by the Soviet imperialistic plans.

Besides the Finlandisation of Europe, Márai also noticed another phenomenon, namely Balkanisation which marked not only Rome but also the whole continent, or at least its eastern part. In this respect, the writer compared Rome to Skopje and as a Balkanized city he described it with characteristics such as: dirt, chaos, disorder, unkindness, greed, fraud. Referencing the stereotypical representation founded on negative associations of the term Balkan, Márai’s identification with the West becomes evident. Moreover, this remark echoes the aspirations of Central European intellectuals to prove their region’s belonging to the Western world and distance from the Balkan or the East. In Márai’s view, European identity in the period of the Cold War was affected and shaped in a negative way not only by Balkanisation but also by Americanisation. At that time, the end of the 1970s, the writer perceived Europe as more and more Americanized by acquiring all the negative aspects of the American culture such as “the madness of advertising, the intrusive mentality of business.” In the opinion of Márai, these unfortunate features borrowed from the American way of life deprived Europe of “character and consciousness of its own identity […]”. Consequently, Europe started “speculating between the Russians and Americans” and gradually became devoid of “its own meaning: dialectical disputes, exuberance of spirit and taste.” The diagnosis of Spengler, which in the interwar period Márai could still perceive as a dark vision of the

---

275 Márai, Simanyi, op.cit., 208.
276 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 63, 84, 172-173.
future and a theory not mirrored entirely by European reality, after the Second World War, seemed to him as fulfilled and converted into practice. Faced with the European civilisation marked with decay in which he declined to participate, in the end, in the loneliness experienced in America, the writer managed to gather some source of comfort.278

Concurrently, it seemed to Márai that while Europe absorbed all the negative aspects of American culture, America became more European than Europe itself. Whereas the European way of life was reshaped in accordance with “consumerism, conformism, mania of success,” America took from the Old Continent “dialectical, scientific thinking, the spirit of individual evaluation.” In this context, the choice of the next exilic destination was clear to the writer. In both Europe and America, Márai had nothing in common with anyone and anything. However, in the extremely diversified, immigrant population of America, the writer could still distinguish a particular phenomenon shared with others, namely a specific consciousness or “sense of life on the continent” guaranteeing freedom of travel. While “Europe has already exhausted its content and sense of self-confidence, America is still getting ready for something.”279 Whereas Europe seemed equivalent to the past betrayed by the unsatisfactory and strange present moment, America appeared to Márai as a future presaged in the equally foreign present but still devoid of the caricature of the past emotionally underpinned with bitter disappointment.

The decision to change the place of stay was accompanied by a tension between the desire for distance and yearning for home. In the choice of the next destination, which can be viewed as expressing the writer’s need for distance from the Old Continent, there was still some hidden wish to retain a bond with Europe and the Mediterranean area. Consequently, perhaps San Diego was not chosen by accident. Márai perceived this new place of stay not as an Anglo-Saxon town but a place reverberating with “Spanish and Aztec elements.”280 According to Zwolińska, San Diego, as “a failed copy of Italian (thus European) seaside town, seems to confirm the desperate desire to be at least a little at home in Europe.”281 However, it appears that the need to acquire a distance from Europe, not only in geographical terms,282 was stronger than the desire to maintain the bonds. San Diego was a place “neither European nor American” where people were more directed towards the East and Asia than towards Europe,283 and thus more towards the future than towards the past.

278 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 94, 88.
279 Ibid., 63, 75, 93-94, 122, 134.
280 Ibid., 121.
281 Zwolińska, “Na peryferiach wielkich miast,” 52.
283 Márai, Dziennik, vol 5, 51, 78.
In California, thanks to the face-to-face encounter with “the definitive sense of loneliness” opened by the Pacific Ocean, “this simultaneous Nothing and Everything”, Márai could keep everything connoted with the European past and present at the biggest distance, as if he acquired the astronaut’s perspective. The writer described this new, surprising perspective, imbued with some lightness of being, as the one which allowed the past “to fade and float away”: “Europe, youth, adult life, ‘history,’ ‘culture of the West.’” Similar to the coastal stones’ erosion, the new perspective enabled Márai to undermine the past which, in the end, lost its unbearable weight. A remedy for time and its speeding pace became eternity. “The close infinity in everything, in water and on the sky” dissolved History and its burdensome connotations such as heritage, identities and roots. Again, on the American shore, the writer sensed as if he closed the door leaving behind: “‘the West,’ tiring slogans of emigration, ‘homeland,’ Hungary.” All these once deeply absorbing and personally engaging references became immersed in “the oceanic indifference.” In San Diego, the writer finally found a shelter.  

However, one thing Márai still missed in California, namely the Mediterranean Sea where he felt “like someone who finally returned home after a long journey.” Not feeling at home, the writer was, nevertheless, grateful to America for the spatiotemporal distance towards both Europe and his past. On Thanksgiving Day, he expressed his gratitude to America, for giving him “Pacific shores, this pleasant refuge […] which is situated in a peacemaking distance from […] nationalism, arrogant patriotism, the People from the Puszta and the blood of Arpad…,” therefore everything which he disliked. Márai was grateful to America for the distance which allowed him to preserve that which was most dear to him, namely the Hungarian language.  

At that point the writer perceived everything linked with “the West” as the most remote but, notwithstanding the distance to Europe and his past, he was sometimes thinking about Kassa and the Hungarian language remaining for him the strongest bonds throughout his exile. 

---

284 Ibid., 55, 88, 93, 127, 133, 135, 146, 152. “In this city on the shores of the Pacific, for the first time in my life, I feel as if I have found a kind of refuge […], the whole emanates with harmony. Maybe it is because of the proximity of the ocean. But also the climate.” (146)  
285 Ibid., 171.  
286 Márai, Diarios 1984-1989, 74-75.  
287 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 93, 133.
6. Concluding remarks

History of the twentieth century in Central Europe, as individually experienced, brought an interesting shift from the Epicurean way of life, free from preoccupations about the future, to a Stoic view emphasizing the fragile individual depending on the impersonal fate. The Epicurean life was centred on a fleeing moment, abundant in cultural, spiritual pleasures (Viennese opera, theatres) and travels in search of answers to existential questions. This Epicurean spirit was, however, quickly substituted by the Stoic, calm acceptance of imminent fate and thus also possible death because in some situations “a man does not await an answer anymore, does not discuss with fate […]” Márai as a Stoic accepted a given pattern of historical circumstances. Stoicism constituted his philosophy of life, especially during the war and later in exile, most visibly in the last stage of his exilic life.

Stoic withdrawal from the historical realm and public life, accompanied by feelings of isolation and alienation, occurs in situations, when two orders of time, one dictated by the course of events and another one of personal story, are parallel but not complementary. Stoicism underpinned Márai’s decision about embarking on diaristic writing, which allowed him to reconfigure his perception of time. Whereas the diaristic practice could facilitate reshaping the experience of temporality, the writer’s almost incessant movement in space let him reformulate his self in the mirrors of different manifestations of cultural alterity. As Márai stated: “The world is happening also in me, not only in time and space. I am also a space,” the space of experienced, problematised and interpreted the world as well as changeable self-understandings emerging on the crossroads of paths leading to different places representing otherness.

Uprooted by the History of the twentieth century, Márai experienced the continuous feeling of being an emigrant on the Earth which shaped his exilic fate. He could not find his place in the new, post-war Europe divided by artificial borders which did not allow for the previous openness and freedom of movement. Unable to recognize his self in the changed, full of tension and suspicion “European panorama and form of life,” Márai would head for America and soon also acquire

---

288 Ibid., 289.
289 “‘Every day I die,’ says Saint Paul. The phrase literally describes my life situation from day to day. Death is very close, I perceive its breath, its smell. However, such familiarity does not frighten me, but rather calms me down.” Márai, *Diarios 1984-1989*, 99.
290 Márai, *Dziennik*, vol. 1, 26.
American citizenship which, however, did not imply any self-identification with the American culture and way of life. Both continents remained alien to him, only some accents of foreignness and familiarity changed. Whereas Europe meant to Márai “foreign homeliness,” America proved to be “familiar strangeness.”293 Even if he did not feel at home in America (as everywhere else in the world), in the atmosphere described in terms of known and bearable foreignness, he did not feel completely alien. The writer compared himself to Robinson, a castaway who again had to formulate new frames of his existence on the American island which seemed to him provincial. Márai could not assimilate and thus approach the American cultural, social sphere and way of life but he noticed that in many aspects he became there more distant to Europe.294 Consequently, it was not the hectic, American order of time which could constitute the meaningful background of his self but the distance from Europe.

In this long-term existential oscillation between two continents, the accents in categories defining the self also shifted and the homeland widened to the entire world. The spatial dimension of self-identification became more relevant than the temporal one. Disillusioned with the loss of his personal, old Europe identified with a community of values, Márai chose America as the last place of his exile. Due to America’s oceanic openness, he could acquire a relieving distance towards his past and the historical burden identified with the shared European fate. The writer could live “[...] as far away from all and everything, [...] as Trappist in a monastery [...]”295 immersed in solitude remote from the events and immune to their emotional impact on the individual, namely feelings of nostalgia or anger. As Márai recalled, he would never feel any nostalgia for his homeland due to “very bad memories of the so-called ‘lordly’ Hungary” which later became accompanied by equally bad memories of communist Hungary. The writer was only susceptible to non-ideologized, cultural traces of his homeland (Hungarian language and literature), sometimes thinking about Kassa with the surrounding area of forests.296 In exile immersion in the present moment became more important than yearning for the past. “I would like to feel nostalgia for something ... for a landscape, for a trip, for a city, for someone. But I can’t afford the luxury of being nostalgic anymore. It is enough for me to be!”297

295 Ibid., 191. “There is no other homeland, only the world.” (93)
296 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 4, 84.
In the American phase of exilic life, the spatial dimension of Márai’s self-identification came to the foreground. At that moment, space understood not only as freedom of movement and travel but also as a promise of escape from the burdensome historical order of time, became more important in reshaping his self-understanding. Struggles with History and the temporal displacement of the self, so intensively experienced while still living in Europe, became mitigated by the oceanic indifferent immensity. The writer compared the ocean with time: “It devours everything which falls into it.” Oceanic infinity thus overshadowed the passage of time liberating Márai from the burden of History. He identified this period of life with a kind of “overtime” or the “encore performances.”

Márai’s final choice of the Western hemisphere to be the last destination of his exilic fate could be interpreted also as a logical extension of his potential philosophy of walk, which inspired by the American writer Henry David Thoreau could lead him only in the western direction. In one of the diaristic notes, Márai mentioned Thoreau’s practice of long walks regarded as some pretext to immerse in thinking. He commented on this act of intellectually underpinned walking as follows: “[…] human ‘always walks to the West’ – from the moment when somewhere in Central Asia he stood up on feet and moved ahead, he was always walking to the West […]” Since 1919, when Márai’s father sent him, the young aspiring journalist to the West, the writer’s later, long, exilic odyssey led him to the extreme, westernmost point. As he mentioned in the last place of his exile, in San Diego: “We live on the edge of the Western world, the second, boundless hemisphere begins behind the door.” By the Pacific Ocean (“Nothing and Everything”), Márai could leave behind his burdensome past and all its manifestations embodied in authoritarian/totalitarian Hungary, the indifferent West or ideologically divided, post-war Europe. The new, broader horizons would open. In front of this oceanic, immense mirror, where Everything (the past) found its reflection in Nothingness (present liberation from the burden of the past), the writer could acquire a new, infinite perspective privileging individual freedom and extending towards both the future self beyond the power of time and the upcoming world dominated by non-European civilisations.

---

298 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 119, 159-160, 188.
301 Márai, Dziennik, vol. 5, 174 (“milliard Chinese people and six hundred million Hindu people”).
VIII. Med Vzhodom in Zapodom (“Between the East and the West”). Vladimir Bartol as the main protagonist of his unfinished novel?

1. Introduction: Triestine dualities

Where is Trieste? Where does it belong to? To the East, to the West or to a “No Man’s Land”? Metaphorical boundaries between reality and imagination as well as geographical frontiers between Eastern and Western Europe in this intermediate area have proved to be debatable, moveable, and porous throughout history. Mythical representations closely interwoven with reality in the urban texture comprise a prism that refracts both the past and the present images of the city. In the borderland area of Trieste and its surroundings, “that most slippery of spaces […] caught on the edge of three worlds,” the Romance, Slavic and German heritages coexist in a Central European spiritual triad. The specific triple intersection of cultural worlds was embodied in the fate of Triestine writer Scipio Slataper, “a man of border” who described himself as “Slavic-German-Italian.” His Italianess was supposed to harmonize both Slavic nostalgias, sentimentality, “an infinite dreaming without limits” as well as German obstinacy and “dictatorial will and tone, […] a wish for dominance.” Slataper described Trieste as “a place of transition, which means a place of struggle. Everything in Trieste is double and triple, beginning with its flora and ending with its ethnicity.”

Doubleness or even tripleness enrich the borderland reality but also problematize it by going beyond clear categorisations, rigid definitions and unambiguous formulas of identity.

Trieste, this pluri-national entrepôt, commercial hub lying at the crossroads of various traditions has been marked with convoluted, multi-layered history and likewise complex cultural identity. Here the contradictions co-occur and ideological, cultural, geographical extremes merge.

The strong northeast wind called in Slovene burja coming from the Karstic limestone plateau,
Trieste’s hilly hinterland, reminds of the presence of the East which embraces the city in its cold grip. Blowing in the westward direction burja reaches the Adriatic Sea opening the Western horizon which to numerous newcomers, entrepreneurs, adventurers, refugees from all over the world has been reverberating with a promise of new possibilities and a better future.

Triestine crossroads of all geographical directions and a transfer zone of diversified cultural influences shaped a cosmopolitan society, which however was inherently marked with numerous particularities espoused by the city’s inhabitants. The place which brooked contradictions necessarily honed relativisation of identities that were rearticulated differently over time depending on political circumstances. The divisions between inhabitants, representing different cultural traditions, were fluctuational following the amplitude extending from relative mitigation or assimilation to exacerbation, conflict as well as national and religious intolerance. Intricate, divergent self-identifications were constantly negotiated and rearticulated in keeping with changing historical circumstances, both state and individual interests, in other words, they differed depending on a concrete interwovenness of a plot of grand narratives with private stories. These fluctuational self-identifications were reflected in the mirror of other who firstly perceived as a neighbour or an equal member of “a commercial ‘Triestine nation,’” with the rise of national tensions was soon viewed as an enemy. Trieste was a fertile ground for uncertainty and ambiguities born out of the contact between people coming from various parts of the world and cultural contexts. Italians, Slovenes, Germans, Greeks, Serbs, Armenians, Czechs, Jews, Swiss Huguenots formed part of Trieste’s genius loci. Otherness manifested itself also in the only apparent closeness towards compatriots abroad. Conditions of life and worldviews of Triestine Italians, Slovenes and Germans, sharing the perspective of a minority, differed from those characterising life of compatriots on territories where they constituted the majority.

5 Henrik Tuma defined this coexistence as follows: “[…] Trieste is historically and ethnographically a linguistic island closely embraced by other nationality.” Henrik Tuma, “Trieste” in Introduzione alla storia culturale e politica slovena a Trieste nel’900, ed. J. Pirjevec (Trieste, 1982), 64.
7 A certain continuity in the national conflict in Trieste and in the eastern Adriatic since the Habsburg times to the post-World War II period, with its culmination in the interwar era, is visible on a memorial plane in politics of memory. The continuous transformation of “an intermittent memoriescape” aimed to expose the Italian character of the city and the region which would overshadow the contribution of other ethnic groups to the urban identity. Borut Klabjan “Erecting fascism: nation, identity, and space in Trieste in the first half of the twentieth century,” Nationalities Papers 46, no. 6 (2018), 959, 971-972.
8 Anna Millo, “Trieste, 1830–70: From Cosmopolitanism to the Nation,” in Different Paths to the Nation Regional and National Identities in Central Europe and Italy, 1830–70, edited and translated by Laurence Cole (New York, 2007), 64.
The constant presence of the alterity in everyday life made it harder to define oneself in clear, unambiguous positive categories which were then replaced per negationem. As Claudio Magris remarks referring to Robert Musil’s definition of the Austrian (“Austro-Hungarian minus Hungarian”), the identity of an inhabitant of Trieste can be expressed only in negative terms “as a result of countdown, subtraction, […] a Triestine will hardly introduce himself with a positive label; instead of defining his sameness, he prefers to specify what he is not, what differs him from others.”10 “Differing from” is accompanied by “being in between.” Serbian writer, Dragan Velikić characterised the Triestine milieu as a source of dualities which have a direct impact on some of its inhabitants’ mechanisms of self-identification. “Trieste has been from time immemorial radiating duality and this also marked its writers […].”11 As the representant of this duality which took the form of a simultaneous presence of two personalities Velikić in his essay discusses Italo Svevo/Ettore Schmitz. In this case, the alter ego of writer Svevo was the commercialist Schmitz. There are certainly many other Triestines writing their life–stories in the first person not singular but plural.

Trieste with its flourishing harbour, for centuries attracting a flux of newcomers, became the city of immigrants12 where arrivals and departures made up discontinuous life-stories tinged by both uprootedness, cosmopolitanism13 and search for some bonds, irredentism. Both nationalism and cosmopolitanism, which remained in the constant interrelation in Trieste, informed inhabitants’ positions depending on their social background, economic, political interests and given the political situation, historical circumstances. Following American historian, Pamela Ballinger’s definition of both cosmopolitanism and irredentism in the Triestine context as “interrelated ideologies upon which individuals may draw in different realms or moments,” self-identifications of Trieste’s inhabitants acquire a changeable and relational character. This coexistence of only seemingly contradictory ideologies was embodied by many Triestine writers such as Scipio Slataper or Italo Svevo who “often cited for their success in having captured the complex, hybrid Mitteleuropean flavor of Trieste, nonetheless supported the Italian irredentist cause.” They “simultaneously

10 Ibid., 13, 15-16.
11 Dragan Velikić, O pisateljih in mestih, translated by Mateja Komel Snoj (Ljubljana, 2019), 70.
12 Cattaruzza, op. cit., 193. “According to the 1910 census, 100 000 of Trieste’s 229 000 inhabitants had been born outside the town, including 29 000 Italians from the kingdom.”
13 For the analysis of cosmopolitanism and its twofold meaning applicable in the research on Trieste both in the historical perspective and from the contemporary standpoint see: Paul Waley, op. cit., 243-256. The first meaning (“Oriental cosmopolitanism”) refers to the history and heritage of the cosmopolitan port cities in the eastern Mediterranean. Another understanding of the concept called “European cosmopolitanism” is less specific and more visionary, future-oriented. Trieste combines these two meanings of cosmopolitanism. 243-244, 246-247, 249-253.
embraced ‘nationalist’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ positions in different aspects of their life […]” Slataper and Svevo were of course accompanied by other Triestine writers who managed to integrate both nationalism and cosmopolitanism into their life-stories.

This Triestine duality of double perspective (minority-majority) and the oscillation between cosmopolitan openness and centripetal nationalism also marked one of the representants of the Slovene literature in Italy, Vladimir Bartol, who was born and spent his childhood in the village close to Trieste, Saint Ivan (now the city’s quarter). In the aftermath of the Great War, when Italians took control of the Julian March and fascist persecution of the Slavic population increased, together with his family he had to leave his homeland. In 1919 they moved to Ljubljana.

The duality inherent in Trieste’s cultural identity and affecting its inhabitants’ experiences was mirrored also in Bartol’s oeuvre. The writer, whose self-formation and literature were, to great extent, shaped by the cosmopolitan and multicultural milieu of the Habsburg, Central European Trieste, witnessed and experienced persecution of Slovene minority and after the war endeavoured to rebuild Slovene/Yugoslav cultural life in Italy. His life and work combined both the width of intellectual horizons and focus on the national question. Bartol’s biography and literature thus could be characterised as both supranational and local, Slovene. Following this line of interpretation, the writer was described by Košuta as “glocal” on the crossroads of globality and locality. Bartol’s openness, trespassing national boundaries, radiates from his experience of cosmopolitan Trieste which more and more tense atmosphere of increasing national divisions also shaped his locality.

Aware of embodying the dual perspective himself, the writer, at some point discerned in his life a specific affinity with Svevo’s fate. Both writers had much in common, dual cultural perspective, inspiration with psychoanalysis and late recognition of their works. Bartol explicitly


15 In Ljubljana Bartol studied biology, philosophy and additionally also geography. In the 1920s, having received his doctorate degree, he went to Paris (1926-27), where he attended lectures at Sorbonne University. When he came back to Yugoslavia, he spent one year (1928) in the army in Petrovaradin in Novi Sad. In the interwar period besides literary work, he was also engaged in journalism by cooperating and contributing to literary reviews such as *Jutro, Slovenski beograjski tednik* and *Modra ptica*. During the war, Bartol became a member of the partisan movement (*Osvobodilna Fronta* - OF) fighting for the liberation of Slovenes from Italian and German occupation. In OF he worked for its cultural division and later he also took care of propaganda. After the war, he was engaged in Slovene theatre life working as a secretary of the National Theatre in Ljubljana. Tomo Virk, “Vladimir Bartol,” in *Novi Slovenski biografski leksikon* (Ljubljana, 2017), 140.

16 Miran Košuta, “‘Tržaški’ Bartol: pisatelj, ki je gledal ladje z vseh kontinentov sveta/ Bartol ‘of Trieste’: the writer who saw ships from all continents of the world,” in *Slovenska tržaška literarni šola*, ed. Z. Duša (Ljubljana, 2015), 73, 86-88.

expressed his kinship with Svevo, founded on cultural and linguistic duality accompanied by double isolation on both sides of the frontier preventing both of them from gaining an immediate and desired recognition of their literature. Bartol was schizophrenically viewing himself as oscillating between Trieste and Ljubljana, the perspective of minority and majority. As a member of the Slovene minority in Italy, he did not feel part of either the Italian or the Slovene literary circles. Even after his return to Trieste, he felt a stranger. Bartol as a “Triestine apparition”? Remaining beyond national literary canons and established, imposed national formulas of identity, the writer was for a long time overlooked and unaccepted by both Italian and Slovene literary critics. Throughout the chapter I will try to tackle Bartol’s mechanisms of self-identification built on the absence understood as a situation of isolation, feeling of loneliness and lack of proper understanding, recognition.

The period of Bartol’s life and work that will be put to the foreground in this chapter is the decade between 1946 and 1956 when the writer moved back to Trieste to reconstruct and supervise the cultural life of Slovenes and Croats. He was appointed to leading posts in the sphere of culture, science, and Slovene-Croatian educational association. In 1956 due to the lack of Italian consent to

that the writer’s wife was living in the flat where once he had been living with his family, just before their translocation to Ljubljana. The familiar name of the street triggered a shudder and an emotional response, imminent “when a man realizes some fateful overlap, which is similar to accident, and which repeats too often to be a coincidence.” In this context, Bartol was asking himself an interesting question that touches upon the issue of relativity inherent in the perception of the passage of time and certain fateful coincidences. Namely, how could it happen that Svevo’s wife chose the same flat which 40 years before was given to Bartol’s family (or the other way round)? “How is it possible that among so many houses the lady lives right here, or better expressed, how could it happen that 40 years ago we received the flat right here?”

Ibid. As Bartol noticed: “Similarly to I. Svevo the same was happening also to me. His first novel was published in 1892 and passed unnoticed. Newspapers did not mention him at all, they pounced on Svevo’s poor language and poor command of Italian.” ("Podobno kakor I. Svevu se je godilo tudi meni. Prvi njegov roman je izšel 1892 in je šel neopaz mimo. Časopisi, ki so ga sploh omenili, so se spotikali predvsem ob Svevovem slabem jeziku in slabem obvladovanju intalijanščine.") Bartol mentioned also in the diary his plans to publish a study on Svevo. He first had heard of him during his stay in Ljubljana and after 20-30 years, when he came back to Trieste, he decided to delve more into the fate of this writer. What drew his attention was Svevo’s lack of recognition and his close contact with Freud, therefore two aspects that similarly made a strong mark upon Bartol’s life and work. Even though Bartol regretted not having had an opportunity to meet Freud personally and listen to his lectures, he was acquainted with almost all of Freud’s writings. At some point, Bartol also met Svevo’s wife and regarded the topic about Freud that the two tackled in their conversation as probably the most important.

Bartol, Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu, vol. 1, 175 “I felt a foreigner in the foreign surroundings, when I returned in 1946, after twenty-three – or even after twenty-six years to Trieste and visited Saint Ivan.”

Vlasta Polojaz gives an affirmative answer to this question in her essay on Bartol’s psychoanalysis and the influence of his childhood Triestine experiences on his literature. She referred here to Košuta’s designation of Slovene literature in Trieste in terms of “apparition.” V. Polojaz, “Vladimir Bartol. Tržaška prikazen,” 1-2, available at www.psihoanalitiki-ija.si/files/Polajaz-Bartol.pdf (retrieved 7 January 2020) In Košuta’s view, the Italian literary history has not recognized the role of Slovene writers born, living and writing in Trieste in their contribution to the multicultural image of the city. The lack of recognition and attribution of a real role converted them into invisible and ephemeral spectres. Miran Košuta, Scritture parallele. Dialoghi di frontiera tra letteratura slovena e italiana, (Trieste, 1997), 105.
prolong his sojourn in Trieste, he had to return to Yugoslavia. Bartol’s return to Trieste after the Second World War had as a cultural background the city’s search for identity which, as literary scholar Katia Pizzi noticed, was accompanied by its quest for historical and cultural recognition. Hence, Bartol’s sojourn in post-war Trieste, which will be at the centre of my attention, was marked with discussions regarding the city’s new geopolitical status and cultural identity. As Pizzi remarked: “The post-Second World War period saw Trieste at the centre of public attention while the Triestine question was being debated in the political arena, at least until 1975. In the 1980s, official critical consent canonized Trieste’s literature mainly on the basis of its specific literary connections with Mitteleuropa.”

The long-standing discussion on Trieste as an intermediary space between different cultures and identities has many times reinforced the myth of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and the city’s bond with Central European heritage. Given the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the genius loci of the city, the question arises about the extent to which the latter shaped Bartol’s self-identification and how he contributed to the city’s post-war identity. How does Triestine atmosphere, tržaškost reflect in the writer’s life and work? Given that, as Košuta reminds, the writer spent more than one-third of his life in Trieste (26 years), it goes without saying that the city’s milieu had essentially shaped Bartol’s literature and had a particular and important impact on his self-understanding. Košuta discerns in the writer’s oeuvre a strong influence of tržaškost which manifests in “topos themes, motives, ambiences, feelings, problems and even linguistic peculiarities of ‘the city in the bay’.”

I will analyse Bartol’s conceptualisations of Trieste in autobiographical terms of his homeland, as a city of the past where the writer spent his youth but also as a city of the future which in Bartol’s view should lead to Trieste’s annexation to Yugoslavia.

I will focus on Bartol’s decade-long stay in Trieste and two aspects of his life writing from this period related to his attitude both to the time of the twentieth century and the space of Central Europe, in this case, “condensed” on a territory of Trieste as well as extending towards other cities, mainly towards Ljubljana. With a return to the city lying by the hill of Saint Just, the writer

21 Virk, “Vladimir Bartol,” 140; M. Jevnikar, “Neznani in problematični Vladimir Bartol,” Primorska Srečanja 134-135 (1992): 356. Having returned to Ljubljana Bartol was employed at the Slovene Academy of Arts and Sciences (SAZU) in Ljubljana, first as a person dealing with the press and then as a member of the administration in the scientific department. Responsible for the contact between the scientific world and people, he published at that time conversations with scientists titled “Visits with Slovene scientists” (Obiski pri slovenskih znanstvenikih, 1961). Apart from this small book and short stories titled “Triestine comedies” (Tržaške humoreske, 1957), he was not as literarily active in this period as before. Some notes for novels and drama remained unfinished. His journey outside Europe, to Egypt in 1960, as a representant of the Union of Yugoslav Associations of Writers, is also worth mentioning.


23 Košuta, “‘Tržaški’ Bartol,” 73.
approached also his past. As he confessed, “only when before ten years I had returned to Trieste, a view on my youth started to come back and become denser.”

Therefore, Bartol treated this return to his hometown also as a journey to his past, explored in the diary and autobiographical writing (main sources in the chapter), which at that time overshadowed his literary works.

The two aspects of self-identification (spatial and temporal) seem worth studying given that the writer mentioned in his autobiography both “geographical instinct” and “historical sense” (zgodovinski čut) as two features of his personality. The image of a young boy following his father’s indications on a big map used to present the changing battle-fronts during the Great War served the writer as an exemplary manifestation of his two instincts in relation to time and space. Bartol recognized in himself a capacity of transgressing both spatial and temporal confinements by approaching some distant in space political events, historical dramas and viewing himself as writing both for the past and future audiences. Firstly, I will concentrate on Bartol’s attempts to frame his self within geographical and cultural frames. The coordinates that designated his existential map extended between the West and the East, between Paris, Trieste and Ljubljana or Belgrade. In the next part, I will also attempt to reconstruct Bartol’s temporal dimension of his self-identification in regard to the historical context of the twentieth century. In this respect, his post-war work in Trieste seems particularly important as at that time he focused on autobiographical writing. Moreover, in 1956, thus at the end of his stay in the city by the hill of Saint Just, Bartol started studying the “historical sense” exploring his own experiences and gathering comments of other people.

How did the writer define his place and his self between the East and the West? This general question will guide my interpretations of Bartol’s autobiographical writing and fragments of his diary (among others, a part titled “Between the East and the West” written just after the war with the intention of a novel under this title). While his autobiography is published in three volumes, the diaristic notes still await further studies. Only a small part of them was published in fragments in the Slovene literary journal Dialogi in the 1980s. The overwhelming part, however, still waits for adequate research, interpretation, and possible publication. Tomo Virk, the Slovene literary critic studying Bartol’s oeuvre, noted that the extensiveness of the writer’s diaristic practice and

---

25 Bartol, Romantika, 157, 158.
26 Ibid., 155.
27 Bartol, “Po dvajsetih letih. Opombe k drugi izdaji Alamuta,” III.
28 Some fragments of Bartol’s diary from years 1930-1933 were published in Dialogi in 1982 (no. 4, 5, 6-7, 8-9, 10) and some of his diaristic notes from years 1958-1961 were published in the same cultural journal in 1983 (no. 1).
manuscript legacy, in general, might drive its researcher into despair.²⁹ As Virk continues, “due to this extensiveness, which is not possible to control totally – for the detailed examination of the entire legacy decades would be needed, it is always possible to expect, that potential future discoveries will complement current findings.”³⁰ Considering Bartol’s immense diaristic legacy, my further interpretations will tackle just a few selected problems and thus will not pretend to be an exhaustive analysis of the writer’s life and work. I attempt to suggest possible interpretative paths and directions which, if continued, would require more research and close reading of Bartol’s manuscripts.

One of the questions tackled in the chapter will be the role of the diary for Bartol. Most of the time he was writing his journal either on separate, small pieces of paper or in small notebooks. Sometimes he was also taking notes on cigarette boxes. The huge amount of diaristic notes required a certain order, therefore the writer was collecting some of them in different, thematical maps. For instance, in one of them, he was putting all his writings about the sense of history (zgodovinski čut), while in another one there were his autobiographical notes. I will interpret Bartol’s journal keeping in anthropological terms as a practice that shaped the writer’s self-identification and acted as a defence against nihilistic power of time, oblivion and indifference or lack of recognition coming from the ambiguous borderland context of his origin.

2. Trieste as a “paper city” (Claudio Magris); existential dimension of Slovene literature in Italy; Bartol’s diaristic practice and autobiographical writing

The openness of the Adriatic Sea broadens horizons and extends the prospective view by luring with promises of change and better perspectives in future. Concurrently, however, the Austro-Hungarian heritage resounds with a strong voice of the past which shapes a nostalgia for the bygone times. Trieste problematises not only stable geographical coordinates of place but also temporal vectors and linearity of the passage of time resulting in the indeterminacy of self-perception. Magris describes the experience of time in Trieste in opposition to linearity and thus in terms of discontinuity, contradictoriness, and simultaneity. The time in the city by the hill of Saint Just would not flow in just one direction, following a trajectory of an arrow but precluding irreversible succession of events, it would enable different sections of time and epochs to coexist in the same moment hic et nunc. Hence, life in Trieste could resemble an immersion in an incoherent collage,

³⁰ Ibid., 78.
which as an all-embracing and open to changes present moment consists of different historical experiences. A fluid presentness of various traces of the past includes nostalgically laden memory of the Habsburg Monarchy, nationalisms, fascism, and the Free Territory of Trieste as well as “the memory of the exodus from Istria […], the persistent wisdom of the Jewish Mitteleuropa, the discreet intelligence of the Slovenes and the epic, calm one of the inhabitants of Friuli, the cult of Italianness.”

A yearning for the heyday of the once flourishing emporium of Felix Austria and a prospective focus on the present moment, characteristic of a commercial spirit of the city, are not the only temporal vectors that constitute Trieste’s genius loci. The image of Triestine experience of time in terms of the eternal presence of memory, which contradicts historical linearity, hints at a mythical, recurrent vision of time in the same way as one’s search for identity is accompanied by mythicisation. Triestine life underwent a long, mythologising process and the perduring mythical image of the city seems inseparable from reality. As Ballinger remarks, “[…] the elaboration of a specifically Triestine myth drew upon, even as at points it differed from, what Magris (1996) has deemed a general ‘Habsburg myth’ whose origins date back to the early 1800s.” Inclination for mythicisation of this borderland area has thus a long history and still informs many, literary images of the city, uncritically reproducing for instance the myth of cosmopolitan Trieste presented as bustling and tolerant mercantile hub. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Trieste has begotten a myth encapsulated in the term of “triestinita,” “a cultural identity,” of which one important component is the emphasis on otherness. Trieste as a place underlain with heterogeneity and

---

31 Claudio Magris, Itaka i dalej, translated by Joanna Ugniewska (Sejny, 2009), 309-310.
33 Ballinger, op. cit., 85.
34 Pizzi, A City in Search of an Author, 37-38. The ambiguous term designating the cultural identity of Trieste has provoked many discussions in literary scholarship. Some Slovene scholars underline the implicit distortive meaning of the term which stems from its limitation to the literature only in the Italian language. Therefore, it disregards other cultural contributions (for instance Slovene) to Trieste’s genius loci. Košuta, Scritture parallele, 130. Slovene literary scholar, Ana Toroš emphasizes the difference between triestinita (“cultural identity of Italians in Trieste”) and tržaškost (“either cultural identity of Slovenes in Trieste or multicultural and multilingual identity of Trieste in the beginning of the twentieth century”). The third meaning of tržaškost takes into account the marginal status of both Slovene and Italian literature in the city (in the period from the end of the Second World War until now) when confronted with the one of the centre. Two concepts entail different literary traditions, historical experiences, memories, perceptions of places and values. Toroš explains the approach of Slovene scholarship to the term tržaškost as not aiming at defining the concept (endeavour present in Italian scholarship with regard to triestinita) in opposition to the Italian Triestine literature. The term is rather used to denote the multilingual and multicultural identity of Trieste in the beginning of the previous century. Ana Toroš, Potovanje po neznanih poteh tržaškosti in Gradnikove poezije. Izbrani spisi (Trieste, 2019), 19, 26-30. The way the term tržaškost is conceptualised within the Slovene scholarship seems important from the point of view of an analysis of Bartol’s Triestine life-world. While interpreting the writer’s self-identification during his stay in Trieste, I will refer to tržaškost understood as multicultural Trieste and associated with the marginal position of the Slovene literature in the city which also strongly marked Bartol’s oeuvre.
35 Ara, Magris, op. cit., 13, 15.
contradictoriness, characterised by an inherent alterity, precludes the possibility of conceptualisation of self in positive categories of continuity and unity. This fragile and relational identity, because always rearticulated with reference to otherness, is ungraspable in definitions but deeply experienced and possible to express only in literature.

As Pizzi argues, Trieste’s unstable, cultural status as a mediator between Italy and Mitteleuropa entailed its search for identity within local literature. Trieste becomes “a place of literature,” “a paper city” where life is lived “under protection of literature.” Triestine cultural identity in the opinion of Magris “is at home in literature, it is its true homeland, nowhere else can it be placed. Trieste is literature […] and namely literature about it.” Therefore, rather than in reality, Trieste would exist in literature enabling to touch the inexpressible, inherently contradictory frames of one’s immersion in the city’s unreal reality, allowing to “convert incertitude of one’s identity into a travel in search for it, that means a more authentic identity.” When life ceases to be an evident, given phenomenon but always questioned and undermined in an encounter with Other, as it happens in the borderland areas such as Trieste, it becomes “grounded in idea and literature.” Consequently, literature acquires an important existential dimension as a sphere where a search for truth, sincerity and self is performed, similarly to “poetry, which must give life a meaning.” This existential understanding of writing marked also Slovene literature in Italy.

As Slovene literary critic Marija Pirjevec emphasised, notwithstanding the post-war, difficult both cultural and economic situation of Slovenes in Italy, due to tragic consequences of the two decades of the cruel fascist rule and the war, the Slovene cultural life found its nourishing ground in the “collective value,” namely the language understood in existential terms as a foundation of the self. The Triestine borderland was “a conflictual incubational space” where Slovene literature was shaped and developed as an existential response, attempt of survival, “fight for one’s endangered identity.” Thus, “the subsistence of values or the will for values” are inherent in this literature.

---

36 Pizzi, *A City in Search of an Author*, 38, 42-43. Changing historical circumstances, namely the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire did not undermine the city’s identity as a mediator between Italy and Mitteleuropa. New reconfiguration of historical scene strengthened the image of Trieste as an intermediary sphere between the West and the East.
37 Magris, op. cit., 308-309.
39 Magris, op. cit., 308-309.
which in consequence is far from aestheticism, self-sufficient erudition, linguistic experimentation or l’art pour l’art. Instead of being only a tool of avant-garde experiments, the language among Slovenes living in Italy becomes “an ethical and ontological category which reaches the deepest layers of human being.”

Bartol shared the fate of the Slovene minority inhabiting Trieste and its surroundings. Therefore, it is worth pondering a possible more general image of the Slovene literary life in Italy and its potential typology. According to Pirjevec the particular historical, political and cultural experiences of Slovenes in Italy gave way to “specific typological features” which would characterise the Slovene literature in this spatial context, distinguishing it from both the Italian literature and the one of the Slovene hinterlands. The literature of the Slovene minority in Italy is shaped by the space not only in content (traces of the outside reality) but also in form (style, language). What defines this literature is its link with “strong hierarchy of values which has four founding cores: linguistic, national, existential and ontological ethos.” This hierarchy, however, (with except for national and linguistic components) is not closed, static but open to influences coming from wider European and global horizons and thus open to changes, to “modern relativisation and destabilisation [...].” This penetrable and negotiable character of the four-core structure of Slovene literature in Italy could make possible the coexistence of both national and cosmopolitan components in Bartol’s life-work.

Košuta follows a similar theoretical path guided by the same aim of delineating a typology of the Slovene literature in Italy. In his book “E-mejli,” the Slovene literary critic poses a question whether among numerous individual poetics of writers, who pertain to Slovene minority in Italy, one can distinguish any shared, typological features and paradigms which could reflect a common spirit of the borderland, imaginary microcosmos and regional specificity of their literature different also from the one of the Slovene hinterlands. He answers affirmatively. What are these common characteristics of Slovene literature in Italy? Košuta distinguishes spatial, linguistic, ethical, ontological, and national features which notwithstanding the passage of time and stylistic,

44 Marija Pirjevec, Tržaška branja (Trieste, 2020), 89-91.
formal, or generational differences of individual poetics, compose an unchanged spiritual axis shaped by the common fate of borderland life of a minority.47

Notwithstanding the cosmopolitan, to great extent mythicized image of Trieste, the coexistence of many cultures in the city inevitably opens a national question. Besides language Pirjevec mentions another value defining the Slovene literature in Italy, namely “ethnic humanism” which tackles moral questions of individuals trapped between two forces, the one of humiliating denationalisation, ideological violence and another one of individual resistance and fight for national identity.48 National feature of the Slovene literature in Italy in Košuta’s view assumes complementary forms ranging from “national activism” to “relativism of nationality.”49 How does this aspect reflect in Bartol’s literature? Cosmopolitanism represents just one side of the writer’s Janus-faced self. The complementary side constituted his occupation with the national cause, which however far from the exaggerated tone of national defence would rather acquire a critical stance in the search for a more natural attitude to one’s Slovene roots, the attitude unencumbered with feelings of national endangerment or complex of smallness.50

Bartol’s work should be placed closer to the second pole of relativism in respect to nationality. Slovene literary historian Drago Bajt described the writer in terms of “a determined cosmopolitan, citizen of the world who opposes closing in national and state borders,” which was reflected also in his viewpoint of global literature while analysing the Slovene one.51 He remained in opposition to parochialism and provinciality in Slovene literature, narrowly focused on the rural world. The writer was critical of the Slovene complex founded on quantitative smallness and tendency to imitate greater nations, rooted in misbelief regarding the possibility of autonomous assertion of one’s assets on a wider, international stage and cultural sphere where each nation shall be equal. In this regard, Bartol shared Gombrowicz’s critical stance towards the receptive inclination of peripheral cultures such as Polish or Argentinean to imitate those representing the dominant centre at the top of a hierarchy of power. Bartol summarized this strong temptation of small nations such as Slovene to imitate greater nations, cultures as follows: “Yesterday, let’s imitate the West. Tomorrow: let’s imitate the East. Nobody comes to a thought: let’s be faithful to ourselves.”52 He

47 Košuta, E-mejli, 28.
48 Pirjevec, Tržaški zapisi, 16-17, 18. Pirjevec, Na pretoku dveh literatur, 12.
49 Košuta, E-mejli, 36.
50 Ibid., 36.
was against foreign measures applied to judge phenomena in particular Slovene context and thus against excessively straightforward comparisons of Slovene writers with authors such as Knut Hamsun or Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy representing a greater nation. Bartol and Gombrowicz advocated the cultural production of small nations independent from greater cultural centres. Instead of relying on the light coming from elsewhere, a representative of a small nation should be a sun himself producing light and warmth from his inner self. The light, which should also have a wider range of radiation in the form of enriching contribution to the history of ideas and general human evolution. In this respect, Bartol treated top alpinism, understood in connection with Darwinism, as a possible Slovene contribution to the evolution of humankind. What is more, alpinism would be the only area that could allow Slovenes to become a competitive and even colonizing force in the world.

Following the typology of Slovene literature in Italy, Košuta defines its ontological dimension as constituted by antinihilism which he identifies with a “Sisyphus insistence in the mid of absurd and inhuman world” assuming barbaric forms either in the past of the totalitarian systems or in the present alienating technocracy and bureaucracy. Košuta distinguishes two types of “ontological antinhilism” depending on its source and the writer’s beliefs, convictions. Consequently, there is antinhilism rooted in one’s belief in theological transcendence which manifests in religious feelings. Moreover, there is laic writers’ antinhilism which emphasises a transgressive nature of the human being faced with nothingness, a voluntaristic nature that implies a readiness to transcend one’s limits in keeping with demands of one’s strong will. The individual resistance to nothingness and chaos, accompanied by constant overcoming of one’s weaknesses, is underpinned by an endeavour to rationalize an irrational world, to find some meaningful order in a chaotic reality. What is common for both groups of writers, as Košuta claims, is “a literary veiled yearning for values and existential sense.”

In the same vein, Pirjevec underlined “a contrast between nothingness and meaning” as well as individual search for the latter as inherent features of the Slovene literature in Italy. Pirjevec

---

54 Mandolessi, op. cit., 83-87, 93-95. The author devotes her contribution to Gombrowicz.
55 Bartol, “XZY1 Balkanijada, 20.VI.45.” Interestingly, being against imitation on an artistic plane, Bartol did not oppose the subjugation of smaller actors (republics) to a greater one (Yugoslavia) regarding political solutions and economic plans. However, some possibility of modification and unique tactics depending on circumstances shall be always allowed to representatives of smaller nations. Ibid., 14.VI.45.
56 Bajt, “Publicistika Vladimira Bartola,” 347.
57 Košuta, E-mejli., 29, 49.
mentioned two types of “ontological humanism” or “ethnic humanism” present in this literature. This engaged, existential position manifests either in a belief in “horizontal transcendence,” realized in the course of history developing towards a better future of human face (“social and psychological humanism”) or in vertical, Christian transcendence. The first variation of “ontological humanism,” liberally/socially oriented, is represented by authors immersed in immanence (Boris Pahor). The second, metaphysical, eschatological variation was for instance close to Alojz Rebula.\textsuperscript{59}

Bartol’s metaphysical relativism, Nietzscheanism, the inclination for psychoanalytic introspection, and voluntarism would place him closer to the laic, immanent “ontological antinihilism.” His scepticism was accompanied and counterweighted by a sensation of kalokagathia deriving from Ancient Greece. Bartol defined it as “some highest value which combines benevolence, truth and beauty in one.”\textsuperscript{60} His ‘ontological antinihilism’ would follow the path of “horizontal transcendence” and express a yearning for an experience of the highest values. Moreover, it refers to his attempt, as much as possible, for an objective presentation of some period of time, its typologizing. Bartol’s existential position, combining both philosophical relativism and its counterweight in the form of the “ontological antinihilism,” was evidently shaped in correlation with particular spatial and temporal coordinates of his life.

Born at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Triestine borderland, Bartol found his homeland under the rule of different political regimes and in states where Slovenes were always in the minority, in which marginalisation and persecution ultimately led to his emigration. Overwhelming politics had to incite in him a certain experience of the absurdity and the defencelessness of an individual when faced with whims of great history. In search of a means to overcome this feeling, he espoused an empowering strong will in subduing one’s weaknesses. As Slovene historian Jože Pirjevec underlines, Bartol’s “will to power” was underpinned by “a sensation of insecurity and existential weakness born out of the personal and collective experience of many Slovenes in Trieste.”\textsuperscript{61} In the same vein Slovene literary historian Igor Grdina characterised the author of “Alamut” as a “man, who becoming emigrant because of politics, was especially sensitive to ‘phenomenology’ of will to power already due to the bitter personal experience.”\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{60} Bartol, \textit{Romantika}, 305. “Kalakogatija” je pravzaprav filozofski pojem za nekakšno najvišjo vrednoto, v kateri se stapljajo dobrota, resnica in lepota v eno.”
\textsuperscript{61} Pirjevec, “Introduzione,” 26-27.
\textsuperscript{62} Igor Grdina, \textit{Non finito} (Šentjur, 2004), 61.
The borderland area of Trieste, as an intersection of changeable and complex identities, nourished the existentialist understanding of literature as well as “a robust autobiographism.” This general tone of uncertainty could provoke many authors to explore their past in search of some stable ground with which it would be possible to (re)establish some bonds. Hence, Bartol embarked on writing his autobiography (Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu) in the 1950s during his stay in Trieste. It was published in fragments in the local Slovene journal Primorski Dnevnik. As some of the diaristic notes suggest, by writing the autobiography, Bartol wanted to strengthen both his and other Slovenes’ bonds with Trieste where he wanted to “take new, incomparably deeper roots.” First and foremost, however, the autobiography was supposed to give a basis to the writer’s oeuvre (especially to the texts published later) which would enable a proper understanding of his work. Interestingly, autobiographical fragments and the diary remained in close relationship for Bartol while he was reconstructing the past he experienced.

As Velikić remarks: “Triestine writers experience literature as something private and all of them in some manner ‘write a diary’ in ‘remainings of time’. What did writing a diary, which as a genre possess a specific temporal configuration, mean to Bartol? What reasons (both of intellectual and emotional character) could lay behind such a long and extensive diaristic practice? What ideas and hopes reinforced Bartol in the continuous inscription of his past and present everyday life within a diaristic order of time? Referring to Bartol’s practice of chiromancy and his attempt to read one’s psychological traits and fate from hand’s lines, the question emerges whether similarly, the

64 Virk, “Vladimir Bartol,” 141, 144.
65 Bartol, “Zapiski 1954. (od 21. X. 54 – 4. XII. 54.). Trst-Ljubljana, Trst, 24. XI. 54, Trst, 26. XI. 54,” MC, ZRC SAZU. Bartol hints at this aim also in his autobiography. In one place he commented on his chapter, dedicated to date and circumstances of his birth, as follows: “I felt obliged not so much in the face of my close compatriots but in the face of a future literary historian to give this explanation for easier understanding of my literary endeavours.” Bartol, Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu, vol. 1, 70.
66 Velikić, op. cit., 83.
67 In the diary, Bartol gave a psychological portrait of one person that was discerned based on his examination of the hands’ lines. “Portret človeka, ki se žrtvuje (za idejo). Pri tem mislim na tov. Miliča, ki je zdaj zaprt. […] Prejšnjo nedeljo sem mu v Portorožu čital iz roke. Črte obeh rok niso enake. Ne eni se življenjska črta ne križa z ‘črto glave,’ kar kaže na nagnjene k drzovitim podvigom. Na drugi se črte stikata, znak stalne korekture v prid realnosti. Dlani so razgrebene od črt, znak meditiranja in notranjih bojev. V njem je neka abstraktna dokrota, preje je
diaristic practice could mean to him an endeavour to read his fate from the traces of the passage of time and its narrated moments. Is this prolific diaristic writing (thousands of pages) a sign of the author’s incessant search for his own place in space and time or/and an attempt of escape from time in order to reach eternity in the form of desired fame?

In one diaristic note (27.06.1950) Bartol compared his everyday practice of collecting some traces of his entanglement in time to Goethe’s similar passion.

Just as him I also had the passion of keeping from youth everything which came from my hands.

Each small piece of paper, each drawing, each note. ‘To note down everything’. It is not an arrogance, it is an elementary passion to defend oneself, one’s developmental phases for eternity, as Plato describes in Simposion.68

Thus, was the writer’s diaristic practice exclusively an attempt to find a desirable recognition in the eyes of future generations?

As Virk reminds, Bartol, from the very beginning of his literary career, believed that he would become a writer of global recognition and that is why he was gathering his manuscripts, diaristic notes and correspondence with great care.69 The role of the diarist also comprised that of the literary critic commenting on his works and analysing their reception. Calling himself the literary historian of his own work,70 Bartol was commenting on his texts with the aim of providing a desirable interpretation and prevent any possible misunderstandings. In his diary, there are both “remarks on reasons and sources of incomprehension”71 with regard to his oeuvre and his own interpretations. Perceiving himself as a “born chronicle of his own era,” Bartol added that in the diary he was also following “the fate of his texts.”72 The writer believed that in future the diary would become a mediator of his later fame.

However, the struggle for eternal recognition was simultaneously a defence against the nihilistic power of time and the changeable identities it implies. In one of the diaristic notes, Bartol

---


70 Bartol, “Iz pisateljeve delavnice” in Zakrinkani trubadur, 273.


72 Bartol, Romantika, 219. “[...] sem kot rojen kronist svoje dobe spremljal v svojih dnevnikih tudi usodo svojih spisov.”
mentioned three instances when his self-identification underwent radical reformulation understood as a considerable re-evaluation of philosophical and ethical ideas that, having fallen to pieces, required some new system. The first significant moment of formation of his inner self happened in 1919 after his family’s relocation to Ljubljana whereto as Bartol recalled later, he came as “an almost unwritten paper” waiting for being filled with experiences and clearer “image of the world.” In Ljubljana, he finished grammar school where his self-formation, having been already to great extent marked by Darwinism, was shaped in opposition to catholic dogmatism represented by his teacher of religion. Later at the university Bartol was greatly influenced by the philosophy of his teacher France Veber (the separation of faith from science) and the voluntaristic, Nietzschean worldview of his companion Klement Jug (the separation of faith from ethics) as well as Jug’s strong personality. These philosophical and existential inspirations, followed in an attempt to put them into practice in everyday life, deepened Bartol’s inclination for abstinence which in fact, as the writer recalled, was against his will and not in accordance with his intimate self. The influence of psychoanalysis, Casanova’s writings and work on his own texts made him realize even stronger this dissonance between the theory he forced himself to follow and his own experience. Bartol’s inner self started “forming again” in 1927 during his stay in Paris when the “first creative epoch” brought inspiration for his masterpiece “Alamut” and the first encounter with “historical sense” (zgodovinski čut).73

Bartol’s next phase of inner disintegration and the consequent reformulation of self in “new personality” occurred after the Second World War. Interestingly he compared the period after 1948 to his first stage of self-formation marked by catholic dogmatism and attempts of its forceful appropriation against his own will. Was the communist ideology experienced as another form of repressing dogmatism by Bartol?74 One of his diaristic notes from 1956 hints at an affirmative answer. He described his existential situation in Trieste after the Second World War as follows:

Immediately after the war I thought that my writing has ended because the time has come when one will have to ‘live the working days as entirely the same’ as far as freedom of mind is considered, then I also accepted functions and without a word I was doing what they ordered me because it does not matter, my opinion as an opinion of reason is out of the question anyway.

73 Bartol, “Autobiograško,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
74 Ibid. “Nikoli, niti kot otrok, nisem mogel verovati v katoliške dogme. Toda takrat, v osmi šoli, sem k temu silil (nekaj podobnega sem doživel, kot sledi iz mojih zapiskov iz Trsta, l. 1948).”
Since the proverb turned into ‘everything, even the greatest absurd is real and nothing is allowed.’\(^{75}\)

The transformed proverb originally comes from Bartol’s “Alamut:” “nothing is real, everything is allowed.” Life permeated with the communist dogmatism posing limits to individual freedom was experienced by the writer as a reversal of his masterpiece, “Alamut” where the metaphysical relativism and absence of the absolute truth would be equivalent to an almost infinite extension of one’s freedom. Significantly enough, in the post-war period, Bartol did not publish much. In the times when his “demon” of literary work was not active, he devoted his time to journalism. However, no matter how much occupied Bartol was with the political, cultural official life in Trieste, he was still following the voice of his creative “demon” and also able to acquire “a mysterious mood ‘from the bottom’”\(^{76}\) from where memories were coming to the surface of the present moment. Therefore, apart from numerous journalistic texts and interviews with scientists (\textit{Obiski pri slovenskih znanstvenikih}, “Visits with Slovene scientists”), he published also satirical novels which take place in Trieste titled \textit{Tržaške humoreske} (“Triestine comedies”) and autobiographical fragments.

The question which arises in this context is whether Bartol’s autobiographical writing and “Triestine comedies,” hence more intensive work of memory and humour were two simultaneous ways of responding to the not entirely satisfactory post-war, present moment in Trieste again shaped by the national antagonism. The confrontational atmosphere was evident during the two-year government of Allies in Trieste and especially in 1946 due to the work of the commission responsible for delineating a frontier. At that time, many manifestations in support of Yugoslavia and Italy were organized in order to show the members of the commission to which Trieste would belong.\(^{77}\) The increasing national and ideological antagonism in the city broke out in incidents of fascist attacks on Slovenes and Slovene associations. The tense atmosphere in the city lasted for many years and became evident again in 1953 when the intentions of the Anglo-American administration to cede Trieste and zone A to Italians became known. The London Memorandum would entail the final handover of the city to Italians. All these components of the post-war


\(^{76}\) Bartol, “V. i Z. VI., 6. VII. 1947.”

\(^{77}\) Cattunar, op. cit., 17.
circumstances affected Slovenes living in Trieste, not meeting their expectations. In the opinion of Košuta, Bartol in such circumstances decided to narratively “settle accounts” with both the external, unjust reality using a satirical, polemical weapon (“Triestine Comedies”) and with his inner self by facing his past in the autobiographical writing.

To the post-war situation in Trieste, unfavourable and undesirable for Slovenes, Bartol responded on the one hand with humour, satirical subversion in his literary activity (“Triestine Comedies”) and on the other hand with autobiography and memory reconstructing and evidencing the Slovene important contribution to the history of the city and its present image. In the face of new attempts of persecution, Bartol aimed to emphasise the role of the Slovene minority in the area by depicting Slovene Trieste in a historical perspective in many aspects (cultural, educational, political, economic, and social). In consequence *Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu* is not only the author’s autobiography but has a wider significance as “the ethnographic document about once predominantly Slovene Triestine district of Saint Ivan […]” and the testimony of significant role of Slovenes in history of Trieste. It seems that during Bartol’s stay in post-war Trieste, freedom of memory that resulted in abundant personal writing overshadowed freedom of a more fictional expression. Before in other circumstances, it was the latter that came to the foreground.

In one diaristic note taken in 1954, Bartol mentioned a period of his life when, notwithstanding his financial struggles (materially he was satisfied with the minimum), he could experience “an unheard freedom” most intensively. It was the decade before the Second World War (1930-1940) that, in contrast to the post-war present moment of “unfreedom and universal boundedness” (1954), Bartol recalled clearly as the period of most intensively experienced freedom. He took the first deep breath of liberty in Paris. Recalling his journalistic work in the interwar period, Bartol remarked that, devoid of bounds with ideology or political party, he was entirely free to write what he had in mind. Unlike his more politically active colleagues (Josip Vidmar, brothers Ferdo and Juš Kozak), whose literature was, therefore, more politically engaged, he called one of his main works, “Al Araf” “a high song of freedom.” With the approaching war Bartol sensed that the period

---

81 Košuta, “Tržaški’ Bartol,” 86.
82 Bartol, “Zapiski 1954. Trst, 24.IV.54,” MC, ZRC SAZU. “Bil sem popolnoma prost. Pisal sem, kar mi je prišlo na pamet. Vežala me ni niti nobena stranka, niti nobena ideologija.” As Bartol recalled other Slovene writers such as Mrzel or Kozak, due to their wish to gain a place in the centre of attention, they had to be more involved in contemporary politics, rushing “from one party to another, from one newspaper to another, from one office to another.” Their aim in
of his artistic freedom would be soon over. After the war, in 1954, the writer remarked: “However, I have a sensation of freedom. Life in fact is a very simple chess game. Argument and an appropriate counterargument.”83 Reading between the lines, one could discern Bartol’s hope for a change, a true counterargument extending his artistic freedom in the post-war historical circumstances.

Both memory and humour could be regarded as the writer’s main weapons against unsatisfactory and unpredictable post-war times. Moreover, in the situation of confined freedom of intellect and in the atmosphere of overwhelming absurdity, the diary could provide some form of compensation and margin of liberty. An extensive diaristic practice that spanned a long period of time allowed Bartol to reflect on his personal interwovenness with changeable historical circumstances and, therefore, better understand how his different self-identifications were undermined and reconfigured with the passage of time. The peripheral position of writing a diary in the “remainders of time” and on the margins of the present moment, allows for a broader view combining both past and present extending towards the future. This broader perception, even more desirable and valuable in times forcefully narrowing individual perspective to ideologized worldview, was explored by Bartol in his personal writings combining both the diary and autobiography.

Their interconnectedness is easily traceable because while writing the autobiography the author was to great extent relying on his diaristic notes which he was rereading and sometimes also mentioning in the text. There are many direct references to the diary in his autobiography.84 One of them indicates also well extensiveness of this diaristic project which sometimes exceeded its author’s capacities to find the needed information. “I probably introduced my discovery with the writer’s name into my notes. But because the date fell out of my memory, it would be too time-consuming to leaf through the decades of my notes in uncertainty if or not I noted down this discovery.”85

general to improve humanity and in particular to better the social situation of Slovenes linked their literature with a specific political and social program.
83 Ibid., “Jaz imam vendarle predobčutje svobode. Življenje je v bistvu zelo preprosta šahovska igra. Poteza in pravilna protipoteza.”
84 For instance: “In my notebook I have with the date of 28.V.1946 the following note […]”; “[…] and what follows from my then taken notes […]”; “in the notes from this day, which I have referred to in the beginning, I have besides other the following remark […]”; “V svoji beležnici imam z datumom 28.V.1946 naslednji zapisek: […]”; “[…] in kot sledi iz mojih takratnih zapiskov […]]”; “V zapiskih istega dne, ki sem ga bil na začetku navedel, imam poleg drugega naslednjo pripombo […].” Bartol, Pot do učenosti, 253, 257.
85 Ibid., 266. “Verjetno sem vnesel to svoje odkritje z imenom pisatelja vred med svoje zapiske. Toda ker mi je datum izpadel iz spomina, bi bilo preveč zamudno, da bi prelistaval desetletja svojih belež v negotovosti, če sem si ali če si nisem to najdbo zapisal.”
Bartol called the process of his autobiographical writing a “research in the sense of finding truth,” the aim of which was to gain a wider image not only of himself as a child and youth entangled in a concrete, historical context but also of other people with whom he interacted. He wanted his autobiography to express the character and typology of time they witnessed as well as the image of certain places which he sought to grasp in their entirety. The autobiography was supposed to give unity to numerous dispersed and fragmentary details which Bartol remembered from his own experience and from others’ stories. The final product should resemble a faithful representation of the past, a construction made in the process of collecting little stones and putting them where they had been before. The only allowed modifications could be justified by the power of oblivion and the passage of time. Bartol’s aim was to write facts that would create a truthful account of people and epoch already passed away. Among the source base used while writing his autobiography Bartol mentioned “numerous fragments and details, his own memory and memory of some relatives and acquaintances.” What escaped his memory, the writer tried to find in the sources reflecting the everyday life of some moment in the past, namely in newspapers, on the photos and other personal sources such as his friend’s diary from the time of Great War. He compared his method of writing the autobiography to putting beads of memories on a string, all of them (also contradictory) without any preferences. In some instances, memories would be also complemented by analysis.

In this context it is worth mentioning the specific character of Bartol’s act of reliving the past, grasping memories and writing them down in his autobiography. He was recalling the bygone times in interaction with relatives, acquaintances and readers of his texts published in the press. In response to letters received from his readers, the writer could redefine his vision of the past, the way how he remembered it. This process of writing, which to some extent also implies a dialogue with an addressee, reminds of Gombrowicz’s public Diary and its interactive form based on a duel with his readers. Even though Gombrowicz in his diaristic writing, which spanned more than a decade, remained in a longer interaction with his readers, the similarity should not be overlooked. While...

86 Bartol, Romantika, 176. “Imenovali smo te spomine raziskovanje nekega človeka, njegove mladosti ter dobe in razmer, v katerih je ta človek živel. Kakor je v življenju nekega človeka važno vse, kar koli se ga dotakne ter vpliva na njegov razvoj in njegovo rast, tako skušamo tudi mi postaviti kamenček za kamenčkom ponovno na isto mesto, na katerem se nekoč stali. Nič naj ne bo premaknjeno, česar se spomnimo, in če kaj bistvenega odpade, naj bo to davek človeški pozabljivosti ter zobu časa.”
87 Bartol, Mladost pri svetu Ivanu, vol. 1, 77-78, 111.
89 Bartol, Romantika, 158-159.
90 Bartol, Pot do učenosti, 231.
Gombrowicz’s tactic was to call his texts’ recipients for a duel most often to debunk their ideas and with even more emphasis affirm his own position, Bartol accepted others’ views, treating them as a possible completion or revision of his own perspective.

In his autobiography, the Slovene writer remarked that he announced his intention to recall the past and that he invited some of his old acquaintances to contribute to this enterprise by reminding him of some experiences and in this way also enabling collective memory to emerge.\textsuperscript{91} In another fragment of his autobiography Bartol mentioned that “for the author, who writes his memories of the years gone a long time ago, it will be always interesting, what others along with him in this period observed as characteristic, what marked their memory. This is, of course, many a thing unreliable, but the perception through eyes of another man on oneself is, however, worth mentioning.”\textsuperscript{92} Therefore, memories of other people were welcome not only because they helped Bartol in recollection of some events but also allowed him to perceive himself through another pair of eyes enriching his self-understanding with a different point of view.

Convinced about a strong influence of space on his literary work, Bartol noticed that this relationship could once in future become of great interest as an “instructive problem” to some psychologist or a literary historian.\textsuperscript{93} Following the writer’s intuition, in continuation I will focus on the changing spatial component of Bartol’s self-identification. Firstly, it is worth delineating his existential topography so a map of places where he stayed for some time. Some of them played a decisive role in influencing his writing and self-understanding. It seems that Bartol’s farthest destination was Egypt where he went as a cultural representative of communist Yugoslavia in 1960. After the Second World War he visited Czechoslovakia in the same role. Before, in the 1920s he stayed for a short time in Paris and in the 1930s also spent some time in Serbia. Unlike Gombrowicz, who spent most of his exilic period in Argentina and Márai, who was living in various places in Europe and the USA, Bartol’s existential topography of the first, post-war decade was delineated by the two cities in a relatively small distance from each other, namely Ljubljana and Trieste. Most of the time he was oscillating between them.

It is important to note that Bartol viewed space in general as an important factor that can to great extent influence one’s perception, way of thinking, feelings, and, thus, also literary, artistic

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 251. “[…] sem, v napovedi svojih spominov zaprosil svoje stare znance, da me spomnijo takih doživljajev in mi s tem obenem obudijo spomin na skupno poznanstvo in na nekdanje čase.”

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 200. “Za avtorja, ki piše svoje spomine na davno minula leta, bo zmerom zanimivo, kaj so pri njem v takratni dobi opazili drugi značilnega, kar se jim je vtipnilo v spomin. Ta je kajpada marsikaj nezanesljiv, toda pogled skozi oči drugega človeka na samega sebe je vendarle opombe vreden.”

\textsuperscript{93} Bartol, “Balkanijada IX. Trst. Trst, VI. Zvezek. Dvoživkarstvo,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
production. In one of his notes the writer remarked: “Besides, it is interesting to observe, how strongly a \textit{milieu} also influences the psychological constitution itself, thoughts, triggering of ideas.”

Consequently, a place had a great impact on the way he was writing. As Bartol recalled his work in Ljubljana, even though he aimed to overcome the general atmosphere of confinement and narrowness he experienced there by placing his literary imagined universe within a “great world,” the outcome was “the Parisian stories” with an Alpine spirit of mountain pastures reminding more of Slovenia than of the Western world. The remedy for this Slovene narrowness became a more open, vigorous, and Serbian context. “A dynamic pace of society developing into capitalism” encountered in Belgrade which made on Bartol “the mighty although not entirely delightful impression” also influenced his writings. The atmosphere in Belgrade was experienced by the writer as favourable to gain and then also apply in literary work a wider perspective. The spirit there was also more realistic. Even in Ljubljana, he tried to apply some of this realism to his literary work.

Bartol’s belief in the decisive role of spatial frames in his artistic work reveals also in his hypothetical considerations and curiosity about a shape which his novel “Alamut” would have taken if he had written it not in Slovenia but Serbia, Belgrade. In the same spirit, the writer noticed an interesting divergence between the notes taken in Trieste and before his arrival there, as well as the difference between theory (plans for writing) and practice of writing emerging due to the change of place. What Bartol intended to write, when already written in a different spatial context, would assume very often another shape from the one planned. As the writer remarked: “It seems to me, that what differs (at least a bit) is also writing, which I brought in head from Ljubljana and here I put it on paper and \textit{vice versa}.” Intentions did not converge with an outcome, and it was a change of place which introduced this discrepancy.

The post-war period of Bartol’s sojourn in Trieste seems particularly interesting from the point of view of his self-identification in relation to space as it implied a double movement. A spatial, physical oscillation between the cities (Trieste and Ljubljana) entailed another movement realized within the inner temporality framed by different historical orders of time extending from the present

94 Ibid. “Pri tem je zanimivo opazovati, kako močno deluje milieu tudi na psihično konstitucijo samo, na misli, na sprožanje idej.”
95 Ibid.
97 Bartol, “Balkanjadja IX. Trst. Trst, VI. zvezek. Dvoživkarstvo.”
98 Ibid. “Zdi se mi, da se že razlikuje (vsaj nekoliko) tudi pisanje, ki sem ga v glavi prinesel iz Ljubljane in ga tu spravil na papir in obratno.”
moment of the Cold War period dominated by ideological and national conflicts towards the remote Habsburg era officially advocating supranationalism but not devoid of national tensions. Moreover, Trieste is important in this context due to its yielding to analysis in spatial terms of individual experience of place. In Waley’s view, Trieste is “a powerful vehicle for geographical reflection. It forces us to think geographically, to think about the meanings of place and of affection for place and the expression of this affection in poetry and prose, as in the works of writers such as Italo Svevo and Umberto Saba.”

What was Bartol’s literary articulation of his experience of such a particular place as Trieste?

3. Spatial coordinates of self and Bartol’s return to Trieste

Trieste and its surroundings before the outbreak of the Great War framed Bartol’s multicultural formation. Even though more than a quarter of a century would pass until the writer’s return, he was all the time linked with his hometown, as Košuta metaphorically remarks, by “a Karstic underground but intimately firm, spiritual umbilical cord.” Bartol’s “tight, long-lasting personal attachment to the pier of the birthplace” was reflected in his bonds with relatives and friends who remained in Trieste as well as in his interest and worry about the fate of compatriots living in the city and the borderland area.

Interestingly, it was not the bond with the sea but with the stony landscape of Karst. Bartol did not share the seaside nations’ feeling of being at home by the sea and he would rather perceive himself as one among “the terrestrial people.” Contrary to the unguenuine, insufficient attitude to the sea, which in the end, according to the writer, would to some extent prove “historically fateful” to his nation, his attitude to stone, hills and Karst was intimate, filled with love and passion. This strong bond drew Bartol several times back to the city and, as Košuta argues, manifested in more or less explicit “geospiritual influence” on his writing (“palimpsest multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and borderland character of the birthplace”).

Before 1946, Bartol visited Trieste twice, once in 1919 and the second time in 1923 when he paid a visit to his uncle’s family. As he recalled, it was his longing for a hometown (“heart’s voice”) that forced him to head for Trieste and spend there some time in the first years of his exile in

---

99 Waley, op. cit., 246.
100 Košuta, “Tržaški’ Bartol,” 74-75, 76, 87.
101 Bartol, Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu, vol. 1, 224.
Ljubljana. In 1926 he just passed Trieste on his way to Paris.\textsuperscript{103} The post-war return to the city lying by the hill of Saint Just was for Bartol not only another change of spatial context of his life but also meant an attempt “to tie his life again to a thread, which was torn before so many years,” thus a journey in time to the years of his youth before the Great War. His official occupation was to reconstruct the South Slavic (Slovene, Croat) cultural life in Trieste and the Littoral part of Slovenia after its 25-year suppression by fascists. The official reason for the return was, however, accompanied by intimate motivation. Accordingly, the external factors (unbearable situation in his hitherto workplace) had also their internal counterpart in form of a gradually unfolding unconscious process that led to the final decision of transfer to Trieste.

In the beginning, Bartol was hesitant about the comeback because of fear of facing his “submerged youth.” The return implied for him an inevitable and direct encounter with places and people he knew from the early years of his life and whom he hoped to keep hidden in his inner self. Both fear and responsibility were the psychological obstacles that, at first, made the writer reluctant to leave. However, Bartol identified an innermost change in perspective on the return to Trieste with an instinctive, subconscious indication of a right meaningful path, which in contrast to a short-sighted or blind, logical reason is most often articulated in dreams. Certain dreams during “a period of exile,” which were set in his lost home and which he noted down in his diary, gave him an insight into his inner self and allowed him to overcome the fear of facing the past. The writer managed to silence the voice of reason and the responsibility he felt for his family as well as his established literary position in Ljubljana.\textsuperscript{105} In the end, following his dreams and memories, Bartol made a “fateful decision” to rediscover his hometown which for a long time during his life in exile was just a setting of numerous dreams. He arrived at Trieste on May 4, 1946.\textsuperscript{106} His experience of the city was sensuous, and the first impressions were very synesthetic:

\begin{quote}
I am walking through my youth as if I were touching it with my fingers. Each touch awakes sound which painfully-sweetly reverberates in everything. Memories, how many there are of you which attack me. Oh, wonderful years of youth, oh wonderful human life of Odysseus who after 27 years came back to his Ithaca. Every life is an Odyssey, I did not read Joyce but
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{103} Bartol, \textit{Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu}, vol. 1, 7.

\textsuperscript{104} Bartol, “Lipa pred staro cerkviso,” 280-281. “Ko sem se četrtega maja 1946. leta po več kot šestindvajsetih letih vračal v svojo rojstno mesto, da poskušam navezati svoje življenje ponovno na nit, ki je bila pred tolkimi leti pretrgana, sem se v duhu naenkrat zagledal kot v grozljivem prividu povsem spremenjenega in drugačnega.”

\textsuperscript{105} Bartol, \textit{Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu}, vol. 1, 7-13. “[…] vse to torišče neštetič mojih sanj v dobi mojega izgnanstva.”

\textsuperscript{106} Bartol, “Lipa pred staro cerkviso,” 281. 283-284. “Bilo me je skoraj strah tega snidenja […].”
I understand him. What an adventurousness is this life of mine! Up and down, crosswise, in heights and depths and in all four directions of the world! Our life is really a journey in unknown – till the end of night […]\textsuperscript{107} Bartol’s 10-year stay in Trieste after the war influenced his diaristic practice and, therefore, also his self-understanding. This return to his hometown allowed the writer to rearticulate his self within a different spatial context and a specific temporal frame. Trieste, which he perceived as abounding in traces of the past, became for him a stage of an almost sensual experience of oneself within the passage of time. The immersion in the past, condensed in the Triestine present moment, provided such strong mirages and memories that they seemed to Bartol more livelier than the present reality itself,\textsuperscript{108} and so overwhelming that he expected his friend, who could share with him this burden of memory, to accompany him during his first walks to the places where he grew up.\textsuperscript{109} The writer described his experience of the new, post-war Triestine context in terms of a careful walk on a thin layer, a verge dividing the present moment from the past and allowing for their easy intermingling. “Everything was enticingly, darkly whirring in me, as if I am treading on a thin layer under which there are strings, which sound with every step.”\textsuperscript{110} Present was echoed with the past reverberating in form of memories, melancholic look and yearning for the lost time which seemed sometimes so close that almost within his grasp.

Bartol’s literary articulation of the Triestine space forms part of a broader image of the Slovene literature in Italy. Among the attributes of regional identity of this literature, Košuta also distinguishes the spatial feature manifesting in more or less direct ways. Besides writers expressing their rootedness into a space understood in physical terms as some village, earth, landscape (mentioned for instance in the context of issues such as expropriation or dichotomy village-city, agrarianism), Košuta mentions also another, indirect way of referring to some space defined in

\begin{flushright}


\end{flushright}
metaphysical terms.\textsuperscript{111} As an “imaginary-historical space,” it is marked with “at least two, unknown to central Slovenia typological peculiarities: Mediterraneanness and multiculturalism.”\textsuperscript{112} Bartol’s relatively thick web of wayfaring and his borderland origins could incite in him a certain distance from viewing his homeland in essentialist terms of roots. Referring to Košuta’s differentiation in respect to the literary ways of describing one’s relationship with place, Bartol would reconstruct some bonds with his homeland in metaphorical terms identifying Trieste with a multicultural milieu where one can breathe a Mediterranean spirit.

In the diaristic notes taken within specific circumstances after the war when the political status of Trieste was still uncertain, Bartol argued that due to the city’s mediatory character as a sphere between the East and the West, it could become a centre of new, Mediterranean, cultural entity. Bartol expressed his wish to convert Trieste into a place where diverse, cultural elements would intermingle and create a new, cultural world. Already before his sojourn in the city by the hill of Saint Just after the Second World War, Bartol was reflecting on “how to activate a symbiosis of the Eastern and Western cultures, Slavic and Roman elements, a new, specific culture upwards of this place. Out of this symbiosis, some new, fresh Mediterranean culture would emerge, which would absorb dynamics and storminess of the East and Apollinianness and sense for measurement of the West.”\textsuperscript{113}

In this sense, two contradictory elements in a complementary and reciprocal combination could coexist and contribute to some new, cultural universe. One of its important features would be “a ‘Mediterranean clarity’: perhaps just in Trieste it will be possible to formulate definite problems of the ‘East’ much more clearly and easily.”\textsuperscript{114} Bartol believed that the Mediterranean character of Trieste could enable to look at the Eastern challenges (social, political?) in other light depriving them of their burdensome complexities. The writer’s conviction about ‘Mediterranean clarity’ reminds of the yearning for the Italian light which for so many intellectuals from Northern Europe constituted one of the motivations to embark on the Grand Tour to Italy. Goethe was one of them

\textsuperscript{111} Košuta, \textit{E-mejli}, 40-42.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 42-43. Košuta underlines that due to the Italian cultural influence on Slovene literature in Trieste and the surrounding area, this literature acquires “a typological characteristic which is entirely new and unknown to the Slovene literature on the other side of the border: a sunny thematic and stylistic ‘Mediterraneanness.’” Košuta, \textit{Scritture parallele}, 137.
\textsuperscript{114} Bartol, “Balkanijada IX. Trst. Trst, VI. zvezek, Dvoživkarstvo, [13.II.47],” MC, ZRC SAZU. “‘Mediterska jasnost’: gotovi problemi ‘Vzhoda’ se bodo dali nemara prav v Trstu veliko jasneje in preposteje formulirati.”
and his stay in Italy inspired him to write a book devoted to theory of light and colours. Márai was also attracted by the Italian light, the memory of which at first was supposed to bring him some consolation in the dark communist times in Hungary and then among other factors made him choose Southern Italy twice on his exilic path of life.

Triestine emporium, this important geographical and cultural crossroads has been the area of transfer of various phenomena and people. In his diary, apart from the image of Triestine Mediterranean, mediatory culture, Bartol also mentioned two main directions of historical processes and transfer of people as well as ideas. These historical processes could focus on Trieste like rays in a lens, considering the city’s location at the Central European point where all trajectories cross, at the intersection of different, cultural influences. The trajectories were leading from the north to the south as well as from the east to the west. The first, southward direction was, in the opinion of Bartol, taken mainly to escape from the unfavourable and cold climate of northern Europe. As an example, he mentioned the itinerary of many travellers from Germany, England, and Scandinavia, who in need of sun and warmth, were heading for Italy.\footnote{Bartol, “Lj. 5. X. 54.”, a note found in “V. i. Z. VI,” MC, ZRC SAZU.}

The second, westward direction, following the celestial movements (“in accordance with the circulation of constellation”), seemed to Bartol the most natural one and thus attempts to take the opposite direction, as unnatural, were doomed to failure (for instance Hitler’s attack on Soviet Russia). The movement in the westward direction, which as the writer claimed, remains “in harmony with the motion of our most important constellation – sun,” (in a relative, practical sense as it is perceived by a man),\footnote{Bartol, “V. i. Z. VI, 15. IV. 47, Bergantova opazovanja,” MC, ZRC SAZU.} has had numerous manifestations throughout history. One of them was, as Bartol remarked, the American penetration of the “Wild West” which he described in terms of an instinctive and natural motion compared to the migration of birds or other animals.\footnote{Bartol, “Lj. 5. X. 54.”} Significantly, another historical manifestation of the westward transfer of ideas mentioned in Bartol’s diary would be the political attempt of the Eastern ideological infiltration of the West, which in the mid of the twentieth century in Trieste, where the frontier between the two ideological blocs would soon take shape, had to be particularly tangible.

Given the time when Bartol discerned in his diaries the idea of the Mediterranean culture combining in Trieste both the eastern and the western elements, the question arises whether this idea was a response to the political situation in Europe becoming more and more polarized. In the city where the Iron Curtain (no matter how porous) would soon descend, Bartol viewed himself as placed

\addcontentsline{toc}{section}{Notes}
by fate on “Al Araf” (the title of his collection of short stories), so the line which, in Koran, divided heaven from hell and thus the two worlds of redemption and damnation. Therefore, the decade-long sojourn in Trieste, in which borderland location implies a certain oscillation between two different worlds, could enable Bartol to widen the perspective by the possibility of a simultaneous look at the two opposite directions.118 His image of Triestine Mediterranean culture seems to be a project not devoid of political overtone. The writer viewed his official position in Trieste as the one forming part of “the first line,’ head of the spear directed against the West so that it tears the old, falling world.”119

Bartol’s diaries are naturally marked with the spirit of the time when they were written. While the Western world was for him collapsing together with Christianity which deprived of ideological content remained an empty cult, the East meant a promise of change and the upcoming future. For Bartol, approaching the West was equivalent to awaiting a depressing atmosphere of autumn and winter. Contrastingly, the East would breathe with a spring-like and youthful aura dominated by young people who believed in projects aimed at bettering the world and were prepared to sacrifice their lives for this noble aim. Bartol contrasted the Eastern belief in communism with Western Christianism which did not have such true believers ready for sacrifice anymore (only a blind dogmatism). While according to Bartol “each true catholic was a fascist,”120 he compared bolshevism to Christianity and Islam from the times when believers were so strongly convinced of their truth that they were ready to sacrifice themselves in the name of their faith.121

In Bartol’s view, the specific symbiosis of various cultures in Trieste would be only possible if an adequate ideological infiltration of the West were undertaken by the East. In the diary, he mentioned his idea of a newspaper devoted to the plan of cultural and ideological “infiltration of the entire Triestine life.” As he described this project: “It is needed first to undermine, infiltrate the West with our ideology and then – to destroy it. Only when this process is accomplished, or still during it, some elements of the West, which are great and positive, would be accepted.”122 Bartol’s

---

118 Bartol, “Med Vzhodom in Zapadom 48/1, 28.VII.47.” MC, ZRC SAZU. It would also mean concentration on the aim putting in the shadow some possible erroneous stages leading to this aim.

119 Bartol, “Balkanijada X Trst.” “[...] mi smo tu ‘prva linija,’ ost sulice, ki je naperjena proti Zapadu, da podre stari, propadajoči svet.”

120 Bartol, “V. i Z. VI, 23.V.47, Ozka vrata,” MC, ZRC SAZU. “Vsak pravi katoličan je bil fašist.”

121 Ibid.

references to the necessary Eastern, ideological infiltration of the West as well as his perception of Trieste issue require further contextualisation.

After the Second World War, there were three possible solutions to the “Question of Trieste” envisaged during the Paris Peace Conference: the city’s return to Italy, its annexation to Yugoslavia or a buffer state of Free Territory of Trieste. The latter option would in the end prevail although in fact remaining unrealized. Bartol’s position regarding the post-war status of Trieste and his self-understanding shaped vis-à-vis this borderland city should be placed in a broader, historical context of Slovene political endeavours since 1848, namely Slovene fight for access to the Adriatic Sea and for the influence on the shape of the western border. What three traditional political currents among Slovenes in Trieste: liberals, catholic and workers had in common after the Second World War, was the support for accomplishing of the resolutions of the Peace Treaty, namely the realisation of the Free Territory of Trieste which also entailed (later unfulfilled) the promise of protection of minority rights. Nevertheless, Slovenes were divided in their perceptions of the desirable fate of the city. Besides supporters of Tito who fostered the idea of Trieste as a basis for the Eastern, ideological infiltration of the West, there were right-oriented Slovenes (Christian-liberal) who fought for the Free Territory of Trieste with the perspective of the city as a basis for the Western infiltration of the East. Furthermore, there were also Slovenes who after Tito’s withdrawal from the Cominform in 1948 were closer to the Stalinist political line and Vittorio Vidali. The final demarcation of the western border in 1954 only entrenched the divisions between Slovenes in Trieste.

Shortly after his return to Trieste, Bartol became a member of the Slovene-Italian antifascist union for the Free Territory of Trieste, the movement supporting Tito’s Yugoslavia to which he remained faithful after the split between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Bloc. Additionally, the writer tried to become a member of the communist party. Bartol supported the territorial claims shaped

125 Ara, Magris, op. cit., 203.
126 Pirjevec, “Trst ja naš!,” 419.
127 Ibid., 483.
128 Košuta, “Komentar,” 326. Even though the party was doubtful in respect to his application, the writer declared that while waiting for the decision he would behave “as if he were accepted.” For more information concerning Bartol’s opinions about communist ideology and the situation in Slovenia during the Second World War, the opinions which, in the end, also resulted in his unsuccessful attempts to become a member of the party see the writer’s interview with Ljenko Urbančič and Tomo Virk, “Komentar” in Zbrano delo. Krajša proza 1935-1945, by Vladimir Bartol, ed. T. Virk, vol. 3 (Ljubljana, 2016), 366-367.
within the Yugoslav partisan movement at the end of the war and then officially advocated by Tito. These claims included not only the demand for Trieste and the surrounding area of the Julian March but also Carinthia and Styria.129

Bartol shared the view already established in the Slovene scholarship which claims that city belongs to the hinterlands. Drawing on this logic, Trieste regarded as the Italian island surrounded by the Slovene countryside also naturally pertains to the Karstic hinterlands and politically, economically to Yugoslavia. Given that at the beginning of the twentieth century Trieste was the biggest Slovene city (in 1910 surpassing Ljubljana), it acquired an important role of both natural and moral, symbolic Slovene capital during the Slovene struggle for national recognition. With the access to the sea, the city promised to Slovenes the end of the isolation and confinement to the hinterlands which certainly did not facilitate their both social and national emancipation.130

Trieste was thus of vital importance for Slovenes and the Adriatic question engaged many Slovene intellectuals as well as politicians especially in historical moments of transition when new borders between states were not yet clearly defined. In the course of the Great War, the Slovene socialist Henrik Tuma underlined an indispensable role of Trieste and the access to the Adriatic for the mere existence of the new Yugoslav state which without the city would be “like a body deprived of regular circulation of blood.” Tuma justified his argument of the necessity of the annexation of Trieste to Yugoslavia in the context of self-determination of peoples and the conviction about the adherence of this Italian “linguistic island” to its nationally and economically compact surroundings which were predominantly Slovene.131 Similarly, the Slovene writer, Ivan Cankar remarked during


129 Ara, Magris, op. cit., 178.

130 Ibid., 66-67, 144. With Slovenes’ gradual social and economic ascension in the second half of the nineteenth century and their increasingly more significant role in reweaving of the urban fabric of Trieste, this dichotomous view (Italian city and Slovene countryside) proved later stereotypical. For the analysis of the development of Slovene national identity in Trieste see: Aleksej Kalc, “Oblike organiziranosti slovenskega Trsta v času družbenega in narodnega vzpona / Forme organizzative degli sloveni a Trieste nel periodo della loro ascesa sociale e nazionale” in Trst: umetnosti izraz ob nacionalnem vprašanju: glasba, likovna in besedna umetnost ob slovensko-italijanski meji v drugi polovici XIX. stoletja do prihoda fašizma / Trieste : l'espressione artistica e la questione nazionale : la musica, le arti figurative e le lettere nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento al confine italo-sloveno fino all'avvento del fascismo, ed. Aleksander Rojc (Trieste, Ljubljana, 2014), 43-66. For the discussion of the Triestine middle class comprising persons coming from the lands now forming part of Slovenia and its role in building the Slovene national consciousness see: Marta Verginella, “Sloveni a Trieste tra Sette e Ottocento. Da comunità etnica a minoranza nazionale,” in Storia economica e sociale di Trieste. La città dei gruppi. 1719-1918, eds. Roberto Finzi, Giovanni Panjek, vol. 1, (Trieste, Lint, 2001), 441-481.

131 Tuma, op. cit., 63-65. Appropriate arrangement of Trieste’s status was in Tuma’s view not only important for the prospects of the new state of South Slavs but also for Europe in general as a way to guarantee a balance of power, stability, and peace. Moreover, Tuma’s vision was very idealistic and later events of the interwar period would unluckily contradict it. In his view, Trieste would be annexed as a free city, thus providing some autonomy to Italians. In his
one of his lectures in Trieste at the end of the war in April 1918, reminding the words of Ljubljana’s mayor and writer Ivan Tavčar: “Ljubljana is the heart of Slovenia, Trieste is its lungs! Without lungs heart will not beat, without heart lungs will not breathe! Without Trieste, without the sea, free, independent, democratic Yugoslavia would be impossible, would be dead already at the moment of birth, buried forever.” The Adriatic question, resurfacing more vividly in the moments of incertitude and territorial rearrangements, remained open till its official solution in 1954 and engaged also Bartol.

Until 1954 Trieste remained the unresolved, international question provoking many tensions. The ideologically and nationally polarized inner situation was unstable, fragile, and marked with manifestations organized either in support of Yugoslavia or Italy. The fate of the city was dependent on the relations between the great political powers. The general tone of uncertainty stemming from the unresolved status of Trieste had an impact on the individual experiences of the city’s inhabitants. Suspended between the West and the East, they breathed the air imbued with feelings of loss and disorientation. In fact, stateless “with no control over their destiny, at the mercy of the vagaries of international geopolitics,” they found themselves in a specific “political and cultural limbo.” The indeterminate, post-war international status of Trieste and alterable state of inner affairs in the city had to be experienced by inhabitants as extremely peculiar if Bartol chose this place as the setting of one of his novels in which the main hero, a noble Englishman, sir Oliver Burke suffering from a strange indisposition of “nihil admirari” desperately searches for a source of astonishment. Having visited almost all the corners of the world and experienced the most exotic phenomena, which however did not surprise him, the main protagonist succeeded to find the desired sense of bewilderment in post-war Trieste.

Trieste as “a seismograph of spiritual earthquakes” announcing upcoming upheavals and tectonic shifts which would spread and shake the entire world? Could Trieste, this “unique geo-

words, Trieste shall become “a connection between German, Latin and Slavic culture” represented by an Italian-Yugoslav university. Furthermore, Tuma underlined Slovene inclination towards Latin culture which he explained referring to the Yugoslav culture and Slovenes’ awareness of the Latin element’s favourable role in their national development, in contrast to German destructive influence on this process.

132 Ivan Cankar, Očiščenje in pomlajenje (Ljubljana, 1976), 121.
133 Košuta, “Komentar,” 323.
political and geo-economic ‘laboratory’,”137 become a geopoetic “extraordinary incubator”138 of cultural experiments and intersecting identities? Trieste as a laboratory of European modernity and phenomena which shaped the twentieth century (psychoanalysis, fascism, antisemitism), was certainly a place that easily provided many sources of amazement of both positive and negative overtone. Bartol, upon his return in 1946 and having in mind Trieste in which he had come of age, namely the city under the Austro-Hungarian rule, was assuredly also amazed by many contradictory aspects of new, post-war Trieste under Anglo-American administration. The writer could find himself, following the image of the city he delineated in one of his novels, in an uneasy situation described as follows:

“[...] between black marketeers and allies, between fascists and communists, between black people, Italians, and Slovenes, between refuges of all shades, between Ustashas and chetniks, between experienced Anglo-American colonizers, between partisans and war orphans, between Jews, exiles and Annamites, between prostitutes and long-skirt Christian democrats, between an armada of unemployed; - in short in our old magnificent Trieste by the Adriatic, [...] between the West and the East.”139

In this period, notwithstanding his fear of distancing from his true occupation of a writer, Bartol still agreed to take some new positions within Slovene cultural life in Trieste. He was the head of the section for Knowledge and Art, the president of the theatre council and the president of the Slovene-Croat educational union which controlled the cultural life (including educational and cultural institutions) on the entire area of the Free Territory of Trieste.140 He justified his decision to accept new obligations in public life with reference to other writers such as Thomas Mann or Oton Župančič who followed a similar path of involvement in the concrete life. Bartol relegated his official work to “the breaks, when the demon was resting,”141 the demon of creativity. He was so occupied with his official role that several times in the diary he would complain about the lack of time and exhaustion which made it impossible to take notes on a regular basis.142 In 1947 the writer mentioned that the pace of political life was too fast for him to be able to catch up with some of the

137 Minca, op. cit., 257.
138 Pizzi, “Triestine Literature between Slovenia and Italy,” 146.
141 Bartol, “Balkanijada IX. Trst. Trst, VI. zvezek, 12.III.47,” MC, ZRC SAZU. “[...] v presledkih, ko demon počiva [...]”
142 Bartol, “Balkanijada X. Trst. Vrhovni princip: Vsi ljudje – vse vedo (V. i. Z.), 29.V.47,” MC, ZRC SAZU. “Zaradi pomanjkanja časa in kopice dogodkov vidim, da začenjam pisati površno. Toda nič ne pomaga – ne utegnem, izčrpan sem, ko bi imel čas.” “Due to the lack of time and cluster of events, I see that I start writing superficially. But nothing helps – I am not able, I am exhausted, if only I had time.”
events in his notes. The speed of public life and the pressure of political events seemed to exceed the rhythm of diaristic practice. “I am very much behind with my notes. No time, the exciting work, fiercely and political life and by no means can I keep up with the events in my notes.”

Not only was Bartol behind with his notes on the current changes in the political reality but also with the notes which could engage his inner self. “There is so much news each day, that when faced with all of it, I forget all personally important things.”

During the Triestine, post-war decade, Bartol’s literary work was overshadowed by intensive, journalistic engagement and his official position as a curator of the Yugoslav cultural life in the city. He was contributing to many newspapers with numerous reviews, critical texts, essays, reportages, travelogues, and autobiographical fragments as well as some literary pieces. The writer was cooperating with Ljudski tednik, Razgledi which first published “Triestine Comedies” (1948, in a book from – 1957) and Primorski dnevnik where he issued his autobiographical fragments (written between 12.01.1955 and 22.06.1956). Moreover, in December 1953 he embarked on a tour to Yugoslav countries (Croatia, Belgrade, Macedonia, Bosnia, Montenegro) aiming to hold several lectures about Slovene literature. Travelling, due to its crucial existential role, seems worth discussing in this context.

Self-identification, shaped by spatial coordinates, becomes especially susceptible to problematisation while travelling and if cultural contexts are often changed. It seems that after the Second World War, the main reference points in Bartol’s process of self-identification in respect to space were two cities: Trieste and Ljubljana. While he was fulfilling his professional duties in Trieste, in Ljubljana he had his family and acquaintances from literary circles who made him visit this city frequently. Sometimes he was coming to Ljubljana almost every week for a couple of days. The city attracted Bartol not only because of the present, familial ties but also due to past experiences. Ljubljana’s streets and atmosphere constituted the background of the longest stage of


144 Ibid., “Toliko je vsak dan novic, da sproti pozabim vse osebno važne stvari.”


147 As Bartol noted in June 1947: “[…] I was the last three weeks each week in Ljubljana. Last time I travelled on Saturday and came back on Monday […] Then again the next day with Bevk we departed to Ljubljana to the common meeting of the Association of literates and on Wednesday evening I returned again with his car in company of Minica Kržičeva.” (“[…] Bil sem zadnje tri tedne vsak teden v Ljubljani. Zadnjič sem potoval v soboto, se vrnil v ponedeljek […] Takoj naslednji dan sva se spet odpeljala z Bevkom v Ljubljano na občni zbor Družstva književnikov in v sredo zvečer sem se spet vrnil z njegovim avtom v družbi Minice Kržičeve.”) Bartol, “Balkanijada X. Trst. Vrhovni princip: Vsi ljudje – vse vedo (V. i. Z.), 27.VI.47,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
his life during which he was studying, made first attempts in a literary world (both successful and failed), experienced many youthful adventures, love. His often travels from one city to another and short sojourns there made him compare himself to a creature that needs two environments simultaneously to survive. He perceived this amphibiousness as “a very well-chosen combination” necessary for his literary creation and ascent as a writer.

Each of these two cities possesses a unique *genius loci* made of different cultural heritages, histories and geographical locations. For Bartol, “an amphibious,” they represented divergent environments and thus every revisit had to entail a specific emotional response to a new context. While oscillating between the two cities, the writer was undergoing a change of “rhythm of organism, rhythm of thinking and feeling.” For instance, after each arrival in Trieste from Ljubljana, he needed some days for his organism to calm down. While each visit to Ljubljana for Bartol, coming either from Paris or Belgrade, was accompanied by “a stage fright,” in the familiar Trieste, all anxiety and uneasiness dispersed. As if a human organism were a sensitive instrument which, in order to be harmonious, requires special tuning in accordance with a particular melody of a place. Bartol’s description of his experience of arrivals and departures with regard to two cities is worth quoting, (notwithstanding the length of citation), as it reflects well the writer’s sensitivity to change of places and his resultant dual, ambiguous self-identification.

Coming from Trieste to Ljubljana I often feel somehow cramped, I feel as if there appeared some ring around my brain. [...] And when I arrive from Ljubljana at Trieste, just at the first sight of the sea from Opčine or Nabrežina the horizon somehow widens, I take a wider breath, anxious bonds go off from me. Also before the war I felt a similar confinement in Ljubljana coming from Paris or Belgrade, my passion was not in vain, every so often to look at the world and widen one’s horizons. Ljubljana is strong, root-like, profound – and also narrow, narrow-minded, it cannot be hidden. Ljubljana is outstandingly cultural city, while Trieste and also Belgrade are not, at least not in the same degree. Strange, in this view Ljubljana is rather similar to Paris. [...] Ljubljana forces a man to contemplation, to determined dealing with some (narrow) problem, to depth, to intensive, deep experience, to thoroughness. Whereas Trieste in opposition to this, widens horizons, forces to big perspectives, goes “widely and highly.” In Trieste you are more a realist than in Ljubljana. You think more clearly, you feel more clearly.

---

149 Bartol, “Balkanijada VI. Trst, 20. VII. [46.],” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Both Trieste and Ljubljana in a complementary combination dominated Bartol’s existential map during at least a decade after the war. Divergent ways of framing thoughts and formulating ideas incited by the two cities were underlain with different moods and feelings. Therefore, the emotional layer, and its components and nuances underwent important changes following the interchangeable urban references of Bartol’s self-identification after the war. As the writer emphasised, “intellectual amphibiousness corresponds also to emotional amphibiousness.”\footnote{Ibid. “Miselnemu dvoživkarstvu odgovarja tudi čustveno dvoživkarstvo, se mi dozdeva.”}

Bartol’s amphibious existential situation in the aftermath of the war was stretched between two environments fostering two different attitudes and perceptions of self.

Trieste as the city under the sign of Mercury, thus having at the origins of its development trade and economy, could resemble a place where life is strongly marked with realism and pragmatism. In this respect, the heritage of commercial harbour of the Habsburg Monarchy was opposed by Bartol with more metaphysical Ljubljana, which as a city dominated by cultural life seemed to him closer to Paris and Western Europe in general. While Ljubljana privileged a contemplative look into depths of oneself or a scrutinizing search for roots of some problem, Trieste opening a view at the seemingly endless sea, blurred this focalized and narrow perspective, making the horizon wider and a person more open. Suddenly the burden of intricate perception searching for rootedness in the hinterlands could be shed or dissolved by the sea and the atmosphere of realism encountered in the harbour city would clarify self-perception, liberating it from a threat of essentialism.

The seaside city relieved Bartol of the confinement he could feel in the Slovene hinterlands surrounded by the Alps where the cultural circles seemed to him devoid of a necessary “valve”
(possibly present in Trieste because of the sea?). In Ljubljana, as the writer remarked, “all are somehow irritated, hysterical as if they cannot or must not out of themselves.” Trieste, in this context, seems a relieving counterweight because one glance at the sea may provide with some distance towards oneself opening a valve of escape from one’s confinement within a monad of the inner world (one dominant ideology or identity imposed by the majority). As if the constantly changing surface of the sea reminded of the inevitable passage of time, fragility, fluidity, and a fleeting nature of all the experienced and observed historical phenomena. Therefore, the roots taken in “profound” Ljubljana could be undermined with a look at the sea and the metaphysical justification of bonds established between the Alps would evaporate in a more realistic atmosphere of the seaside city. “Anxious bonds go off” together with any seemingly fixed identity, which while in the interior of the Slovene lands taken for granted, in the borderland Trieste, when faced with different manifestations of otherness, becomes questioned, relative, and indeterminate.

In contrast to the hectic atmosphere of the port city of Trieste, Ljubljana can make an impression of a place characterised by a considerably slower pace of life. In 1947 while roaming along Ljubljana’s streets, Bartol immersed himself in a sullen mood provoked by a certain atmosphere of the city resembling him the general spirit encountered there ten years before as if time were brought to a halt. Was the rhythm of changes in Ljubljana so slow that the only images which could come to mind were those from the past? In opposition to future-oriented Trieste which, as a commercial hub established by Habsburgs at the beginning of the eighteenth century, privileged a continuous focus on the present moment, Ljubljana would acquire a more traditional character rooted in the past. Moreover, Bartol defined the temporal orientation of both cities also in ideological terms. While in the Slovene Littoral he could experience the partisan spirit more directly, Ljubljana with its rather conservative trait seemed only reluctantly subjugating itself to the subversive, partisan ideas. Bartol formulated his impressions from one of his stays in Ljubljana as follows: “So slow, calm, filister, bureaucratic it seemed to me. Is it because the wide, joyful partisan spirit vanished? Yes, Ljubljana is a heavy, strong city. Heavy is its ambient and it slowly absorbed the entire partisan spirit.”

The borderland place between the East and the West such as Trieste, lying at the crossroads of divergent cultural traditions, enables a privileged position due to wider and more complete perspective, but at the same time may lead to schizophrenia provoking problematic identity dilemmas. The mediating position, marked with heterogeneity and coexistence of various cultural components, makes possible reciprocal enrichments but also poses a threat of double isolation as a result of marginalisation from two sides of the border representing homogenous majorities that define national identities. Bartol experienced both positive and negative aspects of the ambiguous spatial condition of his existential situation which after the Second World War, oscillating between Trieste and Ljubljana, was marked with some in-betweeness.

As a member of the Slovene minority in Italy and identifying with Primorska, the western, seaside region of Slovenia, the writer viewed himself as more open and liberal than Slovenes living in other parts of the country. Bartol, as Košuta mentioned, perceived himself as “the Littoral Slovene among continental Slovenes, a fish on dry land.” The writer explained this clash of worldviews and experiences, distancing him from his compatriots, referring to his origins nourished by an open and multicultural atmosphere of Trieste, foreign to other Slovenes:

A man, who as a child could each day watch ships coming from all the continents of the world and who saw in his birthplace day by day representatives of the most divergent nations, people and races walking along his streets, listened to unknown languages and unknown melodies, necessarily accumulated in his memory different impressions, as a child necessarily indulged in different wishes and fantasies than someone who was born and grew up in the midst of patriarchal peace […] in a separated from the world Slovene village and its more or less poetic idyll.

Bartol’s existential oscillation between Trieste and Ljubljana implied a lack of full recognition both within the community of Triestine literary circles and within those in Ljubljana. Consequently, he found himself in an uneasy vicious circle of double alienation. He described this situation as follows: “In Ljubljana I was a foreigner, they thought it because I am a Triestine […] Here I was a foreigner.

---

155 Košuta, “Tržaški’ Bartol,” 86.
156 Bartol, Pot do učenosti, 293-294. “Človek, ki je kot otrok sleherni dan lahko gledal ladje, ki so prihajale z vseh kontinentov sveta, in ki je videl v svojem rojstnem mestu dan za dnem zastopnike najrazličnejših narodov, ljudstev in ras, ki so se sprehajali po njegovih ulicah, poslušal neznane govorice in neznane melodije, je pač nujno nakopčil v svojem spominu drugačne vtise, se je kot otrok nujno predal drugačnim željam in fantazijam kot nekdo, ki se je rodil in ki je vzrastel sredi patriarhalnega miru in prav tako patriarhalnih večjih ali manjših strasti od sveta odrezane slovenske vasi in njene bolj ali manj poetične idilike.”
for them because they thought that I am from Ljubljana. [...] I am a guest among Slovenes, they accepted me as an annoying intruder."\textsuperscript{157}

Besides the estrangement provoked by life between Trieste and Ljubljana accompanied by the overlapping of two perspectives, one pertaining to the majority and another one characterising life in a minority, Bartol also experienced isolation on the artistic plane. The writer described his own philosophical system as the one which consisted of inspirations coming both from scientific and humanistic sources. "Foundations" of his "philosophical building" were made of natural science.\textsuperscript{158} It was also decisively shaped by the psychoanalysis of Freud and the one applied in literature (Dostoevsky).\textsuperscript{159} In addition Bartol underlined his inspiration with Descartes (criticism of knowledge), Plato, Goethe, Spinoza, Nietzsche. Besides Nietzscheanism (admiration of great heroes and powerful men who shaped the course of History), Pahor recognized among Bartol’s philosophical views also scepticism and cynicism.\textsuperscript{160} The literature nourished with such inspirations evades any clear categorisation.

However, if one discerns in the Slovene literary history a confrontation between antagonistic currents: mimetic social realism versus modernistic trends of expressionism, symbolism, and futurism, Bartol would be certainly closer to the latter pole. Yet, he would not entirely identify and confine his work to this aesthetic doctrine. Remaining beyond the mainstream of any ideological programme because it posed a threat of reductive categorisation of his work, the writer was recognized neither by the first, realistic side nor by much closer to him modernistic one.\textsuperscript{161} Bartol did not want to abide by any clearly defined genre and wished to elaborate his own formal way of expression. As a “multi-genre author,” he was a nonconformist and thus transcended the commonly adopted and expected artistic patterns with his particular attitude to art and approach to the world.

\textsuperscript{157} Bartol, “Zapiski 1954, Trst, 28.III.54,” MC, ZRC SAZU. “V Ljubljani sem bil tujec, mislili so zato, ker sem Tržačan, ‘tržaška merda,’ kot se je izrazil dr. Pregelj. Tu sem jim bil tujec, ker so mislili, da sem ljubljanska srajca. […] Jaz sem pri Slovencih gost, sprejeli so me kot zoprnega, nadležnega vsiljivca.”

\textsuperscript{158} In the autobiography, in accordance with the principle about the matter as a foundation of spirit, Bartol mentioned his affinity to scientific positivism and his inclination for materialism, stronger than for idealism. Bartol, \textit{Mladost pri Svtem Ivanu}, vol. 1, 170.

\textsuperscript{159} Bartol explicitly reminded that: “I was in Slovenia among the first, who ran into Freud, in any case, the first, who tried to make his discoveries understandable to Slovenes.” Bartol, \textit{Mladost pri Svtem Ivanu}, vol. 1, 169. Košuta underlines Bartol’s role as “one of the first Slovene ‘psychoanalytic’ writers.” Interestingly and what might seem paradoxical, due to the lack of intercultural dialogue in Trieste between Slovenes and Italians, Bartol’s fascination with psychoanalysis was not shaped in connection with discussions on Freudian ideas which took place in Trieste mainly among Jewish intellectuals (Eedoardo Weiss, Italo Svevo, Guido Voghera, Roberto Bazlen). He discovered psychoanalysis in Ljubljana. Košuta, \textit{Scritture parallele}, 128-129; Miran Košuta, \textit{Slovenica}, 33. Pirjevec, \textit{Tržaški zapisi}, 31. Košuta, “‘Tržaški’ Bartol,” 78-79.


which combined irony, cynicism, nihilism and Machiavellianism. As outsider, referencing the dominant aesthetic currents, the writer remarked: “In my notes on numerous places I complain about my loneliness and misunderstanding [...]” Furthermore, in his diary Bartol cited one colleague from Ljubljana, Anton Vodnik, who attacked him with following words: “Leave us in peace with your Triestine corruption which you bring from Trieste.” This accusatory tone clearly reveals the dissonances which Bartol had to experience in contact with different Slovene writers coming from other than the Littoral parts of the country.

In the autobiography, Bartol mentioned his distance from the worldview of the Slovene majority and its preferred way of writing in the interwar period, which focused on the countryside and peasant life. As he remembered, for a long time he was “actually swimming to great extent against a generally desired and expected current,” the current of narrow insight, local themes and peasant, realistic literature which came to the foreground around 1930 as a response to the cosmopolitan, modernistic stream (these two currents, according to Bartol, remain in a dialectic relationship). Referring to the Slovene literary history and its double perception through oeuvres of two Slovene writers, Bartol felt some affinity with Franc Prešeren’s poetry marked with cosmopolitanism and opposed to Fran Levstik’s more provincialist thought focused on Slovene peasants’ life.

Whereas Bartol regarded Prešeren, who was also not appreciated during his lifetime, as his artistic predecessor, the majority of Slovene writers after the war were rather closer to Levstik’s artistic programme of “narrow peasant exclusive-sloveness” which seemed to him paradoxical, given that before as members of the partisan movement they were fighting under Prešeren’s words. Bartol as the representant of progressive “foreign knowledge” was not accepted among the established Slovene literary circles. The writer compared the rejection of his ideas in the Slovene cultural sphere to the one provoked by Prešeren a century before. He was also convinced about the similar fate of his works in future which would acquire the same belated recognition and fame.

163 Bartol, Romantika, 269. “V svojih beležkah na številnih mestih tožim o svoji osamljenosti in nerazumljenosti […],” 275
164 Bartol, “V., Z. VI., Lj. 5. IV. 47,” MC, ZRC SAZU. “Pusti nas pri miru s svojo tržaško pokvarjenostjo, ki jo prinašaš iz Trsta.”
165 Bartol, Mladost pri svetem Ivanu, vol. 1, 351.
Bartol’s poetics and main literary themes were indeed different from other Slovene writers’ thematic scope. His early, interwar literary oeuvre, as Virk noticed was unique from the point of view of innovative formal aspects and provocative themes. “It was not only cosmopolitan-oriented, but also full of nihilism, amorality and cynical Machiavellianism, sometimes developed to the extremes.” Bartol placed his literary worlds in foreign cities such as Paris and focused on international, adventurous, cynical heroes, lost and eccentric swindlers who as devoid of any firm social or national consciousness, relativized established morality, and values. Instead of mere description, the writer was approaching his protagonists’ life experiences from the psychoanalytic perspective. This poetics was in clear opposition to the social realism, which prevailing among other Slovene literates of this time, concentrated on the life of Slovene people with an aim of improving their social situation.

Reflecting on his own fate and alternative, untaken paths of life, Bartol concluded that if he had remained in Trieste, he would have become an entirely different person. While in the seaside city he could sense a certain unity with its inhabitants and life in general (“here I am with people and life one”), in Ljubljana he felt more foreign. Many years spent in the Slovene capital could not mitigate his experience of alienation. Bartol compared himself to a “foreign bird” which was lost and unaccepted on the Slovene territory, and became a victim of the locals’ hostility. “The native birds pecked and banished the foreign bird seeking shelter. And where shall it fly away if it cannot go home? In the heights?” He could not go home because with the passage of time and changing political circumstances it became recognizable only in memory.

This situation of double isolation made Bartol present himself in the light of an enforced martyrdom which, as he remarked, was unwanted and foreign to a positive trait of his personality. The writer managed to transcend this double estrangement founded on excluding national identities and the binary perspective of majority-minority by placing himself within wider frames of a universal spirit. As he noted: “In reality I was only the messenger of the universal spirit, der Herold des Weltgeistes. Erratic bloc, meteor which fell on the earth and by accident on the Slovene

---

168 Jevnikar, op. cit., 354.
169 Bartol, “Balkanjada VI. Trst, 2. VII. 46,” MC, ZRC SAZU. “Domači ptiči so okljuvali in prepodili tujega pribeglega ptiča. In kam naj ta odleti, če ne more domov? V višave?”
170 Ibid. With no regrets, Bartol concluded that no matter which other path he took, he would certainly find himself and reach the heights.
Convinced that life itself forced him to follow the “steep way up,” Bartol perceived his fate as similar to Prešeren’s life and believed that in future his original contribution to Slovene and world literature would receive a proper recognition.

Viewing his own emigrant life as marked with adventure and thus also risk, Bartol compared his way of living to game in poker. As he noticed, all his life he was playing it with his contemporaries and people living in the past, with other philosophers, authors, and their works, probably also with his own previous convictions, thoughts, and feelings. However, hometown, children and wife could not be engaged in this game because as Bartol noticed it is through them that he managed to root himself in the world. Therefore, they formed part of his own inner world and vice versa, he was part of their life-worlds. What could be involved in the game were changeable and uncertain phenomena of the outside reality but also the past images of himself (thoughts and feelings) and philosophical systems which are always open to interpretation. Contrariwise, the bonds he established throughout the years with his family and hometown had to remain beyond the risk of easy and quick loss.

4. Relativity of time and Bartol’s sense of history (zgodovinski čut)

One day in November 1955 Bartol was sitting in the municipal library of Trieste in search of some traces from his past. He was travelling around 40 years back in time. His attention concentrated on some old, yellowed sheets of paper (school annual reports) was distracted by a landscape outside the window. He gave a cursory and absent glance to a park, a tree, its yellow leaves falling. Opposite the library there was a big, four-storied building of a former German gymnasium, once Bartol’s “second home.” The autumnal aura perceived outside diffused also internally and intensified feeling of melancholy (“in my heart there is autumn, as it is outside on falling leaves of trees in the park on the Square of Attilio Hortis”). Melancholy and the awareness of the inevitable transience of life. Everything would pass away. Political regimes, wars, youthful times, dreams. Some traces of the past, in form of the annual reports and the building of the school, reminded Bartol of the complex, multi-layered nature of time and the enigmatic character of the present moment which in itself so ungraspable and fleeting, yet with the help of memory, embraces both past and future. The past was

172 Bartol, “Balkanijada VI. Trst, 2. VII. 46.”
present both in the documents and the building which stood almost unchanged and thus more resistant to the passage of time, reminded the writer of a guardian of many memories and mysteries from his childhood. He was such a guard himself as well, carrying in his memory a piece of history shared with others.174

Return to Trieste after more than two decades directed Bartol’s look inwards towards some “dark, underground storage of his interiority.” While he was in the library a certain unspeakable and strange “mysterious and monstrous feeling” emerged.

But where from and when was this both unknown and majestic feeling, which stretched my breast and forced me to leave the room, to go into the air, and which squeezed a tear from eyes? I glanced at the unpredictable paths of fate. […] Here I felt something incomprehensible, complex, unknown, and majestic at the same time. For a moment I was able to look at the infinite multifarious workshop, springs and causes, which turn and move the stream of humanity, which spin and weave a colourful coat of history.175

Was it a sense of belonging to some shared past and community of fate? As the writer remembered, the feeling was so overwhelming that it forced him to leave the library. Immersed too deep in the past, he needed some openness, fresh air, and lively atmosphere of the present moment. However, for a moment he had a sensation of having some invisible company everywhere around in form of “innumerable shadows” which only dispersed under the pressure of the Triestine hustle and bustle.

Notwithstanding the urban hectic atmosphere of the present moment constantly rushing towards the future, Bartol continued his sentimental walk through the city following his memories. The Cavana street along which he had been regularly walking as a child on his way to school led him to the Square of Unity. There, the palace of government hosting Austrians, Italians, Germans, Yugoslav partisans, Anglo-American forces and again Italians reflects changeability of political systems and accelerated pace of history in this part of Europe. Going along the Roman street and having passed the stock market, Bartol reached the Red Square where the sellers of animals reminded him of his regular visits to this market. Each day on the way back home from school this place was attracting the young boy fascinated with various species of animals. A quarter of a century later, towards the end of the day, observing the sellers tidying up their stalls and thus also one of the

174 Bartol, Romantika, 22-23.
175 Ibid., 25. “Toda od kod in kdaj je bilo tisto neznansko in obenem veličastno občutje, ki mi je širilo prsi, da sem moral ven, iz sobe, na zrak, in ki mi je iztisnilo solzo iz oči? Spogledal sem se bil z nepreračunljivimi potmi usode. […] Tu sem začutil nekaj nerazumljivega, zapletenega, neznanskega in veličastnega obenem. Za trenutek mi je bilo dano pogledati v neskončno mnogolično delavnico, vzmeti in vzroke, ki sukajo in pregibajo tok človeštva, ki predejo in tko pisani plašč zgodovine.”
elements of the background of his childhood, the writer asked himself what provoked such intensive “both unknown and majestic” feeling in the library.

The sensation’s source was Bartol’s sudden immersion in the past traced in memories of the “submerged youth,” school years and between the lines of some old documents enlisting names of pupils and professors. One of the traces of the past was also an old, grey album owned by some girl who had been collecting her friends’ inscriptions from 1912 until the Second World War. The majority of the notes were taken before 1918 (the inscription of Bartol’s sister from 1916). Having it in hands again after 40 years, the writer was looking through the notes of his acquaintances and unknown persons taken in different languages (Slovene, Italian, German), which also reflects the multicultural and multilingual milieu of Trieste in this period. Bartol yielded to the past evoked by the place, hometown, and desire to write a history of the pre-war period in Trieste from a child perspective. This mysterious, unknown feeling provoked by various manifestations of the past in the present moment let him for a moment glance at the workshop of History and sense some “unpredictable paths of fate” shaping his life.176

The past forms part not only of consciously perceived world and self as evoked in memories and sensuously experienced but being hidden in corners of subconsciousness is also revealed in dreams. In one of them, Bartol could observe himself walking in the empty Karst plateau, lost in thick mist and snowstorm. Despite the blizzard, he could still recognize some features, so familiar as if he were looking in the mirror. He encountered his bygone self and heard himself uttering the following sentence in the dream: “This is then your way. You are already over fifty and nowhere no harbour.”177 In one of the notes taken in 1938 Bartol compared himself to “a sailing boat in the middle of the sea in windless air.”178 Having finished “Alamut” he was waiting for the next gust of wind, next inspiration.

However, at the time anticipating the outbreak of the war the writer’s attention was more drawn to the historical drama than to his literature. As he remembered, caught up in a whirl of increasingly tense international relations at the end of the 1930s, and anxiously observing the course of events at that moment (the conference in Munich), he even forgot about the publication of his novel written in the long period of 11 years.179 The unpredictable History and its accelerated pace in the 1930s overshadowed individual whims, desires, attempts and successes. Suddenly the

176 Ibid., 22-26.
177 Ibid., 26, 25-27
179 Ibid., 284.
collective fate again came to the foreground. The same happened with Bartol’s return to the city by the hill of Saint Just in these “historical days when fate of Trieste was decided.” At that moment just after the war, the writer perceived time as if it were “rattling in a horrendous hurry to the future and to a man it seemed as if he sensed wheels of history clattering beneath him.” The accelerated pace of History of the twentieth century, experienced so directly by an individual and posing a threat to Slovene presence in the former Austrian Littoral (now the western part of Slovenia), forced Bartol to intensify his work to counteract this. His official functions accompanied by intensified journalistic engagement was aimed at reconstructing the Slavic cultural life in Trieste and thus did not leave him much time for his literary explorations of self. The course of events was so fast that he did not manage to catch up with them in his diary let alone devote to merely literary creation.

The ungraspable nature of time slipping through fingers and especially its speeding pace in the twentieth century could not provide any stable ground, safe shelter, or harbour. Was Bartol’s diaristic and later also autobiographical writing an attempt to create some narrative substitute for a stable ground in reality? His autobiographical search for the typology of a certain era through memory and with help of the specific “historical sense,” analysed also in the diary, could be understood as an attempt to grasp some regularity, character, and more objective image of a particular period. I thus interpret this endeavour as a form of existential defence against the overwhelming and annihilating force of the historic time of the twentieth century.

Three temporal dimensions are visibly intermingled in Bartol’s diaristic writing. The present moment, which as a typological feature of diaristic practice plays a dominant role, is simultaneously stretched to the past and the future. Bartol’s diary extends both to the recent and remote past, which manifests in the writer’s references to recent events, meetings, and memories of his childhood. Concurrently, the intention of writing the diary, namely acquiring fame, and commenting on his own oeuvre, made it in this case a future-oriented act. The diaristic temporality shaped at the intersection of the subjective time of memory (Kairos) and the time of History (Chronos) could also serve Bartol to better understand his place in the current of events.

Among the origins of the diaristic practice, there might be an incongruence between the chronological and memorial lines of time which do not converge. In Bartol’s life this discrepancy and mismatching could be introduced with his family’s abandonment of Trieste in 1919. As the writer noticed “immense and fateful are effects which great historical changes and overthrow have

---

180 Bartol, “Lipa pred staro cerkvio,” 282. “Bili so zgodovinski dnevi, ko se je odločala usoda Trsta. Čas je drdral s pošastno naglico v prihodnost in človeku se je zdelo, kot bi čutil, kako ropočejo pod njim kolesa zgodovine.”
not only for society but also for individual.” Among such changes which decisively affected his life, Bartol mentioned the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy. If only the geopolitical circumstances in the aftermath of the war had not changed so radically leading to the disappearance of Austria-Hungary, he would have studied in Vienna natural sciences and not philosophy. Instead of becoming a “philosophising literate” he would have chosen a path of the natural scientist, scientific researcher, and traveller. Only with his expulsion from Trieste and exilic life did he experience some “drilling into his own self” which also changed his perspective from the one oriented outside and focused on the all-embracing natural life towards “precipices” of his inner self. It was “the shock provoked by the separation from the native soil and exile” which brought this “fateful turn” directing his view inwardly and his future steps on a path of a writer exploring in himself “a new world, a new planet, a new universe in miniature.” As Bartol remembered, with the change of life setting and the transfer of his family from Trieste to Ljubljana, his perception of time underwent a decisive change. Namely, the enforced abandonment of the hometown in the aftermath of the Great War broke the linearity of the chronological time. Bartol tried to erase certain events from the end of the war from his memory, namely the Italian occupation of the Austrian Littoral and his transfer to Ljubljana.

The complex, cyclical time of memory enabled the returns from the present moment to the distant past by a leap over a more recent past (the emigration), which, being overlooked in this manner, was pushed into oblivion. Bartol remembered that all the events leading his family to Ljubljana “went […] as a razor through a recollection of my childhood years in Saint Ivan and in Trieste. Pain after what I lost was too deep and benevolent oblivion put a coat over my memory on those years.” His youth having been “uprooted from its field” sunk in an abyss. In another place he explained his unwillingness in the interwar period to recall his past as follows: “[…] I tried to bury my youth forever, for eternity, because the memory on everything which I lost was too painful

---

181 Ibid., 280. “Neizmerni in usodopolni so učinki velikih zgodovinskih sprememb in prevratov ne samo za družbo, marveč tudi za poedinca.”

182 Ibid., 281. 283. “Nisem se videl kot filozofirajočega literata , kar sem v resnici bil, marveč kot naravoslovca, popotnika po daljnjih deželah in znanstvenega raziskovalca, kar bi bil po vsej verjetnosti postal, če ne bi bila po prvi svetovni vojni Avstrija razpadla. […] Vse moje mladostne sanje so še v to smer, in dokler nisem postal emigrant, nisem poznal vrtanja po lastni notranjosti. Bil sem usmerjen v svet zunaj sebe, in šele pretres, ki sta ga povzročila ločitev od rodnih tal in izgnanstvo, je povzročil v meni usodni preobrat, da sem bolesto zaznal svojo notranjost in začel gledati v njene prepade. […] In ko začneš pozneje odkrivati svet v sebi, ko se začenjaš zavedati svojih čustev in misli, svojih upov in želja, svoje bolečine in svoje ljubezni, si sam postal nov svet, nov planet, novo vesoljstvo v malem.”

183 Bartol, Romantika, 212. “Konec vojne, okupacij, zapustitev doma in rojstnega kraja ter preselitev v Ljubljano so šli, kot sem bil v prvi knjigi povedal, kakor britev čez spomin na moja otroška leta pri Svetem Ivanu in v Trstu. Bolečina za tem, kar sem bil izgubil, je bila prehuda in dobrohotna pozaba je pregriša plašč čez moj spomin na tista leta.”

Feelings of loss and nostalgia accompanied Bartol’s memory of the early years of his life and triggered forces of oblivion which distorted the linearity of chronological time, introducing a rupture in its passage. His early years spent in Trieste resurfacing later along cyclical time were thus recessed to the sphere of memory and subded to processes of mythologisation which converted them in “a lost but never forgotten paradise of his youth.” Only in dreams some images of places related to his homeland were coming back. Consequently, the post-war return to Trieste and rediscovery of the hometown, which was a setting of numerous dreams in exile, was compared by Bartol to a “terribly sweet” act of “raising a curtain over dreams,” putting to the foreground stories, places, and people from the past and making them awake from a sleep. The aim of his autobiographical writing was thus to shed some light on the bygone scenes and shadows relegated to dark recesses of memory on the verge of oblivion.

Chronological time may come to the forefront with the acceleration of the course of History and its sudden intervention into people’s everyday life which happened with the approaching Great War and later throughout the twentieth century. Chronos starts playing a dominant role not only when the pace of History speeds up but also in adult years when processes of rationalisation and a following “disenchantment” force an individual to abide by the movement of the clock’s indicators. In his autobiography, Bartol mentioned his indifference to the clock time (“till the recent years I have been living without a timekeeper”). He compared his perception of time devoid of any need of measurement with his friend’s dependence on the clock indicators’ movement. Surprisingly, it was Bartol’s freedom from chronometers that resulted in his punctuality or even arrivals before some arranged time. While he was always on time or even earlier, his friend Alojzij Dolhar was coming always at the last moment (therefore his nickname – “Last minute”), as if a wristwatch were a form of imagined handcuffs tightly fastening to the clock time and pulling him to some moment pointed by the indicators. While Bartol was always ahead of them overtaking the clock time, his friend was hardly catching up with the indicators’ movement. It might seem, that
having internalized the clock time (‘[…] I created ‘alarm clock’ in head’), Bartol managed to harmonize his biological, natural time with the imposed social order of time. Nevertheless, he still needed his diaristic writing and calendar to mediate his perception of time in some meaningful ways.

Inspired by the incidental finding of a calendar from the times before the Great War, Bartol also tackled its role in the diary. Apart from indicating the time, the encountered calendar was also a collection of diverse articles about politics, local affairs, and the global situation. It comprised information about some anniversaries, memories on men of merit, suggestions, pieces of advice and numerous other matters. Bartol described the calendar as “a chapter from a local history” and appreciated its importance in times of fascism as “an almost only bond that the people from the Slovene Littoral had with a vivid local word and events at home and in the world.”

The writer compared the role which the calendar (“a household friend”) played for decades for local people to Roman Penates; household gods who provided families with protection and offered some advice. Bartol viewed the calendar also as a testimony of anchorage into some place, “an important document” of local people’s life and their hard, continuous fight against repressions, their struggle for survival, better life, and freedom. The calendars seemed to Bartol “boundary stones of a path” taken by local people in the past and continued in the future, “a printed national tradition which will go from one generation to another.” The writer added that this type of calendar preserves “written old jokes and customs, interesting adventures, men of merit, our tradition, the past and the present.” Consequently, Bartol viewed in such calendar not only a schedule of time but also an intermediary of national tradition particularly important for people who as inhabitants of the area passing under the control of one political power to another, were subjected to the policy of denationalisation. The calendar could allow a man to mediate his present moment between the past and the future, as well as, to inscribe his place and self within a wider perspective of generations before him and coming afterwards.

190 Bartol, “Beseda o koledaru,” MC, ZRC SAZU. “‘Saj to je poglavje iz domače zgodovine,’ sem si rekel. Za časa fašizma je bil slovenski koledar skoraj edina vez, ki jo je imelo primorsko ljudstvo z živo domačo besedo in z dogodki doma in v svetu. […] Že dolga, dolga desetletja je koledar našemu človeku nekakšen domači prijatelj, nekaj podobnega, kar so bili starim Rimljanom penati, mali hišni bogovi, ki so bili družini v vartsvo in nasvet. […] Vsakoletni koledar pomeni važen dokument o našem žitju in bitju na teh nasih kraških tleh. […] Naši koledarji so mejni kamni poti, ki smo jo prehodili, ki jo hodimo in ki jo bodo hodili naši zanamci. Ti koledarji so izraz naše zasidranosti v tej zemlji, pričevanja o našem nenehm bivanju na njej. Izraz so naše trde borbe za naš obstoj, zoper nasilja in krivice, ki smo jih utrpeli in jih trpimo, izraz so naše nenehne borbe za svobodo in za boljše življenje.”

191 Ibid. “Vsako leto nov koledar, koledar s pratiko in nasveti, s pestro vsebino o važnejših dogodkih minulega leta, spoučnimi in zabavnimi članki, skratka, nekakšno tiskano narodno izročilo, ki pojde iz roda v rod.”

192 Ibid. “V teh koledarjih se nam ohranjajo zapisane stare šege in navade, zanimive prigode, zasluženi ljudje, naša tradicija, preteklost in sedanjost.”
The temporal dimension of Bartol’s self-identification entails a myriad of problems, regarding his perception of himself in the historical process, his experience of entanglement in time and the idea of history itself related with “historical sense” and the problem of the philosophy of history. Bartol’s sensitivity to the passage of time manifests in many ways. First, in his nostalgia towards the hometown, Saint Ivan, which became predominant at the moment of his return to Trieste in 1946. Secondly, in his “historical sense” (zgodovinski čut), the concept on which he reflected extensively in his diary, autobiography and more thoroughly in the essay written in the 1950s, titled: “Some remarks on historical sense and typology of the epoch.”

Bartol argues that the typology of an epoch is visible only in its aftermath when time has already passed, and a certain period is closed. A character of a particular period cannot manifest simultaneously in the course of history, from within the unfolding of events when their consequences are not yet crystallized. In order to capture some typical characteristics of an epoch a distance is required. Closure of the period may be either of formal character (for instance the end of the century) or historical, logical (as was the end of the war). When these two coincide, as it happened after the Second World War, then “the general desire for clarification” and better comprehension of the epoch by noticing its typology becomes even stronger. It is then the “historical instinct” which makes some people and nations reflect on important events and discern from the already passed period its characteristic phenomena. It is done, for instance, by means of a film (based on chronicles) or cultural events such as art exhibitions which present some typical for a period artistic articulations. There are plenty of multifarious phenomena which may have an impact on the character of the epoch. They comprise significant historical events such as global conflicts or revolutions, ideologies (fascism, socialism) or social, cultural phenomena such as “artistic and ethically voluntaristic titanism” (in culture, politics, economy, or mountaineering), psychoanalysis, relativistic theory and waves of refugees or returnees from captivity, battlefields. All these different facets of life are accompanied by a re-evaluation of the output of some writers and artists which before was likely to fade into oblivion. Besides all these numerous and divergent aspects, there are also other phenomena from everyday cultural and social life (fashion, joke, dance, number of suicides, financial scandals, or some kind of crimes) which shape a typology of an epoch.193

In his autobiography, Bartol remarked that “historical sense” (zgodovinski čut) is very rare (as rare as genius), not equally developed in each individual or nation and that even if some of its

---

traces can be visible already at an early age, by a child, it generally manifests stronger with ageing and in nations with a long history. Similarly, in certain historical circumstances such as revolutions or wars, the “historical sense” can become a collective state of mind. Bartol noticed that “[…] historical sense awakes massively in epochs when the machinery of history rattles with a deafening clatter of war and revolutions such as, for instance, the war of national liberation. In historically peaceful epochs the historical sense is rarer and for the most part a privilege of individuals.”

Nevertheless, the historical sense is not only shaped and heard in the whirls of great events. It echoes also in everyday life. As Bartol underlined in his diary:

[…] to eavesdrop on an unheard course of history also in everyday life, in daily conversations of important and also less important people, for this an exceptionally sharpened historical sense, which coincides with genius is needed. It is given to a man by an awareness or knowledge of one own’s historical function, in short, awareness that one is a historical being.

Bartol believed that he possessed an “instinct for typical” of some period of time (also in future), namely “for this, which creates its underground and unofficial essence.” Subjected to what could be regarded as a typology of some period, he perceived himself as capable of noticing its typical phenomena such as jokes, films, style of love or superstitions, cabalistic patterns. As the writer affirmed, without any previous historical knowledge he could directly get into some essence of an era and recognize its typology. Bartol tried to observe how the types, tastes and ideals were changing over time. This unconscious, instinctive sensitivity to “typological representation of the taste of that time and ideal of the era in general” would also encourage the writer to reflect on typology of the moment he lived in and compare it with other epochs. The period which Bartol characterised as the most similar to the one he witnessed during his lifetime was the time before the
French Revolution. Common features of both periods would be temporariness, uneasiness, and a burden of incertitude regarding the future.200

Bartol’s “historical sense” was also shaped by his careful observation of historical processes from the early days of his life. The earliest recollected events that engaged his attention as a five and a half-year-old child and awoke his awareness of the political, public side of each person (zoon politikon) were the outbursts of increasing tensions between Slovenes and Germans, namely the protests in Ptuj and Ljubljana in 1908 which, in the end, deepened pan-Slavic inclinations among Slovenes. Bartol remembered his reaction to his father’s information about the annexation of Bosna to the Habsburg Monarchy and the imminent war in terms of an unfolding horizon combining both elements of “tremendum et fascinans”201 His experience of the Great War was imbued with “monstrously gruesome and curious expectation.”202 The five and a half-year-old child “for the first time felt in the distance a clatter of machinery, which is called: history.”203

As Bartol remembered, he had been particularly interested in the course of the Balkan wars which he had been eagerly following in newspapers and discussing with his parents as well as other adults. He had perceived the events in the Balkans in terms of drama played on a close-by stage. There were also other more distant but equally interesting historical events for Bartol, for instance, the Sun Yat-sen revolution in China. Analysing his passionate interest in the history of the first decade of the twentieth century from the hindsight of around 40 years, Bartol noticed that his eager witnessing and observation of historical events taught him unconsciously and unwillingly the way history was unfolding and the way it was made.204 His sensitivity to the course of History grew with the development of the war which he experienced “geographically concretely” also due to the closeness of the Italian front to Trieste and, thus also his home.205 Bartol described his bygone self as a young person capable of deep perception of History no matter how far away it would unfold, as if he had had numerous antennas connecting him with all fronts and thus also allowing for a direct, sensuous experience of certain events (echoes of shouts, explosions). As the writer remarked, this kind of immediate experience of the war had not been a product of his imagination, a mirage but

200 Ibid., 214.
202 Bartol, Romantika, 201.
203 Bartol, Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu, vol. 1, 195 (“Prvič je začutil v daljavi ropot kolesja, ki se mu pravi: zgodovina.”)
204 Bartol, Romantika, 28.
205 Ibid., 201.
some very concrete force even if unspeakable and invisible.\footnote{Ibid., 201.} He related his passionate observation of History with his “primordial historical instinct.”\footnote{Ibid., 28.}

In another place of his autobiography, Bartol defines the “historical sense” as “some viewing, so something passive, some intuitive right explanation of the history and historical facts.”\footnote{Drago Bajt, “Problem Bartolove esejistike,” in \textit{Pogledi na Bartola}, 83.} Another psychological phenomenon opposite but to some extent also complementary to the “historical sense” is “function” which understanding is to some degree inspired by Carl Gustav Jung’s collective unconsciousness.\footnote{Bartol, \textit{Romantika}, 224. “‘Funkcija’ je, nasprotno, neka aktivna ustvarjalna psihična potenca, ki ji je zgodovinski čut duševna podlaga in iz katerega ven potem aktivno ustvarja literarne (pa tudi druge umetniške) produkte.”} Bartol defined “function” as some “psychological fact,” “experience or spiritual process,” not necessarily conscious “active, creative, psychological potential, which has the historical sense as a spiritual base and from which then it actively creates literary (and other artistic) products.”\footnote{Ibid., 223 (“izšolan introspektivni psiholog”).} It could be recognized by the “educated introspective psychologist” as Bartol defined himself while reflecting on his creative process.\footnote{Ibid., 223. “To avtomatično in instinktivno raztezanje v preteklost in prihodnost ter takošnje skrčenje na točko, v kateri trenutno tičim, me je toliko osupnilo, da sem o njem vodil v svojih dnevnikih skorajda ‘znanstveno evidenco.’”}

One of the manifestations of “function” was for the writer the sensation that what he was writing in the present moment would be equally important both 50 years before and ahead. He viewed himself as creating not only for the contemporary audience but also for the one living in the past and future. While writing Bartol was also simultaneously trying to assume the role of future reader who shall find in his books what the author regarded as worth preserving from his period. In the same way, he was travelling back in time to see what texts from the past should acquire the attention of the present. Bartol commented on such travels in time as follows: “This automatic and instinctive stretching in the past and the present and the immediate contraction on the point, in which I am stuck, astonished me so much, that I was keeping an almost ‘scientific record’ about it in my diaries.”\footnote{Ibid., 223.}

In his diary, Bartol was very often tackling the problem of “historical sense” and “function” which as he believed, he recognized in himself during his sojourn in Paris in 1927. This automatic and instinctive “function” would lay the foundations of the specific art immortalizing it. Bartol also mentioned its way of articulation. The “function” would manifest in a simultaneous translation of what he was currently writing to other languages as if the words were against the author’s will enforcing their translation. The “function” would be also accompanied by a sensation of validity and
value of one’s writing both in the face of the past and future. Thus, this particular psychological phenomenon combines three temporal dimensions: the past, present, and future in one moment. Bartol expressed “function” also graphically as follows:

In spirit – merely automatically – I delineated a line from the past to the present and then I prolonged it to the future: all this summed up in a synthesis, linked and still at that time somehow divided in two points through which I made the line and in this way I got X – an unknown third point in the future.213

In Bartol’s view, this instinctive “function” accompanied by “historical sense” was not equally developed in every person. In Slovenian literature, it was Prešeren and in foreign Goethe who possessed the deepest and the most developed historical sense. Bartol characterised his “function” echoed by “historical sense” acquiring it with both spatial and temporal dimensions. Spatially universal (words translating themselves in different languages), temporally it embraced the past and the future in the present moment reverberating in a sensation of eternity.

Another question that arises in this context regards Bartol’s philosophy of history. The writer’s belief in the great man theory was already mentioned. From his personal writings, however, another interesting image of the historical process emerges which combines both recurrent and linear components. In the course of events, Bartol discerned an ascending spiral and noticed that development and progress would be always accompanied by cyclicality and returns. As the Slovene writer remarked:

Many times it was noticed that the world progresses and develops in some vertically directed spiral. Who still had caught the tail end of the era before the First World War and intensively experienced the period between both wars, would not be able to defend himself from a gentle astonishment that the taste and style of the era returned – in a vertically directed spiral of course – somehow there, where it had been before the First World War, with adequate changes of course, so to the era of our grandmothers.214

---


Bartol’s return to Trieste after the war opened the door leading to the past wider. He was not only following the bygone times and selves intentionally during his sentimental walks or research in the library but also managed to grasp them unconsciously because the past was lurking in his dreams and feelings. Bartol’s sojourn in Trieste, where his official work was focused on the present situation of the Slovene and Croat culture in the city, was underlain by the overwhelming presence of the past elicited in search of his youth and by his role of the chronicler of his times. It was the act of autobiographical writing that commenced during his 10-year stay in Trieste, which made the author even more conscious about the relativity of time experienced, recalled in memories and mirrored in the present moment.

Bartol remarked that in the processes of memory time acquires a different dimension and direction. It is no longer linear, predictable, and thus easily tamed. Recalled images of the past are mingled, interwoven and simultaneous. Thus, they do not appear in chronological order. The past and the present remain in reciprocal interrelation and reflect one another. As Bartol noticed, this capricious nature of the time of memory encourages some writers to replace a temporal structure of storytelling with “the logical or meaningful sequence.” Could diaristic writing enable Bartol to notice such a sequence in the course of his life? The writer’s “zeal for calculating historical years,” belief in certain cycles, special numbers (just as Gombrowicz’s faith in number 22) as well as his inclination for astrology and horoscopes could definitely contribute to discerning such a “meaningful sequence” in his life.

In the diaristic note taken on 27 June 1950, Bartol remarked that the year 1952 is approaching. This moment seemed important to him because he identified it with the middle of his cycle, its “positive pole.” While walking in the neighbourhood of the house where he grew up, Bartol came up with the idea of a specific periodicity in his life regarding both its artistic and affectionate dimensions. He had been already before noting down some indications of these changeable spiritual states in his diary and noticed such cyclicality by other people. Only after some time looking with hindsight did he discern in his life some meaningful cycles of seven years which he called the periods

---

215 Ibid., 140-141.
217 This special number accompanying Bartol throughout his life was 17. In one of his diaristic notes, he started enumerating all the cases which could prove this supposition. Number 17 was present mainly on the dates of birthdays (Mašenka), addresses of his friends and other places such as theatre in Trieste. He himself was living under number 17 in Ljubljana as well as in Trieste (but after some calculation, the street’s number was 12 but the house was the fifth, thus 12+5 = 17. Bartol, “Zapiski 1951/II/1952 (nadaljevanje zap. 1951), Trst. 9. X. 51,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
of maximum (activity) and minimum (passivity). Bartol viewed these periods as happening with regularity similar to mathematical precision as if they were fulfilling some law. Moreover, their development was supported by other factors and favourable circumstances. These periods were interchanging and each of them had in the middle either the moment of maximum (in the cycle where the principle of minimum was dominant) or minimum (in the cycle where the principle of maximum was predominant). In one diaristic note taken on 27 June 1950 Bartol mentioned some briefly outlined “short table of his life” made while keeping the journal in the previous notebook (thus it should be the one kept between 1949 and April 1950). This interesting table, delineated on a separate piece of paper and dating back probably to the end of the 1940s or the beginning of the 1950s, contains the following information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>the first year, birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>7 years the beginning of school – pneumonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>fourteen years madly in love with Lina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>21 two years before madly in love with Zinka, the beginning of lit. attempts, he was writing dissertation, Milko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>28 Nada, novels, Lopez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>35 Alamut, Dg, loves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>42 Empedokles, 44 more loves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[1952 49 ]</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The aforementioned list of dates allowed Bartol to imaginatively traverse his life in relatively long steps of seven years. Each date is accompanied by a short comment indicating some important experiences in the author’s life both of emotional and professional character. Bartol made this chronological list in keeping with the seven-year cyclical pattern. Interestingly, Márai discerned in his life the similar rhythm. In both cases, it could be understood in terms of a need of some regularity.

---

219 Bartol, a note found in one of the diaristic notebooks, MC; ZRC SAZU. “1903 – 1 leto rojstvo 1910 7 let začetek šole – pljučnica 1917 14 let blazno zaljubljen v Lino 1924 21 2 leti prej blazno zaljubljen v Zinko, začetek lit. poskusov, pisal disertacijo, Milko 1931 28 Nada, novele, Lopez 1938 – 35 Alamut, Dg, ljubeznī 1945 42 Empedokles, 44 več ljub [1952 49 ] ?”
which as a promise of “the logical or meaningful sequence” would be devised in the hope of taming the chaotic and impersonal chronological time.

5. **Concluding remarks**

Modern Trieste’s artificial character, owing to its origins imposed by Habsburgs who devised the city “as a sort of Mitteleuropean St Petersburg of the Mediterranean,”[^220] has contributed to the problematisation of its urban, cultural identity and self-identifications of its inhabitants. As an urban experiment, a realisation of Habsburgs’ dream, and a future-oriented project, the city lacked continuity and foundation. Not defined in territorial terms by a rootedness in the past or in certain traditions, it was framed and “inspired by a broader, maritime horizon.”[^221] Triestine uprootedness from the past in comparison for instance to Venice was well grasped by Karl Marx who reflecting on the reasons of Trieste’s predominance in the Adriatic remarked that whereas “Venice was a town of reminiscences; Trieste shared the privilege of the United States of having no past at all. Formed by a motley crew of Italian, German, English, French, Greek, Armenian and Jewish merchant-adventurers, it was not fettered by traditions like the City of the Lagunes.”[^222] The Triestine cultural patchwork made of different, very often overlapping fragments implied an absence of one, recognizable figure provoking a search (not devoid of mythicisation) for a “meaning of nowhere” mentioned in Jan Morris’ book dedicated to this city – the capital of “the nation of nowhere,” diaspora composed of exiles living in minority. In this “existentialist sort of place,” the “meaning of nowhere” would be sought beyond clearly defined identities and categories such as nation, class, or religion.[^223]

underlines that “[…] dominant imaginations of the city have always been (and continue to be) structured around such ‘geographies of absence’—both in ideal terms (absence as a value in itself), as well as in clear opposition to the ‘geographies of essence’ that sustained the other grand project of European bourgeois modernity: the territorial nation-state.” These manifold absences here referred to the absence of Italy (Trieste/Italian Triestine as an orphan), Vienna (Trieste as “Austria’s widow”), Istrian Peninsula, Slavic nation-state with Trieste as capital (advocated among Slovenes) as well as a new future-oriented cultural horizon and a political project which could restore to post-war Trieste its bygone cosmopolitan spirit. Bartol’s experiences of the post-war Triestine reality, dominated by the increasing national tensions, combined both cosmopolitan (nostalgic) and territorial (future-oriented) “geographies of absence.” At one end, faced with the renewed Italian-Slovene confrontation, the writer sensed some absence of the multicultural, cosmopolitan city of his youth. At the other, convinced about Trieste’s adherence to the Slovene hinterlands, his experience of absence related also to the unfulfilled but desirable annexation of Trieste to Yugoslavia.

The “nowhereness,” nourished by the specific atmosphere of Trieste imbued with such polysemous sensation of absence, shaped also particular mentality which Slovene minority activist, physicist Lavo Čermelj defined as “anarchic.” This Weltanschauung undermining any fanatic attitude privileges an open approach seeking individual independence from dogmas of political, religious, and scientific character. Thus, the “anarchic” perception, lacking definiteness implies immunity to a dogmatic worldview and disinclination for being part of a political party or occupying leading positions in organisations. Bartol also to some degree shared the “anarchic” mentality shaped in the Triestine milieu. Avoiding straightforward identification with collective categories of both political and artistic character, he found himself on the margins of the perspective of the Slovene majority and the Slovene national canon. Even though he applied for membership in the communist party, represented communist Yugoslavia in Trieste in the cultural field and articulated some Marxist ideas in his writings, he was far from dogmatism on both political and artistic planes and would not align with the aesthetic dogmatism of social realism.

224 Minca, op. cit., 269.
225 Ibid., 270-272.
226 Ibid., 270-272. Minca also mentions the third understanding of the absence embraced by the Slovene population of Trieste as “the absence of a Slavic nation, at that moment in time lacking both a capital city and a state; a nation that, nonetheless, begins to imagine Trieste as its natural metropolis, as the realisation of its historical-geographical destiny.” (270) “Finally, the third absence is that perceived by the Triestine Slovenians who, following the brief period of Yugoslav occupation of the city, become once more a nation without a state, a national minority in a non-Slavic city and, by virtue of their identification with the Communist and Yugoslav cause, now perceived by many as the enemy of the city and of its Italian tradition.” (272) 227 Lavo Čermelj, Spomini na moja tržaška leta (Ljubljana, 1969), 44-45.
Being everywhere and nowhere might constitute two complementary tones of Triestine life, imaginatively reworked by some of its participants or appropriated, mythicized by its commentators, writers, literary critics. As Velikić emphasised “Trieste is an exile. And Umberto Saba not by accident called his city a ‘planet’.” Individual immersion in the intricate Triestine fabric, in which strings unfold in all geographical and cultural directions, on one side, brings a feeling of loss and restlessness but on the other, could enable its inhabitants to view their position from the macro perspective of the planet. This double perspective was shared also by Bartol, member of Triestine “community in exile from itself” shaped by the memory of different waves of people who were either forced to abandon the city (Germans, Jews, Slovenes) or opted to settle down there (Italians from Istria). Bartol, who in the aftermath of the Great War together with his family had to leave the city, was also marked with this exilic experience. As Košuta remarks, he followed the path of other Littoral Slovene writers (Srečko Kosovel, Igo Gruden, Alojzij Remec) who after the First World War due to shifts of frontiers, were forced to abandon their homes. Viewing his life in terms of a journey and Odyssey, Bartol perceived his return to Trieste after the war as a mythical comeback to Ithaca, an “odyssey repatriation.” In this manner, his existential itinerary would make a circle allowing the past and the present to symbolically meet in one meaningful point, in the imagined and recalled place of his youth.

Triestine geographical and cultural in-betweenness implies an uneasy existential oscillation on the verge of different worlds, views (the one of the majority and another pertaining to the minority) and paths of life. Feelings of disorientation and enriching cultural multiplication of the self are simultaneous and thus become two sides of the same coin. A nomad breathing with the “anarchic” atmosphere of ‘nowhereness’ is at the same time a cosmopolitan free from any strong bonds with just one place or one reductionist category which could pose a threat of essentializing and thus confining one’s self-identification. Bartol’s amphibiousness shaped by his constant oscillation between Trieste and Ljubljana enriched his self and his literary work but also provoked double isolation. The writer’s spatial self-identification, extended between two cities so much different in character, was accompanied by the intensified work of memory in search of the lost time in Trieste which could to some extent mitigate the temporal discordance. The sense of loss, nourished by the spatial and temporal ambiguity, Bartol managed to transcend by identifying himself

---

228 Velikić, op. cit., 83.
229 Minca, op. cit., 271.
230 Košuta, Slovenica, 31.
231 Ibid., 49.
with a world spirit (*Weltgeist*) and in the process of diaristic practice as well as autobiographical writing.

Bartol as the main protagonist of his unfinished novel titled “Between the East and the West”? One may give an affirmative answer if the writer’s diaristic notes, also including many drafts of novels and dramas are viewed in terms of continuous practice. It becomes possible then to holistically look at Bartol’s diaristic writing, so diversified in its content, and regard it as an endeavour to understand oneself better in particular coordinates of historical time and space. Drawing on this interpretative path, the diaristic notes taken in the notebooks titled “Between the East and the West” (but many others as well) would not only refer to a planned novel but could also hint at some possible deeper and not directly articulated mechanisms of the author’s self-identification. The writer’s fictional texts may be read in a similar anthropological way as well because each text, as he wrote, was rooted in his own experience. As Bartol remarked in his diaristic note taken 6 July 1960 referring to his marital relationship with literature: “I cannot write other way than about myself, about my feelings, experiences. [...] I am interested only in development, subjective moments, anecdotes, biography.”

Bartol’s life writing stretched “between the East and the West,” between Ljubljana and Trieste, was unfinished due to the passage of time and finitude of life. As with all life stories, it was interrupted before all conclusions could be drawn and left many paths untaken. Every existence due to its inevitable temporal character takes place “in a republic of unrealized possibilities” as one of Bartol’s diaristic notebooks is titled. Among several categories of inhabitants of this republic of unfulfilled lives, objects and ideas, the writer also mentioned theories, discoveries, and thoughts whose full realisation was hindered by disease, unfavourable social situation (poverty), political circumstances (dictatorships) or “incomprehension of contemporaries.” Bartol certainly experienced the last hindrance which for a long time deprived his literature of deserved recognition and in this sense placed his life writing in a shadow of “the republic of unrealized possibilities.”

Bartol’s entrance to this “republic” was facilitated by his existential oscillation between Trieste and Ljubljana which also marked his self-understanding with the double perspective of the


233 Bartol, “V republiki neizpolnjenih moznosti. 10 (20) noci!, Trst, 2. X. 1950,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Slovene hinterlands majority and another of life in the Slovene minority in Italy. The writer’s 10-year sojourn in Trieste after the war implied both spatial and temporal reconfiguration of his self-identification and thus allows to put to the fore both temporal and spatial ambiguities of his self. While his spatial amphibiousness manifested in life between Trieste and Ljubljana, his temporal duality meant a confrontation between the present with the past. The combination of spatial coordinates extending between the two cities at that time became desirable because, according to Bartol, it intensified his creative forces. His stay in Trieste was a return to the remembered surroundings of his hometown and times of his childhood. This submersion into the past resulted in his autobiography which besides the reflections on the “historical sense” indicates the writer’s sensitivity to the turbulent times of the twentieth century. Bartol’s life writing, including both autobiography and diaristic practice, from the period of his stay in Trieste, is interesting due to these new spatial and temporal coordinates of his self-identification.

Life passes, yet it is narrated, and its traces are preserved between the lines of written words and heard, retold stories. One of the aims of Bartol’s diaristic practice was to overcome the annihilating power of time and to gain eternal fame. It came later with increasing interest in Bartol’s oeuvre commenced in the 1970s when Slovene literary historian Taras Kermauner identified the writer with the precursor of modernity in Slovene literature. Later Bartol was also given the role of the predecessor of postmodern literature in Slovenia. 234 His novel “Alamut” remains one of the internationally best–known works of Slovene literature and its reception has been enlivened by the recent events (the terrorist attacks 11.09.2001). In the diaristic practice, assuming the role of literary critic of his own texts, Bartol tried to suggest some interpretations of his literature which thusly could avoid misunderstandings. His diary’s aim, however, was not only to create new texts and interpret those already written, published. Bartol’s diaristic writing, understood in terms of continuous practice, was first and foremost a mediator in the process of self-identification, so much needed by the writer who was sensitive to historical changes and claimed to possess both historical and geographical instincts.

IX. Conclusion

What in the beginning of the twentieth century for some Central Europeans seemed merely a distant background, slightly affecting their everyday lives, with the approaching Great War became an unexpected and uninvited guest, suddenly entering their private worlds. It was History which like a river with its steady flow of events observed from a distant bank, suddenly erupted in a flood after having acquired unpredictable speed and rhythm. Zweig metaphorically described such a moment in terms of collision of ascending rough waters or collective fate with individual destiny symbolized by a rock. The poetic image of historical changeability discerned by the Austrian writer can be transposed on historical experience of other Central European intellectuals who at the same period found themselves within narrowing banks of the historical river. Unlike their forebears, who could still observe History from the relatively safe perspective of the audience, they were suddenly pushed onto the stage, becoming part of an overwhelming historical drama.

Zweig’s generation of Central European intellectuals born on the threshold of centuries particularly strongly experienced the volatile nature of History and its ruptures. As one of them, Slovene writer Ivo Brnčič claimed, the general atmosphere of disappointment and doubt shared by his contemporaries was provoked by a dissonance between the concrete, formidable life experience and the optimistic bourgeois worldview. The unprecedentedly dreadful reality of the twentieth century contradicted the once taken for granted modern belief in progress and reverence for the value of freedom as well as the apotheosis of human being regarded as a measure of each act. These fragile and volatile times, abundant in horrifying discontinuities, deprived many young people not only from their past but also from prospects of better life and perspectives of the future. Brnčič in one of his essays described the situation of his generation as shaped not only by certain historical experiences, tearing his contemporaries apart from the previous generation but also by their distressing enclosure within the insecure and evanescent present moment. They found themselves in front of the closed door that led neither to the past nor to the future. Thus, they remained confined to some kind of temporary antechamber or a waiting room leading nowhere. The Slovene writer summarized his generation’s fate as follows: “We did not have neither past nor present; soon it

2 Ivo Brnčič, Generacija pred zaprtimi vrati. Izbor esejev in kritik (Ljubljana, 1954), 11-12. The optimistic bourgeois worldview was accompanied by theoretical frameworks of modern education.
3 Ibid., 14. “Vse besedovanje o bodoči častni izpolnitvi življenjske naloge je z upi in sanjami vredno splahnelo v mrzlem stvarnem, uradnim molku čakalnic in predsob.”
proved, that we also do not have the future, that is, we do not have anything.”

Brnčič described his generation as embittered, repressed and thus hardened by historical circumstances. It was a “kinship of moral and intellectual invalids and refugees from life” who were also marked with nostalgia for more sophisticated spiritual matters, art, beauty and far destinations, long journeys.

Referring to Zweig’s metaphor of History as a river, which approaching shores confine existential horizons and opportunities, it is also possible to metaphorically discern a range of individual responses to the historical current. Within this metaphorical image, the cataract stopping the river’s natural flow emerges in form of destiny. A sudden encounter with forces shaping life’s current imposes on individual certain challenges. Naturally there are a plethora of possible responses to situations conditioned by historical forces. One may abide by a direction of change and, following the stream, become an element of an overwhelming historical scene which “consummates itself.”

On the other hand, one could also try to move against the current. Similar to water persistently eroding banks and shaping them anew, it is possible to provoke some changes in the flow of historical forces by a constant confrontation with historical fate crystallized in the form of a cataract. Moreover, constantly endangered by a flood, one can also attempt to escape from a direct engagement with the events and acquire some (exilic) distance necessary to meaningfully inscribe individual life within broader frames of collective fate by finding a temporary shelter in culture and language (diaristic practice). Brnčič also interestingly delineated some responses which members of his generation, in the atmosphere of distrust and incertitude, chose when faced with the unsettling situation of temporal limbo (uprootedness from all temporal constituents: the past, present, and future). While some escaped inwardly finding a shelter in inner emigration, others chose a transgressive path of nihilism and hedonism. Some were indifferent and devoid of existential will, while others were rebellious.

Historical experiences of Brnčič’s “generation at the closed door” were framed by the modern perception of time. As an American historian, Peter Fritzsche argues, modern temporality, reconfigured in the aftermath of the French Revolution, is characterised by rupture of linear

---

4 Ibid., 11, 13. “Tako nismo imeli ne preteklosti ne sedajnosti; in kmalu se je izkazalo, da tudi prihodnosti nimamo, to je, da nimamo ničesar.”
5 Ibid., 11, 13 “[...] bili smo rod moralnih in intelekualnih invalidov in ubežnikov iz življenja.”
6 Ibid., 17.
7 Ibid., 18-19. While reading Srečko Kosovel’s pessimistic poems, Brnčič could not recognize himself in this poetry and worldview. He thus noticed some transformation in generational historical experiences leading from the hopeless apathy and lack of will for living towards a more optimistic stance founded on an appreciation of life, desire for engagement and a stubborn belief in changes, life. He explained this change with the projection of one’s individual historical experience on a more general level of common fate.
continuity of historical time due to the emergence of always new and different phenomena as well as the increasing distance between the present moment and the past. This temporal hiatus between the “sphere of experience” and “horizon of expectations” (Koselleck), accompanied by the accelerated pace of ever–changing circumstances, had to incite feelings of unsettlement and unfamiliarity. The main characters of this dissertation: Vladimir Bartol, Witold Gombrowicz and Sandor Márai – like François-René de Chateaubriand in Fritzsche’s study – “participated in a fundamental reconsideration of history from one based on correspondence and fulfilment to one alert to rupture and difference.” Their historical experiences, marked with loss and discontinuities, formed part of a modern historical consciousness which, in Fritzsche’s view, could be characterised by nonlinear and discontinuous ways of self-reflection, multiple identities, feeling of dispossession and alienation.

Such discontinuous ways of rewriting and rereading one’s fate define a diaristic practice nourished by feelings of estrangement and crisis of identity. Diary’s temporal dimension is closely related with the modern perception of time, reflecting it but simultaneously also trying to narratively overcome it. The diaristic problematisation of one’s self-understanding is inherently linked with the modern historical process which entailed both new concepts of temporality (for instance diaristic order of time) and new ways of its experience. Each act of taking a diaristic note is centred on the present moment but simultaneously it is projected both retrospectively and prospectively. Diaristic order of time extends retrospectively in diarist’s rereading of previous notes which enables to make comparisons of different, temporal selves or summaries of one’s experiences in some period of time (a year or cycle of seven years). Each diary is also prospectively oriented as it is underpinned with the author’s hopes and expectations. No matter how intimate and secret a journal may seem, it still very often implies some audience in form of an imagined and desirable future self.

The diary viewed as a hermeneutic tool may serve its author as both a means of acquiring a better understanding of one’s entanglement in historical time and gaining wider recognition and

---

8 Peter Fritzsche, Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity, “American Historical Review,” December 2001, 1587-1589. As Fritzsche adds, with the overemphasis on the present moment heading towards progressive future, the presence of absence in the form of ruins became also more visible and perceptible. Thus, nostalgia and remembrance are inherent in the modern structure of temporality.

9 Ibid., 1587. Brnčič’s images of the existential situation of his generation and the dissonance between the bourgeois cultural heritage from the past and the historical present reality confirm Fritzsche’s argument. “Sprejemali smo znanje in nauke, ki so bili pred davnimi desetletji zgrajeni na optimistični podmeni o večni popolnosti obstoječega stanja in sveta, o trajni zveličavnosti njegovih norm in tradicij, načel in idej […] S takšno dediščino klasične meščanske kulture smo polagoma stopali v dejansko življenje – in to življenje je bilo ena sama brutalna negacija gesel, ki smo z njimi rasli, ki smo se jih zavedno ali nezavedno naučili spoštovati, ki se je v njihovem znamenju izoblikovala vsa naša življenjska zavest.” (Brnčič, op. cit., 11-12).

10 Fritzsche, op. cit., 1587-1589.
fame among readers. From the point of view of the diaristic temporal axis, it resembles an inner time of consciousness as described by Edmund Husserl’s triple structure of phenomenological time which centred on the present moment would embrace both the past (“retention”) and the future (“protention”). Therefore, keeping a journal should be perceived in anthropological terms as a practice that enables one to reformulate one’s self-identification vis-à-vis both historical time and a specific space.

The modern historical process, forcefully enclosing individuals within its shrinking temporal shores (“sphere of experience” and “horizon of expectations”), imposed also certain roles, internalized not without hindrance. The inner order of time shaped by memories, hopes, nostalgia, melancholy, and expectations, impedes a straightforward internalisation of historical roles, giving way to dissonances accompanied by feelings of alienation and marginalisation. In this respect, diaristic writing in its mediating function between the historical order of time and the inner time of consciousness may allow its writer to inscribe his/her self within a diaristic order of time. Temporality reconfigured on pages of a diary is meaningful because it rationalizes a chaotic order of historical time by its reference to individual historical experiences. While in some situations a diary can facilitate an author’s easier internalisation of given historical roles, personal change, and integration within a new ideological context, in other cases, it can express an author’s isolation and withdrawal from the political scene. In this respect, a journal perceived in terms of practice may be viewed as an individual attempt to overcome or at least mitigate the subjective side of the modern structure of temporality, namely the feelings of loss and uprootedness. The incessant character of diaristic practice can help in bridging the temporal hiatus and thus also in re-establishing some continuity of the self in time.

The above-mentioned instances of individual responses among Central European writers towards the course of events in the twentieth century, which could range from activism to exilic and diaristic withdrawal, are, of course, neither exhaustive nor exceptive. When the dissertation’s triad (Bartol, Gombrowicz and Márai) is considered, it is difficult to compare the writers’ particular responses to History because due to divergent circumstances, they were articulated differently in individual existential choices and life writings. While Márai and Gombrowicz decided to leave their

---

11 Fritzsch writes about the French Revolution as the event crucial in the reconfiguration of temporality and its resultant modern structure based on nostalgia and remembrance. It made contemporaries view themselves as “playing various parts in an encompassing historical drama that extended throughout Europe, across the Atlantic, and beyond.” Fritzsch emphasizes also that the new reconfiguration of historical process entailed both “the internalisation of historical time” and the importance of subjective accounts of the historical events. (Ibid., 1589)
homelands for good, Bartol was for some time living between his exilic address (Ljubljana) and the place of origins (Trieste). Different, opposite directions defining personal distance towards one’s homeland, also marked the writers’ self-identifications in respect to space. In connection with nostalgia, its intensity varied in their texts. Whereas Gombrowicz’s diary is devoid of such yearning and in Márai’s personal writings there are only its rare manifestations, Bartol maintained the strongest bonds with his homeland.

Another important difference between the writers’ narrative self-identifications stems from their personal involvement in contemporary historical events. Gombrowicz’s indifference and “disengagement” from political affairs are in stark contrast to Bartol’s active role in the Slovene Liberation Front during the Second World War and within the new socialist order in Yugoslavia. Somewhere between these almost opposite stances, there could be placed Márai’s refusal to journalistically engage in the post-war public sphere in Hungary which, however, was not equivalent to an indifference to the political situation and did not force him to leave the country so quickly as it happened with Gombrowicz. Márai was convinced about the collective nature of fate which required from him certain obligations and responsibility. In this regard, both Márai and Bartol did not choose a path of escape as a means of avoiding the common fate because an individual cannot hide from its dictates. Contrary, however, to Bartol, Márai did not approve of political and social changes which marked Central Europe after the war. He would never accept any compromise with political ruling powers which were to confine not only his freedom of speech. When it was not even possible to remain silent within the new socialist regime, Márai decided to leave the country and embark on the long exilic path. His inner emigration preceded an exile which was accompanied by continuous travels, an exile which, as a form of spatial displacement, was a response to the alienating historical situation in his Hungarian and European homeland. Contrariwise, Gombrowicz’s temporal displacement, understood as an attempt of reconfiguration of self with the help of two modes of diaristic writing, could be interpreted as a reaction to estrangement provoked by spatial context and the oppressing, cultural Polish Form.

Notwithstanding all these differences regarding the degree of writers’ engagement with politics as well as an oscillation between homo politicus and homo poeticus, there are still specific parallel features that could shed some light on the broader issue of the Central European community of historical fate. Besides the common spatial background (Central Europe) and temporal horizon (the same generation), the writers at the dissertation’s focal point in some respects shared the same attitude towards History. All of them lived in exile and embarked on diaristic writing. They perceived
their diaries as an important hermeneutic tool that enabled them to reconfigure their self-understanding in the face of suddenly estranged temporal and spatial circumstances. Different historical and existential situations, as well as motivations of exile, also influenced poetics of their diaries. While Gombrowicz’s public Diary was aesthetically important for the author in his struggle for fame, Márai’s personal writing was ethically strongly underpinned. Bartol’s diaristic practice combined different tones raging from the aesthetical dimension (diary’s aims: preparation of drafts of novels and acquisition of desirable fame), via personal one (memories from the past), to the ideological tone (comments and identification with some socialist ideas).

Diaristic practice, having very often at its origins a confrontation of an individual with different embodiments of alterity, implies divergent modes of reconfigurations of time, space and in consequence also various narrative self-identifications. For Gombrowicz, it was his new and foreign spatial context in Argentina and distance towards Poland which forced him to embark on a diaristic struggle for recognition of his literary self. The open, provocative, and polemical struggle for fame in terms of duel engaging the public Diary’s audience was counterbalanced with the soliloquy practised in the intimate diary, Kronos. The mechanism of self-identification which in the public Diary was founded on negative freedom and distance from all possible imposed identities was to some degree counterweighted by Kronos and a search for self in the name of positive freedom to define oneself in accordance with some broader historical context and calendar order of time.

The origins of Márai’s diaristic practice lie in the author’s confrontation with historical foreignness and his estrangement from the Hungarian political context in the twentieth century. This temporal dissonance between Márai’s order of time and the one dictated by History led the writer to embark on diaristic writing which accompanied his spatial displacement in form of firstly inner emigration and then exilic fate. The diaristic practice constituted for Márai some compensation for the role of the journalist which in the changed political circumstances after the war he could not take on any longer. In this sense, the diary allowed Márai to comment on his personal situation within broader frames of historical context without a threat of compromise with political interests, so often required in a journalist’s work. Márai’s diaristic practice can be viewed as a hermeneutic tool of self-understanding constantly problematised not only by the changing historical circumstances but also by the precarious situation of spatial displacement embodied in a nomadic way of life.

The origins of Bartol’s equally multifaceted diaristic practice could be also traced to the author’s confrontation with alterity which resulted in his outcast way of being. As a member of the Slovene minority in Trieste, Bartol was faced with two incongruent perspectives (Trieste’s minority
and Ljubljana’s majority) which converted his existence into an “apparition” and hence provoked some dissonance in his self-identification. Both perspectives put him on the margins where he found himself among those whose complex ethnic background of homeland prevented from straightforward national labelling. Bartol’s way of writing, incompatible with the Slovene national canon of literature and the prevailing at his times poetics in Slovene literature forced him to struggle for recognition of his literary work and its proper understanding. Therefore, in the diaristic practice, though it also served other purposes, he assumed the role of literary critic of his own work in order to provide himself with the desired acceptance and fame.

Moreover, the extensive diaristic practice allowed Bartol to reflect on the historical sense (zgodovinski čut) which he recognized in himself already by an early age, when the Balkan wars and the increasingly tense international relations could announce some radical changes within the Habsburg Empire as well as more broadly, on European and global stages of historical drama. Bartol defined the historical sense as founded on a particular perception of time which in the present moment embraces both the past and the present. In that respect, it could open broader perspectives revealing certain typologies, patterns of historical experience and in that regard also a more objective image of the past. Bartol associated the historical sense with his ability to notice a typology of the historical epoch he witnessed and consequently also with his autobiography which was supposed to evoke as an objective image of the bygone periods of history as possible.

The modes of diaristic practice of the three writers vary in numerous aspects (origins, poetics, function, audience). However, besides the above-mentioned origins placed in otherness, they have in common the crucial existential role resultant from the performative dimension of diaristic practice. By keeping a journal, the writers could better observe themselves, understand their own situation in contemporary historical circumstances and thus meaningfully interweave their perceptions of time with historical unfolding. The diaristic practices allowing for narrative reconstructions of temporality were reshaping the authors’ self-identifications vis-à-vis given historical contexts. Diaries accompanied the writers also on their paths of inner emigration and exile where they enabled them to redefine their self-understandings in relation to space.
Bibliography

Primary sources

Vladimir Bartol
Bartol, Vladimir. “Balkanijada VI. Trst, 2. VII. 46,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “Balkanijada VI. Trst, 20. VII. [46.],” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “Balkanijada IV. Trst, Trst II zvezek Spomini na mladost pri Sv. Ivanu, 24. V. 46. (nadaljevanje),” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “Balkanijada VI. Trst, Trst, Spomini na mladost pri Sv. Ivanu, III zvezek, 2.VII.46,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “Balkanijada IX. Trst, Trst, VI zvezek, 5.III,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “Balkanijada IX. Trst, Trst, VI zvezek, 12.III.47,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “Balkanijada IX. Trst, Trst, VI zvezek, Dvoživkarstvo, [13.II.47],” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “Balkanijada X Trst, 20.III. [47],” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “Beseda o koledarju,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “'Funkcija:' Zgodovinski čut, iz zapiskov: V. i. Z. VI,” 1. Manuscript Collection, Slovene National and University Library.
Bartol, Vladimir. “H 'kritikam' Josipa Vidmarja,” in Zakrinkani trubadur. Izbrani članki in


Bartol, Vladimir. “Lj. 5. X. 54.,” a note found in “V. i. Z. VI,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Bartol, Vladimir. “Med Vzhodom in Zapadom 48/1, 23.VI.48,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Bartol, Vladimir. “Med Vzhodom in Zapadom 48/1, 28.VII.47,” MC, ZRC SAZU.


Bartol, Vladimir. “V. i Z. VI. 13.IV.47,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Bartol, Vladimir. “V. i. Z. VI, 15. IV. 47, Bergantova opazovanja,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Bartol, Vladimir. “V. i v Z. VI, 23.V.47, Ozka vrata,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Bartol, Vladimir. “V. i Z. VI, 6. VII. 1947,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Bartol, Vladimir. “V. i. Z. VI., Lj. 5. IV. 47,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Bartol, Vladimir. “V republiki neizpolnjenih možnosti. 10 (20) noci!,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Bartol, Vladimir. “Vzhod in Zapad IV c,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Bartol, Vladimir. “Vzhod in Zapad IV c, 14.VI.45,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Bartol, Vladimir. “XZY1 Balkanijada, 13.VI.1945,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “XZY1 Balkanijada, 14.VI.45,” MC, ZRC SAZU.
Bartol, Vladimir. “XZY1 Balkanijada, 20.VI.45,” MC, ZRC SAZU.

Witold Gombrowicz


Sándor Márai


**Studies**

**Vladimir Bartol**


Witold Gombrowicz


Mandolessi, Silvana. “Ohyda i podmiotowość: Dziennik, Testament i Wędrówki po


Suchanow, Klementyna. “Rozmowa ze Zbigniewem Maleckim o podróży Witolda Gombrowicza do Argentyny w 1939 roku na statku ‘Chrobry,’’ Teksty Drugie 3

Sándor Márai
Worowska, Teresa. “Świadek entropii,” in Dziennik (fragemnty), by Sándor Márai, translated by


Other studies


Dekker, Rudolf. “Introduction,” in Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing


Bristol, 2013.


Verginella, Marta. “Sloveni a Trieste tra Sette e Ottocento. Da comunità etnica a minoranza


Websites


