Articles

THE POSTMODERN AVANT LA LETTRE. THE DECLINE OF THE GRAND RÉCITS IN WEST SLAVONIC LITERATURE[1]

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"The decline, perhaps the ruin, of the universal idea can free thought and life from totalizing obsessions."
Jean-François Lyotard, *Tomb of the Intellectual*

FOREWORD

The intention of this study is to present, by means of the comparative method, the concurrence between the postmodern theory of the fall of the grand narratives, as formulated by Jean François Lyotard, and the *oeuvre* of three Western Slavonic writers: Dominik Tatarka, Milan Kundera and Jerzy Andrzejewski. Owing to their representative qualities, selected works including *The Demon of Consent* and other writings by the late Tatarka, the political tetralogy by Milan Kundera and Jerzy Andrzejewski's novel *The Pulp*, are treated as paradigmatic cases, and simultaneously as consecutive stages in the same phenomenon the postmodern, *avant la lettre* struggle for emancipation from the totalizing obsessions of modernism, the intellectual terror of the majority (which is supposedly always right), justified by modernity, and its leftist future-oriented myths, based on a belief in the reasonability of history, the irreversible nature of its "iron laws," and the necessity of an absolute subjugation of the individual to them. The works of the selected authors do not exhaust the problem of grand narratives in West Slavonic literature, they are merely the most typical examples of the rejection of grand narratives by means of postmodern poetics.

1. WITHIN THE RANGE OF LOYTARDIAN THOUGHT

The initial concept of *grand récits* (in English: grand narratives or master narratives) was taken from *La Condition postmoderne. Raport sur le savoir* (1979) by Jean-François Lyotard. From that time on, numerous translations of this

1 I take this opportunity to express gratitude to my Host Professor Tetsuo Mochizuki and Professor Koichi Inoue, director of the Slavic Research Centre, for providing such convenient conditions for my work on this theme, and to thank Mr. Yuzuru Tonai, head librarian, for supplying me with literature on the subject, specially brought in from Japanese libraries and the Library of Congress in Washington.

study gave rise to lively discussions on the subject of our postmodern condition and the attitude of postmodernism toward the great "future-orientated myths" of modernity. Its author became known as the "Pope of postmodernism," who undermined the premises of modernity and initiated a new mode of thinking about the widely understood issue of postmodernism.[2]

Despite the fact that *La condition postmoderne* won such enormous acclaim, it is important to recall several of its fundamental theses, together with Lyotard's comments contained in *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (1986). It is just as essential to mention the more recent works by this French thinker such as *L'inhuman* (1988) as well *Moralités postmodernes* (1993), which return to the theme of grand narratives.

In 1946, the "Pope of postmodernism" inaugurated his career as the co-creator of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, a small but influential leftist group which for many years analysed the Soviet Union as bureaucratic totalitarianism.[3] At the turn of the 1970s, this group ultimately rid itself of illusions regarding the relationship between communist doctrine and actual political activity in the international arena. In *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* Lyotard *expressis verbis* listed a number of international political events which gradually altered the views about communism held by the French left-wing: the suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the events in Poland in 1980. Their revised doctrine negated the speculations of historical materialism both as regards the leading role of the Party in the liberation of the proletariat (since the workers opposed the Party) and the universal horizon of social emancipation attained by the proletariat. It was recognized that the slogan of proletarian internationalism primarily served the chauvinistic interests of the Soviet Union.[4]

The realization of the ideas of progress, comprehended in the manner proposed by Lyotard, became compromised not only within the international movement, but above all in the internal development of the communist totalitarian state, where the modernist emancipation utopia, derived from Marxism by Bolshevism, "that Marxist cousin of Enlightenment Jacobinism,"[5] left a bloody imprint in the form of gulags and mass deportations of entire nations and ethnic groups. The realization of the ideas of progress failed also in movements of right-wing modernity, as exemplified by Auschwitz.[6]

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2 On Jean-François Lyotard see: Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern. A History* (London and New York, 1996).

3 Wlad Godzich, "Afterword: Readings against Literacy," in Jean-François Lyotard *The Postmodern Explained. Correspondence 1982-1985*.[Originally published as *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, 1986], trans. ed. by Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas, trans. by Don Barry, Bernadette Maher, Julias Pefanis, Virginia Spate and Morgan Thomas, afterward by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, 1993), p.111.

4 Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained*, p.9.

5 Ibid., p.57.

6 Ibid., p.57.

The author of *La condition postmoderne* regards Auschwitz as one of the paradigmatic names for the tragic end of modernity, which began under the proud slogan of *cogito, ergo sum*, and, following the example of the Encyclopaedists, believed that it is possible to eliminate social evil through the development of science and education. Heeding the French Revolution and its mottoes (liberty, equality and fraternity), it assured mankind about the possibility of guaranteeing global peace and prosperity. In practice, however, it tried to remove everything which appeared to threaten the doctrine: unnecessary nations (fascism) and hostile classes (Bolshevism). In this manner, instead of universal peace, modernity offered the world wars and revolutions, and led to mass incarceration and the death camp crematoria. All this was accomplished in the name of the totalitarian striving to encompass a multiple reality within a single universal doctrine, based either on the belief in communism, steered from above, or the belief in self-regulating capitalism.

In the opinion of Lyotard, the conviction that the free and self-regulating market would work "for general prosperity" proved unsuccessful.[7] Let us add that the new and unexpectedly extensive economic crisis which broke out in the summer of 1998, no longer on a local scale but on a global one, appears to confirm the statements made by Lyotard twenty years ago, although the French philosopher did not make the radical nature of his arguments completely clear. Nonetheless, he never changed his views about the necessity of burying the totalitarian obsessions of modernity, which he perceived as the prime source of terror.

The "paranoid universalism" of modernity had already been the object of Lyotard's most vehement criticism in *La Condition postmoderne*, which was originally envisaged as a report on the state of knowledge, but became a postmodern manifesto brought about by despair and the loss of faith in the great meta-narratives, i.e. the great future-orientated myths of mankind, explained in greater detail in *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*.[8]

Despair caused by the downfall of faith in the so called modernistic project of the amelioration of the mankind and the collapse of master narratives legitimating its existence (both leftist and rightist) was so great that Lyotard and his friends proclaimed the "second funeral of the postwar era." The first such funeral was the burial of the belief in God. The second buried belief came with the understanding that universal emancipation is impossible, and that the attempt at the realization of such an idea always led to terror.[9]

Only at first glance is the object of prime attention in *La condition postmoderne* the situation of knowledge in the most highly-developed societies. For all practical purposes, this is a book dealing with social philosophy and the philosophy of culture, focusing attention on the new rules of the so-

7 Ibid., p.29.

8 Ibid., p.18.

9 Ibid., pp.24-26.

cial game which came into being in the post-industrial and information era, when an enormous number of computers, constructed, *nota bene*, upon the basis of the theories of linguistic games, but governed by their own laws, multiplied information channels and produced two contradictory phenomena. On the one hand, an intensified circuit of information, contained in an immense mist of differentiated and scattered cultural discourses, indicates the transition of social groups into a mass composed of individual atoms, increasingly mobile and evading control. On the other hand, the expanded capitalist bureaucracy aims at unifying all these channels, and reducing all languages into a single one, in order to maximize profits. The new model of knowledge, concentrated on pragmatic goals and production, has no place for so-called narrative knowledge, which always accompanied the exact sciences, and whose task was to speak about the aims and historic destiny of man.

Lyotard distinguished two variants of the grand narratives legitimating knowledge. The first, more philosophical one, was deduced from the speculative philosophy of Hegel and his predecessors among the idealistic German philosophers; the second, more political, is the so-called emancipatory narrative of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.[10] At a certain moment, they both met and merged into a *grand récit* about the Spirit of History and the emancipation of man. To put it briefly, the grand narratives about the emancipation of man, derived from the Enlightenment and even earlier from Christianity, which proclaimed belief in eternal salvation, were reinforced during the French Revolution by a revolutionary dialogue that transformed the people into a collective hero and the republican system into a desirable form of existence; subsequently, they were continued in the teleological conception of history, contained in the speculative Hegelian philosophy taught at German universities. From Hegel the grand narratives led directly to Marx, Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution, and failed at every step along the way, since totalitarianism and gnoseological reductionism, characteristic for them, became the source of multiple disasters for twentieth-century humanity. According to Lyotard, the pro-totalitarian and unification tendencies, which occur also in capitalism, should be opposed by new postmodern knowledge (i.e. a new conception of social development), which embarks upon an incessant debate with the premises of the system in the name of that which is immeasurable and unimaginable, and thus creative. This hope appears to be concealed in pluralism, in the heterogeneous nature of linguistic games conducted by society, in other words, the variety of assorted discourses, each transmitting certain information and expressing a different need. Their diversity, multiplicity and usually antagonistic nature comprise elements which shatter the undesirable, totalizing and hence always dangerous cohesion. Such hope is also hidden in paralogic, which produces

10 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris, 1979), p.54.

fissures in the system, and which is assisted by a crisis of determinism in whose light the theory of evolution appears to be a process by no means continuous, but full of sudden ruptures, catastrophes and antagonisms, and thus a process that makes change possible. In contrast to modern narrative knowledge, the task of postmodern knowledge is the creation of an anti-model of stability, a model open to changes, as opposed to the model of a constant system.

Totalitarian thought - encoded in the grand narratives and rendering reality homogeneous, by reducing it to a single principle in the conviction that history always has some sort of a final purpose - yielded terror. In each of his books, Lyotard declares war against terror, totalitarianism and totalism: he contrasts the grand narratives along with the small narratives, *petits récits*, which come into being within a small group of persons intending to tell their own truth; its members oppose the system for the sake of defending their own dignity or other values; for the time being, the latter are placed outside the rules of the game, but their very existence is capable of imposing a change of rules, that indispensable condition of survival. Lyotard mentions the example of the narratives of dissidents, described by Solzhenitsyn, whose books present experiences so very different from communist assurances about the liquidation of social wrongs. Lyotard also includes into this group narratives by cultural, ethnic, and sexual minorities as well as deviant minorities, since in the light of, for example, the writings by Michel Foucault, with whom Lyotard worked on a reform of the prison system and psychiatric health service, deviants are usually the reflection and expression of social oppression. Finally, Lyotard mentions the individual, whose truth does not have to correspond to the truth recognized by the majority (a claim made by all totalitarian systems), and whose protest could prove to be redeeming. Micro should dominate macro: "For the time being, the defense of reason is conducted by 'micrologies' (...) they trace an immediate line of resistance to the current totalitarianism."[11]

In *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* Lyotard, fascinated with linguistic games, contrasts the pro-totalitarian character of the grand narratives with a discourse that he describes as deliberation and associates with a democratic attitude towards the world. This discourse differs from the system of thought and language characteristic for tyranny, despotism or terror due to the uncertainty of the goals which should be pursued.

Such uncertainty was absent in the grand narratives about the emancipation of man, which regardless of their origin, leftist or rightist, were always authoritarian and did not permit any doubts.

Lyotard indicates the importance of discussion and debate, decisive for the development of knowledge and social development in general; he devoted to this topic a separate study entitled *Le Différend.* In an obsessive manner, Lyotard insists upon accentuating the meaning of discord and dissent, also in

11 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained,* p.73.

La condition postmoderne and *Le postmodern expliqué aux enfants*. He is inclined to accept consensus only as a transitory phenomenon, a certain stage in the motion of thought, and regards the search for a permanent consensus in the wake of experiments associated with the grand narratives as a fatal threat to democracy and the development of social life in general. "Le consensus est un horizon, il n'est jamais acquis [Consensus is a horizon which is never reached]." - claims the famous thesis formulated by Lyotard in *La condition Postmoderne*.[12] This point is also sustained in his other books. There must always be place for the unexpected, Lyotard argues in *L'Inhumain* (1988).[13] His ingenious theses and intuitions reject the whole paranoid form of cultural modernity, together with its "totalizing obsessions," in the hope that its end will result in the rebirth of tolerance and kindness between people.

The idea launched by the French thinker about the downfall, albeit not the resignation (as maintained by Habermas and his adherents) of the so-called modernistic project and the creative role of dissent opposing the ever looming hazard of new terror and a petrification of a permanent consensus, is delineated by the boundary between modernity and postmodernism in the very manner of thinking, convincingly demonstrated by Wlad Godzich in a postscript to his *Postmodern Explained*.[14]

In *Postmodern Fables* (1997) Lyotard drew attention to the fact that the decline of the modernist project is confirmed by the events of 1989 and in particular the capitulation of communism.[15] The collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe was the ultimate blow dealt against the grand emancipatory-speculative narrative of the Bolshevik "cousins of Jacobinism." Capitalism survived because it proved to be a system more open to all innovations and crisis: "It seems to have had good reason for presenting itself as the sole defender of rights and liberties, including the rights of criticism."[16]

On the other hand, "the fall of the Berlin Wall (...) shows that a system is all the more performative for being more 'open' and reciprocally, it is condemned to be eliminated by its competitors or by mere entropy if it encloses on itself."[17]

The demolition of the Berlin Wall makes it possible to view the question of grand narratives and the ideology of emancipation from a different perspective. From this viewpoint, "emancipation is no longer situated as an alternative to reality'"[18] but changes into assorted types of defensive activity whose purpose is to "reaffirm the rights of minorities, women, children, gays,

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12 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, p.99.

13 Jean-François Lyotard, *L'inhumain. Causerie sur le temps* (Paris, 1988), p.88.

14 Wlad Godzich, "Afterward: Reading against Literacy," p.124-125.

15 Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodern fables* [Originally published in French as *Moralités postmodernes*, 1993], trans. by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis, 1997), p.75.

16 Ibid., p.74.

17 Ibid., p.80.

18 Ibid., p.69.

the South, the Third World, the poor, the rights of citizenship, the right to culture and education, the rights of animals and the environment."[19]

In *Intimacy of Terror* Lyotard continues to warn against widely understood terror, which assumes numerous forms (not only political but also cultural, scientific and legal), and, as experience shows, is intimately inscribed into every type of human activity, even that with noble premises; its symptom is found in each attempt at excluding the individual "from the interlocutory community."[20]

The recognition of new situations is accomplished earliest of all by artists, people endowed with the greatest sensitivity. The outright "hysterical" reactions to reality - Lyotard refers to the example of Charles Baudelaire - indicate threats produced by existing social configurations, and their role consists in reaching the "unimaginable" and the "unpresentable."

It is precisely with this sort of recognition that we shall examine the works of three outstanding Western Slavonic writers: Dominik Tatarka (1913-1983), Milan Kundera (b. 1929) and Jerzy Andrzejewski (1909-1983), the earliest discoverers of the malevolent, terroristic aspect of the modernist grand narratives and their gradual disintegration or collapse.

The Lyotardian theory of grand narratives reached Western Slavonic countries ten years after its publication. The first articles and translations of fragments of his works appeared in anthologies of postmodernism.[21] Subsequently, books by Lyotard appeared in translations into Czech, Polish and Slovak.[22] It is difficult, therefore, to speak about the direct impact of his theories upon Slavonic writers prior to 1989.

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19 Ibid., p.68.

20 Jean-François Loytard, "The Intimacy of Terror," in *Postmodern Fables,* p.209.

21 Jean-François Lyotard, "Definiując postmodernizm," trans. by Joanna Holzman and "Natura związków społecznych, perspektywa postmodernistyczna," trans. by Agnieszka Taborska, in Agnieszka Taborska and Marcin Giżycki, eds., *Postmodernizm-kultura wyczerpania*? (Warszawa, 1988), pp.55-66; Jean-François Lyotard "Postmoderná situácia" and "Odpoved na otázku: Čo je postmoderna," trans. by Kristína Korená, in Egon Gál and Miroslav Marcelli, eds., *Za zrcadlom moderny. Filozofia posledného dvadsaťročia* (Bratislava, 1991), pp.67-105; Jean-François Lyotard, *O postmodernismu*, trans. and preface by Jiří Pechar (Praha, 1993)[Originally published as *La condition postmoderne* and *Le postmoderne expliquée aux enfants*]; Id., *Fenomenológia,* trans. by Anna Luptaková [Originally published as *La Phénoménologie*] (Bratislava, Sofia, date of the edition is missing).

22 Jean-François Lyotard, *Kondycja ponowoczesna. Raport o stanie wiedzy*, trans. by Małgorzata Kowalska and Jacek Migasiński (Warszawa, 1997) [Originally published as *La condition postmoderne. Raport sur le savoir* (1979)].

2. The Lyotardian Theory of the Collapse of the Grand Narratives and the Slavs

The presentation of the Lyotardian theory of the collapse of the grand narratives, confronted with the ideas and feelings of the writers whom we shall discuss further on, possesses a certain deeper meaning. In the "little narratives" it fulfils a function resembling, *toutes proportions gardées*, the one performed by narrative knowledge *vis-á-vis* the great narratives; it legitimates them by combining fragments into a single intellectual entity. It also legitimates them as postmodern works not only owing to their aesthetic aspects, but predominantly due to their philosophical content. In the classical asyndeton by Ihab Hassan, encompassing 33 features characteristic for postmodernism, the postmodern reference for the Anti-narrative - *Petite Histoire* - is contrasted with the modernistic preference for the Narrative - *Grande Histoire* -[23] and the former is strongly underlined. A comparison of the famous theories of Lyotard with the reflections of Western Slavonic authors intends to prove that the ideas, which in the West were formulated as late as the end of 1979, were considered by numerous Central European writers much earlier, and are expressed in the intuitions, feelings, thoughts and images contained in their works. After the death of Stalin, Western Slavonic authors embarked upon a critique which in the works of Dominik Tatarka, Milan Kundera and partially the late writings of Jerzy Andrzejewski assumed a model-like form.

This *sui generis* precedence has a simple reason. In contrast to the Western left wing, and in particular its French branch, which for many years uncritically supported the doctrine of communism and remained unfamiliar with life in the totalitarian system, East-Central European authors experienced the practical aspects of real socialism and communism in the most direct manner possible.

An excellent analysis of the intellectual enslavement of authors in communist countries, upon the example of observations made in Polish conditions, was made already in 1953 in the celebrated book *Zniewolony umys*ł [*The Captive Mind*] by Czesław Miłosz. This was not yet an analysis of grand narratives, but an analysis of the betrayal of ideals cherished by the intelligentsia, under the pressure of a necessary adaptation to ideas from the East. Miłosz also considered the postwar European crisis, which consisted in ignoring the menace encroaching from the Soviet Union, that part of the world with which Miłosz, born in Lithuania, was well acquainted, and towards which he harbored no illusions. His book was an indirect accusation of the West for its thoughtless abandonment of Poland and Czechoslovakia, abandoned in Yalta to the mercy of Stalin. *The Captive Mind*, published by Miłosz abroad, at a safe distance from his native land, could employ the language of rationalized,

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23 Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, 2nd rev. edn. (Madison, 1982), p.267.

classical argumentation, which had nothing in common with postmodern tendencies. Miłosz was not compelled to seek refuge in the grotesque, the absurd, the poetics of the metaphor, Aesopian allusion, or all those literary strategies applied by Slovak, Polish and Czech writers in the hope that in this manner they would be able to present more adequately and safely their experiences, which remained "outside the range of censorship," and to avoid persecution.

Nevertheless, none of the authors, who touched upon the dangerous "taboo" - the legitimation of the great narratives and the absence of a justification for their continuation - were capable of evading such persecution.

3. A CRITIQUE OF THE TOTALIZING OBSESSIONS OF MARXISM IN *THE DEMON OF CONSENT* AND LATER WORKS BY TATARKA

The first writer capable of uttering an unambiguous "no" to the ideological obsessions of the creators and propagators of Marxism and their manic striving towards a logical justification of their arguments in terms of instrumentalism was Dominik Tatarka (1913-1989), a Slovak man of letters, a Romanist by training, and in his youth an adherent of French liberty and republican ideas. Tatarka debuted during the second world war as an author of introverted, surrealistic, and artistically sophisticated prose (*V úzkosti hl'adania - In the Anxiety of a Quest*). During the war, he joined the partisan movement, and became a member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party; later, he was one of its main postwar activists. Initially, communism appeared to be extremely attractive. It promised to liquidate hunger and unemployment through the nationalization of industry and farming, and offered an opportunity for the social advancement of the poorest strata in a country which was poor and economically backward, and which before the war had witnessed waves of emigrants. In his capacity as a writer Tatarka supported communism, and wrote, in good faith, so-called production novels, praising the establishment of agricultural cooperatives and the social promotion of peasant sons, who moved from the village to town in the search of education and profession (*Prvý a druhý úder* - The First and Second Blow, *Radostník* - Wedding Cake, and others). Like many other writers, Tatarka placed his trust in the grand narratives of communism, which claimed that he was heir to the most progressive ideas of mankind, stemming from the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution. He also believed in "the iron laws" of history, proclaimed by historical materialism and residing in the collective mind of the Party, which was to be the instrument for the realization of those historical truths on a path leading towards a luminous future. They were also reflected in the doctrine of socialist realism, which declared that literature should be a reflection of truth but at the same time implicitly assumed that there is only one optimistic, Party, class, and Soviet truth, to which everyone should subjugate himself by resigning from his own views. Personal opinions

were forbidden, and such words as "individualism" or "individualist" were officially condemned at all Party conventions and meetings of representatives of culture or writers in Czechoslovakia, sharing the fate of Western and domestic avant-garde, surrealism, existentialism and independent thought. Tatarka went so far in trusting the infallible wisdom of the Party that he even approved the death sentence issued against Vladimír Clementis, Slovak writer and diplomat, imprisoned in 1951 together with Gustáv Husák (later President of the Czechoslovak state and its "normalizer") and the poet Laco Novomeský, accused of so-called bourgeois-democratic deviation and treason. A few years later Novomeský and Husák were set free, while Clementis, who admitted the charges, was executed in 1952, and his ashes were scattered from a car driving along the streets of Prague, so that the working class, as it was put cynically, would not slip on the fresh snow.

The death of Stalin and the ensuing political thaw associated with the toppling of the so-called cult of personality deprived many intellectuals of their heretofore illusions, and made it possible, after a transitory period of relative freedom of expression, to bring forth the accumulated mental traumas connected with the implementation of the communist utopia. The outcome of this process was the absurd-grotesque novel by Tatarka entitled *Démon súhlasu* (Demon of Consent), written and published in a periodical in 1956, but in book form as late as 1963, and recognized as the first postmodern work in Slovak literature, a pioneering book in Czechoslovak literature in general,[24] and an expression of rebellion directed against the paranoia of totalizing Hegelian-Marxian obsessions, in their Eastern and even "gubernya" version.

The protagonists of this grotesque, imbued with black humor, are two figures - Valizlost' Mataj, the provincial "gubernya" (a description proposed by Tatarka with distinct reference to the dependence of Slovakia upon Russia) high-ranking Party activist in control of men of letters (whose name and surname posses special significance, since they denote a person teeming with anger and inclined to sophistry) and Boleráz Slzička (someone in pain and shedding tears, whose name was taken from one of the earlier Tatarka novels). Both protagonists, albeit granted different mentalities and a diverse range of power (Mataj plays the role of the persecutor, and Boleráz is his victim), are equally possessed by a manic need to prove, justify, convince and approve resolutions, directives and orders issued from above, in the name of a single universal and unshaken truth - the truth of the grand narrative, "socialism aiming at communism." Boleráz, whose brain is devoured by "the vulture of abstraction," would like to free himself from abstraction, and to perceive the world once again with his own eyes, as he did years ago. He has no chance to realize this dream. The demon of consent and the demon of trickery, personified by Valizlost' Mataj, never abandons him. Mataj possesses him by means

24 William Marčok, "Literárnohistorické aspekty postmoderny," *Slovenská literatúra* 37 (1990), p.502.

of his arguments and intellectual sophistry. Ultimately, both perish in an aeroplane accident. Boleráz is beheaded by a pile of Party material which he carried. After his death, the airport staff transfer part of Mataj's brain into the shattered skull of Boleráz, who is by no means pleased, but who, obedient to the binding principle of optimism, cheers himself up by recalling that he is not alone, since "many of our contemporaries think posthumously by means of the brain of another. Their skulls carry the pulp of the brains of strangers, just like I carry the brain of Valizlost' Mataj. They believe that they reformed their brain, and are totally convinced that this organ of thought comprehends the world in a much more enlightened method than their own heads."[25]

This posthumous confession of Boleráz, written in the first person and maintained in the mood of a crazy comedy, full of unexpected twists and events, reveals the mechanism of an abdication from his own brain, carried out by the hero, i.e. the author who, thanks to his "production novels," was at this time already elevated to the rank of a state writer, and thus subjected to increasing control. Its outcome is the shattering critique, which the "gubernya" activist, Valizlost' Mataj, presents at a meeting of writers, and with their assistance. Having placed his trust in the infallible verdicts of the Party, Boleráz reacts in the same manner as did all those persecuted during the period of Party purges and court trials - he signs his own death verdict, and then does the same for his wife and son. He behaves in the belief that a supreme intellect, the abstract principle of historical justice, represented by Mataj and his colleagues and friends gathered in the courtroom to condemn the works of Boleráz, cannot be fallible, and that the subjective truth of the individual is meaningless:

"I can think what I want, I can speak as openly as possible, but I cannot be right. No one can be right contrary to authority. Its unity and organizational force, the insistence that a person such as I, the product of a dark past, is correct, denotes evidence of a split personality, and the indubitable beginning of disintegration and insanity."[26]

Possessed by the totalizing obsession of the majority, which is always correct, inseparable from the grand narrative and contrasted with the minority, which is never important in totalitarian systems, the hero, led by the demon of consent, not only subjugates himself to the court sentences but even agrees with them.

He soon notices, however, that Mataj frequently changes his ideological stand depending on the directives received from above and, to cite Tatarka: "is an unbending logician, and a talented or even brilliant thinker of a given thesis."[27] This capability enables him to maintain a position on the pinnacle of power, and to grant every person dependent on him "the greatness of an

25 Dominik Tatarka, *Démon súhlasu* (Bratislava, 1963), p.9.

26 Ibid., p.34.

27 Ibid., p.38.

immortal genius or to burst him like a balloon, to promote him to a miner or sewage worker"[28]; it also enables him to change full-blooded and valuable persons into paper figurines, to be manipulated. Finally, it allows him, by resorting to the consensus of writers' gatherings, and with the aid of intellectual arguments referring to the "iron laws of history" and historical necessities, to elevate to the uppermost regions of fame such "paper masterpieces" of socialist realism as *The Iron Valley*, *Bell of Joy* or *Three Hundred Percent of Happiness*. Privately, Mataj is capable of distinguishing good literature from bad, admires surrealists, and even reads Baudelaire aloud to his protagonist Boleráz, but officially he condemns them vehemently.

Boleráz, a criticized but nonetheless state author, and thus obligated to defend the communist great narrative, gradually notices the surrounding lies in which he too takes part and to whose consolidation he contributes, willingly or not. Truth reveals itself to the writer, increasingly detached from reality, only at those infrequent moments when he leaves formal sittings, together with their participants, to attend informal sessions held in taverns and wine cellars; here those who elsewhere succumbed to violence and their own weakness in order to lie publicly and to agree to everything, give vent to their true feelings. Amidst a group of people who speak the truth, the writer Boleráz starts to notice that uniform truth kills all initiative.

The whole commune "voluntarily" joined a farmers cooperative, but just as voluntarily it ceased working in it, so that ultimately its only employee was a boar, for whose sexual services the commune charged fees, Tatarka comments ironically. By the way, the theme of the destruction of initiative by an imposed consensus recurs in the works of Tatarka during the later surge of freedom in 1968 - the year of a struggle waged for so-called socialism with a human face.

In the company of the ideological intellectual maniac Mataj, who "even undressed down to his underwear does not cease to spew ideology,"[29] the hero, who assumed the form of a mannequin and admits that his "brain becomes a mechanism, a copy, a cast of an external mechanism grinding all my senses and absorbing the whole of me"[30] is incapable of detaching himself from his totalizing narrative obsessions, which are no longer merely the obsessions of a majority that *ex definitione* must be always right; he is also unable to free himself from the prime topic of the controversy - the socialist system which is, or actually must be more magnificent and better than all others. Those features do not follow from its empirically verifiable observation, but from all the rational arguments gathered for the purpose of its defence. In Tatarka's grotesque novel, an allegory of the system assumes the form of a bunch of violets, which Boleráz presents to the beautiful Dúbrava,

28 Ibid., p.39.
29 Ibid., p.60
30 Ibid., p.52.

recommending the wonderful fragrance of the flowers. Meanwhile, Dúbrava, a personification of eternal femininity, and totally indifferent to the ideological possession of the males, declares to both intellectual maniacs that the violets have ceased smelling sweetly many years ago. Boleráz becomes convinced that it is not only the flowers which no longer exude a fragrance, but that the poem *Three Hundred Percent of Happiness* also does not smell like poetry or happiness.

Those findings constitute a threat to the system, a structure cautiously erected with false arguments, but nonetheless logical. Aware of the lurking menace, Mataj employs the whole force of his authority and announces that the bouquet remains fragrant. Following his example, "eight million newspapers claim, radio stations broadcast, and armies of educational, library, propaganda, scientific, and educational workers prove, explain, apply, teach and declare that the bouquet smells, and that its stirring fragrance fills the atmosphere of our epoch. Professors, academicians, schools teachers of all levels (...) place the bouquet next to the nose of each Pioneer, student, pupil or member of a youth organization, and relish, admire and pontificate (...). In this manner, the simple and predominantly ambitious youth (...) delights in the fragrance of a bunch of flowers which is odourless. It learns hypocrisy from its dear parents and teachers."[31]

In the case of Boleráz, the recognition of evil awakens the demon of protest, and recalls the holy obligations of the writer, conceived as the conscience of a nation, who publicly opposes the declaration of that which contradicts the truth. Boleráz becomes a solitary warrior battling for the sake of truth, while every one else continues to vote for, and proclaim the untruth.

Similarly to all Party activists, Mataj treats the truth pragmatically and functionally - there is no truth in general, but only the truth of the ruling group. "What does it matter whether you possess the truth," he declares briefly, "when that truth fires at us."[32]

Ultimately, the writer, anguished and fleeing from Mataj along rooftops, ends up (in a manner fitting for a man of letters from a socialist gubernya) in a mental hospital. The latter proves to be a veritable haven for his tormented soul - the asylum is ruled by principles totally different from those observed by the society of the gubernya. Optimism is replaced by sadness, and the monument of Unity is supplanted by a monument of Suitable Contradiction, while the daily newspaper at breakfast is not "Pravda" [Truth] but "Untruth," whose journalists write about "non-unanimous voting" and "historical non-necessity."

Once again, the episode in the mental hospital throws grotesque light on the destructive force of imposed unity, a consensus based on the terror of the

31 Ibid., p.45-46.

32 Ibid., p.59.

intellect. Nonetheless, Tatarka shows that even the greatest historical upheavals are unable to waver those principles.

An "African cult" of the "outstanding individual" is disclosed in the capital of the gubernya, and Boleráz, a patient of the mental institution, is requested by the chief marshal to attend a session whose purpose is the condemnation of the cult. He is invited as "a person with character," who dared to oppose the cult by declaring that the violets are no longer fragrant; on the other hand, Mataj is accused of creating and supporting the cult. Its toppling is acclaimed by, what else, unanimous voting. The game is conducted according to old rules, and nothing has been altered. The system has absorbed the temporary upheaval and errors. The lesser figures (such as Mataj) have been ousted, but the high ranking leaders remain firmly in their posts. Nothing has changed in the writers' organization. In the wake of Stalin's death members of the Union of Slovak Writers proclaim the end of the cult of the personality with the same enthusiasm as the one with which they passed resolutions in support of the cult. They omit to mention their considerable contribution to the cult and co-responsibility for its observation. "With a feeling of relief we renounced all our resolutions, which we passed only yesterday. We also issued an energetic appeal to the nation, saying that the whole fault lay in the damned African cult, a true epidemic, a plague, a Black Death and a pogrom. All our sincere anger was directed against it (...) In an hour, the organ of our ideological organization and the writers as such became the organ of national conscience."[33] All was restored to normal, and the crowds gathered in the central square of the gubernya town demonstrated in favor of a rejection of the cult; only the puzzling and as always not quite predictable young people rebelled and, setting fire to a pyre, called out: "Speak! Speak!"

The mini-novel by Tatarka provides an extremely apt diagnosis of the events which took place in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, at a time when the collapse of the cult of Stalin changed little. A new spirit did not became apparent until 1967 and the inauguration of a battle waged for socialism with a human face. Benefitting from the subsequent thaw the writer published in a journal a dissertation entitled *Obec božia, obec človečia* [Divine Commune, Human Commune](1968), containing a program of social reconstruction based on grass roots initiative. It features the oldest and most fundamental right to unhampered organization in the form of unions, communities and communes. Those which managed to survive were reduced by the state to "mechanisms of violence, consent for ornament or behind the stage self-will."[34] The reconstruction of authentic culture should be initiated from the creation of small social units, each of which would have the right to "feel that it is a divine commune, to overcome moribund conceptions, to enliven the social organism and to introduce tension therein."[35] The concept of "tension," which

33 Ibid., p.64.

34 Dominik Tatarka, "Obec božia, obec človečia," *Svědectví*, 1979, p.526.

35 Ibid., p.524.

was envisaged as creative unrest undermining the existing structures and schemes, conceals a counterpart, once again *avant la lettre,* of Lyotardian dissent and its comprehension.

Returning to the problem of communes some twenty years later in taped reminiscences, subsequently published in the volume entitled *Navrávačky* [Talks](1988), Tatarka proposed the example of a Protestant religious sect which during the second world war, trusting in the power of a victory of truth over evil, gathered in a local bakery to proclaim the approaching end of the hostilities and resorted to this belief as a source of strength. Other examples included the spiritual community of the readers of Ludvik Vaculík, the Czech opposition writer, the "holy dissident communes," whose prince was Václav Havel, as well as the ecumenical religious community, which was the goal of attempts made by Pope John Paul II.[36] The outcome of such communes was to assume the form of a republic comprehended in the French spirit, i.e. an ideal form of truly democratic governance, which uses the language of liberation and not directives.

The author of *Obec božia*..[Divine Commune] accused the communist state of violating yet another fundamental human right - the right to freedom of information and control over authority. The secrets concealed by Party secretaries from the nation comprise the basis of their authority, and make it possible to issue the most absurd directives. "It is quite understandable that such officials do not want a free circuit of information, which would deprive them of their secrets, without which they would become as extinct as antediluvian dinosaurs!," Tatarka prophesied.[37] The Party-state hierarchy is contrasted with free and independent communes, creating "an innerly free and just republic, and not a dehumanized state mechanism which tramples man."[38] In such communes, rulers and authorities would no longer be imposed from above, but chosen in free elections.

The conception of Tatarka's "divine commune" does not exhaust the political contents contained therein. Its strong foundation is the demonstration of the importance of culture, understood not instrumentally and pragmatically, as is the case in communist theories, but as a sovereign sphere of human activity, considering that every process of social renascence starts with culture.

The rebirth announced by Tatarka and many other Czech and Slovak writers was brutally halted by the invasion of Czechoslovakia, carried out by the Warsaw Pact on 21 August 1968. Tatarka was the only Slovak writer who dared to protest publicly against the armed intervention, and the first who, eleven years later, signed Charter 77, brought by Havel to Bratislava, a

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36 Dominik Tatarka, *Navrávačk*y (Köln, 1988), pp.97, 105, 197, 112.

37 Dominik Tatarka, *Obec božia,* p.524.

38 Ibid., p.525.

document with which the Czech underground declared war against the Husák system and the violation of human rights.

The protest voiced by Tatarka placed him outside the official range of the life of the Slovak community, which accepted the rules of Husák's game and shied from an author who had the courage to undermine it. Tatarka was subjected to brutal persecution, his books were removed from libraries and burnt, and the author suffered poverty and humiliation.

The postmodern memoirs by Tatarka, an autobiographical trilogy entitled *Písačky* [Scribbling], appeared abroad in 1968-1989. They consist of various forms, such as letters, diary notes, confessions addressed to posterity, and conversations with oneself, lovers, as well as dead and living friends, intermingled with reflections on political themes, dream-like visions and lyrical confessions. All are written down with little concern for repetition, gradation of events, the hierarchy of matters, and the subjugation of less significant ones, and without experiencing the modernist need for creating some sort of a cohesive construction of the presented and, essentially, dramatic events. Tatarka does not strive at any sort of synthesis, wide social generalizations, or the justification of *a priori* accepted theses, since, as he writes in *Navrávačky*, the era of the great novel about the masses has become part of the past. "Collectivism in literature, in other words, cyclical novels, have come to an end, and there is no sequel. In the wake of certain Party speeches, made from the position of power, we say: enough!"[39]

The disillusionment of writers was a feature characteristic for a certain generation. Neither Tatarka nor Peter Karvaš and Alfons Bednár, other eminent Slovak writers, completed their planned and inaugurated trilogies or dilogies, which in their original outline were to depict an epopee of victorious, just socialism intended for the wide masses. In its stead, Tatarka proposed a postmodern non-selective, de-centered and polymorphic autobiographical trilogy, which applies numerous narrative forms, but whose syncretic combination reflects better the spirit of the time, whose surface of ossified ideology concealed entirely different, new phenomena.

4. A TOTAL REJECTION OF ALL NARRATIVES IN THE POLITICAL TETRALOGY BY KUNDERA

Milan Kundera, a representative of a younger generation (b. 1929), entered adulthood after the so-called Victorious February of 1948 under the same auspices as those which influenced Tatarka's "enchantment with communism." In 1951, Tatarka supported the hanging of Clementis. In the late 1940s, the twenty year-old Kundera, together with other youngsters, ruled

39 Dominik Tatarka, *Navrávačk*y, p.95. More on the topic see: Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková, "Postmodernistyczny autobiografizm Dominika Tatarki," in Id., *Od modernizmu do postmodernizmu* (Katowice, 1996), pp.133-144.

the university. In other words, they selected and discharged disobedient students, and denounced professors, who failed to adapt or who did not wish to adjust to new reality. Nonetheless, neither he nor any other similar activist engaged in communist games managed to escape repressions, since ultimately he antagonized the Party.

This extremely traumatic experience formed the basis of the novel Žert [The Joke], which brought Kundera international fame and the trust of democratic groups. It also recurred in other variants and interpretations in three of his novels, which, together with *The Joke*, comprised a *sui generis* political tetralogy (Život je jinde / 1973, Life is Elsewhere /, *Kniha smíchu a zapomnění* / The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, 1983/ and *Nesnesitelná lekhost bytí* / 1984, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*).

The new "wind of history" blew straight into the faces of both Kundera and Tatarka. During the first postwar years in Czechoslovakia, this breeze, borne on the wings of the rationalism and skepticism of eighteenth-century French radicals and their German successors, headed by Marx and Engels, changed into an outright religious movement. "It was an era of great collective faith. A man who kept himself within the era experienced feelings that were all but religious: he renounced his ego, his person, his private life for something higher, something suprapersonal."[40] This is also the reason why it was not so much an order issued by Stalin, but the requirement of the moment to turn one's back on the "rotten West" envisaged as the source of the miasma of intellectual skepticism, individualism, distrust and pessimism connected with the then fashionable existentialism. The victorious working class demanded an absolutely optimistic approach to reality. The young Czech activist, the student Ludvik Jahn, hero of *The Joke*, experienced the same feeling from which Tatarka freed himself in *Demon of Consent* in 1956 - the belief that only an individual can err, but that the collective, envisaged as suprapersonal power whose activity is legitimated by the revolution, is infallible. Criticized for an excessively "intellectual smile" (the word "intellectual" being offensive), he tries to restrain it, but proves to be incapable of controlling his sense of humor, his contradictoriness and predilection for joking. After receiving a letter from his girlfriend Marketa, a young activist herself, in which she writes about the "healthy spirit" prevailing at an ideological training camp, Ludvik sends her a postcard with the famous words: "Optimism is the opium of the people! A healthy atmosphere stinks of stupidity! Long live Trotsky!"[41]

This was an era of suspicion and the quest for the class enemy was conducted everywhere. This is why an innocent joke, produced by jealousy and the wish to impress a girl, leads the hero of the novel into the hell of denunciation, verification and disintegration. Finally, it becomes the reason

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40 Milan Kundera, *The Joke*, trans. from the Czech by Michael Heim [Originally published as *Žert*, 1967] (London, 1982), p.190.

41 Ibid., p.46.

for ousting Ludvik, a supposed Trotskyite mocking the ideals of Marxism-Leninism, first from the Party and then from the University. The final verdict is passed at a meeting of young people, at which another activist, Pavel Zemanek, Ludvik's friend, submits a motion about depriving Ludvik of his Party membership as just punishment for besmirching ideals. The voting, similarly as at all such occasions of the period, is held by raising hands. This unforgettable "forest of hands" relegates our hero from the orbit of history. Ludvik is condemned to compulsory labor in the mines of Ostrava, the destination of people regarded as enemies of the people for no particular reason. The fact that they are the victims of terror does not render them more tolerant towards others. The target of successive collective ostracism is a so-called communist-believer, Alexy, sent to the mine as the son of a person wrongly recognized as an enemy of the people and sentenced to death. Alexy is convinced that the Party cannot err, and upon learning about the sentence passed on his father, renounces him publicly. In response to this deed, which the other inmates consider unethical, they decide to drive Alexy to suicide by showing their contempt. This death makes Ludvik aware of the unbearable truth that man is capable of annihilating another person in all sorts of conditions, especially when he enjoys the support of a group. Activity pursued in the name of a shared idea, regardless whether pro- or anti-communist, leads to terror.

Upon his dismissal from the mine, Ludvik tries to seek revenge against his oppressor, the young political activist Zemanek, but the entire well-planned project fails. A new mistake poses yet another obstacle, and reality as a whole proves to be a sequence of errors and deviations. The divine and just character of history is one great joke:

"How happy I would be to revoke the whole story of my life! But what power have I to do so when the errors it stemmed from were not wholly my own? Who, in fact, made the error of taking my stupid joke seriously? Who made the error of arresting and sentencing Alexy's father, long since rehabilitated but nonetheless dead? So frequent, so common were those errors that they cannot be considered mere exceptions, aberrations in the order of things: they *were* the order of things. And who made them? History itself? History the divine, the rational? And why call them history's errors? What if history plays jokes?"[42]

The existential situation in which Kundera as hero found himself during the Stalinist period is described, or rather divided by the Czech author in accordance with the principles of polyphony, observed and realized in all of his works, i.e. the legitimation of not a single but many discourses, expressed by the four heroes of the novel: Ludvik, Helena, the wife of his oppressor and a dangerous political protagonist, Dr. Kostka, a religious man but willing to accept communism as a continuation of Christian theodicy, and Jaromil, an

42 Ibid., p.240.

admirer of folklore, who first expected that communism would recognize his worth and then transforms himself into his own parody. Thanks to the multiplicity of those discourses, of which the most "enlightened" (a term introduced by Kundera) is the discourse by Ludvik, the reader can feel the pulse of the communist era in early postwar Czechoslovakia, and its assorted individual manifestations. In the novel, such discourses fulfil also the function of mirrors placed before the main figure, i.e. Ludvik. They confront his cultural awareness with the consciousness of the other heroes, also committed to the ideology of communism, and each, in his own different way, betrayed by that ideology.

Ultimately, the novel leads to a loss of faith in history and its teleological order, determined in Hegelian-Marxian theodicy, whose consequence was to be a just administration of justice for those who try to free themselves from its "iron laws." By accentuating an insignificant youthful joke and its grave aftermath, the author shows human existence and history in the categories of accident, and thus unforeseeable events, and in the categories of a trap, set for those who trusted the symbols with which history adorned itself at the time. Finally, he perceives them in categories of a mockery of all values, publicly proclaimed in the name of history from the political platforms of the period, and a mockery of the absence of the intellect which, next to progress and equality, comprised the postmodern, and by no means solely communist Holy Trinity.

The Joke accused all the above mentioned elements of binding ideology; this is the reason why the novel can be acknowledged as the first in Czech literature dealing with the *avant la lettre* great narratives about the emancipation of man by means of the realization of the idea about the role of the intellect in history, launched by the Encyclopaedists, and the slogans of the French Revolution (liberty, equality, fraternity), adapted by the communist movement. The Eastern relatives of the Jacobins turned liberty into the acknowledgement of necessity, while egalitarianism, just as in revolutionary France, led to the beheading of those who behaved and thought differently, and the slogans of fraternity and equality produced collective lynching.

This essentially tragic problem was depicted by Kundera in a manner distant from pathos; on the contrary, postmodern (also *avant la lettre*) radical irony and parody offer a method of portraying the false and tangled consciousness of an era and its people; from a formal point of view, tragedy is often supplanted by farce or black comedy. This is the convention of the grand latrine scene closing the work, in which the writer, in a Rabelais-Bakhtin-Hašek spirit, entrusted the corporeal "bottom" of Helena with the function of ridiculing the vengeful wishes of the hero in relation to his former persecutor Zemanek. The revenge was to consist in the seduction of Zemanek's wife, Helena. True, Ludvik succeeds in carrying out his project, but without any greater meaning from the viewpoint of the planned revenge, since Zemanek was quite willing to get rid of his wife; more, he is no longer the narrow-

minded political activist, whom he was at the time of ousting Ludvik from the Party, but has become a great Party reformer. Abandoned by Ludvik, Helena tries to commit suicide, but instead of taking sleeping pills she mistakenly swallows laxatives.

In Ž*ivot je jinde* [Life Is Elswhere] the theme of rejecting grand narratives recurs, but is seen from a different perspective, no longer that of the victim but of the executioner, who appears in the least anticipated form of the "lyrical poet" Jaromil. The latter narcistically observes himself in the hope of leaving his home and setting off towards fame and true life, which *is elsewhere*, in other words, beyond the range of daily life - a region of unusual, magnificent and wondrous things, which, in the conviction of the "lyrical poet," lie within the sphere of the revolution. The revolution calls for its own bards, and offers an opportunity for demonstrating talent before a mass audience; the revolution kindles the imagination. Naturally, it also demands victims but, as Albert Camus wrote in *L'homme revolté*, from the moment when the Marxist-Leninist doctrine sanctioned the revolution in European culture, the revolutionaries required primarily the heads of others, and not their own. The deeds committed by Jaromil are very near to those of which Camus accused the bards of the revolutions - he denounced his professors and perpetrated even more heinous crimes; for example, a wish to find a permanent place in "real male life" leads to an association with the militia apparatus of oppression at a time when cooperation of this sort was already regarded as cooperation with the devil; subsequently, his radical statements about the incompatibility of avant-garde art and socialism ruin the life of a certain painter, and expressing a supposedly authentic enthusiasm, in reality based on falsehood (in 1948 enthusiasm was still voluntary, but already compulsory), he denounces the brother of his red-haired lover by accusing him of planning to escape abroad. In addition, as fitting for a black comedy in whose direction the novel finally evolves, his lover is imprisoned for no apparent reason, since her brother never intended to leave the country. Here, similarly as in *The Joke*, the hero is encircled with mirrored walls, which reflect not so much the truth (as in the epistemological works of modernists) but the lies used both by others and by himself. Everyone is embroiled in this network of mutual lies and hypocrisy, the object of Kundera's endless fascination.

The hero of the novel has an alter ego (a topos frequent in postmodern literature), who assumes the form of Ksawery, a boy from his dreams, his ideal alternative I, indicating who Jaromil would actually want to be, a dream doomed to failure since he lives in an era governed by rules other than the ones he longs for.

The accounts settled with the actual "poet-executioner" would be unambiguous in their symbolic aspect (at the end of the novel he is literally kicked out of a social gathering, and falls to his death through a balcony window), if Jaromil, together with his idealistic semi-illusions, semi-sophistry and a passionate urge for a life which is elsewhere (the very title of the novel

is taken from the closing words of a surrealistic manifesto by Andre Breton: "la vie est ailleurs"), had not been included into a wider inter-cultural and inter-textual context. The latter ennobles him and Jaromil ceases being a monster of evil and becomes part of the great constellation of European poets of various nations and ages, who always set off to the place where they could excel, enjoy the applause of the crowd, and attain fame in the glow of wartime or revolutionary fires. In assorted snapshots, Kundera shows that Rimbaud, Shelley, Halas, Wolker, Keats and Lermontov too sought the eye of the cyclone, fought, or took part in duels, or, like Rimbaud, tried to mount the barricades. During the twentieth century, an age of great numbers, poets are duplicated in numerous copies.

"But in 1968, thousands of Rimbauds have their own barricades. Standing behind them they refuse to make any compromise with the temporary owners of the world. Liberation of man must be total or nothing. The French barricades of 1968 brandished the same slogans as those which inspired the generation of Czech revolutionaries, the 'lyrical poets' of 1948."[43]

By placing an equal sign between two such different events as the revolt of Parisian youth against the capitalist system in 1968 and the struggle of Czech youth for the sake of socialism in 1948, a battle which was subjectively authentic and objectively manipulated (in the eyes of the West the 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia was an ordinary communist putsch), Kundera produced the astonished reaction of French literary critics. In a conversation with Christian Salmon he insisted on upholding his stand, and treats *Life Is Elsewhere* "as a novel of the European revolution as such, in its condensed form (...). As the parody condensation of the European revolutionary tradition. As the continuation and grotesque fulfillment of the era of the European revolutionary tradition."[44]

In the last two parts of his political tetralogy which, just as *Life Is Elsewhere*, was written abroad, Kundera goes further than Lyotard in the rejection of great future-oriented myths. He repudiates all narratives, great or small, perceiving in them a dangerous similarity to the single narrative of communism, which he experienced so painfully. In this manner, in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* the recollection of the "dance of innocence and brotherhood," which "innocent" young people performed in the streets of Prague in the company of Paul Eluard and for the sake of the defense of world peace, at a time when so-called enemies of the revolution (more exactly, the surrealistic poet Kalendra) were hung behind their backs, is confronted with events in the West; here once again young people, in a certain way also wearing uniforms (this time dressed not in blue shirts with a red Pioneer kerchief but

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43 Milan Kundera, *Life Is Elsewhere (Život je jinde)*, trans. from the Czech by Peter Kussi (New York, 1986), p.126.

44 Milan Kundera, *The Arts of the Novel* [first published in French as *L'art du roman* in 1986], trans. by Linda Asher (London, 1988), p.40.

in hippy jeans and cotton T-shirts), seemingly innocent and convinced about the correctness of their reasons, form a circle of dancing defenders of the natural environment. They are confident that by protesting against nuclear plants and weapons they fight not only for the retention of the environment, but also for peace. In other words, the great communist narrative from the end of the 1940s is replaced by its ecological-pacifistic counterpart. The novel proposes a parody of another narrative which is not so much of communist but of purely Western origin - emancipation through sex. What is even more interesting, the promoters of such emancipation are no longer young people; in accordance with Kundera's conviction about the progressing childishness of society, this role is played by children on the "dream" island of Tamina. Sex, however, does not emancipate from anything, but intensifies conflicts. Possession by sex leads to violence, including group rape and group terror. In *The Joke* the victim of terror initiated by teenagers is young Lucia, Ludvik's girl. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the victim is Tamina, a mature woman driven to death by apparently innocent children, whose predatory nature equals that of animals. The attack launched against the sexual narrative has another foundation composed of ideological childhood traumas. The "innocent" children from Tamina's island bring to mind the "innocent" children of East European from the Stalinist period and the neo-Stalinist times of President Gustáv Husák, the Czechoslovak Pioneers wearing red kerchiefs, and presenting the order of the Honorary Pioneer to a President hated by the nation as "the president of forgetting."[45]

Those narratives are observed and described by Kundera, who with characteristic irony and skepticism gradually discloses open hostility towards all attempts made by man to find stability in a decentralized and unstable world, to seek a position which would enable the individual to overcome his loneliness and to act together with others.

In the last part of his political tetralogy, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera resorts to contrasts of contradictory statements, accompanied by his own ironic commentaries, thus evoking a category of a postmodern world of the end of God and the end of man. Suspended in an existential vacuum, generated by the emergence of the titular unbearable lightness of being, Kundera's heroes turn away from such traditional values as motherland, nation, the masses or revolution. Only the idea of the Grand March, connected with the grand narratives, continues to exist in the vacuum, although it becomes increasingly empty. The Grand March, which the author introduces as one of the key concepts, is a metaphor of pseudo-revolutionary undertakings, intent on the implementation of the social utopias expounded by

45 Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting (Kniha smíchu a zapomnění)*, trans. from the Czech by Michael Henry Heim (New York, 1981), see p.158: "If France Kafka was the prohet of world without memory, Gustav Husak is its creator… the seventh president of my country, is known as the president of forgetting."

European leftists. Kundera rejects the idea of a joint march in the belief that it too conceals the possibility of terror. This problem is presented in the form of at least five figures (their deeds and emotions), who speak different cultural tongues. From the viewpoint of the examined problem, the most interesting appears to be a confrontation of the "key words" (which cloak certain ideological attitudes) used by Sabina, a Czech emigré, and her Swiss admirer, Franz. Sabina rejects all revolution, marches and demonstrations, regardless of their purpose. Her decision to emigrate to the West was an escape from the compulsion to "march in a row" and to be transparent. Apparently, the West too lives in a Grand March - the streets of European cities witness daily demonstrations. Sabina becomes aware of a pressure bidding her to join, and refuses to do so since in this atmosphere she discovers the new face of old terror: "Behind all Communism, Fascism, behind all occupations and invasions lurks a more basic, pervasive evil and the image of that evil was a parade of people marching by with raised fists and shouting identical syllables in unison."[46] On the other hand, Franz, who never experienced totalitarian pressure directly, cultivates marches and likes being transparent. "How nice it is to celebrate something, demand something, protest against something, to be out in the open, to be with others (...) He saw the marching, shouting crowd as the image of Europe and its history. Europe was the Grand March. He marched from revolution to revolution, from struggle to struggle, ever onward."[47] It is with nostalgia and even jealousy that Franz reacts to threats and tension as great as those in Czechoslovakia, which provide an opportunity for making sacrifices in a struggle against a hostile regime. He compensates this lack by taking part in other grand marches of the epoch and involving himself on the side of communist China and Korea, to finally die in Bangkok, killed by brigands while returning from a great expedition conducted by Western intellectuals, journalists and film stars. Noble and decent Franz proves to be a fool. He placed his trust in the leftist utopia, which in the meantime, in the opinion of Kundera, turned into kitsch. Franz dies for the sake of kitsch. From the time when he chose to emigrate, Kundera regards all ideology as kitsch. There is nothing, even the smallest petit récit, which deserves to be supported, with the sole exception of the story about the dog Karenin, a polemic against Descartes and the object of an attack launched by postmodernists.

From the moment when Kundera dramatically parted ways with the first grand narrative in his life - the communist narrative - he never abandoned the problem of the narrative, regarded from the theoretical point of view. Kundera notices the return of old ideas in new costume, but the longer he remains an emigrant, the more those narrative ideas fade, and turn into phantoms and simulacres, in other words, simulated copies of reality that

46 Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being (Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí)*, trans. by Michael Henry Heim (London, 1995), p.97.

47 Ibid., pp.96-97.

had lost all reference to the original. The totalizing obsession characteristic for all grand narratives becomes anti-totalizing. The absence of a strong modernistic ideology becomes a challenge to create a new ideology - one composed of question marks, understanding, and tolerance for assorted ways of living, thinking and feeling.

"The novelist teaches the reader to comprehend the world as a question," Kundera claims. "There is wisdom and tolerance in that attitude. In a world built on sacrosanct certainties the novel is dead. The totalitarian world, whether founded on Marx, Islam, or anything else, is a world of answers rather than questions."[48]

The universe of Kundera's novels is populated by a crowd of persons, each of whom has his own distinct life, his own complex of views, his own system of behavior and separate ethics. All those variants of experience and moral interpretation of life are legitimate, and the writer attempts to understand and tolerate them all, with the exception of fundamentalist experiences.

Such an approach to life is admired by yet another anti-fundamentalist, the American postmodern philosopher Richard Rorty, for whom the Kundera's novel, without a single description of the world privileged at the cost of ignoring others, is, "roughly speaking, a synonym of democratic utopia, i.e. an imaginary future society, in which no-one dreams about believing that God, Truth or the nature of things are on his side; the supreme virtue of such utopia, if created, would be tolerance and not the quest for truth."[49]

5. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MODERN MASTER NARRATIVES IN *THE PULP* BY JERZY ANDRZEJEWSKI

The Polish writer Jerzy Andrzejewski (born 1909) debuted as a representative of ideological stands different from those of Kundera or Tatarka. He began his literary career on the eve of the second world war as an author linked with Catholic circles and the rightist weekly "Prosto z mostu." *Ład serca* (Order of the Heart), a gloomy and disturbing novel written in 1938, brought him the prestigious award of the periodical "Wiadomości Literackie" and the acclaim of a Polish moralist on par with Georges Bernanos. Subsequently, Andrzejewski resigned from his cooperation with "Prostu z mostu," disillusioned by the attitude of its editorial board towards nationalism and the Jewish question.

From 1941, Andrzejewski was active, together with Czesław Miłosz in

48 "Afteward: A Talk with the Author by Philip Roth" in Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.237.

49 Richard Rorty, "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," in Id., *Essays on Heidegger and others* (Cambridge, UK, 1991), p.75. More on Kundera and Rorty see: Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková, "Twórczość Milana Kundery z perspektywy postmodernistycznej," in Jerzy Wyrozumski, ed., *Czechy i Polska na szlakach ich kulturalnego rozwoju* (Kraków, 1998),pp. 179-206.

wartime clandestine "Wolność" (Liberty) group, which according to Synoradzka was involved in providing aid to the Jewish population and other persons persecuted and incarcerated by the German police.[50] He also accompanied Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz, a representative of the underground Polish state. After the war, Andrzejewski altered his views radically, and from a fervent Catholic catechumen and a supporter of Polish government in London turned into an even more ardent communist neophyte. During the Stalinist period, he was the author of articles and brochures which his otherwise rather kindly inclined biographer describes in the harshest possible terms, declaring that they "duplicated official propaganda. The writer did not hesitate to repeat the greatest nonsense, absurdities, lies and slander."[51] The authorities rewarded him generously by offering, for example, an eight-room villa in Szczecin, and entrusted a number of important tasks on the so-called ideological front.

This is the atmosphere in which Andrzejewski wrote his celebrated novel *Popiół i diament* [Ashes and Diamond](1947) concerning ideological battles waged in Poland after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising and the liberation of the country by the Soviet Army. The novel dealt a blow aimed against the young Home Army generation, the posthumous heirs of the Uprising, whom Andrzejewski depicted dying on the refuse dump of history, and embroiled in a murky process of settling accounts with the communists, a motif particularly accentuated by the film version. Such an interpretation of the tragic fate of a heroic uprising betrayed by Russia produced bitter reactions among Home Army groups, and correctly so, since, as the contemporary literary critics underline, the novel contains not a single word about the Polish and Soviet communists, who at that time murdered imprisoned Polish patriots. The reason for the absence of this motif is the fact that Andrzejewski "always knew exactly what could and could not be written."[52]

In *Captive Mind*, a novel published in Paris, Czesław Miłosz, already an emigré, based the figure of Alfa on Jerzy Andrzejewski, an exemplification of one of the three described mechanisms of the intellectual taming of writers in the totalitarian system. For over forty years, *Ashes and Diamond*, which cast a dismal shadow on the Warsaw Uprising, remained obligatory reading in Polish schools.

In the meantime, Andrzejewski changed his views, and the former bard of communism became a critic of communist totalitarianism, as evidenced by *Ciemności kryją ziemię* [Darkness Envelopes the Earth], an historical novel about the Holy Inquisition. In 1957, he was one of the first Polish men of letters to leave the Party, which he joined in 1950, as a sign of protest against its policy.

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50 Anna Synoradzka, *Andrzejewski* (Kraków, 1997), p.52.

51 Ibid., p.105.

52 Jacek Trznadel, "Andrzejewski. Hamlet-kondotier honoru," in Id., *Polski Hamlet*, 2nd ed. (Warszawa, 1995), p.363

He parted also with socialist realism as the only just method of creative work, which he had glorified earlier. Works issued during the 1960s and later show Andrzejewski as an unflagging artistic experimenter, engaged in a constant search for new forms of expression. His novel *Bramy raju* [Gates of Paradise] applied, for example, the technique of the nouveau roman, while certain stories introduced grotesque forms.

From that time on, his fate followed a well-trodden course familiar to the majority of outstanding Polish dissidents. Accused of revisionism, Andrzejewski was repressed by censorship, affected by a temporary ban on publication (later lifted thanks to the intervention of Jerzy Putrament), and increasingly strongly associated with the opposition. In 1976, he was one of the founders of the Workers' Defense Committee, a step which contributed to further official condemnation and won him sympathy in the world of culture. Abroad, Andrzejewski became a favorite of the media and assorted foundations. In 1959, he received a Ford scholarship, which enabled him to stay for a few months in Paris, where he made contacts with Polish emigrés. In 1962, Andrzejewski was presented with an award granted by Radio Free Europe. At the turn of 1966, he set off for a several months-long stay in France, preceded by a two-week tour of Germany, which included lectures and meetings with readers. While in Paris, Andrzejewski established contacts with "Kultura Paryska," and in 1967 he permitted (although he was an extremely careful if not outright timid person) the Kultura Library to publish under his own name the novel *Apelacja* [Appellation], a harsh critique of a system which he too for a certain time helped to create. In a 1976 interview for RFN radio he ventured to say (at that time it was dangerous for him) that Russian communism was an enemy of progress and of human dignity and was forced by Russians on conquered nations.[53]

In the mid-1960s, Andrzejewski began gathering material and writing first sketches of *Miazga* (The Pulp), envisaged as a portrait of Polish life and, at the same time, a quest for a new form of writing. The author was capable of making excellent use of the so-called high style. At a certain moment, however, he noticed that he was veering towards academic art and should once again transform his style and the construction of the novels so as to render them capable of expressing the all-pervading feeling that reality is a chaos just as complex as his psyche.

In an interview with Jacek Trznadel, Andrzejewski explained that while giving the novel the title *The Pulp* he had in mind defeat. "A pulp is something left behind by a person who, for example, jumps from the twentieth storey!"[54]

If we were to follow the example of Maria Golaszewska then the key to *Miazga* could be conceived in the concept of the indefiniteness, amorphousness

53 Anna Synoradzka, *Andrzejewski*, p.179.

54 Jacek Trznadel, "Andrzejewski. Hamlet-kondotier honoru," p.379.

and ambiguity of that which is concealed by the titular "pulp" - an image of Polish life at the turn of the 1960s.[55]

Originally, the author intended to write a novel about the wedding of a Warsaw actor and actress - probably a new version of a topos, which from the time of the celebrated *Wesele* [Wedding], a drama by Stanisław Wyspiański, became rooted in Polish culture. This topos demonstrated national strivings, which emerge from informal conversations and the discussions conducted by the invited guests. In the Wyspiański drama the guests represent different social classes; the crowd parading across the Andrzejewski novel is composed of the Warsaw elite, predominantly of artists and Party activists. The plot grows more and more complicated, as befitting a postmodern novel. The actual nuptials never take place (owing to the ambivalent attitude of both heroes to the institution of marriage, and their narcissistic self-involvement). Nonetheless, a wedding of sorts does occur (in the form of descriptions of scenes which should have taken place), accompanied by a depiction of the reception attended by a motley group of guests, and their conversations, which supplement the image of the magma-like Polish reality, in which the system of power intensifies repression although in reality its rule over the nation is deteriorating. From an objective viewpoint, this was a difficult stage in the postwar history of Poland. The year 1968 witnessed the so-called March events, when a ban on performing *Dziady* [Forefathers], a drama by Adam Mickiewicz, led to a protest held by students and their supporters, the so-called commandos (the opposition), who demonstrated in the streets and battled against the police. Consequently, the commandos (who included numerous intellectuals of Jewish descent) were forced to emigrate. In August 1968, the invasion of Czechoslovakia carried out by the Warsaw Pact, with the participation of Polish troops, produced unrest, stifled from above. Political trials and the questioning of socialism multiplied. The novel opens with a description of one such trial, conducted on 7 March 1970 - the so-called case of the Tatra mountain climbers, members of the Polish intelligentsia who smuggled Western publications.

Andrzejewski completed *Miazga* in the second half of 1970. The censors agreed to its publication in 1982, when the novel appeared in Poland. Earlier, it was issued in London by an emigré publishing house.

Finishing the novel, its author had already accomplished two grand narratives: Catholic and communist, which he co-created by means of his

55 Maria Gołaszewska, "Postmodernistyczna absolutyzacja wieloznaczności. Estetyczna analiza dzieła postmodernistycznego na przykładzie 'Miazgi' Andrzejewskiego," in Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková, Douwe Fokkema, eds., *Postmodernizm w literaturze i kulturze krajów Europy-Środkowo-Wschodniej* (Katowice, 1995), pp.211-222; The same in English, Id., "Postmodern Absolutisation of Ambiguity. An Aesthetic Analysis of the Postmodern Work upon the Exemple of 'Miazga' by Jerzy Andrzejewski," in Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková, Douwe Fokkema, eds., *Postmodernism in Literature and Culture of Central and Eastern Europe* (Katowice, 1996), pp.219-229.

own works, and which brought him the officially recognized rank of a "moral authority," of rather dubious merit in the light of his radical changes of views. He treated his ideological transformations, whose direction and rate must appear astonishing, in a rather lighthearted manner: "During a certain period, my involvement, to use the term, was slightly different, and comprised only one of my life reasons or simply an outer skin worn and then cast off."[56] Andrzejewski once again changed his skin at the end of the 1960s. He noticed and described the demise of the totalitarian narrative by resorting to the form of parody and pamphlet. He was rather on the side of the "commandos" and "Tatra mountain climbers" than the authorities, but still refrained from open statements and suspended all assessments. The disintegration of the totalitarian narrative is shown in categories and close-ups similar to postmodernism. This feature is indicated by the amorphous structure of the novel, composed of numerous narratives, a well planned structure. The author proclaims: "it had to be pulp"[57] and elsewhere distinctly declares: "For many years now I have not longed for order... I am surrounded by question marks to which I find no answer."[58] The novel encompasses such different elements as notes from the private diary of the author, remarks about books which he read, self-thematic problems (concerning the manner in which the main hero of the novel, the writer Adam Nagorski, works and the difficulties which he encounters), biographies of the heroes of the novel, prepared in encyclopedic form, fragments of classical fictional narrative, in which the author demonstrates the splendor of high art (the drama about Prometheus), alongside stories and scenes from daily life, deprived of all attempts at rendering them lofty or mythological, and in which the Polish cultural commonplace and its vulgar and obscene language come to the forefront. This is a reality writhing with passion, and resembling the Deleuzian "machine devorante," from which ideology is ousted by common desires: power and sex. The greatest passion is stirred by homosexual relationships, shown drastically and openly, a characteristic feature of contemporaneity portrayed in Polish literature. The multi-vocal and multi-stylistic nature of the work corresponds to the amorphous structure of the reality described by Andrzejewski, which, similarly to the titular "pulp," is totally deconstructed, devoid of value, and composed of the tenacious boredom of lies, falsehood and silence, in which human faces change, as on the canvases by Bosch or Goya, into monstrosities, "terrible strangers before whom one must conceal one's face behind masks and grimaces, in order not to loose that face; putrid bars, vodka, vodka, hangovers. Babble and squeals, stupid disgusting sluts, debilitated friends, the snouts of editors shitting their colorful pants bought at a bazaar (...), jealous scribblers with bank accounts swollen like the bellies of drowned men,

56 Jerzy Andrzejewski, *Miazga* (London, 1981), p.62.

57 Ibid., p.187.

58 Ibid., p.97.

old fools, powdered and titled whores always willing to offer their arses, manure, manure, a dung heap." This was a sample of characteristic Polish reality and the new style proposed by Andrzejewski, so very different from the modernistic, sophisticated, refined and dreadfully boring prose a la Thomas Mann of *Już tylko nic* [Now Only Nothing] which preceded *Miazga.* The deconstruction and fragmentation of outer reality and the inner personality of the fictional heroes, rebellious but still aware of their helplessness, is accompanied by the ambiguity of that reality, a constant questioning of numerous events, both current and past. The conception of culture also changed. The author of "uplifting" Party brochures and novels noticed that Polish culture was no longer a space devoted to the creation of new socialist ethics, but a profound spiritual wasteland - helplessness, enslavement, the loss of faith in one's own strength. The author resigns from a global interpretation of phenomena and a reference to some sort of absolute truths, which he once discerned in religion and then in Marxism. That which continues to pulsate under the surface is the still glowing national feeling, although it too is uncertain and accompanied by numerous question marks.

Miazga is a novel symptomatic for the 1970s, a period in which the Polish intelligentsia, its part connected with power, lost its illusions, and which put an end to all hope for changing socialism into a democratic system, a premonition of the agony of the system, and a fear that this agony may last too long. In this case, the disappearance of master narratives is linked with a feeling of emptiness and political exhaustion.

This settlement of accounts pertains, however, predominantly to the Polish liberal and leftist intelligentsia, since, if we take a closer look at the biographical part of the novel, it becomes obvious that it includes Party activists and the security police, but does not encompass - as Trznadel puts "the postwar Polish pro-independence opposition - former members of the Home Army, tortured in prison, and the non-leftist democratic opposition, which somehow managed to survive the most difficult years without resorting to ideological contortions."[59] The disappearance of master narratives in *The Pulp* is thus connected first of all with a feeling of emptiness and the exhaustion of the communist political system as well as the degeneration of its elites, with whom, despite all the "revisionism" (which, in a certain sense, comprised his integral part) Andrzejewski was associated throughout his entire adult life. After all, revisionism was also a component of the system.

CONCLUSIONS

The works of the discussed authors do not expend the problem of the grand narrative in Western Slavonic literature nor set up a list of eminent writers drawn, in one way or another, into combating communist regime

59 Jacek Trznadel, "Andrzejewski. Hamlet-kondotier honoru," p.379.

(Konwicki, Havel, Mrożek, Vaculík, Škvorecký, and others). They are merely a paradigmatic example of the assorted stages and forms of tackling the great fundamental narratives: from a passionate struggle for the sake of rejecting inseparable totalizing obsessions in the *Demon of Consent* by Tatarka, via the loss of faith in the divine nature of history, its iron laws and wisdom in *The Joke* by Kundera, up to their disappearance caused by the lengthy agony of the system (*The Pulp* by Andrzejewski) or the exhaustion of their creative potential (Milan Kundera in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*). In the case of the latter author, the modernistic mentality of the grand narratives is contrasted with…a new postmodern narrative, fundamentally anti-fundamental, absolutizing the principle of the multiplicity of options, pluralism, an unhampered and mutually contradictory game of interests as well as the life and moral reasons of the numerous subjects of reality - the heroes of Kundera's novel.

Against the backdrop of the overwhelming majority of the literary production in countries where, as Andrzejewski wrote correctly, the model of life had to be restricted to a narrow reality and literature was "in a certain sense a counterpart of the chronicle of accidents and a complaints column,"[60] the works of three Western Slavonic writers: the later Tatarka, the later Andrzejewski and Kundera (*en bloc*) form an unusual phenomenon both as regards the philosophical horizon of their thought, transcending beyond the system, and for aesthetic reasons. Their authors resigned from flat veristic descriptions, traditional plots and ways of storytelling for the sake of a contrast between the high and low, the lofty style of art and the trivial and obscene aspects of everyday life and language, great abstract theories and the unpredictable turmoil of reality. They resorted to parody, pastiche, pamphlets, the grotesque, black humor, and radical irony, in other words, those measures of artistic expression whose amassment is characteristic for *par excellence* postmodern literature. By introducing into their works the revived topos of the Double, labyrinth and mirrors, they multiplied lies and the truth about the reality of an era of violent transformations, revolution and terror, in which seemingly transparent truths prove to be dark and complicated.

SUPPLEMENT: THE DECLINE OF GREAT NARRATIVES IN THE SOCIAL RECEPTION IN SLAVONIC COUNTRIES: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Long before the official capitulation of communism in 1989, when Western theoreticians (Lyotard) announced the downfall of the grand narrative, including the communist narrative, the much earlier works of Western Slavonic writers testified to such an erosion immediately after the death of Stalin.

60 Ibid., p.187.

With all certainty, Western Slavonic authors were not isolated among the Slavs in their destruction of communist utopias. Tendencies towards undermining the latter are to be encountered also in Russian literature, both in the works of traditional authors as Solzhenitsyn as well of the so-called early postmodernists, such as Andrei Bitov, who in his novel *Pushkinskii dom* attacked the entire petrified tradition of classical Russian literature and the resultant excrescence of schemes and intellectual stereotypes of socialist realism, unfitting for current Soviet reality. The same holds true for Venedikt Yerofeyev's *Moskva-Petushki,* which shows, supposedly through a drunken haze, the hypocrisy and nonsense of Soviet civilization, for the Moscow conceptualists, who turned inside out all ideological slogans and cliches supporting the existence of communist utopia in order to disclose the concealed emptiness, and for a whole bevy of postmodern writers of the 1990s, liberating themselves from the complex of authoritarianism, characteristic for the great narratives, as shown by Tetsuo Mochizuki in his paper about postmodern Russian prose of the 1990s. Such examples could be multiplied. A comparative analysis of Western and Eastern Slavonic men of letters, engaged in combatting all narratives, would also reveal, alongside parallels, numerous differences. Owing to the interest shown by readers in Russian literature, conceived as a traditional, although by no means the only correct point of reference for other Slavonic literatures, and despite the fact that this theme remains entirely outside the scope of my study (as evidenced in its title), I would like to note that:

1. In the *oeuvre* of the Russian writers, mentioned above by way of example, similarly to the works of Western Slavonic men of letters, we come across a postmodern critique of phenomena associated with the realization of great future-oriented utopias according to the Soviet version of modernity, but not with a holistic interpretation, close to Western philosophers (Lyotard, Rorty), as in the case of Milan Kundera or Dominik Tatarka. The very manner of arguing against the irrationality of the system also differs, as does the amplitude of emotions, the style of writing and, last but not least, the considerably smaller familiarity with West European literature and culture; the latter phenomenon was the outcome of the obstacles created in the Soviet Union against the flow of information, including an acquaintanceship with French ideas of liberty, which exerted so great impact upon Kundera and Tatarka, and which also played a permanent role in the transformations of late Andrzejewski.

2. Just as different was the attitude to the great communist narratives on the part of Russian society *en masse* as compared to the approach prevalent in Western Slavonic countries. From the time of the October Revolution, Russian society was imbued with the conviction that the Soviet Union fulfilled a global mission in the service of a revolution which should render happy all nations; it was this uplifting feeling which enabled Russian society to suffer the poverty and humiliations of real communism.

In the wake of a brief period of a semi-authentic and semi-enforced fascination with communism, the dominating mood among the Western Slavs

was nostalgia for the period of true democracy, and not its so-called socialist variant, as well as a rapidly and suddenly growing wish to achieve liberation from the culture of the communist East, perceived as primitive and dangerous.

This is the reason why when the downfall of the Soviet version of great modernistic narratives was confirmed not only by literature, but also by the historical fact of the abdication or defeat of communism in 1989, it was accompanied in Russia by apocalyptic moods (as evidenced by Epstein),[61] full of despair and sorrow for lost unity, while Poland and Czechoslovakia experienced relief and liberation (according to Dziamski)[62] or at least a "excellent disaster," to cite Piskor.[63] The history of other master narratives, and predominantly the great capitalistic narrative about emancipation with the mediation of the self-regulating market, forecast by Lyotard and much later retained with his partial blessing, is already an entirely different matter, transcending the scope of this study. On the philosophical level, however, there exists a certain association since, in the opinion of Lyotard, both narratives were to collapse or at least lose their credibility. The current "globoshock" once again undermines trust. Amidst the tide of responses to the question: "Who is in control of the global economy," which in practice denotes also an inquiry concerning control over global politics, i.e. human life, the closest to the spirit of the writings of Lyotard appears to be the concise answer given by Michael Elliot in "Newsweek": NOBODY.[64]

"Nobody" signifies also all: all those who take part in the global heterogeneous game for money and power, as well as those who bear its consequences: billions of human atoms, set into lively intellectual motion under the impact of recent events. The question is whether the unveiled incredulity towards the grand narrative of capitalism, with a self-regulating market, will change into a total loss of illusion, or whether that market will benefit from today's crisis and truly regulate itself? Time will show. It is just as interesting to see what will be the opinion of the "Pope of postmodernism," recently busy predicting in his *L'Inhumain* the decline of the human spirit in the wake of the disintegration of our planet in the course of the next 4.5 billion years.

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61 Mikhail Epstein, *After Future. The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporay Russian Culture*, trans. with an introduction by Anesa Miller-Pogacar (Amherst, 1995), see p.71: "The principal problem posed of this year (Author refers there to 1989 - note by H.J.-I.) is no longer a (derivative) social or a political one, but rather eschatological one: how to live after one's own future, or, if you like, after one's own death."

62 Dziamski Grzegorz, *Awangarda po awangardzie. Od neoawangardy do postmodernizm* (Poznań, 1995), p.56.

63 Piskor Stanisław, "Postmodernizm stosowany?" in Bożena Tokarz and Stanisław Piskor, eds., *Ponowoczesność a Tożsamość* (Katowice, 1997), p. 276.

64 Michael Elliot, "Coming apart," *Newsweek*, October 12, 1998, p.244.