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# IDENTITY AND (DE)FORMATION OF THE PAST IN DARKO TUŠEVLJAKOVIĆ'S NOVEL *THE CHASM*

***Abstract***: The focus of research in this paper is primarily the narrativization of socio-historical reality and the determination of the status of the personal and collective past within the ideological-conceptual structure of the novel *The Chasm* by Darko Tuševljaković. By presenting the designated narrative interest as significantly impactful for various domains of Tuševljaković's fiction (motif corpus, characters as bearers of identity patterns, questions of syuzhet) and for the text itself (composition and linguistic-style registers), the author of this paper provides possible arguments for perceiving *The Chasm* as indicative of post-socialist motifs in contemporary Serbian literature. The research methodology is, therefore, interdisciplinary and involves a basic apparatus of imagology, a partially psychoanalytic approach, and the activation of certain concepts from the field of cultural studies. The paper as a whole offers the first more detailed analysis of Tuševljaković's novel within the given framework.

***Keywords***: *The Chasm*, Darko Tuševljaković, national identity, image, post-socialism, Persona, Shadow.

Darko Tuševljaković's novel *The Chasm* [*Jaz*] from 2016 marks a turning point in his oeuvre up to that time because it greatly profiled the author's poetics, which then ensured its wider reception. The 2017 European Union Prize for Literature undoubtedly also contributed to this, because it helped Tuševljaković's work become more widely known on a European scale. Up to 2022, the novel had been translated into English,

Italian, Albanian, Spanish, Slovenian and Greek—this information comes from the search results of the COBISS library information system. When it comes to its impact on local readership, it is no small matter that the novel was also shortlisted for the *NIN* Award in 2017. What is also telling is the fact that, at the time, *The Chasm* found itself competing against works from renowned writers from the Serbian and South Slavic language regions—Svetislav Basara, Vladan Matijević, Vladislav Bajac, to name a few—but also works from young novelists who set forth with their debut novels, or those who affirmed their position as bearers of relevant and promising poetic tendencies with their second novels (Luka Tripković and Vladimir Tabašević).

Contrary to this, reviews of Tuševljaković's *The Chasm* were surprisingly scant in literary periodicals at the time. In spite of that, some important observations can be found in Ilija Bakić's review of the novel in *Dnevnik* (Бакић 2017). Bakić's text can serve as a preamble to the concerns of this current analysis—from its symbolic title which is true to the substantial and formal complex of the novel ("The Fatal Spheres of Dysfunctionality"), to maybe even its core idea of apostrophizing the poetic outcomes of Tuševljaković's novel as "a unique phenomenon in contemporary realist prose which deals with the recent past and the present". This uniqueness of Tuševljaković's short novel that Bakić mentions is, to a degree, well-argued, as we shall see later. Still, this remains difficult to claim as factual within literary history. This is due to the respectable amount of works since 2000 that deal with the cultural-historical legacy of the last decade of the previous century in Serbia, regardless of the scope or, in a wider sense of the word, the stylistic modus of the literary treatment. It is a legacy of postsocialism, a word that is marked by a terminological proliferation in modern critical thought, which in turn makes it difficult to define, and even harder to state, its "lowest common denominator." In the words of the Croatian philosopher and art theorist who dealt with this topic, "The techno-genesis of new, virtual worlds indicates that the uncanny feeling caused by the inflation of the prefixes such as *post*, *neo*, *meta* and *trans* impacts nearly all spheres of life that we seek to appropriate in this new cognitive mapping" (Paić 2014: 4).

Arif Dirlik, one of the pioneers of the articulated use of the term *postsocialism*, pointed to uncertainty as a category for thinking about the political systems of socialism in the 20th century, especially with regards

to their polysemous legacy (cf. Dirlik 1989: 33–44; 2014: 263–291). Accordingly, at the center of Dirlik's attention lies the problem of perceiving one's place in time after the fall of the Berlin Wall, specifically in those cultures that experienced that which they called socialism, which makes it impossible for that experience to be annulled within them. The category of postsocialism exists primarily for these cultures, as there also exists a kind of gap between them and those parts of the world where socialism never took form on a state level. It is precisely such an impulse of contemporary Balkan history which is present as a literary problem in *The Chasm*. This has been observed in a short foreign review of the novel: "The abyss is the totality of experience in this book. Between the main characters, between East and West, Serbs and Montenegrins, between the ruined vision of one's birthplace and the temptation to leave it behind. It is a relentless and disappointed gaze free from pathos" (Di Liberto 2020).

A substantial number of relevant literary works published in Serbian in the second and third decades of this century resonate with this perception of the legacy of the dissolution of Yugoslavia in many aspects of the social and private spheres in its successor states. In general, these works diverge poetically, yet certain shared, so to speak, generational concerns remain visible at the level of their themes and motifs. It would suffice to just look at the works of Tuševljaković's contemporaries, as well as authors slightly younger and older than him (Saša Ilić, Marko Vidojković, Vladimir Tabašević, Lana Bastašić, Bojan Krivokapić, and others).

One way or the other, the works that make up this corpus coalesce in a narrativized dynamics defined by the relation of *individual*: *collective identification*, in a word, the self-perception implicit in the shift of the socio-political paradigm at the turn of the century.

In relation to this subject matter, many relevant moments in *The Chasm* stem from the beginning of the process of one's self-perception within the collective identifications, followed swiftly by its decline, which never ends in a complete suspension. These collective identifications can be declared within one's family, ethnicity, nation, or class. Additionally, that which could be defined as a *generational paradigm* predetermines the novel's structure as a narrative diptych. The first section of this diptych traces an elderly married couple during their holiday in Dassia on Corfu, Greece, while the second part, which is partially written in the

manner of a contemporary bildungsroman,[1] shows the turning points in the life of their son.

The author writes suggestively, though without stylistic pretentiousness, about Bogdan, a retired army officer, his wife Radica, and their mundane holiday. A chronological narration limited to the character's perspective prevails, occasionally tinted with free indirect speech. There is also, within a secondary narrative layer, the story about Doctor Zoran Simović, who is also a serviceman, and his much younger wife Tanja. The narrator's focus remains on Bogdan and Radica, and their dysfunctional marriage, but Zoran and Tanja's relationship constitutes, in a sense, an image of a similar dysfunctionality. Because of this, we can look at the structure of *The Chasm* as a diptych within another diptych.

The effect of the introductory scene's arrangement of motifs is archetypal because the description of Bogdan's awakening figures as a symbolic birth—a painful and difficult meeting with the world, or perhaps a falling into it. Variations of such an awakening occur in a few more places in the first section of the novel. At a stylistic level, it is shaped with a skillful selection of details related to the description of Bogdan's physical sensations, but here the anticipatory detail is also of note (a headache that is like an *explosion*, hands that *explode*). The descriptions that we comment on are especially effective, in such a way that they hint at something that is somewhat deeper, profounder, and more important for the character's sense of self, than the mere culmination of holiday annoyances.

The events shown in the chapters dedicated to the holiday of two elderly couples could lead the reader to believe that the main point here is the critique of the inability of modern man to experience travel as something authentic. This also suggests a critical view of a provincialist "slave" mentality toward imposed perceptions of fun and vacationing, as well as (verbal) abuse in the marriage, i.e., marital hypocrisy (the motif of half-hearted adultery given shape in the uncomfortable sexual

[1] We do not forget that this term is oftentimes used arbitrarily, but, at the same time, we do not deny the fact that it marks a long and rich history which has created many genre modifications in modern literature (first of all, the coming-of-age narrative). Petru Golban, an important theoretician and scholar of this (sub)genre, notices that the system of literary phenomena that the term *Bildungsroman* refers to is by no means static (Golban 2018: 2–5), which means that, in all likelihood, neither is the usage of the term.

act between Bogdan and Tanja). Bogdan, and partly also the hapless, frustrated, but merely more passive Radica, are portrayed as bearers of all those little neuroses that individuals of transitional, postsocialist societies can never be rid of when placed in the context of consumerist tourism.

At the centre of the narrative interest of this section of the novel is Bogdan's traumatic experience related to his past military service and his witnessing of the death of one of his soldiers. As a kind of counterpart to this personal trauma, a secret from Doctor Zoran's youth is revealed during a conversation between the two couples, a secret that also illustrates the hidden life of the Yugoslav society, embodied in the activities of quasi-state structures and one hormonal incident. At this early point, Tuševljaković instates a twofold, or maybe even manifold genre pattern which will characterize *The Chasm* as a whole. By constituting Bogdan as the main focalizer, the story begins to oscillate between, on the one hand, a psychological portrait as a premise for a unique contemporary family novel, and on the other hand, a potential socio-political thriller. The second option, however, is soon abandoned, i.e., it just serves as motivation for the first one. It could, therefore, be argued that, from an authorial stance, the latter is treated as an argument for the earlier.

With all the troubles that Bogdan and Radica must, paradoxically, deal with during their summer holiday, there exists a family secret which is sporadically hinted at in the course of their reciprocal nagging, or more precisely secrets that shape their unresolved relationship with their son David. In the second part of *The Chasm*, it will be David who speaks as the narrator, which will make clearer the problems between the father and the son, and even the mother and the son. They can also be interpreted from a classical Freudian view of family psychopathology, which Ilija Bakić touches upon in the review which we previously commented on: "Authoritative father—protective mother—a child who fails to fulfill his father's expectations and who overly relies on his mother's help" (Бакић 2017).

However, much textual space is given to Bogdan's cloistered disputes with his fellow countrymen, with the Simovićs, and also with the "young'uns" from Serbia, all of these being situations in which he considers his national identity and place in time as a frame in which that same identity fails to belong. The reference to Milutin Bojić's poem "The Blue

Tomb" ["Plava Grobnica"][2] and the consequences of the Albanian Golgotha the Serbian army experienced in World War I, as a collective crucible deeply impressed into the collective memory of the Serbian nation, is a poignant sign of an interference between the past and the present in Bogdan. Nevertheless, with his specific experience, he clearly belongs to neither of these. He is unsuccessfully trying to preserve the memory of the glorious past with dignity, while in the present he only sees complete decadence.

In these passages the novel traces the clash between the past which is viewed with inert pathos and the unstoppable spirit of the new, postmodern, cynical, bare, depatheticised relation to that past which often reduces it to a mere joke. This thematic branch of the text ends with the description of Bogdan's conflict with a group of Dutch tourists. The culmination of the physical altercation with them primarily brings about a new reliving of trauma. Bogdan becomes an actor in a twofold psychotic situation. This situtation merges the past, related to the perished soldier, and the present in which the Dutch youth, for lack of a real, but always imaginary, enemy, becomes the object of Bogdan's hatred. The scene of the altercation, which is in many ways oneiric, speaks in favor of the unresolvable nature of Bogdan's identity status. The hatred directed at the space of the different, the new and the foreign, simultaneously confirms his inauthentic devotion to the national collective identity, where we can

[2] Corfu is a very aptly chosen setting. Through the characters' statements and certain lapidary scenes, the island becomes a striking illustration of the *chasm* between the demands of cultural memory and the demands of a consumer-driven global world. Such a divided image of Corfu is, in a sense, a synecdoche (with the mechanism *the whole for a part*) for the experience of one of its temporary residents, Bogdan himself. We are ensured that this comparison is not crass, given the special place Corfu has in Serbian historiography, but also in literary tradition. Apart from Milutin Bojić, the tragedy on the islands Vido and Corfu was the subject of poems by Ivan V. Lalić and Milosav Tešić, with deep and elaborate intertextual link to Bojić's poem. Miloš Crnjanski also wrote about Corfu in his travelogue *Naša nebesa* (the part "Hadžiluk na Krf, do Plave Grobnice"). Corfu can then be treated as a literary topos of a specific symbolic capacity in modern and contemporary Serbian culture, and Tuševljaković's imagining of this island is a new semantic contribution to that context. The image of Mount Pantocrator (the highest point of the island) is especially interesting, since it appears as a leitmotif in the novel, with the hazy meaning of a mystical force that *overshadows* all the squabbles between people, i.e. mortals.

read a subtle *metaimage*.[3] What predetermines this metaimage is always the "imperialistic," arrogant attitude of the foreigners from Western Europe, which can be inferred from Bogdan's animosity toward the political and historical structures of the countries they come from.

In other words, Bogdan's national and cultural self-identification greatly and lastingly depends on the antagonistic nature of a foreigner, a nature Bogdan himself ascribes to them. There is an interesting comparison of this heteroimage, i.e., the portrayal of the identity of the Other (cf. Leersen 2007: 27), with the one that stems from Zoran's assumption of the decadence of the Western European spirit, i.e., his comment about the country of the young Europeans Bogdan clashes with:

> Those Dutch [...] I find it hard to picture that country. Their civil liberties, modern society. However, something must be problematic there because, in practice, you get this. Unrestrained teenagers [...] They think they're living their life to the fullest, while in fact they're only pushing themselves to extremes. (Tuševljaković 2019: 25)

It is worth noting that one of the first *chasms* broached or covered in the narrative of Tuševljaković's novel is the one between the cultural complex of the Balkans/Southeastern Europe and the wider, and in a certain sense predominant, cultural complex of the West. Additionally, it is only the image of the latter that is directly thematized by the characters' statements, which is why it becomes a heteroimage that can be discussed from within, with a basis in the text itself. It should also be noted that the heteroimage of the *Westerner* also has a class component, as well as one determined by a generational criterium. It is precisely this manifold content, on which this heteroimage is based, that expands and deepens the discrepancy between Bogdan and Zoran on one side, and the young Dutch tourists on the other side. From a meta-position, with regards to the noted national images, we can notice that the Balkans, with its heritage of Yugoslav history and the outcomes of the past in contemporary Serbian history, are constituted in terms of a remark that is attributed to

[3] In imagology, this term relates to the specific projection between an autoimage and a heteroimage, according to the meaning ascribed to it by Hercules Millas (Leerssen 2016: 24).

Winston Churchill, but whose author is actually unknown: "The Balkans produce more history than they can consume".

In this way, personal and collective history determine the (de)formation in the experience and (sub)consciousness of an individual like Bogdan, which consequently takes shape in a trauma that abruptly surfaces in reality due to the kaleidoscope of identities of peacetime life, more so than due to the pressure of social heritage.

Also, we must not forget about the category of the unreliable narrator, i.e., a particular criterion for its actualization: namely that it is a narrator "whose reliability is undermined by different aspects of his own narration" (Prins 2011: 125). This is why Zoran and especially Bogdan can qualify as unreliable narrators, which makes their stories even more mysterious. Tuševljaković himself draws attention to this in an interview in *NIN*:

> The memory of the endocrinologist from the Military Medical Academy, which bears traces of a mystery, a tragedy, and maybe even of terror, is entirely unreliable; we accept it as his confession, which we can trust but don't have to do. Although the truth is very relativized, the protagonists of the novel define themselves according to it, because they need it. It helps them overcome their troubles. (Tuševljaković in Vujičić 2017)

We see that the past does not only come crashing down on all the characters of Tuševljaković's *The Chasm*, it also figures as an explanation for their personal fates and becomes a symptom of their unpreparedness for the challenges of the present.

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The story of Damir, son of Bogdan and Radica, confirms that the entanglement of individual identity, contextualized within a family life, with collective identifications that take the form of class, gender, or national images,[4] will remain one of the important themes of *The Chasm*.

[4] Within the scope of the field of imagology—as a discipline that originated from comparative literature studies—belong the detailed semantic mechanisms of images of the Other (stereotypes, ethnotypes; autoimages, heteroimages, and so on). Also, among its

The unique friendship between Damir and David, when compared to the dominant matrix defined by the specific chronotope (Kragujevac in the 1990s), appears here as a subversive factor. Different in various ways from the environment in which they are growing up, the two young men are singularly against its traditional patterns on one hand, and the way they are being deformed in the present on the other hand (in the populist climate of post-war Yugoslavia). Since both of them are outsiders,[5] they form a mutual identity based on *extraordinariness*. Furthermore, it is clear that David is, in part due to Damir's interpretation of his character, superior in the relationship, in which we can possibly recognize elements of a latent homoerotic affection.[6] Additionally, Damir's sexual orientation will be yet another factor of his *extraordinarization*, and even of exoticization in the environment he will initially try to live in, only to emigrate eventually.

The chapters dedicated to the close friendship between Damir and David are the most touching part of the novel. However, apart from the perspective of the genre patterns the author uses, they are also intriguing due to the unexpected direction in which the author takes the plot. Contrary to the diptych's first "movement," the events surrounding David seem somewhat bizarre. They add complexity to the rising action and indicate that the denouement will come about by the interference of Bogdan's story, which is related to the present moment, and Damir's story, which is

tasks is, according to Daniel-Henri Pageaux, "[...] to dissolve the structures of the literary system and social imagination in the sense of showing a collection of such images" (Гвозден 2001: 217).

[5] In the conclusion of the introduction of his influential study *National Identity*, Anthony Smith points to several features of nationalism which have throughout history been regarded in two ways. Among the traits of the negative heritage of nationalism, Smith also sees how it often bases its legitimization of political communities on a mutual juxtaposition of cultural communities, which presents a seed of conflict (Smith 1991: 18). In this way Damir and David in *The Chasm* feel uneasy on a cultural level in the political community of their parent nation.

[6] David's playing with the multiple meanings of his affection toward Damir, as well as Katarina—and their affection for him—can be seen in one of his first lines on Katarina's party, the one which precedes the costume party, which is also a very important element in the plot of Tuševljaković's novel. When he introduces them to each other, Damir calls each of them his "better half" and points out, "With you two, I am complete" (Tuševljaković 2019: 127).

placed in the past that resonates crucially with the present. Tuševljaković took a great risk by involving questions and problems of identity in Damir and David's narrative, which is a register that is not featured in the structure of the first part of the diptych.

Apart from the socio-historical prism through which the phases of their identities are refracted, the experiences of the two small-town students are also defined by an inspired introspection, one caused by metaphysical ruminations and even ethereal aspirations—especially in David's case.

In the circumstances of economic and spiritual dearth, in the midst of an increasing amount of new and banal cultural expressions supported by mass media, David is portrayed as a superior intellectual. He is especially like this in Damir's eyes: not only is he eloquent, well-read, capable, witty, but also free-spirited and brave in his attempts to rise above the mediocracy of their surroundings. Sometimes the first layer of the problems of identity—which we could call the *constructivist* one, because it is defined by the social relations toward folklore, or national and political heritage—overlaps with the one which could be described with the epithet *essentialist*, because it is at this level that Damir's and David's fundamental formalistic dilemmas related to their personal existence, both social and spiritual, crop up.

This is why David's statements and observations, which figure greatly in the narrative of the novel's second half, are etched into Damir's memory. Although brief, they collectively form a remarkable image of everyday life in the years of the not-yet-realized transition of the political system in Serbia, i.e., the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Such are David's sarcastic remarks about the general, as well as the material, and even spiritual poverty of the people under Slobodan Milošević's regime,[7] the staleness of the provincial areas that are often depicted comically yet with almost exclusively negative conotation, and frequently even without a cynical distance. David, therefore, exhibits an aversion toward province which borders on pure revulsion. This aversion points more to a

[7] From the many examples, we offer this David's remark, as an illustration: "People in Kragujevac have more *Zastava* cars [the *Zastava 101* car], the popular 'stojadin;' note by M.V.] in the streets than teeth in their mouths" (Tuševljaković 2019: 103).

heteroimage whose contents refer to class differences, than to a heteroimage derived from a specific meaning of an ethnotype, although some of David's actions could give grounds even to that claim. Regarding the questions of identity, which can be usefully explicated with the imagological apparatus, the category of the metaimage is not of great importance when it comes to the nature of David's convictions, regardless of whether they are expressed directly or indirectly.

This character, and consequently Damir as his symbolic follower or companion, will start to question himself on a different level. These are the realms that transcend historical reality with its contents based on political, national, or other constructs.

Even with the revolt which David shows in the realistically formed episodes, such as the one dedicated to the clash with a group of young Montenegrin men at the student dorm, who are led by a nationalist-populist ideology and who are represented in stereotypically negative masculine traits (harshness, bigotry, a confrontational attitude), it is hard to overlook the escapism to which he gradually clings. Damir as the narrator devotes special attention to the fragments from David's childhood and family legacy, which he had confided in him about during their friendship's turning point. This confiding is sometimes followed with David's ironic distance, e.g., when he looks back on the significance of his birth and the mysterious prenatal experience, suggesting at the same time that the attempt of returning to the past is a "moussaka of memories and provincial nostalgia" (Tuševljaković 2019: 121).

With respect to this, it is clear that both the poetic and genre identity of *The Chasm* is complete only from the moment the focus of the story turns to the spiritual and, as it turns out, supernatural experience of the characters, the one that is not coordinated within the socio-historical reality on which the plot is based.

It should not be assumed that this somewhat drastic shift in the novel's trajectory makes no impact on the readers' enjoyment, i.e., that amongst the readers of *The Chasm* there will be those who feel that the transposing of the whole scope of the story into the realm of what could be described as speculative fiction, represents a disruption of the primary narrative structure. Contrary to this assumption, by doing so Tuševljaković has actually opened up new perspectives for actualizing and viewing an already complex identity panorama projected by the conscious and

subconscious actions of the characters. In Ilija Bakić's previously quoted review of the novel, the category of the miracle is also discussed with regard to remark Katarina's remark addressed at Damir: "For, above the trivialities rises an apprehension of a strangeness that will explode into a realization of—a miracle" (Бакић 2017).

Moreover, as part of a differently imagined research perhaps, an analysis of the gender identities in Tuševljaković's novel, would surely point to some other important aspects of its meaning. Even without a detailed analysis, a simple reflection on the implications of Katarina's character among the novel's other motifs indicates that she is clearly constructed as a kind of feminine counterpart to David. As such, she is greatly contrasted with the gender image which forms the basis for Radica's character, one drenched in traditional and traditionalist identity content.

A deep experiential link between Katarina and David is suggested on a few occasions, and rests on a shared tendency towards the extraordinary. In other words, Katarina, as much as David, steps outside the socially induced and in some cases imposed gender roles. These can be read throughout the novel in accordance with the well-established tendency of feminist thought, anticipated in the time of Simone de Beauvoir, and directly voiced in the work of Judith Butler (cf. Butler 1988: 519–531), as an expression of *repeated performances* which mark the difference between nominal masculinity and nominal femininity.[8] Additionally, Katarina's actions are not always benign and they cannot always be described by the stereotypical feature of her character—a rebelliousness typical of the student subculture.

Although the second story in the novel starts off at a point in time furthest away from its epilogue, it is the moment in which the historically-determined identity trauma of two, if not more, generations coalesce. This is why the introduction of a numinous motif in the narrative of David's fate and its effect on Damir's life, his separation from his family and his brief, and by all accounts precarious, stay in Germany, represents

[8] While the original critical thought of Simon de Beauvoir, from the opening chapter of *The Second Sex*, arises from the awareness of the relationship between Sameness and Otherness, from the remark "Subject is posited only while opposing" (Beauvoir 2016: 15), Butler finds a more general premise in the thesis that "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed" (Butler 1988: 519).

an implicit comment. It is a symbolic comment on the effects and power of socially constructed identifications in the post-Yugoslav, and therefore post-socialist era. One gets the impression that David and Damir's generation nurtures a more questioning and certainly more bold attitude toward the national past and social reality. Yet, this does not apply to their generation as a whole, because they, sociologically speaking, represent a subculture which is just a segment of the student population during the years of Milošević's rule. On a discursive level, this is defined by a rebellious-critical attitude toward the imposed collective autoimage. In other words, with regards to the actions of David, Damir, and Katarina which are connected to David's, ultimately, paranormal experience of the "room," their relation toward the tradition of the collective that they belong to takes on an authentic and, in many ways, logical effort to get out of the insufferable existence of their everyday life. From this perspective, it acquires a sense of something ephemeral. The sheer force and essential indescribability of David's experience, which greatly influences the life choices of Damir and Katarina, can be viewed as a maieutic departure from the predefined frame of decadent social processes. At the same time, it is a disheartening confirmation of the supremacy of collectivism over individualism. For the young generation embodied in David, Damir, and Katarina, the attempt of bridging the *chasm* symbolically, as well as quite literally, leads only to an escape out of one's own skin. This phrase is not used facetiously here. The frustration that prevents the main characters from stepping into a space of authentic existence is really only overcome—to an extent—with nothing less than a *Deus ex machina* mechanism on which David's exiting, as well as entering, the "room" rests on.

With this in mind, Tuševljaković successfully merges the two motivational streams in the finale of this novelistic diptych, by creating a stable mutual connection between them. The existential profiling of David's character, and consequently of Damir's, too, is achieved by an even division into their *intimate* and *social* beings. Neither can exist on its own. Although at times it seems that the social being—for example, in the form of David's cynical persona which is always ready to criticize provincialism—plays the primary role in shaping and directing his existence, it is actually the relics of his childhood, which he took with him as something unadulterated, weird and unexplainable, that turn out to be formative experiences. Such experiences are never really forgotten and always

participate in shaping the personal level of existence. Thanks to them, the prominent gnomic phrase in the novel is additionally motivated, "Fireworks come from within" (Tuševljaković 2019: 154).

With respect to the previous observations, in order to understand the manner of David's escapism, i.e., Damir's newfound active relationship toward his own life at the end of the novel, we need to think about the category of the *persona*, more specifically how it interacts with Tuševljaković's antiheroes. Also, someone's persona can tell us much about the scope and role of autoimaging, and consequently heteroimaging, within an intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics.

Provided we do not forget that the use of the term *autoimage* in imagology initially referred to the analysis of collective, and even comparatist, identifications, rather than the individualistic one (cf. Edtstadler et al. 2022: 5–6), a persona which is deeply predetermined by such roles, types and and similar patterns, can be assumed to have a specific actualization of an autoimage. David's case can be described as a persona that is expressed in this manner, which also partially fits into C. G. Jung's conception.

Simply put, among other reasons, the persona of a rebellious miser is necessary for David to establish an ironic distance to what is most authentic within him. Those are all the experiences related to the "room," expressed in his confiding in Damir, the relationship with Katarina, and, ultimately, everything that he carries as the family baggage. They are constructed in the text almost completely in line with Jung's conception of the Persona in opposition to the Shadow as a kind of *counterpersona*.

More precisely, according to Jung's conception, David's subjectivity in the key moments of the novel's second part is based on the endless interaction between his persona and counterpersona, which is even more his own. This is yet another in the long line of chasms which the title of Tuševljaković's novel, in all likelihood, refers to. This chasm differs from the others because it is the only one that is certainly bridged. The counterpersona of David's subjectivity, which is archetype-based (*uteral*, *prenatal*, and *out-of-body experiences*), ultimately becomes adequate. It is the Jungian Shadow, which the Swiss psychoanalyst nominally viewed as "the 'negative' part of personality, the collection of all the hidden, inappropriate traits of the psyche, all the functions and ideas of the individual subconscious that are not developed enough" (Jerotić 1984: 15).

When it comes to the unique individualization David goes through, from the point of view of his Persona (the conscious and chosen social role), this description might seem drastic, but the oneiric experience from the non-materialized "room" really does concern the "inappropriate traits of the psyche." Some of David's statements eloquently speak in favor of this (dis)qualification of the Shadow (e.g., the "moussaka of provincialist memories," the "room-spaceism" between selfism and sophism [Tuševljaković 2019: 134]), but they are also followed by contradictory insights that announce that David will not give up on his internal pursuit. Even though it starts off as escapism, it ultimately triumphs over the obedience to the Persona. In other words, David renounces the Persona, which could, to a degree, also be described by Jung's process of individuation.

In a certain sense, Damir's leaving of his family and country functions as an extended and indirect effect of David's stepping out of an imposed reality. Using this as a motivation, Tuševljaković expresses the relationship between the two young men on yet another level. This relationship is so unique that David's disappearance from Damir's life cannot be made up for by another romantic relationship, which, by all accounts, did happen. By the end of the novel, it can be inferred that Damir's failure in Western Europe was caused by a psychological complex of unlearned trust, which stems from the dysfunctional relationship with both his father and his mother.[9] The conditioned nature of an individual's choices, not only by the wider social frame, but also by the narrowest social environment embodied in the family unit, is illustrated in the sad epilogue of Damir's internal struggle and the emigration that it leads to.

In the novel's short concluding chapter, Damir comes across Katarina after a long time. He learns of the history of her terminal illness, and her, as it is implied, miraculous recovery after a unique, yet exhausting, stay in David's "room." After Katarina disappears in the street crowd, it appears that Damir starts feeling the legacy of the long-vanished David. It seems that the *Deus ex machina* returns in the final passage: while

[9] In the language of psychology, the figure of Radica and her influence are evidently suppressed in her son's self-actualization, especially when compared to Bogdan's far-reaching influence. This is why Tuševljaković's novel is suitable for examining the transmission of masculine images/stereotypes, primarily between father and son, as part of a more detailed analysis of a wider imagological scope.

contemplating the meaninglessness of the lives of the people around him, and also contemplating the "room," David seems to be, in spite of everything, ready for a new beginning.

The separate paths of the two generations—which is the reason why Tuševljaković arranges the novel as a diptych in the first place—are precisely "predestined" to an ultimate canceling out, to a meeting and merging of the personal worlds of individuals from a family burdened by the past. By creating a seemingly sparse, but internally dense, rich and remarkable novelistic world, one that relies heavily on the dialectic between the general and the individual, Tuševljaković does not merely talk about the traumatic conflict between the so-called little man and history, but also about—as has been illustrated in this paper—the induced trauma of his own deeper rootlessness.

*Translated by Matija Cvetanović*

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