

Introduction: Voices from within the Otherness

For the rattling glory of ages to come,
For the high tribe of men, –
At the feast of the fathers I have forfeited my cup,
And my joy, and my honor as well.

A wolfhound-age leaps up on my back,
But I am not a wolf by blood:
Better stuff me inside the sleeve, like a hat,
Of the coat of Siberian steppes...

Let me no more look at the coward, at the mire,
At the bloody bones in the wheel;
Let the blue foxes blaze the whole night through
In their primordial beauty for me.

Lead me into the night, where the Yenisei flows
And the pine tree reaches the star,
Because I am not a wolf by blood
*And only an equal will kill me.*¹

(Osip Mandel'shtam, 17–18 March 1931–1935,
translated by I. Bernshtein, emphasis added)

Memories are killing. So you must not think of certain things,
of those that are dear to you, or rather you must think of them,
for if you don't there is the danger of finding them, in your
mind, little by little.

(S. Beckett: *The Expelled*, 1946)

In the year 1956, significant both for the highly controversial appearance of N. Khrushchev at the 20th Party Congress (see e.g. Jones 2013) as well as for the Hungarian Revolution, Anna Akhmatova, one of the most acclaimed Russian poets, said that “Now two Russians are eyeball to eyeball. Those

1 “За гремучую доблесть грядущих веков, / За высокое племя людей, – / Я лишился
и чаши на пире отцов, / И веселья, и чести своей. // Мне на плечи кидается век-
волкодав, / Но не волк я по крови своей: / Запихай меня лучше, как шапку, в рукав /
Жаркой шубы сибирских степей... // Чтоб не видеть ни труса, ни хлипкой грязцы, /
Ни кровавых кровей в колесе; / Чтоб сияли всю ночь голубые песцы / Мне в своей
первобытной красе. // Уведи меня в ночь, где течет Енисей / И сосна до звезды
достаёт, / Потому что не волк я по крови своей / И меня только равный убьёт”
(Mandel'shtam 1990: 171–172).

who were in prison and those who put them there” (cf. Etkind 2013: 36). The author of *Poem Without a Hero* (*Poëma bez geroja*) speaks of trajectories of myth, memory and trauma in a simple, yet profoundly accurate way. Although she refers to Soviet (national) experience, more specifically to the collective trauma of the Gulag, her statement can also be read in the transnational context, as a description of the complex social and cultural aftermath of collective trauma in numerous national communities during the 20th and 21st centuries. For the countries of former Yugoslavia, there was more than one such chronological boundary: 1945 as the year in which the Second World War ended and 1980 as the year in which Josip Broz Tito died. The relationship between survivors and those who laid claim on their lives has been especially complicated and, as the wars in the 1990s have tragically shown, permanently troubled.

These complicated relationships, so aptly described by Anna Akhmatova, are the reason behind the permanently incomplete process of political, cultural and social transition in the volatile area of postsocialist Europe. In spite of the fact that mechanisms of collective memory have been widely researched in contemporary humanities, we believe this volume not to be redundant, for it provides a fresh perspective on textual gaps into which traumatic encounters, meetings and separations mentioned by the Russian poet are inscribed.

1.

The volume at hand is based on the proceedings of a conference held in September 2015 under the title *Theorizing Myth, Trauma and Memory in Central and East European Cultural Spaces*. The conference was a continuation of a several decades long cooperation between the Institute of Literary Studies at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb and the Institute of Hungarian Literature and Cultural Studies at the ELTE University in Budapest. It was planned as a platform for showcasing current research of scholars whose academic work focuses on correlations between (post)memory, myth and trauma in literature, art and popular culture. In this context, special attention was drawn to the comparative analysis of Central and Eastern European cultural spaces. Topics most widely discussed by scholars invited to the conference concerned under- and overrepresentation of those events whose fixation in language permanently eludes the speaker, thereby pointing to the inexorably unstable nature of textuality. We were keenly interested in the extent to which strategies of representing individual memory confront the notion of the political, as well as in the way the dialogue between individual memory and historical frames of reference gain their visibility in the field of culture. The discourse of trauma proved to be an especially intriguing conceptual frame of experience: trauma was, namely, regarded a privileged cultural field offering

an insight into the witness' attempts to negotiate memory and history, whereby memory operates as a process simultaneously revealing and constituting the speech subject, but also deconstructing and verifying historical narratives.

A significant number of contributions examined the complex relationship between trauma, memory and testimonial discourse: we were interested in dominant genres and institutions of remembrance, as well as in the primary agents and idioms of memorializing and conveying trauma. A compelling analytical challenge was presented by the medium of articulating trauma and memory—by the (in)abilities and limits of the literary language as compared to visual images and their ability to *produce* an affect and not only to *represent* memory. (To this day, it is precisely visual documents such as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* and the ingenious documentaries of A. Resnais² that are considered pivotal and groundbreaking in the representation of trauma.) In the context of theory, especially intriguing was the question of the relationship between myth and mythological consciousness; between mythological discourse on the one, and history, memory, trauma and testimony on the other hand. For instance, if political myths, as R. Barthes argues in 1957, remove history from language, do they, as a second-order semiotic system, also reduce individual memories to similarity? We seek to analyze how different interpretations of political myths (natural or parasite on language) influence testimonies of witnesses and how testimonies negotiate political myths in order to reconstruct language in a non-mythical way.

2 The cover of this volume was inspired by the highly acclaimed Estonian stop-motion animation *Body Memory* (*Keha mälu*, 2011, Nukufilm Studios, author: Ülo Pikkov) portraying Soviet deportations from Estonia in the 1940s. I'm grateful to my friend and colleague, Dijana Jelača, for bringing this film to my attention. In the aesthetic sense, the film uses very sophisticated procedures in order to depict the complex topic of transgenerational memory, the possibility of witnessing trauma through corporeality, the physical state of the witness, but also through the witness' inability to perceive trauma in the moment when it occurs. The plot is fairly simple and consists of highly symbolical and multiply coded motifs: puppets made of string, one of which is carrying an egg in its womb, travel to an unknown destination in a confined train carriage, with only traces of daylight coming through the walls. The film poses the following questions: "What can an old apple tree tell us? What mysteries are hidden in his roots, gnarled over time? Does he remember the serpent and the lost Paradise?" (see <https://vimeo.com/62741577>). The end of the film, reproduced at the back cover of this book, suggest the following unsettling answers to the posed questions: that trauma is a *natural, normative* state of civilization in the 20th and 21st centuries. Furthermore, collective historical tragedies sometimes (more often than not) are not institutionally recognized. They must therefore be witnessed from the centre of one's own vanishing, which also draws attention to the boundaries of physical perception, i.e. to the body or the physical state of the witness as a relevant reflection of trauma.

2.

The majority of texts selected for the volume tackle precisely this extremely delicate and analytically intriguing field of research: the symbolical articulation of experience at the intersection of myth, memory and trauma, in which the individual is both the subject and object of knowledge (the producer and interpreter of his or her production). (S)he resorts to the medium of art, especially to the medium of language (on the basis of the Heideggerian thought that the language is, so to speak, “larger than men”), in order to—as Akhmatova claims at the beginning of this text—confront the Other. The Other in turn figures as a myth, as that which is alien, and, in the case of traumatic experience, constitutes its very core. This contemplation of political subjectivity³ that most of the contributions are based on yields precisely the literary text as the most rewarding and most intriguing medium of articulating language reality and the (self)reflexion of the speech subject. As S. Rahimi emphasizes in distancing his notion of political subjectivity from its pioneer conceptualization as a hidden trace of class struggle (e.g. by F. Jameson), “the politicality of the subject is not limited to the concept of struggle or resistance, but covers all aspects of subjectivity insofar as it recognizes the human social subject as the subject of language, or better put, the subject of the symbolic order” (Rahimi 2015: 8). At the centre of analytical interest in this volume are, namely, configurations of *the subject of language* (and *the subject in language*) and culture (in which the literary text is ascribed a privileged position of symbolic articulation), especially in the relationship (or more precisely, in the gap) between myth and trauma, where memory functions as a seemingly solid bridge between the subject on the one, and myth and trauma on the other hand. In those temporally dis/orientated spaces (see also Jelača & Lugarić, forthcoming), the speaking subject is caught up in the intrusive process of eternal becoming: “I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in process of becoming” (Lacan 2006: 94).

3 As some of the analyses in this volume show, the notion of the subject can refer to different types of political subjectivity, i.e. to structures created by the interaction of meaning and power in, as S. Rahimi argues, at least two respects: 1) the fundamental role of that interaction in the work of culture (in this volume, mainly literature) and 2) the constitutive role of that relationship in the development of “human subjectivity” (2015: 7). The notion of the subject is here, of course, observed in a post-Cartesian manner, by being understood as a political event *par excellence*. In other words, “the subject is conceived as political in its very subjectivity—both in the sense that it engages in an ongoing act of subjugating and conjugating the world into meaningful patterns and in the sense that the subject is continuously subjugated or conjugated by the local meaning system. Politicality, in this sense, is not an added aspect of the subject, but indeed the mode of being of the subject, that is, precisely what the subject is” (8).

3.

It almost goes without saying that this brief introduction cannot provide an overview on the different meanings of myth and trauma, not even a short one. We therefore allow the contributors themselves to explain specific meanings of these notions pertinent to the volume at hand. However, there are two features, or more precisely, two axiological categories that are crucial to almost every contemporary theoretical conceptualization of trauma and/or myth: while myth is primarily considered to be a positive cultural and social value (“treasure”),⁴ every interpretation of trauma without exception underscores the negativity of this experience. Regardless of the difference in the axiological terms, these two notions are *always* and *without exception* culturally conceptualized in relation to language. In this respect, trauma figures as the impossibility of language: trauma is the unspeakability itself, the failure to express oneself in words, the very impotence of language. Whereas trauma is that which precedes language, the myth is above all the reality based on exploiting the potential of language, especially its performativity or ability not only to maintain, but also to produce reality it names. Regardless of the difference between them, myth and some aspects of trauma can be related on a conceptual level: as they are both *acts within language* and *acts of language*, they even appear congenial, because outside of language, the only frame of reference legitimizing their relevance to reality, neither myth nor trauma exists.⁵ It is precisely for this reason that the literary discourse provides an especially solid foundation for their analysis and interpretational conceptualization.

Given their analytical and disciplinary focuses, essays are divided into two sections: *In-Between. Myth, Memory and History* and *Trauma Discourse(s): Language, Subject, Emotion*. We hope that the reader will recognize the overlapping and connections between essays from these two sections.

Myth, the central signifier of the entire volume, refers to a special, culturally and historically conditioned state of consciousness and cognition (Rudnev 1999), and, as such, it is one of the central notions in critical cultural theory of

4 However, in his pivotal study *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes speaks of the ambivalence of the political myth, i.e. of the political myth as exploiting the relationship between language and power, thus naturalizing worldviews and consequently using them as a means of political manipulation.

5 In the context of trauma, it is worth mentioning the fragile figure of Hurbinek, a three-year old mute child of death, a child of Auschwitz, the memory of whom was preserved by Primo Levi, and in Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (1998), cited by many contributors to this volume. Apart from the already canonized texts by C. Caruth, Sh. Felman, S. Friedlander, D. Laub, D. LaCapra, R. Leys and other texts discussing the impossibility to speak about trauma, another interesting text is that of Hannah Arendt under the title *What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günter Gaus* (see: Arendt 1994: 1–24).

the 20th and 21st centuries. As the Russian scholar Vadim Rudnev argues, the mythological consciousness functions by *neutralizing fundamental cultural binary oppositions*, above all the oppositions between life and death, truth and lies, illusion and reality (170). This neutralization is acquired by different means of organizing content in language. The idiosyncrasy of the myth consists in the singularity of its chronotope, in the peculiarities of the spatial and temporal organization of reality, but also in the fact that individuality and the subject are understood in a specific way: the subject of a myth is always a man of the collective, whereby he not only embodies and reflects collective consciousness, but also identifies with it (169). At the same time, the image of a man in a myth is more than just an image of himself: it becomes the integral part of the man it describes; this image is, so to say, one of his forms (170). In order to construe that specific image of man and achieve its function of “shapeshifting” or bricolage (Levi-Strauss; see also Losev 1982: 369), the myth employs a specific type of language: when a person says “I have left the house,” (s)he is simply describing an action or what (s)he is doing. This kind of language is not and cannot be mythological, since it depends on the clear distinction between the subject, object and predicate. In opposition to that, the myth does not differentiate between subject, object and predicate: in its development, the myth recognized neither words nor syntax in the contemporary sense of the word (Rudnev 1999: 170–171).

The aforementioned mythological consciousness develops in accordance to this logic of the mythical language organization. According to Rudnev, one of the features of this consciousness is, namely, the most primitive (co-syntactic) structure, in which *the word is equivalent of an entire sentence*: undivided meanings are arranged in sequences (not “I have left the house,” but something akin to “me-house-outside-go”). Since this functions as a separation of sentence functions from each other, the undivided language cannot differentiate truth from lies. It cannot draw a line between illusion and reality (the latter exists when there are objects and when there are words). Ultimately, it cannot tell the difference between life and death. (This distinction emerges simultaneously with notions of the beginning and ending of a sentence and of beginning and end in general, i.e. after the development of linearity, history and non-mythological time.)⁶

As the title of the first section suggests, the way in which analyses of literary texts (and their dialogue with the notions of myth and history) intervene in the aforementioned understandings of myth and mythological consciousness

6 As follows, the myth is in a direct opposition to the notion of history, which is also a topic of interest in this volume. This can be most precisely observed on different vocational imperatives, i.e. on the fact that historical narratives can be historiographically legitimized thanks to the binary differentiation of contents: the clear-cut distinction between truth and lies, illusion and reality, life and death.

conceptually corresponds to Bhabha's concept of "in-betweenness." In his groundbreaking study *The Location of Culture*, H. Bhabha notices that the understanding of culture requires knowledge of the ontological nature of its boundaries. By evoking M. Heidegger, Bhabha reminds us that the boundary "is not that at which something stops but [...] that from which something begins its presencing" and emphasizes that the trope of our times is "to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond" (1994: 1). Further on, he states that:

the "beyond" is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past... Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the fin de siècle, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the "beyond": an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà*—here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth. (1)

The conceptual categories of "in-betweenness" and "beyond" are relevant to the most of the analyses from the first section. The analyzed texts namely construe language reality through the dialogue of individual memories with petrified (cultural, historical or political) myths, the cognition they imply (which neutralizes binary oppositions) and historiographically legitimized historical narratives. In this respect, the spaces of artistic and symbolical articulation that are situated "beyond" and "in-between" provide these dialogues with "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1–2).

Keeping in mind the aforementioned features of myth, especially the peculiarities of the chronotopical and language organization of its reality along with the subject's place in it, the articles of the first section, each in its own right, challenge A. Jolles' thesis (proposed in his study *Einfache Formen*, 1930) that myths can be considered *answers*, the ultimate and absolute sources of knowledge and cognition. Quite the contrary seems to be the case: opposed to lived memory and the literary organization of language and reality and incorporated into artistic forms, the myth is a never ending process and a mental space offering limitless possibilities of memorial contemplation and creative reflection of political subjectivities.

The first section is opened by E. Kulcsár Szabó's article *Das Musikalische und das Sprachliche: Die Hermeneutik des Dirigenten Furtwängler zwischen Wagner und Nietzsche*, in which the author pays special attention to the musical hermeneutics of the conductor Wilhelm von Furtwängler as a question of approaching the materiality inscribed into the "hidden" sound potential. Starting from Furtwängler's aesthetic writings (1915–1934), E. Kulcsár

Szabó follows his development towards aesthetic divination and vision of aesthetic wholeness of the musical experience and towards the renowned text on Beethoven and the architectonic interpretation of music on the principle of that which is not necessarily realized, but “truly envisioned.” Following the hermeneutical line of thought from Schleiermacher to Gadamer, the author shows the way in which Furtwängler’s interpretation of Wagner’s work changes through time. In the second part of his paper, he focuses on Nietzsche’s discourse of the aesthetic, materiality of music and interpretation of Wagner by means of Furtwängler’s different concept of the “spiritual event,” according to which the music as a whole is an expression of a vision, a not of its material realization.

The article by Gábor Tamás Molnár relies on the notable theory by H. Blumenberg, which postulates two meanings of myth—poetry and terror—and analyzes the play *Nibelung lakópark* (*The Nibelung Residences*, 2004) by János Térey accordingly. As suggested by the subtitle *Fantasy following Richard Wagner*, the play’s composition is derived from the Wagnerian opera cycle and partly refers to dominant, yet rather ambiguous mechanisms of reception and understanding German mythology in contemporary Hungarian literature. Molnár argues that “it both underscores the critical-ironic distance customarily taken from the mythical subject while it also revitalizes the myth by channeling its energies into poetic language.” However, unlike other contemporary texts, Térey’s play trivializes the “extreme gravity” of the heroic myth, while reinterpreting some of its poetical aspects. In his paper entitled “*Die Insel ist die Erfahrung*” — *Erinnerung und Trauma in Lutz Seilers Kruso*, Stephan Krause also resorts to H. Blumenberg in order to analyze the novel *Kruso* (2014) and its intertextual links to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). The novel’s plot revolves around the island Hiddensee during the summer of 1989 and reconstructs a tale of friendship and escape from Eastern German regime to the nearby island of Møn in Denmark.

In the interest of portraying the trauma of the disintegration of Titoist Yugoslavia, Mihály Szajbély interprets late writings by László Végel, published after the post-Yugoslav wars in memory of the Titoist era spent in emigration in Hungary. So as to explain the notion of trauma, Mihály relies on system theory by N. Luhmann and relates it to the psychoanalytical notion of trauma as the impossibility of communication between certain systems. In her text *Pleasure and Pain: Corporeality in Ivan Mažuranić’s The Death of Smail-aga Čengić*, Marina Protrka Štimec relies on the figure of *homo sacer* by G. Agamben as well as to the theoretical hypotheses by E. Scarry for the sake of analyzing connections of bodily practices with collective memory, myths and trauma, as well as with the post-revolutionary ideas in Ivan Mažuranić’s poem from 1846. Protrka Štimec shows that, as an allegory, the poem reverberates the modernist idea that historical progress inevitably throws down

every despotism. Consequently, the colossal body of the voiceless nation is transformed into a strong agent of history and the former sovereign becomes “a marvelous marvel,” a puppet of history. István Fried explores the multilingual aspect of some novels in the cycle *Croatian God Mars* by Miroslav Krleža. Starting from the lyrical fragment *Croatian Rhapsody*, Fried observes the contrast between different language registers and interprets multilingual strategies as resistance towards the imposed cultural system of the Monarchy and enforced language patterns, which can best be seen on the example of military jargon.

In his analysis of Norbert Gstrein’s novel *Die Winter im Süden*, Marijan Bobinac writes about the processes of confronting the legacy of the Second World War in the memorial culture of Croatian emigrants and focuses primarily on the problematic identity of the main character, referred to only as the Old Man, who returns to Croatia during the war in 1990s. The narratologically complex representation of the relationship between the Old Man and his daughter Marija reveals neuralgic spots in European and Croatian history. Special attention is drawn to the portrayal of controversial historical events in Bleiburg, i.e. the historical background of long repressed war traumas situated between myth and tabu. A new perspective on the discussion of war trauma in the countries of the former Yugoslavia in the first half of the 1990s is offered by Dubravka Oraić Tolić in the essay entitled *Erinnerung an Vukovar: zur Repräsentation von Kriegstraumata in der kroatischen Literatur und Kunst an der Wende vom 20. ins 21. Jahrhundert*. Oraić Tolić proposes the hypothesis that trauma, despite its unspeakability, can be effectively portrayed by employing certain aesthetical strategies. The essay therefore offers an overview of recent Croatian literary production portraying the war trauma of the Croatian city Vukovar. Following from Oraić Tolić’s claim that war trauma can be successfully and efficiently represented in art discourse is the predominance of literature as a medium enabling the cathartic renewal of its witnesses.

Nina Weller examines the siege of Leningrad during the Second World War as a mythologized event in the Soviet memorial culture. Weller starts by posing a question about the role of fiction in public and private memory of the blockade as one of the biggest war crimes and at the same time one of the most heroic achievements of the Soviet army and population. At the same time, she brings to the fore different ways of mythologizing heroism, forgotten victims and modes of representing this historical event in the post-Soviet era. Weller analyzes the literary dismantling of the heroic myth of the siege on the example of Andrey Turgenev’s (alias Vjačeslav Kuricyn) novel *Spat’ i verit’* (2007).

The final text of the first section by Gábor Bednancics is entitled *Spatial Memories and Spectacularities in Hungarian Turn-of-Century Poetry*. Bed-

nanics proposes the hypothesis that the so-called “spatial turn” in literature mostly applies to newer interpretative methodology. In opposition to that, Bednanics analyzes János Arany and Dezső Kosztolányi’s poetry in order to argue that, in works of art, space is not solely a function or an additional part to verbal or visual composition, but rather exhibits an excessive potential of articulation. To that end, space “performs not only as frame or a priori or chora, but a possibility to signify and implement, and also makes a counterbalance to signification according to its ‘outside’ quality in Foucauldian sense.”

4.

Another important methodological and intellectual basis of this volume was provided by trauma and memory studies, one of the most prominent scholarly paradigms in the past three decades, dominating a wide range of fields, from the humanities to social sciences. The essays in the second section under the title *Trauma Discourse(s): Language, Subject, Emotion* build on the base of today’s common starting points for the interpretation of traumatic narratives and supplement them by a series of original observations and theoretical interventions into the canonized body of trauma studies which result from a close reading analyses of literary texts (by B. Katušić, Z. Kulcsár-Szabó, Cs. Lőrincz, T. Lénárt, A. Simon). It is up to the reader to decide whether the essays are successful in answering the fundamental and exceptionally complex questions of interest in this volume: Where is trauma located? If language seems to be its primary topos, what kind of a language is it? Is the sovereignty of the testifying witness limited and, when yes, up to which extent?⁷ How is trauma inscribed into collective memory? And finally, is the most popular, psychoanalytic paradigm of analyzing trauma Eurocentric, i.e. economically, ethnically and even gender exclusive?

The starting points for analysis are few key theoretical assumptions (or aporias) connected to the narrativization of trauma, genre of testimony and, ultimately, to the figure of the witness itself. I refer primarily to the *collapse of witnessing*, defined by Dori Laub as the impossibility of knowledge about that which constitutes the traumatic experience itself as inseparable from the

7 G. Agamben’s thesis that it is never the witness who testifies, based on his interpretation of Primo Levi’s testimony, is well known in contemporary humanities. However, it is worth mentioning that, in her latest study *Literature in the Ashes of History* (2013), C. Caruth questions Agamben’s figure of the witness. In Caruth’s study, the “real witness” is not the person who has physically survived, but the person who was “buried alive” as a subject with certain civil rights. This subject—the real witness in Agamben’s sense of the word—is not physically, but metaphysically dead: he can never return to history, to his own biography and cannot reconstruct the wholeness of his identity. Consequently, a new form of historical witnessing arises: witnessing of events that is defined precisely through their vanishing, their erasure from history.

aporia of historical cognition.⁸ Furthermore, I also speak of the *belatedness of witnessing*, because the pathology of trauma lies in the very structure of the traumatic event and the (im)possibilities of its immediate, timely reception. Since the traumatic event cannot be assimilated or experienced in the moment in which it occurs, but only belatedly, the event possesses the one who has experienced it (the subject and object exchange places in a profoundly complicated way)—an instance once again pointing to the aporia of historical cognition: “the history that a flashback tells [...] is, therefore, a history that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood” (Caruth 1995: 153). Finally, the traumatic event is the one that is *historically impossible*:

The Plague (the Holocaust) is disbelieved because it does not enter, and cannot be framed by, an existing frame of reference (be it of knowledge or belief). Because our perception of reality is molded by frames of reference, what is outside them, however imminent and otherwise conspicuous, remains historically invisible, unreal, and can only be encountered by systematic disbelief. (Felman 1992: 103)

Since the traumatic event is an event which cannot be visualized, according to Sh. Felman, it needs a certain imaginative medium: in the case of Camus, he resorts to the plague in order to access the unthinkable pages of history. Several essays in the volume (M. Bobinac, D. Oraić Tolić, M. Protrka Štimec, N. Weller) corroborate our assumption that the myth (cultural, historical and/or political) can enable communication or function as a medium rendering unthinkable events thinkable, unspeakable events speakable. It goes almost without saying that, in so doing, the subject is left in a permanent state of ambivalence, of “revolving” around his own identity, his own experience and/or narrative.

The second section of the volume is introduced by Tatjana Jukić’s intriguing questions about the possibilities to separate any analysis of Central and Eastern European culture in the 20th and 21st centuries from its socialist legacy and formation(s). Jukić asks if we can truly understand Central and Eastern Europe without understanding socialism or access the subject of socialism without engaging a critical theory of trauma. To that end, Jukić argues that socialism shows as good libidinal economy compared to revolution, just as it gives grounds to assessing trauma as good economy compared to the melancholia of revolutions. In his text *Traumatisierte Grammatik bei Szilárd Borbély*, Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó analyzes the poem collection *A Testhez* (2010) by

8 “History was taking place with no witness: it was also the very circumstance of *being inside the event* that made unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist [...] The historical imperative to bear witness could essentially not be met during the actual occurrence” (Laub 1995: 66, 68).

the Hungarian poet Szilárd Borbély. The author refers to the cycles of poems published in the collection as cycles of death, termination of pregnancy and losing a child. By disentangling an intricate web of intertextual allusions, he focuses on Borbély's strategies of working through this kind of trauma. In her contribution to the volume, Bernarda Katušić conducts an extensive search for language traces of unspeakable trauma in the canonical text *The Devil's Yard* (*Prokleta avlija*, 1954) by Ivo Andrić, primarily by relying on the stated difference between the (Lacanian) "empty" and "full" speech. At the same time, she offers a reinterpretation of Lacan's notion of silence. The analysis of Andrić's text, as Katušić writes, illustrates "that silence and 'thoughtless' speech do not define the subject's place in the 'symbolic order' in relation to the other as language and law, and in relation to the self; rather, it is 'full' speech that does so." To that end, Katušić argues that "traumatic states of the subject open up as residues of the real, which appear at points of contact where language and networks used for symbolical framing of the world collide."

In the text *Touched by Disaster: Writing and the Political*, Zrinka Božić Blanuša draws upon the research of several scholars (Blanchot, Heidegger, Huet, Rancière, and others) in order to develop a theory of the politics of literature/politics of writing and takes into consideration complex questions about the possibility of perceiving and remembering catastrophic events. In so doing, she also approaches the issue of the nature of evil as such. Božić Blanuša suggests that "literature has the ability to establish a new regime of partition of the sensible and thereby reveal the new positions of speech, even if instead of the *ego* there is the *il*, the impersonal, no one and every one, the infinite replaceability." According to Božić Blanuša, not only can the disaster be understood as loss of authenticity, but writing after the tragedy (and about the tragedy) constitutes an integral part of the tragedy itself. In his text *Die Passion des Zeugnisses zwischen Leben und Tod*, Csongor Lőrincz interprets the text *Own Death* (*Saját halál*) by the Hungarian author Péter Nádas from the perspective of testimony. He relies on philosophical theories by J. Derrida and G. Agamben in order to discuss the theory of testimonial performativity as a process revolving around experience and then turns his attention to language expressions in Nádas' text. Lőrincz develops a theory of trauma based on the very act of testimony, which he interprets as a performative act, but also observes up to which extent it influences the witness and manifests itself as a trace of significance, *différance*. Nádas' autobiographic confrontation with his own mortality is recognized as the rhetorical figure of catachresis. The essay also examines the sovereignty of the subject confronted with trauma or with the limit that is his mortality. Trauma as an experience that is impossible to witness is also the topic of Tamás Lénárt's paper, which compares the narrative of death and trauma in the essay *Torture* by Jean Améry to one

of the episodes from Péter Nádas' *Parallel Stories*. Based on G. Agamben's study *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Lénárt categorizes different forms of testimony into pseudo- and full testimonies, thus revealing the utter erasure of individuality and dehumanization inherent to these genres.

In the interpretation of the famous novel *Die letzte Welt* (*The Last World*, 1988) by the Austrian author Christoph Ransmayr, Simon Attila connects close reading to psychoanalytic interpretations of trauma and N. Luhmann's system theory. The author pays special attention to the episode about Philomela, in which he recognizes a direct connection between trauma and aphonia or the loss of speech. Processes of metamorphosis, which are at the centre of this novel inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, thus approach the (im-)possibility of articulation, which is shown by a detailed analysis of the relationship between characters and their relation to the trauma of the (un)speakable. The final text of the volume, Péter Fodor's *Rewritten Fates. Traces of Remembering and Retinence in Two Half Times in Hell* (1961), focuses on mnemotechnical practices in Zoltán Fábri's film, a film which emerged in the Hungarian cultural space at a historically significant moment, only a few months after the beginning of the Eichmann trial. The special value of the text lies in the hypothesis that the peculiarity of film as a medium lies in the possibility to record movement in a non-symbolical, non-literal way, so the author observes it "as the acoustic-optical imprint of the real [that] can act as a dimedial narrative instrument that strives to find and produce meaning where there probably was none."

5.

This volume came into existence in 2016, in the year of the 60th anniversary of Khrushchev's speech and the Hungarian Revolution. In the past 60 years the Cold War ended, and the Nuremberg Trials revealed the banality of evil. The Berlin Wall fell, but the migrant crisis prompted the erection of new ones. Numerous wars have been started and many crimes against humanity have been committed. T. W. Adorno was not the only one to doubt the possibility of poetry after Auschwitz. The Russian author V. Shalamov, a former Gulag inmate, also writes about the death of the novel and that all "fairytales of literature" should end because "All terrorists went through [...] the Tolstoy phase, this vegetarian, moralizing school. Russian literature in the second half of the 19th century has excelled in preparing the terrain for the blood that would be shed before our eyes in the 20th century" (Shalamov 1989: 232–233). In his essay *On Prose* (*O proze*), he writes that Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* is the last Russian novel and that "new prose negates [...] the principle of tourism. The writer is not an observer, not a spectator, he is a participant in the drama of life, a participant not in the form and not in the role of the writer.

He is Pluto, who rose from hell, rather than Orpheus, who descended to it” (Shalamov 1965). The prose written by *ex men* (*byvalye ljudi*), the prose of Kolyma’s dystrophics (Kolyma’s *dokhodyaga*),⁹ as Shalamov claimed, is not and cannot be “document prose” (*proza dokumenta*), but prose “suffered as a document” (*vystradannaya kak dokument*). Furthermore, in one of the most touching stories in his *Kolyma tales* (*Kolymskie rasskazi*), entitled *The Glove* (*Perchatka*, 1972), V. Shalamov writes that the glove, preserved in the museum of Siberian ice, is itself a testimony, a self-evidence of the author’s (Gogolian) “fantastic reality” in the Gulag. This glove, which has—as Shalamov writes—in the past 36 years become a part of the his body and a symbol of his soul, does not write just the history of one witness, but also the history of an entire state, one epoch and the whole world. However, in the atmosphere of muteness guided by Beckett’s logic, epitomized by the famous sentences “You must go on. I can’t go on. I’ll go on” (see also Latković 2017: 196), the narrator of Shalamov’s story says:

You must not write good poetry or prose by a dead glove. The glove itself was prose, an accusation, a document, a protocol.

But the glove died at Kolyma—this is why this story is told. The author guarantees that the dactylographic pattern is the same on both gloves.¹⁰ (Shalamov 1998: 307)

Therefore, a logical question arises: if after the First World War (at least according to Felman’s reading of Benjamin’s *Storyteller*), mankind suffered a double loss—the loss of the capacity to symbolize and capacity to moralize (Felman 2002: 28)—can literature today, after the death of the subject/witness—do more than simply store memories? The literary tradition before Auschwitz and Kolyma allowed us to somewhat pretentiously assume that literature can do nothing less than save the world, as exemplified by the legendary Scheherazade whose storytelling literally saved her life. But is literature *today* more than just “memory storage,” when its very existence is seemingly a form of barbarianism *par excellence*?

During the inspirational lecture given by the Bulgarian author Georgi Gospodinov at the beginning of June 2015 in the Balassi Institute in Berlin, he reminded that “history is written by the victor,” but “literature [...] by those

9 The Russian word *доходяга* signifies a person who is—like Muselmann from concentration camps—on the verge between life and death. The literal translation from Russian would be “the one who walks” (towards his own death). It translates to English as “goner” (see Etkind 2013).

10 “Мертвой перчаткой нельзя было написать хорошие стихи или прозу. Сама перчатка была прозой, обвинением, документом, протоколом. Но перчатка погибла на Колыме – потому-то и пишется этот рассказ. Автор ручается, что дактилоскопический узор на обеих перчатках один”.

who had lost.” He optimistically claims that as long as there is “storyhearing” of “storytelling” (done by every author in this volume), there is also the possibility of empathy as man’s universal ability to witness the experience of the other from someone else’s vantage point. In this respect, literature is today, perhaps more than ever, not only an aesthetical, but also an ethical fact. In that vein, it can be concluded that, if literature paves the way for the empathic as a possibility that, in the words of Gospodinov, *the Other can hurt us in our own body*, then literature could indeed save the world (in its own right, and according to its limits), because it can—if nothing else—open up a space in which “eyeball to eyeball confrontation of those who were in prison and those who put them there” can have a positive outcome: literature cannot change the past, but by securing a safe zone for those who lost the war, it can enable national myths and historical narratives to (also) build on everything that is seemingly forgotten, i.e. on its gaps, inconsistencies and discontinuities.

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