



VERITA SRIRATANA

**PARTICULAR**

**MODERNITY/MODERNISM**

Locating Modernist Moments  
in Czech and Slovak Literature



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This book is an invitation for readers to question the discourse of “delayed modernisation”, particularly that which has often been assigned to Central Europe in comparison to Western Europe. This Western Eurocentric view is not only part and parcel of colonialist labelling, but also an evidence of the ahistoricist internalisation and production of knowledge carried out even among residents of Central Europe, which hinder a better understanding of modernism as a transnational phenomenon and of the region’s particular modernity. By “modernist moments” in literature, I mean texts which reflect *momental* and *momentous* ruptures with the past, as well as with the norms and traditions which have been purposely established as “old” or “obsolete”. These moments lead to the subversion of values, the shifting of meanings and the toppling of power regime. By locating moments of modernism in Czech and Slovak literature (and beyond), one comes to challenge the notion of a stagnant and monolithic Modernity/Modernism, a notion which tends to privilege Western European culture and which tends to legitimise the mainstream view that casts Central European, particularly Czech and Slovak, modernity and intellectual movement as underdeveloped, that is, forever delayed or frozen in time.

**Verita Sriratana** is a former recipient of the Anandamahidol Foundation Scholarship under the Royal Patronage of HM the King of Thailand and a former recipient of the Slovak National Scholarship. She earned her Bachelor of Arts (First class honours; gold medal for highest achievement) degree in English from Chulalongkorn University in 2005, her Master of Arts (Distinction) degree in Colonial/Postcolonial Literature in English from the University of Warwick in 2007 with a dissertation entitled “Historical Fiction and Postcolonialism”, and her Doctor of Philosophy degree in English from the University of St Andrews in 2013 with a thesis entitled “‘Making Room’ for One’s Own: Virginia Woolf and Technology of Place”. From March 2013 to March 2014, she took up the position of postdoctoral researcher (Vedecká pracovníčka) at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava. Verita is currently a lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

This book is an outcome of her postdoctoral year in the Slovak Republic.

*For my parents,  
Cristina and Thavesak  
and for what Slovakia has taken and restored*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Particular Modernity/Transnational Modernism

“You know, things are 30 years delayed here” is the phrase which I have heard countless times from 2009, when I first visited Slovakia as a tourist, to 2013, when I took up the position of postdoctoral researcher at the Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava. The phrase, uttered as a casual shrug or a bitter complaint, has its similar variations in which the number of years seems to grow from 50 years to a century depending on the gravity of the shared crisis, from long frozen queues at the post office to bureaucratic mismanagement at government offices. For a tourist from Thailand who knew very little about Slovakia when she first arrived at the pre-renovated M. R. Štefánik Airport in 2009, such self-disparaging comment sounded outlandish and difficult to grasp. It took Slovakia over a century to define and determine its identity (albeit an imagined one) throughout the four landmark years which every school pupil knows: 1918, 1948, 1989 and 1993. 1918 was when Czechoslovakia was demarcated and charted out of the territory of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. 1948 was when Czechoslovakia was under the Communist regime. 1989 was the year of the Velvet Revolution, which ended 41 years of Communist rule and transformed Czechoslovakia into a parliamentary republic. 1993 was the year of the Velvet Divorce, resulting in the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the establishments of separate Czech Republic and Slovak Republic. Fortunately, it took a much shorter period of time for the author of this book to come to her senses. Three years of numerous trips and one whole year of research stay form a duration long enough to help turn Slovakia from my “contact zone”<sup>1</sup> into my second home, and to turn an ignorant badge-

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<sup>1</sup> In “Arts of the Contact Zone”, Mary Louise Pratt defines “contact zone” as social spaces where transculturation and autoethnography, a form or method of research as well as a viewpoint which produces “a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (35), takes place:

Ethnographers have used the term *transculturation* to describe processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture. The term, originally coined by Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s, aimed to replace overly reductive concepts of acculturation and assimilation used to characterize culture under conquest. While subordinate peoples do not usually control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what gets absorbed into their own and what it gets used for. Transculturation, like autoethnography, is a phenomenon of the contact zone. (36)

collecting tourist into a partially-informed academic visitor who is finally beginning to at least comprehend this self-depreciation and the pride hidden within such modest fabric of denigrating cynicism, which is also hidden within the discourse of merciless self-criticism typical of the country and the region of Central Europe. This immense pride in self-depreciation can be seen echoed in a statement made by Slovak writer Pavel Vilikovský, which was directed at the Communist regime.<sup>2</sup> In his short story entitled “Everything I Know about Central Europeanism”, Vilikovský imagines a conversation between Albert Camus (1913-1960) and a young Slovak writer which takes place in Moravia:

“That’s good,” laughed Camus. “In your geographic latitudes? Do you mean Central Europe?”

I didn’t mean Central Europe, since until then I had never encountered that concept, not even on the weather forecast. What do they mean by Central Europe, when with all the curtains around it, you can’t see past your own barn! No, “our geographical latitudes” was a code name, an unobjectionable term for a certain social system—or establishment, as they liked to say in those days. I’d warrant that Camus would have cried, “That’s a downright Central European approach, to call a regime a ‘geographical

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For a Thai student who in 2009 was living and studying in Scotland, Slovakia was initially a “contact zone” where more than two cultures meet and interact. When I was new to Slovakia and when the English language was the only medium of communication, I viewed Slovakia as “subordinated” (Pratt 36) region compared with the dominant British Isles. When I first found myself in central Bratislava, or more precisely, *My Bratislava* Tesco Department Store housed in a marble functionalist building which used to house *Prior* Department Store in the early 1970s, for example, I did not take into account the achievement of the prominent Slovak architect Ivan Matušik (1930- ) who received the Dušan Jurkovič award for the *Prior* department store and the *Kyev* hotel complex projects in 1969. All I could appreciate was the vastness of this Tesco’s bakery section and the prices which were mere crumbs compared with those in St Andrews, Scotland. As Slovakia increasingly became my home due to several research and conference trips to the region in the following years, the metropolitan culture imported from years of living in the UK faded. I found myself thinking of Eastern Slovakia as my *Isan* region. The term “Isan”, or อีสาน, is a Thai word derived from the Pali *īsān* or Sanskrit *īśān* which means “Northeast”. The Northeast region of Thailand is renowned and often romanticised for its pristine nature, agricultural activities, folk culture and local hospitality.

<sup>2</sup> Pavel Vilikovský (1941-) is a Slovak writer, journalist and translator. He began his writing career in 1965 but due to the subversive content of his writings, such as the theme of bisexuality in his best known novel entitled *Ever Green Is...* (*Večne ja zelený*), published most of his works after the Velvet Revolution. He translated into Slovak the works of Joseph Conrad (1857-1924), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), William Faulkner (1897-1962), Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) and James Aldridge (1918-). Known as a prominent writer of postmodern fiction and literary critic, Vilikovský has become a household name in Slovak and international literary circles. Among many literary prizes, he was awarded the prestigious Vilenica Award for Central European literature by the Slovene Writers’ Association for his achievements in the field of literature and essay writing in 1997.

latitude'!" if he'd been informed of that, but you weren't supposed to blurt out such things to a foreigner. So I just nodded. (8)

Vilikovský's ambivalent sense of pride and bitterness towards his region's provincialism can also be seen reflected in Milan Kundera's notion of Europe and, most importantly, Central Europe. In his discussion of "Die Weltliteratur", or world literature, Kundera differentiates between the fates of the "large nations" to that of the "small nations" in Europe:

Whether he is nationalist or cosmopolitan, rooted or uprooted, a European is profoundly conditioned by his relation to his homeland; the national problematic is probably more complex, more grave in Europe than elsewhere, but in any case it is different there. Added to that is another particularity: alongside the large nations Europe contains small nations, several of which have, in the past two centuries, attained or re-attained their political independence. Their existence may have brought me to understand that cultural diversity is the great European value. In a period when the Russian world tried to reshape my small country in its image, I worked out my own ideal of Europe thus: *maximum diversity in minimum space*. The Russians no longer rule my native land, but that ideal is even more imperilled now. (*The Curtain* 31)

Referring to the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact allies in August 1968, Kundera perceives multiculturalism and diversity as Europe's strength as it had withstood the trials and tribulations of war and oppression throughout history. In the case of Czechoslovakia, his "small country" (*The Curtain* 31), it was also multiculturalism and diversity that had the power to break the bondage of freedom and abject deprivation of fundamental rights imposed by Soviet occupation. Kundera's concept of European "diversity" seems to be based on the notion that there is a predestined fate of small countries, which is distinct from that of large countries:

"A faraway country of which we know little...." Those famous words by which Chamberlain sought to justify the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia were accurate. In Europe there are the large countries on one side and the small on the other; there are the nations seated in the negotiating chambers and those who wait all night in the antechambers. (*The Curtain* 33)

Kundera's idea of "diversity" as the defining characteristics of Central Europe is rendered questionable by Eric Hobsbawm, who uncovers the nostalgia behind such a claim through his juxtaposition of Bratislava's past and changing present:

The older families in the city of Bratislava (Pressburg, Pozsony), who remember it as a meeting place of peoples and cultures, still distinguish themselves as 'Pressburaks' from the 'Bratislavaks'



who, coming from the rural hinterlands of Slovakia, now determine the character of their country's capital... Mitteleuropa has lost one of its essential characteristics. (94).

The Bratislava where residents speak Slovak, German, Hungarian and Yiddish no longer exists. The Bratislava of the past has been transformed into a utopian vision which divides, rather than unites, its residents of the present. This is not the only instance where the past takes its toll on the collective cartography of memories which, in turn, shape and reshape the perception of regional history.

My book is an invitation for readers to question the discourse of “delayed modernisation”, particularly that which has often been assigned to Central Europe in comparison to Western Europe. This Western Eurocentric view is not only part and parcel of colonialist labelling but also an evidence of the ahistoricist internalisation and production of knowledge carried out even among residents of Central Europe, which hinder a better understanding of modernism as a transnational phenomenon and of the particular modernity of the region. “Modernity”, asserts modernist scholar Susan Stanford Friedman, “of course, has no single meaning, not even in one location” (473). This book is inspired by Friedman’s idea of transnational and multiple modernities and modernisms which, I propose, can be seen played out in my analysis of the particular(ist) modernist moments in Czech and Slovak literature and beyond. By “modernist moments” in literature, I mean texts which reflect *momental* and *momentous* ruptures with the past, as well as with the norms and traditions which have been purposely established as “old” or “obsolete”. These moments lead to the subversion of values, the shifting of meanings and the toppling of power regime. By locating moments of modernism, one comes to challenge the notion of a stagnant and monolithic modernity/modernism, which tends to privilege Western European culture and which tends to legitimise the concept that Central Europe’s modernity, as well as its aesthetic and intellectual movement, is underdeveloped, that is, delayed or frozen in time:

Recognizing the violence and conquest that are so often a constitutive part of recurrent modernities helps prevent discourses of modernity’s fluidity, multidirectionality, and reciprocal exchange from sliding into a utopian rhetoric of happy hybridity. To counter this tendency, I keep reminding myself that the massive ruptures of modernity across a spectrum of social formations are most likely to occur during periods of rapid, often brutal conquest that cause wide-scale material, psychological, spiritual, representational, and epistemological dislocation. (Friedman 482)

In Vilikovský’s *Večne je zelený...* [*Ever Green Is...*], the modernist moment can be located in the protagonist’s references to Mata Hari (1876-1917), the famous Czech writer Božena Němcová (?-1862) and her novel *Babička* [*Grandmother*]. Published in 1855, Němcová’s

novel is regarded as one of the quintessential works of the Czech National Revival Movement:

The artist in me is like Božena Němcová's grandmother, always prepared to jump over a fence for a colorful feather... especially someone else's fence. Have you heard of Božena Němcová's grandmother? No, you're too young for that, but at least Božena Němcová herself.... Too young for that too? Božena Němcová was the Czech Mata Hari, in the days when the Dutch had not yet even dreamed of Mata Hari. It would be more correct to say that Mata Hari was the Dutch Božena Němcová, but who nowadays, may I ask you, pays attention to correct speech? Maybe some linguist driven to write a language column. (89)

The worldly spy and seductress Mata Hari and the folk writer Božena Němcová seems an incongruous pair. However, with a tinge of irony, Vilikovský puts on centre stage their shared prominence within their own societies. Both are prominent women in their different and particular contexts of modernity, though equally canonised and sanctified by time. For Anglophone readers, the more well-known Mata Hari automatically serves as a standard against which other historical figures are measured. It seems more sensible to refer to a Czech woman writer like Němcová, who is obscure to Western Europe yet renowned in Central Europe, as the Czech Mata Hari and not the other way around when it comes to the Dutch femme fatale. This reflects the (Western) Eurocentrism embedded within our conceptualisation of modernism: "Eurocentrism is the dominant centrism to confront because the West's narrative of itself is the story of its own invention of modernity and because the field of modernist studies itself began in the West as a study of Western modernities and modernisms" (Friedman 476-77). I therefore subscribe to Friedman's notion that "[e]very modernity has its distinctive modernism" (475) and propose in this book that exploring the regional or provincial modernity *particular* to a specific culture is a necessary step which can lead to a better understanding of the *whole* landscape of transnational modernism. Locating modernist moments in a particular language and literature exposes the constructedness of ideological binary opposition, such as the West and the Rest, which sustains (Western) Eurocentric universalism:

How would a simple Indian family cook their soft-boiled eggs for breakfast? From this point of view, it is sheer luck that a simple Indian family never gets any eggs at all. In Hindi, therefore, there is no special word for *vyklepok* (those cracked eggs sold half priced in Slovak groceries): a clear consequence of their long years of colonial bondage. The same fact, namely the lack of an English equivalent, is on the contrary a consequence of the long years of their colonial supremacy. Those are the laws of dialectics; (Vilikovský *Ever Green* 25)



In Vilikovský's work, the irony and absurdity in the protagonist's depiction of India and Slovakia are played out in his discussion of the Slovak term "vyklepok", which he claims does not exist in impoverished India. This is an example of a modernist moment which disrupts the discourse of Western Eurocentrism. By setting the Slovak word, instead of the usual Latin or other Western European languages, as well as its historical and economic context as the only standard against which India is measured, Vilikovský exposes the arbitrariness of "the law of dialectics" (*Ever Green* 25), which tends to privilege Western European culture: "Models of planetary cultural traffic, mimesis, and translation need to supplant older concepts of modernist internationalism, which are typically based on binaries of Self-Other, modern-traditional, civilized-savage, high art-primitive art" (Friedman 483).

My book is also an invitation for readers to revise the definitions of "Central Europe", putting to question Kundera's postulation of the fate of the nations "who wait all night in the antechambers" (*The Curtain* 33), a notion mocked by Pavel Vilikovský in yet another modernist moment:

Do you play chess? That's sensible; at least you don't reinforce your inferiority complex at every step. But I suppose you know what a pawn is, at least. I don't mean the ones who actually labor, but the kind that are manipulated. A pawn who moves from E2 to E4 doesn't need to know that this is a Spanish opening.... I'm sure you don't know this yourself; in this direction I'm not overestimating you in the least.... In a certain sense it is actually desirable that the pawn shouldn't know that he would be sacrificed in another move. Well, this "pawn doctrine" ruled in the counterespionage of the young Czechoslovak state, whether from necessity or from conviction. After all, we are all pawns in the hands of God. I say this only as proof that the above-mentioned words weren't meant as a criticism. (*Ever Green* 81)

By evoking Václav Havel's criticism of Kundera's concept of the "Czech fate", which can be seen as equivalent to Vilikovský's "pawn doctrine" (81), "Chapter One: All the (Central European) World's a Czech Pub" offers an analysis of a novel entitled *Of Kids & Parents* (*O rodičích a dětech*) by the contemporary Czech writer Emil Hakl (1958-). In this chapter, I attempt to locate the modernist moments in the novel which revise and put to question Kundera's concept of Central Europe. Hakl's *Of Kids & Parents* was published in 2002, later translated into English by Marek Tomin and released as a film adaptation in 2008. By choosing to read and analyse this particular recent novel in terms of literary modernism, I propose that Hakl's work needs to be read alongside the context of modernity set and situated in the particular history of Central Europe, a region which remains to this day an ambiguous territory of which only shared history is multiculturalism, multilingualism and ever-shifting borders despite Milan Kundera's controversial attempts to demarcate its aesthetic and intellectual clear-cut boundaries. *Of Kids & Parents* exposes the absurdities

embedded within the most common question in the Czech language “So what’s new?” [“Tak copak je nového?”] (Hakl 10) and within any attempt to establish and uphold the ideological “central/periphery” dichotomy, which has served as the foundation stone of Western Eurocentrism.

In what ways is “decentralising” the concept of “Central Europe” from the mainstream discourses, which often paint a picture of Kundera’s multicultural region comprising “small countries” with predestined fate of powerlessness, related to my project which aims at decentralising the Western Eurocentric notion of modernism? This question is the heart of this book. As my first chapter demonstrates, revising Kundera’s metaphor of Central Europe as a “laboratory of twilight” (*Art of the Novel* 125) forms the first few necessary steps to tackle such a question.

In this Introductory section, it is crucial to evoke Eric Hobsbawm’s observation in “Mitteleuropean Destinies” that “[i]t is always dangerous when geographical terms are used in historical discourse. Great caution is needed, for cartography lends an air of spurious objectivity to terms that often, perhaps usually, belong to politics, to the realm of programmes rather than reality” (84). What the terms “Modernism” and “Central Europe” have in common is their often confused usage to connote a specific geography which, taking heed of Hobsbawm’s warning, must be handled with “[g]reat caution” (84) lest such cartographies would cease to *represent* reality and *become* or *constitute* one’s constructed reality instead. I shall explain in turn.

Let us begin with the dangers of “modernism” when it is perceived strictly as a geographical term. In “Geographies of Modernism in Globalising World”, Andreas Huyssen puts on centre stage the ways in which mainstream understanding of classic modernism as a Eurocentric geographical term often limits the possibility of comprehending and appreciating the multiplicity of modernism which can be seen reflected in the particular modernisms located outside the demarcated metropolitan areas:

The geography of classic modernism is determined primarily by metropolitan cities and the cultural experiments and upheavals they generated: Baudelaire’s Paris, Dostoevsky or Mandelstam’s St Petersburg, Schönberg, Freud, and Wittgenstein’s Vienna, Kafka’s Prague, Joyce’s Dublin, the futurists’ Rome, Woolf’s London, Dada in Zurich, Munich and *der blaue Reiter*, the Berlin of Brecht, Döblin and the Bauhaus, Tretyakov’s Moscow, the Paris of Cubism and Surrealism, Dos Passos’s Manhattan. (6)

The mainstream notion of modernism as an urban movement seems, at first glance, to be indisputable. However, “[g]reat caution” (Hobsbawm 84) should be taken when referring to modernism strictly as a geographical term. I propose that an important danger lies in the fact that when one considers the rise of modernism as one and the same phenomenon as the rise of the cities, one inevitably and automatically determines not only the *spatiality* but also the *temporality* of modernism. My argument finds its resonance in Huyssen:



All these geographies are also shaped by their temporal inscriptions. The time frame of international modernism in the arts is usually said to last from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, but there are significant temporal and spatial variants within that frame. Continental national cultures in Europe do not operate in sync (French modernism precedes the German variant), and different artistic media turn to modernism in different sequence (painting and the novel come first in France, music and philosophy in Germany, and modernist architecture is last to arrive everywhere). Such uneven developments, to use Marx's term, depended on the nature of national traditions as much as they reflected different stages of urbanization and industrialization. (Huysen 6)

The particular(ist) "uneven developments" (6) in Slovakia and in Slovakia's modern literary and aesthetic movement, as reflected in works of literature, will be examined in "Chapter Two: Provincial(ising) Modernism". In this chapter, I present readers with the concept of "provincial modernism", as part of my proposition that Slovak writer Božena Slančíková "Timrava" (1867-1951) can be considered a case study of the problems of literary periodisation which tends to locate and situate modernism only in the geographies of metropolis. Božena Slančíková, known by her nom de plume "Timrava", wrote in a most tumultuous period in the history of Slovakia. Hers was a time of cultural and political oppression, culminated in the Hungarian government's Magyarisation policy. Though her works focus mainly on the microcosmic village life and the relationship between peasants and village intelligentsia, I argue that her novella entitled *Boj* [*Battle*], published in 1900, not only bears the signs of Western European decadence and degeneration consciousness but also challenges them in favour of her provincial reality. Timrava's ambivalent portrayal of her female characters, which follows and at the same time resists the realist tradition prevalent in her time, represents the breaking of the dawn of Slovak modernism. The story can be read as a parody and an allegory of the plight befalling Slovak New Women, who wished to bring an end to the decaying patriarchal civilisation but inevitably and unfortunately failed. Their failure can be seen as a manifestation of the dangers which ensue, particularly when Western European ideals are imported and adhered to without taking into consideration their particular provincial modernity. Timrava's feminist prototypes are undeniably products of the degenerated patriarchal system. The regenerated feminist regime, adopted from Western Europe, however promising, inevitably succumbs to the patriarchal paradigm it emulates. This chapter also suggests a parallel between these female characters and the pioneering modernists like Timrava, who seek to "battle" false harmony and coherence while remaining strictly within the paradigm and parameter of realism and provincialism.

Turning to the concepts and definitions of the term “Central Europe”, which is a translation of the original German “Mitteleuropa”, the danger of using and perceiving both “central Europe” and “mitteleuropa” as strictly geographical terms is that doing so tends to obscure not only the history of the region in question, but also the history of the development of mitteleuropa as a political and ideological term and concept:

Nowhere is geography more indivisible from ideology and politics than in central Europe, if only because, unlike the western peninsula of Eurasia known as the continent of Europe, the region has no accepted borders or definition, even though there are places that will hardly be included in any version of ‘central Europe’, however broad, for example Oslo and Lisbon, Moscow and Palermo. Since some such term as ‘central Europe or middle Europe (Mitteleuropa)’ is convenient and constantly used, this leads to considerable ambiguity. (Hobsbawm 85)

The German term “mitteleuropa” was popularised by the German politician Friedrich Naumann (1860-1919) who wrote a book entitled *Mitteleuropa* (1915). His vision comprises central and eastern regions in Europe that form a unified German-speaking empire. This Prussian-oriented geopolitics goes against Kundera’s nostalgic version of the multicultural Habsburg Empire. Eric Hobsbawm proposes that there are three versions of Mitteleuropa. The first is the Habsburg region of nostalgia referred to by Kundera and other regional writers:

Nostalgia about what Robert Musil called Kakania (after the initials of the double monarchy k.k. [*kaiserlich und königlich*, ‘imperial and royal’]) does not mean that it could ever be revived. Nevertheless, its existence was so central to the power-system of nineteenth-century Europe that attempts were constantly made to find some equivalent central European entity between Germany and Russia (87).

This leads to the second version of Mitteleuropa as a cultural as well as political buffer state between Russia and Germany. This notion of Central Europe, however, like the Austro-Hungarian Empire, belongs to the past as, according to Hobsbawm, “we no longer live in the era of European history when there was significant demand for a middle bloc as a bulwark between German and Russian power” (88). The third and most recent version is therefore “one that distinguishes between a superior ‘us’ and the inferior or even barbarous ‘them’ to the east and the south” (88) as part of an “attempt to separate the more ‘advanced’ from the more ‘backward’ former socialist states in order to convince the European Union to integrate them more rapidly” (88).

Decentralising the concepts of Modernism and Central Europe from their fixed temporal and geographical implications reveals the retrospective attribution of meanings and definitions to both terms. In the case of Central Europe, the nostalgic sentiment



embedded within the conceptualisation of the term reflects that the past is often evoked to quell the discontentment with the present. According to Hobsbawm, homelessness is a key factor which renders the term “Central Europe”, or “Mitteleuropa”, a problematic one:

[T]he people of this culture must be called ‘middle Europeans’ because the twentieth century made them homeless. They could be identified solely in terms of geography, since their states and regimes came and went. During the twentieth century the inhabitants for a city once linked by an electric tram to Vienna, a few kilometres distant, as well as to Pressburg, which was also known as Pozsony and Bratislava (all central European cities have several names), have been citizens of the Hungarian part of Austria-Hungary, of Czechoslovakia, of the German satellite Slovakia, of communist and, briefly, postcommunist Czechoslovakia and, once again, of a Slovak state. If they were Jews who lacked enthusiasm for their own blood-and-soil national state in Palestine, the only fatherland they could look back on, like Joseph Roth (of Brody), was the old monarchy of Franz Joseph, which treated all its nations with the same gentle skepticism. And that, as everyone knew, had gone for good. (91-92)

As the example of Bratislava illustrates, “[a] symptom”, wrote Pavel Vilikovský in *Ever Green Is...*, “always conceals more than it reveals” (59). Preoccupation with a fixed geographical label can be seen as a symptom of the identity crisis suffered by the many countries in the Central European region which saw dramatic regime changes as well as constant (re)mappings of national spaces and borders. Similar to the concept of Central Europe, the Western Eurocentric concept of Modernism can also be seen as a symptom of the mainstream tendency *not* to localise, historicise and essentialise thoughts, aesthetic movements and historical moments. In this case, through the usage of this well-known term, modernism as an aesthetic and intellectual movement is spatialised and temporalised into an equally problematic concept, betraying its own innovative inclination:

Modernity, in normal usage, is something that progresses in company with and at the speed of the years, like the bow-wave of a ship; last year’s modern is not this year’s. Apt as it is to the sensibility of the age to prefer such terms, to insist on the association with time and history, matters have now reached the point where we wish to fix and stabilize the modern. (Bradbury and McFarlane 21-22)

This book can also be read as an attempt to “unfix” and “destabilise” modernism as a spatio-temporal concept, putting to question the mainstream notion of modernism as an aesthetic and intellectual movement which took place in metropolitan spaces such as London, Paris, Vienna, Dublin, Berlin and Manhattan around the twentieth century. By reading and

analysing selected modern and contemporary Czech and Slovak literature which reflects the makings and remakings of the ever-shifting Central European culture and history, I argue that one can come to see and appreciate the creative aspects of modernism, which transcend the temporal and geographical restrictions of its terminological labelling:

European modernism as overarching phenomenon must be located at the threshold of a not yet fully modernized world in which old and new were violently knocked against each other, striking the sparks of that astounding eruption of creativity that came to be known only much later as 'modernism'. (Huysen 7)

In "Chapter Three: Particular(ising) 'High Modernism'", I advocate a particularist and, at the same time, transnational approach to Franz Kafka (1883-1924), a writer often regarded as one of the canonised "High Modernists". The paradox is intentional. It is only by situating Kafka in the context of the Austro-Hungarian Empire on the brink of war that one comes to see and appreciate modernism's "transnational turn", which can be seen reflected particularly in his short story entitled "The Great Wall of China" ["Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer"] (written in 1917). Also, this chapter demonstrates that by accepting modernism's theoretical periodisation without question, one tends to overlook its underlying Western Eurocentric spatial politics and, as a result, promotes a conceptual paradigm which privileges Western European universalism. With its physical and ideological gaps and fragments as well as traces of illusory and unfinished signification, the "piecemeal" construction of the Great Wall of China in Kafka's short story can be seen as an allegory of this book's attempt to locate traces of modernist moments in Kafka's writing in order to despatialise and particularise modernism as an unfinished transnational aesthetic and intellectual movement.

According to Friedman, "[m]odernism, like modernity, exceeds definitional and disciplinary limitations. And yet, these terms require some set of meanings to provide any functional use" (473). "Modernism" should not be an empty umbrella term. Though there is an obvious paradox in thinking and rethinking modernism in Central Europe beyond the usual practice of spatialisation, the textual analyses in this book simultaneously advocate a relativist and historicist reading approach which situates literary works within their specific regional, cultural, temporal and historical contexts. Modernism's "apprehension of a crisis in the ability of art and literature to represent reality" (Lewis xviii) has to be taken into account alongside its dynamic and changing "reality", which does not solely function as a passive backdrop of historical drama. Reality is historical drama *par excellence*. While it is true that modernist writers feel apprehensive towards the crisis of language, they nevertheless firmly believe in their ability to use language to convey such crisis and find an alternative mode of narrative to capture reality. Contrary to the mainstream understanding of modernism as a movement which seeks to counter realism, modernism is in fact the extreme of what it negates and challenges. Though "modo", the Latin root of the term "modern", means "just now", and though the term signifies a break with the past or the



“old”, modernism, in fact, remains deeply rooted in the past, or the old tradition. Despite their radical play with language and literary devices, despite their attempts to undermine and do away with the authority of plot and linear narrative of the realist tradition, writers whom we have come to perceive as “high modernists”, such as Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) and James Joyce (1882-1941), nevertheless took pains in wielding coherent narratives. The stories of Mrs Dalloway’s life in one day, J. Alfred Prufrock’s indecisive musings and Stephen Dedalus’s artistic awakenings are structured and presented in the writers’ joint endeavour to reveal the “unrealistic” trappings in literary realism’s claim to realism. Modernist writers can therefore be regarded as *ultra-realists* in their quest for form which can better capture the limitations of linguistic signification. They owe their intellectual debts to the Realist tradition:

The insistence of many modernist writers on their difference from their Victorian forebears raises an intriguing question: might the strength of their insistence be due to repression, a wish to conceal hidden debts? The question of what modernist texts, particularly modernist novels, owed to the tradition of Victorian realism has broad similarities to the question of modernism’s relation to Romanticism. Modernist writers attempted to put a distance between themselves and their predecessors. (Whitworth 99)

One of the characteristics of modernism is the tendency to establish the recent past, or its “before”, as a tradition to break and/or make new while still adhering to its narrative and linguistic rules. Though we are familiar with the notion that Modernism rose from the cold ashes of Realism, this book argues otherwise. Modernism is realism of a particular kind. I shall illustrate my argument through a survey of the history of Western and Central European nationalist movements.

It is often understood that nationalism is essentially a modern phenomenon, and that the rise of Romantic Nationalism in Europe, since the late eighteenth century, was a crucial factor that triggered Realism, particularly literary realism in the mid-nineteenth century. This is true in the case of Western Europe. The realist turn in the Romantic movement was perceived to be triggered by the Industrial Revolution, its negative impact on the standard as well as condition of living (particularly that of the working class), and the widespread nationalist sentiment. Literary realism entailed significant attempts to address the social problems which ordinary people at that time were forced to encounter in daily life:

Realists exhibited a profound sense of social consciousness and a commitment to contemporary problems of class and gender. Unlike the romantics, who felt alienated from society and often sought to escape the oppressive materialism of the modern world, realists saw themselves as men and women “of their time”. (Fiero 71)

The search for, as well as the projection of, a collective desire for national identity and unity was part of the “of their time” (Fiero 71) spirit fostered and strengthened since the time of



the French Revolution. The French Revolution is often perceived as an event which not only transformed the *ancien régime* of a dynastic state into the new order of a democratic modern state, but also paved the way for the birth of nationalism. As an admirer of the Enlightenment principles of the French Revolution, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), a post-Kantian German Idealist philosopher, who is regarded as one of the founding fathers of National Socialism, stressed the importance of a distinct sense of nationhood. For Fichte, selfhood is a dynamic and perpetual striving to overcome otherness. Fichte's nationalist ideals correspond with the notion of the superiority of the Germanic race, proposed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). By "Germanic peoples" Hegel did not mean the German nation as an entity as such a unified nation did not exist in his time. As he asserts in *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* [*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*], the term "Germanic peoples" stood for the European people in general, with the German race as the sole cultural and intellectual torch-bearer:

The spirit now grasps the *infinite positivity* of its own inwardness, the principle of the unity of divine and human nature and the reconciliation of the objective truth and freedom which have appeared within self-consciousness and subjectivity. The task of accomplishing this reconciliation is assigned to the Nordic principle of the *Germanic peoples*. (379)

Faith in the superiority of one single race is based on the notion of national identity as a fixed entity. Such a notion was proposed by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). Herder stipulates in his writing that mythology forms the basis of a national identity. This paves the way to Radical Traditionalism, an intellectual and, subsequently, nationalist movement which seeks to revive and promote local culture, folklore and mythology as the foundation stones of national identity. According to Herder's concept of the "Volksgeist", which means "spirit of the people", the legitimacy of the state is derived from a specific group of people who share the same culture, language and history. In *Materials for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, Herder states:

The best culture of a people cannot be expressed through a foreign language; it thrives on the soil of a nation most beautifully, and, I may say, it thrives only by means of the nation's inherited and inheritable dialect. With language is created the heart of a people; and is it not a high concern, amongst so many peoples--- Hungarians, Slavs, Rumanians, etc.---to plant seeds of well-being for the far future and in the way that is dearest and most appropriate to them? . . .

A sceptic of the Enlightenment who rejected the Universalist assumption stipulated by the French Revolution that every man/woman is the same and equal and that every nation is identical, Herder asserts in his writing that each nation has its own distinctive "Volksgeist", or national identity, which can only be expressed and preserved through a nation's own



language. Thus it is not surprising that Herder's ideas fuelled the Czech and Slovak National Revival, the two movements which were established by and upon language and literature.

In nineteenth-century Central Europe, on the other hand, the realist turn in the Romantic Movement took place later than its Western European counterpart. The delay, as I have emphasised, cannot be explained chronologically as part of the "delayed modernisation" discourse which tends to depict how the backward soil of philosophical thinking in Central Europe had to wait for the intellectual seeds to be blown by the West wind until they were cultivated. "Nationalism", said Pavel Vilikovský through the mouthpiece of his notorious main character in his book, who is an Austro-Hungarian spy, "interests me only as a donkey that helps to turn the wheel of history" (*Ever Green* 78). To understand such a statement, which is based on and, at the same time, negates the notion of Central Europe as being forever "retarded" in terms of intellectual and historical development of nationalism and literary realism, historical differences and particular modernities should be taken into full consideration:

When at the end of the eighteenth century the idea of modern nationalism spread from its birthplace in western Europe eastwards into central Europe, it underwent considerable change. Beside the original idea of the 'state-nation,' that is, the politically dominant nation in a state, there arose a second idea, that of the cultural-linguistic nation, whose proponents – to begin with at any rate – generally eschewed political objectives. (Brock, Preface page)

One of the major differences between Western European nationalism and its Central European counterpart is aptly summed up in the words of Hans Kohn, a Prague-born Jewish American historian and philosopher, author of *Pan Slavism*, which graces the dedication page to Peter Brock's *The Slovak National Awakening*:

In Western Europe modern nationalism was  
the work of statesmen and political leaders...  
In Central and Eastern Europe it was the poet,  
the philologist, and the historian who created  
the nationalities.

Faithful to the tenets of Romantic Nationalism, Czech and Slovak literary realisms had their roots from the Hegelian notion of Germanic superiority and the Herderian return to regional folklore and mythology. Hegel and Herder, therefore, form the two main strands of socio-political thought in Central Europe. I shall begin with the Czech nationalist movement, which differs from its Slovak counterpart.

From the Battle of White Mountain in 1620 onwards, the Habsburgs ruled the Czech lands and, through the course of centuries, endorsed Germanisation policy. Regarded as oppression in the Czech perspective, the Germanisation policy not only diminished the Czech language's role in state administration as well as education, but also deprived people

of their individual rights to religion. The Habsburgs initiated violent re-Catholicisation of the Czech lands, where the majority of people were Protestants. Having their national language reduced to a vernacular spoken only among the illiterate peasants and their books which contained their literature burnt, it is therefore not surprising that the Czech intelligentsia strongly subscribed to Herder's particularist notion that every ethnic group should be socio-politically distinct and to Herder's prediction that the Slav nations would become the real power of Europe. It is also not surprising that they rightfully dismissed Hegelian philosophy, which outwardly placed Germanic culture and language above those of other ethnic groups:

On the whole, Hegelianism remained an alien lore for Bohemian philosophers and intellectuals. Not even in specialized areas such as the philosophy of history (except for Smetana) did Hegel's thought leave any traces on Czech intellectual life. Czech historiography eschewed teleological perspectives and adopted an austere positivist methodology... In any case, by 1847-48 there was virtually no sign of Hegelianism left in Bohemia. (David 198)

True to the Herderian spirit, Josef Jungmann (1773–1847) modernised the Czech national language by means of extending the Czech vocabulary through his translations of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Friedrich Schiller and John Milton and through the publication of his monumental five-volume *Czech-German Dictionary* [*Slovník česko-německý*] (1835–1839), among others works. Milan Kundera's concept of the "Czech fate", with its particularist undercurrent, stems from this anti-Germanic and anti-universalist Czech nationalism.

The Slovak intelligentsia, on the other hand, favoured the Hegelian philosophy of history while also embracing Herder's thoughts, which went in line with their attempts to codify the modern Slovak language as their national language. Despite being Herder's ardent follower and main ideologist of the Pan-Slavic Movement, Ján Kollár (1793–1852) remained faithful to Hegel's philosophy of history: "Like Hegel, Kollár also accepted an artificial Teutonic-Romance national entity and the idea that the task of a leading nation was to reconcile the preexisting cultural contradictions generated by the historical process" (David 199). This claim can be attested in *Slávy dcera* [*Daughter of Sláva*], Kollár's epic work which formed the core of the Pan-Slavic movement. *Slávy dcera*, published in 1824, originally contained 150 Petrarchan sonnets. Later, in 1832, two cantos were added, resulting in its final form of 622 sonnets (Anonymous "Jan Kollár"). In his cantos, Kollár displays his Herderian belief in the culture of a bygone era by returning to the Slavic folk culture in his depiction of the meek and artful goddess Slavia. Slavia, a female character, represents the Slavic "spirit of the people", or Slavdom. In the following extract, Slavia is juxtaposed with Teutonia, her fierce neighbour. It is in this description that Kollár displays his Hegelian belief in the Teutonic myth and legend which justifies Germanic superiority in Europe:

O, věkové dávní, jako noc vůkol mne ležící,



o, krajino, všeliké slávy i hanby obraz!  
Od Labe zrádného k rovinám až Visly nevěrné,  
od Dunaje k heltným Baltu celého pěnám:  
krásnohlasý zmužilých Slavianů kde se někdy ozýval,  
ai, oněmělť už, byv k ourazu zášti, jazyk.  
A kdo se loupeže té, volající vzhůru, dopustil?  
kdo zhanobil v jednom národu lidstvo celé?  
Zardí se, závistná Teutonie, sousedo Slávy,  
tvé vin těchto počet zpáchali někdy ruky.

O, ancient ages, as the night lays about me,  
O, landscape of my country, the image of glory and shame!  
From treacherous Elbe to plains of unfaithful Vistula,  
from the Danube to the foamy Baltic:  
Euphonious language of courageous Slaviana, which occasionally  
resounded,  
thus became silent as if injured by hatred.  
And who committed the crime of that name-calling?  
who condemned the whole humankind to shame?  
Envious Teutonia, neighbour of Slava,  
burns for your sins committed by your hands.  
(English Translation by Veronika Planková and Verita Sriratana)

Ludovít Štúr (1815-1856), the leading figure of the Slovak National Revival and the codifier of the modern Slovak language standard used to this date, also remained faithful to Hegel's philosophy of history, particularly the Hegelian concept of "philosophical historian". As Hegel's ideal kind of historian, a philosophical historian is distinguished from the other historians by his/her ability to comprehend the manifestation and unfolding of the plan of Providence, the divine force of history which upholds the superiority of the Germanic race and European civilisation: "But to *explain* History is to depict the passions of mankind, the genius, the active powers, that play their part on the great stage; and the providentially determined process which these exhibit, constitutes what is generally called the 'plan' of Providence" (*Philosophy of History* 27). Štúr was fighting for a country oppressed by Magyarisation policy, or forced assimilation or acculturation process, which, according to Peter Brock, began in its earliest form since the year 1790 when Leopold II (1747–1792) was crowned King of Hungary. Leopold II's venture was to appease the discontentment among the Magyar nobilities, which started from the year 1784. 1784 was the year when Joseph II (1741–1790), his predecessor and elder brother, at the height of Germanisation policy, replaced Latin with German as the official language (Škvarna 86):

His [Joseph II's] attempt on grounds of public utility and for purposes of centralization to replace Latin by German as the official

language of the Hungarian kingdom evoked strong opposition on the part of the nobles (the nation hungarica as they considered themselves) and gave birth to a movement that soon found widespread support among them to put Magyar, only recently being cultivated on a wide scale, in place of either Latin or German as the state language. (Brock 6)

Leopold II's coronation was preceded by a settlement with the Diet where the Magyars were granted dominant social position. This reversal of the Habsburg's Germanisation policy made Magyar the dominant language spoken in schools and universities whereas Latin remained as the official administrative language. As part of the many attempts to resurrect the role of the Slovak language which has been reduced to that of a provincial dialect, Štúr published *Náuka reči slovenskej* [*Slovak Grammar*]. To promote Slovak literary language and culture, he secured a permit to publish *Slovenskje Národňje Noviňi* [*Slovak National Newspaper*] from 1845 to 1848, with *Orol Tatránski* [*The Eagle of Tatra*] as a literary supplement (Petro 68). Štúr's endeavours reflected the ways in which he compromised his Romantic nationalist sentiment with the philosophy of Herder and Hegel:

Štúr viewed Hegel's historical dialectics as a way of realizing what he considered to be Herder's idea about the historical mission of the Slavs. Štúr's philosophy of history for both the Slavs and the Slovaks was based directly on Hegel's teaching about a national spirit and its development and gradual unfolding in the national culture. This development was to be based on the specific problems and forms of spiritual life of the Slovak nation. Just as there were laws of nature, there were also laws of history. (David 201)

"Chapter Four: Postnational Modernism" examines the legacy of the Slovak National Revival in the particular modernity of the twenty-first century. Though the European Union has provided a utopian platform for supranational integration, many individual nations, particularly Slovakia, paradoxically veer towards ultra-right policies, which advocate racism, homophobia, xenophobia and hyper-nationalism. Likewise, though transnationalism seems to be the trend of the time, national identity and language are still understood to be inseparable. This phenomenon can be regarded as a morbid and twisted return to the National Revival. Hence, a postnational approach is needed to comprehend, for example, the reasons that right-wing extremist Marian Kotleba (1977-), who has been outwardly promoting anti-Roma and neo-Nazi sentiments, was elected Governor of the Banská Bystrica region in November 2013. The prefix "post" in the term "postnational", like the prefix "post" in "postcolonial", signifies a chronological aftermath and, more importantly, a critique on the existing established tradition. By "postnationalist modernism" I mean aesthetic and intellectual movement which inspires modernist moments of rupture with the prevalent ultra-nationalist sentiment. This chapter examines the legacy of the codification of the Slovak language, which results in the mainstream



notion that national community is strictly defined and categorised by a unified language, or by homogenous grammar and lexicon shared equally among the community members. This concept of speech-national communities, I propose, is deconstructed in Daniela Kapitáňová's *Samko Tále's Cemetery Book* [*Kniha o cintorine*], published in Slovak in 2000 and translated into English by Julia Sherwood in 2010. Through Samko's pedantic engagement in Aristotelian categorisation of knowledge in his obsessive attempt to illustrate his (anti-logical) logic of what it means to be a Slovak and to be part of a community which has gone through dramatic changes in history, tenets and beliefs which are unquestioningly accepted as truth are mercilessly defamiliarised, or "made strange". The disturbing right-wing sentiment in Slovakia, I propose, can be regarded as a product of the many oppressive years endured under totalitarian regimes of Austro-Hungarian Empire, Magyarisation, Nazism, Communism and the ongoing EU Capitalism. Pavel Vilikovský brilliantly captures in his writing the predicament of cultural conservatism shared by the Slovaks who have managed to survive the threat of genocides, cultural annihilation and economic deprivation, so much so that the freedom to merely "exist" has ironically become a luxury:

All nations want to plow a deep furrow in this history of humanity, they want to surpass themselves, but so far, they haven't been able to reach knee-high; only Slovaks, the children of God, see the meaning and fulfillment of their existence in the simple fact that they exist. Who else knows how to have such childlike pleasure: "Two hundred years have gone by already, and we're still here! There must be something behind it! We're still here, and that can't just be an accident!" And then, full of enthusiasm, they determine a clear goal: "Let's keep right on existing!" (*Ever Green* 79)

In "Chapter Five: Transnational and Infra-Historical (Post)Modernism", which is the last chapter of this book, I shall examine the historicist and transnational aspects of (post)modernism. The reason the prefix "post" remains within the parentheses is reflected in my argument that what has come to be known as "postmodernism", in fact, signifies a particular modernism in a particular context of modernity. Locating the (post)modernist moments entail locating modernist ruptures with the tyranny of grand narratives, which has been (re-)established as a regime to break and make new. Through my analysis of historical "infranovel", a genre which crosses and blends together the genres of journalism and fiction and which contributes to an alternative treatment of history, I propose that the radical (post)modernist resistance to the totalitarianism of grand narratives reflects a realist attempt to "get closer" to the truth. The truth in question is not the universal truth according to the Universalist tenets of the Enlightenment. On the contrary, the truth in question is based on (post)modernism's subtle inclination towards historical and psychological particularism, which paradoxically leads to infra-historicity and transnationalism. I propose that such an inclination is played out in literary texts which playfully attempt to arrange and rearrange, as

well as *remember* and *re-member*, as in assembling, the recreated fragments of the past, only to display its utter failure to render the narratives whole and coherent. In other words, (post)modernist texts tend to reflect and function as the uncanny cosmopolitan “spies” of history, sharing the same tasks as the protagonist in Vilikovsky’s *Ever Green Is...*, who is a senile aging spy giving absurd and unreliable professional tips to a younger colleague:

I could reply to you in the words of the old poet who wrote on the gates of hell: “Abandon all hope.” Abandon all prejudices, all conventions, those who enter one of the most difficult professions, the profession which... because in this case it’s not really a profession, but a calling, as they used to say, not a job that you can perform routinely, without your heart in it, eight hours and that’s enough, back to the family circle, to indulge in your hobbies. (I have never in my life, for example, been to a soccer match.) It’s a calling that requires all of your energies and abilities, and the reward? The only reward is your awareness of having been a part of historical motion, the midwife, so to speak, of historical change. Because, remember, all changes that become a part of history are historical. (18)

In terms of Central European history, the genre of the historical infranovel, written particularly by an outsider, or a bystander of history and mainstream grand narrative, functions as both a spy and a midwife whose roles are to detect and to nurture historical changes. This genre of writing reveals more than what it promises to reveal. In Laurent Binet’s *HHhH*, published in French in 2010 and translated into English in 2013, the writer takes his readers beyond the historical facts of a particular event in the past, Operation Anthropoid, to his own life as a French writer faced with the burden of his personal history and the perpetual struggle with the unattainability of historical truth. A historical infranovel puts to question the concept of language as neutral medium in historiography. Binet, like Hayden White in *Metahistory*, blurs the boundaries between history and fiction. I also argue in this chapter that Laurent Binet’s conscious “otherness” to Central Europe, particularly Czech and Slovak languages, cultures and histories, sets him “free to dream” of a different place/time and free to imagine as well as introduce spectres of the obscure and unknown “subaltern” in history, thereby adding critical dimensions to the critical rethinking and re(-)membering of the Czech and Slovak histories of violence and dissidence.

# 1

## ALL THE (CENTRAL EUROPEAN) WORLD'S A CZECH PUB: DECENTRALISING CENTRAL EUROPE

In *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera lays out his definition of “Central Europe” as follows:

CENTRAL EUROPE. Seventeenth century: The enormous force of the baroque imposes a certain cultural unity on the region, which is multinational and thus polycentric, with its shifting and indefinable boundaries. The lingering shadow of baroque Catholicism persists there into the eighteenth century: no Voltaire, no Fielding. In the hierarchy of the arts, music stands at the top. From Haydn on (and up through Schoenberg and Bartók) the center of gravity of European music is there. Nineteenth century: A few great poets, but no Flaubert; the Biedermeier spirit: the veil of the idyllic draped over the real. In the twentieth century, revolt. The greatest minds (Freud, the novelists) revalidate what for centuries was ill known and unknown: rational and demystifying lucidity; a sense of the real; the novel. Their revolt is the exact opposite of French modernism's, which is antirationalist, antirealist, lyrical (this will cause a good many misunderstandings). The pleiad of great Central European novelists: Kafka, Hasek, Musil, Broch, Gombrowicz: their aversion to romanticism; their love for the pre-Balzac novel and for the libertine spirit (Broch interpreting kitsch as a plot by monogamous Puritanism against the Enlightenment); their mistrust of History and of the glorification of the future; their modernism which has nothing to do with the avant-garde's illusions. (124-25)

Despite Kundera's pedantic and controversial attempt to demarcate the artistic and intellectual boundaries of Central Europe by means of tracing its history from the seventeenth century, the region remains an ambiguous territory of which only shared history is multiculturalism, multilingualism and ever-shifting borders. From the excerpt, the literary and philosophical legacies of eighteenth-century Central Europe are defined against the backdrop of the legacies of Voltaire (1694-1778) and Henry Fielding (1707-1754), the two satirists who form a distinctive part of the Western European canon. Kundera's emphasis on the region's supremacy of music among all the arts serves to



further distinguish Central Europe from the rest of Europe. Though the Biedermeier trend, which ushered in and also reflected the rise and growth of middle-class population and artistic taste in Central Europe between the years 1815 and 1848, is mentioned in Kundera's definition, the development of nineteenth-century Central European literature took its course without Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) and his deliberate vacillation between Romanticism and Realism. Finally, arriving at the twentieth century in Kundera's historical survey, the chasm between Central Europe and Western Europe is rendered unbridgeable as Kundera posits the notion of Central European Modernism as the complete opposite of avant-garde French Modernism in its realist tendency and its sober disillusionment with the past.

If Central European Modernism is the antithesis of its Western European counterpart, the excerpt begs crucial questions: What about "Eastern Europe"? What is its position in Milan Kundera's cultural, literary and geopolitical cartographies of Europe? As part of an attempt to ask further questions regarding my proposed questions, the excerpt also invites readers to return to an interview of Kundera by Philip Roth in 1980:

PR: And yet, are not the fates of Eastern Europe and Western Europe radically different matters?

MK: As a concept of cultural history, Eastern Europe is Russia, with its quite specific history anchored in the Byzantine world. Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, just like Austria have never been part of Eastern Europe. From the very beginning they have taken part in the great adventure of Western civilization, with its Gothic, its Renaissance, its Reformation--a movement which has its cradle precisely in this region. It was here, in Central Europe, that modern culture found its greatest impulses; psychoanalysis, structuralism, dodecaphony, Bartók's music, Kafka's and Musil's new esthetics of the novel. The postwar annexation of Central Europe (or at least its major part) by Russian civilization caused Western culture to lose its vital center of gravity. It is the most significant event in the history of the West in our century, and we cannot dismiss the possibility that the end of Central Europe marked the beginning of the end for Europe as a whole.

"Eastern Europe", Kundera asserts, "is Russia" (Roth). The need to distinguish Central European culture, which, according to Kundera, has been part of the "Western Civilisation" and its artistic and cultural movements, from Russian and Eastern European cultures reflects his anxiety for the fate of the Czech nation and culture threatened by the prospect of extermination: "But after the Russian invasion of 1968, every Czech was confronted with the thought that his nation could be quietly erased from Europe, just as over the past five decades 40 million Ukrainians have been quietly vanishing from the world without the world paying any heed" (Roth). Kundera's choice of the term "Central Europe", instead of



“East-Central Europe” or “Eastern Europe”, therefore, can be regarded as a continuation of the legacy of the Czech historian František Palacký (1798-1876). Palacký claims that the Czech people are the centre and the heart of Europe and that the Czech culture functions as a bridge between the East and the West:

The history of the Czech nation is in numerous respects more instructive and more interesting than the history of many other nations. As the Bohemian Lands are located in the center, the heart of Europe, the Czech nation has for many centuries been the central point where elements and principles of national, State, and Church life in modern Europe have, not without a struggle, been in contact. The long conflict as well as the intermingling of Roman, German and Slav elements in Europe is particularly evident here.

Enhancing Palacký’s Czech myth, with its emphasis on the geographical and socio-political centrality of the Czech nation and culture in Europe, Kundera universalises the angst accumulated from centuries of wars and oppression and turns the plight of Central Europe into a shared “European crisis” (*Art of the Novel* 11):

Husserl’s lectures on the European crisis and on the possible disappearance of European mankind were his philosophical testament. He gave those lectures in two capitals of Central Europe. This coincidence has a deep meaning: for it was in that selfsame Central Europe that, for the first time in its modern history, the West could see the death of the West, or, more exactly, the amputation of a part of itself, when Warsaw, Budapest, and Prague were swallowed up by the Russian Empire. This calamity was engendered by the First World War, which, unleashed by the Habsburg empire, led to the end of that empire and unbalanced forever an enfeebled Europe. (*Art of the Novel* 11)

Kundera’s venture to define Central Europe remains deeply Western Eurocentric in its ostracisation of Russian and Eastern European cultures. However vehement his attempt to establish *on centre stage* the *centrality* of Central Europe in terms of politics, history and culture seems, Central Europe, with Czech culture as its heart, remains a mere “laboratory”, where political and cultural experiments of Western Europe take place: “The destruction of the Habsburg empire, and then, after 1945, Austria’s cultural marginality and the political nonexistence of the other countries, make Central Europe a premonitory mirror showing the possible fate of all of Europe. Central Europe: a laboratory of twilight” (*Art of the Novel* 125). Kundera’s “laboratory of twilight” (125) concept therefore exposes the ways in which he uses history not only as a fixed reference point, but also as a means to justify his understanding of the role and position of Central Europe. The result paradoxically subverts as well as deconstructs Kundera’s own carefully constructed

premise of a typical “Czech fate”. My argument finds its resonance in Liisa Steinby’s critique on Kundera’s Eurocentrism in *Kundera and Modernity*:

Kundera ignores the critique of Eurocentrism common in contemporary political and cultural debates. The postcolonial perspective emphasizes that European history and art, or what in Europe is defined as rationality, cannot be identified with history, art, and rationality as such, as assumed traditionally following the Enlightenment; critics of Eurocentrism see in this generalization an unjustifiable claim to European supremacy. Conversely, according to Kundera, it is precisely Europe—as a cultural entity—which today is threatened and in need of advocates. Rather than acting as colonizer, Europe is in danger of being colonized (...). The first time Kundera experienced this happening was when the Soviet tanks rolled into Prague and European culture was forced to withdraw. (14)

The paradox lies in Kundera’s subversion of the role and position of Central Europe. Though he strives to portray the existence of Central Europe as being under threat, that is, being colonised by the Soviet regime, Kundera nevertheless fails to challenge and question the colonial ideology which underpins the dialectical relation between the coloniser and the colonised, between the centre and the periphery. History is seen and referred to as absolute truth, instead of what Michel Foucault refers to as “technologies of power” (146), which means methods, carried out mostly by education and military institutions, of constructing and instilling in the people the kind of belief and knowledge which sustains and propagates the ideology of power. This paradox of “failed subversion”, or “failed radicalism”, can also be seen reflected in Kundera’s life, from his involvement in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia as an aspiring reformist of Czech communism even after the Soviet invasion in 1968 to his subsequent public disputes with Václav Havel which took place before he left his home country for France in the year 1975. By taking refuge in the traditional concept of the Czech myth, as I have outlined, and by positing that the Soviet invasion is an inevitable part of the “Czech fate”, Kundera places hopes on the Communist party and the “Czechoslovak autumn” (Herman) following the political unrest. He wrote:

The significance of the new Czechoslovak politics was too far-reaching not to run into resistance. The conflict, of course, was more drastic than we anticipated, and the trials undergone by this new politics were brutal. But I refuse to call it a national catastrophe, as our somewhat tearful public tends to do today. I would even venture to say that, in spite of this public opinion, the significance of the Czechoslovak autumn may even surpass the significance of the Czechoslovak spring. (Herman)

It is also worth quoting Václav Havel's scathing response to Kundera's optimistic, albeit some would say "naïve", refusal to condemn the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968:

A quite logical link in this pseudo-critical illusionism...is Kundera's concept of the "Czech lot." I do not believe in this fate, and I think that first and foremost we ourselves are the masters of our fate; we will not be freed from this by pleading selfishness nor by hiding behind our geographic position, nor by reference to our centuries-old lot of balancing between sovereignty and subjugation. Again, this is nothing but an abstraction cloaking our concrete responsibility for our concrete actions... I see the summit of Kundera's entire illusionist construct, however, in something even further: we supposedly stood -- for the first time since the end of the Middle Ages -- "at the center of world history," because we strove - - for the first time in world history -- for "socialism without the omnipotence of the secret police, with freedom of the written and the spoken word [...]": our experiment supposedly aimed so far into the future that we had to remain not fully understood. What a balm for our wounds! And yet what bombastic illusion! (Herman)

From the extract, Havel, who would later become the last president of Czechoslovakia in 1989 and the first president of the Czech Republic between the years 1993 and 2003, was apt to point out and also to expose the "bombastic illusion" (Herman) in Kundera's essentialisation of the Czech nation and the predestination of Czech fate.

I propose in this chapter that Central Europe is not Kundera's "laboratory of twilight" (*Art of the Novel* 125), but instead a brawling pub where cocktails of ideology, as reflected by the history of physical and socio-political violence in Central Europe, a region marred by Nazi occupation and Communist oppression, are served. A mélange of blatant betrayals and subtle propaganda which led to collective ethnic cleansing, culminated in pogroms and post-war repatriation policies, as well as personal brainwashing of prejudice gilded in the name of nationalism, Central European history is a distillation of dark humour and (e)strange(d) politics. In Emil Hakl's *Of Kids & Parents (O rodičích a dětech)*, published in 2002, translated into English by Marek Tomin and released as a film adaptation in 2008, social(ist) problem, as well as Kundera's Czech myth, is presented "with a human face" and challenged by two familiar faces. Father and son go on a drinking odyssey around Prague and discuss the so-called "European civilisation", family, immigrant life, post-war repatriation, fleeting memories, death and nihilism, among other random topics over pints of beer, glasses of much stronger substance and typical greasy pub food, with occasional "draining" intermissions at the men's toilet: "I shook my dick and put it back in my trousers. I spat into the urinal. I rinsed my hands" (Hakl 101). A "pub crawl" through the social and political upheavals of the twentieth century, of which the

impact can still be felt on a personal level, *Of Kids & Parents* exposes the absurdities embedded within the common question in the Czech language “So what’s new?” [“Tak copak je nového?”] (Hakl 10) and within any attempt to *fix* and *fixate* on the “central/periphery” dichotomy as readers, along with the characters, become inebriated with and sobered from the (re-)constructed narratives that bind individuals together equally as “kids” of regimes and ideologies, as well as “masters”, according to Václav Havel, of their own ever-changing fate.

During the time when this chapter was first written as a research paper (October 2013) and during the time when it was improved and rewritten as part of this book (February 2014), I was living in Bratislava, Slovakia. The Eurozone crisis could still be felt on all levels, from day-to-day spending on groceries to the seemingly unrelated problem which ensues from the government’s absurd budget allocation on education, where Arts and Humanities lecturers and researchers like myself were obliged to quantify their teaching and research impact in round figures. The question of whether Central Europe’s strive towards becoming “the master of its own fate”, as Havel stipulates in his article in response to Kundera, has been a landmark achievement or an impossible feat is and will still be open to debate in many years to come. However, the fact that such a debate has been taking place and is still taking place in the printed pages of unquantifiable works of fiction, as I shall illustrate, and of journalism, as in the case of Kundera vs Havel controversy, testifies to the triumph of Havel’s calling for a brave act of taking “concrete responsibility for our concrete actions” (Herman) as opposed to hiding passively behind the imagined cloak of inevitability and predestination. Since demolition would have cost a fortune, I propose that the neat and orderly “laboratory of twilight” (*Art of the Novel* 125), a mere reflection of Western European civilisation’s grandeur and menacing plight, has to be ransacked before being completely “renovated”, as in the fashion of many old Central European socialist buildings, into a pub where tangible experiences clink glasses with myths and abstractions. The drinking establishment, or the “public house”, which is Central Europe in my understanding can be seen culminated in Hakl’s description of a “pub in Bořivojova Street” (85) in his novel:

I took a swig and realised Father was staring with a terrified expression at something in one corner of the room. I looked in that direction. There was a bunch of grown-up kids, their hair already going grey, lowering shots of green mint liqueur into freshly drawn pints of beer. The shots descended to the bottom of their mugs like small, heavy divers.

“Oh Christ...,” Father said slowly.

...

“They’re drinking a Magic Eye.”

“Logic Eye?”

“Magic. Don’t you know it?”

“No I don’t, where could I have come across such an abomination? It’s not something you actually drink, is it?”

“Of course, it’s a classic cocktail, an essential part of the repertoire. We’ve been drinking it in Žižkov since I can remember.”

...

“I’ve seen all kinds of things, but I’m sure I’d remember this sort of barbarity...”

“You remind me of a landlady from a pub in Bořivojova Street. In 1990 they opened this brand new place there on the corner where there’d always been a pub, but suddenly there were American flags everywhere, new tables and new staff...”

“And what about this landlady?”

“She was just like you. When we tried ordering Magic Eyes – we were feeling nostalgic – she had no idea what we wanted. A landlady! So we ordered beer and mint liqueur separately and when we dropped the shots into the beer glasses, this beast of a woman rushed over and started screaming: “I’m not having that in my establishment, you can do it anywhere else you like but not here! I’m not serving you another drink! Pay up and go!” We sat there staring at her and just couldn’t think of anything to say, so we paid and left. (84-86)

The geographical location of the pub bears significance in terms of history. Bořivojova street is located in Prague’s Žižkov district. Žižkov district is not only rumoured to be the place where the number of pubs per capita is the highest of any city district in Europe, but also known to be the place of distinctive Czech history and culture. Historically a working-class area, as is sometimes referred to as “Red Žižkov”, the Žižkov district was named after Jan Žižka (1360–1424), the famous Hussite general who took part in the Battle of Grunwald and rose to prominence during the Hussite Wars. He is remembered in history as a Czech national hero, one of the greatest military leaders who never lost a battle. During the Second World War, Žižkov district was also part of the Czech resistance movement as the families within the area gave refuge to the Operation Anthropoid parachutists. Apart from that, Žižkov district is also a district of artists and writers. Jaroslav Hašek (1883–1923), best known for his novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*, wrote many of his works while living in the district and Jaroslav Seifert (1901–1986), poet and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1984, was a native of Žižkov. Franz Kafka was also buried at the New Jewish Cemetery in Žižkov. In my allegory, if the landlady in Hakl’s description represents the ruling political regime which cloaks its post-Cold War ideologies with newly renovated décor of the Post-Communist 1990s, with “American flags everywhere” (Hakl 85) and the promise of uncensored freedom, it can be said that the pub on Bořivojova street, of which she remains the owner, symbolises the physical and intellectual cartography of Central

Europe with, according to Kundera, the Czech nation at its heart. Capitalism seems to be the new currency on which this new pub called Central Europe thrives. However, appearance can be deceiving. Liberation can be a mere illusion. The landlady, not wanting to accept differences in terms of cocktail recipes and drinking methods, retains the power to drive her customers away. Likewise, censorship and persecution prevail after the dissolution of the Iron Curtain, leaving imprints on the people's mentality: "why are you so outraged by someone drinking a Magic Eye?"/"Because I'm not familiar with it and unfamiliar phenomena always lead to outrage" (Hakl 87). The fear of and unrelenting adversary towards differences and the unfamiliar are carried out in a different and a more subtle form. The cocktail of regional history and national identity which used to be acceptable as a norm and mainstream narrative of the Czech nation and of Central Europe as imagined communities at one point in time suddenly becomes unacceptable when it is "consumed" differently. It is also interesting to note that the customers who request such a concoction of nostalgia choose to leave the pub in passivity. This reflects how years of fear and censorship have moulded a habit and mentality of non-confrontation among the citizens of the region.

In the conversation between a 44-year-old son and his 71-year-old father, which takes place in a pub, the Czech myth is not only constantly referred to, but also mercilessly demystified and deconstructed:

"...Why exactly are you here, do you even know?"

"Because you made me."

"Well that's true, sorry about that, it happens... But why do you live in *Prague* all your life?"

"Because I'm afraid of changing my life for the worse. *Prague* is the only place where I can live."

"And how do you know that if you've never tried it anywhere else?"

"Spending a week or two in some other town is more than enough time for me to see that I'd go bonkers from the nothingness, the lack of ambiguity, the *seriousness* of people's lives there. Once you become a *tailor* there, all you can do is tow the line and remain a *tailor* until you die because that's how everyone sees you no matter how hard you try to be something else."

"And what don't you like about that?"

"It's boring! To take on one role and act it out until you completely decompose!"

"Whereas here?"

"Life unfolds here as if it were a comedy by Frič, or some touchingly naff Italian porno... Like the assassination of Heydrich performed by a children's puppet theatre..."



“And you like that?”

“I like that very much.”

“What, for goodness’ sake, do you like about it?”

“The theatrical dimensions, the small space. The way a gangster has a similar social standing to a minister, and vice versa. All the clowning. All the messing around and rubbing of elbows... All those stories about how someone used to drink beer and play cards with the president...”

“A total circus.”

“But a merry one.” (105-106)

The metaphysical resignation behind the famous Shakespearean phrase “All the world’s a stage,/ And all the men and women merely players” (*As You Like It* 83) is rendered deceptive when it comes to the particular modernity of Central Europe. Though the son evokes the myth and lure of Prague as a “merry circus”, or a stage of black comedy, and refers to the spirit of dynamic “ambiguity” shared among the Czech people, the notion of Prague as the metropolitan centre of Europe is challenged by his response to the father’s question “But why do you live in Prague all your life?” (106). Apparently, the son chooses to remain in Prague for fear of a worse living condition had he lived elsewhere. His remarks reflect a paradox typical of a nation or a culture which has long been struggling to establish its identity through insularity. The inferiority complex of “the small space” (106) tends to be perpetually aggrandised. The son’s answer therefore embraces yet, at the same time, refutes František Palacký’s celebration of the Czech nation as “the heart of Europe” and of Milan Kundera’s jubilant optimism in his depiction of the Czech fate.

The father’s side of the story, however, further subverts and challenges the dialectical relation between “centre” and “periphery”. He recounts to his son the story of his own father’s migration to Croatia, which formed part of Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1991: “The thing was that Father joined Tito’s army in the last year of the war, him – a factory owner – and no one could talk him out of it! He joined the Partisans to serve in *the thirteenth proletarian army*, as he never failed to point out...” (28). A capitalist by circumstance, the father’s father, or the son’s grandfather, left home to make his fortune in the city and later in a foreign land as an entrepreneur: “He was the youngest of four children, three of whom were brothers and so he got some money from his father to start him off and went out into the world to make his fortune, that’s how it was” (30). The promise of a post-war socialist Croatia attracted the likes of the father’s father: “And why Croatia? To tell you the truth, I don’t rightly know why he went there, but a lot of Czechs did in those days. I guess they saw it as a land of opportunity” (30). The family remained in Croatia under Josip Broz Tito’s regime and witnessed the violence which took place as Tito’s “benevolent dictatorship” yielded less benevolent results to the Czech migrants, albeit those like the father’s father who had assisted in the National Liberation Army and

Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia war effort, following the conflict between Tito and Joseph Stalin:

But when the war was over the executions and prison sentences began anew because the great comrade Tito began settling accounts with his enemies, first it was the former gendarmes, the monarchists, you know, and then Communists started getting rid of Communists, as always happens everywhere, you know, it's always the same story, the only difference between events of this kind is the way they're later interpreted. (28)

When "Communists started getting rid of Communists" (28) in Zagreb, the irony and absurdity of war and warring ideologies became more evident in Croatia than in the "merry circus" of Prague in Central Europe, the heart of Europe. Faced with persecution and unjust treatment, particularly in the form of Tito's nationalisation policy, the family left their home in Croatia for Czechoslovakia. Little did they know that their plight of being the victims of conflicting and confusing ideologies did not end when they left Yugoslavia. "Titoism", ironically, has been translated into a threat in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, as Anne Applebaum points out in *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-56*:

Eventually 'Titoism', or 'right deviationism', became a very serious political crime: in the Eastern European context, a 'Titoist' was someone who wanted his national communist party to maintain some independence from the Soviet communist party. Like 'Trotskyism' the term could eventually be applied to anyone who objected (or appeared to object, or was accused of objecting) to the mainstream political line. 'Titoists' also became the new scapegoats. If Eastern Europe was not as prosperous as the West, then surely 'Titoists' were to blame. If shops were empty, 'Titoists' were at fault. If Central European factories were not producing at the expected level, 'Titoists' had sabotaged them. (271)

The "theatrical dimensions" (Hakl 106) of violence for which the son later expresses his fondness therefore awaited them in Czechoslovakia:

"...What was it you were asking me, oh yes, why our family came back. Well, for one thing, immediately after the war they started nationalising and even though my father had a few perks on account of his activities in the resistance and they let him sell the factory, in other words, he didn't lose absolutely everything, even so he'd had just about enough of it. His idea was to come back to Bohemia and set up a tie-making factory with his cousin Vilda, all he ever talked about was how he and Vilda were going to have a *little tie* factory and how they were going to live in peace and quiet. So they sent me



to Prague in 1945, I didn't really want to go, I wanted to go to the naval academy, didn't I... So my parents came up in 1948 and within two years the Communists had thrown my father in prison and I'd gone to work in a factory."

"Hmm, that's the way it goes."

"Exactly, you'd think people would learn their lesson, but they never do, especially not here in Bohemia. That's why my father wanted to return, on account of this pipedream about a land of milk and honey that all the Czechs in Yugoslavia had envisaged in a fixated sort of way, they kept sighing about how great it was going to be when Doctor Beneš and his wife Hana returned to Prague Castle and they'd have sausage and Pilsner beer and go for a stroll in Stromovka Park... And about Honza Masaryk, you know, and how Churchill won't let Stalin take... and so on and so on."

"*Churchill* was one of the first words I registered as a child, *Churchill* and *Krushchev*." (28-29)

When the father's father was in Bohemia, Yugoslavia was envisioned as El Dorado. When the father's father and his family went to live in Yugoslavia, Bohemia haunted his dreams as he looked upon his native country as a land of milk and honey. The lived and living experiences of the three generations of characters in *Of Kids & Parents* put to question and eventually dismantle the centrality of the centre/periphery dichotomy in national identity construction, which is reflected in the fixed cultural territories of West, Central and East Europe stipulated by Milan Kundera.

To conclude this chapter, Milan Kundera's attempt to *fix* and *fixate* on the Czech fate and the position of Central Europe as European civilisation's "laboratory of twilight" (*Art of the Novel* 125) can be heard echoed in the most common question of the Czech language and culture: "So what's new?" ["Tak copak je nového?"] (Hakl 10). This question, I imagine, is constantly being uttered in numerous pubs in Bořivojova Street and beyond:

"So what's new?" I asked.

"Nothing's been new in this world for more than two billion years, it's all just variations on the same theme of carbon, hydrogen, helium, and nitrogen," Father answered. (10)

From the excerpt, the father takes the question literally, instead of its typical "how are you?", which most people would have understood it to mean. Emil Hakl's treatment of such a question, which culminates in the father's reply, "Nothing's been new in this world for more than two billion years" (10), exposes and ridicules an individual's as well as a nation's constant need to detect differences and define meanings to the point of obsession. Mutability, the father points out, is not only the heart of natural phenomena but also the basis of life, both on personal and national level, itself:

“Something’s always happening! Even if you’re sitting at home in your comfy armchair, something’s always happening! Increasingly sophisticated viruses are continuously trying to reprogram the way your cells work, antibiotics have almost lost their potency, organisms are being cloned, almost every day an animal species disappears from the planet, the darkies have got the atomic bomb, that’s not enough for you? Entire nations are being displaced around the world, is that not enough for you?” (53)

The world of mutated violence and distorted ideologies that is Central Europe is not a passive laboratory where political experiments are carried out, quantified and recorded in neat tables and diagrams. What is new in this region, as well as in life, cannot always be detected, understood, quantified and explicated. “The world”, Václav Havel asserts, “is not composed – even though it would be very comforting to think of it that way – of dumb superpowers that can do everything and clever little nations that can do nothing” (Herman). In this world, as in life, nothing is black and white. There are no fixed “centres” and “peripheries”, only the rise and fall of power. Whatever one’s stance is regarding these matters, true to Havel’s liberal spirit, they are now at least open to debate after years of silencing. And where else does a good debate take place? Perhaps we shall find a pub on Bořivojova Street with a certain grumpy-looking landlady and spark this particular(ist) debate with a dubious cocktail of the region’s history, but this time refusing to ever leave our seats in submissive silence.

## 2

### PROVINCIAL(ISING) MODERNISM: TIMRAVA AND THE SLOVAK NEW WOMEN

In “The New Modernist Studies”, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz use the organising categories “temporal, spatial, and vertical” (738) to chart the range of recent innovative scholarship of modernism. They contend that new “expansive tendency” (737) can be found in recent modernist studies. The temporal expansion questions the fixed scope of the widely accepted period of modernism, which traditionally stretches from 1880 to 1945. In terms of spatiality, new scholarly attention has been directed towards non-European texts and aesthetic movements. The vertical expansion pertains to the rethinking of the concepts of middle brow and popular media in relation to the concept of high art:

As scholars demonstrate the fertility of questioning rigid temporal delimitations, periods seem inevitably to get bigger (one might think of “the long eighteenth century” or “the age of empire”). Meanwhile, interrogations of the politics, historical validity, and aesthetic value of exclusive focus on the literatures of Europe and North America have spurred the study (in the North American academy) of texts produced in other quarters of the world or by hitherto little-recognized enclaves in the privileged areas. In addition to these temporal and spatial expansions, there has been what we are calling here a vertical one, in which once quite sharp boundaries between high art and popular forms of culture have been reconsidered; in which canons have been critiqued and reconfigured; in which works by members of marginalized social groups have been encountered with fresh eyes and ears; and in which scholarly inquiry has increasingly extended to matters of production, dissemination, and reception. (737-38)

The transnational expansion of recent modernist studies can be seen reflected in new attempts to analyse, by means of tracing networks among writers across nations which bypass the centre-periphery models of empire, the works of writers (especially non-European women writers) from the formerly colonised regions. This transnational turn in modernism contributes to the decentralisation of Eurocentric models of knowledge and history. If such a supposition is true, what can one learn from an investigation of the works of writers from *within* Europe who have been overlooked or forgotten? I propose in this chapter that the study of the literature of Central Europe, a region which is “same (as) but



different” from Western Europe, puts to further question the centre-periphery dichotomy, the (often vague and conflicting) concepts of nationhood and the crisis of language. I intend to demonstrate my premise on a more micro level by means of analysing the work of a Slovak woman writer who is not known to Anglophone readers. The reason is that the women writers’ ambivalent status as symbols of nationalist spirit and, at the same time, as provincial writers under the shadows of their more urban educated male, as well as female, counterparts lends itself to the deconstruction of nationalist discourses, to which women openly subscribe and which, at the same time, they subtly criticise in their works. My argument finds its resonance in Norma Rudinsky’s statement in *Incipient Feminists: Women Writers in the Slovak national Revival*:

The interplay of language and politics is so characteristic of central Europe and so uncharacteristic of the English-speaking world that the word “nationality” becomes a slippery source of confusion. The danger of confusion is doubly important in this study of women’s position as a function of the national position. (7)

I also propose that the three strands of expansion, “temporal, spatial, and vertical” (Mao and Walkowitz 738), in modernist studies can also contribute to an alternative reading of Central European literature in the twentieth century as part of an aesthetic and intellectual movement which I would like to call “provincial modernism”. I agree with Jahan Ramazani, who states in *A Transnational Poetics*, that a particularist model of analysis is important in conceptualising the transnational turn in modernism: “in a reframing of modern and contemporary poetic history, nationality and ethnicity still need to play important roles. An updated version of the universalist ‘Golden Treasury’ model that erases national and ethnic experience must be avoided” (43). Therefore, a comparative study of particular socio-economic and historical contexts of regional modernities, as well as the development of literary modernisms, in Western and Central Europe is needed as a necessary step to understand my proposed trope of provincial modernism.

The Modernist movement in Western Europe was formed by the social and economic transformation from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. This was when modern industry generated the rapid growth of cities, which increasingly became the fertile grounds for the rise of the middle class. This was the time when modernity widened the gap between the city and the countryside. Along with the scientific and technological advancement, this period of time also ushered in the atrocity of the First World War.

The modernist movement in Central Europe, on the other hand, arose from the Romantic Nationalism and the Realism which local intelligentsia adopted and adapted from their Western European counterpart. The reason Romantic Nationalism and Realism found in Central European intellectual sphere such fertile grounds to thrive and flourish was that the intelligentsia of Central Europe, threatened by legal and cultural oppression by both foreign and internal elite powers, were locked in a long struggle for national unity and identity in the region where there had not been definite physical as well as cultural borders.

Milan Kundera went as far as asserting that the unity between the many national groups in Central Europe, particularly in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, was established and solidified only by chance and circumstance:

Is it true that the borders of Central Europe are impossible to trace in any exact, lasting way? It is indeed! Those nations have never been masters of either their own destinies or their borders. They have rarely been the subjects of history, almost always its objects. Their unity was *unintentional*. They were kin to one another not through will, not through fellow-feeling or through linguistic proximity, but by reason or similar experience, by reason of common historical situations that brought them together, at different times, in different configurations, and within shifting, never definitive borders. (*The Curtain* 46)

However, as stipulated in the book's introduction and in the previous chapter, the main premise of my book departs from Kundera's notion of Central European predestination in that it puts on centre stage the notion of Czech and Slovak nationalism as a linguistic and literary movement. The importance of language, particular to the region in question, can be seen from the root word of the term "Slav":

The expression 'Slavs' (*Slovakia* in Slovak, *Slavyane* in Russian) derived from *slovo* – 'word' in Slovak and Russian. A Slav was able to communicate to speak – in contrast to the dumb, mute person: *nemý* in Slovak, *nemoi* in Russian. Thus the designation for a German – who could neither understand nor be understood by Slovaks – is *Nemec* in Slovak, *Nemets* in Russian (*német* in Magyar). (Teich et al 5)

I shall elaborate my claim by offering a brief survey of the literary and socio-political history of Slovakia, which is the focus of this chapter.

While literary Modernism in Western Europe outwardly challenges and questions the absoluteness of the Enlightenment values, literary Modernism in Central Europe relies on the founding stones of Western European Enlightenment, notably those extracted from French and German intellectual culture, in (re-)building their national cultures. While some modernist writers in Western Europe outwardly reject religious belief and question class system, their Central European counterpart tends to embrace religion and rigid social *chains of being* more ardently. The reason is that, in the past, the church as well as the nobility was empowered by the particular economic system of the region which had always proved favourable to the ruling elite. This resulted in the prolongation of years of feudal system. Accordingly, it can be inferred from Krzysztof Brzechczyn's portrayal of the economic structure in Central Europe, in comparison with that in Western Europe, that the rise of the middle class in Central Europe did not produce as strong an impact as that in Western Europe. In "The Notion of Central Europe in Historiography", Brzechczyn maintains that

the Central European middle class population was stunted by the shortage of labour and small overall population, granting the ruling elite almost absolute dominant power over the occupation of urban as well as provincial spaces:

Shortage of manpower was the factor triggering the divergence of development between Central Europe and Western Europe. It worked in two ways. On the one hand, a low population density coupled with the weakening of the power of the state forced the feudal landlords to improve the situation of peasants. The improvement of the economic situation in the villages—as a result of colonization based on the so-called “German law”—limited the scope of peasant migration to the cities. Consequently, the cities in Central Europe were less numerous than in Western Europe. The underdevelopment of the urban component in the united kingdoms of Central Europe disturbed the balance among the king, the burghers, and the nobility. As long as the estate of nobles was weak, the economic development of the cities and the peasantry could continue unobstructed. However, when the nobility gained political dominance in particular Central European societies, it proceeded to abolish the privileges of the burghers and the liberties of peasants. Owing to its almost complete control of the state, the estate of nobility could limit the development of the competitive urban economy and take over the prerogatives of the state towards the peasantry. (8)

Hence, it is not surprising that the majority of key players in Slovak literary establishment were not only upper-class but also affiliated with the Church. Before the nineteenth century, the people in the region known today as the Slovak Republic wrote in Latin and Czech. They spoke Czech, German, Slovak (as a local dialect) and Hungarian. Slovakia's sense of nationhood was only established in the late eighteenth to nineteenth century: “The first attempt at a systematic account of the history of the Slovaks appeared in 1780, in the form of Juraj Papánek's *Historia gentis Slavae*.” (Teich et al 2). Slovak literary language was first codified in 1787 by Anton Bernolák (1762-1813), a Catholic priest. Bernolák published his *Dissertatio philologico-critica de litteris Slavorum*, where he codified a Slovak language standard based on the Western Slovak dialect of the University of Trnava. The Bernolák language was the first successful establishment of a Slovak language standard. However, it was notoriously difficult and it was used mainly by Slovak Catholics, particularly by the writers Juraj Fándly (1750-1811) and Ján Hollý (1785-1849). The Protestants, on the other hand, were still writing in the Czech language preserved in its original form. The Bernolák language soon fell out of popular favour. In 1843, a group of young Slovak Lutheran Protestants, led by Ľudovít Štúr (1815-1856), decided to establish the Central Slovak dialect as the new language standard. This newly codified literary



language was also accepted by some users of the Bernolák language and hence formed the basis of the Slovak literary language that is used today, having been declared the new language standard since August 1844. The first Slovak grammar textbook of this new language was published by Štúr in 1846. It is evident that the cause for a national language was furthered by a collective resistance towards Magyarisation.

From the time of the Great Moravia Empire in the ninth century, Slovakia was ruled under the Magyars (Hungary)<sup>3</sup> and the Habsburgs. Well into the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, Slovakia underwent both political and socio-cultural oppression, known as “Magyarisation”. What is Magyarisation? Magyar is a term used to denote Hungarian cultural and language. The term “magyarisation” stands for forced assimilation and acculturation process by which non-Hungarian nationals came to adopt Magyar culture and language due to social pressure. The process was often carried out in the form of coercive legislation and policies.

As I have mentioned, the Magyarisation policies heightened the tension which led to the Slovak nationalist literary movement in the late nineteenth to the twentieth century. During this period of time, women writers were recruited as reinforcement to help further the nationalist cause on the domestic level. They were expected to write about the desirable duties of a good Slovak woman. By supporting her family, the good Slovak woman contributes to the building of the nation. Emancipation for women was merely instrumental to the nationalist cause. Elena Maróthy-Šoltéssová (1855-1939) was a case in point. Elena Maróthyová was born to a family of a Protestant pastor and poet in Krupina, Upper Hungary. Her father, Daniel Maróthy, remarried after the death of his wife, Karolína Maróthy. Having been granted the privilege of education at a German-speaking all-girls school and college, Elena Šoltéssová (“Šoltés” was her husband’s surname) learnt Hungarian and German as per the custom of her time. It was her childhood experience that propelled her to become an early champion of female education: “As an adult, Maróthy-Šoltéssová bitterly recollected how her stepmother had forced her to do so much housework that she had had no time for school work” (Cviková 301). After her marriage, her family moved to Martin, the centre of the Slovak National Revival Movement, where she became a member

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<sup>3</sup> The Finno-Ugric term “Magyar”, or *Magyarok* in the Hungarian language, denotes a Hungarian-speaking ethnic group associated with Hungary. It is this term which the Hungarian people use to call themselves. The term “Magyar” is derived from “Megyer”, the name of the most prominent Hungarian tribe. Though “Magyar” refers to the Hungarian people as a whole, it is important to differentiate between “Magyar” and “Hungarian”. Norman Rudinsky, in *Incipient Feminists*, perceives Magyar as a subgroup of the Kingdom of Hungary: “I have used the term *Magyar* to distinguish ethnic Hungarians from the political formation of the old Kingdom of Hungary as well as from the non-Magyar population” (6). Peter Petro, in *A History of Slovak Literature*, shares her view: “and here we must distinguish between “Hungarian,” which refers to matters concerning the *multinational* state of the kingdom of Hungary, and “Magyar,” which refers only to the Magyar component of the state and is not used pejoratively” (38).

of the *Živena*<sup>4</sup> committee in 1880 and rose to the position of the president of the organisation in the year 1894. She remained in power until the year 1927. While she was in power as the president of *Živena*, the *Živena School*, the first Slovak school for women, was founded in 1919, in the town of Martin. Though Šoltésová was actively engaged in improving education for women on the level of organisation and administration, and though she believed that “the emancipation of women and the emancipation of the nation are intertwined” (Čaplovič et al 303), her writing nevertheless sustains and promotes the patriarchal notion of women as instrumental to the nationalist movement. For Šoltésová, “[t]he role of women in the family (more often than not as mothers) also acquired its legitimacy through its usefulness to the national struggle. Women’s education was important because of their primary roles within the family as educators and carers” (Čaplovič et al 303). The notion that women’s role is auxiliary to the national movement can be seen reflected in “Dozvuky k poslednému valnému zhromaždeniu Živeny”, or “Outcome of the Last *Živena* General Assembly”, published in 1882:

Nuž, teda vzdorujme temným silám, ktoré vyhášajú svetlá naše!  
Vzdorujme zlému princípu, ktorý temnou peruťou zatienil náš milý rodný kraj! Keď spolok náš odsúdený je k živoreniu, tedy nahradíme ho činnosťou a vplyvmi na spoločnosť a výchovu detí svojich. Kráľovstvo ženy je svätynňou, ktorej nesmie dotýkať sa zúrivosť politických vandalov! Proti nám nemožno upotrebiť barbarské prostriedky, ktorými zahubili diela mužov našich. Pestujme v domoch svojich čistý plameň lásky, nešpiňme krby svoje draho kúpenými otrokmi, ktorí nám za peniaze naše nesú do rodín jed zrady! Čo vyhnali z poradných siení, vysokých škôl, celého verejného života nech nájde sväté miesto na čistej hrudi, v tichom útulku slovenských domov!

Well, let us defy then the dark forces which extinguish our light!  
Let us defy the evil principle which, with dark wings, casts shadows on our beloved homeland! When our organisation is doomed to misery, then let us seek improvement by means of activities and by making an impact on society and its children’s education. Women’s kingdom is holy. It must not be touched by the fury of political vandals! Barbaric means that destroyed the work of our men cannot be employed against us. Let us kindle pure flame of love in our homes. Let us not tarnish our beloved fireplaces with dearly bought slaves who carried into our families the poison of treachery bought at our own expense! Thus, what was expelled from the meeting

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<sup>4</sup> *Živena*, named after the Slavic goddess of life (Cviková 301), which also means “nurture” (Čaplovič et al 148), is a Slovak women’s association established in 1869.

halls, universities and from the whole public life should find a holy space in the quiet shelter of a Slovak home! (Translation by Veronika Planková and Verita Sriratana)

With Terézia Vansová (1857-1942), her closest colleague, Elena Šoltésiová edited works by other women writers, giving them support and publication advice. Terézia Vansová was the founder and editor-in-chief of *Dennica*, which means “morning star”, the first women’s magazine in Slovakia (Cviková 597). The magazine was published in two phases: from 1898 to 1908 strictly as a women’s magazine and from 1910 to 1914 as a “forum for Slovak literary modernists” (Cviková 597). The content of *Dennica* is based on the idea that religious education is the cornerstone of the nation. Therefore, it is not surprising that Šoltésiová’s notion of women as carers and helpers of men in the Slovak nationalist movement can be seen reflected in many sections of the magazine, particularly “tips for household and kitchen and articles on child education and social life” (Cviková 597). Though both Šoltésiová and Vansová have been considered two of the earliest prominent women writers in Slovak literature, their works, which strive towards realism, did not produce subversive impact which would lead to the questioning of patriarchal ideology embedded within Slovak nationalism:

The Slovak women’s movement, founded by the first significant Slovak writers of that time, was strongly embedded in the national revival movement. This resulted in the framing of women’s activities in traditional Christian values and led to specific demands regarding the roles of women and men. (Cviková 596)

I propose in this chapter that the early signs of modernist experimentation and radical tendency, or the modernist moment in Slovak nationalist literary movement, as seen in the exploration of fictional characters’ minds and the ruthless questioning of patriarchal as well as nationalist ideologies, can be found in the works of Božena Slančíková (1867-1951), known by her nom de plume “Timrava”, which is the name of a local water well:

Za pseudonym vzala som si názov jednej studne v polichnianskom chotári, ktorá bola vo veľkej úcte, pretože z nej nikdy nechýbala voda. (“Vlastný životopis”)

As my pseudonym I took the name of a water well in the region of Polichno which was held in high esteem because it never ran out of water. (“Autobiography”) (Translation by Veronika Planková and Verita Sriratana)

Timrava, born in 1867 to a family of a Lutheran pastor in a small village called Polichno, Banská Bystrica region, was one among the women writers who came to forge friendship ties with Elena Maróthy-Šoltésiová and Terézia Vansová. Living in small villages, unlike her urban and cosmopolitan friends, Timrava is known to have declared herself as an autodidact and an untrained provincial writer:



Môj život plynul celkom proste, bez zvláštnych udalostí, tak, že ani neviem, čo by som o ňom napísala. Také sú osudy ľudí bývajúcich v odľahlých dedinách. Narodila som sa v Polichne, v malej dedinke, 2.októbra 1867. Môj otec tam bol farárom. Bolo nás viac detí. Otec vyučoval dcéry sám, lebo malý dôchodok nestačil, aby ich dal na štúdiá. Iba na dovŕšenie výchovy dali nás po jednom roku do mestských škôl. Mňa do Bánskej Bystrice na dievčenskú školu. (“Vlastný životopis”)

My life went quite simply, without special events, so I do not know what I shall write about it. Such are the lives of people living in remote villages. I was born in Polichno, a small village, on 2 October 1867. My father was the parish priest. There were several children in our family. Father taught his daughters himself because his small pension was not enough to send them to school. Only to complete our education, we spent one year in urban schools. I was sent to Banská Bystrica, to an all-girls' school. (“Autobiography”)  
(Translation by Veronika Planková and Verita Sriratana)

However, like in the case of her younger British contemporary, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), Timrava's autodidact claim is part of her identity mythmaking, which has been sustained by the writer herself as well as by the public. While it might seem true that she was “[s]chooled mainly at home” and “read sporadically in European literature (Czech, German, Magyar, Russian)” (Rudinsky “Introduction” x), Timrava nevertheless attended a women's boarding school mainly “to improve her German and Magyar” (Rudinsky “Introduction” x) at the age of fifteen. Likewise, while it might seem true that Virginia Stephen educated herself in her father's library as claimed, she nevertheless attended King's College Ladies' Department between the years 1897 and 1901, when she was between the ages of 15 and 19. According to the syllabi and enrolment records, Virginia Stephen was officially registered for courses in English and Continental History, Greek, Latin and German (Jones and Snaith 41). Whether both writers intended it or not, Timrava and Woolf's identity mythmaking plays out in their works in ways that, to appropriate Rosi Braidotti's term proposed in *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, propel readers to “transpose” themselves into the world of the social “other”: “Transposition is a scientific theory that stresses the experience of creative insight in engendering other, alternative ways of knowing” (6). In the case of Woolf, her downplayed subject position highlights the feminist spirit and radical stylistic experimentation of her writing. In the case of Timrava, her provincial subject position highlights her subtle rebellion which exposes the constructedness of class divide and the patriarchal ideology embedded within the Slovak nationalist movement.

Timrava wrote in one of the most tumultuous periods in the history of Slovakia. Hers was a time of cultural and political oppression, culminated in the Hungarian government's

Magyarisation policy. Magyar nationalism, as well as its legacy in Timrava's time, was deeply rooted in the past:

In the Hungarian period, Slovakia had no administrative frontiers. The Kingdom of Hungary was divided into counties (Latin: *comitatus*, Slovak: *župa*, or *stolica*), which did not take the ethnic situation into account. The Slovaks called their country 'Slovensko' (Slovakia) – the term appears in written documents from as early as the fifteenth century but it was not precisely defined. At the time when the first Slovak political programmes were conceived, it was only an ill-defined region 'between the Tatras and the Danube', that is, the region called 'Upper Hungary' in Magyar literature. (Teich et al 3)

1868 was the year when the Hungarian Nationalities Law was passed. This law guaranteed that all citizens of the Kingdom of Hungary, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whatever their nationality, constituted politically a single indivisible Hungarian nation. According to the Hungarian Nationalities Law, the use of minority languages was reduced to the vernacular level instead of their former status of official languages for administration and judiciary system. In 1883, when Timrava was 16 years of age, all high schools in Slovakia were changed into Magyar schools. In 1902, Slovak elementary church schools were to teach at least eighteen hours of Magyar language per week. In 1907, the Hungarian Apponyi Laws were drafted and passed, granting the Hungarian government, under which Slovak government exercised its authority, the rights to turn all Slovak elementary schools into Hungarian and to declare that the Slovak language was to be taught one hour per week only as a foreign language. The impact of the Hungarian aggressive acculturation regime on Slovak education, for example, was tremendous:

[A]ll teachers, whether in state or church schools, were to educate their pupils to love the Magyar Nation and the Hungarian State. The state was authorized to change even Slovak church schools to Magyar schools if they included a minority of Magyar pupils. Teachers who neglected to teach the Magyar language could be summarily dismissed, and for the same cause the state had the right to close down a school entirely. The school became the most potent weapons of denationalization. (Lettrich 36-37)

The pressure from Magyarisation made writing in the Slovak language a revolutionary act *per se*. The threat of cultural and linguistic assimilation imposed by Magyarisation provided the Slovak intelligentsia with a unifying goal of establishing their national language. This malignant threat has proven to be a benign stimulus for the Slovak nationalist movement:

[T]he danger of forcible Magyarization eventually united all Slovaks, whether Catholics or Protestants, whether they were in favour of a separate Slovak literary language or against it. The

result was an agreement by a large majority of Slovaks of both camps to establish an independent Slovak language of writing, not however based on the West Slovak dialect but upon the Slovak dialect spoken in Central Slovakia. The decisive factor in bringing this about was the need for a more effective resistance to the increasing Magyar pressure upon Slovak political and cultural positions. In 1845, the great Slovak national, cultural, and political leader, the Protestant Ľudovít Štúr, began publishing the important periodical "Slovenskje Narodnje Novini" (Slovak National Newspaper) in the Slovak language of Central Slovakia. This was the first act of establishing the new Slovak language of literature. (Lettrich 27)

Unlike her literary predecessors who were actively involved in the Slovak women's movement and the Slovak nationalist movement, Timrava subtly planted subversive feminist views in her realist portrayal, on the microcosmic level, of ordinary people who are members of a family and of a local community. Her humble subject position, however mythologised, enabled her to become an insightful observer of village life, depicting the relationships between the landowners and the peasants, between the burgeoning middle class and the working class, and between men and women in the advent of modernisation and at the height of the nationalist movement in Slovakia. Among her most famous works is *Ďapákovci* [*The Ďapák Clan*]. Published in 1914, *Ďapákovci* depicts the life of a progressive woman who wants better education for herself and a more spacious and hygienic home of her own. Timrava shows how the main female character struggles with the label of selfishness given by her husband's side of the family, which comprises people who would rather die than change their ways to accommodate a woman's modern views. Similar to *Ďapákovci*, *Skon Paľa Ročku*, [*The Death of Paľo Ročka*], published in 1921, is a psychological exploration of the workings of the human mind when encountered with the question of life and death. Apart from *Ďapákovci* and *Skon Paľa Ročku*, which have been adapted into stage plays, TV serials or films, Timrava is also known for her anti-war works such as *Hrdinovia* [*Heroes*], published in 1918, and *Všetko za národ* [*Everything for the Nation*], published in 1926. Timrava was highly critical of the nationalist movement of her time. Unlike most of her literary forefathers and her contemporary writers, she did not treat her writing as a form of nationalist propaganda. Moreover, if Šoltésová and Vansová introduced to the Slovak public the figure of a Slovak New Woman, a religious, nationalistic and fairly educated homemaker and caretaker of men and children, it can be said that Timrava introduced to the Slovak public the figure of a more radical version of Šoltésová and Vansová's New Woman. Timrava's New Woman is a woman who understands and, in most cases, lives according to the patriarchal rites of passage and codes of conduct but



internally questions the mainstream social values.<sup>5</sup> Her female characters live a double life, one as a public figure and one private. The public figure knows full well that she has to play along the game of patriarchy and nationalism, which assigns an instrumental role to women. This figure might appear to have succumbed to the dictating norms of society, for example, marriage. The private figure, on the other hand, defiantly chooses to remain true to herself by consciously reaping the social capital and economic benefit after she decides to play along the game of mainstream ideologies. Her rebellion is an internal and radical one.

Timrava's radical thinking, which is often internalised in the case of her characters, is played out in an interview entitled "Timrava a ňou vyslovené" ["Timrava and Her Own Words"]:

I básne som písala. Básňami som začala. Keď som bola mladá, bola som ako zlý chlapec. Najradšej som sa škriabala a bývala na stromoch.

Meno? Meno sa spytujete? Meno mám zo studničky Timravy. Bola tam taká čistučká vodička hórna. Že vraj je to ruské slovo. Bola som veľká rusofilka. Ti sa u nás vyslovuje mäkko. – Nechcela som, aby ma poznali.

Zdá sa mi, že mám veľmi chlpské písmo. Raz náhodou som si svoj rukopis čítala, čo som nevedela, že je môj, a aký bol chlpský! Kedy som písala? V noci. Od večera do rána. Na Polichne sa mi lepšie písalo...

Keby som sa bola vydata, iste by som sa nebola stala spisovateľkou. Pravda, nikto ma nechcel... A nebolo takého ozajstného. Raz som sa

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<sup>5</sup> In late-nineteenth Western Europe and America, "New Woman", a term first popularised by Henry James, came to signify women who exercise their agency over their socio-economic and sexual independence granted through an increase of education and employment opportunities, as part of the legal changes propelled by the suffragette movement. The growth of urban, as well as industrialised, spaces and population, was one of the main factors which contributed to an increase of the female workforce and to the shaping of the New Woman liberal mindset. With the crisis of manpower sustained by centuries of feudalism in Central Europe, which stunted and delayed the development of urban spaces and bourgeois culture, the idea of an organised women's movement, such as the Western European suffragette movement, seemed alien to Central European women. Moreover, the need for national unity in the region where borders constantly changed according to the changing regimes of the ruling elite and where the threat of forced cultural and linguistic assimilation loomed large, female emancipation in Central Europe was not as "urgent" a priority as the nationalist cause. Thus the concept of the "New Woman" in Central Europe in the late nineteenth century differed from that in Western Europe in its nationalist origin. The first feminist movement in Slovakia, for example, was part of the rise of nationalism and, hence, the New Women's sole duty was to help support their male compatriots to further their nationalist cause.

tak strašne zaľúbila do jedného. A keď som bola vytrezvená, videla som, ako ten nebol hoden. Taký človečik obyčajný.

Ako som písala? Nuž, obyčajne som už len písala jednu rozprávku, ale v ten istý čas som sa pustila do druhej a pracovala som na prvej. Menila, a menila namáhavo do zúfalosti, kým mi nevyšla úsečná a taká, ako som chcela. A vlastne sa mi nepáčili ani potom. Iba Ťapákovci sa mi páčili a ešte jedna. Vždy vyšlo po oprávačkách celkom inšie, ako som mala pôvodne plánik i fabulu.

Divadlo som napísala, aby som vedela, ako sa cíti autor, keď hrajú. Ale som nič necítila. A nechceli mi to hrať! Že tak a tak, také sa aj u nás postáva. Že niečo iného radšej. Ale potom, z úcty predsa zahráli.

And I wrote poems. I started with poems. When I was young, I was like a naughty boy. I liked best to climb and live on trees.

Name? Name you ask? I adopt the name of the Timrava water well. At this water well, the water surface was pristine. It has been said that the name is Russian. I was a big Russophile. The "Ti" in "Timrava" is pronounced as a soft consonant in the place where I am from. – I did not want to be known.

It seems to me that I have a very masculine handwriting. Once I happened to read a manuscript which I did not know was mine, and thought how macho it was!

When did I write? At night. From evening till morning. I felt more comfortable when writing in Polichno...

If I were married, I certainly would not have become a writer. True, nobody wanted me... And there was not any man who would be good enough. Once I was so terribly in love with someone. And when I was sober, I saw that he was not worthy. Such an ordinary little man.

How did I write? Well, I usually wrote only one story but, at the same time, I would also embark on another story while working on the first. I made changes, and did so desperately until it came out

succinct and the way I wanted it to be. And I actually did not like the end results, even after I had made all the changes. I liked only Ľapákovci and one other piece. My writing did not turn out to be the way I had wanted. After all the corrections, it was always different from my original plan and plot. (Translation by Veronika Planková and Verita Sriratana)

As Virginia Woolf inherited and, at the same time, wrote against the literary legacy of her father, Sir Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), a prominent man of letters who was also first editor of the National Biography, Timrava inherited and also wrote against the legacy of her father, Pavel Slančík (1833–1906). On 4 August 1863, four years before Timrava's birth, Slovakia's prominent cultural and scientific institution, known as Matica Slovenská, was established in the city of Martin. Timrava's father was one of the institution's co-founders. The main objectives of Matica Slovenská were "to foster Slovak education, to encourage literature and the arts, and to improve the material welfare of the nation" (Lettrich 34). Amidst the nationalist trend in the Slovak literary scene, which complemented literary realism, Timrava seemed an unlikely direct inheritor of the trend of decadence and symbolism prevalent in the Western European fin de siècle. However, I argue that Timrava's *Boj* [*Battle*], a relatively obscure novella published as early as 1900, bears the signs of Western European decadence and degeneration consciousness within its provincialised realist context. Timrava's ambivalent portrayal of female characters, which follows and at the same time resists the realist tradition, represents the breaking of the dawn of Slovak modernism. I also argue that her work can be read as an example of Provincial Modernism. Given the socio-political context of her time, Timrava was writing in her vernacular language about a "battle" or war among the women in a small village, a topic which would definitely be shunned upon by the nationalist literary giants of her time. For Timrava, the internal and external battle undergone by women, as well as the war between her characters, is far more significant than the actual war between nations, men's war.

Slovakia in the late nineteenth century saw many wars. In the failed Hungarian Revolution which took place in 1848, the Magyars came close to regaining independence only to be defeated by the Austrian Empire with the assistance of the Russian Empire. 1866 was the year of the Austro-Prussian war. Slovakia, then part of the Austrian Empire, suffered economic and manpower loss in its engagement with this war. When Timrava was born in 1867, Austria was already defeated in the Austro-Prussian War. Its position as one of the leading states of Germany ended. There were also renewed calls in Hungary for complete separation from Austria. To avoid this, Emperor Franz Joseph proposed a dual monarchy system. The outcome of his proposal was the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, which marks the birth of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It can be said that Timrava's birth coincided with a new era, albeit that which proved to be no less turbulent than before.

*Boj* [*Battle*], opens with a character named Mária Bukovičová, a beautiful young woman who has just returned to her small and rural hometown after having spent some time



in the city: "How can I ever settle down here again? She reproached the whole world for making her leave the city where she had happily spent the last winter season with her city cousins. Now she was back in this dull, small town!" (21). Most of the women in her small village feel anxious upon hearing the news that Mária, whose beauty is believed to surpass that of the village's entire female population, has come home. One of them is Marta, Mária's own sister, who dreads her sister's return to the limelight: "She [Marta] looked very much like Mária, but was really only her shadow. She hurried to leave the room, to find a place somewhere alone until she could get used to counting for nothing beside Mária" (24). Mária and Marta are friends with the Beňušovská sisters: Luiza, Estera and Helena. The Beňušovská sisters' goal in life is to avoid marriage: "The goal in our life is higher than just to get married" (55). Lujza, the eldest, no longer mingles with other people in her village: "In her pale face circled by blond hair, her black eyes sparkled like stars. She was still beautiful though she was past thirty-eight years old" (49). Estera is bookish and phlegmatic. Helena cultivates a holier than thou attitude and thinks she is far above others: "I'm someone who lives only for the good of others. I observe the world to see who is suffering injustice. And I feel sorry for all of you!" (52)

The unmarried Beňušovská sisters and their mutual friends meet every evening on Sundays. Mária, feeling too superior for such provincial meetings, never attends the Sunday sessions. The usual members of the meeting are Marta, Anča and Evička. Anča harbours hatred for Mária because Nikodém, her ex-fiancé now engaged to Evička, broke their engagement after admitting that he had been enchanted with Mária. Evička fears Mária's charms as she knows that Nikodém, who is also the village's pastor, was cold-heartedly rejected by Mária after having confessed his love.

The Beňušovská sisters, who are the main organisers of the regular Sunday meetings, declare that their goal is to brainwash their female friends to adopt their "progressive" attitude to marriage: "The Beňušovská sisters were very rich, which was why people were so angry when they refused to get married" (49). Their aim is to establish a "Union of Higher Beings" (52) which, I propose, can be seen as a society of local women who attempt to adopt the Western European feminist ideal of the "New Woman". The members gather to complain about the men in the village: "'And he [Ďuro Bolkin] interferes in everything,' Anča went on, 'even in how I should talk. A young lady's conversation should sparkle like a star, he says!'" (33). However, complaining does not lead to female emancipation. The union is only a façade prolonging the inevitable fate which awaits all women. The members' attempt to appear progressive is reflected in their adopted custom of handshakes, a symbolic gesture which is meant to promote a sense of camaraderie transcending the class division: "'How many of us are here?' Marta looked around. 'Are we meeting again about the Union?' She was shaking hands with each one in turn, a new custom they had taken up" (49). However, since this women's society was initiated by the Beňušovská sisters, wealthy women from the landowner's class, it is not surprising that class distinction and hierarchy remain deeply embedded within the foundation of the "Union

of Higher Beings" (52). The custom of handshakes, along with its symbolic gesture meant to transcend class divide, is a mere empty promise: "When Marta approached her [Lujza], she shook her head furiously. She never shook hands with anyone, as Marta should know, and especially not with her!" (49). The rigid class distinction can be seen reflected in Estera's statement: "Isn't it nice to sit down in the fresh fields to read a book while the peasant women are raking hay, or to go watch the pretty little fish running in neighbour Nátan's pond whenever we feel like it?" (57). It can therefore be said that the union also ironically emulates and sustains patriarchal hierarchy and classist ideologies.

Upon hearing the news about the return of Mária, their arch rival for different reasons as mentioned, the members of the "Union of Higher Beings" (52) convene to conspire against her. They agree that the ultimate destruction pictured for Mária, as part of the revenge, is marriage. They agree that Mária has to marry a man whom they perceive as inferior. The sickly eccentric painter, Šaňo Sidonský, fits their description as they know that Mária would rather die than marry a dying penniless painter. Timrava's wry humour in her portrayal of marriage as the most valued solution for the "Union of Higher Beings" (52), of which members, according to the ideals of the Western European New Woman, are supposed to refute and undermine its value, can be considered a scathing critique on the reality of an "educated man's daughter" (Woolf *Three Guineas* 195), as well as the reality of abject poverty which affects the village's lower class. It can be inferred that the adoption and adap(ta)tion of the concept of the New Woman from Western Europe clashes with the reality of the Slovak "New Women", whose livelihood strictly depended on men and whose prospect of leaving the small village was slim:

"What is the world?" Lujza was thrilled and glanced ardently around. "The world is a stream along whose banks I'm forced to make my way, but I catch up my skirts so that not even the tiniest edge of them gets soiled in the stream!"

"I absolutely don't understand a single word of that." Estera spoke half aloud.

"So, I'd like to have all women live as I do, following my example!" Lujza paid no attention to Estera, if she heard her at all. The sisters were used to each other.

"But what good are our lives?" Estera seemed to be talking to herself. "If we want to do something magnificent, let's give away all our money and go out into the world to work for others. At least I don't see," she sounded bored as she reached for her book again, "what good it does for poor Ondro Beláň where I lie here with a book and imagine I'm living for others." Ondro Beláň was very poor and had eight children.

"So, welcome, Mílca Bolkinová!" Lujza had not listened to Estera. "Give me your hand and accept my kiss, because you know

that I kiss the hand only of one who will never marry!" She stretched out her hand to the approaching Milica, and they could hear her kiss. (56)

At the time when nationalist glory was more urgent an issue than female emancipation, the idea of an organised feminist "Union of Higher Beings" (52), of which main aim was to bring equality between the sexes, could never materialise. However, hope for a prospect of radical feminism comes in the form of a character named Milica, whose subversive presence exposes the hypocrisy of the union itself:

Evička came in, dressed in blue, and with her was another figure, with cropped hair and on top of it a man's hat.

"Who's that?" Lujza jumped up, aghast that Nikodém had come with Evička.

"What an idea!" Anča ridiculed Evička – they didn't like each other. Then looking more closely, she laughed aloud. The newcomer was the Bolkins' cousin who had come to help sew Evička's trousseau. "How stupid of you to cut your hair!"

That bobbed hair made the girl's head look like Niko's, as the others now also recognized.

"Stupid? What's it to you?" The newcomer Milica answered in kind. "You certainly greet people nicely! I just felt like wearing this new hair style, that's all."

"Then you shouldn't have come. The peasants will laugh at you."

"Who'll laugh at me?"

"The peasants!"

"So what? Am I a priest or teacher to care what the peasants say?"

Anča wouldn't answer, just turned away. But the other girls clustered around Milica and elaborately helped her take off her hat. They had all met her three years earlier and found her queer ways so interesting then. (50-51)

Milica, Nikodém's cousin, is not a regular member of the union: "'Dearest ladies,' Milica smiled. 'I expect you'll not begrudge me membership in the Union you're going to found?'" (51). However, as Timrava shows, Milica is ironically the only woman in the novella who can be defined as a true member of the "Union of Higher Beings" (52). Though her presence causes annoyance to some of the union members, her liberal spirit is ironically the closest to that which the "Union of Higher Beings" (52) aspires to obtain or reach, the spirit of the Western European New Woman:

"It's so glorious, I guess, to be frivolous and have cropped hair?" muttered Anča.



“That’s not it.” The elegant Berta corrected her. “But you’re forever irritable nowadays.” She herself could always keep her feelings from showing.

“Irritable?” Milica heard this and looked around at Anča. She hadn’t been irritable in the past. A thought popped into Milica’s head, and approaching Anča she examined her with narrowed eyes, as Nikodém always did. “Anička –”

“My name is Anča,” she interrupted coldly. (51)

The reason Milica’s liberal spirit, as expressed in her unconventional hairstyle and outfit which purposely challenge gender stereotypes and expectations, cannot *completely* match the spirit of the Western European New Woman or of the subsequent first-wave feminism is that Slovakia’s particular modernity was different. In a small village where the major population comprised peasants and where the social and financial gap between the landowners and the peasants was unbreachable, rigid class system was deeply ingrained within the people’s mentality and therefore remained unchallenged:

Along the street came a young peasant woman, Anča Šonková; with a child slung awkwardly over her arm. She had a simple-minded face and, after bowing and lisping a greeting, she still stood there as if wanting to say more. People called her tongue-tied, so she wanted to show she could talk.

The other girls nudged Evička. “You talk to her. You’ll be the pastor’s wife—you have to be kind to the peasants.” They didn’t feel like it themselves. (63)

Though Milica appears to harbour a more liberal view towards the peasants, who form the majority population of the villagers, she nevertheless fails to challenge the authority of priests and teachers, the local intelligentsia. Ironically, most members of the “Union of Higher Beings” (52) are well-to-do peasants who aspire to become part of the local intelligentsia by means of marriage. The leaders of the union themselves are local intelligentsia with a certain financial independence:

“It’s not revenge I’m after.” Helena finally turned to Anča. “We desire to become Higher Beings, as you should know, so we must be without blemish in every way. Letting yourself give way to your feelings like that – you must get over it! You’re not ready yet for our Union.” (53)

Regardless of their class, all the members of the “Union of Higher Beings” (52) do not enjoy full independence. Unlike the middle-class women in Western Europe, they have not been granted the opportunity to earn their living and establish their careers. Their livelihood depends on men. They can therefore be as progressive as the society and mainstream social norms allow. As Anča poignantly states, it is easier for the wealthy sisters to play the role of the independent New Women because they possess financial means. For her, and the

majority population of the women in the village, marriage is not a choice but a means of survival:

“To live as Estera says is nice but very hard, and to live as the sisters really do is impossible when I have no money. I don’t want to live forever on other people’s charity! You don’t know what living on charity is really like! I don’t have a single free hour. I get tired, I drudge for other people’s benefit, I’m baked in the sun just like the earth. Do I have any time to dress up as a young lady should? Do I have time to look in the mirror, use curling irons like Marta there, or any of you? I wear my hair straight, just like a peasant’s!” (56-57)

In the novella’s ending, it is Marta, instead of Mária, who marries Sidonský. After the death of Sidonský, she marries a wealthy man and lives comfortably. Evička, wrought with suspicion and jealousy, kills herself because she believes that Nikodém, her fiancé, falls back in love with Mária. Her suspicion, though ungrounded at first, proves to be true. Nikodém and Mária live in guilt. They later confess their love but suddenly realise that they are not a suitable match so they decide to part ways. Anča and the Beňušovská sisters remain unmarried. The “Union of Higher Beings” (52) remains a whimsical fantasy. At first glance, the novella’s ending seems disappointing. However, *Battle*, can be read as a parody and an allegory of the plight befalling Slovak feminists, who failed to challenge, let alone bring an end to the decaying patriarchal civilisation. Through her characters, Timrava subtly weaves her revolutionary criticism of class system and the Slovak provincial feminism, an imitation of the Western European New Woman, into her writing. Though her writing remains within the parameters of realist and regionalist tradition, in accordance with the trend of her time, Timrava can nevertheless be considered a pioneering modernist who seeks to challenge, or “battle”, realist and nationalist literature which fails to capture and depict the plight of women. By offering a psychological study of her women characters, Timrava probes into the hypocrisy of the provincial elite who perceive and present themselves as progressive without understanding the reality faced by the ordinary people of lower class. Forming the “Union of Higher Beings” (52) as a league of their own, Timrava’s New Women characters are nevertheless defeated both in their battle against the ruling patriarchal convention and in their own internal struggle for independence. While it can be said that Timrava’s feminist prototypes are undeniably products of the degenerated patriarchal system, Timrava demonstrates that the regenerated feminist regime, however promising, inevitably succumbs to the patriarchal paradigm it emulates. Though the novella ends with a bleak view of Slovak feminism, there is still hope that a change will soon come. As I have mentioned, such hope can be seen in the form of Milica, the only progressive New Woman character, whose uncanny appearance and presence shed light on the union members’ frivolousness:

“If you think –” she began to Milica, using the formal pronoun.

"If you think —" Milica corrected her with the familiar *you*, and narrowed her eyes the way Níkodém always did.

"All right, if you think —" Anča stopped, angry again. "It's true, I don't like you." She began without even knowing what she was going to say. "You're just a big pose! Under the guise of frivolousness, you—"

"Oh, again she's starting on that!" Berta sighed. "Such a time we have with her. The Union would have been founded long ago if she didn't always argue instead of helping."

"Of course, because who knows what feelings are hidden under the guise of a smile!"

"No, my dear," Helena preached very gently, "joy can be faked, but frivolousness hides nothing." (53)

It is not Milica's "queer ways" (51) that bother the union members, particularly Anča. On the contrary, it is Milica's natural progressive thinking which strips their superficiality and expose the "Union of Higher Beings" (52) as a mere gossip group: "Ah ha, I know how to gossip too, dear Anička." Milica laughed. "When you get to know me better, my dear, you'll find out just how good a gossip I am!" (51). The provocation staged by Milica propels Anča to expose the hypocrisy and frivolousness of Helena and her circle: "You think I want to be a Higher Being?" Anča demanded. "You're one, and what do you do? You set yourself up above everyone else, but what do you really accomplish? It's all just a joke. You don't even know what goodness is!" (82).

Scholars of Slovak literature have often placed Timrava as a writer belonging to the tradition of "critical realism", that is a writer who challenges the realist trope employing the devices of realism:

The picture of rebellion is a major reason why Slovak critics placed Timrava with the critical realists, which included Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola, who condemned their own society though they did not separate from it enough to join any organized rebellion. Unable to foresee the resolution of these social contradictions, the critical realists often succumbed to the pessimism and determinism that one associates with naturalism. (Rudinsky "Introduction" xii-xiii)

However, as this chapter demonstrates, Timrava is not entirely pessimistic in her critique on the Slovak concept of New Woman and its hypocrisy. Instead of participating in "any organized rebellion" ("Introduction" xiii) in the form of a women's society like Živena, Timrava dismisses the authority of any form of organisation structure as merely instrumental to the patriotic causes, which not only overshadow women's independence but also lead to wars, violence and loss of lives. Her pacifist and feminist messages, subtly woven into the realist plot and characterisation, place her as a writing of provincial modernism. With its lack of the bourgeoisie, the backbone of the modernist movement,

Central European provincialism might seem to hinder the development of modernism in the region. However, my analysis reveals that Timrava's modernist moments are particularly located and situated in the micro habitat of Central European provincialism. Norma Rudinsky may rightly claim that Timrava depicts a typical picture of the provincial class system in which there are only two social "castes":

Timrava's stories have two casts—the numerous peasants and the scattered village intelligentsia—which were really two castes, socially and economically distinct. The peasant caste ranged from rich farmers to destitute, landless laborers, many of whom were barely literate. The higher caste ranged from the gentility to such educated middleclass commoners as schoolteachers, the clergy, and minor officials ("Introduction" xi).

However, I propose that, in *Battle*, Timrava offers an additional "caste" and, more importantly, "class" in the form of Milica. Milica, who "had come to sew while Anča was still engaged with Nikodém" (51), is a free-thinking woman with certain financial independence. She represents the missing middle class population of women who can afford to treat marriage not as a convenience or as a patriotic duty, but as a matter of choice and agency. This is where Timrava departs from women writers such as Šoltésová and Vansová, who were involved in a national women's organisation which promoted women's domestic duties as part of the nationalist movement more than the pressing issue of female emancipation in its most basic form: independence of thought. Timrava might not seem to experiment with her form of writing the way that Western European modernist writers do. However, her experimentation comes in the forms of ambivalent characterisation and playful parody, which are considered notable shared characteristics of many literary modernisms in different contexts of modernity. By exposing the ways in which "[t]he natural conservatism of the village – a positive feature when it meant survival of the Slovak nation – became handicap in a time of revolutionary changes" (Petro 116), Timrava's life signifies both the transformative power of change and the "handicap" (Petro 116) which she seeks to overcome in her writing. In 1919 Czechoslovakia, at the age of 52, Timrava supported herself by taking up a position of a kindergarten teacher, a profession which she practised until her retirement in 1929. The meagre pension and royalties received did not enable her to live a comfortable life and she was therefore forced to move to Lučenec and live with her relatives in 1945. Taking these biographical facts into consideration, it can be said that the failure of Timrava's aspiring New Woman, as reflected in her own life-long struggle for financial and intellectual independence, does not reflect her nihilistic attitude towards social change. On the contrary, as a living exemplar of free thinking and of women's struggle to attain social and economic independence without seeking the security of institutionalised marriage, Timrava embodies the modernist spirit of experimentation which promotes personal, realistic and provincialist visions of an ever-changing and multifaceted society in transition.





### 3

#### **PARTICULAR(ISING) "HIGH MODERNISM": KAFKA AND THEORETICAL PERIODISATION**

On the level of textual content, it can be said that modernist literature reflects a preoccupation with the change in one's views on and understanding of time and space in relation to human existence. The modernist project centres upon in-depth observation and representation of a distinct moment in time, rather than a chronological chain of events which has been understood to be the focus of literary realism. The transformation on the level of spatial and temporal conceptualisation is caused by socio-political, cultural and economic transformation in world history:

The social, scientific and technological transformations and the psychological disruptions that took place at the end of the nineteenth century profoundly changed common perception and experience of time and space. The notion of time as a steady course of continuous moments and the sense of space as an objective and fixed phenomenon, but above all the distinctiveness of the temporal and spatial dimensions of reality were fundamentally disrupted. The establishment of an objective global dateline and new conceptions of space and time stressing their dependency on the observer and the contexts in which they operate radically undermined the certainties built on the idea of a stable universe and a rationally fixed perception of the world. Modernist artists captured these transformations and experimented with alternative temporal and spatial constructions of reality. The loss of stable parameters of reality caused both anguish and disorientation, which gave rise to various forms of rupture and fragmentation in modernist works of literature, but these works also gave expression to the widespread and varied experience of liberation from old frameworks of perception. Newly gained insights into the intertwining of time and space corresponded to the artistic exploration of multiple types of "space-time" in the visual arts and in literature. (Eysteinnsson and Liska 251)

Literary modernism puts to question the notion of "absolute space", or "[s]pace that exists as a background to events and processes and is not affected by objects or other entities in the universe" (*Dictionary of Science* 3). This concept of "absolute space", which led to the concept of time and space as mutually exclusive, was stipulated by the Enlightenment

scientific principles based on absolutism and rationalism and, therefore, has been associated with René Descartes (1596-1650), who posited that space is infinite, and Isaac Newton (1642-1727), who stated that space and time are distinct entities. The transitional landmarks which contributed to the rethinking of time and space from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century was the relational theories of Ernst Mach (1838-1916) and the notion that time is the fourth dimension of space proposed by Hermann Minkowski (1864-1909). Mach's critique on Newton's concept of "absolute space", as well as Minkowski's notion of time as the fourth dimension, were the founding stones upon which Albert Einstein (1879-1955) developed his general theory of relativity, which was first formulated in 1905 and later revised in 1916. Einstein's theory refutes the notion of a fixed continuity of time and space by maintaining that time and space are relative to the individual observer. Influenced by Einstein, modernist literature thus calls into question the realist linear narrative and the notion of space and time as *tabula rasa* waiting to be defined or assigned meanings:

In the modern novel, the traditional symmetry of life and narrative—whereby the account of the former takes the form of the latter, whose logic basically parallels the temporal order of human life—has been broken up. The traditional realm of "scenes and settings" tends to be emancipated from plot and to impart significance as an autonomous field of aesthetic composition. (Eysteinson and Liska 251)

On the level of theoretical periodisation, however, scholastic attempts to define and conceptualise Modernism as an aesthetic and intellectual movement have proven to betray the spirit of modernist scepticism towards fixity of time and space, the experimentalist spirit which makes modernism unique, described by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane as "the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos" (27):

It [Modernism] is the art consequent on the dis-establishing of communal reality and conventional notions of causality, on the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character, on the linguistic chaos that ensues when public notions of language have been discredited and when all realities have become subjective fictions. (27)

How does periodisation of Modernism go against its deconstruction tendency? Having been allocated fixed temporal borders which span from the 1890s to the 1940s, the accepted nominal "make it new" definitions of modernism are Western Eurocentric as they privilege Western Europe as the origin and kernel of the modernist movement. Even though there have been attempts to expand the period range of modernism, Susan Stanford Friedman nevertheless cautions that "the danger of an expansionist modernism lapsing into meaninglessness or colonizing gestures is real" (474). The expansionist attempts can only substantiate and solidify Western European modernity and modernism as the standard to which all other modernities and modernisms outside the West are measured. Again, my

argument finds its resonance in Friedman's "Planetary: Musing Modernist Studies", where she advocates leaving the comfort zone of periodisation by rethinking its spatial politics which promote the superiority of modernity and innovation of the West over the Rest:

Could it be that the anxieties about the geohistorical and generic expansion of modernist studies represents an uncanny desire to re-establish a particular early twentieth-century Western aesthetic style as the *sina qua non* of modernism? What is the ethics of that interminably repeated comfort zone? How are we to break the hold of the old modernist mold? (474)

As part of this book's objective to advocate a transnational turn in modernist studies, I propose in this chapter that modernism can be better understood as a transnational movement by means of examining the dangers of dwelling in the comfort zone of temporal spatialisation on both the level of modernist literature's textual content and theoretical periodisation. The notion that modernism took place only in a fixed period of time fails to embrace the dynamism of change and transnational relativism which has made modernist literature "our art" (Bradbury and McFarlane 27), or the intellectual and aesthetic movement of the "new", the "here" and the "now". Focusing on the subversive aspects of modernism as a "break" with the old and the past in particular contexts will enable the existing yet, oftentimes, obscure multifarious modernities and modernisms in different places and periods of time to emerge.

To "de-spatialise" time is not an easy task as it is often understood that time can only be perceived in terms of space and that spatialisation of time limits the power of the abstract, or the virtual, by making it strictly dependent on preferable material conditions. It is difficult to deny the fact that one divides one's time in a day into terrains where goals and actions are planned. One might picture mornings, afternoons, late afternoons, evenings, and nights as empty spaces on paper. Each demarcated time is like a page or a section in planners and calendars to be filled with the tasks required to be done at a certain point in time. It is not so easy to deny that one regularly "spatialises" time, or thinks of time in terms of space, on a regular basis. "Spatialisation of time", as I have mentioned, is based on the notion that space is fixed, a *tabula rasa* that is always there waiting to be defined and assigned meanings as one charts and re-charts the cartography of activities in each passing minute, or even in each passing second. To de-spatialise time, or to dissect the spatial politics behind the mainstream concept of temporality, I propose that we start by examining the history of space as a concept.

The notion that space is a fixed container can be traced back to Aristotle's *Physics*. For Aristotle, space functions as a receptacle of smaller objects, a "form" which contains "matter":

First, the matter and the form are not separate from the object of which they are the matter and the form, but the place is separable. For, as we have already said, the place where air was before now



contains water instead, as they replace each other, and the same goes for other bodies too; consequently, the place of any given thing is not a part or a state of that thing, but is separable from it. In fact, people do think of place as being like a vessel (since a vessel is a movable place) and a vessel is not a part of the object it contains. Anyway, since place is separable from the object, it is not form; and since it is a container, it is different from matter. It also seems as though anything which is somewhere is not only itself, whatever it may be, but also has something else outside itself. (82)

Thinking of time in terms of a vessel, Aristotle maintains that the past and the present can be understood in and through space: "Now, what is before and after is found primarily in place" (*Physics* 105). It is this Aristotelian conceptual paradigm, presuming fixity to be the essence of space, which has been widely accepted as *sine qua non*. However, modernist literature, through stylistic experimentation, opens up a creative possibility in its treatment of space and time: temporalisation of space, or the art of depicting and perceiving space in terms of time. The speaker in Virginia Woolf's short story entitled "Flying over London", for example, gives an account of her aeroplane experience and describes her view of London from above. Temporalisation of space, as in seeing and experiencing London's landscape in terms of time by means of imagining its past, can be seen reflected in the following passage:

Nothing more fantastic could be imagined. Houses, streets, banks, public buildings, and habits and mutton and Brussels sprouts had been swept into long spirals and curves of pink and purple like that a wet brush makes when it sweeps mounds of paint together. One could see through the Bank of England; all the business houses were transparent; the River Thames was as the Romans saw it, as paleolithic man saw it, at dawn from a hill shaggy with wood, with the rhinoceros digging his horn into the roots of rhododendrons. (204)

The vertical distance between the plane and the ground offers a new perspective which invites the voyeur/voyageur to look at place in terms of its history. The speaker imagines the River Thames during the Old Stone Age and the Roman Empire, hence temporalising the landscape she sees. However, there is a paradox which must be addressed. In the process of thinking of the place one has never seen in actuality (since the place in question existed only in the past) in terms of time, as reflected in Woolf's short story, one is also inevitably engaged in spatialising time. It has become apparent that temporalisation of space, in fact, bases itself on spatialisation of time, and *vice versa*. Jacques Derrida defines this spatio-temporal (inter)reaction and logical co-signification as spacing (*espacement*): "Espacement names the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space, the fact of différance that renders any self-identity or absolute self-presence impossible and that haunts all

difference and repetition of the same" (Solomon 20). Espacement leaves undecidable yet repeatable trace. It is the necessary condition of trace: "Derrida defines the trace as the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space, which he abbreviates as spacing (*espacement*)" (Hägglund 15). The question as to whether the images of the River Thames in the Palaeolithic and Roman times in Woolf's short story are strictly derived from temporalising space or from spatialising time is impossible to answer. The evidence is untraceable:

[S]ince for Derrida the trace is always the trace of another trace, it does not give itself as simple origin. (For Derrida, trace is not a master word but an always replaceable term in an unmasterable series including *difference, supplement, writing, cinder*, and so on.) Nor can the trace be thought in terms of the logic of *presence*. Since every sign in its manifestation or apparent 'presence' always includes traces of others which are supposedly 'absent', the trace can be reduced to neither side of the presence-absence opposition so prized by the *metaphysical* tradition. The trace thus redescribes the entire field which the metaphysics of presence seeks to dominate throughout history. The trace names that non-systematizable reserve which is at once constitutive and unrepresentable within such a field. (Wortham "trace" 229-30)

The term "trace" has been discussed at length in Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena*, a study of Edmund Husserl which was published in 1967:

Since the trace is the intimate relation of the living present with its outside, the openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is not "one's own," etc., *the temporalization of sense is, from the outset, a "spacing."* As soon as we admit spacing both as "interval" or difference and as openness upon the outside, there can no longer be any absolute inside, for the "outside" has insinuated itself into the movement by which the inside of the nonspatial, which is called "time," appears, is constituted, is "presented." Space is "in" time; it is time's pure leaving-itself; it is the "outside-itself" as the self-relation of time. (86)

The relative space-time paradigm, as opposed to the absolutist separation of space and time, is emphasised in this book. When the external (Woolf's River Thames of her present) is internalised, the internal (Woolf's imagination of the River Thames in the past) is also simultaneously externalised, or re(-)presented in the form of writing. In connection with the concept of trace, Derrida also revises Husserl's concept of "augenblick" (*Speech* 62). The direct English translation of the word "augenblick" is "instant" or "moment". The literal meaning of the word is "blink of an eye". Husserl describes what he calls the "living present", the present that we experience right now, as being perception, and maintains that

the living present is “thick”. Why is it thick? The present is thick because the instant moment inherently consists of the memory of the recent past, to the point that the past and the present become almost inseparable. Moreover, the present, as well as the past, is not a result of repetition or reproduction. Husserl’s spatialisation of time results in the notion that “now”, this very moment, is an instant point. For Derrida, on the contrary, “now” is not an instant point. The present itself is a reproduction (Rosenthal 33). Therefore, each slice of immediate experience is necessarily unjust or violent. The violence imposed by the “now” and “here” is stipulated in Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1993), of which the title alludes to the opening statement made by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels at the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto*: “A SPECTRE is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism. All the Powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre;...” (Marx and Engels 11). For Derrida, the spectre of Marxism becomes ever more hauntingly tangible after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The spectre which haunts Europe, an allusion to the spectre in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, is a reminder that time, as well as one’s experience of time, is disjointed: .

GHOST

Swear

HAMLET

Rest, rest, perturbed spirit. So, gentlemen,  
With all my love I do commend me to you,  
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is  
May do, t’express his love and friending to you  
God willing shall not lack. Let us go in together  
And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.  
The time is *out of joint* [my emphasis]; O cursed spite  
That ever I was born to set it right!  
Nay, come, let’s go together. (Shakespeare *Hamlet* 226-27)

In what ways is time “out of joint” (*Hamlet* 227)? When we stand in front of a mirror and look at ourselves in the mirror, we are “distanced” from the mirror. That distancing is a necessary condition. We must be “spaced” away from ourselves so that we can simultaneously look through the eyes of the voyeur and become the viewed. The space between us and the mirror, however, remains invisible, and because of that, like a blink of an eye, manages to blind our eyes in an instant. We see ourselves projected in the mirror and yet, that self over there is our “other”. It is not possible to see ourselves as ourselves. This temporalisation of the spacing between us and the mirror is the “out-of-joint” blink of the moment, the untraceable trace left by the spacing between the living and the haunting dead, the voyeur and the viewed, the present and the past.

In this chapter, I propose that Franz Kafka’s “The Great Wall of China” [“Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer”], written in 1917 and published in 1931, is an example of a modernist writing which not only problematises the concepts of time and temporality as

well as of space and spatiality, but also puts on centre stage the problem of theoretical periodisation of modernism. With its physical and ideological gaps and fragments, as well as traces of illusory and unfinished signification, the “piecemeal” construction of the Great Wall of China in Kafka’s short story not only exposes the process of spatialising time, but also reflects the modernist subtle (re-)evaluation of such a conceptual paradigm.

To begin, in Kafka’s story, the construction of the Great Wall is based on and driven by strong collective imagination. Workers and overseers labour unquestioningly with the image of a completed enclosing wall, the image of the future, constantly in mind. The wall’s construction does not commence from point A to point B. It is intentionally carried out in fragments. Kafka here stresses the rationale behind the Great Wall’s “piecemeal” construction, as well as the controversy which ensues:

But how can a wall protect if it is not a continuous structure? Indeed, not only does such a wall give no protection, it is itself in constant danger. These blocks of wall, left standing in deserted regions, could easily be destroyed time and again by the nomads, especially since in those days, alarmed by the wall-building, they kept shifting from place to place with incredible rapidity like locusts, and so perhaps had an even better picture of how the wall was progressing than we who were building it. Nevertheless the work could probably not have been carried out in any other way. To understand this one must consider the following: the wall was to be a protection for centuries; accordingly, scrupulous care in the construction, use of the architectural wisdom of all known periods and peoples, and a permanent sense of personal responsibility on the part of the builders were indispensable prerequisites for the work. (58-59)

The problem of discontinuity is the spectre which haunts the speaker in Kafka’s story. The “how can a wall protect” (58) question is a rhetorical one. The speaker who asks this question is a Chinese historian. Looking back in history from the perspective of the present or, in fact, from the perspective of the “future of his past”, to the time when the construction had just been launched and slabs of stone were still freshly installed, the speaker knows full well whether or not the wall has served its purpose: “For my own inquiry is a purely historical one; lightning no longer flashes from the thunderclouds that have long since rolled away, ...” (63). The answer is no.

When we read Kafka’s “The Great Wall of China”, we also experience Derridean *espacement*. When we read the speaker’s account of the past, it can be said that we automatically spatialise time, or think of time in terms of space, which is a normal reaction. However, as I shall explain, Kafka’s story also subtly propels readers to do the opposite.

When one thinks of time in terms of space, in this case, in terms of the Great Wall, one tends to imagine the passage of time as a one-way trajectory. If the construction process of the wall from the beginning to the overall completion, albeit imaginary,



resembles the process of time from the past, passing through the present, to the future, Kafka's piecemeal construction disrupts the gradual processing of time, as well as of the wall, itself. What propels workers and overseers to understand and undertake the project of the Great Wall is the image of the future. What motivates them is the "promise" that one day the wall will be completed in its entirety or, in other words, all the missing gaps filled and the fragmented wall rendered whole:

This meant that many great gaps were left, which were only filled in by slow and gradual stages, and some indeed not until after the completion of the wall had actually been announced. It is even said that there are gaps which have never been filled in at all, and according to some people they are far larger than the completed sections, but this assertion may admittedly be no more than one of the many legends that have grown up round the wall, and which no single person can verify, at least not with his own eyes and his own judgement, owing to the great extent of the structure. (58)

Kafka's depiction of the piecemeal construction in "The Great Wall of China" therefore illustrates the disjointed time of the present. It shows that there is no such thing as a "present continuous" time setting. The notion of time as inherently "out of joint" (Shakespeare *Hamlet* 227) is also put on centre stage in a parable within the short story. The parable, published separately in 1919 as "An Imperial Message" ["Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft"] (Gray et al 156), depicts the story of a dying Chinese Emperor who whispered his last words to a messenger. The messenger was assigned to relay the Emperor's message to one of his subjects living in the farthest corner of the Chinese Empire: "but for the people in our village Peking itself is far stranger than the next world" (Kafka 68). The more the messenger struggle to travel across the vast realm of the empire with the message, the more readers come to realise that his mission is an impossible feat: "Our land is so vast, no fairy tale can give an inkling of its size, the heavens can scarcely span it. And Peking is only a dot, and the imperial palace less than a dot" (Kafka 66). The message, delayed by the unfathomable distance and the passing time, can never reach the intended recipient. As the message of the dying emperor travels across the vast land of China, the promise of the letter's content remains, for the Chinese narrator in Kafka's story, a pledge made in the *future's past*. For Kafka the writer, this pledge, or Derridean promise, was made in the *past's past*. For readers, the imperial pledge was made in the *present's past*. China's vast landscape, which can be regarded as a metaphor for time's infinite boundaries, hindered the fulfilment of the Great Wall promise and obliterated the content of the Emperor's message. However, the act of working towards a promise and the act of travelling despite the looming failure of never ever reaching the intended destination can nevertheless prove to be a statement in itself:

At once the messenger set out on his way, a strong, an indefatigable man, a swimmer without equal; striking out now with one arm, now the other, he cleaves a path through the throng; if he meets with

resistance he points to his breast, which bears the sign of the sun, and he forges ahead with an ease that none could match. But the throng is so vast, there is no end to their dwellings; if he could reach open country how fast would he fly, and soon you would surely hear the majestic pounding of his fists on your door. But instead of that, how vain are his efforts; he is still only forcing his way through the chambers of the innermost palace, never will he get to the end of them; and if he succeeded in that, nothing would be gained; down the stairs he would have to fight his way; and if he succeeded in that, nothing would be gained; the courtyard would have to be traversed, and after the courtyards the second, outer palace; and again stairs and courtyards; and again a palace; and so on for thousands of years; and if at last he should burst through the outermost gate – but never, never can that happen – the royal capital would still lie before him, the centre of the world, piled high with all its dregs. No one can force his way through here, least of all with a message from a dead man to a shadow. But you sit at your window and dream up that message when evening falls. (Kafka 66-67)

Like the piecemeal construction, the promise leaves traces of illusory and incomplete signification only to be completed by the readers' imagination: "Such was the world into which the news of the building of the wall now penetrated. It too came belatedly, some thirty years after it had been announced" (69). As readers reach these passages extracted from the parody within "The Great Wall of China", the Emperor's message had long been sent out to the intended recipient. The message's receipt was already delayed. The *espacement* readers collectively experience *within the walls* of the story and *as* the story itself, therefore, has already created gaps, or interstices, between the spatialised temporality of the distant past and the recent "past of our future" which, in fact, is the present. Moreover, the piecemeal construction and the *espacement* which ensues illustrate how the disjointed time of the present awkwardly awaits the filling of gaps through collective promise of the future. Readers in 2017 and beyond know, as Kafka knew in 1917, that the promise of the completion of the Great Wall would never be fulfilled. The sovereignty of spatialised time might only point towards an empty promise, as well as towards the obscure, even unknowable, content of the Emperor's message. Piecemeal construction, on the other hand, invites readers to imagine the content of the promise, the impossible project of a finished Great Wall. Temporalisation of space is a modernist device which transforms the passive *voyeur* into a committed *voyageur* who travels along the almost unimaginable expanse of the Chinese landscape and the great expanse of time. For Derrida, a "promise" is a performative act:

[T]he promise is impossible but inevitable.... Even if a promise could be kept, this would matter little. What is essential here is that a pure promise cannot properly take place, in a proper place, even though promising is inevitable as soon as we open our mouths—or rather as soon as there is a text. (*Memoires* 98)

Since the promise that fulfils itself ceases to be a promise, it reflects a temporality which is “out of joint” (Shakespeare *Hamlet* 227). My argument finds its resonance in Martin Hägglund’s statement in *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov*: “The condition of temporality is, strictly speaking, ‘undecidable,’ since it consists in a relentless displacement that unsettles any definitive assurance or given meaning” (62). Also, a promise is structurally open to the possibility of an “other” beyond oneself, a heterogeneous “other” and “temporality” to come: “The promise responds to the **future** and the **other**, it is **performative** in as much as it entails a pledge, an **affirmation** or giving that is not simply identical to or exhausted by its specific content. Even if the promise is not kept, its gesture retains a certain significance” (Wortham “promise” 146).

The context of Kafka’s story reveals a particular modernity, which was an outcome of an unfulfilled promise of state security. The speaker of the short story, Kafka and readers of Kafka have the benefit of the hindsight of knowing the “future” of the Great Wall’s “past”, namely, the fact that the construction of the wall was never completed. Kafka and readers of his story might have learnt about the Chinese Revolution, known as the Xinhai Revolution, of 1911, which marked the end of over 2,000 years of imperial rule and the beginning of China’s republican era. The fact that the overthrown Qing dynasty, China’s last imperial dynasty, was of the Manchu ethnic minority reveals an irony. The Manchus are considered part of a nomadic ethnic group called Xiongnu. This nomadic group, portrayed by the authority as barbaric, was precisely the enemy from whom the Emperor in Kafka’s short story built the Great Wall to defend his empire: “After the Qin First Emperor defeated the Six States, he continued to expand his territory and define the border areas. At this time the Xiongnu, ..., had already established their own regime and began to move their territory southward” (Xinpei et al). Time has proven that the wall was far from being an effective defence. While emperors and dictators took turns ruling China, the people remained violently and unjustly oppressed in the name of the imagined enemy:

Against whom is the Great Wall supposed to protect us? Against the peoples of the north. I come from the south-east of China. No northern tribe can threaten us there. We read about them in the books of the ancients; the cruelties which they commit in accordance with their nature make us heave deep sighs in our peaceful bowers; in the faithful representations of artists we see these faces of the damned, their gaping mouths, their jaws furnished with great pointed teeth, their screwed-up eyes that already seem to be leering at the prey which their fangs will crush and rend to

pieces. When our children misbehave we show them these pictures, and at once they fling themselves sobbing into our arms. But that is all that we know of these northerners; we have never set eyes on them, and if we remain in our villages we shall never set eyes on them, even if they should spur their wild horses and keep charging straight towards us; the land is too vast and will never let them through to us, they will ride on until they vanish in the empty air. (Kafka 64)

The *past's past* has left traces on the *present's past*. The Xinhai Revolution, which affected only the ruling class, was established on the fragments of its past. The fate of the common people had been sealed since the time of the Qin dynasty, when peasants were coerced and exploited in the construction of the Great Wall. The common people's poor condition of living remained untouched and unimproved through time:

The First Emperor played a progressive role in establishing the unified Qin Dynasty, promoting the growth of social productive forces and developing production. On the other hand, he became increasingly tyrannical. Peasants were forced to fight expeditionary wars, guard frontiers, transport provisions for the army and build the Great Wall. The emperor ordered a string of palaces to be built. For the construction of the Epang (Efang) Palace alone, some 700,000 peasants were conscripted, and the same number labored to build the First Emperor's mausoleum. Many peasants died working on these projects. Moreover, they never knew when they might be punished at any moment on any pretext under the harsh laws of the Qin dynasty. (Zhao et al 127)

Years under oppressive regimes under Shi Huang Di (also known as Qin Shi Huang), the first Emperor of China, and his successor led to inevitable repercussion: "The nature of man, flighty in its essence, made like the swirling dust, can abide no bondage; if it fetters itself it will soon begin to tear wildly at the fetters, rip all asunder – the wall, the binding chain, and itself – and scatter them to the four quarters of heaven" (Kafka 62). The peasants successfully overturned the power of the Qin dynasty and ended its reign:

Shi Huang Di and his successor, the Second Emperor (reigned 209-207 B.C.), both exploited the labour power of the people without scruples. They collected as much as two-thirds of the harvested crops as land rent and, as a result, large tracts of land belonging to the peasants fell into the hands of the landlords and merchants. They forced 300,000 men to build the Great Wall and dispatched 500,000 to garrison Lingnan (Guangdong). An additional 700,000 men were used to build palaces, an equal number to erect Shi Huang Di's mausoleum, and myriads more



were conscripted to build roads. As a result, taxation and enforced labour services became so onerous that the peasants had no time to till their own fields and their womenfolk had no time for spinning or weaving. It was literally impossible for the peasants to exist under such burdens. The inevitable happened. In 209 B.C. peasants led by Chen Sheng (?-208 B.C.) and Wu Guang (?-208 B.C.) rose in revolt. Armed only with hoes and clubs they destroyed the rule of the Qin dynasty. (Jian et al 21-22)

It is sadly ironic that the Great Wall's promise of security made to the people who built the wall and lived within its enclosure has proved to be nothing but a statement of tyranny and inequality. Likewise, the threat of a common enemy from the north proved to be a spectre of collective fear, which had been exploited to the fullest by emperors and noble elites. This spectre of the past returned to haunt the present day. This can be seen in the demonisation of Arabs and Muslims by the United States, particularly as part of the psychological warfare propagated by the George W. Bush regime:

[A strange boatman – I know all those who usually pass here, but this one was a stranger – has just told me that a great wall is going to be built to protect the emperor. For it seems that infidel tribes, and demons among them, often gather in front of the imperial palace and shoot their black arrows at the emperor.] (Kafka 70)

Though Franz Kafka has been considered as quintessentially “one of the jewels in the crown of high modernism” (Bridgewater 5) and of “German-language Modernism” (Wilke 2) by many readers and scholars, the author and his works are rarely situated in the “particular modernity” of Austro-Hungarian Empire in which he lived and wrote. On the contrary, Kafka's stature as a writer has long been part of the Western Eurocentric theoretical periodisation of modernism, which demarcates modernism's temporal borders from around 1890 to 1940. “No, believe me, nobody would know Kafka today—”, Milan Kundera insisted, “nobody—if he had been a Czech” (*The Curtain* 34). Kundera's scathing comment on the possibility of Kafka being demoted to a less known or obscure writer had he written in the Czech language and considered himself a Czech confirms the notion that modernist literature, as well as its teaching and learning, has been a product, as well as a promoter, of exclusionist theorisation and canonisation, against which Susan Stanford Friedman has emphatically cautioned:

We need to let go of the familiar laundry list of aesthetic properties drawn from the Western culture capitals of the early twentieth century as *the* definitional core of modernism. I'm attached to that list, as I have confessed. But we need to provincialize it, that is to see “high” or “avant-garde” modernism as ONE articulation of a particularly situated modernism—an important modernism but not the measure by which all others are judged and to which all others

must be compared. Instead, we must look across the planet, through deep time, and vertically within each location to identify sites of the slash—modernity/modernism—and then focus our attention on the nature of the particularly modernity in question, explore the shapes and forms of creative expressivities engaging that modernity, and ask what cultural and political work those aesthetic practices perform as an important domain within it. (487-88)

In order to de-spatialise the affixed time period of modernism, dismantling the notion of High Modernism as modernism's quintessence is needed as a necessary step. In the case of this chapter's chosen text, one needs not look further for evidence which will help put to question the legitimacy of monolithic modernism and essentialised concept of so-called literary High Modernism. Kafka's work, written in a particular context of modernity experienced by a German Jewish writer living in Prague at the critical moments in the history of Austro-Hungarian Empire leading up to the Great War and its aftermath sufficiently testifies to the multiplicity of modernities and modernisms. Once again, I propose that by examining the "particular" one comes to see the overall montage of modernism's diversity and dynamism. Though oftentimes overlooked, such diversity and dynamism are inherent within the complex subjectivities of modernist writers and the untraceable "traces", or haunting undecidable spectres, of countless lives, thoughts and histories reflected in their works. In other words, a study of particular(ist) modernism reveals the indefinite versions and varieties of modernities which are deeply ingrained within the modernist movement from the beginning. In the following paragraphs, I shall briefly put my theory into practice.

Franz Kafka wrote "An Imperial Message" at his sister Ottla's home on Alchimistengasse (known as Zlatá ulička [Golden Lane] in Czech),<sup>6</sup> within the Prague Castle complex, in the spring of 1917. In the same year, he also rented a two-room flat in the Schönborn Palace in Prague's Malá Strana district (Wagenbach 112). From his flat, he could clearly see Laurenziberg, a hill known in the Czech language as "Petřín". Petřín hill is where the medieval Hunger Wall, [Hladová zeď in Czech], had been built in the fourteenth century by the orders of Charles IV (1316-1378), the first king of Bohemia to become Holy Roman Emperor. According to the legend, after the famine in 1361, the construction of the Hunger Wall was carried out only as a means to provide livelihood for the city's poor. This wall in Prague was therefore not meant to provide military protection, the purpose which most walls are expected to serve. Hence, the term "hladová zeď" has become a euphemism in the Czech language, signifying useless public work. Traces of the Hunger Wall can be found in

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<sup>6</sup> Though the meaning of the lane's German name, Alchimistengasse, is "Alchemists' street", alchemists never lived there. There is a legend, however, that sixteenth-century alchemists came to this particular lane to look for a reaction to produce gold. Hence, the street became rightfully known as "Zlatá ulička", or "Golden Lane".

Kafka's depiction of the Great Wall of China: "On the first few pages of the so-called sixth octavo notebook begins the longish story 'The Great Wall of China', very clearly inspired by a historic site in Prague in the immediate vicinity of Kafka's apartment" (Wagenbach 113). The similarity between the two walls in terms of being "hladová zed", or walls of which promises were never fulfilled, becomes clearer when one also takes into account the particular context of world history in which Kafka lived and wrote. When "An Imperial Message" was written in 1917, it was several months *before* Kafka would come to know about his tuberculosis condition. However, it was also several months *after* he knew that the Habsburg Empire's war bonds in which he had invested his savings would not turn profit as expected. His homeland had plunged into an impossible war following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife, Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, in 1914. Franz Joseph died in 1916. In the same year of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor's death, the Empire of China, an empire which a Chinese General named Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) attempted to reinstate in order to re-establish absolute monarchy in China after the 1911 revolution, had been brought to an end. Readers have the benefit of the hindsight to know the social and historical context of Kafka's "Great Wall of China", which reflects a sense of futility and despair on both personal and collective levels, as well as national and transnational levels. By avoiding the pitfall of temporal spatialisation which tends to label Kafka's short story as only a High Modernist metaphysical allegory, one might come to embrace the possibility that the depiction of the Chinese Emperor in the short story might reflect Kafka's perception of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire regime in passing. The people in Kafka's time, of our *present's past*, as well as the people in our time, *Kafka's future*, collectively yearn for the comforting words from the past. They yearn for the dying Emperor's last message before the winds of change catch hold of it and blow it away. Kafka's short story is located in those particular moments of uncertainty.

As this chapter's analysis of Kafka's "The Great Wall of China" demonstrates, placing Kafka in the comfort zone of High Modernism, a *momental* and *momentous* landmark within the unchallenged absolute space of Western Eurocentric modernism, serves only to hinder a better understanding of the enriching complexity of modernism and of other modernist writers. On the contrary, by exploring particular contexts of modernity, one might come to perceive the ways and moments in which modernism, instead of being a sacred monolithic entity, manifests itself as multifarious aesthetic and intellectual movements which contain and, at the same time, inspire numerous and diverse ruptures of change and transnational innovation.

## 4

### POSTNATIONAL MODERNISM: DEFAMILIARISING THE SLOVAK IMAGINED COMMUNITY

In 2010, the Slovak National Party [Slovenská národná strana], known as the SNS, stirred up a controversy with its xenophobic campaign strategy aimed at instigating hatred and intolerance towards the Roma community in Slovakia. The SNS's propaganda campaign can be seen culminated in an election billboard which features an overweight, half-naked and dark-skinned man with elaborate tattoos and with a thick gold chain around his neck. Depicted in the background of the portrait is a dark cupboard with shelves on which rows of glasses and stacks of plates are cast in shadowy light. It is not difficult to guess for whom the caption, "Do not feed those who do not want to work" ["Aby sme nekŕmili tých, čo nechcú pracovať"] was intended. The billboard plays on the stereotypes of Roma people as lazy, dirty and morally corrupt social parasites living on good Slovak citizens' tax money by exploiting the welfare system. It plays on the stereotypes of Roma people who, according to Jan Šlota, SNS's co-founder and former president, should best be disciplined in "a small courtyard and with a long whip" (Nicholson). The visual composition of this controversial billboard is a story in itself, a narrative which lives and grows on what the public find familiar and, at the same time, obscure. The thieving gypsy comfortably sitting in his dark and dirty kitchen and staring defiantly at the voyeur seems a familiar sight to the mind's eye, which tends to stare through the fabric of rumours and laces of media-spun sensational headlines. However, the man's day-to-day existence remains a mystery to the voyeur, who is not and never will be part of his household or community, i.e., not living in his dirty house or standing in his dark abyss of a kitchen. One does not know him. One does not even know his name or his family. One does not know what he *does or fails to do* for a living. The figure on the billboard is seen and, at the same time, imagined. The face is both real and unreal. Anonymity is crucial for racist and xenophobic discourses. One is not supposed to look beyond the indifferent label of "otherness" and find a fellow human being who is, in fact, not different "from us". The true story behind the man on the billboard exposes the process of story-telling itself. On 5 May 2010, *SME.sk* (Kováčová) published coverage on a man named Lukáč Bart. The face on the billboard was, for the first time, given a name and a narrative. Bart collects scraps to support his wife and his two children. One day, he and his brother were offered 150 euros for a photo shoot which he claimed he had no idea would later become an emblem of ultra-nationalist and xenophobic propaganda. On the *SME.sk* website, readers are given two juxtaposing photographs. One of the billboard and one of a thinner, less hairy and less tattooed Lukáč Bart in front of an ordinary cupboard. On the latter photograph, which is the original shot,



there is sufficient light in the kitchen background. There are no dark and dirty corners. Bart is not wearing a thick gold chain. His facial expression is far from menacing. Apparently, the heart-shaped tattoo on his chest visible on the billboard was artificially created and inserted as part of the photographic editing and manipulation.

What does Lukáč Bart's story, this "narrative within the narrative" of the billboard, tell us? Nationalism and notable works of fiction share the attributes of a good story. Drawing on the repository of "the familiar", be it familiar characters and landscapes, or familiar themes of human love and strife, life and death, nationalist sentiment thrives on threads of gripping and memorable story lines. The Lukáč Bart on SNS's billboards is not a reflection of reality, but a projection of a fantasy. The billboard itself is not an end product, but rather part of the whole production process which aims towards *making tangible* and *rendering more abstract* the familiar as well as the obscure terrains of known collective fears and unknown shared destiny. Nationalism is not only a product, but also a procedure. It is a production which is constantly adapted and hijacked to create, as well as promote, an ideology: "the 'nation' proved an invention on which it was impossible to secure a patent. It became available for pirating by widely different, and sometimes unexpected, hands" (Anderson 67).

In this chapter, apart from locating the modernist moments of "postnational" deconstruction in my chosen literary text, I shall go as far as to assert that nationalism is a work of fiction. Like Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*, whose fate hangs off the edge of the Sultan's mercy, nationalism's survival depends upon its cliffhanging narrative woven with threads of the familiar past, unknown present and utopian hopes for the future. Nationalism's survival depends upon having ordinary characters made into extraordinary epic or tragic heroes/heroines, upon its constant myth-(re)makings which strive to capture, attract, and even captivate the imagination, inducing the mind not only to will the stories to be true but also to kill and die for them. By "postnational" approach I mean the thinking and reading strategies which challenge the hegemony of nationalism and which expose the ideological constructedness of national identities and sense of nationhood. Like the prefix "post" in "postcolonialism", the prefix "post" in "postnationalism" *does not* connote a nihilistic rejection of the existence of nations. On the contrary, postnationalism is a critique on nationalism and the ideological construction of the physical, cultural and intellectual boundaries of nationality and sense of nationhood. To engage in a postnational textual analysis, one should first return to the main concepts of nationalism.

Though Boyd C. Shafer's *Nationalism: Myth and Reality*, published in 1955, seems anachronistic, the text is worth quoting as this chapter's starting point because of its particular context of Cold War modernity, where the prevalence of national unity and identity was considerably increased. In this classic book on the rise of European nationalism, Shafer not only points out the hybrid and Janus-faced nature of modern nationalism but also offers a list of its preliminary characteristics which helps one to

understand nationalism as a constructed concept, as Scheherazade's most painfully beautiful dreams/nightmares and beautifully painful fabricated lies:

The fact is that myth and actuality and truth and error are inextricably intermixed in modern nationalism. The only reasonable way to get at the nature of nationalism is to determine what beliefs – however true or false – and what conditions – however misinterpreted – are commonly present. The following ten are here hypothetically advanced. No claim is, however, laid for their infallibility or finality:

1. A certain defined (often vaguely) unit of territory (whether possessed or coveted).
2. Some common cultural characteristics such as language (or widely understood languages), customs, manners and literature (folktales and lore are a beginning). If an individual believes he shares these, and wishes to continue sharing them, he is usually said to be a member of the nationality.
3. Some common dominant social (as Christian) and economic (as capitalistic or recently communistic) institutions.
4. A common independent or sovereign government (type does not matter) or the desire for one. The "principle" that each nationality should be separate and independent is involved here.
5. A belief in a common history (it can be invented) and in a common origin (often mistakenly conceived to be racial in nature).
6. A love or esteem for fellow nationals (not necessarily as individuals).
7. A devotion to the entity (however little comprehended) called the nation, which embodies the common territory, culture, social and economic institution, government, and the fellow nationals and which is at the same time (whether organism or not) more than their sum.
8. A common pride in the achievement (often the military more than the cultural) of this nation and a common sorrow in the tragedies (particularly its defeats).
9. A disregard for or hostility to other (not necessarily all) like groups, especially if these prevent or seem to threaten the separate national existence.
10. A hope that the nation will have a great and glorious future (usually in territorial expansion) and become supreme in some way (in world power if the nation is already large). (7-8)

If nationalism is a work of fiction, where else, then, can one fittingly witness the nationalist Scheherazade in action and come to perceive such *mythical creature* and *living flesh and blood* called “the nation” than a work of fiction itself? Thus I shall examine each of Shafer’s hypotheses alongside my analysis of Daniela Kapitáňová’s novel entitled *Samko Tále’s Cemetery Book* [*Kniha o cintoríne*]. *Samko Tále’s Cemetery Book* was published in Slovak in 2000 and translated into English by Julia Sherwood in 2010. I shall demonstrate in this chapter that the nationalist tenets and beliefs which tend to be accepted unquestioningly as absolute truth are mercilessly defamiliarised, or “made strange” by Samko, the novel’s protagonist, through his pedantic engagement in Aristotelian categorisation of knowledge in his obsessive attempt to illustrate his (anti-logical) logic of what it means to be a Slovak and to be part of a community which has been through dramatic changes in history. *Samko Tále’s Cemetery Book* corresponds with Benedict Anderson’s notion of human communities as imagined entities in which people “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). The novel was written in the form of a memoir, a cemetery book, where the living are juxtaposed with the dead, and where the ideologies of present-day Slovakia are juxtaposed with those of its Communist past. Samko, the main character, is depicted in the novel’s introductory section by Julia Sherwood and Donald Rayfield as “an intellectually and physically stunted creature and arch-conformist who enthusiastically embraces every kind of prejudice under Communism and as it continued in the newly independent Slovakia” (Kapitáňová 5). Samko describes himself in this following passage:

The thing is I hate it when people call me Boy, because I’m not a boy, I’m nearly forty-four years old and people respect me because I’m hardworking, even though I don’t need to work because I have a disability pension due to my kidneys, and I have another illness as well that has a proper name, but that illness has nothing to do with my disability pension, I just have it. My disability pension has gone up quite a lot because people respect me.

Anyway. (Kapitáňová 12)

Despite the protagonist’s age, the name “Samko” is referred to in diminutive form throughout the novel. This can be seen as a traditional marker of intimacy but also, more likely, a condescending marker of his “otherness” as an intellectually disabled person. Samko’s position and status in society contribute to his appeal to readers of the novel as his views on the world possess the power to “make strange”, or defamiliarise, one’s preconceived notions of truth. Samko’s straightforward and, at times, awkward comments reveal questions and concerns which one prefers to gloss over with euphemism or evade with silence. The adverb “anyway” can be found after most of Samko’s statement in the novel. The “aside” characteristic of his observation which the adverb connotes might signify that Samko’s words, like Samko himself, serve as a digression from the mainstream narrative of the novel and, particularly, of the nationalist discourses. However, the irony lies

in the fact that the whole book can be seen as a digression. It is clear to readers that Samko's "anyway" turns out to be the "only way" in which the story *develops* or *fails to develop*.

Returning to Shafer's ten hypotheses on nationalist sentiment, the first item, which is the notion that a fixed territory, be it geographical or mental, is necessary for the development of nationalism, is put to question by Samko in his following remarks:

There's just one thing I don't get and that's why there are so many Gypsies in Komárno, and not just in Komárno but all over the world, because what I don't get is why there have to be Gypsies in the world. I don't want there to be Gypsies in the world, they should go somewhere else, for example to Gypsyland where they came from, ... (36)

On an individual level, one tends to define and measure oneself against "the other". Likewise, on a collective level, a nation with supposedly fixed borders and boundaries like Slovakia is to be defined against its menacing adversaries, one of which, in Samko's opinion, is Gypsyland, home of the Gypsies. The belief that each nationality forms a separate and independent group sustained and propagated as part of the nationalist movement, as pointed out by Shafer in item 4, is challenged in the novel. My argument finds its resonance in Benedict Anderson's critical dissection of nationalism and of a nation's need for imagined boundaries: "The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind" (7).

If it is true that the gypsies belong to a limited nation called "Gypsyland" as Slovaks belong to the territories of the Slovak Republic as Samko believes, then the absurdity of such a statement is made clear to readers. If one finds Samko's idea of Gypsyland ridiculous, given the long history of Romani people's migration, displacement and persecution, not to mention the stereotypes of their nomadic habit and lifestyle, one should also find the idea of Slovakia and the notion that this land, with its definite cultural and physical borders, should be populated exclusively by pure-blood "Slovak people" ridiculous as well. The existence and legitimacy of "Gypsyland" are questioned alongside those of Slovakia, given the country's history of shifting borders and multiculturalism. Komárno, in particular, is a case in point. The territory of this Czechoslovak town was defined in the Treaty of Trianon, signed at the end of the First World War in 1920 as part of a peace agreement between the Allies and the Kingdom of Hungary. The newly created border divided the original territory of the Hungarian town in two. The smaller section is known in the present day as the Hungarian town of Komárom. In the same way that the relation between words and meanings, Ferdinand de Saussure's "signifier" and "signified", is arbitrary (*Course in General Linguistics* 67), borders and boundaries, as well as the essence of so-called "Gypsy-ness" and "Slovakness", what it means to be a "gypsy" or a Slovak, are arbitrarily human-made and constantly customised. Who, one might ask, is the true "other"



in a town like Komárno? Is it the Slovaks, the Hungarians or the Gypsies? This Derridean undecidability yields constructive as well as destructive results. The return to multiculturalism and the promotion of tolerance form part of the creative aspects of Derridean suspicion towards nationalist ideological labelling. On the other hand, socio-political conflicts, ranging from mass violence to petty vandalism, for example, of the bilingual street signs in the town of Komárno, or even casual racist remarks, form part of the degenerative aspects of nationalist otherisation. "We did not establish our independent state for minorities", said Robert Fico, "although we respect them, but mainly for the Slovak state-forming nation" (Smith). Stripped off of its ultra-nationalist rhetoric, Fico's statement would have only revealed blatant discrimination as a result of an all-too-familiar ignorance in supposing that what constitutes Fico's "minorities", Slovakia's parasitical other, is a given entity independent from the repeated production and reproduction by what Louis Althusser terms "ideological state apparatuses" ("Ideology" 96). Fico, who is currently [in 2013] the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, can be considered as part of the apparatuses which sustain and promote nationalist ideology. Speaking from the "(e)strange(d)" perspective as "the other" in a society of "normal" people, Samko puts on centre stage and makes strange the notion of nationhood and the question of national territory, both of which tend to be taken for granted as given entities. The affirmative "I didn't like it, either" (Kapitáňová 14), uttered when he believes that Slovak people do not like the idea that his great-great grandmother was Hungarian and had a Hungarian name, is rendered disturbing in the following passage:

But Grandmummy and Granddaddy were not German because they were in Slovakia, except that Grandmummy's grandmother was Hungarian and her name was Eszter Csonka, meaning that she had a Hungarian name too. And nobody liked that.

I didn't like it, either. (14)

By wholeheartedly conforming to mainstream nationalist discourse against the Germans and the Hungarians, Samko shocks readers into an awareness of how ridiculous and narrow-minded racial discrimination truly is: "because I don't speak German because I don't have time for such silly things. I can speak Slovak because I'm a Slovak and I can speak Hungarian because I've learned it because I've got I.Q., even though you're not supposed to do that, because this is Slovakia" (14-15). Through defamiliarisation, Samko propels readers to stop, think and question the ideology behind "not liking" the fact that one's own ancestors was or one's own living relatives happen to be so-called "foreigners".

Perhaps this is the time to ask the overdue question: What is defamiliarisation? The term "defamiliarisation" is a translation of the Russian *ostranenie* which means "making strange". The concept was introduced by the Russian formalist thinker Viktor Shklovsky ("Art as Technique" 213-14). In "Art as Technique", Shklovsky argues against an individual's automated perception and responses to life. Objects, landscapes and physical experiences tend to be overlooked and undervalued as they have become too dull to provoke

an individual's thought or sensation. It is art's mission to shatter the familiar images of the world: "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (Cuddon 12). Defamiliarisation can be seen reflected in Samko's treatment of the notion laid down by Shafer in items 2 and 5 that a sense of nationhood is honed out of a shared language, which leads to supposedly shared culture, customs and history: "We used to call our grandparents Grandmummy and Granddaddy, but only at home because it would have been weird to call them Grandmummy and Granddaddy in front of other people,... Because that's in German and we're in Slovakia" (Kapitáňová 14). What is deemed "weird" to the "weird" Samko is the act of calling his grandparents in a foreign language in public while in Slovakia. Through Samko's defamiliarised eyes, one encounters the "all too familiar" concept that national identity and language are inseparable. This claim is testified by the history of the Slovak language, notably Anton Bernolák and Ľudovít Štúr's codifications of the modern Slovak language as part of the Slovak National Revival Movement, as I have recounted in the previous sections of this book. The notion that a national community can only be defined by one unified language, or by homogenous grammar and lexicon shared among the community members, is "made strange" in Samko's views towards Hungarian people in juxtaposition with Vietnamese people:

[B]ut the Vietnamese are nice because they don't push other people around and they don't speak Vietnamese. I mean they do speak Vietnamese but only among themselves. But Hungarians speak Hungarian even when they are not among themselves.

But people forgive the Vietnamese for speaking Vietnamese because we have never been suppressed by them. And that's why they are allowed in Slovakia. We have always been suppressed by the Hungarians and that's why we will never forgive them. That goes without saying, right?

Right. (92)

The absurdity of Samko's statement is put on centre stage through defamiliarisation. For Samko, the Hungarians are "not as nice as" the Vietnamese because they speak "Hungarian even when they are not among themselves" (92) while living in Slovakia. Samko's sense of ownership regarding his national language and territory, as culminated in the notion of "while in Slovakia, do as the Slovaks do", including *speak what the Slovaks speak*, is fuelled by a collective resentment towards Hungary's "unforgivable" late nineteenth-century Magyarisation law and policy, which left a bitter mark in Slovak history. However, as Benedict Anderson posits at the beginning of *Imagined Communities*, national identity is an artefact, a signification process which evolves with time and which adapts to changing socio-political climate and landscape:

My point of departure is that nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy. (4)

According to Samko, "proper Slovak" (Kapitáňová 11) is deemed "proper" official language for the independent Slovak Republic. The rationale behind such a rule lies in Samko's phrase "Because that's the law" (11), which is repeatedly emphasised throughout the novel. The irony of Samko's repetition is clear. There is no rationale behind the nationalist arbitrary assignment and allocation of language usage. Though breaking such a law does not lead to criminal punishment, offenders are nevertheless "informally" punished as this imagined law tends to be readily incorporated into the social norms and customs which, when breached, leads to the idea that someone would "be in big trouble for that" (11). The scorn and mockery, which are part of the punishment for corrupting "proper Slovak", might seem trivial compared with a legal sentence given by a legal court of law. However, the triviality is deceptive. Social pressure is part of what Pierre Bourdieu (121) terms "symbolic violence", a subtle form of cultural and social domination common in everyday life. Violence of this kind is "symbolic" because it works not on the physical level, but on the level of categories of thoughts and perception. Samko depicts the ways in which the nationalist discourse of dominant language usage establishes further symbolically violent "laws" which normalise ignorance and prejudice: "They should speak Slovak, and if they don't they will get reported" (Kapitáňová 55). Moreover, in one of the modernist moments in Kapitáňová's novel, Samko defamiliarises the subtle gender prejudice which attaches itself in day-to-day language usage:

[A]t school we did this writer, her name was Timrava and she was a woman. Seriously, I'm not making it up, she was a woman and her name was Timrava not Timravaová, even though a proper Slovak name for a woman is supposed to have *-ová* at the end, like Darinka Gunárová, she's also called Darinka Gunárová with *-ová* at the end *because that's the law* [my emphasis]. (16)

Once again, simply "because that's the law" (16), the name "Timrava", without the feminine suffix *-ová*, defies the rules of "proper Slovak" and therefore causes utter surprise to Samko, particularly when he learns that this writer is female. As I have mentioned in the previous sections of this book, Slovak writer Božena Slančíková "Timrava" took her pseudonym from a water well in a village called Polichno, in Banská Bystrica region. The practice of adopting Slavic names or names of towns, villages and geographical landmarks as pseudonyms was common for Slovak writers in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. This custom was part of the nationalist movement of which objective was to

celebrate the Slovak folk culture and promote the Pan-Slavic sentiment. However, Samko would not have been so surprised to hear the names of Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav (1849-1921), whose Slavic-sounding pseudonym "Hviezdoslav" means "Slav of the stars", or Jozef Gregor Tajovský (1874-1940), who took his pseudonym from "Tajov", the name of his birth village, as when he encountered Timrava at school. The irony in Samko's remark is subtle. The fact that Timrava is a woman and also a woman writer whose strange and out-of-the-ordinary name, not to mention theme and style of writing, stands out amidst the dominant male writers in the Slovak literary canon taught in schools serves as an indicator of the patriarchal ideology embedded within the Slovak nationalist movement.

As Boyd C. Shafer points out in items 6, 7, 8 and 10, shared language, customs and history among the imagined citizens of an artefact called "nation" bring about shared love and pride in national language and culture. As Samko reveals in his exaltation of the Slovak people and language, such nationalist devotion and hope for a collective utopian future are constructed, inseminated and disseminated in institutions such as schools, as part of Althusser's "ideological state apparatuses" ("Ideology" 96): "Because Slovaks are the best people in the world and the Slovak language is the most beautiful language in the world./ That is what we were taught at school and it also said on TV that the Slovak language was the most beautiful language in the world" (Kapitáňová 37). By "making strange" the Slovak national pride, Samko exposes the ways in which it is sustained and instigated: "Because every Slovak is proud of being a Slovak./I'm proud of being a Slovak, too" (38). Nationalist sentiment is built up on a macro scale through mass media and on a micro scale through members of the family unit:

My dad used to say that yoghurt was invented by the Mongols and that this went to show what a civilized people these Mongols were, because they invented yoghurt. And not just because of yoghurt, but also because they had chased the Hungarians out of Mongolia, because nobody in the world likes the Hungarians, because they are Hungarian. But everybody in the world likes Slovaks because they are Slovaks. (37)

For Benedict Anderson, though the nation is an imagined community, the comradeship forged within the imagined group is real and has the power to compel people to sacrifice their lives and take away other people's lives for such an ideological construct: "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (7). Patriotism, as Shafer also points out in his third hypothesis, needs to be represented through an emblem or a shared institution. In Samko's case, the Communist regime and the Communist party are necessary signifiers for such immense imagined love, honed out of collective fear and pride, for one's nation: "The Young Pioneer's Oath is beautiful" (13). For him, the colour and condition of



his Young Pioneer's scarf must be impeccable as he believes it reflects on his devotion to the Communist regime and on his being a good Slovak citizen:

I'm a really good Slovak and I used to be a really good Young Pioneer, too. But the one thing I don't get is why it had to be me who got a Young Pioneer's Scarf that wasn't properly red but sort of orange. That's why sometimes I thought that people might wonder why my scarf wasn't properly red like all proper Young Pioneers' Scarves and that they might think that I was different. But I'm not different, I'm just like everyone else in the world and the only reason I have a disability pension is because of my kidneys and not because of this illness that has a proper name and makes you stop growing and stops your beard from growing. (53)

Samko's fear and anxiety of being or appearing different reflects the nationalist mentality with a high propensity towards xenophobia: "because a Gypsy who wears glasses could be very dangerous because he could pretend to have I.Q." (56). As Shafer also posits in his ninth hypothesis, one's love and devotion for the nation is based on and can lead to hostility towards other national groups. Samko's exaltation in the Slovak language is based on and fuelled by his contempt for Czech and Hungarian languages:

Other languages, like the Czech language for example, can never be most beautiful in the world because they don't have the letter L'. And that's why the Slovak language is the most beautiful in the world because it has the letter L'.

The funniest language in the world is Hungarian.

And the way you can tell is because if you say something with a Hungarian accent it's very humorous and it makes everyone laugh. Because it's very funny. (37)

Making fun of other languages and having a good laugh as a result might again seem trivial. However, Samko's innocent remarks expose a disturbing root cause for discrimination and intolerance deeply ingrained in one's personal mindset: false belief in one's superiority. The damage caused by such delusion might not be apparent. The Czechs and the Hungarians might only feel annoyed and offended by Samko's remarks. However, more severe injuries can be found in the following passage, where intolerance and symbolic violence possess the power to destroy lives:

There was this man in Komárno whose name was Zdenko Horilla and he was the manager of a Cinema. Once he was sent to the Soviet Union regarding Friendship because back then we still had the Soviet Union so it was OK. And during Friendship they drank all sorts of Soviet alcoholic drinks and because Russian doesn't have the letter H they called him Gorilla instead of Horilla.

He didn't like that at all and when they finished drinking all the Soviet alcoholic drinks he said this:

'If you call me Gorilla we will say Haharin instead of Gagarin.'

And everyone in the Soviet Union took offence because he offended the World's First Soviet Cosmonaut and when he came home he got into big trouble because he had offended them. And he couldn't be manager of the Cinema anymore.

And then everyone said it served him right, even managers should keep their mouths shut in the Soviet Union.

I said so, too.

Because he shouldn't have offended the World's First Soviet Cosmonaut.

Anyway. (126-27)

The most atrocious aspect of Zdenko Horilla's story is not the fact that Horilla has been fired from his management position by the Russians, but rather the fact that everyone, including Samko the conformist, chooses to ignore or even fails to see the atrocity of censorship imposed by the Soviet Union. Nationalism has the power to transform a linguistic joke from a meaningless prank to total destruction. Horilla's punishment is decided by the ruling regime, which is the Soviet Union. Had the power dynamics and relations between Russia and Slovakia been different, it would have been entirely acceptable, or even witty and comical, to refer to the famous Soviet cosmonaut as "Yuri Haharin".

*Samko Tále's Cemetery Book* is a novel which successfully kills the lure of the Scheherazade of nationalist discourse by "making strange" nationalist beliefs which one finds "all too familiar" and by unveiling the absurdity behind the likes of Lukáč Bart's presentation on the SNS billboard. As my analysis of this novel demonstrates, nationalism can be regarded as a work of fiction, a product of the imagination. By locating the modernist moments of postnational critique on nationalism in *Samko Tále's Cemetery Book*, readers come to perceive "nation" as an imagined community which can be experienced, challenged and deconstructed within no better imaginable realm than one's own (literary) imagination. The best conclusion to this chapter, in my opinion, can be found in Pavel Vilikovský's statement in his article entitled "Marginalia: On the Elusive Quality of 'Slovakness'":

The sad truth is that, instead of thinking about the future, the Slovaks are still fighting battles of the past, as if they had not been won or lost long ago. This is another phenomenon we might call typically Slovak: the violent ruptures in national development, frequent changes of political and social conditions that have stifled the ambitions and careers of whole generations, have generated a deep sense of frustration, and of wishful thinking about 'what might have been, if only...' – which has become a favourite pastime of

many senior Slovaks who try to excuse their personal inadequacies and failures by blaming history. (101)

## 5

### TRANSNATIONAL AND INFRA-HISTORICAL (POST)MODERNISM LAURENT BINET'S *HHhH*

From Fritz Lang's film entitled *Hangmen Also Die!* (1943) to a recent Czech film entitled *Lidice* (2011), from Jiří Weil's novel entitled *Na střeše je Mendelssohn* [*Mendelssohn Is on the Roof*] (1960) to Alan Burgess's *Seven Men at Daybreak* (1960) and, recently, Gerald Brennan's *Resistance* (2012), Operation Anthropoid and the Nazi's merciless reprisals, one of the darkest chapters of Czechoslovak history of oppression and resistance, have been portrayed and recounted in a number of films and literary works. Though cinematic and literary portrayals and adaptations of the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich (1904-1942), Reichsprotektor of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, carried out in Prague on 27 May 1942, tend to be regarded as indisputable classic resources and references in their own right, I argue in this chapter that the representation of the Czech and Slovak histories of violence and dissidence nevertheless *remains* and *should remain* problematic. The problem lies in the notion that such representation entails rearranging as well as manipulating narrative elements to tell a (hi)story, an act which tends to be subjected to the totalitarianism of what Jean-François Lyotard refers to as the "grand narratives", or the "metanarratives":

One of the fundamental attacks postmodernism subjects modernism to is on the latter's belief in a 'grand narrative'. It is a rejection of the idea that the ultimate truth associated with a grand narrative is possible and that the world as experienced is as a result of hidden structures. A grand narrative or metanarrative can also be understood as an ideology or paradigm; a system of thought and belief. (Du Toit 86)

In *The Postmodern Condition*, where he revises the notion of knowledge and proposes the tenets of the "postmodern" aesthetic and intellectual movement, Lyotard defines postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv) and thus signals a break with modernism which, despite its subversive and experimental tendencies, is nevertheless firmly based on the belief in the grand narrative:

What, then, is the postmodern? What place does it or does it not occupy in the vertiginous work of the questions hurled at the rules of image and narration? It is undoubtedly a part of the modern. All that has been received, if only yesterday (*modo, modo*, Petronius



used to say), must be suspected. What space does Cézanne challenge? The Impressionists'. What object do Picasso and Braque attack? Cézanne's. What presupposition does Duchamp break with in 1912? That which says one must make a painting, be it cubist. And Buren questions that other presupposition which he believes had survived untouched by the work of Duchamp: the place of presentation of the work. In an amazing acceleration, the generations precipitate themselves. A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant. (79)

According to Lyotard, *postmodern* is a condition, a temporary movement inherent within the first stage of the modernist tradition. It is a condition forged by dissidence, honed by an urge to challenge the norms of the Enlightenment and break free from human tendency to submit the complexity of history and society to a fixed totalitarian pattern which makes up the myth of a transcendental metanarrative, or grand narrative. Lyotard maintains that the narrative structure of a story, the order and manner in which a story is presented to the reader, tends to reflect and uphold the authority of the "large-scale theories and philosophies of the world which, . . . , should be viewed with deep scepticism" (Du Toit 86). Such is "the crisis of narratives" (xxiii) which Lyotard emphasises in his writing and which Fredric Jameson explicates and expands to include what he refers to as the "crisis of representation" (viii) in his foreword to Lyotard's seminal book. For Jameson, the "crisis of representation" (viii) stems from one's tendency to uphold the supremacy of universal truth without questioning and one's failure to see how belief in such "essentially realistic epistemology" (viii) leads to the notion that representation is a faithful reproduction of truth, which lies in its entire essence outside subjectivity:

It is in terms of this crisis that the transition, in the history of form, from a novelistic "realism" of the Lukácsean variety to the various now classical "high" modernisms, has been described: the cognitive vocation of science would however seem even more disastrously impaired by the analogous shift from a representational to a nonrepresentational practice. (Jameson viii-ix)

However, I posit an opposite view on modernism and postmodernism. As I have mentioned in this book's introduction, I argue that the postmodern condition, in fact, entails modernist moments particular to our modernity of the twenty-first century, the time when the authority of the grand narratives, or the metanarratives, is again and again put to question. I argue that postmodernist nihilistic attempt to do away with the grand narrative of truth is a mere gimmick. We cannot deny or do away with the truth within the existence of our physical world and corporeal experience. Moreover, we cannot deny or do away with the language which is used to relay or convey our distrust in the language system itself.

Modernism as an aesthetic and intellectual movement of the “here” and “now”, of the numerous ruptures with traditions which have been established as the “old” (here, for example, we can also see such ruptures reflected in Lyotard’s own description of the relationship between Cézanne and the Impressionists), *is not done and over*. The modernist project to capture the “crisis of narratives” (xxiii) as stipulated by Lyotard or the “crisis of representation” (viii) as stipulated by Jameson is ongoing. Here, I share Susan Stanford Friedman’s sentiment regarding modernism’s transformative power which knows no bounds, albeit spatial or temporal:

Change is what drew me to modernism in the beginning. Why should it ossify? Why should the fluid freeze over, the undecidable become decided?

All that is solid melts into air. We know that. Why should we want a stability for the field that the modernists themselves rebelled against?” (473).

Therefore, I choose to refer to Lyotard’s “postmodern condition” as a “(post)modern condition” and I choose to refer to postmodernism, which I believe is just one of the multiple modernities and modernisms, as (post)modernism.

To return to Operation Anthropoid and its filmic and literary representations, the story of a Czech soldier and a Slovak soldier’s attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler’s prominent henchman, who was known as “the hangman” of Prague and architect of the Final Solution of the Jewish question leading to the Holocaust, seems simple enough to be retold and re(-)presented in its entirety. However, as Lyotard and Jameson point out, universal truth, along with the grand narrative which renders all events in human history representational, is a myth. However, I insist that this truth stands as a necessary myth which inspires creativity and sustains human aspiration to understand one’s own (hi)story. In this chapter, I propose that Laurent Binet’s novel entitled *HHhH*, published in French in 2010 and translated into English in 2013, exposes the “nonrepresentational” aspects of history and the ways in which a writer grapples with his/her authorial urge to impose order and recount the story as a whole to fit the scheme of metanarrative, while also struggling with the knowledge that such urge does not do justice to the (hi)story. *HHhH*, as I shall demonstrate, offers alternative means and methods of narrating a (hi)story, which Johanna Lindbladh describes in *The Poetics of Memory in Post-Totalitarian Narration*: “individual and collective memory is enigmatic, fragmented, intimately connected to our senses and feelings, and thereby in need of an alternative epistemology, challenging traditional definitions of knowledge and truth” (5). The modernist moments of dissent towards the absolutism of truth, as well as the dilemma which ensues, can be located in Binet’s attempt to expose the process of historical fiction writing. In the novel, Binet draws attention to two aspects of dissent in his work. The first is dissent on the level of content, or the story of Operation Anthropoid and its tragic ending. The second is dissent on the level of narrative form. Binet calls *HHhH* an “infranovel”, of which combination of journalism and fiction

serves as an alternative genre to the traditional historical novel. Traces of Binet's experimental tendency can be seen in the novel's structure. *HHhH*, containing no page numbers, for example, is markedly divided into 257 random disproportionate sections.

On the level of content, it is undeniable that Operation Anthropoid was part of the Czechoslovak resistance movement orchestrated by the Czech Government-in-Exile. However, the narrative of such an act of dissent cannot be told in one coherent metanarrative as it is disputable whether or not the assassination of Heydrich yielded nothing more than horrifying consequences, as described on the dust jacket of Jan Wiener's *The Assassination of Heydrich*:

The repercussions of Heydrich's death shook the world. To Hitler, Heydrich was an "irreplaceable" SS chief. To the Czech people, he was a symbol of the terror and horror of the Nazi occupation. In reprisal, Hitler ordered a massive slaughter of the Czech "resistors" and totally demolished the small town of Lidice demanding that grass be planted where the town stood and that the name be erased from all maps.

Some historians have posited that the post-assassination retribution was far graver than the symbolic nationalist gesture of Heydrich's assassination. The villages of Lidice and Ležáky were razed to the ground as a result of false accusations. Their residents were terrorised and murdered:

On the morning of 10 June 1942 the SS shot Lidice's entire male population and burned the village to the ground. Lidice's women and those of its children who failed to meet "racial" criteria were deported to concentration camps... Two weeks later, the SS murdered all twenty-four adults in the village of Ležáky and similarly divided its children. (Frommer 19-20)

For the loss of Heydrich's life, the Czech people paid the high price with the currency of their lives: "In the wave of terror that followed Heydrich's assassination, the Germans arrested 3,188 Czechs, sentenced 1,357 to death, and executed 679, most for having 'approved the assassination.' Hitler had initially called for 10,000 Czechs to be summarily shot..." (Frommer 20). Though Laurent Binet's treatment of the subject of Nazi retribution does not undermine Operation Anthropoid as a symbolic act of resistance, *HHhH* nevertheless highlights the atrocities of the incident's repercussions:

The most appropriate tribute paid by the Nazis to Heydrich's memory was not Hitler's speech at his zealous servant's funeral, but probably this: in July 1942 the programme to exterminate all Poland's Jews began, with the opening of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Between July 1942 and October 1943, more than two million Jews and almost fifty thousand Romany will die as part of

this programme. Its code name is Aktion Reinhard. (Binet Section 252)

Apart from Hitler's horrifying tribute to Heydrich, an important event which followed Heydrich's death also renders Binet's novel "unfinishable":

My story is finished and my book should be, too, but I'm discovering that it's impossible to be finished with a story like this. My father calls me to read out something he copied down at the Museum of Man in Paris, where he visited an exhibition on the recently deceased Germaine Tillion, an anthropologist and Resistance fighter who was sent to Ravensbrück. This is what the text said:

The vivisection experiments on 74 young female prisoners constitute one of Ravensbrück's most sinister episodes. The experiments, conducted between August '42 and August '43, consisted of mutilating operations aimed at reproducing the injuries that caused the death of Reinhard Heydrich, the gauleiter of Czechoslovakia. Professor Gerhardt, having been unable to save Heydrich from a gaseous gangrene, wished to prove that the use of sulphonamides would have made no difference. So he deliberately infected the young women with viruses, and many of them died. (Binet Section 256)

On the level of content, therefore, Operation Anthropoid as an act of dissidence resists the authority of the realist grand narrative. Though the mission was accomplished at the expense of the death of seven soldiers which took place at an Eastern Orthodox church in Prague, where they had sought refuge, its successful outcome triggered reprisals on a massive scale:

As far as the resistance strategy is concerned, the assassination of Heydrich was a classic example of an attack against a powerful enemy undertaken with inadequate forces and disastrous consequences. It showed how counterproductive violence can be, when it is employed in the wrong place and at the wrong time. Throughout the entire occupation period, the Czech underground and the exiles in London improvised in a vain search for the right strategy. Their failure makes evident the need for advance planning of underground resistance; such planning should be part of the national defense effort in peacetime. (Mastný 224)

Before we can locate the (post)modernist moments in Binet's writing on the level of narrative form, I shall offer an overview of historical fiction genre and Binet's (post)modern



dissidence towards the totalitarianism of general narratives, or metanarratives, which underpins not only the historical fiction genre but also the concept of history.

In Section 11 of his novel, Binet describes his preparatory work as a writer of historical fiction thus:

I also read lots of historical novels, to see how others deal with the genre's constraints. Some are keen to demonstrate their extreme accuracy, others don't bother, and a few manage skilfully to skirt around the historical truth without inventing too much. I am struck all the same by the fact that, in every case, fiction wins out over history. It's logical, I suppose, but I have trouble getting my head around it.

Binet's dismay caused by witnessing how other writers of historical fiction are inevitably defeated by the unattainability of "accuracy" and "historical truth" in recounting and representing history is also part and parcel of Lyotard's "crisis of narratives" (xxiii), as well as Jameson's "crisis of representation" (viii), which I have mentioned. To better understand Binet's struggle with such "constraints", it might be useful to evoke Harry E. Shaw's definitions of historical fiction in *The Forms of Historical Fiction* as a starting point:

The historical novel raises in an acute form a question common to all mimetic works of art—the relationship of the individual to the general, of particulars to universals. Such problems tend to remain submerged in most literary works. Several things bring them to the surface in the historical novel. Because historical novelists depict ages significantly different from their own and may aspire to represent the workings of historical process itself, they are faced with the task of creating characters that represent social groups and historical trends. But creating such characters involves certain inherent difficulties. This is a major reason for the problem with historical novels. (30)

The crises of narratives and representation are inherent within the genre of historical fiction. *HHhH*'s title might, at first glance, seem to suggest that the novel's main focus is on the life story of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi prototype *par excellence*: "(‘HHhH,’ they say in the SS: *Himmlers Hirn heisst Heydrich* – Himmler's brain is called Heydrich)" (Section 108). Instead, Binet intentionally puts the characters of Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš, the two parachutists assigned to assassinate Heydrich, on centre stage: "Whenever I talk about the book I'm writing, I say, 'My book on Heydrich.' But Heydrich is not supposed to be the main character" (Section 88). Such a conscious choice aggravates the problem as it is much easier to write a book about Heydrich, the cold-hearted villain, whose life and death have been extensively documented. The novel, instead, begins with a scene in which readers are introduced to Jozef Gabčík, the Slovak parachutist involved in Operation Anthropoid whose Sten gun jammed at the moment of his close encounter with Reinhard Heydrich:

Gabčík – that’s his name – really did exist. Lying alone on a little iron bed, did he hear, from outside, beyond the shutters of a darkened apartment, the unmistakable creaking of the Prague tramways? I want to believe so. I know Prague well, so I can imagine the tram’s number (but perhaps it’s changed?), its route, and the place where Gabčík waits, thinking and listening. We are at the corner of Vyšehradská and Trojická. The number 18 tram (or the number 22) has stopped in front of the Botanical Gardens. We are, most important, in 1942. (Section 1)

Binet reveals in his novel that to imagine how it was like to be Gabčík, the less-known hero of the two parachutists, is not an easy feat. His affirmation that the character “really did exist”, along with his insertion of the images of Prague in the present day into his depiction of Gabčík’s Prague in 1942, puts the readers *in medias res* of the Operation Anthropoid story, as well as of historical fiction in the making. One of the significant effects of Binet’s “re-presenting” the past, or situating the past in the present, is that readers are not only made consciously aware of the historical fiction genre’s devices and limitations, but also invited to question their own concepts and conceptualisation of history:

The problems historical novel have with history and we have with historical novels are potentially instructive. They can help to reveal limits in the esthetic forms we most prize—knowledge that matters for those who employ imaginative forms to make sense of the world. A clearer understanding of the workings of historical fiction can also clarify certain aspects of the nature of history itself, and of our situations as historical beings. (Shaw 9)

A more complacent writer might see no difficulty or dilemma in recounting the story of two men, a Czech and a Slovak, who parachuted down to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich. A less thoughtful reader might not be moved by the incident despite the fact that it took place not in the distant past, but less than 100 years ago. As a “historical being” himself, Binet does not make it a secret that he has had difficulty conjuring the world of the past. Operation Anthropoid is clearly not a story which can be recounted through a simple plot. The simplicity of the story is deceptive. While it is true that Operation Anthropoid was a success, in that Heydrich later died of his injuries caused by Jan Kubiš. However, its success was at the expense of subsequent tragic deaths of the parachutists, their colleagues, the people who helped and sheltered them, as well as other innocent people who perished to quench Hitler’s rage. This historical event involves many other characters, in fact, real people whose lives and the tiny details which make up their existence lie far beyond the knowledge of the writer:

To begin with, this seemed a simple-enough story to tell. Two men have to kill a third man. They succeed, or not, and that’s the end, or nearly. I thought of all the other people as mere ghosts who would

glide elegantly across the tapestry of history. Ghosts have to be looked after, and that requires great care – I knew that. On the other hand, what I didn't know (but should have guessed) is that a ghost desires only one thing: to live again. Personally, I'd like nothing better, but I am constrained by the needs of my story. I can't keep leaving space for this ever-growing army of shadows, these ghosts who – perhaps to avenge themselves for the meagre care I show them – are haunting me. (Section 175)

Here, the (post)modernist moment in Binet's writing paves way to an *infra-historical* reading of the novel. By "infra-historical approach" I mean thinking and reading strategies which put to question the mainstream concept of history as linear and monolithic by means of *uncovering* and *recovering* the often overlooked subnarratives of history, such as the writer's subject position as a historical being and stories of obscure figures in history. From the extract, it is clear that Binet dedicates his novel to the "ghosts", or Derridean spectres, of historical "subaltern". By "subaltern", I refer to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's definitions of the term in "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In this seminal essay, Spivak asks whether or not the marginalised people, who have been silenced by and confined within the oppressive language system of the elite for centuries, can truly express themselves (37). The language and history of the subaltern are made up of fragmented heterogeneous voices, which find no precise outlet in the very vocabulary and power system that put them in the margins of society. Therefore, Spivak's answer is that the subaltern cannot speak. Binet's novel is an attempt to resurrect, recreate and pay tribute to the obscure, as well as to the nameless and faceless people who are ghosts of anonymity: "I tremble with guilt at the thought of all those hundreds those thousands, whom I have allowed to die in anonymity. But I want to believe that people exist even if we don't speak of them" (Section 251). To uncover the obscurely known is a challenge. To uncover the unknown, however, is an impossible task:

I examine a map of Prague, marking the locations of the families who helped and sheltered the parachutists. Almost all of them paid with their lives – men, women, and children. The Svatoš family, a few feet from the Charles Bridge; the Ogoun family, near the castle; the Novak, Moravec, Zelenka, and Fafek families, all farther east. Each member of each of these families would deserve his or her own book – an account of their involvement with the Resistance until the tragic *dénouement* of Mauthausen. How many forgotten heroes sleep in history's great cemetery? Thousands, millions of Fafeks and Moravecs, of Novaks and Zelenkas...

The dead are dead, and it makes no difference to them whether I pay homage to their deeds. But for us, the living, it does mean something. Memory is of no use to the remembered, only to those

who remember. We build ourselves with memory and console ourselves with memory.

No reader could possibly retain this list of names, so why write it? For you to remember them, I would have to turn them into characters. Unfair, but there you go. I know already that only the Moravěcs, and perhaps the Fafěks, will find a place in my story. The Svatošes, the Novaks, the Zelenkas – not to mention all those whose names or existence I'm unaware of – will return to their oblivion. But in the end a name is just a name. I think of them all. I want to tell them. And if no one hears me, that doesn't matter. Not to them, and not to me. One day, perhaps, someone in need of solace will write the story of the Novaks and the Svatošes, of the Zelenkas and the Fafěks. (Section 150)

Binet also expresses his frustration as a historical fiction writer who is forced by the genre's rules and constraints to rearrange the elements of history and fit them into a mould of one coherent story, while seeking ways to do justice to history's subaltern:

I'm fighting a losing battle. I can't tell this story the way it should be told. This whole hotchpotch of characters, events, dates, and the infinite branching of cause and effect – and these people, these real people who actually existed. I'm barely able to mention a tiny fragment of their lives, their actions, their thoughts. I keep banging my head against the wall of history. And I look up and see, growing all over it – even higher and denser, like a creeping ivy – the unmappable pattern of causality. (Section 150)

The “unmappable pattern of causality” when it comes to the depiction of nameless and faceless people involved in and affected by Operation Anthropoid becomes even more “unmappable” for Binet, who is consciously aware that he is writing a historical novel, set in Prague, from the point of view of a French man living in the twentieth century. To complicate matters further, Binet refers to Marjane Satrapi's interview, in which she highlights the notion that a writer's own birthplace as well as place of residence justifies his/her authority and credibility to write about a certain place:

'I adore Kundera, but the novel of his I love the least is the one set in Paris. Because he's not truly in his element. As if he were wearing a very beautiful jacket that was just a little bit too big or a little bit too small for him [laughs]. But when Milos and Pavel are walking through Prague, I believe it totally.'

This is Marjane Satrapi, in an interview given to *Les Inrockuptibles* magazine to promote the release of her beautiful film, *Persepolis*. I feel a vague sense of anxiety as I read this. Flicking through the magazine in the apartment of a young woman,



I confide my anxiety to her. 'Yes, but you've been to Prague,' she reassures me. 'You've lived there, you love that city.' But the same is true for Kundera and Paris... Will Marjane Satrapi sense that I didn't grow up in Prague?... does that mean she'll think my story is happening in Paris, where I was born, and not in Prague, the city my whole being yearns for? Will there be images of Paris in her mind when I drive the Mercedes to Holešovice, near the Troie Bridge? (Section 179)

According to Satrapi, Milan Kundera is "not truly in his element" when it comes to his depiction of Paris because he was born and grew up in Prague, not Paris. If the legitimacy and verisimilitude of a story depend solely upon the writer's place of origin, then it can be said that Binet can never be "truly in his element" when it comes to his depiction of Prague because he was born and grew up in Paris, not Prague. Binet justifies his stance as a French writer recounting the story of a historical event set in Prague as follows:

Unlike Marjane Satrapi, Milan Kundera, Jan Kubiš, and Jozef Gabčík, I am not a political exile. But that is perhaps why I can talk of where I want to be without always being dragged back to my starting point. I don't owe my homeland anything, and I don't have a score to settle with it. For Paris, I feel neither the heartbreaking nostalgia nor the melancholy disenchantment of the great exiles. That is why I am free to dream of Prague. (Section 179)

Binet refutes Satrapi's theory by admitting that his visions of Prague are products of his dream, which is devoid of political agenda and devoid of an exile's nostalgic longing for home. He also makes clear that he conjures up his visual and textual images of Prague from those presented in the media: "Prague in 1942 looks like a black-and-white photo. The passing men wear crumpled hats and dark suits, while the women wear those fitted skirts that make them all look like secretaries. I know this – I have the photos on my desk" (Section 193). I argue that Binet's statement here reflects a *transnational* (post)modernist moment of dissidence not only towards the authority of a linear and unifying historical metanarrative, but also towards the *authorial nationality* discourse, the notion that a writing can only be justified by a writer's nationality, or sense of nationhood. Binet's conscious "otherness" to East-Central Europe, particularly Czech and Slovak cultures and histories, sets him "free to dream" of a different place/time and free to imagine, as well as introduce, spectres of the obscure and unknown subaltern involved, thereby adding critical dimensions to the (post)modern rethinking and re(-)membering of the region's histories of violence and dissidence.

The (post)modernist moment of dissent on the level of *HHhH*'s narrative form can also be seen manifested most clearly in Binet's coinage of the term "infranovel": "I think I'm beginning to understand. What I'm writing is an *infranovel*" (Section 205). Though he does not provide the reader with a clear definition of what he means by that specific term,

Binet leaves clues and hints from which the concept can be inferred. The Latin prefix "infra" means "below". From the extracts which I have analysed, as well as the following one, Binet offers readers the many subnarratives which lie beneath or below the surface both of his book and of historical fiction as a genre. Note that the bottom-to-top metaphor, which the prefix "infra" connotes, subverts the omniscient gaze from top to bottom often imposed on an analysed object. A historical infranovel calls into question the concept of language as neutral medium in historiography. Binet, like Hayden White in *Metahistory*, blurs the boundaries between history and fiction:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by "finding," "identifying," or "uncovering" the "stories" that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between "history" and "fiction" resides in the fact that the historian "finds" his stories, whereas the fiction writer "invents" his. This conception of the historian's task, however, obscures the extent to which "invention" also plays a part in the historian's operations. (6-7)

By outlining and acknowledging the processes and limitations of historical fiction writing, Binet exposes how historical fiction writers, historical film producers and even historians treat history as a narrative prose discourse that classifies and regulates past events in order to establish and re(-)present them as one coherent grand narrative. The following extract is an example of the ways in which Binet's infranovel uncovers the process and techniques of historiography and historical fiction writing, as well as the underlying concepts of history "below" the texts one reads. Here, readers encounter a dialogue between young Heydrich and his father:

'Why is there a war, Father?'  
'Because France and England are jealous of Germany, my son.'  
'Why are they jealous?'  
'Because the Germans are stronger than they are.' (Section 14)

There is nothing more artificial in a historical narrative than this kind of dialogue – reconstructed from more or less firsthand accounts with the idea of breathing life into the dead pages of history. In stylistic terms, this process has certain similarities with hypotyposis, which means making a scene so lifelike that it gives the reader the impression he can see it with his own eyes. When a writer tries to bring a conversation back to life in this way, the result is often contrived and the effect the opposite of that desired: you see too clearly the strings controlling the puppets, you hear too distinctly the author's voice in the mouths of these historical figures. (Section 15)

The invented dialogue is followed by Binet's commentary, in which he points out the absurdity of a writer's extreme quest for verisimilitude. *HHhH*, as a historical infranovel, is a book which critiques itself, dissecting the creative process and reading experience in meticulous detail. In re(-)membering, or *commemorating* and *reinventing* in fiction form, the history of dissent, Binet chooses to avoid the authorial pretension found in history textbooks:

"But I've said that I don't want to write a historical handbook. This story is personal. That's why my visions sometimes get mixed up with the known facts. It's just how it is" (Section 91). He also chooses to avoid the extreme "life-like" rhetoric of hypotyposis: "inventing a character in order to understand historical facts is like fabricating evidence. Or rather, in the words of my brother-in-law, with whom I've discussed all this: *It's like planting false proof at a crime scene where the floor is already strewn with incriminating evidence*" (Section 192). As a historical infranovel, *HHhH* therefore becomes part of the (post)modern dissidence as it seeks to revolutionise the genre of historical writing and mainstream conceptualisation of history. In Lyotard's words, "invention is always born of dissension. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (xxv). Binet's invented genre of infranovel reflects his anti-grand narrative stance. Accordingly, in his historical infranovel, the writer's life becomes closely entwined with the lives of the obscure, or the subaltern, and also with the less obscure people, or the key players, involved in Operation Anthropoid. However, Binet is also aware of the dangers of over-stylised representation of history, particularly historical figures like Reinhard Heydrich:

It is obviously impossible that I – son of a Jewish mother and a Communist father, brought up on the republican values of the most progressive French petite bourgeoisie and immersed through my literary studies in the humanism of Montaigne and the philosophy of the Enlightenment, the Surrealist revolution and the Existentialist worldview – could ever be tempted to 'sympathize' with anything to do with Nazism, in any shape or form.

But I must, once more, bow down before the limitless and nefarious power of literature. Because this dream proves beyond doubt that, with his larger-than-life, storybook aura, Heydrich *impresses* me. (Section 41)

Literature has the magical powers which can bring allure even to one of the darkest villains in history. Binet cannot help feeling impressed with the literary representation of legends surrounding the historical character of Heydrich, one of Hitler's most trusted henchmen who not only orchestrated the Final Solution, sending around six million Jews to their death, but also gave out orders for the staging of the Gleiwitz incident on 31 August 1939. According to the caption of the photograph of Hitler holding "photographic proof" or the

“attack by Polish bandits” on the back cover Edouard Calic’s *Reinhard Heydrich*, the Gleiwitz incident, a staged attack by Nazi forces posing as Poles against the German radio station in Gleiwitz, “was used as a pretext for the German invasion of Poland, which triggered World War II”.

To locate further traces of (post)modernist moment in *HHhH*, we can see that, though this historical infranovel is not a direct treatment of the history of Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, it nevertheless suggests that the history of Nazi occupation is far from being the final ending of the region’s historiographical narrative. Central European uncanny chaos and histories of dissent and opposition ensued from shifting authoritarian regimes and ideologies can only be understood in retrospect, for example, by taking into account the Derridean *trace* and *spectre* of the (past-future/future-past) Soviet narrative strand. To understand how the almost unimagined past of Soviet occupation has left its traces in Binet’s *HHhH*, it might prove useful to revisit Derrida and Derridean definition of “trace”, which have already been addressed in this book’s Chapter Three:

[I]f the trace refers to an absolute past, it is because it obliges us to think a past that can no longer be understood in the form of a modified presence, as a present-past. Since past has always signified present-past, the absolute past that is retained in the trace no longer rigorously merits the name “past.”... With the same precaution and under the same erasure, it may be said that its passivity is also its relationship with the “future.” The concepts of *present*, *past*, and *future*, everything in the concepts of time and history which implies evidence of them—the metaphysical concept of time in general—cannot adequately describe the structure of the trace. (*Of Grammatology* 66-67)

There is no concrete evidence which accounts for the existence of trace. However, it can be said that trace is a *presence* of the *absence* of concrete *evidence of the past*. By evoking Wilhelm Keitel’s statement in one of the Nuremberg trial sessions in 1946, Binet evokes in the readers’ minds the near future-of-the-past Soviet regime which would later subject the region of Czechoslovakia under its power:

In 1946, at Nuremberg, the representative for Czechoslovakia will ask Keitel, the German chief of staff: ‘Would the Reich have attacked Czechoslovakia in 1938 if the Western powers had supported Prague? To which Keitel will reply: ‘Definitely not. Militarily, we weren’t strong enough.’

Hitler can curse all he likes. The truth is that France and Britain opened a door to which he did not have the key. And, obviously, by displaying such servility, encouraged him to start again. (Section 74)

Like the Nazi regime, the Soviet regime based its authority on a bluff of power play. Even the Soviet soldiers were subjected to blinding propaganda and came to call on the bluff only when they reached Eastern Europe and saw the wealth of region with their own eyes:

In part, the Soviet soldiers seemed foreign to East Europeans because they seemed so suspicious of Eastern Europeans, and because they appeared so shocked by the material wealth of Eastern Europe. Since the time of the revolution, Russians had been told of the poverty, unemployment and misery of capitalism, and about the superiority of their own system. But even upon entering eastern Poland, at that time one of the poorest parts of Europe, they found ordinary peasants who owned several chickens, a couple of cows and more than one change of clothes. They found small country towns with stone churches, cobbled streets and people riding bicycles, which were then still unknown in most of Russia. They found farms equipped with solid barns, and crops planted in neat rows. These were scenes of abundance by comparison with the desperate poverty, the muddy roads and the tiny wooden cottages of rural Russia. (Applebaum 26-27)

The Derridean spectre of absolute past haunts the present, in the same way that the future haunts (our conceptualisation of) the past. Once again, particularly after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw pact countries in 1968, the world would prove itself to be ignorant of what was happening behind the iron curtain. Binet here uncovers and recovers the traces of recent past and the past's immediate future: "Chamberlain declares: 'How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing'" (Section 63). The betrayal of Czechoslovakia by England and France, which led to the Munich Treaty, for example, left its mark upon individual lives and collective memory. With the Cold War as one of its legacies, the victimisation of Czechoslovakia remains an ineradicable trace in history.

Returning to the concept of the "spectre", which I have outlined in Chapter Three, Derrida explains: "As in Hamlet, the Prince of a rotten State, everything begins by the apparition of a specter. More precisely by the waiting for this apparition. The anticipation is at once impatient, anxious, and fascinated: this, the thing ('this thing') will end up coming" (*Specters* 2). Binet's *HHhH* foreshadows or "awaits" the apparition of the shift of power which eventually took place at the Prague Castle. In the time of the Nazi occupation, the newly crowned King was Reinhard Heydrich. Likewise, in the time of the Soviet occupation, the castle became the seat of Communist head of state. Power changes hands but the spectre of the "trappings of power" (Section 133) remains intact:

There is no proof that Heydrich really did put the crown on his head. I think people wanted to believe this story because it



suggested, retrospectively, an act of hubris that could not go unpunished. But I doubt whether Heydrich suddenly believed himself to be in the middle of a Wagnerian opera. As evidence, I offer the fact that Heydrich handed three of the seven keys back to Hácha: a show of friendship designed to give the illusion that the Germans were prepared to share the government of the country with the Czechs. An empty symbolic gesture, to be sure, but the halfhearted nature of this exchange means that the scene loses its potential outrageousness.

...

I don't believe he put the crown on his head, because we're not in a Charlie Chaplin film, but I'm equally sure that he did pick up the sceptre – to weigh it casually in his hand. A less demonstrative gesture, but symbolic all the same. And Heydrich, though pragmatic, also had a pronounced taste for the trappings of power. (Section 133)

The spectre of historical anticipation can also be found in Binet's reference to and depiction of Edvard Beneš (1884-1948), then President of the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile. The Czechoslovak independence movement sought to balance out the power of the Nazi and Soviet regimes, appeasing them equally, to save the fate of a small and powerless country:

With anthropoid, Beneš is attempting a great coup to impress these two European giants. London has given logistical backing and collaborated closely. But Beneš has to be careful not to offend the Russians' pride: that's why he has decided to inform Moscow of the launch of the operation. So the pressure is now at its height: Churchill and Stalin are waiting. The future of Czechoslovakia is in their hands; best not disappoint them. Above all, if it's the Red Army that liberates his country, Beneš wants Stalin to regard him as a credible representative – all the more so given his fears of the Czech Communists' influence. (Section 140)

To conclude this chapter, Laurent Binet's infranovel might, at first glance, promise to deliver a story of Operation Anthropoid with Reinhard Heydrich, Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš as main characters. However, as readers are taken to the "infra" level of the text, *HHhH* is more a novel about a novel of and beyond history. By revealing the techniques of historical fiction writing, a writer's dilemma and anxiety in preparing for and in writing this book, Binet becomes part in the history of (post)modern dissidence which seeks to look beyond mainstream conceptualisation of history. As my analysis of *HHhH* demonstrates, Binet stages a (post)modern revolution against grand narratives, or metanarratives, as well as against the mainstream conceptualisation of history, journalism and fiction writing. His subject position as the "other" to Czech and Slovak histories challenges the notion that the

right to re(-)present history can only be justified by time and space, namely the writer's direct experience with that particular history and the writer's nationality derived from his/her place of origin. His revolution is therefore part of transnational and infra-historical (post)modernism:

Everyone finds it normal, fudging reality to make a screenplay more dramatic, or adding coherence to the narrative of a character whose real path probably included too many random ups and downs, insufficiently loaded with significance. It's because of people like that forever messing with historical truth just to sell their stories, that an old friend, familiar with all these fictional genres and therefore fatally accustomed to these processes of glib falsification, can say to me in innocent surprise: 'oh, really, it's not invented?'

No, it's not invented! What would be the point of 'inventing' Nazism? (Section 40)

## CONCLUSION

### TRANSLATIONAL MODERNISM

In Jáchym Topol's *The Devil's Workshop*, originally published in 2009 under the Czech title *Chladnou zemí* [*Through a Cold Land*] and translated into English by Alex Zucker in 2013, a Swedish woman, whose Jewish grandfather was born in Košice and whose father was smuggled out of Nazi Central Europe through the Red Cross transport, reveals to a Czech man the true reason she finds it gratifying to return to "Eastern Europe":

My dad was a smart little boy. Sara clapped her hands. He made it to Sweden, and that means I'm normal. I can finish university, I've got a passport that's good wherever I go, no debt. Eventually I'd like a kid or two, a man, a house, all of that.

Hm!

They stuck them [her father and other Slovak Jewish children] on a train in Prague with signs around their necks, and off to Sweden you go! Did you know that Sweden was neutral during the war?

No. What does that mean?

Oh, never mind. Listen, you know why I like the East?

Yeah, you're looking for your ancestors and roots here and stuff.

No, come on, you know why I feel so good here?

No.

I feel superior. You've all got complexes because of who you are and where you're from. But I've just got my own personal complexes, you see? Now, good night! (44)

The sense of superiority felt by Sara, the Swedish character in Topol's novel, can be read equally as a symptom of Western European Imperialism and as a symptom of Central European "delayed modernisation" discourse. The extract sums up the two main ideologies which *Particular Modernity/Modernism* has addressed and revised through critical analyses of the particular literary modernism reflecting particular Czech and Slovak modernities. This project of locating modernist moments in literary works by writers who are "obscure" according to the Anglophone and Western European literary studies standard would have been impossible without the crucial bridge which connects particular modernity with transnational modernism: Translation. In this book's conclusion, I wish to pay homage to translators, whose role of both particularising their source texts and disseminating their

translations worldwide, have proven to be indispensable to the scholarship of the transnational turn in literary modernism.

To understand the whole picture of modernism as *transnational* and *translational* aesthetic and intellectual movements, one has to seek the particular. By “seeking the particular” I mean exploring, translating and disseminating works of the vernacular which reflect particular cultures and histories of the region. I have emphasised throughout this book that there is no such thing as one monolithic modernism. I have demonstrated in this book that modernities and modernisms are multiple, multiplying and multifarious. Once again I evoke Susan Stanford Friedman, whose writing has inspired my research project:

Modernism, for many, became a reflection of and engagement with a wide spectrum of historical changes, including intensified and alienating urbanization; the cataclysms of world war and technological progress run amok; the rise and fall of European empires; changing gender, class, and race relations; and technological inventions that radically changed the nature of everyday life, work, mobility, and communication. Once modernity became the defining cause of aesthetic engagements with it, the door opened to thinking about the specific conditions of modernity for different genders, races, sexualities, nations, and so forth. Modernity became modernities, a pluralization that spawned a plurality of modernisms and the circulations among them. (474)

Where can we locate and situate the role of translators in my thesis? To answer this question, let us picture Google Maps, one of the most impressive inventions of our particular modernity which have been produced by modern men and women’s love of freedom and sustained by technological gadgets increasingly becoming our extra organs, such as portable touchscreen phones and pads. If modernism contains many recurrent moments which can be mapped globally and simultaneously, translators and their work can be seen equivalent to the suggestions which appear in Google Maps route planner’s dropboxes, as well as the iconic dropped pins which depict saved locations. When it comes to Google Street View, translators and their work can be seen equivalent to the Google Street View cars which, equipped with cameras, lasers and GPS devices, travel to many parts of the world to record and transmit photographs of streets and places. They introduce remote places which one has never been and confirm one’s knowledge of places with which one is partially familiar. In the process of translating the literal meanings of source texts into a target language, translators also enrich both the source and target texts with their knowledge and experience of particular cultures. Modernism, I propose, should be translational. The different contexts of modernity and, to appropriate Friedman’s term, the “plurality of modernisms” (474) should be made available for comparative analysis and also

for dynamic “transposition”. As I have mentioned briefly in Chapter Two, according to Rosi Braidotti, “transposition” is a mental transfer from one set of social habitus to another:

The term ‘transpositions’ has a double source of inspiration: from music and from genetics. It indicates an intertextual, cross-boundary or transversal transfer, in the sense of a leap from one code, field or axis into another, not merely in the quantitative mode of plural multiplications, but rather in the qualitative sense of complex multiplicities... As a term in music, transposition indicates variations and shifts of scale in a discontinuous but harmonious pattern. It is thus created as an in-between space of zigzagging and of crossing: non-linear, but not chaotic; nomadic, yet accountable and committed; creative but also cognitively valid; discursive and also materially embedded – it is coherent without falling into instrumental rationality. (5)

In the process of translation, translators not only relay the content of the source text, but also implant modernism’s “plural multiplications” (5) in the target text and beyond. This book would not have been written without the cross-fertilisation of particular cultures and histories, which transcend boundaries demarcated by nationalist zeal and Western Eurocentric tautology.

Apart from transposition, translation in the form of textual analysis has been at work throughout the course of this book, inviting readers to transpose their understanding of modernity/modernism to Central Europe. Marek Tomin, translator of Emil Hakl’s *Of Kids & Parents*, parked his Google Street View car on Bořivojova street and opened up the door to the quaint little pub for us readers to sit, have a drink and listen to father and son discuss and even fight over their particular (hi)stories and views of their home country and of Central Europe. It is here, in a particular place in Prague, that we have put to question Milan Kundera’s Western Eurocentric concepts of Central Europe and the Czech fate. Norma Rudinsky, who had translated Timrava’s *Battle*, neatly placed a number of pins on the map of Slovakia for Anglophone readers to get to know this revolutionary woman writer and situate her writing in the Slovak women’s movement. It is here that my concept of provincial modernism has been added to the navigation dropbox as one of the many entries of global modernisms. Malcolm Pasley, translator of Franz Kafka’s writings, took us to the remnants of the Great Wall of China which Kafka had imagined and to which he had transposed his Austro-Hungarian reality. It is while we awaited the much delayed message from the Chinese Emperor and, at the same time, cast our eyes upon Prague’s Hunger Wall from the palace’s window, that we have challenged the label of “High Modernism” and the periodisation of the modernist movement, which tends to privilege Western Europe. Then, Julia Sherwood transported us to the neighbouring Komárno to meet Samko and hear his rambling complaints. It is here, at Slovakia’s problematic town, that we have witnessed the strange powers of nationalism which, despite its blatant absurdity, can terrifyingly instigate



hatred and violence on the mental and physical levels. Lastly, Sam Taylor, who transmitted a French writer's particular view on Czech and Slovak histories to Anglophone readers, strapped the parachute on us before encouraging us to jump back in time to revisit Prague under the Protectorate. It is here, on the Charles Bridge, overlooking the Vltava, which was compulsorily known at that time as the German "Moldau", that we have come to reflect on our understanding of history and historical writing. It is also here that we have come to catch up with Kafka and Kundera, as well as come to think about the many oppressive regimes which have defined the particular region of Central Europe. The transnational journey ends where it has begun.

Anyway (as Samko would have added).

To begin anew, the task of translation does not end here. This book has a modernity of its own which might contribute to the particular yet universal modernism of cultural multiplicity. The modernity experienced as a Thai scholar living in Slovakia, who is typing this seemingly never-ending (yet soon-to-end) conclusion from a flat on Rajska street overlooking the magnificent My Bratislava Tesco, Hotel Kyjev and Špitálska, or "hospital" street, has also been translated and transposed into every line written, every (post)modern Google Map pin dropped. Thinking of a country where political turbulence, as a result of society's lack of infra-historical awareness, is ongoing, a discussion of nationalist ideology and the ways in which it cloaks itself in the fancy names of "patriotism" and "righteousness", as reflected in the chosen texts of analysis, seems not far from home. Modernist moments like this will definitely reoccur in a flat in Bangkok overlooking not the usual traffic or pagoda spires, but a small dilapidated cottage in Polichno, Banská Bystrica, where a particular elderly woman writer sits at her wooden table and writes across time.

Anyway.

To always begin anew, as well as to translate anew, is the beating heart of modernism.

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