

## AUTO-IMAGE IN THE WRITINGS OF DOMINIK TATARKA

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**Key words:** Central Europe, politics and literature, autobiography, category of author, text as an event, de-ideologization  
**Słowa kluczowe:** Europa Środkowa, polityka a literatura, autobiografia, kategoria autora, tekst jako zdarzenie, deideologizacja

**Abstract:** Mária Bátorová, AUTO-IMAGE IN THE WRITINGS OF DOMINIK TATARKA. "PORÓWNANIA" 20, 2017. T. XX, P. 53–62. ISSN 1733–165X. Based on previous analyses, this study uses the theoretical discourse of comparative imagology to show the productive aspects of this discipline on the material which can document the relationship between politics and literature. The particular works that were chosen for analysis constitute crucial events in the development of Slovak literature and allow to make references to Central European literature of the 1940s. The paper also focuses on other symptoms: two phases of dissent, internal emigration, internal freedom, some types of self-images and their fulfilment or impact in the structure of literary work. This study informs about the specific type of Slovak literature and aims at providing a de-ideologized picture of Slovak literature as a literature of the rural type.

**Abstrakt:** Mária Bátorová, AUTOIMAGE W PISANIU DOMINIKA TATARKI. „PORÓWNANIA" 20, 2017. VOL. XX, P. 53–62. ISSN 1733–165X. Artykuł, oparty na dotychczasowych analizach, wykorzystuje teoretyczny dyskurs komparatystycznej imagologii, by pokazać jej produktywny aspekt na materiale będącym przykładem stosunku polityki i literatury. Wybrano przede wszystkim utwory, które były istotnymi wydarzeniami w rozwoju literatury słowackiej i pozwalają na jej odniesienie do kontekstu literatury Europy Środkowej od lat czterdziestych XX wieku. W artykule zwrócono uwagę również na inne symptomy: dwa etapy podziemia literackiego, emigrację wewnętrzną, niezależność wewnętrzną, kilka typów auto-obrazów i ich występowania lub oddziaływania w strukturze dzieła literackiego. Artykuł dotyczy jednego z typów słowackiej twórczości literackiej i dąży do odideologizowania obrazu słowackiej literatury jako literatury typu wiejskiego.

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## Autobiographical writing as a symptom of modernity<sup>2</sup>

In this study, by focusing on the writings of one great Slovak writer, the so called “syuzhet poet”, I would like to show how strong the auto-imagination in modern production can be, and how strongly emotionally, personally and individualistically the writer can be involved, and besides that, or thanks to that, how it affects others, or at the same time – the whole society.

The study of concern will be the writings of Dominik Tatarka, both belletrist and essayistic, which covered almost the whole 20th century.<sup>3</sup> I assume that in the pamphlet – “*To more sharply hate the enemy – to more passionately love the party*” („*Prudšie nenávidieť nepriateľa – vrúcnejšie milovať rodnú stranu*“) the fact that the author was involved in judicial murders in the 50s due to his profession was gnawing at him so much from the inside that he became one of the first Slovak writers, after the death of Stalin in 1955, to publish in the journal “*Kultúrny život*” an extensive paper “*A Word to Contemporaries about Literature*” (“*Slovo k súčasníkom o literatúre*“) about the uniqueness of the literary output of every author.<sup>4</sup> One year later, in the same journal, Tatarka also published a novel – essay, “*The demon of conformism*” (“*Démon*

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2 The question of a relationship between the artistic treatment of authors experienced as a symptom of modernity of art is one of the basic theoretical questions in the monograph about Dominik Tatarka, see: Bátorová, Mária: *Dominik Tatarka slovenský Don Quijote*. Bratislava: Veda, 2012 (English translation by Peter Lang 2015), but the author of this article is focused on this question in the long term, also see the connections when comparing Jozef Ciger Hronský with paintings of Edvard Munch. See: *Žena ako hrozba, osud, vampír* (A, Strindberg, E. Munch a J. C. Hronský), in: Bátorová, Mária: *J. C. Hronský a moderna. Mýtus a mytológia v literatúre*. Bratislava: Veda, 2000, p. 77 – 85, last published more broadly in the study: Bátorová, Mária: „*Intertextualität*“ in der Moderne, *Malerei und Literatur (Tagebücher und Bilder von Edward Munch im Vergleich mit den Romanen von Jozef Ciger Hronský)*. Presented at the World Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, Wien, 23th of July 2016.

3 Dominik Tatarka (1913–1989) produced his first writings at the beginning of the 30s as a student, therefore he entered the Slovak interwar literature among the writers – authors of extensive novels with its fragmentation and existential vertone even before existentialism, as an intellectual movement, was official in France. As a student of the grammar school in Trenčín he lead the literary circle of Ľudovít Štúr. He studied in Prague and in Paris at Sorbonne. Debuting in 1942, in the period of the first Slovak republic, with the collection of novels – *V úzkosti hľadania* (“*In the Anguish of Searching*“), he was involved in the Slovak National Uprising, and because of that, after the war he automatically became a prominent person within the socialist establishment. He published his novel „*Panna Zázračnica*“ (“*The Miraculous Maiden*“) (1943) and the novel „*Pach*“ (“*Smell*“) (1943). He entered the Communist Party and left the Catholic Church. He published the realistic novel „*Farská republika*“ (“*The Clerical Republic*“ – another translation „*The Parish Republic*“) (1948) and a few novels created with the use of the methods of socialistic realism. He was mostly struck from inside by the pamphlet which was written under the terror of propaganda, as well as an appeal he followed and led himself to be excommunicated from the Catholic Church. The pamphlet „*Prudšie nenávidieť nepriateľa – vrúcnejšie milovať rodnú stranu*“ (“*To more sharply hate the enemy – to more passionately love the party*“), (Pravda 26. 11. 1952) was published together with other pamphlets of writers Ladislav Mňačko and Andrej Bagar.

4 *Kultúrny život* nr. 47, 1955, p. 6–7.

súhlasu") in which he described the manipulation praxis of the ruling government of the one and only – communist party. The mental violence of the years of schematism is shown in the absurd example from the family sphere. Here, we also find the first self-portrait reflected in the character of the power hungry Boleráz:

My closest were not able to live with a traitor, who was clenching to his treachery like it was a principle. They were looking for and finally found another company; the company of people disabled like this or like that. How was it and how wasn't, I don't know, but they got into the public process with traitors, and were condemned. And me, in the name of my holy conviction and high principle, I asked for the most grievous punishment, I asked for the death penalty: for my wife, for my son. After this act, only a principle remained, only a horrible canon lingered: to depend and to conform.<sup>5</sup>

Boleráz is the symbolic surname of the main protagonist. As its semantic basis, it has both the word for pain as well as a plant, which in the Slovak folk herbal medicine is used to denote a healing plant.

The "*Demon of Conformism*" exaggerated the caricature of the depraved, by the establishment enforced submission. That is why Tatarka was accepted in the 60s as a person engaged in the process of uncovering the mechanisms of power. With this essay, he was among the first critiques of the totalitarian practice in the Eastern Bloc. Czesław Miłosz published his "*La prise du Pouvoir*" (*Uchopenie moci*) in 1952 and in London in 1953 "*Zniewolony umysł*" (*Zotročené vedomie* – "*The Captive Mind*") was also published. Pavel Kohout was at this time writing his play "*Zářijové noci*" – "*September Nights*" (Praha, 1954). Transformations of socio-political praxis, covered by these authors, were typical for Central Europe.<sup>6</sup>

5 Tatarka, D.: *Demon of Conformism*. Ed. Viera, Desanka and Oleg Tatarka (text from 1956). Edit. Milan Hamada, introduction Václav Havel (text from 1985). Bratislava: Archa, 1991. Manuscript excerpt (typescript) published from archive material, In: Bátorová, Mária: *Dominik Tatarka slovenský Don Quijote*. Veda 2012, p. 53 – 74, príloha č. 15, 15a, 15b.

6 In the history of the 20th century there were a few concepts of Central Europe (CE). In *Mitteleuropa* by Friedrich Naumann (Georg Reimer: Berlin, 1915) CE was seen as Germany part of which was Austria and the surrounding states. Slavs were seen as a destructive element. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk labelled CE in 1918 as small states between Germany and Russia. Milan Kundera wrote in 1984 in his essay "*The Tragedy of Central Europe*" that Russians stole CE from the West. Erhard Busek and Emil Brix in the book *Projekt Mitteleuropa* (Wien: Ueberreuter, 1986) saw the concept of the small state lying along the Danube, but also some Scandinavian states and states in the Balkans with Vienna as a centre. This concept was taken over by the Austrian writer Robert Menasse.

From the discourse about CE it is evident that it is a region with specific attributes which differentiate it from western and eastern states. One of the most essential is the fact that these states were in the history very often under the hegemony of great powers. It is though known from the history of every state of CE that each one was fighting for their own identity and autonomy in different periods (sometimes even at the same time). The institutions in the missing state structure were very often substituted by culture and literature. In CE, similar themes and motives were evident in culture and literature, dependent on the specific characteristics of the historical development. It is mostly what

An interesting example of autobiographical disunity is offered in the novel "Červený Benčat" ("Benčat, the Red") where we are able to find the author in both main protagonists: in the open-hearted defenceless farmer who is opposed to the terror and who pays for his pointless pride and scrupulosity with his life and in the hypocritical intellectual – story narrator. The author of the first monograph about Tatarka, as well as this paper, calls Tatarka a "double-skin" because this particular parallel bipolarity of existence in one person occurs in the duality of writing by this author with completely different methods at the same time.<sup>7</sup>

### Myth and reality of author's "archai (arché - ἀρχή)"

Every creator – author – has his/her own "archai", his/her organic being, similar to an identity which is individual as well as universal, so it is able to absorb as well as influence (something). It is creating this "I" that connects the modernity with tradition. The writing style is then immanent in the choice of words and in their configuration and nature. His/her persona and social identity is the sum of their inherited experiences in childhood and later acquired wisdom and aspects which are in their own specific way exhibited with artistic tools. The core of the personality is therefore creating invisible networks of psyche (unconscious imaginative fantasy) which is the personal wisdom of the author acting outside the acquired esthetical procedures. These questions of the "unconscious personality" of the author are handled by the discipline of the literary science called "La psychocritique" (Charles Mauron).

This specific feature of an author's personality is created by the ability of self-presentation as a distinct person with preconditions from their youth (for example the family myth of Juraj Jánošík), artist (also an artist of life – the myth of manhood in the novel „Písáčky“ – „Scribbless“) and titan – rescuer, saviour (the myth of the shepherd). By the time this personal exhibition rises to the forefront, we can assume that the author put in the forefront his courage and personal freedom manifested in the willingness to express his opinion in his speeches, essays, contributions to discussion, living the way he wants etc. mostly in a time of social crisis and lack of freedom.

The personal-myth is one of the most basic characteristics of Tatarka's output, because his literary works are autobiographic. As we have shown with regard to

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Kundera referred to in the already mentioned essay that is whether CE belonged to the West or to the East. The terror of totalitarian systems was the theme for Adam Michnik (*Zlošť a hanba, smútok a radosť*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2006). Hannah Arendt published the first version of the book *The Origin of Totalitarianism* six years after the second world war. In the book she analysed the masses and introduced the characteristic attributes of totalities. She saw fascism and communism as equivalent regimes (we used the Czech translation: *Původ totalitarizmu I-III*. Praha: Oikoymenh, 1996).

Karl Schlögel with his book about *Russia: Teror und Traum. Moskau 1937*. Karl Hanser Verlag: München, 2008, also belong among these authors.

7 Bátorová, Mária: cite further: p. 94 and following.

the differentiation of myth and truth (his building and de-mythization) it is an especially strong self-reflexion and de-mythization event in creating the personal myth, therefore it is self-critique in the name of the truth.

We are able to learn about the personal myths of this author constructed by the positive projection of him, retrospectively, by recordings of him made by Eva Štobová and later published in the work "*Navrávačky*" – "*Recordings*".

In the essay "*Tajomstvo*" – "*The Secret*"<sup>8</sup> he writes:

Manín was for me a kind of grandfather who knows everything and is never wrong, like Grandfather Adamec, in a heavy, huge broad-brimmed hat, with grey hair hanging to his shoulders. Many times I asked him, because curiosity was growing in me, bubbling forth. 'Grandfather Adamec, have you ever been up there on Manín?' 'Well, my lad', Grandfather Adamec marvels from the soul. 'People don't go up there... You don't see them, but kites and falcons are nesting there. When you get married and you'll want to build a cottage, you'll pick up an axe; you've got enough down here for a wooden cottage. But up there only stubs grow.' Well, but I, but I, God knows why – perhaps because I wanted, I had to be as soon as possible an adult like father, who was lost to me in the First World War, when I wasn't even one and a half years old – before sunrise I headed up there (-) But I – that time – did get there...

The image is as if from an old folk tale: the small boy – author – is climbing alone when the sun rises on the top of a hill where only vultures reside. He is exploring the top of the hill where nobody from his neighbourhood dared to venture, not even adults. The reader can choose whether to believe it true or not. It is not important because it is more or less fiction, a "meta-communication strategy of the author" (Anton Popovič). It is a legend which the author tells to himself creating the personal myth of a man who maybe already as a child received the help from supernatural powers, just like a young biblical Goliath. However, the "second mounting" on the imaginary Manín was entangled with the situation in 1968, when after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact army, the author spoke at the manifestation in the SNP square, in front of the students who later carried him on their hands, high over their heads. Here, he demonstrates his personal freedom, therefore creating the myth because he is the titan. He can do what the others cannot. It is the freedom of his individuality which spreads into the vast area of the society and starts to act. For this act we even have proof: one of the most well-known pieces of photography of these times. The provocative power is in Tatarka's mentality and it is typical. It is a self-conquest in the act which only a titan can achieve, even if he sacrifices himself because in the

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8 *V ne čase (In Bad Times)*. The book dedicated to Czech friends on Christmas 1978, edit. by Oleg and Viera Tatarka, published with illustrations of Ervín Semian, Bratislava 1998, p. 7, 8. The text for analysis as well as all markings in it (missing text, cursive and highlight) is made by the author of the analysis.

"*Obec Božia*" – "*City of God*" – he prophesizes his own social decline, his social death. This trait is characteristic of Tatarka's mental predisposition, however it is not the impulsivity it could be mistaken for at first glance. The whole essay "*City of God*" makes it obvious that his personality was compacted and integrated – a monolith and a manifestation of wisdom, intellectual power which not only brings the knowledge but also its analysis, diagnosis and interpretation (or point of departure). The skill "to sacrifice yourself" by standing up for the chosen idea, to speak, to act, to publish something which nobody would say publicly or even publish. This we can observe in Tatarka right from the beginning.

Here, Tatarka finds harmony with himself because before this date, we witnessed his self-critique and the dissolution of this personal myth:

The only bearable stance to this was resignation. Or the stance of a conjuring, sorcering shaman. I will place his mask on my face, and with Epiphany chalk I will draw a circle around myself, a circle of my own seclusion, I will sacrifice to divinity whatever is requested, friendship, my brain, principles, my lover. (p. 5)

The description of this procedure and the behaviour in the regime of power was described by Tatarka already in the "*Demon of Conformism*" as well as in the novel "*Benčat, the Red*".

## Autoimage of the shepherd

Tatarka is often portrayed in the role of a shepherd. This imaginary connotation with pastoral people living under the Carpathian arc, freedom of movement and un-attachment to a solid piece of land, "cosmopolitanism and globe-trotting" as well as inferior meaning against the salutation "prince" (as Tatarka called Václav Havel) is different to its counterpart in the depiction of pre-Christian-Greek iconography. Here the shepherd was a symbol of humanity and philanthropy and later had Christian-biblical connotation: Jesus Christ often compared his mission to the role of a "good shepherd": "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10, 11. 14 – 15).

It is the identification with the personality of "a good shepherd" – God who is responsible for his people.<sup>9</sup> The political restriction of freedom, its religious "inte-

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9 The symbolism of the shepherd is also present in the Old Testament. The rulers of the Israeli nation are compared to shepherds. For example when David became a king, he acquired the crown directly from the herd: "Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince[a] over my people Israel'. (2 Samuel 7:8). The ruler who behaves against the interest of his subjects is warned

riorization" as we know it from the other authors of Slovak inner emigration (such as Pavol Strauss), existential "curse of freedom" (such as Jozef Hnitka) which was eliminated by Tatarka, by personal stylization into the character of the Carpathian shepherd – into "responsible freedom" for the people.

This spiritual thread runs parallel with his political route from the writing of "City of God" (1969), through the attribute and function to which he ascribes the name "Carpathian shepherd" to the moment of his re-entering the church which he asked for in a document written by his own hand – that is the return of "the lost (or prodigal) son" – Dominik Tatarka, to the catholic church. Here, the identity of Tatarka once again narrows down; the citizen's principle of freedom and of personal rights for self-identification and freedom of choice is a value which in many ways overlaps with Christian universalism. The Christian concepts of immortality and eternity co-create the key repertoire of Tatarka's contemplations about the meaning of life and the meaning of art.

The initial tragic feelings of life and uncertainty invoked by the death of his father push him into an earlier adulthood, therefore creating the desire for complexity, harmony, society and love. The harsh reality of his life journey of dissident<sup>10</sup> and chartist is however repeatedly showing him that in his romantic vision he wants more than he can get from life. He acts against the circumstances as if it was possible for them to change. His erudition as well as his intellectual potential enabled him to

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by God through the words of the prophet: "Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be wholly withered, his right eye utterly blinded!" (*Zechariah 11, 17*). The image of the shepherd evokes the goodness, the love to wards and the guardianship over them.

- 10 The concept of "dissent" was co-created according to Zdeněk Mlynář by western journalists and people engaged in the opposition who were not able to define themselves more precisely than as "those who think differently". To be in dissent meant that you will express your opinions publicly, "to not live in a lie" (Alexandr Solženecyn), to live "a life in truth" (Václav Havel), "to defend your own reality" (Milan Šimečka). In Czechoslovakia, the question of dissent is related to the natural way of the world which was formulated against the conformism of "real socialism" (Miroslav Kusý). The natural world and its interpretation is considered to be an explicit component of Tatarka's contemplations, for example in the work "Recordings" – *Navrávačky*. INDEX Společnost pro českou a slovenskou literaturu v zahraničí: Köln, 1988. See also: Mlynář, Zdeněk.: „Disidentství“ na politické mapě dneška. In: *Svědectví, 15, 1980, č. 60, s. 660.*; Bělohradský, Václav: *Přirozený svět jako politický problém. Eseje o člověku pozdní doby*. Československý spisovatel: Praha 1991, p. 83; Patočka, Jan: *Přirozený svět jako filozofický problém*. Československý spisovatel: Praha 1992, s. 9; Kusý, Miroslav: *Velký brat a Velká sestra*. In: Kusý, M., Šimečka, M.: *Velký brat a Velká sestra. O skutečnosti v ideologii reálného socialismu*. Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2000, p. 95; See also the study: Kmeť, Norbert: *Disent*. In: *Slovensko a režim normalizácie*. (Ed.: N. Kmeť and J. Marušiak), Ústav politických vied SAV, published by Michala Vaška: Prešov (without the year of publication). Based on political events in Slovak literary history of the 20th century the author of this study differentiates two groups of dissent – "those who think differently" 1.) dissident of the 50s (Pavol Strauss, Jozef Hnitka, Ján Smrek, authors of the so called catholic modernism, the whole catholic underground movement); 2.) authors after the year 1968 in the time of political consolidation to which D. Tatarka also belongs.

have the vision of a better future. Tatarka, by his actions and exemplary behaviour, held the continuity of Slovak intellectuals who were not able to maintain their dignity in life and were still depriving themselves of the right to live as free citizens.<sup>11</sup>

Tatarka has moved along a path from his old self to the people as well as to his personal self. Everything that is said about him here and his writing, provides a picture of his relatively complex life, so in balancing on the proverbial Zarathustra's rope in the range of years 1945–1968, he once fell into the abyss. This and other lesser mistakes are still remembered, even after his death, by his remaining living contemporaries and mainly those who were not brave enough to sacrifice themselves publicly – for ideas and for the truth. However, Tatarka did not rise like a phoenix from the ashes right away. Slowly, continuously, but surely – yes, even painfully – he climbed from the bottom in search of his own essence, his dream, himself, or at least the fixed idea of himself. The self-identification in the 70s signified that Tatarka became for a long time the “emendation” for the people in Slovakia in the years of normalization. He was heading towards his “godly sacrifice”. He experienced a social death. Through this self-destructive gesture he became a legend and a paragon.

This individual ethical act became a symbol for two events at the same time: this act – the sacrifice has its own meaning as an example of a revolt and resistance against the violence. As Ján Palach is for the Czech people the eternal monument of burnt offering, Dominik Tatarka became the imaginary torch of freedom in his last nineteen years of life.

With the emphasis on individuality and uniqueness of production, Dominik Tatarka is a typical author of modernism. With his seriousness, contemplation without humour, seeking the foundation of things, worthy solutions and points of departure, often tragic and in the vicinity of death, his presence in the culture and literature in Slovakia was, in spite of all his mistakes, unavoidable in human life setting the borders of what is right and providing almost a mythical dimension of artistic-human destiny<sup>12</sup>.

Tatarka's writings were contingent on the education of the author characterized by self-reflection and spontaneity. His literary work belongs to the top of Slovak literary modernism. However, because of the typological similarity to Czech modernism (Pavel Kohout), Polish modernism (Czesław Miłosz) and even a genetic relationship to French modernism (Albert Camus), Slovak literary modernism can be seen in a different light, therefore un-ideologizing the picture of Slovak literature as rural<sup>13</sup>.

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11 Bátorová, Mária: Slovak literature and culture from the postcolonial“ perspective. *Primerjalna književnost, letnik 37/3*, Ljubljana, December 2014, p. 71 – 85.

12 See more broadly: Bátorová, Mária: Z hľadiska mýtu dualitný typ spisovateľa. (*Dominik Tatarka: stavanie a deštrukcia mýtov*). Slavica Litteraria, in print.

13 Dyserinck, H.: Zum Problem der „images“ und „mirages“ und ihrer Untersuchung im Rahmen der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft. *Arcadia*, Nr. 1, 1966, p. 107 – 120.

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Hugo Dyserinck points out the importance of comparative imagologie which attempts to grasp mainly the forms of manifestation of images, their origin and acting. It wants to contribute to the enlightening of the role of these literary images when single cultures are confronted to un-ideologize. It is the dissolution of stereotypical images which individual cultures mutually create about themselves.

Besides H.Dyserinck who together with his students U. Syndram, M. Fischer and others founded the so called Aachen comparativist programme – the concept „Laboratorium Europa“, the image of the „other“ was also studied in the following decades by, for instance, D.H. Pageaux (1980s), M. Beller and J. Leerssen. These are key current imagologists summarizing texts with national character and defining related terms. The current article about the work and personality of Dominik Tatarka is the first study of its kind applying the imagological perspective and studying his diversified auto-image.

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