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ABSTRACT

OF A DISERTATION FOR OBTAINING THE SCIENTIFIC AND EDUCATIONAL DEGREE DOCTOR

IN PROFESSIONAL FIELD 2.1. PHILOLOGY, PHD PROGRAMME "LITERATURE OF THE PEOPLE OF EUROPE, AMERICA, ASIA, AFRICA AND AUSTRALIA", HISTORY OF SLAVIC LITERATURES

WITH SUBJECT:

THE 20TH CENTURY WARS – NOVEL INTERPRETATIONS IN POST-1989 SLAVIC LITERATURES

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The dissertation includes an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. It has a total volume of 280 pages, of which 10 pages bibliography (36 positions in Bulgarian, 87 in English, 8 in Serbian, 13 In Croatian, 3 in Bosnian, 2 in Polish, 1 in German).

The public defense of the dissertation will take place on July 15th, 2025, at 13:00, Conference Hall 1, Main Building of Sofia University "St. Climent Ohridski", bul. "Tsar Osvoboditel" 15.

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The defense-related materials are available to all interested parties in room 156 in the Main Building of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Content

INTRODUCTION

The history of 20th century is problematic, complex, and is the subject of many representations in art, which are an attempt to evaluate the past century and place it within certain historical and philosophical frameworks. These attempts reveal a desire to understand, evaluate, or subject the century's destructive trends to rational analysis, even through some of the key events categorically elude such aspirations. For the period from 1901 to 2000, marked by numerous "-isms" (Colonialism, Imperialism, Racism, Capitalism, Fascism, Socialism, Communism, McCarthyism, Freudism, Feminism, etc.), one can often find the definition "a Century of War", which William Engdahl also used as the tittle of one of his books (Engdahl 2004).

The impact of the two World Wars can be noticed across societies and cultures, with few being unaffected by them, either directly or indirectly. As result, old political entities are disintegrating and new ones are forming, new regimes and personalities become dominant, different ideologies compete. The unfamiliar environment affects literary life as well, which, like the rest of life spheres, turns out to be unprepared for the new situation. After the initial excitement and hope for change, the clash with reality manages to rearrange human priorities and interests, as reactions turn into indignation and condemnation. Literature increasingly focuses on the experience of the individual participant in the war and the significance of each person. There are attempts trying to explain the reason for reaching the devastating situation. At the same time, some authors direct their efforts to warn of the possibility of history repeating itself and try to find possible prevention. According to Kate McLoughlin how one writes about war as a phenomenon is important to every person, who either lived during it or not, because this importance is not born out of the ambition to prevent future conflicts, but "it can at least keep the record straight. It is equally vital that techniques and tools are found to

dismantle accounts of war that are distorting or deceitful: the process of dismantling might do nothing to prevent conflict, but it can at least lay bare the nature of what is at stake. In identifying these techniques and tools, literary scholarship has a unique opportunity – that of constituting an act of good citizenship" (McLoughlin 2009: 1).

It is difficult to talk about the existence of a single way to summarize what the importance of war theme is for literature, but writing about it, to a certain extent, succeeds in improving its understanding, because "War reverberates through literature" (McLoughlin 2009: 1). There are a lot of similarities between different conflicts, which creates conditions for finding intersections, but also opens up the possibility of isolated interpretation, because repetition is never absolute. Thus, the 20th century and the conflicts within it contribute to the creation of its own poetics, which continues its development in the transition post-1989 period and the beginning of the next 21st century. In her commentary in relation to the telling of/about the story, Ani Burova notes that the big variability of interpretations is a significant difference between contemporary literature and that of previous periods: "The traditional literary attitude toward reconstructing historical epochs and social processes, familiar from previous centuries and decades, is marked above all by an aspiration toward large-scale images in which the entire historical and social experience is synthesized. But such a generalizing point of view is not intrinsic to contemporary literature; its account of life is usually fragmentary, personal, and subjective" (Burova 2020: 112).

In analyzing war writing from the end of the last century and the beginning of the new one, one must take into account the fact that its themes are strongly influenced by the historical context. This dependence can be found in novel interpretations in post-1989 South and West Slavic literatures. Closely connected with the course of World War II, and therefore important topics when writing about it, are the specific situations of resistance against the Nazi occupation in the General Government in Poland and

Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In addition, the fate of the Jewish population in the occupied territories is the subject of a vast volume of Holocaust literature. Since these themes have their own literary treatment and interpretation in Polish and Czech literature, which goes beyond the scope of specific war writing, they will not be deeply addressed in the dissertation work. On the other hand, for some Slavic countries, the two world wars were not the last major conflicts of the 20th century. For South Slavs the 1990s are marked by new conflicts, this time not of global, but of a regional nature. Similar to the other wars, Yugoslav wars also surprise their contemporaries, and first reactions are mixed. In literary world, initially there is silence and only later the taboo surrounding the topic will gradually begin to give away to the desire for the atrocities not to remain uncommented upon.

Also, the higher frequency of conflicts is a condition that allows to track the change in perception of conflicts such as heroism, patriotism, the fear of death, etc., as well as the understanding of the causality and existence of war as phenomenon. Along with this, the literary representation of the very manner of warfare can be considered – how technological and militaristic advances are changing the type of combat, how and to what extent traditionally non-combatant social groups such as women and children are involved.

In narrative approaches, due to the influence of postmodernist tendencies related to genre selection, experimentation and fragmentation, it can be noted that: "Today's literature approaches the past through various artistic and thematic perspectives, modes and aspects. As a result of this, the novel deploys a very broad palette of genre possibilities" (Burova 2020: 113), which can also be found in the works of war writing in Slavic literatures over the past three decades.

Another problem in analyzing of the novels of war writing is the vastness of the subject. In his article "War literature – chances of synthesis to occur" the Polish literary

critic Sławomir Buryła notes some of the difficulties in examining the topic, among which are "a distinct turn away from the "*longue duree*" perspective and the subsequent dominance of the contemporary moment and an ahistorical approach" (Buryła 2017: 43) or inherited from the tradition of Poststructuralism and Postmodernism detachment from historical, social and political context. The result of the isolation is a loss of possibilities for interpretation of the text, as well as the inability to place it in certain frames. An additional factor is the constant emergence of new fiction and critical literature, as well as the positioning of literature in the background of leading interests. For a possible solution and preferred approach in the analysis of large-scale topics such as war writing, for example, Buryła suggests "using a classification system that is not based in genre, movement or literary group, but is instead thematic" (Buryła 2017: 43).

In the analysis of literary texts in the dissertation work, the thematic approach was used, along with which various narrative models of war writing novels were examined. The dissertation does not aim to exhaustively analyze the topic, but rather offers an attempt to present frequently occurring phenomena, motifs and images in the novels written after 1989 in Bulgarian, Czech, Polish language and in the literatures of the countries of former Yugoslavia. The work aims to analyze one part of the phenomena of war writing, which will provide guidance in answering some main questions: what is the motivation of those who fought and those who decided to write about the war, who are the authors of this type of texts and what is their expected and main goal in creating such works.

Although in varying degrees the two world wars affected all Slavic countries, the thesis does not seek absolute equality between the works considered from the different literatures. The reason for the overwhelming number of works from Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian literatures is also a circumstantial – the 20th century is more saturated in military-historical terms for these nations because of the Yugoslav wars from

1991 to 1995. The way in which the collapse of Yugoslavia came about opened up opportunities to examine themes such as the cyclical nature of history, personal, family and national destiny, in which several generations are active participants in the fighting or directly affected by the chaos of war. In the analysis of interneighbourly clashes, the native perspective is presented as most closely related to the problem. However, this does not mean that the writing of other Slavic literatures has been ignored, only that the number of possible problems affected can be considered limited.

The selected works of fiction are examined in a comparative literary-historical perspective using an interdisciplinary approach based on research on war writing, sociology and psychoanalysis. The commented works are linked to general themes such as the meaning of existence, human morality, values and priorities, as well as to those that focus specifically on wartime and the reactions around it. The first category concerns the relationship of elements such as the individual, the family, and the nation in moments of ambiguity and impasse, while the second focuses on motifs such as patriotism, heroism, sacrifice, and their value.

The subject of this study are novels of Slavic literatures written after 1989. They are chosen for analysis with regards to the recent anniversaries of important 20th century global and regional military conflicts, together with the emergence of new ones in the 21st century, both on the Old Continent and in its Eastern Borderlands. The selected authors and works are recognizable in the social and cultural circles of their respective countries, have gained regional, some even global recognition, and have also won literary awards. Some of the works contain autobiographical elements and are written from the perspective of a direct witness and/or participant in the war. Others are dominated by historiography and the reconstruction of foreign story, others involve elements of fantasy or crime novel, while some present family history and the impact of the war on several

generations affected by it. In addition to the themes important for war writing, the types of narrative models to which it resorts are also examined.

The object of the study is the interpretation of war in novels whose plots are set during the 20th century conflicts, as well as the relationship between the authorial figure, the literary text and extra-literary factors. By defining connections between literature and other sciences, the artistic interpretation of a phenomenon difficult to recreate and explain manages to acquire completeness and clarity.

The hypothesis, that the dissertation aims to prove is related to the place of post-1989 war writing against the background of the overall literary production. On the one hand, one can find continuity from previous periods, while on the other, one can observe how the present has built its own poetics in relation to the issues under consideration. In the most recent Slavic literatures, the number of works that perform political functions or are written with a purely patriotic orientation is greatly reduced. The approach to the image of the war is extremely judgmental, there is a lack of images that are related to the possible positives of the event. The introduction of new narrative figures contributes to this feeling, presenting not only the witness, the combatant or the omniscient narrator, but also the perspective of the indirect victim.

This dissertation contains an introduction, four chapters divided into subsections, a conclusion, and a bibliography. The focus of the first two parts is on theoretical concepts and constructs, while the second half of the work emphasizes literary analysis of works of literature that provide examples of the theoretically discussed themes and issues of war writing.

In the commentary on a novel narrative of historical and epic type are examined the novels "Alexander from Yugoslavia" (*Александар од Југославије*, 2018) и "Both Grave and Slave" (*И гроб и роб*, 2020) by Vuk Drašković. As containing elements of historiography, diary and witness narratives are considered the books by Bosnian authors

as Ivica Đikić "Beara: a Documentary Novel about the Genocide in Srebrenica" (*Beara: dokumentarni roman o genocidu u Srebrenici*, 2016) and Emir Suljagić "Postcards from the Grave" (*Razglednica iz groba,* 2005), as well as "Scorpions – Design of the Crime" (*Škorpioni – dizajn zločina*, 2009) by Serbian activist and writer Jasmina Tešanović. Along with classic narratives, also are analyzed those built on experiment and the construction of alternative reality. Examples for such novels are "Lala" (*Lala,* 2006) by the Polish author Jacek Dehnel, "Ice" (2007) of his countryman Jacek Dukaj and "Europeana: Short Story of 20th century" (2001) from the Czech author Patrik Ouředník. In addition to novels written on the basis of these narrative models, works in which war is presented through the experiences of children and women are also examined. The dissertation focuses on works from Croatian, Czech, Polish and Slovenian literatures: "Hotel Tito" (2010) with author Ivana Simić Bodrožić, "The Devil's Workshop" (*Chladnou zemí,* 2009) by Jachym Topol, "Yugoslavia, My Fatherland" (*Jugoslavija, moja dežela,* 2012) by Goran Vojnović, "Primeval and Other Times" (1996) of the Polish Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk, „As If I am not There" (*Kao da me* nema, 1999) by Slavenka Drakulić and "Mona" (2019) by Bianca Bellova.

The analytical part of the dissertation contains commentary on novels of war writing that display thematic dominants characteristic of the genre. The focus falls on the importance of the leader and the construction of his image, as well as the damage that war, because of its cyclical nature, inflicts on those affected by it. The division between "us" and "them" in the perceptions of the individual warring parties, indicated by the theoretical part, is also presented with literary examples. For this purpose, along with some of the already examined novels, also analyzed are the books by the Croatian writer Josip Mlakić "When the Fogs Lift" (*Kad magle stanu*, 2000), "The Living and the Dead" (*Živi i mrtvi,* 2002) and „People That Planted Trees" (*Ljudi koji su sadili drveće*, 2010), "The Big Onslaught" (*Велики јуриш*, 2018) by Slobodan Vladušić, "Germans"

(2012) by Jakuba Katalpa, “Morphine” (*Morfina*, 2012) by Szczepan Twardoch, “Alabaster Sheep” (*Ovce od gipsa*, 1997) by Jurica Pavičić, “Short Field Trip: Records from the Croatian War of Independence” (*Kratki izlet: zapisi iz domovinskog rata*, 1997) by Ratko Cvetnić, as well as the Bulgarian novels „Wound“ (*Рана,* 2023) by Zachary Karabashliev and “The Palaveev Sisters: In the Storm of the History” (*Сестри Палавееви: в бурята на историята* 2013) by Alek Popov.

The dissertation analyses 24 novels, which represent a small part of the huge volume of literary production that constructs an image of war and interprets its essence. Although the study cannot claim to be exhaustive, it does set out certain narrative and thematic aspects of war writing that can serve in the analysis of other works, including novels that have yet to appear in Slavic literatures. The constant appearance of new critical and artistic works on the subject is indicative of the interest in the topic, as well as the possibility of divergent approaches to its discussion.

I. PSYCHOLOGY OF WAR

The first chapter presents and summarizes various theories that analyze extra-literary aspects in examining war – with an emphasis on the sociological and psychological factors of its outbreak and course. Some of the possible reasons for participating in a conflict (regardless of its scale) are indicated, including the fear of death, the individual's desire to belong to a certain group, or the ambition to destroy evil. Along with the goals of the combatants, those of their leaders are also noted, additional attention is paid to some of the manipulative strategies that are triggered in wartime. Examined are common human concepts and the extent to which they change in the unfamiliar situation in which individual "actors" play different roles in the "Theatre of War".

The Fear of Death and Heroism

The first theoretical subchapter begins the analysis of the extra-literary concepts that influence conceptions of war and its meaning. The aim is to present common human attitudes, doubts and questions about fighting and killing. Heroism, patriotism and the fear of the death are seen as some of the main drivers and motivators in an individual's voluntary choice to fight. To support the claim are used the texts of Sigmund Freud "The Disappointment of War" (1915) and "Why War?" (1932), as well as "The Denial of Death" from 1973, "Escape from Evil" from 1976) by Ernest Becker, who writes that "the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity — activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man" (Becker 1975: ix). The change in the perception of the idea of death is also linked to the inability to react adequately to an event such as war, which proves difficult to assimilate, generating

unexpected reactions. The fear in question leads to attempts at self-preservation that would seem unacceptable in "normal times". The knowledge that today you have survived at the expense of the enemy leads to a gradual increase in confidence in one's own immortality (at the expense of someone else's), a turning away from the fear of death, and the creation of heroes in the minds of others. By managing every day to "outsmart" death, while many others fail, due to human nature, you can become a model and a cult to others. To some extent, it is the fear of death (one's own) that is one of the reasons for the creation of military models, heroes or bloodthirsty fighters, even the reason for participation in war.

Speaking of the fear of death in times of peace and war, psychoanalyst and historian Gregory Zilborg points to a key difference. If in the absence of war man manages to suppress his fears in one way or another, in a war situation his attitude changes. Even if they are far from the conflict, at some point a civilian learns of the death of their relatives, friends or acquaintances, which leads to a "clearer emotional realization of the dangers of war, the civilian begins to wrestle with an unconscious sense of guilt about those who have fallen, and with a mounting sense of anger and feeling of hatred for the enemy who kills. Compassion and scorn thus become more prominent components of that complex set of psychological factors which group themselves around the repressed fear of death" (Zilboorg 1943: 471).

The relationship between heroism and fear of death is also influenced by external factors. Heroism is rare, whether in peacetime or in wartime, and its activation requires a drastic change in the status quo in order for a new type of personality to emerge capable of dealing with overcoming the fear in question. A man knows that his life has had meaning if he has been able to contribute to a better present and future for humanity „men have always honored their heroes, especially in religion, medicine, science

diplomacy, and war. Here is where heroism has been most easily identifiable“ (Becker 1976: 149).

Annihilation of Evil. We are the good, they are the bad

In addition to the different understanding of concepts such as the fear of death and heroism, war also manages to overturn traditional ideas about the division between “good” and “evil”. In order to create a desire to fight in an individual, a workable motivation must be found that can be properly explained to him. This requires an external intervention that disrupts the familiar present, in this case an object that must fulfill the role of victim.

The familiar struggle between good and evil, not only in literary plots but in other spheres of life, must be “personified”, as noted by Hugh D. Duncan. Role-playing clearly stands out in the presence of a conflict, or in the time before its outbreak, when most often aggressors use manipulative strategies in order to exonerate their plans and motivate the masses to “voluntary” participate in the war. Dealing with this struggle can be achieved “through punishing the villain in the name of some great transcendent principle. Only then does the suffering and death of the sacrificial victim purge us of guilt” (Duncan 2017: 126).

In order for evil to be redeemed and the hero to be “born”, it is necessary for the enemy to fulfill his role. This is the reason why wars are presented as sacred or liberating. Evil takes the form that will most easily fulfill the functions necessary for the governing structure. As Becker writes, “holiness“ is the reason why people are „dedicated to war precisely in its most horrifying aspects: it is a passion of human purgation” (Becker 1976: 115). In order for the individual to receive his perpetuation, it is necessary to purge the world of evil, thus demonstrating his belonging to purity.

Hate and death of others, especially under extreme conditions (such as war), manage to unite society as effectively as pleasure and love do under "normal" ones. To facilitate the belief that the belligerent is the "good guy" and it is his cause that is just, strategies of hyperbolized portrayal of the enemy are resorted to. According to cultural and literary historian Paul Fussell, what can be called „gross dihotomizing", is a persisting imaginative habit of modern times, traceable, it would seem, to the actualities of the Great War (Fussel 2013: 82). The perception of the enemy is often linked to its remoteness, unfamiliarity and radical opposite: "We" are all here on this side; "the enemy" is over there. "We" are individuals with names and personal identities; "he" is a mere collective entity. We are visible; he is invisible. We are normal; he is grotesque. Our appurtenances are natural; his, bizarre. He is not as good as we are" (Fussell 2013: 82).

Total detachment from the enemy sets the stage for easier coping with guilt, and also offers the possibility of a trial that only the chosen or true hero, in whom the collective can recognize its leader, can overcome.

The need of leaders. Leading and Supporting roles in the "Theatre of War"

To distinguish what is good and what is not, the human being needs confirmation, which he can only receive from certain authorities. That is why it is of great importance for him to know whether he is liked or not: "This is why it is so vital for him emotionally to know whether he is liked or disliked, why he will do anything the group wants in order to meet its standards of "good": his eternal life depends on it" (Becker 1976: 116). In this quest to be good for someone (someone's hero) and to defeat death, the individual is willing to fight, kill, commit acts contrary to accepted moral norms, and also to create evil in places where it does not always exist.

Within each group, a division can be observed between its members, most often with one part having a leadership (main) role while the rest has an executive (supporting) role. This model can also be applied to the structure of war, and the event itself can be considered a kind of play, in which there are again those who set an example and those who imitate them. The main personality can be taken to be that of the leader, which most often includes the figure of the hero, already discussed, that of the military commander, and also the political one, which is active not only during the hostilities themselves, but also long before their occurrence (in most cases it is the cause). The category of supporting roles can include regular soldiers, for whose development the military commander and newly created heroes are most important, and civilians, who indirectly support the military action thanks to the influence exerted by the state leader or politician.

If one of the reasons and purposes of participating in a group is the opportunity to share guilt and reduce its effect, then the acceptance of warfare as theatre provides participants with an opportunity for mental escape from reality. According to Fussel, because of this projection, the soldier can "perform his duties without implicating his "real" self and without impairing his innermost conviction that the world is still a rational place" (Fussell 2013: 208). Most inexperienced in killing find it hard to believe that the new reality must be part of themselves, because it is too cruel and perversely absurd. Playing a role can be used as a justification for what is happening and an attempt to suppress the surrounding world. Accepting Sigmund Freud's thesis that one's own death is unimaginable, and when an individual attempts to imagine it, he realizes that he is experiencing it as a spectator, may serve to support the idea that war is a kind of theatrical stage. At a given moment, participants act as actors and spectators. If the military commanders are the ones giving instructions and observing the process itself for tactical analysis, mainly fulfilling the role of observers, the regular soldiers have the opportunity to observe the play from the front row. In addition to being active "actors", they are also

spectators who “record” and create/preserve the memory of what happened, and the witnessing part is enhanced especially in extreme situations. The training process of the individual soldier, as well as the war itself, just as in a dramatic work, can be divided into actions. In comparing warfare with theatre, Fussell notes that: “After all, just as a play must have an ending, so might the war; just as an actor gets up unhurt after the curtain falls on his apparent murder, so might the soldier. And just as a play has a structure, so might a war conceived as analogous to a play have a structure — and with it, a meaning” (Fussell 2013: 215–216).

The preparation in the military camps can be taken as the first act, the climax involves the fighting itself, and the dismissal and eventual return to the homeland (its occurrence or non-occurrence can also determine how many acts the play itself will have) is the epilogue. And the army, with its leaders, heroes, and soldiers, can be perceived as a theater troupe or a group of people playing their roles in a large-scale theater.

Instilling Agressivness or other Methods of Manipulation

The last sub-chapter of the first part attempts to answer the question whether the aggression embedded in each individual is the basis for starting and waging war or whether its existence is rather artificially imposed for manipulative purposes.

According to Sigmund Freud, human aggressiveness arises after the fusion of the drives of life and death – the death drive represents the organism's desire to die, but the organism cannot save itself from its own impulse toward death and therefore redirects it outward (for more information see Freud 1955). The urge to die is replaced by the urge to kill, and thus man overcomes his own instinct. Killing is a symbolic solution to nature’s limitations, being the result of the fusion between the biological (the animal) and the symbolic (the fear of death). Man’s attempt to protect himself from his own death

creates a vicious circle, hatred leads to fear and fear to hatred, while the mass enthusiasm generated by the attraction of power and group membership contributes to the manifestations of aggression.

Hanah Segal believes that: “Psychoanalysis is very familiar with vicious circles of hatred and fear. It teaches us that in an individual, destructive and self-destructive drives can only be modified when the individual can get some insight into their motives and visualize the consequences to others and to themselves of their action” (Segal 2005: 119). The individual seeks to deny consequences and aggressive impulses, but because of internal and external factors does not always succeed in doing so, and “when our own aggressiveness can be disguised and hidden from us ‘for security reasons’, projective mechanisms and subsequent paranoia are increased“ (Segal 2005: 120). This model is also another way in which the enemy is presented as the personification of the evil.

The first chapter of the dissertation attempts to examine some of the important psychological, social and cultural factors that can become an incentive for participation in war, from the attempt to defeat death, immortalization through heroic act, to the influence of the group, leaders and the need to purge the world of evil. Society and the military create ideas that aim to break mental and social norms in those who build them, remodeling them to be fit for their military duty, and soldiers move through social space marked as different from “normal life”.

II. WAR WRITING

The second chapter of the dissertation focuses on war writing itself, using the term from English literary theory. Problems in the precise definition of the concept are presented, as well as its main characteristics and their manifestations in novel interpretations. Along with the definition itself, the specifics of the writer's figure in creating the genre are outlined. As time passes and the subject unfolds, the perception of which is the most appropriate approach to presenting the war and whose view best meets the demands of war writing begins to change. The ultimate position that only frontline soldiers can paint an objective and accurate picture of what happened (what is happening) is losing ground, resulting in the increasingly strong role of women during the conflict and the emergence of writing about it and recreating it from a new perspective. Along with the analysis of war writing, questions of internal division and its authorship, the second chapter of the dissertation also presents some of the functions and goals set by novels centered on military conflict.

Personality and Authorship in War Writing

At the onset of the Great War, perceptions of its occurrence varied. For some the war was nothing more than "ultimate manifestation of the follies of the past" (Hynes 2011: 27), while for others, the World War I is an opportunity for a rebirth of the spirit and the building of new values within society. The first understanding will continue to exist in human consciousness after the World War II, as well as all the local or smaller-scale ones that followed it in the 20th century, while the second views warfare from the perspective of hope for the renewal of cultural and intellectual life. In either case, however, one can speak of a kind of confusion and uncertainty in the first months after the outbreak of a war. They influence the creative life as well as its representatives.

Unfamiliarity seeks its own interpretation, a task that many try to accomplish by referring to someone else's or their own experience, or to a model they once used that turns out not always to work.

The way a war is perceived determines the type of literature that will be written about it. Those who support the optimistic position foreground the poetic and pathetic nature of the conflict, while those who disagree with them emphasize its catastrophism and meaninglessness. Alongside the variation in the understanding of the war, one is born in the direction of the authorial figure who is able (or deserves) to comment on the event. According to some, only frontline soldiers can create the most accurate and meaningful image, due to their active position. In examining war writing about World War I, James Campbell uses the term *combat gnosticism* – a concept that accepts time at the front as indescribable knowledge. Civilians are free from the fear that the frontline soldier encounters, so their narrative is devoid of a specific type of emotionality. The definition of combat Gnosticism includes the belief that for frontline soldiers, who participated in the war "combat represents a qualitatively separate order of experience that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an identical experience" (Campbell 1999: 203). According to others you don't have to have fought to have experienced the chaos and horror of war.

Attitudes toward either claim wavered during the years of World War II and after its conclusion. Due to the specifics of the more recent global conflict, mainly the greater number of civilians affected or suffering personal losses, the attitude towards who "can" write about the war is also changing. There is a growing understanding that novels about war should not present only the perspective of the combatants, as the frontline fighters are not the only participants in the conflict. Expanding the boundaries of conflict creates an opportunity for a new type of writing to develop, with new writers – women. According to the author Gill Plain "many women writers had no direct

experience of war's violence and their writing cannot straightforwardly be categorized through shared trauma", but they still share the "climate of the time", the attempt to articulate this climate gave rise to a complex body of writing that grapples in particular with issues of belonging and exclusion surrounding the perceived cultural disjuncture between "woman" and "war" (Plain 2009: 166). If during World War I the main perception of women is that they are natural non-combatants or "sexually unfit", as the British writer Rose Macaulay called them in her novel "Non-Combatants and Others", 1916, during and after World War II the role of women in art changed. Women's writing about the war manages to incorporate new themes and perspectives on the conflict, because women writers are "engaged with the cultural constructions that problematized women's relationship to nation and war" and important is "the impact of war on the individual" (Plain 2009: 171).

No matter whether the writer is a witness or a person distanced from the front, a professional writer or an amateur, a woman or a man, "the war did not produce a homogeneous literature" (Plain 2009: 175), and every author manage to find his own answer to the event. Personal experience and the conflict entering different phases contribute to the development of war writing.

The variation of authors, thematic selection, and the literary/novel form itself changes or evolves according to the type of war. The manner of proceeding, the scale, and the type of used weapons are only some of the factors that prove to be an obstacle in analyzing texts that consider war as a central theme, as well as the possibility of finding a formula that is universally applicable.

Main Characteristics of War Novels

The greatest obstacle in front of the war writing in the 20th century is unfamiliarity with the situation, and the novelty of the conflict led to following previously familiar patterns. It relies on the structural and aesthetic heritage, which turns out to be incompatible with the situation of the second decade of the century, and as a summary of the state of literature and in particular the novel of the period, Evelyn Cobley argues that while realism affirms bourgeois values and modernism is questioning them, then the World War I stories confirms this with its formal and thematic decisions (Cobley 1993: 5). According to Kate McLoughlin the initial reaction to what is happening is expressed in "inarticulacy, like silence itself" (McLoughlin 2009: 17). At a later stage in the history of 20th century, namely the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, it can be seen that even when society has repeatedly confronted technological warfare and its way of proceeding, shock and silence continue to be the primal instinctive reaction. There is generational, poetic and genre diversity, but both with the onset of the Great War and after the beginning of the Yugoslav Wars, a turn is observed. The matrix shifts and "testimonial literature" becomes leading, with a clear dominance of documentary and autobiography. In addition to the already established authors, works by new writers, amateurs, are also beginning to appear – a phenomenon that will dictate the specifics of the literary scene for nearly two decades, and a change in the situation will occur only after the need for a poetics of testimony has fulfilled its tasks and literature returns to its artistry.

In addition to the reaction to the war and its reflection in literature, this part of the dissertation also proposes a division of the novels of war writing, influenced by the views of the American author Samuel Hynes. The researcher distinguishes two main narrative models that can be applied in the recreation of any military conflict: "the

Autobiographical and the Historical, or the Personal and the General, or the Small Picture and the Large" (Hynes 2011: 495). The main characteristic of the autobiographical narrative is the use of the individual experience of war as the central theme. The narrative begins and ends with the protagonist's personal war, excluding all other modes of existence before and after the conflict as they are considered fundamentally different and irrelevant. History is presented as a discontinuity – the present/ "now" does not follow the past/ "then", war is not a consequence, and the world before the war is not a cause. The end of the story (narrative), as well as what the soldier suffered, coincides with the end of the war itself. The experience of the individual is characterized by a certain discontinuity, since the individual soldier cannot grasp the enormity of the war in which he is engaged. This discontinuity represents an aspect of military reality that can be depicted but not ordered (Hynes 2011: 495). Defining the autobiographical novel of war, whether fictional or not, are its discontinuities, incoherence, and moments of irony – elements that define the conception of history that individual narratives adopt and portray.

The second major pattern in the war writing novels is the historical or "general narrative of war – offers what seems at first a very different model of history" (Hynes 2011: 497). The main distinguishing feature from the autobiographical novel is the time period that the narrative covers. The time range is much wider, reaching episodes before the war began and after it ended, and the conflict is positioned in the space between these two worlds, fulfilling the function of a historical transformer (Hynes 2011: 498). It is main goal is to outline, through comparison, the social changes that have been achieved as a result of the conflict – it depicts the overall historical myth in an understandable form. Discontinuity, fragmentation, and subjectivity are features that are present in works of modernism, and are also a main characteristic of the historical type of war novels. *Before* and *after* are territories of time from whose perspective the whole story

can be viewed, but they also represent distinct periods in the life of the individual. The narrative of the self before becoming a soldier and the one after are different, the two periods are distant realities, as "one finds in the classic personal war stories a marked sense of the narrators' separation from the earlier selves about whom they write" (Hynes 2011: 505). If one of the methods attempts to introduce some order into the past and explain what happened, the other seeks a way out of this situation in literature/fiction. If in biographical novels about the war the time is only "during", then the historical type tries to present a more general view of the whole picture. Precisely because of the need to explain and provide answers, historical novels do not begin with the war, but with the time before it, trying to understand "why".

Purposes and Goals of War Writing

Before moving on to comment on specific works from Western and Southern Slavic literatures, the dissertation also comments on some of the reasons for the emergence of war writing, as well as its functions. Texts about war aim to work through the trauma caused by war, to answer questions of guilt and responsibility, to trace causes and consequences. Some of the works promote pacifism, others examine the mechanisms of military conflict, trying to explain them.

Apart from the military conflict itself, the onset of the post-war period is also an important moment for the development of war writing, as new themes emerge, and "the psychological consequences of war became the crux of their writing, and their texts expose the impact of war on individual subjectivity" (Plain 2009: 173). The new reality also serves as an opportunity to create literary works that draw attention to the emotional world of those who experienced war events, while the focus of the plot is also shifted

away from the battlefield and the specifics. It is because of this that the purposes of writing about war also undergo development.

In both cases – when war writing takes place alongside the event itself or when a given work is written from the distance of time, among the author's impulses can be found the attempt to escape reality, or an effort to escape from the consequences that occurred from the reality of the time. Elements of "reassembly/reshaping" of the personality are discovered through the act of writing, and it itself serves to preserve identity during events devoid of previous analogue, while at the same time being a strategy that brings hope for eventual redemption. Alongside with the death, pain and wounding, the motives of salvation, help and love also come to the fore, thus achieving a kind of soothing of the mind, as the reader is left with the knowledge that even in the darkest episodes of history, the beauty can be found and triumph over the evil. The writing itself can be seen as a kind of therapy and the distance of time is becoming a necessity.

After the initial attempt to explain what happened, some of the writers set out to honor the victims' sacrifice. At the same time, they seek to emphasize the need to prevent the possible recurrence of events, while also paying attention to the themes that "accompany" the military conflict – the trauma it caused, the disintegration of the social and family world, the cultural and social decline, etc.

War writing is directly related to and provoked by writing that attempts to promote peace. Like the monuments, the texts aim to reassure survivors and non-combatants that the dead died voluntarily, without regrets for the sacrifice they made. Both forms of art can be seen as a formal act of closure that embody the idea of war as heroic, romantic, theatrical or tragic. History becomes one alternative for restoring order, and literature becomes the other. The need to make sense of mass death can be met by giving it some meaning or by explaining the reasons for its occurrence.

War writing is also a kind of a protest against those who do not take an active position – civilians or politicians. Last but not least is the ability of this type of literature to soothe. It creates comfort in the reader, based on the idea that the world after the war, contrary to the expectations of pessimists, is not so bad, and no matter how catastrophic the changes are, they are not irreversible. It imposes an optimistic vision that civilization has managed to survive after all – at least until the next conflict.

III. NARRATIVE MODELS

The third chapter of the dissertation focuses on the commentary of specific literature works, which are divided and examined according to the narrative model that dominates in them. Initially, attention is given to "more traditional" models such as the epic narrative or to genre forms such as the diary, biography, and the eyewitness account. The chapter also presents an analysis of novels in which experimental techniques dominate or alternative realities are created. At the end of the part, the perspective of categories of the population that are traditionally considered as "non-combatants", such as women and children, is also commented upon. The focus in this type of works is on addressing key moments in the growing up of minors, whose encounter with war leads to an absence of parental authority, and the need for the woman/mother to assume a leading role in the disrupted by the war family.

Historical and Epic Narrative

As typical representative of the historical or epic in combination with another narrative model, the dissertation examines two of the novels of the Serbian politician and writer Vuk Drašković – "Alexander from Yugoslavia", together with its sequel "Both Grave and Slave". Both texts place in theirs center the fate of Serbia, which later became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, during the two world wars, focusing on the rulers and their role during a troubled for their country period. This is also the reason why the same novels are the center of the analysis of the leader's significance, placed in the fourth and final chapter of the dissertation.

A number of real historical figures appear in the narrative of Drašković's two novels. The presentation of the interwar period in "Alexander from Yugoslavia" and the

time of World War II in “Both Grave and Slave” is a sign of the author’s ambition to recreate the spirit and dynamics of 20th century. Along with the existing/ real characters appear fictional ones, whose function is to lead the narrative, or to represent the position of the

By mixing historical and personal narrative, Vuk Drašković presents familiar literary themes. On the one hand, that of the responsibility and role of the “little” man within the big history, and on the other, the fleeting nature of human life. In the period 1918–1982, which, although with gaps, both novels are covering, a number of personalities and countries lost their lives. Through the diary narrative of the protagonist of the second novel is summed up the idea of impermanence and the human capacity quickly to forget. The only significant thing in the dynamic 20th century turns out to be what is written and what can be read by future generations.

Historiography, Diary and Eyewitness Narrative

Novels which represent the testimonial narrative, but now entirely based on personal experience and history, are commented in the next subchapter of the thesis. It analyzes works close to the chronicle and diary narratives or which are directly named as novels diary. Common among the works chosen for analysis is the figure of their writer – a contemporary, direct witness and/or participant in the war about which he writes. This common characteristic is also the reason for commenting works from South Slavic literature, in which Yugoslav wars and their aftermath are a frequent theme and the authors are from the region where the military actions took place.

In the novels Bosnian writers Ivica Đikić „Beara: a Documentary Novel about the Genocide in Srebrenica“ (2016), Emir Suljagić “Postcards from the Grave” (2005) and Serbian author Jasmina Tešanović “Scorpions – Design of the Crime” (2009) from

a historical perspective is presented the position of victims and criminals. The authors choose the approach of realistic and documentary narration, and the argumentation for their decision can also be tied to the nature of the topic itself – according to them the seriousness of the interneighbourly wars and ethnic cleansing with a focus on the events surrounding Srebrenica cannot be described in any other way and it is difficult (even impossible) to intertwine elements of fiction. Also commented is the novel "Short Field Trip: Records from the Croatian War of Independence" (1997), where the narrator's one-year experience as a Croatian *domobran* (home guard) is presented in the form of an ironic diary.

Đikić writes his novel from the perspective of an outside observer, of someone who has studied history, while Emir Suljagić relies on his personal memories during the Sarajevo occupation from the early to mid 1990s. In "Postcards from the Grave" the author presents what happened in eastern Bosnia entirely through the biographical. The book convincingly conveys the young Bosnian's testimony about the tragedy from 1992 to 1995. This is a personal story about Srebrenica's enclave, where the author lived, worked and survived; a personal story that may be valid for many who were in similar situation. On the other hand, in "Scorpions – Design of the Crime" Jasmina Tešanović is not a witness to what happened in Srebrenica and the surrounding area. The narrative is centered around the writer's stories and observations from the trial of five members of the Serbian paramilitary unit "Scorpions". The three novels attempt to answer the question why the Srebrenica massacre from 1995 happened, as well as what were the motives of the perpetrators. In their attempt to unravel the case, the three authors use different strategies, which leads to incompletely overlapping answers.

Along with the noted works, also is commented "Short field trip" by the Croatian *domobran* Ratko Cvetnić. Although the novel also uses the diary narrator model, the work is not examined in direct comparison with the other three works for two

reasons. On the one hand, it does not address the topic of the massacre in Srebrenica and the surrounding area, and on the other hand, because of the position of the narrator himself. Cvetnić was part of the Croatian army for a year, during which, in the form of a literary memoir, the intellectual presented a series of tragicomic personal and hearsay stories and observations.

The authors analyzed in the subchapter and their novels present different narrative positions, with all four writers distancing themselves from their ethnic and national affiliation, sparing themselves unnecessary patriotism and undeserved accusations just because of their difference. In depicting the wars of the late last century, eyewitness narrative focuses on the human aspect of the participants, abstracting from extra-moral categories to construct the images.

Experimental Chronicling and Alternative Reality

The next part of the dissertation aims to examine three novels in which the history of the 20th century is presented through a non-traditional narrative. Through the diverse representation, are made attempts to place the past century within certain historiosophical frameworks.

The novel "Lala" (2006) by the Polish author Jacek Dehnel is a kind of family chronicle, where the author's grandmother recounts personal, family and foreign experiences of the past century. Unlike Dehnel, Patrik Ouředník in „Europeana: Short Story of 20th century" (2001) builds his commentary on the past from a position of distance, outside of personal experience, not skipping the importance of wars, but in the form of unimportant anecdotes and dubious statistics. The third novel, Jacek Dukaj's "Ice" (2007), creates an alternative vision of the years from 1900 till 1999, where the Great War never happened, but in 1924 the Russian Empire, led by the Romanoffs, still

stays unshakably above the rest of Europe. The aim is to re-present the importance of military conflicts (even if some are deliberately omitted) and humanity's inability to react in such situations by examining novels that use the narrative model of experimental chronicling, multi-voice narration combined with diary writing, as well as alternative history.

In "Europeana" Patrik Ouředník crates a map of 20th century, using the main events that occurred during it, throwing in numerous facts that at times seem naturalistically disturbing. The events of the century are seen on a scale, with the history of humanity at the center, and the specific individual remaining on the margins of statistics and events far larger than him. Unlike other war novels written after 1989, "Europeana" lacks, or rather sarcastically implies, the idea of the importance of the "little" man within the big history.

Jacek Dehnel's novel offers a diary-like personal narrative, but written by a person who is not a direct witness to the events. The author of the book reconstructs the family chronicle of his own lineage with the help of someone else's story – that of his grandmother, Lala (Helena) Benecka. The grandmother, who has become a kind of attraction among Dehnel's friends, is always ready to share something from the family's past, no matter whether she is at the center of events or retelling what she learned from her mother and grandmother, for example. In places, a story is started, but its integrity is disrupted so that a previous one can be completed, and after a while the author returns to it to complete it. The chronology of world history has not been followed either. In some episodes, the grandmother promises to share about her childhood, but she jumps to the years of World War II, when she was twenty years old. Many stories have an unclear beginning and end, or start from the middle. The novel has a specific narrative, which, on the one hand, moves thanks to the narrator himself, and on the other, because of someone else's story. The nonlinear narrative introduces the reader to an eccentric

and colorful family, whose story begins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the chaos of the turbulent times is conveyed through scattered memories and incidents.

At first glance in "Europeana" by Patrik Ouředník, and in "Lala" by Jacek Dehnel the narrative seems disorganized and scattered, but both novels follow their own specific path and maintain peculiar order, often point out the significance of the wars of the past century. The two novels can be considered for experimental chronicles, while "Ice" by Dukaj is characterized by the lack of credibility in the events. Despite the existence of real historical figures such as Grigori Rasputin, Nikola Tesla or the Romanoff dynasty, the narrative is built around the idea of an alternative history. The plot takes place in 1924, with World War I not occurred, resulting in the All-Russian Empire being the dominant power on the world geopolitical map. Instead of the large-scale social and technical changes that the world conflict and the October Revolution brought to the historical course of the 20th century, the century was shaped by ecological and biological transformations that the novel's fantastic plot introduces. The novel offers the opportunity to be viewed not only through the prism of an alternative history that is frozen before the Great War, but also through philosophical notions and concepts such as shame and fear.

Growing up or Childhood's Encounter with the War

The absence or dominance of one (or both) of the parents is a frequent symptom in war writing novels, and most often the reflected in the continuers of the family. At the center of the events are the young, who are forced to find a working way of maturing and adapt to the new reality, in order to become functioning representatives of society. The next part of the dissertation aims to comment novels in which the narrative is presented precisely from the position of the youngest.

The plot of works of this type concern key moments in the growth of children, whose encounter with war leads to the absence of parental authority. As a result, the leadership role in the disrupted family in placed on the mother which in turn provides an opportunity to trace the attitude towards the war and its consequences among the other affected group of inactive combatants – that of women. Along with narrative models in which the impact of armed conflicts is conveyed through the prism of minors, also will be analyzed novels from the perspective of women's writing, which will be further developed in the next section of the dissertation. The goal is to be analyzed different approaches shown by the two of the traditionally considered for most defenseless groups and their attempt to cope with the cataclysm of war. The idea is to be traced the position of an outsider and reflection of the war on his future.

In the selected works such as "Hotel Tito" (2010) by the Croatian author Ivana Simić Bodrožić growing up and narration move together, or are shown through the intertwining of present and memories of the adults as is in "Yugoslavia, My Fatherland" (2012) by the Slovenian Goran Vojnović and "The Devil's Workshop" (2009) by the Czech author Jachym Topol. This choice further reveals the differences in the upbringing and consequences in the lives of adults who are children of war-torn families. A major difference between the protagonists of the three novels is the presence of elements of hope and optimism in those in whom the narrative ends before the beginning of an independent life and final maturity, in contrast to those who talk about their childhood from the distance of time and return to memory.

The first-person stories and the lack of full names in Bodrožić's novel reinforce the idea, that such cases of war-affected children are many. The character's formative years coincide with periods in which their homelands also change. Through the eyes of the youngest, in addition to the personal difficulties of transition, are commented the inability of adults to cope with the burdens of the war.

A major difference between the three coming-of-age novels that this part of the dissertation examines is the notion of hope for a better future and the preservation of the remnants of the family. Topol's protagonist lost his parents at young age and the Vojnović's never maintained a good relationship with his. In "Hotel Tito", although illusory, is presented an alternative where family's integrity will be achieved.

A common theme among adolescents in war-affected families in the three novels examined in this section is their growing up within four walls and the influence of narrow square rooms on their lives and the lack of a father figure during most of their formation as individuals. In two of the cases, the woman must also perform the functions of her husband, one being a relatively successful example, while the other presents a situation in which, after the reduction in family size, the family reaches the point of disintegration.

Along with presenting the defense mechanism traditionally resorted to by non-combatants during the war, is commented the importance of conflict on the smaller parts of the society such as the family. In addition to the catastrophic effect on the nation, a similar can be seen on the family and the individual

The War, Seen from a Female Perspective

The situations of families threatened with disintegration due to the outbreak of a conflict lead to different responses, and the level of success in the new reality varies from adaptation to dysfunction. The last part of the third chapter of the dissertation analyzes the works of Olga Tokarczuk "Primeval and Other Times" (1996), "As If I am not There" (1999) by Slavenka Drakulić and "Mona" (2019) by Bianka Bellova, which offer encounters with and resistance to war, this time through the female perspective and position in general, not just that of the mother.

According to traditional beliefs, it is the man who fights during conflict. In the commented novels, female characters “receive” additional responsibilities and must act like men. The new and unclear order requires the acquisition of new skills, while also creating additional responsibilities for some of the heroines. Like other war novels, those told from a female perspective also comment on how the encounter with war, whether direct or indirect, is capable of leading to large-scale changes in human character.

Through the tracing of numerous echoes from several generations of heroines who witnessed and suffered from the wars of 20th century, are examined the cases of abandonment, abuse or systematic rape. Women must find a way to survive during and after the conflict. Some of the difficulties they face are directly tied to their biological sex.

A common feature among the three novels is that the female characters are forced to live and cope within a world that is dominated by men. In many ways, women depend on the actions and decisions of the men, and in most cases are helpless against their will. At the same time, the conditions of war create additional power for men, which they take advantage of, turning them into violent and criminals and often deprives them of the opportunity to be punished for their actions.

IV. THEMATIC DOMINANTS IN WAR NOVELS

The fourth chapter of the dissertation offers second separation of the war writing novels – relative to the possible thematic synthesis. By referring to the theoretical framework built in the previous chapters, the dissertation analyze works that comment the importance of the leader (in a negative or positive sense) both for the course of the conflict and for his overall assimilation by the rest of those involved in the war.

Along with the mentioned topic, analyzed are the ways of presenting the enemy and allies frequent characters in war writing novels. Terms as “good” and “evil” are fundamental in creating the image of the compatriot or the enemy and related to the idea of “we” and “they”. In some examples, these characteristics are clearly distinguishable and there are no surprises in terms of perception, while in others it turns out that there is an unexpected overlap or discrepancy with the educationally and morally established categories.

The final topic that the dissertation focuses on is related to the cyclical nature of war, with its results being damage noticeable over several generations. Regardless of the degree of participation and commitment to the conflict, the result of every contact with it is a wound - be it the visible physical or the tangible psychological one.

The Significant of the Leader – Mythologizing and Demythologizing of the Image

The theoretical part of the work examines the figure of the leader, focusing on the psychological significance of his role, which is related to the ability to provide salvation, and this makes him an easily recognizable hero in the minds of others. The relationship between the leader and the group is built on the knowledge that he can provide something that others are unable to offer. Another reason for someone’s rise to

a leadership position, and later his retention, is the personal example they set. If we look at history, we can find many examples of military veterans who, precisely because of their displays of heroism during battles or their contribution to victory, were subsequently elected as heads of their countries.

In literary, the figure of the leader is present through examples of its two extreme manifestations – from beloved favorite to complete disappointment who is identified with national disgrace. In positive assessments, the leader stands out both for his qualities as commander, such as expressed patriotism and willingness to sacrifice, and by his characteristic human virtues. In his person, the rest of the population manages to see an example, to recognize in him his own fatherland. The good leader becomes a byword for all of his people or of his country, while his opposite/negative manifestation is considered to bear the responsibility for the failure. Examples of both types can be found in the novels of Vuk Drasković which were mentioned regarding the historical and epic narratives of war writing.

In contrast to the dominant tendencies of war writing in contemporary Slavic literatures, where mainly can be found ideas such as the meaninglessness of the conflict, insecurity about who is actually "good" or the inevitable damage to the individuals, Drasković refuses to accept the possibility that the national (in more general sense) to be seen as negative/ to carry negative meanings. In most of the cases, especially in the Serbian author's earlier work, where the main characters is the living Alexander Karađorđević, the evaluative attitude is easily discernible. Not only the Serbian monarch is presented as an unquestionable authority and role model, but also those in his inner circle. On the other hand, all of those who oppose him or in any way attempt to hinder his plans for building united and strong Yugoslavia, are criticized by Drašković.

Along with the two novels of the Serbian politician and writer, this part of the dissertation also offers and analysis of two novels from contemporary Bulgarian

literature, which present the significance of the leader – "Wound" by Zahari Karabashliev and "The Palaveev Sisters: In the storm of the History" by Alek Popov. The differences between the two Balkan literatures in presenting the figure of the monarch are pointed out, as well as the different approach when commenting the war – through the easily perceptible irony and humor in Popov's novel. In addition to the ridiculing the characters, the work also exemplifies the tendencies towards demythologizing the "forgotten subgenre" of the *partisan novel*, which can be found in the image of the leader's figure, created by the author.

A similar technique of irony is noted in another work, already commented in the previous chapter – Ratko Cvetnić's novel "Short Field Trip: Records from the Croatian War of Independence". A difference with the other analyzed texts is the author's decision to ironize not only the leaders and the phenomenon war, but also all of the categories of participants in it, and the negativism towards the individuals from the political world is noticeable. The way the war unfolds leads to a sense of timelessness and absurdity, where the entire conflict is seen as a farce and a vulgar comedy.

Are we the Good or are They the Bad?

The subchapter of the dissertation presents, through an analysis of literature works, the question about the roles in the mentioned from the theoretical part "theatre of war". The examined novels from South and West Slavic literatures demonstrate the possibility for increasingly frequent questioning of whether "we" are the real "good" ones, which often leads to the conclusion, that by many criteria the closeness between the warring parties is greater that the differences between them. Many questions are raised, which makes identifying the real enemy difficult, and also complicate the already commented concepts of guilt and righteousness.

In addition to some of the already analyzed in previous parts of the dissertation novels ("Wound" by Zahari Karabashliev, "Lala" by Jacek Dehnel, "Primeval and Other Times" by Olga Tokarczuk), the last chapter examines "Germans" by the Czech writer Jakuba Katalpa, "Morphine" by the Polish author Szczepan Twardoch and the Croatian "Alabaster Sheep" by Jurica Pavičić, where also can be found doubts regarding the separation "us/them" and "good/evil". The protagonists of the three works are in position, which transforms them into strangers/foreigners within a certain collective or they themselves are not completely aware of which community they actually belong to. The "us/ them" separation takes place between civilians and soldiers, enemies and allies, as well as between the representatives of the smaller unit of the society – the family. The texts demonstrate how the new situation helps the ability of war to reveal negative aspects of human character such as prejudice against the different (the Other) and the inability to tolerate him. Also, it testifies to the incapability to distinguish good from evil when unexpected external factors, such as the order of power and accumulated in the recent past hatred, appear. Ignorance provokes the representatives of one nation, or former victims, to start behaving like their former oppressors without thinking about their recent position, copying actions they used to condemn.

Also analyzed is the motif of intergenerational transmission of dilemmas related to the attitude towards the enemy. In wartime "good" and "evil" become relative concepts, as they are, in addition to nationality, directly related to the position of the combatants. For some of the characters, there is a need to assign themselves to a category without focusing on the rightness of its actions, precisely because of the already mentioned uncertainty during military conflict. The common element is related to war's ability to bring out unexpected qualities and abilities in people, whether positive or negative.

„Damaged People“ and the Cycling Nature of War

The final thematic dominance that the dissertation examines is related to the repetitive nature of war, and its ability to damage all who are/were in contact with it. In some of the war novels, the theme of “damaged people” appears to be central. In most texts, whether of the historical or autobiographical type, the characters are changed after the war experience. Whether they were frontline soldiers or civilians, contemporaries or children of combatants, all who directly or indirectly are in touch with war, become its victims.

In the analysis of the topic, are examined three of the works of Croatian author Josip Mlakić. Already in his first major novels – “When the Fogs lift“, “The Living and the Dead” and “People that Planted Trees” – the author’s desire to focus on the fate and hardships faced by the involved in the Yugoslav wars, the conflict’s capacity to generate fear and awaken bestial instincts in those affected by it, is evident. The main message of Mlakić’s texts is related to the idea that the war is the greatest evil that exists in the human world and it places the individual in situations of humiliation and threatened existence, as well as the observation that who faced the horrors of the war emerge from them scarred forever.

Through the images created by the Croatian author his novels present his understanding of the conflict, the different types of participants, as well as the everyday life during war. Like the other examined war writing novels and authors, Mlakić focuses on the monotony and futility of the phenomenon with its constant aimless skirmishes and battles. The only vehicle for change is death, but even its presence does not permanently alter the perception of the situation. The writer offers different possibilities in relation to the (in)overcoming of trauma. For some of the characters there is hope in dealing with

the personal drama, while for others the defeats are final and eventual salvation seem impossible.

This part of the dissertation also comments the presence of the topic „damaged people“, which is combined with different motives typical for the war writing– the breakdown of the family world, the need to make choices in critical and unexpected circumstances, as well as its results, which are often “passed down” from one generation to another. Decisions of the predecessors leave a lasting mark on future generations which usually has traumatic nature. Successors resurrect old enmities and find themselves locked in vicious cycle of repetition. This transgenerational burden problematizes the question of individual choices faced by many of the inhabitants of the Balkans, a tendency clearly observed in some of South Slavic novels of the war writing, published after 1989.

The introduction of the theme of cycling creates preconditions for an analysis of the question of whether salvation from the tragic recurrence of events is possible. The discovery of similarities and differences between the participants in the Yugoslav wars and those of world conflicts leads to the conclusion of whether choice is possible, or whether the past/family history is the builder of the present and the future.

The relationship between cyclicality of history and intergenerational relations in the narratives of war writing are represented through several manifestations. In some, new generations must carry on the work of their ancestors, leaded by the hope for change, but also doomed with the same type of “damage”. Others, in which participants in earlier conflicts are unaware what can be the effects of their actions, and third group in which the newer generations attempt to break the integrity of the vicious cycle and secure a stable future.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation attempts to explore the nature of the phenomena of war and to point out the connections between them and their constituent parts. They are bond to the literature and the need to record and interpret the event as accurately as possible. It turns out that one concept, which seems familiar to everyone and needs no explanation, is emotionally difficult to be explained even to those who have encountered it. Despite the many works where the war is central theme, and the ambition to be exposed its destructive beginning, the problem turns out to be inability of precise picture of the violence. The representability and ineffability are caused by the inability of a single version/vision to be used as universal code. Because of this in many cases, the key motivator for war writing is not the aim for absolute truth. The need to understand the origins and mechanisms of the conflict, to address the trauma, and to resolve the questions of responsibility and blame, prove to be main factors in the choice to place the subject as central in range of fiction, poetry and drama.

The dissertation is based on the research interest and desire to present the place of war writing novels after 1989 in South and West Slavic literatures. This ambition points to the hypothesis that we can speak of the existence of continuity, since even if the wars of the 20th century differ from those that preceded them, some of their characteristics are generally valid and familiar. What was written at the end of the past and the beginning of the present century demonstrates the authors' unanimity regarding the perception of the conflict. The time of the conflict is presented as stopped or lost, some kind of vacuum, during which humanity takes step back in its cultural and moral development. By using mainly three of the major war conflicts of the 20th century, the dissertation demonstrates how the period of its occurrence, or more precisely the time elapsed after its conclusion, is also important in presenting the conflict.

A comparative reading of novels that place war as a central theme demonstrates the ability of literature to respond to even the darkest periods of human civilization. The analysis, which uses concepts from sociology and psychoanalysis as auxiliary interpretative tools, reveals some of the reasons for the increased interest in the topic, as well as the methods by which its various interpretations are presented. The need to write about war is influenced by the desire to alert the audience of the unacceptability of the phenomenon, and in an ideal, albeit unlikely, scenario, to overcome the need to repeat what has already been said.

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CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. The dissertation proposes a new and complex overview of the war as a phenomenon and its consequences, while focusing not only on the more popular interpretations and authors, but also on the perspective of traditionally marginalized as non-combatant groups such as women, children and otherwise others.
2. The works of fiction analyzed in the dissertations show the change in the understanding the war as a phenomenon, as well as the narrative and genre changes, which occurred in its representations between the World War I and the post-1989 period.
3. The dissertation analyzes a substantial number of works of fiction from post-1989 Southern and Western Slavic literatures, some of which have been discussed for the first time in Bulgarian humanities. The majority of them are not translated in Bulgarian and have not been a subject of such a complex comparative study.
4. The dissertation topic is analyzed through its connection to psychoanalysis and sociology, and some of the extra-literary factors, which influence the concept of war and those of the fear of death, the heroism and the self-sacrifice, are noted.

Publications on the Topic of the Dissertation:

1. Човекът във време на войни в южнославянските романи след 1989 г. – между индивидуалния избор и междупоколенческото повторение. – В: *Полемики и избори. Т. 2. Литературознание, културна антропология*. София: УИ „Св. Климент Охридски“, 2024, стр. 383–390.
2. Миналото и настоящето в (анти)военните романи на Йосип Млакич. – В: *Verba iuvenium. Словото на младите*. Пловдив: УИ „Паисий Хилендарски“, 2022, стр. 283–290.
3. Сребреница в постюгославския романов свят. – В: *Литературните поредици – конструиране и деконструиране на канона*. София: УИ „Св. Климент Охридски“, 2021, стр. 177–185.
4. XX век в ретроспекция – Гюнтер Грас и Патрик Оуржедник като хроникьори на миналото столетие. – В: *Verba iuvenium. Словото на младите*. Пловдив: УИ „Паисий Хилендарски“, 2021, стр. 333–342.

Other publications; translations; participation in scientific projects, conferences and compilation activities

Full list:
https://authors.uni-sofia.bg/AuthorPublications.aspx?id=69eab2f1-2629-4107-b833-722689e0e6d8