

## HISTORY AND STORYTELLING. CONSIDERATIONS ON SOME NOVELS OF INDEFINITION<sup>1</sup>

Grațiela BENGA-ȚUȚUIANU

(Institutul de Studii Banatice „Titu Maiorescu”,

Filiala din Timișoara a Academiei Române)

g.benga@academiاتم.ro

### Abstract

These pages aim to revitalize the debate about the importance of placing (and re-reading) the novels written in peripheral areas (such as Banat) in the larger Central-European and transnational context. The study brings together two novelists, a Romanian writer (actively involved in the Romanian Revolution that started in Timișoara) and a Serbian novelist, namely Daniel Vighi and Milisav Savić. In order to make similarities and diversity visible, my approach adopts a comparative perspective, and examines junctions, distinctions and differentiations in their novels and beyond. As a consequence, it highlights themes and characters, looks into the relation between history, (post)memory, and narration, while shaping the Central-European ethos.

**Keywords:** interval, fragmentation, (post)memory, Central-European paradigm

### Rezumat

Articolul repune în discuție, succint, nevoia de situare într-o perspectivă transnațională, cu atât mai mult cu cât, pe de-o parte, spațiile (semi)periferice sunt amenințate de izolaționism sau de excepționalism și, pe de altă parte, relațiile intra- și intersistemice au o intensitate aparte. Pornind de la două romane scrise în 1989 și 1991 de un autor român și de unul sârb, Daniel Vighi și Milisav Savić, microstudiul comparativ pe care îl propun pune în evidență interferențe și operează distincții pe fundalul analitic al relației dintre istorie, (post)memorie și povestire și al etosului central-european.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** interval, fragmentare, (post)memorie, ficțiune, paradigmă central-europeană

### Brief Cartographies

Beyond the contradictory positions regarding Banat, reflected through metaphorical analogies (Terra incognita, Terra Nova<sup>2</sup>), one can identify a (semi)peripheral Banat space that, like

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<sup>1</sup> This microstudy integrates and expands segments from the articles on the novels *Note on recent Years* (*Insemnare despre anii din urmă* - Daniel Vighi) și *Pâine și frică* (*Bread and Fear* - Milisav Savić), which I have written for the *Dictionary of Central-European Novel of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (*Dicționarul romanului central-european din secolul XX*), Adriana Babeți (coord.), edited by Oana Fotache, Iași: Polirom.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Adriana Babeți, *Banatul – un paradis între frontiere*, în vol. *Le Banat: Un Eldorado aux confins*, textes réunis par Adriana Babeți, coordination éditoriale Cécile Kovacsazy, Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherches Centre-Européennes, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2007. The text appears in Romanian at

Bohemia, Silesia, or Galicia, has undergone undeniable metamorphoses, becoming a transitional area endowed, more than once, with the attributes of centrality. However, in Central Europe<sup>3</sup>, the seeds of dissolution were present everywhere, and centrifugal forces repeatedly threatened both the centre and the periphery. Banat could not have been spared from the cyclical movements<sup>4</sup> that brought it closer at times to paradise, and at other times to apocalypse. Writers, with their sensitivity (capable of perceiving the subtle forms of reality and, through the relationship between the brain and the horizon of interiority, transforming them into images), were the first to sound the alarm in the face of catastrophes or major historical turning points. They also reflected in their texts the paradoxes, the twilight, the agonizing, the provisional nature, or the waiting – the milestones around which the map of literature from a region with ‘utopian potential’ and ‘a threat of political regression’ (Le Rider, 2001, 21) is charted. At the same time, Eastern European literature raises the issue of closely studying the areas of interference and the differences between imperialism and (neo)colonialism, with all the particularities of each literary system and time period.

This article will focus on the first novel published by the Timișoara prose writer Daniel Vighi<sup>5</sup> and will compare it with one of the narratives of the Serbian writer Milisav Savić<sup>6</sup>, in order to propose investigative paths converging on a Central European ethos. I am interested in observing some of the prose layers of writers whose instinct for freedom cannot be separated from the spirit of Central Europe.

### **Nodes, Intervals, Re-compositions**

*Note on Recent Years (Însemnare despre anii din urmă)* appeared shortly before the Revolution of December 1989, four years after Daniel Vighi’s debut with *Tales of the Warehouse Street*. Following Vighi’s debut volume, which labelled him as a refined postmodern prose writer, the novel expanded the thematic range, broadened the scope of narrative techniques, and enlivened the stylistic palette used in his early stories. The novel focuses on the story of the bridges between ages and epochs, between reality and its transfiguration, in a flexible structure that is about to complete or unravel the fabric of history and storytelling. With a skilfully maneuvered lens, the

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<http://www.memoriabanatului.ro/index.php?page=banat> [accessed on 15 June 2024] and was included in the extensive Introduction to the *Dictionary of Central-European Novel of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*.

<sup>3</sup> The concept is controversial and marked by successive debates, in which figures like Bojtár Endre, Milan Kundera, Henry Kissinger, Michael Heim, Jaques Le Rider, and Timothy Garton Ash have distinguished themselves. For the various nuances of concepts such as Central Europe, Mitteleuropa, Zentraleuropa, see Jacques Le Rider (*Mitteleuropa*, translated by Anca Opric, foreword by Andrei Corbea, Iași, Polirom, 1997, p. 15-30) and Timothy Garton Ash (*The Uses of Adversity. The Magic Lantern*, translated by Catrinel Pleșu and Corina Popescu, Bucharest, Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Adriana Babeți writes about the cyclicity of history in Central Europe in the *Foreword* to the volume *Europa Centrală. Memorie, paradis, apocalipsă (Central Europe: Memory, Paradise, Apocalypse)*, (coord. Adriana Babeți and Cornel Ungureanu), Iași, Polirom, 1998, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Vighi (1956-2022), novelist, essayist, journalist, and professor at the West University of Timișoara. He was noted for his vibrant civic spirit, both during the Timișoara Revolution and in the decades that followed.

<sup>6</sup> Milisav Savić (1945-), Serbian writer. He taught Serbo-Croatian at London University, at SUNY, Albany, at the University of Florence (Italy), and at the University of Lodz, Poland.

narrator tracks the coefficient of actuality and exemplarity of the narrative. He harmonizes incompatible worlds, changes his masks and voices, and remains diffuse and protean.

The central character is an unnamed student attending a university in a provincial town located somewhere in the west of the country, probably in Banat. The town, therefore, is also unnamed, and marginal in relation to an unidentified but implicitly present centre. At the same time, it should be noted that in Central Europe the centre drew its vitality from the fertile layers of the periphery, allowing for the emergence of a polycentrism that generated regional metropolises (in Banat, in Bukovina, in Bohemia, in Galicia, etc.). Consequently, the unnamed town (yet a university centre) in *Note on Recent Years* embodies any *marginal-central urban node* (Cornis-Pope, 2006, 11), whose ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and political interferences are similar, to varying degrees, to those in Novi Sad or Krakow.

The student attends classes without enthusiasm, and the drained everyday life awakens no interest in him. He prefers to take long walks in parks or on streets – transit spaces that illustrate the fragility of identity and the escape from oneself. He likes to linger in cafes (an emblematic topos of Central Europe), lost in thought. He enjoys having conversations with Iuliu Manoilă (the only other student he tolerates around him) and needs to escape into the imaginary to recover lost histories and add new versions to them. He investigates biographies, reconstructs fragmented paths, but above all, he reshapes them according to an individual imaginary that mixes the shadows of personal memory with the persistent traces of collective memory<sup>7</sup>, while also reacting to the memory manipulations and blockages orchestrated by official history<sup>8</sup>.

Milisav Savić's characters move through small towns or unknown villages. *Bread and Fear* appeared two years after *Note on Recent Years*, specifically in 1991 – the year the war began on the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This time, spatial directions are outlined in the absence of any cohesive attributes: always between worlds, which are semi-urban or rural-urbanized, geographically present but absent in terms of meaning. On the brink of a historical moment that will confirm disintegration, the Serbian writer's novel maps a space of the residual. To save themselves, people (destroyed by history and mentally disturbed by chimeras) are forced to leave behind this perimeter of dissolution.

### **Between Postmemory and Imagination**

Similar to Daniel Vighi's narrative, the novel by the Serbian writer contrasts (narrative and political) precision and order with denial and mobility. The rejection of norms and the refusal to finalise things are at the foundation of the Central European novel tradition, which includes figures like Witold Gombrowicz, Bohumil Hrabal, and Olga Tokarczuk. Through the architecture of an anonymous peripheral space and the adherence to an unforgiving atmosphere, *Bread and Fear* fits within the parameters of Milisav Savić's prose. Its novelty lies in how it examines the flexible

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<sup>7</sup> I evoke Tzvetan Todorov's statement: "The representation of the past is a constitutive element not only of individual identity – the present person is composed of their own images of themselves – but also of collective identity." (Todorov, 1999, 52)

<sup>8</sup> For details about the use and abuse of memory, see Paul Ricoeur, 2001.

endurance of the relationship between history and fiction. In other words, far from being antagonistic, biography and storytelling meet in a tense complementarity (as they intersect in Daniel Vighi's novel): they recognize each other, label each other, estimate each other, connect and mould each other, cautiously detecting extremes and stimulating convergence points. The first sentence of Savić's novel is highly significant: 'This story is about me, but equally about others, so it can be narrated in any grammatical person.' (Savić 1996). Dramatic in substance and realistically parabolic in expression, the novel is not only the story of a writer, but also the epic of a generation that experienced the distorting pressure of ideology and the violent reshaping of borders.

The effects of political traumas weaken the generations represented in the novel *Note on Recent Years* as well. Transmitted inter- and trans-generationally, collisions with history, whose dimensions place them among collective catastrophes, have consequences in the horizon of postmemory (cf. Hirsch, 2012, 106). The student in Vighi's novel, as well as the protagonist imagined by Savić, were shaped under the domination of inter-imperial and totalitarian narratives passed down as inherited memories. Consequently, events from the past have effects in the present experienced by these young people who channelled their traumas and energies into projections of the imaginary. Continually revisited, the stories evade passage. They refuse determination in time and, as a corollary, their inevitable disappearance. Without form, without stable contour, time/times (with their protean nature that is impossible to determine) occupy the nodes, plexuses, and points of narrative tension – moving fluidly and ambiguously, capturing an alienating present and briefly touching on a mythical, matrix-like age with a crepuscular extension that is defining for the semantics of the interval.

For a moment, he sees the room where he slept two nights. The table. A chest. A carafe. A bunch of wildflowers he has picked this afternoon. Several branches with leaves tinged red during the cold night. Above, an old family painting adorned at the edges with faces weathered by time; at the top, a man wearing a moustache and medals. To the right and left, a few others like him. Younger, though. Below them, in ovals, the coat of arms with a two-headed eagle and crossed swords. [...] In the middle, a larger photograph of a man in uniform. On either side, ladies with hats and children in shorts, sitting or standing. He imagines himself descending the stairs conspiratorially. The old woman sits silently by the stove, surrounded by the things in the house; the chest, carafes, the painting of the emperor. Of the crown princes. Imperial decorations alongside which he treads cautiously. Anonymous and humble streets, despite the stone fences and tall houses.<sup>9</sup> (Vighi, 1989)

The neat room, the old atmosphere, and above all, the recurring imperial symbols cannot be separated from the refuge in form, equated with an attempt to disguise emptiness and mitigate the fear of void (cf. Babeți, 2022, 68-69). However, the confusion caused by a tumultuous history

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<sup>9</sup> The source texts were translated into English by Antuza Genescu.

and the nostalgia for a settled time also consume many of Milisav Savić's characters. Passing through the decades separating World War II from the wild conflicts that put an end to Yugoslavia (as a Socialist Federal Republic), *Bread and Fear* reflects the struggle for survival during political repression and alongside 'the great beasts, called hunger and poverty'.

In a restless world, where brutal events and epic aspirations endowed old Central European ballads and myths with new meanings (Vienna being a relevant topos of sentimental experience and fictionalisation), the young writer and journalist, 'Pyjamas' (his friend from school, who had sketched the American Promised Land for him), a Russian librarian settled in Raška, political leaders, female artists, teachers, journalists, peasants, rebels hidden in forests, women tortured for having given their hunted and murdered husbands a Christian funeral, rebellious students, violent militia or petty Romanian, Hungarian and Serbian traffickers appear as prisoners of their own fragility or as victims of unbalanced vitality. Most characters experience relational blockage, but some (especially women) rediscover solidarity and sacrifice. Finally, others slip into a state of mental combustion, animated by the manic experience of utopia, by complicity, disobedience, the temptation of durability, or the traditional convention of periodic reconstruction.

"Nothing should ever be fully completed," my father told me when we were left alone, "you know who is entitled to that. If you understand this, you will know why ballads are always reinvented, even though they tell things that have been told before." (Savić, 1996, 74).

An entire set of concepts woven around instability, destruction, and creation (as rebuilding, reorganisation, resizing) is hidden in the words of the father – concepts that measure the value of a thing through the power of its opposite. The paradox of Central European instability insinuates itself deeply into the minds of characters who subject even the details of daily life to the logic of contradictions, transferring the real agent of evil to the hazy myths. Or vice versa.

Reinvention also defines the student in Daniel Vighi's novel. Retractility in the face of ridicule is compensated by hyperactive imaginary enhanced by readings from the library. Solitary existence finds a protective space here. The insular perspective, with its holistic qualities, intuits the immaterial principle of the world and associates it with creative tension. Therefore, the student's creativity is not projected into a material support. Unlike the hero in *Bread and Fear*, he rejects writing. Mentally articulated and orally exposed, creativity remains evanescent, yet it retains both its efficacy and fervour. Insularity as a state, and the island (the library) as personal space are animated by an internal movement that stimulates recalibration on a human scale and the amplitude of the imaginary. Even though the principle of rationality is not eliminated, the imaginary manifests as resistance (against a destabilising present) and as metamorphosis (in the realm of an existence opposed to being included in a series).

Restoring the stories of the imperial age through which the (semi)periphery once passed – by appealing to both formalised, treasured memory and to communicative, therefore unstable memory (cf. Assmann, 2008) – as well as shaping them according to the pressure of an individual

imaginary elicit different reactions. Initially rejecting them ('his friend's behaviour is impossible to understand'), Iuliu ends up fascinated by the intertwined stories of his friend. On the other hand, Doctor Svetozar argues that the hyperactivity of the imaginary could be a pathological manifestation, and the laboratory technician ('a refined man') in whose studio flat young people gather to listen to music ends up sharing the same opinion, after his initial surprise:

On hearing these words, the laboratory technician smiles. He fills the glasses, lights a cigarette. He listens in amazement. Is the student retelling a movie? Or a book? And why that inappropriate phrase, that 'as I was saying', since the student has never told him about any Hungarian notary named Pişta something or about the baron he worked for a few years back. When did he work for that baron? Are there any barons today? The student pays no mind to his confusion. It seems he neither wants to clear it up nor does he care about it. Viewed through a careful eye located somewhere outside, they give the impression that they are both sinking into something whose old articulations they can sense, even though they have never thought about them and they have never known that *this exotic past, assumed through voice, through confession, through the rough air that lends this boy the rigid appearance of someone being hypnotized*, can exist. [emphasis added]. (Vighi, 1989)

If in Daniel Vighi's novel the therapeutic escape into evanescent fiction (manifested through storytelling) is one of the themes, Milisav Savić projects narratively the (de)mystifying and expiatory functions of the written word. Raised in unforgiving times and in a (geographically, politically, socially) marginalised family, with an uncle imprisoned due to a mischievous form of revolt, the protagonist has had a cult of reading since childhood and is animated by creative frenzy – even though the effervescence of writing is forced to occasionally veer towards the veneration of the Great Leader as a form of memory manipulation: 'He is not God (God no longer exists, *he* made him disappear), but he is his equal, and even his superior in some respects.' (Savić 1996) Gradually, the child is exposed to an unacceptable reality, as the distance between truth and lies, reason and instinct, warm humanity and the allure of evil seems insurmountable. His evolution is influenced more by his uncle than by his father (a figure of vulnerable ascendancy, typical of Central Europe, with the absent father in the foreground), and his unleashing is forged in the flame of seemingly minor gestures. Innocent at first, salvation takes the form of adventure and signs of solidarity. Later, rebellion directly pushes the boundaries – of thought, of words, and of political geography.

The dream of escaping the alienating walls of the margins (hidden in the incompatibility with the ironies of fellow beings or, on another level of existence, in the repressive everyday existence of totalitarianism) demands intellectual freedom and finding a perimeter that, even if not paradisiacal, has the advantage of endurance. The young writer leaves behind a traditionally unstable territory, torn apart by centrifugal forces and contradictory impulses, to settle in an

America where the University Library of Albany reminds him of his uncle's room - a heavenly island where the mind is free and imagination can truly flourish, even when reality shows its harsh face. 'He could go there anytime; rain or shine, at dawn or at midnight. It was the great empire of fantasy. Here the story unfolded day and night, incessantly and endlessly.' (Savić 1996). I briefly mention that the relational dimension of reading/writing (cf. Moraru, 2011, 313) is amplified in postmodernism through the recourse to the theme of literary otherness.

From the story told in *Note on Recent Years*, the reader does not learn with certainty what reality is and to what extent fiction intervenes (completing or replacing it), because reality itself proves to be plural, and the characters' existence unfolds in an ontological horizon that is itself pluralistic. Consequently, the space in Daniel Vighi's novel appears as a heterotopia<sup>10</sup>: it juxtaposes worlds with incompatible structures, where histories and times merge their surface lines and sublayers. Multiple possible worlds coexist in a space that becomes ambiguous, difficult to locate anywhere other than within the lines of *Note on....* Some worlds are fragmentary (barely sketched, like the scene when the Italian courtesans are surrounded by young men in puffy pants who gesture to the student that 'everything is true'), while others are masterfully crafted.

### **Power relations and an inter-imperial perspective**

From the intertwining of these universes, the histories of the von Maiowitz and Massong families emerge, constructed and deconstructed simultaneously. Their names are suggestive of the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious mix of the Banat region. Examined through the lens of these multiple interferences, this region highlights a *marginal-central* area whose specific nature would question the hegemony of the centre and would encourage the expansion of the national field of attraction (sometimes the forces of national contortion). However, when considering the transformation catalysed by the unequal power relations (specific to the inter-imperial<sup>11</sup> tradition of Central and Eastern Europe), we should outline a space marked by creolisation<sup>12</sup>.

From this perspective, the intra- and inter-systemic relations that fuel the laws of cultural interference (cf. Even-Zohar, 2005, 52) acquire particular, often traumatizing, values. The involvement of hierarchies and the tracking of domination dynamics distinguish creolisation from hybridisation (primarily known through Homi Bhabha's book, *The Location of Culture*). In other words, while hybridisation predominantly suggests the mixing of equal elements, creolisation highlights the means of connection – following in the footsteps of Édouard Glissant, who started from the Caribbean reality to arrive at a comprehensive vision of a transforming world (cf. Glissant, 1990).

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<sup>10</sup> I use this concept in the line of Michel Foucault: "real places, actual places [...] and which are a kind of counter-sites" (cf. Foucault, 1994, 752).

<sup>11</sup> I adopt the concept of inter-imperial(ity) from Laura Doyle, *Inter-imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor and the Literary Arts of Alliance*, 2020. The prefix *inter-* refers to the empires that interact, as well as the multitude of subjective positions within empires, between empires, or against them.

<sup>12</sup> It is the conceptual core around which revolves the recent book written by Anca Pârvolescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizarea modernului. Transilvania la răscrucea imperiilor (Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires)*, translated from English by Ciprian Șulea, revised by the authors. Sibiu: "Lucian Blaga" University, 2024.

The world represented in Daniel Vighi's novel is also in constant metamorphosis. Baron von Mairowitz is ill, withdrawn in his room, and dreams almost incessantly of another world – somewhere on the border between reality and imagination. Illicit love affairs, a child born out of wedlock, humiliation, punishment, adventure, or failed careers shake both the aristocrat's and the carpenter's family, united by the feelings aroused by Rozalia Massong (the mother of Iuliu Manoilă, the student's only friend), as well as by their attachment to a creolised chronotope – where the linguistic stamp is not just polyglot, but manifests an interglot openness: it suggests conflicts, evokes inequalities, sketches hierarchies. By leveraging a linguistic (especially anthroponymic) element that projects the imprints of the political, social, and economic regimes, including their contestation (cf. Pârvulescu, Boatcă, 2024, 76), *Note on Recent Years* melts, in the deep layers of the narrative, the corpuscles aggregated by the relationships and the transformations that are characteristic of inter-imperiality and enhances the tension of the crepuscule.

In the case of Milisav Savić's novel, the (familial, social, political) power relations intensify the disorienting dialectic of borders, ideologies, and the configuration of individual or collective mentality. It is no wonder, therefore, that through hesitations, failures, disappointments, and successes the protagonist evolves within an uncertain paradigm, blending together the depth of introspection and the scattering of journalistic pursuits, emotional enthusiasm and sensory impulses, enthusiasm and scepticism. He tries to escape from this web when, in tumultuous circumstances, he is forced to choose between being complicit in evil (through indifference) and explicitly assuming rebellion. On the level of ethical particles that traverse the story, with their crises and/or recoveries, *Bread and Fear* includes essayistic parentheses about the delicate relationship between moral responsibility and creative vocation. Inserted into the narrative mosaic, Ivo Andrić and Danilo Kiš operate on different levels of refuge. In Andrić's case, literature isolates itself from the present on a protective fictional island, while for Danilo Kiš, it constitutes the domain for organizing the charges that perceive and demystify a reality that is difficult to understand.

### **The freedom to build, the freedom to imagine**

Symbolically and existentially, the narratives explore a generous reservoir of references. At the same time, they reshape the relationship between life and death – of the characters (with their plural identities), of histories, and of storytelling. Unfolding as a system of branches and intersections, the recursive storytelling in Daniel Vighi's novel generates a change in the ontological level through the interference of multiple secondary worlds, which include hypotheses and intertextual suggestions.

Iuliu listens while he talks to him about the purpose of their wandering through the town streets. He tells him things he has probably read somewhere. Their journey is very necessary, he says. Everything will be revealed to them at the end of the long and challenging road that awaits them. They will be dead for the world here and be reborn in the world there, above which they will see the sign of the book, of the cup, of the pilgrim. (Vighi, 1989)

Through the narrative strategies it employs (juxtaposition, overlapping, and false attribution), the narrative justifies its belonging to postmodernism, with the specification that the doubled exposure and the fracturing of accepted information also determine the paradoxical coexistence of times, not just space. The area configured in *Note on Recent Years* is, therefore, one of transition, where the present and the past blend through the articulations of the imaginary and configure an intermediate and visionary interval. In other words, history and fiction switch places: recognised history transforms into fiction, fiction substitutes real history, and reality dissipates, carried by the currents of ambiguity. Most often, the metamorphosis occurs subtly in a narrative that melts plans, ages, and worlds. However, there is also the episodic-clarifying insertion of the connecting bridge, which – due to its figural nature – does not diminish the dominant ambiguity in the discursive mechanism of the novel:

“After all, we can sift through the heap of impressions and memories as much as we like,” he says, almost happy to have found this bridge, this compromise that gives him the freedom to continue the discussions. “We can search for another image. We can build another setting. Who’s to stop us?” (Vighi, 1989)

The authorial voice, as well as the narrator-character, always have multiple options, because the resources of the concrete and the potential of the imaginary are hard to anticipate, just as surprising is the continuous need for fiction that Luliu acknowledges at the train station - a non-place that intensifies loneliness (cf. Augé, 1995, 93) - at the moment of parting from his student friend. Grosso modo, the narrative contradicts the temporal interval established in the title, because the acrobatics of fiction lead the characters beyond time. The freedom of the imaginary breaks historical threads and, as such, annuls time, transforming chronology into a useless instrument.

Chronological sequentiality is also disregarded, though by other means, in Savić’s novel, which shifts (through disorienting pirouettes) from first to third person and from the factual germinal humus to reticular fiction or even to the yet untouched potential of epic imaginary – ‘that first essence and form of storytelling, the melody of that language yet unspoken.’ (Savić, 1996) The composite structure of the narrative draws attention through the diversity of biographical combinations and the narrative velocity. On one hand, they are meant to suggest the incandescence of the connection between existence and fiction. On the other hand, they highlight persistence in the paradigmatic register of reflexivity, parable, and endowment with meaning.

But just as literature is nothing but the repetition, with variations, of the same infinite story, so too life is nothing but the repetition of experiences we have already had. At my next Serbian language class for foreigners, I will place on the lectern a loaf of bread baked on the morning of the same day and a bottle of monastery wine; I will invite the students to come closer and I will say: “This is *bread*, and this is *wine*.” [...] Dead heroes cannot be resurrected, says father. But new stories about them can always be invented and told – as long as we hope for a new morning. And that’s no small matter. (Savić 1996)

## Conclusions

Novels of fragility humbled before history, *Notes on Recent Years* and *Bread and Wine* testify to the regenerative power of words and express different forms of revolt against political superstructures (a common element in Central European cultures). They map plural worlds that bear their wounds in time while retelling the story anew – *a mise en abyme* of the paradox of ephemerality and consistency that shapes time, (post)memory, imagination, and storytelling. Reading them in parallel, one can observe that these two novels shake the traditional model imposed by cultural geographies (with boundaries established by national literatures), metabolize the Central European ethos, and bring into discussion sets of coordinates that are integrable to the horizon outlined by world literature.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In the “Introduction” to “Romanian Literature as World Literature”, the necessity to stop thinking of national literatures as linguistic equivalents of territorial maps is justified in the line of Wai Chee Dimock. (Cf. Moraru, Terian, 2017, p. 16). Facilitating reading within a transnational framework also forms the foundation of McDonald and Suleiman’s work, 2010.