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**Magical Realism as the Poetological Framework  
 for the Concept of the Other and the Different  
 in the Croatian 21<sup>st</sup> Century Novel**

Realizm magiczny jako poetologiczne ramy  
 koncepcji Drugiego i Innego w chorwackiej powieści XXI wieku

**Abstract**

The poetical determinants of magical realism, although several elements had already been present in Croatian literature from at least the time of the generation of the „Borgesian“ writers, and also earlier, have not been the subject of more in-depth research until recently. And yet, novelistic prose in Croatia, under the influence of similar movements in the World-literature scene, is still a witness to its appearance. In our investigation we will research the elements of magical realism in relation to the concepts and constructs of the Other and the Different in the corpus of these recent Croatian novels: *Baba Jaga je snijela jaje* (*Baba Jaga Laid an Egg*) (2008) by Dubravke Ugrešić, *Črna mati zemla* (*Black Mother the Earth*) (2013) and *Ciganin ali najljepši* (*Gypsy but the Most Beautiful*) (2016) by Kristijan Novak as well as *Prevaranti: Iskupljenje* (*The Cheaters: Redemption*) (2016) by Dorotea Vučić. Literary-theoretical approaches have linked magical realism (since its beginnings in Latin American Literatures) with statements on the Other and the Different (Postcolonial approaches), and in this research we will present how elements of the same function within the context of the 21st century Croatian novel. In her novel, D. Ugrešić uses the theme of aging in the post-transitional nations of Eastern Europe to present the context of the construction of the Other and the Different, realised with the aid of magical-realist elements and characteristics. K. Novak presents a psycho-socially traumatised child in his novel *Črna mati zemla* as well as the Romani community in *Ciganin, ali najljepši*. D. Vučić also uses this same ethnic group as her theme in her novel, which among all these cited novels is closest to the genre of magical realism, yet her Other is the former collective state of South Slavs, which is literarily constructed as a magical space titled Tromeđe (Tripoint), with emphasis on historical precedents allowing its recognition. After the topic of magical realism is

discussed, through a reading of the most important theoretical texts, as a mode and genre as well as its relationship to realism and the fantastic, the presence of these elements in the aforementioned texts will be placed under scrutiny, so that after this, with the aforementioned poetological framework, the concepts and constructs of the Other and the Different will be investigated. Magical realism is recognised as a mode which deconstructs dominant metanarratives (familial, social, political, founded in tradition or actual, universal and local). Its incorporation into the mimetic narrative of novelistic prose texts informs the entirely actual social engagement of these authors, emphasised, in fact by these aforementioned concepts. The deconstruction of dominant metanarratives and the focus of the differences in human experience and the concept of reality, as well as the approaches of the magical realistic mode, are considered here in the poetics of the 21st Croatian novel.

**Keywords:** Croatian novel, post-transition, magical realism, Other, Otherness, Dubravka Ugrešić, Kristijan Novak, Dorotea Vučić

**Słowa kluczowe:** powieść chorwacka, post-transformacja, realizm magiczny, Inne, Inność, Dubravka Ugrešić, Kristijan Novak, Dorotea Vučić

When the Croatian novel of the 2000s is called into question, we encounter the mention of magical realism more in the sense of a recognition of individual elements or narrative techniques rather than the strict genre definition of an individual text.<sup>1</sup> The characteristic of the majority of novels selected here is that, as far as their content is concerned, they are primarily constructed with the Croatian and Eastern European (post)transitional social and political reality at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in view: furthermore, also the position of marginal figures and individuals marked by difference in relation to the collective to which they belong. All three of the authors selected here have included mythological, (Dubravka Ugrešić and Kristijan Novak), and even ethnographical (ur)Slavic and pre-Christian intertexts in their constructs, while K. Novak and D. Vučić have also added Romani folklore and belief to their intertexts. The aforementioned intertext in these novels corresponds to the magical-realist mode. This relationship between a mimetically constructed post-transitional reality (and the dominant metanarratives<sup>2</sup> within the same) and its magical

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<sup>1</sup> Thus B. Čegec claims that Dorotea Vučić's novel *Prevaranti: Iskupljenje* (2016) is a „Romanesque story positioned from one side between the fantastic and 'magical realism' as we can recognise such in the brilliant writings of South American writers, and this 'magical realism' is enacted by the mediation of mythological, biblical and other creations, as well as of the factually verifiable history of the former Yugoslavia and the new Croatia, 'the positive side of clichés' and of that which will be recognised as the 'distinctive Balkans'." (Čegec, 2016) On the other hand, within the accompanying text on the same, we find the statement that this book is something of an alternative history of a geographical Tripoint, which can be recognised by the readers of our climate and of works of speculative fiction (the text is unsigned).

<sup>2</sup> „Metanarrative or grand narrative or metanarrative is a term developed by Jean-François Lyotard to mean a theory that tries to give a totalizing, comprehensive account to various historical events, experiences, and social, cultural phenomena based upon the appeal to universal truth or universal values. In this context, the narrative is a story that functions to legitimize power, authority, and social customs. A grand narrative or metanarrative is one that claims to explain various events in history, gives meaning by connecting disperse events and

magical-realist „estrangement“<sup>3</sup> will be investigated on the stylistic, semantic, textual and narrative levels as the poetological framework for the construction and concept of the Other and the Different in all three novels.

### 1. Magical Realism as Mode or Genre and its Relation to the Other as a Suspended Object

As Alejo Carpentier<sup>4</sup> elaborated, the original concept of magical realism or the „marvellous real“ was connected to the mythic arch-text of an autochthonic American culture and that which was different from the concept (and construct) of the fantastic in European literatures.<sup>5</sup> In the original culture it is not necessary to reveal the fantastic by undermining or transcending reality with abstract forms or a combination of images. (Carpentier 1995:75) Wendy B. Faris (1995) terms magical realism a genre and mode, Amaryll Chanady (1995) terms it a literary mode which can be found in various types of prose and which, as a genre, is not subject to historical and geographical boundaries, displaying a critical attitude to the idea of the territorialisation of the imaginary. Lusila-Ines Mena emphasises that the main theoretical problems of magical realism are in the definition of its contents, and not in the naming of its trends. (Mena, 1978:65) According to M. H. Abrams, who presents it as one of

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*phenomena by appealing to some kind of universal knowledge or schema. The term grand narratives can be applied to a wide range of thoughts which includes Marxism, religious doctrines, belief in progress, universal reason, and others. The concept was criticized by Jean-François Lyotard in his work, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1979). In this text, Lyotard refers to what he describes as the postmodern condition, which he characterized as increasing scepticism toward the totalizing nature of 'metanarratives' or 'grand narratives' (...) According to the advocates of postmodernism, metanarratives have lost their power to convince stories that are told in order to legitimize various versions of "the truth." With the transition from modern to postmodern, Lyotard proposes that metanarratives should give way to 'petits récits', or more modest and "localized" narratives.* “ (<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Metanarrative> 10. 1. 2019.)

<sup>3</sup>In order to counteract an irresistible sense of disbelief, magical realists present known (close and familiar) things in an unusual way (flying carpets, Nabokovian butterflies, collective amnesias, etc.) accentuating their inherent magical qualities. By doing so, magical realists accomplish what the Russian formalists termed „estrangement“ for the purpose of a radical emphasis of the common elements of reality, elements which are omnipresent, yet have become almost invisible, essentially due to their closeness, the fact they are well known. (acc: Simpkins, 1988:145)

<sup>4</sup>The concept of magical realism was the idea of the German art historian Franz Roh (cf. Roh, 1995), yet the literary genre in Latin America under the influence of the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, who in his highly regarded essay „Lo real maravilloso“ (1949), provided a more influential interpretation of magical realism as a phenomenon, which was considered inseparable from the way in which non-Europeans (especially those who belong to Hispano-American cultures) conceive of reality: „In fact, what Franz Roh calls magical realism is simply Expressionist painting(..)“ (Carpentier 1995:102) „(...)the marvellous real that I defend and that is our own marvellous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace and always was commonplace.“ (Carpentier, 1995:104)

<sup>5</sup>Carpentier's concept of „lo real maravilloso americano“ is often provided as a description of a „magical“ reality which is not created by the imagination or the subconscious, which he recognises as an artificial means to „provoke the miraculous“ in Europe, but is actually inherent in the myths and beliefs of non-Europeans. (Delbaere-Garant, 1995:252) Thus, magical realism is originally constructed from the position of difference, in border regions, in a deviation from the influence of hegemonic cultural centres and this difference is its immanent characteristic.

the genres of the postmodern novel, the writers of magical realism continually connect a realistic means of narration with the fantastic and fable, as well as with the elements of myth (Abrams, 1999: 195). Zdenko Lešić defines „magical realism“ as one of the aspects of the structure of a literary-artistic text<sup>6</sup>, which in literary theory and criticism now has a permanent name (and can thus be defined, as the burlesque, grotesque, parody and travesty can be). He also emphasises that what is understood by such aspects, on the one hand, is a certain stance toward the historical world, and on the other, a stance toward other works of literature and the literary tradition generally. (Lešić 2005:318). Milivoj Solar considers magical realism as a technique, one which G. G. Marquez incorporated into the framework of his historical novels. In this case, there is no difference between reality as understood in myth and magic and that which belongs to real historical circumstance. (Solar, 2011:167)

According to Wendy B. Faris, there are five primary characteristics of magical realism. The text includes the irreducible elements of magic;<sup>7</sup> descriptions express the presence of the phenomenal world in detail; the reader can sense certain doubts in the attempt to harmonise two contradictory understandings of an event; narration unites different domains (in the perception of reality) and, finally, magical realism de-establishes common ideas of time, space and identity. (cf. Faris 1995:167-174) Here we can notice in the very definition of irreducible elements (inexplicable apparitions from the perspective of general laws as were established in the modern age, post-enlightenment and empiricism) that there is an evident divergence from rationalistic metanarratives and the universality of enlightenment epistemology. Certain theoreticians of magical realism maintain that it is a part of the fantastic in literature or that fantastic elements are constitutive parts for magical realism as an artistic procedure or mode (Flores, Faris, Lešić, Simpkins), while others maintain a difference between the fantastic and magical realism, as in the second instance there is a lack of the creation of an imaginary world or a distorted reality (Leal)<sup>8</sup>, or due to the fact that the

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<sup>6</sup>According to Roman Ingaarden's thesis on the aspectualisation of the structure of a literary text, which is, closely linked to the "metaphysical qualities" of a work, i.e. with those final forms which convey meaning, and which "play an important part during the construction of the aesthetic concretion of a work during the time of reading". A special vision of an object constructs it in a certain way; on the other hand, a specially structured text establishes a certain vision of the object. (Lešić, 2005:317)

<sup>7</sup>„Most essential among my criteria for inclusion in the mode of magical realism is the existence of an "irreducible element" that is unexplainable according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated by modern, post-enlightenment empiricism, with its heavy reliance on sensory data, together with a preponderance of realistic event, character, and description that conform to the conventions of literary realism. In other words, magical realism is a combination of realism and the fantastic in which the former predominates.“(Faris 2002:102)

<sup>8</sup>According to Roger Caillois, the fantastic is especially linked to a breach, an unusual, almost unbearable intrusion into the real world (*Au Coeur Du Fantastique*, 1965) which is not identical to magical realism where the marvellous is inherent to it. (author's note)

fantastic, in its more specific meaning, (as defined by Todorov for example), reaffirms a western, hegemonic, and yet contradictory concepts of the supernatural, as well as a frightening and logically impossible one, in contradiction to a rational concepts: magical realism presents radically different world views (rational and magical) as well as natural and supernatural events without explicit aporia, as is the case in the fantastic (eg. Chanady, 2003:429-430). Luis Leal uses, as his point of departure, the writer's approach to the reality from which he does not attempt to escape into some imaginary world, thus attempting to comprehend what is mysterious in things, life and human actions. Magical realism, as Leal argues, does not use, as surrealism does, the motifs of dream, nor does it distort reality or create imaginary worlds as is the procedure in the fantastic. (Leal, 1995:121) In his book *El Realismo Magico y Otros Esayos*, Enrique Anderson Imbert (1976) claims that magical realism should not be confused with „fantastic literature “ and that magical realism appears when we „are present at the scene of a new creation. (...) The strategy of writers consists of the suggestion of a supernatural atmosphere, without a separation from nature, and its tactic consists of the deformation of reality in the imagination of neurotic characters. (...) The magical, the marvellous is not found in reality but in the skill of transformation.“ (Soldatić 1978: 30-31)

Finally it is important to state that, although we are aware that certain theoreticians of magical realism see this phenomenon as exclusively linked to the culture and literature of Latin America,<sup>9</sup> in the context of this analysis we include it as one of the strategies and forms of postmodern literature: this following the argument of decentralisation, respectively the conscious tendency of postmodern authors toward a discourses of power which creates privileged centres (of language, class, race, gender, nation), as elaborated by Theo L. D'haen.<sup>10</sup> In his work, Stephen Slemon (1995) provided an in-depth argument for magical realism as the central element in the concept of postcolonial literature.<sup>11</sup> The suspension

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<sup>9</sup>E.g. Dalibor Soldatić claims that terms such as magical realism, fantastic realism and marvellous realism, are specifically ties to the context of the development of the Latin American novel from the 1940s to the 1970s, as in this context they have a specific meaning, although they were also applied to the works of others from other countries. (Soldatić 1978:30) Such conclusions have been superseded judging from recent research.

<sup>10</sup>The author states that the writers of the 1960s and 1970s, then considered to be an especially idiosyncratic group or the representatives of a national movement or trend, were placed among the postmodernists in the 1980s, and he himself maintains that many among that group can be simply considered postmodernists (e.g. Angela Carter, Salman Rushdi, D. M. Thomas, as Richard Todd had already defined them). Geert Lernout makes a similar conclusion when writing on postmodernists in Canada who follow the tradition of Borges, Grass, Nabokov, Rushdi, Calvino. (D'haen 1995:193-4)

<sup>11</sup>“*In the language of the narration in a magical-realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. (...) Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the 'other,' a situation which creates disjunction within each of*

between two systems of discourse is similar to the suspension of the colonial subject between two or more cultural systems. A resistance to realism is a resistance to the coloniser, an argument followed by Linda Hutcheon who emphasises the dimension of dialogues with history, which is characteristic of postcolonial and postmodern literature. W. Faris maintains that the incorporation of magical realism as a mode, with its irreducible elements which bring the dominant discourse into question, itself constructs a kind of liberating poetics (Faris, 2002:103) so it is on the basis of this that we will place the concept of the Other and the Different as a form of the suspended subject in the novels under research.

## **2. *Baba Yaga Laid an Egg* (2008.) by Dubravka Ugrešić – Feminine Old Age as Otherness**

The prior circumstances concerning an international publishing project greatly influenced the concept of this novel, its structure, as well as its narrative strategy. (Primorac, 2008).<sup>12</sup> In his critical work, Saša Ćirić recognises that „the primarily Russian folkloristic material serves as an impetus and mask for an entirely modern and Ugrešić-like narrative on the phenomenon of ageing, on the only remaining ideology of a post-World which is inscribed in the space of the human body, on the relationship between generations and an epoch of eastern-European transition.“ (Ćirić, 2008)

D. Ugrešić's construction of characters has its origins in two cultural systems – the post-transitional (the realistic construct of the contemporary reality of old women in Croatia and Eastern Europe, emphasised in the first part of the novel), and another, long lost magical realism which I can interpret as the undermining of a generally accepted image of reality, respectively a refutation of a colonising post-transition culture and further (as a refutation of the dominant global metanarratives of old age and human existence generally). With feminine old age as the position of the Other, and the transformation of the mythological substrate of Baba Yaga (a witch) into the literary (also consciously intensified as the position of the Other) a critical distance is enacted, furthering it from traditional and contemporary

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*the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences.”* (Slemon 1995:409) *“This suspension between two discursive systems resembles the colonial subject's suspension between two—or more—cultural systems, and hence serves to reflect the postcolonial situation especially well. It has therefore served a decolonising role, one in which new voices have emerged, an alternative to European realism.”* (Faris 2002:103)

<sup>12</sup>Prior to the writing of this novel, a work of research was published on the mythological and folkloric traditions of the Slavs, especially Slavic narratives about baba Yaga, which resulted in the glossary of Baba Yaga for beginners (as an integral segment of the novel). (Primorac, 2008).

social, psychoanalytical, and also political metanarratives,<sup>13</sup> as well as from personal and familial ones (the patriarchal metanarrative of motherhood).

The Slavic mythological intertext informs a „marvellous reality“ on several narrative levels. The novel consists of three parts which are linked by allusions to time and characters or to an integral narrator or style. In the first part (in autodiegetic narration,<sup>14</sup> the element which can be read in a magical realist key is an invasion of birds, firstly in a suburb in Zagreb in which the protagonist lives, and further in latter parts of the novel, in large European cities. Space is estranged by this invasion of birds, and the motif of the bird itself is a link to a mythic intertext.<sup>15</sup> „Nobody notices“ this invasion of birds, although it appears as a hyperbolic element in the construction of reality, by which it metaphorically alludes to an invasion of old women in European cities which (also) nobody notices. In the second part of the novel (*Ask, but know, every question does not lead to good*)<sup>16</sup> and identification-metaphor is realised which has been hinted at thus far: female character – Baba Yaga – bird. The core of the second part is the story of three older women (Pupi, Kukli i Bebi) who arrive at a Czech spa for rejuvenation. Every one of them is estranged (in the literary sense) by some irreducible element (characterisation by the marvellous) in an otherwise detailed and realistic procedure of portraiture, and this, in itself, represents its deconstruction. E.g. Beba discovers details on her own body that allude to a bird (the realisation of this metaphor is, but remains, in the grotesque conceptualisation of an old woman’s body).<sup>17</sup> She speaks languages which she does

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<sup>13</sup>When mention is made of old age, it is linked to capitalist logic, which was something Karolina Hrga spoke about, also taking into account what Judith Butler had to say: „*The exclusive matrix which generates sex and gender inequality, functions in a similar when an elderly body is in question, which, as is the case of a sick or disabled body, is treated as useless and unmarketable or simply as an anomaly which is to be discarded in a system.*“ (Hrga, 2011:41)

<sup>14</sup>„The first part, *Podi tamo – ne znam kamo, donesi to – ne znam što* (*Go there – I don’t know where, bring this – I don’t know what*), talks about the relationship between a mother and daughter: a daughter who occasionally comes over from abroad to her elderly mother who lives alone in a new suburb in Zagreb. The text is written in the first person and can be read as autobiographical, as the narrator and the author are the same character.“ (Primorac, 2008)

<sup>15</sup>Thus, Baba Yaga, in some Slavic mythic folklore and according to some mythological-ritual traditions and interpretations, is construed as „(...) *mistress of birds, from which she has a cottage on chicken legs and a nose which looks like a beak* (...)“ (Ugrešić, 2008:236) Also, she shares the character of a witch, and witches possesses the power of metamorphosis. „She most often turns into a black bird (crow, black hen, magpie).“ (Ugrešić, 2008:240)

<sup>16</sup>The title of both chapters are Baba Yaga’s puzzles or replies. The puzzle in the third part, according to the interpreter, should be evidence of Baba Yaga’s wisdom and manipulative power. (acc. Ugrešić, 2008:302)

<sup>17</sup>„*Beba je apatično čupnula onaj 'grmić' dolje... A kada je htjela krenuti u kupaonicu, u jednoj sekundi učinilo joj se da umjesto suhog, sivkastog 'grmića' vidi sjajno, crno perje. Beba se posve približila ogledalu, i gle, sada joj se činilo da je s toga mjesta promatra ptičje oko, što više, da joj to sjajno, zlobno ptičje oko namiguje. Iš, vraže...! – protisnula je Beba, stegnula frotirni haljetak i uputila se u kupaonicu.*“ (Ugrešić, 2008:119)

(*Beba apathetically grabbed the 'little bush' down there...And when she wanted to go to the bathroom, in a second it seemed to her, that instead of that dry, grey 'little bush' she saw a bright, black feather. Beba got close*

not know,<sup>18</sup> and breaks the law of probability, without any conscious knowledge about what is happening to her, winning a significant amount in a hotel casino. Thus, she has the ability to foresee winning combinations of numbers, yet leads to her suffering abuse at the hands of a male.<sup>19</sup> The appearance of the second old woman, Kukla, is accompanied with an unusual sense of being touched by the wind which people feel when they meet her.<sup>20</sup> Kukla has telekinetic powers,<sup>21</sup> yet all her husbands have died. The same happens to the character Mr.

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*to the mirror, and lo, it seemed that from that place she was being watched by a bird's eye, that this bright, malicious bird's eye was winking at her. Fie, the devil...! – Beba shrieked, tightened her bathrobe and entered the bathroom.)*

<sup>18</sup> „Kukla i Pupa su je iznenađeno slušale. – Ti znaš ruski?! – pitala je Kukla. – Ne. A zašto pitate? – pitala je Beba. Beba je citirala stih iz Puškinove poeme Ruslan i Ljudmila. Bila je to, osim povremenih lapsusa, još jedna od Bebinih osobitosti, to da povremeno nešto lane na jezicima o kojima inače nije imala pojma. Bebi su se takvi napadaji javljali iznenada, kao u snu, i zato je Kukla i Pupa nisu budile.“ (Ugrešić, 2008:129)

*(Kuka and Pupa listened to her in surprise. – You know Russian?! – Kuka asked. – No. Why do you ask? – Beba asked. Beba recited a line from Pushkin's Ruslan and Ludmila. This was, besides the occasional slip of the tongue, another one of Beba's specialties, that sometimes she would blurt something in a language she had no idea about. Beba's attacks of such would happen haphazardly, as in a dream, and because of this Kukla and Pupa didn't wake her up).*

<sup>19</sup> „Umjesto da uzvрати udarac, ili da se rasplače, ili da nešto kaže, Beba je u potpunom kaosu izgovorila seriju brojeva. Tip je bio dripac, lijenčina, ali mu nije usfalo mašte, pa je zapisao brojeve, sutradan kupio lutriju i, gle, dobio pozamašnu sumu novaca, što Bebi, dakako, nije spomenuo. Otada je Bebina veza krenula nizbrdo, jer ju je tip često šamarao, prepadao, vriješao, sve u nadi da će Beba ponovo ispljunuti neku dobitnu kombinaciju.“ (Ugrešić, 2008:152)

*(Instead of returning the hit, or crying or saying something, Beba chaotically enunciated a series of numbers. The guy was a twerp, a slacker, yet wasn't lacking in imagination, so he wrote the numbers down and the day after bought a lottery ticket, and lo, won a significant sum of money which he, naturally, didn't tell Beba. From this point on, Beba's relationship took a downturn because the guy would beat her, frighten her, insult her, all in the hope that Beba would spit out another winning combination.)*

<sup>20</sup> „I još nešto, osobama koje bi se našle pored nje znalo se činiti da u njezinu prisustvu osjećaju neko nejasno strujanje, nešto poput lagala lahora, što li...“ (Ugrešić, 2008:133)

*(And furthermore, it seemed to people who were next to her that in her presence they would feel an unclear current, something like a light breeze, perhaps...)*

„- Čudno... - rekao je Mr. Shake.

- Što je čudno?

- Uz vas se osjećam kao pored ventilatora... - rekao je i dodao. – Naravno, uz pretpostavku da je vruć ljetni dan...“ (Ugrešić, 2008:144)

*(-Strange...-Mr Shake said.*

*-What is strange?*

*-Next to you I feel like I'm beside a ventilator- he said and added. – Naturally, with the suggestion that it's a hot summer day)*

<sup>21</sup> „Ponekad su te dnevne sanjarije bile tako jake da se Kukli činilo da su stvarne. Kada je bila djevojčica oko nje se, od siline umišljaja, ponešto zaista i događalo: nešto bi se pomaklo, zaškripalo, srušilo se, palo na pod... S vremenom je naučila da hoda svijetom oprezno, kao po jajima, tiha i šutljiva kao sjena, praćena strujanjima zraka za koja nije znala odakle dolaze.“ (Ugrešić, 2008:145)

*(Sometimes these daydreamings were so strong that they appeared to Kukla to be real. When she was a girl, from letting her mind wander so, sometimes something would actually happen: something would move, screech,*



Shake (a representative of the western industry of the „dream of a perfect body“) while teaching her golf, and this in a very bizzare way – he suffocated on a ball which flew into his mouth.<sup>22</sup>

When we observe the intertextual level of the construct of the Other and the Different in this novel, an important element is represented by the procedure of the *mise en abyme* of the integration of fable. Thus, besides the fable-like quality of the protagonists' speech, estranged by this and part of their magical-realist characterisation, fable is integrated by the inclusion of two proto-texts. The first is Pushkin's poem *Ruslan and Ludmila* (the procedure of open citation: in one part of the text Beba recites verses from it in Russian, which she does not speak). There is a sub-fable within the poem (a 3<sup>rd</sup> degree text in relation to its referent) on the late love of an old witch who was spurned by an old man in disgust, once madly in love with her, which is part of the culturally common hegemonic conceptualisation of feminine old age, respectively the traditional metanarrative. The second proto-text is the Russian fable of Ivan Tsarevitch who searches for an egg, for in it is the hidden love of his lady, which will be ironically reinterpreted in the aforementioned Mr Shake's death (a typical post-transitional character).<sup>23</sup> Thus, the death of this representative of the „anti-Baba yaga industry“ cannot be interpreted outside the ideological framework of this novel which, with its grotesque conceptualisation of the corporeal, undermines the normative narratives of a young and healthy body within the dominant social metanarrative of western civilisation, and which turns old age into a socially scandalous phenomenon to be displaced. Ugrešić's characters of the old women are themselves displaced, spatially and on the level of character as decentred, suspended subjects. The mimetic level of the text thus realises an image of the state of the things in the post-transitional nations of Eastern Europe, abruptly opened to western consumerism, as well as the consequences of it.<sup>24</sup> In the novel, meanwhile, from the position

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*collapse, fall to the floor...In time she learned to walk the world carefully, as on eggshells, quiet and silent, followed by currents of wind she knew not from whence)*

<sup>22</sup> „Muškarac je poskočio od veselja, bravo, savršen udarac, stisnuo šaku i pokazao prema Kukli uzdignuti palac, pohvalivši je za dobar udarac. Loptica je načas zastala u zraku, ili se Kukli samo tako pričiniilo, a onda je svom snagom jurnula i zabila se u muškarčeva širom otvorena usta. Muškarac je pao na tlo kao pokošen.“ (Ugrešić, 2008:145)

*(The man jumped for joy, bravo, a perfect hit, clenched his fist and raised a thumb to Kukla, complimenting her on a perfect hit. The ball briefly stopped in mid-air, or it seemed so to Kukla, and then it sped with all force and forced its way into the man's wide open mouth. The man fell to the ground as if mowed down).*

<sup>23</sup>Kukla, thus, tells the fable herself, which is followed by the author's allusive comment: „Smrt Mr. Shakea čučala je u bezazlenoj loptici za golf.“ (Mr Shake's death squatted in a harmless golf ball)(Ugrešić, 2008:146.)

<sup>24</sup> And yet, it is important to note that one is not dealing with a critique of post-transition exclusively. Nikola Đoković navodi: „The mythic layer of the novel is the 'given' point of departure based on a centuries old oral

of the Other (as in fable) the old women reach a position of power, generated primarily by those very same elements which constructed the Different in the magical-realist mode (supernatural abilities, characterisation by miraculous, irreducible elements).

In this second part of the novel, the aforementioned fable of Ivan Tsarevitch and Ivan Budalina is reinterpreted once more in a grotesque and carnivalesque way, through the (at first glance) typically post-transitional character of Mevludin, a young man who came from a Bosnia wracked by war and now works in a Czech spa as a masseuse dressed as a Turk. Yet this costume cannot hide his bizarre handicap: after a grenade fell in close proximity, he now has a permanent erection yet feels nothing and cannot return to Bosnia as he would be taken there as figure of fun. Mevludin is, thus, in the position of the Other and the Different. He will be „freed from the spell“ only after a girl falls in love with him, and she is in fact Mr Shake's daughter. Mevludin is constructed by citation, when taking the proto-text into account,<sup>25</sup> and yet he is also, in his magical-realist characterisation, a suspended subject between at least two discourses, as his character is in contrast to dominant stereotypes on several different levels (national, gender, class etc.).<sup>26</sup> As in the fable when Ivan receives the lady's love after giving her the egg in which love is hidden, so Mevludin frees himself from his handicap at the moment when the girl eats the egg he had offered her, sharing his meal with her.<sup>27</sup> Through

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*heritage so that the author, ironically playing with a mythic, gynophobic heritage (which 'sees' feminine old age as an exponent of a female 'other', yet in its foundations is of a truly witch-like and demonic nature, as well as its ties to the chthonic world of death and dying), as well as the placement of this heritage in the entirely contemporary socio-political context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, questions the role myth has in the foundation of 'gender' identities and the creation of the 'public image' of female 'gender'. What is under question here is, thus, the politicisation of a mythic narrative, as well as of mythic simplifications with the purpose of forming a type of normative public stance, not only toward women of older age, but also in a mediated way, toward the entire female gender, of which the old woman is its 'most drastic' exponent. “ (Đoković, 2016)*

<sup>25</sup>„- E, pameti nemam... - živnuo je mladić. – Ja sam ti, bona, blento. A ko se rodi kô blento, taj i umre kô blento.“ (Ugrešić, 2008:108)

*(Hey, I've got no smarts... -the young man said with cheer. – I am truly a nitwit. And who is born a nitwit, dies a nitwit.)*

<sup>26</sup>„Vratio bi se ja u svoju Bosnu, meni je u Bosni super fino bilo, čak i za vrijeme rata, al' moji bi me tamo ufatili u šegu. Mevlo Superman, Mevlo Zlatna Ćuna, znaš kakvi su naši... (...) Ovakav ne mogu nazad, nit' sam muško, nit' sam žensko, sav sam nikakav...“ (Ugrešić, 2008:107)

*(I would go back to my Bosnia, Bosnia for me was super great, even when the war was on, yet my own would make fun of me there. Mevlo Superman, Mevlo Golden Prick, you know what our own are like... (...) I can't go back like this, I'm neither man, nor am I woman, I'm more or less gone...)*

<sup>27</sup>„U toj sekundi Mevlo je osjetio da ona napetost desetak centimetara ispod pupka popušta. Kao da se nešto teško odlomilo od njega i nečujno palo na pod. Mevlo je dobro znao što se događa... Kako ga je ona nesretna granata bila začarala, tako ga je ova nesretna djevojka s jajetom u ruci otčarala...“ (Ugrešić 2008:158-159)

*(In this second Mevlo felt that the tension ten centimetres below the navel was receding. As if something heavy had broken and silently fell to the floor. Mevlo knew quite well what was happening... As that unfortunate grenade had put him under a spell, so this unfortunate girl with an egg was freeing him from a spell)*

the simultaneous estrangement of space by the motif of the feather,<sup>28</sup> it is suggested to the reader that these three strange old women – Baba Yaga, as well as Melvudin’s friendship with Beba, influence the fortunate sequence of events.

Post-transitional metanarratives can be understood as a colonising discursive system of discourse that threatens the identity of the subject, with special emphasis on the fact that in D.Ugrešić’s case this subject is the Other and the Different – an old woman and, in the second fable, a young man – a war refugee with a handicap. Through a mythological matrix, the dominant cultural hierarchy is undermined by making it face what is suppressed, in which a rather ambivalent, yet, surprisingly strong construct of an old woman (grandmothers, witches, Baba Yaga) is disclosed. The aforementioned ambivalence of these female characters is also disclosed in the conflicting relationship between mother and daughter (the woman writer in the first part: her old mother smothers and also motivates her with an inscribed guilt; Pupa who separated herself from her in the second world war in order to save her, yet afterwards her daughter wants to hear nothing of her – Beba and her homosexual son for whom she blames herself etc.), in which a distance from patriarchal narratives can be read.

Magical realism, according to Slemon, enacts a decolonising role, in which new voices are birthed as an alternative to European realism. He also claims that the space in magical-realist texts, through typical descriptions of local backdrops, is a metonym for an entire postcolonial culture. (Slemon, 1995:411) A Czech thermal spa, Zagreb, Varna (as the city in which the narrator’s mother sends her daughter in search of common female roots– in the first part), in analogy to this, can be interpreted as analogies of a post-transitional culture (or some of its aspects) which are placed under scrutiny. In as much as the problems of post-transitional reality are a theme of literature, e.g. consumerism and an attitude toward man as an expendable good; or more specific ones from the nations of the former Yugoslavia, e.g. the consequences of war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, are understood here as the colonisation of the subject’s identity, the function of magical realism can be transferred to the field of the decolonisation of the subject, which is especially evident when representations of

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<sup>28</sup> „Mladić i djevojka bili su tako uronjeni u ljubavno šaputanje da nisu ni zamijetili da se digao lagani povjetarac i podigao ona pera razbacana po zelenoj tratini oko njih. Krošnje starog kestena zašumorile su, a zrakom je na sve strane letjelo perje...” (Ugrešić, 2008:214)

*(The young man and woman were so deep into whisperings of love that they hadn’t noticed that a gentle breeze had risen and lifted those feathers strewn on the grass around them. The branches of the old chestnut tree sounded, and feathers flew on all sides...)*

the Other and the Different are at the centre. In as much as we take old age as one pole in this position, then youth, childhood to be more exact, is its other pole, which we will consider in the case of K. Novak's novel.

### 3. Kristijan Novak, *Black Mother The Earth* (2013)– Trauma as the Experience of Otherness

Concepts of the Other and the Different are enacted in this novel on the level of psychemic and sociemic figures. Regarding the first, it is through its main protagonist, the writer Matija Dolenčec, who is psychologically formed by a suppressed childhood trauma. There are also several secondary characters who help form questions on the problems of a local community, the Croatian region of Međimurje (e.g. an abused, mentally disabled boy, also a victim of paedophilia, who commits suicide and is one of the catalysts for Matija's sense of guilt, yet who is characterised exclusively in a realistic and naturalistic mode). The basis of its story is the childhood trauma of losing a father, and after a series of firstly unexplained suicides in a village in Međimurje in 1991, which Matija Dolenčec at age 6 began to relate to himself, using them as the foundation for a false perception of his own identity. Contemporary research indicates the complex relationship between statements of trauma and forms of magical realism: thus Anja Mrak (2013) shows (using *Monkey Beach* from 2000 by E. Robinson as an example) how certain narrative strategies of magical realism create a practicable form for the representation of traumatic experience and memory. In the first chapter of Novak's novel (*Collectors of Secondary Waste*), he develops the psychological complexity of the main character in a mimetic mode (represented here as an adult) whose girlfriend, no longer able to listen to his false stories of his own past, by leaving him forces him to revert from this image of himself and confront reality. This is another type of the decentring of the subject whose identity is constructed in so-called fragments.<sup>29</sup> The problem field in which the magical-realist mode is to be developed here is the theme of the relationship between personal and collective trauma, as well as that between victimiser and victim. The question is raised whether the death of the boy's father is the exclusive catalyst for the inflection from one's own memory, and thus from personal identity, or if the small-town taboo of the phenomenon of death, as well as the social exclusion of the family of the

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<sup>29</sup>„The heterotopic, the cracks within both personal and collective identity, simultaneously deprive the disembodied contemporary individual of responsibility. This individual assumes the identity of a virtual imaginium, although it never belongs to him completely, as he does not really exist there. Yet, this ability of placement becomes a constitutive component of a new decentred subject.“ (Hrga, 2011:38)

deceased, has contributed anything to this. Or perhaps it is the awareness of the sexual abuse of a friend who could not or did not have the strength to help, and for whose suicide he now feels responsible. On the other hand, the question is raised whether collective mythic legends on the damnation of a Međimurje village (which are part of the dominant local metanarrative) contributed to the constructs of a child's consciousness and that of the collective (primarily to its prejudices). Or perhaps they are only a justification for the evil individuals carry within themselves.<sup>30</sup>

In the second part (expressed through an autodiegetic narrator in a letter to his girlfriend in which Matija finally discloses himself ,after succeeding to unravel the causes and consequences from 1991 after an unexpected discovery), the story of the protagonist's childhood is elaborated in analepsis. Socially isolated after his father's death and the death of others in his community and after deviations in his behaviour of which he was unaware, two grotesque creatures appear to Matija Dolenčec (originating from the context of these aforementioned legends), Hešto and Pujito, who disclose the hidden details from the lives of every suicide, and on the circumstances of the crimes committed in the village. Every one of these stories (on a hypodiegetic level), provides a very realistic construct on the dark realities of the lives of Matija's town-fellows (who now appear as murderers, criminals and perpetrators of domestic violence) and also the fact that Hešto and Pujito rapidly change from friends to a frightening threats: this functions as a signal that Matija's encounter with the evil in his own community has begun too soon, and also he has been marked by the differences of his own experience. Mythic beings are a characteristically irreducible element of magical realism (within the framework of the elaboration of the Other and the Different), and function as something which distances the child's discovery of a traumatic reality. First of all, Hešto and Pujito are „symptoms“ of a split in the child's identity, for when his mother and grandmother find broken things in the house, butchered chickens and cats etc., in Matija's

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<sup>30</sup> Thus, in the Prologue, by using a narrated pseudo-scientific discourse in the form of a fictional study in the aforementioned series of suicides in a village in Međimurje (just before the Croatian war of independence), for the purpose of describing the collective aspects of the mechanisms of memory and the explication of social and natural phenomena, „three explicatory models with emphatic elements of the supernatural“ are cited (Novak, 2013:15). The first is that these suicides: „(...) *prouzročila bića za koja su stariji mještani vjerovali da žive u šumovitim brdima iznad sela. Riječ je prema predaji o neumrlim tijelima tamošnjih stanovnika koje su mještani sela pobili u jednomdavnom mitskom sukobu. Ta su bića osuđena da do kraja svijeta budu zarobljenicima tih šuma te su zauzvrat bacila kletvu na selo.*“ (Novak, 2013:15-16)

(were caused by beings which the older inhabitants believed lived in the wooded hills behind the village. According to legend these are the undead bodies of former inhabitants who were murdered by the villagers long ago in a mythic battle. These beings have been cursed to be captives of these woods and have cursed the village in return.)

consciousness these two, who Matije „called out from the dark“ are the perpetrators. When he kills Lejdij (the neighbour's dog), he is now convinced that he has the power to kill should he desire to do so, yet the root of this delusion is disclosed by the fact that the child feels guilt as he does not have the courage to find his father, who he believes is among the 'birthday-boys' (mythic beings from the legends of Međimurje). Hešto and Pujito directly originated from this cultural phenomenon, respectively from the local collective consciousness based on oral traditions and belief in the supernatural, which enacts a significant influence on the formation of the child's identity. With great similarities to the most renowned writers of magical realism, there is also, in Novak's work, the narrator's magical journey to the past as well as the inclusion of the dark side of the child's present, and this through the characters of Hešto and Pujito. It is a fact that the individual stories of the dark lives of these town-fellows, which in no way fit the metanarrative of harmonious family village life, are conveyed by magical beings and not by an infantile narrator: this confirms that the inclusion of the magical realist mode in characterisation is present as a narrative strategy when representing traumatic experience and memories, as well as a procedure in the elaboration of the Other and the Different. By distancing an infantile narrator from the reality he encountered and introducing magical beings in the position of the narrator, the impression of a child having to face the darkest side of adults is intensified, reaching a climax in the scenes of the paedophilic rape of Matija's friend, a disabled boy. And yet, the reason why we cannot entirely define Novak's novel as a magical-realist one, despite having such elements, is due to fact that the story ends with a logical link between cause and effect: the cause of the suicides in the village has a rational source – the land in this village was smothered with the pesticide Butanediol, which was uncontrollably used in the village in 1991, entering the water supply. His guilt for the boy's suicide, thus, is neither magic nor mythic in origin, does not represent an irreducible element, but returns the story to real people, the village community, greed as a collective sin, and those directly involved, and here somewhere the guilt of isolation lies, of an unfortunate traumatic childhood and the main protagonist's split identity.

If mention is made of the Other on the level of a sociemic figure, then it is important to mention the village in Međimurje and chronotopy, but also the marker of the periphery (which W. B. maintains is a very important element of magical realism, cf. 1995:165). This enables a diversion from the dominant, central viewpoint, allowing the Other and the Different a voice, by which the entire collective of the village in Međimurje when compared to the centre (a big city in which the main character lives at a later stage in life): the village is represented as a marginal space, as the Other and the Different and also counterpoised, and the vitality of local

metanarratives also contributes to this (some town-fellows, as we saw in the first part, really did connect this series of suicides with mythic legends and believed in them). In Novak's case, meanwhile, there is no idealisation or glorification of these positions in themselves: he differentiates the approach to the collective as the Other and the individual within this collective as a special Other, becoming its victim. The motif „black earth the mother“ is developed as a symbol of the Other and the Different, upon which (this symbolic layer) he constructs all characters and relations in this novel:

*„Shvatio sam zašto je zemlja blizu moga sela uvijek tako proketo tamna, gotovo crna. Črna mati zemla. Svaki puta kada padne noć, gusti mrak ulazi u zemlju. Ali zemlja ne može u sebe upiti još puno. Bilo je izvjesno da će za neko vrijeme mrak ostati iznad zemlje i da više nikad neće svanuti dan.“* (Novak 2013:143)

*(I came to understand why the land near my village was always so cursedly dark, almost black. Black earth the mother. Whenever night fell, the dark air enters the earth. Yet the earth cannot absorb much more. It was certain that for a certain amount of time the air would stay above ground and day would break no more)*

#### **4. Gypsy, but the Most Beautiful (2016) by Kristijan Novak – the Problem of the Other Ethnicity**

On the basis of a crime plot, the author mimetically creates a concept of the Croatian and Romani community who live in neighbouring villages in Međimurje (often in conflict), with emphasis on the individual fates of characters who, on the one side and the other, are marked by the position of the Other and the Different. The Romani in the village of Bukov Dol (Đinjc) are shown as different from their Croatian neighbours in the village of Sabolščak, and inter alia, by the element of belief in the supernatural as an inherently visible reality so that, in accordance with this, the novel's protagonists are constructed by it.<sup>31</sup> Albina comes

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<sup>31</sup> In this community, death is understood as a personified being that can be tricked: „Dauži svoju ženu što je umirala od lošeg disanja pokušao sakrit, odvuko ženu u neuglednu kuću u Globokom, mislio Dauži da je smrt velik gospodin. Miljenko Kalanjoš zvani Strmbu svojoj majci dao drugo ime kad je umirala, a njezinim imenom krstio psa. Možda se zabuni, prokleta smrt.“ (Novak, 2016:160)

*(Dauži tried to hide his wife who had difficulty breathing, he dragged his wife into a nondescript house in Globok, Dauži thought death was a grand gentleman. Miljenko Kalanjoš, known as Strmbu, gave his mother another name when she was dying, and baptised his dog with her name. Maybe damned death might be confused this way)*

first here, the mother of the main protagonist, Sandi Ignac, killed when smuggling immigrants. One branch of two fundamental story plots are enacted through this. Albina is physically very ill, yet clairvoyant, and expresses her premonitions with magical drawings upon the walls. The other main protagonist, Milena Muriša from Sabolščak (a Croatian woman and Sandi's girlfriend) at first exclusively sees mental illness in Albina's behaviour, which is an understanding she has taken from her own cultural (ontological) framework. The Romani community and the main characters belonging to it, believe entirely in the reality of magic, and on a structural level this is a fundamental differentiating marker within the constructs of their perceptions. Sandi is also characterised by the magical element of clairvoyance, who as a child saw his friend Tompa's (who was abused by his own father ) shadow.<sup>32</sup>

Sandi is in a comatose state. After he is gravely injured while illegally smuggling immigrants from the Middle East, he enacts an internal dialogue with Milena's father, the elder Japica, who receives the entire retrospective of Sandi's life and a realistic representation of the Romani community in Međimurje: this part of the novel is narrated in the first person (by Sandi) and this character's internal focalisation during a dream. All the directions and tasks with which Sandi provides Japica, with the aim to liberate himself from the ties of life among the living, Japica will attempt to enact while awake. In this way the enacted procedure of dialogue and the estrangement of the channels of communication (the comatose state of one protagonist and the dream state of another), in the conveyance of a message, is read as an experiment on the level of narrative form, which is a characteristic of magical-realist narration.<sup>33</sup> One of the main focalisers and also part of its wider social context, is the police spokesman, who cannot understand Japica (through whom Sandi magically acts and thus

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<sup>32</sup> „Duboko je spremio bol. Za njega je to čuvala sjena što ga je neprestano pratila, sreću sam je nekoliko puta. Hoda pokraj njega, gurka ga, podmeće mu nogu. Ponekad i ulazi u njega. Tada bi se njegovo lice stalno kreveljilo, nisi ni znao kako zapravo izgleda.“ (Novak, 2016:200)

*(He prepared pain deeply. A shadow which followed him continuously looked after it for him, I greeted it several times. It walks beside him, shoves him, trips him over. Sometimes it even enters him. Then his face would constantly twist, you didn't know what he really looked like)*

<sup>33</sup> According to M. H. Abrams, the writers of magical realism continually connect a realistic mode of narrative with the fantastic and fable, as well as elements derived from myth. Abrams connects magical realism in the novel with Roberta Sholes' concept of fabulation, which means the breaking of the conventions of the so-called classic realist novel through experiments with subject, form, style, temporal categories, as well as the permeation between the mundane, fantastic, mythic and frightening in representations which throw a mist over what is serious or trivial, humorous or frightening, tragic or comic. (Abrams, 1999: 195-6)



influences outside reality), when, ambling around, he really attempts to listen to Sandi's directions and untie the knots.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to mention that Sandi's identity is also constructed as split one, different when the Romani community is taken into consideration (his family was never entirely accepted). The metaphor of the spider living inside of him and in whose existence as a living being inside of him Sandi truly believes, characterises this protagonist as an individual torn between two communities (Romani and Croatian), and a desire for a different and better life (which his stepfather Đani and his schoolmistress who taught him Croatian embedded within him). The spider, who ties him in knots to certain crucial places and defining moments in his life (e.g. his first theft, the place where he cut his leg on a rusty can and almost died, Milena's courtyard where he first saw her, the hole in which he buried an immigrant woman's dead new-born child etc.), through which the protagonist's personal mythic space is constructed, is a metaphor for all the tragically opposed layers of Sandi's identity. Sandi does not sense this spider at happier moments: „*U zidanom ništa ne kapa po tebi usred noći, ima za jesti, budiš se u toplo, nisi stalno mokat; pauk miruje.*“ (Within walls nothing drips on you in the night, there's something to eat, you're not always wet: the spider is at rest). (Novak, 2016:198) The reason for Sandi's internal dialogue with Japica (an interpersonal dialogue between spirits can also be considered a magical element) is to tell him of the places in real space to which the spider tied him, and to tell him how to untie them as (Sandi cannot die without this), and this is something Albina knew all along. And here we also find a suspended, decentred and displaced subject construed on the margins between, at least, two opposing worlds and the discourses which generate them, all condensed in the symbol of the spider and the spider's web. Space and identity are inextricably linked.<sup>35</sup>

It is possible to link the construction of Albina within the magical-realist mode. As she is the only one who can see Sandi's spider, so Sandi is the only one with the ability to see her

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<sup>34</sup> „Nisu istukli ni onog ludog Japicu Rudolfa, čuo sam da je noću došao u Đinjc i rekao da traži čvorove. Čak ga je netko autom dofurao natrag u Sabošćak, lude priče.“ (Novak, 2016:386)

(They didn't beat up that crazy Japica Rudolf either, I heard that he came to Đinjc last night and said he was looking for knots. Someone even drove him back by car to Sabošćak, crazy stories.)

<sup>35</sup> „Jedina je majka možda znala za pauka, pa mi rekla, još sam bio mali, kaže Albina: Antoršiči p ista kalji, navek p ista kalji. Po hrvatski: vrati se istim putem, uvijek istim putem. Znala žena, ako ne pazim, ostat ću zapetljan visiti negdi nasred ceste, kao lutak, na kiši, negdje gdje pada noć i šeću sjene kojima i nisam nešto drag.“ (Novak, 2016:161)

(Maybe only mother knew about the spiders, so he said to me, I was still a child, Albina said: Antoršiči p ista kalji, navek p ista kalji. In Croatian; come back by the same path, always by the same path. The women knew, if I am not careful, I will remain tangled somewhere in the middle of the road, like a puppet, in the rain, somewhere where night falls and shadows walk to whom I am not dear)

interior.<sup>36</sup> To Marina she is not clairvoyant, even with her supernatural powers, only sick, but also frightening, because of something Marina has inside of herself (although it does not come from a world in which the marvellous is omnipresent in the real), but which she still recognises as true and important in an epistemological sense.<sup>37</sup> The estrangement of Albina's construct in the continuation of the story has an increasing influence on Marina's experience.<sup>38</sup> The „white“ doctors, certainly, find nothing of the things in Albina which Sandi can recognise. In the narrated dialogue between Sandi and a doctor, the presence of two opposing and mutually incomprehensible cultural and, thus, epistemological, frameworks are apparent:

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<sup>36</sup> „U to je doba malo ljudskoga ostalo u njoj. Uvijek je bila boležljiva, eto, puhni i raspast će se. A sada je bilo sve gore, mirovala je, šutjela, ponekad i danima, Japica, zamisli to. Dijelovi nje postajali su tvrdi i sivi, baš kao pravi kamen. Znam ja zašto. Tijelo joj se borilo da i nju muhe ne liježu ličinke, one što bodu. Zamišljao sam da je njezina koža samo platno napeto preko nje, a ona se cijela sastoji od nečega nalik pčelinjem saću. Pravilne rupice, oko rubova tamno crvene, tu je meso bolesno i vruće i bolno. Kroz kožu vidiš kako ličinke migolje pod površinom. (...) Ja u sebi imam pauka, ali ja ga poznajem dobro, mogo sam živjeti s njim. S onime što zuji u mojoj majci nikada. Hoćeš pobjeći od nje, a ne smiješ, majka ti je. Budi ti meni kamenom, Albina, neka tebe.“ (Novak, 2016:198)

(At that time little that was human remained in her. She was always sickly, and so, blow and she will fall apart. And now it was even worse, she was still and silent, sometimes for days, Japica, think about it. Parts of her body greyed and hardened, like real stone. I know why. Her body fought so that flies would not breed maggots inside her as well, those that sting. I thought that her skin was only a sheet tightened over her, and that she consisted of something like honeycomb. Little holes of regular shape, deep red around the edges, here the flesh is hot and painful. Through the skin you can see how maggots squirm beneath the surface. (...) I have a spider inside me, but I know him well, I could live with him. Never with that buzzing inside my mother. You want to run away from her, but are not allowed to, she is your mother. Be my rock, Albina, be as you are.)

<sup>37</sup> „Iz mraka izroni glava. Nasmije mi se široko, pa se opet uozbilji. - Znam kaj si mi došla reči. I znam što si – kaže, pa se opet nasmije, pa kaže nešto nerazumljivo. Vidim, nije ona 'šutljiva' ili 'čudna' ili 'drugačija'. I nije vidjela budućnost, kako ju je Sandi sve bio opisivao. Albina je mentalno retardirana. Govorila je većinom na bajaškom i ne znam jesam li ikada čula nešto toliko jezivo. Kao da ne govori ona, iz usta, nego je progutala zvučnik na koji se povremeno javlja netko iz daleke prošlosti i zapovijeda. Njezino tijelo samo je prigušivač. Po nemirnim očima joj vidiš da nema kontrolu nad svojim riječima. Sandi mi je tada bio gotovo potpuno stran. Preko nje najavio mi se golemi dio njega nepoznatog.“ (Novak, 2016:207-208)

(A head emerged from the darkness. It laughed at me broadly, then was serious again. – I know what you came to say – it said, so it laughed again, and said something incomprehensible. I see, it is neither 'quiet' nor 'strange' nor 'different'. And it didn't see the future, as Sandi entirely described it. Albina is mentally retarded. She mostly spoke in Bajaški dialect and I don't know if I ever heard anything so frightening. It was as if she wasn't speaking, from her mouth, but she swallowed a speaker through someone from the distant past who calls and commands. Her body is only a silencer. You can see by her restless eyes that she hasn't any control over her words. Sandi was almost completely unknown to me then. Through her much that was unknown about him was announced to me)

<sup>38</sup> „ Mislim, da, ona je luda. Ali ja znam zašto ju je tamo uhvatilo. Našla se u zgradi u kojoj joj je umirao sin. Ona je to znala, nemam pojma kako. S crnom gumom, privezana, njezine su se oči zajedno s prstima i stopalima divljački trzale u smjeru intenzivne. Kako je ona mogla znati gdje je? Ha? Kako je mogla znati? Jezivo.“ (Novak, 2016:231)

*„Odemo doktoru, on kaže: nije joj ništa, sve u redu, samo je stara i loše živi. Trebala bi jesti, da joj je toplo, i da joj nađem nešto da radi umjesto da pije. Kažem mu da nikada nije pila i da malo-malo uzme drvo iz vatre, pa crta po zidu, preko pukotina. Kaže on, može i to, samo da manje pije. Ne vidi on ništa ispod kože, šalje nas u bolnicu u Čakovec. Tamo cijeli dan čekamo na krivom mjestu, a Albina se izgubi kad sam nam otišo po klipiće, pa smo morali doći i drugi dan.“ (Novak, 2016: 225)*

*(We go the doctor, he says: there is nothing wrong with her, all is good, she's only old and doesn't live well. She should eat, keep warm, and that I find something for her to do other than drinking. I tell him that she never drank and that sometimes she turns the wood in the fire, then writes on the walls, over the cracks. He says, she can do that as well, only that she drink less. He sees nothing beneath her skin, sends us to the hospital in Čakovec. We wait there the entire day in the wrong place, and Albina goes missing when I go out to look for twigs, so we had to come another day)*

When Sandi got involved in smuggling immigrants, his mother began to draw pictures (which are displayed in the novel). It is interesting to note that in moments of spite toward Albina that Sandi uses a *white* discourse Sandi and then Albina communicates with him through pictures:

*„Albini sam se inatio. Znala je ona što radim. Kaže ona meni jedan jedini put: ne valja ti to. A ja joj kažem: začepi, pij lijek, jedi što sam ti donio. I ona više ni riječi, nego uzme iz vatre drvo, pa nacрта na zidu tijelo, okrenuto naopačke, slomljeno, glava izokrenuta krivo. Tamo gdje je na zidu pukotina, leđa su krivo presavijena, kao da su pukla sa zidom. Tada nisam znao što misli, ali tamo ćeš odvezati čvor.“ (Novak, 2016:229)*

*(I was spiteful toward Albina. She knew what I was doing. She said to me only once: What you're doing is no good. And I say to her: shut up, drink your medicine and eat what I brought you. And she doesn't say a word, but takes a piece of wood from the fire, then draws a body on the wall, turned upside-down, broken, its head turned the wrong way, its back bent out of shape, as if it cracked with the wall. Then I didn't know what she was thinking, but here you'll untie the knot)*

Albina prophesied Sandi's state a week before his injury:

*„Rekao sam Albini drugo jutro neka crta. Iz pukotine ide rupa, pa onda tanka tanka užad, spojena na leđima tijela, čovjek visi na toj užadi, na nitima, ne vidiš glavu.*

*Nacrtala me kako ovdje visim, kunem ti se, ja sam ovo vidio tjedan dana prije nego što su me ubili. Samo nisam znao da u sebe gledam.*“ (Novak, 2016:354)

*(I told Albina to draw on the morning after. A hole comes from the crack, and then a thin rope, tied to a body's back, a man is hanging from this rope, on its threads, you can't see the head. She drew hanging here, I swear to you, I saw this a week before they killed me. I just didn't know that I was seeing myself.*

The incorporation of Albina's drawings into the text of the novel as a specific concretisation, a making present of the fictional and an overcoming of the very textual boundaries of the novel, can be connected somewhat with Wendy B. Faris' statement when she claims that magical realism, as it provides a voice for autochthonic and ancient myths in its thematic domain, as well as a voice for legends and cultural practices, and in the domain of narrative techniques which are expressed by the use of non-realistic events and images, can be translated as a kind of „narrative primitivism“ (Faris, 2002:103). And yet, as Novak's novel (except only in elements) does not belong to the genre of magical realism, we cannot define it as narrative primitivism, in fact the opposite. From this example, the author's awareness is clear on the function of two different culturally marked discourses in the construct of two separated social communities, whose intertwining leads the main protagonist, as well as his two-fold Otherness, to a tragic end. On the other hand, when crime and violence are in question, there is little difference between both communities (the hyper-realistic scenes of the sexual abuse and humiliation of Romani women are identical to the abuse the Moldavian immigrant women suffer at the hands of „white“ smugglers, the inhabitants of Sabolščak, among whom is also the police inspector Padolek). The very end of the novel represents an apex in the opposition of two discourses. The final chapter is written in the form of a preliminary record of a psychiatric hospital in Popovača. Medicinal discourse, as an ultimate form in the making of a dominant „white“ metanarrative on objective, empirical (respectively scientific) knowledge, provides insight into the mental state of the character of Tompa, Sandi's friend. On the night of a triple murder, in which an immigrant was killed, a Romani man – Mirza and which led to Sandi's coma, an immigrant, Nuzat (a Kurd from Mosul) was forced to confess (although he did not commit the crime) under Plančić's pressure. The perpetrator was in fact a person with special needs. After killing his town-fellow and partner in crime, the hardened thug Mirza (from whom Sandi desires to escape during the course of the story and who would have certainly killed Sandi if Tompa did not kill Mirza first), Tompa flees to the woods, hides there for some time, is found and then taken to a psychiatric institution. Due to the opposition of both discourses, which are not only on the semantic level,

but are also on the ontological one (the white collective is not really interested in truth, but in supporting the metanarrative), the doctors do not take Tompa's murder confession as truth, but decide to hospitalise him and provide him with medicine. Tompa's statement which, as we have seen, originates from a community that believes and forms the supernatural in its discourse on the same epistemological level as that which is fact, is put in parenthesis and taken to be a symptom of illness: „*Pacijent naime opisuje kako je 'konačno ubio zvijer' koja je ušla u nekoga koga naziva 'Šlajfar'. Ili je 'Šlajfar' ime zvijeri, teško je dokučiti jer je disociranog tijeka misli.*“ (Novak, 2016:392)

*(The patient has described to us how he 'finally killed the beast' who entered someone he calls 'Šlajfar'. Or 'Šlajfar' is the name of the beast, it is difficult to tell because of the dissociative train of thought.)*

As in Novak's previous novel, it can be noted that the concept of the collective from the position of the Other and the Different as victims *a priori* is made relative, by which the author questions the actual public discourse as well in which the dominant metanarratives, marked by political correctness yet primarily contradictory, that ideologically interpret the individuals fate when tragic or excessive situations occur.<sup>39</sup>

### 5. Dorotea Vučić, *Cheater (Redemption)* (2016.) – the Otherness of Marked Space

Of all the novels researched here, this one is closest to the genre of magical realism, as there is not a single layer of its construction in which such elements are not dominant. In this

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<sup>39</sup>„*Pratim povremeno što se gore zbiva. Bilo je neko sranje s borbama pasa u romskim selima pa su ih stisli borci za prava životinja. Oni im smiju prijetiti. Ali onda se odmah pojavila snimka kako mali Rom odlikaš kaže da mu se ne ide u školu jer su bezobrazni prema njemu i gorko zaplače. I sad, tko ima pravo prvenstva žrtve? Psi? Odlikaš? Mi smo žešće zbunjena zemlja.*“ (Novak, 2016:385)

*(Sometimes I follow what is going on over there. Some shit was going on with dogfights in the Romani villages so animal rights activists put the squeeze on them. They're allowed to threaten them. And then a video appeared in which a little Romani A-grade pupil says that he doesn't want to go to school because they treat him badly and then cries bitterly. Now, who has the primacy to be a victim? The dogs? The A-grade pupil? We're a furiously confused country)*

„*Sandija spominju, ali s nelagodom, kao da svi čekaju da konačno umre. Prikazivali ga zabranjenim ljubavnikom, pa predstavnikom potlačene radničke klase. A sad vidi tamo negdje između života i smrti, ostvario pravo građanstva čovjek. Da nije ubijen, bio bi nebitan. Da je umro, bio bi zaboravljen. Ovako, visi li lijepo, podsjetnik kakvi smo debili.*“ (Novak, 2016:385)

*(They mention Sandi, but with unease, as if they're all waiting for him to die. The represented him as a forbidden lover, then as a representative of the suppressed working class. And see that now there between life and death, the man has gained the rights of citizenship. If he wasn't killed, he'd be unimportant. If he died, he'd be forgotten. Like this, hanging nicely, he's a reminder of what idiots we are.)*

novel, there is not the direct construct of a post-transitional reality, yet an estranged space and time develops in front of the reader, establishing links with the real space of the former collective of states of the nation of Southern Slavs from the 1970s to the 1990s. The novel's plot begins with the death of Latica Perković when giving birth to her seventh child, Little One, in 1973 in a space in the novel named the Place, marked by a small lake and Hill (which separate it into Podol and Odol), and located in a wider space named Tripoint. The space of Tripoint is determined and defined by elements which, despite their accentuated metaphors and idealisations, clearly suggest a real geographic space (the border between Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia), its past, everyday life, religious faiths and lack thereof, and even the future outbreak of war in it.<sup>40</sup> In the construct of this space the then president of the socialist Yugoslavia, Tito, is included, and here elements of a mythologising public discourse from the period of his rule are also found (the generally known narratives in the states of the former

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<sup>40</sup> „Plavim žilama, većim ili manjim, kočile su se rijeke s imenima na velikoj mapu Federacije, a plava oblakolika rupa dobila je ime mediteranskog mora. Cijela zemlja bila je prošarana nevidljivim granicama – koje će jednog dana biti itekako bitne. Te su granice dijelile Federaciju na šest dijelova, a naše malo jezero naraslo je taman nedaleko od granica, koje su dijelile tri zemlje – jedna u obliku golubice, druga u obliku nabrekle sarme koja je jednim svojim dijelom pokušavala dodirnuti more, i tek netom uspjela. Trećoj je uvijek nedostajalo more. To mjesto, takozvana Tromeda, bilo je bogato šumom i vodom, napuštajući ravnice istoka, ali još uvijek ne toliko stjenovito a da ne bi bilo plodno.“ (Vučić, 2016:25)

*(With their larger or smaller blue veins all the rivers stopped on the large map of the Federation, and a blue cloud-like hole was given the name of the Mediterranean Sea. The entire country was scribbled over with invisible borders-which one day will be of very great importance. These borders divided the Federation into six parts, and our little lake grew just in the proximity of these borders, which divided the three countries-one in the shape of a dove, one in the shape of a swollen cabbage roll which attempted to touch the sea with one of its parts, and recently managed to do so. The third country was always missing a sea. This place, the so-called Tripoint, was rich in forests and water, deserting the plains of the east, yet still with enough umbrage to remain fertile.)*

*„Na krpici na kojoj se prostiralo bezimeno jezero, na Tromedi, živjeli su različiti ljudi. Neki su vjerovali da je Bog Jedan, a neki da je Drugi. Bilo je tu i trećih, koji su vjerovali da ih je Više. No svi su se više-manje slagali s time da to i nije tako bitno, dok god svi žive u jedinstvu (kako je želio Državnik). I tako su se međusobno ljubili, govoreći više-manje istim jezikom, vjenčavali se međusobno, a kad bi se i svađali, svađali su se više-manje oko običnih stvari. I nitko ne bi mislio da će uskoro biti bitno kako se tko od njih preziva i s kime se vjenčao, i čiji djed dijeli dvorište s čijim. Gradili su, prilično nesmetano, kuće svojim božanstvima, jedne pored drugih, neki su u svoje ulazili bosi, a neki u cipelama. Ostali, vjerni Državniku, smatrali su da su i bogovi i njihove kuće kao takve, suvišne. Čak su išli tako daleko da su ih htjeli zabraniti. Ali to je u mjestu u kojem se nalazi naše malo jezero, bilo još nepotrebno i daleko.“ (Vučić, 2016:26)*

*(On the cloth on which the unnamed lake spread itself, inn Tripoint, different people lived. Some believed that God was one, and some that he was Another. There were even others, who believed there were More. Yet all more or less agreed amongst themselves that this wasn't so important, while they lived in unity (as the Statesman desired). And they loved one another speaking more or less the same language, married one another, and even when they argued, they more or less argued about ordinary things. And none of them thought that surnames would soon be important and who married whom, and whose grandfather shares a courtyard with another's. They built, quite undisturbed, houses to their gods, one next to the other, some entered them barefoot, some in shoes. The others, faithful to the Statesman, believed that gods and their houses are, as such, superfluous. They even went as far as attempting to prohibit them. But in the place where our little lake was located, this was still unnecessary and distant)*

Yugoslavia of Tito's theft of a pig's head and the feeding of his younger brothers in childhood, the state 'pioneer' ritual etc.), rather than naming them outright.<sup>41</sup>

Tripoint is constructed as a wider space (in a geographic and semantic sense), and the Place as a displaced, other space, in which the strange day to day life of the Perković family and its town-fellows takes place. This is Three-storey, the house in which the Perković family lives, a space characterised primarily by intimacy and a Romani tent. Both spaces are emphatically marked by the magical and the marvellous in which the inhabitants firmly believe, having all grown up with them. The members of the Perković family survive thanks to their supernatural powers (clairvoyance, surprise disappearances, so-called double languages etc., and they talk about all of these things as if it were ordinary and self-evident) from which the title „cheaters“ originates. The Perković family, as the Romani, are constructed in the position of the Other and Different:

*„O tome kako je obitelj na Brdu i više nego čudna, kako je pomalo zastrašujuća, kako se druže s Ciganima, a od toga nikada nije došlo ništa dobro, kako je gospođa L. bila zadnje bogobojazno stvorenje u toj kući, dobro, možda i baba... Znao je da je ono što su zapravo mislile bilo – možda je i bolje da više ne bude potomaka u toj čudnoj kući, kad već ne mogu spriječiti to bezočno namnažanje Cigana (...) kako je ona mala riđokosa stoposto vještica...“ (Vučić, 2016:33-34)*

*(About how the family on the hill was more than strange, about how they are a little frightening, and how they associate with Gypsies, and how nothing good had ever come out of that, how Mrs L was the last god-fearing person in that house, fine, perhaps the grandmother as well, he knew that what they thought was-that there should be no more*

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<sup>41</sup> „Šest zemalja tada se, barem na prvi pogled, nije obaziralo na nevidljive granice i kad bi zapelo ljetno sunce, velikom seobom spustilo bi se na more, tko je kako i koliko dugo mogao. Zemljom je vladao veliki Državnik, koga su svi zvali nadimkom, čak i puno dalje od Federacije, tamo gdje žive ljudi čija je koža crna kao ebanovina. O njemu su djeca čitala ili slušala priče, duboko u noć, priče o tome kako je jednom nahranio gladnu braću kuhanom svinjskom glavom i potom sve priznao roditeljima. No upravo tom je krađom zadobio poštovanje malih i velikih, malih, koji bi u njegovo ime stavljali plavu kapu na glavu, u točno određeni dan svoga odrastanja, kapu s malom, ali ponosnom crvenom zvijezdom, i velikih, koji su se toga dana sjećali do detalja (...).“ (Vučić, 2016:25)

*(Six nations at that time, and at first sight at least, paid no attention to these invisible borders and when the summer sun would burn, a large migration would descend to the sea, how and for how long as possible. The country was ruled by the great Statesman, whom everybody called by a nickname, even far away from the Federation, in lands where people live whose skin is as black as ebony. Children read and heard stories about him, late into the night, stories about how he once fed his brothers with a boiled pig's head and afterward admitted everything to his parents. And yet it was by this theft that he earned the respect of both the big ones and the little ones, of the little ones, who would put a blue cap on their heads in his name, on a certain day while growing up, a hat with a small, yet proud red star, and of the big ones, who remembered every detail of that day.)*

*descendnats in that strange house, when they cannot hinder that unscrupulous breeding of Gypsies (...) about how that little red haired girl is certainly a witch)*

It is not only them, but also the Romani girl (who is also one of the narrators) who has supernatural powers (she presents herself as a witch). Meanwhile, while they all come from different religious backgrounds (pre-Christian, Christian and Romani), the Perković family live with the Romani in harmony and concord. This harmony lasts until the appearance of three mythic beings; the devil – evil itself, which the Gypsy will call Beng, and in the text will have various forms and titles. Corresponding intertextually with archetypal and apocalyptic motifs (from the Revelation of St John), Beng is constructed as a being whose task is to destroy the new-born Little One – a child with the miraculous ability to heal other people. His birth was additionally marked by space and the relationships between characters, and this in itself brought evil:

*„Ono što je bitno – jest to da se ovoga utorka, na Brdu, upravo ovdje, od svih mjesta na svijetu, rodilo jedno posebno dijete. I da se jednim zaprašenim puteljkom prema Odolu, u otprilike isto vrijeme, stiglo Nešto, što nije bilo ni čovjek ni životinja. (...) U ciganskoj čergi jedna je bijela vještica zadrhtala i ispustila prepeličje krlo na pod. Ono je oživjelo i bez tijela odletjelo iza ormara, gdje ga je uzalud tražila sljedećih nekoliko sati, neprekidno ispred sebe vidjevši par žutih očiju kako sijevaju iz mraka.“ (Vučić, 2016:27-28)*

*What is important is that here – is that this Tuesday, on the Hill, exactly here, among all places in the world, a special baby was born. And that on a dusty little path on the way to Odol, at approximately the same time, Something arrived, that was neither beast nor man. (...) A white witch shivered in a gypsy tent and dropped a pheasant wing on the floor. It came to life and flew behind the wardrobe without a body, where she looked for it for several hours without success, constantly seeing in front of herself a pair of yellow eyes flashing in the darkness.)*

Other than these powers, the characters are also estranged by the linguistic constructs characteristic of mythic discourse. E.g. Helena, Little One's curly-haired sister, wears the markings of a witch and will bear the responsibility of letting Beng into the family as she will fall in love with him during the course of the story and give birth to his children: *„Helena je rasla recitirajući stihove pjesama koje ju nitko nije naučio, opisujući gradove u kojima nikada nije bila, crtajući livade neprimjerenih boja, a onda je počela naglas, ponovno u čudno izabrano doba, blebetati tajne ukućana, ili nekoga slučajnog gosta.“ (Vučić, 2016:21)* (*Helena grew up reciting the verses of poems nobody ever taught her, describing cities where*



*she had never been, drawing pictures of fields in inappropriate colours, and then she began, again at a strange and certain time, to babble the secrets of her cohabitants, or some passing guest.)* She received the ability to speak a double language after the death of her twin brothers, and the motif of secret knowledge is used in her characterisation:

*„Ona ih je sanjala iste večeri kad su napustili ovaj svijet. I nakon nekog vremena, progovorila je riječima koje oni nisu nikad izgovorili. Dvojnim jezikom, koji je zvučao kao jedan. Što su zapravo rekli, to nikada nitko nije saznao. Samo Helena. Njoj kao da su rekli tajne postojanja i nepostojanja. Otad, ona je bila druga osoba.“* (Vučić, 2016:24)

*(She dreamed of them the same night they left this world. And after some time spoke words they had never spoken. A double language, which had the sound of one. What they actually said, nobody ever knew. Only Helena. It was if they told her the secret of existence and non-existence. From that time on, she was a different person.)*

*„Mogli su je čuti kako naprimjer kaže: - Plodovi su nedorasli u ovo doba godine.*

*I nitko ne bi povezao da se zapravo radi o susjedima iz mjesta koji su pokušavali dobiti dijete i nisu uspijevali.“* (Vučić, 2016:24)

*(They could hear how she would say for example: - the fruits are unripe at this time of year. And nobody would realise that this was actually about the neighbours from the place where they tried to have a child and did not succeed.)*

Helena's grandmother, Jelica, talks to a statue of Saint Anthony and will save the Little One from death at the very beginning when his father, Dragan, hated him as his wife's cause of death. Jelica also has the mythic power of insight, expressed in an estranged language: *„Djetešce ju je pogledalo čudnim uzvikom... da, uzvikom... kao da joj je htjelo reći da je živo, ali se ne usuđuje biti.“* (Vučić, 2016:31)

*(The child looked at her with a strange shout...yes, a shout...as if it wanted to say it was alive, yet does not dare to be.)*

It is also the case that in *The Cheaters*, texts pertaining to belief and magical formula (both pre-Christian and Romani) are included in its intertextuality, linking it to the genre of magical realism. Like Marques's *Maconda*, Tripoint is construed, until the entrance of evil, almost as an entirely, yet not so entirely, utopian space and establishes a metaphorical, sometimes an ironical, relationship toward the reality of a concrete space and time until the war years of the 1990s. In this novel, magical realism, evinced in the construction of the reality of a displaced, other space and estranged characters, on its stylistic, narrative and

textual levels, creates an opposition to the concept of the real space of a former communal state in the dominant social and political metanarratives in the states which originated with its collapse.

### Conclusion

According to Z. Lešić, the fundamental point of departure of magical realism as an „artistic procedure“ is in the sense that „(...) the world which surrounds us is only apparently firm and stable and that in it, or from it, certain forces act that can always break the lens of this illusion. Nothing is as it seems which is the main effect of these works, and in this way the feeling of security we think we have of this world is brought into question.“ (Lešić, 2005:331)

In this work we analysed the elements of magical realism as an aspect of the structure of the literary text and as a mode in which the concepts of the Other and the Different are constructed in the corpus of four Croatian novels from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In all these novels we confirmed that there are elements of magical realism according to W. B. Faris' categories. The irreducible elements of magic are present in the constructions of D. Ugrešić's characters, and in the mythic beings and magical characteristics of K. Novak's and D. Vučić's characters. The presence of worldly phenomena are all described in great detail in all four novels (the post-transitional reality of eastern European countries – Croatia, the Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina - in D. Ugrešić's work, yet in K. Novak's work with an emphasis on regionalism (the Croatian region of Međimurje), while in D. Vučić's novel the mythic space of Tripoint is connected with its factual determinants to the space and time of the former Yugoslavia from the 1970s to the 1990s and to the real historical events that occurred during transition, war first of all). The reader's doubt in the attempt to harmonise two contradicting understandings of events is most greatly evident in D. Vučić's work, which is why her novel *the Cheaters*, in this corpus, comes closest to the genre of magical realism. In D. Ugrešić's novel, the possibility of a contradictory understanding of reality is also present, whereas in K. Novak's case it is the least present, especially in the novel *Black Mother the Earth*, due to the rational ending of the novel, resolved by cause and effect. In all these novels narration unites different aspects of the perception of reality, at least in parts of the story (in D. Vučić's case this procedure is complete) and standard ideas of time and space are somewhat broken, and to a greater extent ideas of monolithic identities. It is evident that none of the authors analysed here constructs imaginary worlds (neither is this the case with Tripoint by D. Vučić as its

historical context is clear), yet what is disclosed in their reality is that which L. Leal termed the mystery of things, life and human actions. An expression on the difference of the suspended subject is developed through this in instances where the subject is either the individual or the collective, and realities are expressed which have been suppressed by the dominant metanarratives in an array from an individual's psycho-physical trauma in a local and marginal community who suppresses his own trauma (K. Novak), to the social displacement of marginal social groups (D. Ugrešić, K. Novak) to the separation of the discourse of power when the interpretation of the historical reality of a certain space is in question (D. Vučić). The other is constructed as a decentred subject, suspended between at least two opposing discourses and on the margin between two opposing fictional worlds in which this subject functions as a kind of mediator between their dialectic.

The mode of magical realism is expressed as a functional poetological framework for the construction of the Other and the Different, and with this the author's social and political engagement becomes a strategy that cannot be ignored in the formation of a fictional reality in the Croatian postmodern novel of the 2000s.

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