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Interwar Modernism: Nałkowska and Krleža – the Metaphor of the »Evil Love« Between Polish and Croatian Literature¹

/.../Nałkowska told me today she was fascinated by Krleža, and Krleža told me he was fascinated by Nałkowska. Fine.

Julije Benešić, 1932

Introduction

»/.../writing/.../about our open problem, how to express our unknown and dark stubborn reality in literature and art/.../«

M. Krleža, 1933

According to the established position of Croatian literary historiography, Miroslav Krleža is the most significant literary phenomenon of Croatian literature, let us be careful, at least in the interwar period, if we decide that the majority of his best literary works were created between the two wars, although the literary reception as well as the gradual yet persistent process of literary-aesthetic canonization lasted throughout the second half of the twentieth century, with occasional dissonant tones and attempts at re-evaluation, which are nevertheless primarily aimed at criticizing “krležology”, rather than challenging the aesthetic value of Krleža's opus. Our reading of his long-canonized interwar novel is also an attempt to contribute to understanding its role as a text that anticipated poetic changes in prose that modern literature in the Croatian surrounding was just trying to consolidate, coexisting with the prevailing regressive literary practices, which in terms of their literary habitus were distant echoes of nineteenth-century poetics rather than corresponding with the modernity of art and literature after the so-called The Great War. Krleža's interwar work as a whole showed that Croatian literature had the energy and vision that enabled it to keep pace with European tendencies.

Zofia Nałkowska, on the other hand, belongs to a small group of female authors who became the bearers of a certain literary opinion in their surroundings, and her opus had a wide reception enabling it a long and privileged life in terms of literary critiques. However, one feature of Nałkowska's and Krleža's novels, in our opinion, makes a difference in relation to the multitude

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of engaged and socially conscious novelists from the interwar period: politics did not influence their aesthetics and in turn their literary aesthetics was not sociopolitical, no matter how convincingly it witnessed to the then sociality. The years after the First World War brought no recovery to Europe, but a total breakdown of old Europe, the collapse of the self-mystifying notion in the European literature and art as a space of autonomy and freedom that addresses major issues of human social role based on its supposedly infallible taste and civilizational experience, covered with a net of hidden inequality and centuries-old privilege of the minority, according to either hereditary, political or, already then, the capitalist principle. Krleža's skeptical spirit has no illusions about old Europe and its destiny. Although the critique of the old order is more subtle in Nałkowska compared to Krleža's destructive discourse, we will try to single out their similarities, especially with regard to the obvious critique of civic morality in the novel *Evil Love*. We therefore hold the view that both authors in their poetics, in the interwar period, present the metonymy of modernity, insofar as their works compress the most important determinants of concrete reality, literary shaping the world that was at its end, but also offering solutions and possibilities in what direction to proceed. Even if society did not take the right path, falling into the catastrophe of the new world war, for literature there was no return to the old, as evidenced by their postwar works as well.

The cultural-historical context

The connection between M. Krleža² and Zofia Nałkowska³ in the cultural-historical diachrony begins with a small piece of information about the theatrical performance of the adaptation of Krleža's play *In Agony* in the Polish version, the translation of which was edited by Nałkowska at the request of J. Benešić, under the title *Baronowa Lenbach* at the theater Mały Teatr in Warsaw. Croatian public was informed about the event by B. Klaić, who attended the tenth and twenty-second performances, during which, as he testified (»Our Drama on the Warsaw Stage. »Baronowa Lenbach« translated by Zofia Nałkowska«, *Književnik*, 1934, 1, p. 45), the theater

² Krleža's foreign reception expands in the years after his meeting and correspondence with Nałkowska, relatively late, after the Second World War, in relation to his initial appearance in Croatian literature, during the First World War. Undoubtedly, Krleža's biography and literary development testify to the most important social and cultural processes not only in Croatia but also in Central Europe in the mid-20th century. A comparative reading of any of Krleža's works along with a work of his Polish fellow writers created at approximately the same time seems to be, in terms of literary history and methodology, a task without perspective, a work that cannot be encompassed interpretively. In a series of J. Wierzbicki's contributions to reading Krleža, we believe the best Polish synthetic reading of Krleža's opus is his article »Light Circles of Knowledge« and »Dark, Stubborn Reality«. *Miroslav Krleža Versus the European Spiritual Context*. *Dijalog*, 1977, 4, p. 95–113.

³ »This seems to be the first example in Polish literature of a literary encounter between two nations with such important and comprehensible consequences and, thanks to the creative rank of both figures, a very valuable one« (H. Kirchner, 1980: 60).

was filled to the last seat and the performances were well received by Warsaw audience.⁴ On the occasion of the premiere in Warsaw in December 1933, Benešić used the opportunity to present a longer essay on Krleža's work in Warsaw's *Pion* (1933, 8; reprinted in the collection of papers *Miroslav Krleža*, JAZU, Zagreb 1963). The essay was written from critically affirmative perspective, as expected given the long acquaintance and even the history of friendship with the writer, yet as Lasić established,⁵ he still made several vague and erroneous claims (with minor biographical details, some of which cannot be documented, and Benešić might have heard them from Krleža), including the wrong year of the publication of *The Return of Philip Latinowicz*⁶ and the wrong year in which Krleža resided in Warsaw⁷ (spending days with Benešić, which was documented in detail in the Warsaw chronicle). Notwithstanding the minor omissions in that article, it is not an exaggeration to establish that Krleža's Polish reception in the first half of the 1930s⁸ existed thanks to Benešić's personal commitment as well as translation efforts and lobbying for theatrical performances, which Benešić had also done in the 1920s in the Zagreb theater and even earlier, when Krleža appeared with the *Noonday Symphony* (*Savremenik*, 1916), encountering resistance of the critics, while Benešić's distinct laud⁹ to Krleža's non-metrical verse itself was challenged.

Nałkowska was not mentioned in writing in the Croatian public until Benešić's afterword to his own translation of *Medallions*,¹⁰ in which he repeated the then long-known information that her play *The House of Women*¹¹ was staged in Zagreb¹² on October 1, 1930 (the play was written that year and performed successfully in Warsaw, while its Croatian translation and performance, the earliest foreign one, can be considered a rare example of prompt cultural exchange, which of course would not have happened without Benešić's intervention).¹³ Her

⁴ In the chronology of Krleža's relations with critics, S. Lasić briefly reviews also these performances, stating that Klaić met the translator, Nałkowska, who was of course assisted in the translation by Benešić, and that the Polish writer »admired Krleža, considering him «a writer of European proportions» (1989: 223).

⁵ S. Lasić, 1989: 175.

⁶ »I'm reading his "Philip" with Fritz (the novel has no title yet). A good but difficult read. It is mostly the same lyrics present in his Symphonies, although he calls his old lyrics onanism« (Benešić 1981: 373).

⁷ »I was with Fric at Nałkowska's.../ Krleža behaved like a stone idol« (J. Benešić, 1981: 374).

⁸ In those years, Nałkowska »entered the sixth decade of her life with a lot of self-effacing and at the same time theatrical courage... slightly with Krleža's help as well.../ In that diary, Krleža does not turn out so badly« (Malić 2018: 427–428).

⁹ J. Benešić, *O hrvatskom ritmu*, *Savremenik*, 12 (1917) 1, p. 35.

¹⁰ *Medaljoni*, Nakladni zavod Hrvatske, Zagreb 1948, pp. 88–90.

¹¹ Benešić notes in Warsaw: »I was at Zofia Nałkowska's play "The House of Women" (Dom kobiet). Eight female roles, no male one. The piece is absolutely good. I will try to translate it. Here they say that they have not had such a good piece for a long time« (J. Benešić, 1981: 250).

¹² »I was at Zofia Nałkowska's, who excitedly talked about Zagreb. Our people pretended perfectly to look polite in front of her. They succeeded« (J. Benešić, 1981: 275).

¹³ The Zagreb premiere, thanks to the writer's visit to Zagreb and meeting with the audience, was a first-class cultural event of the season (cf. Kirchner 1971: 70). Her Zagreb companion was Zdenka Marković. In a multitude

play *The Day of His Return* was shown, again in Zagreb, on 15 January 1932. Nałkowska visited Zagreb again in October 1931, when she traveled with a group of Polish women writers to southern Europe, and in January 1932 attended the premiere of her play.¹⁴ She was in Croatia after the war as well, in 1946, as a member of a delegation of Polish writers. In the context of *Medallions*, Benešić claims that her prose is difficult to classify in any literary current or movement because, as he rightly notes, the width of her conceptions surpassed the prose poetics of the interwar period, which could already be critically established in the post-war period. He presents *Medallions*¹⁵ to the Croatian readership as an important work of Polish post-war prose, a collection of eight excellent novellas, in which the writer, with certain expected adaptations, faithfully presents the war reality to which she herself witnessed. As in the pre-war works, her narrator is a discreet observer who subtly interprets events from the background, rarely giving direct comments. The cold sequence of facts and the lack of biased comments make the narration in *Medallions*, Benešić claims, very shocking. At the time of the translation of *Medallions*, Nałkowska – if literary status can be measured by the level of unanimously affirmative domestic criticism – was a greater classic than Krleža: she published her first work in 1906, in the midst of Polish Moderna period, and gained the title of the best Polish prose writer, her war novellas confirming her affiliation to the top of the prose canon. Her work, however, does not delve deeper into the post-war era, outside the context of *Medallions*;¹⁶ after all, she lived only until 1954. On the other hand, in the first years after the Second World War, Krleža has a long history of conflicts and critical turmoil, as well as major ideological and worldview frictions, although his canonical status, from the narrow view of the domestic reception of his overall hitherto printed works, was already unquestioned. Nałkowska gained social influence also thanks to her literary salon¹⁷ which was a place of literary gatherings for decades, before the war she was canonized as a kind of cultural arbiter, which was formalized

of exalted and positive impressions, Nałkowska wrote in the diary: »I experience only good things here«, completely committing to friendship in Zagreb society, where she was welcomed and treated as an undoubtedly great literary figure (with regard to this, the writer notes »how amazed and grateful I am«). Benešić continued his hard work, his translation of *Croatian God Mars* was published in 1939 in Warsaw, as the 13th volume of Jugoslavenska biblioteka. Nałkowska also translated *The Glembays* but the play was not performed in Poland until 1959.

¹⁴ She notes in her diary that during this visit she »received 1000 dinars, 160 zlotys, for the Croatian translation of *Evil Love*« (H. Kirchner, 1971: 72).

¹⁵ Z. Malić calls them »a series of portrait sketches«, which do not break the genealogical connection with the traditional »personalist psychology« (2019: 682).

¹⁶ The success and relevance of this work long after the war encouraged »critical stereotyping« in the reading of her pre-war novels (H. Kirchner, 1980: 60), gaining a new critical rise only with a renewed interest in interwar modernism.

¹⁷ »I went at Nałkowska's for tea. I had no idea that all the elite of Warsaw literature would be there. Who wasn't there!« (J. Benešić, 1981: 358).

by her social position, the membership in The Polish Academy of Literature (Polska Akademia LiteratURY) and the position of a deputy in the Sejm after the war.

Krleža was introduced to Nałkowska during his visit to Warsaw in 1932, on the occasion of the premiere of the translation of the play *In Agony*, which at this moment was only being arranged. From the diaries¹⁸ and their subsequent generalizations, it can be concluded that Krleža appeared at the time of her re-examination of her own work¹⁹ and when she begins to work on the novel *Boundary*, which is considered to be her most mature and overall most successful novel. Krleža's indirect influence on this novel, thanks to the confession in the author's diary, is a mythical place of their reciprocity:²⁰ of all her novels, Krleža was familiar only with *Evil Love*, thanks to the Croatian translation, and this work met with his approval. Nałkowska notes: »He told me, "I have never written a sentence I didn't want to write." It is an instruction to me, who have written so many times under moral or financial coercion.«²¹ In *Evil Love* there are a number of places that anticipate the turn that occurred with the encounter with Krleža, but Nałkowska had articulated it before, interpreting the inner doubts of her characters: "The life that surrounded them trapped them with an ever narrower hoop, and striving to defend what they possessed required of them a heavy, unusual effort and strength. Culture, tradition, past, law – all this ceased to be an argument, which would suffice and mean something; it no longer worked. The matter became too important: it was a question of to be or not to be./.../Even the art of carefree intellectual entertainment, that ordinary ability and agility of conversation, was slowly leaving gentlemen's thresholds. Elsewhere, art and love, beautiful women, books, or travel, and all other useless things, which are counted among the psychic luxuries, were spoken of with ease today.«²² In August 1932, Nałkowska recorded in her diary that her encounter with Krleža had directly prompted her »in the higher demands I now place before myself«, claiming that she owed him a »return to herself«. She was in Paris at the end of 1932, when Krleža was also staying there. The details of the Paris meeting will be known only later, from the diary, when in mid-November 1932 she wrote that he had long since left Paris (»I live in the shadow of this man, who surpasses me in every way, my whole life here is in his sign.«).²³

¹⁸ *Dzienniki*, published in fragments in 1970–88, given the amount of literary-historical data and comments, similarly to Benešić's Warsaw chronicle and Zdravko Malić's diaries published in our time, are a treasure trove for interpreting interwar Polish literature and a source for researching literary relations between Croatia and Poland.

¹⁹ »I will not write things I do not want to write and I will write only the way I think – without looking at it and at myself from the outside, from the point of view of others« (H. Kirchner, 1980: 73).

²⁰ Mythical, because Benešić had already ironized it: »I frighten people here with Krleža, and I think this is a good method, especially for Poles and toward Poles, who are infinitely lukewarm in terms of reciprocity« (1981: 357).

²¹ *Ibid.* : 73.

²² *Evil Love*, p. 91.

²³ H. Kirchner, 1971: 73.

The year 1932 is very important in Krleža's formal biography: it is when he first went from Warsaw to Vienna, then in June to Paris, where he remained for three months, and published the first four volumes of his collected works in Minerva's edition, including *The Return of Philip Latinowicz*. Nałkowska's essay *Miroslav Krleža* (published in her posthumous book *Widzenie bliskie i dalekie*, Warsaw 1957; originally in *Gazeta Polska*, 1933, 311), along with Benešić's translation and editing efforts, is the only pre-war Polish attempt to synthesize Krleža's work. Their correspondence lasted throughout 1933, but his letters were burned, like all her manuscripts, in Warsaw in 1944. She met Krleža for the last time at the congress of writers in Belgrade in 1946 (where, unlike her, he did not speak publicly), when, judging by the notes in the diary, their relationship had the features of conscious ceremonialism (»during the pause he came to me and said what was right to say«).

The boundaries of reading and literary comparisons

Zofia Nałkowska fits into the notion of female writers as authors who basically always write about love,²⁴ and there is always something wrong with that love. In her fiction, it is easy to find connections between the author's real life and life disappointments on the one hand and the protagonists and their traumas and love experiences on the other hand (in the introduction to the Croatian translation she introduced herself in the following way: »I see the history of my life as the history of my relationship to creation«). Simultaneously,²⁵ Nałkowska also fits into the widespread notion of interwar prose writers as engaged, socially interested individuals, sensitive to social and political changes, and ready for polemics about the nature of the writer's role and her/his engagement in social life. The permanence of the image of an engaged literary author whose main task is to demystify social myths created after the First World War, and still unaware of what horrors the societies will face with the Second World War, has not abandoned the interpretations of interwar modernists, including Nałkowska and Krleža, although the reflection about their prose outgrows that context. Though surpassed by their texts at the time,

²⁴ A sharp opinion about the so-called femininity of her writing was presented by Z. Malić: »Zofia Nałkowska and her diaries. Today, this type of text is called "women's writing". I cannot say that *in summa* I do not evaluate her positively/.../but if only she saw a little less inevitably in every man/.../a possible partner in bed. And from everything she writes, it is obvious that she is happiest with a pen or a book in her hand« (2018: 354).

²⁵ We understand the question of the »simultaneity« of Nałkowska and Krleža's novels in the key of the metaphor of the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous (cf. collection of papers *Istodobnost raznodobnog, Tekst i povijesni ritmovi*. Komparativna povijest hrvatske književnosti, 12. Split–Zagreb 2010). In our example, it is not a question of similarities between works created in different periods, but precisely of differences, and unexpected correlations between the two works created following the same literary paradigm. Both the reception and the reverse of the application of modernist poetics in the novels suggest that temporal simultaneity is extremely relative in terms of the given similarity, and that the true relation between the two novels – and the two writers – remained locked in the realm of their life at the time, which we cannot reconstruct today other than through the text of the novel, without dwelling too much on the reconstruction of their contacts.

the image of them as social commentators and engaged intellectuals does not abandon approaches to their work. As the initial curiosity we can emphasize that in the preface to the translation of her novel, Julije Benešić, who is certainly most responsible for Nałkowska's recognition in Croatian context along with the translator Zdenka Marković, stresses the characteristic property of the author's storytelling: discrete, seemingly neutral narrator who stays away from larger social comments, but presents examples and facts which, with their persuasiveness, comment on the social context in which supposedly petty, private dramas take place among the protagonists, thus achieving by inductive sequencing a broad deductive synthesis of the social state and its then burning anomalies. Both novels in question, *Niedobra miłość* and *The Return of Philip Latinowicz*, belong to the central branch of interwar prose, basically to a form of psychological novel with a touch of social critique, but in both cases it is evident that their authors' narrative skills take on universally current features that transcend the actual social context and the time of the novel's creation and narration.

Let us try to detect common features, in order to gradually nuance the differences: both novels are centered around a fatal woman, a typical character of European decadent modernism,²⁶ a love affair, a ruined marriage, a fatal attraction, a failure of clerical lives. It should be noted that Paweł Blizbor is related to Baločanski, not Philip, because his whole life has been reduced to fulfilling the tasks of his own career, maintaining the illusion of a happy marriage and trying to break conventions, which he does in part by openly admitting adultery (it is significant, for marriage psychology as seen by Nałkowska, that »confession« is not verbalized to Agnieszka, rather he continues to oppose her in spite of the obvious, but the act of revelation occurs when he openly shows himself in company with Renata). Bobočka's partner in such a key would be Renata, a seemingly discreet, delicate lady, but »wounded« on the inside, as Krleža describes

²⁶ It is advisable to distinguish *décadence* from decadency: the former is the literary-historical and cultural-historical category relating to the literature of the last third of the nineteenth century, and decadency is an ethical complex accompanied by morbidity, decay, death (M. Grizelj, 2016: 151). For a more complete description of the differences between the two decadencies, Polish and Croatian, a number of other prose should be included in the comparative reading, but from our two examples it is clear that Krleža's decadency is paradigmatic, directly related to the literary-historical notion of the epoch of decadency. On the other hand, decadency, or rather decadence, in Nałkowska is a sporadic feature of her characters' psychology, which however is not to be linked to the programmatic decadency of the modernism of *fin de siècle*. It is indicative that in this comparison Krleža manifests himself as the author of paradigmatic modernism (centered in 1900, although Krleža is undoubtedly the author of the post-aestheticist epoch and we will not generalize on the basis of a comparison with Nałkowska about his poetic boundaries), while Nałkowska is a typical interwar, poetically eclectic author, who is basically interested in the psychology of intimate relationships, as the leitmotif of the so-called women's writing. As much as we do not intend to narrow down Nałkowska to the femininity of her themes and psychological approach, her prose discourse is undoubtedly impregnated with a private view of the female position in society, the social position with regard to marriage and divorce, and the service of women in the community. Yet, it would be tendentious to deprive the novel *Evil Love* of this perspective, even though it is insufficient and does not exhaust the topic of the mentality and psychological constitution of her characters.

Bobočka. Although Blizbor risks everything because of his attachment to the seemingly restrained Renata, which others cannot understand, the outcome is, as expected, completely different. It could be concluded, *cum grano salis*, that in the Polish novel the cliché of the Polish restrained temperament, in which duty takes precedence over pleasure, does not seem to be a stereotype but a convincing end to a dramatic love episode whose passion must be overcome by rational resolution. Krleža, of course, did not afford his heroes a »heroic«, dignified retreat; they end up in a fatalistic denouement, in which no one is spared, although Philip remains alive, but alone and ultimately aware of the truth he sought, which of course does not fulfill him. The end of Krleža's novel is a classic tragic epilogue without catharsis, while the end of *Evil Love* is a »big clean-up«: »Usually we think that when a man plays an evil role in life, a special change also occurs in women, who carry the secret of instinct; the genius of femininity. We think of them, that they always bring with them the danger of someone else's love, that they threaten families, that they come from outside to perform plays. But are these women different than everyone else? Or any woman can be like that – in a constant set of events and occasions, at a certain moment of life, when you reach the top or experience a turnaround. Can't any woman become cruel and dangerous, if she needs to and if her new happiness demands it?«²⁷

There are two key similarities between *Evil Love* and *The Return of Philip Latinowicz*, the two novels that, in our view, anticipate the poetics of existentialist modernism: the first is the disintegration of an individual's identity, the second is her/his limited and conditioned ability to emotionally exchange with the environment. How Philip's true actant counterpart Agnieszka feels (both are basically passive with regard to their situation; at first jovial and social, as she gradually realizes her plight, Agnieszka becomes completely passive, hesitating, in a distracted state of mind, whether to face the situation or simply let go), she cannot explain it to others, while at the same time being aware that her inner drama is directly caused by the behaviors and emotions of others. The Other remains far from her. Agnieszka in psychological nuances meets the criterion written by the author in the preface²⁸ (entitled *About Myself*) to the Croatian edition: »In the first years of my writing, I turned my gaze to the depths of myself, full of strict study and admiration. I myself was the measure of things and the criterion in judging the world.« Philip, on the other hand, is traumatically marked by his loneliness; even when

²⁷ *Evil Love*, p. 220–221.

²⁸ The novel was printed with short notes: *Evil Love, a Novel from a Polish Province*. Zabavna biblioteka (edited by N. Andrić). Zagreb 1932. At the end of the novel: translated by Dr. Zdenka Marković. The introduction was signed by the author, *In Zagreb, on January 18, 1932*. She was in Zagreb for the third time then. (»I will be happy if this work, like the previous one, shows as a new bond of friendship, which already connects me with Yugoslavia. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to Mrs. Zdenka Marković and Mr. Julije Benešić, my excellent translators, who thanks to their efforts introduced me to their homeland«).

surrounded by others, he remains lonely and misunderstood. At the level of narrative technique, neither Krleža nor Nałkowska abandon linear composition, although the narrator of *Evil Love* narrates in analepsis, recalling the events she witnessed and which are the central plot of the novel (there are analeptic episodes in *Philip* as well, in recollections of the past in the introductory exposition, just after the return). The link that places these two novels on the same modernist axis is the following: Krleža's novel »does not allow escape into the imaginary«,²⁹ does not agree with the outdated ideology of civic life, as the end of *Evil Love* suggests a disillusioned situation between the protagonists, who indeed must return to the shell of their civic education and behavior, which Philip does not have to, since his starting position is different. He starts from the bottom, as an individual who knows neither who he is or whose he is and has nothing to return to. Both Krleža and Nałkowska undermine civic morality by revealing its reverse, Krleža brutally and extremely, Nałkowska subjectivistically. Hence an inevitable catastrophe in Krleža's works, and in *Evil Love* the narrator continues to move on the surface of civic propriety, in reconciled resignation. Neither narrative is resolved in an unambiguous finale, Philip is left alone in his nothingness (»The plot actually develops only in the last chapter and – it is not completed. The novel is unfinished. It is again a bundle or a handful from its great stack, from which the Glembays were taken away and so on«),³⁰ the Blizbors, emotionally unsettled, return to the box of civic routine.

Concluding remarks: a sketch of a modern subject in the novels *Evil Love* and *The Return of Philip Latinowicz*

The novels *Evil Love* and *The Return of Philip Latinowicz* share a fundamental feature of interwar modernity: at their center there is a modern subject that is narratively shaped as a diagnosis of a twentieth-century human. To us today, this modernity may seem implicit, after the experience of the modern novel until the end of the century. But in the 1920s, which is the formative poetic period of both authors, modernity is recognized as the awareness that the end of one world has inevitably come, and that the new century has brought controversies that the individual has yet to resolve existentially. »But is it possible: *to mourn for oneself, to bury oneself* and – *to live on?*«³¹ Philip Latinowicz and Pavel Blizbor are the metonymies of a modern man at the end of one social paradigm, an age marked by impermanence and change, with a clear end and no beginning of a new one. The reflection of this variability, which does

²⁹ M. Grizelj, 2016: 158. The author refers to the interpretation of Peter Zima.

³⁰ J. Benešić, 1981: 375.

³¹ V. Pavletić, *Siluetu modernog čovjeka u sutonu građanskog društva, Krugovi*, 1952, 2, p. 136 (Italics added by Pavletić).

not yet have its clear direction because it is overshadowed by a premonition of a tragic upheaval and a new war, is undoubted in Philip's reflections on modern art and painting, but also as a poetic sign indicating that the novel in which this agonic variability is manifested has nothing to rely on, its foundations are slipping, and new ones are just potentially emerging.

Emphasizing the similarities of the two novels, we had in mind a broader parallelism. These are two authors belonging to approximately the same Central European literary generation and two related aesthetic orientations that emerge independently of each other. This orientation *in summa* contained two features in common, the need to literary shape the spiritual atmosphere of the formative years of the interwar period and, despite subjectivist stylizations, which include different achievements in psychological characterization and motivation of characters, the need to correspond to the social reality of postwar decades, characterized mainly with the disintegration of the civic rational spirit, the crisis of civic consciousness based on collective values that the interwar society, with its real spiritual development, had already overcome. Neither Krleža nor Nałkowska are deprived of nostalgia for the declining world of civic culture, which should not be read as a lack of consistency in their cognitive and worldview apparatus, but as a sign of real anchoring in the spiritual moment between the 1920s and 1930s.

Their parallelism arises outside the metaphor of the »evil love« of two real people, caught in a web of life's limitations and impossibilities. As much as the episode of their interconnectedness in terms of their lives and biographies was culturally and historically significant, belonging to permanently relevant places in the chronology of literary relations between Croatia and Poland, their reciprocity, preceding the cultural-historical episode that only confirmed it, arose beyond the Warsaw and Paris meetings. In the text of the novels.

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