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Forgetting Strategies in (Re)structuring Collective Memory of Goran's Poem *The Pit**

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Since the (re) structuring collective memory always implies particular political processes, in the case of Ivan Goran Kovačić and his narrative poem *The Pit (Jama)*, the fundamental text of the Partisan canon of Croatian literature, it may be divided into two periods with a transitional watershed of the 90s (or the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) as a historical turning point. Post-Yugoslav revisionist processes of the memory of World War II, which then started, inevitably had to influence the "myth about Goran", up to that time in the conventional memory constructed around three key points. The first was his leaving Zagreb, together with Vladimir Nazor, to join the Partisans; the second was the revelation of Ustasha crimes in the epic poem *The Pit* and third his death by a "chetnik's knife", which he prophetically hinted at in his poem "My Tomb". Furthermore, the critical reception of *The Pit* from its first edition takes place on two plans of expression – artistic (fine arts) and literary. These "two lives" of one epic poem had different destinies and also attached to themselves different memories including forgetting strategies of (re)structuring collective memory.

KEYWORDS: Ivan Goran Kovačić; poem *The Pit*; partisan art; forgetting strategies; repressive erasure

1. Introduction

Ivan Goran Kovačić was imprinted on the collective Yugoslav memory primarily through his narrative poem *The Pit*, which, from its creation in 1943, as a creative inspiration sparked significant visual¹ and literary

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¹Among the most noteworthy is a Picasso's copperplate from 1948, two graphic maps by Zlatko Prica and Edo Murtić from 1944 and 1982, the art map by Ivan Lovrenčić from

interpretations.² However, along with the literary work, his human and political engagement in the war was undoubtedly crucial for creating the legend of Goran. Kovačić's departure from the then Ustasha Zagreb to the Partisans and his premature and tragic death that occurred in the same year when he wrote *The Pit* made the poet's character a story which was canonised together with his literary text. The death of Ivan Goran Kovačić in political and literary interpretations in the aftermath of the Second World War was ideologically connected with the poem describing a terrible massacre.

Since the Chetniks killed the poet near Foča, there were attempts to look at his death in the context of tragic controversies of a fratricidal war, and such critical approaches insisted on the context of the Ustasha slaughter described by *The Pit*. There are no significant errors in this reading, except for the methodological positivism that is in function of specific political engagement. It should be noted, however, that Goran's real incentives can only be reconstructed from the knowledge of the extra-literary circumstances and Vladimir Nazor's diary entries, but the only precise historical concretisation mentioned in *The Pit* is the Partisans, who appear as salvation at the end of the poem³. Nonetheless, shortly after it appeared, *The Pit* had experienced this simplified historical interpretation, in which the text was approached as a war testimony depicting Ustasha massacres and whose author was killed by a "Chetnick knife". Thus, for example, in 1944, Moša Pijade⁴ built a semantic bridge between the theme of *The Pit* and the death of its author by interpreting the crimes described in *The Pit* and author's death in the national key:

1977, as well as numerous works by Vojin Bakić, including graphic sketches and sculptures.

²The person of Ivan Goran Kovačić inspired some poems by Paul Éluard, Vesna Parun, Dragutin Tadijanović, Jure Kaštelan, Oto Šolc. In the contemporary prose, Goran's figure appears in the metahistorical fiction *History of my family from 1941 to 1991 Summary (Povijest moje obitelji od 1941 so 1991. Sažetak)* by Ivana Sajko.

³For the unexpected salvation that occurs in the last sestinas of the tenth canto, Slaven Jurić noticed that it dramaturgically reminds us of "divine intervention" (Jurić, 2015, 173).

⁴An influential pre-war communist known for the translation of *The Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto*. During and after the war, Tito's close associate, a member of the National Liberation Movement for Yugoslavia (NOPOJ) and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

The young Croatian poet, who in the poem *The Pit* so strongly formed the most fervent protest in this war against the Ustasha massacre over the Serbs, was killed by ‘Serbian avengers’, the Chetnik monsters, those German and Ustasha allies. They cut a throat that so loudly shouted from the fraternal Croatian soul against the Ustasha crimes over weak Serbian children (cit., according to Miloradović, 2012, 27).

Given that this opinion of Moša Pijade was often cited on various occasions, it could be assumed that from the time of the Second World War until the disintegration of the SFRY, Goran’s myth in the collective memory functioned uniquely and that a general consensus was reached about it. However, in the examples of the first editions of *The Pit*, it was evident that in parallel to the active memory policy, different “forgetting strategies” were also included (Connerton, 2008)⁵. Among these, the “repressive erasure” in this function appeared already in the first partisan edition of 1944 and in the case of the first French edition of 1948, which was, in fact, its first translation.

2. Meeting of a partisan poem and “decadent” art

In terms of the form, *The Pit* is a very conventional text; a classical poem in ten symmetrical cantos written in iambic pentameter in a set pattern of rhymed sestinas. Such a form from the beginning evoked the literary tradition and comparisons with Dante, Mažuranić, Gundulić and Nazor⁶. Regarding the contents, a blinded narrator in it presents a horrible

⁵Starting from the assumption that forgetting is not always an accidental or unintentional oversight, but rather a functional practice in shaping cultural memory, Paul Connerton (2008) lists seven types of strategic forgetting: “repressive erasure,” “prescriptive forgetting,” “forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity,” “structural amnesia,” “forgetting as annulment,” “forgetting as planned obsolescence,” “forgetting as humiliated silence”.

⁶An elaborate verse study of the specific features of Goran’s hendecasyllables was carried out by Marin Franičević (1989). The traditional context of Goran’s lyricism and prose was also written by Ante Stamać, who, in Goran’s choice of iambic pentameter, “the equivalent of Italian endecasillabo, German five-beat iamb and the English iambic pentameter” saw Goran’s conscious call to tradition, first of all Kombol’s translation of Dante’s *Inferno*, then domestic motifs, including Vladimir Nazor. Stamać also interprets the choice of sestina for metric and intertextual reasons (Stamać, 1989, 15–17). In his interpretation of *The Pit* with the atmosphere dominated by infernal images, Zdenko Lešić also observes Goran’s delight

vision of mass killings, while in his painful consciousness the images of light and darkness alternate. Vladimir Nazor noted in his diary that Goran was visibly disturbed by the scenes of “the burnt down Serbian villages” and “the pits full of slaughtered people”, which they saw on their way from Zagreb to the liberated territory.

Further, an interesting, but rather long and difficult journey across the Sava and the Kupa, by day and night, by side-ways, through meadows and forests, and then through the so-called No One’s Land, and an agreed meeting with a troop of partisans and a sad passing by the burnt down Serbian villages and the pits full of slaughtered people I will not describe here. Goran asked me to let him talk about everything in more detail (Nazor, 1949, 12).

Later in Livno he met the few who had managed to get out of the pit after the Ustasha massacres in the Livno field and wrote their experiences. As we know it today, Goran completed *The Pit* in Livno on February 10, 1943, and two days later, Vjekoslav Afrić⁷ read the poem to the wounded of the First Proletarian Partisan Division (Lešić, 1984, 25; Urem, 2013, 17). Shortly afterwards, on July 12, 1943, Goran was killed by the Chetniks near Foča in Bosnia, and his grave remained unknown. One year after Goran’s death, after the Cultural Workers’ Congress, at the end of November 1944, on the liberated territory of Topusko, just from the preserved Afrić’s transcript, the first edition of *The Pit* was printed. This partisan edition was a completely autonomous work of art illustrated by 16 lithographs of Zlatko Prica and Edo Murtić, bound in parachute linen and printed in 250 copies, of which 150 contained a signature of the authors. Šime Balen, editor of the war *Vjesnik* from 1943 to 1945 revealed in an interview that Murtić and Prica had to print the text by hand because the technique they used at that time did not have such big letters (Garmaz, 2005, 8). By transposing the verbal text into the picture of the text, an additional level of visualisation was created, an image of the verse, which is unique for this edition⁸.

with Dante’s *Inferno* – “The content of the *Inferno* is closest to the reader because it is most earthly” (Lešić, 1984, 95). As for the intertextual reading of *The Pit*, Slaven Jurić points out to Jure Kaštelan as the first who established an analogy with Dante’s epic, although later on, numerous researchers insisted on it (Jurić, 2015, 170).

⁷One of the famous then actors who also left Zagreb to join the Partisans.

⁸After the war Murtić and Prica collaborated again on illustrating the 1982 edition of

Edo Murtić sent the signed copies to Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin and Picasso (Karić, 2013, 8). But in an interview for *Novi list* in June 2000, Murtić recalls bitterly:

Prica and I had created a map with the verses by Ivan Goran Kovačić and sent it into the world. It was one of the first works of this kind made in occupied Europe. It came into the hands of Picasso, Churchill, De Gaulle, which earned us immediate recognition. However, and at the same time, at the end of 1944, we were humiliated, because Đilas and Zogović claimed that it was decadent art and everything was dumped, except for several copies, which I, fortunately, saved (Garmaz, 2005, 3).

These “few copies”, Murtić “fortunately saved”, are priceless today. In 2005, the journalist Željko Garmaz reported the news of a copy of one map, housed in the History Museum of Belgrade. The map is a legacy of Vicko Krstulović, and at the exhibition organised in the National and University Library in Zagreb in 2013 the exhibition catalogue says that the Collection of graphics contains a map Ref. no. 71. So these are the only two copies of whose existence I managed to find evidence, considering that the other few are in the private Murtić’s legacy.

3. *Damnatio memoriae* – erasing Goran’s name from French cultural memory

But even a more restrictive example of erasure from public memory is related to the French edition of 1948. The recognition of *The Pit* in France began at the first post-war conference of left-wing intellectuals in Marseille in 1946, chaired by Louis Aragon. The poem was read in its entirety, and Aragon’s enthusiasm⁹ was crucial for printing of the first complete translation, whose hand-written version was first sent to Picasso. Then he allegedly uttered the famous sentence: “It is a pity that my Spain does not have one such poet in this Franco’s time.” After Picasso had agreed to illustrate the poem, the book was printed in the publishing house founded

The Pit. This edition, however, was printed in different conditions and the text was separated from the illustrations.

⁹Mladen Urem notes that on that occasion Aragon exclaimed – “After the *Divine Comedy*, this is for me the ultimate poetic achievement!” (Urem, 2013, 14).

during the World War II by Aragon himself for the Resistance Movement. This edition was sponsored by the French Communist Party and the Yugoslav Embassy, which was then headed by Marko Ristić, who was also a surrealist poet and a friend of Aragon and Éluard's. The cover also listed the name of Marko Ristić, who wrote the preface, as well as Paul Éluard with the occasional poem "The Tomb of Goran Kovačić" (*Tombeau de Goran Kovatchitch*). There is another version of the cover in 110 copies of the edition, which after Éluard's name adds *Avec un burin de Picasso* ("with a Picasso's copperplate"). But this edition lasted for only ten days, from June 18, when it was published, until June 28, when after the Cominform Resolution, Maurice Thorez, the then secretary of the FKP (The French Communist Party), declared strict censorship of everything that came from Yugoslavia (Urem, 2013, 14; Karić, 2013, 9). The complete edition of *La fosse commune* withdrew from the public, Aragon forgot his enthusiasm and, together with Éluard, terminated all contacts with Marko Ristić. Moreover, in his researching about French destiny of *The Pit*, Mladen Urem reveals an interesting anecdote about it – Fadil Ekmečić, the owner of the then Yugoslav bookshop in Paris (who owned one copy), went to the publishing house to inquire about the book and was surprised to find out that the text had been deleted from all the La Bibliothèque français catalogues as if it had never existed. Ekmečić showed the publishers his copy of the book, and they told him it was apparent that the book had been printed in their house, but they did not have any information about it (Urem, 2013, 15). This measure, in fact, is a genuine example of "repressive erasure", the practice which Connerton has been following since the Roman punishment of *damnatio memoriae* which involved erasing the name of a politically powerful person from all public inscriptions after he/she became the enemy of the state (Connerton, 2008, 60). Spanish comparatist Juez Gálvez believes that after "Tito's heresy", it was inconceivable that any book of Yugoslav origin (by order of Stalin) should remain in the La Bibliothèque français catalogue next to the titles that they were publishing *The International of Traitors*¹⁰ and *Tito, Traitor Marshal*¹¹ (Juez Gálvez, 2015, 186).

¹⁰ Renaud de Jouvenel, *L'Internationale des traîtres* (1948, 1949).

¹¹ Renaud de Jouvenel, *Tito, maréchal des traîtres* (1950).

At the opening of the 2013 exhibition “All Goran’s Pits” in the National and University Library (NUL), Mikica Maštrović, head of the NUL’s Collection of Graphics, warned that the NUL did not possess a single copy of it, and there was no information on how many of these rare copies were still left. On this occasion, she expressed regret that they had missed an auction at Christie’s, where one copy appeared and reached the price of 10.5 thousand dollars. She allowed for the possibility that in some Belgrade archive there might be a copy from the legacy of Marko Ristić, which he owned (Piteša, 2013, [http](#)).

It is interesting, however, that although withdrawn from circulation, the French edition served as a basis for the Spanish translation, published in Argentina during the first term in the office of General Peron in 1951. In this regard, Juez Gálvez notes that the covers of the Argentine edition were modelled upon the French ones with the addition of the name of the Spanish translator Pablo Rojas Paz. However, instead of Picasso’s copperplate before Éluard’s poem, a black and white photo of a bronze bust of Ivan Goran Kovačić made by Vojin Bakić was inserted. There is a comment on Vojin Bakić at the bottom of the picture, which goes as follows: *el joven escultor servio Vojin Bakić, autor del gran monumento a los héroes caídos en Bjelovar*.¹² (Juez Gálvez, 2015, 185).

4. First and Second Goran by Bakić

The picture which Gálvez mentions presents the so-called “Bakić’s first Goran”. Vojin Bakić almost obsessively returned to the figure of Goran in his opus and did not stop at his “first Goran”. Critics and biographers

¹²Translation: “a young Serbian sculptor, the author of the monument to the fallen hero in Bjelovar”. This is probably the monument named “A Call to Uprising”, which was set up in the Bjelovar City Park, and is well-known as “Bjelovarac”. Tonko Maroević found that this bronze statue represents a prototype of later “often abused figures of agitators” that could be seen on prominent bronze bases throughout Yugoslavia (Maroević, 1998, 22). However, this statue was blown up in 1991 when many other Bakić’s monuments were destroyed with explosives. Luckily, thanks to the persistence and initiatives of the Monument Restoration Group made up of Snješka Knežević PhD, academician Tonko Maroević, Zvonko Maković PhD and Dušan Matić, the monument was restored and after its reconstruction taken back to the old location in Bjelovar on December 8, 2010, with a special ceremony.

connect his obsession with the tragic fate of his four brothers who, at their young ages from 22 to 29 were captured in 1941 and executed in the concentration camp of Jadovno. The death in the Ustasha camp is the theme that is close to the death Goran wrote about in *The Pit*, and he died himself. Moreover, the “theme of Goran” in art is always a topic of death, premature, violent, tragic, horrible death. Goran’s character and epic *The Pit*, precisely through death, the poet’s death and the death described by the young poet, fused to such an extent that his death entered the interpretative field of the poem itself, and the poem “My Tomb” was read as the poet’s foreboding of death. Finally, Èluard’s poem in the preface of the French *Pit* is dedicated to the poet’s death, that is, the tomb of Goran Kovačić.

However, when it comes to Bakić’s sculptural opus, writing about the ambiguous glory of the state sculptor, Tonko Maroević notes that Bakić often knew “to knock on the closed door of the monumental practice even ahead of time” (Maroević 1998, 14). An example of this is Bakić’s “second Goran,” a sculpture from 1956, or Goran’s marble head placed in the Zagreb’s public park of Ribnjak in 1964, and in the same year, in the version of stainless steel in Lukovdol, the birthplace of Ivan Goran Kovačić. At this time, the sculpture sparked negative reactions provoking with its cubism, and “demonstrative and declarative” distancing from Kršinić’s tradition, in which Bakić himself grew up (ibid: 24). The stylistic distance between the “first” and the “second” Goran is the distance between soc-realism and (socialist) modernism. Although Bakić very often had to break the prejudices of the environment and clash with the coryphaeuses of discerning tastes, Maroević points out that “cracks in a soc-realistic perception of visual art” came about as a result of the breakup with the Cominform, which aimed to distance itself from the Soviet model, and this opened up space for the affirmation of divergent aesthetics. Owing to this request, Bakić in time became the most prominent representative of modern (“abstract”) sculpture in public function. Thus, his sculpture called “Goran’s necklace”, has been given the honour to be awarded to young poets in Lukovdol since 1971 as “Goran’s Wreath”¹³.

¹³The event of Goran’s Spring has been taking place since the spring of 1964 every year in Lukovdol, Ivan Goran Kovačić’s birthplace. On this occasion two awards are given: “Goran’s Wreath” (since 1971) and “Goran for young poets” (since 1977).

As we can see, the myth about Goran and *The Pit* from the very beginning had their own artistic life, but unlike conventional literary texts which evoke tradition, his art is markedly unconventional. On the one hand, we have a literary text which represents the fundamental myth of the victim and the victory of Socialist Yugoslavia, which is ultimately very conventionally written and which consciously evoked intertextual reading in the backdrop of tradition. On the other hand, in fine arts, however, the text inspired a radical break-up with a traditional expression. It was an explicit demand for a departure from soc-realism and the introduction of new procedures from the very first edition, from Murtić's abstraction, Picasso and Bakić's cubism, all that was initially considered as decadent art which was later to become the officially recognised art of "socialist modernism".

Edo Murtić in an interview claimed that we never actually had soc-realism and that visual art as an "unconquered thought" always also intrigued political thought (Tenžera, 2000). For this reason, it seems, that after the 90s transitional changes, it would have been more rewarding to question the visuality of the text rather than the text itself. Thus the 2013 exhibition "All Goran's Pits", organised by the National and University Library on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Goran's birth, was dedicated for the most part to the theme of the receptiveness of a literary text in visual arts.

5. Memory "disburdening strategies" after the 90s and the burden of *The Pit*

After 1991, with the collapse of Yugoslavia, a framework of collective memory, in which Goran's story functioned in a unique way, also disintegrated. In visual arts, the retrograde atmosphere of the '90s might be best illustrated with the return to "the first Goran" of Vojin Bakić, a hard soc-realistic illustration that appeared on a commemorative postal stamp of 1993. The return from modernism to the positivist social realism which in the 90s occurred in this example of the return of "the first Goran" does not only occur in art but also in the literary and historical interpretation. The positivist historiography which has approached the poetic text in a strict ideological

and historical context repeated methodologically, with the difference that, now, insisting on the application of the national key in the interpretation had a different political context. Thus, according to the opinion of Moša Pijade, for Marko Ristić in 1947, *The Pit* talked about the Ustasha massacres and was “more than a work, an act in the struggle of man and people for freedom, for fraternity among peoples” (Lešić, 1984, 134). However, in the new *History of Croatian Literature* written by Dubravko Jelčić in 1997, *The Pit* is “a work of uneven poetic value, perhaps triggered by the Chetnik massacres,” and the hand holding a “Chetnik knife” in the myth of Goran’s death is “the same hand that in our days was raised against Croatia and savagely shed Croatian blood” (Jelčić, 1997, 266). In the interpretation of Dubravko Jelčić, the death of the poet was again highlighted in the context of political manipulation, used for the need of history revisionism based on the general relativisation of crimes committed in the Second World War. Such an approach often reaches for a “universal” condemnation of “crimes in general” to avoid talking about a particular crime. The rhetorical novelty in this manipulation is only an a priori denial of one’s own manipulation.

It is an open question whether the poem was triggered by the Chetniks’ slaughter of Croats in Herzegovina in the first days of the NDH (Independent State of Croatia), and later changed by the last stanza written at the beginning of 1943 in the Livno Cave, but this probability cannot be eliminated without any firm evidence, which so far has not been found [...] Thus, a work of uneven poetic value, motivated perhaps by Chetnik massacres and written to be a protest – voice of human consciousness against every crime in general, was by political manipulation proclaimed top poetry and exploited for the needs of the Yugo-communist ideology. How do you put Goran’s death by a Chetnik knife in that context? As a tragic, martyr-like death by the same hand, which in our days raised against Croatia and brutally shed Croatian blood, he joined an endless procession of victims that Croatia sacrificed, at that chaotic time, looking for ways of salvation when it was easiest to make a mistake (Jelčić, 1997, 265–266).

The breakdown of the great narratives lead to the “flood of new memories,” which Etienne François calls the “other memory” of the Second World War. Given that in the post-war period “great formative narratives” were first created among the victorious countries, just after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, there was a collapse of that victorious interpretation. In this process of disintegration of the dominant remembrance policies, Etienne François notes the return to the problematic past

from the perspective of suppressed memories. Return to the suppressed memories leads to the creation of antagonistic cultures of memory which often appear as a sort of “competition of the group of victims” (François, 2006, 233). Likewise, with the breakup of Yugoslavia, there began some questioning of what was until then unquestionable in the predominant official collective memory of the Second World War, and that was the victory and the status of the victim.¹⁴

Since *The Pit*, as the fundamental text of the Partisan canon, is exactly about the victim and the victory, it has become a disturbance in the canon of Croatian literature after the 90s, which is trying to build on the new, primarily nationally-labelled criteria. Besides, the central text of the Partisan canon becomes a burden for various “disburdening strategies” which derive from the perspective of those political forces that are identified with crimes and defeat, and not with the victim and victory.

Therefore, after the 90s, there is an ambiguous relationship between Goran’s poetry and Goran as a person. Although Ivan Goran Kovačić is still remembered in the collective memory through the poem *The Pit*, in the conditions when the transmission mechanisms of the Partisan tradition are interrupted, the transitional literary and historical studies have placed the author in the centre thus neglecting the text which affirmed him as the Partisan poet. So discussions about Goran over the past decades have

¹⁴The collapse of Yugoslavia in Croatia in the early 1990s was experienced as a return to the historical point in which it came about, but now, the subsequent failure of socialism enters into this historical point and is identified with the defeat of anti-fascism by ante-dating. At the same time, the erasure of socialist history and the reinterpretation of history takes place on behalf of the political forces that were defeated in 1945. Just as the Communist Party in 1945 succeeded in attributing to itself all the merit of anti-fascist victory, now the democratic transition of the '90s claims the revisionist historical significance of the winning over communism, which never really happened on the battlefield, and the merits for this “victory” go to the politically marginalized forces that nurture the Ustasha sentiment and in pursuit of a non-existent state continuity, link the narrative of sovereignty to the NDH (Independent State of Croatia). However, the changed attitude towards the history, in the nineties Croatia, manifested primarily in relation to the crimes committed in the NDH. Holm Sundhaussen notes many examples in which the new (but also official) confrontation with the past leads to the relativisation of Ustasha terror over Serbs, Roma and Jews. Thus, for example, in the eight primary school class textbook in 1992, the persecution of non-Croats is dealt with in one sentence, while at the same time, its author insists on the Serbian crimes against Croats so as to leave an impression that Croats were the only victims of the Ustasha regime (Sundhaussen, 2006, 265).

mostly focused on the positivist political trivialization – questioning the motivation of his joining the Partisans, reconstructing the circumstances of his death, establishing his “real” political affiliation and the nature of the relationship with Vladimir Nazor.

The work on shaping new memories also included the institutional marking of Goran’s birth and death anniversaries, such as the exhibition opened on December 11, 2003 at the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (HAZU) and the occasional Collegiate Body held on October 29, 2013 in the Society of Croatian Writers (DHK). Although the year of publication of *The Pit* and the poet’s death coincide, the anniversaries were organised solely on the occasion of Goran’s birth (1913) and death (1943), thus also redirecting literary and historical studies from the interpretation of the text to questioning circumstances of the political “myth about Goran” with the aim of its deconstruction.

The work on the deconstruction of the “myth about Goran” has been inspired by the new identity policies which aim to disintegrate not only the ideological context but also to redefine the national roles in that context. For example, in the scientific colloquium of 2013, Božidar Petrač insisted on the revision of Goran’s political views and the judgment of his work in the light of the national political ideas of Starčević, Radić and Maček, and Ivica Matičević questioned the motives of Goran’s joining the Partisans.¹⁵ In a series of such neo-positivist readings, the Belgrade historian Goran Miloradović wrote a paper, in which he insists on the fact that Sima Milošević, who was killed along with Goran, was the main target of the

¹⁵Although announced, the Book of Proceedings of the scientific Collegiate, held on October 29, 2013, at the Society of Croatian Writers, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth and the 70th anniversary of the death of the poet, narrator, essayist and critic Ivan Goran Kovačić, has never been published. However, it had an extensive media coverage. Thus for example, portal Culturenet.hr on October 29 2013, brings the news headlined: “A Conference on the Croatian Writer Ivan Goran Kovačić” (<http://www.culturenet.hr/default2.aspx?id=54836>, 26.06.2018). This brief report says that the literary critic Ivica Matičević “also recalled the motives of Goran’s and Nazor’s joining the Partisans, noting that in 1942, Kovačić asked to be Croatian cultural attaché in Italy, but his application was refused. That is the reason why, according to Matičević, after the rejection, on Ban Jelačić square, Goran exclaimed that he would retaliate them. From this anecdote we can see what was his true motivation to join the Partisans.” Since we do not have Matičević’s complete article, we are only left with this short, unargued defamation that Goran joined the Partisans only because he failed to make a career in the NDH.

Chetniks because they were allegedly not interested in an “unimportant” Zagreb journalist but a respected Belgrade physician.

THESIS: In some interpretations, the role of Sima Milošević in the encounter with the Chetniks is either completely left out or given a minor significance [...]

ANTI-THESIS: On the occasion of the meeting with the Chetniks, the role of Sima Milošević was more significant than that of Kovačić. Chetniks were above all interested in the well-known doctor and professor at Belgrade University Milošević, whose knowledge and skills they needed and who was also an important member of the AVNOJ Executive Board. ‘Zagreb journalist’ Kovačić was an incidental, less important prisoner (Miloradović, 2012, 35).

However, under the guise of the “ideology-free revaluation” of his work, to fit it into the new identity and national narrative, the work on memory is diverted to some other details, sometimes trivial, and in doing so, the zero point of history is the starting point. This point is perhaps best illustrated by Ivica Matičević in his speech at the opening of the Exhibition of the Life of Ivan Goran Kovačić in the atrium of the palace of the HAZU (Croatian Academy of Arts and Science) on December 11, 2003. – “Ivan Goran Kovačić has long been in the ghetto, and the HAZU exhibition is an attempt to drag him out of ideology and the walls of oblivion and silence”. For this purpose, “his birth certificate from 1913, a certificate of citizenship from 1923, manuscripts, photographs, matriculation book and school certificates, address book, drawings, and even a charge slip for the Erika 1939” typewriter were exhibited. How these exhibit trivia, however, will get Goran out of the claws of “ideology and the walls of oblivion and silence” is an unsolvable puzzle.

A request to read *The Pit* outside ideology often comes down to reading it outside of the historical context or in a changed context. This is also apparent in the Grammar school fourth-class Reader from 2006. In the introductory biographical note, whose author is Joža Skok, the usual formulation of Goran’s “departure to the Partisans” was replaced by the statement that Goran “crossed over to the Partisan side with Vladimir Nazor”. This implies that until then, he had been on some other side. However, there is no mention of the other side from which he can join the Partisans anywhere; neither in the introductory note nor the passage of the essay by Vlatko Pavletić nor in the methodological elaboration by Mirjana Živny. So there is no historical context, NDH (Independent State of

Croatia) and fascism are also excluded, as is the occupied Zagreb and the liberated territory. Moreover, insisting on historical de-contextualization, Vlatko Pavletić argues that *The Pit* is talking about “a bloody struggle of the human and the inhuman which has been going on from time primordial”. Well, this is not the war which lasted from ‘41 to ‘45, but the struggle from the beginning of time.

Although the Croatian National Curriculum has included *The Pit* and *My Tomb* as part of the set literature in the 4th Grammar school classes, a survey conducted in 2017 comprising 51 first-year students of Croatian Studies in Zadar revealed that only ten of them recognised the author of the verses “Blood is my daylight and darkness too. // Blessing of the night has been gouged from my cheeks”¹⁶. In 2018, the same survey was conducted, which comprised 31 students, and five students recognised the above-mentioned verses. This information may also point to the duality of approaching Goran’s poetry. Since it is present in lectures, but not receptive, it is obvious that the historical deconstruction of the text also means its decanonisation. Finally, if we include in the analysis the types of forgetting strategies proposed by Connerton, it seems that from the third forgetting type, “forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity”, the memorising of Goran’s poem has passed to the level of the fourth type, “structural amnesia” or selective memory, and in this last example also to “forgetting as annulment” as the fifth in the set of Connerton’s forgetting strategies.

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¹⁶Translated by Alec Brown (*The Pit: Poem*, Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1961).

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