Paradoxes of History in Pavao Pavličić's Novel Muzej revolucije (The Museum of the Revolution)

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Paradoxes of History in Pavao Pavličić's Novel *Muzej revolucije* (*The Museum of the Revolution*)[1]

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There are only a few historical novels in Pavao Pavličić's extensive body of work. The most recent one is *Muzej revolucije* (*The Museum of the Revolution*) (2012), which speaks about the times in Croatia between World War II and the Croatian War of Independence. Right at the end of the last war, the narrator becomes a sort of a guard of the abandoned Museum of Revolution in an unnamed "sleepy town" in the Croatian Danube region. By watching the ruinous symbol of the former communist regime, the narrator is trying to reconstruct its history. However, that takes him on the path of reconstructing the history of his own friendship with two of his best friends, who were taken to the opposing sides of the current historical processes. He also realises that reconstructing the history of his friendship as well as the history of the museum is not possible without looking back at the national history, which is involved in it all. Personal, institutional and national histories are constantly intertwined in the novel. That makes it a type of a neo-historical novel (*novel about history*), which questions not only the influence of the *big* history on *weak* individuals, but also the paradox of history itself. The focus of this paper will be on how *Museum of the Revolution* shows the paradox of revolutions, as well as ideologies starting the revolutions.

KEYWORDS: *ideology, neo-historical novel, revolution*

Introduction

With more than hundred published books,[2] contemporary Croatian writer, scholar, professor emeritus, publicist, translator and screenwriter Pavao Pavličić is one of the most significant names in contemporary Croatian literature and

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[2] The most complete bibliography of Pavličić's books to date (as of 2021) was published in the collection *Kuća od knjiga* (*House of Books*) on the occasion of his 70th birthday (Pavlović 2017: 225-230).

culture. He has published, excluding his professional and journalistic works, a total of seventy literary and related works, most of which are crime novels and prose with fantastic elements, as well as a significant amount of memoirs and prose for children and young adults. Although to a lesser extent, important genres in his oeuvre are historical novels, one of which, *Muzej revolucije* (*The Museum of the Revolution*) (2012), we will pay special attention to in this paper.

Although traces of history are present in many of Pavličić's works, especially in his memoirs,[3] but also in some thrillers with fantastic elements,[4] history plays the most important role, according to Julijana Matanović (2016), in four of Pavličić's novels, *Nevidljivo pismo* (*Invisible Letter*), *Kronika provincijskog kazališta* (*Chronicle of the Provincial Theatre*), *Devet spomenika* (*Nine Monuments*) and *Muzej revolucije* (*The Museum of the Revolution*). According to Matanović, these are "novels in which history is one of the many layers dealt with and in which history sets the keynote" with "major national political developments influencing the biographies of ordinary people and determining their brief histories" (Matanović 2016: 80). In this sense, Pavličić's novels could not be seen in the context of a traditional historical novel, but of a Croatian *neo-historical novel*, i.e. *a novel about history*, whose main representatives are Nedjeljko Fabrio, Ivan Aralica, Feđa Šehović, Ivan Supek, Stjepan Tomaš, Ludwig Bauer, etc.[5] The approach to history in these novels is not monumental, the main characters are neither famous historical figures nor decisive historical events such as revolutions and wars, but the focus is on the so-called weak heroes and their fate. Accordingly, in addition to the official historical sources, the testimonies of the so-called ordinary people and their personal letters, family photos, etc. are equally valuable. In any case, history in these novels is not a straight path to progress, it is no longer a *life's teacher* as it is seen in the Šenoanian tradition of the historical novel, but becomes "madness, barrenness, and death", as Fabrio called it in his novel *Vježbanje života* (*Practicing Life*) (1986: 212), that is, it represents wanderings in which we constantly repeat the same mistakes (cf. Matanović 2003).

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[3] *Dunav* (*Danube*), *Šapudl* (*The Shapudl Street*), *Vodič po Vukovaru* (*A Guide Through Vukovar*), *Vukovarski spomenar* (*Memoirs of Vukovar*), *Bilo pa prošlo* (*Bygones*), *Narodno veselje* (*Folk Festival*).

[4] *Kraj mandata* (*The End of Mandate*), *Rupa na nebu* (*A Hole in the Sky*), *Diksilend* (*Dixieland*), *Zaborav* (*Oblivion*), *Odbor za sreću* (*The Happiness Committee*), *Literarna sekcija* (*Literary Group*), *Trajanovo pravilo* (*Trajan's Rule*).

[5] While Julijana Matanović most often uses the term *novel about history* (cf. Matanović 2003, 2016), Cvjetko Milanja more often uses the term *neo-historical novel* and considers it mainly in the context of new historicism (cf. Milanja 1996: 100-120), and Krešimir Nemec in his work *Povijest hrvatskog romana* (*History of the Croatian Novel*) uses the general chronological term "new historical novel of our time" and considers it mainly in the context of postmodernist historiographical metafiction (cf. Nemec 2006: 265-268).

When speaking about the elements of the novel about history in Pavličić's *Museum of the Revolution*, Matanović (2006) paid the most attention to the effect of *great* history on the *ordinary* person and to questioning the reliance on official historical documents. In this paper, the focus is mainly on examples in the novel *The Museum of Revolution* that stand for the paradox of the revolution as one of the main means ideologies use to set in motion the so-called great history.[6]

From the history of a friendship to national history

The basic narrative line of the novel follows the attempt of the main character, an unnamed 50-year-old historian with literary ambitions, who is also the first-person narrator, to reconstruct the history of his long-standing friendship with Ljudevit (Lujo) Kraljevec and Gvozden (Gogo) Lončarić. The narrator is located in an unnamed "sleepy Pannonian town" (Pavličić 2012: 10),[7] and the time of the action is 1995, more precisely the beginning of August and the military-police operation "Storm", through which the Croatian army and police liberated a large part of the Croatian territory occupied by Serbian paramilitaries during the Croatian War for Independence. Unlike the narrator, Lujo and Gogo are involved in operation "Storm", but on opposite sides: Lujo is on the battlefield as a Croatian volunteer and Gogo is in Bosanski Petrovac, a place that will soon also be affected by operation "Storm", where he is on assignment to visit the monuments of the National Liberation War in Yugoslavia during World War II. The narrator's evocation of friendship with the two is called forth insofar as he may never see them again after operation "Storm", but also by his stay at the abandoned City Museum of the Revolution, where their friendship began in 1952. The narrator goes to the museum at Lujo's request, which he sends him from the battlefield – there are rumours even at the battlefield that someone wants to destroy the museum – and the narrator's mission is to prevent such possible actions.

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[6] Although contemporary theories extend the concept of ideology from politics to literature, film, advertising, everyday language, etc. (cf. Freeden 2006), in this paper we use this term in the traditional meaning of a complete (usually totalitarian and dogmatic) system of political thought and action aimed at creating a "good society" (cf. Schwarzmantel 2005).

[7] An undefined peaceful town on the Danube with often described avenues of chestnut and linden trees is the setting of Pavličić's novels *Nevidljivo pismo* (*Invisible Letter*) and *Škola pisanja* (*Writing Classes*) and resembles not only the fictional town Varoš on the Danube river, which appears in novels *Kronika provincijskog kazališta* (*Chronicle of the Provincial Theatre*), *Odbor za sreću* (*The Happiness Committee*), *Devet spomenika* (*Nine Monuments*) and *Literarna sekcija* (*Literary Group*), but also in the real town of Vukovar, the author's hometown, which first appears as a plot location in the novel *Diksilend* (*Dixieland*).

Thus, the novel begins with the thematisation of the so-called big history. However, in the course of the plot, more and more attention is paid to the personal history of the three main characters and their families, i.e. the influence of *great* history on *small* human destinies. While in the museum, the narrator writes down his memories of Lujo and Gogo in the museum's commemorative book: "I write because I hope that by structuring a text, composing sentences, striving for logic and meaning, I will somehow understand what really happened to us, what our lives were like" (Pavličić 2012: 20). Although he has paid little attention to it until then, in this reconstruction of his relationship with two best friends, the narrator realizes that they were influenced by many factors, especially by the history of their families and consequently by national history itself. The narrator tries to understand how national history interfered in their private lives and becomes aware of the paradoxical nature of the *great* history, i.e. ideology and revolution as the main driving forces, which are clearly visible in many situations of the novel.

Paradoxes of ideology

Liberalism, conservatism, socialism and nationalism are usually mentioned as the most dominant political (macro)ideologies in the Western world from the French Revolution to the present (cf. Schwarzmantel 2005). Since World War II, the latter two have been the most dominant in Croatia, so the *Museum of the Revolution* mainly questions their postulates, or rather the postulates of political movements and regimes that emerged from them.

Contact with ideologies becomes clear first through the history of Lujo's and Gogo's families, then also through their own life stories. During the Second World War, Lujo's father Alojz was an industrialist, while Gogo's father Milovan became a local hero of the national liberation war. Alojz and Milovan were therefore on opposite sides, but both died in the same year: Alojz was shot as an "enemy element" by partisans in 1945, while Milovan was killed near Trieste in the same year. Apart from the fact that Lujo and Gogo lost their fathers shortly after birth, their families are also connected by the Museum of the Revolution. In fact, the property where the museum is located belonged to Lujo's father until World War II, and Gogo's father was employed there. After the war, the estate was nationalized and the largest building on the estate was turned into the Museum of the Revolution, which was partly a residential building, so Lujo and Gogo lived in it with their mothers after the war. Gogo's family was in a better position now, of course. Moreover, the museum was for a short period of time named after Gogo's father. Unlike such a close connection between Lujo's and Gogo's family and the so-called big history, the narrator's family was not directly affected by it: The narrator's father was for a short time Domobran, member of

the armed forces of the Independent State of Croatia which existed during World War II, but he fled on one occasion and later did not take sides in the War.

As for three friends, the situation is similar. Gogo, as the son of a National Liberation War hero, enjoyed the privileges of the communist regime until the early 1990s. After studying architecture, he worked as an expert on the monuments of the National Liberation War, first in Zagreb and then in Belgrade, and was very close to the regime. Lujo, on the other hand, finished his law studies and also moved to Zagreb, where he reached the rank of major in the 1990s as a volunteer in the Croatian War for Independence. Opposite them, the narrator graduated in history and lived in his hometown, where he worked in the library. But apart from the profession, the difference between the three friends is obvious in their personal lives: both Lujo and Gogo were married to Kosjenka, with whom all three were in love in their youth. Later, Lujo and Gogo remarried and had children. The narrator has never been involved with Kosjenka; moreover, with occasional brief love affairs, he is single all the time.

The contrast between the narrator, on the one hand, and Lujo and Gogo, on the other (as well as their families), is more than clear in every respect. Therefore, as far as the reference to history is concerned, which is what interests us most here, Lujo's and Gogo's families took active part in it, while narrator's family suffered from its consequences, as the narrator himself observed: "Gogo's and Lujo's family made history, each in its own way, while my family was affected by it, it was the object and material of that history" (Pavličić 2012: 208). Because of such relationships between the three families, some critics objected to the novel for excessive "geometrization, almost schematization in the relationship of the characters" (Andonovski 2013) or for "unexpected and unnecessary artificiality" (Arsenić 2012). Such a clear contrast between characters, however, is very much motivated by the novel's main intention: to point out the paradox of ideologies. In other words, *The Museum of the Revolution* should not be read as a historical novel, but as a novel about history (which actually means a metahistorical novel) whose primary aim is to problematize a particular philosophy of history, not a particular historical period. In this sense, *The Museum of the Revolution* is not (only) a novel about the collapse of Yugoslavia and the communist regime, but above all a novel that questions the ideas of history, that is, ideology and revolution as such. In this respect, the characters appearing in the novel represent certain types and not significantly individualized existences, i.e. one could say that the characters are deliberately radically opposed in order to reflect the basic ideas of the novel as clearly as possible.

And one of the basic ideas is that of the paradox of ideologies, exemplified by the fate of Gogo's father, who, despite choosing the winning side, perished at the same time as Lujo's father, who was on the wrong side. The novel shows that ideologies are paradoxical through the memories of Lujo's and Gogo's father:

> communists only remember that Alojz Kraljevac was an oppressor of the working class and that Milovan Lončarić Nino was a communist and a hero, and they forget that Alojz Kraljevac helped this hero and that Milovan Lončarić Nino authorized throwing people down from the church tower. And anti-communists only remember that Milovan Lončarić Nino was friends with an Ustasha and committed a war crime, and they forget that Alojz Kraljevac ruthlessly fired workers and let their children starve. (Pavličić 2012: 174)[8]

Observing one's actions through an ideological prism is always one-sided and then misguided, just as ideologies are in themselves, so whatever they are, they always harm someone.

How then does one position oneself in a world (and in a specific society) strongly dominated by ideologies? One of the solutions offered by this novel is the narrator's position. Staying away from ideological commitments, the narrator did not achieve professional and personal successes during his lifetime like Lujo and Gogo did. However, by the end of the novel, that attitude turned out to be rewarding, while it was disastrous for the other two. In fact, both Lujo and Gogo were killed in operation "Storm", for which the other is likely (accidentally) to blame, and the narrator lives peacefully in his hometown, where Kosjenka returns after a series of failed marriages, so it can be assumed that things will finally get better for him in the matter of love.

The fact that the narrator was richly rewarded at the end of the novel for his passivity in the past, namely for his neutral attitude towards ideologies, is one of Vladimir Arsenić's (2012) objections to the novel. He first argues that a man from the former Yugoslavia "cannot live through such a turbulent history and remain uninvolved, disinterested, outside the mainstream, on the sidelines" (Arsenić 2012), as the narrator succeeded, and then concludes that "it [meaning the narrator's strategy of ideological non-determination] should not be favoured in a novelistic world" (Arsenić 2012). To be honest, the narrator in the novel came very close to the fact that his *passivity* deserves the condemnation that Arsenić pronounces about him. However, he does not seem to be as passive as the aforementioned critic sees him. Indeed, the narrator was partly involved in the student movements of that time in 1968, as well as in 1971 within the Croatian Spring, a cultural-political movement that requested for corresponding rights for Croatia which was then part of Yugoslavia, as well as democratic and economic reforms. He also wrote the book *Naš grad u klasnoj borbi* (*Our City in the Class Struggle*) in the 1980s, in which he took a certain ideological stance, as

[8] TN: Ustaša (Ustasha), a member of the Croatian fascist movement that ruled the Independent State of Croatia during World War II.

well as in a 1989 paper at the symposium *Revolutions on the Threshold of the New Millennium*. However, all his political engagement came about at the urging of someone: Gogo's in 1968, Lujo's in 1971, and the impetus for the book came from the then director of the museum Nižetić. The narrator therefore had experience with ideological engagements. And they were all negative, so that withdrawal from more direct ideological engagement was in fact the narrator's only logical decision. Namely, in 1968 he was beaten, in 1971 he lost his job, his book was ideologically instrumentalized by Nižetić without him knowing about it and giving his consent, just as he clumsily presented his thoughts at the symposium, so that his final message almost contradicted what he actually wanted to say. In other words, all of the narrator's contacts with ideological engagement, however indirect or scarce, ended badly, so that the only logical consequence of his future behaviour was to stay away from them.

A kind of recipe for avoiding ideological engagements and yet not being completely passive seems to be given through the narrator's relationship with the Museum of the Revolution in the narrative present (1995). At that time, unlike Lujo and Gogo, the narrator was not directly involved in the major events of contemporary history (operation "Storm"), but he was very involved in the defence of the Museum of the Revolution, that is, in the defence of the history that it symbolizes, which some want to change and some have even erased. For example, the narrator is literally exposed to danger when he fights off attackers who first want to blow up the museum and then set it on fire. Finally, although it is not his duty, he decides to take care of the museum even after Lujo and Gogo are killed and the city government does not know what to do with the museum. He does so not out of ideological conviction – the narrator does not want to preserve the museum either because it is a symbol of the old (Yugoslav) regime or because it carries a symbol of Croatia (plaque to Zrinski and Frankopan) – but because the museum is simply a historical fact that should not be manipulated or erased at will, as if it did not exist. The museum, he says, should be protected "not only from attackers, but also from false meaning that might be attributed to it in public" (Pavličić 2012: 302). The first requires literally physical protection, which he is willing to give, and the second requires "recording in detail everything that happened: I have to organize the exhibition of the museum, analyse all these secret documents in the cellar and describe the events that took place recently. Everything must be assigned its place and meaning" (Pavličić 2012: 302-303). Therefore, the narrator is not completely passive, but simply does not want to actively take sides, because he is aware that any (political) ideology is always one-sided and therefore misguided. In this sense, he embodies the thesis that the future "does not belong to ideologies and revolutions, but to the so-called ordinary, but free and determined people, who are unaware of overriding historical accelerations and mind-numbing ideologies and who find them repulsive and foreign" (Matičević 2015: 138).

This distancing of the narrator from ideologies could also be seen in the context of a postmodern man who no longer believes in so-called grand narratives, which traditional political ideologies – being overarching visions of a "good society" – in fact are. Likewise, as Schwarzmantel shows, postmodern theories reject their (awareness-rising) idealization of "reason" and the idea of "progress" at its core:

> The experiences of fascism, the barbarism of Nazism, and the mass terror and violence of Stalinism have severely dented belief in the power of reason, in the capacity of humanity to construct a good society and eradicate violence and political tyranny… Nor has the experience of the years since the end of fascism, as humanity advances toward the end of the 20th century, been very encouraging in terms of realization of the Enlightenment project of a world ruled by reason. Critics of that project point to the emergence of religious and ethnic fundamentalism, to desperate appeals to national identity, to illustrate their view that the idea of a society controlled by rational cooperation between human beings is further away than ever. (Schwarzmantel 2016: 219)

Moreover, the idea that an ideology is a system of thought has been criticized because in postmodern times of extreme plurality and diversity, "no single party or movement can encapsulate everybody's vision of the good society, hence the idea of a single force creating a free society is irrelevant" (Schwarzmantel 2016: 211). As for the ideologies discussed in the novel, critics of socialist ideology have complained that it "fails to recognize the individualistic and fragmentary thrust of contemporary society" and that it "pays too little heed to democratic rights and the importance of people choosing their representatives and deciding what they thought best" (Schwarzmantel 2016: 229). As for nationalism, the crux of the objection is that it often "shares with some forms of conservatism a defensive and aggressive traditionalism that seeks to avoid or suppress pluralism and difference within the nation" (Schwarzmantel 2016: 232). As we have seen, similar criticism of both ideologies is integral part of *The Museum of the Revolution*, so this novel can be considered as a postmodern criticism of not only specific ideologies but also of the concept of ideology in general.

The paradoxes of revolution

Political ideologies "offer a criticism of existing society, which is condemned as imperfect and contrasted with some vision of 'the good society' that is to be attained" (Schwarzmantel 2005: 10). One of the most common methods by which this transformation of society is sought is through revolution. However, this

means of achieving a "good society" had its paradoxical side, and the narrator began to notice it as a child, when he realized that, for example, Tito's Relay Race was just an empty parade, as were the speeches of high-ranking guests at various school events:

> These were bigwigs from the Communist Party Committee, then promising members of the youth organization, then some fat-assed female comrades who said at the meetings that we have to *consider* something, how we have to *agree on something*, or how we have to be the supporters of this or that. An obligatory spice in the speeches of such people was the word *revolution*: they called the revolution not only *ours*, but the feeling was conveyed as if they personally had carried out the revolution, although we knew that they did not participate in it in the war. (Pavličić 2012: 85)

Moreover, the narrator soon enough concluded that for high-ranking officials the term revolution means a "political reality and government structure", so anything that deviates from it would mean an attack on the revolution (Pavličić 2012: 85), i.e. "revolution meant a state in which for the officials there are no problems, and the counterrevolution is everything else" (Pavličić 2012: 86).

The history of the Museum of the Revolution itself shows that the revolution can be understood by everyone in their own way. The history of the museum is revealed as the narrator reconstructs the history of the friendship with Lujo and Gogo that began there. Thus, the narrator realizes that the museum fulfilled its original function – glorification of the Revolution of the National Liberation War – especially in the sixties, when its director was a regime man Stanko Bakula, who put in the foreground national heroes and the like. In the seventies, however, director became Ante Nižetić, who was a great opponent of nationalism, so that the museum becomes primarily the site of getting even with the Ustasha. In the 1980s, Tamara Lukić became the director of the museum, who abstracted the idea of revolution and brought it closer to contemporary popular culture. In her opinion, the purpose of the museum should not be limited to the representation of the socialist revolution, but the museum should problematize the revolution as such, i.e. tell of any rebellion and mass movement in a popular way, being consistent with contemporary popular culture (rock music, film, etc.).

In addition to pointing out the paradoxical nature of the socialist revolution, at the end of the novel the narrator makes several theses about the idea of revolution in general. He wrote the story of his friendship with Lujo and Gogo, but he did not manage, as he himself confessed, to illuminate some events entirely, but he was able to learn something about the revolution. The first thesis is that "every revolution always comes too soon", and the second that "every revolution starts well and ends badly" (Pavličić 2012: 280). As for the first thesis, the narrator

believes that every revolution "in its frenzied need" to achieve its goal, "killed many people and brought many disasters", and if we had waited "just a little longer", its goal – the logic of historical change – would have been achieved anyway; a little later, but without casualties and accidents (Pavličić 2012: 280). This thesis is also related to the question of whether revolutionaries have the right to kill in the name of higher goals, which the narrator's grandfather Martin warned him against by giving him an example from his own life. Namely, his grandfather was in a situation to kill a war profiteer at the time he was a member of the military defectors called zeleni kadar (Green Cadre). At that moment, grandfather asked himself,

> Who am I to determine who can live and who cannot? Who am I to determine who should be sacrificed for the betterment of humanity and for a more just society? (...) Aren't the chances of me being fair in this very slim? Am I not much more likely to make a terrible mistake? (Pavličić 2012: 137)

As for the second thesis, the narrator is aware that every revolution begins with the pursuit of something better, but when this is achieved, revenge is taken on what should have been overthrown, with the innocent suffering again. And who is to say that the *new* is better than the *old*? At the end of the novel, after both Lujo and Gogo are killed on the same day, the narrator ponders whether a third thesis – provoked by the death of two friends – should be added to these two: "those who rush headlong into a revolution will sooner or later become its victims?" (Pavličić 2012: 291).

Paradoxes of history

Given the paradoxical nature of revolutions and ideologies, the novel shows that the nature of history itself can hardly be different. This thesis is supported by narrator's conclusion that "everyone remembers history as they see fit" (Pavličić 2012: 174), i.e. that "everything is more or less distorted in history and that everyone is doing with it whatever they want, only if they can" (Pavličić 2012: 187). These theses are supported by many examples of history being wrapped in new clothes.

One of the most impressive examples concerns the mentioned commemorative plaque at the front of the Museum of the Revolution. It is actually a large stone relief depicting Croatian nobleman Fran Krsto Frankopan made by Ivan Meštrović, commissioned around 1940 by Lujo's grandfather Gustav, who also built the estate where the museum is located. However, after the Second World War, the new regime renamed the nobleman Frankopan from the plaque the

Revolutionary, i.e. the Hero of the National Liberation War. Another motif that shows how history is wrapped in new clothes concerns changes in the exhibitions of the museum. With the arrival of each new director, but also with the change of historical and political circumstances, the museum exhibition changes. The old exhibits are not thrown away, but kept in the cellar, which at the moment when the narrator looks around in it, contains several alternative exhibitions, for each revolution its own. In other words, there are several *parallel histories* in the museum archive. However, in addition to alternative museum exhibitions, there are four alternative museum commemorative books in the museum repository. Each director apparently procured a new one, *his own* commemorative book, taking from the previous ones only what suited him. In other words, each director *created* his own history of the museum, redesigned it and adapted it to his needs in general. He also did not throw away old commemorative books, but kept them in the cellar of the museum, which represents a kind of "subconscious of the house, the city and the entire former society" (Pavličić 2012: 234). The fact that the narrator also writes his chronicle in one of the museum's commemorative books (the last one he found in the museum, which still has empty pages) makes his story another one of the alternative (museum) histories. In fact, the narrator becomes a kind of new director, not only because he writes the museum's chronicle, but also because he temporarily runs the museum until the city government decides what to do with it.

In this respect, the fate of the museum after the 1990s is paradoxical. Indeed, after legal complications, in 1995 the museum passed to Lujo as sole heir, although it had been transferred to state ownership after World War II. Since Lujo died soon after, the city government does not know to whom it should be transferred now. The property could be transferred to the city itself, but what to do with it? On the one hand, the local government does not dare to demolish it because the National Liberation War is common property, something that even belongs to the new state, and for some it could be a problem if it were demolished, and who knows, maybe one day the National Liberation War will become relevant again. On the other hand, the reopening of the museum is not a solution, because it still symbolizes the past regime, which is undesirable today, and if the local government does not want to reopen it, why should it own it at all. So, if we consider the museum as a symbol of history, it means that the municipality does not know what to do with its own history and would rather do without it. But various interested groups know exactly what to do with it. So first those who want to get rid of it as a symbol of the old regime, try to blow it up, and then, the others, who want to take revenge for the liberation of the city of Knin and do not want to leave this symbol of the past system as a legacy to those who, in their opinion, do not deserve it, want to set it on fire. For the third time, it was to be demolished by those who focus not on national issues but on material ones: After demolition, the land it is on would become cheaper, so it

could be bought and a shopping centre could be built on it. Given the motives of the latter interest group, it is obvious that they are in a way degraded: from the reconstruction to the destruction of the museum, similarly to how the motives for the installation of new museum exhibits have changed – first the focus was on ideological and finally on banal motives, which is a true reflection of modern society, for which only entertainment and profit are important.

The paradox of history is shown by the relationship between official, unofficial, and fictional historical data introduced into the novel. Namely, since the narrator is a historian, he decides at several points in the novel to investigate some historical facts on his own that strike him as suspicious. And these researches of his usually lead to findings opposite to the traditional ones. In order to get better acquainted to the biography of Gogo's father, the narrator finds some official documents about him while studying at the Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement in Zagreb, but they contain only dry, uninteresting information. When he asks his father about him at home, he, a little drunk (because only in such a state he wanted to talk about past), gives him much more interesting information that is not in official documents. For example, he tells him that Gogo's father, publicly known as a national hero, is actually a traitor (he is said to have betrayed his long-time pre-war friend, who was an Ustasha, even though this friend had saved him during the Ustasha regime). While researching the beginning of the socialist revolution in his town, the narrator again makes an interesting discovery:

> So I learned – first from police files, then from living witnesses (...) that the whole story of the uprising in our area went a little differently than the official version claims: the so-called first insurgent rifle was actually a gun from which Jure Vrećica shot at the gendarme at the fair, when there was a dispute about who would dance next to the most beautiful girl in a circle dance. (Pavličić 2012: 215)

In contrast to such data, which could be called unofficial, there are also those in the novel whose credibility is completely questionable. The most vivid example of this is the alleged documents showing that Tito held a secret meeting with local communists in the future Museum of the Revolution in the late 1930s, where he first expressed the idea of having to prepare for an armed uprising (Pavličić 2012: 121). These documents *were found* in the 1960s by the then director of the museum, Stanko Bakula, a man of the regime, of course.

Conclusion or is *The Museum of the Revolution* dancing on the edge of utopia?

By pointing to the paradox of history, Pavličić's *Museum of the Revolution* undoubtedly belongs to the paradigm of a novel about history. Although material on the history of the three friends and the history of the Museum of the Revolution is chronologically presented whereby the so-called great historical events and confirmed historical figures, which are elements of a traditional historical novel, are occasionally mentioned, the novel deviates from this tradition mainly by questioning the possibility of authentic knowledge of the past and by analysing the influence of great history on the fate of *weak* characters who are the focus of the novel. At the same time, the criticism is directed not only against the actors of the so-called great history, but also against those who reproduce them often and falsely. This was well noted by Strahimir Primorac, who wrote that *The Museum of the Revolution* is another of Pavličić's "witty, sharp incisions with a literary scalpel under the skin of a time where 'all held sacred' turned into their opposite" (Primorac 2012: 1356).

The novel also places great emphasis on pointing out the paradoxical nature of ideologies and revolutions as the main driving forces of so-called great history. Ideologies prove to be one-sided and therefore harmful, as do revolutions, which are disastrous not only for those against whom they are directed, but usually also for their initiators, since sooner or later a new revolution is launched against them as well. But the worst thing is that under the targets of revolutions, as the novel shows, suffer a lot not only those who have nothing to do with revolutions, but also those who do not want to have anything to do with them. The counterpoint to all this in the novel is the narrator, who throughout his life tries to maintain a neutral ideological position, that is, he is not actively involved in the events of the so-called great history. In doing so, he is not completely passive, nor does he advocate complete exclusion from all events, but merely advocates an attempt to avoid (and we might even say rise above) narrow ideological frameworks. In practice, however, this means avoiding direct participation in revolutions, protests, wars, and similar means by which ideologies try to attain a "better society". However, not complete passivity is meant, but a different kind of activity as a chronicler or writer.

The narrator's position deserves respect because it offers the possibility of interpreting events as neutrally as possible, which could, for example, prevent plunging into new bloody conflicts for the sake of an ideology or higher goals of a particular revolution. The narrator largely succeeds in this, unlike Lujo and Gogo, who do not rise above ideological frameworks. In this sense, the narrator, as he reflects on himself, represents in the novel "ordinary life, non-interference in history, the normal, something that guarantees that the destructive forces of revolution and counterrevolution will not destroy everything that lies ahead"

(Pavličić 2012: 207). Looking beyond ideologies may not be possible[9], but attempting to rise as high as possible above (at least narrowest) ideological framework could result in a perspective from which any ideological or revolutionary engagement proves to be one-sided and then inappropriate.

The narrator is aware that it is not easy to break away from ideologies and history, even if one tries hard to achieve it. This is evident from his reflections on his own writing, and especially from the one he presents at the end of his notes:

> Only now, after writing all this down, do I realize more clearly what I was really talking about […] I wanted to talk about our lives, but I was – unknowingly – talking about the revolution all the time. It intruded into my text from the outside, against my will… At first I thought it was because I sit in the Museum of the Revolution… But then I realized that wasn't the problem: The revolution did not intrude into my text from this building, but from the society in which I live and from the historical moment in which this society found itself. (Pavličić 2012: 278-279).

Just as the narrator of Fabrio's novel *Vježbanje života* (*Practicing Life*) found that history invaded his narrative unbidden, sticking to it "like a bur, intrusive and hurting mercilessly" (Fabrio 1992: 212), so did the narrator in *The Museum of the Revolution* state that history "permeated" his text not only without his knowledge but even against his will. And for this, in addition to his own literary incompetence, he blames the history-laden society and the time in which he lives.

Pavličić spoke about a similar problem in his essay, namely in a fictional letter to Madonna Markantunova from the novel *Mirisi, zlato i tamjan* (*Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh*) by Slobodan Novak (Pavličić 2001). In this letter, Pavličić answers his own question of when Croatian literature, and Croatian society as well, will stop being a slave to its own history (of which Madonna is a symbol):

> It will by no means happen when we change or when we change our position. Our position can hardly change: It's quite complicated with our history, and it could get even more complicated. But maybe that's why we could change: by understanding our position, by understanding our relationship to history, by finally changing it, by refusing to be its servants. So that we become people of this time. (Pavličić 2001: 150)

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[9] If we consider the concept of ideology beyond the political context in which it is most often used, ideology can be understood as a conceptual scheme consisting of "adopted attitudes, ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving that are regularly related to some philosophical, scientific, and/or ideological elements". In this sense, according to Solar, "in our age of relativism, it is almost impossible to look beyond the ideological horizon, because any statement can be understood as an ideological statement" (Solar 2011: 107).

Isn't that what the narrator in *The Museum of the Revolution* does? And also the narrator in Pavličić's novel *Odbor za sreću* (*The Happiness Committee*) (2004)? Namely, the narrator of this novel also rescues a kind of historical relic (he repairs a shabby Danube barge that belonged to his great-granduncle), but not in order to use it, or for its history to weigh him down, but in order to deal with this history, to explain it to himself, and free himself from it. The narrator of this novel, like the narrator in *The Museum of the Revolution*, therefore does not want to erase history, because it is never completely possible (neither by destroying the river barge nor by destroying the museum does history disappear), but he accepts it as it is and settles accounts with it, after which he can confidently look into the future.

Although such an attempt to deal with history in times and places thematised in *The Museum of the Revolution* may (still) sound almost utopian in Croatian society, the narrator's example can at least provide food for thought. Accordingly, the novel may be accused of dancing on the edge of utopia, but the idea of leaving history behind (where it belongs) and distancing oneself from often frivolous ideological commitments is certainly worth considering as a promise of a better present, and, above all, a better future.

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Paradoksi revolucije i povijesti u *Muzeju revolucije* Pavla Pavličića

Sažetak

U opsežnom opusu suvremenog hrvatskog pisca Pavla Pavličića tek je nekoliko povijesnih romana. Najnoviji od njih je *Muzej revolucije* (2012), koji govori o vremenima od Drugog svjetskog rata do Domovinskog rata u Hrvatskoj. Taman u vrijeme završetka potonjeg, pripovjedač postaje svojevrsni čuvar napuštenog Muzeja revolucije u neimenovanom „pospanom gradiću" hrvatskog Podunavlja. Promatrajući taj derutni simbol bivšeg komunističkog režima, pripovjedač tijekom romana nastoji rekonstruirati njegovu povijest. To ga, međutim, vodi i u rekonstrukciju povijesti vlastitog prijateljstva s dvojicom najboljih prijatelja, koje je život odnio na suprotne polove aktualnih povijesnih procesa. Pritom uviđa da rekonstrukcija povijesti prijateljstva i povijesti muzeja nije moguća bez osvrta na nacionalnu povijesti, koja se u sve to uplela. Tako se u romanu neprestano isprepliću osobna, institucijska i nacionalna povijest, čime se približava paradigmi suvremenog hrvatskog novopovijesnog, odnosno romana o povijesti, koji propituje ne samo utjecaj *velike* povijesti na *slabe* pojedince, nego i paradoksalnost povijesti kao takve. U *Muzeju revolucije* posebno se ukazuje i na paradoksalnost revolucija, kao i ideologija zbog kojih se revolucije pokreću, čemu će se u ovome radu i posvetiti najviše pažnje.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: *ideologija, povijesni roman, revolucija*

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