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**“VICTIM OF THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE POSSIBLE FUTURE”
BELLADONNA by DAŠA DRNDIĆ**

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The discussion about the war plays not only a central role in German literature of the 20th century, but it also holds a very important and indispensable place in Croatian literature, considering the events of the previous war on Croatian territory (i.e. former Yugoslavia) around 1990. Wars are, as Carsten Gansel says: “similar to revolutions, fundamental disturbances of the social system status, a social ‘state of emergency’” (Gansel 2012: 9-12). Literature as a form of ‘self-observation of societies’ (H. Böhme 1998: 476–485) constitutes a medium, in which ‘fault conditions’ (Gansel 2012: 9-12), caused by wars, can be thematized. The “dualism of offender and victim, observer and combatant, army and civil population, rulers and subjects” (also in socio-political everyday life), find expression in literature, by processing it literarily and discussing it.

In her work, Daša Drndić thematizes exceedingly controversial and lively past and current war discourses in socio-cultural context from the perspective of the past, as well as of the present. Her work, i.e. her texts, can be considered as a cultural form of expression, which “in symbolic presentation provides individual, and/or generation-specific reminiscence of the collective memory¹” (Gansel 2011:11).

Daša Drndić discusses openly and without reservation already controversially conducted discourses about the Second World War, Holocaust, escape, expulsion, camp and destruction, especially after 1945, as well as the roles of the offender and victim not only in the Second World War and the ‘Yugoslavian war’ (civil war, fatherland war) from an – let’s say – own perspective. In her most recent work *Belladonna* (2012)², she even goes one step further, by thematizing and questioning the present everyday life interwoven with experiences, events and stories from the past through illness, suffering, dying, death and being a victim of diverse socio-political and socio-cultural systems until it becomes unbearable.

Daša Drndić, a retired professor of Modern English Literature and author of several award-winning novels, with residence in Rijeka and several study and research periods amongst others in the USA, Canada, Serbia, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, born 1946 in Zagreb, is, besides Slavenka Drakulić, Dubravka Ugrešić and Ivana Sajko, one of the most read and most committed (as well as the most controversial) author of contemporary Croatia.

¹ Collective stories are based on collective memory, which – as opposed to the individual memory - is developed in social interdependency of members of a collective. The individual memory, which is formed by the collective memory of the social-historical environment, builds, however, individual stories. See:Gansel/Kaulen 2011.

² All quotations of the novel *Belladonna* (2012) will be marked/quoted only with ‘Belladonna’ and the page number. All quotations have been translated from Croatian into German by the author of this article, as a German Translation of the novel *Belladonna* is not yet available. The novel *Sonnenschein*, which is on a paratextual level very important for this study, is currently being translated from Croatian into German (status: 29.9.2014). The German translation will be presented at the book fair in Leipzig in 2015.

In almost all of her works, as in her newest work *Belladonna*³, she always primarily deals with the theme of war in a socio-cultural context. However, her work is not only characterised by the theme of wars (the First and Second World War and the Yugoslavian war), but the theme of war serves as a scenery for the embedding of collective-individual narratives of victims, which is also the central theme of this article.

In this paper it shall be shown how victims arise through themes of totalitarianism, race hostility, concentration camps in the Second World War, emigration, exile and finally through everyday social and political life. It shall be demonstrated, how Daša Drndić indicates on people's past, present and possible future strokes of fate and how she lets stories of and about victims emerge and speak.

At this point it should be mentioned, that with regard to the narration and stylistics the novel *Belladonna* – as the novel *Sonnenschein* (2007) – is structured in such a way, that there are diverse rooms⁴, which are open for the reader. Those are especially rooms of reminiscence, i.e. places of reminiscence⁵ (camps, prison, psychiatry, hospital, university, etc.). This article deals not only with provided facts and events, but rather with the manner, in which those are illustrated and presented in relation to the theme of victim.

The title of the novel *Belladonna*, in order to briefly present the work, exhibits by means of the specific and particularly poisonous plant species, which is also called *Deadly Nightshade* or *Atropa belladonna*, forgotten events not only from the past, but also events, about which currently (as in future) is not, should not and cannot be spoken about, because it seems inappropriate for socio-cultural reasons. The author revives stories of victims on diverse temporal, spatial and historical levels. This involves not only victims of the war, but all those who in any particular respect (especially in socio-political regards) had to suffer existential and intellectual harm and, nevertheless, are regarded as the weaklings and losers of the social systems and orders. Under victims one can understand outcasts, the injured, sufferers, the sick, the poor and finally the dead, who had to die (often in agony) in favour or because of others. Stories of single individuals are preserved in this work. Drndić actually conserves them, by using an omniscient narrator, who tells the story of the life and suffering

³ *Belladonna* or the *deadly nightshade* (*Atropa belladonna*) is a poisonous plant species. This plant derives from the Solanaceae family, or also called nightshades, and therefore stands in close relation to Greek mythology. You can read the name of one of the three fate gods *Atropos* out of the additional name *Antropa*. In Italian *Belladonna* means beautiful woman. The name *Belladonna* is also connected with the fact, that especially women in the renaissance dripped the sap, which contains atropine, into their eyes, in order to get more beautiful and shinier eyes, that means the plant, although very poisonous, was used for beauty purposes and therefore got an additional name, *Magic Plant*. It's sap enlarged the pupils and caused gradual blindness. Nowadays, this plant is used for medical purposes.

⁴ For the understanding of the rooms of reminiscence as places of the memory see Neumann/Nünnig 2007: 12-13. The demonstration and representation of rooms of reminiscences is not only a reflection of extra-literary places, but a "constructive, often conflictual negotiation about places of the collective memory." See more about that: Rupp, Jan (2001: 182).

⁵ The term "place of reminiscence" is not going to be defined any further in this article. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized, that the term "place of reminiscence" means more than just reminiscence at a specific place. In this study this term should be understood as "a localization of reminiscence in a room". On the other hand, the term "room" should be understood as a collective reminiscence, which is manifested in "a place" (e.g. in the concentration camp in Dachau, children's homes, schools, concentration camp Zasavica next to Šabac, mass graves in Srebrenica etc.) or in a personality (e.g. Andreas Ban, Bertha Pappenheim, Leo Ban, Ema Sass etc.) (See Pierre 2005.) Places of reminiscences endow identity for individuals in a collective. Various social groups (captives, Jews, women, children, sick persons, professors, soldiers on duty etc.) have and build particular places of reminiscence, that can reach differently far into the past, which can be seen in this paper. Places of reminiscence are according to Francois Etienne and Hagen Schulze (2001) "long-living, cross-generational focal points of collective reminiscence and identity."

of the protagonist Andreas Ban. The story of his life is used as a frame story and a basis for the formation of following victim narratives.

The change of media between document, photography, newspaper and language, brings forgotten, concealed and in the society suppressed stories of victims back to life. The protagonist⁶ (Andreas Ban) is at this point, as in the majority of her works, a victim (of past political and current social systems and events). The plot of the novel is primarily bound on Andrea Ban's life. By now he is a 65-year-old psychologist and author, being concerned with his past, family origin, fates of acquaintances and the actions of friends and miserable colleagues. A scientist, who is managing to get by with his miserable pension of a university professor and trying to combat his disease, which is very rare for the male gender, namely breast cancer.

Andreas Ban is a person, whose view over his life is told and commented by an omniscient narrator. The narrator captures Ban's gaze, as a pupil dilating one, and anticipates in this way metaphorically the toxic effects of the deadly nightshade, *Belladonna*, of which consumption the protagonist eventually dies.

What Andreas Ban leaves behind after his death, is a with factitive photos and documents lined fictive fragment, which lists forgotten stories of victims in an unsorted and almost chaotic sequence with exact time specification. The novel ends on page 312 in a fragment of summarized stories of victims, which his son Leo finds. At this point it should be emphasized, that the story about Andreas Ban does not only accept him as a victim on the historical-political and socio-political level of the past wars (the Second World War, Yugoslavian war), but also in the hypocritical academic society and until now ignorance of the proliferating cancer.

Around Ban's life, various other victims' stories are generated, which will be illustrated in the following part of this study.

If you look at the narrative line of Daša Drndić's works, then you also have to regard it as fragmented. The narration in *Belladonna* (as in her previous works: *Sonnenschein*, *April in Berlin*, *Totenwände*, *Leica format*) is interrupted, lined and supplemented with factitive material (documents, photos, testimonies, shorthand reports of audio recordings, letters, encyclopaedic and biographic footnotes) and it leaves the end of a certain stories open.

In *Belladonna* the reader is presented with two long clearly arranged lists of victims⁷. One list consists of over 1700 names of deported Jews from Northern and Eastern Europe as well as Jewish children from the Netherlands in the concentration camp Zasavica (next to Šabac). Behind every name, as Drndić emphasizes in various interviews and to repeat it once more in the context of the work *Belladonna*, stands a story, which needs to be told and there are a number of stories, which attempt to complete and expand the narrative framework of Andreas Ban's story.

The novel begins with an exact time specification:

On Saturday, 16th January 2002, sixty for illegal emigration imprisoned persons stitch up their mouths. Sixty persons with sutured mouths wander around the camp and gaze lifelessly into the sky. [...] Tereza Acosta is a woman, who decided to not remember anymore. Tereza Acosta doesn't remember her childhood until the age of ten. As if she did not exist until then. [...] He (Andreas

⁶ The protagonist is very reminiscent of the author. In various recensions about the work can be read, that it is partially an autobiographical work.

⁷ See also the novel *Sonnenschein* (2007:50).

Ban, as a psychiatrist) could also stop speaking like this. Stop remembering.
(Belladonna: 7-8)

The previous story of the camp institution (psychiatry)⁸, which is told in the prolepsis, is used as a reason to open up further narrative frameworks, but especially Andreas Ban's story. The narrative act is implemented in the plot through three possible time relations (previous, now, later). This involves victims of the great world history, fascism, and Yugoslavian war, the terror that lies on Europe and Croatia, academic nepotism and the invincible diseases. So the stories of victims have all names and are not only told alongside Andreas Ban's course of life, but also his family and world history and they are questioned through factual material from a historical and present dimension.

As a reader, we get to know Andreas Ban in the following way:

His name is Andrea Ban. A psychologist, who no longer psychologises. An author, who no longer writes. A tourist guide, who no longer guides. A swimmer, who no longer swims. There are professions, which are not needed by anyone anymore, especially not by him. He is sixty-five years old, looks relatively well-groomed, as if he is fifty. The earthquake, for which he was ready, for which he had prepared himself (he knows, how it is done, he had prepared (trained/educated) himself for this his whole life), happens in a second, comes unexpected in the very moment, when his half-educated colleague, an extraordinary bureaucrat, an obedient apparatchik, this extremely genteel and reserved colleague, throws the fact into his face in front of the whole collective: that he is no longer needed, because he goes into retirement.[...] You go, I stay.
(Belladonna: 16)

In this scene, in which he is, although still being vital, pulled out of the academic field and released into retirement, the authorial narrator gradually roles up his life. In various temporal prolepses and through the use of diverse factive documents (photos, letter, etc.), the transition from collective histories/reminiscences to individual/personal/private histories and the other way round is emphasized on a narrative level.

On the linguistic level, there are wordplays used, like for example *apparatchick*, to indicate collective as well as for instance individual, intellectual narrowness of some colleagues from the protagonist's working environment, who are incapable or rather too cowardly to question the academic system, as in Andreas Ban's case, and to react accordingly and to take a stand. The passiveness or blindness of such people generates victims (of the academic system).

The academic life and its consequences on the protagonist are reflected through the use of rhetorical stylistic devices, such as sarcasm, irony and cynicism:

There are professors, who, in order to appear very engaged, try to make an effort at meetings of the faculty council, like some women do, by complaining very extensively about missing shelves for handbags and psychological needs in toilets. Furthermore, ninety people in the hall are silent and listen, while the recording clerk writes everything down. Afterwards, arms are raised, which – as soon as a more delicate theme is brought up – withdraw from a concrete opinion/withhold or agree or disagree unanimously. [...] There is wonderful

⁸ In the novel mentioned and partially described camp institution, i.e. psychiatry can be seen as an interspace, which is according to Michel Foucault (1976) a "heterotopia of deviation". Those are rooms/places where people are accommodated, whose behaviour deviate from the average or from the required norms. In these includes Foucault also: sanatoria, mental institutions and prisons. See Gansel 2011: 19.

harmony, solitary union at the margin of life. Those, who revolt, are soon silenced. Everything has to be done according to the rules, establishment, statute and an appropriate gap can always be found. (Belladonna: 17)

Memories in stories, which result in academic life, disease, war, captivity, homicide, mass extinction and death, i.e. which prepare the reader for certain victims, are transformed fragmentarily and retrospectively step by step. The story enhances circularly from the university to common social areas, as follows:

[...] As soon as (within the meeting of the faculty council) a, let's say more important question emerges, then the audience gets tired and the more important the matter/question gets, the more tired gets the audience. The tiredness grows among the teachers in geometrical progression. The teachers get thirsty, hungry and the meeting is terminated, or respectively postponed, in order to not solve anything, or rather everything gets settled in an unclear, lame and ambiguous way. [...] Andreas Ban would like to leave this abstracted collective, he would like to leave those mask carriers, who cover an even bigger whole, and commit himself to more cheerful assignments, which would feed his thoughts and would let them pulsate, but the miserable pension in this small, decayed and big-headed country, in which he lives and which is left by a lot of people [...] takes his life. (Belladonna: 17)

The strokes of fate around Andreas Ban are not conveyed chronologically. In fact, the anarchy provides the option to reorganize the sequence of the victims' events. Through the switching of returns, which recoils past times, the occurred disease can be seen as a preview (in form of a prolepsis), implying the possible end:

Lately, you can read more and more about the body/torso. The body as a geographical map, a body that stores, a body that punishes, fat body, thin body, muscular body, slack body, a body that loves, body cult, the cleanliness of the body, the body and its signals, a body that rules, determines, behaves, revolts. A body that resigns? [...] Andreas Ban is sure, that he and his body are fighting a constant battle [...]. (Belladonna: 33)

His disease gets visible with every progress on the level of the narrated time, because his "body shows strong generative changes" (Belladonna: 33) and his remembrances of previous times and places get more intensive:

Andreas Ban still works in Paris, as Yugoslavia falls apart. He was sent to Paris, because they trusted him, because he was born in Paris after the wars, when his father, a national hero and carrier of the partisan medal, was sent to Paris to establish relations in 1941. Relations in the areas of culture, politics and economy. (Belladonna: 34)

Disturbing⁹ processes of remembrance take form, by processing the individual experiences of the protagonist through meaningful narrations of the collective:

Andreas Ban returned from Paris to Belgrade, where else, as Yugoslavia fell apart. He gets dismissed. He is told: You're a public enemy, a Croat. Being a Croat, is for him an unimportant fact, because he has his name. [...] His savings

⁹ In the novel there are three stages of disorder visible: disturb, unsettle, destroy. See Gansel 2012. The protagonist gets disturbed, as he gets dismissed from the university sector against his will. Afterwards follows an unsettled increase by the breast cancer, in order to eventually get physically and mentally destroyed by the disease and the society.

dissave. Friendships are crowned. Colleagues become Šešelj's supporter. Andreas Ban wanders the streets and visits his graves. (Belladonna: 34)

In a prolepsis, thus "many years later" (Belladonna: 38), an event is continued on a transtextual level¹⁰ (from Daša Drndić's novel *Sonnenschein*), which picks up the factive, in *Belladonna* as the fictive fate of the Italian family (around Haya Tedeschie), and contextualizes in relation to the search of Andreas Ban's further family members. By means of the work *Sonnenschein*, Andreas Ban discovers a lot of forgotten, reportedly fictive names of victims, which point to missing connections in his own family story. Now, since his disease has already progressed, alone, without a job, with a miserable pension, the truth, that had been falsified and kept secret and which he wants to uncover, comes to light. The name Ketz for example from the novel *Sonnenschein*, Carlo Ketz, his brother-in-law and husband of his sister, who died in Ljubljana, sojourns, as Andreas Ban finds out, in the 1970s in Albania and is ready to defend and protect the country from an invisible and never seen hostile power. Haya Tedeschie, the protagonist of the novel *Sonnenschein* "approaches" Andreas and tells him about the self-researched fate stories of Second World War victims.

Single stories are told and connected in an assembly-like manner. The narrative strategies should be understood rather as an aesthetic method than a prominent technical one. Stories of victims are taken through temporal and spatial dimensions on an individual and collective, as well as on a metatextual/transtextual level, as following example illustrates:

Now, as he (Andrea) writes and speaks (and he does it only when he has to), Andreas Ban changes the languages, as they run through his mind. As with Bertha Pappenheim (1859-1936), who Freud, out of discretion, calls Anna O. and doesn't get to know her, about whom he only knows a little.[...] Freud took her, Bertha Pappenheim, in her crisis, named and turned her into Miss Anna O., and withdrew her identity [...], by imposing his picture of her upon her. [...] In her life crisis, instead of learning, travelling and being cheerful, everyone tells her (Bertha Pappenheim) 'stay at home' [...], prepare meals and take care of your dying father. [...] The day after the Kristallnacht on 10th October 1938, the Gestapo orders to burn down Bertha's Neu-Isenburg schools in the entire German Reich and in 1942 all the pupils and staff are deported to the concentration camp in Theresienstadt, where most of them die. (Belladonna: 285)

The dense sequence of events and unexpected turning points on the discourse (how) and historical level (what) (like e.g. the comparison of the protagonist with Bertha Pappenheim's person), that is in the extensively gathered granularity of information, which are told in a breathtaking rhythm, the theme of victims is gradually sharpened, in order to seal it with the use of footnotes (see Belladonna: 61-64), as it is the case in scientific contributions, hence the usage of additional information. Footnotes serve as a guarantor for leading stories of victims.

On a transtextual level the novel *Sonnenschein* becomes a trigger of Andreas Ban's¹¹ diverse thought processes and research work. Uncovering and discovering his past, in order to be able to roll up his life once more, to be able to question the occurred blows of fate and his own actions, whether and to what extent it is responsible for his current existence/state of health, makes him restless. It has become a disruptive factor, caused by staged paratextual conversations with the Jew victim Haya Tedeschie.¹² The protagonist of the work

¹⁰See G. Genette: Paratexte.

¹¹ The novel *Belladonna* is being regarded by Croatian critique as a continuation of the previously published work *Sonnenschein*.

¹² In the novel *Sonnenschein*, Haya Tedeschie leads paratextual conversations with the philosopher S. Kierkegaard. Haya's processes of reminiscence are demonstrated on the basis of these conversations: "Leave me

Sonnenschein informs Andreas Ban about the famous graphic designer Christoph Meckel and his work *Search image: about my father* and *Search image: about my mother*, and about Monika Göth (daughter of the infamous and subsequently sentenced to death SS officer in the concentration camp Plasz).

Due to introduced cuts, breaks and montages¹³, the reality is taken from the past into the present, interpreted and controlled, and in this way the reader learns for example:

In October 2010, at the age of 81, in the clinic in Schönau – Oh, what irony and coincidence, - near Berchtesgaden, with a beautiful view over Obersalzburg [...] and Berghoft, dies the writer and film director Thomas Harlan of pulmonary emphysema. Thomas Harlan is the son of the in the third Reich famous and important producer of the notorious and anti-Semitic film *Jew Süß*. [...] This ‘artistically’ propagandistic product, which sentimentally and melodramatically ends in a bloody Jew execution, attracted masses, and a lot of Croats of the NDH time were keen on it too. (Belladonna: 53)

Individual stories are connected with supra-individual/unknown/collective stories. In the work, stories of the extermination of people pour out plentifully, which do not stop to pour out and constantly open up further stories of victims, through death, homicide, disease, corruption etc. Places of individual remembrance are always mingled with places of the collective memory and end with information/data like:

“Pavelić’s grandchildren are coming to reclaim their fortune. A granddaughter with little grief but a lot determination, a certain Ivana Sheridan-Pšeničnik, expresses herself as loud as her father: Today we lost Bosnia and Herzegovina, the heart of Croatia” (Belladonna: 74). This procedure makes offenders appear as victims, in order to question and illustrate the already delicate issue of being/becoming a victim in even more depth. The author lets victims (as well as offenders) balance along the margin of the events. She marks the paradox situation of the pre- and post-war period and mixes the world wars and the Yugoslavian war.

In the further course, the reader finds out, that the initially furled, but then with the scene of the disease interrupted story, that in 1990 Andreas Ban leaves Belgrade. It comes to existential, political and linguistic problems. He ‘sends’ his 9-year-old son via Ljubljana to Rovinj/Rovigno to his friend. He books an alleged trip to Budapest in a travel agency, to not have to go back to Belgrade anymore. “Andreas Ban arrives in Croatia with a pyjama, three underpants, two shirts, a manicure case and one thousand five hundred DM for an appropriate and desolated new beginning” (Belladonna: 82). His new beginning is a life at the edge of existence. He was just able to enrol his son Leo into school, but Leo did not managed to learn in Croatian ‘to whisper’, ‘to keep silent’, ‘to dream’, neither how to love in a Croatian manner. He graduated from all schools, attended courses for computer design and film. The outcome of this are resigned documentary films. He swims, travels, grows, becomes stronger, studies medicine, completes his studies and leaves. Andreas Ban is left behind, alone, abandoned, devastated, weak and sick. It only remains collecting the remains of his and other people’s life.

This rather oppressed than forgotten pain experience of the protagonist, is a revision of neglected and concealed substories, which by means of inserted quotations (poems), documents, metaphors and personifications, that revive and underline once again forms of violence, pain and suffering. The encounter with his relative from his mother’s side, named

Kierkegaard. I don’t want to talk. [...] My memories aren’t an illusion. My memories aren’t past. My memories are present.” (Sonnenschein: 347). See Zagar-Sostarić 2012: 441-458.

¹³ See Berghan 1980: 270-281.

Clara, whom he, lurching through the streets looking for džezva¹⁴, currently (after ten years) meets and whom he wants to ask about family information, is diagnosed with a brain tumour and dies after six months. He does not know anything about the strictly preserved secrets of the family.

The attempted revision of the past and memories of those can be understood as a sequence of constant catastrophes and attempted new beginnings. On the other hand the italicised narrative I sees past events in the light of the presence. The seeing or rather decoding of the past happens with a survey/questioning of the events and single/individual actions (external focalisation/remembrance of the observer). The higher the process of thinking and questioning, the more frequently changes the focalisation level¹⁵. When Andreas Ban, as a psychiatrist, thinks about e.g. Rudolf Sass, who suffers from depression (see *Belladonna*: 163), then it comes to the surface, that the reason for this disease are suppressed reminiscences of the concentration camp (Dachau, *Belladonna*: 163), police prisons (Rossauerlaende, *Belladonna*: 163), mass graves such as in Srebrenica and the fallen Vukovar.

The discontinuous style of the narration pushes stories from the past into the foreground, conducts them with possible future events over the presence. The more of such impressive, bigger-smaller fragmented, thus never entirely solved life stories are mentioned and explained/described, so the more of such stories Andreas Ban finds out through researching, writing down and rethinking, the weaker and sicker becomes his condition:

After 12 months is he (Andreas Ban) grown together with sever degenerative changes. He has transformed into a degenerative change, which cannot run and climb the stairs anymore. He has become a limping generative change, which only waits for the generative change to ossify, localize, embody in the body, which is becoming more degenerative, until it finally becomes completely degenerative. And then they want to get rid of him. [...] The therapy in Opatija was useless. (*Belladonna*: 88)

The protagonist's degenerative condition exhibits in two ways the decay (i.e. the end): On the one hand it deals with the physical decay, the decay of cells, tissues i.e. organs, caused by cancer. This means, that we can speak about a victim of the disease (physical decay). On the other hand it deals with the decay, which provokes an existential decline and precipice due to long lasting deconstructing of civilisation (existential decay). The expensive therapy, which is not covered by health insurance, but supposedly essential, finally proves to be useless and points to the death of the protagonist. The delay of inevitable examination because of long waiting lists in Croatian hospitals and in addition his small monthly pension became fatal for Ban. The injustice that was inflicted upon him is discussed with a transtextual reference to Herman Broch's foreword to the book *Die Schuldlosen* from 1950:

Hermann Broch observes that political indifference stands in close relation to ethnic expulsion/depravity, i.e. that political innocent people are to a great extent ethnically suspected. They are the culprits in an ethnical sense, emphasises [Broch], that the German bourgeoisie does not fell responsible for, when Hitler

¹⁴ Džezva is a Turkish term for a coffeepot, or rather a term for an ancient coffee cooking utensil. It is a small can, mostly out of cooper, which is, from the Ottoman reign, nowadays still used in many parts of Croatia (and the former Yugoslavia) to cook a proper Turkish cup of coffee.

¹⁵ The focalisation level changes from zero focalisation (the narrator knows more than the figures/the protagonist themselves) to external focalisation (the narrator reports from the perspective of an external observer).

came to power, because they remain apolitically and were in no way connected, with what was happening at that time. (Belladonna: 189)

The distribution of events of disease and war, is questioned, reconstructed and in historical-political correlations networked over the collective to the individual level, because the paragraph continues as following in question: “What about Croatian apolitical citizens, who are selectively apolitical? How do they behave towards what was and is going on around them? No comment. They enjoy the music and the applause” (Belladonna: 189). The heterogeneity of discourses, which by means of erratic and constantly changing use of various (socio-political) stories in diverse time spans with specific time specification, are demonstrated, determine the dense aligned narrative rhythm, which gives the reader the feeling, to assimilate all descriptions, data and connection in one breath. Andreas Ban’s life is illustrated sarcastically, ironically and provokingly and, through the specific use of language, the already tense narrative discourse sharpens by the usage of non-Croatian lexemes (pasoš, lična, talasanje), which underlines the otherness of all those who are different and who cannot i.e. do not want to accommodate in a linguistic, political, social way.

Various transtextual references (among those are also meta- and paratextual references)¹⁶, serve as a medium for self-help and comprehension, that there are still victims: “When it becomes worse, when it becomes worse from the inside, when the inside cannot stand it anymore, then Andreas sings *I still have a suitcase in Belgrade*, although it is a lie”¹⁷ (Belladonna: 104).

Coming to terms with the past and present as well as the physical coping (with the deadly disease) build the narrative frame and form, to sum it up in this way:

1. the search for justice for forgotten, never solved events, which especially took place in the wars, left numerous victims and hence generate at present new victims. (Those are people, who are nowhere at home and who always feel like outsiders)

2. the existent exposure of unfair treatment in social, precisely academic respect. The silence of the mass gives the authorities on all levels of the society more power and allows, that regulations can legally be interpreted illegally, what finally leads to the third current resignation in existential, mental and at last physical regards, which will be continued in the future, as long as the mass keeps silent and tolerates, that the life, memories and acts are in regards extinguished, forgotten and oppressed.

Final Remark

Unexpected discoveries, which the protagonist made through diligent researches after being retired, through re-access in documents, photographs and letters are life stories of and about victims told. By the use of reconstructions of the past, which proceed parallel to the protagonist’s process of remembrance, it is tried to construct a present and future counter-world. Given that the narration cannot endure to bring ‘the individually experienced truth(s)’ into light, this is, as already shown and repeatedly mentioned, ‘compensatory bedight’ with the use of diverse linguistic devices (word plays, sarcasm, irony, Yugoslavisms).¹⁸

The search for the I, as well as for the reasons, which surrender a once wealthy person to the underground, to the nonentity and suspend him unwillingly on the margin of life, is mentioned at the beginning with the furred impacts of the mythical berry *Belladonna*, which is abruptly finished. By consummating those berries an end is put to the sufferings. He also leaves/left his body, with which he cannot identify himself anymore,

¹⁶ See G. Genette, Paratexte.

¹⁷ This is a reference to Marlene Dietrich’s song *I still have a suitcase in Berlin*.

¹⁸ See Leschke: Kriege ohne Opfer.

before the body leaves him. A two paged list of victims, which is attached in the novel *Belladonna*, is used to exemplarily immortalise the theme of victims, because:

Stories and memories can only hardly be extinguished. Stories and memories like to come back. They look under the human skin and enter the cycle. Yes, I have learned: people are connected invisible and they don't know it. They touch each other over the life, which will always remain strange for them. They get into time segments, which they don't regard as theirs. They wander through landscapes, which are only new to them, but they exist for centuries." (Belladonna: 305)

The list, in which on two pages victims of the war (Jewish children from the Netherlands and Jews from Northern or Eastern Europe, killed in the concentration camp Zasavica near Šabac) are listed, they do not only share their name, stories and fates with the protagonist Andreas Bas, but also with many other, still not discovered victims of the previous, present and future wars and socio-political systems. A superordinate and existing knowledge horizon is, as already mentioned, conveyed through an omniscient narrator (zero focalization). However, the end of the novel is told from the point of view of the experiencing I (Leo). He 'sees', 'questions', tries to 'decode' (external focalisation/remembrance of the observer) the past (the writing and research, the life of his father). The apartment, in which he arrives, is lifeless and empty. Leo's room "remains untouched" (Belladonna: 301). There is only a black folder with the title *Belladonna* on his desk. It is a fragment, in which life stories of and about victims are in an unsorted and chaotic way bond together, they are for all: "[...] those who entered the mirror, those who entered the frame of the mirror and for those for whom the time outside no longer exists, because when the death arrives, it risks, that there is nobody to be found" (Belladonna: 306).

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