

## **Vjekoslava Jurdana: “Central Europe as a place of culture/destiny (on the example of Chakavian poetry of Drago Gervais)”**

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### **Abstract**

The paper deals with the life and creative work of the Croatian writer Drago Gervais (Opatija 1904 - Sežana 1957) from the aspect of a complex relationship between writing history and writing literature in Central Europe. This is the area comprising Istria and the Croatian Littoral which, being an area of unstable geopolitical entity, faced numerous colonisations. Such colonial dynamics wrote its history, neglecting the voices of those who lived there.

Experiencing all the horrors of the exile, Gervais articulated its entire complexity in a literary and artistic way. The author created a poetics which served him to thematise his own exile offering itself as a specific traumatic experience expressed in great nostalgia and then in melancholia. By creating his authentic poetic expression, he became a (Chakavian) anthological poet and an unrepeatable witness of the trauma of exile as one of the most complex conditions of a human being.

Key words: Drago Gervais; exile; nostalgia; melancholia; Chakavian poetry

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Drago Gervais (1904-1957) a poet, prose writer, dramatist, essayist and historian, in his life and works focused on numerous complex relationships between writing history and writing literature. The scope of this paper is to shed light on these relationships in his Chakavian poetry and to make evident that the bearing and cohesion elements of a thus obtained picture are **history** and **space**.<sup>2</sup> Within such a framework this work wishes to prove that Gervais shares the typical fate of a Central-European intellectual whose family roots are mostly heterogeneous and whose biography has been, as a rule, earmarked by undesirable historical events. Starting from the place and the role of history in Gervais' life and creative work, and discerning, drawing on Heidegger's words, that here the historical survival, the problem of creation and the destiny of a work are an inner one, the article is interested in how the space and the time of the poetical act assimilate the historical time and space of the actual life. Following this inventory, we do not wish, Heideggerianly speaking, to make Gervais congruous to our time. On the contrary, we wish to bring ourselves and those who are to come under the measure of the poet. Yet what remains, the poets found, not so much as what remains, but most of all as what is permanent, a trace, a memory, a monument.<sup>3</sup>

## **Central Europe as a place of culture**

Central Europe demarcates a fluid geopolitical region which, through various historical periods, meant a different area. Apart from a maze of terms used to give a name to this unstable space,<sup>4</sup> the region can also be 'recognised' by a host of divergent authorial approaches to its definition

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on some conclusions and material from Jurdana (2009), which are revised and edited here. The translations of Gervais' Chakavian verses in English (which appear here for the first time ever) were done by Loreta Štefanić, who also assisted the author in the English translation of the text.

<sup>2</sup> Jurdana (2009): 7.

<sup>3</sup> Heidegger (2014): 3.

<sup>4</sup> This area is often referred to as Eastern Europe. This inaccuracy has several consequences: firstly, it disregards the entity of Central Europe, and secondly, two separate identities – Central Europe and Eastern Europe are reduced into a single, seemingly interchangeable entity.

and positioning.<sup>5</sup> This instability of the entity of Central Europe, is at the same time pointed to but also caused by its history which testifies to a region that has always been subjected to the realisation of various forces.<sup>6</sup> Within such a course, a constant appears in the form of a colonial reality, which opens the position of Central Europe as a colony. Within these margins a new theoretical paradigm arose which enables the reconceptualization of literary and cultural histories of the Central-European space, namely, from the perspective of postcolonial theories as well as colonial and postcolonial literary criticism. This is about the reaching of various dominant cultures which regard the space of Central Europe as an object to dominate and about the experience of countless historical and political intrusions as a recognizable ‘feature’ of the Central-European region. Such circumstances suggest the existence of: “*a historical (post)colonialism of a distinct, Central-European type.*”<sup>7</sup>

A question arises: Does Central Europe constitute a true cultural configuration with its own history? And if such a configuration exists, can it be defined geographically? What are its borders? Drawing on these (his) questions, Milan Kundera highlights that: “*Central Europe is not a state: it is a culture or a fate*” and it would be senseless to try to draw its borders exactly. Moreover, Kundera explains, its: “*borders are imaginary*” and

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<sup>5</sup> Krzysztof Pomian (1992): 33 offered a quite interesting definition of Central Europe. He names Central Europe as that part of the European continent inhabited by mostly Catholic or Protestant nations, but which has been tied for decades – even centuries – whether by territorial neighborhood or coexistence in the circle of the same political entity, either by ruling or by submission, with one majority Orthodox people. Thus defined Central Europe, says Pomian, today comprises the Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Austrians, Hungarians, Croats, and partly Germans.

<sup>6</sup> István Bibó (2010): 291-300, speaks of a strong influence on the governments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, starting from aristocratic landowners, monopoly capitalists and military cliques, that: “*would not be tolerated by a country with a free spirit and a more unified development.*” Because, Bibó explains, this is a region which: “*provides a fertile ground for the proliferation of the most muddled political philosophies and the grossest political lies which cannot even be put into words, let alone appear convincing in countries with healthy development.*”

<sup>7</sup> Petković (2003): 18, 23.

must be drawn and redrawn with each new historical situation.<sup>8</sup> The questioning of (the lack of) objectivity in the representation of history of this region becomes significant, just as the writing of counter-history which reshapes the historical discourse of the colonial master. Because, as Kundera emphasizes, although the people of Central Europe are not conquerors, they cannot be separated from European history; they cannot exist outside it; but they represent the wrong side of this history – they are its victims and outsiders. It is this disabused view of history – concludes Kundera – that is the source of their culture, of their wisdom, of the “*nonserious spirit*” that mocks grandeur and glory. Kundera therefore points out that the sentence by Witold Gombrowicz: “*Never forget that only in opposing History as such can we resist the history of our own day*”, should be engraved above the entry gate to Central Europe.<sup>9</sup> The Central-European national literatures speak of colonial life conditions caused by a permanent presence of different masters.<sup>10</sup> Departing from the ‘grand narrations’ of imposed historical dynamics, these literary readouts are in search of a discourse of authenticity, a discourse of those living inside this space as subjects of continual colonial dynamics, indicating that the Central-European spirit can be fathomed through the destinies of small people. On the other hand, in the West, the metamorphosis of modern values, which is seen by J. F. Lyotard as “*the postmodern condition*”, which also includes “*the crisis of narratives*,” is explained.<sup>11</sup> It is the so called ‘end of history’, a term referring to the end of Historicism, i.e. the

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<sup>8</sup> Kundera (1984): 35. He says that Central Europe therefore cannot be defined and determined by political frontiers (which are inauthentic, always imposed by invasions, conquests, and occupations), “*but by the great common situations that reassemble peoples, regroup them in ever new ways along the imaginary and ever-changing borders that mark the realms inhabited by the same memories, the same problems and conflicts, the same common tradition.*”

<sup>9</sup> Kundera (1984): 36.

<sup>10</sup> In this perspective, Mikecin’s (1995): 9 thought seems characteristic. Mikecin, moving within the areas of sociology of art and culture, says that in the Croatian history, in particular the later one, literature and art had a first-class role in the shaping and affirmation of cultural identity and modern subjectivity. What is more, the author’s point of departure is that the works of art and culture represent a first-rate formative moment of the historical world itself.

<sup>11</sup> Lyotard (1984): xxiii.

understanding of the human doings as a linear flux. The relationship between the past events and historical facts as a construct, as an event that was given (acknowledged) meanings is problematized.<sup>12</sup> It is noticed that the approach to history is conveyed by documents, testimonies and archival material which enable us to construct our narrations or explanations. The authenticity of history as written history actually depends on the ability of the institutionalization of the records it studies, so that: *“The present, as well as the past, is always irremediably textualized. The past does exist, but today we can ‘know’ the past only through its texts, where its link to literature lays.”*<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, there is never only one truth, but different historical perspectives which draw different facts from the same events. This multiperspectivity, which cannot be constructed within universal laws, requires the respect of the otherness of the Other and to retain the contradictory diversity of the social space, which is not comprehended in terms of *one* history, *one* theory or *one* narrative text.<sup>14</sup> There is, therefore, no obstacle that would: *“prevent billions of stories, little or less little, to weave the tissue of everyday life.”*<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the sceptical Europe has long been doubting in the sense of history. The high valuing of freedom and culture here matured from this doubt in history and its imposed masters. Focusing on this scepticism as opposed to history which was, and this is emphasized in particular, in this region normally written by others, and drawing on the postmodern abandoning of the historicist enactment within Lyotard’s ‘postmodern condition’, there appear testimonies of new subjectivities which present Central Europe as a locally established truth, founded on authors’ experiences of the region. These are experiences mostly of writers-historians who were witnesses and/or victims of sudden and largely erratic regional changes. The essential attribute of thus created worlds, as areas of intersections of history and memory, reality and fiction, is the neuralgic nodes in the form of (imposed) episodes of individual

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<sup>12</sup> Hutcheon (2004): 89.

<sup>13</sup> Belsey (1998): 46.

<sup>14</sup> Lyotard (1995): 16.

<sup>15</sup> Lyotard (1990): 35.

history. These worlds speak of unwanted, sudden and uninvited intrusions of the ‘grand’ history capturing the private/intimate sphere of an individual(s).<sup>16</sup>

In the focus of interest of these authors is thus the problematizing of history and/or the ‘truth’. Czesław Miłosz emphasized that the most valuable determinants of Central-European literature are: “*awareness of the history, the past and the present equally ... Persons and characters in these works live in a time shaped in way different from the time in the works of western authors.*”<sup>17</sup>

By writing his ‘own’ history, a Central-European intellectual/writer wishes to deconstruct the ossified concepts and ‘knowledge’ of this space, which had been construed from the perspective of large forces.<sup>18</sup> Even though it can be said that “*in this case literature is history*”, Nikola Petković accentuates that this is not (only) about the subversion of the authority of history, but about individual literary and historical imaginations which include and centre precisely on those details which are marginalised or not included into their own discourse by the historical records to preserve their ‘objectivity’. Writers belonging to the Central European region, such as e.g. Franz Kafka, Italo Svevo, Robert Musil, Miroslav Krleža, Czesław Miłosz, Nedjeljko Fabrio, Claudio Magris, create their own imaginary worlds that are no longer built on strict division between literature and historiography.<sup>19</sup>

Departing from the ‘grand narrations’ of imposed historical dynamics, these literary readouts are in search of a discourse of authenticity, a discourse of those living inside this space as subjects of continual colonial dynamics, indicating that the Central-European spirit

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<sup>16</sup> Petković (2003): 36-37.

<sup>17</sup> Miłosz (1988), cited by Škvorc (2003): 68-72.

<sup>18</sup> In this sense, L. Johnson (1996): 5, explains that, although the (western) tradition of Central European peoples is more than a thousand years old, the venerable traditions and valiant struggles of Central European kingdoms (or, as considered by professional historians, Eastern European) are not well known. The author mentions that the important years are: 1102 to Croats, 1389 to Serbs, 1526 to Hungarians, 1620 to Czechs, 1772 to Poles. “*These are dates of world historical importance for Central Europeans*”, emphasizes the author “*and we know so little about them.*”

<sup>19</sup> Petković (2003): 8-9, 34.

can be fathomed through the destinies of small people. Since the destinies of writers/intellectuals are by no means an exception, we are starting from the thesis of Edward Said that the intellectual, by exposing his ‘counter-discourse’ which does not allow the conscience to look at the other side or fall asleep, is himself a kind of ‘counter-memory’. This includes, Said says, that task of publicly raising embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma. Finally, this intellectual is someone whose *raison d’être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely marginalised.

The answers to the questions about ‘scenes’ should thus be found with a writer/intellectual, the one who speaks the truth to the power, the one who testifies to the persecution and sufferings and the one who, in his (symbolical) role of the writer testifies to the experience of a country and/or a region, thus giving the experience a public identity which will forever remain written in the global discourse agenda.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Central European summer resort as a place of destiny**

The writing of Drago Gervais is contemplated as an account which reflects the voice of the subcolonial Liburnia,<sup>21</sup> traditionally, a summer resort in Central Europe, an area whose history was written by the many who crossed it. The analysis is thereat limited by two coordinates: ‘literature as history’ and ‘history as a biography’. That is because Gervais’ (auto)biography, as a testimony of the turbulent history of spaces which shares the fate of Central Europe, becomes/remains the foundation for the creation of his fiction where specific biographical, literary, aesthetic and ideational motifs interleave.<sup>22</sup> The settings of the social and culture(al) history have been set in the previous chapter, however it is not our

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<sup>20</sup> Said (1994) and (2001).

<sup>21</sup> To be more precise, we are focusing on the so-called Istrian Liburnia, an area limited by the Mountain of Učka and the Bays of Preluk and Plomin, and which is presented as a geological, geographical and political unit, and which has influenced its linguistic and cultural dimension. This is a section of the Istrian peninsula which, unlike its remaining parts, was part of medieval Croatia. It was never under the Venetian dominion (with the exception of Plomin and briefly Mošćenice), Muzur (2004a): 79.

<sup>22</sup> Jurdana (2009): 117.

intention to show one creativity in a positivistic way, or to ‘explain’ one literary opus with positivistic biographism. Still, this does not mean that we à priori reject the stances of literary theoreticians who point out that biography will always be part of criticism. Northrop Frye emphasizes that the biographer will naturally be interested in his subject’s poetry as a personal document, recording his private dreams, associations, ambitions, and expressed or repressed desires. Studies of such matters, as well as those including the relation between psychology and criticism, form an essential part of criticism.<sup>23</sup> This methodological controversy in observing literary opuses which belong to the Central European social and humanistic context acquires an entirely specific dimension. Namely, fiction and faction are permeated, they influence each other, the context here is the text, and the text is often the only stable context. Moreover, as Czeslaw Miłosz stresses, the division into macro- and micro-cosmos is not possible here, and the past did not disappear, although it was irreversible.<sup>24</sup>

The history of the Istrian Liburnia, situated between the mountain of Učka and the sea, is at the same time the history of those who came and passed by, rarely stayed. These are, for instance, Markvard Eppenstein (Count of Carinthia), Henry (Earl of Gorizia), Sieghard (Patriarch of Aquileia), then Eppenstein again, followed by Orlamünde, Rhinelandic Spanheim and Bavarian Andechs, Maximilian I, Ferdinand I, Counts of Walsee, Ferdinand III; transits of Venetians, Turks, French, and later arrivals of Austrians and Italians.<sup>25</sup> It is a long string whose permanence (also) embraces episodes of different concepts of colonialism which

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<sup>23</sup> Frye (2000): 127. Frye accentuates that this is not about reviews which simply project an author’s personality, but of the serious studies which are aware how much guesswork is involved and how tentative all the conclusions must be.

<sup>24</sup> Miłosz (2002): 169 and 16.

<sup>25</sup> Muzur (2004a): 80-81. In addition to the migration influx into Istrian Liburnia until World War I, which slowed down and was reduced to Italian clerks and workers during the Italian occupation, the author emphasizes the second migration wave after World War II when Italians and political emigrants left and people from Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo arrived. The third, most recent, migration inflow happened in the 1990s in the context of the Croatian War for Independence. Refugees from Slavonia, Lika, Dalmatia and Herzegovina arrived in this area and a kind of ‘migration period’, reminiscent of the early medieval migrations, was repeated.



invade the lives of the local population. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Opatija was recognised as a lucrative tourist investment by Friedrich Schüller, General Manager of the Austrian Southern Railway (*Südbahn-Gesellschaft*). Namely, during the period when Austria has lost its Italian destination to war, he was searching for a way to increase the profitability of the Pivka to Rijeka Railway.

This is the time of the ascent of the middle class which needed to fill their free time. In the Central European continental area these classes, made up of rentiers, higher civil servants, bankers, physicians and tradesmen, early retired officers, chronic patients, wealthy students, artists, are forced to ‘survive’ long and grey winters. But, Opatija offered them a safe heaven. As a winter resort it provided a mild climate and, being linked by railway to the major Austro-Hungarian cities, it was a relatively close destination. Consequently, the population of Opatija and Istrian Liburnia was expanded with the indispensable craftsmen, caterers and professionals arrived from urban centres throughout the Monarchy. They all found a job and a place to live here.<sup>26</sup>

Owing to its multiculturalism and specific coexistence, this area is revealed as part of the Central European region. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Opatija boasted a multicultural and multiethnic civil society, typical for Croatian and Hungarian Pannonian regions, but with the specific features of a (Mediterranean) tourist destination.<sup>27</sup> At that time a young classically trained musician Artur Gervais arrived in Opatija from Vienna. His father Ludwig, born at Severin na Kupi in the Gorski kotar mountain district, was a building entrepreneur and had worked in various parts of the Monarchy. Ludwig married Antonia (Toni) Kessler from Graz.

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<sup>26</sup> Muzur (2004a): 79. The author makes a vivid comparison of the Liburnian society from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the contemporary (but also modern) conditions in North America. In both these entities, which were created by a constant influx of new immigrants, individual identities and identities of small groups disappeared making space for a growing identity of the new environment offering countless opportunities of success and affirmations of all kinds, while the need for identity lost its importance. However, unlike America, the “*K und K world*”, Muzur emphasises, “*was acutely conservationist and supported an entire range of class and caste principles and differences.*”

<sup>27</sup> Zakošek (2005): 67.

This fact again reveals the heterogeneity of family roots. This heterogeneity, as the characteristic of the Central European context, can be recognized in other Central Europeans.<sup>28</sup> This heterogeneity and complexity of identity points is underlined by the surname Gervais, which, apart from different pronunciation variants [ʒer've:, ger'vais], implies the French or German origin. In addition, the Gervais family frequently changed their place of living. Arthur was thus born in Trieste in 1877. The family lived for a brief period in Istanbul. Namely, when the tender published by Turkey for the construction of the Istanbul to Ankara railway was won by Austria-Hungary, Ludwig, being a building entrepreneur, was also included in this project.<sup>29</sup> Artur was educated in various towns over the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including also Bosnia and Herzegovina. He attended secondary school in Istanbul, where he also acquired musical education. He then went to Vienna where he studied music. This individual trajectory that saw Artur starting from the margins of the Monarchy and eventually reaching its capital is the example of a much more complex system that the colonial organisation of the Monarchy resided on. This is the so called 'centripetal colonial structure', whose direction was moving from the provinces and countries towards the centre – Vienna or Budapest.<sup>30</sup>

In the background of this politics is the capital's task of mediation between heterogeneous regions, cultures and nations, whereby it had a spiritual and amalgamating position of the central place and the centre of a multinational state. This position included also the tasks of taking as well

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<sup>28</sup> Czesław Miłosz (1999): 22 writes of his *mélange* of Polish, Lithuanian and German blood, as of something that the supporters of purity could not be proud of.

<sup>29</sup> The Gervais family thus participated in the momentum of the railway policy of Austria-Hungary discussed by Horst Haselsteiner (1997): 153-55. Austria-Hungary had a decisive role in the definition of routes, financing, construction and control of international railway lines, ever since the Sandžak crisis and the Danube – Adriatic Railway until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Haselsteiner finds the background of such policy in the increasing requests by particularly Cisleithanian chambers of trade which, following the 1873 economic crisis, kept insisting on the establishment of trade relationships with Southeastern Europe and the East, since the 'Orient' was considered a 'natural market' of the Monarchy.

<sup>30</sup> Petković (2003): 42.

as of further propagation.<sup>31</sup> As a professional musician, the young Artur came from Vienna to the fashionable Opatija where he got the position of town band conductor. He was renting a room with the Tomašić family, and soon after married Klementina, one of the Tomašić's four daughters. Their son Drago was born shortly after.

In 1904, when Drago Gervais was born, Opatija was a well-established summer resort of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, visited by the members of royal and imperial families, composers and writers. At that time Opatija, with its perfect infrastructure and excellent reputation, was one the most prestigious European health resorts. In the Central European context, this was the time which Stefan Zweig describes as the 'Golden Age of Security':

*"When I attempt to find a simple formula for the period in which I grew up, prior to the First World War, I hope that I convey its fullness by calling it the Golden Age of Security. Everything in our almost thousand-year-old Austrian monarchy seemed based on permanency, and the State itself was the chief guarantor of this stability ... In this vast empire everything stood firmly and immovably in its appointed place, and at its head was the aged emperor, and were he to die, one knew (or believed) another would come to take his place, and nothing would change in the well-regulated order."*<sup>32</sup>

In his native Opatija Drago attended the Public Croatian Community School (*Javna hrvatska pučka škola*). The school was established by the Society of SS Cyril and Methodius with the support of the Town Council. Namely, the Society, as a political, cultural and educational association of Istrian Croats, opened a number of schools throughout Istria as the most appropriate network to spread Croatian national awareness.

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<sup>31</sup> Haselsteiner (1997): 240. The author points out that Vienna, in this role, received multivariate cultural and spiritual currents and impulses, both from west-European regions, as from the Empire and various countries of the Monarchy, and in this way mediated between them and the entire European consciousness.

<sup>32</sup> Zweig (1964): 2-3.

After finishing this school, Drago enrolled in the four-year lower grammar school (*Četverorazredna komunalna mala realna gimnazija*) in Volosko-Opatija in 1914. But, World War One erupted and radically changed everything. The old world disappeared following the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Fascist and irredentist movement was gathering momentum in Italy. This historically ‘dense’ time, delimited by the end of the war on one hand and the 1924 Treaty of Rome on the other, was marked by a string of events unfolding at an almost film speed, while history was being observed in Liburnia with eyes wide open. The culmination was at Rapallo, a small place near Genova, where the Treaty of Rapallo was signed on 12<sup>th</sup> of November 1920. The Treaty allowed Italy to acquire Trieste, Gorizia, Gradisca, and a part of Carniola, Istria (except for the Municipality of Kastav), the City of Zadar and the islands of Cres, Lošinj, Lastovo and Palagruža.

In the context of history which was written by foreign centres of power, Opatija, having lived through the war trauma, was expecting the western allies as a sign of liberation from the just collapsed Monarchy. Yet, the unwanted occurred. Those who had no say in it and who knew nothing about the trade in which they were used as currency, stood horrified astoundingly watching the history shyly sailing into the Opatija’s harbour in the form of the green colour on the tricolour flying on the stern of the destroyer Acerbo.<sup>33</sup> This event, but from the perspective of the neighbouring Rijeka port, was described by Gervais in his novella *Night has fallen on Earth (Noć je pala na zemlju)*: “*Nobody is offering resistance, only sighs can be heard coming not from one man, but from all those people standing in the harbour, mute and serious: It’s a fraud!*”<sup>34</sup>

It is, actually, the disbelief that is so typical of historical intrusions in the Central European region, and which, as Czesław Miłosz would put it, usually happens in the presence of occupying soldiers. What is more, it usually happens on a bright and sunny day, explains Miłosz, and for an ignorant observer, it would seem as though nothing had happened that day

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<sup>33</sup> Muzur (1998): 111.

<sup>34</sup> “*Nitko ne pruža otpor, tek se čuju uzdasi ne jednog čovjeka, nego svih onih ljudi koji su nijemi i ozbiljni, stajali u luci: To je prevara!*”, Gervais (1996): 12-13.

at all.<sup>35</sup> Drago Gervais, speaking from the perspective of those who lived here, underlines the fact that in 1918, instead of liberation, (another) occupation arrived, and:

*“... for Istria this meant the devastation of all that had been built through the efforts of its people from the last decades of the last century until 1914: a total loss of the hardly acquired, even though still limited, economic and cultural positions; it meant a brutal action to denationalise our element ... There was no man in Istria in those days whose soul was not filled with despair, exasperation and dark pessimism. And there was no man in Istria whose eyes were not slowly opened by this backroom agreement and to whom this was not a dearly paid experience and a good lesson for the future. Istria felt on its own skin what it meant when the big ones compromised at the expense of the small ones.”*

Such a traumatic historical event resulted in the equally traumatic consequences. In this case – exile. Gervais says:

*“The Treaty of Rapallo and the Italian annexation changed the image of Istria. Entire families, teachers, clerks, farmers fled or moved to Yugoslavia; Istria was left void of intellectuals overnight.”*<sup>36</sup>

The Opatians were imposed with new names for streets, parks and bathing places. The progress made before the start of the war was now a far away dream. Beside their well-established destinations such as Rimini, Capri or Venice, the Italian Government saw no reason to invest in a former summer and health resort of the perished Monarchy. Having become the rulers, they did not miss the opportunity to eradicate Opatija's most vital autochthonous factors – the Croatian middle class from the public, political and social lives.<sup>37</sup> Even though the Italian occupation and the condition

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<sup>35</sup> Miłosz (1999): 174.

<sup>36</sup> “*Rapalski ugovor i aneksija Italiji potpuno mijenjaju sliku Istre. Iz Istre bježe ili preseljavaju u Jugoslaviju čitave obitelji, učitelji, profesori, činovnici, seljaci; Istra preko noći ostaje bez svojih intelektualaca*”, Gervais (1950): 698.

<sup>37</sup> Zakošek (200): 90; Muzur (2004a): 82.

Gervais' family was facing were not the consequence of their actions, it was an event which radically changed their lives. They became/remained subjects of colonial dynamics which usurped the power of exclusion and inclusion. Gervais says: "*So it happened, Istria was included into Italy, and we were excluded*"<sup>38</sup> Having become excluded, they were forced to go into exile.<sup>39</sup> It was Artur who left Opatija first, only to be soon followed by his son Drago who crossed the border illegally and on his own. This unwanted departure from his native Opatija at a very young age, was the turning point of his destiny.

The family joined in exile, they experienced dramatic changes in their social status and place of residence. Finally, the family settled in Bakar in 1923. Drago studied law in Zagreb. The beginnings of his Chakavian poetry are linked to that period:

*"I wrote the first Chakavian poem, Nostalgia, I believe it was its title, on a damn sad autumn day, in a dark classroom of the student dormitory, Ilica 83, some time in 1923 while Baron's Institutes of Roman Law were in front of me, but I was far away from them..."*<sup>40</sup>

About that time, as he says, Gervais also wrote the poem *God Homeland (Bog domovina)*: "... in which I definitely left behind any hope of returning in Istria. I did not believe in a miracle which could save it."<sup>41</sup>

In 1929 Gervais, then aged 25, published his first collection – *Chakavian Verses (Čakavski stihovi)*. The second revised edition of the collection was published in 1935. It contained the foreword entitled *Lute and Accordion (Leut i armunika)* by Vladimir Nazor. 1940 saw the

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<sup>38</sup> "Ali, eto priključilo Istru Italiji, tamo u Rapallu, a nas isključilo", Gervais (1997): 208-09.

<sup>39</sup> Muzur (2004b): 85. He explains that the majority fled from Opatija to the territory of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The nearest town was Sušak which became a place of residence to many people.

<sup>40</sup> "Prvu čakavsku pjesmu, zvala se, čini mi se, Nostalgija, napisao sam jednog proketo tužnog jesenskog dana u mračnoj učionici Đačkog doma, Ilica 83, negdje godine 1923. kada su preda mnom stajale Baronove Institucije rimskog prava, ali sam ja daleko od njih...", Gervais (1997): 209.

<sup>41</sup> "... u kojoj sam definitivno raskrstio s nadom, da ću se ikad vratiti u Istru. I nisam vjerovao u nikakvo čudo, koje bi je moglo spasiti.", Gervais (1950): 699.

publishing of the third edition. Gervais continued to change his residence. During Second World War he lived in Belgrade, just as many other Istrian emigrants. He saw the end of the war there.

In a letter to Viktor Car Emin, dated 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1945, Gervais says: “*It is a fantastic feeling to be able to write letters to Opatija where I had not been for exactly 19 years.*”<sup>42</sup> The drama of his long exile can be felt in the announcement of a brief visit to Car in Liburnia: “*I cannot say how I feel when I think of that return, albeit for a couple of days; after so many years of absence. It casts a chill over me.*”<sup>43</sup>

But, the international stage became complicated (again) so that Rijeka, Istria, Zadar, the Slovene Littoral and Trieste were not recognized as integral parts of federal Yugoslavia. In the background of this situation of neither peace nor war, a diplomatic struggle for these regions was going on. The struggle resulted in the signing of the Paris Peace Treaties on 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1947. In that same year Gervais was moved from Belgrade to Rijeka to work as legal administrator with the Merchant Navy General Directorate. Drago Gervais thus returned to his native region after an almost 20 year long exile. In 1949 he became the manager of the drama section of the Rijeka Theatre. At the same time he started working as a playwright. 1955 saw the publication of the sixth edition of his collection *Čakavski stihovi*.

On the occasion of attending the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishment of the Academic Society “Balkan” in Sežana, Drago Gervais met a tragic accident when he fell off the balcony and died on the way to the Ljubljana Hospital on 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1957. Along with his novellas and plays, what remained after him was his Chakavian poetry which has today reached the status of anthological value in Croatian literature. In this context it is worth emphasizing that following his death the *Čakavski stihovi* have been in print permanently to date in a series of critical editions.

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<sup>42</sup> “*Divan je osjećaj kad čovjek može opet pisati pisma i to u Opatiju u kojoj nisam bio ravno 19 godina.*” The letter of Drago Gervais to Viktor Car Emin is archived in the documents of Viktor Car Emin held in the Lovran Library, which is a branch of „Viktor Car Emin“ - Opatija City Library and reading room, wrap K 16-2. It is published in Jurdana (2009):55-56.

<sup>43</sup> “*Ne mogu reći kako mi je kad mislim na taj povratak, pa makar na par dana; poslije toliko godina odsustva. Prosto, zazebe me nešto.*”

### Saving one's home with poetry

*“It would suffice to take the thread of fate and, by following it, ponder into the entanglement of mutual dependencies of single individuals and history.”*<sup>44</sup>

If man can be reached, as Czesław Miłosz says, also in his *“historical moment”*<sup>45</sup>, in Gervais’ case this moment was the unwanted parting from the native Liburnia.<sup>46</sup> In that 1918, when history entered in the form of the Italian Destroyer *Acerbo* into the life of a boy, his childhood was reaching an end, and a world was laying in ruins.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the precise spot in which the author expressed his desperate scream must be read off, the impotence of resigning with the inevitable disaster: his first revolt against Fate.<sup>48</sup> If we draw on Fulvio Tomizza’s thesis that a writer: *“... is either born a genius or begins to write because in one moment of his life, in the face of death, destruction, infinite loneliness, he is confronting the questions of his existence”*,<sup>49</sup> Gervais, just like Tomizza, becomes/remains a writer in the face of death and in a moment of infinite loneliness. The drama of growing up was thus intertwined with the drama of an unwanted historical moment and of an unwanted parting. In this framework the key word is exile, and exile is a great inconsolable sorrow, whereby the exile often shows signs

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<sup>44</sup> Miłosz (1999): 168.

<sup>45</sup> Miłosz (1999): 7.

<sup>46</sup> Jurdana (2009): 132.

<sup>47</sup> Gauss (1991): 153-54. Karl-Markus Gauss uses these words of childhood and ruins (1994): 59 and 68 to speak about a similar destiny, that of Danilo Kiš. Kiš experienced a similar situation after World War Two. Thus for both writers applies what Milan Kundera said about the Central European nations in general – that their very existence can be put in question at any moment.

<sup>48</sup> Miłosz (1999): 34.

<sup>49</sup> *“... ili se rađa kao genij ili počinje pisati jer se u određenom trenutku svog života, pred licem smrti, razaranja, bezgranične osamljenosti razračunava s pitanjima svoje egzistencije, svoga života”*. Tomizza is defined a Central-European author by Gauss (1994): 83. Tomizza once admitted: *“I became a writer through dramatic and traumatic experiences; through a ruthless conflict which developed between the Italians and the Slavs in my native Istria following World War II ...”* (*“Postao sam pisac putem dramatičnih i traumatskih iskustava; putem okrutnog konflikta što se nakon drugoga svjetskog rata razvio između Talijana i Slavena u mojoj domovini Istri ...”*).



more of a conflicting displacement than of unquestionable belonging. At that moment, Gervais, just like any exile reduced to himself, is not himself any more.<sup>50</sup> Because physical expulsion is accompanied by a particular mind-set. An exile becomes a traveller between two realities, a traveller always returning to the point of origin, a “*victim of geography*”,<sup>51</sup> and in this case a victim of history as well. Poets, artists in general, in such circumstances wear a particular mark of discomfort. The need for a poetic expression of the “*The Therapeutics of Exile and Pilgrimage*”<sup>52</sup> is raised, just as the need to speak about this, the need to turn to oneself, at the same time desperately seeking to capture what has been lived. These are the roots (but not the causes) of an imaginary matter – in this case Gervais’ Chakavian poetry – which confines the time and empties it to reduce it to a cast shadow of a Thing which is missing. This is about mourning which always follows a trauma. Gervais says in one of his poems titled *Va tujine* (*In foreign lands*):

*Ma najveća je žalost / The greatest of all sorrows  
tujac bit va tujine / is to be a foreigner in a foreign land  
čovjek prez domovine. / a man without a homeland.*<sup>53</sup>

Articulating testimony of his own traumatic experience, Gervais’ poetry does not aspire to the absolute truth of a traumatic event. It reads of desperation, anxiety from the pain of the colonized person. At the same time it expresses the horror ‘of not having one’s life’, which is searched for in the space of the aesthetic. In brief, a tragic melancholy.<sup>54</sup> Because, although mourning and melancholy are reflected in an excruciating pain, in a loss of ability to adopt any new object of love, explains Sigmund Freud, melancholia is a state which leads to the disorder of self-esteem. Namely, in melancholia, unlike mourning, an object-loss has turned into an ego-loss. Thus the loss is turned into the loss of one’s ‘I’. Freud says: “*In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in*

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<sup>50</sup> This is how Alain Finkielkraut speaks of exile (1998): 96.

<sup>51</sup> Brodski (1992).

<sup>52</sup> Kristeva (1991): 77.

<sup>53</sup> Gervais (1997): 117.

<sup>54</sup> This type of melancholia with authors in general is discussed by Buci-Glucksmann (1998): 246-47.

*melancholia it is the ego itself.*"<sup>55</sup> This melancholic ego, emphasizes Freud, identifies with the loved object to safeguard it from extinction. This internalisation, this establishment of the lost object inside us, Freud explains, relinks mourning and melancholia. Melancholia is always the reaction to a certain loss, in this case the loss of the country, the loss of liberty, the neglecting of a colonized nation and area. Gervais' poetry of nostalgia, with an emphasis on -algia, i.e. pain for the impossibility of return: *How ugly it is to be without you / and how cold man's heart feels* (*Kako je grdo bit prez tebe, / i kako čoveka srce zebe*), since the house, tradition and identity have become lost or have become inaccessible *when long away from you* (*kada je dugo od tebe*) due to the mapping of foreign centres, grows in the complex interweaving of melancholia, in which a lost object (home and homeland) *identifies* with the ego *like a man who has lost the ground under his feet* (*kako čovek ki j' tlo pod nogami zgubil*). This is therefore not (only) the matter of longing of a lyrical subject for the lost childhood as such, but of a statement of traumatic mourning caused by violent removal and destruction of a world of childhood and home.<sup>56</sup> To re-construct a lost world means to re-construct the ego identified with the lost Object. This object-loss assumes much wider dimensions, it becomes/remains an unattainable, unspeakable object which captures subjectivity and recurs constantly like a scene from a story, for instance in the poem *God, Homeland*:

*Kot udovica sama ćeš ustat, / Like a widow you shall remain alone,  
 će drugi moju, te uživati, / though mine, others will enjoy you,  
 a sin će nebog ti po svete lutati / and your wretched son will wander the  
 world  
 i vavek za tobun jokat / and forever weep for you.*<sup>57</sup>

Starting from this connection, the lost place is identified with a non-belonging woman (*though mine, others will enjoy you*). The Ahasver complex of eternal wandering develops from this position (*and your wretched son will wander the world*) and impossibility to return (*And I*

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<sup>55</sup> Freud (1971): 246.

<sup>56</sup> Jurdana (2009): 165.

<sup>57</sup> Gervais (1964): 71.

*shall return never more*). At a lexical level this is shown by the repeating of the greeting word *bog* (God) i.e. *zbogom* (go with God), which, emphasizes Milan Crnković, is not by chance one of the most frequent words of Gervais' poetry.<sup>58</sup>

Every intellectual in emigration, Adorno points out, is, without exception, mutilated, and does well to acknowledge it to himself, if he wishes to avoid being cruelly appraised of it behind the tightly-closed doors of his self-esteem. His language has been expropriated, and the historical dimension that nourished his knowledge, sapped.<sup>59</sup>

In these circumstances Gervais reached for the language – the only home available to a poet. Authenticity of Gervais' Chakavian expression is contained in a completely specific poetic creation of a world which reads of desperation and anxiety in the pain of the colonized person.<sup>60</sup> What Czesław Miłosz stated in a self-referential phrase: “*Choosing poetry at a later point, I remained loyal to the promise I gave to myself – that I would never be like them, succumb to impotence. I wanted to save my childhood with poetry*”,<sup>61</sup> applies also to Gervais.

The most dramatic such poetic description is given in Gervais' poem *Moja zemja* (*My Country*) which in the original had eight parts<sup>62</sup>, but the fifth part was later extracted as a self-standing poem, often under the title *Pod Učkun* (*Beneath the Učka*). In the latter poem Gervais, in contrast with other parts of the original version which are decidedly dramatic and painful, enters into an oneiric state and re-constructs what is in reality unreachable. He is dreaming:

*Pod Učkun kućice / Beneath the Učka houses*  
*bele / white,*  
*miće, kot suzice small / like little teardrops*  
*vele / slight.*  
*Beli zidići, črjeni krovíci, / White walls, red roofs,*  
*na keh vrapčíci kantaju. / where little sparrows are singing.*

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<sup>58</sup> Crnković (1975): 11.

<sup>59</sup> Adorno (2005): 33.

<sup>60</sup> Jurđana (2009): 164.

<sup>61</sup> Miłosz (1999): 223.

<sup>62</sup> Gervais (1997): 29-32.

*Mići dolčići, još manje lešice / Little valleys, littler seed beds*  
*na keh ženice / where little women*  
*kopaju. / are digging.*  
*Cestice bele, tanki putići, / White roads, slim paths,*  
*po keh se vozići / where little wains*  
*pejaju, / are driving,*  
*i jedna mića, uska rečica, / and a small, narrow river,*  
*pul ke se dečica / by which little children*  
*igraju. / are playing.*

*Na sunce se kućice / Houses in the sun*  
*griju, / warming*  
*na turne urice / hours on the tower*  
*biju. / chiming.<sup>63</sup>*

The poem describes an extraordinarily vivid world, however a world minimized to a picture mirrored in the human eye.<sup>64</sup> This miniature size is reflected in the significant concentration of diminutives: of the 17 nouns, 15 have a diminutive form and the diminution is amplified by attributes attached to the nouns: *little teardrops, little valleys, littler seedbeds, narrow river*. This diminutive cumulateness is not exaggerated, as it could be and actually is with a less versed poet, but is a specific Gervais' stylization, aligned with Gervais' poetics.<sup>65</sup> At the content level, this diminution, with its miniaturization of the world, also invokes the miniaturization of history. History remains outside the described world. This is a diminution as a form of regional narrative mimicry, which is followed in an epigonic style, mostly unsuccessfully, by other poets of the Croatian Adriatic Littoral. However, in this instance of Gervais' poetry, this diminution serves to hide the (lyrical) subject in order to use infantilisation, i.e. "*neutralization of his adulthood*",<sup>66</sup> to remove the burden of history from his shoulders.

Despite numerous verbs in the significant end positions, which is also a distinguishing feature of Gervais' poetics, time has stopped, or

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<sup>63</sup> Gervais (1997): 30-31.

<sup>64</sup> Kovačić (1951): 419.

<sup>65</sup> Moguš (1987): 584-85.

<sup>66</sup> Bošnjak (2000): 58.

better, it lasts undisturbed in the stopped moment. This is the timeless present in which a protected, uterus-like, world lasts. Gervais says: *little women* and *small children*. In this poetry there is no man. It is a female world of fluidity (*small, narrow river*) where everything flows without hindrance, without any obstacle, without the aggression of Thanatos. It is the primordial world, a world without domination over the Other. A timeless world of the imaginary indicating the unreality, an idea, a memory – a DREAM. In the space and time, seized by Thanatos, reality becomes fallacious and dreaming means the search for a true life which is put to death by the thanato-agonised world.

Since there is no right life in the wrong one,<sup>67</sup> dream is the chosen reality. The reduction of space is thus linking with the oneiric production of the literature of memory which can only confirm its right over the lost homeland. This is the dream which is the wish of the dreamer shown as fulfilment,<sup>68</sup> because the oneiric, just like the mythical, shows what the wish would say in a personification without reservations.<sup>69</sup> These processes happen in order to restore the psychological balance by producing dream material that re-establishes in a subtle way the total psychic equilibrium.<sup>70</sup> But, a dream being mimicry, delusion prevails over manifest in it, so that the dream looks back, towards the past, towards childhood.<sup>71</sup> The lyrical subject in this song, returning into the world of his childhood (*little children are playing*), and, in the space of his native countryside, occupies the only space of freedom, the space of dream. However, in the verses which follow in the original multi-part poem, the (lyrical) subject returns to the harsh reality and lets us know it was all but a dream:

*Takovu san te va sanje gledal / I saw you such in my dream*  
*Zemjo moja (...) / My country (...)*  
*To je sanja bila. / It was all a dream.*<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Adorno (2005): 39.

<sup>68</sup> Freud (1959): 8.

<sup>69</sup> Ricoeur (2005): 22-23.

<sup>70</sup> Jung (1988): 50.

<sup>71</sup> Freud (1959): 59.

<sup>72</sup> Gervais (1997): 31.

The desired lost Object (lost native place, country) remains in its oneiric existence, remaining in the space of unreality. It is an unrealizable Object of desire and the subject feels mourning for the non-existent object. This is a disorder which appears in the moment when the subject finds himself in absolute contradiction with that of his surroundings. There is certain discordance, an attack on the integrity of our senses, a sudden shift on the verge of vertigo, which causes ‘ex-placement’ of everything which surrounds us. This unexpectedness is called *melancholia*.<sup>73</sup> Gervais’ lines point to the condition of the author from which he paints what he observes, and he observes what he feels. Namely, “*for those who racked by melancholia, writing about it would have meaning only if writing sprang out of that very melancholia*” says Julia Kristeva.<sup>74</sup> This is about a precipice of mourning, of unutterable pain which sometimes encloses us, clarifies Kristeva, and it takes the shape of ‘emptiness in one’s soul’, ‘spleen’, nostalgia, and whose “*echo is collected in art, in literature, and which, despite the trouble often receives lofty aspects of beauty.*” In the same way, with Gervais, the *beautiful* is born in the land of melancholia, like “*a source of harmony that goes beyond despair.*”<sup>75</sup> Within this framework, Gervais’ diminutives are hoping like refined tokens of melancholia. Nevertheless, this space of oneiric miniaturization is crumbling as it cannot withstand historical trials. The next part of the poem sends us back into a political time:

*A kad san se s sanji zbudil / And when I woke up from my dreams  
za mene je sve pasalo / Everything was gone  
za mene je sve nestalo / Everything was lost.*<sup>76</sup>

The poet returns to an elevated affecting tone of a Biblical lamentation, which is also present in the parts preceding the fifth, oneiric one, as also to parallelisms which create a (biblical) rhythm. What is more, the lamentation turns into a jeremiad expressing grief over a former beautiful life, i.e. over the lost native country. Utmost despair can be noticed,

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<sup>73</sup> Delvaille (1998): 239.

<sup>74</sup> Kristeva (1989): 3.

<sup>75</sup> Kristeva (1998): 240.

<sup>76</sup> Gervais (1997): 31.

resignation of the enslaved, colonized man. The finale of such a condition develops in the last eighth part, where the autumn of the tree of life moves towards winter. Thoughts are becoming bleaker and a strong funeral component can be felt:

*Moja zemja umira / My country is dying,  
mrtvac na njoj leži / A dead man is lying on it,  
i sve ča j' zdravo, živo / And what is healthy, alive  
s nje ča, va svet, beži. / Is leaving, escaping into the world.<sup>77</sup>*

It is possible to read off in Gervais' lines the mechanisms described by Jacques Derrida, namely, when the subject/ego identified with an (dead) object, cannot end his mourning for what he had lost, because by mourning he is keeping it inside himself. In this double inhibition the attempt of ontologization of the remains in order to make them *present*, to *identify* and *localize* the dead. In these circumstances, speaking with the dead here means communicate with the dead-in-me, who is speaking through me and to me, while I am speaking to others in the universalism of language.<sup>78</sup> This is about that feature of melancholia which, in its persevering brooding receives dead things in its contemplation to save them.<sup>79</sup>

This intensive pain, a flash of the dead other in the lyric subject, while his mourning is expressed in words which remember, discovers an internalisation of the Object that cannot be overcome by the subject. Only graves remained on the land that had to be abandoned. Gervais' authorship expression shows/denounces the characteristic of a melancholic who lives with no hope in the future.

## Conclusion

In this situation, when only a desert is inherited, the ability to self-start takes on a new unexpected meaning.<sup>80</sup> In the case of Drago Gervais this ability is articulated in the literary-artistic account which he uses to create his own space of intervention against the past which has entered his life

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<sup>77</sup> Gervais (1997): 32.

<sup>78</sup> Derrida (1995): 152.

<sup>79</sup> Benjamin (2003).

<sup>80</sup> Sloterdijk (1992): 29.

uninvited.<sup>81</sup> This intervention settles into the area of fiction which we recognized as the art of the colonized, in this case of a Central-European, where the haunting by the ghosts of history<sup>82</sup> is fully expressed. Putting down his testimony on himself and the others, Drago Gervais confirms Sloterdijk's thought that the one who brings something to the world, does so to be born and to make himself lighter.<sup>83</sup>

Edward Said said that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical and it is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. Exile is like death but without death's ultimate mercy, it tears a man from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography and, concludes Said, while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind for ever.<sup>84</sup>

In this respect, also the poetry of Drago Gervais points to the fact that "*language is the only eternal and ineradicable homeland that an exile took with him*",<sup>85</sup> i.e. that "*for a man who no longer has a homeland*", as Adorno emphasized, "*writing becomes a place to live*".<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, a writer like this, explains Hazanov, can only write about what he knows thoroughly, and what has been stored in his memory.

This is the reason why Drago Gervais' poetry is an example of the exile literature turned back to the past, to what it had left behind. The poet – emigrant replete with his past, must confirm this past and he becomes Lot's wife who cannot avert her eyes from the past.<sup>87</sup>

These are the reasons why exile literature seems outdated in the eyes of many people. But, in this it must be considered that exile literature, Drago Gervais' poetry included, created something much more important

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<sup>81</sup> Jurdana (2009): 290.

<sup>82</sup> Bhabha (1994).

<sup>83</sup> Sloterdijk (1992): 71.

<sup>84</sup> Said (2002): 138-49.

<sup>85</sup> Hazanov (2000): 42-43.

<sup>86</sup> Adorno (2005): 87.

<sup>87</sup> Hazanov (2000): 45.



– a new way of seeing. Moreover, many of those who came after him followed that way in an epigonic style. Because, even though exiles – writers leave an impression of being invalids of history, and this is a fact; however, despite and/or because of this, they sometime march forward more courageously than the others.<sup>88</sup> Gervais' linguistic setting into the Liburnian life texture is at the same time the component of his artistic credibility, but also the only possible author's choice. He had no predecessor in this and, by creating his own authentic poetic expression, which became and remained the classic (Chakavian) opus, he opened an immense poetic space of a language.

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<sup>88</sup> Hazanov (2000): 45.

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## Sažetak

Hrvatski književnik Drago Gervais (Opatija, 1904. - Sežana, 1957.) pisao je poeziju, prozu i dramu, a na to stvaralaštvo presudno je utjecala povijest prostora na kojem je živio i djelovao. Riječ je o prostoru Istre i Hrvatskog primorja koji po svojim specifičnim obilježjima daje prepoznati kao južni dio Srednje Europe koja je kao nestabilan geopolitički entitet bila područjem brojnih kolonizacija. Te su kolonijalne dinamike, ujedno pisale i njezinu povijest, zanemarujući glasove onih koji su ondje živjeli. Štoviše, ta je povijest ulazila nepozvana u živote koloniziranih potirući granicu između privatnog i javnog. I sudbinu Drage Gervaisa obilježila je jedna takva intruzija povijesti. Naime, nakon Rapalskoga ugovora, Gervaisova rodna Liburnija pripala je Kraljevini Italiji, te je i Gervaisova obitelj, zajedno sa tisućama sunarodnjaka, bila prisiljena otići u progonstvo. Proživljavajući sve strahote egzila, Gervais je na književnoumjetnički način artikulirao svu njegovu složenost. Iz te pozicije, 1929. godine objavljuje svoju prvu pjesničku zbirku *Čakavski stihovi* iskazujući njima nesavladivu tugu za izgubljenim zavičajem. Upravo je tom svojom čakavskom poezijom zadužio hrvatsku književnost, jer je ona kasnije postala antologijskom, a sama zbirka objavljuje se sve do danas u brojnim novim i ponovljenim izdanjima.

U svojoj je čakavskoj poeziji Gervais kao egzilant posegnuo za jedinim domom koji pjesnik ima, a to je njegov jezik. Riječ je o stvaranju poetike kojom autor tematizira vlastito izgnanstvo te se nudi kao specifično traumatsko iskustvo koje se iskazuje u snažnoj nostalgiji, a zatim u melankoliji. Upravo melankolija omogućuje autoru da se identificira sa izgubljenim objektom kako bi ga sačuvao od utruća. A spasiti svoj izgubljeni zavičaj, znači (re)opisati ga, ostaviti svjedočanstvo iz kaosa povijesti. U takvu iskazu Gervais artikulira glasove s margine i imenuje, unatoč aktualnim dinamikama isključivanja/uključivanja, ono što je isključeno, izbrisano, oštećeno.

Gervais ne bilježi samo pamćenje jednog egzilanta, kako bi spasio ono što se spasiti daje, već se njegovim pjesništvom bilježi i pamćenje kulture pri čemu je Gervaisovo jezično ambijentiranje u liburnijsku životnu građu, istodobno i sastavnicom njegove umjetničke uvjerljivosti, ali i jedini mogući autorski izbor.

U tome nije imao prethodnika, a stvorivši svoj autentični pjesnički izričaj, postao je (čakavskim) antologijskim pjesnikom i neponovljivim svjedokom traume progonstva kao jednog od najsloženijih stanja ljudskog bića.

