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# FACTOGRAPHY AND FICTION: MIRRORING IN THE NOVEL *A TIME OF DEATH* BY DOBRICA ĆOSIĆ

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*Abstract.* The subject of this paper is the analysis of Dobrica Ćosić's novel *A Time of Death I–IV* (1972–1979), primarily from the perspective of possible worlds theory. One of the most important Serbian novels about the First World War, which critics have frequently defined as an epic novel, was inspiring for our research for at least two reasons: the first lies in the fact that historiographic metafiction is still the most prominent literary current in Serbian novelistic production, and the second is that contemporary readers have returned to Ćosić through intensive film adaptations in the recent years. The analysis and survey of the relationship between the factographic and fictional is precisely what led to the illumination and better understanding of the contemporary readers' attitude towards the so-called *neo-historical novel*, which, according to Tihomir Brajović, began with Dobrica Ćosić.

An interpretation of the characters in terms of possible worlds theory is at the center of attention, particularly the function of extratextual narrative identities of military leaders, statesmen, politicians, and warriors (Nikola Pašić, Aleksandar Karađorđević, Radomir Putnik, Stepa Stepanović, Živojin Mišić, Petar Bojović, Apis, and Stanislav Vinaver, among others). The specific aim of this paper is to understand the creative process whereby the characters were transformed and shaped as they made the transition from fact to fiction and, in this context, to analyze the documentary and artistic function of different types of texts that are incorporated into the narrative fabric of the novel. In particular, the author's auto-poetic comments are deemed particularly relevant to unlocking the process of metamorphosis of the historical into the fictional. Two more questions are addressed as separate research challenges: (1) the importance of the specific way in which the author constructs the so-called historical characters to form national identity in the novel; and (2) the more general issue of historical truth, with particular regard to the nature of historiographic narrative. The methodological starting point for the interpretation of the characters is provided by the tenets of postclassical (cognitive) narratology, with priority given to Hilary Dannenberg's typology of transworld identities.

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## Introduction

The First World War, as a real historical event and an event of public interest, is the central motif of the novel *A Time of Death*<sup>4</sup> by the Serbian novelist Dobrica Ćosić (1921–2014). This author is one of the most widely read writers in the former Yugoslavia, as confirmed by the data on the circulation, prizes, and critical reception of his novels. Many questions are often asked not only regarding the popularity of his work and its high circulation figures (which were tremendously high for the period when they were released; e.g., his novel *A Time of Death* had a print run of 180,000 copies, compared to 1,500,000 copies of his first novel *Far is the Sun*), but also concerning their artistic value and social engagement. Controversy followed each of his novels, not just as a result of the author's prominent position in Serbian society, literature, and culture in the period from the 1950s to the end of the twentieth century. Ćosić entered literature from politics as a prominent member of the Communist Party during and after the Second World War, and this connection with politics remained uninterrupted until the end of his life; indeed, Ćosić served as the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992–1993. The fact that the interpretation of his work has always been “deafened by ideological discourse” seems to be the reason behind his often being considered an “unread author,” with this uncommon research challenge arising out of Ćosić's fundamental position—“as a writer who speaks [to us] from history, as someone who participated in the making of that history ... and from the perspective of a government man;” therefore, his work “is beginning to be challenged from an unexpected quarter—as a generator of ideology that produced historical conflicts” (Јерemiћ, 2005, pp. 33–39)!

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<sup>4</sup> The edition we used was *Време смрти I, II, III, IV* (прир. М. Радловић), *Дела Добрице Ћосића*, коло 2, књ. 9, 10, 11, 12. Београд: Филип Вишњић, 2001 (*Vreme smrti [A Time of Death] I, II, III, IV* (M. Radulović, Comp.), *Dela Dobrice Ćosića [Works of Dobrica Ćosić]*, Series II, Vols. 9, 10, 11, 12, Belgrade, 2001).

All Ćosić's novels<sup>5</sup> (whose number is not small) take as their themes certain historical events and social phenomena. Very early in his career, Ćosić conceived the idea of creating a series of novels that would be a poetic transposition of Serbian history from the nineteenth century to the present day. He achieved this aim, and the novel *A Time of Death* takes the central position in the series. The focus of the writer's creative motivation and imagination was the transposition of history, so that the resulting relationship between reality and fiction—that is, the way these two categories function in the work—establishes itself as a reasonable starting point for an analytical consideration of the novel and, moreover, for the reconstruction of the author's creative poetics. After examining numerous literary critiques of *A Time of Death*, it can be concluded that this problem has been discussed by almost all the critics concerned. Furthermore, it should be noted that Ćosić himself held the view that determining the precise relationship between reality and fiction was a fundamental task of any writer who embarked upon composing a so-called historical novel. In the case of *A Time of Death*, which we chose as the main subject of this study, we sought answers to the aforementioned question (primarily) through character analysis and, in that context, through the analysis of the documentarity of the novel, i.e., the artistic features of different types of texts incorporated into the narrative fabric of the novel. The purpose of our paper is to offer a reading grounded in the methodology of literary studies as practiced at the core of postclassical (cognitive) narratology, with special emphasis placed on character analysis using Hilary Dannenberg's (2008)<sup>6</sup> typology of transworld identities,<sup>7</sup> which we believe is best suited to provide valid conclusions regarding the main characteristics and artistic value of the novel.

Character analysis makes it possible to assess, at the micro level, the ratio between the factographic and the fictional, most notably by seeing the manner in which so-called historical figures are characterized compared to “non-historical” ones, that is, extratextual versions or characters created by “transferring” real historical figures as “realistic individuals” (Margolin, 1997, pp. 88–100) into a fictional space structured according to a specific genre (Милосављевић Милић, 2014, pp. 783–793); such are the characters of, for example, the former Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić and Field Marshal Živojin Mišić. In contrast,

<sup>5</sup> Ćosić's novels include: *Daleko je sunce* [*Far Away is the Sun*] (1951); *Koreni* [*Roots*] (1954); *Deobe 1–3* [*Divisions 1–3*] (1961); *Bajka* [*A Fable*] (1965); *Vreme smrti 1–4* [*A Time of Death 1–4*] (1972–1979); *Vreme zla* [*A Time of Evil*]; *Grešnik* [*Sinner*] (1985), *Otpadnik* [*Renegade*] (1986), *Vernik* [*Believer*] (1990); *Vreme vlasti 1–2* [*A Time of Power 1–2*] (1996, 2007, respectively).

<sup>6</sup> Dannenberg currently publishes as Hilary Duffield (University of Trier): <https://uni-trier.academia.edu/HilaryDannenberg>.

<sup>7</sup> Hilary Dannenberg's observations about the extratextual space that characters may occupy are grounded in possible worlds theory.

intratextual characters are variants of imaginary individuals within the actual and virtual narrative worlds of the novel (e.g., members of the Katić and Dačić families—Aćim, Vukašin, Ivan, Tola, Adam, and others). Although both types of characters are the product of creative imagination, the appearance of extratextual versions inevitably addresses, on the one hand, the question of their relation to their prototypes, i.e., the real historical figures that lived under those names, and, on the other, their relation to completely fictional characters, who are purely fictional products of imagination within the novel's narrative. Consideration of this issue in connection to Ćosić's characters reveals much about the author's perspective on certain historical facts and data that, in one way or another (even if only as inspiration), found their way into his novel.

### *Factography and Fiction: A Time of Death*

The First World War provides the general historical framework for the events described in the novel. Ćosić opted for an artistic transposition of the first two years of the war (1914–1915), namely, for the period that followed the Serbian victory at Mount Cer, when the Serbian army and people were about to face a new enemy offensive, and when help from their allies was dependent on their meeting some unacceptable demands. The dramatic period in which difficult political, diplomatic, and military decisions were taken, ultimately leading, at the end of 1915, to the tragic withdrawal of the Serbian army and people beyond the borders of their own country and through the icy mountains of Albania—an event in many ways unique in the history of wars that came to be known as the Albanian Golgotha—inspired Ćosić in a very creative sense.

On the general novelistic plane on which the characters of the novel *A Time of Death* act, narration constantly takes place at two levels—a general, broader historical level (showing the work of the government, Parliament, diplomats, and the General Staff; the war background; the positions and movements of the Serbian army; battles; the mood and atmosphere in certain parts of the front; a field hospital), and an individual level, depicted through the individual stories of the characters. The extratextual transworld identity<sup>8</sup> of the principal protag-

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<sup>8</sup> The term “extratextual transworld identities” basically refers to the permeability that exists in narratives (particularly in historical novels) between the real world of factual individuals and collective identities, and the fictional world of characters produced by the author's imagination. They have their original in the real world, and so they occupy an extratextual space from which the reader can identify them and “import” information about them. Precisely because extratextual transworld identities exist not only in fictional worlds but also outside of them, the cognitive operations needed to grasp them differ from those for characters who possess only intertextual or intratextual fictional counterparts. With this, Hilary Dannenberg likewise refutes Lubomir Doležel's claim that all fictional identities are ontologically homogenous (Dannenberg, 2008, pp. 60–61). As the theory of

onists (both characters and historical figures) operates on both the historical and individual planes, ensuring they remain connected. This effect, created at all levels of the novelistic structure, is achieved by applying the so-called counterpoint method, i.e., by incorporating additional distinct voices according to the laws of harmonics, as well as using the principle of polarity or contrast in characterization. These are the basic principles of textual organization in this work. Historical documents incorporated into the text function in a similar way, standing in stark yet meaningful contrast to the content of the text, i.e., to the “reality” as it evolves in the novel.

All events that the author artistically processes in the novel basically correspond to historical facts. In an effort to create an overall artistic vision that will leave a strong impression of veracity, Ćosić almost always allows narrative flows to converge with the historical chronology of events; in all four books of the novel, events take place in the order in which they occurred in reality, i.e., in the exact way historiographic facts recount it—the military defeats at the River Drina, the retreat from Valjevo, the battle of Suvobor in 1914, the liberation of Serbia, the typhus epidemic, the Valjevo hospital in 1915, the new enemy offensive, the retreat of the Serbian army and population, and the Albanian Golgotha.

One of the various ways in which the illusion of authenticity is achieved in the novel is through the employment of documentary techniques, i.e., the use of different types of documents (Величковић, 1998, p. 15). The very high levels of use of real and (pseudo-)fictional documentation achieved in *A Time of Death* are not easy to miss: the reader’s attention is drawn to both types of documents by the fact that they are visually/graphically highlighted by being italicized. Since original documentary material is sometimes allowed to replace the conventional narrative voice, it often does not serve merely as an illustration but as something deliberately introduced with a clear creative intention to elucidate the time, events, and people in a new manner. In this way, the technique is able to offer different viewpoints and attitudes towards events, and this is its particular aesthetic and receptive value.

*A Time of Death* is a novel in which there is a complete synthesis of the factual and fictional (of the real and invented), and this makes these two pairs of categories difficult to separate. No historical fact providing the starting point for the work of the writer’s imagination is incorrect and it is all basically authentic; yet, it has all been upgraded in a special way. In the author’s artistic reworking, each document used, each well-known historical fact presented

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transworld identities has already been written about extensively in Serbian literary theory (Милосављевић Милић, 2014; Milosavljević Milić, 2016; Ноцић, 2013; Јовановић, 2022; 2024; Божић, 2020) and widely applied in interpreting literary characters, we will not dwell on it here.

receives a new meaning, different from the one that prevails in the world of true historical facts. As the language of history becomes the multi-meaningful language of literature, specific events, places, and personalities are also able to impose universal meaning,<sup>9</sup> engaging the reader not only intellectually but also emotionally. At the same time, the presence of various forms of historical records in the novel impacts its entire structure, influencing the development of those parts of the text that are purely imaginary (plot, summary, “non-historical” characters, forms of narration, descriptions and representations of characters’ psychological states, etc.).

In this context, especially interesting is the way in which characters are realized, particularly the extratextual transworld identities under the names of important historical figures from the period of the First World War. A good explanation of the relationship between the documentary and fictional in the characterization process is provided by the author himself. The children of Field Marshal Živojin Mišić resented the fact that the novel did not, in their view, present their father accurately; Ćosić replied that it was not their father but *his* Živojin Mišić that was portrayed.<sup>10</sup> The author created this and other characters as extratextual versions of historical figures by way of creative transfer of the factual into the fictional; they are exactly as the writer imagined them, based on his knowledge of authentic historical material, rather than what they really were like. Complete authenticity is almost impossible, but when it comes to art—including novels—it is not even desirable.<sup>11</sup>

Nikola Pašić is a paradigmatic example of the literary design of extratextual identity. In the first book of the novel, he is a dominant and “realistic individual;” indeed, thanks to his presence in the actual and virtual worlds of the narrative, the novel is able to introduce a large number of historical facts, as well as some

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<sup>9</sup> See Aristotle’s observations about historical and literary truths: “Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular” (2008, p. 11). Ćosić’s understanding of poetic historicism follows this consideration: “I believe that literature today faces the epochal task of poetic transposition of twentieth-century history, thereby also having the opportunity of reasserting its importance for the spiritual life of people” (Ђосић, 2001a, p. 144).

<sup>10</sup> Other authors’ (e.g., Ivo Andrić, Dragoslav Mihailović) treatment of the relationship between reality and fiction in developing characters with extratextual counterparts have also been misunderstood.

<sup>11</sup> The search for suprafactual truths is clearly expressed in Ćosić’s auto-poetic writings, because, according to him, some essential truths cannot be found in facts or “in any historical content in a document” (Ђосић, 2001a, p. 166). That is why literature goes beyond factuality, representing an individual view of the particular: “The novelist searches for the motivation of human action and ideas, for driving thoughts and personal dilemmas, for a veritable and credible experience of a historical situation, and for human emotions in historical events” (Ђосић, 2001a, p. 166). For a more detailed overview of Ćosić’s auto-poetic standpoints, see Vožić (Ђожић, 2009).

other extratextual identities (i.e., historical figures), with whom he was in contact. The reader, for example, follows Pašić's telephone conversation with Field Marshal Putnik, in which the two discuss the situation on the front, an interview given by Pašić's to reporters, and his statement that the Serbs will win. The same applies to a large number of other—not only extratextual—characters.

It is legitimate to conclude that the documentary features in *A Time of Death* do not only include historical documents<sup>12</sup> in their original form, but also the extratextual transworld identities of the main, supporting, and episodic characters,<sup>13</sup> including certain sites and locations (i.e., cities, taverns, various

<sup>12</sup> The entire *Prologue* (Ђосић, *Време смртиу I*, pp. 7–26) is a collage of different non-fictional items. It contains: part of an article from the special issue of a Viennese newspaper describing the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo in June 1914; Nikola Pašić's letter to all delegations of the Kingdom of Serbia concerning the event; a note by Baron Guiseley, the Austro-Hungarian representative in Belgrade, to Laza Pacu, a representative of the Serbian Prime Minister, giving Serbia an unacceptable ultimatum on 23 July 1914; the Serbian royal government's response to the note, two days later; the declaration of war, sent on 28 July by Count Leopold Berthold to Nikola Pašić; a letter from King Nikola of Montenegro to Serbian Prince Regent Aleksandar, in which he promises to help Serbia; a report from Count Moritz Palfi on his audience with the Cardinal Secretary of State Mary de Val and Pope Pius X, which shows the Pope's attitude on the war with Serbia; several telegrams by European emperors and kings (German, Russian, Prussian, and English) in which they tried, in vain, to prevent the outbreak of the First World War (which began on 3 August 1914, when Germany declared war on France, followed the next day by the UK's declaration of war on Germany); the announcement of the Supreme Command of the Serbian Army, published in the *Politika* daily, on the retreat of its troops, greatly outnumbered by the Austro-Hungarian forces advancing into the Serbian hinterland and the war's uncertain prospects (Ђосић, *op. cit.*, p. 45). The third section of the novel starts with a paragraph from a text in a book by Archibald Reiss, titled "How the Austro-Hungarians Fought the War in Serbia," which includes the original document by the Austro-Hungarian military command with instructions on how the Serbian people are to be treated, on which Reiss comments sharply (Ђосић, *op. cit.*, pp. 132–134). The third section ends with Chapter 15, which consists of three Pašić's telegrams addressed to Serbian representatives in St. Petersburg, Paris, and London, in which he urges the abandonment of the allies' demands that Serbia cede a part of Macedonia to Bulgaria, and requests assistance with ammunition supply (Ђосић, *op. cit.*, pp. 207–208).

<sup>13</sup> In the first book, the main characters are Nikola Pašić, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Serbia and a general; and later, Field Marshal Živojin Mišić, who took command of the First Army. The episodic and secondary characters include Prince Regent Aleksandar; Jovan Jovanović, Pašić's foreign affairs assistant; Field Marshal Radomir Putnik, Chief of the Serbian Army and Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command; Field Marshal Stepa Stepanović, Commander of the Second Army; General Petar Bojović, Commander of the First Army; General Pavle Jurišić-Sturm, Commander of the Third Army; General Živković, who commanded the defense of Belgrade; General Aračić, Commander of the Užice Army; Lieutenant Colonel Apis; Colonel Živko Pavlović, Chief of the Operations Department of the Supreme Command; French journalist Henri Barbusse; Ljuba Davidović, a party leader; Stojan Protić, a politician; and Stanislav Vinaver, a member of the Students' Battalion who later became a famous writer.



frontlines).<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the pseudo-documentary features in the novel consist of private correspondence between characters and extracts from their personal diaries.<sup>15</sup> Letters (private and family) are the most common form of non-fiction in the novel's structure. Through these, specific characters, on a personal or individual plane, speak about life and their views on the situations in which they find themselves. In addition to providing a form of (auto-)characterization of the protagonists, subjective views always reveal the horrific backdrop of the war (in a general sense), anxiety, and aversion to things beyond one's control.

It should be noted that the number of forms of non-fiction (documentary and pseudo-documentary) interpolated into the novel's fabric increases in the other three books of the tetralogy, particularly in the third and fourth, as the events turn more dramatic and the situation becomes more complex (there are, for example, Ivan's letters to his relatives, King Petar's notes, Crown Prince Aleksandar's proclamation to the army, greeting cards, statements, orders, the Niš Declaration, prisoners' letters, quotes from newspaper articles, dispatches, telegrams, notes by an unknown hospital patient, pronouncements of the Supreme Commands of the warring parties, Stanislav Vinaver's recollections, records by Milutin Bojić, dispatches of ministers and delegations, etc.). Their presence in the novel has the artistic effect of making the design more complex, enriching the novel's text, and achieving certain artistic ideas and intentions of the author, whose creative treatment provides a better contextualization of the events described. What is emphasized are the echoes and reactions provoked by certain events beyond the national sphere, and what is revealed is the dynamics of diplomatic activities and the diverse, often conflicting interests of various protagonists. What is achieved is an enhanced effectiveness of the narration (the documents replace narration so as to avoid, in given situations, additional complexity and ramifications of the storyline, the introduction of new characters, etc.), and what is improved is the quality of reception, because the use of documents intensifies the psychological and aesthetic effect on the reader, contributing to a strong illusion of credibility and veracity of the artistic world at large.

The complex relations between the events, heroes, and chronotopes in *A Time of Death* are established in line with the conventions of the historical novel. Thanks to the privileged position of a large number of characters and a critical temporal distance, the structure of the novel is primarily dialogic and its character encyclopedic:

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<sup>14</sup> The cities mentioned in the first book are Niš, Valjevo, Kragujevac, Skoplje, and Ljig, and the taverns "Kalča" in Niš, "Sloboda" in Skopje, and "Talpara" in Kragujevac.

<sup>15</sup> In the first sequel, these are: two Adam Katić's letters to his grandfather and father from the battlefield (pp. 25–26); Bogdan Dragović's letter to Natalija (Chapter 10 of Section I); Ivan Katić's letter to his sister Milena (pp. 152–154); and parts of Ivan Katić's diary at the beginning of Chapter 4.

“It is difficult to understand the semantic meaning, causes, and nature of certain historical events within one and the same temporal circle of those involved. The nature of such events is revealed only later, when certain temporal conditions are created, or the so-called temporal or historical distance. If we take art to be a language system that reveals realities that are inaccessible to rational examination, then the logical conclusion is that the supra-rational plane of historical events can only be revealed in a single encyclopedic artistic structure. The structure of *A Time of Death* is such a case: it neither wants to romanticize nor psychologize history but to break it down and critically overgrow it.” (Јоковић, 1994, p. 158)

*A Time of Death* is seen, therefore, as a combination of “real history and the writer’s vision of those elusive suprarational historical currents,” which leads to the conclusion that the novel was pre-conditioned by “specific relations within the literary material” (Јоковић, 1994, p. 159). The particularly interesting relation between the (pseudo-)historical and the poetic in the novel can also be seen at the level of language. In this sense, as the same author observes, there is a lower level of metaphorical statements when protagonists representing historical figures (i.e., extratextual transworld individuals) speak about the problems of history or when the narrative adheres closely to historical documents and facts, while, on the other hand, there are plenty of metaphorical statements when the narrative focuses on a subjective projection of reality, especially when that reality is deprived of its historical elements. The transitional variant between these two situations is a fusion of the historic and the poetic, wherein certain historical problems are viewed through various forms of a character’s subjective experience. Looking at the tetralogy as a whole, the first three books can be seen as considerably more metaphorical than the fourth, which is saturated in historical, philosophical, and political statements. Notably, the language of the novel becomes its most poetic at its very end (Јоковић, 1994, p. 159).

As for the aforementioned privileged position of the characters, it should be said that to Ćosić, it is not important “what his character is to the world, but above all what the world is to his character, and what he is to himself” (Јоковић, 1994, p. 135). Therefore, the world is usually shown from the perspective of the characters, often serving their metaphorical characterization, with only a small number of descriptions provided by an omniscient narrator. Each character carries a single narrative thread and, as such, dominates a certain part of time and space in which it is projected, giving it strong individual characteristics. The overall picture of time and events is achieved by incorporating the individual fates of numerous characters into the novel as a whole.

The main character among the group of extratextual transworld individuals (historical figures) in the first book of the tetralogy is the aforementioned Serbian Prime Minister, Nikola Pašić, whose role corresponds to the one which he played

in the historical context of his time. For the most part, the technique of dialogue is applied in designing this character. In the first book, the most frequent are his dialogues with Vukašin Katić, who is portrayed as Pašić's opposite in fundamental characteristics, with the two representing a unity of opposites. Principled and consistent, Katić serves to "expose" Pašić's thoughts and opinions; by Katić constantly presenting an opposing viewpoint, his presence encourages Pašić not only to reveal himself by way of self-characterization, but it also provides opportunities to verify Pašić's political views and to offer critical correctives. The role of the character of Vukašin Katić in shaping the reader's perception of Pašić is not restricted to participating in dialogues and initiating their content. There are also Vukašin's attitudes and opinions of Pašić, based on the experiences he gained over his long political career, which were connected to Pašić from the beginning. Always close to Pašić, Katić has seen both sides of the argument: in his youth, he was a prominent member of Pašić's Radical Party (and of the faction opposed by Vukašin's father), only later becoming a sworn opponent. Thus, the reader learns about Pašić's character, not so much by drawing direct conclusions from his actions or speech, but from comments made by other characters (primarily Katić).

In the novel, the character of Nikola Pašić appears only in the political sphere, so that one can legitimately speak of its one-dimensionality. He is not enriched with a personal and family life like Ćosić's other protagonists (in whose case the political dimension is much emphasized). Ćosić was not interested in presenting any other concerns Pašić might have had, apart from those related to the fate of Serbia. Thus, Pašić is actually the epitome of the policy he pursues, his politics being synonymous with his character. Regardless of this "external" treatment of his character, what gives him depth and conviction is that Nikola Pašić in his role as politician—as Prime Minister—is seen and discussed from various sides, through various contacts, conversations, and situations, at different levels, thereby allowing the reader to more fully understand this character.

In comparison to Pašić, other so-called historical figures in the first book of the tetralogy occupy much less space. The device typically used in their characterization is the dramatic technique, or the (self-)expression of protagonists by means of dialogues or shorter monologue sequences. In this respect, the most developed character is Field Marshal Radomir Putnik, Chief of the Supreme Command of the Serbian Army, who stands in contrast to Field Marshal Živojin Mišić within the overall structure of the novel. In the case of Putnik, there are elements of more developed internal monologue; his character is more meditative than Pašić or Mišić, who are practical, people of action, and hence more inclined to optimism. For Putnik, optimism is a "fishing philosophy" (Ђосић, 2001, p. 139). Despite being "Stjepa and Mišić's superior, and a subject of Pašić and Aleksandar" (Ђосић, 2001, p. 139), Putnik feels a strong responsibility for the war's outcome and sees himself, the commander of the army, as the culprit behind the eventual (and, at that moment, seemingly inevitable) defeat.

By assuming command of the First Army, General Živojin Mišić becomes the main character among the group of historical figures that populate the second book of the novel. This takeover was prepared in the first book by pointing out the characteristics of this character as the only man in the Supreme Command capable of changing things for the better in the given circumstances. To do this, the author contrasts his character traits with those of Putnik and Vukašin Katić while also allowing an omniscient narrator to comment on Mišić. The fullness and persuasiveness of Mišić's character are achieved by foregrounding—both from the inside and outside—his historical and social role, and by highlighting his private life among family and friends. The fact that Mišić calls warfare “work for life” is in accordance with Ćosić's general approach to characterizing people of humble origin, such as peasants, the stratum to which Živojin Mišić feels he still belongs to a certain extent. Such people appreciate life above all else, and by their nature are intrinsically opposed to those who are guided by ideas and principles, putting them above life. In this way, the novel differentiates Živojin Mišić from Vukašin Katić, and the Dačić and Katić families, in terms of both personal philosophy and interpersonal relations.

We now turn to the collective character of the Students' Battalion, which, in the first book, grows from an historical into a multi-functional artistic fact. When it seemed that all hope was lost, the decision of the Supreme Command to send to the front pupils and students who had returned to Serbia from different European universities after the war began—so that their youth and enthusiasm may raise the combat morale, reinvigorate the exhausted army, and fill the numerous officer vacancies—seems to many, especially to students' families, a deliberate act of unjustified sacrifice. It turns out, however, that the decision was correct and that it achieved the desired effect. Even Vukašin Katić, who, due to his principles and for personal reasons opposed sending students to the front, is amazed while watching student troops marching through Kragujevac, fascinated by their power, strength, and self-confidence. Sending students to the front in the first book of the novel coincides with Živojin Mišić's decision to take command of the First Army; these two historical facts, which produce positive outcomes at the given moment and in a general psychological sense, constitute the core of the novel, providing the essential initial motivation and the ensuing development of the story in the subsequent parts of the tetralogy. The importance of the Students' Battalion, in structural and semantic terms, is highlighted by the fact that it is dealt with in all of Chapter 4 and most of Chapter 5 of the first sequel. In addition to illustrating the weight of the historical situation in which Serbia finds itself (i.e., its being forced to send almost all its young intellectuals to the front), the Students' Battalion serves as an economical and effective way of revealing the conceptual and ideological currents dominant among young intellectuals of that era. This is achieved by introducing several characters from the circle of Ivan Katić, Vukašin's son, each of whom exemplifies, to varying

degrees, a certain way of thinking, one of the ideological currents prevalent at the time. For the purposes of this paper, the most interesting character is Stanislav Vinaver, an extratextual transworld individual bearing the name of an authentic historical figure—a famous Serbian writer. Vinaver's theatrically expressed jokes and profound statements present a fresh, distinctive, and poetic perspective on war. Certain remarks, particularly those at the end of the fourth sequel made during a conversation with another poet, Milutin Bojić,<sup>16</sup> can be interpreted as a form of (auto-)poetic declaration by the author.

When it comes to the relationship between the historical and fictional, a principle recognized throughout the novel was also applied in the creation of the Students' Battalion. All the general information regarding the Battalion is accurate—its location (Skopje, Blue Barracks), its deployment to the front when individuals are promoted to corporals, and the names of their commanders. All members of the Students' Battalion who are mentioned individually in the first book, apart from Stanislav Vinaver, are fictional yet plausible—based on well-studied prototypes<sup>17</sup>—boys who were less well-known or completely unknown but who actually lived at the time.

In one of his many auto-poetic texts, Ćosić asserts that the advantage of the historical novel lies in its ability to express the multifaceted nature of human

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<sup>16</sup> Vinaver tells Bojić: “Modern is only the one who understood the old and knew how to reject it. And in our case, one should possess a hundredfold Homeric power. A tragedy should be written within a novel, a novel within a poem, a poem within an essay or a story; a play, a comedy, a parody, a military letter and a court-martial verdict should fit into one. And satirize it all! Laughter must be heard over the Serbian grave. And swearing in the middle of a requiem” (Ђосић IV, 2001, p. 622)

While explaining the spiritual horizons of each of the prominent members of the Students' Battalion in *A Time of Death*, Milan Radulović says the following about Stanislav Vinaver: “From Vinaver's experience of destiny as a glorious, cosmic absurdity that challenges man and invites him to plunge into the heart of universe, and to appropriate and conquer what is impossible, what was developed was a social and aesthetic awareness of the artistic avant-garde, and a grain of faith grew into the overall spiritual and even cosmic revolution which will be realized in the art and through art.” (Радуловић, 1998, p. 21). Here, it should be noted that Stanislav Vinaver, in his collection of poetry *War Comrades* (1939), provides an impressive gallery of authentic characters—his fallen comrades; each song is an epitaph, written in simple, clear, and coherent language, and the portrayed figures of the war comrades are exalted in their humanity and tragedy (“Gire from Sorbonne,” “Radmilo Zagorčić,” “Lieutenant Lazar Dilberović,” “Danilo,” etc.); we believe that this collection might have inspired Ćosić's development of some of the characters, especially the members of the Student Battalion.

<sup>17</sup> Since the articles published by literary critics present information regarding the prototypes underpinning two of the fictional characters of the Students' Battalion (Ivan Katić and Bogdan Dragović), it is logical to assume that Ćosić had prototypes for other Battalion members as well. The factographic version of Bora Pub (Bora Luković Pub) might have been Petar Božanić, a famous gambler and Thessaloniki volunteer from Tužević in Lika. It is the same person as Boža Pub in Đorđe Balašević's eponymous song.

existence in its historical totality, explaining that, in a literary work, historiographic facts are inevitably transformed, even when the author has no conscious desire to change anything. “In a literary work, the past is not reality as actuality but rather as probability and possibility, another reality” (Ђосић, 1992/96, p. 30). The transition to “another reality” creates a new, essentially unknown world that presupposes the abolition of “historical facticity, which actually means that the historical as such in an established work of art is eliminated” (Ђосић, 1992/96, p. 31). That is why Ćosić habitually refers to the “so-called” historical novel, or consistently places the words “historical novel” in quotation marks.

With regard to the extratextual narrative identities that appear as protagonists in the novel, Ćosić says that they are real “only concerning the generality of the meaning of their primary features and functions,” and that he transposed them “in accordance with his philosophical and poetic ideas and dramatic structure of the novel” (Ђосић, 1992/96, pp. 33–34). In addition, the value of the documents used in the creative process depends on the author’s personal experience, through which, in Ćosić’s words, “he studies and interprets the epoch, i.e., the contents of history that are close to his experience, ideas and feelings.” This history is, then, nothing more than “just a writer’s projection of the past; actually, his own subjective history; his war, his revolution, his military, political, research, creative, adventurous act” (Ђосић, 1992/96, p. 36). In this regard, Ćosić’s conclusion is important; namely, regardless of the extent to which the historical novel is based on documentary material, it essentially involves “the creation of an unknown world,” and that is what gives the novel its “communicative universality.” Only the poetic word “really completes history,” and that, Ćosić argues, even Aristotle understood. This poetic word, a fictional reality, “cancels factuality from history, and human existence is converted into imaginary history.” This is why Ćosić believes that literature is “the most complete and comprehensive history of humanity” (Ђосић, 1992/96, p. 37).

While it is legitimate to compare a literary character to its historical prototype—unless established historical truths are betrayed, crucial facts in particular—such a comparison and research is questionable, and may even be redundant. In a historical novel such as the one on which this paper focuses the reader encounters *literary characters*, created according to the author’s knowledge of history and artistic sensibility. The reader should, therefore, not be very interested in how “genuine” the imagined character is compared to the real personality used as the prototype; rather, we should be concerned more with how “genuine,” convincing, and believable that character is in the world of the created literary work.

### Concluding Remarks

In the year that marks a decade since the death of Dobrica Ćosić, seventy years since the Katić lineage was brought to life in *The Roots* and thirty-five years since the completion of the *A Time of Death* tetralogy, it is valuable to highlight the relevance of the author's most extensive and celebrated work for contemporary readers. It is especially important, in the light of the emergence of the new, transmedial receptions of his works—the film adaptations of *The Roots* (2018) and *A Time of Death* (2021) appearing in recent years and the series *A Time of Death* currently airing (with the first fifteen episodes released in early 2024 and another fifteen announced for this fall)—to revisit the analysis of extratextual characters. These characters continue their “journey” beyond their time, indicating the audience's enduring interest in both Ćosić and historiographic fiction. The television “revival” of *A Time of Death* can indirectly help us to better understand a fairly stable line of development of historiographic metafiction in contemporary Serbian literature within the context of “novelistic hegemony” (Брајовић, 2009, p. 59). Tihomir Brajović sees Ćosić as the “informal leader of this authorial orientation” and defines the poetics of the historical narrative as a form of *neo-historical novel*, whereby “the Serbian novel with historical orientation most often ... deals with attempts at narrative-fictional thematization of recent national and—occasionally—supranational history” (Брајовић, 2009, p. 69). What is especially provocative in the analysis of our subject is the attitude towards the documentary (here, primarily in the form of an overview of extratextual versions of wandering individuals), which, in the contemporary historical novel, sometimes leads to applied literature due to an explicitly expressed memoir trait. In this regard, Brajović, quoting Ćosić to strengthen his argument, concludes that it is a mode of writing “which combines fiction with rather pragmatic interests, thus establishing itself as a form of ‘impure’ or hybrid fiction, which essentially means ambivalent literature with belletristic aspirations, as well as distinct cognitive-corrective and implicitly compensatory ambitions” (Брајовић, 2009, p. 60). This kind of literatery aspiration has spilled over into other media as well, resulting in screen adaptation of the extratextual versions from *A Time of Death*. In that sense, it would be interesting to continue research in the area of transmediality and to examine the relationship between literary and film protagonists inspired by historical figures. This would reveal how Ćosić is read today and whether documentary, ideological, or artistic elements prevail in the reception. Considering that we are awaiting the second season of the *A Time of Death* series, we prefer not to draw premature conclusions at this time, as that would be at least academically unfair, despite the already evident developments. In that sense, we hope this paper serves as an incentive and framework for future transmedial readings of Dobrica Ćosić's oeuvre, methodologically grounded in the possible worlds

theory of Uri Margolin and Hilary Dannenberg, as applied in this study. More recently, this framework has been enriched by research from cognitive narratologists such as David Herman, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Henry Jenkins, whose approaches deepen our understanding of transworld identities.

Based on the insights obtained from this analysis of the factographic and fictional models employed in the formation of characters in the *A Time of Death* tetralogy, we can conclude that while creating extratextual narrative identities, the author remained within the known facts about them, yet operated freely within these boundaries. For most of Ćosić's extratextual transworld individuals (i.e., real historical characters), imagination predominates over fact, and there is no essential difference in the process of characterizing the so-called historical and fictional types of identities employed by the author.

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### Фактографија и фикција: огледавања у роману *Време смрти* Добрице Ћосића

#### Резиме

Предмет овог рада је анализа романа *Време смрти* I–IV (1972–1979) Добрице Ћосића преваходно из угла теорије могућих светова. Један од најзначајнијих српских романа о Првом светском рату, који критика често одређује као роман-епопеју, био је инспиративан за истраживање из најмање два разлога: први лежи у чињеници да је историографска метафикција још увек највидљивија струја у српској романескној продукцији, а друга да су се савремени читаоци вратили Ћосићу кроз интензивне екранизације у последњих неколико година. Управо анализа и преглед односа фактографског и фиктивног донекле је довела до расветљавања и бољег разумевања комплексног односа савремених читалаца према тзв. *новоисторијском роману* који, по речима Тихомира Брајовића, зачиње Добрица Ћосић.

У центру истраживачке пажње нашло се тумачење ликова *Времена смрти* у терминима теорије могућих светова, посебно функције екстратекстуалних наративних идентитета војсковођа, државника, политичара, ратника (Никола Пашић, Александар Карађорђевић, Радомир Путник, Степа Степановић, Живојин Мишић, Петар Бојовић, Апис, Станислав Винавер). Циљ рада представља разумевање креативног процеса који је подразумевао трансформацију и обликовање

ликова на путу од фактографског ка фикционалном, и у том контексту анализу документарне, уметничке функције различитих врста докумената инкорпорираних у наративно ткиво романа. Аутопоетички коментари самог писца сматрани су релевантним у откључавању процеса метаморфозе историјског у фикционално. Као посебан истраживачки изазов отворена су још два питања: (1) колико је специфичан начин изградње такозваних историјских ликова у овом роману важан за формирање националног идентитета и (2) општије питање историјске истине, односно природе историографског наратива. Методолошко полазиште у тумачењу ликова представљала су достигнућа посткласичне (когнитивне) наратологије, са посебним упориштем у типологији трансфикционалних идентитета Јурија Марголина и Хилари Даненберг.

Закључак је, без обзира на дисонантне гласове који се могу чути у вези са обрадом историјске грађе у *Времену смрти*, да је при обликовању екстратекстуалних наративних идентитета /ликова историјских личности/ аутор остајао у оквирима о њима познатих чињеница, али да је, унутар тих граница, његова имагинација била потпуно слободна; да код већине Ћосићевих екстратекстуалних трансветовних јединки (тзв. историјских ликова) претеже/доминира замишљање над фактографијом, те да у поступку карактеризације обе врсте ликова – тзв. историјских и неисторијских (фиктивних), нема суштинске разлике.

*Кључне речи:* фактографија; фикција; историјски роман; Први светски рат; екстратекстуални идентитети.



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