



From Epicureanism to Stoicism: Central European Literary Responses to History of the Twentieth Century and Exile (Sándor Márai, Joseph Roth and Stefan Zweig)

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Abstract

The article addresses Central European historical experiences of the twentieth century manifesting in the fates of Sándor Márai, Joseph Roth and Stefan Zweig. Entangled in the speeding wheel of the modern history, the three writers experienced excessive historical discontinuities (wars, revolutions, dictatorships) which they conceptualized in terms of Epicureanism and Stoicism. To a great extent mythicized Epicurean 'lightness of being,' carefree travelling, journalistic openness coexist with the Stoic inward diaristic safeguarding of the self from the historical burden in their texts. While in the Epicurean approach to life, individual is a master of his own fate realizing positive freedom, the centripetal Stoic worldview entails a search of negative freedom from the overwhelming historical fate and a withdrawal to inner (diaristic) self as the only anchor in volatile times. Moreover, the three writers' historical experiences shaped their double displacement. Whereas its spatial dimension (exilic nomadism) made their self-identifications oscillate between *homo politicus* and *homo poeticus*, its temporal aspect – in the article's foreground – implied the need to narratively inscribe one's self within a meaningful order of time reconfigured in personal writing.

Keywords: Epicureanism, Stoicism, Central Europe, Sándor Márai, Joseph Roth, Stefan Zweig

Abstrakt

Artykuł porusza problem środkowoeuropejskich doświadczeń historycznych XX wieku, przejawiających się w losach Sándora Máraiego, Josepha Rotha i Stefana Zweiga. Uwikłani w pędzący bieg nowoczesnej historii trzej pisarze doświadczyli nadmiernych historycznych nieciągłości (wojen, rewolucji, dyktatur), które konceptualizowali w kategoriach epikureizmu i stoicyzmu. W ich tekstach przeplatają się w dużym stopniu zmityzowana epikurejska 'lekkość bytu', beztrioskie podróżowanie, dziennikarska otwartość i stoicka diarystyczna asekuracja jaźni przed historycznym ciężarem. Podczas gdy w epikurejskim podejściu do życia jednostka jest panem własnego losu i realizuje pozytywną wolność, dośrodkowy światopogląd stoicki pociąga za sobą poszukiwanie negatywnej wolności od przytłaczającego losu historycznego i wycofanie się do wewnętrznego (diarystycznego) 'ja' jako jedynej kotwicy w niestabilnych czasach. Co więcej, historyczne doświadczenia pisarzy ukształtowały ich podwójne przemieszczenie. Podczas gdy jego wymiar przestrzenny (emigracyjny nomadyzm) sprawił, że samoidentyfikacje pisarzy oscylowały między *homo politicus* i *homo poeticus*, jego aspekt czasowy – na pierwszym planie artykułu – implikował potrzebę narracyjnego wpisania siebie w znaczący porządek czasu rekonfigurowany w osobistym pisarstwie.

Słowa kluczowe: epikureizm, stoicyzm, Europa Środkowa, Sándor Márai, Joseph Roth, Stefan Zweig

Introduction

The Epicurean seeks out the situation, the persons, and even the events that suit his extremely sensitive intellectual constitution; he forgoes the rest—that is, almost everything—because it would be too strong and heavy a diet. The Stoic, by contrast, trains himself to swallow stones and worms, glass shards and scorpions without nausea; he wants his stomach to be ultimately insensible to everything the chance of existence pours into him [...]. Stoicism may well be advisable for those with whom fate improvises and who live in violent times and depend on impulsive and changeable people. But someone who more or less *expects* fate to allow him to spin *a long thread* does well to take an Epicurean orientation [...].¹

In the Epicurean orientation of life an individual is a master of his own fate. When historical changes seem distant, the needs of 'extremely sensitive intellectual constitution' are put to the forefront. However, the approaching stage of ever more

engaging and intricate historical drama which starts evolving in an increasing pace, outcasts the Epicurean from a safe private garden where s/he could jauntily stroll and taste the fruit of culture, long tradition and political stability. Aesthetic pleasures are replaced by ethical rigor. New circumstances harden skin and the Epicurean becomes a Stoic 'with porcupine spines'² who degraded by whimsical historical changes to a mere improvisation of fate, withdraws to his/her 'inner citadel,'³ the last enclave of independence. Uncontrollable and irrational external reality makes the Stoic accept fate and excel in a rational self-mastery and self-sufficiency immune to historical contingencies.⁴ 'In place of an aristocratic doing, the Stoic celebrates an inner distancing from events that creates a more "inward" aristocratic virtue.'⁵

Faced with the overwhelming History written with capital letter and understood in Reinhart Koselleck's terms of modernity, progress and acceleration, the Stoic's temporality becomes confined to a fleeting moment distancing from both the past ('space of experience') and the future ('horizon of expectation'). In a fragile moment *hit et nunc* devoid of both comforting foundations inherited from the past and the long-term perspective on the future, a consolation is sought within alternative (imagined) spatiotemporal coordinates of self, in exile and nostalgia or in a diaristic order of time which foregrounds the present moment.

The paper's opening remarks of Friedrich Nietzsche⁶ constitute a mirror in which it is possible to recognize some Central European writers in their oscillation between Epicureanism and Stoicism, also present, even if not explicitly, in the texts of Sándor Márai, Joseph Roth and Stefan Zweig. Before addressing this issue in more detail, a crucial question, inevitable in each comparative study, shall be posed, namely the one regarding criteria of choice of the paper's three protagonists. The common denominator consists of both biographical and literary kinship. Márai, Roth and Zweig were born on the threshold of the twentieth century and they all grew up in the Habsburg Monarchy imbued at that time with *fin de siècle*-culture. All of them were sensitive observers of the epoch they lived in witnessing the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and rise of totalitarian ideologies which in the end also forced them to live in exile. Cooperating with the world famous newspapers such as *Frankfurter Zeitung* they expressed anxieties and uncertainties of the ever more tense atmosphere of the interwar period.⁷ Deprived of homelands, their feeling of belonging was nourished by culture, language, literature and ethical realm of certain values (humanism, cosmopolitanism). Moreover, they were writing diaries and committed suicide which may also bespeak their affinity to Stoicism.⁸ Regarding the interpersonal ties between the three writers, the strongest bond of friendship linked

Roth and Zweig, whom also Márai, as he mentioned in his autobiography, had a chance to meet during his stay in Frankfurt in the 1920s.⁹

There is a wealth of secondary literature studying separately the biographies and texts of Roth, Zweig and Márai. However, the comparative perspective, even if often embracing two of them,¹⁰ to my knowledge only rarely has been applied to this intellectual triad and not in the context of Central European historical experience of the twentieth century understood in terms of oscillation between Epicureanism and Stoicism. In this sense, besides enriching the scholarship focused on the three writers by analysing them together, the paper's main aim is to inscribe their fates in a broader regional framework and in this way contribute to the area studies by exploring the phenomenological aspect of Central Europe composed of particular historical experiences. As the French historian Jacques Le Rider claims, the Central European 'intercultural area' requires a comparative approach to literature which may evince other dimensions of the concept of *Mitteleuropa*.¹¹ One of them, as will be argued in the following interpretation, is the Central European phenomenological side founded on experiences of excessive historical changes which intensify a nostalgic view of the past regarded in Epicurean terms and the Stoic withdrawal from the present moment.

Experiences of the accelerated pace of the 'short twentieth century' are not unique to Central Europe. What may, however, constitute the regional feature which transposes these experiences on 'crisis symptoms of disorientation' and in the end leads to 'dynamic multipolarity of identities' is the Central European multicultural context (Habsburg legacy), unfound to such a degree and complexity in other parts of Europe.¹² This cultural-historical and first of all existential background of 'endogenous and exogenous plurality' made Central European modernism different from other parts of the Old Continent. The 'consciousness of differentiation was [...] perceived especially clearly, and the conflicts and crises of identities were felt more strongly than in other European cultural environments.'¹³ Central European 'heterogenous "hybrid" Lebenswelt was, therefore, also a cause of the constant individual and collective uncertainty, and in a given specific situation, [...] it had to become a cause of crises and conflicts.'¹⁴ This regional cultural, ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity, allowing individuals to switch between cultures and identities (practised in a most blatant way by Roth), made Central Europe, 'Europe in small' a laboratory of processes which had a wider, global impact.¹⁵

If Central Europe in the twentieth century is defined by 'the same rules of historical grammar'¹⁶ and a specific historical awareness, it is worth asking about the significant role of history¹⁷ and its impact on self-identification. What were individual perceptions of time understood as the fourth dimension of space¹⁸ (in this case Central

Europe) and their different literary/diaristic reconfigurations (such as the one combining both Epicureanism and Stoicism)? In the attempt to tackle this specific reciprocal co-occurrence of philosophies of life (Epicurean and Stoic) as a shared pattern of Central European historical experiences, the article distances from the dominant geopolitical perspective of the region and draws on literary and geopoetic approach to Central Europe which accentuates individual experiences of struggle with historical (dis)order of time.¹⁹ Comparative study of literature and egodocuments in particular allows to put to the foreground individual voices silenced in the geopolitical macro narratives imposed on the region.

The analysis of the interrelated attitudes of the Epicurean carefree way of being in regard to the past and the Stoic inwardness of the present moment, as expressed in life writings, emphasizes the moment of change, rupture and the significant role of discontinuous history in reshaping one's self-identification. This conceptual framework also unveils a certain community of historical fate of the twentieth century marked with the accelerated course of events which overwhelming character intervening in private lives would more than once convert its witness into a Stoic who redefines the past in the Epicurean terms on the retrospective plane of memory.²⁰ Even though this coexistence of two worldviews most often was not defined by the writers explicitly, it is possible to trace it in their texts. Thus the main aim will be to reflect on their perceptions of time of the twentieth century in terms of a tension between Epicureanism and Stoicism even if it was articulated only indirectly in their egodocuments.

Conceptual framework, methodological remarks, sources

The inspiration to trace the writers' responses to the history of the twentieth century as framed by the existential oscillation between Epicureanism and Stoicism came from Zweig's autobiography 'The World of Yesterday' and in particular the passage where the author compared life in the Habsburg Monarchy with the later period after the Great War.²¹ I will not aim at deconstructing Zweig's idealized image of Austria-Hungary which constitutes a well-trodden interpretative path of long tradition.²² Instead of comparing the literary images with their historical references, I will focus on the writers' attitudes towards the past. Accordingly, in place of asking how they wrote about the bygone times and with what degree of trustworthiness, I am more interested in the question why they did it in this rather than other way. This perspective seems more revealing because it hints at the authors' existential motives of literary engagement with the past and a shift in philosophies of life depending on

the changeable relationship of individual with the historical unfolding. Consequently, the writers' Epicurean literary images of the pre-war times may give more insight into the present moment of the Stoic post-war period when they were created than into the past these texts refer to. Instead of merely relating about the bygone times, these writings would rather play an existential role in the attempt to give some answers to the challenges posed by the present moment, providing an alleviation of the desperation, frustration and disappointment with the new world.²³ Could the oscillation between Epicureanism and Stoicism be interpreted as a frame which served to conceptualize individual historical experiences in a way to endow the unsatisfactory present moment with some meaning?

The rupture in worldviews and generations of Epicureans and Stoics in the Central European context of the twentieth century originates in 'three major spheres of the Austro-Hungarian experience' problematized in literature and indicated by Polish historian Adam Kozuchowski who defined them as follows: 'this sense of change, the passing of the old, and the emerging of the new.'²⁴ A chain of sudden alterations driven by the hastened pace of time embraced the paper's three protagonists in a tightening grip which converted them into Stoics for whom the lost old world from the retrospective view radiated with Epicurean 'lightness of being.'

Moreover, the interrelation of Epicureanism and Stoicism in literature of numerous Central European writers forms part of the Habsburg myth which, encompassing both Arcadian and apocalyptic elements,²⁵ combines idealized aspects of the pre-war past, its happy, tolerant and peaceful harmony as well as the dark side of the present moment characterized by conflict, loss and decline. According to Claudio Magris, this myth consists of three main motives: bureaucracy, supranationalism and 'sensual and joyful hedonism,'²⁶ thus also the lightsome Epicurean atmosphere. The idealized recollected image of the Habsburg Monarchy, as founded on harmonious coexistence of people, order, stability, privilege given to culture and slower pace of time, is present in the works of Márai, Roth and Zweig. Their nostalgia for the lost past was nurtured by the memories of childhood and youth spent in Austria-Hungary as well as by the disappointing present moment unfolding in the bellicose spirit of global conflagrations.

Following Franklin Rudolf Ankersmit's reflection on phenomenology of historical experience, I understand this idealization of the past identified with Epicureanism and retrospectively opposed to the Stoic attitude towards the later epoch, in terms of nostalgic difference between irretrievable, inaccessible past and unsatisfactory present. As Ankersmit claims, the nostalgic remembrance implies images of '[...] a kind of Stoic, stable order [...] where the nostalgically desired past seems to differ so

conspicuously from the unpredictable vicissitudes of the present.’²⁷ According to the Dutch historical theorist, the experience of history is founded on the nostalgic difference and does not confine to individual experience of one’s own personal past but extends towards the collective and more remote past. One may ask in this context whether also towards Central European community of historical fate. Ankersmit’s definition of the nostalgic experience of the past as a twofold displacement of temporal and spatial character,²⁸ can serve as a conceptual framework in the analysis of individual historical experiences of being displaced in time of the twentieth century in the context of Central Europe.

The interrelated and reciprocal forms of displacement manifest the experience of a certain dissonance both in time (historical temporality *versus* inner time) and space (lost, abandoned homeland *versus* changeable places of stay in exile). Whereas spatial displacement leads to exilic nomadism and life imbued with a particular philosophy of travel,²⁹ the temporal aspect is related to a need to narratively inscribe one’s self within a cultural order of time encountered in a foreign place and within a meaningful *kairotic* temporality reconfigured in literature and more explicitly in personal writings which also constitute this paper’s main sources. These egodocuments comprise diaries, autobiographies and letters of Márai and Zweig. Regarding Roth, who did not write autobiography³⁰ and whose diary is not so extensive, most references are made to his correspondence, his ‘life in letters.’

Diaries and other personal writings were for the three writers important hermeneutic tools of self-understanding constantly problematized not only by the changing historical circumstances but also by the precarious situation of spatial displacement embodied in a nomadic way of life. This crucial existential role of diaristic practice, which combines both acts of writing and re-reading, resulted from its performative dimension.³¹ By keeping journals, the authors could better observe themselves, comprehend their selves both synchronically in particular moments and diachronically in the course of time. Consequently the diaries served them as a vital means of meaningful interweave of their inner temporality with the historical order of time.

In the hierarchy of his works, Márai placed the diary, which he kept several decades, higher than his novels. ‘The Complete Diary’ comprises eighteen volumes (eight thousand pages).³² At a certain point he stated: ‘It is possible that this diary takes away from my work some part of strength, attention and inner concentration which I possess – but maybe it is this diary which is my true task and all the rest constitutes just a waste of these forces.’³³ In another note in 1974, he noticed that 30 years after

losing the flat in Budapest, he regarded his manuscripts of diary (1943-1973) as the most important (a substitution of home in a situation of exilic uprootedness?).³⁴

Similarly Zweig, even if he was not writing his diary continuously, every return to journal keeping meant for him 'a test of will' and an important step towards 'inner self' hopefully leading to greater awareness of the 'external decisions' and thus to better self-perception in the changeable historical context. Zweig's need 'to roll up a steel spiral in' himself (like winding up a clock every night) in order 'to give an account, to report to himself' was motivated by the feeling of fluidity of life, ungraspable character of time and interplay between memory and forgetfulness. Provoked by the sensation of having 'no possession of the past' he felt an urge to recall what had happened to him and relive his life. The diarist was rereading his notes but could not recognize himself in the bygone narrated selves. Moreover, Zweig's comment on the loss of his diary ('these two the most intensive years' of his life) in terms of 'the most terrible thing'³⁵ also manifests the journal's existential significance for the author.

Roth also embarked on diaristic writing, which, however, was not so extensive and so strongly inwardly oriented. His 'Black-yellow diary' written in 1939 and embracing just some days, is much shorter than diaristic practice of Zweig and Márai. Journal keeping accompanied him also during his journeys and, even if not devoid of personal matters, its main aim was to note impressions of a new place and culture which later would serve him as a base for a reportage.³⁶ Consequently the main source in Roth's case would be here his rich correspondence which, better than his diaries, reveals his personal life, its contradictory aspects and struggles with history. 'In this respect the letters do enable us to access Roth's most fervent and personal side, most of all through the correspondence with Zweig'³⁷ which will be also analysed in the paper. In the following comparative study the emphasis will be put on the writers' experiences of displacement in relation to the historical (dis)order of time of the twentieth century, thus on the temporal aspect of their self-identifications.

Attitudes towards history and temporal dimension of exilic displacement

The writers' perceptions of time considerably marked their selves. According to Roth time plays even more important role than space in shaping one's self-understanding. Therefore, it is 'space in time,' meaning 'the stigma of the epoch' or *Zeitgeist* which defines the course of events and individuals more than their particular spatial frames. One belongs more to the common spirit of a particular period than to a territory, which

contrary to the moment in time, can be always changed. 'Our epoch is our homeland, and our "statesmen" would better be known as "epoch-men."' ³⁸ Moreover, Roth's sensitivity to the passage of time could motivate him to start collecting clocks, which, as his friend Géza von Cziffra remembered, he called his 'greatest passion.' ³⁹ Zweig's 'historical worldview,' ⁴⁰ evidenced by his rich collection of autographs and manuscripts of famous people, also suggests a deep sensitivity to personal entanglement in history. The accelerated course of events in Central Europe intensified its witnesses' urge to understand the rapidly changing political situation by posing questions about a sense of history which according to Zweig reveals itself in the periods of crisis. Uncertain and kaleidoscopically fluid times arouse in the Austrian writer a particular interest in history which as he believed could provide with some answers to the unclear present moment of the interwar period. ⁴¹ Márai was similarly sensitive to the passage of time and he expressed his attitude to this overwhelming and ungraspable phenomenon as well as 'his new position in relation to the universe' in terms of 'a harrowing experience,' 'the greatest upheaval that could befall man in the course of his earthly journey. [...] "I myself am" not but "I am happening," and probably "happening" even when "I am" no longer.' He defined the modern Western epoch and thinking as 'marked by the emergence of the very notion of time as a component that defines everything and absorbs everything into itself.' Furthermore Márai compared temporality to 'a true fate,' 'a sphere of material and spiritual fate at the same time' in which a man thinks, lives and tries to go beyond in search of 'some metaphysical height.' ⁴²

Whereas in the beginning of the twentieth century, the history still seemed to the three writers to constitute a faraway background with a rather imperceptible echo in everyday life of individuals, the Great War brought this distant horizon much closer. A straight historical line ascending towards progress became distorted and entangled entrapping individual lives in its complex mesh. Apparently steady flow of events kept at a safe distance and hardly visible from a remote hinterland, accelerated its pace in the end erupting in a flood of global conflagrations. A witness of this overwhelming abundance of events became 'forced to experience how frighteningly quickly the wheel of history turns and the situation changes, and how quickly history becomes the boring and indifferent news of the day.' ⁴³ History became unpredictable and according to Zweig 'as random as roulette or any other game of chance.' Even if some occurrences in time might have seemed similar and thus foreseeable, it was a mere illusion, 'a play with resemblances' because there is no repetition in the historical drama. ⁴⁴

Deeply affected by this speeding wheel of history, in one of the letters in 1941, Zweig described his generation as living within more than one time. Its members, consequently, could have a sensation of being immersed in different historical times of various rhythms and flows.⁴⁵ The writer described the general atmosphere in the 1930s as 'tense and overheated' adding that his generation was longing for a short rest and relief 'from the constant overabundance of events [...], to take a breath amidst the unremitting political assault [...].'⁴⁶ He claimed that due to the historical burden of his generation which in the interwar period experienced 'all conceivable crises' (war, revolutions, counterrevolutions, inflations, dictatorships etc.), normally extended over a time span of one century, its members would understand history better than their predecessors.⁴⁷ As Zweig remarked in his autobiography referring to his contemporaries: 'Every one of us, therefore, even the least of the human race, knows a thousand times more about reality today than the wisest of our forebears.'⁴⁸ With this sharp intergenerational chasm introduced by the First World War, disproportionately assigning different amounts of historical experiences to both generations, the roles could also change. Thus, what once was expected from grandparents due to their life wisdom, now could be relegated to grandchildren. As Roth described his generation: 'We knew more than the old people, we were the unhappy grandsons who put their grandfathers on the laps to tell them stories.'⁴⁹

While the writers' ancestors could still identify with the narrative of progress promising a long path ahead, members of the next generation found themselves 'at the closed doors,'⁵⁰ devoid of both roots with the past and prospects for future. Having witnessed the destructive side of historical process, they caught sight of Walter Benjamin's 'angel of history' moving forward by the wind of progress but at the same time directed towards its reverse side in ruins. The writers' life trajectories, not straight but unfolding in a zigzag way, were imbued with loss, discontinuity, nostalgia and non-belonging. Márai, Zweig and Roth – like François-René de Chateaubriand in the study of American historian Peter Fritzsche – 'participated in a fundamental reconsideration of history from one based on correspondence and fulfillment to one alert to rupture and difference.' They shared the modern historical consciousness which Fritzsche described in terms of multiple, complex identities, nonlinear ways of self-reflection, alienation and dispossession.⁵¹ Given that, as Svetlana Boym claims, modernity (progress) and nostalgia are two sides of the same coin ('a new understanding of time and space'), the three writers also embraced nostalgic longing, understood existentially as 'a strategy of survival' and 'a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals.'⁵² Their sideways modes of thinking and being, full of detours and continuous 'yearning for a different time,' hint

at their 'off-modern' condition and 'reflective nostalgia' focused on '*algia*, the longing itself [...] and devoid of 'restorative' attempt of homecoming.⁵³

Two orders of time, the one dictated by history and another one pertaining to individual, were experienced as mismatching by the three writers. As Zweig noticed in 1934: 'Any concern which torments us in this moment results in the end from the fact that we have not completely adjusted to the new rhythm, the new dimension of events yet.'⁵⁴ This unadaptability went hand in hand with Zweig's experience of increasing alienation from interwar Europe, ever more Americanized, uniformized, collectivist and thus spiritually foreign to him. He considered himself to share a fate of rare and doomed to extinction species becoming 'peculiarities of time,' in the same way Encyclopedists could feel during the French Revolution.⁵⁵

In a similar manner Márai articulated a distressing misalignment with the history of the twentieth century by posing a question: 'What to do, when a man does not have internally anything anymore in common with the epoch he lives in?'⁵⁶ He experienced the existential dissonance with the century he witnessed, firstly with the outbreak of the Great War which deprived him of political and social frames of his hitherto life in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The next war influenced his life even stronger forcing him to withdraw from journalism to diaristic writing. In the face of the historical (dis)order of time beyond his control, he became a Stoic⁵⁷ in search of inner freedom. Similarly, Roth as 'an alien in an epoch of virulent nationalism'⁵⁸ did not feel any close bond with the twentieth century. Some expression of his experience of disaccord with the epoch he lived in can be found in his novel titled *The Emperor's Tomb* which narrator states that: 'I am not a man of my time. In fact I find it hard not to declare myself its enemy.'⁵⁹

Different orders of time were on the one hand mismatching but on the other hand closely intermingled because private life of individual was directly interlocked with the great history. In this respect Zweig in a diaristic note in 1935 diagnosed his generation's predicament as follows: 'Always since 1914, every morning, we were opening a newspaper with a slightly gruesome feeling, our private fate (more than in the earlier times) was always bound with politics and its accidental men.'⁶⁰ Márai experienced the same forced interwovenness with history, its increasing velocity, arbitrariness and unpredictability. Recollecting his journey to France in 1947 and in reference to the Paris Peace Treaties, he noted that 'there are days when everything, personal and worldly, intermeshes. When "History" becomes a private matter, a palpable personal reality.'⁶¹ Márai presented the post-war situation in his country marked by the gradual seizure of power by communists as forcing an individual to

embrace the historical order of time. 'Now every day of life was no longer an ordinary Monday or Tuesday but lasting history.'⁶²

The question which emerges here regards the way such a twofold perception of historical realm in the Central European context (history viewed as dissonant but at the same time closely intermingled with inner temporality) reshaped the writers' self-identifications. How did the temporal dimension of their displacement, understood in terms of incongruence between the historical order of time and the one underlying their individual lifeworlds, influence their selves? How did the history's overwhelming force aiming at tight interlock with individual inner time affect their self-understandings? Could they respond with a multiplication of self? As Zweig remarked in a letter in 1941, those growing up in the interwar period had lived not just one life but more different lives.⁶³

The predilection for conjuring up one's self by toying with different phantasmagorical categories, which give way to multiple ways of defining oneself not devoid of contradictoriness and mystification, is most visible in Roth's *oeuvre*. Following Naphtali Kroj, the main protagonist of his autobiographical novel 'Strawberries,' Roth could identify himself with a 'conman.' According to the story's narrator/author, inhabitants of Eastern Europe, contrary to those living in the West, become conmen because of the lack of official papers confirming their identities. Having only 'a false passport, no birth certificate, and no family tree'⁶⁴ Kroj-Roth could easily forge his self. His imagined and thus chameleonic self-understanding, unfamiliar with any stable sense of belonging, did not accord with officially expected and imposed national identity. The contrast became even more ostensible while applying for nationality. In a letter to Benno Reifenberg in 1928 Roth noticed that for 25 years his life resembled a 'fantastic figment' conceived by 'the unorthodox means' which when faced with some bureaucratic requirements for obtaining the Austrian nationality were 'tested to their destruction.'⁶⁵ The writer's constant existential balancing on a thin line between truth and fiction was very often underlined in his friends' memories and literary critics' reviews. Roth's multifarious, imagined selves make him unclassifiable in one definition only. He was continuously re-writing the story of his life by changing the basic facts of his biography such as date and place of birth, by inventing his aristocratic genealogy and by reinterpreting other information regarding his military rank or the figure of his father.⁶⁶ In a letter to Zweig he also confessed that he pretended to be somebody else.⁶⁷

In the course of accelerated history of the twentieth century and especially due to the outbreak of the Great War, the general optimism and belief in progress were replaced by a common feeling of disorientation. Unable to make sense out of the

chaotic events, Roth remarked that ‘we grope blindly into our histories and we are blind within our history.’⁶⁸ Consequently, as Márai noticed in his diary, ‘an insatiable desire *to belong*, to adhere to something’ emerged among the young people. He recalled that “‘leftism’ was this utopian homeland to which “one could belong.”” In the aftermath of the Great War the leftist ideas, embraced also by Márai, seemed to him to alleviate the general feeling of disillusionment, lack of self-confidence, loss and yearning for adherence.⁶⁹ However, besides leftism, conservatism as an ‘antimodern reaction to the First World War’⁷⁰ could also offer a handle to lean on in the unstable interwar times. Notwithstanding Roth’s initial inclination for the leftist ideas, after his journey to France he would approach a catholic conservative worldview.

What was the interrelation between *homo poeticus* and *homo politicus*,⁷¹ the two sides of the writers’ self-identifications shaped by the unescapable interlock with history? Notwithstanding their exilic distance, they were not indifferent to political changes they were witnessing. After a short period of youthful enthusiasm for German patriotism in the beginning of the Great War, Zweig’s hatred towards politics⁷² increased and made him engage in the pacifist movement. During the Second World War he tried to rescue his family, friends and other intellectuals by arranging visas and permissions of stay.⁷³ Márai, even if following the political matters (and distracted by them in his intellectual endeavours), was convinced that his true task pertained to literature and thus always tried to fulfill it like ‘a madman who believes in his mania even when an earthquake shatters the world around him.’ He defined his attitude neither in terms of escape nor a posture.⁷⁴ Driven by the imperative to conscientiously accomplish his obligation as a writer, Márai distinguished between the transient world and the lasting sphere of thought placing himself in the latter realm. However, aware of being part of historical reality he also took a more engaged stance at many occasions. Trapped in besieged Budapest during the war, Márai was helping Jewish people intervening on their behalf and hiding them.⁷⁵ After the war he was cooperating with the radio Free Europe actively responding to the altering geopolitical situation. When the Hungarian revolution in 1956 broke out Márai tried to come back from exile as he was convinced about a collective fate shared also abroad with his compatriots in Hungary.⁷⁶ Moreover, even though the writer was distant from the dissident activism, one of his poems titled ‘Funeral speech’ shaped the underground culture in the early 1950s and foreshadowed the samizdat literature in Hungary.⁷⁷ Still, Zweig and Márai were more reluctant to make explicit public statements about the current political situation than Roth who opted for the position of engaged writer-witness of history.

While as a committed journalist in the 1920s 'der rote Roth' was close to the leftist ideas,⁷⁸ after his travel to the Soviet Union in 1926 and the resulting disappointment with the socialist experiment, he embraced the monarchist cause which also made him engage in a plan of *coup d'état* aimed at Otto von Habsburg's seizure of power.⁷⁹ Yet, Roth would never identify himself entirely with one political label. In his friends' memories he was at the same time anticommunist, anti-Zionist and anti-fascist, fervently and intransigently opposing national socialism.⁸⁰ Roth's political inclinations remain unclassifiable not only due to his poetic distance opposed to fanaticism but also because of the negative way he articulated them, namely as a response to the unacceptable political circumstances. Thus, his nostalgic legitimism was not a mere affirmation of political sympathy stemming from a glorification of the past but rather a form of antidote to the unsatisfactory present moment and to be more precise to the threat of nationalisms and especially Nazism.

The differing degree of the writers' responsiveness to changeable political situations is traceable in the correspondence between Roth and Zweig, between the 'monarchist of a bellicose spirit' (Roth, as recalled by his friend Soma Morgenstern) and the 'excessive pacifist' (Zweig in Roth's view).⁸¹ Their discussions about politics acquired very often a polemical tone once also leading to ultimatum when Roth demanded from his friend either to express his clear renouncement of the Third Reich or to break ties with him.⁸² Some instances of disaccord between Roth and Zweig could be caused by their different social, cultural and economic backgrounds as well as various Jewish traditions they represented: the Orthodox poor eastern Jewry (Roth) and the western, assimilated and relatively affluent Jewish middle class (Zweig).⁸³ Whereas Roth in general was clear-sighted and sensitive to premonitory signs of certain historical phenomena,⁸⁴ Zweig was rather passive,⁸⁵ noncommittal and more reserved.⁸⁶ Engaged journalist Roth, whose cosmopolitan worldview never lost from the sight a concrete, very often anonymous individual, disapproved of Zweig's 'shilly-shallying'⁸⁷ and political naivete underpinned with cosmopolitanism which to him seemed excessively abstract and intellectual.⁸⁸

Were the two friends speaking divergent languages preventing them from mutual understanding as Roth inferred in one of the letters? Difference in attitudes would indeed sometimes assume a confrontational tone in the correspondence. Roth criticized Zweig for his sense of defenseless and surrender to fate which the latter justified with his 'fallibility.' Whereas Zweig advised Roth to '*refute*' an excessive involvement in circumstances leading to engaged writing (articles), Roth would continue his open denouncement of current political situation. Zweig, who strove to distance himself from all the 'lies' of politics by reading a newspaper only '*once* a

week,' tried in vain to discourage his friend from following a dialectical path of dissent. According to Zweig this path was wrong because its oppositional line served only to reaffirm the adversary ('assent to it and strengthen it') and embitter the author himself ('*don't* grow hard from the hardness of the times'). Roth, however, in his friend's 'gentleness' did not see any source of refusal but a manifestation of escape. He could not understand Zweig's indifference, defeatism⁸⁹ and was against a 'premature surrender' to fate or a position of a 'behind-the-lines' Jew. Roth tried to no end to persuade his friend to support his monarchist vision as 'the only possible salvation for Austria' and potential prevention of war.⁹⁰ Instead of following Zweig's escapist stance of recluse and his suggestion that Jews shall fight 'in the second or the fifth or the tenth rank, not always on the front line,'⁹¹ Roth as a passionate witness of his epoch, deeply immersed in changeable geopolitical situation, felt the need to acquire a merciless tone in his fight 'in the front line'⁹² against unright and inhuman political situation.

Zweig's rather apolitical, passive attitude of 'surrender' to fate in response to historical vicissitudes was shared by Márai. Once active journalist he opted for the same inward retreat during the Second World War. In 1943 after giving a lecture, interestingly about Marcus Aurelius, the writer followed the Stoic path of inner emigration and withdrawal from the public life.⁹³ He addressed Marcus Aurelius as 'a great, noble and faithful friend' who was 'the greatest consolation' to him in the difficult times and the world ever more affected by the disappearance of 'a lifestyle whose main content was culture.' Following the philosopher 'human emperor,' Márai tried to withstand this situation 'with patience, understanding, by retreating into the depths of the soul, by surrendering body and fate to the forces of the world, and keeping the soul and true intentions to oneself.'⁹⁴ As he emphasized in the diary during the war, 'the writer must inevitably emigrate to solitude, to the most dense, entirely conscious solitude. Who will not do this, one day will find himself at the barricade or – what is probably even worse – in a literary café.'⁹⁵

Márai, the Stoic, in times of war replaced journalism with diaristic writing which accompanied him later during his long exilic odyssey.⁹⁶ Stoics were his often interlocutors providing him with a necessary comfort in difficult moments: 'Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, my former fellow saints, calm me down! "Deal only with what we have influence on..." – that's probably the secret.'⁹⁷ The writer accentuated his close bond with Stoicism many times in his personal writings, both during the war and later in exile, especially in Italy where in everyday life he would encounter the Stoic, 'wise, full of resignation attitude and readiness to make one's life independent of the attacks of History.'⁹⁸ In Rome just after the Second World War Márai found himself in front

of the statue of Marcus Aurelius – his ‘personal Saint [...], the author whose words had often reassured’ him – ‘better than bromine! – in years gone by, even in the basement [...].’⁹⁹ In 1961, while reading Epictetus, the writer again identified himself entirely with Stoicism, underlining that ‘this kind of spirituality’ was ‘the closest’ to him, ‘organically in line with’ his ‘nature and inclinations. Indifference to the world, high expectations of oneself [...]’ – these were his aspirations in life and work.¹⁰⁰

Both Zweig and Márai agreed on the flawed nature of politics of the twentieth century in general. Each ideology, having acquired a fanatic form of a System, poses a threat to individual freedom and humanism. As Zweig noted in the letter to Romain Rolland in 1932: ‘For me everything which today happens politically is a pure madness: whether one chooses Hitler or Stalin, that changes nothing. The foundation is rotten.’¹⁰¹ In a similar way in the diary in 1948 Márai commented on a paradoxical phenomenon of members of Arrow Cross and Bolsheviks (becoming rightists) in Hungary, as possibly shaking hands in a gesture of agreement. While the initial direction was clearly different (rightist, leftist), both political movements were, as Márai argued, evolving in such a way that they could meet in the end at the same point of equal degree of suppression of individual freedom.¹⁰²

Notwithstanding all these instances of interest in politics, the three writers were far from any close identification with political ideology which would confine their selves exclusively to one dimension of *homo politicus*. The latter coexisted with *homo poeticus* leading to some contradictory attitudes. The writers deeply immersed in the political situation were on the one hand following the *Zeitgeist* but on the other hand at the same time tried to escape it.¹⁰³ As sensitive witnesses of the epoch and representatives of the cultural sphere they felt urged to respond to the current state of affairs in Europe and more broadly in the world. The degree of escapism and the ways they expressed their attitudes towards the political realm differed in each case oscillating between more geopolitical, activist, dissident manner (Roth) and geopoetic, more indirect approach (Zweig, Márai). However, all of them as writers would over the dialectical reaction of an activist privilege the hermeneutic search for meaning in life writing and exilic odyssey, thus in reformulation of self in relation to history of the twentieth century and changeable places of stay in emigration.

Conclusion

Márai, Roth and Zweig identified themselves with *hinternationale*¹⁰⁴ Europe, thus with (to some extent mythicized) tolerant Habsburg Monarchy where nationalisms were still behind (*hinter*) the multiethnic coexistence and where culture was in greater

esteem than politics. What seems significant in the context of this essay is Magris's remark that the kinship of the writers reflecting on the Danubian monarchy goes beyond a mere external affinity of content (shared themes, motives). It is rooted deeper in 'the precisely defined cultural subsoil' which influenced formal aspects of writing such as style and tone. 'The cultural subsoil' was nourished by the community of historical fate. Magris hints at its shape noticing that the writers' attitudes, sensitivity and thought were primarily underpinned with 'the ambiguous condition of lack of stability and dissatisfaction with the current situation and the resultant will of escape, impossible return to reality and emotions characteristic for the world which history swept from the surface of earth.'¹⁰⁵ The historical experiences of instability, disillusionment as well as escapism, which constitute the Central European 'cultural subsoil,' were shared by the paper's three protagonists. Disenchantment with the post-war circumstances and the general atmosphere of incertitude provoked them to safeguard their freedom in Stoic inwardness. At the same time they found some comfort in Epicurean visions of the past. They expressed the need to escape from the present moment and the will to return to the idealized bygone times.

For Márai, Roth and Zweig this tension between the mythical, nostalgic images of the past imbued with the Epicurean openness and the Stoic defense of one's freedom in the present moment appeared with the outbreak of the Great War, described by Zweig in terms of 'a sharp cut' which 'inexorably marked the boundary for our generation: before and after.'¹⁰⁶ Roth defined this decisive *caesura* in his correspondence in terms of 'the most powerful experience' in his life. Having lost an anchorage in the only homeland he ever had and accompanied by 'the feeling of not belonging anywhere,' the writer was doomed to the fate of 'flight without end.'¹⁰⁷

Notwithstanding all the harbingers of dark times which, as Márai critically reminded, were already present in the supposedly Epicurean period from 1867 until the outbreak of the Great War, it was possible in Central Europe to lead life in 'relative peace'¹⁰⁸ and security which, according to the writer, 'pampered' his ancestors.¹⁰⁹ The period before 'a sharp cut' meant a life – as Roth remarked in his diary – 'in the security under Habsburg,'¹¹⁰ distant from any 'specific political, social or international catastrophe.'¹¹¹ Both Roth and Márai would agree with Zweig who in his autobiography described the Epicurean period before the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, thus pertaining to his childhood and youth, as 'the Golden Age of Security.' The old Habsburg Monarchy, political system and currency were the synonyms of stability, immutability and durability. In the world where 'everything had its norm, its correct measurement and weight' nothing seemed endangered by contingency and unpredictability of radical and violent historical changes. Everyone

had its proper place in the social order and could 'drowse' in a secure embrace of tradition, comfort, prosperity and stability. In Zweig's recollection, the monarchy's scarce political ambitions, indolence, military unsuccessful endeavours and economic backwardness shaped the Epicurean life of Vienna's inhabitants, distant from *Realpolitik* because underlain by general enthusiasm for art and culture.¹¹²

This continuous and solid life, however, as Roth noticed in his diary, was soon undermined by 'the constant fear of adventurers encircling [...]'¹¹³ and endangering the peace and order in the gardens of Epicureans. Consequently, the later generation of the three writers 'was born to fight' for the last enclaves of freedom overflowed by historical waves. Stoicism became one of the responses to the circumstances when what once was taken for granted, namely peace, security and stability converted in some exceptions to the rule which became incertitude and volatility.¹¹⁴ This shift intensified a centripetal movement towards the only certainty, that is to say a stronghold of self and individual freedom. While the ancestors of Zweig, Roth and Márai could perceive their lives in terms of 'a solid stone house,' the writers, constantly challenged by historical upheavals and outbursts of collective destructive forces, seemed to inhabit 'a castle in the air'¹¹⁵ which only fragile fundamentals constituted the constantly reconfigured spatiotemporal frames of self. The predictable act of climbing the consecutive stages of life equivalent to a continuum of past, present and future was replaced by a hazardous balancing on a thin line above an abyss of the present moment.

Contrary to previous generations, who could experience a certain continuity between childhood, adult life and old age, Roth described his contemporaries' experiences as follows: 'It was only our generation who experienced the earthquake, after having counted on the complete security of the earth from the moment we were born. We all were like someone who gets on a train, with the timetable in his hand, to travel and see the world. But a storm blew our train away [...]'¹¹⁶ The main characteristic of his generation was skepticism born out of a sudden and radical discontinuity and the loss of childhood brought by the war. It was 'the skepticism of metaphysical wisdom.' The truths and ideas, these metaphysically underpinned points of reference defining social, cultural life and tradition were undermined in a sudden 'somersault'¹¹⁷ of history. The writers' predecessors, according to Roth, were still 'more substantial' because not yet uprooted by the modern times and imbued with 'the hollow emptiness of the present day.'¹¹⁸

The accelerated pace and changeable spatial frames of the post-war present moment had a decisive impact on the three writers' self-identifications reconfigured in relation to time and space. Caught in the whirls of history they experienced at one

end the existential mismatching with its rhythm and at the other the direct entanglement in the course of events. The speeding wheel of historical time constantly reshuffling borders deprived Márai, Roth and Zweig of their homelands and forced them to embark on the exilic odyssey. Roth described metaphorically this double displacement mentioning that timetables and travel books became redundant in the interwar period due to the variable historical reality outstripping every attempt of its control. In the new unstable epoch, spatially and temporally constantly redefined by changeable borders and hastened passage of time, there was no place for the illusory control neither of time nor space with the help of timetables and guidebooks. The world started changing too fast to be recognizable in a guide and the speeding time could not be tamed or grasped in some schedule. Tourists were replaced by wanderers, refugees and emigrants aware of the fact that 'in the space of a single second, everything can be transformed a thousand times over, disfigured, rendered unrecognizable.'¹¹⁹

In 1935 Zweig, the Stoic, diagnosed the situation of his generation in the diary as follows: 'We constantly see the straight line being askew, easiness made difficult, and sometimes a man does not get rid of the feeling that absurdity took hold of a driving wheel and drives the world in a drunken, senseless zigzag to the unknown.'¹²⁰ The writers' reaction to the overwhelming absurdity was a meaningful, *kairotic*, literary and diaristic synthesis out of the chaotic time of *Chronos*. In this light Zweig's attempt in one of his essays to discern a poetic language of history, its 'elevated spirit' could be seen as a response to this 'lunatic age'¹²¹ of the twentieth century, speaking in meaningless ideological slogans so distant from poetry. Márai and Roth opposed the absurd historical realm with literature and nomadic way of life as well. The Hungarian writer remarked in 1943 in the diary that only in literature a human measure may be restored to the inhuman existence.¹²² The literary world centered on individual undermines historical fate which has always posed a threat to uniqueness of human being. Entangled in hermetically closed accelerated wheel of history, reverberating with the absurdist tone, Márai, Roth and Zweig responded hermeneutically choosing a 'spirally open' path of meaning sought in exile and life writing, in nonlinear ways of being (nomadic wandering) and writing (diaristic practice).

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Notes

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 174.

² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 174.

³ Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Mediations of Marcus Aurelius*, trans. Michael Chase (Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁴ James A. Mollison, "Nietzsche Contra Stoicism: Naturalism and Value, Suffering and *Amor Fati*," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 62, no. 1 (2019): 94-97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2019.1527547>.

⁵ Roy O. Elveton, "Nietzsche's Stoicism: The Depths are Inside," in *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, ed. Paul Bishop (Camden House, 2004), 192-203, 195-196.

⁶ For the analysis of common principles of both Epicureanism and Nietzsche's thought see: Arthur Harold John Knight, "Nietzsche and Epicurean Philosophy," *Philosophy* 8, no. 32 (1933): 431-445. For more information on Nietzsche's changeable attitude to Epicurean philosophy see also Keith Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche and Epicurus In Search of the Heroic-Idyllic," in *Nietzsche and the Philosophers*, ed. Mark T. Conard (Routledge, 2017), 121-145. The concept of individual freedom is of great importance within both philosophies. On the differences and similarities between Stoicism and Nietzsche's philosophy see: Mollison, "Nietzsche contra stoicism," 93-115.

⁷ Márai mentioned that 'all authors whose names mattered in Central Europe' cooperated with *Frankfurter Zeitung*. He enumerated Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig and Gerhart Hauptmann. Sándor Márai, *Wyznania patrycjusza*, trans. Teresa Worowska (Czytelnik, 2005), 292.

⁸ Roth's fate and life writing, even if in general pattern (double, spatial and temporal displacement) similar to those of Zweig and Márai, differ considerably. Firstly, his diary titled 'Black-yellow diary' is very short in comparison with Zweig's journal and Márai's even more extensive diaristic practice. Secondly, Roth's suicide took many years as it assumed a form of gradual self-annihilation in the long-term addiction to alcohol. Joseph Roth's letters to Stefan Zweig (15 July 1934 and 18 October 1935), in "Jede Freundschaft mit mir ist verderblich:" *Joseph Roth und Stefan Zweig: Briefwechsel 1927-1938*, ed. Madeleine Rietra and Rainer-Joachim Siegel (Wallstein, 2011), 178, 257. Joseph Roth's letter to Stefan Zweig (22 December 1933), in *A Life in Letters*, transl. and ed. Michael Hofmann (Granta Publications Ltd, 2013), 292.

⁹ Márai, *Wyznania*, 301.

¹⁰ For instance works such as: Mauricio Polanco, "Sándor Márai et Stefan Zweig: Deux Témoins de la Mitteleuropa," accessed January 31, 2025,

https://www.academia.edu/4126016/SANDOR_MARAI_ET_STEFAN_ZWEIG_DEUX_TEMOINS_DE_LA_MITTELEUROPA – study of parallel biographical paths and literary worlds of Márai and Zweig framed by the common historical and cultural background of the Viennese *fin de siècle*; Cathy S. Gelbin, "Nomadic Cosmopolitanism: Jewish Prototypes of the Cosmopolitan in the Writings of Stefan Zweig, Joseph Roth and Lion Feuchtwanger, 1918-1933," *Jewish Culture and History* 16, no. 2 (2015): 157-177, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2015.1084147> – emphasis on the relationship between the writers' concept of Jewish culture and 'nomadic cosmopolitanism'; Volker Weidermann, *Summer Before the Dark. Stefan Zweig and Joseph Roth, Ostend 1936*, trans. Carol Brown Janeway (Pushkin Press, 2016) – portrait of the writers' difficult situation of balancing on the verge of the doomed world approaching the next global conflict.

¹¹ Jacques Le Rider, *Mitteleuropa: Posición histórica de Alemania en la Europa Central*, trans. Ana García (Idea Books, 2000), 76.

¹² Moritz Csáky, "Ambivalentnost kolektivnega spomina v Centralni Evropi," trans. Anja Naglič, *Zgodovinski časopis* 58, no. 1-2 (2004): 134, 139, <https://hdl.handle.net/11686/file45>.

¹³ Moritz Csáky, "Introduction" in *Collective Identities in Central Europe in Modern Times*, ed. Moritz Csáky and Elena Mannová (Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1999), 9, 14; Csáky, "Ambivalentnost kolektivnega spomina," 137.

¹⁴ Csáky, "Introduction," 18.

¹⁵ Csáky, "Ambivalentnost kolektivnega spomina," 137-140; Csáky, "Introduction," 9, 14.

¹⁶ Csaba G. Kiss, *Powinowactwa wyszehradzkie*, ed. Hanna Jaworowska-Błońska (Studio Emka, 2016), 56.

¹⁷ Czech literary scholar Jiří Trávniček noted that everything fundamental in Central Europe 'happens in reference to history, against it, in conflict with, under its weight or in its grip.' Jiří Trávniček, ed., *V kleštích dějin. Střední Evropa jako pojem a problem* (Host, 2009), 241.

¹⁸ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, ed. Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 1981), in *The Bakhtin Reader. Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (Arnold Publishers, 1994), 184.

¹⁹ I follow here Simona Škrabec's literary (particularizing) approach to Central Europe which she opposes to the traditional geopolitical and historical (unifying) view of the region that runs the risk of distorting its cultural diversity and historical complexity. Most importantly, what distinguishes the two

perspectives is the conceptualization of time. While the historical concepts of the region are structured around the chronological linear time and singular identity, the second bottom-up approach based on particular literary expressions of historical experiences tries to accentuate different temporal dimensions and, by extension, various self-identifications. Referring to Walter Benjamin's concept of *angel of history*, Škrabec raises a significant question 'whether it is possible for history, in place of the angelic glance suspended in the air high above the people and their sufferings, to take some closer perspective from which it will be possible to stop the passage of time and make the burden of life present. Undoubtedly this mission pertains to literature.' Simona Škrabec, *Geografia wyobrażona. Koncepcja Europy Środkowej w XX wieku*, trans. Rozalya Sasor (Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2013), 25.

²⁰ As Mollison remarked, the origins of Stoicism were closely linked with the general atmosphere of anxiety and incertitude. In this sense the Stoic philosophy remains to many sensitive witnesses of a particular historical moment a desirable response to insecure and violent times beyond their control. 'The Hellenistic period when Stoicism gains popularity is highly dangerous and uncertain. For the especially sensitive or anxious, and for those facing extraordinary insecurity, the notion that there is nothing to be prized other than rational judgment and nothing to be feared but its absence is likely attractive. If one suffers slavery, as Epictetus did, advises a violent and impulsive emperor, as Seneca did, or faces wars on multiple fronts, as Marcus did, then the invitation to turn away from the external world toward the inner citadel of reason may provide great comfort.' Mollison, "Nietzsche contra stoicism," 99.

²¹ The entire structure of the autobiography is founded on a dichotomy opposing two parts of the book: the first 'positive' part representing a peaceful life before the Great War and another, negative one describing the chaotic situation of the interwar period and the Second World War. Helmut Galle, "Die Welt von Gestern als Autobiografie, Memoirenwerk und Zeugnis," in *Stefan-Zweig-Handbuch*, ed. Arturo Larcati, Klemens Renoldner and Martina Wörgötter (De Gruyter, 2018), 357. While the pre-war times could be defined by the Epicurean 'lightness of being' distant from history, the second following period marked with the burden of historical experience would be imbued with Stoicism.

²² As Austrian writer and literary scholar Klemens Renoldner claims 'this kind of criticism of the *Word of Yesterday* has a very long history. [...] This negative line of reception is still practised.' He mentions Hannah Arendt as one of the voices in this line of criticism. Ruth Bohunovsky, "Stefan Zweig: Ein Mann von Gestern? Ein Interview mit Klemens Renoldner [Stefan Zweig: A man of yesterday? An Interview with Klemens Renoldner]," *Pandaemonium Germanicum* 18, no. 26 (December/2015): 230, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-883718267214235>.

²³ Adam Kożuchowski, *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary: The Image of the Habsburg Monarchy in Interwar Europe* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 117.

²⁴ Kożuchowski, *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary*, 108, 110.

²⁵ I am referring here to Ewa Wiegandt's interpretation of the Galician myth in Polish literature. According to the Polish literary historian, this myth is 'a version of the Habsburg myth' and combines opposite *topoi*: Arcadia and 'Viennese apocalypse.' Ewa Wiegandt, "Mit Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej: (rekonesans tematologiczny)," *Teksty: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja* 47, no. 5 (1979): 54-57.

²⁶ Claudio Magris, *Mit habsburski w literaturze austriackiej moderny*, trans. Elżbieta Jogała and Joanna Ugniewska (Austeria, 2019), 33.

²⁷ Franklin Rudolf Ankersmit, *History and Tropology. The Rise and Fall of Metaphor* (University of California Press, 1994), 202.

²⁸ Ankersmit, *History and Tropology*, 196-197, 203-205, 199.

²⁹ Slovene Germanist Matjaž Birk writes about similarities of philosophy of travel shared by Roth and Zweig which manifest in their fascination with 'transition' and 'in-betweenness.' Matjaž Birk, "'Der Heroismus der Intellektuellen–Der liquidierte Heroismus.' Fremd-und Selbstbilder in Joseph Roths und Stefan Zweigs Reisefeuilletons," in *Joseph Roth: europäisch-jüdischer Schriftsteller und österreichischer Universalist*, eds. Mira Miladinović Zalaznik and Johann Georg Lughofer (De Gruyter, 2011), 104.

³⁰ Heinz Lunzer, "Quellen zu Leben und Werk von Joseph Roth. Interviews und andere Aussagen von Zeitzeugen," in *Joseph Roth: europäisch-jüdischer Schriftsteller*, 343.

³¹ István Dobos, "Sándor Márai: *The Complete Diary*," *Central European Cultures* 4, no.1 (2024): 197. Dobos also interprets Márai's diary in terms of a performative act, namely 'as a fight against the temptation of emptiness, aimlessness, depression, and indifference [...]; writing a diary is a performative activity for him, aimed at consolidating his presence.'

³² Dobos, "Sándor Márai," 195.

³³ Sándor Márai, *Dziennik 1949-1956*, vol. 2, trans., ed., and annot. Teresa Worowska (Czytelnik, 2017), 13.

³⁴ Sándor Márai, *Dziennik 1967-1976*, vol. 4, trans., ed., and annot. Teresa Worowska (Czytelnik, 2019), 296-297.

³⁵ Stefan Zweig, "Tagebuch September 1912 und Frühjahr 1913 (Paris) [10. September 1912 bis 6. Mai 1913/20.-28. März 1914]," (Vienna, 10. September 1912), in *Tagebücher*, ed., and annot. Knut Beck (S. Fischer, 1984), 9-10.

³⁶ See for instance Roth's 'Russian Diary' written during his journey to the Soviet Union (1926) which gives an insight into the author's experiences of the new place. Not all of them were included in the later published reportage from the trip. Ievgeniia Volochshuk, "I have finally cut myself off from the East': the post-revolutionary Russia in Joseph Roth's diary notes about his journey to the USSR," *Studia Culturae* 4, no. 34 (2018): 237, <http://iculture.spb.ru/index.php/stucult/article/view/959/937>.

³⁷ Lara Feigel, "Joseph Roth: A Life in Letters by Michael Hofmann – Review. The life of Joseph Roth was as dramatic as any of his novels," *The Guardian*, February 24, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/feb/24/joseph-roth-letters-michael-hofmann>.

³⁸ Joseph Roth, *On the End of the World*, ed. and trans. Will Stone (Pushkin Press, 2019), 91-94.

³⁹ Géza von Cziffra, "Święty pijak," in *Samotny wizjoner. Joseph Roth we wspomnieniach przyjaciół, esejach krytycznych i artykułach prasowych*, ed. Elżbieta Jogała, trans. Paweł Krzak (Austeria, 2013), 52.

⁴⁰ Oliver Matuschek, "Autographensammlung," in *Stefan-Zweig-Handbuch*, 618, 622. Zweig as the collector gradually directed his attention from the present to the past by including more and more historical figures to his collection which thus also indicates his increasing interest in the bygone times and in particular in the creative forces of people from the past.

⁴¹ A. Rosseaux, "Eine Unterhaltung mit Stefan Zweig (1934)," in "*Worte haben keine Macht mehr:*" *Essays zu Politik und Zeitgeschehen 1916-1941*, ed. Stephan Resch (Sonderzahl, 2019), 222-224. Zweig defined the new dimension of historical time in terms of massive character of events, their escalation, expansion and general uniformity accompanied by technological progress suppressing individuality.

⁴² Sándor Márai, *Porwanie Europy*, trans., ed., and annot. Irena Makarewicz (Czytelnik, 2022), 95, 97.

⁴³ Márai, *Porwanie Europy*, 130.

⁴⁴ Stefan Zweig, "History as Poetess," in *Messages from a Lost World. Europe on the Brink* (Pushkin Press, 2016), 71.

⁴⁵ Stefan Zweig's letter to Alma and Franz Werfel (12 February 1941), in *Briefe 1932-1942*, ed. Knut Beck and Jeffrey B. Berlin (S. Fischer, 2005), 299.

⁴⁶ Zweig, "History as Poetess," 82.

⁴⁷ Rosseaux, "Eine Unterhaltung mit Stefan Zweig (1934)," 223.

⁴⁸ Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, trans. Anthea Bell (University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 48.

⁴⁹ Joseph Roth, "Die weißen Städte" (1925), in "*Ich zeichne das Gesicht der Zeit:*" *Essays, Reportagen, Feuilletons*, ed. Helmuth Nürnberger (Wallstein, 2010), 99; Joseph Roth, "The White Cities," in *Report from a Parisian Paradise. Essays from France 1925-1939*, trans. Michael Hofmann (W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 70-71.

⁵⁰ Ivo Brnčić, *Generacija pred zaprtimi vrati. Izbor esejev in kritik* (Cankarjeva Založba, 1954), 11-14.

⁵¹ Peter Fritzsche, "Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (December 2001): 1587-1589.

⁵² Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books 2001), xiv-xvii, 7-11, 13, 16.

⁵³ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xvi-xviii, 13, 30-31. "Reflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols" (xviii).

⁵⁴ Rosseaux, "Eine Unterhaltung mit Stefan Zweig (1934)," 224.

⁵⁵ Stefan Zweig, "Die Monotonisierung der Welt (1925)," in *Zeiten und Schicksale: Aufsätze und Vorträge aus den Jahren 1902-1942*, ed. Knut Beck (S. Fischer, 1990), 37, 38.

⁵⁶ Sándor Márai, *W podróży*, trans. Teresa Worowska (Zeszyty Literackie, 2011), 117. Sándor Márai and Tibor Simanyi, *Lieber Tibor. Briefwechsel* (Piper Verlag, 2002), 252-253. Márai felt stronger affinity to the nineteenth century but devoid of nostalgia. What differed these two centuries was according to the writer the pace of historical changes which in the nineteenth century unfolded 'at a snail's pace,' later considerably speeding up. Márai, *Dziennik 1949-1956*, 406.

⁵⁷ Teresa Worowska, Polish translator of Hungarian literature, emphasizes the year 1944 as a significant *caesura* in Márai's life. The successful journalist and writer turned inwardly towards the Stoic diaristic practice. Teresa Worowska, "Europy w Europie już nie ma," interview by Zofia Zaleska, *Dwutygodnik*, no. 124 (January 2014), <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/4981-europy-w-europie-juz-nie-ma.html>.

⁵⁸ Sidney Rosenfeld, *Understanding Joseph Roth* (University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 88.

⁵⁹ Joseph Roth, *The Emperor's Tomb*, trans. John Hoare (Hogarth, 1984), 7.

⁶⁰ Stefan Zweig, "Tagebuchblatt vom 27. September 1935 (Reise von Paris nach London)," in *Tagebücher*, 384.

⁶¹ Sándor Márai, *Memoir of Hungary 1944-1948*, trans. Albert Tezla (Corvina in association with Central European University Press, 1996), 277.

⁶² Márai, *Memoir of Hungary*, 328.

⁶³ Stefan Zweig's letter to Alma and Franz Werfel (12 February 1941), in *Briefe 1932-1942*, 299. Interestingly, in the beginning his autobiography was supposed to be titled 'My three lives.' It also forms part of the title of Oliver Matuschek's biography of Zweig. Oliver Matuschek, *Three Lives: A Biography of Stefan Zweig* (Pushkin Press, 2013).

⁶⁴ Joseph Roth, *Die Erzählungen* (Kiepenheuer&Witsch, 2008), 163-164.

⁶⁵ Joseph Roth's letter to Benno Reifenberg (30 July 1928), in *A Life in Letters*, 124.

⁶⁶ Reinhard Baumgart, "Trzy spojrzania," in *Samotny wizjoner*, 232-238, 248. David Bronsen, "Joseph Roth w walce swojego życia—o Austrię wewnętrzną," in *Samotny wizjoner*, 254, 257, 259. Géza von Cziffra, "Święty pijak," 31-37, 48-50, 63. On the one hand for some time Roth was rejecting his Jewish origins but on the other hand at some point he started calling himself Moses. Joseph Roth's letter to Benno Reifenberg (9 April 1926), in *A Life in Letters*, 77.

⁶⁷ Joseph Roth's letter to Stefan Zweig (31 October 1934), in "Jede Freundschaft mit mir ist verderblich," 220.

⁶⁸ Roth, *On the End of the World*, 91.

⁶⁹ Márai, *Dziennik 1967-1976*, 91.

⁷⁰ Ilse Josepha Lazaroms, "Europa in den Klauen des Antichrist. Paris und Amsterdam in Roths Vision eines Kontinents in Aufruhr," in *Der verirrte Kosmopolit: Joseph Roth in den Niederlanden und in Belgien*, eds. Benjamin Biebuyck, Petra Campe and Els Snick (Aisthesis, 2020), 174-175.

⁷¹ Danilo Kiš, *Homo Poeticus: Essays and Interviews*, ed. Susan Sontag (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995).

⁷² In the letter to Hermann Hesse in 1935 Zweig wrote: 'I have learned honestly to hate the politics as the opposite of justice, the politics which must always supersize, betray a word in favour of a slogan, a dogma in favour of its exaggeration.' Stefan Zweig's letter to Hermann Hesse (30 January 1935), in *Briefe 1932-1942*, 112. For the analysis of Zweig's attitude towards political matters in the 1930s and early 1940s see: Jeffrey B. Berlin, "The Writer's Political Obligations in Exile: The Case of Stefan Zweig," in *Stefan Zweig and World Literature. Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. Birger Vanwesenbeeck and Mark H. Gelber (Camden House, 2014), 224-255.

⁷³ In 1941 desperate Zweig in need of some rest complained to his ex-wife Friderike that for three years he was only dealing with helping other people by arranging visas and permissions of stay. Stefan

Zweig's letter to Friderike Maria Zweig (20 March 1941), in *Briefe 1932-1942*, 300-302. For some time this work deprived him of a peace of mind necessary for intellectual activity. Stefan Zweig's letter to Romain Rolland (28 February 1939), in *Briefwechsel 1910-1940*, ed. Waltraud Schwarze, trans. Christel Gersch, 2 vols (Rütten & Loening, 1987), II (1924-1940), 697.

⁷⁴ Sándor Márai, *Dziennik 1943-1948*, vol. 1, trans., ed., and annot. Teresa Worowska (Czytelnik, 2016), 28.

⁷⁵ Worowska reminds that Márai saved his wife and her cousin with the daughter, Worowska, "Europy w Europie już nie ma." The writer also intervened on behalf of his father-in-law deported to Poland. Márai, *Dziennik 1943-1948*, 75. Teresa Worowska, "Świadek entropii," in Sándor Márai, *Dziennik (fragmenty)*, trans., ed., and annot. Teresa Worowska (Czytelnik, 2004), 618.

⁷⁶ Márai, *Dziennik 1949-1956*, 171. Márai did not manage to reach Budapest. While staying in Munich he was addressing broadcasts to Hungarians each day (498). Zweig was of similar conviction regarding an émigré writer's and thus his strong bond with the compatriots' fate at home. Berlin, "The Writer's Political Obligations in Exile," 236.

⁷⁷ Ernö Zeltner, *Sándor Márai. Ein Leben in Bildern* (Piper, 2001), 174. Márai, *Dziennik 1949-1956*, 189-190.

⁷⁸ Ilse Josepha Lazaromes, *The Grace of Misery. Joseph Roth and the Politics of Exile, 1919-1939* (Brill, 2013), xix-xx, xxxi, 11-15, 18, 109.

⁷⁹ Joseph Roth's letters to Stefan Zweig (28 April 1933, 9 May 1933, 24 July 1935) and René Schickele (September 1934?), in *A Life in Letters*, 252, 254, 372, 412. Ulrich Greiner, "Joseph Roth," in *Samotny wizjoner*, 159-160. Will Stone, "Introduction," in *On the End of the World*, 12.

⁸⁰ Von Cziffra, "Święty pijak," 36; Irmgard Keun, "Spotkanie na emigracji," in *Samotny wizjoner*, 138; Ludwig Marcuse, "Pożegnanie z Josephem Rothem," in *Samotny wizjoner*, 153-154.

⁸¹ Soma Morgenstern, *Fuga e fine di Joseph Roth*, trans. Sabina de Waal (Biblioteca Adelphi, 2001), 215.

⁸² Joseph Roth's letter to Stefan Zweig (7 November 1933), in "Jede Freundschaft mit mir ist verderblich," 129. Joseph Roth's letter to Stefan Zweig (7 November 1933), in *A Life in Letters*, 281

⁸³ Morgenstern, *Fuga e fine di Joseph Roth*, 217. In one of the letters Roth also wrote that he had more instinct than reason. Joseph Roth's letter to Stefan Zweig (24 January 1934), in "Jede Freundschaft mit mir ist verderblich," 145-146.

⁸⁴ Joseph Roth's letter to Stefan Zweig (24 July 1935) in *A Life in Letters*, 412.

⁸⁵ Tatiana Liani, "'Zum Emigranten habe ich kein Talent': Stefan Zweig's Exile in London," in *'Immortal Austria'? Austrians in Exile in Britain*, ed. Charmian Brinson, Richard Dove and Jennifer Taylor (Rodopi, 2007), 38.

⁸⁶ Stefan Zweig, "Stefan Zweig berichtet über den Plan für eine Rundschau (1935)," in "Worte haben keine Macht mehr," 231-233. Frédéric Lefèvre, "Ein internationaler Appell: Eine Stunde mit Stefan Zweig—Die Rolle des Intellektuellen in der aktuellen Krise (1932)," in "Worte haben keine Macht mehr," 209-212.

⁸⁷ Joseph Roth's letter to Stefan Zweig (7 November 1933), in "Jede Freundschaft mit mir ist verderblich," 127. Joseph Roth's letter to Stefan Zweig (7 November 1933), in *A Life in Letters*, 280.

⁸⁸ David Horrocks, "Kosmopolitismus im Vergleich: Joseph Roth und Stefan Zweig," in *Joseph Roth: europäisch-jüdischer Schriftsteller*, 73, 76-77, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110265057.69>

⁸⁹ Joseph Roth's letters to Stefan Zweig (7 November 1933, 8 October 1937, 10 October 1938) and Stefan Zweig's letters to Joseph Roth (25 September 1937, 10 October 1937 and 10 January 1938), in "Jede Freundschaft mit mir ist verderblich," 126, 357-359, 361, 369, 374. Stefan Zweig's letters to Joseph Roth (25 September 1937, autumn 1937, January 1938) and Joseph Roth's letter to Stefan Zweig (10 October 1938), in *A Life in Letters*, 513-515, 521, 527. The translator of correspondence, Michael Hoffman, also argues that Roth and Zweig sometimes seemed to inhabit 'different planets' (517).

⁹⁰ Joseph Roth's letters to Stefan Zweig (26 March 1933, 31 August 1933) and Joseph Roth's letter to René Schickele (September 1934?), in *A Life in Letters*, 267, 250, 267, 372.

⁹¹ Berlin, "The Writer's Political Obligations in Exile: The Case of Stefan Zweig," 237.

⁹² Joseph Roth's letter to Stefan Zweig (7 November 1933), in *A Life in Letters*, 279.

⁹³ Márai, *Dziennik 1943-1948*, 48.

⁹⁴ Márai, *Dziennik 1943-1948*, 52, 55.

- ⁹⁵ Márai, *Dziennik 1943-1948*, 51.
- ⁹⁶ Worowska, "Europy w Europie już nie ma."
- ⁹⁷ Márai, *Dziennik 1943-1948*, 313.
- ⁹⁸ Márai, *Dziennik 1967-1976*, 321.
- ⁹⁹ Márai, *Porwanie Europy*, 84.
- ¹⁰⁰ Sándor Márai, *Dziennik 1957-1966*, vol. 3, trans., ed., and annot. Teresa Worowska (Czytelnik, 2018), 284, 285.
- ¹⁰¹ Stefan Zweig's letter to Romain Rolland (18 December 1932), in *Briefwechsel 1910-1940*, 483.
- ¹⁰² Márai, *Dziennik 1943-1948*, 414-415.
- ¹⁰³ Andreas Simmen, "Stefan Zweigs subrealistische Geschichtsschreibung," in *Stefan Zweig – Triumph und Tragik: Aufsätze, Tagebuchnotizen, Briefe*, ed. Ulrich Weinzierl (Fischer Taschenbuch, 1992), 184.
- ¹⁰⁴ Johannes Urzidil, "Predella. Relief der Stadt," in *Prager Triptychon. Erzählungen* (Langen Müller, 1960), 13, in *HinterNational–Johannes Urzidil: Ein Lesebuch*, ed. Johann Klaus and Vera Schneider (Deutsches Kulturforum Östliches Europa, 2010), 5.
- ¹⁰⁵ Magris, *Mit habsburski*, 19-20, 21.
- ¹⁰⁶ Zweig, "Joseph Roth," in *Samotny wizjoner*, 143.
- ¹⁰⁷ Joseph Roth's letters to Otto Forst-Battaglia (28 October 1932) and Félix Bertaux (21 December 1927), in *A Life in Letters*, 221, 105. 'Flight Without End is largely autobiographical [...]' (221).
- ¹⁰⁸ This supposedly Epicurean 'happy generation' of ancestors, as Márai recalled, was not devoid of worries and anxieties. He problematized the commonly accepted and thus truistic view about the last joyful and carefree period in Hungary from 1867 till the Great War. Notwithstanding all the favourable conditions of economic and political character (balance of powers), the atmosphere was already permeated with forces posing a threat to the European culture and presaging the upcoming catastrophe of war. Sándor Márai, "Szczęśliwe pokolenie" (29 June 1941), in *Kronika Niedzielnia*, trans. Irena Makarewicz (Czytelnik, 2019), 235-236.
- ¹⁰⁹ Márai, "Na przykład Holbein" (18 April 1938), in *Kronika Niedzielnia*, 87.
- ¹¹⁰ Joseph Roth, "Schwarz-gelbes Tagebuch," in *Werke. Das journalistische Werk 1929-1939*, vol. 3, ed. Klaus Westermann (Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1991), 1469.
- ¹¹¹ Sándor Márai, "Na przykład Holbein," 87.
- ¹¹² Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 23, 34, 36, 39, 48. Stefan Zweig, "The Vienna of Yesterday," in *Messages from a Lost World. Europe on the Brink* (Pushkin Press, 2016), 196, 198.
- ¹¹³ Roth, "Schwarz-gelbes Tagebuch," 1469.
- ¹¹⁴ Márai, "Na przykład Holbein," 87.
- ¹¹⁵ Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 26-27.
- ¹¹⁶ Roth, "The White Cities," 70.
- ¹¹⁷ Referring to the Russian revolution and the meeting with a czarist officer Roth remarked: 'History has performed a somersault...' Joseph Roth, *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-1933*, trans. Michael Hofmann (Granta Publications Ltd: 2011), 67.
- ¹¹⁸ Joseph Roth, "Druzgocąca krytyka," in *Samotny wizjoner*, 19, 20.
- ¹¹⁹ Roth, "The White Cities," 71.
- ¹²⁰ Zweig, "Tagebuchblatt vom 27. September 1935 (Reise von Paris nach London)," in *Tagebücher*, 387.
- ¹²¹ Stefan Zweig's letter to Joseph Roth (May 1934), in *A Life in Letters*, 331.
- ¹²² Márai, *Dziennik 1943-1948*, 14.