

The Second City: The space of the city of Košice in contemporary Slovak literature

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This reading of the urban space of Košice in eastern Slovakia will be based on texts both fictional and essayistic. The period covered will be the 1990s to the present day, but since we would like to offer an outline of the nature of the older, “latent” discussion of this space, it will be necessary to go back, outside this time-frame, into the 1960s and, in the case of Sándor Márai, whose significance for the contemporary literary reception of Košice is fundamental, into the first half of the 20th century (his novel *Egy polgár vallomásai/Confessions of a Bourgeois* [1934], and essays *Kassai őrvjárati/Walks around Košice* [1941]).

A functional, i.e., an intimate and two-way semiotic relationship between a city and literary or creative texts is an attribute of a multidimensional urban space. This relationship exists on a number of levels, from the basic thematic level (the city and its life as a theme of literary texts) to more abstract levels, for example, the genealogical in the case of a space that signals (more or less obviously) the generic form of the text, and vice versa: the genre itself evokes a certain type of space. Although the close relationship between literature and urban space is undoubtedly also perceived outside of literary scholarship, its two-way nature is often overlooked. For example, the architect and urbanologist Bogdan Bogdanovič can see cities in novels but ignores the novels in cities, namely their ability to transform our imagination about the space in which we live. “Between the city and the novel – for example – correlations exist. It is not just that the novel is an urban genre in contrast to, say, the epic, but the rule is that in every novel there is at least one big city” (Bogdanovič, 2002, p. 44). Naturally, this “obligatory” presence of a big city in the novel could be easily undermined in the context of Slovak literature, but its absence undoubtedly signals the specificity of this cultural space: it is a symptom of a certain historical development. Other generic forms could be similarly analysed according to their characteristic, non-symptomatic place on the rural – urban axis, when we find that while in certain genres, such as the short story, this opposition does not play a relevant defining role, in others, for example a bucolic vs a hip-hop text, it is a defining spatial code definitely placed in the “genetic core” of a genre.

In the two-way relationship between city and creative text the primary position is held by the direction from the city to its depiction in a text, but equally important are the questions of how literature (art) contributes to the creation of a “mental map”¹ of a certain space (in this case, the city). The issue here is the potential of a creative work to influence or even recreate the semiotic system of a city. Whether this mental space narrowly correlates in the recipient’s mind to the “obvious”, “objective” topography of the city is

¹ A term we owe to the German philosopher and historian Karl Schlögel. See SCHLÖGEL, Karl: *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik*. (In Space We Read Time. On the History of Civilization and Geopolitics). München : Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003.

irrelevant. A mental map of a city is thus something like the “inside city”² of Daniela Hodrová, a term subordinate to the “text of the city”, which is “a sort of umbrella text, including all types of texts that write the inside and the outside of the city, i.e. architectural texts, art texts, film texts, literary texts and others, such as lived ‘texts’: the life stories of the inhabitants, how they exist in the city. These are so interrelated that even a text seemingly about the outside city (e.g. an architectural text) is in another sense an inside text if we consider that it becomes more or less a living frame of stories, the place of living-reading-writing” (Hodrová, 2006, p. 36 – 37). Thus, on the basis of previous reflections we could identify at least two types of relationships between a creative text and the city as a semiotic space: reflexiveness and assimilation.

Literary and, more generally, creative texts on the one hand reflect the city as one of their basic topoi and its perception is important for the identification of ideological frameworks of the author;³ on the other hand, they have the potential to participate in the creation of this topos. The process of collective creation and gradual assimilation (of the literary text with “city text” or “context”)⁴ is usually much rarer, longer and more complex, because it takes place outside of the fictitious world, in a space that in contrast to the literary work is shaped by multiple authors (urbanists, architects, but also the inhabitants themselves) and many recipients. The external, first-level expressions of this assimilation of creative texts or their authors with the organism of the city are for example plaques, memorials, and statues.⁵ On the deeper level, visible

² In the case of Prague, an influential version of his inside city was offered by e.g. A. M. Rippelino in his *Magická Praha* (Magical Prague).

³ Practically from the beginning of European culture two concepts have existed in parallel of the relationship city-country (nature). The city is either the space of evil and immorality or, contrariwise, the space of creativity, intellectual activity and development. See e.g., SVATOŇ, Vladimír: Na cestě z centra na okraj – Z města na venkov. (On the Way from the Centre to the Margins – from the City to the Countryside) In: *Cesty. Pojem – metafora – žánr*. (Roads. Term – Metaphor – Genre.) Ed. O. Král, Z. Hrbata. Praha, 2004, p. 113 – 125.

⁴ Various forms of the functioning and definitions of city texts and contexts are offered by Daniela Hodrová in her book *Citlivé město (eseje z mytopoetiky)* (A Sensitive City. Essays in Mythopoetics). Referring to the Tartu School of Semiotics volume *Semiotika mesta a mestskej kultúry – Petrohrad* (1984) that she edited she states that, e.g., the notion ‘Petersburg text’ has a quite precise meaning. “For their authors, the ‘Petersburg text’ was something that goes beyond the subjective reader’s horizon, based on the city itself and its texts, which exists as if independently of the individual subject – the author and the reader – and which functions as a kind of motif paradigm over concrete texts” (Hodrová, 2006, p. 112). Concerning Prague, Hodrová prefers the term the Prague context or the Prague net (ibid., p. 114).

⁵ The question here is how much of the representation of the author and his work is central and actively involved in assimilation, how much functions as the catalyst, and which parts of his personality remain unused (and why) in the process of assimilation to the city context. It seems that the most active layer of the author’s work in this process is the ‘legend’ layer: the author’s work as interpreted and codified by official institutions. A Košice example of such assimilation is the memorial plaque of the encounter of Ľudovít Štúr with Jonáš Záborský: “THE LEADING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SLOVAK NATION ĽUDOVÍT ŠTÚR AND JONÁŠ ZÁBORSKÝ MET IN KOŠICE PARSONAGE ON 24 FEBRUARY 1849 AND DISCUSSED THE NATIONAL PROGRAMME OF THE SLOVAKS.” When we compare this stylistically neutral and value-free text with, e.g., the record of this event in Záborský’s *Vlastný životopis* (Autobiography), we find that the assimilation of this “author text” to the city context has in this case acquired an almost parodic dimension, a compromise reflecting the taste and value frame of the

when researching cultural history, we can talk about texts and authors who opened the cultural space of a city to the world and thus significantly contributed to its self-identification (Joyce's Dublin, Italo Svevo's Trieste, Kafka's Prague, etc.). This self-identification can of course have its "higher", cultivated form, if it is cultivated as a tradition and continuity by the intellectual and artistic elites, but also another, often paradoxical commercial form. Here we can mention as an example the present semiotic status of the no-longer existing Grand Hotel Schalkház, one of the self-identifying cultural-social spaces of Košice's "old" inhabitants. The hotel was demolished in the 1960s to make way for the construction of the robust socialist Hotel Slovan, which drastically changed the urban proportions of the southern part of the historic city centre. The childhood memories of the autobiographical narrator of Márai's *Confessions of a Bourgeois* symptomatically connect the hotel with the name of the emperor: "The view from the windows of our dining room looked out on the big hotel opposite, the biggest of its kind in this part of the country, where once, during military manoeuvres, the emperor and king Franz Joseph himself dined and lodged" (Márai, 2003, p. 50). The general postcommunist need to reconstruct our past and reveal how its parts were deformed and disguised by the communist power, as well as the return from the all-levelling internationalism to "local patriotism" and regionalism, were certainly the reason why in the Košice milieu Márai's *Confessions*, the first part of which is about Košice, and especially the long essay *Walks around Košice*, rapidly became the basic texts of the re-constituted Košice urban literary tradition. Naturally, this tradition is created not in the Slovak language, but that is for the moment not the focus of our interest. The urban realities recalled by Márai and evoked by other authors are thus revived in new and unexpected contexts. Several decades after the demolition of the aforementioned Hotel Schalkház some media present the new hotel Doubletree by Hilton (formerly Hotel Slovan) as a continuation of the famous Schalkház tradition, although there is nothing relating the present building or its owner to the old hotel.⁶ A rather bizarre form of sign is thus created, an index sign pointing to the historical Schalkház as the guarantor of the quality and reputation of the present Hilton based on the mere coincidence of the same physical situatedness. This is a rather rare phenomenon in Slovakia, that a local trademark is called upon to affirm an international one.

'street' recipient targeted. "Štúr did not know we were neighbours, and I, surrounded in the house itself with spies and treacherous colleagues, did not dare to visit him. I watched his movements and when he walked nearby, I pulled him into the house. Here I explained to him the reason for my reserve, but I could see that it was no use. He spoke through gritted teeth, in a tone that was not intimate. Nevertheless we exchanged our opinions, although each of us maintained our own. I opined that the Slovaks, in helping to undermine Hungary, will lose a lot as citizens, and gain nothing as a nation" (Záborský, 1953, p. 267 – 268).

⁶ "In June 2007 the Hotel Slovan finally underwent the long-planned reconstruction to write a new chapter in its history under the new name Doubletree by Hilton Košice, as well as under the flag of the world-renowned trademark. The Hotel Slovan was built on the site of what was formerly the most opulent hotel in Slovakia, the Schalkház built in 1873. After the liberation of Košice (1945) it was renamed Slovan and was known under this name until recently. The original building was demolished in the 1960s due to its poor condition and the new Slovan was built on its site." Available at <http://www.stavebne-forum.sk/sk/article/13020/hotel-doubletree-by-hilton-Košice-prvy-u-nas-druhy-v-europe/> [accessed 30. 11. 2009]

On the basis of the analysis of several key texts there seem to be two basic approaches to the urban space of Košice, which intersect at some points:

1. We have already mentioned that the modern initiator of the “inside tradition” is S. Márai. At its core are narratives focused thematically on the inclusive world of Košice’s urban space, interpreted as intimately familiar, emotionally close, and relatively closed towards the outside world. Typically, there are emotional emphases on the world of childhood, “authenticity”, the long forgotten, the “authentic” order of things is revealed. Alternatively, these narratives are set in a more up-to-date time frame, in which case the city is interpreted as a self-sufficient world, “a world in miniature”, and is an instrument and simultaneously a space for getting to know the self. The motifs include family relationships, “initiation” walks, the transformation of the outside “city text” as a measure of the subjective time of the narrator. In terms of space, we could, with a certain licence, call the inside tradition north-south: “*The singularity of the space of Košice is the unusual, dominant position of the north and the south. This spatial orientation can be challenged only by a strong centre, but the sense of the east and the west disappears. In no other city have I encountered such a powerful significance attached by the inhabitants to the words ‘south’ and ‘north’*” (Rakús, 2003, p. 23 – 24). “*The opposition north-south, this symbolic unity of contrasting principles, reflecting the age-old antinomy of birth and death, is one of the reasons why I myself see the Košice space as literary*“ (ibid, p. 24).⁷ The journalistic epitheton constans “the metropolis of the east” is clearly more recent, coming into being in relation to Košice probably after the 1920s. It reflects the position of the city within Czechoslovakia/Slovakia and represents an approach to be further discussed below. For now, let us recall that in the present context the remote “inside” north-south orientation supported by the natural quality of the surrounding landscape⁸ is opposed by the newer east-west “geopolitical-national” movement. The north-south orientation and its emotional significance in the space of Košice is also naturally reproduced and confirmed in the route of the Košice marathon, this singular sports tradition of the city: until 1989 the route led from Košice to Seňa and back, which is an almost straight line from the south to the north. A literary canonization of the south-north marathon movement is the important short story collection about Košice *Maratón Juana Zabalu/The Marathon of Juan Zabala* by Dušan Šimko (1984, published in Slovakia in 1991). The author offers a detailed, nostalgic illumination of the Košice-Prešov space, its singularities and

⁷ The closeness of the fictional and essayistic urban world of Košice in the work of S. Rakús was noted already by V. Barborik: „The urban nature of *Temporálne poznámky* is based on the competence of the reader, who can see the city as a complex sign system. Košice – the author dedicated to the city a notable essay a few years ago – is an autonomous space, inhabited by human beings and culturally sufficient, an obvious part of the world of Dušan Sakmár (and Stanislav Rakús)” (Rakús, 2006, p. 158).

⁸ Béla Hamvas in his book of essays *The Philosophy of Wine* operates with two types of space, the land of wine and the land of spirit (alcohol distilled from fruit). One possible borderline between these lands, which for him signify not just two gastronomical, but also emotional-cultural models, could be drawn across Košice. The north part, Ťahanovce, represented a historical border with the Šariš region, whose mountainous and semi-mountainous landscape almost literally represented the „land of the spirit“, featuring the highest ratio of the number of distilleries to the number of inhabitants in all of Hungary. The central part of Košice opens towards the south, towards Abov and Zemplín with their Tokay vineyards, the best-known wine regions within Hungary.

dominant aspects, as in the short story *Lekár/The Doctor* from his prose collection *Gubbio. Kniha udavačov/Gubbio. The Book of Informers*.

The natural urban order of Košice is closely related to another important motif that repeatedly emerges in reading the Košice text. It is the phenomenon of the *flâneur* – the “aimless”, non-pragmatic wanderer around the city, seeking to evoke memories, as in S. Márai’s *Walks around Košice* or in D. Šimko’s *Košická čítanka/Košice Reader*,⁹ or to construct an identity of an inhabitant (S. Rakús as an essayist, but also Rakús’s Dušan Sakmár in *Temporálne Poznámky/Temporary Notes*. These literary walks in the city of coffe-shops and panoramic views must be seen also through the best-known Košice *flâneur* from its artistic circles, the exceptional painter Július Jakoby (nicknamed the *Hermit of Košice* in the title of the eponymous book on Jacoby by Albert Marenčin), whose statue by Juraj Bartusz, in a *flâneur* pose, is located on Alžbetina street (*Chodec/Walker*, 1982).¹⁰ After all, in the semiotically most overloaded space of Košice, the city centre, there are only two sculptures of artists, personalities with a decisive significance for the contemporary cultural identity of the city, the writer Márai and the painter Jakoby. The static sculpture of a sitting, older Márai, who in fact left Košice at age 18 and became a cosmopolitan citizen, contrasts with the dynamic, walking sculpture of Jakoby.¹¹

Here we should mention briefly S. Rakús’s essay *Mesto výhľadu /The City with a View*. One of the things Rakús mentions is his own “lowland personality”, which is also seen in his “*obsessive penchant for disproportionate or uncommon commonness, those things which normally are not recorded on memorial plaques*” (Rakús, 2003, p. 28 – 29). In this context he mentions that he is just as interested in the avant-garde painter Jasusch as in “*his father Anton, a master butcher from Košice*” (ibid, p. 29). With regard to Rakús’s artistic style, as manifested in his attention to detail in his short stories and novels – so far away from Jasusch’s exalted avant-garde paintings on large-scale canvases, as well as his confessed cosy relationship with Košice, which he never needs to leave, not even to go on a holiday, his more appropriate equivalent in the Košice artistic scene would be Jakoby rather than Jasusch.¹² Rakús’s tendency towards balance would thus be more convincing, supported by the closeness of his and Jakoby’s “artistic technique” in relation to space.¹³

⁹ See Okroy, 2005.

¹⁰ The most recent elaboration of this hermit tradition is Martin Vlado’s book of micro-stories *Mestský pustovník /City Hermit*, 2009.

¹¹ See the figures in the Appendix.

¹² Jakoby’s father was also a butcher; Jakoby’s first studio was in his father’s former butcher’s shop in the cellar of their family home in Ťahanovce.

¹³ Július Jakoby: „I can only say that nowhere else would I have created and achieved what I have created and achieved in Košice. I cannot imagine my artistic work without the Hungarian cultural environment, the democratic atmosphere of pre-war Czechoslovakia, and the Slovak artistic avant-garde and its inspiring impulses“ (Marenčin, 1988, p. 68).

“– So those who claim that you just sit at home are right. – That’s a bit of an exaggeration! See, I first visited America at age 3... – And then? – And then I continued to travel, only not that far. To Prešov, to Bratislava, to Tatry, to Prague... – Have you been abroad? – Why, I studied in Budapest! And then... forty years later, in 1968, I visited Austria... – And that’s all? – That’s all.“ (Marenčin, 1988, p. 82).

The re-activating effect of the translations of Márai's texts from the 1990s onwards cannot be asserted categorically. Yet it is quite certain that they brought a new quality into the discourse about Košice, developed by authors whose personal investment in it is clear (Š. Kasarda, T. Kočík, P. Juščák, S. Rakús, D. Šimko, and others). The evidence of the fragility of this rediscovered key to the city context is the uncritical reception of S. Márai in this period. His views are treated "positively", his controversial attitudes are passed over in silence, and his uncompromising anti-communism is presented as evidence of his democratic attitudes, which is however missing from many of his assertions.¹⁴

The conspicuous absence of Márai-esque links between the past and present can be noted for instance in texts from the 1960s, such as Ján Štrasser's epistolary essay *Medzimesto/Intercity* (1968), dedicated to Peter Repka, an editor of the literary journal *Mladá tvorba*, which features younger writers. Clearly, the young author lacks a deeper consciousness of the continuity of the inside city space of Košice and the ability to feel its qualities. He is sensitive to cultural and architectural discontinuities, disruptions of the city organism, but he lacks a connecting link that would enable him to express a concrete and focused critique or to articulate his own vision, his mental map of his city, instead of his unclear doubts about the direction of the city's development. His is the most journalistic text among those discussed here, although this is the result of a compromise. The author did not find a basis on which to build his reflections in order to avoid descriptive and obvious comments: "*Peter, I am not defending this city. Nor do I think that my city is my castle and that the city gallows is only for our children. I am disgusted by the local geniuses whose faces shout: I am the greatest poet in this coffee shop! I don't want to apologize for this city. I simply live here and would like to understand it*" (Štrasser, 1968, p. 46). "*It is an intercity, dear Peter. What else can I say?*" (ibid., p. 51).

2. The more recent tradition of the second city has geopolitical roots, i.e. it is imported into the city from the outside and its natural essence is logically the more or less conflicting relationship with the centre. The position of the "second cit"¹⁵ of Slovakia, which never moved, but suddenly found itself in the east of Czecho-Slovakia, as a substitute city, supplementing the centre in the national culture and in a critical relationship with the centre, is evidently weaker than, say, the position of Brno in relation to Prague. Rather than criticism and rejection we find indifference, as illustrated by a symptomatic sentence in Šimko's short story *Hymna/Anthem*, set in the period when the Czecho-Slovak government meets in a liberated Košice: "*Since liberation, or defeat, – Chorvát had not yet made up his mind on this – the city was full of soldiers*" (Šimko, 1971, p. 99). The reason for this indifference could be the weakness of the inside tradition already mentioned. Košice lacks the continuity of prose works such as Bogdan Trojak's *Brněnské metro* (Brno Underground, 2006) that would construct the difference of the second centre in the most obvious way: by emphasizing the existence of a local scene,

¹⁴ S. Márai in his *Walks around Košice* written in 1941, i.e. shortly after the First Vienna Arbitration (1938) which resulted in the annexation of Košice to Hungary, practically ignores the Slovak inhabitants of Košice and comments on the Czech presence in the city with the words: "They had no place here, that is a historical fact. Their fall from grace lacks gravity, because they were selfish, haughty and unfair" (Márai, 2000, p. 41).

recording its “bohemian” life, accentuating the different, independent system of aesthetic values, inventing a local mythology and, of course, ironizing the capital city. Trojak summarizes this traditional phenomenon in the epigraph to his above-mentioned collection of autobiographical short stories, an ironical quotation from a newspaper: “*We often do not realize that even the nationally respected and celebrated personalities have an important connection to Brno (MF Dnes, 1998)*” (Trojak, 2008, p. 7).¹⁵

The position of the second city, which fulfils relatively obvious functions, is weakened by the insufficiently visible and poorly communicated inside tradition, which was of concern to Košice authors already in the 1960s, if not earlier. The evidence for this can be found, for example, in the above-mentioned essay by J. Štrasser *Medzimesto/Intercity*, published in *Mladá tvorba*, or in the discussion about regionalism and several essays about the culture of Košice in the Košice literary journal *Krok*, which was edited in 1966 – 1967 by Ivan Kadlečík and Jozef Mríz and was the publishing space mainly for the authors in the circle of the literary critic Albín Bagin.

The phenomenon of cultural and linguistic otherness of Košice, as well as the various cultural-social stereotypes associated with the second city, are the theme of Agda Bavi Pain’s novel *Koniec sveta/The End of the World*. The narrative can be seen as poetically constructed on two dominant stylistic choices, the narrator’s convincing imitation of the original language of the city and the hyperbolic, slapstick parody of a crime story, appropriately set in the context of Košice’s underworld, deriving from the Slovak stereotype of the “gangster from the east”. Confounding reader expectations, which are formed as he encounters everything physical, low and vulgar, the narrator puts into the head of his protagonist – the Košice ex-policeman and professional murderer Lučkay – also some “high”, “urbanological” ideas about the difference between Bratislava and Košice in terms of their street layout and the psychological consequences of this: “*Lučkay feels anxious again. Fucking city, as if space and time curved in these winding streets, not like at home, where the streets are straight, almost parallel, linear, so to speak analogical*” (Agda Bavi Pain, 2006, p. 101).¹⁶ It is notable that the relationship of the “first” and “second” city is similarly thematized in other national literatures too in the form of a tension between two urban principles: for example the organic, circular Moscow and the rational, regularly ordered Petersburg.¹⁷

¹⁵ Probably the most distinctive Slovak work of this type after 1989 is *Bystrica... v tom/Bystrica...* knocked up, by Pavol Hruží (2000), which aims to be a “theoretical” study of humour, as well as an anthology of Bystrica jokes, anecdotes and humorous stories.

¹⁶ A Bratislava analogue to Pain’s Košice novel is D. Hevier’s novel *Kniha, ktorá sa stane/The Book That Will Happen*, where the city mythology about the “organic” structure of the Petržalka district is discussed thus: “Do you know why Petržalka is built in such a hallucinogenic manner?” asked Fictus. Without waiting for an answer he began to explain: “When, in the dull 1970s when we were both still in primary school, they decided to build Petržalka, some top ideologist from Prague or Kremlin pushed this idea, which was of course never written down, unless it is in secret army documents, that Petržalka must be first of all a strategic zone of the socialist block. A buffer zone, you see. Do you see why the streets are built so chaotically and zig-zag, that you still get lost even though you’ve lived here for twenty years?” He answered his own question: “Beause they were meant to be a labyrinth to confuse NATO tanks!” (Hevier, 2009, p. 11 – 12).

¹⁷ See e.g., Hodrová, 2006, p. 112 et seqq.

So far we have focused on the relationship of Košice to the (more widely or more narrowly understood) space surrounding it.¹⁸ We will now attempt to outline a provisional and incomplete typological index of internal city spaces. In thinking about the mutual relationships between individual elements of the city structure it seems useful to refer to Foucault's analysis of the outside space as described in his essay *On Other Spaces* (1967). Foucault is particularly interested in one type of outside space, which he calls heterotopia or heterotopic space. These are spaces that "have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to interrogate, neutralize or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault, 1967).

He defines two types of these spaces – utopia ("Utopias are sites without a real place", *ibid.*) and heterotopia. In Slovak literature, we can find enough instances of this type of representation of Košice, which Foucault would call the heterotopia of crisis. In relation to Košice, paradoxically during the inter-war Czechoslovak period, when its hyperbolic title "the eastern metropolis" became current, the city and the region acquired the image of a space of exclusion, a place of exile as a milder form of punishment, associated not only with Košice, but with the entire eastern region and Carpathian Ruthenia. Alexander Matuška was appointed to teach in Michalovce grammar school "as a punishment", Alfonz Bednár in Bardejov grammar school, and so forth. The narrator of D. Šimko's short story *Hymna/Anthem*, set in the period immediately after World War II, thus observes with unreserved satisfaction: "*The metropolis of the east, Košice, stopped being a provincial hinterland where for decades the state would send incapable bureaucrats, stupid policemen or corrupt civil servants, and became for a time the capital of Czechoslovakia. It was an unforeseen joke of the war strategy; since the visit of the emperor Ferdinand the city had not had a greater surprise*" (Šimko, 1991, p. 99).

The exoticisation and mythicisation of this space, popular at the time mainly in the form of literary reportage (Ladislav Mňačko, *Kde končia prašné cesty/Where the Dusty Roads End*; Ivan Klíma, *Mezi třemi hranicemi/Between Three Borders*; Ivan Olbracht, *Hory a staletí/Mountains and Centuries*, among others) and memoirs (Elo Šándor, *Byrokrati/ Bureaucrats*, among others), but also of fiction (Karel Čapek, *Hordubal*; Ivan Olbracht, *Golet v údolí/Golet in the Valley* and *Nikola Šuhaj loupežník/Nikola the Thief*) also supports the heterotopic position of the city and the region in the context of Slovak and Czech literature. The signs of heterotopia are to be found not only in the relation of the semiotic system of the city to the entirety of national culture, but also within this system itself, as evidenced in several of the text mentioned above. We can hypothesise about various forms of the heterotopic space that subvert the commonly visible urban-semiotic structure of Košice as follows:

In the context of the inside tradition, which, as already mentioned, respects two types of historicity, the socio-cultural and the personal-individualistic, we could call the first heterotopic structure "absent city". The Czech poet and essayist Jan Štolba originally

¹⁸ The entire spatial horizon of these reflections is the discussion of the central European space and its cultural, social and political-historic parameters, most recently captured and summarized in Jiří Trávníček's anthology *V kleštích dějin. Střední Evropa jako pojem a problém* (In the Grip of History. Central Europe as a Term and a Problem, 2009).

used this term in relation to contemporary Prague, in the sense of the splitting of identity of the city between the outside and the individualistic, inside text of the city. A massive influx of tourists causes the city centre to become empty, drained of “real” life, resulting in it ceasing to fulfil the function of a domicile and its mutilation by temporariness. Historical spaces are transformed into spiritless stage sets for money making, real buildings with inhabitants and a life into hotels without inhabitants and their continuous life stories. In our case, the “absent city” offers textual evidence of physical presence in the city, which coexists with an absence of historical awareness about it. It is the kind of narrative voice that interprets the contemporary city space as weakened because its history is repressed and the city undergoes irreversible transformations. The heterotopic space of Košice’s “absent city” is the theme of J. Štrasser’s *Medzimesto/Intercity*: the authorial subject oscillates between the role of an expert of S. Márai’s city in his *Walks around Košice* on the one hand, and his pleasant emotional disengagement on the other, a newcomer’s lack of interest in the city space. Similarly, Peter Kerekes is interested in the “absent city” of Košice in his film *66 sezón* (66 Seasons, 2003) about the “personal histories” associated with the space of the city’s historic swimming pool.

Another type of the heterotopic space, the “anti-city”, is found in D. Šimko’s *Košická čítanka/Košice Reader* in reference to the Roma ghetto Luník IX (of course, there are many references to Luník IX in Agda Bavi Pain also). It is a city space that simultaneously denies all attributes of a city by definition: it is an isolated space, disqualified socially and communication-wise.¹⁹ The term anti-city can also be applied to the representations of the topos of the cemetery, which in the literary representations of Košice is almost always the cemetery of St. Rozália in the northwest of the city (S. Márai, S. Rakús, D. Šimko and others).

A distinct type of heterotopia can be represented by a “rural city”: the constricting circle of high-rise apartment blocks of the Soviet type, which according to M. Marcelli replace the diversity of the European city with an assertive internationalism. Their spiritlessness is reflected in the novella *Maratón Juana Zabalu/The Marathon of Juan Zabala* by D. Šimko, or in the short story *Svet pre Janu/The World for Jana* by J. Patarák, which partly unintentionally but aptly describes the inadequate social functioning of the housing estates. At the end of this story the narrator walks through a Košice housing estate and dreams about the future of his small daughter while the concrete road blends with a field, which metonymically represents the rural mental world of the majority of the socialist housing estate dwellers at the time of rapid urbanization: “*The pram handle hit me in the belly. I raised my head. Concrete panels on the road! A pile of blocks of concrete! I left the pram where it stood and walked around the panels. The place was deserted. The road ended. There was a freshly ploughed field*” (Patarák, 2002, p. 86). Similarly, S. Rakús in his essay *Mesto výhľadu/The City with a View* mentions the deserted Košice streets at night that provide those out walking at night with a sense of security, but his

¹⁹ A summary of the rich terminology related to various types of ruined, „socially heterotopic“ spaces can be found in Aleš Burjank’s study *Sociálně vyloučené lokality města: názvosloví a charakteristiky/Socially Excluded Parts of the City: Terminology and Characteristics* in the edited volume *Město: Proměnlivá (ne)samozřejmost/The City: A Changing (Un)Truism*, 2009, p. 51 – 67.

observation simultaneously highlights the other side of this emptiness: uniform social regulation, blandness, the artificiality of the socialist city. In the words of B. Bogdanovič, “the problem of identity redefinition involves not only the space of Balkan horrors, the demolished and burnt cities and villages, but also many cities in the wider central European context. They have survived another disaster: the Soviet urbanist model, unbearably rigid and monotonous, which transformed parts of historical cities into scenes of depressingly empty and cold Swedenborgian hell” (Bogdanovič, 2002, p. 90).

The aim of this essay has been to contribute to the permanent redefinition of city identities by offering mainly an index of motifs and suggesting possibilities for their further analysis.

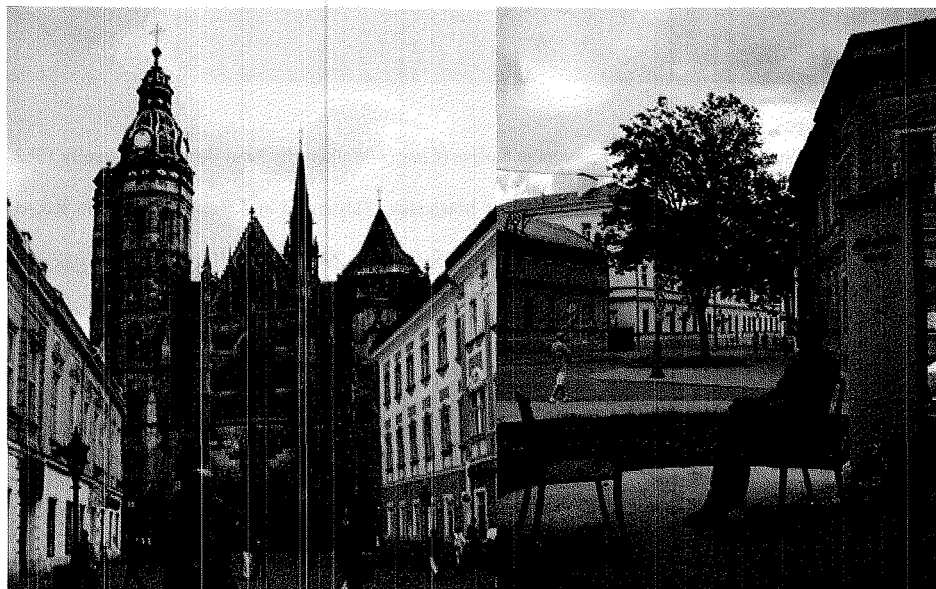
Translated by Dobrota Pucherová

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Appendix





All photos by R. Passia

1. The statue of Július Jakoby on Alžbetina street in Košice (*Chodec/Walker*), by Juraj Bartusz (originally 1982, in this location since 2003).
2. The statue of Sándor Márai at the intersection of Másiarska, Zbrojničná and Baštová streets in Košice (*Dialóg/Dialogue*), by Péter Gáspár (2004).
3. The memorial plaque commemorating the meeting of L. Štúr and J. Záborský, 28 Hlavná Street, Košice, by Juraj Bartusz (1972).
4. *Marathon Memorial*, The Peace Marathon Square in Košice, by Arpád Račko (1959).