

INTRODUCTION

How to write history following the postmodern criticism of historical thought? How, in the “post-historical age”, are the historiographic canon and master narratives, which determine the basic structure of other narratives, constructed? Historicism had a seminal influence on grand narratives before World War II. From the perspective of historicism, history was composed of particular units, for instance individuals or nations, subject to historical development. Master narratives mediated “integrative stories” for various partial phenomena. The existence of the generally accepted fundamental historical themes—nation, race, class, state, gender, and culture—was a prerequisite for the coherence of master narratives. The canonized concepts determining the interpretation of the world and suppressing all alternatives were discredited in the period of national socialism and real socialism. Critics of classical master narratives deny not only the hegemonic discourse but also the narrative technique in constructing the “story”.¹ The literary form of the narrative itself becomes the subject of scientific analysis. Nadine Jänicke uses the techniques of literary theory for construing a teleological global story of the world history in the cult book “The End of History and the Last Man” by Francis Fukuyama. The paper shows how Fukuyama heroizes the West and marginalizes the East using rhetorical-narrative techniques. The methodology of “suspicion” based on Hayden White enables the deciphering of literary mechanisms in the text used by Fukuyama to produce ideological and mythological meanings of his grand narrative. Tropes are not only an aesthetic but also a cognitive vehicle. Milan Řepa analyzes the use of metaphor, metonymy and personification by Czech historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in their great works. The author describes how tropes gained ground as strategies for construing certain historical periods and phenomena.

History was and still is an effective tool for defining identities of particular groups and individuals. Martin L. Davies provides an overview of the critical views of various authors on the concept of historical identity. These approaches result in demonizing “History” as such and overestimating its importance within society. They a priori assign responsibility for their own instrumentalization to history. We should not forget that it is not only historical science that plays an important role in

¹ For details on master narratives, see Motzkin, G. Das Ende der Meistererzählungen. In J. Eibach, G. Lottes (Hgs.) *Kompass der Geschichtswissenschaft*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 2002, 371-387.

constructing history but chiefly the activation of various traditions in both the collective and the individual memory.

Case studies by Adam Hudek and Margarita Aleksahhina discuss the constructions of national history of “non-dominant” ethnic groups in multinational states and how they cope with the discontinuity of historical processes. The analysis of the themes and paradigms in representative synthetic works of Slovak historiography shows the gradual shaping of an emancipatory story. At the beginning, there was the Slovak interpretation of the Hungarian patriotic narrative which Slovaks and Magyars shared²—within the context of *natio hungarica* and the Hungarian state tradition, culminating in an independent Slovak national story. The study of the boom of national historicism in legitimizing contemporary Estonian politics focuses on re-defining citizenship and on granting citizenship to the Russian-speaking inhabitants. Central points in the construction of the Estonian historical narrative are the principles of restitutions and debates about the occupation of the Baltic states by the Soviet Union in 1939/1940. The principle of the “return to the original state” before the “occupation” is allied with the idealization of the interwar period. The term “occupation” enables the cultivation of the myth of victim and the myth of revolt (both belonging to the standard equipment of many European nations). Contemporary historical discourse demarcates political and cultural borders with respect to ethnic Russians and polarizes the inhabitants of Estonia. Both studies provide examples of the homogenization of the images of the past in ethnocentric historiographies.

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² The term “Magyar” in the study of A. Hudek denotes exclusively an ethnic group. The term Hungarian is associated with the state during Habsburg monarchy—e.g. it refers to both Magyar and non-Magyar inhabitants of the Kingdom of Hungary.