

# László Krasznahorkai's *War and war* as an apocalyptic metahistorical novel

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### ABSTRACT

This paper looks at a novel by László Krasznahorkai in the context of the narrative turn in history, which also stimulated a reevaluation of the fictional historical narrative. *War and War* was one of a series of Hungarian historical novels, or mixed novel formations with a historical theme, published at the turn of the millennium, whose primary aim was not to recount a self-assured historical tale but rather to highlight, via the story, the models/schemas/shifts/blank spaces in our present-day comprehension of the past. This paper interprets the novel with reference to historic-philosophical conceptions (Löwith, Koselleck), tracks its references to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and argues that it transforms the teleological idea of the historical process into an apocalyptic model of history.

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### KEYWORDS

contemporary Hungarian literature, László Krasznahorkai, fictional historical narrative, historiographical metafiction, apocalyptic model of history

The narrative turn in history, which occurred in the last quarter of the 20th century and unsettled the frameworks of our historical thinking, caused attention to be focused on the linguistic and narrative aspects of historical episodes. Stress was laid, for example, on the fact that the structural givens (linguistic and textual) of historical discourse determine its ideological or imaginary character *a priori*, since they establish the frameworks of meaning for historical facts (Barthes 1989). Further analysis was done on the implications of time structures (Koselleck 1979) and of the rhetorical positioning of historiographical texts (e.g. Ricoeur 1994, Gossman

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1990). Narration began to be seen as the fundamental thought-operation of historical awareness, which additionally determines the “order” of the past (Ankersmit 1983, 1989); and research on the narrative characteristics of historical texts ran in parallel with this. Hayden White, a theorist of narrative historiography, understands narrative as the universal *metacode* for the transformation of human experience into a form convenient for existing structures of meaning (White 1980). Furthermore, he regards narrative as a form of historical representation where, via the *emplotment*, facts are coded as elements of plot structures (of defined types). According to White, this coding represents one of the means which are offered by culture to the individual or the collective for the interpretation of the past (White 1978).

A paradigmatic change in understanding what the historical is, and the possibilities of transmitting it, was brought about by inter-discursive research work. Here the entire range of problems was covered, taking account of the philosophical, literary-theoretical, historiographical and socio-psychological aspects.<sup>1</sup> Historiographical and literary texts also offered thoughts on the theoretical problems posed. For historical fiction fresh areas of interest appeared: the ideological employment of history and the socio-psychological functions of historical narrative; the question of (national) historical *grand narrative* and alternative historical stories; the standpoint of remembrance and individual/collective historical memory. The new ways of looking at history had the unanticipated effect of revitalizing the historical novel.

In Hungarian literature this genre has been experiencing a renaissance since the turn of the millennium. One must note, however, that there is rarely any question of a “pure” generic form: rather, there are mixed formations of the novel with a historical theme, and their primary aim is not to recount some self-assured historical tale but rather to highlight, via the story, models/schemas/shifts/blank spaces in today’s perception of the past. The accent is thus shifted to metahistorical questions, as Linda Hutcheon, drawing on world-ranking literary works, has elaborated theoretically (*historiographic metafiction* Hutcheon 1995) from a postmodern standpoint. A series of interesting texts has appeared in Hungarian literature, problematizing the relationship of fiction and history from the most varied viewpoints. We may leave aside for the moment László Krasznahorkai’s novel *War and War*, which this paper will address in detail. Among the others, the following approaches appear to be most characteristic: deconstruction of historical memory and historical narration (e.g. Péter Esterházy: *Harmonia caelestis – Celestial Harmonies*); putting in question causal relationships and historical “fidelity”, via the magic realist mode of narration (e.g. László Márton: *Testvériség – Fraternity*, Zsolt Láng: *Bestiárium Transylvaniae*, the historical novels of László Darvasi); bringing to bear aspects of microhistory or the viewpoints of marginalized – ethnic, social or gender – groups (e.g. Zsuzsa Rakovszky: *A kígyó árnyéka – The Shadow of the Snake*, Éva Bánki: *Esőváros – Rain City*, the historical novels of Judit Kováts, Gergely Péterfy: *Kitömött barbár – The Stuffed Barbarian*); thematization of the relationship between corporality and history (e.g. Péter Nádas: *Párhuzamos történetek – Parallel stories*); confrontation of visual and linguistic narratives about the past (e.g. Pál Závada: *Természetes fény – Natural Light*, László Márton: *Árnyas főutca – Shady Main Street*); and the relationship of personal remembrance and history.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>This phenomenon, as manifested in Hungarian literature, has been studied in several books: cf. e.g. Hites 2004, Bokányi 2007, Szegedy-Maszák 2016, J. Görözdí 2019.



## WAR AND WAR AS AN ARTISTIC PROJECT AND A NOVEL STORY

For László Krasznahorkai's writing project *War and War* (*Háború és háború*, 1999), to dissolve the received modes of linguistic-literary comprehension of history, or the ideological/socio-psychological operations used in historical remembrance, is not the principal aim. Rather, Krasznahorkai's approach depends on presenting some sort of model of history's functioning and posing final questions about our historical being, if any.

*War and War* is the fruit of thoroughgoing preparation and many years' travelling by the author around the locations of the action (peripheral regions of Europe). However, as a work of art it goes beyond the actual novel text. On the one hand, prior to the novel's publication, in various Hungarian journals the author published so-called "messages" (Krasznahorkai's expression), texts of lesser format under the unifying title *One Sentence – A Slice from a Book* (*Egy mondat – Metszet egy könyvből*, 1996–1997). Via poetic philosophical thoughts about the state of the world, history and human existence, these sentences reported on the thinking-positions of Korin, the main character in the book. A year before the novel appeared, Krasznahorkai published the story *Isaiah Has Come – Overture to a Novel* (*Megjött Ézsaiás – Előjáték egy regényhez*, 1998), which thematized the episode of how the disillusioned Korin turned into the busy herald of *War and War*. In later editions of the novel the story became part of the book (though not of the novel text); in most cases it has also been included in foreign language editions. On the other hand, the novel's plot outgrew the fictional world, via performance: the last will of the novel's character was complied with in reality, when a memorial plaque was fixed on the wall of a museum in Schaffhausen (Krasznahorkai 2016, 253). The project as a whole is accessible on CD-ROM and also on the internet (Krasznahorkai 1999). This grandiose work, which covers enormous distances of time and space, has been classed with the major works of Fuentes, Pynchon and Rushdie, while stressing also the genre characteristic of contemporary fictional achievements: "the monumentality of the 'new' major novels consists precisely in a non-integral comprehension of the world, a specific epic formation that emerges in the absence of connections, hierarchies and binary oppositions" (Bényei 1999, 1305).

Its philosophical dimension and its grasp of history lend this novel a unique grace. The basic plot is simple. We are told of a somewhat eccentric archivist from rural Hungary, György Korin, who is torn from his everyday monotony by a loss of fixed coordinates: that is, all of a sudden he becomes aware that the world as a whole with a unified, "forever-and-ever structure" does not exist and that humanity suffers from a total deficiency of *nobility*. He is freed from his existential hopelessness by reception of a prophetic message, a task of "sharing" a found manuscript. Korin travels to New York, regarded as the center of the world, and puts the document on the web, because in the virtual space of the internet he finds a guarantee of the eternal life of the manuscript and unceasing, geographically unrestricted access to it: "The Internet, which must be a purely intellectual matrix and therefore immortal, being maintained solely by computers in a virtual realm. . ." (Krasznahorkai 2016, 84).<sup>3</sup> This manuscript is at the centre of the novel, but in fact the novel does not include it. We make acquaintance with it indirectly, through Korin's work reports.

<sup>3</sup>Quotations from the novel are from: Krasznahorkai, László: *War and War*. Translated by Georg Szirtes. London: Tuscar Rock Press, 2016.



The text is based on multiple mirroring, which is manifested, among other things, in the storytelling: the narrative relates to a version of the manuscript such as Korin perceives it, while also containing thoughts about its linguistic beauty, composition and copies. But it is never quoted. Korin's narrative of the manuscript is mirrored, however, in the hearers to whom he declaims his monologues, differently in each according to his or her nature, but always they are in some way touched. (Sometimes they are moved emotionally, as witness the air hostess, the Hungarian artist in New York, or the staff team of the Schaffhausen museum; elsewhere his listeners reject him and mock him as a lunatic, as in the instances of the Pest children and the interpreter). Though the narrator is an omniscient reporter, an equally important role in the narrative is played by the mutually mirroring stories of the characters. In turn, the working out of the story gives a mirror-image of the novel's basic philosophy:

“. . . having been granted a glimpse of the terrible complexity ahead, (Korin) saw that while the world appeared not to exist, the totality of that-which-had-been-thought-about-it did in fact exist, and furthermore, that it was only this, in its countless thousands of varieties, that did exist as such, that what existed was his identity as the sum of the countless thousand imaginings of the human spirit that were engaged in writing the world, in writing his identity, he said, in terms of pure word, the doing word, the Verb that brooded over the waters. . .” (12)

This philosophy does not believe in a central principle that grasps the ordering of the world (in other parts of the text, indeed, the absence of any such principle is bewailed): “. . . there was no common denominator, no interdependence between them, the only order and relationship existing within the discrete worlds of above and below, and indeed of anywhere. . .” (7). At the same time, the conviction that language precedes reality is expressed via metaphysical connections: an allusion to the Old Testament Book of Genesis, which is combined with the New Testament affirmation of the incarnation of the Logos.<sup>4</sup> The Judaeo-Christian tradition, one of the most important sources of European culture, is present in the novel's background as the point of departure. It affects the idea of the world in the text, the image of history, the formation of characters, structure, genre, and so on. Whatever László Krasznahorkai's text may say, then, is pronounced with this tradition in view. In his earlier works also this attitude is familiar, inhering as it does in a distinctive metaphysics, as described by Gergely Angyalosi in an article highlighting this theme: “a privileged relationship with the absolute, with final reality, »with being as an elemental and non-derivable act«, which is depicted in the form of an eternal and unrealisable pursuit” (Angyalosi 1999, 39).

The mirroring procedure is also used in the composition of the novel. The manuscript contains six partial stories which are played out in different historical periods, but without following a chronological order. Four men with metaphysical attributes appear there, referred to as “angelic men” (202), who admire the fruits of human art/work/reason/creativity, originating in a striving after nobility. In a Crete that recalls the lost Atlantis they observe, half a millennium before our era, the “radiant beauty” of the unity of man and Nature: “. . . a kind of marvelous correspondence by the light of which man could understand everything. . .” (106); in Cologne in the 19th century, watching the building of the cathedral, they have an insight into holiness: “. . .

<sup>4</sup>“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” [ Genesis 1,2; King James version]; “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” [John 1,1. King James version].



this was the truly startling, truly extraordinary thing, they said, this all-consuming idea that weak and feeble man was capable of creating a universe that far exceeded him. . .” (135); in 15th century Venice they appreciate the defensive dispositions which repulse war, “never before. . . had beauty and intelligence been so aptly conjoined as in Venice. . .” (154); in Britain, in the works on Hadrian’s Wall in the 2nd century, they praise the admission that civilization has its limits:

“. . .the loveliest aspect of it being the ability to construct fastidious answers to insoluble problems, to propose the monumental in the face of the miscellaneous, to offer security in the face of defencelessness, [. . .] in other words to produce things of high order as opposed to those of a lower order, though you might put it as effectively [. . .] to credit him with the creation of peace instead of war – instead of war the peace, in Korin’s words – for peace was the greatest, the highest, the supreme achievement of man. . .” (175)

In late 15th century Gibraltar, when Columbus is launching his expedition, they admire the courage to test the limits of the affirmable world against the unknown; and finally, the chapter on the fall of Rome in the 5th century melts into Korin’s own story. Mirroring here becomes evident as the compositional procedure. The manuscript stories illuminate one another by repeating the identical plot structure, independently of historical place, time, experience: the “angelic men” make their appearance at a peaceful juncture in European history, as observers and admirers of authentic harmony. But shortly after their arrival the evil genius Mastemann appears; ruin and war follow, and the “angelic men” flee to another place in history which promises peace. And hence – even though they had intended to be “here for eternity” (96) – their journeying through human history becomes an unbroken and hopeless flight, since indeed human history is nothing but a series of wars: as against Tolstoy’s conception evoked in the novel’s title, for Krasznahorkai history is exclusively war and war.

The essential skeleton of the plot from the manuscript’s partial stories is further mirrored in the story of Korin, because *noble* values and people defenceless in their love of peace are defeated by evil, “the streetfighter” driven by the desire to crush and to rule. Korin’s world, however, is the well-known world of our everyday life. In this terrain there is no spectacular stage of history, rather there are the pettinesses of common practice. Evil itself does not take the form of a diabolical monster; it is simply our rotten value system (for example, in the character of the arrogant male interpreter or the criminal children of Pest, but also in the perverse thinking of the interpreter’s lover, who admires false values). The pre-text of the novel, the story *Isaiah Has Come*, summarises Korin’s philosophy, which he drunkenly expounds to an Angel, a “notary of heaven and earth” (258–9), late at night: “They have ruined the world. [. . .] seizing and, in seizing, ruining, seizing and thereby ruining, sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes brazenly: now subtly, now crudely, that’s the way they carried on, the only way they could carry on over centuries. . .” (260) – says Korin, and these thoughts do not merely sustain his awareness of his mission, they also connect with the historical philosophy of the novel. Attila Bombitz, writing about this book, addresses the motif of war in several of Krasznahorkai’s novels. War never appears as an external threat, according to Bombitz, but rather as the outcome of a warlike spirit present in man: “The novel does not speak of a ‘twilight of the West’; it looks upon immemorial human existence as a deplorable process of development towards the cancer of all mankind” (Bombitz 2000, 86).



Krasznahorkai's text outlines the course of history as a dynamic of fundamental categories, a struggle between *good* (construction, peace, harmony) and *evil* (dissolution, war, chaos). On the positive side, the meaning of history is formulated by the "angelic men", who see it in the culture-forming, noble force of the work of mankind, in "their infinite capacity, their temperament and love of life, their skill and courage. . ." (114). The pro-war arguments of the negative side are summarised in Mastemann's letter: ". . .for here the driver started a reiteration in praise of war, about the glory of war, saying that men were ennobled by great deeds [. . .] that might be attempted, planned and carried out only under circumstances of great personal danger, [. . .], only under the conditions of war" (159) – and these arguments culminate in the conclusion (familiar also from politico-historiographical writings) that "victory is truth". Behind this dual historico-philosophical dilemma, however, stands that same ultimate question, which asks about the meaning of history and the rightness of the trend of development.

## THE ULTIMATE MEANING OF HISTORY AND APOCALYPTIC ASSOCIATIONS

The philosopher Karl Löwith, in his fundamental work on the philosophy of history (1949), explored the thought-frameworks for the interpretation of history and identified variations on two principles: the cyclical model of history from antiquity, and the goal-driven, causal model of history of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Löwith says that all interpretations of history which create a relationship between historical events and consequences with the aim of finding some ultimate meaning, originate from the same source. They are derived from the history of salvation, i.e. the theological interpretation of history. This remains the true source even when later thinkers (Voltaire, the French Enlightenment authors, and the German idealists) replace the principle of Divine Providence with a principle of "human foresight" (Löwith 1949, 94), or alternatively with a principle of rational progress (whose manifestations include the 18th and 19th century idea of the universal state, Kant's prognostication of perpetual peace, and the theory of Marx and Engels which predicts a universal classless society). Löwith also emphasises the fact that in this schema the significance of historical events overshoots itself: it becomes visible in the context of some kind of *telos*, which always represents some future eschatological (in the broad sense of the world) fulfilment. Another analyst of the history of philosophy and historiography, Reinhart Koselleck, goes so far as to say that the treatment of the past always naturally appertains to some *horizon of expectation* (*Erwartungshorizont*), which adapts the historical narrative according to a certain anticipation of the future (Koselleck 2004). Löwith's thinking again highlights the fact that our idea of history has its source in Judaeo-Christian historical understanding, where the past is seen as the preparation of a future with an ultimate meaning ("the interpretation of the past becomes a prophecy in reverse", Löwith 1949, 6). It is beyond doubt that László Krasznahorkai, as he comprehends history in his novel, employs the frameworks (and even some concepts and motifs) of this eschatological goal-determined causality, even if his text does not contain the actual *telos* of the Judaeo-Christian tradition; to be precise, in numerous parts of the novel it is made unambiguously clear that there is no such assumption of a divine principle guiding things ("their talk kept straying to the deep metaphysical aspect of this unsurpassable masterpiece of the human imagination, to heaven and earth and the underworld. . .", 139). The conceptual frameworks which comprise the central values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition are presented only in human contexts ("love and



goodness, which [...] may be regarded as the two most significant European inventions”, 135–136), presumably under the auspices of humanist values. In a similar manner the text evokes the Last Judgment: in structure and motifs the original is drawn upon, but its validity is transformed.

Evident also are the apocalyptic associations of the text. Apocalyptic literature is a distinct genre, whose characteristic elements were taking shape from the time of its emergence in the 4th-3rd century BCE. We may find them in Krasznahorkai's novel also. Attila Mizser has studied the survival of the apocalyptic tradition in Hungarian literature of the second half of the 20th century, in this context analysing Krasznahorkai's short story collection *Relations of Grace* (*Kegyelmi viszonyok*, 1986). Mizser employs a broad understanding of apocalypse: as he conceives it,

“in contemporary literature the apocalyptic tradition may be detected on the one hand as the presence of a network of motifs. Alternatively, it appears as a peculiarity [...] of textual structure, which may be derived from the fragmentary nature of postmodern prose, its ambivalent relation to grand narratives, and a frequently contrapuntal functioning of rhetoric and grammar and of the metaphorical and phenomenological levels” (Mizser 2013, 26–27).

While this postmodern, motivic/linguistic/structural delimitation of the apocalypse as an ultimate state corresponds well to *War and War*, the novel also utilises the narrower generic tradition. One must, however, distinguish two (mutually permeating) layers of the text: firstly, the manuscript that shows affinity with apocalyptic literature (we are denied any direct access to this, learning of it only by report from Korin)<sup>5</sup>; secondly, the narrative about Korin, who, among other things, provides information about the manuscript's influence and also his interpretation of it as an archivist. Korin's relation to the manuscript determines the position and credibility of the text, giving a source of significance to its revelation (*apokalyptein*) of a prophetic message about the (sad) consummation of history.

It would seem useful to examine how the novel's text reflects on the generic codes of apocalyptic literature. (In this I rely on Pavel Filipi's summary.) The subject of apocalyptic writings is the entire history of the world and its ultimate outcome, which it attains in two phases (*aión*), an historical and a post-historical phase. These texts situate their addressees in history's final act and initiate them in the pre-ordained ultimate events, which take place beyond the bounds of history. Krasznahorkai's *War and War* is likewise about the final epoch, when things have gone definitively wrong (“... this is what God's absence leads to, to the production of a miraculous, brilliant and utterly captivating kind of human being who is incapable and always will be incapable of just one thing, that is, of controlling that which he has created. . .”, 220), but the story of history is not portrayed as linear (what does have a linear quality is the unstoppable expansion of evil, but this follows the sequentiality of reading, not the time sequence of events). After catastrophe comes another and still another catastrophe, which (contrary to the promise of salvation in biblical apocalyptic texts) no divine intervention or Last

<sup>5</sup>On the writing problem that lies behind this solution, László Krasznahorkai has said in an interview: “I had long held the opinion that the story of this flight could be written; I wrote over 200 pages about it, but I didn't like it any more, [...] so I physically destroyed it, because it was leading off in another direction. It betrayed an ambition which was not mine at all; deep down it contained some kind of certainty that one could know something certain about these European historical times which no one had known hitherto” (Keresztury 2000, 85).



Judgment will halt. The recurrent plot dynamic of the manuscript proliferates even into the story of Korin and Korin's own time period. The latter is also shown to be the final epoch, as the protagonist in *Isaiah Has Come* tells the Angel: "when it comes down to it you have to know that, once again, it's over. . . . That here [ . . . ] . . . once again, it's over." (257) Furthermore, the novel adheres to the specification of time structure in apocalyptic writings, according to which episodes are arranged not consequentially or consecutively but spirally; in particular curves of the spiral there is a recurrence of scenes already engaged with, appearing always in a different light (Filipi 2006, 139–141). This feature, as I mentioned above regarding the mutual mirroring of stories in the novel, is characteristic both of the manuscript and of Korin's story. What Krasznahorkai's text does not employ, from the *instrumentarium* of apocalyptic writings, is their over-abundance of imagery. For them the profusion of symbols and allegories serves to veil the significance, because interpretation belongs to the competence of the person entrusted with prophecy, and the meaning may be uncovered only in the last times. But if the apocalyptic texts are obscured by this exaggerated use of imagery, likewise in the novel there are difficulties with the interpretation of the manuscript. The meaning of the text on the "angelic men" remains, according to Korin after several readings, undiscoverable. And yet he forms the conviction that "the mystery obscured by the unknowable and inexplicable was more important than anything else could possibly be" (104).

In the Christian eschatological understanding of history, and in apocalyptic literature generally, the central text is the *Revelation to John*. Reference is made to it in Krasznahorkai's novel, which comprehends things with a similarly polarised dualism (Zs. Görözdi 2019, 97). For example, the mirrored recurrence of stories about the collapse of the world recalls the recurring structure of the Last Judgment in the *Revelation to John*, as it smites the earth; again, the New York - Babylon parallel evokes the comparison of the "great whore", symbolising the corrupt cities of Rome and Babylon; the afflictions at the end of particular stories in the manuscript (darkening, smoke) advert to the calamities in *Revelation*; the reference to paradise in the chapter on Crete summons up the motif of the promised new creation and paradisiacal bliss, and its fulfilment; in the Venetian chapter the genius of Genoa, namely the global power of money trading, suggests the merchant in *Revelation* riding a dark horse, who causes ruin by his manipulation of prices; and Korin's solidarity with the unfortunate and the powerless echoes the passages on how those who are coming from suffering will be satisfied and exalted.

## TRANSFORMATION OF ELEMENTS OF JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION

In a study of the inter-, intra- and trans-textual associations in *War and War*, András Kányádi demonstrated that other biblical passages/motifs besides *Revelations* had been used in many parts of the novel. They were transformed satirically, however, in Krasznahorkai's text, so as to represent the vulgarity of human affairs. Such a biblical travesty may be seen in the pair of old beggars in *Isaiah Has Come* (a subversion of the original human couple), or in the prophetic mission entrusted to the drunken Korin by the buffet angel toying with a glowing cigarette – in Isaiah 6, 4–7 a seraph cleanses guilt from the mouth of the future prophet with a burning coal (Kányádi 2017, 166–167). Kányádi makes the important observation that Krasznahorkai's hyper-textual allusions are subjected to procedures which modify their meaning; furthermore, that in reading they may be combined with a variety of signifying codes (175). The title of the pre-





text story indicates a parallel with the prophet Isaiah, and when we seek further connections between the prophetic *Book of Isaiah* and the novel, we may notice that *Isaiah*, too, contains apocalyptic writing (chapters 24–27); that certain critical interpreters question the authorship of Isaiah's prophecies of future bliss and regard this prophet as a herald of some kind of total downfall; that one of the principal themes of the Deutero-Isaiah book is the leading of the Hebrews away from their Babylonian captivity (40–42; at the end of the novel Korin takes on the task of leading the “angelic men” out of the “Babylonian” world); and that this Old Testament book is also concerned with the question of proxy suffering (53,12; in the story Korin makes an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, the manner of which evokes the sacrifice of Christ) (Tóth 1993, 440–443).

Keeping to the central question of my essay, however, the primary connection is this: the prophetic *Book of Isaiah* is one of the early manifestations of western historical consciousness based on religious foundations. According to Karl Löwith, a first characteristic peculiarity of this consciousness is the idea of historical time, in which the ultimate goal (*telos*), as an expression of the future, forms the course of history, and offers a schema for interpreting events as developments of the order and meaning which is subordinated to this *telos*. A second distinctive feature is universalism, i.e. the conviction that with the Christian god “the historical world becomes, in principle, perfect. . . All history moves up to this point, and then on from this point” (Löwith 1996, 56–57). Reinhart Koselleck addresses the question of how this historical thought pattern had made its way from transcendent content to politico-historical utilisation. Koselleck emphasises the fact that “the end of the world is only an integrating factor as long as its politico-historical meaning remains indeterminate” (Koselleck 2004, 13). He links the suppression of apocalyptic and astrological interpretations of the future to the birth of the absolute state. This repression aims at achieving “a monopoly of the control of the future” (16), using the means of “rational prognosis and the philosophy of historical process” (18). Reinhart Koselleck was interested above all in the time structure of modern historical ideas, and therefore his analysis is concentrated on the component elements of the teleological idea of history. He discovers that the rational outlook on the future (though having got rid of the divine/transcendent with its remote vistas, instead of which the future comes with open possibilities) maintains a principle of the alternative of good and evil for thinking about the course of human history (30–31). Furthermore, maintaining the promise of “the attainment of an ultimate paradise”, it implants in historical reality a commitment to fictitious ideas (for example, in Koselleck's view, the vision of a classless society), via which the historical process is concealed from its participants (23). In that regard, we may observe in agreement with Löwith, the *horizon of expectation* in this idea of history is not separated from the horizon of the history of salvation.

László Krasznahorkai's conception of history in *War and War*, in my opinion, explores/elaborates/questions a variety of aspects (including those outlined above) of Judaeo-Christian historical consciousness, using literary means. Unquestionably, what is in the background is Christian eschatological philosophy, although without the promise of salvation or indeed of any divine order, including God himself. What remains is an apocalyptic model of history, i.e. a development tending to catastrophe and the ruins of war. But if this is a depiction of a judgment, it is not understood as final: in the novel it is constantly, unstoppably repeated, which is to say, the evil of the human world generates its own punishment (a further allusion to the *Apocalypse of John*, 16, 5–6). From Judaeo-Christian eschatology there still remains, as the sole



representative of a heavenly world, the angel, meaning a messenger of God.<sup>6</sup> Korin's story acquires legitimacy and meaning from the angel: in the pre-text story he is conferred by him with a "prophetic" mission, while in the novel it is Korin's work as an archivist that directs his attention (the angel appears only in two places in the novel, but his occasionally revealed presence stresses the fact that he functions as a pivotal point of the entire narrative). But we never discover who this angel is and why he is a silent observer of Korin and his story. In his interesting essay András Kányádi teases out various possible positions and functions of the angel, based on the text and the pre-text story; he points to the interpretive consequences this may imply for the narrative (Kányádi 2017).

At the close of my analysis of László Krasznahorkai's apocalyptic metahistorical novel, I will nonetheless mention another angel from a philosophical tradition bound up with angels, because it expresses a very similar attitude to the meaning of history and the historical state of the world. I have in mind the angel of history by Walter Benjamin, which was inspired by Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*. The figure appears in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, which Benjamin wrote during fascism and where he engages in polemic with historical materialism:

A painting by Klee named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he was about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise [. . .] The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin 2007, 257)

*Translated by John Minahane*

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<sup>6</sup>The author addresses angelological questions in his essay *On the Angel's Counsel (Az angyali rendről)* (Krasznahorkai 2001).



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