

HEROES AND ENEMIES: WORLDVIEW AS THE MAIN DETERMINING FACTOR IN THE EMERGENCE OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN IDENTITIES AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR*

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I.

Usually the question of the beginning poses the most hitches for the inquiry of the past. The flagship example is an age-old question about the origin of the world or the efficient cause of the world *creation*, which has drawn the attention of thinkers from antiquity onwards.

Reference to the beginning and driving force of the world allowed one to establish a sense of order in antiquity, which the Greeks called *κόσμος* (*kósmos*), maintained by subsequent hypotheses, and characterized often by a *mélange* of truth and invention. That is why the ancient Greeks were able to extract the forms of discourse on the past (*ιστορία; istoría*), clearly demarcating *ἀλήθεια* (*alátheia*) from *δόξα* (*dóxa*). The combination of truth and fiction Greeks called *μῦθος* (*mythos*) that fulfilled educational functions by future generations and thus reinforced collective memory.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Roland Barthes devoted attention in his *Mythologies* to the distinction between *δόξα* and *μῦθος*, whereby the former meets system function, while the latter sign was understood to be a tool of ideology.¹ The “myth,” as a form of discourse about the past, draws its roots therefore in antiquity, not only Greek but also Hindu or Chinese. Mythology, as the

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1 Cf. R. Barthes (1957), *Mythologies*, Paris: Seuil.

science of myths, was a relatively late product, as it was coined in the seventeenth century, and the notion of ideology, as the logic of ideas, in the eighteenth century. The Early Modern Times with the “Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns” will bring therefore not only the hullabaloo of new ideas with old, not just the fascination for the Enlightenment, the interest for the beginnings of *history*, scientifically studied, but also the attention for phenomena less rationally explicable, deeply immersed in *myths* and stories out of this world. Although the fascination with the notions of *utopia*, *myth* and *ideology* will appear in the nineteenth century, it is only the twentieth century that the consequences of these interests would float on the border between the *appearance* and the *reality*, what—according to Whitehead—seduced the West since the days of Plato.² The blurring line between Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (*Poetry and Truth*)³ in the discourse of the public sphere became a reality in the thirties, thanks to *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* by Alfred Rosenberg.⁴ But not every myth, created in the twentieth century led to so gigantic disaster. Since the beginning of the twentieth century myths had become a part of the political discourses that merged thinking on the ideas of the *nation* or *country*, with those regarding the world, *fatherland* or *homeland*. Nevertheless, in the middle of the century, in 1946 was published Ernst Cassirer’s posthumous book *The Myth of the State*⁵ and, three years later, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*⁶ George Orwell diagnosed the uses of the past in politics that the Greeks appointed *πολιτικός* (*politikós*), and essentially signified the theory and practice of influencing other people.⁷ Since the 1970s the topic of political myths has gained in importance within Anglo-Saxon political theory.⁸ At the start of the second millennium the so-called “Clash of Civilizations” marked the return of myths not only on the national level, but also on the level of entire civilizations.

2 Cf. A. N. Whitehead (1933), *Adventures of Ideas*, New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 209 ff.

3 Cf. J. W. von Goethe (1811), *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Tübingen: Cotta.

4 Cf. A. Rosenberg (1930), *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit*, München: Hoheneichen-Verl.

5 Cf. E. Cassirer (1946), *The Myth of the State*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

6 Cf. G. Orwell (1949), *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, London: Secker & Warburg.

7 Cf. G. Orwell (1949), *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 24: “The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia as short a time as four years ago. But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed — if all records told the same tale — then the lie passed into history and became truth. ‘Who controls the past,’ ran the Party slogan, ‘controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.’ And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. ‘Reality control’, they called it: in Newspeak, ‘doublethink.’”

8 Cf. H. Tudor (1972), *The Political Myth*, London: Pall Mall; Ch. Flood (1996), *Political Myth*, New York: Garland Pub; Ch. Bottici (2007), *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; R. Boer (2009), *Political Myth: on the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes*, Durham: Duke University Press.

II.

It would not be an oversimplification to state that the eighteenth century gave birth to the essential elements of modern politics: importantly, new visions of law and statehood, as well as attempts at their violent implementation. New and old socio-political accounts—competing with each other—generated new patterns and gave birth to new notions such as the “nation-state” and “citizenship.” These developments occurred in a wider current of growing interest in the past, understood not only in terms of continuity (e.g. of empires, kingdoms, principalities or republics), but also as a newly construed, continuous entity, namely, the notion of *fatherland* or *homeland*, with its proper nation and language. Therefore, in the nineteenth century, the ideas of *fatherland* and *nation* increasingly influenced discourse in the public sphere, as affected not only by those in power, but also by the “body politic”, the broader, everyday concerns of citizens. These developments were not only built upon the foundation of preexisting territories, which could be defended (like Russia during the Napoleonic wars), for which nations could vie (like Poles at all possible fronts), or that could be won (as overseas colonies or Eastern European lands), but also upon new strategies of national development.

The classic example of such development is Germany, whose appearance on the map as a single entity was marked by the development of a national consciousness on the basis of idealist philosophy and the development of science within a reworked education system (*Bildung*). The fruits of these efforts were especially pertinent at the beginning of the twentieth century when we see the development of the notion of *ideology*, as the logic of ideas, and *Weltanschauung* (*worldview*), as the view of the world. The nineteenth century was thus not only a period of great thinkers, systems, utopias and ideologies, but also of the rapid growth of the concept of *Weltanschauung*, according to which the world was ordered and its particular components evaluated according to the ethical, moral, aesthetic and economic spheres. Thus, in the beginning of the twentieth century, Europe was a scene not only of military and technological hostilities, but also of philosophical and ideological confrontations. World War I brought with it a new meaning of “heroic,” stimulated by the power of ideas, words, and technology, among them, military and pharmacological inventions (e.g. diacetylmorphine marked since 1895 by the German drug company Bayer under the trademark name “Heroin”). Clarity was won, as influenced by the concept of *Weltanschauung*, thanks to the dichotomous ordering of the world into *truth* and *falsehood*, *black* and *white*, *good* and *evil*, *heroes* and *enemies*.

In the ambiance of ideological and military confrontations, “heroism” advanced gradually—above all in the first decades of the twentieth century and especially since 1905—to a secular form of “holiness,” the quintessence of virtue, an ideal worthy of the “ultimate sacrifice.” Equally simplified, the “enemy” became that,

which was to be destroyed, and doing so, the task of the “hero.” The end of the First World War brought far-reaching changes in the geopolitics of Europe: on the map appeared a new country, Czechoslovakia, as well as a re-emerged Poland. Although First World War ended with an armistice, the ideological confrontations were compounded in all areas of the public sphere. This was possible thanks to the various reformulations of the notion of *Weltanschauung* in all parts of Europe, which intertwined with the creation of new coalitions of ideas and ideological interests. The notions of “hero” and “enemy” would also gain new, and freshly amplified, significance.

But what does this strange word mean—*Weltanschauung*—this word that we can find in both French and English dictionaries?⁹ It is the representation of the world, to which whole systems of values is subordinated.¹⁰ This idea of the world could be a bone of contention between particular states, groups of people or single persons. In the beginning of the twentieth century Heinrich Gomperz in Austria¹¹ and Wilhelm Dilthey in Germany proposed distinct theories of this concept.¹² After the First World War the notion appear in Georg Simmel’s posthumously published work on *Lebensanschauung* and in Karl Jaspers’ *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*.¹³ In the interbellum period, the concept itself would be—on one hand—a key word of German philosophy within all possible streams of thought and—on the other hand—a frequently used passe-partout of the Third Reich, as Victor Klemperer observed in his diary *Lingua Tertii Imperii*.¹⁴ It is difficult to anticipate how this concept will develop further. This is because it has nourished different approaches: from patriotic or nationalistic (in the British sense of the term) to the totalitarian (national socialist of the Third Reich or communist of the Soviet Union). The potential danger of this concept can be seen in the official song of the Hitler-Jugend: “Today we have Germany, and tomorrow the whole world” (“Und heute gehört uns Deutschland und morgen die ganze Welt.”).¹⁵ There are

9 Cf. M. H. Kowalewicz (2013), ‘Übersetzungsprobleme des Begriffs ‘Weltanschauung.’ In: Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte 55, p. 237-249.

10 Cf. H. Rickert (1920-21), *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen und Philosophie der Werte*. In: Logos 9, p. 1-42.

11 Cf. H. Gomperz (1905-1908), *Weltanschauungslehre: ein Versuch, die Hauptprobleme der allgemeinen theoretischen Philosophie geschichtlich zu entwickeln und sachlich zu bearbeiten*, Jena: E. Diederichs., 2 Vols.

12 Cf. W. Dilthey (1910): *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt, Abhandlung der königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Berlin: Verl. der Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften; M. H. Kowalewicz (2013), *Dilthey’s Kritik der Weltanschauungen*. In: *Dilthey’s Werk und die Wissenschaften: neue Aspekte*, ed. by G. Scholtz, Göttingen: V&R: uni-press, p. 243-257.

13 Cf. K. Jaspers (1918), *Lebensanschauung*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot; K. Jaspers (1919), *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Berlin: Springer.

14 Cf. V. Klemperer (1947), *LTI. Notizen eines Philologen*, Berlin : Aufbau-Verlag.

15 The song was written by Hans Baumann, a national socialist poet and songwriter, and after the Second World War author of children’s books.

numerous examples of how *Weltanschauung* has become myth itself within powerful twentieth century political rhetoric.

III.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the geographical center of the continent, from the Balkans to the Vistula Spit, a region that had been consecutively disregarded in the past as the western or eastern “periphery,” caused gigantic convulsions of world nations by unleashing profound geopolitical reformulations. On the political arena new states appeared, new persons with new visions for the region gained power, new (hi)stories were told, and new myths were formulated.

One of the relevant examples of the mythical creation of the twentieth century is the person of Józef Piłsudski, whose portrait was sketched by Bruno Schulz in the thirties, shortly after the death of the “commander in chief” or “guide,” as he was usually called:

He emerged from the underground of history, from graves, from the past. He was leaden by dreams of bards, misty by delusions of poets, charged by martyrdom of generations. He was the sequel in its entirety. He dragged history behind him, as a coat for all of Poland.

His face was perhaps in his lifetime, the face of an individual human. Probably those, who were close to him, knew his smile and the clouds passing before him, the light moments on his face. Individual features become lost in the increasing distance between us, becoming increasingly cloudy, while increasingly radiating outward, internal features that are greater, broader, and that contain hundreds of faces from the past. In dying, entering eternity, that face dreams memories, wandering through a series of faces that are increasingly pale, more spacious and even more radiating until in the end, from the layers of these faces laid upon her, cools into its shape, the mask that is the final image of Poland – forever.¹⁶

16 Cf. B Schulz: “Powstają legendy” [Legends are Created], in: *Powstają legendy. Trzy szkice wokół Piłsudskiego* [Legends are Created. Three Outlines about Piłsudski], introduced and edited by S. Rosiek, Kraków: Oficyna Literacka 1993, p. 25: ”Tenże [Piłsudski] wyszedł z podziemi historii, z grobów, z przeszłości. Był ciężki marzeniami wieszczów, mglisty rojeniami poetów, obciążony męczeństwem pokoleń. Był cały dalszym ciągiem. Ciągnął za sobą przeszłość, jak płaszcz ogromny na całą Polskę. Jego twarz była może za życia twarzą indywidualnego człowieka. Zapewne ci, którzy byli w pobliżu niego, znali Jego uśmiech i zachmurzenie, błyski chwili na jego twarzy. Nam z daleka coraz bardziej gubią się indywidualne rysy, stają się mgliste i przepuszczają od wewnątrz jakieś promieniowanie rysów większych, obszerniejszych, mieszczących w sobie setki minionych twarzy. Umierając, wchodząc w wieczność, marzy ta twarz wspomnieniami, wędruje przez szereg twarzy, coraz bledsza, przestrzenniejsza i promienniejsza, aż w końcu z nawarstwień tych twarzy układa się na niej i zastęga w maskę ostateczną oblicze Polski – już na zawsze.”

Already in the past Poland drew strength from myths, which allowed the Poles to survive partitions and the brutal assimilation policies enacted in the enslaved territories by Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary. Poland was herself understood in mythical terms: as the *Christ of Nations* – a people made to suffer for the sins of others, but a people who ultimately rise victorious from that suffering, and even arise victorious because of it. Therefore, the myth of the *Slavic Pope*, created by Juliusz Słowacki in 1848, is another example of national consciousness expressed within literary creations, and based on a blend of patriotism and religion:

He will distribute love like a warlord
 Pass out arms;
 His strength sacramental will gather the cosmos
 Into his palms.
 Then will he send glad tidings to flutter
 Like Noah's dove;
 News that the spirit's here and acknowledged,
 Shining alone.
 And we shall see part nicely before him
 The sky above.
 He'll stand on his throne, illumined, creating
 Both world and throne. [...]
 His voice will transform the nations to brethren.
 Burnt offerings
 Circle the spirits in their march toward
 Their final goal.
 Strength sacramental of hundreds of nations
 Will help our king
 See that the spirits' work overpowers
 Death's mournful toll.
 The wounds of the world shall he cleanse, and banish
 Rot, pus and all
 He will redeem the world and bring to it
 Both health and love.
 He shall sweep clean the insides of churches
 And clear the hall,
 And then reveal the Lord our Creator
 Shining above.¹⁷

¹⁷ Quoted from: M. H. Kowalewicz, The Role of John Paul II in the Twentieth-Century Exodus from Enslavement to Freedom, in: *De Revolutionibus Orbium Populorum Ioannis Pauli II. The Pope Against Social Exclusion*, ed. by K. Pilarczyk in coop. with G. Sokolowski, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe 2015, pp. 68f [English version]. Cf. also the original cited in the Polish version of the mentioned text, p. 68f:

On rozda miłość, jak dziś mocarze
 Rozdają broń,

Therefore, the myth of Poland as the *Christ of Nations*, the French myth of the *Grand Nation* and the German myth of the *Übermensch*, are closely connected to the specific national *Weltanschauung* and to the role played by the particular nation within the history of the world, as understood through the lens of the given *Weltanschauung*.

IV.

Polish collective memory and national mythology is also linked in many ways with historical events connected to the struggle for Polish independence and national existence: the struggle for Freedom and Liberty under the command of Kosciuszko and Lafayette in America and Poland, armed participation in the Napoleonic wars in the ranks of the Grand Army, the November Uprising in 1830/31, the 1863/64 Rebellion or the struggle against the colonial politics of the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Austria-Hungary, not with weapons, but through methodical and meaningful contributions made to the world's scientific, technological, economic and cultural heritage and finally also systematic resistance against Russification by the Russian Empire and Germanization by Bismarck's Germany. The new myths were also born in Poland with the beginning of the twentieth century, not only around the armed struggle against invaders, not just around defenders of the territories and national heroes, not only surrounding statehood and the Commonwealth, but above all for "the commons" of civil society.¹⁸ Poland was

Sakramentalną moc on pokaże,
 Świat wzięwszy w dłoń;
 Gołąb mu słowa w hymnie wyleci,
 Poniesie wieść,
 Nowinę słodką, że duch już świeci
 I ma swą cześć;
 Niebo się nad nim piękne otworzy
 Z obojga stron,
 Bo on na świecie stanął i tworzy
 I świat, i tron [...]
 Takiego ducha wkrótce ujrzycie
 Cień, potem twarz:
 Wszelką z ran świata wyrzuci zgniłość,
 Robactwo, gad,
 Zdrowie przyniesie, rozpali miłość
 I zbawi świat;
 Wnętrze kościołów on powymiała,
 Oczyści sień,
 Boga pokaże w twórczości świata,
 Jasno jak dzień.

18 "The commons" understood by Poles at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are close

arguably the most convincing example of underground civil society in the twentieth century: from the dawn of the century to the eighties and the movement of Solidarity.

Poland entered the twentieth century with two important myths of civil disobedience that have been inscribed forever in the Polish collective memory: the myth of children struggling with Bismarck's policy of *Kulturkampf* in Września (the region of Greater Poland) by strike that refused instruction of religion and music in German language, protests that occurred in the years 1901–1904 and inspired following movements of students in 1907, and the myth of Russian Empire's opponents, systematically deported from the ancient territories of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for penal labor in Siberia (e.g. after the Uprising of 1863/64 and the unrest of 1905/07). Kept alive within Poland's collective memory, was the myth of those deported Poles, hardened by Siberia's arctic cold and the brutality of the Russian authorities (a collective experience that would be repeated under the Soviet authorities). A special place in Polish remembrance is also reserved for the oldest Polish university, the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. In 1864 the university was not able to celebrate its jubilee because of the Austrian repressions following the Uprising of 1863/64. Festivities were renewed in 1900, a year full of hope for new century and expressions of national unity in all former territories of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹⁹

The consecutive examples of Polish civil courage in the face of foreign aggressors, resulted in increased repressions, but also gave rise to more and more myths. Polish recalcitrance in relation to the aggressors has often been compared by observers in Western Europe with the fight of the Irish against the English. In both Poland and Ireland the incessant struggle for commons and national independence was closely linked to the religious system of values. Examples of the irritated votes from foreign observers were initially published in *The Times* in 1866, were recalled by Norman Davies—one hundred forty years later—in his brilliant work *Europe: East & West*:

to the modern interpretation, referring to ethics and axiology, not only to material goods. Cf. e.g. the modern definition of „commons”, presented in the statement of David Bollier in American Academy in Berlin December, 4th 2012: „The commons is at heart an ethic -- a way of being human that goes beyond homo economicus, the selfish, rational, utility-maximizing ideal of a human being that economists and politicians say we are. The commons presumes that humans are more complex, and that a richer set of human behaviors can be “designed into” our institutions. The commons asserts that there is an important role for self-organized governance that both challenges and complements formal government:” http://p2pfoundation.net/Commons_as_a_New_Paradigm_for_Governance,_Economics_and_Policy [05.11.15].

19 Cf. M. H. Kowalewicz (2015), Symbolika roku jubileuszowego Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. „Kozioróg” albo „dzień ubłagania po wszystkim ziemi waszej” [Symbolism of the Jagiellonian University's jubilee. “The goat's horn” or “the day of atonement throughout all your land”], in-print.

‘The Poles are the Irish of the Continent,’ they said, talking of ‘their unstable character, their incapacity for self-government, and the futility of their schemes’ – ‘a very hot-headed and unreasonable people, who have quarreled with their benefactors, the Russians, without any cause’. In support of their ‘Imperial reasoning’, as they put it, they accepted that ‘Russia is made to govern’, That Russia is ‘a Power which has been, and always will be, successful,’ that ‘the Poles have nothing left but to submit’. ‘Poland,’ they concluded, ‘is now nothing, and can do nothing.’ At the same time, these self-important Victorians were thoroughly outraged by the idea that British rule in England was comparable in any way to tsarist rule in Poland. ‘How many . . . tens of thousands {of Poles} have been dragged from their homes since 1830 and marched to the depths of Siberia or shut up in dungeons at home! Where is the parallel to this in Ireland?’²⁰

Almost all Polish history since the eighteenth century was arranged in accordance with one myth or another, be it the histories written either by the Poles themselves, the invaders or external observers of the successive aggressions upon the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Poland’s second Republic, a state since 1918, would survive only two decades before being attacked, in September 1939, from two sides simultaneously: on September 1st in the West by Nazi Germany and on September 17th in the East by Soviet Russia. As decided in Yalta in 1945, the price for the Third Reich’s defeat and the liberation of Western Europe was the further enslavement of Poland, which lasted until 1989.

The myths surrounding the independent Poland of the interwar period, including the new Polish economy and Polish science, and the most symbolic of Polish triumphs in the Polish-Soviet War in 1920, the so-called “Miracle on the Vistula River,” became points of obsession for both the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Therefore the consecutive myths: of the September 1939 campaign, Katyń, Squadron 303 in the Battle for Britain, the Battle of Narvik, the struggles for Tobrouk and Monte Cassino, the Warsaw Uprising or the Insurrection in Warsaw’s Ghetto, the government in exile (first in Paris, than in Angers and finally in London), Mikołajczyk’s referendum and—last but not least—the Polish Church’s clandestine role in the race for independence – provide national exemplars of bravery, but also persons that become myths in the collective memory of Poles. Of course, one of them is certainly Józef Piłsudski, but it is not however a singular myth, which was cultivated by patriots and aggressors. The myth of Piłsudski was (and is) not even a myth of a particular person, but a myth of a historical figure incarnating the Resurrection of Poland. This myth is a complement and fulfillment of the myth of Poland, as the *Christ of Nations*. This difference is evident thanks to Schulz, who contrasted Piłsudski with Napoleon:

20 Cf. N. Davis (2006), *Europe : East & West*, London: Jonathan Cape, p. 23.

Napoleon represented only himself. He dressed himself in history as the royal coat, made as a train great for his career. One of the moments of his strength was that he was not charged by tradition, not burdened with the past. He [Piłsudski] emerged from the underground of history, from graves, from the past. He was leaden by dreams of bards, misty by delusions of poets, charged by martyrdom of generations. He was the sequel in its entirety. He dragged history behind him, as a coat for all of Poland.²¹

Therefore, to reduce the history of interwar Poland to the history of one person might be an obvious oversimplification. The search for a single, most vivid myth in Polish history during the years 1918-1948 seems to be devoid of deeper meaning, because in doing so we would be forced to compare and contrast not only the persons under consideration, but we would have to do so across incomparable periods and geopolitical, social and military contexts.

V.

Therefore the simple question of who or what became myth in the period 1918-1948 in Central and Eastern Europe looks to be at the same time both easy and difficult to answer. This question appears simple and yet singular, satisfying answers are difficult to find, especially when dealing with this vast region, but also even in regards to particular states. This question is largely connected with the founding myths and the rising of national identities of the states that gained independence following the First World War. Each new state brought with it its own the baggage of past experiences. Additionally, the politics of the first half of the twentieth century was changing so dynamically, bringing with it all fuzzy responses to a world politics replete with new heroes and new enemies of history. History was written like never before from the perspective of national capital cities (including Warsaw, Berlin, and Moscow, but also Paris and London), from the point of view of the interests of altering diplomatic agreements, military ententes or changing core values and defense goals. Although Erich Maria Remarque's 1929 novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (*Im Westen nichts Neues*) was believed to have given the world an antiwar manifesto,²² but already four years later this bestseller will be burned by the Nazi regime in Germany. At the same time, the old myths surrounding the Franco-Prussian War would be reborn with an equally intensity on both sides of

21 Cf. Cf. B Schulz: "Powstają legendy" [Legends are Created], p. 25: "Napoleon reprezentował tylko siebie. Ubrał się w historię jak w płaszcz królewski, zrobił z niej tren wspaniały dla swojej kariery. Jednym z momentów jego siły było to, że był bez tradycji, nie obciążony przeszłością." Cf. also the suite of Polish original in food notes above.

22 E. M. Remarque (1928), *Im Westen nichts Neues*, Berlin: Propyläen-Verl.

the Rhine, and new myth would be born regarding the colonization of territories in Central and Eastern Europe.

This challenge can also be seen in the case of France. Who was the person whom we might unequivocally identify as a national myth in this very short but also how long period between 1918 and 1948? Is it Jean Jaurès, an antimilitarist and pacifist who was assassinated in July 1914,²³ or Marshal Philippe Pétain, generally known as “the Lion of Verdun,” or Marshal Pétain, the Head of State of Vichy France in the forties? As we can see, history is in no way static. Also in Poland the dynamics of the first half of the twentieth century brings new highs and lows, new heroes and new myths. The question is therefore fully justified: is Piłsudski, an uncontested hero in November 1918 and during the War with Soviet Union in 1920, the same hero in the collective memory of Poles before and after September 1939. Furthermore, is he the same mythical figure in the year 1948 or in the 1980s during the Solidarity movement?

One important remark: between 1918 and 1948 we have not only to do with the period flanked by wars, but also with a completely new order after the Second World War. The German occupation in the time between 1939 and 1945 was not a simple episode in the history of Europe but the turning point in the whole world history. If the period after Second World War is a new one, are Poland’s wartime heroes, such as General Władysław Sikorski and General Władysław Anders, much like General Charles De Gaulle or General Philippe Leclerc de Hautecloque in France, Poland’s new national heroes? Can they be counted among the national myths in the collective memory, especially in the public sphere? Is Marshall Piłsudski in 1948 really more of a national myth than Anders or Sikorski? The question is an open one, but for the Polish collective memory the national myth is not so much one linked with single figures, but rather with the wider symbolic notion of the warrior (soldier or civil) fighting against the Russians, Germans, Austrians and other national enemies over the ages. This picture is nicely painted in 1938 by Bruno Schulz after Piłsudski’s death: “In dying, entering eternity, that face dreams memories, wandering through a series of faces that are increasingly pale, more spacious and even more radiating until in the end, from the layers of these faces laid upon her, cools into its shape, the mask that is the final image of Poland – forever.” Hence, the symbolic hero may be moreover a figure of a Polish warrior, fighting in official uniforms, but also in civilian life. It is not the unknown or unnamed soldier alone that fits this myth, but the notion of the combatant more widely understood; those who have struggled for Poland and thus marked Polish history in any number of ways. This struggle has been recorded not only by Poles themselves, but also by the invaders and also historiographers from outside, thus

23 Cf. J. Jaurès (1903, 2014), *Maudite soit la guerre: discours à la jeunesse et autres paroles publiques*, [préface de Pierre-Yves Ruff], Saint-Martin-de-Bonfossé: Théolib.

the myth of the warrior has been etched into the national consciousness from various points of view.

Were we to search for a definitive definition of *the* enemy, we would have an equally difficult time. The statement that my ally is the enemy of my enemy is not very useful in the case of Poland. It is really not so difficult to find heroes in Poland, and in the collective memory Józef Piłsudski is one, and occupies an important place for many Poles. But if we are talking about enemies here we have also more than one. To understand this complex condition we must return to the eighteenth century. This was a glorious century for Western Europe but not so for Poland, as it was the time of the national Partitions. Glorious, however, was the regular and organized fight for Freedom and Liberty, and it would be those Poles fighting for national freedom who would enter the pantheon of national myth. For example, the Polish soldier of the Grand Army survived in a myth born in France combining both the high alcohol tolerance of Poles and their heroic efficacy in the battlefield.

VI.

In 1918, when Polish independence was proclaimed, the model of the German state were not so far away from Piłsudski's political vision of government within his *Weltanschauung* and view of culture. Curiously, the approach to German philosophy distinguished arguably the future president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, a philosopher who seems to have been more attracted by rationalist and humanist philosophy,²⁴ from the future leader of Poland, Józef Piłsudski, by the romantic, Promethean philosophy, closer to the German idealism.²⁵ The reference to the German model changes with time and in September 1939 we have, like we can see in the Polish war propaganda, the Polish Army fighting for western civilization within German barbarian culture. The ambiguous synonymy of both terms can be seen in their interchangeable use within the discourse of the press at the time of intensified political tensions between the Allies and Germany, particularly when faced with the invasion of Poland on September 3, 1939. The *Illustrated Daily Courier*, in an article entitled "Poland again in the vanguard of Europe," introduces both the concept of culture and civilization, stressing that

24 About the philosophical position between realism and Neo-Kantianism of Masaryk before the First World War cf. F. Krejčí, *Filosofie posledních let před válkou*, Praha: Jan Laichter 1918, pp. 267ff; about the research of specific Czechoslovak national character in the thirties: E. Chalupný, *Národní filosofie československá*, vol. 1: *Národní povaha československá*, Praha: Bursík a Kohout 1932.

25 The realism and pragmatism in politics represented at the time his political rival, Roman Dmowski, another myth of Polish collective memory.

Poland is present today not only in self-defense. It [Poland] occurs in defense of threatened international peace and order. It [Poland] occurs as a bulwark of Western culture, Christian culture, based on the principles of freedom, justice and equity. [...] Two civilizations are today facing each other in mortal combat: Christian civilization and pagan civilization, the Roman civilization and the Germanic civilization, governments of rule of law and morality with the governments of lawlessness and crime in international life.²⁶

The next day, on September 4, 1939, *The Warsaw National Journal*, in the article “Hey allies,” reassures the inhabitants of Warsaw as follows:

All the powerful forces of three allied big powers of the peace front will be used to destroy the nest of crime and violence, so that in the world will reign a better and more lasting peace, so that future generations of free nations can maintain their political freedom, and so that civilization will prevail over lawlessness and the madness of people who to accommodate the interests of one nation want to surrender to its reign the whole of Europe, and later the whole world.²⁷

At the end of the second week of struggles with the forces of the Third Reich *The Evening of Warsaw*, from September 12, 1939, presented readers with the article “Eden exposes the intentions of Germany. The fracture plan of the resistance in the East and the plan of concluding peace at the expense of Poland,” which was a declaration of Robert Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in Chamberlain’s government:

The government of Nazi is under the illusion that winning the attack on Poland would lead to a quick peace. This is not true. Repeating the words of Chamberlain, Eden emphasizes that England is not fighting for a distant city and a distant country, but in order to liberate the modern world from the bondage of Nazism. All the dominions of Great Britain, even Canada and Australia, New Zealand and India as well as overseas colonies declare part in the war. Old

26 Cf. article “Polska znów przednią strażą Europy”, in: *Ilustrowany Kuryer codzienny*, September, 3rd 1939, p. 3: “Polska występuje dziś jednak nie tylko w obronie własnej. Występuje ona w obronie zagrożonego ładu i porządku międzynarodowego. Występuje jako przedmurze kultury zachodniej, kultury chrześcijańskiej, opartej na zasadach wolności, sprawiedliwości i słuszności. [...] Dwie cywilizacje stają dziś naprzeciwko siebie w śmiertelnej walce. Cywilizacja chrześcijańska z cywilizacją pogańską, cywilizacja rzymska z cywilizacją germańską, rządy prawa i moralności z rządami bezprawia i przestępczości w życiu międzynarodowym.”

27 Cf. article „Czołem sojusznikom”, in: “Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy”, Spetember, 4th 1939, p. 3: “Wszystkie potężne siły trzech sprzymierzonych mocarstw frontu pokoju zostaną zużyte w celu zniszczenia gniazda zbrodni i gwałtu, ażeby w świecie zapanował lepszy i trwalszy pokój, ażeby przyszłe pokolenia wolnych narodów mogły zachować swą wolność polityczną, ażeby cywilizacja zapanowała nad bezprawiem i szaleństwem ludzi, którzy dla dogodzenia interesom jednego narodu chcą podporządkować swemu panowaniu całą Europę, a potem [sic] cały świat.”

errors will no longer be reproduced. A new world and a new civilization will be created, better than the present, starting from today. Nazism is a transient phenomenon, as everything that is built on violence. There can be no more beautiful purpose than the deliverance of Europe from oppression, than the creation of a true union of European states that animate common ideals.²⁸

The role of Poland in this war was similar to Sobieski's battle with the Ottoman Empire in Vienna. The subtle distinction applies particularly to the dispute—since the mid-eighteenth century—between the French-British vision of civilization and German culture, between the universal character of civilization and the particular nature of culture.²⁹ Civilization is a word emerged thanks to Mirabeau the Elder and designated a necessary process for mankind that is obligated to participate by overcoming primitive barbarity.³⁰ The *Kultur*—according to the meaning valuable in the beginning of the twentieth century—is not a process but an initiation. Only individuals, initiated into the *Kultur*, could be cultivate. So we have—on one hand—the common “man” and—on the other—“superman.” The relation between civilization and culture were often brought into opposition of the French-British *savoir-vivre* and German *savoir-faire*.³¹ *Bildung* and *Kultur* were so in the past the instruments of distinction between humans, nations or continents.³²

As Russia itself has undergone consecutive waves of German cultural and philosophical influence, as exemplified within the Europeanization project of Peter the Great starting in the eighteenth century, in 1945, the Soviet authorities promoted again the Germanic culture model in all people's republics. And if we insist on finding a common denominator for all of Eastern Europe, in the end we can find only the German model of culture and the concept of *Weltanschauung* (that be-

28 Cf. article in “Wieczór Warszawski”, September, 12th 1939, p. 2: “Rząd hitlerowski ludzi się, że zwycięski atak na Polskę doprowadzi do szybkiego pokoju. Nieprawda. Powtarzając słowa Chamberlaina, Eden podkreśla, że Anglia nie walczy dla jakiegoś dalekiego miasta i dalekiego kraju, ale poto [sic!] by wyswobodzić świat współczesny z więzów hitlerizmu. Wszystkie dominia Wielkiej Brytanii, nawet Kanada i Australia, Nowa Zelandia oraz Indie, a także kolonie zamorskie zgłaszają udział w wojnie. Już się nie powtórzą stare błędy. Powstanie nowy świat i nowa cywilizacja, lepsza od obecnej, od dzisiejszej. Hitlerizm jest przemijającym zjawiskiem, jak wszystko, co zbudowane jest na przemocy. Nie może być piękniejszego celu, niż wyswobodenie Europy od opresji, niż stworzenie prawdziwego zjednoczenia państw europejskich, ożywionych wspólnymi ideałami.”

29 Cf. *Dictionary of Untranslatables. A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. by B. Cassin, transl. by S. Rendall / Ch. Hubert / J. Mehlman / N. Stein / M. Syrotinski; transl. ed. by E. Apter / J. Lezra / M. Wood, Princeton: Princeton University Press [e-book ed.], pp. 1004-1017.

30 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 1004.

31 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 1138 ff.

32 W. Paravicini, *Savoir-vivre et savoir-faire. Civilisation courtoise et civilisation technique dans les relations entre France et Allemagne du Moyen Âge et aux Temps modernes* (Conférences annuelles, 1), 1995. An interesting example of the inconsistencies and ambiguities of the concept of *Kultur* can be seen in the notion of *Kulturtasche*, which does not mean “a bag of culture,” but rather a trivial thing like a “beauty case.” Here we see lofty ideals boiled down to the mundane.

came dominant and common with the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism), a major designate for all eastern European countries under Soviet domination in 1948. The year 1948 became symbolically important for certain countries, such as Czechoslovakia and Hungary, but not so symbolically important for Poland, such as 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976 and 1980. The year 1948 was marked in Poland by the first trial of Auschwitz, the process of National Armed Force and other processes and executions of opponents of the communist regime. In the same year the Polish Workers' Party was united with the Polish Socialist Party and became the Polish United Workers' Party. Thus, the history of Soviet domination in Eastern and Central-Eastern Europe was in each country different and organized in a diverse way. Therefore our common history in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and also in occupied Austria (between 1945 and 1955) is full of twists and turns, and involving the creation of many new myths.

Probably one of the most widespread new myths of the second half of twentieth century is the idea of the Adolf Hitler's Third Reich (and moreover the belief that he was a German). These kinds of myths allow nations to avoid direct or indirect responsibility the terror that was wrought across Europe – an imagine cleaning process that is accomplished by placing blame on a single person or a single mythical state.. Hitler, determined in 1951 by Roger Caillois to be an idol of the nation and in the after-war period a symbol for bestiality,³³ becomes in the twenty-first century normalized, through innovative narrations and new myths.³⁴

VII.

The first attempt to rewrite a common history of the twentieth century was supposed to be written since 1972 in the framework of the joint Polish-German History Textbooks Commission, established under the auspices of UNESCO.³⁵ Writing out the common history of Europe is certainly a challenge of the century, and Central and East European History of the twentieth century in particular. The first step in this direction should be the identification of the most important historical facts, specific to Central and Eastern Europe, concerning beginnings and turning points. Only then will it be possible to reflect on the common and unique identity of this part of Europe, which certainly could be reinforced by

33 Cf. R. Caillois, *Le Pouvoir charismatique: Adolf Hitler comme idole*, in: Id, Oeuvres, Paris: Gallimard 2008, pp. 330 ff.

34 Cf. G. D. Rosenfeld (2014): *Hi Hitler. How the Nazi Past is being Normalized in Contemporary Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

35 Cf.: <http://library.fes.de/library/netzquelle/deutsch-polnisch/schulbuch.html> [15.10.15]; Cf. <http://ece.columbia.edu/files/ece/images/HistoryoftheGerman-PolishTextbookCommission-3.pdf> [15.10.15].

many glorious but also shameful points in our common history. This history must be written down together, respecting each other not only throughout national sensibilities, where the form of narrative and founding myths should be reconciled. Only then it will be possible to write a common history, *ἀλήθεια* (*alátheia*) distinctly demarcated from *δόξα* (*dóxa*). To reflect this common heritage, including heroes and enemies, a common sensibility will emerge. This shared sensibility will not be just geographical or mental in nature, but also linguistic. An earlier attempt at the creation of such a shared language arose in the multiethnic Poland of the last century, namely in the creation Esperanto by Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof. In recent decades English would come to play the role intended for Esperanto. However it is also important to make this language, foreign for each of us, and not imposing a foreign content that would “knead” our identity in form of a new *Weltanschauung* as did earlier the Germanization of Austria-Hungary, Prussia and Germany or the Russification of the Russian Empire or Sovietization of the Soviet Union.

Already even the Visegrad group should have its own identity and in the new European order a proper image of the world, its resources, politics and history to find its place in this world. This image of the world and the *Weltanschauung* are even two different concepts. It might be worthwhile to go back to the initiative of King Charles I of Hungary in 1335, inviting the sovereigns of Central Europe to Visegrad in order to establish a common peace. It is the idea of community that should be learned from the past and not the conviction that everything starts over again. This is particularly important in 2015, six hundred eighty years later. It is also important to keep in mind the Orwell’s diagnose: “Who controls the past, [...] controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.” Included in that process are the myths about the heroes and enemies reinforcing unity in each community.

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Attachment



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