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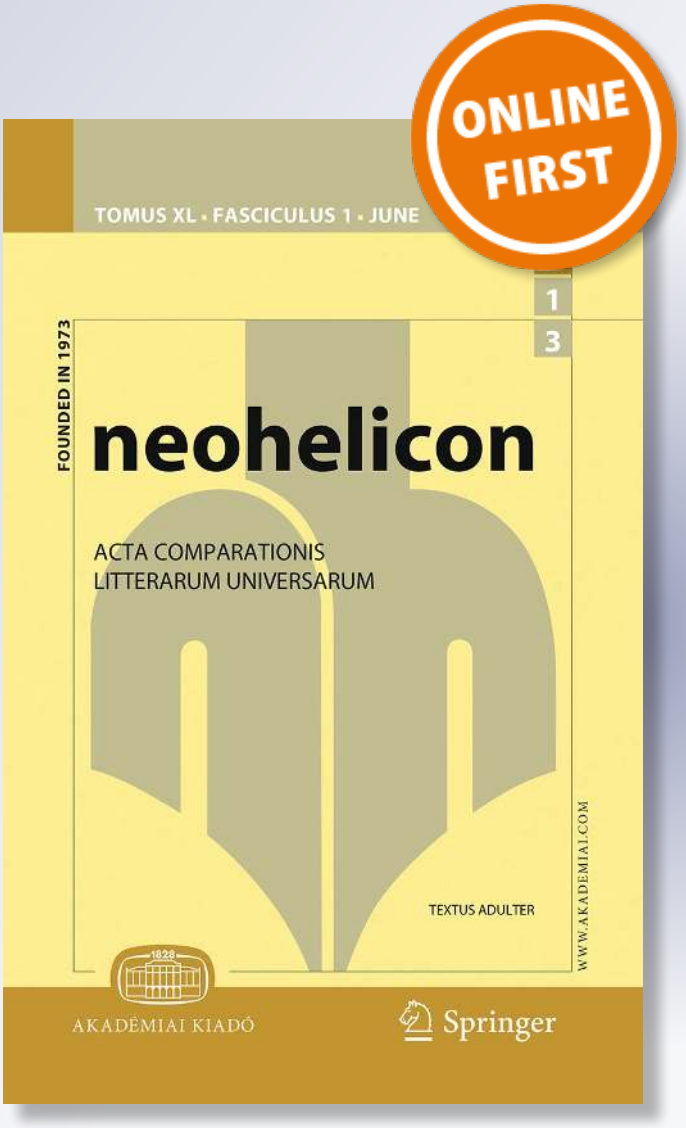

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"The phoenix hasn't shaken off the ashes from which it rose": revisiting Natzweiler-Struthof in Boris Pahor's *Nekropola*

Tilde Geerardyn[1]

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Abstract In the semi-autobiographic novel Nekropola (Necropolis, 1966) of the Slovene author Boris Pahor (born in 1913), the main character revisits the concentration camp Natzweiler-Struthof where he spent part of his imprisonment during the Second World War. During this visit the world of the concentration-camp prisoner and the world of the concentration-camp survivor are reunited. In both worlds the (lack of) connection between the protagonist and the surrounding characters, and the hereto related emotional spectrum of loneliness (alienation, distance, solitude) occupy a central position. Earlier research pointed out that the reunion of the concentration-camp world in the memories of the protagonist and the world he lives in now emphasizes the discrepancy between these two worlds. Based on the narrative concepts described by Michael Rothberg (timelessness, falsifiability and normality vs the extreme), this article indicates that this discrepancy actually does not only originate in the confrontation between the world of the past and the present. Illustrated by the very different and sometimes opposite effects of the constant confrontation with loneliness, distance and alienation, present paper reveals that this hiatus between past and present is embedded in the state of mind, or rather, in the identity of the main character.

Keywords Boris Pahor · Identity · Concentration-camp literature · Alienation · Bildungsroman

> "Moj položaj je bil izjemen, kakor se mi je zgodilo večkrat v življenju. Prej ali potem je naneslo, da sem ostal zunaj normalnih lestvic" (Pahor 2011: 147).

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> "An exception was made for me, as it has been repeatedly throughout my life. I am never weighed on the usual scales."[1] (Pahor 2010: 135).

These words appear in the closing section of Boris Pahor's shiver-inducing novel *Nekropola* (*Necropolis*, 1966). This semi-autobiographical novel has its roots in Pahor's own imprisonment in Natzweiler-Struthof and other concentration camps[2] during the Second World War. It tells the story of the return of a former prisoner to the site of Natzweiler-Struthof, in search of confrontation with the memories of his past, which are characterized by constant humiliation, complex relations with the other prisoners, and isolation from the outside world. In the novel, the relation of the fictionalized Pahor to the other characters is key: more precisely, the lack of real relationships and the seemingly permanent presence of at least a touch of loneliness as expressed in the introductory quote to this article. As such, *Nekropola* is not just a stroll through the memories of a world of humiliation, fear, cold, illness and death. It is also a guided tour through the loneliness and alienation that are part of the life of a (former) camp prisoner. Moreover, the emotions the reader is confronted with leave traces throughout the entire narrative: the wide array of different realizations of distance and isolation in *Nekropola* reveals how thoroughly the trauma of the camps affected different layers of personality and aspects of the lives of those who survived.

This article aims to tackle this multifaceted feeling of loneliness that lingers throughout the narrative of the novel. How are loneliness, alienation and distance portrayed in the narrative? Are these feelings a permanent or existential state of mind of the protagonist, or do they only come to the surface sporadically? Also, related to this: Do these emotions find a different interpretation in different layers of the story? Another pressing issue that will be treated is how alienation, isolation and distance affect the identity of the main character and whether this results in different outcomes over time. One final issue that the article aims to tackle is the fact that *Nekropola* harbours a crossroad of the world of the prisoner and the world of the survivor. How are past and present brought together and, more importantly, how do these two significant phases relate to one another throughout the narrative?

Nekropola and Pahor's other stories all deal with one or more of three (according to Pahor causally related) periods that had a decisive impact on his life: growing up in the Italian-dominated Slovene Trieste (during and after the First World War), surviving the concentration camps during the Second World War, and living under the totalitarian regime of Yugoslavia afterwards (Hergold 1997: 195–211). Interconnectedness characterizes Pahor's oeuvre. His works do not only have one or more of these historical backgrounds in common, but they also share plot elements (e.g., in most of the novels the main character is a Slovene with roots in

[1] All translations come from the English translation of *Nekropola* by Michael Biggins: *Necropolis* (2010), unless indicated otherwise. In certain instances the English version omits words, sentences or complete paragraphs. In those cases another or a modified translation is given.

[2] Pahor is arrested during the last year of the Second World War, moments before the start of the evacuations of the concentration camps. Running from the upcoming Allies, the Germans move Pahor and his fellow inmates from Natzweiler-Struthof to the following camps: Dachau, Harzungen, Bergen-Belsen and Dora-Mittelbau.

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Trieste, and usually one of the [Slovene] characters has a relationship with an Italian woman[3]) and sometimes even characters: for example, both the camp medic Janoš, the main character in *Sto šestdeset trupel in še eno* (*One Hundred and Sixty Bodies and One More*), and the camp prisoner Tomaž, the main character in the novella *Naslov na žaganci* (*Address on the Ceiling*), make their appearance in *Nekropola* (Hergold 1997: 200–204). Both novellas appeared in the compilation *Moj Tržaški naslov* (*My Address in Trieste*, 1948). Next to historical backgrounds, plot elements and characters, several themes also recur in Pahor's oeuvre: the Slovene language, childhood and authorship (cf. Bernard 2003).

Pahor (born in 1913) started writing short stories during the interbellum years under the alias Jožko Ambrožič (Ambrožič is his mother's name), but his first novel appeared in 1955 under his own name: *Mesto v zalivu* (*The City by the Bay*). Eleven other novels followed suit, of which *Nekropola* (1966) is the fifth and most famous. Next to his novels and short stories, Pahor is also known for his polemic writings and his advocacy for the identity of minorities worldwide. Despite the prizes he has received[4] and a growing scholarly interest over the years, Pahor's oeuvre has not been studied thoroughly. In Slovenia, he received critical acclaim from the 1990s on. In these years a couple of scholarly articles were collected in the edited volume *Pahorjev Zbornik* (1993), published in honour of the writer's eightieth birthday.[5] With the passing of time, Pahor's work has also garnered more international attention. The central role of his hometown Trieste and its history in particular have been treated by Bernard (2003) and Bandelj (2010), among others. *Nekropola*, then, appears in several general comparative works about the camps during the Second World War, such as Michaela Wolf's take on the position of interpreters in the camps in *German speakers, step forward.* (2013), and Arich-Gerz's *Mittelbau-Dora*, which deals with the representation of the camp in literature and memoires (2009).

Although most of the aforementioned studies consider *Nekropola* as the climax and culmination of Pahor's oeuvre, none of them treats the novel that way. An exception to this is Françoise Genevray's *Retour au camp, retour du camp* (2007), which compares several elements in the accounts of concentration-camp survivors in *Nekropola* and Varlam Shalamov's *Kolymskie Rasskazy* (*Kolyma Tales*). Genevray focuses on the expression of memory in both novels and scrutinizes the figurative language the authors use to portray the world and atmosphere of the camps.

Genevray's work (2007: 145–160) shows that remembering plays an important role in the narratological process of *Nekropola*. The article illustrates that Pahor's

[3] The perfect way to address the difficult relations between Italians and Slovenes (Hergold 1997: 195–211).

[4] Among others: the Slovene *Prešerna Nagrada* (1992), the French *Chevalier de la légion d'Honneur* (2007) and the Austrian *Ehrenkreuz für Wissenschaft und Kunst* (2009), along with several nominations for the Nobel Prize for Literature.

[5] These articles cover different facets of Pahor's writings: Pirjevec treats Pahor's oeuvre in *Kocbekov pogled na roman v pismih Borisu Pahorju* (*Kocbek's Vision of the Novel in Letters to Boris Pahor*), while Hergold and Cvetek-Russie apply a deeper analysis to specific novels and novellas in *Zapiski o Pahorjevi Nekropoli* (*Thoughts on Pahor's* Nekropola) and *Prvine govornjega jezika v Pahorjevi kratki pripovedni prozi* (*The Elements of Direct Speech in Pahor's Short Stories*), respectively.

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masterpiece deserves a reading that does not reduce it to a 'mere' testimony of an atrocious past. Instead, remembrance and the narratological process are joined together with the alienating and distancing effect of living in and surviving (or living after) the concentration-camp world. *Nekropola*, Genevray suggests, should be read with attention to the subtle narrative techniques that underline the hiatus between the worlds in- and outside the barbed wire, without losing sight of the original paradoxical intention to bring past and present closer to each other.

These techniques are the result of Pahor's struggle to find a way to portray camp life and the consequences of the trauma of the concentration-camp world, just like other former camp residents struggled to find a way to do this. Writing after the atrocities of the camps was not impossible (contrary to the often wrongly cited quotation by Adorno), but it was a challenge for all survivor-authors to come up with innovative narrative techniques to transfer their stories into literature. Rothberg (2000a, b) has examined how survivors of the camps in the Second World War described their experiences in literature without shocking the reader, yet simultaneously without losing the gravity of what happened. In *Traumatic Realism* Rothberg points to three primary narrative concepts that occur in post-concentration-camp literature: *timelessness*, *falsifiability* and the combination of *normality and the extreme* (2000a, b: 99–177). These concepts comprise several techniques used by several survivor-authors to give a truthful account of the uncanny world they lived in and as such form a framework that enables an analysis of the narrative techniques used in *Nekropola*. Moreover these concepts allow us to explore the different aspects of the ambiguous theme of alienation and distance within its scope.

The different sections of this article each address one of the concepts Rothberg identifies. In the first section the topic of language will be tackled, since Rothberg indicates it as a basic aspect of survival in the camps (2000a, b: 149–150); next to this, the effect of language on loneliness during and after the camps will be treated. The subsequent three sections will focus on *timelessness*, *falsifiability* and *normality and the extreme*, respectively, in relation to the expression of loneliness and alienation in *Nekropola*. In the analysis the works that take a central place in Rothberg's study, *Auschwitz et après* (1965a) and *La mémoire et les jours* (1985) by Charlotte Delbo, and *Weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (1992) by Ruth Klüger, will serve an exemplary and comparative role.

Language, belonging and isolation

Rothberg points out the influence of homogeneity and heterogeneity of languages in the concentration-camp world (2000a, b: 150). With Charlotte Delbo's *Le convoi du 24 janvier* (1965b) he shows how different camp life can be, depending on the knowledge of the language of the other prisoners. Delbo tells of the differences in treatment between Jewish and political prisoners during transportation. Political prisoners were generally divided by country, while the Jewish prisoners were crammed into wagons regardless of their nationality. As a consequence, most Jews could hardly understand each other. This resulted in a lack of communication and

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made the development of stable relationships and mutual support impossible. Hence, heterogeneity in language prevented the creation of a homogenous group.

This kind of isolation does not characterize the camp experience of the main character. The protagonist of *Nekropola*, a first-person narrator, is a political prisoner. His group is categorized by nationality,[6] which enables communication and makes it possible to cope with the situation in group. Moreover, the hero knows numerous languages: he speaks French, Italian and German (although unwillingly), and because of his mother tongue (Slovene) he understands other Slavic languages. This knowledge allows him to belong to several groups of prisoners and to become an interpreter at the *Revier*, the infirmary. Nevertheless, communication is not one of the fictionalized Pahor's strengths. Although his language skills are a positive result of his troubled and chaotic youth in Trieste, he only focuses on his closed and stern character that developed during those same years. He mentions this closed personality as a common feature of his people and, thus, of himself, originating in the constant adaptation of the Slovenes to several succeeding dominators—the Italians were not the first. To illustrate this, the protagonist tells the story of the Slovene girl Zora. Zora Perello was a young member of the anti-fascist resistance in Trieste during the Second World War. She was imprisoned several times and eventually died in Ravensbrück concentration camp in 1945 (Jevnikar 1985: 614–615). The hero explains that the Slovenes call Zora "the Slovene Anne Frank", because she kept a diary of her life in Italian and German prisons. Unlike Anne Frank, who became world-famous, Zora is only known by the Slovenes, as the closed personality of the people prevents them from sharing their suffering with the world:

> "A slovenski ljudje smo preveč zanikrni, da bi zbrali Zorina pisma, njene zapiske, […] Ne znamo pokazati svetu Zore. Naša revna narodna duša se še ne more izmotati iz bolečine, v katero se je zabubila." (Pahor 2011:153–154)
> "But we Slovenes are too negligent a people to have collected Zora's letters or her diaries […]. We wouldn't know how to present her to the world. To this day our nation's meagre soul had not managed to free itself from the cocoon of its pain." (Pahor 2010: 140)

Unlike Delbo, who wrote: "Language was defence, comfort, hope. In speaking of what we had been before, of our life, we continued that before, we held on to our reality" (Delbo 1966: 17, cited in Rothberg 2000a, b: 150), the imprisoned Pahor (as a true Slovene) generally does not really tell others about his troubled roots. Only once, when a gypsy seer in the camp acknowledges he read the past of the protagonist in his hands, does the hero admit he would not be opposed to sharing his past:

> "Da, zelo razvito telepatsko sposobnost je imel, a kljub temu, da mi je povedal to, kar so mu prenesle moje misli, mi je bilo vendar všeč, da drug človek nekaj ve o mojih resnicah." (Pahor 2011: 117)

[6] The main character is categorized as an Italian, since he lived in Italian-dominated Trieste.

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> "Clearly, his telepathic powers were formidable, and despite the fact that he only told me what my thoughts transferred to him, I nevertheless liked that another human being knew something about my past." (Pahor 2010: 106; Modified translation)

Although the previous experience shows that the protagonist does feel the need for deeper relationships, he reveals that his closed personality usually gains the upper hand and is one of the main causes of his loneliness:

> "A priznam, te osamitve je bila morebiti v veliki meri kriva alergija za sklepanje tesnih prijateljskih vezi. Moja razmerja do drugih so lahko zelo prisrčna, nikoli pa se ne razvijejo do popolne zaupljivosti." (Pahor 2011: 147)
> "But I admit, this isolation was maybe to a great extent some kind of allergy for the formation of tight friendly bonds. My relationships with others can be very warm, but they never develop into full trustfulness." (Author's translation)

Nonetheless, Pahor's roots (that caused the stern personality) do lead to a feeling of homogeneity within the Slavic group of prisoners. This is indicated by a recurrent change in conjugation: when speaking of the Slovene people, the first-person singular, which occurs throughout the majority of the story, often changes into a first-person plural: 'Slovenci, smo…' ('We, the Slovenes, are…'). This first-person plural can be seen as a first-person singular in disguise: the "I" is replaced by "we", but the main character still gives an account of his own individual experiences and opinions, which he projects onto the group. As such the use of the first-person plural creates a collective feeling. The protagonist clearly identifies with his people during several episodes of the narrative: for example, when he elaborates on the aforementioned closed Slovene character (first-person plural is italicized in the examples):

> "A slovenski ljudje *smo* preveč zanikrni." (Pahor 2011: 153)
> "But *we* Slovenes *are* too negligent a people." (Pahor 2010: 140)

But also when he mentions his knowledge of languages:

> "Tudi slovenska sposobnost za vživetje v duha tujega jezika. In ne vem, če je ta *naša* sposobnost znamenje psihološkega bogastva […] s katero *smo* se skozi stoletja *obogatili*." (Pahor 2011: 19)
> "The Slovene talent for learning foreign languages also helped me. I can't say whether that ability *of ours* is a sign of psychological wealth […] *we've acquired* over the centuries." (Pahor 2010: 14)

In another fragment the hero even mentions that the Slovenes, though divided in the real world because of Italy's annexation of Trieste, now become one community within the community of prisoners:

> "Da, ker tukaj, kjer *smo* že *bili* prestopili mejnike življenja, državljanstvo ni več ločevalo slovenskih ljudi, ki zdaj *nismo bili edini* same v jeziku ampak zavoljo upora proti uničevalcu *našega* rodu tudi združeni v kazni in v želji po skupnem odrešenju." (Pahor 2011: 26)

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> "Here, where *we had* long ago *passed* life's border stone, we Slovenes were no longer separated by citizenship. More than language *brought us together* now; in *our* resistance against the exterminator of *our* kind we had become united in suffering and the search for common salvation." (Pahor 2010: 22)

The imprisoned hero also identifies with the whole group of prisoners, and also here the first-person plural replaces the first-person singular every so often. In this instance the first-person plural expresses a collectivity that is particularly connected to the isolation of the group, as the following example illustrates:

> "*Bili smo vzdignjeni* visoko nad poraslo sotesko, a v *nas* se ni porajal nobeden od občutkov človeka, ki s hriba občuduje celotno podobo nižine. *Nismo bili postavljeni* v višino, da bi se še bolj *povezali* s človeškimi bivališči, ampak zato, da bi razločno *videli*, kako dokončna je *naša* ločitev od njih." (Pahor 2011: 46)
> "*We had* a wonderful view, but *experienced* none of the pleasure of a person admiring a panorama. *We had been planted* on this height not to *feel connected* to human scenery but, rather, *to be shown* how totally cut off from it *we were*." (Pahor 2010: 44)

The first-person plural is also used to show the group's collective destruction:

> "To *smo doživeli* prvič in zadnjič v vsem času *naše* izgubljenosti." (Pahor 2011: 145)
> "*We experienced* this for the first and last time in the whole period of *our* damnation." (Author's translation)

The hero's identification with the group of prisoners reaches such levels that it even becomes unimaginable and undesirable no longer to belong to the anonymous mass:

> "…to se pravi, da *nismo mislili* toliko na kazen, ki bo doletela nesrečnika, ampak *smo sprežali* za trenutkom, ko bo nekje […] se znašel ves sam v votlem ozračju, sam pred tihimi vrstami, ki so se kakor zebrasta piramida vzpele proti nebu. *Strah nas je bilo* njegove ločenosti od *naših* strnjenih vrst, ki sta jih molk in preplah še tesneje amalgamirala v trdno gmoto." (Pahor 2011: 29)
> "That is, *we didn't think* of the punishment in store for the poor devil so much as *we held our breath* for the moment when he would […] find himself alone in the barracks, and then alone before the silent rows stretching skyward like a striped pyramid. *We were terrified* by this separation from *our* tight ranks, which the silence and the alarm had made even tighter." (Pahor 2010: 25–26)

The last group the imprisoned Pahor identifies with is the group of medics and caretakers in the infirmary. Once he becomes a part of that well-oiled machine the hero reserves the first-person plural for the medical crew during the remainder of his tale of imprisonment (except for flashbacks embedded in the narrative), as if he no longer identifies with the two other collectives:

> "No, *imeli smo* tudi dvocentimetrske ampule coramina." (Pahor 2011: 83)
> "*We* also *had* two-centilitre ampules of Coramine." (Pahor 2010: 76)

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By doing so, the protagonist shows he has adopted a different attitude toward the larger group of prisoners. Suddenly, standing out of the mass does not seem as bad as it did before, and even becomes preferable:

> "In tedaj sem se zavedel sreče ob nenadnem odkritju, da sem obsojeni skupnosti lahko koristen in s tem tudi sam rešen brezimne pogube." (Pahor 2011: 22)
> "I was elated at the sudden discovery that I could be useful to this doomed group and thus deliver myself from anonymous death." (Pahor 2010: 17–18)

When the camp and its prisoners are moved to another, larger camp, the imprisoned Pahor unexpectedly loses his acquired position as an interpreter at the sick-bay. The protagonist has to go back to the once-beloved faceless mass, but he no longer perceives its embrace as protecting, but more and more as frightening and suffocating:

> "Brezglavi preplah, ki je prežal iz zasede, je prihajal iz občutka izgubljenosti sredi prelivajoče se, brezoblične in vsestransko ranljive mase." (Pahor 2011: 149)
> "The irrational panic, waiting in an ambush, came to me from a feeling of lostness in the drifting, shapeless and very vulnerable mass." (Author's translation)

This change of heart also has an effect on the textual level: the first-person plural and the collective feeling it represents never come back. Instead, the lonely first-person singular reigns from that moment on; thus, his return to the mass marks the beginning of a period where the feeling of isolation toward the outside world is strengthened by the isolation of the self.

The loss of the collective identity of the prisoner does not only isolate the "I", it establishes a division between "I" and "they". The protagonist addresses the other prisoners as a group, which emphasizes the outsider position of the first-person narrator. The distance and the fear toward the anonymous mass is accentuated even more by dehumanizing the group of faceless 'numbers'; the hero calls them bodies (*tela*), corpses (*krupi*/*mrliči*) or creatures (*bitja*), as in the following example:

> "Sprožil se je brezumen pohlep v bitjih, ki niso vedela več, kaj je osebna lastnina, tako da je stopila takrat v ozadje celo starodavna lakota, ki jo je bil dopolnil celotedenski post." (Pahor 2011: 81)
> "Such an irrational greed rose in the creatures, who had forgotten what private property was, and in the frenzy of possession even the hunger after a weeklong fast diminished in importance." (Pahor 2010: 75; Modified translation)

Sometimes the main character goes even further and calls his fellow prisoners 'cells' (*celice*), to reduce them to the smallest particles of human life. He continues the dehumanization by the Nazis in his own narrative: he no longer portrays the members of the faceless mass as completely human; even in his eyes, the eyes of a fellow prisoner, they are identity-less (*spare*) parts of the assembly line of death that the Germans have created.

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In the period after the camps the hero also views his past self from a different, dehumanizing angle. The perceived distance between the "I" in the camps and the group of prisoners becomes smaller in comparison to the distance between the "I" in the camps and the "I" in the present. The present self situates the past self more and more within the group of dehumanized prisoners. The protagonist sees the reflection of his own camp behaviour in the behaviour of his pet dog and recognizes part of his identity in the dog's eyes:

> "Tedaj mu gledam v oči in si pravim, da mi je nekje soroden, čeprav sedi na zadnjih nogah, jaz pa na najnovejšem izdelku kraške tovarne pohištva." (Pahor 2011: 15)
> "When I look him in the eyes then, I see we are related, the main difference between us being that he sits on his haunches while I sit on the latest product of a Karst furniture factory." (Pahor 2010: 10)

The homogeneity of the group of prisoners also has consequences for the development of the language used in the camps. Because of the complete isolation of the prisoners, their language develops in a different way than the language of the outside world. This separate evolution of the camp idiolect creates a stronger bond between the prisoners, but also enlarges the distance toward the people outside of the camps. The idiolect includes typical camp jargon and German words, which normally would not be a part of the language of the prisoners. Concentration-camp survivors who write down their experiences generally have an ambiguous attitude toward these words. When they testify they cannot but use these words, however, one can assume they want to show distance at the same time. Distance is created in the first instance not by translating the German words; rather it comes to the surface more clearly through the use of italics, or brackets, or by simply stating: "We used to say…" or "What we called…" (Louwagie 2006: 58–61). Pahor uses italics when he adds the German words of the camp idiolect: *Zellenblock*, *Kamerad*, *Appelplatz*, *Unterscharführer*, *Weberei*… He usually applies this technique to the German language as a whole. Almost every display of German direct speech is left in the original language and is italicized, as in the following scene in which the protagonist describes an angry and violent German SS-guard:

> "*Verfluchtes Dreckstück*, ga je zmerjal in ga odbrcal v waschraum, na sredo, kjer so bili okrogli umivalniki. *Pass mal, wie er stinkt, der Verfluchte!* […] *Bleib da stehen*, je kriknil preganjavec." (Pahor 2011: 161, italics in the original.)
> "'*Verfluchtes Dreckstück!*' he cursed, kicking him into the waschraum, toward the middle where the big lavatories stood. '*Pass mal, wie er stinkt, der Verfluchte!*' […] '*Bleib da stehen*,' the tormentor shouted." (Pahor 2010: 147; Modified translation)

This technique also appears when the main character is confronted with the reaction of a French couple who sees the ovens for the first time. When the man tells his wife they are watching the oven, she reacts with "*les pauvres*". These two words are initially put in italics and remain untranslated to accentuate the distance and alienation the visiting Pahor feels in relation to this reaction. Later the main

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character repeats the story and this time he does translate the short dialogue while adding some commentary, as if wanting to explain his aversion:

> "On je rekel: Peč. Ona pa: Ubožci. Taka kratka vprašanja in tako kratki odgovori bi bili lahko lapidarni, lahko bi bili polni zgoščenega, neizgovorjenega smisla; tako pa se mi je zdela njena pripomba kakor tožba žene, ki je videla muco pod avtomobilskim kolesom." (Pahor 2011: 44)
> He said, "The oven." She, "Poor devils." Laconic, pregnant with meaning, you might think, yet her remark strikes me as the sigh of a woman who has just seen a car run over a cat. (Pahor 2010: 41)

As one can notice in the fragment about the SS-guard, Pahor did not italicize all the German words; he seems to have forgotten the italics for the word Waschraum. He uses this word only once (other times he uses the word *kopalnica*), as if by coincidence. It is as if the word slipped into the text as a part of his own language, and hence the German word is rid of its negative undertone. It could be a choice only to use italics for the German direct speech, so as to distinguish the words of the SS-guard as the most malign. Another factor that should be taken into account is the position of the Waschraum in the lives of the prisoners. The Waschraum is an ambiguous place: although strongly related to the dehumanization of the prisoners (the shaving, the guards that rush the naked prisoners inside and the water heated by burning the corpses of deceased comrades), the connotation in the minds of the prisoners is positive. They associate the Waschraum with warmth and life-saving energy; they see it as a haven where they feel human again, if only temporarily. This positive position of the Waschraum within the lives of the prisoners overcomes the possible negative connotations:

> "ker je beli in gorki oblak neudržana vaba za begajoče sence […] ampak jim je skoraj v veselo dobrodošlico kričanje brivcev […] A telesu je prijetno, da ga oblizujejo tako številni topli jeziki, in spomin […] se ne zaveda, da je pod kopalnico peč, v katero kurjač noč in dan polaga človeška polena. In tudi če bi telesa pomislila, da bo morebiti v kratkem tudi z njimi tako grel vodo, bi bil užitek, ki ga nudi mokra toplota, vendar še velik. (Pahor 2011: 34–35)
> "The white, warm cloud draws the scrambling shadows […] They take the barbers' curses as a hearty welcome. […] The body loves the countless warm tongues that lick it, and […] we forget that beneath the shower room is an oven, and that night and day a stoker heaves human logs into it. Even if the bodies think that soon they might be used to heat the water, the pleasure offered by this wet warmth is not lessened." (Pahor 2010: 31–32)

Later the protagonist adds that the hot water feels like a last gift of the deceased. A gift that creates a brotherhood, a unity, between those who still fight the dehumanization and those who no longer can:

> "Hkrati mi je, kakor da so me rajnki z doživetim darom nekaj tople vode sprejeli v bratovščino, ki je svetejša od vseh bratovščin, kar jih rodijo verstva." (Pahor 2011: 39)

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> "But it is also as if the dead, by their gift of a minute of hot water, had inducted me into their brotherhood, one holier than all the brotherhoods that religion has produced." (Pahor 2010: 36)

Timelessness and focalization

> Koliko dni je potem trajalo tisto potovanje ? Šest ? Sedem ? Pa saj je čas že zdavnaj izgubil vrednost, ki mu jo dajeta kroženje in srečanje nebesnih teles. (Pahor 2011: 73)
> How many days did that journey last? Six? Seven? Time had long since lost the meaning that the rotation and convergence of heavenly bodies give it. (Pahor 2010: 67)

Endless roll calls alternated with days of blind travel in overcrowded carriages: days of numbingly hard work, constant, seemingly everlasting, longing for a small bowl of watery soup or a thin slice of stale bread. The passing of time becomes almost intangible for the camp prisoners. Timelessness is a typical feature of the concentration-camp world and one of the hardest ones to transfer into literature (Rothberg 2000a, b: 156–162). The problem of transferring timelessness is tackled differently by several survivor-authors, for each personal experience and perception demands a different approach. A good example, as Rothberg points out in *Traumatic Realism* (2000a, b), is Delbo's fragmented story-telling in *Auschwitz et après* (in three parts: 1965, 1970, 1971). The novel consists of several impressions of varying length (sometimes only a couple of sentences) placed one after another. Delbo also uses variable interlinear space and plays with syntax to give time a textual dimension. Another technique Rothberg distinguishes in Delbo's, among others', work is the way she plays with memory and switches between several layers in time.

Despite the greater linearity in *Nekropola*—Pahor includes some chronology and embeds the memories more organically into the narrative—the combination of fragments and memory is actually similar to Delbo's fragmentary story-telling. However, the expression of timelessness in *Nekropola* is related more to the construction of the narrative than to the composition of fragments and text, and it reveals an inner conflict related to the memories that occur in the story.

Genevray considers "the person who writes" the narrator, who brings past and present together (2007: 145–160). She states that the narrator's writing about the visit to the Natzweiler-Struthof memorial camp brings the images from his past as a prisoner to his mind. The narrator embeds these memories within the narrative of the visit, simultaneously complementing the world of the memorial camp as well as the concentration-camp world with adjustments, remarks and additional information, because he deems the impression they evoke incomplete. Genevray understands "l'écriture en service de la mémoire" in a twofold way: writing as a means of bringing memories back; and, secondly, writing as a means of explaining or supporting those memories. This is a logical line of argument, but it can be argued that the character explaining his memories and the memories as such are different

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layers of a split narration that can be distinguished in *Nekropola*. In fact, it can be hypothesized that it is precisely this split in the narration that reveals the mental state of the main character, making it necessary for the writing character to explain his memories.

Nekropola is told through the views and thoughts of three different narrator–focalizers linked to three periods of the protagonist's life: the imprisonment, the return(s) to the camp, and the writing of the novel. This construction not only embeds the distance in time and space between the worlds inside and outside of the barbed wire, but also portrays the identity gap of the main character caused by the trauma of the camps. The act of visiting the camp brings back the memories and confronts the survivor-narrators with the world of the imprisoned self. During the visit, the impressions of the camp in past and present alternate. Despite the 20-year difference in time, the narrators in the camp walk the same road and come closer to each other, but in the end their physical closeness only emphasizes the temporal and mental distance between them. Back at home the protagonist assesses this attempt of reuniting the two worlds—or, rather, the two parts of his identity—and tries to use his greater distance from the camps to succeed in narrowing the gap in his identity through his writing after all. The three narrator–focalizers can also be perceived as shifting perspectives of one and the same person. For this analysis it is nonetheless more pertinent to consider them as three distinctive personae (cf. infra).

The first narrator–focalizer that can be distinguished is "the Visitor", who visits the site of Natzweiler-Struthof 20 years after its liberation. This perspective can be seen as the frame narrative, since "the Visitor" opens and ends the story and gives the different memories a place during his walk through the camp. As the following example shows, the buildings and places "the Visitor" encounters during the tour are triggers for the memories related to his camp experience (and not the act of writing afterwards as Genevray argues):

> "Tukaj nekako je bila baraka št. 6, v kateri je bil v prvih časih *Weberei*; […] A kakšni čudaški tkalci smo bili. […] Kupi gumijastih in platnenih odrezkov se po mizah kopičijo pred nami kakor svežnji pisane šare." (Pahor 2011: 23; italics in the original).
>
> "Somewhere close by was Block 6, which in the early days bore the sign *Weberei*; […] What strange weavers we were. […] Heaps of rubber and canvas strips were piled up on the tables before us like the bundles of colorful rummage a ragman hordes in his stall." (Pahor 2010: 19)

Every time these triggers pull "the Visitor" back in time, they bring more and more aspects associated with the place to the surface. Sometimes they even overpower "the Visitor" and let him disappear into the memories. The distinction between "the Visitor", who is recalling the past, and the imprisoned protagonist, who is actually experiencing that past, blurs increasingly, until the transition is completed and the second narrator–focalizer emerges: "the Prisoner". In the original Slovene version, this transition also happens on a verbal level, allowing the second narrator(–focalizer) to come to the surface. In the aforementioned fragment, a past tense—*smo bili* (we were)—is used in the second sentence when "the Visitor" talks about his past. In the third sentence, however, this past tense changes into the historical

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present tense: *se kopičijo* (they pile up). In Slovene a historical present tense is used to give the impression the actions in the past happen right in front of the reader, he watches through the eyes of someone in the camp now: "the Prisoner". Such a transition can be found many times in *Nekropola*, as the following examples illustrate. The next fragment shows the main character, who is telling of the reactions in the camp when a white flag with a red cross appears in the valley nearby:

> "Bil je kakor svetlobni blisk, ki šine skozi motno zavest […]. Bojijo se zaveznikov, ki se bližajo Belfortu." (Pahor 2011: 47)
> "Like a light that flickers through the dim consciousness […]. They were afraid of the Allies approaching Belfort." (Pahor 2010: 45)

The first sentence again includes a past tense: *bil je* (it was). Further on in the fragment, this changes into a historical present tense: *bojijo*, *bližajo* (they are afraid, they approach). After such transitions "the Prisoner" gives the reader a direct impression of "the camp experience", an impression the other narrator–focalizers can no longer recall and, as such, cannot render to the reader. A similar transition happens in the following fragment, where "the Visitor" starts imagining the camp the tourists should experience, and is pulled into the memory of the scene he is recreating:

> "Morali bi hoditi po ravnici, ki jo spodaj zaslanja visok zid temnih dreves, v dneh, ko so terase v oblasti mraka, valivov in podivjanih vetrov. […] Blokaš pa zmeraj enako noro kriči Tempo, tempo! in odganja z gumijevko zebraste suhce iz barake, da se prevračajo po stopnicah." (Pahor 2011: 32)
> "They should be required to walk along the ledge down below, obscured by a high wall of trees, on days when the terraces are in the grip of gloom, rain, and raging wind. […] The white stairs are even more merciless. But the block leader shrieks furiously, 'Move! Move!' as he drives the striped stick figures out of the barracks with his club and they topple over one another." (Pahor 2010: 29)

The transition is slightly different here: "the Visitor" uses a conditional tense to express the experience he has in mind *morali bi* (they should), but the scene that unfolds before his eyes is depicted as if he is living it now, with a present tense: *kriči*, *odganja*, *se prevračajo* (he shouts, he drives, they fall). He is again drowning in memory.

The last narrator–focalizer is "the Writer–Narrator", the fictionalized author who is actually writing the book. He has a more distant position, both physically and emotionally, and this affords him the possibility to assess the situation and to add perspective and commentary. Genevray argues that the presence of the main character in the camp problematizes the process of recalling instead of facilitating it. In her opinion, the act of writing, and the distance that it implies, creates the condition for the narrator to remember his past. This process of remembering, though incomplete, is part of the narrative (2007: 147–152). Another interpretation may be that different aspects of Natzweiler Struthof not only serve as a trigger for memory in general, but that they evoke images of the past that are no longer part of

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the memory of both "the Visitor" and "the Writer–Narrator". The holes in their memory are caused by their distance from "the Prisoner" in time as well as in terms of identity. "The Writer–Narrator" tries to explain the short submersion into the past and tries to evaluate and assess the camp life of "the Prisoner", but because of the distance he has to base his assessment on a poor rendering of the original experience. Hence his evaluation cannot be complete/perfect.

The presence of "the Writer–Narrator" is mostly implicit. Only once does he manifest a clear-cut appearance, when he comments on his own negative reaction to a flirting couple:

> "In šele zdaj, ko si to zapisujem, si pravim, da bi bilo zelo otročje, ko bi prenesel ta dva zaljubljenca v naš nekdanji svet." (Pahor 2011: 97)
> "And only now, when I am writing this down, do I realise, it would be childish, to transport these two lovers to our former world." (Pahor 2010: 88; Modified translation)

Sometimes he reveals himself in a bold way by placing a comment in parentheses, as in the following examples:

> "Jean je bil (tedaj nisem še vedel za njegovo ime) nekako razpoložen." (Pahor 2011: 20)
> "Jean (I didn't know his name yet) was pleased that I knew French." (Pahor 2010: 15)

> "(Da, vsekakor ne bi bilo napak, če bi se kdo lotil študije o psihološki podobi človeka, ki si je zamislil klešče, s katerimii lahko povlečeš okostnjaka na kup in ga potem odvlečeš k železnemu dvigalu pod pečjo.)" (Pahor 2011: 19)
> "(Someone would do well to study the psychological make-up of the person who designed those tongs, which made it possible to move a body onto a heap of other bodies and then to the iron lift beneath the ovens.)" (Pahor 2010: 14)

> "Vendar je bilo aprilsko sonce (namesto septembrskega tukaj) kar nekam rožnato v prozornem zraku, samo da se je še zmeraj bleščalo tudi v štirikotnih šipah vrh lesenega stolpa s stražo in strojnico." (Pahor 2011: 65)
> "The April sun (instead of the September sun here) glinted pink in the square panes atop the wooden tower that held guard and machine gun." (Pahor 2010: 61; Modified translation)

Because of the earlier mentioned distance "the Writer–Narrator" is capable of self-reflection. Not completely understanding and not always agreeing with the (re)actions of his earlier selves, he wants to explain or adjust them. In this way "the Writer–Narrator" is indeed an overarching character who creates a bond between the present and the past (Genevray 2007: 147–152), or rather the character who tries to fill the gap between the other two narrator–focalizers. Such a comment can be found in the following fragment, in which the story of Vlado is told. Vlado is one of Pahor's friends during his imprisonment; they share the same roots and are both medics in the camp. During one of the evacuations of the camp, which happen regularly when the Germans know the Allies are drawing nearer, the medics are presented with a choice: to leave immediately with the strong and healthy, or to stay

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behind and help the sick during the relocation. Vlado decides to leave early. Afterwards, "the Writer–Narrator" points out that Vlado's departure was a rational decision, but "the Prisoner" reacts rather disappointedly and does not understand:

> "A je šel. In zdelo se mi je krivično, ker sem bil nekako prepričan, da bo ostal zavoljo tovariške navezanosti name, saj sva bila vsak prosti čas skupaj. Pa sem spoznal, da seže tovarištvo lahko samo do nekaterih plasti človeškega bitja." […] Če zdaj razmišljam o tem, mislim, da sem imel, prav nasprotno kakor Vlado, občutek, da bom na poseben način varen, če bom del revierja." (Pahor 2011: 128–129).
> "But he left. I had thought that our bond of friendship would keep him here. Hadn't we spent all our free time together? But I learned that camaraderie can only seep through some layers of the human being. […] Perhaps I felt that I would be safe only if I remained part of the infirmary, that working for the common good would make me less vulnerable if not immune." (Pahor 2010: 117; Modified translation)

Likewise "the Writer–Narrator" has a different reaction to the meager response of the French couple, mentioned earlier. Later on, "the Writer–Narrator" admits that the comment "the Visitor" made was not a fair one, but adds that he sometimes forgets that the evil of the camps was never a part of the life of the tourists visiting the memorial camp:

> "Res, krivičen sem, ker njeno vprašanje ob razklenjenih ustih železne sfinge je bilo samo rešitev iz zadrege, beg pred strahom, da se ji kovinasti goltanec ne bi približal. Krivičen sem, ker ne upoštevam, da vsem tem številnim ljudem zlo ni tako domače in vsakdanje kakor meni. (Pahor 2011: 43)
> "I know, it's unfair; her question in front of the iron monster's gaping jaws may have simply been to relieve the awkwardness of the situation. And I should take into consideration the fact that evil has not become a part of her daily life as it has for me." (Pahor 2010: 41)

This also shows the ambiguity of Pahor's relation to the other tourists: he understands why they react in a different way, but it is very hard for him to live with it.

The attempt of "the Writer–Narrator" to reconnect the past and present parts of his identity manifests itself on a textual/narratological level, yet on a psychological level the trinity of narrator–focalizers is almost completely fragmented. Because of the trauma "the Prisoner" experienced, the two later selves have lost their connection to their identity in the past. This reminds of a similar experience which Charlotte Delbo mentions in her *La mémoire et les jours* (1985: 11–13). According to Delbo, her traumatic past still has a lingering presence in her life, without ever really having become an essential part of it. Because of the conflict between the traumatic concentration-camp world and the normal world, it is impossible to restore the missing link fully. In *Nekropola* this conflict between the two worlds is reinforced when the protagonist revisits the camp to relive the camp and recover his identity. He fails to reconnect fully, however, which causes a feeling of inner loneliness. The camp experience is so different from his life in the normal world that

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the "I", once he is part of the normal world again, partly loses its connection with the past.

Each different stage of dehumanization is part of the main character's memory. Because of and necessary for their survival, however, the survivor-narrators ("the Visitor" and "the Writer–Narrator") have built a distance between themselves and "the Prisoner"; they had to become detached from their earlier self. As a consequence, the memories the survivor-narrators still possess are incomplete and appear to be devoid of emotion. The images in the minds of "the Visitor" and "the Writer–Narrator" could be compared to a documentary. It seems to them as if "the Prisoner" apathetically observed the concentration-camp world through a camera. Watching the "documentary" of their imprisoned life, two emotions are central in the perception of the survivor-narrators. First of all, they experience shame because the dehumanization of a part of their identity is now for all the world to see:

> "Skoraj bolje, da takega filma ni, ker danes bi se suha bitja z golimi koraki komu lahko zazdela kakor trop dresiranih psov, ki jih je gospodar z lakoto izuril, da si, stoječ na zadnjih nogah na stolčku, eden drugemu ovohavajo korak." (Pahor 2011: 17).
> "A good thing there was no film – today these wizened creatures with their crotches on display could be taken for a pack of trained dogs, taught through hunger to stand on a stool on their hind legs and sniff each other's parts." (Pahor 2010: 12)

The other emotion they experience is incomprehension, which is closely related to the documentary-like rendering of memory the survivor-narrators perceive. They cannot understand how their former self registered camp life without emotion; they accuse him of being inhumane. In some cases the past self indeed prefers a certain lethargy; he sees it as part of the self-protecting mechanism:

> "[…] ni zmeraj dobro, če je človek popolnoma prebujen. V nekaterih primerih je dosti boljše, če je v napol letargičnem stanju." (Pahor 2011:150).
> "[…] It is not always good for a man to be conscious of everything. In some cases it is even better if he finds himself in a half-lethargic state." (Author's translation)

Mostly, however, this seemingly unemotional documentary is a result of the detached perception of "the Visitor" and "the Writer–Narrator". They simply no longer remember whether their past self acted ethically (enough) during the imprisonment, and although they think the choices made by "the Prisoner" 20 years earlier did not really matter, it is not difficult to judge with hindsight, and they do wonder: Could "the Prisoner" have done more to help other inmates, to resist his faith, to stay human?… Strikingly, this dilemma is often accompanied by the following exclamation: "Ne vem!" ("I don't know!"). In order to cope with this problem "the Writer–Narrator" falls back on common truths when this doubt comes to the surface. He uses the insights he has gained from 20 years of extra distance to appease his conscious somehow, as he does in the following examples:

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"Res, odšel sem na podstrešje, a ne vem, zakaj sem […] najbrž pa predvsem iz potrebe, ki jo čuti ujeti, da obhodi kraj svoje ujetosti." (Pahor 2011: 86)
"I went upstairs to the attic, I don't know why. […] or else to break the spell of savagery and indecision by doing something different, or simply from the need a captive feels to walk the perimeter of his captivity." (Pahor 2010: 79)

"Da, človek zares upa, da se mu bo posrečilo, upa, da bosta zmagali dobrota in naivnost, […] ta nedolžni lepi nagon, ki marsikdaj preživi puberteto in jo s trdoživjostjo podaljša v nedogled." (Pahor 2011: 89)
"That's what we hope for. We hope that kindness will prevail and lives will be saved. This is the innocent, beautiful instinct of our youth, which sometimes survives our youth and lives on stubbornly." (Pahor 2010: 81–82)

"Zato se mi zdaj večkrat zazdi, da sem bil zavoljo spojitve s strahom v tem svetu neobčutljiva filsmka kamera, ki ne sočustvuje, ampak samo snema. No, primera seveda ni prava, ker ni šla na ravnodušje, ampak za obrambni sistem, ki ni dopuščal, da bi čustva segla do človeškega jedra in načela njegovo zgoščeno samoohranitveno energijo." (Pahor 2011: 143)
"That's why it often seems to me that the fear in that world made me an insensitive camera, one that didn't sympathize but only registered. But this example isn't right, of course, because it wasn't about indifference, but about a defense mechanism, one that didn't allow feelings to reach the human core, where the self-protecting energy is harbored." (Author's translation)

Falsifiability and co-narrators

A second narrative technique that Rothberg (2000a, b: 133) mentions is falsifiability. When falsifiable facts are added to the testimony of a survivor it becomes more truthful. Rothberg enlightens this with Klüger's *Weiter Leben: Eine Jugend* (1992). Rothberg explains that by adding historical facts, Klüger broadens the scope of her narrative and shows a glimpse of the bigger picture: What happened with the other people behind the barbed wire? Simultaneously, Rothberg states, this shift to the story of other prisoners emphasizes that Klüger's story should not be read as a *pars pro toto* for the concentration-camp world, that her story is not the only one.

Nekropola contains several references to historical facts, in fact, the frame narrative, the visit to the Natzweiler Struthof memorial camp, is perfectly falsifiable. Genevray argues that the frame narrative of *Nekropola* does not evoke the real scenery of the concentration-camp world, because the memorial camp with its holiday atmosphere makes the evocation of the past more difficult. This incites the protagonist to take the "resurrection" of the camps in his own hands: he adds information from before and outside of the memorial camp in an attempt to complete the narrative (2007: 149). Despite the discrepancy between the camp now and the camp in the past, the memorial camp is still a valuable and falsifiable source of information about the past. "The Visitor" meticulously follows and describes the

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ground plan of the Natzweiler Struthof memorial camp and includes the texts of information boards.

Also, falsifiable details are included in the itinerary of "the Prisoner": every new stop is indicated simply but effectively—the name of the camp, followed by a period (e.g., Harzungen.). Details of the terrain, the buildings and striking incidents are included and make it possible to connect different scenes in the novel to facts in history books. "The Prisoner" mentions, for example, the train journey from Harzungen (a subcamp of concentration camp Dora) to Bergen-Belsen, during which the Germans stop the train to bury 163 bodies. The same anecdotal fact is mentioned in the historical work of D'Hainaut and Somerhausen (1992: 131–135).

Nekropola is made more truthful and allows the reader to peek into the lives of others because of the presence of historical facts. However, these facts are only one way of showing the story of the concentration-camp world next to and outside of "the Prisoner's" own experience. *Nekropola* lets the reader glimpse into the lives, experiences and thoughts of (former) prisoners at several moments during the story through the use of co-narrators. The relationship the protagonist has with these co-narrators and how their stories influence him show the interconnectedness between the theme of loneliness and the technique of falsifiability.

The first important co-narrator is the tour guide, in whom "the Visitor" wants to see another former prisoner:

> "Mogoče je samo upokojenec in si tem poslom zboljšuje dohodke, a rajši si seveda mislim, da je eden nekdanjih stanovalcev tega pogubljenega domovja." (Pahor 2011: 95)
> "Maybe he's retired and makes some money on the side doing this, but of course I prefer to think that he is a former resident." (Pahor 2010: 86–87)

The elderly man "recognizes" "the Visitor" at the front gate. Nowhere in the novel is indicated whether this recognition stems from an earlier visit of Pahor 2 years earlier, or from the aura of a prisoner that, according to "the Visitor", still lingers around him. Because of the recognition, though, the guide lets Pahor enter the premises on his own and in doing so immediately separates him from the other tourists. "The Visitor" welcomes this different status, because he does not want to join the group of holiday-spirited tourists who cannot fully understand what they are seeing. Simultaneously, however, this different status makes it impossible to become part of the normal group of tourists.

Because of the speakers in every corner of the camp it is still possible to follow the stories of the guide. The relationship between "the Visitor" and the tour guide is of a complex nature. Already from the start there is a distance between them, because the narrator is rather skeptical toward the guide:

> "Pa sploh, tudi o smrti kakor o ljubezni se človek lahko pogovarja samo sam s sabo ali pa še z ljubljenim bitjem, s katerim se je zlil v eno. Niti smrt ljubezen ne preneseta prič," (Pahor 2011: 12)
> "It's impossible, anyway, to talk about death – or love – with anyone but yourself. Death and love allow no witnesses." (Pahor 2010: 6)

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Nonetheless, the guide acts as a bridge between "the Visitor" and the tourists in the memorial camp. The anecdotes of the tour guide seduce the protagonist to come closer to the group of tourists, but this does not mean that his emotional connection with the group of tourists or the guide is growing. "The Visitor" states that it is mere curiosity, similar to the curiosity he felt as a prisoner when news was brought to the camp:

> "Tako mi je, kakor da nisem prišel to popoldne iz zunanjega sveta, ampak sem jih pričakal tukaj in mi je, kakor vsem jetnikom, sleherna novica drobec resničnega življenja. Zato se spet približam, da slišim vodnika. […] Zavoljo mrmranja turistov ne razumem, […] Še bolj sem se približal gruči." (Pahor 2011: 168)
> "It's as though I didn't arrive this morning from the outside world but was waiting for them here, greedy like all prisoners for any scrap of news, any shred of life that they have brought with them. I join them again and listen to the guide. […] A murmur rises from the tourists, and I can't hear the end of the story. […] I move in closer." (Pahor 2010: 153)

A game of attracting and repelling is created. While the curiosity of "the Visitor" repeatedly draws him closer to the group of tourists, he turns away when he detects a single false note in the narrative of the tour guide, as the following example illustrates:

> "Tako je tudi mož s palico dodal novico o londonskem radiu, da bi dal ljudem iskro vedrine, a bolje bi naredil, ko bi pustil zlo popolno in dokončno, kakršno je bilo. Njegova želva je obiskovalce raztresla kakor nepričakovana otroška igrača," (Pahor 2011: 96)
> "The man with the cane added the anecdote about the London radio to give the people a sparkle of optimism, but he should have left evil absolute and complete. His tortoise distracted the visitors like an unexpected treat." (Author's translation)

The stance of the "I" toward the tourists develops in an ambiguous way. He is happy Natzweiler-Struthof no longer is a place of destruction and that the world acknowledges what happened in the past, yet simultaneously he feels ashamed at the thought of the other tourists seeing the humiliation he and his fellow prisoners underwent. "The Visitor" understandably prefers to walk through the camp alone, as though to be submerged by his memories without interference, but, as the former paragraph shows, he nonetheless follows the other tourists closely: the reactions of those unspoiled minds, the different ways they perceive and interpret the buildings around them are essential for him as a benchmark of the normal world. From the beginning "the Visitor" senses there is a risk of banalization: the sun is shining, the barracks are tidy, and, more importantly, the gaunt figures of the prisoners are no longer part of the camp, which makes the atmosphere completely different. Next to that, the tourists do not carry the same memories with them, which makes them stop at the easily interpretable aspects of the camp. See the comment "the Visitor" makes when the tourists stop at the ovens, while he experiences more shivers at the sight of the red gloves of a camp doctor:

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> "Peč je kljub vsej svoji grobosti vsekakor bolj čista kurjač, ki uptravlja z njo, je pravzaprav grobar. […] poklic torej kakor vsi drugi poklici. Medtem pa je rdeča orokavičena roka ovila požoltele ploščice v hudodelsko ozračje, ki še zdaj trepeta nad osamljeno hladno mizo sredi sobe." (Pahor 2011: 42)
> "In spite of all her roughness, the oven is more pure; the stoker who worked with her was only a gravedigger […] a profession like any other. But that red-gloved hand engendered a criminal atmosphere here that even now hovers over the yellow-tiled table in the middle of the room." (Pahor 2010: 40; Modified translation)

Drawn closer by the curiosity of the narrator, his interest in the reactions of the tourists and the stories of the guide, the distance between "the Visitor" and the group of tourists is physically growing smaller. "The Visitor" needs the presence of the tourists; he uses their reactions to assess his own feelings and to be able to process his past, but their different reactions emphasize and increase the distance between the former survivor and the "innocent" tourists.

The second and largest group of co-narrators is formed by the fellow prisoners. In his position as a medic, Pahor has a great deal of contact with other prisoners, mostly Slavs. By telling the stories of Gabriele, Ivo, Tomaž, Janoš, Ivanček, Darko, Vlado and Mladen (Pahor 2011: 24–28, 44–46, 46–58, 73–78, 87–90, 118–124, 126–129 and 135–140) he lets the other prisoners add their version to his. Strikingly, two of these co-narrators had already appeared in Pahor's earlier work (viz. Tomaž and Janoš in *Moj Tržaški naslov*). As "the Prisoner" is the focalizer, the stories he transfers are coloured by his opinion and the relation between him and the co-narrator. This is also often expressed in the comments he adds. When "the Prisoner" tells the story of Tomaž, he mentions that the latter is constantly talking about the region he lived in before and sometimes acts as if he is still living there. "The Prisoner" thinks this is not clever:

> "Pa to ni prav, sem si mislil, da si tukaj in hkrati tam, v živem svetu, Tomaž, to ni prav. Smrt tega ne dopušča. […] A ne bi smel, Tomaž, ker gre pravkar nosilnica mimo ležišč, smrt je ljubosumna megera, Tomaž." (Pahor 2011: 55)
> "But that's not right, I thought. You can't be here and there in the world of the living, Tomaž, death won't allow it. […] But you shouldn't, Tomaž. Look, there goes a stretcher right past your bunk. Death is jealous, Tomaž." (Pahor 2010: 52)

Pahor gives a similar comment right after the autopsy on the body of his deceased friend Mladen. This time he accuses his friend of not opposing death enough, of being too scared:

> "A nisi imel prav, sem ga zdaj na tihem karal, ko smo odhajali iz koče, nisi imel prav, Mladen, moral bi se premagati, morebiti bi se laže bojeval s smrtjo." (Pahor 2011, 140)
> "'But you were wrong,' I chided him quietly as we left the cabin. 'You were wrong, Mladen, you should have resisted death.'"[7] (Pahor 2010: 128)

[7] Quotation marks are missing in the original.

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These comments not only show how "the Prisoner" reacts to the choices and actions of his fellow inmates, but also express how he deals with the testimonies and eventual deaths of his comrades.

The way witnesses react to those testimonies by (former) camp prisoners is treated by Felman and Laub (1992: 57–59). In their psychoanalytically inspired approach to trauma, they state that in normal situations a witness of such a traumatic story experiences a certain distance toward that story, which makes it possible to put it into perspective. This distance mostly disappears in *Nekropola* because "the Prisoner" shares the same living conditions and experiences similar traumatic events. Testimonies of his comrades also cause feelings of powerlessness, since he knows—due to his having the same background—that the trauma they recount often leads them straight to the hospital wing and, ultimately, to death. Their testimonies are an omen of the future loss of a comrade and the lonely feeling "the Prisoner" will acquire instead.

The fragment about Mladen in one of the previous paragraphs shows "the Prisoner's" accusatory reaction toward his already deceased friend. This reaction seems in vain, but it is one that often occurs in relation to the death of a friend or relative. The shift from grief to anger happens because it is no longer possible for the mourning person to take care of or help the deceased other (Felman and Laub 1992: 72). In the case of "the Prisoner", the death of his patients is an important obstacle within the construction of his identity. When he becomes part of the medical staff, he builds his identity around the care for his patients and being part of the team of medics. When one of the patients dies, "the Prisoner" feels as if he has failed, despite the inevitability of death in those circumstances. Death decreases the worth of his role, of his capabilities and, hence, has a harmful effect on "the Prisoner's" identity. The death of a medic, as in the case of Mladen, economically increases the value of the main character, because medics become rarer. However, for "the Prisoner" the death of another medic is an attack on his identity: the naive safety he ascribes to the role of the caretaker turns out to be an illusion. Guilt is another emotion "the Prisoner" experiences when others die; he then feels as if he did not do well enough, or even perceives it as a failure to achieve of one of the few goals left in his life.

The last group of co-narrators, perfectly falsifiable in this case, are other, extra-textual survivors of the camps who have published their experiences. The narrator now and again mentions the writings of other such external survivors:

> "Že dolgo pa se zavedam, da so pravzaprav moja doživetja, če jih primerjam s tistimi, ki so jih drugi opisali v svojih spominih, zelo skromna. Blaha, Levi, Rousset, Bruck, Ragot, Pappalettera. Pa tudi premalo razgledan sem bil." (Pahor 2011: 142)
>
> "For a long time now I've been aware that my own experiences were modest compared to what others described in their memoirs. Blaha, Levi, Rousset, Bruck, Ragot, Pappalettera. And that I wasn't observant enough." (Pahor 2010: 130)

> "Zdaj vem iz povojne literature, da so profesorju Hirtu izročili osemdeset ženskih in moških teles, ki jih je Kramer, komandant tega taborišča, dobil iz

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> Oświecima in jih s plinom zadušil med temi belimi ploščicami." (Pahor 2011: 177)
> "Now I know, from the material published since the war, that Professor Hirt was consigned eighty male and female prisoners which Joseph Kramer, the camp commandant, got from Auschwitz and gassed amid these white tiles." (Pahor 2010: 161)

In the accounts of others, the main character discovers that his knowledge of the concentration-camp world is not complete, "the Writer–Narrator" and "the Visitor" use these books to fill in the gaps in their memory. Simultaneously they use these writings as a mirror for the actions of "the Prisoner" and fellow prisoners. The following fragment about the more amply treated book *Medicina na zcesti* (Medicine on the Wrong Track) by Dr. Blaha shows how the survivor-narrators compare their own memories to the accounts of others:

> "Človeške kože so v Dachauu visele, pripoveduje doktor Blaha, kakor perilo, ki se suši. Iz njih so izdelovali tenko usnje za jahalne hlače, aktovke, copate in uporabljali so jih za vezavo knjig. […] Njegova knjiga pa je tristo strani dolga galirija razodetij. Res, mislil sem, da sem kolikor toliko doma v taboriških zadevah, a sem ob takih pričevanjih pravi novinec." (Pahor 2011: 159)
> "Flayed human skins hung in Dachau, Dr. Blaha writes, like laundry set out to dry. They were used to make thin leather for riding breeches, briefcases, slippers, book bindings. This is why it wasn't healthy to have healthy skin, he writes. I may be more or less at home in the reality of the camps, but in the light of some of Dr. Blaha's testimony I am a novice." (Pahor 2010: 145)

"The Visitor" and "the Writer–Narrator" also use the extra information as a reference frame with which to compare their own incomplete memory to the testimonies of others. During these comparisons, the survivor-narrators acknowledge that "the Prisoner" could not know the camp world as thoroughly as others because of his relatively short camp experience. Nonetheless, with the "heroic" stories of other survivors in mind, they do not understand that their former self did not use the knowledge it had to oppose the system. They somehow minimize the small gestures of resistance of "the Prisoner". It is as if they do not remember how proud "the Prisoner" felt when his small rebellions succeeded, or how this contributed to his identity as a prisoner, as in the following example:

> "Oddal sem bil petnajst listkov into je bil hoten, zavesten poskus, da bi prevaral smrt. Seveda je prav lahko oporekati, da je bil moj poskus skoraj gotovo jalov, zakaj zavoljo mojih listkov so pomrli samo kakšen dan kasneje. A kdo ve, mogoče se je kateri rešil, samo že ta možnost pa je vredna celo človeško življenje," (Pahor 2011: 110)
> "I […] handed him the fifteen passes, an attempt to outwit death. One could argue that this attempt was irrelevant, since my passes delayed death only by a day or two. Who knows, though, maybe one or two people would survive. Even that small hope is worth an entire life's work." (Pahor 2010: 100)

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Whether "the Writer–Narrator" and "the Visitor" remember "the Prisoner's" small acts of rebellion or not, they judge the documentary of their past self from another ethical position. They live in a different world, they know of different kinds of resistance, they are not limited by the dehumanizing circumstances of the concentration-camp world. Yet again this brings the identity gap to the surface.

Normality versus the extreme

Rothberg mentions yet another narrative technique: authors of camp literature often evoke the uneasy feeling of alienation that is part of life during and after the camps (2000a, b: 129–140). Rothberg argues that this feeling can be provoked by opposing the normal world and the extremely divergent "concentration universe"—the name given by Rousset (1998) to stress the difference of the world created by the Nazis. The friction caused by this confrontation emphasizes the distance between those two worlds, and hence brings about alienation.

When everyday actions are performed within the boundaries of the camps, the abnormality of the world in which they appear is accentuated. "The Prisoner" is sometimes confronted with the uneasy feeling the friction causes, as the next story shows. The hero tells of a picture of an Italian actress he finds in a propaganda leaflet. The picture reminds him of his sister, which makes him tear it out, glue it onto a piece of cardboard and hang it in his room. When two camp doctors laugh about the picture he realizes this normal action does not belong in the camps:

> "Kako sem mogel biti tak bedak, da sem dal portret žive osebe med mrliče." (Pahor 2011: 124)
> "How could I act so foolishly and hang the portrait of a living creature between the dead." (Author's translation)

Rothberg mentions a similar effect in his essay about Ruth Klüger (2000a: 133–134). In her story two women want to throw a pair of socks to two other women on the other side of the fence. The socks do not reach the other side, but get stuck in the barbed wire: in this way the dangling socks become a symbol for the unusual situation where normal actions do not have their place.

Furthermore, the connotation of everyday objects changes when they are used for other, less-expected purposes. Scheiber (2009: 3–4) shows how the use of stretchers creates a feeling of alienation in Delbo's *Auschwitz et après*. The usual connotation of stretchers is a hopeful one—the sick or wounded are put on a stretcher to get to the hospital and be cured—or a respectful one, when they are used to carry the dead. The only connotation linked to the quickly assembled stretchers in the camps is convenience: they are only made to make it easier to convey the useless corpses (useless because they can no longer be put to work) to the ovens. In *Nekropola* a similar shift in connotation happens with a simple wheelbarrow. One scene clearly depicts the scaring and even surreal atmosphere that surrounds wheelbarrows when they are put to the same use as Delbo's stretchers:

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> "Takrat pa se je s steze onkraj barak oglasilo zateglo cviljenje, ki je ritmično prebadalo tišino. […] zdaj pa je bilo kakor da se nizko pri tleh mota cvileča tožba, ki se zelo počasi in s težavo vzdiguje po pobočju. […] Kdo se jih je domislil, samokolnic, da je z njimi nadomestil nosilnice, ki jih ni bilo zadosti." (Pahor 2011: 60–61)
> "But then a squealing came from the path that ran along the far side of the barracks, a rhythmic noise in the silence. […] The squealing ascended slowly and with difficulty up the hill. […] Who thought of using wheelbarrows instead of stretchers, which were always in short supply?" (Pahor 2010: 57)

Nevertheless, when normality (or the illusion of normality) is created, despite the extreme environment, this creates an unexpected benefit for the prisoners. This effect particularly occurs in the work of the medics in the infirmary. Without sufficient resources they create a hospital-like atmosphere with a bed and improvised medicine as white plaster powder, carbon powder and glucose ampoules (Pahor 2011: 99), which establishes an atmosphere where patients once again believe they can survive:

> "Bolničarjeva skrb jih je razreševala amorfnosti skupnega pogina, morebiti so tudi čutili potrebo po bolničarjevi bližini, po dotiku njegovih rok, kakor da jih nevzdržno vabi sanjsko zaupanje v njegov obred s progami belega papirja," (Pahor 2011: 193)
> "The care of a medic relieved them from the amorphousness of the group destruction; maybe they also felt the need for the closeness of a medic, for the touch of his hands, as if a dreamy trust in his ritual with strips of white paper unbearably seduced them." (Author's translation)

The creation of normality seemingly has the capacity to decrease the feeling of loneliness in such a problematic environment and to bring consolation. However, when the need of "the Prisoner" to create normality collides with the indifference of others, this brings up yet another situation of distance, as the following example expresses. "The Prisoner" feels it can be comforting to do things in a traditional way, to respect certain values from the world outside the camps. It annoys him that not everybody deems this correct. When he watches an autopsy he notes it is disrespectful of the doctor to light a cigarette next to the body, it is even worse when he sees that the assistant, instead of sewing the patient back together, makes a little pile of the intestines (Pahor 2011: 140).

The feeling of alienation is also an important factor in the loneliness as perceived by "the Visitor" and "the Writer–Narrator". It is caused by the fact they live in the present, with one foot still in the past, but without the possibility to live fully that past. In *Nekropola* Natzweiler Struthof is a uniting place: "the Visitor" needs to be in the camp to allow "the Prisoner" to come to the surface and to bring together the concentration-camp world and the world in which the protagonist now lives. Within the boundaries of the memorial camp "the Visitor" is a connector between the different stages in time. However, the reunion of both worlds also causes the aforementioned friction in two ways: "the Visitor" feels alien toward the tourists visiting the memorial camp and society in general, because he is an element of the

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"concentration universe" confronted with the normal world. He likewise feels this distance toward the lingering deceased comrades, because of the 20 years of normal life that stand between them and the guilt that he survived. Both manifestations of alienation are provoked by the identity gap of the protagonist: the earlier self feels more related to his fellow prisoners; the later selves lean more toward the tourists. Re-visiting the camp brings about a paradox: the protagonist gets closer to his former self, but this closeness emphasizes his inner alienation.

In the guise of a tourist from the new world, the feeling of alienation starts as soon as "the Visitor" enters the camp. When the guide lets him enter on his own when he recognizes him, "the Visitor" does not disapprove of the fact that this makes him different in the eyes of the other tourists:

> "Zato sem mu hvaležen, da grem sam po neslišnem svetu; into zadovoljstvo je kakor zadoščenje ob zavesti prednosti, posebnega privilegija, ki upošteva mojo pripadnost kasti zavržencev." (Pahor 2011:12)
> "But I am grateful to him for letting me walk through this inaudible world alone. I feel superior, satisfied with the special privilege that comes from my former status as an outcast." (Pahor 2010: 6)

> "Obenem pa je ločenost tudi nadaljevanje nekdanje ločenosti in nekdanjega molka." (Pahor 2011: 12)
> "Simultaneously this separation is a continuation of the separation and silence of the past." (Author's translation)

He is grateful, because he feels as if they perceive him as different anyway:

> "Bedasto je, a zdi se mi, da me turisti, ki se vračajo k svojim vozilom, opazujejo, kakor da se je naenkrat poveznil na moje rame zebrasti jopič in da moje lesene cokle tarejo kamenčke na poti." (Pahor 2011: 10)
> "It's absurd, but I almost feel that the tourists walking back to their cars can see the striped jacket wrapped around my shoulders and hear my wooden clogs crunch on the gravel path." (Pahor 2010: 5)

Although this feeling of alienation toward the tourists in Natzweiler Struthof is stronger than the alienation the survivor-narrators experience in everyday life, the confrontation with society also regularly emphasizes the protagonist's peculiarity. While "the Prisoner" tries to honour the values of the normal world within the camp boundaries in order to create normality, the confrontation of the survivor-narrator with the survival instinct he developed in the camps creates alienation. This makes it harder to return to the normal world. He cannot, for example, bear the sight of his dog spilling water, because saving was essential to survive in the camp. The return is even harder when the survivors feel that family, friends and society have a hard time understanding and even believing the horror they have lived through. The anecdote that Franc, a former inmate with whom the later Pahor still occasionally meets, tells in *Nekropola* gives a good impression:

> "[…] je Franc v skladišču za obleko sunil frak. […] A on, kakor da se mu je zavrtelo, ga je oblekel in se prikazal v nejem na najvišjem paštnu. […] In ko pripoveduje, se Franc živčno reži na divanu majhne sprejemnice ob

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> Ljubljanci. V filmu so prikazali taboriščnika, ki se obleče v frak, pravi, gledalcem pa se zdi izmišljeno. A jaz sem se oblekel zares." (Pahor 2011: 158)
> "One day, Franc pilfered a tuxedo from the clothing storehouse. […] Franc put it on and walked out onto the highest terrace. […]When he tells the story, he laughs nervously, sitting on the divan in his small parlour overlooking the Ljubljanica River. 'I saw a movie in which a prisoner is shown dressed in a tuxedo,' he says. 'The audience thinks it was made up. But I knew better.'" (Pahor 2010: 145)

A lot of reactions of viewers of Holocaust documentaries have the same self-protecting reaction: "This cannot be true." Disbelief reigns, because accepting what happened to be true would shake their belief in the goodness and superiority of the human race (Felman & Laub 1992: 68). This self-protecting reaction also comes to the surface in the short meaningless conversation of the French couple in front of the oven. The expression "*les pauvres*" seems somewhat out of place, but actually portrays the coping mechanism of outsiders.

"The Visitor" is not only confronted with the tourists. As Natzweiler Struthof is also a place of commemoration, he comes closer to the comrades he left behind. He reacts rather emotionlessly at the sight of the small crosses for the victims and the large monument in the centre of the camp. He feels more connected to the ashes of the deceased that penetrated the soil and the images of his deceased friends that populate the camp again in his dreams. During this nightly and imaginary confrontation, "the Visitor" cannot get close to them, because the aura of a former prisoner is replaced with traces of modern life. At the end of his dream "the Visitor" realizes that the 20 years he has lived make a real connection between him and the past impossible:

> "Takrat pa se mi je razodelo, da me vrste na paštnih niso hoté prezrle, ampak pa sploh niso opazile žive podobe, ki ni bila primerna za njihove brezteže oči." (Pahor 2011: 190)
> "It occurred to me that the formations along the terraces hadn't ignored me intentionally but that they simply could not see a living being with their weightless eyes." (Pahor 2010: 174)

Because the main character does not feel a real connection with other people in society who did not experience the same past, and since it is impossible to come close to the comrades he left behind in the camps, the survivor-narrator experiences a constant feeling of homelessness or disconnectedness. The protagonist is constantly on the road, in search of connection, and he comes close to solving his disconnectedness when he visits the memorial camp, which explains why he is visiting the camp for the second time already. The hero would also get closer to connection in the presence of other survivors. Meeting them, however, does not only enable a real connection (relation); it also brings him closer to the fear and the trauma he never wants to experience again.

When "the Visitor" reads the back of André Ragot's book about Natzweiler Struthof, he learns his friend and colleague in the camps died a decade ago. The

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protagonist regrets he never complied with his friend's request to meet afterwards, but the fear of reliving the trauma, and the fear of meeting the survivor André instead of his friend, the prisoner André, made the main character turn down the invitation that would have been one of the few possibilities of experiencing a real connection again:

> "Zakaj se nisem odzval tvojemu listku, ki me je vabil v Sens! […] Tako pa si zame tudi André Ragot, zdravnik v Sensu, a predvsem si še zmeraj mladi mož v lesenih coklah, v zebri, zvoljo odpete srajce skoraj fantovski, […] Bližji si mi kakor tisti, ki so mi blizu, a so zunaj naše skrivnosti." (Pahor 2011: 182–184)
> "Why did I not react to your note, that invited me to Sens! […] André Ragot, a physician from Sens. But for me you will always be a young man in wooden clogs and striped prison clothes, looking boyish with your collar unbuttoned. […] You, part of our secret, are closer to me than those who are close to me now. (Pahor 2010: 168–169)

A short, controllable submersion in the concentration-camp world in the form of a visit to the camps, seems preferable instead of a constant relationship with another remnant of that world.

The survivor-narrator lives the life of a lone pilgrim, but he does not perceive this lonely existence as loneliness (Pahor 2011: 181). His connection to the past, on the other hand, never really disappears: not only does a part of his mind wander around in the past, but he also carries a striking "souvenir" of the camps with him—his strangely curved little finger. One day during his imprisonment it bent, and never returned to normal again. Afterwards it reminds him every day of the atrocities of the world he left behind, and it disturbs him initially. The hero decides not to straighten it, however, because he sees it as the metaphorical hook of a mountain climber that protects him from falling into the empty void below (Pahor 2011: 22). It is as if surgically straightening the little finger would deny his past and the part of his identity that lingers in that past.

Conclusion

Loneliness plays a central role in *Nekropola*, but more important is the relationship between identity and loneliness throughout the life of the protagonist. Loneliness, in all its aspects and variations, from alienation and solitude caused by purely physical distance to mental detachment, influences the identity of the main character in several ways. To analyse the relationship between these two important features of the narrative, the revisiting of Natzweiler Struthof should also be seen as a revisiting of the self. The division of the narrator into three individual narrator–focalizers helps us read *Nekropola* as a self-exploratory journey. The split narration allows the reader to treat "the Prisoner", "the Visitor" and "the Writer–Narrator" as three independent yet interacting personae of the main character. All three of them share the trauma of the camps, although it is an end point for "the Prisoner" and a starting point for the two survivor-narrators. As such, their existential beings develop in

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opposite directions: the persona of "the Prisoner" undergoes the degenerative effect of the concentration-camp world until he almost ceases to exist, while "the Survivor-Narrators" start with the reconstruction of their identity. Each narrator–focalizer portrays his own camp reality and his position within that reality. In order to give a complete picture of their camp world, all narrator–focalizers add the voice of others to their account: the fellow prisoners, the tour guide, and other survivor-narrators.

"The Prisoner" starts the first part of the self-exploratory journey: he travels through the concentration-camp world and fights the intended dehumanization with varying success, but the longer the journey lasts, the more his losses pile up. His fragmentary but chronological log reads as an anti-Bildungsroman, and, in spite of his wish to survive, the course of his journey draws nearer to the outcome he reads in the eyes of a dying patient:

> "A vendar je še bila v njih [očih] tudi plahost mladega fanta, kateremu so zamenjali deške pustolovske zgodbe z nepredvidenimi podobami tovarne smrti." (Pahor 2011: 87)
> "They [his eyes] still preserved the timidity of a young boy whose swashbuckling adventure tales had been replaced by inconceivable images of assembly-line death." (Pahor 2010: 80)

For the protagonist the destruction of his people—and hence his identity—began with the dominance of Italy in Trieste, but with his arrival in the camps the decline goes into free fall. Despite the inescapable dehumanization, "the Prisoner" finds (a substitute) identity in the anonymous collectivity. He places himself among "we, the Slovenes", an identity that is reinforced, since the boundaries that separated his people in the real world disappear within the boundaries of the camp. "The Prisoner" also talks of "we, the prisoners", who find refuge in the faceless mass of numbers created by the German oppressors. This group identity is strengthened further because of the separation of the prisoners from the normal world, not only in a physical way, but also through their different status, extreme way of life and the development of their own camp idiolect.

Paradoxically, the only chance for "the Prisoner" to preserve his identity is by leaving the relatively comfortable safety of the mass and finding a goal in the miserable camp life. Hence, the turning point for "the Prisoner", his start as an interpreter and later as a medic, forces him to forsake his collective identity in order to become "I" again. Being part of the medical staff enables him to build his identity around the position he has obtained. This new position makes it possible to regain his self-worth: evoking the illusion of a hospital in the infirmary keeps his patients from losing themselves and allows him to turn other "numbers" into humans again. The same patients, however, hold the position of guides within the anti-Bildungsprocess of "the Prisoner": their testimonies and eventual deaths are examples of the different stages of decay that are possibly awaiting him along the road through the concentration-camp world.

As a medic he tries to counter these omens of a nearby end by helping the patients in spite of the nearly non-existent medical facilities. Nevertheless, during this phase of the journey the identity of the "I" is constantly under attack: every day

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he brings piles of corpses from the infirmary to the crematorium; sometimes his creation of normality emphasizes the hopelessness of the situation instead of countering it; more than once he is disappointed by the decisions of fellow medics with whom he identifies; and, finally, the death of another medic ends the illusion of safety and immunity associated to this role.

As if the failed illusion of immunity deals him the final blow, "the Prisoner" becomes a patient himself not long afterwards. The progressing disease makes it impossible for him to fully keep up the work as a medic, his identity falters, and he can no longer find refuge in his former collective identity. At the end of his journey "the Prisoner" seems to end up identity-less, at last overthrown by the "concentration universe".

Against all odds the protagonist survives the world that should have killed him. He goes home, tries to pick up his life, and necessarily distances himself from those traumatic fourteen months within the barbed-wire confines. Again the main character needs to forsake a part of his identity in order to move on, but where the collective identity he left behind in the camps was a temporary substitute, a gap is now created between two essential parts of his identity, which causes the survivor-narrators to feel incomplete. This feeling of detachment manifests itself during the whole narrative of both "the Visitor" and "the Writer–Narrator". Where "the Prisoner" only thought he did not fit the frame, but found refuge in collectivity (for the greatest part of his imprisonment), loneliness now becomes an inherent part of his being. This explains the setting of *Nekropola*: the frame narrative consists of the return of the main character to the terraces of death, to relive his past and to overcome this barrier in his identity. In other words, during the visit, part two of the protagonist's journey, the "re-Bildungsroman", begins.

The survivor-narrators wander the earth in search of a way of overcoming the feeling of detachment that dominates their life. In *Nekropola* they revisit Natzweiler Struthof already for the second time during their nomadic travels. This indicates that the presence of the main character in the camp brings him closer to the connection he is looking for. "The Visitor" gets closest to bridging the gap in his identity when he walks through the memorial camp; only there his memories are triggered in such a way that "the Prisoner" comes to the surface.

During the visit to the camp, the main character literally walks across several stages in the reconstruction of his identity. The antagonists in the camp guide him along this road, but simultaneously confront him with the limits of this "re-Bildung". The relationship of "The Visitor" with his first guides, the tourists, is rather ambiguous. He feels alienated from the tourists but nevertheless uses their reactions to scale his own. In spite of the gap in his identity, the trauma still affects his life and lets him watch the camp with the eyes of a survivor. He is scared that the holiday-esque atmosphere of the camp will make the tourists trivialize the circumstances; after all, without the memories it is impossible to understand the real impact. On the other hand, because of the identity gap, the connection with his past self deteriorated with the passing of the years, and with the diminishing of the memories "the Visitor" gradually becomes more like the other tourists. He is "infested with life", which limits his own understanding of what happened in the past.

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The most obvious guide in the "re-Bildungsprocess" is the tour guide. His anecdotal stories complement the limited memories of "the Visitor", they kindle the curiosity of the protagonist and make him draw up closer to the tourists. However, the discrepancy between the interpretations of "the Visitor" and the tourists causes friction and creates a game of attracting and repelling. This represents the daily confrontation of the survivor-narrators with society: the occasional rise of camp instinct is replaced by moments of complete submersion in the past, and the disbelief and miscomprehension of other members of society can be observed closely through the reactions of the tourists. In either case, both in the memorial camp and in society, the protagonist feels as an outsider.

"The Visitor" also looks for the former inhabitants of the camps during his visit. They are the guides of his choice, and he hopes they will reach out to him and guide him to his past self. Disappointingly, the inmates that live in the world of "the Prisoner" only come back as ghosts in the dreams of "the Visitor". These spirits do not recognize "the Visitor" and after the visit he concludes that, although they share the same past, his connection with the present and with life makes the reconnection to the past impossible.

"The Writer–Narrator" tries to overcome the distance for a second time when he is writing down the story. He tries to create a surrogate memory and combines the incomplete documentary of his past life with the memories of the visit and adds the information of extra-textual survivor-authors like Blaha, Levi and Pappalettera to complete his frame of reference. "The Writer–Narrator" concludes, in the light of those great testimonies, that "the Prisoner" watched the world with "the eyes of a boy" (kot novinec/malo razgledan/nesrečnik). "The Writer–Narrator" uses the knowledge he collected to propose the "proper reaction" instead of some of "the Prisoner's" reactions that he remembers. From a distance "the Writer–Narrator" places the visit to Natzweiler Struthof into perspective and tries to diminish the distance between "the Visitor" and "the Prisoner" through comments and common truths. This works to a certain extent, but more often than not his attempts end with "Ne vem": two words that express the doubt of "the Writer–Narrator" and topple his last attempt to unify his identity.

Nekropola ends with the thought of the main character that he does not know how to bring the former inhabitants of the camp together with the children who visit it now. But the protagonist neither manages to reconnect the lost piece of his former self to his current, incomplete identity. As such, the "re-Bildungsroman" does not end with the reunion of the three personae; it ends with the conclusion that comprises the paradox in the existence of the "I": in order to move on it is necessary to create distance from the trauma of the camps, and thus to live with inner alienation, yet the sheer existence of the trauma makes it impossible to let it go completely, which creates alienation to the outside world:

> "Tako sem kljub povezavi s tukajšnjimi skrivnostmi polovičarski v tem ozračju, ki je zdaj zavoljo tišine skoraj sanjsko, in sem prav tako polovičarski, ko sem daleč od tod, a je v meni odločujoče nekdanje tukajšnje ozračje. Tako se najbrž tudi ptič feniks ni za zmerom rešil pepela, iz katerega je vzletel." (Pahor 2011: 94)

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> "Despite my connection to the secrets of this place, I only half exist in its dreamlike, silent atmosphere, and similarly, when I am far from here, my existence is only half, for half is this atmosphere. The phoenix hasn't shaken off the ashes from which it rose." (Pahor 2010: 85–86)

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