

NARRATIVE THEOLOGY (1986–1987)

With the publication of the essay collection *On the Edge* in 1987 Basara arguably “matured,” since, as Zoran Jeremić points out, most of the aesthetic and ideological attitudes articulated in the book will later be used in his fiction.⁹⁹ Prior to this book of essays, Basara published collections of short stories *Vanishing Tales* and *Peking by Night*, as well as the novels *Chinese Letter* and *Through the Looking-glass Cracked*. In Jeremić’s opinion, as an author decisively formed by the spirit of urban mythology, Basara in his first books defiantly proclaimed the continuation of one of the principal currents of Serbian fiction (represented by the work of Danilo Kiš and Borislav Pekić), itself closely related to a tradition of world literature exemplified by Kafka, Beckett, and Borges, while also invoking the teachings of metaphysicians, this first stage of his writing reaching its high point with the novel *The Cyclist Conspiracy*. In an interview with Dejan Ilić in 1997, Basara comments on his book of essays *On the Edge* and the novel *Through the Looking-glass Cracked* and on some other features of his narrative work, such as his propensity for first-person narration: he claims that he was never interested in objectivity, and for him, the third person is maintaining a kind of distance from writing, “the petty-bourgeois imperative of *non-interference*.”¹⁰⁰ At the time of writing those books, which I consider to be related, Basara claims to have intuitively sensed that it doesn’t make much sense to deal with external phenomena (including the psychological domain) and that “the peg on which the whole problem hangs is in fact me.”¹⁰¹ In this context, he embarked on writing in the sense of not only rejecting grand narratives, but the story in general, and placed it under the magnifying glass of the self. It wasn’t the circumstances of “the self” that mattered to him, only what “the self” actually is. Basara therefore stepped into the field of the religious, without, as he maintains, even knowing it himself:

⁹⁹ Зоран Јеремић, “Басара by night,” *Басара*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ “Тумарање по беспућу,” *Басара*, p. 65.

When, in my youthful confusion, I thought that I was lost, I was in fact already saved. When you stay alone in a room long enough, with a sheet of paper in front of you, it quickly becomes clear that you're also made up of small, internal stories about yourself. Nice situation: empty stories outside, empty stories inside. When you dare to admit to yourself that the self, in its purest of forms is only a point where longings and anxieties rage, then it won't take long for the day to arrive when you will sink into a dream and cry: "God, help me!"¹⁰²

In this way, Basara explains his original aversion to the third person, too: he points out that he was facing a big problem, because the subject of his interest – the self – proved to be but “an unbearably present nothing.”¹⁰³ On the one hand, there was narration in the third person, which he suspected was a lie, and on the other, everything was firmly connected with the fictitious self. Basara concludes that it is probably from this atmosphere of his first books that a critical view of his comic nihilism stems, which he considers to be a sign of superficial reading. He points out that he is always deadly serious, and that he didn't think that in a substantial sense the outside world was nothing – quite on the contrary, in his opinion, it was all too material – but it all seemed insignificant to him, so he asked what kind of *I* could accept such a world. Basara is opposed to the subversive and destructive projects of the modern age, and for him, writing is not a vehicle for expressing his ideas, but a means to bring his spiritual life into harmony with tradition, while mocking the subversive and basically provincial doctrines of the modern age – first and foremost the apotheosis of man and the pseudo myth of man's omnipotence. Basara points out that this is what the critics mistakenly interpret as his comic nihilism. Hence the atmosphere of paralysis and frustration that dominated his first books.

I am convinced that there is nothing one can do. A being that exists, and sooner or later must die, can do nothing. That's right, and millions of pages of humanistic gossip don't help. Nothing can disprove the fear and truth of the fact that we can't do anything for ourselves, nor can we do anything for anything at all. The life of modern man, all his hyperactivity, is just a

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

manic delay in dealing with that fact. A large part of literature is also in the function of this delay, so I would rather see myself as a narrative theologian than as a writer.¹⁰⁴

Basara defines the thematic focus of his early books as the “archaeology of the ego,” and argues that his later works speak of the outside world. He sets up some barriers here: he claims to have left the care of the *I* to religious introspection, so he had to indulge in the general delirium of producing false reflections of reality – he openly says that his geographies and phenomenologies are completely fabricated; moreover, they are fictions that tendentiously refuse to resemble anything real. He adds that they later began to resemble reality, but “that’s another story.”¹⁰⁵ According to Basara, fiction is true when it doesn’t present itself falsely – when it shows itself to be fiction. This is true because there is no mimesis; there are no reference points. The rule that Basara states here is: “The less mimesis there is in a work of art, the truer it is.”¹⁰⁶ He emphasises that the gap between the world of objects and our perception widens when fiction (and according to Basara, every written text is a fiction) simulates objectivity and truthfulness. The reason for this, he argues, is in the placement of supra-philosophical and ideologically blurred lenses between them. His conclusion is that reality suffers more in the process than aesthetics. In this sense, historicism and objectivism, according to Basara, devastate reality because the number of these lenses increases over time to the point of absolute opacity. In this way, he explains the popularity of his novel *The Cyclist Conspiracy* – people read this novel because they intuitively sense that grand history is based on the same principles as his novel; in other words, imaginary problems obscure the real (metaphysical) problem: the problem of life and death as a logically irresolvable aporia. But, on the other hand, *The Cyclist Conspiracy* clearly declares itself to be fiction – not a mimesis of the phenomenal, but a *mimesis of unreality of the phenomenal*. An example that illustrates this is the fact that readers of *The Cyclist Conspiracy* accept, in most cases, the only authentic document of the novel – *An Analysis of the Ideological Ori-*

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

entation of the Journal, Vidici, and the Newspaper Student¹⁰⁷ – as fiction. Basara emphasises that the essence of *The Cyclist Conspiracy* project was to demonstrate that false and authentic documents are equally fake; in other words, that history is a field of inauthenticity. In this sense, history shows itself as a place of loss of identity and subjectivity – it is objective only insofar as we become objects in it.

Basara's narration is always on the verge of turning into an essay, as Ilić points out,¹⁰⁸ while his essay collections can be read as narrative fiction. Nevertheless, the author acknowledges the difference between the two genres. He explains this as follows: the division into essayistic and narrative prose is not meant to explain things and to bring order to literature; the point of all such divisions is to atomise perception, in order for the sense of the particular to expand at the expense of the feeling for the general. In his case, the books of essays are created as a recapitulation of a period and paving the way for new interests. According to Ilić, the novel *Through the Looking-glass Cracked* represents a turning point in Basara's work, while the author himself claims that a turn is only hinted at. This is the first time that the narrative *I* steps out into the world. It is dithering, but also self-conscious. On his own account, after *Through the Looking-glass Cracked*, Basara "gave up on the world. The world is irrelevant for salvation and ruin alike."¹⁰⁹ Since then, all of his literary projects have been aimed at articulating the insignificance of global reality. A careful reader, Basara warns, will notice that for him, the world after *Through the Looking-glass Cracked* is no longer a horrible place, but a simulated one. He interprets the title of his first book of essays – *On the Edge* – as a kind of concise essay on his position in the world: constantly being on the edge. On one side of that edging is the everyday world, and on the other side the mystical space of internal spiritual experience. When it comes to Basara, the title of the book usually summarises its programme and concept. This book contains the text "Metaphysics of Fiction in the Light of the Decline of the West," which, according to Ilić, could be seen as programmatic more generally.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Basara, *The Cyclist Conspiracy*, pp. 90-108.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. "Тумарање по беспућу," p. 67.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 71.

This text, on Basara's explanation in the same interview, summarises his experience of life and of literature; it is a kind of construction of an intellectual identity, part of the painstaking process of mastering the inner reality. Basara argues that it is ultimately about sharpening one's perception. In this context, he expresses his astonishment at the fact that none of the people who have written about his books have noticed the principal role that perception plays in them. Visions, deceptions, illusions are all mentioned, but perceptions are not. "In one of its significant layers, my literary project could be defined as sharpening perception."¹¹¹ He warns that it is by and large ignored that the domain of perception abounds in commonplaces, as does the domain of language. Just as we automatically use linguistic generalities, conventional phrases, ready-made sentences, we also perceive phenomena by means of established perceptual patterns. Basic prejudice, Basara warns, is that it is the subject who is the owner of perception. If it were not so, media manipulation would not be possible, Basara concludes:

But it very much is possible, and already exceeds the limit of equilibrium: now the *object* becomes a more active factor in the process of perception. A great example is right in front of us: Serbian national TV network. The programmes of that infernal television make the viewers passive to the extent that the illusions it broadcasts are more convincing than the possibility of direct insight is. This is the phase of hi-tech totalitarianism that I wrote about in *Virtual Kabbalah*. The time of the creation of the "Metaphysics of Fiction" coincides with the twilight of the low-tech phase. Just over ten years have passed and things have changed dramatically. First of all, the heliocentric system has been tacitly suspended, and the New World Order is inaugurating geocentrism again. However, this time, the Earth, which is placed at the centre of the virtual universe, is *an optoelectronic copy of our planet*. At that time, geopolitics was still taken into account. Now these wares are only hawked in the unstable territories of Russia and former Yugoslavia.¹¹²

Taken as a whole, *On the Edge* is a sort of preaching about storytelling.¹¹³ Predrag Marković interprets the title of this collection – the awareness of existence *on the edge* – as the awareness of creation. In this sense,

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 72.

¹¹³ Cf. Марковић, "Проповедник прозе," p. 98.

to think about the world in which one is creating is not to think about the meaning of that world, but about the meaning of creation. Basara's essayistic lectures, as well as his fictions, according to Marković, are lectures on philosophy, a speaking about the other, precisely because they give meaning to the speech of the other. All paradoxes thus belong to creation and allow being on the edge as being constantly in the position of leaping, despite the fact that the leap is interrupted by fragments of speech. The preacher speaks in metaphors – metaphors are the goal of speaking; the narrator creates what he is talking about because the subject of the speech is forgotten, concludes Marković. In this sense, to create in a world without a creator is tantamount to consenting to being a creator. In this way, the consequences of the paradox of Basara's texts become the consequences of re-creation. Marković explains the necessity of banalisation, the impossibility of thinking about the world, caricature and inauthenticity as the fruits of a time that has renounced faith. The fiction of metaphysics, thus, according to him, becomes the last possibility of doubt in faith – a kind of resuscitation of a process that once defeated the individual in an attempt to rationalise the world.

Basara should be considered a writer of religious provenance – a Christian writer, in fact, as Ivan Radosavljević claims in his reading of the novel *Through the Looking-glass Cracked*.¹¹⁴ He also believes that this novel marked a turning point in Basara's work. Radosavljević emphasises the importance of the name of the main character in the novel – Ananias – in the context of the New Testament. Namely, Ananias is one of the disciples from Damascus, to whom God appears instructing him to go and find Saul, who, in turn, at that moment, since God appeared to him on the way to Damascus, is blind, and to lay his hands on him and make him see again. According to Radosavljević, that is the pattern on which the novel *Through the Looking-glass Cracked* is based. Ananias, the narrator of that novel, is himself a convert and has his own Saul – his own father – who needs to be enlightened and freed from the darkness in which he lives, to be made able to see. After conversion, his father will indeed continue to spread the faith (in America), before he goes off to Syria. In

¹¹⁴Иван Радосављевић, “Апостолски ланац: о религијским аспектима романа *Нанукло огледало*,” *Басара*, pp. 99-105.

his study, Radosavljević proves the religious basis of *Through the Looking-glass Cracked*, as well as its connections with the relevant Biblical text, and also refers to the answer that Basara gives to the question posed by the contemporary state of the world and man in it – it can be presented as an “apostolic succession” of sorts, which is actually a series structured by characters who endlessly pass the faith and the knowledge of the Way, Truth, and Life on to each other. According to Radosavljević, this answer is the most important aspect of the totality of the meaning and significance of the novel *Through the Looking-glass Cracked*. Faith, religion, and God play a role that is of key importance in the world that Basara creates in the novel, Radosavljević points out. It all starts with the narrator gaining the knowledge that he did not evolve from an ape. Ananias, the first-person narrator, before gaining this knowledge, believes in the order of reality whose constituent parts are evolution, history, science, the Party, and the Youth Alliance. This order disappears irretrievably, and due to his newly acquired knowledge, Ananias realises its falsity and unreality. The new knowledge cannot be questioned – it is the truth that the Holy Spirit communicates to the narrator in a dream. In this way, Ananias becomes aware of the fact that he was created from nothing, just like everything else that exists. From that fact, Ananias draws a paradoxical conclusion: that he doesn’t exist. That is, he exists only as a voice in a novel that is actually writing itself. Initially, Ananias is the only one in the world of the novel who acknowledges this fact; this disturbs the initial balance, which will be re-established when the narrator manages to convince others around him of what he knows. According to Radosavljević, Ananias’ father is a representative of others: the basic conflict on which the plot is based is the difference between the knowledge that the narrator has and the delusion in which his father lives. The narrator’s action moves towards the goal of eliminating that distinction. When this goal is achieved, a kind of balance is re-established in the world of the novel and the narration ends. The knowledge that the son possesses, Radosavljević explains, is of a religious nature, and its transfer to others is possible only through their conversion. The laws of the plot in *Through the Looking-glass Cracked* dictate that Ananias converts his father. The narrative voice of the novel, Ananias, is left out of the world of the novel he creates by his own decision: he retains the superior posi-

tion of the creator on whose will the content and the nature of the created world depends, but since at the same time he himself is a part of that world – against his own wishes, because that is what the empirical author of the text wants – he is forced to fight with those who inhabit this world, and above all with his father, in order to gain the desired position. Radosavljević emphasises the external sign of the narrator’s not belonging: the time in which he chooses to exist – 1949 – as opposed to the indefinite present of the other characters in the novel. The time in which Ananias exists is not defined by standards valid in the time of others; the first day of “his” time begins when the Holy Spirit speaks to him. When he tells others that the time in which he exists is different from their own, he encounters opposition – the first quarrel with his father was provoked in this way. During this discussion, the narrator presents the concept of indoctrination for the first time, according to which, true knowledge is only his privilege, acquired by the direct action of the Holy Spirit. The true cognition is contrasted with the knowledge the other inhabitants of the space of the novel believe to possess. Such false knowledge is the result of indoctrination. Ananias has the role of an apostle in the world of *Through the Looking-glass Cracked*, concludes Radosavljević. He is a figure who knows the truth at its source, he spreads it and hands it over to others, and tries to lead them to the path of salvation: “Like the Apostles, he leaves ‘his ship and his father’ for the Word of Truth.”¹¹⁵ According to this interpretation, the idea of *being lost to this world* is the central motif in the narrator’s discussions and in the evidence he presents: salvation is possible only *in another world*, and for man to be saved in the other world, he must be dead to this world. The narrator, as Radosavljević points out, conveys an eminently religious truth, according to which the search for fulfilment in this world is the wrong way; it is necessary to look towards the interior of one’s own personality. When this is done, the realisation follows that nothing is to be found there, i.e. nothing authentic. Since he was created from nothing, man as such is also *nothing*; still, he is *something* more by virtue of the divine spark that given him by the act of creation, explains Radosavljević. Dejan Ilić wrote exhaustively about this problem in his essay “The Expe-

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 101.

rience of Emptiness and the Experience of the Saint in the Fiction of Svetislav Basara.”¹¹⁶ His preliminary thesis is that Basara’s fictional world does not fit completely into the interpretive framework of the postmodernist paradigm, because his stories and novels do not speak exclusively about the “outside” world. In this sense, the definition of postmodernism given by Linda Hutcheon focuses on the socio-historical dimension of the so-called historical metafiction. If we define this dimension as secular, it could be said that Hutcheon leaves the religious dimension of literature out of her considerations, concludes Ilić. Basara’s first three books – *Vanishing Tales*, *Chinese Letter*, and *Peking by Night* – can be understood as a kind of *religious introspection* – in these texts, the characters try to determine their own *I* in relation to the narrator; the narrative *I* tries to determine itself in relation to the author, and the author tries to determine himself in relation to God. In this attempt at self-determination, reason is inactive, because it cannot overcome or remove the ontological barrier – the discontinuity between man as a creature and God the creator can only be overcome by a mystical “sacred experience” that contradicts logic and common sense. That is why this fiction abounds in absurd and inexplicable situations, concludes Ilić. These books map the boundaries separating humanity from the divine. It is only in *Through the Looking-glass Cracked* that the narrative *I* steps into the outside world – that stepping out is a mission, an attempt to share his personal mystical experience with others. Ilić contends that Basara’s fiction abounds in metatextual comments that point to such a reading, and yet literary criticism has largely failed to pay attention to the religious beliefs often expressed in Basara’s books, as well as to the insights into the nature and state of the contemporary world that arise from such beliefs. Ilić puts forward a strident thesis with which we must agree:

Although it is true that Basara’s narration decomposes the narrative form and at the same time exposes the illusions that are presented to us as undeniable truths; although it is true that by juxtaposing ideological, historical, and literary constructs he exposes and carries to absurdity various procedures of “the production of reality;” although it is true that by decomposing

¹¹⁶Dejan Ilić, *Osam i po ogleđa iz razumevanja* (Beograd: Fabrika knjiga, 2008), pp. 167-201.

and examining the forms of fiction, he actually shows that all of the comprehensive sign systems that give meaning to our experience are provisional and unstable – although all this is true, when we talk about the fiction of Svetislav Basara, we cannot conclude from this that his fiction provides us with an insight into the existence of man, doomed to the meaninglessness and inauthenticity of existence. On the contrary, in parallel with all this, Basara narrates how it happened that human existence became seemingly meaningless, suggesting a way out of hopelessness through the acceptance of the word of God.¹¹⁷

In *Through the Looking-glass Cracked*, Basara's narrator says: "All of history is just a series of unsuccessful attempts by humans to become like gods. In our effort, we have ceased to be humans and have become mannequins."¹¹⁸ History, continues Ilić, is an attempt to interpretively connect past events in view of a single ultimate meaning – here the author relies on the concept of the history found in Karl Löwith and M.H. Abrams. While this concept is derived from the theological understanding of history as an event of salvation, it differs from the theological view because the guiding principle is different: it is no longer a matter of God's will and providence, but of man's will and reason. In this sense, the change in the conceptual pattern for the past, present and future of human history can be presented as a replacement of the rectangular biblical pattern *paradise – collapse – redemption – regained paradise* with the post-biblical spiral pattern *unity – multitude – regained unity*. Thus, the historical pattern has been translated into the referential frame of the self-exaltation of the human race, which should lead to the removal of evil and suffering in the world. In this way, religious history becomes a secular form of history, the meaning of which is the attainment of good, justice, and truth in this world. However, as Ilić further explains in his study, the trouble is that faith in the human mind and progress proved unfounded – everything that happened from the end of the 18th century onwards proved that it was unreasonable to believe in man's ability to independently manage his own destiny and the destiny of the world by relying on reason. The weakening of faith in the human mind has necessitated a re-examination of the key notions of progress, including

¹¹⁷Ibid., pp. 184-185.

¹¹⁸Basara, *Fata Morgana*, p. 82.

an understanding of secular history as a meaningful sequence of events. The conclusion was that both progress and history were meaningless. Gaining awareness of this, man has stepped into a post-historic time, in which he must redefine what is good, just, and true. It was concluded, on the other hand, that the world, having renounced God, did not deserve any better than what had happened to it over the last two hundred years. These conclusions also apply to particular histories: for example, the history of a state or a people. In this context, the transition from the general to the particular fails to alter anything: the novels *The Cyclist Conspiracy* and *In Search of the Grail* deal with the general, while the novels *The Fated Land* (1995) and *Looney Tunes* (1997) narrate the events of the 1990s Yugoslavia.

Let us return at the end to Basara's essay "Metaphysics of Fiction in the Light of the Decline of the West"¹¹⁹ as the core of his narrative programme: in this essay, the author clearly states that in his view literature as well as history is a nonsense with an illusion of meaning about it, wherein lies the connection between them. An important theme of the essay, as well as of Basara's work in general, is mimesis. This has already been discussed in the context of the *mimesis of the unreality of the phenomenal* as a kind of formula for Basara's narrative machine, but this thesis should be supplemented by Basara's point about the politics of mimesis: mimetic literature, as Basara argues, is always at the service of history – primarily because it spreads misinformation. History, on the other hand, inevitably leads to fascism and to totalitarianism in general, to the most primitive state of consciousness – the course of history demonstrates this unequivocally and every engagement, Basara further claims, turns into totalitarianism. History is created behind desks, where false myths are written about the purity of blood or the purity of ideas, which never existed. According to Basara, contemporary fiction should be engaged, it is more necessary than ever, by pointing to the dimension of man facing the absolute being / the unconscious / God. Basara calls this *the engagement of dis-engagement*, and it is more necessary than ever because in our time man has been reduced to a single (robotic) dimension of his potential. He feels like nothing, because he is almost nothing, in his mindless desire to be everything.

¹¹⁹ Basara, *Na ivici*, pp. 43-51.

But, how can one talk about what can't be talked about? All the possibilities are abolished by language itself; language simply refuses to speak of anything that transcends mimesis. The logos is broken down into logic, and more recently into logorrhoea. We no longer speak in order to say something (nor do we write for that reason), but we speak and write in order to drown out the silence dumbly pointing to the nothingness within us.¹²⁰

The possibility of salvation is sought in the space of the crack that can arise from the destruction of language: writing with the awareness that we cannot write or prove anything can free us eventually from the mania of trying to prove – because evidence is, as Basara paradoxically concludes, a sign of ignorance. Basara argues that the decline of Western civilisation begins, therefore, on the day that civilisation turned to logic. The West shows a pathological tendency to marshal events chronologically and systematically, thereby establishing the foundations of technology and allowing for the exploitation and consumer madness at one go. These pseudo-paradoxical conclusions were allegedly written in 1987, before the break-up of Yugoslavia and the unfurling of transitional flags, but they could have been published for the first time yesterday, on the site of some virtual portal, within Basara's *virtual Kabbalah*. In both cases, we should take them into account.

Basara's book of essays *On the Edge* opens with "The Biography that Kills" and closes with "The Beast that Devours Itself."¹²¹ Since the problems these essays open up are compatible with the problems of Maurice Blanchot's essays, I will read them together and thus try to provide a frame of reference for the reading of Basara's autopoietics. I proceed in this manner, not in order to establish the equivalence of Basara's fictional and non-fictional discourse, nor in any attempt at "aligning" the worldviews of the two authors. It seems to me that reading Basara and Blanchot together helps us understand Basara's fiction in a way that differs significantly from the way in which it has been read thus far: instead of approaching it from the position of some predetermined knowledge, I will try to read it carefully, so as to allow it to reveal itself. This "hesitant reading" seeks to illuminate the narrative voice and reveal the principles by which it es-

¹²⁰ Ibid., 45-46.

¹²¹ Ibid., 7-20 and 57-62.

establishes itself. In addition, the intention is also to examine the consistency of the narrative voice: should one speak of a voice or of voices? Is there evidence for the claim that Basara's poetics changed? Does he, on the contrary, adhere to a coherent poetic programme throughout? I will start from the beginning: the sentence that opens *On the Edge* is "Good and evil are relative terms in history."¹²² It could appear in any of Basara's books. It can even be said that it represents a kind of motto of *The Cyclist Conspiracy*. The elaboration of this thesis, on the other hand, resembles parts of *Through the Looking-glass Cracked*: "When it the particular is abstracted, history appears as a metaphysical conflict of being and non-being; it is above all a deception and grows into a drama only when we succumb to this deception"¹²³ Soon after these introductory considerations, the author introduces death in his exposition. On the second page of the book we are faced with death, which is presented as the common goal of all events in life. Namely, according to Basara, the biographical "good" and the biographical "evil" are equally fatal. And the greatest of all evils is death. In such a setting, history figures as a chronology of the inability of the human race to resist the urge of destruction, which arises from nothingness. In other words: to accept history, and biography within it, is tantamount to suicide. The goals of history are vague, the author argues, and are never achieved. In the process, things are turned upside down: history is considered as something normal, the historical good as good, and the historical evil as evil. Success in life, as Basara preaches further, is a failure of individual life, because to succeed in life means to mystify one's biography. Our biography is a thing of the past, but the past is neither dead nor lost. There is nothing real in time, Basara concludes. The only positive aspect of the historical course is separation: distinguishing the real from the unreal. The pain of separation is the suffering of the world – this is Basara's theological conclusion. These birth pangs should give birth to something more real. The concluding remarks are, as expected, paradoxical: the biographical sequence is but wasting one's life on what we dread the most: dying. That is what most people are doing. The minority distances themselves from history, that is, biography, using the time to be born again.

¹²² Ibid., p. 7.

¹²³ Ibid.

At this point I will pause and join Blanchot's thought to Basara's: writing on Kafka, Blanchot argues that the writer writes so that he could die.¹²⁴ As paradoxical as this thesis may sound, the contradiction refers us yet again, to paraphrase Blanchot (and Basara!), into the very depths of experience: the writer draws his own power from his relationship with death. Exploration of the possibility of death seems to be the purpose of writing, but that exploration becomes significant only when it is necessary. The issue of one's own power of dying comes in force only when all excuses are rejected, Blanchot points out. The human vocation of the writer consists in creating one's own death. The final essay in *On the Edge*, "The Beast that Devours Itself" is permeated with theological issues to a much greater extent than "The Biography That Kills." It opens with the question of Creation: what was in the Beginning? According to Basara, the mystery of creation reveals the metaphysical unfoundedness of reason. Namely, faced with the question of why anything exists – reason reveals itself as but a phantasm that does not understand its own meaning. The function of reason is the rationalisation of the incomprehensible and the inconceivable; in other words, the world was created from nothing, and therefore the core of the world is nothing, as is the root of our being. Our fear of nothingness is proof that nothingness is part of our experience. In addition, Basara continues, our desire for immortality shows that immortality is in our nature. Man is a synthesis of seemingly incompatible contradictions. Here, the author introduces the figure of God in his exposition, just as he very quickly introduced the figure of death in the first essay. In this way, the essay acquires strong theological outlines, unlike the first one, which insisted on the problems of writing and biography, and thus on the problem of death. Here, the matter is set out differently: at the centre is the problem of God, and the sets of problems associated with him are not related to writing as a philosophical problem, but to a certain *technology of writing*. The technology of world-making discussed can also read as a consideration of the technology of creating a fictional world. Namely, the basic operative categories are God, reason, false paradise, technology, the Fall, and faith. They are set in interesting relations,

¹²⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, translated by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 93.

about which it is necessary to say something in more detail. Basara argues that the world only makes sense if it has God. Otherwise, it is subject to the rule of chance, and coincidence is just a euphemism for depersonalisation which ends in nothingness. Reason, on the other hand, declared God to be nonsense. Science, which is the pinnacle of reason, agitates against the supernatural, warns Basara, and provides no evidence against it. Science, which insists on evidence, demands faith. Therefore, aversion to the idea of God is incomprehensible only at first glance – behind aversion there lies fear. To acknowledge the existence of God, we must renounce any illusion of our own omnipotence and omniscience. In other words, it would mean giving up your own self. Here, Basara introduces the notion of technology into his considerations: the assumption that the Spirit creates from freedom, while technology creates from necessity is the starting point. “The distant shadow of such creation is art, whose fruits are different from the creator, and yet contain his indelible stamp.”¹²⁵ Technology is necessary to transform the world into a false paradise, Basara warns. Technology is not known in a true paradise, because there is no need for it there. Before the Fall, there was a state of immediacy and completeness. After the Fall, Satan’s envoys appear as enlighteners and humanists. The foundation of every good must be freedom – that is why God did not intervene to prevent the serpent in its undertaking. It would be violence against the freedom of being. Adam abused his freedom and left his descendants a legacy of reason and death. Adam’s legacy is a split mind. This split introduces death into the wholeness of life, and evil into the wholeness of good. The Fall, however, was not a fall into technological insanity; it is a human creation. The advancement of technology is associated with the deepening of alienation – Basara explains this phenomenon as follows: where need flourishes, technology flourishes too. And the need grows where the whole is lacking; where emptiness and the sense of something being missing are felt. Technology has no goal, Basara argues; the goal can only be guided by a linear flow, and technology is a system which is closed in on itself. Therefore, the only possible starting point is self-destruction. In this way, the solipsism of the creator can be seen transparently: the creation reflects its nature.

¹²⁵ Basara, *Na ivici*, p. 58.

Basara cites one extreme example to explain his thesis: the medieval project of a machine for turning humans into animals, although ridiculed for its naive malice, was not actually realised due to two reasons alone: because it is not commercially viable, and because no great technologist is interested in such a thing (he does not need animals, but robotic humans).¹²⁶ Basara claims that it is natural that the goals of technology in history are – mindless. The clock is at the core of technology – writes the author of *The Cyclist Conspiracy*, in which the clock, along with the bicycle, is one of the basic building blocks of the novel's plot. "The clock introduces time into the obvious; time no longer passes, it doesn't *flow* towards some source, but repeats itself in a closed circle. The pointless turning of the hands lulls us into the illusion that everything repeats itself and from there it leads to a deadly reconciliation with the determinism of history and biography"¹²⁷ The consequence of such a process, Basara concludes, is manipulation: technological hell is disguised by the dream of the Saviour's return, and the unreal space of such contaminated time is populated with virtually limitless possibilities for manipulation. Lately, Basara preaches, the ideal has become the satisfaction of needs, with needs evolving into refined perversions, resulting in the necessity of the highest degree being distorted and indicated as success. What is overlooked here, Basara warns in his theological sermon, is the possibility of freedom. Namely, in order to meet ever growing needs, man had to invest a lot of work, and any work that is not creative is "pure cretinisation,"¹²⁸ so it is quite logical that the most monstrous tyrannies of this world insisted on the slogan: *work, order, and peace*. In Basara's terminology, *work* means *cretinisation*, *order* means *obedience*, and *peace* means *deadening*. Therefore, the tyranny of the clock (dead time!) Is what kills the will to live a creative life, he concludes. "The circling of the hands creates the illusion of eternity."¹²⁹ But time is different from its technical surrogate, Basara warns; it flows toward its goal, which is its own abolition in the confrontation with eternity. At this point, he introduces the central notion of his experiment: the beast. The beast is syn-

¹²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 59-60.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

onymous with technology. She is at the height of her power, while man is in endless desolation. The technology of consciousness is something that is of special interest to Basara – not only in that text, but also in his fiction (especially in *The Cyclist Conspiracy*). He is interested in the role of consciousness of technology in maintaining idiocy. Personal judgment is a rare occurrence, Basara maintains, because in a technological society, few people have any experience. Everything is mediated. The individual is shown here as a psychophysiological medium in which the messages of ideological centres of power resonate. “In the light of such reasoning, John’s *Revelation* is seen as a collection of charming hallucinations.”¹³⁰ The essay ends in a theological spirit; of course, it is a specific narrative theology. Namely, Basara concludes that the only consistent humanism, along with Buddhism, is the “mystical body of the Church,”¹³¹ which is different from the church as an institution, because it is a council of everyone: both the living and the dead, in which “there is hope for evil, for the desperate too, but there is no hope for the mediocre, for those who are neither hot nor cold, for those who don’t want hope, blinded by the false wonders of technology that, in front of everyone’s eyes, devours itself and its children.”¹³² The final motif of the essay is, once again, death: in his interpretation, to be deluded, to love determination, to be enchanted by technology – means to want death voluntarily. The love of death is unforgivable, unlike even the most terrible hatred. It is a pseudo-paradox of the Basarian type: the weakness of the will is mistaken for a clinging to life, and to the weak of will, this lie is seen as the truth of life. The last sentence of the essay reads: “But he who has seven Debts and seven stars tells each of the deceived: I know your deeds, that you have a name, that you are alive, and that you are dead.”¹³³

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 62.