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## **Stoic Virtues in Tertullian's Works and Their Relation to Cicero**

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**Abstract.** Q. S. F. Tertullian was one of the most prominent writers and apologists of the early Christian Church. He had two important goals with his works: on the one hand, to introduce, according to the spirit of the age, the Christian teachings embedded in contemporary Roman culture; on the other hand, to highlight and emphasize the difference between the Christian teachings and the pagan ideas. This dichotomy is characteristic of his ethical teachings as well: while he emphasizes the importance of the Christian virtues, he does not forget about their philosophical background either. Tertullian demonstrably considered Stoic philosophy as the most acceptable philosophical thinking. Virtues have an important status in the teachings of the stoic body, just as they are a fundamental part of Christian ethics. The question arises whether Tertullian's views on virtues could have been influenced by his pagan Roman ancestor, M. T. Cicero, who also shared stoic doctrines. This is the question the present lecture tries to answer.

**Keywords:** virtues, Christianity, Tertullian, Cicero, ancient philosophy

Christianity, with its appearance, announced the coming of a new era in the history of the pagan Roman Empire. The new religion tried—at least, apparently—to separate itself from everything connected to the pagan culture (pageantry, lifestyle, literature, philosophy, etc.). We might think, based on the aforesaid, that the two cultures did not communicate with each other at all and no cultural transfer whatsoever could take place between them. However, this is not the case—as many have pointed it out before—and we shall demonstrate it in relation with a particular virtue, that of *patientia*, and two authors: the pagan Roman statesman and philosopher, M. T. Cicero, and Q. S. F. Tertullian, the Christian apologist.

Morals and virtues had an important role within the classic Greek-Roman culture. Together with the appearance of sophistry the topic of virtues became the focus of interest; that is when the different arguments began to be contrasted

according to the principle of the *dissoi logoi* (Cf. Steiger 1993, 107–121). The first philosopher to truly deal with moral questions was Socrates; then Plato followed in his steps by being concerned not only with the philosophy of science but with ethical questions as well (Gosling 1983). According to Plato and his moral relativism, virtues are such values which, if accepted and internalized, will be beneficial and useful for those who have chosen to live according to them.<sup>1</sup> Similarly to Plato, Aristotle sees virtues as values that are to be chosen and are useful at the same time. However, unlike Plato, he thinks that knowledge does not stand at the core of virtues; they are rather natural endowments that men are born with. To him, it is important to live a moral life because, according to him, virtuous deeds cause us pleasure, and pleasure is what we are looking for during our lives. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* he elaborated a catalogue of 12 virtues, among which the first one is courage, its passive form being *hypomone*, usually translated as *patientia*. An important element of this heroic virtue is *magnanimitas* (or *megalopshychia*, noble ambition at Aristotle). According to the Stoics, everything is moral which is in harmony with nature. They sustain Socrates's scientism in that they also emphasize the importance of *oikeosis*, in other words, the importance of learning about nature (Striker 1996, 183–195). Man possesses virtues only if he has knowledge as well; furthermore, one's reason can be taken away by strong emotions and passions (Marót 1999, 259).

M. T. Cicero's (stoic) philosophical conception is well known and has a vast literature (Cf. Graff 1963, Kerfeld 1972, Powel 1995). According to him, one of the greatest virtues is the one that has already been mentioned before i.e. *magnanimitas*, which incorporates the virtues of *constantia*, *clementia* and finally *patientia* which our paper focuses on (Tusc. 3.32, Part. Orat. 77, De oratore 2.143.). The virtue of *magnanimitas* has an important role in Stoic thinking, highlighting the peaceful acceptance of one's changing luck as well as endurance. According to Cicero, the starting point of every ethical question is *oikeosis* (Cf. Forschner 2008), the ability of the human soul to comply with the laws that rule in the universe, and with the necessities within men called *fatum* (Marót 1988). *Fortitudo* and *patientia* are like twins (together with *magnificentia*, *fidencia* and *perseverentia*). The Roman logographer defines these concepts in the following way:

The power of virtue then is twofold, for virtue is distinguished either by theory or by practice. For that which is called prudence, or shrewdness, or (if we must have the most dignified title for it) wisdom, is all theoretical. But that, which is praised as regulating the passions, and restraining the feelings of the mind, finds its exercise in practice. And its name is temperance. (Part. 77.)

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1 *Rep.* 357 B-D.



At the same time, *patientia* means that those who possess this virtue, are their own masters, they have *potestas* over themselves; therefore, it is not incidental that Cicero, in *Tusculanae disputationes*, says the following:

The whole, then, consists in this—that you should have command over yourself. I have already told you what kind of command this is; and by considering what is most consistent with patience, fortitude, and greatness of soul, a man not only restrains himself, but, somehow or other, mitigates even pain itself. (Tusc. II.53.)

Furthermore, self-control is what has a hold on and governs the *animus*, thus making suffering tolerable.<sup>2</sup> In *Tusculanae disputationes* *patientia* accompanies the male virtue of courage. The interlocutors in Cicero's work say the following:

Will you act in a manner consistently with courage, and its attendants, greatness of soul, resolution, patience, and contempt for all worldly things? Can you hear yourself called a great man when you lie grovelling, dejected, and deploring your condition with a lamentable voice; no one would call you even a man while in such a condition. You must therefore either abandon all pretensions to courage, or else pain must be put out of the question. (Tusc. II. 32.)

Pain exists; the participants of the dialogue cannot and do not want to deny it; nevertheless, to endure suffering, one needs some kind of strength, the virtue of *patientia*:

I do not deny pain to be pain—for were that the case, in what would courage consist?—but I say it should be assuaged by patience, if there be such a thing as patience: if there be no such thing, why do we speak so in praise of philosophy? or why do we glory in its name? (Tusc. II. 33.)

In this sentence the speaker hints at the fact that in Greek-Roman culture the concept of *patientia* belonged primarily to the field of philosophy<sup>3</sup> and it was of

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Tusc.* 5. 41. 74, 77, 80.

<sup>3</sup> There is no mentioning of a godly embodiment of *patientia* in the Greek-Roman world either in archaeological or epigraphic, or in literary sources (Cf. Deubner 1909, 2127). The *CIL* VIII, 2728 talks about an inscription in which the triad of *virtus*, *spes* and *patientia* can be found. The author of the inscription is Nonius Datus (Takács 2013, 68–69), a famous Roman engineer from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (Cf. Février 1979). However, this triad was probably the result of the engineer's own combination as, while the cult of *virtus* and *spes* was well known in those times (Cf. Eisenhut 1974, 897; Latte 1929, 1634), there is no data about a similar cult of *patientia*; furthermore, there are only two occasions when it appears as an attribute of gods (Cf. Carter 1902, 138). The propaganda of the imperial period, such as the *Patientia Augusti*, did not have

an extremely great importance in philosophical thinking, as we implied earlier. *Patientia* was considered a very important human virtue by Cicero as well; the word *patientia* and its inflections appear more than 33 times in his works. Roman history provides us with numerous *magna exempla* for *patientia* controlling and governing the *animus*, and helping to endure pain, for example: Mucius Scaevola, M. Curtius, Regulus,<sup>4</sup> the Decius or the Fabius.<sup>5</sup> Cicero, as *pater patriae*, considered the fact that he managed to save the state from Catilina's raid, one of his greatest deeds; from that Catilina who, like a *portentum*, was only concerned with his own benefits and political ambition, rejecting and violating every moral and legal law. The first lines of the *Oratio in Catilinam Prima* became a proverb over the millenia and if one recalls these lines, he may observe the word *patientia* right at the beginning.<sup>6</sup> The key element of his rhetorical question is: for how long Catilina, this enemy of the state, will abuse the *patientia* of the *boni*, the *patientia* which ensues from their *magnanimitas*, not from their fear. *Patientia*—as we could see earlier—is only characteristic of brave, outstanding men. Thus, the word appears mainly in Cicero's philosophical works; he uses the word *patientia* in his speeches as well, but much less frequently. Interestingly, we can find it in four of his speeches uttered in judicial proceedings: in *In Pisonem*, *Pro Milone*, *Orationes Philippicae*, beside the previously mentioned *In Catilinam*. In almost all of these occasions, the term refers to the endless patience manifested towards the state's enemies by the honest Roman citizens and urban communities, together with Cicero, who are worried about the future of the state, the *res publica Romana*.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, another common trait of the speeches enumerated above is that the *tyrannicidium*, the enemy of the *tyrannis* or the autocrat is demonstrably retraceable to Stoic philosophy, just as the idea of *patientia* belongs to the Stoic thinking. We do not attempt to prove that Cicero was a Stoic; however, the arguments expressed earlier demonstrate that he had a Stoic attitude towards these two issues (Clark and Ruebel 1985). And, although he talks about two different meanings of *patientia* (on the one hand, the endurance of physical pain and suffering, which is characteristic of the brave, outstanding figures; on the other hand, the almost limitless *patientia* of the patient *cives*, the responsible *civitas* and the *boni*, the responsible statesmen who work hard on the safety of the state), they both have the same source, that is, Stoic philosophical thinking.

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a great resonance either (Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1981).

4 *Fin.* 5. 82-83.

5 In the Roman tradition *patientia* refers not only to the tough, manly, military endurance, but also to a virtue of the old youth (Aen. 9. 607-8.); it also appears with a not completely positive overtone like in some of the poems of Catullus; still, in the case of the great, outstanding men the word *patientia* always refers to a virtue (Kaster 2002, 142-143).

6 *In Cat.* 1. 1. *Quo usque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra?*

7 *Pis.* II. *Ego Antonium conlegam cupidum provinciae, ulta in re publica molientem patientia atque obsequio meo mitigavi.*

Virtue was an important constituent of the pagan Roman world; similarly, the ability to choose good over bad, the *arete* or *virtue* is an important characteristic of a Christian's life as well, the lack of which prevents him from fulfilling the life worthy of a real Christian. Faith, hope and love are fundamental Christian virtues. Moreover, the Christian teaching highlights the importance of four other virtues described by cardinal attributes: *prudentia*, *iustitia*, *temperantia* and *fortitudo*. If we look at the Christian tradition, we may observe that the Old Testament does not say much about virtues, at least not as the abstract term for good deeds. The term *arete* occasionally appears, but with different meanings: perseverance (2Macc. 10,28; 15,12), piety (Wise 5,13), God's glory (Iz 42,8.12; 43,21; 63,7). The case is similar in the New Testament as well; the term *arete* does not have a unified meaning (the general conduct of the just, 2Pt 1,5: moral strength, 1,3: the power of God). We may find more accurate information about it in the so-called virtue-catalogues (Gal 5,22-26; Ef 5,25-32). This list of virtues contains: perseverance (*perseverantia*), peace (*pax*), faith (*fides*), fidelity (*fidelitas*), justice (*iustitia*), soundness, self-abnegation (*abnegatio sui*), meekness, patience (*patientia*) and religiousness (*religiositas*).

Virtues had an important role in the life of the early Christian church as well. Q. S. F. Tertullian is one of the most well-known figures of early Christian literature. Even though his personality and life divided the Christian public opinion for a long time, his works were of service to the—then quite young—Church. Virtues had an important role in Tertullian's conception as well. The source of his ethics and ethical thinking consists of his theological and eschatological views and character, his interpretation of the Bible, and last but not least, his Stoic way of thinking. The totality of these factors reveals an extremely various moral concept that is—at least partially—a Christian one, as long as its strength of validity is drawn from the rules of faith; but at the same time it also has non-Christian features, as long as it distances itself from the Christian moral concept to be found in the New Testament. Knowing that Tertullian had an impulsive and imperious nature, one may wonder why he was so interested in the virtue of endurance or *patientia*. Interestingly, the author was conscious of this discrepancy himself, thus he used this deficiency of his character as a *captatio benevolentiae*:

I Fully confess unto the Lord God that it has been rash enough, if not even impudent, in me to have dared compose a treatise on Patience, for practising which I am all unfit, being a man of no goodness; whereas it were becoming that such as have addressed themselves to the demonstration and commendation of some particular thing, should themselves first be conspicuous in the practice of that thing, and should regulate the constancy of their commonishing by the authority of their personal conduct, for fear their words blush at the deficiency of their deeds. And would that this

‘blushing’ would bring a remedy, so that shame for not exhibiting that which we go to suggest to others should prove a tutorship into exhibiting it; except that the magnitude of some good things—just as of some ills too—is insupportable, so that only the grace of divine inspiration is effectual for attaining and practising them. For what is most good rests most with God; nor does any other than He who possesses it dispense it, as He deems meet to each. And so to discuss about that which it is not given one to enjoy, will be, as it were, a solace; after the manner of invalids, who since they are without health, know not how to be silent about its blessings. So I, most miserable, ever sick with the heats of impatience, must of necessity sigh after, and invoke, and persistently plead for, that health of patience which I possess not; while I recall to mind, and, in the contemplation of my own weakness, digest, the truth, that the good health of faith, and the soundness of the Lord’s discipline, accrue not easily to any unless patience sit by his side. So is patience set over the things of God, that one can obey no precept, fulfil no work well-pleasing to the Lord, if estranged from it. (Pat. I. 1-6.)

According to Tertullian *patientia* is the first among the virtues that a Christian may resort to in his moral and religious life, and based on which he can live a life according to God. Putting away his apparent contempt toward the pagans, he mentions that their *summa virtus* is also *patientia* (I. 7.), although they live in spiritual darkness. Philosophers and philosophical schools, regardless of the differences in their approach or views, all study *patientia*:

The good of it, even they who live outside it, honour with the name of highest virtue. Philosophers indeed, who are accounted animals of some considerable wisdom, assign it so high a place that, while they are mutually at discord with the various fancies of their sects and rivalries of their sentiments, yet, having a community of regard for patience alone, to this one of their pursuits they have joined in granting peace: for it they conspire; for it they league; it, in their affectation of virtue, they unanimously pursue; concerning patience they exhibit all their ostentation of wisdom. (Pat. I.7.)

So in his writing Tertullian does not refer to the *pietas* or *patientia* that appears in different cultures and ideologies, but to philosophy and to those philosophers who dealt with this issue more extensively, namely the Stoics. It is evident that in the middle Stoic body and in that of the imperial period *patientia* did not have a secondary role anymore. Its coming to the fore had to do with the fact that it was associated with courage and *magnanimitas*. But why this particular virtue: *patientia*? And why did Tertullian consider it so important that he wrote an entire book on it? Beside the individual references mentioned above, it was

also influential that Tertullian wanted to prove the existence of such topics or elements common in the Christian and the pagan thinking, which could show that pagan and Christian morality were closely related to each other.<sup>8</sup> *Patientia* characterizes both the *miles Romanus* and the *miles Christianus* (Daniélou 1978, 28). The spiritual virtues gain their completion through the body.<sup>9</sup> *Patientia* helps Christians to endure physical pain, which was very important in choosing martyrdom, especially for the early Christians of the first few centuries. As the author himself emphasizes: *Si spiritus promptus, sed caro (sine patientia) infirma, ubi salus spiritus et carnis ipsius?* Hence, God himself tells that the body must necessarily be strong to be able to endure all kinds of suffering.<sup>10</sup> According to Tertullian the body becomes tolerant to all kinds of pain only with the help of *patientia*. He thought that martyrdom was the greatest honour for a Christian which, however, could only be reached through the high cultivation of *patientia*. In his interpretation *patientia* does not mean some kind of cynical stolidity, indolence, or dullness; on the contrary, it is a divine characteristic which manifested itself in God's act of creation and providence. Not only does the pagan Roman world have its *magna exempla*, but Christians also have their own role models; two of them are identified by Tertullian as being Isaiah and the martyr Saint Stephen.<sup>11</sup> He creates a new triad: the Christian *patientia*, the pagan *patientia* and *impatientia*. A good example for the first one is God himself, because, on the one hand, he gave all the created goods to men in spite of the fact that they did not deserve it; and, on the other hand, he tolerated idolatry, the persecution of his worshipers and the sins of the pagan. Other examples of the Christian *patientia* are the great personalities of the Old Testament such as Abraham, then Jesus Christ himself, who demonstrated this virtue with his whole life; and last but not least, the Christian believers, the *servi dei* gave a good example of how one must endure torture and suffering. The pagan *patientia* is

8 *Apol.* 46. 2 Sed dum unicuique manifestatur veritas nostra, interim incredulitas, dum de bono sectae huius obducitur, quod usu[i] iam et de commercio innotuit, non utique divinum negotium existimat, et magis philosophiae genus. Eadem, inquit, et philosophi moment atque profitentur, innocentiam iustitiam patientiam sobrietatem pudicitiam.

9 *Pat* XIII. 6-7. Quod de uirtute animi uenit in carne perficitur: carnis patientia in persecutionibus denique proeliatur. Si fuga urgeat, incommoda fugae caro militat; si et carcer praeueniat, caro in uinculis, caro in ligno, caro in solo, et in illa paupertate lucis et in illa penuria mundi. Cum uero producitur ad experimentum felicitatis, ad occasionem secundae intinctionis, ad ipsum diuinæ sedis ascensum, nulla plus illic quam patientia corporis.

10 *Pat* XIII. 8. At cum hoc dominus de carne dicit, infirmam pronuntians, quid ei firmandae opus sit ostendit, patientia scilicet, aduersus omnem subuertendae fidei uel puniendae paraturam, ut uerba, ut ignem, ut crucem bestias gladium constantissime toleret quae prophetae, quae apostoli sustinendo uicerunt.

11 *Pat* XIV. 1. His patientiae uiribus secatur Esaias et de domino non tacet, lapidatur Stephanus et ueniam hostibus suis postulat.

represented by the philosophers. Examples of impatientia include Satan, who rebelled against God because he could not accept that God gave the created world to men; further examples are Adam and Eve, Cain and the people of Israel who dared to rebel against God, their benefactor, and turn to idols.

Still, the closest example of *patientia* for the Christians is Jesus Christ, who suffered death. Thus, the *homo patiens* is characterized by the strength to accept suffering (sickness, starvation) or even death for the sake of Christ and his faith. Tertullian also says that *patientia* can even cause delight for its bearer if somebody attempts at disturbing him or wants to cause some damage to him but he fails to do so. Then, the suffering of the offender gives the patient man some kind of gratification. However, the Christian *patientia* is in no way connected to hatred; its prototype is the divine *patientia*, the patient suffering of Christ for our sins, which should characterize every Christian, as the virtue of the good (*boni*) is *patientia*, the lack of which makes Christian love impossible to sustain, since this virtue gives reason and quality for *caritas*.<sup>12</sup> From the foregoing it is clear that Tertullian's view on *patientia* was strongly influenced by the philosophical concept of *apatheia*. Even though the exact origin of this concept is still unclarified, it is certain that Stoic philosophy used it in this context, as *arete* or virtue which is knowledge; consequently, we must avoid any irrational urge (*pathos*) which might influence our reason; for, as only our virtues can make us truly happy, *pathos* would only keep us from our pursuit of happiness. The overcoming of the *perturbatio*<sup>13</sup> *animi* was important for Cicero as well, and it could be reached through the *tranquillitas animi* (Brachtendorf 1997).

Based on the aforesaid we can conclude that Tertullian, the Christian apologist considered *patientia* an extremely important virtue even though he did not possess it himself. He knew about its Christian roots, but still, he did not build his treatise about the Christian virtue of patience on that knowledge. He rather based his reasoning on Stoic ideas which he used to conceptualize the Christian virtue, so he was in favour of the pagan philosophical thinking instead of the Christian one. In this he follows in the footsteps of Cicero, who was also preoccupied with this matter, and his approach was built on no other philosophical ground (cynical or peripathetic) than the Stoic one. He wrote about the nature of *patientia* in his philosophical tracts, and he treated the concept with distinguished attention in his speeches (it could not appear anywhere and in any textual context). As shown before, the similarities in the way of thinking of the two authors are not restricted to this particular matter. *Patientia* is one of the cardinal virtues for both of them, one that is possessed only by the good, the *boni* who are able to endure the physical and spiritual sufferings caused by the evil and thus their

12 Cf. *Pat.* 1. 15. *Pud.* 1.

13 It can also be interpreted as the equivalent of the Christian *passio*, since the concept, as used by Tertullian, was unknown in Cicero's time.

moral conduct conquers over the evil. In the discourse on this one particular virtue we find that an intercultural transfer did exist between such worlds that, at first view, seem not to have been in contact with each other; but, due to their rich cultural heritage, they could never part completely; the two worlds being that of the Christian culture and the ancient, pagan Greek-Roman culture.

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## Intercultural Reflections on Translating Petőfi onto Serbian Language

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**Abstract.** Only six years subsequent to Petőfi's disappearance, i.e. his death, in 1855 the Petőfi reception took on in Serbian literature, when Jovan Jovanović Zmaj translated the poem *A csárda romjai* (*Razorena čarda* [*The Ruins of the Inn*]). From that point on, Petőfi became part of Serbian literature as well: famous and popular, to such an extent that there was hardly a Serbian poet who would not engage in translating at least one of Petőfi's poems. Sava Babić, who made an account of the Petőfi translations published between 1855 and 1980, listed as many as 658 entries in his bibliography. Translating Petőfi's poems, according to literary historians, "proved an outstanding bridge between the lives of the two neighbouring nations" (Nagy 1994).<sup>1</sup> These poems substituted for what Serbian literature lacked—the Serbian folk epic poem. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the reception of Petőfi's poetry in Serbian literature virtually bloomed into a cult, namely because his poems of patriotic and social themes as well as his revolutionary poetry quite complied and were even consonant with the increasingly aggressive patriotism of the so-called New Serbian Youth (*Nova omladina*). In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the receptive attitude towards his poetry waned significantly. The study looks into the characteristics and effects of the translations of Petőfi's poetry from its 'literary transfer,' its receptive situation, up to the intensification of its popularity and folklorization. In fact, it analyzes the literary/cultural transfer which fulfilled certain needs and conjunctures, but which was surprisingly integrated into the Serbian literary tradition of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Sándor Petőfi, literary translation, Serbian literary reception, cult, literary transfer

According to István Lőkös, in the Serbian literature of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, there were three Serbian poets from Hungary who "within a short period, raised Serbian literature onto a high level, even of European standards. (...) All three of them were raised on Hungarian culture and educated in Hungarian schools;

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1 Quotations from Hungarian specialist literature were translated by the author.

all three of them lived within contemporary Hungarian literature” (Lőkös 2004). These poets were Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Đura Jakšić and Laza Kostić.<sup>2</sup> Each of them enriched their own oeuvre as well as the whole of Serbian literature with the reception of one of the most prominent figures of Hungarian poetry. Among them Zmaj, the leading figure in building Serbian-Hungarian relations, undertook translating and popularizing Petőfi’s, Arany’s and Madách’s works.

Subsequent to the 1848–49 Revolution, it understandably took quite some time for the Serbian anti-Hungarian actions to wane and for the general attitude and tone of Serbian-Hungarian relations to improve. According to István Póth, among the Serbs “the Hungarian influence (...) was primarily noticeable in cultural and literary life. (...) This (...) was specifically represented (...) in the field of literature through a rapidly created and so-to-speak general Petőfi cult” (Póth 1972, 388).

However, in the literary sense, “the tone (...) towards the Hungarians becomes that of a friendly kind in the oeuvre of Jovan Jovanović Zmaj” (Lőkös 2004). In István Lőkös’s words, Zmaj “first became a recipient of Petőfi’s poetry as a translator, and the translatorial impulses were those that gave Zmaj’s original poems the Petőfi-esque atmosphere and character.” (*idem*) This left a hallmark of Petőfi’s poems on Zmaj’s poetry, which points at a strong literary transfer.

Only six years subsequent to Petőfi’s disappearance, i.e. his death, in 1855 the Petőfi reception took on in Serbian literature, when Jovan Jovanović Zmaj translated the poem *A csárda romjai* (*Razorena čarda* [*The Ruins of the Inn*]) (Babić 1985, 26; Petefi 1855, 148–152). As István Fried put it, “both the gesture and the choice of poems can be seen as a symbolic act: opposition to the Bach era, using Petőfi’s name and the idea of his love of freedom” (Fried 1987, 319).

To quote Sava Babić, “from then on, Petőfi became an integral part of Serbian literature as well” (Babić 2009, 99). He became renowned and popular in Serbian literature, so that there was hardly a Serbian poet who did not engage in translating at least one of Petőfi’s poems (*idem*, 139). The following Serbian periodicals and magazines had his poetry translated and published continually: *Serbski Letopis*, *Neven*, *Sedmica*, *Danica*, *Komarac*, *Javor*, *Sloga*, *Matica*, *Polaženik*, *Vienac*, *Srpska sloga*, *Sloboda* etc. (Babić 1985, 351–378). As the popularity of Petőfi’s poetry grew, so did the number of its translators. Thus, apart from Zmaj, poems by Petőfi were translated by Ivan Maršovski, Milan Andrić, Josip Eugen Tomić, Mita R. Stojković, Josip Jukić, Ivan Vončina, Đura Strajić, Đorđe Srdić, Blagoje Brančić, Vidoje Žeravica, Ivan M. Popović, Laza Kostić, Radovan Košutić, Milutin Jakšić and others. Later there were Bogdan Čipilić, Mladen Leskovac, Josip Velebit, Enver Čolaković, Veljko Petrović, Danilo Kiš, Sava Babić and Marija Cindori.

2 Đura Jakšić was Petőfi’s great admirer, and although he fought in the opposing Serbian army, “he stayed Petőfi’s follower with fervent soul throughout the confrontations” (Németh 2014, 223). Their correspondence shows that he even translated Petőfi’s poems. Laza Kostić was another aficionado and translator of Petőfi’s poetry.

Sava Babić, who made an account of the Petőfi translations published between 1855 and 1980, listed as many as 658 entries in his bibliography (*idem*).

## Translation as ‘substitution’ in the recipient literature

Studying Serbian literary translations of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dušan Ivanić came to the conclusion that, on the one hand, the translated literary texts had a fertilizing effect in contemporary Serbian magazines and periodicals, while, on the other hand, they substituted for what Serbian literature lacked at that time—the Serbian folk epic poem (Ivanić 1988, 195). This is the reason why the works of Hungarian poets—primarily Petőfi’s and Arany’s—were so attractive to Serbian translators (*idem*, 196). This was a significant recognition since it boosted literary/intercultural transfer, which had a stopgap role in Serbian literature. Ivanić points to another important detail in connection with Petőfi’s unflagging popularity: his poems of patriotic and social themes as well as his revolutionary poetry quite complied and were even consonant with the increasingly aggressive patriotism of the so-called New Serbian Youth (Nova omladina) (*idem*, 197). This circumstance also sped up the reception of Petőfi’s poetry and heightened the work of translators.

Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, the most distinguished Petőfi translator of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, completed the translation of *János vitéz* (*John the Valiant*) as early as 1858, but due to political reasons it could not be published before 1860 (*idem*, 29, 62).

According to Imre Bori, “When Zmaj translated Petőfi’s *János vitéz* [...] into Serbian, he actually filled the gap of the Serbian folk epic, in other words, he brought in what Serbian literature had lacked” (Bori 1970, 73).

## Folklorization of Petőfi translations

On the occasion of Zmaj’s death in 1904, the magazine *Bácska*, regarding his poetic translations, found it important to underline that

[...] the popularity of the poem beginning with the line *Falu végén kurta kocsmá* [*There is an Inn at the End of the Village*]... well proves the fidelity of his translations. It can be said that this poem is equally well known in the Serbian world as in the Hungarian one. In the southern fringe regions in Serbia and in all the corners of the Balkans inhabited by Serbs, people know it by heart, while only few would know that it is not an original poem written in Serbian. (Anonymous 1904)

This is a fine example of total assimilation into the recipient literary context, i.e. of folklorization of Petőfi translations.

What also speaks for Petőfi's popularity among the Serbs, and goes along with the fact of folklorization, is the claim by Vladislava Polit that "Petőfi's poems were often recited during Serbian feasts as if they had originally been written in Serbian, like *Az őriült* [*The Madman*], *Három fiú* [*The Three Boys*]; what is more, some of the poems were even made into songs and were sung at merry occasions, like *Falu végén kurta kocsmá...*, *Ambrus gazda* [*Master Ambrus*], *Ezrivel terem fán a meggy* [*Cherry Grows by the Thousand*]..." (Polit 1912, 31–32).

According to Veljko Petrović, "nowhere was Petőfi so well received and embraced, in a word—adopted, as here, particularly among the Serbs. His name was even pronounced in a particularly soft homely way, 'Petefi', since his good reputation reached the farthest corners of the country, and because his translated poems made their way to all levels of society; they were sung for a long time and are still sung to certain well-known melodies" (Petrović 1958, 580). Having talked like this, Petrović refers not only to the Petőfi cult created among the Serbian people, but also to the folklorization of Petőfi's poems in Serbian literature.

To the Serbian reading public, the *lyrical* Petőfi emerged much earlier than the *revolutionary* Petőfi. The latter was recognized only just after World War I, when one of his popular revolutionary poems entitled *Az ítélet* [*Strašni sud – The Verdict*], often recited at workers' gatherings, was published on the front page of the paper *Radnička straža* of its 1<sup>st</sup> May 1919 issue (David 1977, 185). This poem, being appropriate and topical, and due to its ideological motives, was often recited during the National Liberation War (WWII) at certain partisan meetings. In addition, in 1944 it was even printed in a publication in Lika (*Zbornik građe za kulturno-umjetničku propagandu* [*Collection of Materials for Cultural and Political Propaganda*]) (*idem*). After 1946, for a briefer period, serving the general political atmosphere, the communist ideology continued to promote poems by the *revolutionary* Petőfi (Babić 1985, 372; Petefi 1946). All this speaks for the scope of the popularity of Petőfi's poems.

However, as early as between the two World Wars, interest in Petőfi's poetry almost completely ceased—with the exception of five-six translations (*idem*, 371–372). Only after World War II, in 1946, did the publication of his selected poems (*Izabrane pesme*) bring back Petőfi's verse into Serbian literature (*idem*; Petefi 1946).

## From reception to cult: creators of the Petőfi cult in Serbia

Vladislava Polit, who conducted detailed research on Petőfi's popularity and cult in Serbian literature as early as 1912, found that the poet had greatly influenced the Serbs and that he "was an idol to the youth, who saw him as a genuine

leader who unified all the ideals of national freedom. [...] This was what made Petőfi immortal not only among the Hungarians but also [...] among the Serbs” (Polit 1912, 15). In her words, “already in the 1850s, Petőfi won the affection of Serbian readers, and from then on, his cult kept spreading. [...] Certain Serbian poets drew enthusiasm from Petőfi’s poetry, and so did the reading public who keenly read the greatest Hungarian lyricist whenever they had the opportunity to indulge in such pleasure” (*idem*, 17). Vladislava Polit highlights three translators of Petőfi as the creators of his cult in Serbia: Jovan Jovanović Zmaj (*idem*, 17–19), Blagoje Brančić (*idem*, 29–34) and Milan L. Popović (*idem*, 41–44).

Of Zmaj’s translations, Polit holds the opinion that “they are superbly successful, so much that they still remain Petőfi’s poems, they are only clad into the Serbian language” (*idem*, 19). In addition, she risks the statement that by means of the popular Petőfi translations Zmaj is “more popular among the Serbian readers than with several of his own original poems” (*idem*, 20).

Regarding the Novi Sad born translator Blagoje Brančić, she states that “he was the initiator of the Petőfi cult among the Serbs”<sup>3</sup> since “he not only translated Petőfi’s poetry but he also looked at him from a scientific angle, and being a teacher at the Novi Sad Grammar School he inspired his students to read Petőfi, so the generations of students graduating from the Grammar School at Brančić’s time saw Petőfi as an icon, wrote abundantly about him, and translated his poems. That period can boldly be called the age of Petőfi among the Serbs, since there was actually a genuine infatuation with him” (*idem*, 34). In his student days, Brančić wrote the poem *Petőfi szobra előtt* [*In front of Petőfi’s statue*], which was published in a contemporary almanac (*idem*, 31). How Brančić “looked at Petőfi from a scientific angle” can be seen through the following examples.

In 1900, in the *Matica Srpska Yearbook* he published an extensive treatise on Petőfi, which he formulated in cult-like rhetoric:

Petőfi’s services to the nation politically fit the war-time merits of an ingenious army general. [...] Poets can be best compared to stars. [...] One star shines less brightly, lights only its nearest vicinity and extinguishes sooner; another star burns more luminously knowing no boundaries. Thus, among the poets some also illuminate a narrower circle, while some reach out to the whole world. [...] They shine for the entire humanity and exist infinitely, since their ideas too, which they have composed in verse, are eternal. [...] Petőfi as a first-rate poet will live ceaselessly, and so will the undying ideas of his verse. What he sang in his poetry touches the whole world; the entire world has recognized it and will treasure it. He undeniably deserves the words of a Serbian poet: ‘Happy is one who lives eternally, he was worth being born.’ (Brančić qtd. in Polit 1912, 38–39).

3 According to Vladislava Polit, Brančić translated about 150–200 poems by Petőfi.

Referring to the lawyer from Pančevo, later a newspaper editor and Petőfi translator Milan L. Popović (1883–?), Vladislava Polit underlines that “he was Petőfi’s ardent admirer as early as in his schooldays. He even translated some of Petőfi’s poems and read them out at literature club meetings,” while his first Petőfi translations came out in *Ženski Svet*, *Brankovo Kolo* and *Bosanska Vila* magazines (*idem*, 42). As she put it, “Popović’s greatest accomplishment was that he was the first to introduce Petőfi’s poetry to the Serbs living in Serbia” (*idem*). In 1904, Popović published a discourse on Petőfi in *Delo* magazine, Belgrade, and “since then attention to Petőfi has risen increasingly” (*idem*). In this discourse, Popović gave the following appraisal:

What I most admire and am in awe of are his remarkable odes which have not yet been exceeded in excellence or beauty. Petőfi reaches the climax of his art in them. With his love poetry he gained popularity, while his patriotic and sublime odes indebted his nation and brought him immortality. [...] His patriotism is unsurpassed, zealous. He sacrificed everything he had, his love and himself, everything in the world, and fought with exhilaration in the battlefield to die heroically for the nation and to return as their apostle praising the divine, sacred doctrine of liberty, fraternity and equality. (Popović qtd. in Polit 1912, *idem*, 43–44)

András Dávid is apparently right when he says that “Petőfi’s poetry and revolutionary figure have been consistently popular among South Slav nations” (David 1977, 185).

## Conclusions

The Serbian reception of Petőfi made its start in 1855, owing to the translation by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj *Razorena čarda* (*A csárda romjai – Ruins of the tavern*), a poem by Petőfi. From that time, the foundations of the Petőfi cult in Serbian literature were laid predominantly by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Đura Jakšić and Laza Kostić, who were later joined by a number of poets-translators in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like Bogdan Čiplić, Mladen Leskovac, Veljko Petrović, Danilo Kiš, Sava Babić and others. The secret of Petőfi’s popularity in Serbia was that his patriotic poems with a highly social message, as well as his revolutionary poetry, particularly in the 1880s, suited and even struck the same chord as the growing patriotism of the New Serbian Youth (Nova omladina).

Later Petőfi’s popularity was changing: the *revolutionary* Petőfi was discovered by the Serbs just after the First World War, in 1919, and also again in 1944,

and in 1946 too, as the communist ideology some time used the *revolutionary* Petőfi poems. Later, the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death (1969) and his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary (1973) were good opportunities for publishing several volumes of his poems.

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## Ion Valjan: *With the Voice of Time*. The Hypostasis of a Romanian Belle Epoque

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**Abstract.** Ion Valjan is the literary pseudonym of Ion Al. Vasilescu (1881–1960), famous lawyer, playwright, writer of memoirs, publicist and politician. Dramatic author in the line of Caragiale, he was the manager of The National Theatre in Bucharest between 1923 and 1924, and general manager of theatres between 1923 and 1926. He wrote drama, he collaborated with *Sburătorul*, *Vremea*, *Rampa*, being appreciated by the exigent literary critique of the inter-war period. After the war, in 1950, he was involved in a political trial, accused of high treason, espionage for Great Britain, and got sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, where he died. Valjan is the author of the only theatrical show, played in a communist prison, *Revista Pitești 59*. Ion Valjan's memoirs, *With the Voice of Time. Memories*, written during the Second World War, represent a turn back in time, into the age of the author's childhood and adolescence, giving the contemporary reader the chance to travel in time and space, the end of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the past century projecting an authentic image, in the Romanian version of a Belle Epoque, interesting and extremely prolific for the Romanian cultural life. Also, evoking his childhood years spent in cities by the Danube (Călărași, Brăila, Turnu-Severin), Valjan unveils the harmonious meeting of different peoples and their mentalities, which transform the Danube Plain into an interethnic space of unique value.

**Keywords:** Balcanism, identity, alterity, Romanian *belle époque*

Ion Al. Vasilescu—literary pen name Valjan—born in 1881, was a lawyer, playwright, memorialist, politician. He studied Law and Philology in Iași and obtained his doctorate in Law in Paris. He gained notoriety as a lawyer following the trial Sotiriu-Crețulescu, a famous case in the field of justice. A passionate of theatre, he wrote five comedies that enjoyed the appreciation of the literary critique: *What the Village Knew* (*Ce știa satul*, 1912), *The Gordian Knot* (*Nodul Gordian*, 1920), *The Tear* (*Lacrima*, 1920), *The Sacrifice Generation* (*Generația de sacrificiu*, 1933, 1936), *An Inspection* (*O inspecție*, 1941). A collaborator

of Lovinescu's magazine *Sburatorul*, of the magazines *Rampa* and *Vremea*, he was the manager of the National Theatre in Bucharest (1923–1924), and general manager of theatres (1923–1926). Starting with 1921, he published in magazines pages with a confessional-memorialistic character, on the theme of childhood, of the adolescence that Vasilescu-Valjan spent in the picturesque Balkan towns on the banks of the Danube, Turnu-Severin, Călărași, Brăila, where his father, due to his profession (he was a customs administrator) was moved to, every two years. The confessional writings stop at the evoking of the Victory parade in 1918, the author being marked by the arrest of his son Corneliu Valjan by the Soviet secret services (sent to the Gulag from where he would return in 1955). In 1950 Vasilescu-Valjan was arrested, following some ridiculous accusations of espionage in favour of the British powers. He was sentenced to 15 years in jail, he would make "the pilgrimage" of the fiercest communist jails, Aiud, Ocnele Mari and Pitești, dying at the age of 79 in detention. Even if his dramatic writings would deserve another, more attentive reading, we propose ourselves to take a closer look at his memorialistic work, published by the Humanitas Publishing House under the title of *With the Voice of Time. Memories* (established text, edition cared for by the author's niece, Micaela Gulea, who also signs the thrilling Epilogue of the volume) in 2013, this being the third edition after those published by the Eminescu Publishing House in 1987 and in 1996.

In the context of contemporary research from imagologic perspectives, Ion Valjan's *Memories* constitute an ideal and fertile pretext to analyze the relationship between *identity* and *alterity*, between the Self and the Other(s), in a space configured by multi-ethnicity in the Danube area (Turnu Severin, Călărași, Giurgiu, Brăila) in a topos of differences, eclecticism, of confluences of the European spirit with the Balkan one. The first four chapters are suggestive, from this perspective, 'A long time ago,' 'In Călărași,' 'In Brăila,' 'In Iași.' Starting with the fifth chapter, 'Novitiate,' Vasilescu-Valjan's confessions take us into the Bucharest of the 1900s, and the signs of a *belle époque* with a Romanian perfume become interesting to decipher at the dawn of the process of turning Romanian culture into a southern, Bucharest like culture, a process in which Iași, the cultural capital of the elites, loses its supremacy and Bucharest becomes a capital not only from an administrative point of view but mostly from a cultural one. We indulge ourselves in quoting, in this sense, from a savourous work by Dan C. Mihăilescu on the city of Bucharest, his observations finding their full justification in the confessions of Vasilescu-Valjan:

Some find the normality of Bucharest life incredible, absolutely synchronic with the Western Europe of 1900, we being, unfortunately used to the theory of a rude Romania, bordering the desert. (...) we speak of a Romania where the Leu was stronger than the French franc, where, around 1900

and so, Bucharest was sending help to Paris flooded by the Seine, where on Clementa Street people read *Le Figaro* with their morning coffee, and letters took a day to any corner of Europe.... (Mihăilescu 2003, 25–26)<sup>1</sup>

We identify another kind of alterity in the chapter entitled ‘The War’ in Ion Valjan’s memorialistic writing. It is his anti-German attitude, but one with strong political connotations, in a country officially Francophone and traditionally Franchophile. Valjan’s memoirs render an atmosphere of general rejection of the German expansion politics: “Formidably armed, Germany hurried with a terrifying rush onto Belgium, seeking the road to Paris. Massacres, fires, terror, deportations, destructions, nothing can stop the Teutonic armies on their way to the prey.” (Valjan 2013, 317)<sup>2</sup> The only one who states his pro-German position, Petre Carp, a member of Junimea, is unanimously condemned, his act being considered “an act of dementia.” (*idem*, 319)

The first chapters of the confessions follow the formation of an *identity*, of the one confessing in a permanent dialogue with *the other*, with alterity. The chapter ‘A long time ago’ is centred on family and school as topoi of formation. The pages dedicated to the school in Ploiești, where “Mister Maior” used traditional punitive methods, e.g. “would savagely beat the palms with a ruler” (*idem*, 26), are of an extraordinary verve, similarly to those pages on which the high school Traian from Turnu Severin is evoked, where the method was the same, beating, and an essential component of education was the preoccupation for hygiene. Even though he evokes a Romanian space that stood still in dust and mud, a country that wakes up at the dawn of its modernization, of its becoming European (there were no pavements, no sewer drains, the means of transport were the carriage or the coach, education in schools was done through beating and sending into “detention”), we must remember the profound joy of living, the land of optimism of all, from young to old, the general feeling that the world is beautiful, that life is first of all joy. Reading Valjan’s confessions, we understand how healthy the Romanian mentalities of the Beautiful Century were, how happy the people were, and how much the generations to follow retrogressed, ground by wars and crushed by communism. The favourite space of childhood, the village of Cioraca, is the archetype of the Romanian village, with an archetypal figure also, that of the Olt county people. “The Olt people from the north of Olt county are diligent,

1 Quotations from Romanian literature were translated by the author.

2 It would be interesting to bring into discussion the study of professor Lucian Boia, “*Germanofilii*” – *elita intelectuală românească în anii primului război mondial* [“*Germanophiles*.” *The Romanian intellectual elite in the years of the First World War*] (2009), which undermines the theory that the adepts of the Triple Alliance would have been only small collaborationists, opportunists. To understand the reasons that stand at the basis of the Alliance attitude of most Romanian intellectuals, the chapter ‘The War,’ the humane but also political, lucid and witty arguments to build a Great Romania must be read.

overcoming, smart, curious and no work frightens them when it comes to making a living for himself and his family.” (*idem*, 32)<sup>3</sup>

The second chapter announces a change of perspective, the memorialist proposes himself to see what happened “with the then eyes, with the then memories” to speak “with the voice of time” (*idem*, 35). The link between us and the others is a complex system of alterities. We can only define and form ourselves in a social network, only when we project our own desires onto the others and we let ourselves be influenced by the impulses that alterity addresses to us. This interrelatedness is the leading thread of Ion Valjan’s confessions. The Balkan universe that he revives on his pages is special not only because of its picturesque charm, but also due to its force with which it shaped characters, acting in a community in which the Romanians peacefully lived together with Bulgarians, Turks, Greeks, Armenians or Jews. Paul Ricoeur’s (2001) observation well fits this context according to which identity is “a field of tensions,” a complex network with ethical, ethnic or national components. The identity of the individual who lives in the multicolour towns on the banks of the Danube is interculturally coded and is manifested in a certain unique psychological matrix, defined by the contributions of each people, of each ethnicity. The pages where the memorialist describes the sweets with which the street vendors allure children: from “infuriated doughnuts” to a variety of sorts with oriental-exotic names: bigi-bigi, salip, sacaz, etc., are a novelty. The best coffee maker is an Armenian, the milkman is Bulgarian, and the kid, when punished, fights an imaginary “cataon” (a Greek, n.a). The identity discourse of the memorialist is born grafted on the ethnic component. It is, of course, about the curiosity and openness towards the Other, being seen as Another, a Foreigner, assimilated peacefully every time.

The arrival of young Valjan in Iași in July 1900 is noted by fixing the ethnicities of those individuals he comes into contact with. The coach driver of the one-horse coach is a Russian who “gathered his fat in a velvet coat” (Valjan 2013,102) and steals the clients from the poor Jewish coach driver, the “poor and weak competitor.” (*idem*, 102)<sup>4</sup> The firms of tradesmen: Barasch, Alexidis, Buch, Weiss, Porjes, Smirnof, Ermacov, Pollingher, Kahane seem to overwhelm him by the fact that they are the names of some Foreigners, and when he finally sees the statue of Miron Costin, he remembers the well-known aphorism of the chronicler “The

3 We cannot ignore the resemblance in spirit with “Childhood memories” by Creangă. It is about the same attitude of the diarist in his mature age who evokes his childhood nostalgically, protectively coated in the bed of his natal village’s world. Ciocara is the place where he will always return, no matter how far he could be.

4 “I haven’t seen a Jewish coach driver in Muntenia or Oltenia so far”, wonders the author, obviously alluding to the fact that these were mostly tradesmen. It is also Valjan who later evokes the Jewish exodus, following the economic crisis during Mitiță Sturdza’s period. Thousands of Jews go to America, fascinated by the mirage of an Eldorado that promised a better life. Most of them were small craftsmen and tradesmen.

times are not in man's command, man is under the times' command". Alterity creates discomfort and awkwardness, because, as the author remembers: "I broke the ties with the world of yesterday and I have no ties with the world I am in." (*idem*, 103)

We have noticed a growing interest of readers in the genres of diaries, memoirs, and confessions from times gone by. It is most certainly about the reader's feeling of curiosity, whom the diary, the memoirs, the confession allow an indiscreet look into the fold of personal life, about which he couldn't have found out otherwise. We also find in them the faithful mirror of times gone by, an authentic and sincere reconstruction of *a modus vivendi*, a conservation of the truest and cleanest history, without the voluntary and involuntary falsity of historic study, without the coldness and rigidity of scientific texts. The discussed book represents the unfalsified past and must be read as an authentic source of information of a *modus vivendi* in the most interesting era in our country, which we elegantly and aristocratically call *la Belle Epoque*.

Settled along "some Turkish Danube," at a reasonable distance, Călărași and Brăila seem cut out of different realities. In Călărași, in 1894, only three streets "have some pavement on them" (*idem*, 40); the mud on the lanes reaches the ankles, the mosquitoes spread malaria, and no day passes without a funeral. The Danube, topos that fuels the Balkan picturesque, is in itself a bad news bearer: the scene in which a whole wedding retinue is swallowed by the hungry waters of the river suddenly melting seems cut out of a Russian film. Brăila, in exchange, seems an earthly paradise, a promised land with its heart beating in the area of the harbour:

in the harbour there is devilish movement, a bustle, a buzz and a mixture of faces and colours such as in a fantastic panorama. Sailors from other harbours, English, Germans, Greeks, Turks, Austrians, Hungarians, with a pipe in the mouth and the cap leaning back, cross roads, push each other, bump into our sailors, speak and call in all languages. Amongst them the go-betweens, the tradesmen and the lemonade sellers who call out their merchandise. Somebody must have overturned the Babel Tower and spilt here on the quays a maddened world. (*idem*, 72)

The strange charm of the city is fueled by the names of the ship owners, turned legends at the Gates of the Orient: Mendel, Embericos, Galiatzatos, and Dreifus. The inhabitants of Brăila voluptuously emerge themselves in a *dolce far niente*, which places them on this side of the line that separates the West from the Orient: policemen shoot into the air, nobody can leave the pub until Monday morning, cigarettes are lit up with a 20 Lei banknote, the gypsies in the folk music band play continuously, alcohol is consumed by the bottle, and in Totis restaurant one only drinks wines from Chios and Tenedos. Ion Valjan's literature fixes, through

painting Brăila, an intermediate zone, an urban space of transition that we call, most of the time with a depreciative meaning, Balkan through the confrontation of two antagonistic tendencies. On one side the barbarian Ottoman Byzantine influences, which give the picturesque character of this city, on the other side the shy attempt of the civilized Europe's influences to put down roots at the mouth of the Danube. The Balkan spirit comes alive in the pages of our memorialist and is visible through all the pores of the writing: cosmopolitanism, voluptuousness, vitality to self-destruction, passionate loves, and Fanar laziness; in the middle, standing on a throne, lazy and indifferent—the Foreigner.

The motif of the foreigner has imposed itself in the Romanian literature with different degrees of hostility, and Valjan is not totally a stranger to this feeling. With him it is rather about the feeling of superiority of the one who righteously belongs to these places, different from the Others through his origins, his education. Knowing oneself passes through knowing the other, and the finality of this act is becoming conscious of the fact that “others” represent a social group to which “we” do not belong. The axiological plan of Ion Valjan's writing, albeit discreetly interwoven in the anecdote-thread, is however present and cannot be ignored. Sorin Alexandrescu (1998) defined the myth of identity as being born out of placing Romania, through the force of geographical and historical factors, in a space isolated from Latinity, surrounded by countries of Central Europe, Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the Romanian spirituality making efforts to self preserve itself, through exacerbating traditionalist tendencies, but also through perpetuating a permanent feeling of curiosity towards everything that supposes alterity. The history of events in Ion Valjan's memoir, placed under the sign of the pleasure of telling how the world gone by was, is doubled by a history of mentalities and the memory of an ethnographic picturesqueness, marked by a colourful, contrasting multiethnic mixture, the final result being an identity discourse.

The narrative self is being built in parallel with the formation of an existential Balkan archetype. The Balkan picturesqueness is maintained by the specific topoi, i.e. the fair and the harbour, by typologies such as that of the sailor, the tramps that populate the colourful world of harbours, or that of tradesmen, fishermen, and customs officers. The identity of the memorialist is being built by gradually discovering the charm of reading, of the art of the theatre and of classical music. It is interesting to follow how the adolescent living at the edge of the Orient develops in contact with theatre, literature, music and the friendship of some eminent professors. Ion Valjan's discourse is an authentic, unconcealed pleading for the role and importance of education at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Romanian culture, overwhelmed by traditionalist tendencies and a general feeling of *passeisme*, was taking its first steps towards synchronizing itself with Western European modernity. “Why should this cosmopolitan fair interest me?” the young man asks, having barely arrived from Călărași, “I want however to be as far as

possible from the noise of city burnt by so many riches... I would not exchange a lyric from Eminescu for the whole gold that is amassed in Brăila.” (Valjan 2013, 73) In Călărași he discovered the naïve charm of the books with outlaws or of the plays with Nora Marinescu and Ion Livescu<sup>5</sup> and shortly afterwards it became clear to him that he could not live without theatre. Numerous and substantial are the notes linked to the modeling effects of art, in general, and of theatre in particular. “A great change had occurred in me since I saw, acted in and read plays”, the memorialist confesses and from here on his confessions will pursue not only the reconstitution of a Romanian *forma mentis*, determining for the transition period from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, but they will also become a diary of intellectual formation, a diary of developing through literature, art and friendships of modeling values, out of which we could name the friendship with writer Panait Cerna, from Ion Valjan’s period spent in Brăila. The Danube spirit is favorable for reading, thus the two of them walk the boulevards in Brăila and ardently discuss Goethe, Schiller, Lenau or Schopenhauer.

Extremely interesting are the pages about the two great cultural cities of the time, Iași, the cradle of the elitist movement of Junimea, and Bucharest. The former gradually loses its importance, the latter becoming the pulsating heart of the country, through the slow but steady process of turning Romanian culture into a Muntenia style culture. The University of Iași, imposing as a temple, the place of accomplishment for the greatest Romanian intellectuals of the time, becomes the space of shaping student Ion Valjan, a student in Law and Philology and at The Dramatic Art Conservatory. In evoking the professors, famous doctrinaires and lawyers, he is respectful and full of gratitude: Tanoviceanu, Dimitrie Alexandrescu, Matei Cantacuzin, Vasile Dimitriu or Constantin Stere. The portrait Ion Valjan makes of Matei Cantacuzin, a descendant of an old boyar family, is special. This depicts “through mind, book and birth three aristocracies: blood, talent and culture aristocracies.” (*idem*, 108) Valjan-Vasilescu’s Iași is a Romanian Oxford, with professors emeriti, students dedicated to the world of books, of science, where lectures are held and attended, memorable speeches are delivered, conferences are organized in a general atmosphere of enthusiasm, of the joy of living, of trust in the triumph of intelligence, of human reason. Iași lives in a rarefied climate of superior intellectuality; it is the Paradise for those who bow to the god of books. And how could you not feel as an intellectual on the ninth cloud, when you have professors such as A. D. Xenopol, Petre P. Negulescu, Ion Găvănescu, Philippide, Teohari Antonescu, etc. We cannot ignore the sensitivity and the piousness with which Iași is evoked: “it is the Iași of the Mihaileanu Academy, of Eminescu, of Vasile Alecsandri, Titu Maiorescu, Vasile Conta, Negruzzi, Nicu Gane, of the Junimea society, of *Convorbiri Literare*... Iași

5 “I am fascinated. I am happy. Everything charms me. A new world opens in my life, a world of delights and beauty.” the adolescent exclaims in the theatre hall (Valjan 2013, 61).

lives closed in its nobility titles, in the poetry of the past, with a lifestyle of its own, with the carriage of an authentic aristocrat.” (*idem*, 111)

Bucharest becomes the capital in 1859, after the Union of the Romanian Principalities, and a Little Paris, at the gates of the Orient, by assiduously using the French language, a bohemian lifestyle, through the variegated mixture of peoples and imitating, in general, of everything that is life in the Paris along the banks of the Seine. For the majority of the Balkan tradesmen, Paris is too far away and they dedicate themselves to business in this miniature Paris on the banks of the Dâmbovița, rapidly turned European, urban settlement at the gates of the Orient, but perfectly impregnated by the cosmopolitan spirit of the French capital.

The chapter entitled ‘Noviciat’ in Ion Valjan’s memoirs describes the ratio identity-alterity from the perspective of the relationship between *the outskirts and the center*. The memorialist recognizes that he had a choice, between 1903 and 1904, to stay in Iași or to leave for Bucharest. The attraction for Bucharest is stronger, “because it has a wider field of activity, there are many credit houses, various public and private institutions, ministries, firms, a living trade, an industrial, political movement.” (*idem*, 137) Bucharest’s charm is irresistible, the capital gives birth to its legends on the move, the Kiseleff road with its vivid traffic, with its en vogue world, with luxurious carriages, driven by white horses and names stirring a lot of rumour such as Lilly Gheorghiadis, Mița Biciclista or Lina Colivia, suggestions of the most scandalous habits of Bucharest a long time ago. The country’s capital is situated at the confluence of two worlds, attracted not only through the rhythm of its modernization, but also through the fact that it was a city of pleasure, of voluptuousness and depravation.

The chapter ‘The Bar of Time. Politics’ is a minute and sincere survey made by a Law specialist, an intellectual of deep thought, of the Romanian political life in the proximity of the First World War. The portraits of the great jurists of the time, Take Ionescu, Toma Stelian, Alexandru Djuvara or of the most brilliant criminal law specialist, Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, are special. Their pleadings attract a vast audience, their brilliant intelligence triggers admiration and envy at the same time, and they embody the greatest living school for future Romanian jurists. Delavrancea is not only a specialist in criminal law, he is a “magician,” his pleadings attract to the court room doctors, teachers, journalists, artists; the moment he starts speaking Delavrancea is more than a jurist, he becomes an artist, and his speech turns into a monument.

The pages of political analysis of the time are carefully drawn, especially those dedicated to the relationships between Carol I and the conservative party. Also, there are numerous moments in which Ion Valjan expresses his sincere admiration for the one he considered the most illustrious politician of all times, Ion Brătianu. The scope of analysis gradually expands, and the reflection upon the Romanian political life gains European dimensions. The atrocities of war,



even the reason that triggered it are explainable in Ion Vasilescu's perspective, through the same cursed Balkan spirit, the only one capable of such troubles. Thus the assassination of the Royal Serbian family (King Alexander of Serbia and Queen Draga Masin), planned by a military conspiracy led by another Serbian, Prince Peter Karagheorghevici, could take place in a Slav barbarian and uncivilized environment, predisposed to violence. And in the spirit of the same shameful mixture of Balkanism-Orientalism, the tragedy turned rapidly and deliberately into street show, the hysteric, shocked and curious crowd had something to talk about, being distracted from what was going to happen in Europe. The artist Vasilescu-Valjan perceives reality as a show, sad indeed, and the succession to the state power as a premeditated and mechanic action, led by an invisible mechanism. "We know it all beforehand, as in a play in which the spectator sees from the beginning what line the action shall take on." (*idem*, 173) In the show of the political life the role of *the other* is played by King Carol I., a strong, domineering king, in an unuttered warlike stage with the Conservative party, flattered by the Liberals, led by Mititza Sturdza, a king who in history had as only opponent the politician Ionel Brătianu, the uncontested creator of the Kingdom of Romania. How clear and lucid is the portrait that Ion Valjan draws of this controversial character, who indissolubly linked his destiny to that of the Romanian people. "Carol I remained German, through blood, mentality, conceptions, spirit and soul, and sees Romania's interests only in an ideal agreement with German interests. Romania is a necessary satellite for Germany. Working with all probity for Romania, he works for Germany too. He is linked to his native country with a link that no power in the world could undo. He does not forget that he was a Prussian officer, and that he was part of the noble house of the Junkers." (*idem*, 180) In other words, no foreign leader could love his adopted country more than the country that gave birth to him and to which he belonged feudally, and the political consequences for the first would be excessive.

In such a political context, Transylvania's situation seems hopeless. The image of alterity, embodied by King Carol, becomes complete when Romania enters the First World War, and provides a rather conflictual vision towards *the other*, of German origin, but manifesting attachment towards French spirituality. Germany is a giant Teutonic creature, which marches mercilessly against the European civilization, and on the other side there are France and Paris as images of humanism, of civilization, in the spirit of unanimous Francophilia. Not only Germans, but also Germanophiles are sworn enemies. The war is fought not only on the front, but also in Bucharest, in political circles and inside cultural groups. Thus, Junimea member Petre Carp, a convinced Germanophile, followed by Marghiloman or C. Arion, becomes the target of indignation of most Romanian intellectuals. The open anti-German attitude brings about the memorialist's arrest (hospitalization) at the Imperial Hotel, and then a deportation in the camp of

Săveni, in Ialomița county. Săveni becomes for a short period of time the capital of Romanian culture, occupied by the most prestigious Romanian intellectuals of the time—Virgil Dărăscu, doctor Alexandru Obregia, Ionică Pillat, Galction Cordun, C. Rădulescu-Motru and many others—united by the same national ideal, unifying Transylvania with the country and the hatred against the Germans. The memorialist's feelings towards the Germans cover a whole range, from hatred towards a nation considered barbarian, grim and savage, through pity and compassion, forgiveness and human understanding for the trifling German soldier, to finally reach the conclusion that the entire race suffers “a sort of madness” that turns them into merciless conquerors, with an unhealthy drive for destruction. Romania is also devastated by the lack of food, because the Germans take everything to feed their numerous armies. The hatred against them accentuates together with the growing cowardice and of unconditional surrender of the Romanian intellectuals. The memorialist is disgusted by the accepted slavery, by the cowardice, but also by the indifference and platitude of most. And the portrait of feld-marshal Makensen, the conqueror of Romania, above the desk of an eminent jurist in the Palace of Justice leaves him speechless. In such a context, the Allies' victory in 1918 becomes the victory of humanism against barbarians, a frantic moment, a moment of re-awakening the feeling of the joy to live, to call yourself a human being.

Thus, *With the Voice of Time. Memories* must necessarily be read today, in a climate of globalization and reunification in a great European family. Ion Vasilescu-Valjan's lesson is as follows: a strong person is the one that does not humiliate itself, does not bow to anybody, to which education is primordial, in which the temple is the University, and the dictatorship is one of intelligence and common sense. How few Romanians have learnt this lesson!

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## The Census, Maps, and Museums, or a Way of ‘Translating’ Identity

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**Abstract.** The Census, which aims at recording pieces of information about the members of the population of a country, the historical and geographical maps drawn at the orders of the government, as well as national museums, may be more than the mere sum of the collected data to be presented. Based upon Benedict Anderson’s theory, as shown in his book entitled *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006), in my paper I shall try to point at the subtle ways in which official governmental institutions have tried to use the Census, maps and museums in order to shape national identity and influence the image of a nation. Quite often what one can read about the results of the Census, what one can see on a map or encounter in a museum are not objective facts, but items placed there carefully, fulfilling specific purposes. On the one hand, they target the compatriots, on the other hand, the foreigners. Could we say that what we are dealing with here is not only an act of cultural mediation, but also a specific way of ‘translating’ identity? The next couple of pages shall try to analyze the topic and find an answer to the question above by giving examples.

**Keywords:** identity, national images, maps, museums

Living in the age of globalization and the Internet, travelling, that is being literally or virtually on the road has become a commonplace. No matter if for business or for fun, people travel all over the world, thus meet *the other* and have the possibility and opportunity to get to know different cultures and customs. Due to this freedom of movement the world opens up to people, and a multitude of information is offered to them. Yet, this does not mean that there is no control over the phenomena. The official data—e.g., the Census, maps—released by the government of a country or the institutions meant for the eyes of tourists—e.g., national museums—are closely supervised.

Benedict Anderson in his book entitled *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; 2006) examines the Census, maps,

and museums as institutions of power that helped colonizers in Southeast Asia get and draw a clear picture of the colonized (2006, 164). In my paper based upon examples taken from literature I shall try to show that Anderson's theory is to some extent true of the 20<sup>th</sup> and even the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries' nation states in Europe which make use of the three institutions mentioned above in order to strengthen their own dominance and integrity, as well as to shape national identity and influence the image of a nation.

In one of my previous studies,<sup>1</sup> which I shall partially recapitulate here, based upon the theories of Lucian Boia (2012) and Benedict Anderson (2006), I defined the concept of nation as a modern myth. Yet, the meaning of the term *myth* as a story that provides us with an example dating *in illo tempore*, prescribing behaviour patterns for today's people, and which is in itself a language, a message referring to human existence (Ries 2007, 11–18), becomes secondary. Far more important is the definition of modern myths as products of our imagination, imagined constructions, meant to manipulate the masses (Barthes 1996).

Both traditional and modern myths somehow fulfil the function of giving protection and hope to people. This is also one of the roles that the concept of nation is meant to play. In the pre-technological era protection was granted by forms of elementary social cohesion: family, the tribe, the rural community, on the one hand, limited the individual, on the other hand, protected him/her from the unseen (Boia 2012, 8). There was also a strong belief in the existence of a higher dimension, the realm of Gods. This transcendental world was responsible for the destiny of humanity; as such it conveyed a meaning to everything in a closed and perfect system (*idem*). Yet, as these traditional peoples became victims of time and history, their mythical and religious conceptions of the world also grew obsolete. They were replaced by modern myths such as the modern industries, commerce and urbanization. As a consequence of this development, people have been granted more freedom, but have also lost several reference points, so that they have become more and more confused (2012, 9). What has always been present in the subconscious of humans is the thirst for absolute knowledge and the desire to overcome all limits imposed on them by existence itself. They seem to have always believed that there is more to life than one can see and that there has to be a higher and nobler purpose hidden in all things (2012, 10). Therefore, when the traditional concepts ceased to function in a changing, modern world, not only were they replaced by science, progress or any other modern phenomenon but also each of these could easily be sacralised and play the role of the Divine (2012, 10). In this respect the modern phenomenon of the nation ensures solidarity and identity, preserving sacrality. It is a religion "according to which humanity is made up (through divine will or nature) of national entities; history is going to be fulfilled in its universality through each nation apart, and the individual can

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1 Mihály (2012).

find salvation only within his/her nation, as part of a collective destiny" (2012, 11) [translated by me, V-I. M.].

Besides the interpretation of *nation* as a modern myth, the concept can be defined as a historical phenomenon that replaces great dynasties and religions. It can be regarded as a collective subject travelling through history together, with members speaking the same language. On this journey the nation becomes self-conscious and self-aware, drawing a line between the self and the other(s), whereby the other can also turn into an enemy. In this respect a nation is also discriminatory: the 'similar' are allies, the 'others' are excluded (Anderson 2006, 1–9).

Thus, we can draw the conclusion that a *nation* can be best defined as an imagined, limited, sovereign political community (cf. Anderson 2006, 4): *imagined* because it is impossible for its members to know each and every person of their nation; *limited* because they need to have frontiers that separate them from other nations, otherwise they would encompass the whole world; *sovereign* because they can only exist if they are free from others; and its members build a *community* based upon comradeship and fraternity on the horizontal level (2006, 6–7). This point of view emphasizes the voluntary, constructed and artificial character of the nation, interpreted by Anderson as belonging with kinship and religion, rather than ideologies (2006, 5), yet leading Boia to the conclusion that a nation is the projection of an ideology (2012, 15). We can witness a reversed perspective: it is not history that makes a nation, but it is the nation which, as it has already been established, will invent its history that is later going to be thought of as standing at its foundation (*idem*). Concerning the language there is a change of perception as well: a nation is not held together by the language its representatives share, but once established the nation imposes a standard version upon its members—e.g. at the time of the French Revolution in France half of the population spoke different dialects of French, or even other languages such as Italian or German (15–19). In other words, language, religion, ethnic basis or history alone is not sufficient to hold a nation or nation state together. A nation needs an outer voluntary act of creation, a will to exist in order to survive. However, as products of history, but self-made at the same time, nation and nationalism can become obsolete as well, especially if they stick to their limitations and borders so ruthlessly.

The Census, maps, and museums can, on the one hand, hold the nation together fulfilling an internal function, on the other hand, playing an external role as well, they show the others how strong and unified one's own community is. These institutions of power are the means which make the modern myth of the nation, this imagined construction work.

The Census is ordered by the government and conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, and has the task to enumerate the population of the nation state with respect to several criteria, e.g., the number of people living in towns/in the

countryside, the number of men/women, nationality, religion, mother tongue, etc. The results, besides being factual, are highly depersonalizing as they reduce people to numbers and interpret them in terms of quantity. Moreover, in this manner the different regions are being mapped from on high (Anderson 2006, 169), facilitating an easier organizing of the educational, juridical, health systems and of the police in such a way as to allow the nation state to prosper. The goal is apparently a good one, who would not want to reach prosperity? Yet, let us not forget that the construct is fragile and that there are no ultimately pure nation states, for within a country there are several ethnic and religious minorities, to whom their own imagined national values count just as much. Often after a new Census, governmental structures are changed so as to assimilate and acculturate these minorities, most of the time for fear that they represent a threat to the existence of the nation state.

Similarly to censuses, today's European maps showing space from a bird's-eye view work based on totalizing classifications (cf. 2006, 173). Besides their role of pointing out directions, these maps draw clear lines, borders between nation states. In order to justify the righteousness of the frontiers, historical maps are being used to certify the antiquity of a certain territorial unit (*idem*, 175). If they are arranged into a chronological order, these maps form the "political-biographical narrative of the realm" (*idem*), which serves as proof for the nation's continuity.



The Map Room of the Cabinet War Rooms<sup>2</sup>

The use of maps as logos which is also a wide-spread phenomenon in our society, can be traced back to colonial states when imperials dyed their colonies on the map with certain colors, e.g., British imperial maps used pink-red for their own colonies, purple-blue for the French, yellow-brown for the Dutch, etc. This way, each territory looked as if it could easily be detached any time from its context becoming a mere sign, no longer a compass.

2 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial\\_War\\_Museum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_War_Museum), MapRoomCabinetWarRooms20060617\_CopyrightKaihsuTai.jpg. Modifications made by SilkTork. Accessed on 10 April 2014.



An elaborate map of the British Empire in 1886, marked in the traditional color for imperial British dominions on maps<sup>3</sup>

These colorful puzzle pieces could be reproduced in an infinite number and transferred onto posters, seals, magazines or textbook covers, even key chains (*idem*). Through their omnipresence these items were often misused ending up to turn the cause they were meant to propagate into the opposite; while they functioned as a reminder of the national feeling, because they were everywhere, people started to ignore them after a while and their meaning became hollow.

Museums in general and national museums in particular are institutions which exhibit national values both for compatriots, as well as for tourists. Yet, the process of museumizing does not only mean putting on a show in order to entertain, but has always had a political side to it as well. Items displayed at museums are often placed there for a specific reason, labeled to be interpreted in the way those at power want to.

In each nation state there has to be a national museum, which, just as the sequence of historical maps, plays the role of proving and fortifying national history and continuity. Paradoxically, the unique nature of these exposed national treasures is betrayed by the very fact that they are reproduced, just as maps, in a variety of products meant for mass consumption.

In conclusion, the three institutions of power, the Census, maps, and museums are interconnected and form a frame which is totalizing and classificatory, called by Anderson a “warp of thinking” (184) applicable to all that the state controls: people, regions, religions, languages, monuments, etc. Once the frame has been drawn, everything has got its well-defined place, can be easily identified and becomes countable, one in a series with a serial number, visible and controllable (185).

3 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British\\_Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire), Author: Walter Crane (1845–1915) – public domain. Accessed on 10 April 2014.



15-inch guns outside the museum; one from HMS *Ramillies*, the other from HMS *Roberts*.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, these institutions do not only mediate information, but also translate it to the viewer in a specific language, namely the language of power. The way the Census is interpreted, maps are drawn and objects exhibited, already establishes the perspective of the visitors. It is a conducted translation of national identity, a manipulation of the masses for political reasons.

Literary works quite often have the force to reveal the schemes behind the institutional machinery. In the following I shall name a couple of examples, which come to strengthen the point of view stated above.

Sándor Márai in his travelogue written in form of a diary entitled *Europa's Abduction* (1946/47)<sup>5</sup> renders his own impressions and experiences while travelling to Western Europe, more precisely to Switzerland, Italy and France right after World War II, when new borders were established and thus, new maps had to be drawn. The journey gives the narrator the opportunity to take a close look at the political, social and mental changes that the war caused in Eastern and Western Europe, to compare these and view the two sides in each other's reflection. During the journey the narrator has the opportunity to visit several museums where he encounters, for example, statues exhibited as a mocking gesture at the address of the past to strengthen the leading nations of the present. When he visits Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini's office, there is a bronze statue of Europa's Abduction dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century:

4 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial\\_War\\_Museum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_War_Museum), source: [geograph.org.uk](http://geograph.org.uk), author: Chris Gunns. Accessed on 10 April 2014.

5 Cf. Mihály (2013).



In Palazzo Venetia, in Mussolini's office, a small statue from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Its title: *Ratto d'Europa* [Europa's Abduction]. It may be a coincidence, it may be an ironic hint; the exhibition has been organized by the Americans. (Márai 2008, 54) [translated by me, V-I. M.]<sup>6</sup>

In a very concise manner in this short passage the narrator points at how those in power, the organizers of the event, the Americans, the winners could choose the object to be exposed, and by doing so wanted to transmit a precise message. From the lines above we can conclude that the statue had not been exhibited because of its beauty but because of its title and symbolic value. Had Mussolini tried to abduct the continent of Europe and failed to succeed? Were the Americans mocking at him because of his failure and their own apparent triumph in doing what he had not managed to? Both the questions and answers are implied by the excerpt above. Besides its artistic value, the choice of the statue in the given political context could not have been arbitrary, thus its exposure already contains a readymade translation and interpretation.

Another example taken from literature is Joseph Roth's short story *Die Büste des Kaisers* [*The Bust of the Emperor*] (1934/35),<sup>7</sup> which presents the nostalgic image of the Austro-Hungarian Empire resembling a world without boundaries, where one could travel without a passport and felt at home in every corner of it. This is the very attitude that the main character of the short story, Count Franz Xaver Morstin has, when he returns home after World War I. Only that the circumstances have changed, the Monarchy has fallen, there are nation states now and frontiers. "To a man above nationality" (Roth 1986 [1924], 157) who was accustomed to moving freely, the newly established frontiers of the nation states seem unnatural. They are artificial lines, drawn for political reasons, which do not take into consideration people's feelings or do not follow the (natural) lines of the landscape.

The plot of the short story revolves around the bust of the Emperor that the Count has put up in the little village of Lopatyny, a peripheral territory inhabited by people of different ethnic groups, which within the Monarchy was oppressed by the centre, building a no-man's-land at the frontier. Yet, the representatives of the new nation state cannot allow the old values to survive, because these are threatening the emerging system. The Count and the old world he stands for are subject to ridicule in several instances. Though there is sympathy from the part of the narrator, the facts prove that the old way of life the Count so desperately clings on to is no longer valid. It may have moral value, but it is not taken into consideration. There is a discrepancy between universal moral

6 „A Palazzo Veneziában, Mussolini dolgozószobájában egy kis bronz a XVI. századból. Címe: *Ratto d'Europa*. Lehet véletlen, lehet gúnyos célzás is; a kiállítást amerikaiak rendezték.”

7 Cf. Mihály (2012).

values of humanity and the machinery of depersonalized history. The outcome is obvious: finally, the Count is asked or ordered, one should rather say, to pull down the Bust of the Emperor. The lost world cannot be brought back. The Count also realizes this fact and decides to bury the bust; he is being accompanied by the simple folk:

The church bells tolled, the larks trilled and the crickets sang unceasingly. The grave was prepared. The coffin was lowered with the flag draped over it, and for the last time Franz Xaver Morstin raised his sabre in salute to his Emperor. The crowd began to sob as though the Emperor Franz Josef and with him the old Monarchy and their own old home had only then been buried. The three pastors prayed.

So the old Emperor was laid to rest a second time, in the village of Lopatyny, in what had once been Galicia. A few weeks later the news of this episode reached the papers. They published a few witticisms about it [...]. (Roth 1986 [1924], 181–182)

Besides the artificial character of the frontiers, and thus implicitly of the maps too, this excerpt is a clear evidence of how monuments, museum pieces are handled/mishandled according to the circumstances, to the change of regimes or to the will of those at power. The same statue can be interpreted in several, at times antithetic ways. While one moment it stands for the Monarchy and is celebrated as a symbol of unity, with the change of regimes it has to be pulled down because it has become a threat to national identity. It cannot even remain there as a piece belonging into a history museum.

These examples have briefly shown us how institutions of power use facts to strengthen their own position. The Census, maps, and museums are not only there to inform us about real data, but they also translate them for us, providing us with the interpretation they want to. The image we get of a nation comes through their lenses, what we get as a result is a translated identity. These thoughts can be developed even further, if we discussed the way literature can also influence/change these images by translating/interpreting in its turn the mechanism of the institutions of power.

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## Translation and Transtextuality

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**Abstract.** Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* as a postmodern literary work is extensively based on transtextuality. There are series of quotations from the Bible, Petrus Abelardus, St. Bernard, Petrarch, Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Jorge L. Borges, Nietzsche, and other classic authors interwoven into the novel's narrative. The text is a result of multiple translations, a truly intercultural adventure: Adso, a 14<sup>th</sup>-century German monk from the Melk monastery provides a Northern Italian travel experience in Latin language, this memoir is translated by the publishing narrator into the Italian language of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The characters of the story come from different areas of Europe, as there are monks from England, Spain, Norway, Germany, and other countries. This paper sheds light on the problems that occurred during the novel's translation.

**Keywords:** postmodern literature, translation, transtextuality

Eco's first novel, *Il nome della rosa*, published in 1980, was a great national and international success. It was published in 6,500 copies in Italy, and translated into 47 languages.

The novel narrates a series of mysterious events occurring in the autumn of 1327 in a fictitious Northern Italian Benedictine abbey, presented as if it were real, and which could have really existed. The detailed depiction of the building of Europe's largest monastery, the everyday monastic life, the origins of the contemporary heretic movements (told by the learned William of Baskerville to his rather interested novice), the doctrinal clashes within the Church concerning Jesus's poverty, the vivid description of the process of inquisition, all reinforce the realistic atmosphere of the medieval world. The story is narrated by Adso, a Benedictine monk from the Austrian abbey of Melk (an allusion to the famous 10<sup>th</sup>-century Benedictine author of the 'Letter on the Antichrist'), who evokes his memories of early youth towards the end of his life. He remembers arriving at the abbey as a novice in the company of his master William of Baskerville, a Franciscan monk from England. The story blends the conventions of historical novels with

the best tradition of memoirs and also shows elements of a Bildungsroman, since the events experienced by Adso are evoked in the mirror of his later years with the impact they had on his entire life. The Franciscan brother has arrived to prepare a conciliatory meeting between the adepts of the Holy Roman Emperor and the Avignon Pope, but the abbot of the Benedictine monastery commissions William to solve the mystery of consecutive murders, whose victims are all friars, who used to work in the scriptorium of the monastery's library. But in the structure of the book the crime story is only the superficial stratum. Following the model of the medieval interpreters, Eco later completes his work with an explanatory glossary, entitled *Annotations to The Name of the Rose* (which in the Hungarian edition is already included in the volume). There he explains the game of the labyrinth dominating the novel, and concludes that "even a naïve reader realizes that he has to deal with such labyrinths, which do not have anything in common with special representation." The labyrinth does not only represent the scene of the plot (as the library was meant to be built originally as a maze, to be deciphered only with much difficulty), but the story is also an entangled labyrinthine web itself, with the threads of searching, lapsing and finding forming the loops and nods of the narration. The introduction already foreshadows the intricate structure of the novel with the manuscripts appearing and disappearing embarrassingly.

The distinctive features of a detective story may be observed in several different aspects: the text of the novel itself is like a riddle that must be solved by the reader, while the past appears as a body to be revived through interpretation, by the reconstruction of the events. The introduction, told by the modern intermediary narrator—the story of quest for a medieval manuscript, and the attempt to reconstruct it—is actually already an authentic tangle text. It is a miniature representation of the entire work's purpose: to reconstruct from its remnants and revive something that seems irremediably and irrevocably lost. Similarly, at the end of the novel the old Adso looks back once more to the great adventure of his youth, and he tries to reason out and reconstruct the contents of the half burnt codex shreds he had found among the ruins of the monastery. These symbolic acts, just as the title of the book itself, are metaphors of the past. Postmodern theorists consider that history cannot be grasped objectively; we can approach the past only through various narratives, products of our imagination, just like fictional literature. Our ideas relate to the events of reality as Adso's codex-fragments relate to the irrecoverably lost hundreds of volumes of the perished monastery library.

This postmodern literary work is based on transtextuality.<sup>1</sup> There are series of quotations from the Bible, Petrus Abelardus, St. Bernard, Petrarch, Conan

1 Gérard Genette defines **transtextuality** as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (1997 [1981], 1).

Doyle, Agatha Christie, Jorge L. Borges, Nietzsche, and other classic authors in it. Eco plays one of his favorite postmodern creative games by building fragments of other author's texts into his own works, without any quotation marks, as if written by himself. He also plays with the opposite procedure by imitating a medieval literary habit in the extensive use of quotations, however some of the quotations—put into his characters' mouths—are invented by himself.

But I believe a historical novel should do this, too: not only identify in the past the causes of what came later, but also trace a process through which those causes began slowly to produce their effects.

If a character of mine, comparing two medieval ideas, produces a third, more modern, idea, he is doing exactly what culture did; and if nobody has ever written what he says, someone, however confusedly, should surely have begun to think it (perhaps without saying it, blocked by countless fears and by shame). (Eco 1984, 534)

Several scholars led by investigative fervor have listed these "quotations," identifying and classifying their would-be authors in their effort to reconstruct Eco's extremely rich historical compendium of ideas. Eco plays a game with the reader through the hidden and false quotes: he translates into medieval German a philosophical item of Wittgenstein's which is told by one of the characters.

Translatability and untranslatability, the relationship between language and reality, the issue of understandability constitute the central themes of the novel. The two investigators in the memoir have to perform translation work. They find out that the mysterious murders are somehow related to a certain text read by the monks working in the *scriptorium*. On the fourth day of the week of the plot they try to decipher the note of the second victim, Venantius, who had been translating from Greek, but this proves to be undecipherable. Venantius had recorded for himself with a cryptography consisting of zodiac signs how one can enter into the library-labyrinth. Although William manages to decipher the code: "Secretum finis Africae manus supra idolum age primum et septimum de quatuor," still, the meaning of the text and of the Greek sentences put on paper in a hurry avoids their understanding. They could finally enter the labyrinth after they had deciphered its secret from the outside, and even the fragmentary Greek text unveiled its murderous intent only at the end of the novel. As if the parable would warn us about the difficulties of translation: the text always deceives its reader, who cannot understand it but through misunderstandings.

Comparing the Romanian and Hungarian translations of the novel several important cultural differences can be observed. The most obvious difference is how the names: *Guglielmo*—*William*, *Venantio*—*Venantius*, *Nicola*—*Miklós* are used. The English translator retains the "original" English name of the detective-

monk: *William*. The Hungarian translation follows the Latin and German language versions, whereas the Romanian follows the Italian Romanesque forms. The same is true for words related to the monastic life: *vesper*, *vesperás*. The Hungarian version thus stands closer to the medieval Latin than the original work.

Imre Barna, the Hungarian translator retains the Latin and German verse quotations, their Hungarian translations are given in the footnotes, to which there are added 30 pages of glossary by Gábor Klaniczay, a researcher of the era, for those readers who wish to understand the historical references. Each Hungarian edition contains the author's additional notes, which were published separately by Eco.

The Romanian editions do not include the glossary, neither the translations of the German and other texts; instead of these the translator, Florin Chirițescu provides some concept explanation guidance on the Middle Ages in the epilogue.

For the Romanian reader the maze-effect is stronger because, on the one hand, the unknown names, concepts, and theological debates are creating a semantically puzzling atmosphere, on the other hand, they constitute a veritable ideological labyrinth. The most important information can be seen in the text associated with the names, which for the Hungarian reader serve as Ariadne's thread, helping in interpreting the articles.

A specific performance is the translation of Salvatore's speech, because he uses a mixture of languages.

In the sexta period of the third day Adso evokes the adventures of Salvatore. The Romanian translator interprets the elements of the list in parentheses; the Hungarian translates them, or retains the better known Latin names.

Și după faptele pe care le povestesc, de-a lungul cursului Dunării am văzut și încă mai văd mulți dintre acești șarlatani care-și aveau numele și împărșeala lor în legiuni, ca dracii: *accapponi* (castratori de cocoși), *lotori* (înnoroiți), *protomedici* (medici de curte), *pauperes verecundi* (săraci sfioși), *morghigeri* ([aprox.] potoliții), *affamiglioli* (încîrduiții), *crociari* (cruciații), *alacerbati* (iuții), relicvari, înfăinați, *falpatori*, *iucchi* (lilieci), *spectini* (făloși), *cochini* (muzicanți de tarantelă), *acconi* și *admiracti* (demni de privit), *mutuatori* (care împrumută), *attermanti* (curinși de tremurici), *cagnabaldi* (câini curajoși), *falsibordoni* (falși sprijinitori), *accadenti* (picați pe nepusă masă), *alacrimanti* (înlăcrimați) și *affarfanti* (îndrăciți). (Eco 2004, 191, translated by Florin Chirițescu)

Az elbeszélésemben történtek után a Duna völgyében később is sok efféle szélhámost láttam és látok mind a mai napig, nevük volt, osztályaik és légioik voltak, mint az ördögöknek: libabőrzők, sárdagasztók, protomedikusok, pauperes verecundi, béljósok, cruciariusok, alacerbatusok, ereklyeárusok, porhintők, nagyotmondók, jugulátusok, táltosok, kotyvasztók, ettőllopók és



attólkoldulók, adconátusok és admiractusok, uzsorálók, orrolók, füllentők, szájalók, nyelvelők, kesztyűbe dudálók és fűzfánfűtyülők. (Eco 2011, 221, translated by Imre Barna)

In this respect, it is worth looking at the English translation as well, where the translator chose to omit the whole enumeration: “Long after the events I am narrating, along the course of the Danube I saw many, and still see some, of these charlatans who had their names and their subdivisions in legions, like the devils.” (Eco 1983, 402, translated by William Weaver)

The translation of the biblical paraphrases represents yet another special challenge, since these texts are also the result of multiple translations (from Hebrew or Aramaic, Greek-Latin). What (Bible) translation should the translator turn to? In the case of the Hungarian language, should the translator use the earlier—but Protestant—Bible translation of Gáspár Károli, closer to the medieval stage of language, or would it be more appropriate to use the later, more “modern” Catholic version? In the scene of Adso’s sinning, when—in the central episode of the memoir, on the night of the third day of the plot—the young novice is making love with a peasant girl, he recites verses from the Song of Songs: “[...] ímé szép vagy, én mátkám, ímé szép vagy, a te szemeid olyanok mint a galambok [...] megsebesítetted az én szívemet, én húgom, én jegyesem [...]” (Eco 2011, 290, translated by Imre Barna).

Imre Barna quotes, or rather alludes to, the older Bible translation of Gáspár Károli published in 1490. The Romanian translator uses a more modern version, because the oldest Romanian translations are obsolete today.

The censors’s hand can be traced in the Romanian edition published in the eighties: the sentence referring to the 1968 Soviet invasion of Prague was removed from the foreword.

The Romanian writer Mircea Cărtărescu mentioned on a meeting with his readers that Umberto Eco, while visiting Romania during the era of dictatorship, was perplexed when he was told that certain parts of his novel had been omitted due to reasons of censorship. Although the novel draws a highly plastic vision of totalitarian mentality and censorial logic in the figure of the multiple murderer Jorge—paying homage at the same time with postmodern irony to the postmodern master Jorge Luís Borges—the Italian author could hardly understand what had actually irritated the Romanian authorities in a novel built on a medieval topic and along semiotic problems. He received the humorous answer that in Romania even cookbooks were censored.

## Conclusions

Gérard Genette revised the phenomenon called intertextuality by Julia Kristeva and Michael Riffaterre. In the case of translation the relationships between texts, defined by him as different cases of transtextuality (intertextuality, metatextuality, paratextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality), indicate problems of not the same weight. In the case of *The Name of the Rose* architextuality, that is generic determinedness, does not play a significant role, as the novel evokes several narrative genres,<sup>2</sup> however, these do not appear literally in the text, this is why they do not constitute a translation problem either. The architext only influences the reader, who categorizes according to the generic patterns known by him/her when interpreting the text (Bildungsroman, parable, memoir, historical novel, detective novel). Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians* can be regarded as a hypotext as concerns the detective thread; the library as labyrinth evokes Jorge Lu  s Borges's short stories (e.g. *The Garden of Forking Paths*).

Eco applies the intertextual games, the inclusion of real or false quotations, text borrowings also in his later literary works, in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004) and in *The Prague Cemetery* (2010). These quotations—as long as they have been translated into the target language—must be taken over from the already canonized translation. Thus the translator has to reproduce the detective work of searching for and reconstructing texts. The false quotations, such as the Wittgenstein fragment transposed into medieval German by Eco, requires a double effort on the part of the translator. The more simple procedure is if the translator leaves the “original” German version in the text, and—perhaps—adds the explanation in a footnote. It is more difficult to produce an own medievalized translation, in the spirit of the German.

From among the paratexts, the translation of the title can be carried out in every language, preserving the enigmatic character of the original. The Latin subtitles indicating the passage of time formally change depending on the culture of the target language (*nona*—*n  na*, *vesper*—*vesper  s*). The illustration, the map of the abbey serving as the scene of the plot can be taken over without any problem in each translation.

There is a significant difference, however, in the case of metatexts. Eco's explanatory glossary did not appear in the volume at the first publication of the Romanian translation, in this way the readers did not receive any assistance on the part of the writer in the interpretation of the novel, contrary to the Hungarian readers, who, besides Umberto Eco's instructions, were also guided by the culture-historical explanations assembled by G  bor Klaniczay.

When translating a literary work, besides the source text, the cultural embeddedness of the translator and the receivers of the translated text is also

2 See Tapodi (2009).

determining. The characteristics of the open work [*opera aperta*], dealt with by Eco, also manifest in translation. Every translation is also interpretation, as many different languages belonging to different cultures a text is translated into, as many—different—variants the original text will have.

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## ‘Transfers’ in Hungarian Literature from Vojvodina

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**Abstract.** The study examines the variants of the postmodern phenomena of literary ‘transfer’ (‘trans-correspondence,’ ‘transpass’) and their relationships with Hungarian literature (in Vojvodina) from the beginnings (the creative tradition of Kornél Szenteleky’s oeuvre) up to the events of present-time literary history (e.g., to the publication of *Esti* by Péter Esterházy). Referential aspects (the literary themes of the railway, the train, the change of trains), specific contexts (e.g., Kornél Esti as a contextual ‘transferring’ literary character) and metaphorical contents (e.g., the meanings of the straight line and the plane in the literature of the region) come into the focus of our research. Another significant aspect of the research is the interpretation of the intricate web of cross-cultural ‘transfers’ (between the works of Dezső Kosztolányi—Danilo Kiš—Péter Esterházy). The dominant motif of Central-Eastern European man’s experience of space is the straight line of the flatlands: lacking the sea-experience of the Southern European or of the more southern regions, as well as the related mythical experience of the world, infinity-experience, or reality perceptions hosting unrealities. The trip in this sense is an intermediate form of life: movement towards other shapes. The direction and extent of this movement has always been defined by the ‘straight line,’ the main road, and later the straight line of the railway.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Kornél Esti, straight line, transfer, trans-correspondence, travel, train, Hungarian literature, Hungarian literary representation in Vojvodina, Danilo Kiš’s oeuvre

### Transfer, trans-correspondence, transpass

The term literary ‘transfer’ was borrowed from the study entitled *Esti Kornél „átszállásai” a vajdasági magyar irodalomban* [*Kornél Esti’s Transfers in Hungarian Literature in Vojvodina*] by Éva Hózsa (2009, 109–117). It is to be interpreted as

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1 The study was conducted within project no. 178017 of the Ministry of Science and Education of Serbia.

a term denoting evolutionary connections of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina, ‘transfers’ of poetic phenomena from one literary work into another, and intertextual ‘connections,’ by which the *intermediate movements* of the given literature can be presented. It simultaneously shows concrete intertextual connections and metaphorical contents; it may describe one of the thematic planes and genre-creating variants of life form in regional Hungarian literature: a literary mesh woven from travel, (e)migration, leaving, roads/military ways/railways, (straight) lines and the lines created by sands; it is a border novel/history comprehensible as a travelogue/novel. ‘Transfer’ as a key expression in this case does not only convey such tropic implications as ‘crosstalk,’ ‘cross-correspondence,’ ‘transpass,’ but also the referential aspects (‘transfer’ to another train line, to catch the other ‘connection’).

The ‘transferring’ passenger of Hungarian literature is Kornél Esti: “...he would always ‘travel on,’ more precisely, ‘travel further,’ from time to time, just from one vehicle to the other, crossing from one text into another” (Hózsza 2011, 71–72).<sup>2</sup> He is the epitome of the duality of leaving—returning, departure—arrival, flatland (Sárszeg, Porváros)—seaside (Fiume), straight—curved (still—dynamic). While in his own time Kornél Esti plays the role of the traveller withdrawing from the boredom of the motionless flatlands (but inevitably returning to his homeland), in the 1990s he becomes the alter ego of a fleeing, transborder, nostalgic character of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina. Hózsza connects this attitude to the ‘elementary situation of discontinuity’ (*ibid*): it refers to changes of countries, living space cut up by borders, broken life forms in the region. The reflected ‘transfers’ of Kornél Esti are well known to us: the novels *Esti Kornél utolsó hazalátogatása* [*Last Homecoming of Kornél Esti*] by Károly Dudás (1996, 164–166), *Után-utazás Esti Kornél fiumei gyorsán* [*Travelling on Kornél Esti’s Track on the Fiume Express Train*] by Erzsébet Juhász (1998, 59–65), and two short stories about Esti in *Tükörcselek* [*Mirror Tricks*], a collection of short stories by Árpád Nagy Abonyi (2003) and his novel *Budapest, Retour* (2008) function as emblematic examples of intertextual ‘transfers’ and ‘connections.’ In 2010, our “Kornél Esti” ‘transferred’ to *Esti*, Péter Esterházy’s work, and travelled on.

The visualization of the silhouette-like or referential attitude (metaphorical connections) of the Traveller can also be exemplified by several literary contexts and textual discourses: viewing their situation, the nostalgia towards the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and awareness of separation determined the lives of the travellers, i.e., the members of the Patarcsics family; the purpose of termination or ‘alleviation’ (Juhász 2001) of administrative/political borders on the one hand, and the psychological/mental separation, on the other, is served by travelling, ‘riding on the tram’ or ‘taking the train,’ as is done for a whole day by Angeline Nenadovics—riding on the tram around Novi Sad (*Egy villamos végállomást jelző csengetése* [*A Ring for the Final Tram Station*]), or as the members of the Patarcsics family

2 Quotations from Hungarian and Serbian literature were translated by the author.

do, actually and symbolically travelling “from Graz to Subotica, from Szeged to the Isonzo valley, from Timișoara to Bratislava, from Novi Sad to Arad, back and forth, all around” (*Linzi Anziks [Postcard from Linz]*) (Juhász 2001, 94). However, the Central European literary ‘transfers’ loosely contain Ildikó Lovas’s latest novel written subsequent to the recent Yugoslav wars, entitled *Kijárat az Adriára [Access to the Adriatic]* (2005), in which although they do drive “through Bosnia... down to the coast” (Lovas 2005, 286), wallowing in the “sand from Bácska,” “among the props of provincial environment” (*idem*, 199) is seen in contrast with the ‘access’ to the seaside, a ‘transfer’ into another kind of space; as well as ‘changing’ to the Fiume train by Kornél Esti in Dezső Kosztolányi’s novel.

Literary discourses can be linked to the essay *Dezső Kosztolányi and Danilo Kiš* by Sava Babić—cited frequently—which discusses the possibilities of translating *Kornél Esti*. He explains the translation of Kornél Esti’s name into Kornel Večernji (Vespertine) as a necessity: “Although names are not to be translated, I have nevertheless translated Kornél Esti’s name since the Serbian reader does not understand what Esti means; therefore, if it gets published, the name will be Kornel Večernji.” (Babić 2007, 164) Seen from the viewpoint of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina, it conveys more than just translating into another language: at the same time, what takes place is the ‘takeover’ of one of its most important metaphors and connotations into Serbian literature.

Sticking to the railway terminology and metaphors from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century regional literature (e.g., Árpád Nagy Abonyi), literary ‘transfers’ are generally of ‘round trip’ character. In one of her studies (2009a) Éva Hózsza discusses the ‘infiltration’ of Danilo Kiš’s prose-poetics into the novels of Péter Esterházy. A similar phenomenon can be documented—studying the textual discourse of Dezső Kosztolányi’s *A szegény kisgyermek panasza [The Poor Little Boy’s Grievances]* (1910) and Danilo Kiš’s short story-novel *Korai bánat [Early Sorrows]* (1971) (Milosevits 1998, 499)—in a ‘comparative dictionary,’ which has been done by Éva Hózsza (2009a, 112–117). Roland Orcsik (2004, 205) sees this as an archeological procedure and places the prose of Ottó Tolnai and Attila Balázs into the same discourse. Jutka Rudaš views several works by Danilo Kiš as pretexts to Esterházy’s novels: thus, she examines the discourse (Rudaš 2008, 149–161) in the context of *Fövenyóra [Sand Glass]* (1972) and *Harmonia Caelestis* (2000), *Anatómiai lecke [Lessons in Anatomy]* (1978) and *Javított kiadás [Revised Edition]* (2000).

## Straight line, railway, train

As known, the ‘straight line’ of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina was drawn by Kornél Szenteky. “Soberness draws straight lines...”—he wrote in 1928, in his poem *Bácskai éjjel [Night in Bácska]*. In 1929, his novel *Isola Bella*—which

was published posthumously (1944, 1993) in Vojvodina—Kornél Esti’s preview is created in the character of Szabolcs, a decadent writer from Bácska, who flees from the “sluggish, passionless [...] land of joyless souls” (Szenteleky 1993, 187) to the world of Sicily’s Beautiful Isle—as Kornél Esti does towards the ‘vast’ sea. Árpád Nagy Abonyi’s Esti alter ego also returns home from his Western European travels to “the dusty town in Bácska” where “people already die many times during their lives” (Nagy Abonyi 2003, 91).

The dominant motif of Central Eastern European people’s space experience is the straight line of the flatlands: lacking the sea-experience of the Southern European or even of the more southern regions, as well as the related mythical experience of the world, the infinity-experience, or the reality perceptions hosting unrealities. Travelling in this sense is an intermediate form of life: a movement towards other shapes. The direction and extent of this movement has always been defined by the ‘straight line,’ the main road, and later the straight line of the railway. The earlier horse-drawn vehicles were replaced by the train in 1825 (in Hungary in 1846). “Throughout the history of Central Eastern Europe, there have been trains running along, with or without any signs.” (Bence 2008, 77) “As one who fell between the rails...”—says the frequently quoted line of the opening poem of the famous cycle (Dezső Kosztolányi: *A szegény kisgyermek panaszaí/The Poor Little Boy’s Grievances*). (The well-known parody by Frigyes Karinthy: “As one who quietly stepped into it.”) A manifestation of a similar regional experience is *Apámmal utazunk a vonaton* [*Travelling with Father on the Train*]:

Apámmal utazunk a vonaton.  
Hideg, sugáros, éji nyugalom.

A szunnyadó csöndesség lomha, mély,  
de ébredsz, hallucinál az éj. (...)

[*I’m travelling with Father on the train.*  
*Cold, beaming, nocturnal serenity.*

*Dormant silence, sluggish, deep,*  
*but waking, the night’s hallucinating. (...)]*

The dominant means of travel in Central Eastern Europe is the train. (Occasionally—in the oeuvres of Dezső Kosztolányi, Erzsébet Juhász, and István Szathmári—it is the tram but with a different meaning.) Among the emblematic literary examples (ranging from Sándor Petőfi’s poem *Vasúton* [*By Rail*] written in 1847, through Orsolya Karafiáth’s poem *Nagypapa én és a keleti blokk* [*Granddad, Me and the Eastern Block*], up to the story *Veszteglő vonatok a sötétben* [*Stranded*



*trains in the dark*] and *Bolond utazás* [*Mad trip*]) and among the numerous ‘relations’ to ‘trips by train’ in Erzsébet Juhász’s *Határregény* [*Border novel*] I would like to underline the metaphoric final image, the scene when on the empty Vienna Express Gézi, Margit’s “difficult-minded” son, unexpectedly starts running around in the corridor. According to the narrative comment: “... at that moment, several centuries’ paths of motion emerge along the corridor of this train speeding to Vienna, reproducing the multitude of past roads by incredible velocity, so that all this could be passed on to the decay of irrepressible oblivion.” (Juhász 2001, 94)

It is at this point that the “Kosztolányi–Kiš összehasonlító szótár” [Kosztolányi–Kiš Comparative Dictionary] by Éva Hózsza becomes very important:

Kosztolányi uses the introductory motif also known from Karinthy’s parody as the expression of intermediacy. The rails open up a perspective; however, they can also get entangled: the tangle of rails is Kiš’s metaphor. It is a hidden central kernel, which can be uncoiled, and related to Ahasuerus’s wandering. The parallel ceases as soon as the wanderer starts travelling. The father relates both to the train schedule as well as to chaotic disappearance. In Kosztolányi’s volume, the poem beginning with the line *Apámmal utazunk a vonaton* [*I’m travelling with Father on the train*] attempts to capture the impressions intruding the nocturnal peace, sounds and fragments of images. (Hózsza 2009a, 116)

In Hózsza’s article, the opposition of ‘parallelism,’ i.e. ‘travel according to the schedule,’ and the wandering (chaos) is emphasized as a particularly significant motif to understand the Kosztolányi–Kiš discourse.

## Danilo Kiš’s transfers into Hungarian literature (in Vojvodina)

In his interview bearing the title *Élet, irodalom* [*Life, Literature*], Danilo Kiš calls the father’s (i.e. Eduard Sam’s) *Menetrend* [*Schedule*] “a work of the Talmud” (Kiš 1994, 23) in the sense of explaining (existence). It was created by the symbolic necessity to bring order into the chaos of straight lines (roads, rail tracks) enmeshing the space (of existence) of Central Eastern Europe—an experiment to see through this space cut up by straight lines. A quote from the interview: “His work, *Vasúti-, társasgépkeszi-, hajó- és repülőgépjáratok Menetrendje* [*Schedule of trains, buses, ships and airplanes*] became renown owing to my books.” (Kiš 1994, 26) The same is mentioned in *Kert, hamu* [*Garden, Ash*] as “apocrypha, a sacral Bible,” with a concrete reference to how to ‘correct’ and ‘restore’: in

*Schedule*, the distances and separations between different places of the world become of ‘the size of a human step.’ (Kis 2004, 38 [1965], [1967: in Hungarian])

As mentioned before, the history of the region is crisscrossed by trains with or without signs. The aim of Eduard Sam’s order/schedule-creating act is to produce a state of transparency accomplished by marking these. Instead of the chaos caused by the lack of a schedule there arises the necessity to restore order:

After several unsuccessful businesses, my father got a position at the Railway Ministry where he made it all the way to the general inspectorate. Owing to this, the whole family travelled first-class for free until 1992, and the ticket collectors saluted my father like a general. (*ibid.*)

It is exactly this that seems to be the greatest paradox in the father’s life: instead of the trains (roads) that he named and marked, he disappeared on an unscheduled train. Instead of the Schedule symbolizing order, absence is what interprets his existence in literature: “The scenes in which my father appears are a type of negatives: the prints of his Absence. Up to the present day, I still see him getting into a car, a carriage, boarding a train, or a tram. We are constantly expecting and seeing him off.” (*idem*, 20)

## Departure and arrival

In the presented space of existence, the experience of departure and arrival is a significant, notable moment in life thanks to which the notion of *station* also becomes a topic in art, moreover, in everyday life it gets an additional sacral meaning: ‘the stations of human life.’ Among its manifestations in literature, I would mention the scene when Pacsirta is leaving, and her parents are seeing her off to the station. Or the images from Árpád Nagy Abonyi’s *Budapest, Retour*, which are created in Kornél Esti’s mind when after a long time spent in emigration—now coming home for a funeral—his train pulls into the station. In the second short story on Kornél Esti, *Mirror Tricks*, the narrative comment summarizes the regional way of life: “The moment he spotted the worn railway station, melancholy came over him. He stopped in the deserted corridor of the station: he idly browsed through the ragged schedule, as if he was about to travel on.” (Nagy Abonyi 2003, 91)

## How Eduard M. Kiš as a 'railway inspector' made it into literature

Subsequent to literary transfers, transpasses and connections having been interpreted above, the way it is due and according to schedule, I wonder whether it is possible and necessary to answer the question posed. The model of family history, i.e. the encyclopedic work, which functions in Danilo Kiš's oeuvre as a genre-creating mode, brings up moments analogous to the poetic of questioning the past historical narrative 'of present interest.' The essence is the possibility of crisis modeling, projections of personal destinies into the past; the interpretation of a personal biography in the past. Danilo Kiš cannot be envisaged otherwise but as a traveller, on the train.

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## Questions of Language and Culture in Erzsébet Juhász's *Border Novel*

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**Abstract.** The paper gives an account of the linguistic and cultural questions dealt with by Erzsébet Juhász in her novel *Határregény* [*Border Novel*]. It attempts to interpret the novel and to present the relations of its heroes to their environment. The narration covers the areas in which cultural and ethnic diversity, as well as linguistic colourfulness are present due to the coexistence of different nations. The novel's central theme is spatial separation and separation evoked by political borders; the concept of border is introduced as early as in the novel's title. The story of the Patacsics is an inter-generational family story. Its members are characterized as people struggling with identity crisis and the uncertainty of national belonging. Wartime events, the behaviour and the way of thinking of families torn apart by border changes—with the mentality becoming the legacy of the next generation—are perfect reflections, illustrations of changes forced upon human lives pushed to the periphery. Not only identity and language loss, language replacement but introversion, seclusion and distantiation can also be observed at some characters. The work is exposing ruptures created by wars, and how these ruptures transform identity and cultural heritage, only to show us later how a new culture and mentality are created.

**Keywords:** border, language, culture, identity

### 1. Introduction

The Treaty of Trianon in 1920 led to the disintegration of Hungary. The Hungarian writers who suddenly found themselves outside the territory of the country had to reconsider their belonging to Hungarian literature and to set new goals for themselves.

Erzsébet Juhász was born on 19 April 1947 in Topolya. She already belonged to the generation which was born within the borders of the new state formation. She died on 25 September 1998 in Novi Sad; her novel entitled *Határregény* [*Border Novel*], first published in 2001, is a posthumous release. Erika Bence in her study

entitled *Concepts Constructing Genre (Types) in the Hungarian Literature of Vojvodina* formulated the idea that this particular novel by Juhász is “noted as one of her most studied works and one that calls to life to several significant discourses” (Bence 2011, 93).<sup>1</sup> It has already been pointed out in the reception of the novel that the *Border Novel* depicts cultural diversity and a concomitant linguistic mix and variability. It primarily deals with matters of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity. The narrative incorporates areas where cultural and ethnic variegation and the variety of language use appear due to the coexistence of different nations.

Éva Hózsza characterizes it as a “novel of border and death consciousness,” highlighting the novel’s opening towards intertextuality, its possible interpretation as a Trianon novel, its attachment to the literature of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and explains the novel’s “connections to the domestic novel’s architextual system of relations and ‘lineage-climbing’ attitude, moreover, its relations to the travel novels of the Enlightenment, and to the traveler’s point of view at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” (Hózsza 2001, 59)

The concept of border already presents itself in the title of the novel. This is the central idea of the novel, representing spatial separation, separation by means of political borders. In the story spanning over generations identity crisis and uncertainty about nationality are common characteristics of the members of the Patarcsics family. As a consequence of wars and border readjustments, the behavior and mentality of family members separated from one another well reflect the imposed changes on human lives getting to the periphery. This is also passed onto the lives of the following generations. The loss of identity and language, the language exchange, the separation and seclusion can all be observed in the lives of the heroes.

## 2. The novel’s borders

During the decades following the First World War, the Vojvodinean Hungarians became a minority in the worst sense of the word, not only in numerical proportion, but as citizens inferior in rank, right and value, therefore inferior also as human beings and as artists; consequently, their intellectual orientation, art, and literature were profoundly pervaded by the behaviour originating from this state: insecurity, loss of direction, loss of faith, introversion, and as a concomitant symptom: intellectual and linguistic impoverishment, a worrying fall of standards and value level. (Szeli 1974, 9)

Together with the change of borders “the flow of intellectual goods from the literary workshops of Budapest ceased or declined, the process emigration of talents also came to a standstill...” (Bori 1998, 69)

1 Quotations from Hungarian literature and specialist literature were translated by the author.



While investigating the genres of Hungarian literature from Vojvodina, Erika Bence states that in the work of Erzsébet Juhász “border readjustments and establishments following the disintegration of the Monarchy activate the patterns of domestic and travel novels, creating a type of fiction that relies on both the traditional and more recent figurations of the historical novel.” (Bence 2011, 93) The chapters of the novel tell the tales of the ancestors; it can be said that “it moves on the border of the domestic novel” (Hózsá 2001, 59), however, considering its spatial structure it has to be treated as a unique type. The novel follows the stories of the members of a family who got separated in the course of time, and by presenting these private life stories “its view of history embraces the whole twentieth century.” (Bence 2007, 128) It can be interpreted as a border novel, because it contains the life experience of border novels, namely homelessness and the experience of foreignness, and because “its events unfold along the borders that got formed during the wars of the century and along the roads crossing them.” (*ibid.*)

When the members of the family meet again, they tell each other their experiences and stories. They tell their stories in retrospect, therefore the novel can also be related to the genre of the domestic novel. It can be analyzed as a travel novel as well, since the characters traverse a specific area in the course of the novel, namely the countries of the historical Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, this is why the “Monarchy experience” acquires a special significance (Toldi 2012, 20).

## 2.1. Political borders

The discourse so far on channel and city novels [...] leads us to a third very important regional genre constituting element, namely to the concept of border and its circle of signification. If it were only about the frontier in a political sense, obviously we could only be talking about novels thematizing the Trianon trauma. But this is not the case, not only because the experience of being stuck between frontiers had already been known in the regional narrative tradition before Trianon, but also because the frontiers created their spiritual figurations also beyond the minority existence, such as cultural and linguistic identity frontiers. (Bence 2011, 92)

Border readjustment separates family members, and people suddenly find themselves in an environment where the loss of their identities is at stake. “The political frontier also signifies cultural separation and linguistic foreignness and vice versa.” (Bence 2008, 116) People feel alienated in their own environment, no matter whether they had drifted from their homes as a consequence of war, sometimes due to marriage or any other circumstances. The border readjustment does not necessarily mean resettlement, but getting into a different environment,

a different social situation or being attached to another country is surely an experience of alienation.

All the characters in the novel are confined within and isolated by borders. The war separates families, and draws impenetrable borders between family members, forcing them into emigration. The characters are compelled to continue their lives separated from one another.

Frontiers are, on the one hand, historical formations, results of wars, conclusions of peace and political treaties; they are summoned into existence by true or untrue political-cultural-national interests—but at the same time they have linguistic, cultural and social consequences, they trigger identity traumas, discords and losses. Their dimensions overlap with the borders of social justice and individual freedom. (Bence 2008, 117)

The unfolding stories form part of Emi's family history, and these family legends "are destroyed by the frontier readjustments following the two world wars." (*ibid.*)

## 2. 2. Spatial separation

"The 'border novel' is not an unknown genre in Hungarian literature" (Hózsza 2001, 59); still, it can be said that "so far there has been only one literary work where the main structuring, text organizing principle relies on the figurations of spatial separation" (Bence 2008, 116), and this is Erzsébet Juhász's *Border Novel* [*Határregény*].

The first chapter of the novel is about the wars of the 1990s, told from Emi's perspective. Her husband, Boro had left the country, and since Emi was unable to follow him, they got separated. As a consequence of this war, Emi lost her university friends. This circle of friends had provided its members a sense of stability. Although it had seemed as it would last forever, and be indestructible, it was destroyed by the war. Running away from the war had its consequences, physical distantiation and separation. "Some people had moved even before the war started or immediately after that, most of them to Hungary, but there were some who settled in Germany, in the Netherlands, in Canada, or in the USA." (Juhász 2001, 13)

It had already happened in Emi's family several times that the war had torn family members apart. Her grandfather, Miklós Patarcsis, had been separated from his younger brother, János, by a border for years. "After the Great War [...] he went missing." (*idem*, 30.) So "János had to wait until 1923 for a kind-hearted person [...] to finally deliver, after twenty-six, the twenty-seventh letter, which signified life for both of the Patarcsics brothers, in the deepest and truest sense of

the word." (*idem*, 32–34 ). Far away from his home János "couldn't even imagine or believe that after all these Subotica could still exist." Together with Kálmán, his father-in-law, he saw the absurdity of the situation and was horrified by the way it was organized that "the Suboticians decide with popular vote that they would like to belong to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes." (*idem*, 41) The gradual elimination of Bratislava's Hungarian character began in the period between 1919 and 1938. "The most troublesome times began in October 1938 [...]" (*idem*, 48) According to historical data, in this period education in Hungarian and German was almost completely abolished in Bratislava; Hungarian related statues were removed or destroyed.

János Patarcsics had already been living in Bratislava for twenty years at that time, still, for him "the new rearrangement of the borders was not a second loss of home, [...] but somehow it was as if the ground had been pulled out from under his feet." (*idem*, 50–51)

Emi's grandmother was born in Szeged, and "came from Ila's hometown to Subotica in November 1911." (*idem*, 57) For more than fifty years she had not gone back to Szeged. It was only in 1968 that she made a brief visit again thanks to her son Endre. She was sceptical about it, "neither did her face show any emotions, nor did her eyes well up with tears" (*ibid.*); the sight of the town she had been talking about for years did not impress her. After the visit, "she never mentioned Szeged again." (*idem*, 58)

Ila "had never missed the city where she had been born and had grown up, she was always buried in work." (*idem*, 57) When she saw the places from her old stories, they were not the same as the ones she once left, "she didn't recognize her birthplace, or she simply didn't want to recognize it." (*ibid.*) Perhaps the fact that she was able to adapt made integration easier for her, and maybe this is why she felt different about border readjustments.

Her husband, Miklós, desperately longed for the Hungarians. This strengthened in him after the war, and perhaps this was the main cause of his insecurity. "Not long after the war the borders were rearranged, and Subotica was placed within the borders of the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes." (*idem*, 61–62) After this, Miklós was forced to write his name in conformity with Serbian orthography. In 1944 the Russian troops marched into Subotica. Then Miklós "had the horrible suspicion that from then on the Russians [...] would force him to declare himself a Russian." This terrible thought may have caused his death.

Lexi turned out to have chosen separation himself. After moving to Austria he broke off every direct contact with his family, and this estrangement was even made easier by the frontiers.

### 3. Cultural, ethnic, linguistic and national variegation

Due to the readjustment of the frontiers that followed the war, some areas came under the authority of foreign states. “The consequences of the frontier readjustments after the Treaty of Trianon are thematized by several novels written at the end of the twentieth and in the first decade of the twenty-first century.” (Bence 2011, 93) As a consequence of the Treaty of Trianon, not only Hungary fell into pieces, but Hungarian literature as well. “The Treaty of Trianon led to a limiting transformation, the structural decay imposing a new state, a new discourse upon the citizens of the disintegrating Monarchy. Becoming a ‘minority’ generates a new situation.” (Hózsza 2001) Territorial losses also entail cultural damage, as significant Hungarian intellectual centres like Bratislava, Košice, Cluj-Napoca, Oradea, Subotica and Novi Sad came under foreign authority. People living in these cities were compelled to integrate into the cultures of the new state formations. Erzsébet Juhász “emphasizedly thematizes the issue of identity” (Toldi 2009, 85). The search for identity acquires a central role and always originates from some kind of feeling of lack.

#### 3.1. The cultural alienation of the Patarcsics family

In her study entitled *Issues of Cultural Identity in Erzsébet Juhász's Border Novel* Csilla Utasi discusses how the novel and its characters relate to culture. She states that the novel “is part of the group of Central European, Balkanian literary works” (Utasi 2011, 55). She justifies her statement with the fact that the “characters’ identities are determined by their relation to culture” (*ibid.*), and the universe of the novel portrays cultural diversity based on cultural differences, thus pointing out the conflicts among societies living in the Balkan region. The relationships between the characters are also determined by their attitude to culture.

The disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Treaty of Trianon imposed frontier readjustments, which led to the identity crisis, exclusion and alienation of the characters in the novel.

Miklós and János Patarcsics were separated because of the frontier readjustment following the Treaty of Trianon. János, who was born in Subotica, settled down in Bratislava. János “was completely trodden down by the consequences of 13 November 1918 [...]” (Juhász 2001, 31), as the violent demarcations detached large territories from Hungary and the former Hungarian crowning city, Pozsony, became the capital of Slovakia under the name Bratislava.

Angeline’s first love was born in Novi Sad, this is why the city was so dear to her, but she never met him during her long stay. She was unable to integrate into the community of Novi Sad. The experience of cultural differences haunted her till death. All Angeline could do was to relive again and again the tram rides and the memories of her unfulfilled love.

János Patarcsics came to Bratislava after the war; he settled down and started a family there. During the war he was persuaded not to go home, because Subotica probably no longer existed. This was the reason why he stayed in Bratislava until his death. However, in his letters which he wrote to his brother, he always said that his stay in Bratislava was only temporary; his “naturalization” eluded him till the end of his life. At the end of these letters he “never failed to write that he felt homesick.” (*idem*, 34.) In his dreams Subotica and Bratislava merged together and he saw himself “a homeless stranger, who drifted from Subotica to Bratislava.” (*idem*, 36)

### 3.2. Identification crisis in the Patarcsics family

It is the space of memories that gives the opportunity for the characters of the novel to express their identities in their stories. “Memory brings fateful events to the surface, and the act of someone listening to these remembrances articulates the demand of ‘genuine stories.’” (Toldi 2009, 87) Alienation often forces the characters to escape into their past. “Angeline had already transposed the era of her existence into the period preceding the First World War.” (Juhász 2001, 7) “The perspective of the present gets intensified in parallel to referencializable historical facts and to the destruction of families and countries.” (Toldi 2009, 91)

The novel clarifies that it is not only the identities of those who were forced into emigration that were endangered, but also the identities of those who remained in their homeland. “At the same time the escapee is the member of the majority, s/he has a sense of the future, while the ones living in the minority do not, therefore they are unable to change.” (*idem*, 90)

The locations are also important for the characters in terms of identity. “The novel’s chapters start from clearly identified regional locations, and have an important function in the plot development and in the portrayal of alienation.” (*idem*, 86) The scene of the novel is intercultural; the coexistence of cultures and their interaction are well represented in the novel.

The decline caused by the war and the loss of her husband made Emi think about methods of committing suicide. The realization that “she in fact never had a homeland in true sense of the word” (Juhász 2001, 14) came to her when personal and historical events converged. When she found her old schoolbook, she had to realize that “everything was strange and uninteresting for her” and she found the idea of homeland disgusting even as a child. As Éva Toldi remarks, the “belonging to different cultures and identities cannot be tolerated, because it bears the risk of the loss of identity.” (2009, 87–88)

The omniscient narrator is capable of entering and mediating the characters’ thoughts and feelings. Dreams metaphorically mediate the psychological state of the characters. “The feeling of alienation sets topographically labeled and

interculturally determined dimensions into motion; they become important novel organizing elements without eliminating the existential aspects of fate and the universality of being an outcast.” (Toldi 2009, 91)

### 3.3. Linguistic variegation

Complete chaos, confusion around identity and uncertainty about nationality characterize the Patarcsis family; the language use also reflects this diversity. This is already rendered by the first words of the novel, in the different spelling variations of the same name: “Angeline Nenadovits (Nenádovics, Nenadović)” (Juhász 2001, 5). This phenomenon of spelling variations of names can be observed later as well. The name of Cecília Bájics (Bajić) is always written with two different kinds of spelling; the reader also witnesses the imposed name change of Miklós Patarcsics to Nikola Patarčić due to the frontier readjustments. A different type of variation can be observed as well: Lina Rösch’s cousin is called Ödön Ross (Toldi 2009, 86). This is a typical example of how people are trying to adapt to the official language.

Miklós and his brother, János, declared themselves Hungarians. In fact, Miklós’s death was caused by the lack of his linguistic identity, when the Russians invaded Subotica. Their father’s conviction was that the family came from Slovenia, while for their mother, Cecilia Bájics, “it was completely irrelevant if she was Bunjevac, Croat or perhaps some kind of Serb, the only important thing was that she should not be believed to be Hungarian, because that was the worst.” (Juhász 2001, 60) She never spoke one word in Hungarian.

The mix of identities is reiterated in the value system of the next generation. Emi’s relatives in Bratislava and their friends proudly declare themselves Slovaks, Germans and Hungarians or Bunjevaces, Germans and Slovaks at the same time.

Ila’s mother, Amália Eichinger “felt a curious longing for the German language and had some treasured books in German” (*idem*, 66); in the end, it was her eldest son, Sándor, who made use of them. His mother “always spoke in German with him, moreover, she taught him to write and read in German” (*ibid.*) The boy got to Timișoara, to the Rösch family, where “the conversation was a mixture of Hungarian and German” (*idem*, 68) and Sándor thought that “this specific manner of speech could best be described as intellectual coquetry, because its source was never the knowledge of one or the other language, it always meant a little bit of mocking characterization.” (*ibid.*)

According to Erika Bence, “Language appears as a specific formation of intellectual borders in these stories” (2008, 120). The prohibition of language usage appears as a trauma, similarly to the matter of national identity. What Miklós wanted more than anything was the clarification of his identity, so he could declare himself as a Hungarian, “he knew that if he could only once truly feel as a Hungarian that would mean fulfillment for him [...]” (*idem*, 61). But for

his wife the use of different languages in the family was natural. He did not have a talent for languages, he did not even like to converse. For him, the only purpose of language was orientation.

## 4. Conclusions

Besides the era, the society, and the situation, it was the person's individual stance that most determined how one can prevail in life. Kornélia Faragó's thoughts below, from her epilogue to the novel, can be quoted as the best argumentation supporting the border character of Erzsébet Juhász's work, sensitive to the Central European dualities and controversies:

In the duality of the linear order of causality and the eventuality of the Central European chaos-game, the variations of the experience of closeness (the remarkably well elaborated, chaotic-emotive family relations scrutinized with peculiar irony), the figurations of essence-comprising distance and recurring lack (tragically passionate and lifelong, but never mutual love affairs, perfect brotherly congruencies despite temporal and spatial distances), remembrance and self-oblivion, language and identity, war and escape, the experience of home and being-elsewhere are organized into a narrative. (Faragó 2001, 96)

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## Intercultural Passages in Ottó Tolnai's Textual Universe

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**Abstract.** The literary palette of Tolnai's textual universe within the Hungarian literature from Vojvodina is based, among others, upon the intertwining of various cultural entities. The social and cultural spaces of "Big Yugoslavia," the phenomena, figures, and works of the European-oriented Yugoslav and ethnic culture (literature, painting, book publishing, theatre, sports, etc.), the mentalities of the migrant worker's life, the legends of the Tito cult embed the narrative procedures of particular texts by Tolnai into a rich culture-historical context. Similarly to the model of Valéry's Mediterranean, the narrator's Janus-faced Yugoslavia simultaneously generates concrete and utopian spaces, folding upon one another. Above the micro spaces (towns, houses, flats) evolving along the traces of reality, there float the Proustian concepts of scent and colour of the Adriatic sea (salt, azure, mimosa, lavender, laurel). The nostalgia towards the lost Eden rises high and waves about the "grand form" of Big Yugoslavia, the related space of which is the Monarchy. The counterpoints of the grand forms are "the small, void forms," provinces, regions (Vojvodina, North Bačka) and the micro spaces coded into them. The text analyses of the paper examine the intercultural motions and identity-forming culture-historical elements of the outlined space system.

**Keywords:** textual universe, culture history, intercultural passage, identity, Ottó Tolnai

### 1. Forming spatial relations in Ottó Tolnai's prose

In the panopticon of Tolnai's texts "the grand forms are always counterpointed, from the outset, by small, void forms, though these are well-contoured territories, regions, places, small communities like *Fáj*<sup>1</sup>—such as Vojvodina or North Bačka,

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1 *Fáj* is a hamlet in Hungary, in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, in the micro-region of Encs, 50 kilometres northeast from Miskolc. The settlement was first mentioned in 1243 as the Fáy family's estate. Currently it has 372 inhabitants. (personal remark, <http://foldhivatalok.geod.hu/telepules.php?page=2741>)

Lana in South Tyrol, Frisia [...], Szatymaz, Kičevo and Aporka or, for example, Járás and Vértó [...]" (Tolnai 2011 (2007), 297).<sup>2</sup>

The space coordinates of textual motions are diverse. In the *Lovers of Pompeii* [*Pompeji szerelmesek*] the narratorial gaze is narrowed, it turns from the large space into the direction of smaller, seemingly less significant dimensions: Big Yugoslavia, Small Yugoslavia, Serbia, Vojvodina, Bačka, North Bačka or Hungary, Budapest, Lónyay Street, Pilisborosjenő.

In *Grenadírmars*, the "strictly closed unity," homogeneity of the Monarchy and Big Yugoslavia, of the Adriatic Sea and Bačka, culminates in one single everlasting moment, "When in the midst of the creaking of the rails—typical of the Monarchy—the train stopped" (Tolnai 2011 (2008), 290).

The space treatment of the "stained water prose" uses the technique of reflecting. The coordinates of two parallel worlds folding onto each other are outlined, the infinity of which (the immanent macro and micro spaces) become adjacent again and again during the time travels of the narrator and its alter egos, during their "crab-like regress." The twin points emerging from the space, the lighthouses of the sea with light strips and the grain silos of the Great Plain, the Adriatic Sea and the Pannonian landscape, the Pannonian Sea are stressed interfaces.

The flavour associations completing the sight reconcile earlier already this specific, twofold, temporal and spatial sea experience of Tolnai's texts. The gastronomic memory of Bačka from the Monarchy is projected onto the world of the Adriatic: "pretending to be dumb, I was listening to *désiré's* the new thesis / that a poet has to eat a lot of sweets / a lot of bonbons and bombs with rum / he says he adores me by the oversalted Adriatic ink soup / suffocating in small confectioneries in big cream cakes" (Tolnai 2010 (1992), 81).

The relation between sugar and salt, sweet and bitter emerges in its entirety in the textual universe of Tolnai's "stained water prose." The twin towers of brine pits from North Dalmatia and Istria are projected onto the continental (Vojvodinean) sugar factories of Big Yugoslavia. Ottó Bocskay, the mythical alter ego of the narrator is the accountant of the sugar factory in Senta. Ottó, magnified with the devices of magical realism, may become a member of the Novi Sad Writers' Community, of the Vojvodinean Writers' Association, and moreover, even of the Yugoslav Writers' Association if his great work in progress, "his big sweet book," is ready sometime. Ottó's amazing abilities reevaluate even the significance of the brine pits. Besides the vision of the "sweet book" it is essential to engage "the salty book" as well:

Then another picture: Ottó is walking around the brine pits [...] it would not have taken one or two years, and Ottó would have connected the sugar factories of Vojvodina with the Dalmatian brine pits, launching a never

2 Quotations from Hungarian literary works and specialist literature were translated by Katalin Süge.

witnessed barter trade among them—I forgot to mention that the sugar factory in Senta (or the milk factory, I do not know exactly) had a holiday villa on Krk Island. Each small town in Vojvodina had a holiday villa near the Adriatic; what is more, larger companies had their own separately [...]. (Tolnai 2010, 16)

In this way Ottó, “our great, bitter writer,” will be the descendant of Károly Szirmai, lawyer of the sugar factory in Vrbas.

Besides the traces of World War II (the monument of the battle in Batina) and the bridgeheads of the modern Balkan wars (the Maslenica bridge in Croatia, the Novi Sad bridges bombed by NATO), the map of the incessantly disintegrating and transforming Big Yugoslavia (Csányi 2007) is enriched by the various micro spaces, from the time of the Monarchy, of Bačka. The hometown, Stara Kanjiža in Bačka that “by now lives mainly in my imagination” (Tolnai 2010, 9) unfolds its virtual, mythical spaces in accordance with the movements of the alter ego: “[...] I saw Ottó appearing on the promenade, by the Tisza, in the Tükörfürdő, in the Nylon restaurant, on the promenades of the Népkert, around the sculpture of the gypsy girl exchanging pleasantries in the group of the miracle bath [...].” (Tolnai 2010, 12). The intimate place of the narrator limited to the minimum is the tower room of Homokvár by the coast of the Vértó, lined with papers, paintings, culture and art.

The heterogeneous continental micro spaces of Tolnai's text are completed with the colours of the Adriatic Sea: the azure of the lavender, tamarisk, mountain laurel, bogumil and saffron. The colour of the sea cannot be defined exactly. This mystery has a tradition in the history of literature, and this infiltrates in the Tolnai opus as well. In the *Lovers of Pompeii* Attila József and Lajos Nagy

[...] argued about the colour of the sea. Attila József claimed that the colour of the sea is: green; Lajos Nagy said that the colour of the sea is: blue. Finally, Attila József has given up his position, saying: it is blue indeed:— but in another way. Notwithstanding, he could have safely clung to his opinion, namely that the sea is: green. But in another way, of course. (Tolnai 2011 (2007), 115)

The definition of colour within the “stained water prose” is not contingent; it rests on scientific basis. The reference of Tolnai's text is dr. Béla Mauritz's “specific red leather spine volume” entitled *The Earth and the Sea* [*A föld és a tenger*]. In the third volume of the series *The World of Nature* [*A természet világa*] the following definition can be read:

[...] we can define the colour of the sea as blue and through that turning into green. If the standard white sheet with a diameter of 0.5 m is floated

out, it first looks green, then as it sinks deeper and deeper, it turns into more and more bluish, and finally it entirely disappears from the observer's view. [...] There are still a lot of deficiencies and arguable parts in the explanation of the colour of the water on a strict physical basis. The prospective researches still need to fill a wide gap. In some places there also appear some extraordinary colours of the sea. The sailors call this kind of water 'stained' water. (Tolnai 2010, 77–78)

For Tolnai, the (sea) colour is a metaphysical category (Acsai 2004). Its nature and quality cannot be precisely defined, not even when approached from the direction of science. The refractions of light, the illusions of the Adriatic's stained water are diverse, they cannot be precisely described, they are constantly changing as much as we regard them as the reflections of parallel worlds gleaming in the waving of the "stained water prose," and not merely of the Balkan (Ladányi 2004).

The relations between literary spaces and real spaces in Ottó Tolnai's texts are variegated. The most typical is the case of a transformed relation, of remodeling or synthesis of various spaces. There often occur synthesized spatial forms, special forms when "within the text, two or more spaces are synthesized to a new, third space" (Reuschel–Hurni 2011, 296). Applying space shifting, when "an existing place is shifted to a new location, in a new geographical context" is also characteristic of Tolnai's prose (*ibid.*).

## 2. Spaces and cultures

The multilingual cultures (of the Monarchy, Vojvodina, Yugoslavia, Bačka) appearing in the spaces of Tolnai's prose get condensed into short story-like text parts, fragments generating each other, organized around figures and artworks moving in the textual spaces.

The narrator's "chosen terrain" (Tolnai 2011 (2008)), the Monarchy and Big Yugoslavia, the Adriatic and Bačka "form a strictly closed unit." The corn mountains of Bačka shining like gold, the bottom of the Pannonian Sea containing natron, the lapwings swarming like seagulls, the "Monarchy-yellow" and the "Monarchy-yellow buildings (railway stations, courts, high schools)" (Tolnai 1992, 12) melt with the mimosa fragrance of Big Yugoslavia, with the colour and fragrance cavalcade of the traditional ceremony of mimosa picking held in Hercegnovi, because "the yellow effect has been placed next to the azure" (Tolnai 2011 (2007), 298).

The belonging together of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Big Yugoslavia is confirmed by the in-between position and living space of the amphibious figures.

All I know about Krstonošić, Éva's former boss, is that he no longer participates in rally racings in Monte Carlo, he has not entered for the route of Paris-Dakar for a long time, he roams with a scooter the streets with worse and worse pavements in Novi Sad, and spends more and more time in Ljubljana and Prague, where he moved his studio and also his office; he was a typical middle-class Monarchy figure, he kept the photo of his mother playing tennis with Miklós Horthy, or at least they can be seen together with tennis rackets in their hands. (Tolnai 2010, 11)

One of the famous Bačka pharmacists of the Monarchy times, the local poet, Aurél Stadler "spent a part of all of his summer holidays by the Adriatic, in Dubrovnik, the so called folk-natural, close-to-the-ground poems of his about Palić, Ludas, and Hajdukovo alternating on a regular basis with the mondaine Adriatic poems" (Tolnai 2004, 119). The "days of glory" of Big Yugoslavia are entwined with the intermediary states of the migrant worker existence: "since the musicians in Vojvodina used—better said, not just used, it was obligatory for them—to spend the summer by the sea, they played music in hotels or on pleasure boats, thereafter all of them to continue in Germany [...]" (Tolnai 2004, 125). The position of the above figures may even be connected with the twofold trend of Hungarian literature and culture in Vojvodina, with the tendencies, with their eternal conflicts, formulated in the spirit of "odi et amo," of (ethnic, national) preservation, on the one hand, and of innovation, longing to leave, being constantly on the way (modernism, western patterns), on the other. Bačka and the sea are also basic motifs in Ervin Sinkó's early poems, in Kornél Szenteleky's novels and poems, as well as in the art of the Symposion generation.

Yugoslavia is, on the one hand, "a positive grand form, like the Monarchy" (Tolnai 2010 (1997), 80). On the other, its volatility is conspicuous, since, quite like Valéry's Mediterranean, it is simultaneously concrete and utopian (Tolnai 2011 (2007), 100). Its spaces are retiform, abundant in passages; it is a heterogeneous structure in which "All units are primarily the net of solidarities and the affinity of mentalities" (Daniel 1996). Thirdly, it is irony itself taking shape: "...one of his sons was given the name Yugoslav, the other one Tito, although his Belgian-Congolese wife had no idea of what Yugoslavia meant and who Tito was. I said that if things went on like that, the poor woman would give birth to all the republicans, the entire Central Committee" (Tolnai 2011 (2007), 101).

The source of "manifestation" of Big Yugoslavia is private mythology. The passages of the Tolnai opus draw the metamorphosis of the narrator, the cases and stages of its turning into space, by the use of biography, biblical references, metaphor, sensual associations and metonymy. We become witnesses of the espacement of the body melting into space, into the sea (water). The halts of the process are the biography ("After all, the so-called Big Yugoslavia was identical

with my life. They coincided [...] I had a thousand and one small intimate places all over the country.” (Tolnai 2011, 180), certain stages of it, as well as the emotional states of the subject:

He remembered the first time he sank, he precisely recognized the water of the Danube, the gentle, yet so essential differences in quality between the Palić Lake, the Tisza and the Adriatic; in the first one there was his childhood, in the other his manhood, in the third his present (so much so since the Kis-Palics (Small-Palić) is called Vértó), and in the fourth his dreams, or maybe he could say, his utopia. (Tolnai 2011 (2007), 257)

The body “taken” from the surrounding material/space is present everywhere:

[...] this is the background against which insignificant things are revealed; North Bačka, Vojvodina, Big Yugoslavia, the Balkan Peninsula, the Adriatic as far as Trieste, Duino [...] Venice are nothing else, but my body, since everywhere some grain of dust, mud, shit, azure stuck on me; I was taken out from this and I do not associate things but reveal my own wounds [...] (Tolnai 2011, 286);

some of its parts can be precisely localized: “[...] Indeed, a part of me lives on the Adriatic by now. It floats in my memories between the intensely shining Split and the four islands, Hvar, Brač, Korčula and Šolta” (Tolnai 2010, 25). The separation of part from the whole, the metonymical representation of the narrator pave the way for the azure game of the “stained water prose”: “I was still staring at the beautiful blue vase. At my blue reflected face. At the lake reflected as the sea.” (Tolnai 2010 (1987), 271)

The hydrography, the rill system of the small and big world of the Tolnai type textual corpus is not confined to the problematization of the sea. The narrator’s spaces are abundant in water: “I was born in a river, in the Tisza, in Stara Kanjiža, I live beside the Palić Lake—and all my life I have been preaching about a sea, the Adriatic” (Tolnai 2011 (2008), 345). As the lost, magical paradise, as the source of light (Daniel 1996), the appearance of the Mediterranean in central position is not unusual; it gains its function by fitting into the hydrography of the variable space/map. In footnote number 8 of *Grenadírmars*, the definition of János Apáczay Csere’s lexicon (*Hungarian Encyclopaedia*) displays the sea as a magical, omnipresent element: “1. The water is sea or waters that have their sources in it. 2. The sea has external or internal [...] bosoms and streams.” The magical hydrography of Tolnai’s texts is based on similar principles. Essential elements are the lake appearing as the leftover of the sea (the Balaton, the Palić Lake, the narrator’s “corn pie like” being [Tolnai 1994, 153]), the river flowing

into the sea, and last but not least, the miracle, when the rivers of memories flow backwards. The state of “looking at the stained water” points back to the sight of the mayfly of the Tisza in July: “the concentration of the nuptials, fertilisation and death in this single moment shows us the complete model of existence” (Tolnai 2007, 71). It points back to the water of the memories, which is the “mythical site of the author’s childhood, the fluent, absolute chlorophyll” (Mikola 2012, 414). It refers back to the erotic relation with the Tisza:

among the red branched willow-bushes I totter down to the Tisza, often sinking into mire up to my ankles, especially in spring, and at this time of autumn I love to crouch near its steaming mass, while on the other bank I catch sight of a familiar, statue-like fisherman in his flat-boat, as if I would shamelessly crouch, lean over, have recourse to an uncovered sweet female body. In fact it is about re-positioning into the angle of the childhood. I dip my hand. I put my hands between the legs of the Tisza. I’m here, I say. And I wash my face [...]. (Tolnai 2010, 151)

“Since it is by no means incidental where the Tisza flows into the Adriatic” (Tolnai 2010, 119), because the Tisza flows into the sea on the ink-pencilled, magical, torn little Monarchy-map of childhood.

From time to time, the space built into the perishable body becomes objectified; the collapsed political, cultural space turns into the symbol of the grand form:

Empty, partly finished, storied alpine houses, all the money earned as a migrant worker being spent on them. They wanted houses our chiefs in Germany had. But everywhere only the kitchen was used. The whole Yugoslavia was full of houses like this. Throughout the past ten years, most of them were destroyed with some breathtaking method. (Tolnai 2011 (2007), 60)

### **3. Text forming procedures**

The narrative units of Ottó Tolnai’s texts are culture-historical elements. They form the base of the series of events, of the story. The dynamic alternation of the narrative units is provided by the omnipresent narrator’s motions, his chain-like, inserted or parallel space shifts, as well as by the formation and movement of its various alter egos. The identity shaping, spatially embedded stories of Tolnai’s prose get shape in the course of syntactic and textual processes that resort to devices such as reduction, strength and extension, compression, fragmentation, metaphoricity, symbolization and irony (Thomka 1986). Short stories, novellas, “little stories and fragments within the short story, germs of novella within the

novella (...) episodes drifted into narration” (Bence 2008, 75), “low-Pannonian fragments” (Tolnai 2011 (2007)), small forms, novel of fragments, in which “the emphasis is on the process of creation” (Bence 2008, 76).

Beáta Thomka speaks about poetic prose, whose structural units are diverse, still uniform: “collage narration,” “patchwork narrative,” “moment mosaics, filings, splinters,” “moment-prose” (Thomka 1994). The source of poetic character is fragmentation, the light and fast flow of the text, one great version of which is the “stained water prose.” Tolnai’s efforts in this direction are already formulated (indirectly) in the motto of the novel entitled *Flower Street 3* [*Virág utca 3*]:

My literary work consists exclusively of including such notes and fragments (literally) into my work that I have already written down in connection with everything in the world, at every stage of my narrative. Elaborating a topic means to me grouping the already existing details around a later selected or suggested topic. I accept nothing else as material, only details given by the circumstances that come naturally, if they come, and are worth as much as they are. For me, the topic is as irrelevant to the literary work as the text of an opera—that the listener usually does not understand—and that is anyway just a mere indication. (Valéry Papers) (Tolnai 2010 (1983), 5)

Due to the results of the above methods, in Tolnai’s texts

[...] the different genres almost dissolve, become one in the personal tone; with him the motifs are connected to each other more tightly than with other writers; the cohesion created by the motifs of the writings is almost stronger than the unity created by the order of the particular writings. It is not the writings that create the writer’s world, but vice versa, it is the writer’s world that creates [...] the writings. (Füzi 1997, 1253)

The text generating, “text rolling operations” of the Tolnai opus are briefly described by Éva Hózsza in the way the elements of the work of art “are rearranged, they drip into each other” (according to the model of sandcastle building) (Hózsza 2012, 35).

## 4. Meeting of cultures, intercultural passages

Tolnai’s fragment collages and hypertexts are reconstructions, continuous recreations of various cultures and relation systems. The various text forming procedures create the contacts and intercultural passages of the particular texts through the application of metaphors.



“The literary work is a transcendent and burly spider web” (Parti Nagy 2004, 11). “Encyclopaedia or spider web?” Lajos Kántor asks in the wake of Lajos Parti Nagy. Our answer is: spider web *and* encyclopaedia. The spider web is the encyclopaedia itself. The ancestor of the hypertext, the genre including the totality of human knowledge makes the relating system, built like a spider web, complete, of documentary value, representative, and dynamic. “Ottó Tolnai is an excellent spectator-contemplator, a great receiver and preserver—though he is as much an innovator as well” (Kántor 2005, 75). His opus is like the continuously changing extended editions of a big encyclopaedia. The complex texture of the Tolnai type encyclopaedia supports the wide horizon, the transcendent arch of the encyclopaedia (Bence 2008); the corpus made of narrators, stories, heroes, and objects, permeated by domestic and private mythology, is “the breviary, encyclopaedia, literary anthology of the Pannonian micro-region fate stories—the imprint of world understanding in novel form and the mythical story of novel writing at the same time” (Bence 2008, 79). The “void” (Füzi 1997) ‘entries’ of the New Tolnai Encyclopaedia rethink and poeticize the genre of the encyclopaedia.

The sea is the most important “subject” of the encyclopaedia. Tolnai is the encyclopaedist of the azure, of “the sea attracting and absorbing everything into itself” (Virág 2003, 116). Tolnai’s stained water is “the territory of multiracialism and manifoldness, of the situatedness within and beyond, of the finite and infinite, life and death, the visible and the invisible” (Virág 2003, 116).

In the field of association of the sea penetrating everywhere there appear the delta and the delta situation. The delta is the meeting point of the starting point and end point, it is rise and estuary, a collecting area and mixing surface, an imaginary region (quite like Vojvodina) “that is the permeable, receptive, and containing medium of cultural and intellectual values and currents. It is a virtual gate standing at the crossroads of cultures, cardinal points, and civilisations. There were times when free flow might have circulated through this to Central Europe, between the Balkans and the Mediterranean” (Thomka 2007, 11–12). The delta situation is the positionedness of multiple-rooted identity, of the multilingual and multicultural Homo Adriaticus. It implies a border situation that simultaneously brings an end and recreates, separates and binds, “it is the reservoir of the existence oscillating between the Self and The Other, the familiar and the foreign, the small and the big, source and destination, periphery and centre, marginality-minority and dominance” (Csányi 2007, 53).

The cultural figurations of the river, the delta and the sea appear to be in a border situation themselves, in the flow of Hungarian literature. In connection with the layers of the Hungarian literary tradition, Tolnai’s hydrographic map overwrites Ferenc Herczeg’s sea view, and last but not least, connects to the love-geography, to “the standard elements of emotional cartography.” On the other hand, they can

also be interpreted as the cultural (artistic, literary, culture-historical and private) atlas of the symposionist art of writing (Virág 2010, 8).

The reservoir of the delta can be brought into connection with the relics treasured in the early museums, with the heterogeneity of the chaotic objectual world. The prototype, the source of the museum experience of the Tolnai opus is the father's, Mátyás Tolnai's shop in Stara Kanjiža, "registered in certain texts sometimes as a grocery, sometimes as a shop of colonial goods" (Mikola 2005, 76). The narrator's affinity tending towards collections is developed further by the stock of the Novi Sad Store of the Yugoslav times. "Graceful trifles! Graceful tastes!" cause the narrator's delight (Tolnai 2010 (1987), 121).

The sacral private collection of Homokvár in Palić, appearing much later, is connected to this objectual world. The above context is supported by the narrator's self-characterization, according to which the storyteller stuck into the space of the attic is the "guard of trifles" (Tolnai 2012 (1972), 62). His alter ego, Mária Róza Bánszky, restorer of the Museum of Novi Sad (Vojvodina), about whom we can only know that "her name often appears in my writings, in many of my stories and poems actually being nothing else, but her words taken down" (Tolnai 2011 (2007), 314). The collection, the maniacal archiving of authentic and false references are both the topic and the text organizing procedure of Tolnai's prose (Novák 2012).

In the Tolnai type text universe or "text cathedral" (Rudas 2010, 41) the trifles endlessly enlarge the circle of the "objects" that can be archived in the museum space. There is room for everything here: adventure, experience, mystery, mood, colours, scrolls, connections, passages—an imaginary "collection resulting from a creative process," a "text museum" (Novák 2013, 35).

## **5. Encounter of cultures—the narrator's "self-reinterpretations" (Vitéz 1997)**

The process of (text) writing creates the one-ness, the essence of which, in Valéry's interpretation, is not the harmony, but the "awareness of the transitions from construction to destruction, from destruction again to construction through writing and thinking" (Vitéz 1997, 5). Tolnai's narrators, alter egos, speaking from various (minor and intermediary) (speech) situations, synthesize the world view of the continuously forming textual universe of Tolnai's with epithets such as Yugoslavian, Vojvodinean, from Novi Sad, from Bačka, from Stara Kanjiža.

The passages, inherent in spaces and revealed in the course of space shifts, between majority and minority, national and multicultural, central and peripheral cultures generate a heterogeneous textual universe, wherein "the literary representations create an illusion of knowledge and identity with the

territories referenced. The readers share the description of these spaces and mentally assimilate the geography” (Alves–Queiroz 2013, 459). The narrator of Tolnai's complex text is active, his entity coming to life in the process of the reader's (identity) forming process. Tolnai's narrator codes the culture-historical traditions constructing Tolnai's textual spaces, reshaped again and again in space and time, and stores them for the (identity) decoding reader of all times.

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## Life Stories and Interculturality

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**Abstract.** This article examines two short stories: Teréz Müller's *Igaz történet* [A True Story] and József Bálint senior's *Imádkozzál és dolgozzál* [Pray and Work]. The argument explores the way the texts reflect on shifts in power in the Hungarian region of Vojvodina, and the way power structures define the relationship between majority and minority in a society that undergoes constant and radical changes. Contemporary historical events of the twentieth century, changes, faultlines, traumatic life events and identity shifts emerge as the contexts for these narratives of the daily experiences of a Jewish merchant family and a farmer family respectively. Thus, the two texts analysed are representative works rooted in two fundamentally different social backgrounds. The discourse about the *I* is always also about the other; the construction of identity is already in itself a dialogic, intercultural act, which makes it an ideal topic for the exploration of the changes and shifts in one's own and the other's cultural identity. Translational processes of transmission are also required for the narration of traumatic experiences. Teréz Müller was the grandmother of the Serbian writer Aleksandar Tišma. Her book is not primarily a document of their relationship; however, it does throw light on diverse background events of the writer's life and oeuvre. Comparing the experiences of identity in the autobiographical novel of Aleksandar Tišma and the recollections of his grandmother reveals geocultural characteristics of their intercultural life experiences.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** interculturality, life stories, identity, memory culture, social interaction

Hungarians in Vojvodina have recently started to discover the significance of popular and bourgeois narratives framed in diaries and autobiographies. Forms of self-representation on the border between diary and memoir are published one after the other. Authors come from diverse backgrounds, and their writings betray the characteristics of the social layer which they belong to. Among the authors there are farmers who played an important role only in the narrow environment of

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1 The study was conducted within project no. 178017 of the Ministry of Science and Education of Serbia.

their own community, and whose anthologized memoirs fell victim to the rules of editorial practices as well as linguistic and stylistic standardization. Other authors, such as craftsmen or art loving teachers, voluntarily resign from the spontaneity of producing their own texts, frequently embellishing their writing with quotations. However, books written by authors who were politically influential in the interwar period have also been published, shaped into diaries only retrospectively. These are books in which the authors consciously foreground the collection of documents rather than the events of personal life, and the aims of the editors are similarly more focused on documenting social events than family matters.

The material that is growing larger and richer has remained mainly unreflected. The present article undertakes a discussion of a relatively new phenomenon in the cultural milieu of minority Hungarians in Vojvodina,<sup>2</sup> with its focus on two texts that are representative works of fundamentally different social environments, but which are comparable in the sense that both can be characterized by their authors as belonging to the same genre; both texts were written with the aim of describing “true stories.”

## The past as an entity worthy of documentation

My analysis focuses on two autobiographies whose respective authors started to document their lives when they were in their senior years. The first paragraph of József Bálint senior's work entitled *Imádkozzál és dolgozzál* [*Pray and Work*] reveals that he started to write his autobiography when he was eighty, while Teréz Müller was ninety-one when she began noting down her memoirs entitled *Igaz történet* [*A True Story*]. She specified her age herself: “in two months’ time I will turn ninety-two”<sup>3</sup> (Müller 2011, 9), and she was ninety-five when she completed the text.

It is beyond doubt that Assmann's category of memory culture completely applies to both of these authors, since in Assmann's understanding the person who remembers has to be in a “relationship” with the past, which must also be consciously interpreted as the past. According to Assmann, this presupposes two things. One is that the past cannot have disappeared completely, and some documentation has to be available that refers to it. The other is that documents

2 The notion of the “cultural milieu of minority Hungarians in Vojvodina” presupposes the knowledge of a number of historical events, the most important of which are the following: after the First World War, the Trianon Peace Treaty annexed a territory that formerly belonged to Hungary, inhabited by Hungarians, Serbs, Bunjevci, Slovacs, Rusyns, Germans, Šokci and Croatians, to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. During the Second World War the territory again belonged to Hungary, while at the end of the war the Red Army and Tito's partisans occupied it, and made it part of Yugoslavia and of the state of Serbia. When referring to changes of borders and changes of regimes in my paper, it is these historical events that I have in mind.

3 Quotations from Hungarian and Serbian literature were translated by the author.



about the past have to display characteristic differences when compared to the present (Assmann 2011, 18).

The author of *A True Story*, Teréz Müller, started her life story accordingly, referring to the past and the present as markedly different categories. “My thoughts must fly back to times long past.” (Müller 2011, 9) The attitude of the autobiographical author was driven by the intention of documenting the past. She first described her family tree, without which understanding the life narrative would not be complete, since as it customarily happens, the characters appearing in the narrative are family members who bear similar names. The author specified her intentions as well. She considered the “future generation” as her readers, aware of the fact that the past was constituted throughout her text. She wished to put her life story in writing, and the guiding principle of her undertaking was truth. In her words, “My aim is to report truth as it happened, even when it was not entirely nice or good, and I also want to report about places where the sun was always shining on me.” (Müller 2011, 9) She did not strive for further pedagogical aim. The aim of her self-representation was not to set up an example to be followed, nor to create a moral model; she merely wished to describe the story of her family for the next generation, so that they could get to know their ancestors. Hers was a gesture of leaving a trace, of summarizing a life while creating the past. She was propelled by the type of primal experience that is discussed by Jan Assmann in his volume entitled *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*:

The rupture between yesterday and today, in which the choice to obliterate or preserve must be considered, is experienced in its most basic and, in a sense, primal form in death. Life only assumes the form of the past on which a memory culture can be built through its end, through its irremediable discontinuity. One might even call it the primal scene of memory culture. There is a difference between the autobiographical memory of the individual looking back from a certain vantage point over his own life, and the posthumous commemoration of him by posterity, and it is this distinction that brings out the specifically cultural element of collective memory. We say that the dead will live on in the memory of others, as if this were some kind of natural prolongation of their life. (Assmann 2011, 19-20)

The autobiographical writing of Teréz Müller may be partially called a “commemoration by posterity,” since her grandchild, the well-known Serbian writer, Aleksandar Tišma was the person to buy her the notebook in which she started recording her memories—as we learn from his autobiographical novel *Sećaj se većkrat na Vali* [*Always Remember Vali*]. He asked his grandmother to write down the stories she frequently used to tell her family, just to pass the time, as a recreational activity. He mentioned in the same text that his grandmother

could always entertain her guests with exciting stories about the stinginess of the grandfather, her husband, or her chores with the villagers and the maids, and said that her memory did not fade a bit, not even in her old age. It was with this same gesture that he kept her among the “members of the community,” and transferred her to the present.

“Commemoration by posterity” was taken over at this point by natural remembrance, and it was moulded according to the psychology of the elderly: childhood was given the largest role, and the biggest gaps of uncovered periods appeared in mature adulthood and old age.

When discussing the autobiography of Teréz Müller, it should be kept in consideration that the primal experience of death played a crucial role in the narrative. At the primal stage of memory culture, stories written with a consciousness of death—but not in its proximity—play an important role in the early stages of remembrance. The goal of writing was constituted in opposition to death: the family history emerged at the border between a real and a mythical worldview, since the narrator believed in it, while later those who are no longer among the living will live on through our reading about them.

Apart from Assmann and his notion of memory culture, another influential theorist has to be mentioned, whose work is also related to autobiographies. Philippe Lejeune in his work discussing diaries as antifiction proposes the primacy of everyday/ordinary writings against narrative strategies and solutions relying on diverse types of fiction. He calls authors of literary diaries imitators of the genre, and believes that a diary evoking genuine interest in its readers is the one which describes a subject that is impossible to control, in other words, something that cannot be found in other sources, such as history books or works written for the larger public. It is also important that the narrative should not be goal-oriented, the narrator should not know how things will evolve, and it is also crucial that the readers do not know the end of the story either. In Lejeune’s opinion our life offers several scripts, and the choice changes daily, while we are acquainted with them only partially. “Nobody knows where the path of their life will take them, except for the final destination: death.” (Lejeune 2008, 19)

Regarding the narrative in memoirs, the principle of a story does not allow us to take the material as entirely unstructured. The “past,” for the narrator, is an already known, existing entity, which receives its final form through its creation. What gives Müller’s text a diary-like quality is the dates signalling the beginning and the end of her writing: 25<sup>th</sup> October 1968 and “Novi Sad, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1972.” It took nearly four years for Teréz Müller to finish the story, and end her notebook with the following words: “Thus I finish the story of my life. God only knows when I will add the full-stop at the end.” (Müller 2011, 76)

## Narrating the experience of trauma

Teréz Müller's autobiography is a remembrance which inscribes not only the identity of the self, but is also imbued with historical, social and cultural tradition. An interpretation cannot disregard the fact that the narrative, apart from recording real, factual events and creating a private history, has another dimension as well, that which textualizes significant historical events.

A crucial part of her narrative is the story of the survivor, in which she described the 1942 raid in Novi Sad and its preceding events, which resulted in the Hungarian fascist regime's massacre of several thousand Jews and Serbs. Since there are few descriptions of the events, let me include here a quote from the testimony, which can be interpreted as a significant document of oral history. The attitude of fear was prevalent in those days in Novi Sad: "We dreaded going to bed, and waking up in the morning meant dreading our unknown fate." (Müller 2011, 58)

Later we get to know details from the rising fear and the state of public affairs. "Anyone can imagine what these days were like; although from a distance only, gunshots could be heard from morning to evening, and despite the strictest prohibition, the news spread that there was a human victim for each shot." (*ibid.*) The voice of detachment and distance is constituted as the prefiguration of the experience of trauma. "The dead were thrown into the Danube." (*ibid.*) Even the knowledge of sure death was better than insecurity, fulfilment better than waiting. This is revealed by the author's slip of the tongue. The word introducing her deportation is *at last*. At last, on the third day of the raid, a sergeant and two ordinary soldiers arrived. The way she described the sergeant is characteristic: he was a rather kind man, who even warned her to put on her heavier fur coat instead of the cloth coat, since it was minus 29 degrees Celsius outside.

I was sixty-five then, and I did as he said, put on warm clothes and stepped out of the gate of the house followed by the sergeant. A long line of deported Jews were waiting outside, and I was thrust among them, and we were walked towards a square where empty lorries waited to take us to the Danube. (*idem*, 59)

The narrator's attitude was governed by the principle of keeping one's dignity at all times. The psychological shock wiped emotions out, it was only a few details, such as "I was thrust," that revealed her strong emotions. Human life appeared as a worthless object, the body a thing, and consequently, even human beings as existential entities became questioned in the narrative recollection: "We were thrown up onto the lorries as if we were rubbish, until they were full. Then off to the Danube." (*ibid.*)

The description of the terrible event emerges vividly even from the distant past; it is succinct and objective:

When we reached the shore of the Danube, we were arranged into lines of five, and were slowly marched towards a hole cut in the ice, into which, clothes stripped off, adults and children were thrown in alive. If someone had the strength and the life instinct to try and crawl out, they were pushed back with a pitchfork. (*ibid.*)

Survival did not evoke exultation or joy either; the author confined herself to record the facts without emotions: “The line was shrinking slowly, and there were about five metres between me and the site, when a car rolled in with a few civilians who stopped the massacre. The rest of us, who were freezing outside, perhaps five or six hundred, were set free.” (*ibid.*)

Apart from being unique, the return home and the escape draw attention to the narrating subject’s mechanisms of remembrance. The sequence of images based on personal observations emerging from the depths of consciousness arranges scenes next to each other which are crucially important for the narrator, even though the scale of the presented events is not really comparable in the eyes of the readers: in the process of recollecting the memories, facts of shooting decrepit people, being seated on the floor and then called out in pairs are equally frightening for the narrator:

While we were on our way, decrepit people who couldn’t keep pace with the rest were simply shot and left in the snow. When we arrived at the sports hall, everybody had to sit down on the floor, and no one was allowed to go out, not even in urgent need for the bathroom. Now we were waiting here speechless and hopeless, when finally they started taking out people in pairs; we were trembling with fear of what was still to come. (*idem*, 59–60)

In a deeply cynical situation they had to listen to the explanation of the events, as if they had not seen them with their own eyes. At this point we witness deception, the concoction of a lie: “When everybody was inside, a loudspeaker went off from the balcony: ‘And now we’d like to thank all the Jews for behaving so well, and everybody can go home now. Our reasons for keeping you so long were merely to have the streets cleared’.” (*idem*, 60) In the moment of survival, one of the paradoxical emotions stemming from fear was gratitude towards their executioners that filled the people present, triggered by the psychological moment of the traumatic experience. People thanked them, exalting them for having been set free: “This was when hysteria broke out. ‘Long live Horthy’, cried several women hugging and kissing the policemen.” (*ibid.*)

The primal experience of death is coupled with figures of silence. Teréz Müller obviously did not speak or perhaps not much about her experiences to her children. Aleksandar Tišma did not include this episode in his autobiographical novel, only the circumstances of the escape, primarily the absurdity of the situation and the gratitude of the survivors.

Leaving the site of the trauma behind initiated a process of self healing. Teréz Müller most probably wished to spare her family from the dreadful events; her daughter reacted in the following way: “My poor Olga got so excited, she was seized by a fit, Gábor and I could hardly put her to bed. I rested after the excitement at Olga’s house, lying in bed for a couple of days, Saturday, Sunday and Monday.” (*ibid.*) Dori Laub’s remarks can be duly applied to this situation. In her opinion those who are listening to the account defend themselves with total paralysis, and “a sense of total withdrawal and numbness.” (Laub 1992, 72)

The unaccountability of trauma is also connected with this. According to Dori Laub, the fear of fate returning like a bad omen plays a key role in narrations of traumatic events, and hinders both the witness and the person recollecting the events from talking about them. Silence offers security, while uttering words may revive things from which one is trying to hide. Also, the act of speaking may become traumatic in itself. Thus, revival and speech do not function anymore as remedies, but become further sources of traumas.

Teréz Müller never returned to the house from which she was taken to the Danube, nor did she go back to the city, but left for Budapest.

## The cultural background of the narrative

I first underscored the most traumatic event in the volume, but the whole book can be generally characterized as a series of crisis narratives. The reasons for this were, first, that the narrator wished to avoid being a boaster, and second, that the hurtful events were probably inscribed and stored very deep in her memory.

The described period of nearly a hundred years, an entire history of the twentieth century with its diverse changes and shifts in power, ensures that the way the narrator’s life evolved remains a secret for the reader. The author was an exceptional “civilian autobiographer,” constructing herself as the subject and creating her past while writing about her life.

In the house of my grandmother, Teréz Müller, [...] there was a piano on which she played festive songs and classical etudes; although she completed only four years of school, she had her own books as well, among others, the collected works of writers such as Victor Hugo, naturally in Hungarian, and when she went to Szeged or Budapest on business trips, she would

always go to the theatre or opera in the evening, and she would talk about the performances for a long time—Aleksandar Tišma (2012) wrote in his work mentioned above.

The narrator attended school for four years only, but in her youth received private tuition. The six siblings—five girls and their brother—learned to play the piano, were taught German, and twice a week a teacher visited them “for the sole reason of teaching us spelling and writing in Hungarian.” (Müller 2011, 13) Learning to knit and crochet prepared Teréz for becoming a good housewife and businesswoman already in childhood.

She spent her youth at the turn of the twentieth century in an exuberant, eventful village, Horgos, a place where balls were organized weekly. The place was full of lively people, teachers, journalists from the capital, tradespeople and poor people, doctors, registrars, judges and scribes, and her spirited descriptions about them surpasses the observations of ethnographers and anthropologists. The socially stratified world in Horgos was created between groups at the crossroads of social relations and interrelationships; this was a world in which work discipline and the knowhow of trade and business were acquired already in childhood.

Teréz Müller revealed secrets of her life unintended. The perspective of the naïve narrator not only obscured facts, but with the power of her style and narrative vein disclosed hidden connections as well. Narrating without any pretence, Teréz gave a vivid account of her suitors, explaining how she followed her sister’s advice on whom and how to reject, and whose lily of the valley bouquet to throw after the suitor into the street. It is only the linguistic power of depicting the scene that reveals the intense jealousy of her older sister; the narrator did not recognize the web of intrigue spun around her, which led to her sister seduce and marry the narrator’s fiancé.

The recurring element of starting anew is the central motif of the narrative written as a remembrance in the past tense. Moving between Horgos, Martonos, Szeged, Mezőtúr, Budapest and Novi Sad with several changes of regimes and borders were the central elements in her recollection. Teréz Müller, the person who was always on the move, was always active and engaged.

The establishment of the new border, the “Serbian occupation,” was regarded as temporary by the Horgos society, but they soon realized that they had been wrong. The family was in Szeged at the time, but only the parents returned, leaving their three daughters and the governess behind. To attend her daughter’s wedding, the mother could cross the border only by bribing a “detective,” who took her to the border and waited for her until she returned.

In the meantime, the family was affected by market fluctuations: the Hungarian crown was replaced by the Serbian dinar. Entire enterprises were run on smuggling goods across the borders. The new regime tried to penalize the black

market traders, and Teréz Müller was also interrogated about the smugglers; since she would not betray her fellow villagers, she was even slapped across the face.

Changes in her family and the society, as well as her unfortunate marriage did not feed her defeatism, but rather, strengthened the determined warrior inside her. Her dominant life motive was not defined by the fact that she belonged to more than one minority group, which could have become a traumatic experience in the interwar period. She did not consider herself a second class citizen due to her religious beliefs or being a Hungarian. Being a woman could further aggravate the feelings of inferiority. Although it is true that she admitted she was not a great housewife, and perhaps she did not take as much care of her children as she should have, she took over the role of leader and supporter of the family.

Her female identity as a narrator is unquestionable, but her text does not belong to the group of feminist texts which although in line with patriarchal ways of behaviour undermine and contest at the same time. Her authorial attitude is comparable to “feminil” texts that are written from the point of view of female experiences, and written in a style that is culturally defined as feminine (Zlatař 2012, 165).

*A True Story* is also a book about a woman who managed to survive, and who was endlessly resourceful. It is a report about a grandmother who left this world when she was ninety-seven, ultimately without fortune, but in the firm belief that she had carried out her duties properly, since she was able to start from scratch eight times and make a living for herself and her loved ones even when she was old.

## Imagery and visual communication

Teréz Müller concealed and suppressed her emotions in her memoirs. This is not surprising, since the *I* that is constructed within the texts as powerful and fit for survival is not compatible with an overflow of emotions. However, the book also includes photographs and a few hand-written pages from the notebook. The poem by József Kiss, entitled *The Heart of a Mother*, which she included on the final page—probably from memory—stands out as a sentimental counterpoint, since neither its punctuation nor its type-setting resembles anything previously printed in the volume. It seems to soften the rationality of the text, while modestly directing attention from herself onto her descendants.

The cohesive power of the family plays a central role in the memoirs; helping out each other was a natural state of existence. Descriptions regarding household duties or raising children are rare. Even the relationship between mother and daughter is mentioned only in connection with minor quarrels.

However, as already mentioned, the volume also includes photographs, which convey a strong sense of narrativity, and contribute to the process of identity

formation. Among the first images there is one which represents the head of the family resting his hands on a book. The gesture is telling even if we know it was set by the photographer.

The lack of intimate descriptions is entirely substituted by another element: the photographs intensify the motive of bodily inscriptions, primarily through the posture of the grandmother. The role of the hand is particularly noteworthy among body narratives: the grandmother always holds someone's hand firmly; in the pictures from the late 1960s she has her arm around her teenager great-grandson with a protecting and guarding gesture.

## Dilemmas of identity

*A True Story* talks about the city of Novi Sad as of a place where speaking several languages was a natural phenomenon; Teréz spoke Hungarian, but she could still communicate with the Serbian major. "He spoke Serbian, a bit of German, I spoke German better than him, and a little Serbian, yet we could still understand each other well." (Müller 2011, 66–67)

If we compare the autobiography of the grandmother with the diary and autobiographical novel of her grandson, Aleksandar Tišma, we can see that the identity of the grandmother is immutable. It is not through practice of religion that we can sense Jewish lifestyle: it is obvious that Teréz Müller did not consider religion to be important. Nevertheless, Jewish identity defined her lifestyle and worldview to a great extent. Her sister was rejected by the family because she married a non-Jew, so Teréz Müller chose a Jewish husband, with whom she was not even happy, because she did not wish to end up like her sister. The empathy of the parents became obvious later when the family, seeing that she was unhappy, was inclined toward a divorce, letting her even marry a Catholic, in case that would end her misery. Nevertheless she stood her ground. This shows that the family is characterized as being tolerant and able to adapt to changes.

The grandson, on the other hand, struggled continuously with the question of belonging. "Based on the claims of Tajfel's (1974, 1978) theory, Bourhis and Giles (1977) conclude that the individual will leave his/her group if it does not offer them a positive image of identity in the process of comparison." (Bindorffer 2001) Aleksandar Tišma dedicated long reflective passages to this topic both in his last, autobiographical novel and in his diaries. Indeed, the entire narrative of *Sečaj se večkrat na Vali* [*Always Remember Vali*] deals with this set of problems. Hungarian, Jewish, Serbian, Orthodox identities—these are the national and religious groups that he reflected upon, since his identity included elements of each.

His grandmother's memoirs, as I have mentioned above, deal with the question of nationality and religion only regarding her own identity. She referred to her



son-in-law, the husband of her daughter Olga, as Gábor. From her grandson's autobiography we learn that Gábor, i.e. Gavra Tišma was in fact a Serb from Lika who, as an immigrant in Vojvodina, adapted perfectly to the urban lifestyle of Novi Sad, not only to its superficial characteristics, an impeccable sartorial taste, suits and ties, but also to its cultural traditions. In the typically intercultural spirit of the place he learned both Hungarian and German. Aleksandar Tišma, whose mother was a converted Hungarian Jew and whose father was a Serb with a weak Orthodox identity, tried to find his own identity and weigh the rightfulness of his choice.

Aleksandar Tišma continued to deal with the issue of identity and homelessness throughout his life: "The difference stems from the fact that I believed that I was secretly something else (i.e. a Jew) and not what people considered me to be (i.e. a Serb), but in fact it was only me pretending to be something else (i.e. a Serb) rather than being what I really was, and what people considered me to be (i.e. a Jew)." (Tišma 2001, 785) However, regarding the question of identity, an equally forceful role is played by languages and the switch of languages.

An example for the personal background of nationalism: while I was hesitating about which language to write in (in Hungarian, his first language or Serbian—the author's remark)—in other words, which nation to belong to, I was almost left completely indifferent about the rebirth of the Serbian or the Yugoslav state. But once I decided, although not quite firmly, to be a Serbian writer, I have started to worry about the fate of the Serbian nation. I wish to see the nation to whom I primarily write to be as powerful and as important as possible. (Tišma 2001, 39)

Language played an important role in his everyday life as well. As he remarked about it later, his Serbian wife laughed at him when they quarrelled, because he started losing his Serbian. No wonder, said his wife, it was because "I left my home and went to live among Hungarians. Yet, I spoke Hungarian only with my mother. The fact that I started losing my language competence stemmed from trying to distance myself from the language I learned later—somewhere in the brain. Today, while waking up, I murmured Hungarian words..." (*idem*, 784)

Words that one murmurs while being half asleep support Jan Assmann's claim, according to which "[i]dentity is the matter of consciousness, that is, of becoming aware of an otherwise unconscious image of the self" (Assmann 2011, 111), and this applies to both individual and collective identity.

## Individual and personal identity

The time we live in is spun through with stories. Our place in life is defined by family stories even before we gain consciousness; perhaps we are not exaggerating when we say: even before we are born. We add our own ever changing story—which does not come to an end even with our death—to the ones that we inherit. Things that influence us from the outside, things that we do ourselves, things we think, imagine, experience, things that we are afraid of or hope for—we tell all these things about ourselves, and about each other, over and over again, and as different stories. (Tengelyi 1998, 13)

László Tengelyi's words from his volume entitled *Élettörténet és sorseseemény* [*Life Story and Event of Fate*] apply to the autobiography of József Bálint senior, who wrote his memoirs *Imádkozzál és dolgozzál* [*Pray and Work*] at a similarly old age as Teréz Müller, at the age of eighty; it took him ten years to write it, and he lived for another nine after finishing it. He wrote the source text in slightly more than three years, but after that he made six copies of the text, not entirely identical: some were amended, while he left out some episodes from the others (Bálint 2010, 211). The published version of the text does not refer to differences between the various copies, although these could reveal the "ever changing story" of our identity mentioned by László Tengelyi. It may be significant, though, to look at the list of people to whom he presented copies of his memoirs: his two sons and the family of his third son who had disappeared in the war; the village teacher, a respected priest and a Hungarian journalist reporter working for the minority Hungarian daily paper. The seventh copy is in a public library, available for anybody upon request.

It turns out from his introduction that apart from documenting the events of his life, he also found it important that his readers followed what he considered was "right and true." (*idem*, 7) He offered his writing not only to his successors—or as he referred to them, his "family"—but hoped for the recognition of intellectuals, and apart from that, dedicated it to all of his "Christian Catholic Hungarian brothers and sisters," as a moral exemplum. The subtitle reads: "This is a farmer's autobiography, from which all people could learn." He continuously reflected on morality in his writing; he called it a parable at one point, and compared it to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

We cannot know exactly which books József Bálint senior read in his mature age, but he admitted that his readings inspired him to record the events of his life: "Since I have read a lot of great books, especially in the latter half of my life, it made me think that the authors of these books were encouraged by the gospel and the teaching of our Lord Jesus, and the different views on life they had met during their lifetime." (*ibid.*) Based on this quote his sources may have been the

Bible and facts of life, although there is no sign that he ventured upon the serious reading or study of the Bible at any point in his life.

The act of writing reveals the experience related to Assmann's notion of "individual identity," which is "the coherent self-image that builds itself up in the consciousness of the individual through features that (a) distinguish them significantly from everyone else and (b) remain constant across the various phases of their development. It is the awareness, beginning with the constant motif of one's own body, of an irreducible self that is unmistakable and irreplaceable." (Assmann 2011, 113) Actually, in Assmann's words, "[i]ndividual identity relates to the contingencies of life, incorporating such key elements as birth and death, physical existence, and basic needs." (*ibid.*) Related ideas, however, are more important than individual identity in József Bálint senior's text. "It is not a eulogy for myself that I wish to write, but praise to the glory of God, according to my humble talents." (Bálint 2010, 7) On the one hand, we hear the echo of lessons learnt at school, on the other, the humbleness is not genuine. The ideas of praising God and praising oneself are placed next to each other, and the book has hardly a single page without God and the praise of God.

This context raises the question of personal identity, which is "the embodiment of all of the roles, qualities, and talents that give the individual his own special place in the social network." (Assmann 2011, 113) References to social acknowledgement and classification of the individual are raised gradually; in this case, they are connected to Catholicism and belief. Assmann (*ibid.*) comes to the following conclusion:

Both aspects of the "I" identity are determined sociogenically and culturally, and both processes – individuation and socialization – follow culturally prescribed paths. They arise from a consciousness that is formed and determined by the language, ideas, norms, and values of a particular time and culture. Thus, in the sense of the first thesis, society is not a powerful opponent for the individual; instead it is a constitutive element of the self. Society is not a dimension mightier than the individual, but represents a constituent element of the self. Identity, including that of the "I", is always a social construct, and as such it is always cultural.

Regarding the question of personal identity, peasant lifestyle is given a secondary importance in the recollections, at least from a rhetorical point of view. However, in reality, the various stages in a farmer's life were of utmost importance for Bálint. He described not only stages of self-sustenance, but also of economic growth. Both the language and the moral values of the text are in line with the norms of this social stratum.

## Sites of movement, cultural encounters, shifts

Sites of movement are created accordingly. At the beginning, before his parents settled in the re-populated village of Telecska, the main course of migration took them from one house to another which they rented according to their financial circumstance. When older, he was to go to work to the neighbouring village. Finally, military service came, a typical site of migration for young men, which also contributed to the experience of foreignness.

The principle that defines the notion of journey is closely connected to the genealogy of foreignness, and in this case, it is realised through migration. There is also a shift in the status of the individual in this process: Bálint left the familiar world that he considered home. In works that are based on an intercultural perspective, the emerging feeling of foreignness is represented by war, which foreshadows a direct and physical threat to the life of the individual. “If the definition of the Self needs the confrontation with the Other to mark its own borders, it is undoubtedly war as the most intensive conflict between cultures, which effects the strongest motivation for the shaping of the cultural self-image.” (Hima 2005)

As a teenager, he had been drafted several times by the age of sixteen, but was always considered too short and weakly built. His first experience of war was when, still a child, he walked his brother to the train leaving for the Galician front. He was overwhelmed by the external formalities of the sight:

Although I felt sorry for my brother, from my child's perspective I felt immense joy and a great experience to be there. The officers were marching at the front of the procession, followed by the infantry, after them the trumpet band, and finally the machine gun squadron, with my brother Jani marching on the surfaced road, and me trotting on the pavement, always towards my brother. I followed him with my eyes all the time, and I enjoyed the sound of music; I was admiring the sight. (Bálint 2010, 25)

His brother died of pneumonia and did not come home from the Galician front. The description of the loss of the First World War is reduced to including contemporary patriotic poems and songs, together with numerous stereotypical slogans: “Our wonderful Hungarian land was wrapped in grief, it was torn apart. All the precious Hungarian blood was spilt in vain.” (*idem*, 37)

This time he could not avoid military service, since Hungarians too, had to become “Yugoslav soldiers.” As it turned out, he would have earlier considered it a status symbol to be a Hungarian soldier. The fact that he was previously rejected is mentioned not as a fortunate circumstance, but rather as a painful memory. “I hadn’t been able to become a Hungarian soldier; I wouldn’t jump now at the

opportunity to enlist as a Yugoslav soldier.” (*idem*, 40) Language knowledge and cultural differences gain new tension with the change of the borders: “One afternoon I was lying in my room and the door opened, with policemen, two Serbian and a local one, entering; actually, this last one was the interpreter, since at that time we couldn’t speak a word of Serbian ...” (*ibid.*)

Until that time he lived the life of a farmer, with no movement; he hardly left the village where he was born, and this was why he attributed such great significance to the geocultural experience: “We were taken to Prizren. At that time there was no railway there. We travelled by train for two days, from Sombor to Subotica, Topola, Vrbas, Novi Sad, Belgrade, Niš, Skopje, then to the west to Uroševac, and from there 60 kilometres on foot to Prizren.” (*idem*, 48) The training was fast, since most of the soldiers “had already done service for the Hungarians.” (*ibid.*) Among his memories from the military he mentioned that they “lived well”; the first things they learned in Serbian were commands and military ranks, and Bálint used the Serbian terms when mentioning them. The farmer boy did not feel that military service in peacetime was a burden; he ended up in a multicultural community, the company of “5 Hungarian, 3 German and 2 Serbian” young men. “I got rested in the military, especially in those four months when we were stationed near the Albanian border; we didn’t work, and lived like lords.” (*idem*, 51)

After the end of the service, a period of consolidation commenced. The formation of autonomous collective identity began in the interwar period. “The collective or ‘we’ identity is the image that a group has of itself and with which its members associate themselves. It therefore has no existence of its own, but comes into being through recognition by its participating individuals.” (Assmann 2011, 113–114) Its prerequisite is that the members of the group acknowledge it: it would not exist “in itself.” Its force also depends on its vividness in the consciousness of the participants and the intensity of its influence on their thinking and acts. We can trace collective identity being formed on the pages of the memoirs:

We are in the year 1941, and exciting days are to come, although we almost got used to being parts of Yugoslavia [...] The Hungarian Cultural Public Association was established. On some evenings we had nice gatherings [...] Hungarian poems were recited, songs were sung, and we had readings too. (Bálint 2010, 75)

Soon the community became reorganised yet again, and this is interpreted as dislocation. The war shifted towards revision:

After that came the great joy for the true Hungarians of King St. Stephen, the Easter of 1941. But we later learned that in this Christian Catholic community, which used to be entirely Hungarian, there were only few

Hungarians of St. Stephen. Ten percent, the Germans, waited for Hitler; and about another two-thirds of the Hungarians were waiting for another Hitler-type regime, that is, the Russians... (*ibid.*)

Bálint was drafted into the Hungarian army when he was forty-five and his ethnocentric thoughts were imbued with emotions: "The Hungarian commands sounded wonderful, not like when I was a Serbian soldier." (*idem*, 76) The fact that the author "really hates" the gun refers to cultural differences; although he was taught to aim, he never shot. In the end he was lucky, because he avoided being sent to the front.

A new change came about at the end of the Second World War, when the partisans entered. The description of the gathering around the Catholic church, partisan women, harmonica, the kolo, the Serbian round dance, and the shooting all draw attention to the culturally specific characteristics of one's own and of the other. Under these circumstances the idea of permeability of the relationship between the new order and the local community was mere illusion.

There was continuous shooting on the road, and my two horses were almost impossible to control, perhaps they felt that my end and their end was nearing. Opposite the church, next to the two-story school building I stopped my cart; the place was crammed with partisans; a group of men and women, boys of 16 or 17 were followed here by armed partisans and a harmonica player. Another group was dancing the kolo in front of the church; the music was on, shooting everywhere, and my horses were terrified. (*idem*, 78)

The compulsory deliveries of products to the state were followed by the first "free elections," and this is one of the points in the text which stirred strong emotions and the feeling of rejection in the author: "The people from Telecska voted for cheap and vile people, they did not know that they elected the least worthy people to be leaders of the municipality." (*idem*, 97) He even included their names: "The well-known Andor Bezdán, and the other one, his pal, János Medve, became role models for leaders of the communist regime." (*ibid.*)

## On questions of the genre of true stories

According to Ilona S. Dobos (1964), there are significant differences between male and female narrators of "true stories." The narratives of women are structured primarily around love, intimate events in the family, often stories about mothers-in-law, or the descriptions of first love. Men, on the other hand, write about their

adventures, mostly heroic, which imbue the narrator with almost superhuman powers. But they may also include horror stories, or happy, funny events, while moral homilies are also frequent.

These categories do not apply in our cases. József Bálint senior's narrator gave a more detailed description of his marriage proposal than the female narrator, and a crucial role was given in his story to a matriarchal social structure: his mother gave her opinion about all the girls who he was going to propose to, and she was to give her consent, too, which he accepted with no objections, no matter how controversial her decisions were. He documented events of family fights about ownership of assets which were frequently difficult to entangle. He wrote about the birth of his children in different places in the text, including the event of an infant's death. Although he frequently included moralizing elements and episodes in his narrative—which are primarily texts with religious teaching that pervade his life narrative—the more significant layer of his memoirs was still formed at the crossroads of family and society, individual and collective identity, tinged with empathic, but frequently stereotypical voices of dissatisfaction. Elements of culture surfaced here that we are normally not aware of.

Teréz Müller, on the other hand, bore the female burden of taking care of her family, and remained an innovative personality to the end of her life, communicating in the meantime trauma experiences which are exceedingly rare in the literature of Hungarians in Vojvodina. Her personality as the narrator included spite, hurt and defiance, but was also characterized by exceptional resourcefulness; she was aware of her drawbacks, and always took them into consideration. Despite all, her story reveals the career of a content person: she felt fulfilment, she was endlessly open and always ready for change.

The difference between the two autobiographies is not gender-related, but rather stems from the differences in the authors' respective attitudes which are further underlined and nuanced by cultural contrasts and an intercultural experience of the world.

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## Interpretation – Artistic Reproduction – Translatability. Theoretical Queries

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**Abstract.** Along Wolfgang Iser's considerations—formulated in his work entitled *The Range of Interpretation*—we can speak about translation whenever a shift of levels/registers takes place. Literary interpretation is essentially an act of translation. As Iser points out, the register to which interpretation translates always depends on the subject matter that is translated. Translation does not repeat its subject matter, making it redundant, but transposes it into another register while the subject matter itself is also tailored by the interpretive register. The presentation aims to discuss the question of translatability in relation to the hermeneutical concept of application, and proposes to rethink the issue of change of the medium of artistic expression in the light of the concept of artistic reproduction as posited by Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics in his seminal work *Truth and Method*.

**Keywords:** translatability, untranslatability, cultural and medial translation, hermeneutics

### Introduction

When considering translation, we must indispensably start from the recognition of the diversity and complexity of the act of translation. The act of translation is present in the relationship between theory and practice; in this case we speak of application, putting into practice. It is also present in the interaction between different cultures; between the literal and the metaphorical; between word and image; between text and interpretation. From among this set of issues the present paper will touch, within the confines of a theoretical argumentation, upon the notion of application, the relationship between application and translation, (medial) translatability and untranslatability as well as the hermeneutical significance of artistic reproduction.

In the first part of the paper, relying on the wider sense of cultural translation and relating it to the experience of reception, I will discuss the hermeneutical

correlation between interpretation and translation, based on Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Wolfgang Iser's concepts. The question leading to the next phase of the argumentation is how understanding works in the case of medial translation, particularly of the translation from the domain of the verbal to that of the visual. The second part of the article offers hermeneutical possibilities of answering this question, along the recognition of consubstantiality of artistic reproduction and interpretation.

## Interpretation as Act of Translation

In his seminal work entitled *Truth and Method* Hans-Georg Gadamer dedicates a whole subchapter to the issue of application, with the title *The recovery of the fundamental hermeneutic problem* (Gadamer 2004, 305–336). He starts from the recognition that application, that is, the term *subtilitas applicandi* of traditional hermeneutics, became undeservedly marginalized in the hermeneutical process, as compared to understanding (*subtilitas intelligendi*) and interpretation (*subtilitas explicandi*). Contrary to the previous conception, Gadamer posits application not as an additional phase, but rather as the central issue of hermeneutics, and regards it as the integral part of the hermeneutical process. Application necessarily brings into discussion the act of translation. In Gadamer's definition, the notion of application means that the interpreter applies the text to his own situation. Application, that is, applying the meaning of the text to the concrete situation, is similar to the interpreter's task. The interpreter is in an intermediary and at the same time privileged situation:

But even today it is still the case that an interpreter's task is not simply to repeat what one of the partners says in the discussion he is translating, but to express what is said in the way that seems most appropriate to him, considering the real situation of the dialogue, which only he knows, since he alone knows both languages being used in the discussion. (Gadamer 2004, 307)

Thus, translating the text onto the reader's concrete situation is a constitutive moment of actual understanding, and takes place in accordance with the text's demand. Application, Gadamer writes, occurs in every act of reading, it can be found in all forms of understanding. Interpretation is, similarly, always application, thus it is always translation. This is made inevitable by being situated within tradition. This implies that Gadamer's notion of application also transmits the idea that translation always takes place in a changing situation. The historicity of transmission will inevitably result in the fact that translation will always change as compared to the previous one in accordance with this x parameter.

Thus understanding never takes place twice in the same way, the relationship to tradition cannot be the same due to the historicity of understanding.

The fact that Gadamer reconsiders and posits as of central importance an earlier ignored aspect, regarded as *ex post*, insignificant and occasional, is not far from Walter Benjamin's translation concept; Benjamin also considers translation of key importance, as being more significant than an aleatory operation, attached to the text *ex post*. Walter Benjamin writes:

Translation is properly essential to certain works: this does not mean that their translation is essential for themselves, but rather that a specific significance inherent in the original texts expresses itself in their translatability. It is clear that a translation, no matter how good, cannot have any significance for the original. Nevertheless, it stands in the closest connection with the original by virtue of the latter's translatability. (Benjamin 1997, 153)

Although in his writing *The Translator's Task* Walter Benjamin formulates a statement that radically contradicts reception theory, which can make the connection between his and Gadamer's concept questionable, still, it is worth thinking about the chiasmic symmetry that can be discovered with the two authors: while Gadamer speaks about the act of translation present in reading, Benjamin reflects on the act of reading present in translation. The act of translation present in the hermeneutical concept of application reconsidered by Gadamer as well as the critical aspect reinforced in the act of translation in Benjamin's concept turn our attention to the interdependence of reading/interpretation and translation.

The history of interpretation, the changeability of the modes of interpretation testify that the act and working of interpretation is not at all self-evident or given. In his work entitled *The Range of Interpretation* Wolfgang Iser surveys the various interpretives at the level of science theory and interdisciplinarity. He considers that what is common in these practices is that they can all be conceived as activities of translation, during which the transfer from one system, register or discourse into another takes place. Iser speaks about the liminal space between the subject matter and the act of interpretation, which makes transposition necessary and problematic at the same time: the liminal space created in/by the act of translation is "bound to contain a resistance to translation, a resistance, however, that energizes the drive to overcome it." (Iser 2000, 6)

Iser's key statement is that the register into which interpretation translates always depends on what is translated. Translation is dually coded: on the one hand, according to the "viewpoints and assumptions that provide the angle from which the subject matter is approached," and according to "the parameters into which the subject matter is to be translated for the sake of grasping," on

the other (*ibid.*). In the sense of this dual codedness translation does not repeat and thus makes the subject matter redundant but transposes it into another register while the register itself is modified. As Iser points out: “Whenever we translate something to something else, the register is nothing but the bootstraps by which we pull ourselves up toward comprehension.” (*ibid.*) According to Iser, translatability depends on what kind of register is to be translated: texts, nontextual cultural phenomena or even incommensurabilities beyond language (e.g., when God is to be translated into knowledge).

According to Iser the liminal space can be bridged, and this lies not in the explanatory but in the event-like character of interpretation. The difference between interpretation as explanation and interpretation as event lies in the fact that the explanation is valid within a certain referential framework, while the performative act creates its own rules. The possibility of bridging the liminal space is thus made possible by its own performativity: something happens in interpretation, or rather we expect something to happen in interpretation. In this sense, interpretation as an act of translation, is a determining human feature, an anthropological necessity.

## **The change of the medium of artistic expression and translatability**

Human culture is characterized by the conflict between the impossibility and necessity of translation. Or in other words, by the tension between the theory of untranslatability and the practice of translatability, about which Mihály Szegedy-Maszák writes:

Translation is the most impossible possibility. On the one hand, it separates the signifier and the signified, the sound or letter and the meaning, and this is impossible almost in the same way as to transform a painting into sculpture, pentatonic music into heptatonic one, as the structure of the signifier in the original text—the system of internal repetitions, the rhyme, the wordplay, the rhythm, the sentence structure—calls forth a meaning that vanishes together with this structure; on the other hand, translation is the indispensable and unalienable component of the mode of existence of literature, with an ever growing significance in the unifying world. (Szegedy-Maszák 2008, 16, translated by me, J. P.)

The idea of untranslatability is also present in Walter Benjamin’s term in the German original, *Aufgabe*: translation is not only a task that has to be performed, but it is at the same time also an impossible enterprise that one must sooner or later give up.

Iser also relates the questions of cultural translation to nontextual aspects of culture:

If something nontextual, open-ended, or, beyond the reach of one's stance has to be made manageable, the hermeneutic circle may no longer be adequate. Translating open-endedness into graspability, or entropy into control, is different from translating a text into understanding, or from turning understanding into its application, or from deciphering what its disguises may either hide or reveal. (Iser 2000, 8)

The paradox of (un)translatability also characterizes the discourse of medial translation. Iser reflects on the modes of transforming incongruences into congruences; the hermeneutical issues, also pertaining to general science theory, can also be applied to the particular case of medial translation.

In his volume *Aufschreibesysteme 1800–1900* Friedrich A. Kittler formulates the idea that ever since the film medium was born, the criterion of high literature has been the impossibility of turning it into the screen (Kittler 1995, 314). Kittler's statement seems to be consonant with Dezső Kosztolányi's translation theory—embedded in his organic view of language—according to which there are different degrees of transferability from one language into another, and the more developed a language, the less it can be translated. In one of his essays on translation Kosztolányi radically formulates this idea: "It is not possible to translate." (Kosztolányi 1990, 120)

In another writing of his Kosztolányi expounds on how he actually understands his statement quoted above:

If we admit the justifiedness of literary translation, then we cannot claim fidelity from the translator, as fidelity to the letter is infidelity. The material of each language is different. The sculptor carries out his task differently depending on whether he has to mould a figure from marble or from wood. Materiality imposes on him the must to change; there are always two that work on the sculpture: the sculptor and the matter itself. The translator's work is similar to this. He has to carve a sculpture from a totally different material. This needs freedom. A poem must be translated with the precision of a chartered interpreter to the same little extent as wordplay. A new one, another one must be created, which is identical with the original in spirit, in music, in form; which is false but still true. *To translate a literary text is to dance bound hand and foot.*" (Kosztolányi 1990, 575–576, translated by me, emphasis mine, J. P.)<sup>1</sup>

1 "Műfordítani annyi, mint gúzsba kötöten táncolni."

Kosztolányi's view on translation is related to the romantic tradition of creative freedom. He recognizes that fidelity to the letter is mere illusion. Due to the determining character of the materiality of language the experience of being preceded by language refers to translation to the same extent as it refers to writing itself. Language, the material of the literary work, must not be thought of as an external aspect, language is not "vesture" ["*köntös*"], but "body itself," "shell" and "kernel" together, Kosztolányi writes (1990, 167).

The impossibility of turning literature into screen as well as the impossibility of translation equally refer to the same operation of *re*-producing the original—in another medium, in another language. Béla Balázs relates the difficulties and problems of adaptation to "the inner structure of film essence." He reveals the paradox that the literary texts characterized by excessive visuality constitute the greatest challenge for adaptation. The more organic the interrelatedness of the story skeleton and the visuality of the text, the more problematic it is for the film to render it adequately. He expresses this view—which will be the basis of the semiotic approach—in a set of suggestive metaphors: the camera transilluminates the literary works as a Roentgen ray, and shows the skeleton of the plot, which is no longer literature and not yet film, but the content that is the essence of neither of the two (cf. Balázs 1984, 33).

The most frequent question of the specialist literature dealing with medial translation refers to whether medial commensurability is possible, whether it is possible to create equivalences through which the systematic replacement of verbal signifiers with visual signifiers can be carried out. How can the specifically literary be transformed, "translated" into the specifically cinematic, from one system of signifiers into the other? The question can be answered differently in the light of distinct theoretical approaches.

According to semiotics-based views, while the materiality of literature differs from that of film, at the level of the deep structure of narrative they share common grounds. Their relationship is described as code transfer, in the sense that, though words and images belong to distinct sign systems, at a certain level of abstraction they share common—narrative, perceptual, referential, symbolic—codes, which make the transformation, the comparison possible and provide solid medial links between the two media (Cohen 1979). Theories relying on the basic premise of semiotics outlined above take into account the similarities and differences of film and literature, focusing on what is common and, respectively, what is medium-specific in the two of them. Due to the differences of the two media, the task of medial translation is thus to find an *aesthetic equivalent* appropriate to literary texts.

## The hermeneutical significance of artistic reproduction

According to the assumptions of the hermeneutics of the image, we get to a deeper understanding of visual artworks relying on texts downright by suspending the principle of adequation. As the aim is not to *dissolve* the (aesthetic, historical, medial) distance that is created with the act of transposition, it is the very resistance implied in the distance that activates the intention of interpretation. The distance created in the incongruencies between the text and the image indicates the direction of interpretation, providing the necessary perspective for a productive interpretation.

The issue of the relationship between texts and images is considered by András Rényi as “the eminent problem of the hermeneutics of the image” (Rényi 1999, 66, translated by me, J. P.), as long as the translation of a text into the language of the image is not considered as a task that can be performed along well-formed preconceptions, but rather as one that always creates a new situation for both the creator and the receiver. The connections, the passages between texts and images constitute a recurrent issue in the tradition of art history, let us think of the principle of *ut pictura poesis* resounding in the present ever since the antiquity, formulating the idea of commensurability of poetry and painting; or let us think of the term *invention* in the context of painting, which in the tradition of iconology refers to finding the adequate visual equivalent of the notions or texts to be represented.

These examples taken from the history of aesthetics can be related to film, the (relatively) new branch of art. The visual “reproduction” of a literary text is in strong connection with the literary text, however, it distances the receiver from the materiality of the letter. Through the change of the medium of artistic expression the written text is simultaneously present (*in praesentia*), as constitutive part of the integrative intermedial character of film, and absent (*in absentia*), as a distant reference. The hermeneutical experience is based on the recognition of the simultaneous presence and mutual interdependence, still incommensurability of text and image. (Cinematic) interpretation is a possible rewriting of the literary text, a reconfiguration of the meanings of the literary text; a special relationship is formed in which text and image mutually overwrite and interpret each other.

The insights of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics can bring us closer to the essence of the set of questions presented above. The screen adaptation, or the translation of the *eminent* literary text, in Gadamer’s sense of the term, into the language of film, seems to be doomed to failure from the outset, due to the very mode of existence and characteristic features of the eminent text. As in the case of eminent texts, we can speak of the total equivalence of form and content, the *what* and the *how* inseparably layer upon each other: “Such a text fixes the pure speech act and therefore has an eminent relation to writing. In it language is present in such a way that its cognitive relation to the given disappears, just as does the communicative relation to the addressee.” (Gadamer 2004, 578)

Through its linguistic constitutedness the eminent text carries an infinite potential of meanings; through this inherent abundance in meanings it is capable of addressing the reader and of offering a distinct set of meanings on the occasion of each encounter with the text. The eminent text is capable of saying more than what it literally expresses, it is also capable of expressing what its letters do not utter. The eminent text is not subjected to the laws of time, as once read it becomes inalienable part of the present of reading.

Several examples may justify that it makes indeed no sense to call film to account for the compositional, poetical and rhetorical unity of literature, its unrepeatable uniqueness inseparable from its materiality. The—theatrical, cinematic, musical—reproduction of the eminent text aims at, or rather is constrained to, concretization, it bears the risk of being capable of “reproducing” only one meaning—or a limited number of meanings—, while the rest of meanings goes unrecognized; thus we necessarily have the impression that artistic “reproduction” is poorer than the “original” and we are compelled to resort to the rhetoric of gain or loss in interpretation.

However, the mode of existence of the eminent text also makes possible that its reproduction, as a possible interpretation, becomes itself an eminent text, capable of generating additional meanings, even if not in an identical manner. Gadamer restores the significance of reproduction, as what “is not a second creation re-creating the first; rather, it makes the work of art appear as itself for the first time.” (Gadamer 2004, 400) Accordingly, reproductive interpretation and philological interpretation are based on the same premise, that of translation, thus they are consubstantial, it is of no conceptual significance to make a distinction between them.

Retrieving the hermeneutical significance of reproduction is based on the fact that the artwork is essentially dependent on presentation, and it can preserve its identity even if the presentation radically transforms, distorts the artwork. The concept of reproduction is in relation with non-identical repetition, and is to be understood as such. In Gadamer’s words, “Here ‘repetition’ does not mean that something is literally repeated—i.e., can be reduced to something original. Rather, every repetition is as original as the work itself.” (Gadamer 2004, 120) Artistic reproduction, as interpretation, disposes in itself of the quality of creation, “bringing forth.”

Gadamer illuminates the essential interdependence and ontological interwovenness of the “original” and its “reproduction” through the difference between picture (*Bild*, also image) and copy (*Abbild*). While the copy (*Abbild*) fulfils its role if we can recognize the model, the represented without difficulty, the picture (*Bild*) does not direct our attention further to the represented, as representation itself is what deserves attention, “picture has an essential relation to its original.” (Gadamer 2004, 132) Presentation [*Darstellung*] essentially belongs to the presented artwork, revealing its unalienable aesthetic truth.



Thus, presentation [*Darstellung*] is not accidental to the artwork, on the contrary, it constitutes the mode of existence of the artwork and thus has to be understood in an ontological sense. In his aesthetic and hermeneutical conclusions regarding the interpretation of the concept of the play as the mode of existence of the artwork, as “transformation into structure,” being in an essential relation to self-presentation [*Selbstdarstellung*], Gadamer reveals the significance of presentation as follows:

The world that appears in the play of presentation does not stand like a copy next to the real world, but is that world in the heightened truth of its being. And certainly reproduction—e.g., performance on the stage—is not a copy beside which the original performance of the drama itself retains a separate existence. (...) Hence, in presentation, the presence of what is presented reaches its consummation. (Gadamer 2004, 132–133)

As a conclusion, by suspending the principle of equivalence, the dichotomy and hierarchy of the original and the copy, untranslatability can be turned from loss into gain in the experience of—or rather in between—arts and media; it is the non-identical that will provide space for interpreting the differences and displacements, resulting in a fruitful dialogue between the self and the other.

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## **Book Reviews**





**Judit Pioldner and Zsuzsanna Ajtony, eds.**  
***Discourses of Space.***

*Newcastle Upon Tyne:*  
*Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.*

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Over the past few decades a ‘spatial turn’ has made its ways across the humanities and social sciences, sparking renewed interest in the study of space as a constitutive part of cognitive processes and cultural, social practices. In March 2012, the Department of Humanities in Miercurea Ciuc of the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania hosted an international conference entitled “Discourses of Space”, offering researchers, scholars and scientists the possibility of analysing space and spatial relations in a variety of literary, cinematic and artistic works. This volume, containing the essays presented in the conference and also a few additional articles, dwells on this topic from several perspectives.

Consisting of three main parts, entitled *Shakespeare and the Poetics of Space*; *Space and Identity*, *Space and Inter(Mediality)*; and *Space and Culture, Cultural Geography*, respectively, the book touches upon many aspects of space (intercultural space, linguistic space, textual space, cultural geography, geographical space, cyberspace, relational spaces, spatial-temporal relations, the relation between culture and nature, inter-art relations and intermediality, spatial metaphors, etc.) and also gives an overview of space constructing specificities of the theatre, literature and film. The topics range from the relationship between literary texts and space to the medial and intermedial spatial relations involving literature, film and theatre, showing how the different artistic representations interact and intermingle with each other. Considering the variety of topics covered, I would wish to highlight only some of the points discussed in the essays, aspects not mentioned being nevertheless equally significant.

With respect to the understanding of space and spatial relations, the essays offer an overview of space interpretations of the Western tradition of philosophy (Plato, Kant, Heidegger, Foucault, etc.) pointing to the great importance they bear

on the theories of space today. Several definitions of space can be found throughout the book: space is seen as a construct, not always ontologically given but often created by discursive and corporeal practices, closely interwoven with time, characterized by duality (it can play both an integrative and a disintegrative role), heterogeneity, a medium that allows things to be positioned, creating relations that become spatial. While place and space can concur (e.g. *Sinistra District* in Ádám Bodor's novel can be considered both a place and a space: a place, since it is localisable, but also a space, being a place of transit, where the characters are in constant movement), these two concepts describe distinct phenomena. Different from place which is specific, concrete and localisable, space is expandable and constantly changing. Spaces are created and re-created as the discourse of action unfolds, resulting in additional spaces that are in close interaction with each other and also with the reader/spectator. Created by different values, ideologies, narratives, beliefs, symbols, phantasms and cultural maps, spaces are culturally embedded. They can have both a symbolic/abstract and a realistic dimension that often get superimposed, giving rise to simultaneously present spaces (such is the case with realistic spaces rendering symbolic meanings).

The space-creating techniques in the different forms of art receive considerable attention throughout the book. The space creating modalities of the narrative (by the space constructing potential of language), theatre and film and their specific characteristics (the absence of realistic illusion of the Elizabethan emblematic theatre, the creation of simultaneous spaces, of symbolic and realistic spaces in film, together with the possibility of horizontal and vertical space division) create different perspectives and various modes of interpretation. The different representations may interact with each other and result in a dialogue between the narrative and the language of film or that of the theatre.

The relation between space, identity and identification is a recurrent topic in the essays. The quest for identity often happens through travelling which stands either for the attempt of breaking free, a quest for freedom or for recapturing the deserted, the place that was left behind (the image of the man arriving in the homeland intending to recapture a well-known land expresses a colonial point of view, where the relationship between the own and the other is transformed into the otherness of the own). Travelling means a wandering to and fro, a horizontal displacement which brings about a correlational relation between the subject and the object (the observer and the observed, the covered distance and the observed road). As a spatial movement from certainty to uncertainty, travelling makes the continuous observation and reconsideration of the Self and of the Other possible. This implies an encounter with the stranger but also with the Other in us, enabling the interrelation between the Self and the Other inherent in the harbour situated at the intersection of nature and culture or in heterotopic places like the zoo, the museum, the flea-market, etc.

The continuous dislocations and displacements often result in a heterotopic spatial experience, characterized by the juxtaposition and co-existence in a single real place of various spaces, intermediary spaces, in-betweenness (also cultural in-betweenness) and placelessness. Under such circumstances, identity itself becomes non-fixable. Since identification is a continuous process, the formation of a fully developed and coherent identity becomes impossible, and so does the formation of a collective cultural identity. Instead, the in-betweenness of space as the intercultural border-space leads to the formation of border identities.

Also, the juxtaposition of several perspectives in filmic representations, the shift between different modes of representation and, at the same time, their deconstruction can result in a hybrid mode of perception, and, in consequence, in the duality of identification and reflection. This, in turn, leads to the creation of an aesthetic distance (e.g. Omer Fast's video entitled *Spielberg's List* shows how the continuous switch between two points of view (that of the insider and of the outsider) creates a delicate balance between different modes of perception). Regarding filmic representations, from the point of view of cultural geography, the question arises as to how films make transportable the historical image of a culture and if they can be evaluated aesthetically, irrespective of culture and geography and of any ideological expectation. The interaction between space as a physical, geographical entity and as a cultural and ethnic construct is addressed in the book as well. There are several studies that deal with this topic (among others the verbal representations of Britain and Britishness in G. B. Shaw's plays, the comparison of the British cultural space with the French one and the stereotype of Britishness from an ironical perspective in the works of Julian Barnes, the image of the African space from different angles, and also the cultural representation of Central Eastern Europe and the Balkans). The book also touches upon the delicate relationship between geographical space and cyberspace, characterized by the opposition of space/spacelessness, place/placelessness, private space/public space and by the presence of a cultural dimension (two women coming from different cultural backgrounds communicate in cyberspace by the cultural references they both share).

Overall, the book offers a very interesting account of space constructing techniques and space interpretation in an intertextual and intermedial context. It raises many relevant issues and though it calls for supplementary reading because of the wide range of topics, it also inspires further research regarding space and spatiality. The stills from the movies and also the illustrations facilitate the understanding and make the essays more enjoyable.







**Ștefania Maria Custură, Vilma-Irén Mihály and  
Zsuzsa Tapodi, eds. *Întâlnirea cu celălalt.  
Studii de contactologie și imagologie*  
[*Encounter with the Other. Studies in  
Contactology and Imagology*]  
Cluj-Napoca: Transylvanian Museum Society, 2013.**

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The volume has 204 pages and contains scientific articles from the domains of contactology and imagology written by doctors of philology, researchers, teachers, and PhD students from different Romanian or foreign (Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Serbian) universities. The 17 articles of the volume are grouped into three thematic chapters: Stereotypes – Representations (7), Images through Literature (6), Intercultural Transfer (4).

The volume is the outcome of the *Fourth International Conference on Imagology* held at Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania in Miercurea Ciuc, which aimed to return to “the issue of images of nations in the context of global postmodernism, which has generated a wide area of studies about representations of identity and otherness”(*Preface*).<sup>1</sup> The volume presents the topics of the conference which “focused on the concept of imagology, understood as an essential condition for ethnic and cultural equilibrium” (*Preface*) and some key concepts such as “identity,” “otherness,” and “references to the Other.” The term “contactology” covers a wide range of topics dealing with self-image, representation of the self and representation of the Other as it can be seen from the titles of the three chapters. The aim of the conference as well as of the present volume was to establish a professional dialogue in a cultural and socio-political context located in a region of linguistic diversity and cultural interference.

The publication tackles the concepts of the Other and otherness from several different perspectives such as gender, ethnicity, skin colour, social status, politics,

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1 Quotations from the Romanian article were translated by the reviewer, I. T.

religion, geography, linguistics, etc. Some of the articles even use a multi-level approach and combine the above mentioned perspectives. Obviously, some of these perspectives are impossible to be handled in isolation. For example, language and ethnicity are closely bound and, as Alexandru Gafton (15) affirms, “there is such an organic relationship between nation and language that linguists and historians state that glottogenesis is equal to ethnogenesis, that the appearance of a language also means the appearance of a nation and vice versa.” The issue of gender is discussed in several articles, and is built upon the dichotomy of male/female, patriarchal/matriarchal, men/women considered to be the most obvious by Gafton (21), who also mentions that this dichotomy, which has been prevailing from prehistoric times, is rooted in the different fields of activity associated with man and woman. Male activity is related to public domains, while female activities are linked to the private spheres (*idem*). An article which discusses the issue of gender is that of Andreea Petre, entitled *Femininul, o figură a alterității în „Pădureanca” de Ioan Slavici* [*Femininity – An Image of Alterity in the “Girl from the Forest” by Ioan Slavici*].

Ethnicity is a recurring topic throughout the volume, being treated in general (Alexandru Gafton, Béla Bíró) and in particular (Klára Papp – the Greeks, the Jews, the Hungarians, the Romanians; Dumitru Elena – the Hungarians, the Romanians). Some authors focus on the complexity of defining ethnicity (Levente Pap – the Szeklers) or on the complex nature of ethnicity, providing an ethnic collage of literary characters (Anca Andriescu Garcia – literary characters as the sum of different ethnicities: Jewish, Spanish, Italian, Maltese, etc.). Ethnic diversity often generates conflicts as in the case of tradesmen of different ethnicity – Jews, Greeks or even Armenians versus local traders (Klára Papp). In this latter case, we can also sense an interference of ethnicity and social status, sometimes the notions merchant/tradesman being understood as a synonym for Jew, Greek or Armenian. Klára Papp also shows that under the name of “traders named ‘Greeks’” we can actually find Greeks, Serbians, Macedonians, etc. (Papp, 32).

Ethnic conflicts are also presented in literature as shown by Elena Dumitru in *Aspecte ale raporturilor interetnice în povestirea „Stele ardelene” de Tamási Áron* [*Aspects of the Intercultural Relations in “Transylvanian Stars” by Áron Tamási*]. Literary analysis is thus another way to present and discuss the situation of minorities, especially the issues related to Hungarian minorities and the Szeklers after the Treaty of Trianon. This is a world of taboos characterised by a strong “instinct of preservation and defence which is consciously highlighted by the author in exaggeration in order to point out another basic aspect which can occur in any multi-ethnic society, namely mixed personal relations and marriages” (Dumitru, 136).

Another interesting topic is the origins of Szeklers, which has attracted and will continuously attract several researchers because of its debatable character.

According to Pap (60) “[t]he issue of Szekler origins is one of the great enigmas of history” even if there are a variety of theories, the oldest being the Hunnic origin, as it is shown in Pap’s article on *Originea secuilor în opera „De originibus populorum Transilvaniae” de Ion Budai Deleanu* [*The Origins of the Szeklers in “De originibus populorum Transilvaniae” by Ion Budai Deleanu*]. Regarding the Szeklers’ self-representation, the author points out that “[t]he Szeklers do not have their own country but they have their own territory, they also have their myth of origins and a history of their own. The Szeklers are somewhat more conscious than other nations from the Carpathian Basin as they have a Socratic attitude towards their own origin: they know for sure that they do not know anything for sure” (Pap, 61). The article then presents the image of the Szeklers as depicted in Budai Deleanu’s writing.

Otherness generated by skin colour is another issue discussed by several authors in the volume. Lena Dimitrakopoulou presents the Greek perception of the black and black culture in her article entitled *Reprezentări ale „alterității”: portretul rasei și al culturii afro-americane în Grecia de la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea până în anii interbelici* [*Representations of ‘Otherness’: the Portrayal of the Black and Black Culture in Greece from the Mid Nineteenth Century to the Interwar Years*], while Custură Ștefania Maria discusses the issue as represented in press publications and arts in the article *Identitate și alteritate în jurnalul lui Johann Martin Honigberger, „Treizeci și cinci de ani în Orient”* [*Identity and Otherness in the Journal of Johann Martin Honigberger*]. The two authors discuss otherness by giving examples not only of the negative vs. positive perceptions but also of direct information and impressions.

Social status is another distinctive feature, often generator of conflicts, whether real or fictional, as it is shown in the articles that discuss this issue. Social differences are present through the dichotomy of rich versus poor. This topic is dealt with in the article written by Klára Papp, entitled *Negustorii greci și evrei din comitatul Bihor în secolul al XVIII-lea, în oglinda proceselor-verbale de consemnare a unor mărturii* [*Greek and Jew Tradesmen of Bihor County in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century as Present in the Official Reports of Testimonies*] along other issues such as religious or ethnic differences. This article shows that high social status might trigger ethnic, linguistic or religious benefits as well. Due to their social status, Jew and Greek tradesmen obtained other rights as well, such as having their own churches, using their mother tongue, owning properties, having nobility titles, even their “education became compulsory” (Papp, 50).

Ideology is presented on both political and religious levels. On the political level we can find the presentation of the communist ideology, for example in the *False reprezentări naționale și etnice propagate de literatura școlară în perioada comunistă* [*False National and Ethnical Representations Widely Promoted in the School Literature during Communism*], an article written by Cosmina Cristescu

and Cristina Pipoș. The article presents two periods of the communist regime, the one marked by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej and the other by Nicolae Ceaușescu, and focuses on the idea of textbooks as “instruments of propaganda.”

The same topic is discussed in Anca Andriescu-Garcia's article *Dușmanul construit sau despre cum se transformă propaganda în istorie* [*Inventing the Enemy. When Propaganda Becomes History*]. This article, besides the analysis of Eco's novel *The Prague cemetery*, speaks about the concept of the “new man” (in Marxist and fascist vision) of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which “oscillates between these two extreme images—one of mythical origins, and one which is antagonistic to everything that preceded it, and is presumably completely new” (Andriescu-Garcia, 157). The novel analysed by Anca Andriescu-Garcia in the aforementioned article can also be read, from the perspective of “fictional politics,” namely, where ethnic, religious etc. differences are pushed to caricature, as it is shown by the author. Andriescu-Garcia identifies the “invention of the enemy” as being the key metaphor in Eco's *The Prague Cemetery*. In *Inventing the Enemy* Eco writes: “Having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth. So when there is no enemy, we have to invent one.” The article written by Susana-Monica Tapodi *Dimensiuni recente ale alterității în literaturile contemporane maghiară și română* [*Recent Dimensions of Otherness in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Literature*] also reflects on political ideologies as it presents political oppression as a force that erases ethnic, religious boundaries to the extent of unrecognizability in the novels of Ádám Bodor (*The Sinistra Zone*) and Corin Braga *Claustrofobul* [*The Claustrophobe*]. The two novels share a lot of similarities and common elements such as the main topics and issues that are presented in the novels—“dehumanizing dictatorship, the world of concentration camps, a reality that transforms into a nightmare” (Tapodi, 143)—the dark atmosphere of the narrative, and the scene of “interethnic area.” The author shows how in the two novels ethnic, religious, cultural identity or even general human issues are marked by politics, which distorts all types of identity and humanity to the extent of eliminating faith and belief and transforming them into tools of totalitarian political ideology.

The volume also discusses ideology from a religious point of view. Alexandru Gafton in his article entitled *The Other* claims that “faith, in general, and religious faith, in particular is stronger than nationality” (Gafton, 19). Religious ideologies are presented in the volume through the dichotomies of catholic versus protestant, Jews or Turks versus Christians, orthodox versus catholic or dichotomies such as sacred and profane, the pure versus the impure. Gafton also mentions the importance of religion in shaping identity and points out its disadvantages which are rooted in the fact that “believers are limited in their thoughts, behaviour and relationships with others [...]. Identity comes from

consistency and not equilibrium, whether it is dynamic or not. National identity is too general and can be diminished, while religion imposes several limitations which can make a community homogeneous and differentiate it from all other communities" (Gafton, 20).

In line with the above mentioned idea of limitation we can also mention the article written by Erika Mária Tódor, entitled *Hărțile și căile de cunoaștere în contextul alterității lingvistice* [*Maps and Ways of Knowing in the Context of Linguistic Otherness*]. The article is based on a wider research called "Barometru cultural 2010" [Cultural barometer 2010] carried out by Gallup Romania in cooperation with the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities from Cluj-Napoca. The article presents "the world within the context of linguistic diversity" (Tódor, 198). The author discusses knowing and understanding reality in Gadamerian terms, namely as "the ability to listen to the other" (*idem*). The author also highlights that the Gadamerian perspective leads to another interpretation of language acquisition, this being no longer a matter of linguistics, but an epistemological one and thus the acquisition of a language requires not only learning but also knowing each other, learning accompanied by understanding existential forms and specific culture of the Other.

Bi- and multilingualism are also discussed by Béla Bíró, who in his article *Prejudecata prejudecății* [*The Preconception of Prejudice*] claims that "[I]n order to arrive at a context of real multiculturalism and reciprocity minority languages should be given official status and legal opportunities should be created so that minority languages would be accessible for the members of the majority community, at least within the territory" (Bíró, 28).

Linguistic diversity is the topic of other two articles, namely, *Reflectarea stereotipurilor etnice în proverbe* [*Ethnic Stereotypes as Reflected in the Proverbs*] by Ioan Milică and *Imagini culturale ca o problemă în procesul traducerii* [*Cultural Images as Problems in Translation*] by Dagmar Maria Anoca. The article written by Milică uses Goffman's concept on social identity as a relation between virtual and actual identity and he states that "the relationship between projection (the virtual identity) and observation (the actual identity) can generate balance/convergence or imbalances/differences where identity and diversity reciprocally and critically constitute and delimit each other" (Mică, 186–187). The author discusses ethnicity through proverbs which can build a positive or negative image about the other.

The article written by Dagmar Maria Anoca emphasizes some of the translation problems generated from cultural diversity and brings examples which show that certain phrases or terms with positive connotation in one language (e.g. Slovak) through denotative translation into Romanian may lose their meaning or can even transform into negative, pejorative terms (Anoca, 166). Besides translation difficulties caused by cultural diversity, the author presents some examples

where gender representation in different languages (Slovak and Romanian) may also generate problems.

The main topic presented by Ramadanski's article *Interacțiuni culturale* [*Cultural Interactions*] is, on the one hand, the mystification of a text written by Mór Jókai by the young Chekhov, and, on the other hand, the triple mask of a young Russian contemporary novelist, Faina Grimberg, who presented herself as the translator of a Hungarian author but this Hungarian author turns out to be just a pseudonym for an immigrant couple who live in London (Ramadanski, 130). The author shows that Faina Grimberg has published several novels "under the names of some fictive foreign authors and she stated to be their translator [...] The translator as the mask of the author is nothing else but the reversion of the idea of plagiarism" (Ramadanski, 128).

Geography appears in some articles of the volume as a marker of otherness through the dichotomies East/West, civilized/uncivilized or primitive, etc. An interesting article is that of Valentin Trifescu who in *Inventarierea spațiului alsacian în istoriografia de artă regionalistă din prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea* [*The Inventory of the Alsatian Territory in the Historiography of Regional Art in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*] presents the disputes over a territory located at the borderline of two great powers, France and Germany. The author shows that despite territorial, linguistic and ethnic controversies important cultural elements were born which later became symbols of Alsatian identity and art, such as the bell towers (campanile).

I believe the present volume is important and relevant not only because of the wide range of identity issues discussed (religion, ethnicity, gender, social, political, etc.) but also because of the different perspectives and domains from which these issues are approached (psychology, philosophy, theology, statistics, linguistics, literature, history, etc.). Furthermore, the volume deals with issues and terminology that have often been (and will probably be) considered taboos as it presents concepts such as intolerance, stigmatising, caricature, fixed ideas, prejudice and preconceptions. As one of the authors states "Where there are two competing elements, hierarchy already appears" (Gafton, 21) but "the inability to understand the other implicitly means the inability to understand the self" (Gafton, 22).



## The International Magazine *Carmina Balcanica* and the Intercultural Dialogue

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### Introduction. Western and/vs. Eastern culture

The Southeastern European space has been analyzed through the “anthropo-geographical constants” as well as through the prism of a common historic destiny, destiny which lead to political, religious or cultural similarities for the countries in this region. This “natural citadel of a large geographical entity,” as defined by Victor Papacostea, and of a large historical entity, shall we add, has determined multiple cultural interferences.

Balkans, Balkanity, Balkanism! The last word has acquired—over time—a rather pejorative connotation. And the stereotypical thinking of a haughty/proud/arrogant Western world continues to associate it with a certain stigma. Spirituality, arts, teachings and all other forms of higher expression found here should justify rather a complimentary way in which the world of the Levant is regarded and understood. There are actually already solid arguments for this. All European civilizations have originated from the Balkanic space. The idea of Democracy was born at the foothills of Athens. The concept of a Constitution appeared for the first time in Greece. The Christianity has spread throughout Europe due to the apostolic work started in Greece as well. In an interview, the Romanian Academy member Răzvan Theodorescu noted that, although the First World War was started in Sarajevo, one should not forget that Sarajevo is the place considered at one point the *New Jerusalem*, where three civilizations, Judaic, Christian, and Muslim, were coexisting. And more examples could be added. It is forgotten that what is now seen as a land of intolerance was in the past a true model of coexistence.

Every time the West European intellectual sets out to analyze European culture, his/her analysis will almost always focus on Western European culture. Thus, for a Westerner, the cultural Europe is one and its features are definitely set by Western culture alone. Eastern Europe has the only merit of continuing

models, mental constructs, their aesthetics or tendencies beyond the borders of Western cultural spaces. All it can do is to add colour to the picture! This attitude is based on the hypothesis that the European's sensitivity, despite the diversity of the spaces he/she occupies, is different in the East and in the West and only historical asynchrony let the West significantly outrun the East. Things tend to look this way but they are not what they look like. Moreover, the wealth and originality of the Western cultural products together with the scarcity and frequent lack of originality of the Eastern cultural products seem to rightly justify this attitude.

If we can speak of a consciousness common to all Europeans, since we all claim common ancestors in thinking—Greek philosophy, Judaic Christianity and Roman civilization—we cannot speak of a sensitivity common to all Europeans without approximating and simplifying things. Sensitivities arise from deeper recesses and their strange alchemy combines elements according to rules that are by no means common to the whole of Europe. The Westerner's sensitivity is undoubtedly different from the Easterner's and the difference is a major one. If we objectively consider the crucial events in European history we can easily notice that the European's creative core was preserved for almost one thousand years in Eastern Europe, in the Byzantine Empire.

*What can the South-East bring to the Western civilization?* This is a question that is not at all rhetorical, and prof. Mircea Muthu—the one who asks it—offers also some very interesting answers. Here is one of them: “Accompanied by the cohabitation of the three cultural substrata—archaic, medieval and modern—the Southeast can help Europe relearn its own past and, last but not least, to remodel its projects for the future.[...] The phenomenon can be illustrated by the imaginary, influenced by the epic that links, in the same pulsatory rhythm, Kazantzakis to Ivo Andrić, to Ismail Kadare and to Sadoveanu etc. [...] Beyond the accent changes, the archaic and folkloric remains particularize an area of confluences, whose vitality is the result of some paradoxical alloys between the old and the modern.”

In his paper published in *Carmina Balcanica* no. 6/2011, acad. Răzvan Theodorescu also wrote about “the cultural paths,” about their dynamics, which is able to explain, in the most part of it, the multi-millenary evolution of this area, reminding of Herder's famous aphorism, according to which history is nothing else but a geography in motion. “They are or remind, R. Theodorescu continues his idea, of *the corridors* where, especially from South to North, there circulate cultural goods, ideas, innovations, soldiers, scholars as well as the ferments and the germs of the civilization which gather together Byzantium, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia, Hungary, The Romanian Countries without forgetting the Dalmatian, Italo-Pontic, Polish-Lithuanian and micro-Asiatic areas, in one and unique cultural, vivid and active organism.”



## ***Carmina Balcanica* and the Intercultural Dialogue between West & East**

Starting from the point of view expressed by the great Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga—the Orient, by including “Eastern Europe (...) takes part in building of the European civilization”—we intend through the literary journal, suggestively entitled *Carmina Balcanica* (founded in 2008),<sup>1</sup> to reveal not only the cultural identity of each country from this space but also the prominent features of the Western-Eastern dialogue. In other words, we intend to emphasize the contribution of the Balkan space (geographically extended to the South and to the East) to European culture and civilization.

Although its title is *Carmina Balcanica*, our publication is not dedicated exclusively to poetry. It is yet linked to poetry in a special way, as poetry is a fundamental and privileged act of the human spirit, capable of conferring on the artistic fact a hue of *ideality* that cancels distances and enables *encounters* beyond the particular limits of each language. According to this idea, *The Melancholy of the Unique Unicorn* meets Ioan Cucuzelos’ Byzantine melos; the charm and strangeness of the churches in Nesebar (the old Nessambria), or the subtle stony embroidery of the frames in the palace of Brâncoveanu (Mogoșoaia) find themselves in a secret dialogue with the voice in *Neagoe Basarab’s teachings*; similarly, the fabulous Byzantine silverwork, now in the Venetian shrine in San Marco, called *Pala d’oro*, resonates in the intoxicating *Song of the Sphynx...* from Enescu’s *Oedip*; Barbu’s Isarlak *dream* hides also the stained-glass window glitter of the Romanian-Greek Xenachis’s music. According to Martin Heidegger, *any art is essentially Poetry (Dichtung)*. Therefore, we think that prose, essay, architecture, painting, sculpture, graphics, music, dance have a *poetical nature (dichterisch)*. In this sense *Carmina Balcanica* is connected to *Poetry*. In this sense we have asked those who got involved in this project to reveal the existing unity in the forms of expression that can be found here, rendering thus consistent the spiritual identity of the Danubian-Balkan area. We think that this identity is really capable of such an ostentation that includes the extinguished (yet not totally) splendours of the Byzantium.

Prof. Mircea Muthu wrote a series of works in which he offered, brilliantly we could say, an identification of rhythms and trajectories of thinking and expressing that are essential for Southeastern spirituality as *forma mentis*. His works firmly contour the *concept of Balkanity* that allows the perception of those elements that impregnate the psychology, mentality and, inter-relatedly, the artistic creation in the specific forms of *Southeastern man’s sensitivity of yesterday and of today*. In this respect, *Carmina Balcanica* is also an attempt to give substance to that concept. It is another reason why we intend each text to be presented also in

1 <http://www.carminabalcanica.org/Magazine.html>

its original language, but also in a language (English) capable to open the door towards *communication/knowledge/encounter* with the Western European world.

Within a dispute of the elements, which are obviously different, there is still an essence that includes also us, the inhabitants of the Levant, with our mutual identity in the same old and harmonious original lands. The historian Nicolae Iorga explained the numerous similarities that emphasize the unity of the Balkanic peoples by the old *ethnic element of Thracian origin, previous to the Latin, Slavic, Turanian and even Hellenic expansions*.

From the point of view of *consumer society*, the West exaggerated the individual against integration, sense against intuition, science against religion, etc. This type of unilateral development became alarming and caused a series of social, ecological, moral and spiritual crises. By contrast, we could say that the Levant has a spiritual experience and traditions that differ from the Western ones. We have examples in the Greek religious tradition created poetically—therefore, a notable unity of poetry and religion—the Orthodox coordinates of Christianity, the *mystical incandescence* of Dionysius the Areopagit, the hesychast of the Atonian hermits; all these offer us the image of some defining contrasts.

Nevertheless, the Westerners (Paul Valéry, Ortega y Gasset, Martin Heidegger) have felt and talked, for some time now, about a *diminishing of culture and of spiritual freedom*, which is more and more obvious in the Western world. In *Carmina Balcanica* we also think that time has come to rethink and become aware of these real warnings.

According to the practicableness of the Western civilization, as soon as the simply aesthetical and spiritual elements install the domination of the *transparency* which is in fact the work of art, the reception is blocked, paralyzed, deafened: the *artistic object* vanishes or totally disappears.

*Carmina Balcanica* also tries a re-configuration of the image of the Levant as an eminent land of poetry. Many ancient Greek poets were known under the name of *the Thracian*. According to tradition, the cult of Muses originates in Pierida, and Orpheus—the symbol character of Thracia—as well as his master, Linus, lived somewhere near, at the foot of the mountain Haemus. Here, in the Balkans, the tragedy was born, as well as the endless tragedies of some unhappy histories. This is how, probably, beyond all differences, beyond our original Thracic, Hellenic, Latin or Slavic oldness, *Poetry*—as understood in our magazine—is our possible (re)-unifying element, above history and languages. This is another *element* that *Balkanism* could mean. Or *Balkanity*! It was stated before, in different ways: *Poetry* can be considered also a reason for the development of History in the past and, possibly, in the future. Therefore, we do not think it is a simple cultural phenomenon. The fundamental similarities through which it can reveal us to the world represent *the profound truth of a spirit* that visits us all, and, at the same time, the unique impress of an old civilization that still exists in us.

The diversity, by origin, of authors who publish—in each issue—is conjugated with a given theme regarding a country from yesterday and from today: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Turkey, and also regarding the culture of the minorities living in Romania—Albanians, Bulgarians, Germans, Hungarians, Turks, etc. Essayists, poets, literary critics, regardless of origin, will reflect upon their cultural and spiritual territory.

Although the journal is published in Romania, it is not intended specifically for the Romanian readers but rather—as it would have been expected from similar publications, to readers from all over the world: the Balkans and beyond. That is why the invited authors are encouraged to submit material in their maternal language. That is why there is an English version for all the submitted materials as we try with every essay, poem or literary analysis to surpass the geographical boundaries and make it relevant for all those interested in the Balkans, a space plagued by political conflict and yet culturally and spiritually united through diversity.

## Conclusions

The international publication *Carmina Balcanica* is intended to reflect the cultural musicality and harmony of the Balkan space. From a mosaic of literary expressions, it is hoped that the journal will slowly crystallize the cultural identity of each represented country and their place, as a unified space, on the cultural and spiritual map of Europe.

In short: what do we hope to achieve in *Carmina Balcanica*?

Two things: to deal with the characteristics of an Eastern soul that, we believe, has a particular individuality, then to stimulate the artistic creation that can adequately express this soul.

Eugen Simion, one of the most important Romanian literary critics, on the occasion of an international conference underlined that “Europe’s prosperity depends on the richness and diversity of its national cultures. [...] Culture should not be a dividing wall; it should bring Eastern, Western, Southeastern, Central, and Northern Europeans closer together.”

Therefore—through the magazine’s pages—the editors’ intention is to create an *intercultural dialogue*. And this dialogue—as Eugen Simion also emphasizes—“*should not take place only between the East and the West, but also between the East and the East.*”



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