Proceedings of the conference on

**HOMO VIATOR**

Sapientia University
Institute of Humanities, Miercurea Ciuc
24-25 April 2015

# Contents

# "Journeys are Meaningful" (Travelling, Travellers, Literary Periods, Literary Journeys)

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**Abstract.** If the changes of the "discourse networks" (Aufschreibesysteme) from 1800 to 1900 model the relations pertaining to the personality, to the cultural determinedness of technology and personality as well as to their interconnections (Kittler 1995), especially having in view the literary *mise en scène*, it applies all the more to travelling – setting out on a journey, heading towards a destination, pilgrimage and/or wandering as well as the relationship between transport technology and personality. The changes taking place in "transport" are partly of technological, partly (in close connection with the former) indicative of individual and collective claims. The diplomatic, religious, commercial and educational journeys essentially belong to the continuous processes of European centuries; however, the appearance of the railway starts a new era at least to the same extent as the car and the airplane in the twentieth century. The journeys becoming systematic and perhaps most tightly connected to pilgrimages from the Middle Ages on assured the "transfer" of ideas, attitudes and cultural materials in the widest sense; the journeys and personal encounters (of course, taking place, in part, through correspondence) of the more cultured layers mainly, are to be highly appreciated from the viewpoint of the history of mentalities and society.

**Keywords:** history of literature, history of travel, Sterne, Smollett, Radishchev, Gogol

Mann reist ja nicht, um anzukommen, sondern zu reisen.

(Goethe qtd. in Robel 1980, 18)

What is only important for me in travelling is what happened within myself under the impact of the journey experience.

(Márai 1995 [1947], 10)

It will be one step toward knowing himself.

(Sterne 1968, 11)

The world history of transport can be periodized in the same way as the personal and "universal" endeavours emerging in parallel with transport, regarding wider knowledge acquisition, the placement of the self in the widest possible

(and of course, the narrowest possible) context, and also the manifestation of the possibilities of the individual in the course of travelling. In the periodization the stages of humanizing, minimizing or in other cases interpreting distance (as an ancient ally and enemy to be defeated) are getting shape, the journey evolves from myth to novel-utopias, from exploring-adventurous stories to the demonstration of the change of mentality, from the messianistic colonialism of Europeanness to the identity crisis of the wanderers of the "inner journey" bordering on psychoanalysis, from the introduction of the new literary genre to the almost simultaneously emerging parodic-satirical novel forms, from imagological premises to the turn in cultural studies (and within, spatial turn) (Bachmann-Medick 2006, 184–328; Hillis Miller 1995). In this way, it is relatively early that the journey/travelling became the metaphor of life/death, of the journey of life and the lyrics of death.

To start my lyrical–narrative review with lesser-known texts, I quote from Propertius's elegies. First I quote a few lines from the characteristically polysemic enunciation of the topos of escape complaining about the hostile nature of distance (II/30):

> Where are you going, O, mad one? There's no escape:
> though you head for Tanais, Love will pursue you there.
> Not even if coursing the air on Pegasus's back,
> nor if the wings of Perseus moved your feet.
> Even if winds, divided, snatch you on winged sandals,
> the highways of Mercury will do you no good.[1]

The mythological dimension opens up the imaginary-poetical sphere; through the gesture of addressing the basic, archetypal situation becomes more human. The incorporation of various myths indicates a mutual referenciality of the universal and the personal, the earthly and the "divine" dimensions, which reveals the unique and particular in the individual. This is why the earthly and the aerial, transcendental journeys simultaneously indicate an existential-mythological situation expressed in the lyrical mode.

Elegy 11 of Book IV speaks about the closing of the road(s); with death the roads cease to exist, a border is drawn between the road and its absence:

> Paullus, no longer burden my grave with tears:
> the black gate opens to no one's prayer.
> When once the dead obey the law of infernal places,
> the gate remains like adamant, unmoved by pleas.[2]

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1    *http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/PropertiusBkTwo.htm.*
2    *http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/PropertiusBkFour.htm.*

The poet turning into verse his own death similarly projects his journey from thinking back to life to the act of will into larger spaces; the poetic word contextualizes distance and also the traversed (life) journey in terms of family, mythology and "history," thus making his own fate significant, but also referring to the knowledge of a wider sphere than those traversing similar life journeys. The "knowledge" accumulated during the life journey is capable of endowing the description or narration with lessons well beyond the particular case, while the personal moments prevent the poem from becoming a didactic one.

Research connects the date of age-shaping changes of travelling (Klátik 1968, 17–61) to various events: some date it to the turn of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries (Robel 1980, 11, 22), when the acts of pleasure/entertainment are taken over by cultural journeys. These certainly do not exclude entertainment – Goethe's *Italian Journey* is usually mentioned as the conclusive example of culture, cognition and aesthetic-scientific education – and raise the issue of the correlations between autobiography and travel account, "self-account" (Goethe 1984), with particular regard to the construction of the figure of the traveller. They also question whether the space of the travel account formed in the course of recollection can be rendered independent of the events, rich in newly gained knowledge, of the time that has passed between the journey and its projection into the literary work; whether the landscape is also the indicator of such "constitutedness" as that of the attentive, learning, reacting and reflecting personality, whose work will be apt for being placed in a collected edition. A rather lengthy quotation from the 1830s is very important in my line of thoughts as besides reporting on the changes of social mobility taking place in the history of travelling it also indicates the ever wider sphere of travellers, in the background of which travelling plays a significant role in the slowly–gradually emerging process of democratization. My summoned witness is Karl Immermann (1796–1840), who started his career under the spell of German Romanticism. Thus I do not refer to an English or Russian author thematizing – though poetizing (thus creating genres) in the eighteenth century – the most notable travellers, travel novels as well as travel as lifestyle, as a mentality-shaping possibility, although English and Russian literature created the genre of the "sentimental" novel still influential today, in which versions of conduct, ironically drawn episodes related to journeys as well as time dissolved in space can be found, not only as a form of existence evincing a concrete life event (the journey), but also as the allegory of life, mostly in a way that the useful information on the concrete details of the journey can be found not in these novels but in travel books becoming popular by the end of the eighteenth century. After these considerations, let's read the quotation carefully:

> Travelling penetrates into people's present state even more deeply. Otherwise, people also travelled thirty-forty years ago; for those belonging to the middle class it was exceptional, and when it took place, the reason was business matter, a concrete aim, unfolding with the special elegance of spirit or relations. Now it is different. To remain in one's home is exceptional; that everybody who disposes of the proper means, (…) moves farther than one hundred German miles every year or in not much longer intervals is regular. The minority of the travellers are merchants who travel with a concrete aim; the majority travel for the sake of travelling. (Immermann qtd. in Sautermeister 1986, 271, trans. J. P.)

If we open the prominent volumes of English literature, we can realize that there this process took place much earlier, with the French – and later with the Polish – emigrational interludes increasing the number of travellers already in the eighteenth century, whereas in the case of the Russians it is mainly (but not exclusively) the aristocrats who travel abroad (the account of such a European journey is inserted in *Anna Karenina*); inland travelling becomes the subject of *belles lettres* from the eighteenth century. Not even Pushkin is an exception; however, it is officials, inner exiles and soldiers who take part in these journeys, which in the course of time will be connected with the Caucasian military operations of tzarist imperialism (Pushkin, Lermontov). It can be brought in connection with the interest of Russian literature (and partly of Russian society) in English culture that Russian literature keeps referring to Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* even in the twentieth century (the great formalist Shklovsky (1966) reports on a real journey in the country and abroad). I would add, before looking into the English literary prose of the eighteenth century, that the means of transport get not less poeticized than the types of travellers, and we can identify as reasons for this not only the customs, the variants of the transport system making travelling possible, but also the way the accessories of travelling become national stereotypes; the stagecoach carries the literary characters in London and to the countryside not only in Dickens's and Thackeray's novels, but it [the red stagecoach] is also the main character of the Hungarian writer Gyula Krúdy's twentieth-century novels; the troika is connected to Russianness, albeit through the translations into European languages of Russian novels. The stagecoach and the troika complete the figure of the traveller. The stagecoach accelerates communication, it cooperates in correspondence. While they swallow distance, they also reveal the social status of the traveller. It is to be noted here that the train is no longer connected to imagological concepts; due to its border-crossing character it reinforces the idea that functions in line and in cooperation with the strengthening of the intensity of connections between peoples, nations, cultures and literatures, thus it does not bear the indicators of any nation (the inscriptions

on a train can cause national conflicts later on);[3] however, it maintains social stratification, the first, second and third class providing transportation to nearer and farther destinations for travellers of different rank and occupation. Besides, it is not only the distance but also the speed conquering distance that has to be paid for, as there is significant difference in price between the international express trains and the passenger trains destined for inland use; the services of the international express trains serve the needs of the elite as compared to the poorer equipment of the inland rail transport. To mention a literary example: the disguised countess of Mór Jókai's late novel entitled *Rich Poor* (*A gazdag szegények*, 1890) can successfully elope because she travels among the travellers of the third class and at the destination nobody looks for her among the poor.

Turning back to the eighteenth century, English literature attests that travelling is no longer the prerogative of the privileged; it has become a general practice. The travellers heading mainly towards the European south feel the need of belonging to the ever widening circle of travellers, that travelling adds to social prestige, it turns from a commercial or cultural journey into a tourist journey, sometimes the goal is less the spectacle, but rather the events, curiosities and specificities abroad that will serve as discussion topics. The travellers strive less to understand, to get to know and to acknowledge the 'foreigner,' the other, they rather call to account the own, the habitual on the foreign. The critical traveller bears hard the world of customs different from his way of life; the English traveller will be a recurrent, not always sympathetic figure on the continent in the eighteenth century (and even later, as Dickens's and Thackeray's novels testify).

The English self-image is changing, and this can be well illustrated with Tobias Smollett's and Laurence Sterne's (Warner 1993) travel descriptions (the latter author introduced himself relatively early and with considerable success in German and Hungarian literature; it is a revealing data as regards the reception history of *A Sentimental Journey* that almost at the same time with the posthumous English publication it was published in German; Kazinczy translated it into Hungarian and published it in 1815 [Kazinczy 2007, 377–454]). The simultaneous reading or cross-reading of these travel descriptions not only contour two/several kinds of traveller's attitudes, but testify to the struggle for a different concept of the travel novel, a literary polemics initiated by Sterne.[4] Whereas in the description of his journey to France and Italy Smollett represented the rationality of the critical Englishman, Sterne (who was profoundly influenced by Locke's sensualism) introduced the figure of the sensitive (sentimental)

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3    The conflict broke out at the beginning of the twentieth century, because of the Hungarian inscriptions on the trains of MÁV [Hungarian State Railways], and the situation became extremely tense in Croatia, leading to protests against Hungarians and actions on the part of authorities.

4    "A *Sentimental Journey* makes fun of the conventional book of travels."

traveller, who travels not only with his mind, but – to use his own phrasing – also with his heart; as a proof of this he not only contemplates with proper distance the bustle of his contemporaries in Europe, but breaking with their pedantry and self-quest, tries to rethink himself by reconciling his satirical world view with the claim of understanding, also where the situation is comical (a French aristocrat appears to recognize *Hamlet*'s Yorick in the narrator Yorick applying for a passport), inscribing his traveller-self into the episode at least to the same extent as the fervour of the aristocrat. Smollett will make use of his travel description experience in novel writing; his *Humphrey Clincker* (1771) reports journeys in letters sent during travelling in the country. However, these letters are written by different members of the family to different people, thus a heterodiegetic and hetero-perspectivical narration is created, the same event is experienced differently by various characters, and the particular episodes are bricolaged together through the various letters, while the framework is provided by the journey itself. Contrary to Smollett's journey, one of Sterne's first gestures is that of distancing. In the mid-eighteenth century it already proved possible to draw the typology of the travellers,[5] for Sterne to distinguish himself from the average traveller. It is in fact this typology that will be taken further by Thackeray in *The Book of Snobs* (191?, Chapter XXI, 82, 89) only to arrive at the ironical attitude towards his characters in *Vanity Fair* who are tourists in the German dukedom called Pumpernickel (Thackeray 1901 [1847–48]). Sterne's travel description is, on the one hand, the counterpoint of Smollett's work (cf. Fried 2014, 362), on the other hand, he blurs the boundaries between travel description and travel account, in a way that he says almost nothing about the journey itself, and after the typology of the travellers the portrayal of the sentimental traveller is carried out by the entire (uncompleted) novel. As concerns the typology, it can be noticed that the particular types do not refer to the aristocrats, Yorick rather views the journey and the travellers from below/from a side perspective, and we can also assume from the fact that he presents himself as a sentimental traveller that he strives to interfere into the process of creating the novel. And he may also aspire towards a prose that would differ from Richardson's sentimental novels. The polemics, the distancing, however, is just one layer of Sterne's travel description; in the subsequent typology the intent aiming at entwining the stories of the sentimental traveller reaching a new place (a place in general), at the same time at offering the work as one single whole: a travel description into which stories and fragments are inserted which do not move the storyline, the journey ahead. Certainly, continuous narration is less important for the traveller; the reflection on the events, the processing of the sentiments and experiences and their use for self-education are more important. All these are contrasted with the

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5    Idle Travellers, Inquisitive Travelleres, Lying Travellers, Proud Travellers, Vain Travellers, Splenetic Travellers.

travellers classified in the other type, Smelfungus and Mundungus. It is worth leafing into what is written about the two tourists, especially with respect to the fact that generic issues can be discussed through their figures. Although Sterne proves to be unworthily strict, this indirectness leaves a mark on Sterne's own poetical-narratological concepts; he mentions a conduct version in order to form an opinion about the antinomies of the travelling-traveller issue. First I quote from what we can read about Smelfungus-Smollett:

> I popp'd upon Smelfungus again at Turin, in his return home; and a sad tale of sorrowful adventures he had to tell; 'wherein he spoke of moving accidents by flood and field, and of the cannibals which each other eat—the Anthropophagi.' He had been flay'd alive, and bedevil'd, and used worse than St. Bartholomew, at every stage he had come at. (Sterne 1831, 284)

Mundungus is Samuel Sharp, author of the 1766 *Travels through France and Italy*; his name bearing references to several meanings of *mundus*; he embodies the *proud* traveller, whereas Smelfungus belongs to the *splenetic* type. They are both the opposites of the narrator of *A Sentimental Journey*, whose positive attitude to the tiny joys of life meets the pleasure of narration (of the text?). The discovery of the foreign is interpreted as a factor enriching the self; his mistakes can be harmonized with the intent of positive acceptance of the impulses arriving from the foreign with the help of his ironical world view. Contrary to this, in spite of striving to get familiarized, Smelfungus and Mundungus form a critical attitude, not disposing of means to draw a balance of experience with the hermeneutics of goodwill.

> Mundungus, with an immense fortune, made the whole tour; going from Rome to Naples—from Naples to Venice—from Venice to Vienna—to Dresden, to Berlin, without one generous connection or pleasurable anecdote to tell of; but he had travell'd straight on looking neither to his right hand or his left, lest Love or Pity should seduce him out of his road. (Sterne 1831, 284)

Sterne's reception history reaches an important Hungarian stage with Ferenc Kazinczy's translation. Sterne's language – for example, his use of French terms in descriptions for the sake of authenticity – had a liberating effect on Kazinczy, whose stylistic reform seemed justified by Sterne. On the other hand, the status in narration of social, conversational and landscape-observing moments created with the help of the "poetics" of sensitivity may have urged Kazinczy to try his wings in this direction. Thirdly, the caricature-like figures and contrary to them, the example of the traveller moving freely in the foreign world, with a free mind

and a free heart, open to the happenings around, also made their presence felt in his travel descriptions. Sterne's polyvocal prose, his satirical style prone to exaggerations are counterpointed with the odaic style, the picturesque episode drawn sometimes in an elusive, suggestive manner combined with well-planned dialogues result in the diversity of presentation; the emerging "insert" stories (especially the already mentioned fragment) serve to maintain the reader's interest (according to the intention of the literary work), but of course we can make one step further and note the emancipatory intent of the fragment. The closure of Sterne's work is the tragic irony of both his biography and literature; it interrupts a (previously mentioned) picturesque episode, it creates the impression of the lack/impossibility of completion, and seems to make accepted the justification of fragmentariness, biographically from the perspective of the author's factual death. This diversity, this series of changes in the narrative tone that might as well be called polyphony led to the success story of Sterne's urging role for the generation immediately following him. In Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, besides the more frequent mentions of Richardson, mostly placed in an ironical context, the occurrence of "Poor Yorick" cannot be ignored either, in connection with (the Schillerian-idealist) Lensky (characterized with considerable irony); and although Sterne is not mentioned by name, the perhaps first travel novel of Russian literature, triggering intervention on the part of the ruler, with a stormy reception, Alexander Radishchev's *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (1790) can thank a lot to Sterne's path breaking, to the circumspect world view of the sentimental traveller. Although Radishchev is an inland traveller, this world view is not less diverse, often panoramic, than Sterne's, also characterized by the changes in the narrative tone, and the Ode to Liberty, which can be read in one of the closing chapters as a summary of the much more open social portrayal/criticism (at Radishchev in excerpt and in verse form) fulfills a similar role as in Sterne's prose. We find out about the travel as much as at Sterne, the succession of events (which can also be conceived as case studies) seems more important than the account of the actual advancement in space. The story, that is, each and every episode creates its own couleur locale; the narrowness of the time frame, however, as the traveller has to reach Moscow by all means, makes possible only a succint narration. Otherwise, Radishchev plays with the well-known "technique" of transforming the found manuscript into a narrative, and uses essayistic prose to a better understanding of social problems occurring in the particular stories. The apparently loosely conected series of events testifies in fact (in agreement with Sterne's procedure) that whatever the story, the end cannot be arrived at; an episode starts by the traveller's arriving at the respective place and it ends when the traveller leaves; what is in-between can either be accounted for or not, is either recorded in form of a manuscript or ends without reflection on further events. The travel account does not come to an end either, the episodes of the arrival are not known. Radishchev's

work was confiscated, so it spread in manuscript form, while Sterne could be read in original and in translations.

Gogol's novel *Dead Souls* (1842) can be approached from both directions: on the one hand, from the direction of the densely depicted journeys, on the other hand, by having in view the novel-forming narrative strategies. What is certain is that when reading the first completed part of the novel, the narration of the visits placed in-between two journeys may be conspicuous, with equal focus on the genre picture, on the various types of landowners, on the narrator hiding behind the protagonist. As a consequence of the vast Russian distances, the travel novel almost becomes an account of a journey around the world, with the only restriction that it is a journey around the Russian world, placed into the adventure time – and space – of an average hero. This adventure time is the continuation of the stream of European novel tradition which Cervantes or even Sterne also belong to: along his journey from landowner to landowner the protagonist, essentially with a formed personality, meets the diversity of human nature, odd figures about whom we mostly find out as much as the protagonist perceives, as is revealed from conversations-negotiations, and as it becomes clear from the description of the environment. In the introductory lines of the novel the britzka, which represents social status and signals what kind of personalities it carries on the endless roads, enters the yard of the inn: "Through the gates of the inn in the provincial town of N. drove a rather handsome, smallish spring britzka, of the sort driven around in by bachelors: retired lieutenant colonels, staff captains, landowners possessed of some hundred peasant souls – in short, all those known as gentlemen of the middling sort" (Gogol 1997, 3). Chichikov belongs to those whose existence is insecure, who are situated far from the upper layers of society, and whose similarity with their britzka betrays little about their real entity. Besides, it is not only the britzka that signals the features of the protagonist that manifest in the course of the journey; the narrator of the novel also wishes to express something important about the journey, turning narration itself into a journey. The infinite perspectives may seem frightening; however, the reader is reassured that at a certain point the narration, the journey will come to an end: "But of all that the reader will learn gradually and in due time, if only he has patience enough to read the proffered tale, a very long one, which is to expand more widely and vastly later on, as it nears the end that crowns the matter" (Gogol 1997, 16).

The self-reflective narrator/narration is aware of entering the above mentioned adventure time essentially characterized by repetition (Chichikov is travelling, arrives at the respective landowner, negotiates with him, sometimes more easily, other times in a more difficult manner, then sets out on the journey again and continues the same pattern). However, sometimes the narrator steps out of his role, addresses the reader directly in first person: in the sixth chapter of the first

part he reflects on the fact that as opposed to the enthusiasm of the journeys at a young age, he is now travelling "ravnodusno" (indifferently). We could confront the traveller's attitude with Sterne's typology of travellers; even the sentimental traveller can be discovered behind the lines. However, it seems that by the end of the novel the story of the traveller turns into the lyrical prose of travelling, which thematizes the passionate desire of expression of lyrical prose. Chichikov's repeatedly narrated journeys, the petty micro-world of the provincial town seems to disappear behind the performance of travelling and travelling customs. Neither irony, nor self-reflection, nor the dialogue initiated with the reader can be given voice, it is rather the journey that turns into a life experience, into the tone of self-accomplishment and through this, of separation from the world.

"But which Russian doesn't like travelling? As he feels really in his waters when he flies with a breathtaking speed and sometimes cries out in extasy: 'Damn the whole world!'" (Gogol 1997, 355). As follows, leaving the customs behind, the troika gets independent of the concepts associated to it, and quickly acquires symbolic overtones, becoming the symbol of the viability of a nation and that of Russia; the myth is gradually formed, in the course of which the troika functions as a sacred object, as a polysemic symbol in a cosmos organized around and through it. "And you, Rus, are you not also like a brisk, unbeatable troika racing on? The road smokes under you, bridges rumble, everything falls back and is left behind" (Gogol 1997, 356).

Each of the short questions and exclamations use visual and auditive tools and the phonetic parallelism tells us about a speech condensed to the last ditch (e.g. Dümom dümitszja, otsztajet i osztajetszja). In the end it is not the novel, not the plot acted out by the characters that we follow, but the sound of bird-troika (i.e. ptyica troika) and the questions of speeding through the world. Nature, the Universe is witness to this speeding up and Russia, whose unsolvable and unsolved force lies in its infinite loneliness, (understood in its literal meaning) symbolized by the troika, changes into a primary force. The final few pages of the novel grow out of Chichikov's escape. The adventures of the mediocre trickster remain unfolded behind the rhapsodical finale, just like the world in which he failed and the (outside) world which might experience speeding up as a threat. The speaker of the last few paragraphs is not the self-reflecting narrator wandering about the possibilities of the narration, but a speaker from whose words the self-narrating Russian novel evolves, a novel which looks for and eventually finds its own possibilities for expression. The ending is less and more than a novel, it is an appendix of another genre of narrative. It represents the vision of the existence of a Russia which leaves behind the world of the novel, as well as those nations and states which observe its flight with more and more concern. In *Dead Souls* no chance of a different life emerges, the troika flies us towards unknown possibilities, faith, destiny and existence.

Russian land, Russian homeland, where do you fly away? Answer me. But Russia does not answer. The bells sound beautifully, they turn into wind, the torn-to-pieces air is wuthering, everything on earth remains behind and other nations stand aside with sneaking looks. (Gogol 1997, 357)

Not even the author knows the answer. The second volume of *Dead Souls* survived only in fragments, as the author was not satisfied with it (or with the answer?), so he burnt it.

Between the two World Wars more and more writers choose to write travel journals or to make reports about their journeys. International literary or scientific conferences, apparently advantageous offers made by travel agencies and demands of the newspaper readers, all urge writers to inform readers about their experiences in the daily press, and gathering the articles, publish them in volumes or print collections of essays on their journeys. Serbian writer Jovan Dučić, as well as Karel Čapek or the Slovakian Martin Kukučin, even Dezső Kosztolányi and Sándor Márai did so. Kosztolányi reported on his European journeys in his newspaper articles (Kosztolányi 1979), as well as poems, sometimes appearing to be sceptical about mass tourism, other times considering it as a characteristic symptom of the modern world, wandering about the dichotomies of knowledge or the projections of the already possessed knowledge during his trips. However, this remark sheds light upon the binary relation between adventure and travelling, on the one hand, and on the process of change in case of symbols, on the other, how apparently unimportant objects can grow into symbols in particular contexts. The spirituality of the journey, destination and experience is made possible by the materiality of accessories. "The train is the titanic toy of contemporary mankind. Travelling – what an adventure! What used to be a walking stick, a trial of one's luck, the great sea, setting off for the world, today is condensed and simplified into a slim little train ticket" (Kosztolányi 1979, trans. J. P.).

As for the closure, let there stand a slightly enigmatic quote by Márai from the *Western Patrol* which proposes to look at and experience Western democracies:

We will be travelling really slowly, looking thoroughly at everything that lies before us, we will be stopping even in places where officially there is nothing worth seeing, we will be wondering around in London and Paris. If anyone is in a hurry, presumably offended, please, travel with other company. Because if there is a shuffle for this journey, it cannot be anything else, but this tardiness, this careful looking around, this aimlessness. (Márai 1936, 10, trans. J. P.)

*Translated by Judit Pieldner*

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# Piso the Rambler: Travelling and Tracking in Cicero's Rhetoric Discourse

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**Abstract.** Travelling was not less popular in ancient times than nowadays. People would set out for distant lands with various purposes: to trade, to do business, to gain information, to further develop science, to fight a battle, to visit sacred sites, and last but not least, they travelled with political-administrative purposes. Those who returned from these voyages often shared their exotic experiences; sometimes they even put them down on paper (like Herodotus, Pausanias, Caesar, etc.). When somebody's journey or delegation had not been very successful, they could still cosmeticize the story when telling it in the City, in case there had not been any witnesses to tell otherwise. On the other hand, such cases could easily be exploited by the prosecutor in critical situations such as a trial: Cicero used this exact method in his attack against Piso.

**Keywords:** Cicero, travel, route, in Pisonem, discourse

Travelling is a motif which has not been studied the most thoroughly by classical philology. This is why a new tendency is in development which tries to compensate for this deficiency. The topic of this article is worth studying and fits well into the current trends of classical studies. Meijer's *A History of Seafaring in the Classical World* (2014) or Morley's *Trade in Classical Antiquity* (2007) are the best examples for this tendency.

Romans had a somewhat different attitude towards travelling than Greeks. They were much more earthbound than the latter nation, which is not so strange if we consider the fact that they had always been a continental nation. Being an agricultural community, at the beginning Romans would travel to distant lands only as part of some military operation, and even then, they did not feel like going back to those places, in spite of the rich souvenirs they brought back from their wanderings. When the *pater familias* made a trip to the market (where he would go most often) or when he was visiting his land in the country, he could not be gone for more than two nights. When any bad omen occurred prior to the departure, he immediately called off the journey (Ihm 2012 [1993]).

Romans never really became sea people. They travelled by sea only out of obligation and necessity. They dreaded to be cut off from their beloved homeland or to die on sea, never to be buried properly and thus wander around restlessly in the afterlife. They may not have loathed exactly the sea, but at least they hated the naval powers. We may find evidence for this in Cicero's work entitled *The Republic*, where he talks about the thoughtfulness of Romulus to have chosen an ideal scene for founding the state (*re publica*). The proximity of the sea generally has a negative impact on a state because of the social, military and political dangers that come with it, and also because of the danger of moral decadence.

Romans were perfectly satisfied by withdrawing to their peaceful countryside mansions and listening to interesting stories about the exotic East, told by those who had been in those parts of the world. Not even pilgrimages to different sacred places had an important tradition within their culture – a very characteristic tradition for the Greeks and for the Eastern cultures, though. Romans were ready to participate only in very short-distance pilgrimages. One of their somewhat "bigger" pilgrimages was called the *Feria Latina*, when they ceremoniously marched out to the *Mons Albanus*. This festivity was always held in April. Its exact time was never fixed – the date of the festivity was always set and declared by the consul who had won the elections for the given year. The event was meant to celebrate the foundation of Rome (a commemoration of the bucolic Rome) and the reinforcement of the Latin fraternity, as well. All Latin cities (those of Latium) sent delegates to this festivity and they did not arrive with empty hands – they brought lambs, cheese and other products with them.

This negative attitude towards travelling can even be found in the example of the ancient Trojan Aeneas, and of Lucumo or Tarquinius, who had been fugitive wanderers, travelling only out of necessity, their only wish being to find a permanent home where they could settle down and make an end to their roaming. Therefore, it is not accidental that Roman priests were forbidden to travel. Nevertheless, the concept of travelling was not totally unknown for the Romans.

The officially delegated diplomats set out for professional journeys, craftsmen travelled to sell their goods or to share their experiences, artists (mostly actors) and intellectuals moved from place to place, eager to find a job or to learn new things. Cicero himself took part in such professional journeys – he went to Greece to study rhetoric and philosophy (cf. Inwood and Mansfeld 1997, Guite 1962, Scribne 1920) and, as a lawyer, he often did field-work at several crime scenes, looking for evidence. On one occasion he travelled to Sicily in order to shed light on the abuse of power exercised by *propraetor* Verres. He spent more than 50 days there doing research in the cold and rough weather (cf. Havas 1989).

Peasants would go to the nearby towns or sometimes a little further to sell their goods and to buy products they could not produce themselves. Merchants took great risks in order to gain big profit: they did not baulk at the idea of long

travels on land or by sea. Rome was full of merchants as well, many of them coming from abroad. They gathered near the *Ostia* harbour to sell their goods. In the light of recent study results, the views on the commercial activities of the ancient world are quite different, and somewhat controversial. Those who have a positive view on ancient commerce presuppose that it was similar to the one in our days and see only a quantitative difference between the two (Rostovtzeff 1926, 10; 1957, 165–166; Hopkins 1978). The other camp, however, states that there is a quantitative and a qualitative difference as well between the commerce of the two different historical eras (Morley 2007).

Furthermore, official journeys often took place in the Roman Empire. Beginning with the third and second centuries, the diplomatic relationship between Rome and Greece became stronger; more and more rulers from the East came to visit Rome, while legates from Rome were sent to Greece or to the Eastern countries. At the same time, expeditions were made more and more often, e.g. between 136–133 Scipio Aemilianus travelled to Greece and to the East in order to explore the mentality and customs of the different peoples living there (Astin 1967). Explorations of distant lands were systematically organized by the Roman Empire: Maecenas himself travelled a lot between Rome and Greece (cf. Le Doze 2014). The emperor's leaving Rome was also a very important event – a fact corroborated by the coins having the inscription: *Adventus Augusti*. And, as the emperor was welcome in the provinces, he was just as much missed in Rome – the *Fortuna Redux* imprints are another numismatic evidence for this (cf. Dufraigne 1994).

Travelling by sea was especially detested by the Romans: Propertius says in his work that it is only the desire for profit that makes people so desperate as to set out on journeys across the sea and risk to die on waters (Eleg. III. 7. 1–18). He was not the only one with this negative attitude; the Romans' view on travelling by sea was somewhat similar to the way Europeans think about travelling by plane in our days: there are means of better convenience, but they are much slower, so people fall back upon the former. Cicero was not more of a sea-travelling fan either.

> A sea voyage is a serious business, and in the month of July too. We got to Delos on the sixth day from Athens. On the 6th of July we got from the Piraeus to Zoster, with a troublesome wind, which kept us there on the 7th. On the 8th we got to Ceos with a pleasant voyage. Thence to Gyaros with a violent wind, though it wasn't against us. Hence to Syros, and from that to Delos; we in both cases accomplished the passage quicker than we could have wished. You have had experience of Rhodian open vessels: they are the worst things in the world for rough water. Accordingly, my intention is not to be at all in a hurry, nor to stir from Delos unless I see "Gyrae's headlands" all clear. (Cicero, ad Atticum, V, 12. [trans. Shuckburgh 1908])

Cicero tried to use this controversy around travelling in his verbal attack against Piso. Rhetoric was, for Cicero, a means to express political attitude just as much as anything else: according to him, the issues related to speech are strongly tied to different legal, moral and social values as well (Havas 1989). He formulated and announced his social and political responsibility in *de inventione*, and this theoretical presentation was also illustrated in his actions on several occasions. In his speech supporting Quintius he shed light on the Sulla-type proscriptions, the same way he did in *a pro Roscio Amerino* in the person of Chrysogonus. Then, in his speech against Verres, Cicero also represented the interests of the equestrian order by emphasizing – among other things – that, by excluding the knights from the courts, the aristocratic state ensured that the ransacking of governors – again, of aristocratic origins – could remain unpunished. For, even if their actions got reported, the ones judging them would be aristocrats as well, which means they would most probably exonerate them. This speech of Cicero does not lack political references either: as, beside the personal scores, it takes into consideration the fact that Piso and his associates exiled the one person who had taken pains to rebuild the politically instable state by revealing the Catilinarian conspiracy, and he interpreted his unfortunate situation as having become the poor victim of the unfolding dictatorship.

Lucius Calpurnius Piso was the consul in 58 BC. His activity on the political scenery can first be noticed in 59 BC. This was the time when the tribune P. Clodius accused him (and not without any ground) of having robbed, as a praetor, the provinces under his control. This year, however, also brought some real success to Piso: he managed to marry his daughter Calpurnia to one of the consuls of that year, Caius Iulius Caesar. This fortunate marriage paid off quite early: with the support of his new son-in-law he was elected consul of the year, together with Aulius Gabinius, supported by Pompeius. Thus, practically, all of the consuls were completely under the influence of the triumvirs. This new legislative body, consisting of Clodius, Piso and Gabinius, created several laws that were favourable to Caesar and his appropriates, e.g. *leges Aeliae et Fufiae*. They re-established the *collegia*, and limited the power of the *censor*s who, from that time on, were not authorized to exclude anybody from the *senatus*. In January or February 58 BC Clodius submitted two draft laws, both of them being aimed against Cicero: the *lex de exilio Ciceronis* and the *lex de capite civis Romani*. The latter lays down that anyone who exiles or executes a Roman citizen without a given order of the *senatus*, shall be sent to exile themselves *(interdicere aqua et igni)*. At first, Piso had a good relationship with Cicero, the consul in 63 BC, he even approved of Cicero's ardent actions against the Catilinarians. However, he also maintained a good relationship with the pro-Catalinarian Cethegus. Piso did not tolerate the execution of the Catalinarians, and what is more, he even supported, together with another consul, the tribune Clodius in sending Cicero in exile.

After Cicero's exile, when the terms of his office ended, Piso became the governor of the Roman province of Macedonia. However, after plundering the province for two years, in 55 BC the *senatus* appointed another governor instead of Piso, in the person of Quintus Ancharius.

After his return, Cicero could not wait to take revenge on Piso for his contribution in Cicero's exile. On Piso's revocation debate Cicero did not spare his enemy who, after his return from Macedonia, expressed his indignation about it. As a way of 'propitiation' Cicero addressed his enemy by a vituperation known as *in Pisonem*.

Taking into consideration the history of their relationship, Cicero loathed Piso and tried everything to succeed in his attack against him. His offence aimed at several areas of Piso's life, bringing up problems regarding his personal life, ridiculing his origins and his world-view. Beside all these means of pillory, he thought it important to show the judges Piso's travelling habits. As we have already mentioned before, after an unfortunate governing period in Macedonia, Piso got revoked from the province. His return, however, cannot be considered a successful one at all, since he could not come back triumphantly. In relation to Piso's disgraceful return Cicero does not forget to point out that he came back from Macedonia without any glorious deeds which could have earned him the right to a triumph, and that such a thing had rarely happened before in the case of this Roman province (this statement might be a little bit exaggerated). Piso's return raises suspicion even from the beginning, says Cicero: his departure took place in wintertime when sailing is quite dangerous due to the extreme weather conditions. As we have mentioned before, Cicero was not very fond of travelling by sea. One might imagine how wicked a man must be, or in how big a trouble he must be, if he does not have any other choice but to embark on a ship in wintertime. According to Cicero, such a decision can only be made by a rascal:

> …and then, in order that there should be something which might be recorded and engraved on the pedestal of his trophies, when, on his departure from his province, he arrived at Dyrrachium, he was besieged by those very soldiers whom he told Torquatus just now, in answer to his questions, had been disbanded by him out of kindness. And when he had assured them with an oath that he would pay them the next day all that was due to them, he hid himself at home; and then on a very stormy night, in slippers and in the garb of a slave, he embarked on board a ship, and avoided Brundusium, and sailed towards the furthest part of the coast of the Adriatic Sea; while, in the meantime, the soldiers at Dyrrachium began to besiege the house in which they thought that he was, and as they thought that he was hiding himself there, they began to set fire to it. And the people of Dyrrachium, being alarmed at that proceeding, told them that their "Imperator" had fled away by night in his slippers. Then the troops displace, and throw down,

and deface, and destroy a statue of his, an excellent likeness of him, which he had caused to be erected in the most frequented place, that the recollection of so delightful a man might not perish; and in this way they expended on his likeness and on his effigy the hatred which they had hoped to wreak on himself. (Pis. 92–93 [trans. Yonge 1891])

It is not enough that he departed in wintertime, but he also chose to embark in a small port instead of a big and busy one, which suggests that he is not an honourable man. It is the same situation as nowadays when criminals choose the smaller and less frequently visited airports, where they have a bigger chance to get away unnoticed, instead of big airports with higher security control. In other words, Piso had to escape like a criminal, for he had been governing the province so dishonestly that its citizens banished him.

After his arrival to Italy, he continued to travel shamefully on different quirky roads till he reached Rome. As we know quite well, honest people prefer the direct roads, as those are the safest ones and they offer the shortest way between two endpoints. On the other hand, guilty people such as Piso, need to take the risk and look for the more dangerous, less taken roads which offer them a hiding place. Then, so as to emphasize the lugubriosity of Piso's return, Cicero compares it with a triumphant return, that of his own:

But since we have begun to institute a comparison between our fortunes we will say no more of the return of Gabinius, whom, though he has cut the ground from under his own feet, I still wish to see to admire the impudence of the man. Let us, if you please, compare your return with mine. Mine was such that the whole way from Brundusium to Rome I was beholding one unbroken line of the inhabitants of all Italy. For there was no district nor municipal town, nor prefecture, nor colony, from which a deputation was not sent by the public authority to congratulate me. Why should I speak of my arrival in the different towns? why of the crowds of men who thronged out to meet me? why of the way in which the fathers of families with their wives and children gathered together to greet me? why of those days which were celebrated by every one on my arrival and return, as if they had been solemn festival days of the immortal gods?

That one day was to me like an immortality, on which I returned to my country, and saw the senate which had come forth to meet me, and the whole Roman people; while Rome itself, torn, if I may so say, from its foundations, seemed to come forward to embrace her saviour. Rome, which received me in such a manner that not only all men and all women of all classes, and ages, and orders of society, of every fortune and every rank, but that even the walls and houses of the city and temples appeared to be exulting. And on the

succeeding days, the pontiffs, the consuls, the conscript fathers, placed me in that very house from which you had driven me, which you had pillaged, and which you had burnt and voted that my house was to be built up for me again at the public expense, an honour which they had never paid to any one before. Now you know the circumstances of my return. Now compare yours with it, since, having lost your army, you have brought nothing safe back with you except that pristine countenance and impudence of yours. And who is there who knows where you first came to with those laurelled lictors of yours? What meanders, what turnings and windings did you thread, while seeking for the most solitary possible places? What municipal town saw you? What friend invited you? What entertainer beheld you? Did you not make night take the place of day? solitude of society? a cookshop of the town? so that you did not appear to be returning from Macedonia as a noble commander, but to be being brought back as a disgraced corpse? and even Rome itself was polluted by your arrival.

[…] and in this manner he, the Macedonian "Imperator," returning home from his mighty and from his important province, after three years government, entered the city in such a guise that no obscure peddler ever returned home in a more solitary condition […]. (Pis. 51–54. [trans. Yonge 1891])

Cicero also points out that after his arrival in the city, Piso was still looking for the least frequented city gate instead of the main gate. Piso tries in vain to reject this accusation by saying that, in fact, he entered the city through the porta Caelimontana, which is not an obscure entrance of the city, for Cicero is able to manage the awkward situations very artfully:

When I said that he had entered the city by the Caelimontane gate, that ever ready man wanted to lay me a wager that he had entered by the Esquiline gate; as if I was bound to know, or as if any one of you had heard, or as if it had anything on earth to do with the matter, by what gate you had entered, as long as it was not by the triumphal one; for that is the gate which had previously always been open for the Macedonian proconsuls. You are the first person ever discovered who, having been invested with consular authority there, did not triumph on your return from Macedonia. (Pis. 55. [trans. Yonge 1891])

The motif of the journey and facts of travelling appear in numerous ways in European literature, but its application in such a witty way shows Cicero's excellent rhetoric skills and techniques. He employs the unfortunate story of Piso's journey to question the trustworthiness of his enemy and finally to defeat him. However, the use of such attacking means is not so frequent in Cicero's oeuvre.

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# The Pre-Raphaelite Journey into the Middle Ages
## *A Quest for Spiritual Experience*

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**Abstract.** The Pre-Raphaelite artists and poets rejected contemporary conventional style in art, and did not concern themselves with the representation of contemporary life either. They viewed the surrounding social life as sordid, and reached back to the Middle Ages both for technique and subject matter. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and later William Morris found inspiration in late medieval art and literature. They took their subjects from history, legend, religion or poetry, focusing on moral or psychological issues, and expressed fascination for beauty as a value of spiritual nature. This paper examines three of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's medieval fantasy pictures (*The Tune of Seven Towers*, *The Blue Closet* and *A Christmas Carol*), which prompt a meditative and imaginative response through their enigmatic references, and thus attest the mysterious feature of Pre-Raphaelite medieval imagery. The paper discusses their enigmatic nature in the light of William Morris's early dream poems *The Tune of Seven Towers* and *The Blue Closet*, written on the relevant Rossetti pictures. A parallel reading of poem and picture evidences how Pre-Raphaelite medievalism in painting can invite the onlooker for an inner journey through exploring an imagined referential background.

**Keywords:** cult of the medieval, fantasy picture, mysterious quality

## Introduction

Everybody knows the experience of being immersed in a work of art, and how such an experience results in a feeling of spiritual enlargement, i.e. in an experience of understanding some important meaning not only intellectually, but with one's whole self involved. The term "spiritual experience" in this paper refers to non-religious experience, something similar to what readers experience when projecting their minds into the world of a novel, relating to characters and scenes in a way that they gain new insights into truths. Spiritual experience is examined here as the artist striving to discover truths through artistic creation

and show life as meaningful. The Pre-Raphaelite poets and artists[1] often chose medieval subjects and settings as inspiration to contemplate life's values, and also to mediate them in their works.

## Medievalism and the Pre-Raphaelites

In mid-19th century, the Pre-Raphaelite enthusiasm for the Middle Ages was closely related to a general cult of the medieval in contemporary culture both in England and on the Continent. A reaction against industrialism, architecture from the late 18th century had been dominated by Gothic Revival style, whose most famous project was the Palace of Westminster (1840–70), designed by Augustus Pugin. In his theoretical works Pugin claims that medieval architecture reflects and transmits a moral force, the principles of Christianity, as the very title of his treatise shows: *Contrasts: or A Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages and Similar Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste* (1836).

Architectural Gothic Revival inspired medieval themes in art, and when the interior design of the Palace of Westminster had to be decided, it was suggested that the artists rely on Malory as a source for national subjects. For a building of political importance, this represented national identity, as well as historical and political legitimacy. As his three-volume treatise on Venetian art and architecture testifies, *The Stones of Venice,* first published from 1851 to 1853, the art critic John Ruskin, a friend of the Pre-Raphaelites, was an ardent supporter of the Gothic Revival in architecture. He admired the individuality of medieval craftsmanship, as opposed to the mass production of his industrialized age. The cult of the medieval pervaded everyday life in 19th century England to an extent that there was a trend of collecting medieval art objects, so overwhelming that old illuminated manuscripts were dismembered, their miniatures removed and sold individually – not even Ruskin left his collection manuscripts intact. (Fliegal 2002)

In art and poetry, a similar interest for the medieval was a romantic quest for the ideal, the lost virtues of chivalry, such as friendship, chastity, sacrifice, courtesy, and honour. The first decades of the 19th century saw the popularity of the novels of Walter Scott, and the poetry of Keats, Shelley and Tennyson, who also drew on medieval subjects, and their works represented an ideal for

1 The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was a group of seven artists and critics between 1848 and 1853: John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti, Thomas Woolner, Frederick George Stephens and James Collinson. Their major common artistic principle was the return to the style, technique and subject matter of late medieval and early Renaissance art as a source of inspiration. From the late 1850s Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris formed the second generation of Pre-Raphaelitism.

the Pre-Raphaelites. When in 1857 the Moxon illustrated edition of Tennyson's *Poems* was published, it included 30 woodcut illustrations by the three leading Pre-Raphaelite artists – Dante Gabriel Rossetti contributed 4, John Everett Millais 18, and Holman Hunt 7 – besides the 24 illustrations by four other Victorian artists. Other notable pictures on medieval subjects painted by Pre-Raphaelite artists in the late 1840s and early 1850s were John Everett Millais: *A Dream of the Past – Sir Isumbras at the Ford*, inspired by a short, metrical Middle English romance, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *The Wedding of St George and Princess Sabra*, based on the medieval legend of St George, and Holman Hunt: *Rienzi Vowing to Obtain Justice for the Death of his Young Brother Slain in a Skirmish between the Colonna and the Orsini faction,* referring to the same story of a political figure in 14th century Italy as the libretto of Wagner's early opera. In 1857, Rossetti offered to paint the ten bays of the Union Society Debating Hall in Oxford with designs from subjects in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. In this "Jovial Campaign," (McGann, 2) he painted the murals with his new friends, William Morris and Edward-Burne Jones, whom he met the previous year, and they together formed the second generation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

The Pre-Raphaelite fascination with the medieval might have been more than what it is usually considered, i.e. idealization of a past culture as a form of dissent, rejection of the industrialized contemporary world, which they considered dirty, and dominated by material interests, a reason why they hardly ever painted contemporary subjects. It was certainly related with their desire to paint pictures that had reference beyond themselves, to stories from literature or the past. However, the Pre-Raphaelite interest in the medieval was possibly also due to the rich symbolism of medieval culture. Symbolism of numbers, colours, shapes, animals and flowers, etc., in heraldry and religion, permeated everyday life in the medieval age, and was also present in frescoes, manuscript books and paintings, thus providing a treasury for the Pre-Raphaelite artists in their endeavours to visualize subjective experience and suggest its inscrutability at the same time. Medieval symbols carried a certain element of mysteriousness to the 19th century, both because of the time gap, i.e. some of the intellectual background to interpret them had been lost, and because many symbols were polysemic, i.e. had more than one or two meanings, and sometimes had contradictory meanings, so their interpretation was context-dependent and free. The Pre-Raphaelite artists chose to view the human world through the lens of mysterious medieval symbolism, as it suggested more than could be revealed by the modern viewer accustomed to lifelike representation of reality in landscape painting, portraiture and still studies, or to representation of stories and characters from the Bible.

# Fantasy pictures – Rossetti's watercolours of 1857

Most Pre-Raphaelite paintings had recognizable subjects, from Arthurian legends, Shakespeare, and Dante, but the following three watercolours of 1857 by Rossetti are known as fantasy pictures with no referential background: *The Tune of Seven Towers, A Christmas Carol,* and *The Blue Closet.* As to their subject, the most easily recognizable common features of these fantasy pictures are the presence of enigmatic characters in situations suggesting a narrative background which, however, remains unidentifiable, of characters depicted in the visual context of decorative objects carrying symbolic meanings. In these pictures the artist seeks to evoke a sensation induced by the music that the characters are playing, however, without the intense sensuality of Rossetti's art in the 1860s and 1870s, when many of his pictures show female beauty with a musical instrument. As to their composition, these small watercolours were painted in the style of medieval frescoes, or perhaps more importantly, in the style of manuscript illuminations with warm and rich colours, using flattened forms, where the elements are crammed into narrow spaces with no shadows, so the tight arrangement of the compositional elements creates an almost claustrophobic image (Faxon 1992, 59). The three watercolours can be seen as the artist's attempts to create a kind of art where the message is communicated through formal qualities rather than through a narrative or didactic content.

Although its narrative background is unclear, *The Tune of Seven Towers* has a more or less identifiable subject. Its title refers to a fortress (Yedikule Fortress) in Istanbul built in 1458, with dungeons for prisoners. Its subject, a doomed love affair, is decipherable through symbolic elements in the picture: there is a pennon on a lance, on the left, with the images of the seven towers; the lance is stuck in a bucket, and cuts diagonally across the entire picture, which is thus half crossed; there is a boy in the window placing a bough of holly, a symbol of marriage, on the lady's bed, which contrasts the sadness on the faces of all the three central characters, who have no eye-contact; the woman behind the seated lady, in a servile posture, obviously has some fatal illness, as suggested by the skin of her face; the knight is resting his arms in deep thought on the handle of his sword stuck in the floor, while his built looks rather strong in contrast to the poor thin lady playing the zither, whose haggard body and frail fingers also suggest imminence of death. The composition bears some resemblance to Renaissance Ecce Homo paintings, like Andrea Solari's *Ecce Homo* or Titian's *Ecce Homo* portraits. These images are cut diagonally by the reed "they smote him [Christ] on the head with," as written in Mark 15, 19 (King James Bible), suggesting that Christ is destined to die, and show Christ with an averted gaze, looking away from the centre, which conveys his sorrow over the doomed fate of humanity for its rejecting salvation. The averted gaze of Christ is similar to how Rossetti represents the woeful melancholy of his

characters in the three fantasy pictures. The onlooker familiar with the artist's biography is in an easier position to recognize the theme of *The Tune of Seven Towers,* since the model of the lady, Lizzie Siddal, Rossetti's wife later on, was a laudanum addict, who died two years after their marriage, in 1862.

*A Christmas Carol* shows a young woman, also modelled by Siddal, dressed in red and seated in the centre. While playing a clavichord, she is having her hair combed by two damzels standing in symmetrical arrangement, just like the two holly trees in barrels striped red and black, to the left and right. The clavichord in the centre is decorated with some sprigs of green leaves as well as with scenes of the Annunciation and Nativity. Together with the colour arrangement of black and gold tapestry behind the central figure, which then forms a carpet beneath her feet, the composition suggests harmony. The characters' delicate melancholy gazes reflect their self-absorbed delight in their activity and the Christmas music played by the young woman.

*A Christmas Carol* inspired the first ten lines of Charles Swinburne' poem of the same title (Marillier 1899, 83), and William Morris, the first owner of the two other watercolours, wrote a poem of the same name both to *The Tune of Seven Towers* and to *The Blue Closet*. Rossetti, however, said that Morris's poems were "the results of the pictures but do not tally to any purpose with them, though beautiful in themselves" (Rossetti, William 1889, 44). Obviously, William Morris focused on the effect of the macabre in the painting, and composed his song, *The Tune of Seven Towers*, with a similar ambience: fair Yoland sends her lover, Oliver to the Tune of Seven Towers, allegedly to fetch her clothes, in fact, her purpose is to cause his death.

What do these watercolours have to do with spiritual experience? Before examining *The Blue Closet,* it might prove worthwhile to consider Rossetti's artistic manifesto as defined in his early prose tale *Hand and Soul*. Written in 1849 and published in the first issue of *The Germ*, the monthly journal of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the tale features a young Italian artist Chiaro, who is searching for true art. First he finds it in religious devotion, and then in beauty, until finally he has a vision of a beautiful woman, who says to him, "I am an image, Chiaro, of thine own soul within thee. See me and know me as I am" (Rossetti 2003, 314), and later she adds, "Chiaro, servant of God, take now thine Art unto thee, and paint me thus as I am..." (316). At this moment, as if in an epiphany, he understands the purpose of art, which is to represent the artist's soul through expression of beauty. That partly explains why almost all of Rossetti's paintings feature beautiful women. The prime significance of Chiaro's experience for us, interested in traces of spiritual experience in Pre-Raphaelite art, is *how* his insight into the true purpose of art happens to him.

Chiaro's experience seems very much to correspond to the 'process definition' of spiritual experience used in mental health counselling. Author of books on

counselling psychology Elfie Hinterkopf proposes the definition of spiritual experience as an event of the following three phases:

– First there appears "a subtle, bodily feeling with vague meanings" which can be located in the body,

– Then this bodily feeling with vague meanings "brings new, clearer meanings", i.e. the client may receive a new, explicit meaning in an act of epiphany, which may include transpersonal experiences,

– Finally, "a spiritual experience involves a transcendent growth process."

Exactly the same happens to Chiaro, who is sitting in intense contemplation of his art, and experiences bodily sensations:

– "…the fever encroached slowly on his veins, till he could sit no longer and would have risen; but suddenly he found awe within him, and held his head bowed, without stirring. The warmth of the air was not shaken; but there seemed a pulse in the light, and a living freshness, like rain. The silence was a painful music, that made the blood ache in his temples" (314).

– Chiaro has a transpersonal experience, accompanied with strong bodily sensations, when his soul appears to him in a vision as a beautiful woman. She tells him that she is an image of his own soul, and he has a feeling of oneness with the vision, "as he looked, Chiaro's spirit appeared abashed of its own intimate presence; and his lips shook with the thrill of tears" (314). The woman says to him: "seek thine own conscience (not thy mind's conscience, but thine heart's), and all shall approve and suffice" (314). Later on she instructs Chiaro, "…take now thine Art unto thee, and paint me thus, as I am, to know me […] Do this; so shall thy soul stand before thee always, and perplex thee no more" (316).

– Chiaro manages to move beyond his former view of art, and the narrator makes clear the effect of his growth process, as he describes how Chiaro spent the rest of the day working with intense introspection: "And Chiaro did as she bade him. While he worked, his face grew solemn with knowledge" (316). After his work was done, he felt "like one just come out of a dusk, hollow country, bewildered with echoes, where he had lost himself" (316), which means that he learnt to work with the same all-consuming concentration. All this is a description of how intense focusing results in a spiritual experience producing a transcendent growth process.

The comparison between a sensation of being immersed in the process of artistic creation and being "lost" makes one wonder if such a peculiar state of mind, necessary, as Rossetti states, for producing meaningful art, can be attained by conscious effort. As all aspects of the human mind are mediated by the brain, there has been a growing interest in neuroscience between the connection of spiritual experience and the working of the brain, which is testified by the researches of Fenwick (2004), Newberg (2010),Wildman (2011) and a recently published volume of studies on this subject edited by Walach**,** Schmidt and

Wayne (2011). In his definition of intense experiences Wildman underlines the neural aspect of the experience:

> Intense experiences involve strong and broad neural activation, corresponding to existential potency and wide awareness, involving both strength of feeling and interconnectedness of ideas, memories, and emotions in such a way as to engage a person with ultimate existential and spiritual concerns and leverage significant personal change and social effects. (Wildman 2011, 104)

Newberg, who researches religious experience, relies on computed tomography images to show how the human brain is affected by concentration. The frontal lobes of the brain are involved in focusing attention and the parietal lobes are responsible for the sense of orientation in space and time. The various parts of the brain are, however, interconnected, so a high degree of concentration blocks sensory and cognitive input in parietal lobes, which results in a decreased sense of space and time (Newberg 2010). This seems to explain why intense introspection or immersion in a subject creates a feeling of being "lost," as described by the narrator of *Hand and Soul*. Rossetti's artistic manifesto drew on the artist's intense introspective concentration that would enable him to paint his own soul. Consequently, the student of Rossetti's art is intrigued by the question whether the artist's intense introspective concentration is reflected in the composition in any way. Is it possible to examine Dante Gabriel Rossetti's third watercolour of 1857, *The Blue Closet*, from this perspective? What are the benefits of this approach?

## The artist's intense introspection reflected in the composition of *The Blue Closet*

As *The Blue Closet* does not refer to anything proper beyond what it represents, yet suggests a lot more, the theme of the picture remains enigmatic. It invites interpretation through contemplation or intense focusing, but will remain elusive enough not to allow its meaning to be specified. Four ladies are depicted in symmetrical arrangement of shapes and colours, with two playing the clavichord, and two standing against a blue tiled wall, singing from musical notes. In a letter, Rossetti referred to the subject of this picture simply as "some people playing music" (Hill 1897, 201). Rossetti's contemporary and friend Frederick George Stephens interpreted the theme of *The Blue Closet* in terms of synaesthesia, as association of colour with music, and supported his idea by linking certain colours in the picture with the visualized musical instruments. To Stephens, the

scarlet and green evoke the unheard sound of the bell, and the softer crimson, purple and white correspond with the notes of the lute and the clavichord, while the blue on the walls and floor accord with the flute-like voices of the girls (1894, 42). Associations between colour and music, based on the shared emotions that they evoke, have fascinated humans since the ancient Greeks, and there have even been attempts at artistic syntheses of colour and music grounded in the correspondences between them, e.g. the opera *The Bluebeard Castle* by Béla Bartók. Whereas it is generally believed that colour and music can independently carry emotional valence, though most often subjective, it is rarely individual colours and sounds that trigger a psychic response, but their combination in a context. In Rossetti's picture the arrangement of colours and instruments is indeed suggestive of their linkage, as Stephens pointed out. Seen against the backdrop of the artist's cult of the medieval, however, the picture offers a broader perspective of interpretation.

The compositions of two of Rossetti's 1857 watercolours, *A Christmas Carol* and *The Blue Closet*, were clearly inspired by medieval visual arts, such as manuscript psalters with ornamental initials of musicians, or manuscript song books like the Portuguese *Cantigas de Santa Maria,* which include detailed miniatures besides illuminated initials depicting musicians. The influence of such miniatures is recognizable in the composition and technique of Rossetti's late 1850s watercolours (Braesel 2004, 41–42). Another obvious source of inspiration is Italian altarpieces with musical angels; e.g. Bernardo Daddi's *Four Musical Angels* has a similar symmetrical arrangement of figures. The Pre-Raphaelite artists regarded painting and poetry as sister arts, and were masters of both, but they did not emphasize a similar sister art link between music and painting, so there must be a message different from this linkage in the two Rossetti watercolours.

In *The Blue Closet* the scene is placed in an enclosed space with almost no depth, thus the focus is encompassed on the four figures and the surrounding symbolic objects close to them. The two pairs of women are arranged symmetrically so as to complement each other in colours, figures and actions. The two maidens singing from musical notes behind the instrumentalists form a mirror-like image due to their head positions and gazes. The two instrumentalists, standing facing each other, are playing with their right hands a double-keyed clavichord placed between them, which suggests a mirror-like image, also underscored by the crossed legs of their instrument. The mirror image of the women is, however, modified by a pair of vertically placed but different instruments: one of the women pulls the string of little bells, while the other woman pinches the strings of a harp next to the bells. The sleeves of the women's clothes are of the same design but of different colours, and the colour of the green sleeves on the left is repeated in the garment of the woman singing on the right. The oriental style headwear of the women on the left evoke the East, whereas the two other figures on the right are

wearing a crown and a horned head-dress, typical of the West. The blue tiles of the background wall are repeated on the floor, suggesting continuity and integrity. This compositional complementation of symmetrical grouping, echoed poses, colours and complementary clothing styles suggests oneness and equilibrium, the prime quality of polyphonic music, which was invented in the Middle Ages. Polyphonic style means the harmonious cooperation of individual voices with none subordinated to any other, simultaneous lines of independent melody. The spiritual experience that the painting communicates though its composition is a sensation of oneness with music by singing and playing it, the experience of what it is like being *within* music.

The sensation of oneness seems to be supported by the complementary symbols in the picture: the sprigs of holly at the top of the bells and the harp, complemented by an orange lily sprung up from the floor, evoke Christmas and fertility. The blue emblem at the top of the bells looks like a western coat of arms, whereas the emblem at the bottom of the harp shows a crescent and star in a blue field, a symbol of the East also in medieval art. As an example, the coat of arm of Balthazar, one of the three Magi who visited Jesus at his birth, who is known in legend to have been King of Ethiopia, includes a crescent and star in a 1555 manuscript armorial by Virgilius Solis. The star and the moon at the bottom of the harp in Rossetti's picture are counterbalanced by emblems of the sun in a yellow field at the top of the harp and on the clavichord on the left. East and West, the Moon and the Sun together suggest the universe, the oneness of the world, whereas the bells are symbolic of time, a major dimension of the world. There still remain, however, some elements in the picture, whose identity and symbolic sense remain obscure. Is the wheel on the left a part of the instrument or a painted pattern? What is the emblem above the wheel? What birds and other animals are painted on the right hand side of the clavichord? There seems to be a pelican among those shapes, a medieval Christian symbol of protection and sacrifice, echoing the Pelican Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I by Nicholas Hilliard. The uncertainty of some of the symbolic objects allows the picture to remain a visual image of delicate mysteriousness.

Mysteriousness is a quality that fascinated romantic artists and poets, and Rossetti's first illustration was made to a poem whose main effect rests on the mystical link of interference between supernatural events and earthly actions. The 1855 edition of William Allingham's book of poems, *Day and Night Songs and The Music Master*, includes Rossetti's illustration for *The Maids of Elfen Mere* (Allingham 1860, 202–204). The poem is a ballad telling about the apparition of three maids, who always come at night, wearing the same white clothes, and sing songs while spinning until eleven o'clock, when they disappear. What links this illustration of 1855 with Rossetti's watercolour *The Blue Closet*? The compositional arrangement and concept is somewhat similar. The maids of Elfen

Mere share the same face, figure and clothes, their averted gazes are directed into some distant space beyond the spinning room and the time in the village. They are in a timeless, trance-like state, looking half-conscious of their present, being absorbed in the shared activity of spinning and singing. The characters form a semi-circle, and the harmony of their communion is conveyed through their identical faces, figures, clothing and posture.

Introspective concentration is suggested in the composition of *The Blue Closet* through the symmetrical and complementary arrangement of elements, figures, objects, colours and emblems, but the main message communicated by the painting, oneness with music, is visualized also in the facial expression of the four female figures. The women singing while holding sheets of music gaze outward, away from the centre, the woman on the left gazes downward, but not on her instrument, and the woman on the right is listening to the soft sounds of her harp with her eyes half closed. The gazes of the four women reflect their self-absorbed presence, as each of them focuses on her part in the music, and at the same time participates in it in communion with the others. The lack of eye-contact between them shifts the emphasis from their physical community of making music to their spiritual unity in the melody, inaudible to the onlooker, which they are performing. One is left wondering what kind of music the women are playing; the holly and the lily hint at Christmas, but rather than the joy associated with Christmas, the emotion of awe is visualized in the image.

## Between Death and Heaven – the interpretation of Rossetti's picture by William Morris in *The Blue Closet* (1857)

The mysterious quality of Rossetti's image allowed William Morris to interpret the painted scene in accord with his own sensation, received while focusing on the characters in the picture, which explains why Rossetti called the poem "stunning" (Doughty 1960, 210). To Morris, the averted gazes of the women in the picture communicated a melancholy mood, a sensation of anticipating with fear and hope, and his interpretation in the poem *The Blue Closet* was obviously triggered by this imagined sadness of the characters. The poem with its fairytale-like story is aimed at an insight into the four women's psyche: they are in a state between death and afterlife, waiting for the return of Lord Arthur, the lover of Lady Louise, and are only allowed to sing once a year at Christmas. The characters singing by the wall in the Rossetti picture are identified by Morris as the *Damozels*, whereas the two other women playing the clavichord are Lady Alice and Lady Louise. All the four are singing praise to the Lord, "Laudate pueri," i.e. Psalm 113. There

are two more speakers, the narrator and Lord Arthur, and there is also one silent character, an evil mermaid, who is not named but simply referred to as 'she'. This mysterious creature, probably a character inspired by the tales of the Brothers Grimm or Benjamin Thorpe's *Yuletide Stories*, keeps Arthur's tears in a casket, so he cannot weep for his Queen. Lady Louis remembers how in the past Lord Arthur came to this tower, knelt down, and sprinkled snow over her head. Lord Arthur complains that he is controlled by a 'she,' and cannot weep for Louise, his eyes have become grey and small, he himself has grown old and feeble. Lady Louise wonders whether Arthur is still alive, and prays to God to let him come to her, as it does not matter to her if his appearance has changed. Arthur arrives, with his eyes blind though blue as in the happy time, bringing the key to Heaven, and invites the women to cross with him the bridge leading to the golden land.

This narrative structure of current situation, preceding events, action and solution is wrapped in an intricate ballad-like texture of varying communicative forms. This is the means by which the poet recreates in the verbal medium of a ballad the evocative quality of both the complex visual relationships and the mysterious symbolism in Rossetti's image. What communicative forms are employed? How are they related to the time levels of the narrative?

In a ballad, action is both dramatized and narrated. The following two major dramatic communicative forms can be distinguished, with shifting relations between the present and the past:

1. Interactive utterances (to elicit responses, either verbal or non-verbal, from a partner whose presence is implied from the context):

– Requests, e.g. the Damozels addressing the two Queens, "We are ready to sing, if you so please;/So lay your hands on the keys," Lady Louise saying, " Sister, let the measure swell/Not too loud," and Lord Arthur, "O sisters, cross the bridge with me."

– Dialogue, e.g. between Arthur and Louise: "O, love Louise, have you waited long?" – "O, my lord Arthur, yea."

2. Monologues:

– Narrating, e.g. Lady Louise recalling the past event of Arthur sprinkling snow on her head.

– Complaining, e.g. Lady Alice describing the current situation, "And there is none to let us go,/To break the locks of the doors below," and Lord Arthur, "I cannot weep for thee, poor love Louise,/For my tears are all hidden deep under the seas."

Meditating with fear, e.g. Lady Louise exclaiming, "O! is he sleeping, my scarf round his head?/Or did they strangle him as he lay there,/With the long scarlet scarf I used to wear?"

Expressing desire by praying, e.g. Lady Louise saying, "Only I pray thee, Lord, let him come here!"

The intricate combination of varying communicative forms in the ballad-like texture of the poem is further complicated by blending first person and third person viewpoints, like in the opening four lines of Lady Alice's monologue. In this respect, the narrator's line in the middle of the poem, "They sing all together," marks a division, a departure from the situation depicted in Rossetti's painting. From this line on, the verbal texture of its imaginative enhancement by the poet becomes increasingly more complex by the several unmarked shifts of viewpoints. The voices shift, unmarked, between Lady Louise and Lord Arthur, some nine times, which adds to the quality of uncertainty in the poem.

Narration is provided by the narrator's lines, in six rhyming triplets, all written in past tense form. Representing an external viewpoint, the narrator is, however, far from being a reliable, objective storyteller of happenings; instead, he restricts his description to what could be heard and seen, and doubles the uncertainty of the characters about anything beyond the obvious facts. Besides loosely interlacing the line of present happenings, the function of the narrator can be seen in this, in being a means of creating some mystical obscurity. When Arthur is first mentioned by Lady Louise, he is referred to as 'he', and the narrator simply repeats the pronominal reference instead of naming the character in his verse. Typically, the narrator recedes, instead of coming forward to make the situation of the characters clear, which thus remains enigmatic. Although the narrator's repeated references to the knell of the great bell for the dead suggest that the women are dead, Lady Alice talks about their state as captivity, "And there is none to let us go;/To break the locks of the doors below,/Or shovel away the heaped-up snow." Moreover, she continues, "And when we die no man will know/That we are dead," implying that they are not dead yet. The women are "between the wash of the tumbling seas," as the Damozels claim in their second line. First Lady Alice speaks as if they are locked in a tower where there is none "to shovel away the heaped-up snow," a few lines later, however, she exclaims, "But, alas! the sea-salt oozes through/The chinks of the tiles of the Closet Blue." The exact location of the women's captivity is not clarified by the narrator either. It seems that to the Pre-Raphaelite poet, mystery was more captivating than a clear narrative.

There is another way of the narrator adding to the mysterious quality of the poem, which is applying past tense forms consistently, as if all were settled and finished, yet he avoids providing comments to clarify what happened. In all his verses the narrator refers to death, but in a mysterious manner. There was a great bell in the Ladies' tower booming the knell for the dead, because the wind played on the bell, "And ever the great bell overhead/Boom'd in the wind a knell for the dead,/Though no one toll'd it, a knell for the dead." Through some obscure reason, there is a connection between the wind and the death of the characters, as the reader is allowed to conclude, and this creates suspense. Thus the peak point

in the ballad is when suddenly the narrator says, "…the great knell overhead/ Left off his pealing for the dead,/Perchance, because the wind was dead," which is simultaneous with Lady Louise's meditating and praying with fear and desire. Will Arthur return, or is he dead forever? A red lily that shot up through the floor in the narrator's verse marks a turning point in the narrative: Arthur comes back to help the women cross the bridge to heaven.

## Conclusion

The Pre-Raphaelite artists were inheritors of the romantic age. They almost never painted contemporary life, and turned to medieval subjects and art for more meaningful spiritual values. They composed art and poetry with a deliberate attempt to leave the audience guessing, so they painted subjects in medieval settings in search for the effect of mysteriousness. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's early watercolours can be seen as the artist's attempts to create art reflecting the artist's interior world and spiritual experience. Spiritual experience requires intensity of attention, and always ends in an act of learning, i.e. becoming conscious of some significant truth. The Pre-Raphaelite artists and poets regarded art and poetry as closely related modes of expressing artistic and poetic visions. A comparison of poem and image linked by inspiration evidences, as is the case with *The Blue Closet*, that it takes intense imaginative focusing and introspection to comprehend and experience meaning in art and poetry.

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# Orpheus in the Underground
## *Descents to the Underworld in 20th-Century and Contemporary Literature*

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**Abstract.** In my study I deal with descents to the underworld and hell in literature in the 20th century and in contemporary literature. I will focus on modern literary reinterpretations of the myth of Orpheus, starting with Rilke's *Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes.* In Seamus Heaney's *The Underground*, in the Hungarian István Baka's *Descending to the Underground of Moscow* and in Czesław Miłosz's *Orpheus and Eurydice* underworld appears as underground, similarly to the contemporary Hungarian János Térey's play entitled *Jeramiah*, where underground will also be a metaphorical underworld which is populated with the ghosts of the famous deceased people of Debrecen, and finally, in Péter Kárpáti's *Everywoman* the grave of the final scene of the medieval *Everyman* will be replaced with a contemporary underground station. I analyse how an underground station could be parallel with the underworld and I deal with the role of musicality and sounds in the literary works based on the myth of Orpheus.

**Keywords:** descent, underworld, underground, Orpheus

## Introduction

> "A sequel to Dante's *Divine Comedy*: The modern hero retraces his steps from heaven to hell."
>
> Charles Simic: *The Monster Loves His Labyrinth* (Simic 2008, 78)

The title of my study comes from Offenbach's famous operetta entitled *Orpheus in the Underworld*. In my paper I am going to deal with descents to the underground and hell in 20th-century literature until nowadays, and among these literary works I will focus on literary rewritings of the myth of Orpheus.

Among the several literary works based on the motif of Orpheus I would like to analyse only a few poems: Rilke's *Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes*, Czesław Miłosz's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, Seamus Heaney's *The Underground* and István Baka's *Descending to Underground of Moscow*[1] from the cycle entitled *Stepan Pehotny's Testament*. When I selected these particular literary works, I was interested in those poems where the underworld was replaced with an underground station.

In the ancient times scenes of descents to the underworld were very distant, far away places, like in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, which were only accessible for privileged people who could go there through dangerous adventures where they risked their lives, or through ecstasy, like the Er of Pamphylia in Plato's *Republic* or Dante in medieval times. Sándor V. Kovács claims that in the Middle Ages descents could be divided into two patterns: into a religious and a secular one. Clerics did not tempt God, so only their souls were carried away to the other world from where they could return to earth by the grace of God, but secular knights and noblemen descended in a physical way to achieve secular triumph and reputation, or to prove their courage and power (V. Kovács 1985, 12–13). However, the cavaliers' physical descents to hell, either for a test of strength or for penitence, were done alone, like Orpheus's, thus, they could be compared to Orpheus in terms of self-interpretation and an inner journey. Descents are usually based on the pattern of death and resurrection. For instance, Plato's Er from Pamphylia had his vision in a state of pseudo-death, in *Gilgamesh* Ishtar (the goddess of fertility) descended to the underworld to visit her sister, Ereshkigal (the goddess of the underworld), who was frightened of her visitation and ordered her slaves to treat her sister as if she were dead, and the Hungarian visitors of St. Patrick's Purgatory also had a symbolic funeral before their descents to hell.

But as the centuries passed, hell got closer and closer, so in Rimbaud's *Une Saison en Enfer* (*A Season in Hell*, 1873) it turned into the narrator's inner journey. In Anouilh's *Eurydice* (1941) the descent took place at a railway station, but the person who is the modern equivalent of Hermes moved the play to psychological depth, while in T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* (1949) the descent of the myth of Alcestis was transferred to a psychological level, so Heracles, the powerful hero was replaced by a pshychologist.

Among the descents of the second half of the 20th century Kurt Vonnegut's story collection entitled *God Bless You, Dr. Kevorkian* (1999) is worth mentioning, where the narrator – thanks to a treatment which was developed by the doctor mentioned in the title – is able to make odysseys to death where he interviews famous or notorius deceased people (e.g. Shakespeare, Newton, Hitler, Mary Shelley).[2] The satirical tone of this collection reminds us of Lucian's *Dialogues of*

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1    When I qoute this poem I use my own rough translation from Hungarian.
2    In the 29th chapter of the first book of Vonnegut's *Galápagos* there is also a character called Richard who used to hire strange men to choke him until he lost consciousness, and he could

*the Dead*. Glyn Maxwell in his verse novel entitled *Time's Fool* (2000) also made allusions to Dante and *The Flying Dutchman*. In his work a train turns into a metaphorical ghost train where the narrator meets a poet. In Philip Terry's *Dante's Inferno* (2014) the medieval story is transferred into a contemporary scene, and in *Canto I* Dante's visional ecstasy is replaced with the effects of drugs and alcohol.[3] In my paper I will not deal with these works, but I think it is necessary to mention them because I wish to outline the context of these descents and I try to show how this literary tradition survives in contemporary literature.

## The Myth of Orpheus

The myth of Orpheus does not need a detailed presentation, but there are a few points in the myth that I would like to specify. As regards the issue of shades, Roland Barthes's thought is worth mentioning; he described the withdrawn lover with the term *fading*: "Like a kind of melancholy image, the other withdraws into infinity and I wear myself out trying to get there" (Barthes 1990, 112). She becomes a living person without contour in the realm of Shades like Ulysses's mother, when he visited her in the underworld and he could not hug her no matter how hard he tried to (Barthes 1990, 113).

The character of Orpheus is a bit ambivalent, because in Plato's *Symposium* he was too cowardly to die for his lover (like Alcestis did), so the gods gave him only the image of his wife, but he could not get even her image (Plato 1951, 43–44).[4] But Károly Kerényi claims that Orpheus brought his name into repute with a daring descent into the underworld alone, so his act of heroism raised him among the great mythical heroes such as Perseus, Heracles, Theseus and Jason (Kerényi 1977, 365).[5]

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take short odysseys to death with this method. In this chapter there is a brief description of what this odyssey looks like.

3  "Halfway trough a bad trip / I found myself in this stinking car park, / Underground, miles from Amarillo" (Terry 2014, 22)
There is a very interesting parallel with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, because *trip* in this context means that someone is under the influence of drugs, but *trip* could be read as a reference to *pilgrimage* and the author utilized the similarity of ecstasy and the name of a drug.

4  Károly Kerényi claims that according to that version of the myth which survived, Orpheus's story began in Thessaly, where Heracles had already brought back Alcestis from among the dead (Kerényi 1977, 367). But in Ovid's work Orpheus was a strong-minded character who could negotiate with gods, he said if they would not give him back his wife, he would not like to live any longer: "if the Fates / Will not reprive her, my resolve is clear / Not to return: may two deaths give you cheer" (Ovid 1998, 226) (X. 39–41).

5  In Lucian's *Menippus* the protagonist has a comic appearance: he wears a cap, lion skin and he brings a lyre with him during his descent because he wants to take after the famous descenders: Ulysses, Heracles and Orpheus.

# Modern Rewritings of Orpheus and the Underground

> "The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough."
>
> Ezra Pound: *In a Station of the Metro* (Pound 2007, 66)

David Ashford published a volume of studies entitled *London Underground* (2013), pointing at the importance of the underground in literature and culture, including popular culture. In the context of the underground, Ashford uses the term 'uncanny' (hinting at its German equivalent, *unheimlich*). He quotes Roger Luckhurst saying that "only ghosts, after all, can walk through walls, breach the boundaries of the increasingly privatized zone of the city, and shimmer impossibly between past and present Londons" (Ashford 2008).

The Underground is one of the earliest modern spaces and it is a perfect symbol of urban alienation; but it is also one of the places which have a huge myth-making potential (Ashford 2008). He claims that our condition in the underground is like a ghost in the machine and we feel that "we haunt rather than inhabit the modern city" (Ashford 2008). The shades of several deceased people who have just arrived in the underworld are compared to the stream of the faceless crowd in an underground station.[6] In Virgil's *Aeneid* the underworld is paralleled with a station of public transport, because Charon is the ferryman of the river of the underworld who can take the shades of the several deceased people to the other side of the river. Virgil wrote: "The whole throng of / the dead was rushing to this part of the bank, mothers, men, / great-hearted heroes whose lives were ended, boys, unmarried / girls and young men laid on the pyre before the faces of their / parents […] / There they stood begging to / be allowed to be the first to cross and stretching out their arms / in longing for the shore" (Virgil 2003, 213).[7]

In István Baka's poem the whole underground of Moscow is mythicized: the escalator is the tongue of Charybdis, the entrance of the hall is the mouth of Scylla, the trolley buses are Charon's boats, the five-kopeks are obols, and the ticket collector is Cerberus in Stepan Pehotny's vision. In his work the motif

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6   In Homer's *Odyssey* we can read: "I took the victims, over the trench I cut their throats / and the dark blood flowed in – and up out of Erebus they came, / flocking toward me now, the ghosts of the dead and gone… / Brides and unwed youths and old men who have suffered much / and girls with their tender hearts freshly scarred by sorrow / and great armies of battle dead, stabbed by bronze spears, / men of war still wrapped in bloody armor – thousands / swarming around the trench from every side – / unearthly cries – blanching terror gripped me!" (Homer 2002: 254. XI. 40–48). In the inserted story entitled *The Myth of Er* in the tenth book of Plato's *The Republic* we can read: "He [the Er from Pamphylia] said that when his soul left his body it travelled in company of many others till they came to a wonderfully strange place, where there were close to each other, two gasping chasms in the earth, and opposite and above them two other chasms in the sky" (Plato 1987: 448. X. 614c).

7   VI. 305–309; 312–314.

of concentricity is very important: "the train goes on / Through the circles of stations / Like an infernal Mobius-loop / The track circulates underground above-ground / And it is closed into the tricky inner infinity / It could go nowhere except to itself" (Baka 2003, 283).[8] In this poem the underworld is depicted as a living and pulsing organism, which could be compared to Lőrinc Szabó's poem entitled *Grand Hotel Miramonti*, where the hotel mentioned in the title is like a vegetal or animal organism. In his study Ashford quotes from Rod Menhgam's *End of the Line* as a motto: "At every Underground stop, people climb to the surface, emerge into the light of day, but the train goes on, circulation continues, the Circle Line[9] providing a visual and conceptual magnet for the way the city stays alive by pumping flows of energy around the system" (Ashford 2008).

It is a significant difference that in Rilke's and Heaney's poems the underworld is empty and uninhabited. Rilke also intensifies emptiness with overwhelming silence, so there is almost no sound or voice coming from Eurydice or Hermes, who were walking behind Orpheus (Hermes only said a sentence in the end: "Er hat sich umgewendet" ("He has turned around"),[10] and after it Eurydice only asked a word: "*Wer?*" ("*Who?*") [Rilke 1980, 301]). The two characters following Orpheus are depicted as mute people almost in the whole poem by Rilke's narrator: "Wie *stille* Silbererze gingen sie / als Aldern durch sein Dunkel" (Rilke 1980, 298);[11] "Sie kämen doch, nur wärens zwei / die furchtbar *leise* gingen" (Rilke 1980, 299)[12] and "müßte er sie sehen, / die beiden *Leisen*, die ihm *schweigend* nachgehn" (Rilke 1980, 299) (the italics in the German quotes are all my emphases – D. P.).[13]

In Rilke's poem it is difficult to detect Orpheus's uncertainty whether his wife is following him or not, so Miłosz in his work expresses it with sounds, rythm and non-instrumental music. The descent is also accompanied by music according to the myth: "For his defense he had a nine-string lyre. / He carried in it music of the earth, against the abyss / That buries all the sounds in silence. / He submitted to the music, yielded / To the dictations of a song, listening with rapt attention, / Became, like his lyre, its instrument" (Miłosz 2010). Furthermore, in Miłosz's poem the persona talks about the song played for Persephone, so this song represents vocal music with instrumental accompaniment. But when Orpheus leaves the underworld, the power of music fails, or as the text says: "he was, now,

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8    In Hungarian: "a metró szalad / Az állomások bugyrai között / Mint pokolbéli Möbius-szalag / Sínpár kering föld mélyén föld fölött / S fortélyos belső végtelenbe zárva / Nem futhat máshová csak önmagába".
     This poem can also be read on the Internet in Hungarian: *http://www.baka.hu/alaszallas-a-moszkvai-metroba-1142* (22 Apr. 2015) The structure of this poem is also circular, with repeating and varying the first line in the following stanzas.
9    It is an underground line in London. – *D. P.*
10   When I qoute Rilke's poem in English I resort to Stephen Mitchell's translation.
11   "Like veins of silent ore they silently / moved through its massive darkness"
12   "They had to be behind him, but their steps / were ominously soft."
13   "then he could not fail to see them, / those other two, who followed him so softly"

like every other mortal. / His lyre was silent, yet he dreamed, defenseless" (Miłosz 2010), because in Ovid's *Orpheus and Eurydice* he was able to bring the whole underworld to a stop for a short time with his singing and playing the lyre.[14] Only the rythm of the sounds of their steps makes evidence of Eurydice and Hermes following him: "And so they set out. He first, and then, not right away, / The slap of the god's sandals and the light patter / Of her feet fettered by her robe, as if by a shroud" (Miłosz 2010). Like Rilke's Orpheus, he can only trust his hearing to sense them, and it seems that they just follow him as an echo, i. e. only in their acoustical capacity, so the question arises whether they are really following him or he just hears the echo of his own footsteps. In the text there is nothing to support this idea, but we cannot prove the opposite either: "He would stop and listen. But then / They stopped, too, and the echo faded. / And when he began to walk the double tapping commenced again. / Sometimes it seemed closer, sometimes more distant" (Miłosz 2010). Furthermore, when the exit of the underworld became visible with the first blushes of dawn, there was nobody behind him and he could get no solace compared to Rilke's *Orpheus*, because at least he could see the hardly recognisable shape of his wife going back to the underworld.[15]

Seamus Heaney's work based on the motif of Orpheus is the first poem of his collection entitled *Station Island* (1984). The title of this book refers to a famous Irish place of pilgrimage[16] – it is the location of St. Patrick's Purgatory, where many cavaliers descended (e.g. Lőrinc Tar from Hungary).[17] In the cycle which comes from the title of this book there are references to Orpheus and in unit VI the narrator quotes Dante during his pilgrimage, but his pilgrimage is an interior one.

Heaney's poem *The Underground* is not only a rewriting of the myth of Orpheus – motifs from other myths and folk tales can also be traced in it. In the opening image, there is a newly wed couple running in the underground, the woman runs ahead, so it is reminiscent of the story of Apollo and Daphne ("me then like a fleet god gaining / Upon you before you turned to a reed") (Heaney 1985b, 13), followed

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14   "So to the music of his string he sang, / And all the bloodless spirits wept to hear; / And Tantalus forgot the fleeing water, / Ixion's wheel was tranced; the Danaids / Laid down their urns; the vultures left their feast, / And Sisyphus sat rapt upon his stone. / Then first by that sad singing overwhelmed, / The Furies' cheeks, it's said, were wet with tears; / And Hades' queen and he whose sceptre rules / The Underworld could not deny the prayer, / And called Eurydice" (Ovid 1998: 226. X. 42–52).

15   "It happened as he expected. He turned his head / And behind him on the path was no one" (Miłosz 2010). Cf. Rilke's version, where Orpheus could see: "der Gestallt zu folgen" ("[Hermes] silently turned to follow the small figure" (Rilke 1980, 301)).

16   You can read more about it in Michael Thurston's book entitled *The Underworld in Twentieth Century Poetry: From Pound and Eliot to Heaney and Walcott* (2009, 161).

17   In the jacket illustration of the American edition of the book we can see Sir John Lavery's picture entitled *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. This edition was published in 1985 by Farrar Straus Giroux. I use this edition when I qoute from the collection.
Seamus Heaney. 1985. *Station Island*, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux. For the jacket illustration: *http://www.amazon.com/Station-Island-Seamus-Heaney/dp/0374519358* (22 Apr. 2015)

by a reference to the tale of Hansel and Gretel, while the motif of Orpheus appears only in the final stanza: "the wet track / Bared and tensed as I am, all attention / For your step following and damned if I look back" (Heaney 1985b, 13). There are some acoustic references, too: "Honeymooning, moonlighting, late for the Proms,[18] / Our echoes die in that corridor" (Heaney 1985b, 13).

In the title of this book the word *station* refers to Jesus Christ's Calvary (The Stations of the Cross), but it can also refer to an underground station. In contemporary Hungarian literature, in Péter Kárpáti's play entitled *Everywoman* (which is inspired by the medieval *Everyman* but set in Budapest at the end of the 20th century) the grave scene of the medieval play is set in the underground station "Astoria" where the allegorical characters are played by homeless people (who were former characters of the play). The dying medieval protagonist can be compared to the stations of Christ's Calvary, and there was a staging directed by Radu Afrim at the Tamási Áron Theatre in Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy in 2013 , where the stage was an underground station and the scenes of the play could be read on the wall like the stations of an underground line. In Kárpáti's play there is a short scene of Danse Macabre during the underground scene where the character Skeleton tempts the protagonist to commit suicide. (However, in a later version published in 1999 she does not do it.) It recalls the Danse Macabre woodcuts from the 20th century, for instance, Alfred Kubin's series entitled *Ein neuer Totentanz* (*A New Danse Macabre*) from 1947, where he transferred the medieval genre into a contemporary scene.

In 2009, in part III of János Térey's play entitled *Jeremiah* the underground station is also turned into a scene of the underworld, because in that unit several deceased people from Debrecen appear in the fictional underground station of Debrecen. There are men and women, adults and children who are telling the stories of their life and death after introducing themselves, this way reminding us of the Danse Macabre.

# Conclusion

"Then I seemed to waken out of sleep
among more pilgrims whom I did not know
drifting to the hostel for the night."

Seamus Heaney: *Station Island*, VIII (Heaney 1985a, 83)

In my paper I analysed poems from the 20th century which adopted the story of Orpheus's descent to the underworld: poems by Rainer Marie Rilke, Czesław

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18    It is an eight-week summer season of daily orchestral classical music concerts which is usually held in Royal Albert Hall in London. – *D. P.*

Miłosz, Seamus Heaney and István Baka, and of course, this list could be continued with many other interesting texts (for instance, with Carol Ann Duffy's *Eurydice* in her famous collection of poems entitled *The World's Wife* (1999)), but I was chiefly interested in literary works based on the motif of Orpheus where the underworld is replaced with the underground.

David Ashford's book, *London Underground*, points out that the underground has become one of the most important spaces of modern cities, so it has an effect on culture and literature as well, and he claims that "the London Underground is a prominent symbol of urban alienation" (Ashford 2008), which is a bit similar to the apathy of the dead people in the ancient Greek and Roman descents underground (e. g. in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*). In Rilke's poem Eurydice is also alienated from life and worldly things: "Sie war in sich, wie Eine hoher Hoffnung, / und dachte nicht des Mannes, der voranging, / und nicht des Weges, der ins Leben aufstieg. / Sie war in sich. Und ihr Gestorbsein / erfüllte sie wie Fülle" (Rilke 1980, 300).[19] The underground also has a huge myth-making potential (Ashford 2008), and the analysed literary works, Heaney's, Miłosz's and Baka's poems respectively, benefitted from it and they mixed ancient and medieval motifs with modern patterns.

Although Rilke's poem is an exception among the texts which deal with representing the underground as the underworld, but in utilizing the role of sounds and music it has a great effect on the other literary works, for example, on Miłosz's and Heaney's poems, where the sound of footsteps is very important. In the myth of Orpheus there is a huge possibility of self-reflection, of meditating on the role and power of art (especially poetry and music). In 1937 W. H. Auden also raised the question in his poem entitled *Orpheus*: "What does the song hope for? / […] / To be bewildered and happy, / Or most of all the knowledge of life?" (Auden 1994, 158).

Orpheus could make miraculous things with his singing and playing the lyre:[20] he could enchant wild beasts and even make the trees and rocks follow him and dance (Graves 1973, 111),[21] and he could descend to the underworld and come back from there alive. It is not accidental that there are a lot of musical adaptations of the myth, for instance, Monteverdi's and Gluck's operas, Offenbach's operetta,

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19   "She was deep within herself, like a woman heavy / with child, and did not see the man in front / or the path ascending steeply into life. / Deep within herself. Being dead / filled her beyond fulfilment."

She could not recognise even her husband: "Und als plötzlich jäh / der Gott sie anhielt und mit Schmerz im Ausruf / die Wörte spach: Er hat sich umgewendet –, / begriff sie nichts und sagte leise: *Wer?*" (Rilke 1980, 301). In English: "And when abruptly / the god put out his hand to stop her, saying, / with sorrow in his voice: He has turned around –, / she could not understand, and softly answered: *Who?*"

20   Cf. it with the myth of Zethus and Amphion. They founded Thebe with music: Amphion played the lyre and the stones glided into place (Graves 1973, 257).

21   He got his lyre from Apollo and the Muses taught him its use (Graves 1973, 111).

Franz Liszt's symphonic poem and Stravinsky's ballet. In art Orpheus is one of the greatest survivors among mythical characters and the newer works of art still keep his myth alive.

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# Homeward Journey through Poetry: Wallace Stevens's *The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain*

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**Abstract**. Analyzing Stevens's 1952 *The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain* I trace the laborious journey the persona of the poem undertakes – an external as well as an internal adventure – transforming thus the world into a possible home. I show how the poem – through its self-reflexive nature and complex system of interwoven external and internal images and circular movements – may offer the persona a sense of self and home in space and time among the fragments of the broken universe.

**Keywords**: Stevens, poetry, metatext, transcendental

A central preoccupation of Stevens's poetry consists in questioning what connects the image about the world created by the self with reality and what road the creative imagination travels in order to make sense of a universe that lacks a central ordering idea. *The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain* attempts to answer these questions taking its reader on a journey of self-discovery, even if the answers Stevens formulates are always conditional and undermined, deconstructed by the subtle irony of his works.

The title already foreshadows the fundamental themes of this 1952 short poem: the abstract, the created poem takes the place of a concrete, un-created mountain, a movement from the objective to the subjective, toward a new interpretation of reality. Considering the symbolic potential of the word *mountain*, we may already state that the poem will present a view of the world different from the everyday, ordinary one. It will be a view from above, from the top of a mountain – in all cultures mountains being holy places where one gets closer to and may connect with God, with the transcendental. Stevens also pre-signals the self-reflexive nature of his work using the word "poem" in the title – as he often does.

In this literary universe a work of art – the poem – takes the place of a mountain. The fixed physical object, the natural is replaced by something of man's own creation. As stated, Stevens's primary concern was the relation between the mind, art and reality in an era when the belief in God had vanished and in which people felt lost without the values and comfort once given by faith and the thought of heaven. Thus, the task of poetry is to offer a believable new "grand narrative" in a decreative age. If God is dead – as Nietzsche argues –, the mountain where one would go to get closer to him and to heaven, has lost its functionality, it has been stripped of its purpose and value. This function and purpose – according to Stevens – can only be taken over by poetry. The mountain where one met the transcendental in the time of the religious world view is replaced by a creation of the human mind and imagination, a constructed spiritual object. The title also suggests the shift so typical of Stevens's poems: from the exterior objective description to the subjective (Palmer 1992, 1), a metamorphosis that according to the title has already taken place.

> There it was, word for word,
> The poem that took the place of a mountain.

Reading the title one might expect to find in what follows the poem it mentions. The distancing "There it was", however, reveals that this is a poem about the poem of the title. Meta- and intertextuality is thus strengthened, the reader's expectations are undermined and turned toward another direction. But as this presentation also happens through a work of art, we witness a doubling of the theme, with the actual poem fulfilling all the functions and purpose ascribed to its topic.

"[…] word for word" – states Stevens in this very first line, again an element of intense self-reflexivity. Every single word is necessary in order to make up a creation that is whole and capable of playing the role ascribed to it in the title. The past tense verbs of the stanza (*was, took*) reinforce distancing: the poem we are told about has already been written, the shift from the mountain to the poem, from the objective/exterior to the subjective/interior dimension has already taken place. At the same time, the inter- and metatextual character of these lines suggests that this kind of shifting is a continuous process, that the poem we are reading is going to re-enact the one it is talking about. "There it was", but not fixed and eternal, for it is made up of words – just like the one we are reading – open to multiple interpretations, reinterpretations and doomed to be replaced.

> He breathed its oxygen,
> Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table.

In this second stanza the persona of the poem appears with the – again distancing – third person singular pronoun "he". Alan Filreis suggests that Stevens

is known "for a series of quintessentially modernist poems-about-poetry in which a spectral second- or third-person pronoun behaves like a depersonalized, meditative figure" (1994, 2). Here the persona "he" may be interpreted as the alter ego of the poet, the alter ego of any reader of poetry, or a universal representation of the individual of the mid-twentieth century. First we are offered an objective exterior image of this persona – obviously a scholar surrounded by, "living in" his books, breathing the oxygen of poetry even when not actually reading. The book turned upside down emphasises this scholarly character: it is not put away on a shelf, but left on the table, at hand all the time.[1]

Also within this stanza the topic poem is enlarged: it is not merely an object replacing the mountain, but a whole universe in itself, its oxygen is what the persona breathes. The term "oxygen" – used instead of the customary air – refers back to the mountain mentioned in the title that we associate with fresh and clean air, while the noun "dust" describing the actual setting already indicates the difference in value of the real and the imagined spaces.[2]

> It reminded him of how he had needed
> A place to go to in his own direction.

At this point the topic poem becomes a reminder of past wishes and desires. And, from this point on, the poem which started with an exterior, objective description of the persona's world, turns inward again – a journey starts not only into the workings of art/poetry but also into the persona's/recipient's internal world, to a presentation of human needs and dispositions. The use of the past perfect in stating these desires and the opening statement "It reminded him" suggest that such needs and dispositions are now a matter of the past. Neither do the following stanzas settle the questions whether they have ever been fulfilled. Still, the fact that their presentation takes up more than half of the poem indicates their importance: even if they were forgotten, they did not vanish forever, the struggle for their fulfilment was just temporarily suspended. At the same time, the title may also be suggesting an answer: if the poem took the place of the

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1    Another interpretative path opens up with the word "book" which may refer to the Bible, reinforcing the symbolic valences of the "mountain" as a reference to Biblical figures climbing holy mountains in order to communicate with the transcendental.

2    The term "dust" may once again indicate a possible Biblical reading of the poem, where the upper sphere, the mountain, respectively the poem are associated with "oxygen", while the secular, human world is that of dust, a reference to the Biblical "Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Genesis 2:7), as well as "for you are dust and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19), "All came from the dust and all return to the dust" (Ecclesiastes 3:20); or "And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them" (Luke 9:5) similarly to "And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town" (Matthew 10:14).

mountain, it became the fulfilment. Beside this it also took up a second role: that of reminding, bringing back the memory of such past longing, blunted by time.

This longing becomes the element individualising the persona: "to go to in his own direction". This need is the universal human desire to find one's own path – calling to mind Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*. It also highlights the fact that not a place, a setting is personal, unique and individualising, not one's destination is the defining element of one's self, but much rather the individual direction, the journey one takes.

> How he had recomposed the pines,
> Shifted the rocks and picked his way among clouds,

Following the persona on this internal voyage we find elements of a physical climb up a mountain representing here inner happenings, the spiritual journey of the self from the dusty table of his external reality to the clean, fresh oxygen of the mountain, to the imaginary world created through and in art, and implicitly to the height of consciousness and self-understanding. On this journey elements of nature, the pines are deconstructed and "recomposed", suggesting that travelling one's inner world will lead to the dismantling of one's pre-existing concepts about reality. Still, such a deconstruction does not lead to nothingness or nihilism, but to a reinterpretation of the world.

Rocks are shifted. The rock in Stevens's poetry holds a special significance: it is the symbol of the empirical, physical world, the real thing, the base. The real is only the base, but it is the base – argues Stevens again and again in his works, suggesting that any creative process is founded on some bit of the empirical world which the imagination deconstructs and reconstructs into a new order, a new understanding of both the surrounding and our internal universes.

The second half of the line, "and picked his way among clouds", suggests an upward movement. The persona – having found or chosen his "direction" – is moving upward among diminished visibility conditions. A telling image is created of the self's internal journey, which seems reversed though. We would expect the persona to "descend" toward the depths of his soul, to his subconscious. But Stevens emphatically chooses to display this as an upward movement, stressing the effort that is needed in order to attain a clear view of the self. The imagery representing this inner quest continues the juxtaposition of the external and the internal. The world within and the one surrounding us are confusing and chaotic, cloudy. And one can only find his path and place under such circumstances if one follows his own path and confronts this confusion on his own terms – "for the outlook that would be right." This desired appropriate outlook should replace the dusty world around the table as well as the confusion among the clouds through which the laborious journey takes our traveller. Such a

path might ultimately lead one to the right perspective of both the external reality and one's inner world. From such an outlook the self, fractured and incomplete in the lower world of dust and clouds, seems complete and whole:

> For the outlook that would be right,
> Where he would be complete in an unexplained completion:

The qualifier attached to this "completion" is "unexplained." In a world stripped of transcendence, where all the gods are dead, nothing can be complete, least of all the human self. There is no more use in climbing the mountain like Moses did to listen to the words and hear the message of God. But the struggle, the journey itself, not the place but the way one gets there, may evoke the necessary disposition of the self to see the world and one's place in it clearly. The poem – in an "unexplained" way – becomes capable of conferring wholeness and transcendence in a fragmented and broken world, where meaning is blurred by clouds, and rocks shift taking on new forms and new meanings with every step.

> The exact rock where his inexactnesses
> Would discover, at last, the view toward which they had edged,
> Where he could lie and, gazing down at the sea,
> Recognize his unique and solitary home.

The shifting rock of the earlier stanza here turns into the "exact rock", one physical, empirical, fixed and well-defined bit of reality, clear, solid and eternal, which ties the self to the surrounding reality. This "exact rock" becomes the base from which a new perspective, a new understanding of the world may start out. As Stevens states in a letter: "[…] the whole effort of modern art has been about this: the attachment to real things" (qtd. in Filreis 1992, 10).

The "inexactnesses" of the self – starting out from the reality of the rock – discover a view of the world and of the self that he has longed for, a stable position from where intense observation and intensive experience are possible. The twofold movement – the pseudo-external movement upwards and the internal movement towards the depths of the ego – come to a momentary standstill from where the view upon both the surroundings and the internal universe – even if in a continuous process of change – is clear and meaningful, conveying a whole picture. The self has always longed for this momentum, where all the rocks of the physical, real world and all the inexactnesses, all the spiritual fragments would come together to create wholeness. This is the momentum and the place where the ego and the world surrounding it would be rearranged – not into a random arrangement of broken bits, but into order and meaning. This is the ultimate human desire: to come together, be one and create a whole with the world.

The persona of the poem halts at this point, comes to a total rest with the verb "lie." The self has reached a position from where he can observe, may gaze down at the world and himself. Gazing at the world means intensely and continuously observing it with surprise and admiration, discovering it anew – just like Nietzsche's child.[3] This gazing involves the intense activity of the senses, of the intellect, but it also evokes emotions and the creative activity of the imagination. As Walzer argues, in Stevens' poetry "[r]eality […] might exist in the process of trying to refer to it, meditate on it, – in short, trying to perceive it" (2000, 50).

The object of this gaze is yet another element of manifold symbolic valences: the sea. This symbol of endlessness, of eternity and of continuous change, uninhabited and eternally renewing itself, suggests here that when facing the great ontological and epistemological questions of existence man is alone. From ancient times the sea has also been the terrain of quests for truth and for knowledge, where man was tested and confronted with the world and his own limitations. Its ever-changing nature also illustrates Stevens's ideas concerning reality, for – as Walzer states – there is "an uncertainty about what a picture of plain reality might look like. […] Stevens is hesitant to settle on too fixed or certain a notion of what reality is" (2000, 47). A similar argument comes from Pfau: "Stevens invites us to surrender the individual authority of knowing clearly to become 'part and particle' of the universe, as we come to reconceive our notions of what is real or true in a never-resting movement of figuration" (1999, 608).

This image of the sea may call to mind Husserl's phenomenology or Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology. But Stevens was not a phenomenologist and nor a nihilist. As Leonard and Wharton (1988) suggest, Stevens's poetry reveals another type of thinking according to which the world is what you make of it. The objective, empirical elements of the world are the material from which the imagination creates a new worldview. Reality is a process, and all one can do to understand it is to find a solid position and observe the ever-changing images produced by the metamorphoses of the world.

A further element of this presentation of the self's quest for knowledge and understanding of the world is the fact that the persona of the poem does not gaze up to the sky – despite being positioned on the symbolic top of the mountain. The poem explicitly states: "gazing down at the sea". For the sky is empty, there

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3    According to Stevens, the artist deconstructs existing concepts and, starting out from these disassembled elements of the real, the creative imagination creates what he calls the "fluent mundo", the "supreme fiction", a poetic order of things. Nietzsche also presents a similar process in his camel – lion – child threefold metamorphosis, where the camel represents the phase of acceptance of the given, the lions is the No, the revolt against the given and its deconstruction, while the child is the Yes, the creation of a new perception of the world (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). The same concept appears in Cassirer's poetics who argues: "Like all the other symbolic forms art is not the mere reproduction of the ready-made given reality. It is one of the ways leading to an objective view of things and of human life. It is not an imitation but a discovery of reality" (*An Essay on Man*).

is no point searching for heaven, for God, for meaning and wholeness in the sky. Therefore, one should look for meaning in the world of reality, the one man was "thrown into" – to use Heideggerian terminology – and also down into the depths of one's soul. And although the sea, nature is not capable of offering transcendence and does not carry any meaning or value beyond itself, it functions as the base, where the persona recognizes "his unique and solitary home." Here again the idea of a world stripped of transcendence is present: the home is unique and solitary, there is no transcendental power to guide one toward some heavenly adobe. Finding one's self and direction in the world is not a communal and collective quest, but an individual and lonesome one. The self of the twentieth century lives in a universe of relativity where there are no absolutes (Walzer 2000, 52). Still, through the intense observation of this reality and the changes it undergoes the creative imagination rearranges its elements into the "supreme fiction", a construct that is ephemeral but which may suspend disbelief and may satisfy the questing mind. As Stevens argues: "God is a symbol for something that can as well take other forms, as for example, the form of high poetry," and "After one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its places as life's redemption" (*Adagia*).

During the presented journey the persona goes through a transformation that correlates with Nietzsche's three metamorphoses: 1. after the longing and ardent needs of the past he accepts a fragmented world without meaning, 2. just to be reminded of the past longing by the poem and revolt against his circumstances (dust, clouds), to de-construct his pre-existent concepts (recomposing the pines, shifting the rocks), 3. to reach finally – through and within the poem – a new image of the world that feels like home, where one is complete. This new image is thus not pre-existent – as it would be according to Emerson[4] – but it is created in the process of perception and the workings of imagination. Reality, truth in Stevens' view are "constructed domains" (Filreis 1992, 8). Stevens – though trained in the art of poetry by the confusing times of the first half of the twentieth century – did not question the value of literature, but he continuously felt "the need to decide exactly wherein the worth and efficacy of a literary work reside" (Burke qtd. in Filreis 1994, 7). He pondered much on the nature of writing and the function of poetry – a clearly modernist feature of his work. In *A Primitive like an Orb* he states:

> We do not prove the existence of the poem.
> It is something seen and known in lesser poems.
> It is the huge, high harmony that sounds
> A little and a little, suddenly,
> By means of a separate sense.

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4    According to Emerson, the poet's role is to excavate the pre-existing truth (*The Poet*).

In this sense, his work fits well with that of T. S. Eliot as does some of his aesthetic rationale. In *Adagia* he argues: "Poetry is not personal", calling to mind Eliot's *Tradition and Individual Talent*. He also states: "Poetry must be irrational. The purpose of poetry is to make life complete in itself", as well as "In the absence of a belief in God, the mind turns to its own creations and examines them not alone from the aesthetic point of view, but from what they reveal, from what they validate and invalidate" (*Adagia*). Poetry for Stevens sometimes seems to be a therapeutic refuge from the chaotic and confusing mid-twentieth century:

> […] Poetry
> Exceeding music must take the place
> Of empty heaven and its hymns.

But while Eliot mourns the loss of religious tradition, Stevens celebrates the liberation of the mind from old myths. In his opinion, man needs to free himself from the ghosts of the past and achieve transcendence through art, the "supreme fiction". Poetry for him constitutes the one authentic defence of imagination facing the overwhelming external and internal confusion, for his own disposition was – states James Longenback – one of being at peace with the world: "Stevens often wrote a verse of high imagination but he was able to do so by understanding his place in the world of politics and economics" (1991, 8).

Stevens believed in the Romantic idea of the restoring power of poetry. *The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain* through its self-reflexivity and complex system of interwoven external and internal images and circular movements from the objective to the subjective and back again is an excellent example of his literary credo: although poetry is something created by the human mind, if there is a fundamental need for belief, then man willingly turns towards poetry with the knowledge of this being his own creation and thus temporal and ephemeral, he accepts momentarily that it is the truth, real and eternal, and so through poetry an understanding and realization of what is achieved (Leonard and Wharton 1988, 71). Up the imaginary mountain, among the fragments of the shattered universe the self undertakes his homeward journey.

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# A Melancholy Journey through Landscapes of Transience
## W. G. Sebald: *The Rings of Saturn*

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**Abstract.** Saturn is the planet of melancholy, about which Walter Benjamin writes: "I came into the world under the sign of Saturn – the star of the slowest revolution, the planet of detours and delays." W. G. Sebald's prose poetics seems to be driven by this motion, which is more than a simple state of being: it is a way of perceiving the world as well as a way of writing, perpetual transition, walk, halt, deviation from the road, getting lost and finding the way back. The paper reflects on W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (*Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine englische Wallfahrt*, 1995), a unique literary achievement deeply embedded into the history of literature, culture and the arts, which can be best construed from the direction of "the order of melancholy." On the pages of the book the reader can traverse, together with the Sebald-narrator, a route in East Anglia, with digressions in various directions of (culture) history. The journey in the concrete physical space turns into an inner journey, into a spiritual pilgrimage; the traversed locations become documents of destruction and transience. From the perspective of the order of melancholy places are determined by their relations, temporality and role in history rather than by their concrete geographic coordinates. The infinitely rich construction of the narrative creates a continuous passage between the local and the universal, the concrete locations of the journey and the scenes of world history, between the time of the journey and the (colonial) past, between East and West. The traversed historical, cultural and medial spaces displace the perception of human existence and result in the incommensurable aesthetic experience of the Sebaldian prose.[1]

**Keywords:** Sebald, journey, digression, melancholy

W. G. Sebald is the emigrant of German literature; wandering, emigration and exile constitute the main motifs of both his life and works. Similarly to the great writer models, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett or Vladimir

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Nabokov, Sebald is a perpetual wanderer, in-between languages, cultures, space coordinates, time zones and literary genres. Winfried Georg Maximilian Sebald was born in Wertach, in the Bavarian Alps in 1944. He studied German and comparative literature, then he worked as a secondary school teacher in Switzerland. In 1969 he moved to Norwich in East Anglia, where he pursued his activity as a university teacher, he taught German literary history. He died in 2001 in a car accident caused by a heart attack.

His literary works, which he wrote in German, were published and became known in the 1990s and after the turn of the millenium. His essay-novels entitled *Vertigo* (2000 [1990])*, The Emigrants* (1996 [1992]), *The Rings of Saturn* (2002 [1995]), as well as *Austerlitz* (2001) are the particularly hybrid components of an oeuvre expanding inwards, which combine the generic characteristics of novel, memoir, travel journal, essay and historiography. It may be due to the "migrant" character of his work – both in terms of authorial biography and of textual reference – that W. G. Sebald's prose seems to have had a greater echo in Great Britain and in the United States than in Germany. As Mark Richard McCulloh states: "Ironically, despite numerous literary prizes in his homeland, he seems to have struck a chord with English-speaking readers to a greater extent than with his fellow Germans. Part of the reason for this is precisely his 'Europeanness' in the minds of English-speaking readers; his idiosyncratic prose has a distinctly exotic appeal" (2003, 25).

The predominant feature of his novels is the permanent oscillation between fact and fiction, presence and absence, between memoir-like documentation and imagination, between private memories and the interpersonal heritage of cultural memory. The map of emigration of Sebald's protagonists is in fact the map of Europe, modelling a geo-cultural terrain determined by the continuous confrontation between the self and the other, the private and the collective, the familiar and the foreign. Sebald's heroes seem to be lost on the map of Europe and on the map of their own identity: they desperately try to find themselves and their roots in this territory, which is but a land of foreignness, a land of incurable, open wounds that recall past traumas.

Further common thematic, narrative and stylistic features of W. G. Sebald's novels can be identified: the novels resort to first-person-narration, the (primary) narrator being/resembling the author's figure, Sebald himself, being on the road, *all'estero*, that is, abroad. Thus, the texts conform to the generic requirements of memoirs and travel journals, and employ a flowing, sophisticated, essay-like style, which moves his works towards the boundary between fiction and non-fiction. And, maybe the most interesting feature of the Sebaldian prose is that textual references are completed, counterpointed by illustrations, photos, paintings, drawings, maps, various reproductions that are systematically inserted into the body of the texts, contributing on their own to further blurring the silhouettes of fact and fiction.

Besides the topics of wandering, emigration and exile, Sebald's other great topic is the nature of decay, the evanescence of existence of humans, animals and plants, the grand history constructed upon the infinite and recurrent patterns of mass destruction, and the topography of places and spaces – traces of pain as Sebald calls them in *Austerlitz* – that preserve the memory of the past. "Sebald is one of the great melancholic writers of the twentieth century", as Zsófia Bán writes (2007, author's translation), or "the last traumatophile," as Roger Luckhurst (2008) calls him. The locations traversed in his works become documents of destruction and transience. The moments of life are traces of decay or carry the "promise" of destruction, hence the uncanny and visionary character of the singular inscribed into the transcience-rhythm of existence. At Sebald all this is included in the span of the sentences, in the breath of the words. Ferenc Takács describes this complex tone of Sebald's prose as follows: "The emotional accompaniment, at the same time, counterpoint, of this universal catastrophism is the self-possessed despair; the quiet melancholy of hopelessness (the silent irony, what is more, humour) pervades his books, among them also *The Rings of Saturn*" (2011, author's translation). Sebald's works are essentially trauma narratives "not just because they explore the legacy of the Second World War and are imbued with this suave melancholia, but also because they hold to a model of history that coincides exactly with the idea of traumatic occlusion and the belated recovery of memory" (Lockhurst 2008, 112).

W. G. Sebald's essay novel entitled *The Rings of Saturn* (*Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine englische Wallfahrt*, 1995) is a unique, unparalleled achievement of world literature, at the same time organically incorporated in the history of culture, of the arts and literature, which can be best construed from the direction of "the order of melancholy." Similarly to the archaeological layers formed out of open books on Janine Rosalind Dakyns Flaubert-researcher's desk, "the apparent chaos surrounding her represented in reality a perfect kind of order, or an order which at least tended towards perfection" (Sebald 2002, 9). The predominant prose-poetical feature of Sebald's works is that a specific narrative order, infinitely rich in detail, is constructed while the very sense of order, the ideal of the possibility of scientific cognition and systematization is questioned and overwritten.

Saturn is the planet of melancholy, about which Walter Benjamin writes: "I came into the world under the sign of Saturn – the star of the slowest revolution, the planet of detours and delays" (qtd. in Sontag 2001). W. G. Sebald's prose poetics seems to be driven by this motion, which is more than a simple state of being: it is a way of perceiving the world as well as a way of writing, perpetual transition, walk, halt, deviation from the road, getting lost and finding the way back. On the pages of the book the reader can traverse, alongside the journey, the walking tour of the Sebald-narrator, a route in East Anglia, in Suffolk shire in the summer of 1992. The original German subtitle, *Eine englische Wallfahrt*

(*An English Pilgrimage*), defines the walking tour as a pilgrimage, traditionally associated to religious visits of holy sites with the purpose of spiritual purification and initiation. At Sebald the term pilgrimage both defies and retains this basic meaning: it is definitely not a pilgrimage in the religious sense, as the wandering narrator traverses a route that mainly includes sites of past traumas, crises and catastrophes, however, the search for what is beyond the visible, beyond the material lift the physical journey into the realm of the spiritual.

The abundance of micro-narratives and digressions organically embedded into the travelogue turn the concrete physical journey into an extended reflection upon (culture) history and the totality of human existence. The book starts with the description of the narrator-protagonist's state of crisis revealing the antecedents of the journey: "in the hope of dispelling the emptiness that takes hold of me whenever I have completed a long stint of work" (Sebald 2002, 3). However, the walking in the deserted landscape seems to deepen the suffering even more, as the narrator-protagonist gets into the hospital in a state of deep depression, and lying in his bed he can only see a small segment of the sky through the wired window of his hospital room, the photo of which (?) we can see in the book. J. J. Long draws attention to the fact that the narrator's corporeality is always pushed to the fore, in the sense that it is always some kind of breakdown and crisis that constitutes the starting point of the journey and "sets free a displaced or vertiginous mode of perception" (2007, 133). The thought of writing this book is born in this state of pain, evolving from a simple travel journal into an inner journey, a spiritual pilgrimage, and even more than that, into a universal historical reflection and visionary prose, while the description of the stages and scenes of the concrete journey is preserved throughout the text. This implies a double vision, both on the part of the reader and that of the narrator, an active gaze which perceives every detail of the surrounding environment, on the one hand, and a reflective gaze, detached from the concrete site and getting "elsewhere", into distinct spatio-temporal and culture-historical dimensions, on the other. Thus, the material world is always transcended, or better said, the traversed spaces are at once material and transcendental, real and metaphysical. As Christina Kraenzle puts it, "geographical locations become liminal spaces, gateways between the material and the unearthly" (2007, 126).

Thus, the route of the pilgrimage, albeit being very concrete, becomes floating and relative; the description of the East-Anglian spaces evoking the memory of WWII bombings turns into the topography of transcience and destruction. From the perspective of the order of melancholy places are determined by their relations, temporality and role in history rather than by their concrete geographic coordinates. It is essential that this route is traversed by the Sebald-wanderer in East-Anglia. The topos of the East carries the complex symbolism of constant degradation, crisis, abandonment and oblivion. By the time of the journey East

Anglia, where the thriving tourist resorts used to be full of visitors, where hundreds of servants and chambermaids bustled to serve the guests of the monumental hotels, had turned into a mere ghostly memory of this dazzling past. The whole space floats as the phantom of the past, geographically in-between the British Isles and the European continent, from the point of view of colonization and the history of trade, in-between Europe and Africa, Asia and South-America, activating the "post-colonial English historical consciousness" (Luckhurst 2008, 112).

The East is transition itself, not only spatially but also temporally, associating far eastern connections, far back into the past. The various temporal patterns are folded upon one another; the boundaries of private and historical memory, of civilization and barbarism are redrawn, while the constellation of details points at the false perspective of grand history. An unbelievable amount of forgotten detail, memory, pain, suffering, destruction and death is accumulated and flows continuously in the shade of grand history.

The "ambulatory"[2] (Long 2007) character of the Sebaldian prose transporting from the journey in the concrete space into the space of reflection reveals that the larger horizons always pop up in the details, similarly to the way Flaubert, evoked at the beginning of the book, "saw the whole of the Sahara. For him, every speck of dust weighed as heavy as the Atlas mountains" (Sebald 2002, 8). In parallel with the journey taking place in the physical-geographical space, another route unfolds in the space of reflection, leading through English culture history, in the course of which we meet several odd figures, many emigrants, as Sebald himself, such as Sir Thomas Browne seventeenth-century doctor who, similarly to Sebald, moved to Norwich and there he wrote his hybrid works, similar to those of Sebald's, in-between science and arts, his melancholic Baroque sentences surely determining Sebald's way of writing; further on, with Edward FitzGerald, Joseph Conrad, that is József Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowsk, Charles Algernon Swinburne or vicomte Chateaubriand. We travel through the scenes of world history, from the tyranny of medieval China, through the shameful episodes of African colonization also documented in Joseph Conrad's prose, to the plague spots and destructions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The meaning of darkness is also activated in a Conradian sense: "*The white patch had become a place of darkness*" (Sebald 2002, 139). The darkness of the colonizing past haunts the spaces of the present.

We are walking in burdened places, among ruins and traces of pain, where, as Sebald says, he imagined himself "amidst the remains of our civilization after its

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2    In my view, J. J. Long's term can be actually related to what Carsten Strathausen expounds on as follows: "In Sebald's universe, physical movement always brings forth and, paradoxically, results from the emotional and spiritual wanderings of his protagonists. Internal, psychological space and external, geographical space ceaselessly merge and (re)constitute each other, and his protagonists are both fleeing from one particular scene and are desperately searching for another place." (2007, 475)

extinction in some future catastrophe" (2002, 237). The infinitely rich construction of the narrative creates a continuous passage between the local and the universal, the concrete locations of the journey and the scenes of world history, between the concrete time of the journey and the (colonial) past, between East and West. As Thomas Browne points out the same octagonal *quincunx*-pattern in the figurations of nature and art,[3] similarly the patterns of history are superimposed in an uncanny manner, in simultaneous coverage through time and space. In this total (textual) space there fold upon each other the passion of the herrings and the cultivation of silk worms, the sugar cane and art history, Doctor Tulp's anatomy lesson on Rembrandt's painting and the Cartesian heritage of European civilization.

The perspective created in the text also resembles the one that Thomas Browne writes about: as if we were using a telescope and a microscope at the same time, and the more we see, the more conscious we become of how we just grope our way in the darkness. "What we perceive are no more than isolated lights in the abyss of ignorance, in the shadow-filled edifice of the world" (Sebald 2002, 19). The order of melancholy is contoured in this distinct, complex and simultaneous seeing. The spectacle opening up in the text is always visionary, as the visible always manifests together with the invisible, the present appears in the horizon and simultaneity of the past and the future. Perception extends beyond the mere thing, the spectacle and the present moment. The spectacle reveals itself from the perspective of transience for the gaze of the melancholic, for the child of Saturn. A place, a spectacle, an occurrence carry past traces, at the same time, viewed from the future, everything becomes the document of transience.

> Next morning, the atmosphere at Schiphol airport was so strangely muted that one might have thought one was already a good way beyond this world. As if they were under sedation or moving through time stretched and expanded, the passengers wandered the halls or, standing still on the escalators, were delivered to their various destinations on high or underground. [...] Every now and then the announcers' voices, disembodied and intoning their messages like angels, would call someone's name. *Passagiers Sandberg en Stromberg naar Copenhagen. Mr. Freeman to Lagos. La señora Rodrigo, por favor.* Sooner or later the call would come for each and every one of those waiting here. (Sebald 2002, 89, emphasis in original)

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3    "Browne identifies this structure everywhere, in animate and inanimate matter: in certain crystalline forms, in starfish and sea urchins, in the vertebrae of mammals and the backbones of birds and fish, in the skins of various species of snake, in the crosswise prints left by quadrupeds, in the physical shapes of caterpillars, butterflies, silkworms and moths, in the root of the water fern, in the seed husks of the sunflower and the Caledonian pine, within young oak shoots or the stem of the horsetail; and in the creations of mankind, in the pyramids of Egypt and the mausoleum of Augustus as in the garden of King Solomon, which was planted with mathematical precision with pomegranate trees and white lilies" (Sebald 2002, 20–21).

The past, the present and the future moves together up and down on the escalators, in the passengers' luggage, creating a deep sense of the uncanny.

"The rings of Saturn consist of ice crystals and probably meteorite particles describing circular orbits around the planet's equator. In all likelihood these are fragments of a former moon that was too close to the planet and was destroyed by its tidal effect (→ Roché-limit)" – we can read the entry quoted from the Brockhaus Encyclopaedia as the third motto of the book. Ferenc Takács places this motto into the interpretive framework of the Sebaldian aesthetics of universal destruction:

> As we advance in reading, *The Rings of Saturn* turns more and more into some kind of encyclopaedia of destruction: this encyclopaedia is »Sebald«'s memory, *the* memory, as well as writing, the only means capable of creating a trace and memory of universal destruction. There is nothing else – the book suggests – to stand in the way of this indeed universal process, everything is relentlessly subjected to […] the astrophysical law, the description of which we can read in the motto placed at the beginning of the book. The so-called Roche-limit is the critical distance within which the tidal forces generated by the planet (in our case the Saturn) scrunch the moon revolving around it and the moon is destroyed: it falls into pieces and revolves around its planet as an inert ice and power ring. (Takács 2011, author's translation)

Travel is a recurrent, if not obligatory, trope of Sebald's prose in general. It does not follow prescribed itineraries but rather the rhythm of a search for something that vanishes once one attempts at touching it, the unattainable ultimate reality in the Derridean sense of infinite regress. Travel is also staged medially, in the disparity between text and image, verbal account and visual traces that never attest certainties but rather contribute to blurring the boundaries between the real and imaginary geography of the traversed – cultural, historical and mental – sites. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of this multilayered travel that Sebald's books allow is the travel in the textual landscape, in the text-scape itself, capable of transforming the experience of loss and destruction into the jouissance of reading. To conclude by reconnecting to the title and to the motto, the enthralling beauty – carrying the spell of decay – of the rings of Saturn may become the signifier of the aesthetic pleasure that Sebald's reader can experience as an addiction, as the irresistible pleasure of the text.

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# The Pilgrimage as Inner and Outer Journey in Paulo Coelho's *The Pilgrimage*

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**Abstract**. The present paper aims at analyzing the significance and occurrence of pilgrimages as inner and outer journeys, focusing on their form(s) and role(s) in today's postmodern society. The introductory part presents the phenomenon from a theoretical point of view, that is taking into consideration its possible definitions (e.g. as a religious phenomenon in pre-Christian and Christian cultures from the Middle Ages to the present; and pilgrimages in literature). The core of the paper then discusses Paulo Coelho's novel entitled *The Pilgrimage. A Contemporary Quest for Ancient Wisdom*, which, though extremely popular, has not yet undergone any significant literary analysis. We shall examine the protagonist's spiritual journey from the perspective of the postmodern human condition. The questions that the paper tries to answer also refer to the relationship between the novel and different religions such as Christianity and New Age, respectively neo-pagan movements that are the product and proof of postmodern pluralism at the same time.

**Keywords**: pilgrimage, inner and outer journey, the postmodern condition

Pilgrimages have been present in mankind's history from ancient times up to our days. Usually they are a special type of journey undertaken for a religious motive with pilgrims seeking a certain place which has been sanctified being connected to the Divine or a Saint (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). By going on the journey pilgrims hope to become part of something bigger than them, and to be able to communicate with higher spiritual spheres. Although pilgrimages can be found in and are practiced by all world religions, they cannot be reduced to religious journeys only. In the past the search for miracles of divine origin might have been the driving force for pilgrims, yet today it has become much more important to find oneself, one's own path in life, so that parallel to the outer physical journey there is an inner journey towards the soul: "A pilgrimage entails a journey from one place to another, from one aspect of one's life to another. As a result of this movement, many people experience pilgrimage as a transformation" (Gesler 1996, 95–105).

The academic study of pilgrimage has received attention from many fields such as cultural anthropology, archaeology, art, history, geography, the sociology of religion and/or theology. Thus, pilgrimage is a field of cross- and inter-disciplinary interest and focus, and each academic discipline brings unique questions and answers on the topic.

In cultural anthropology, for example, the Turners (2011) interpret the experience of pilgrimage through the concepts of *liminality* and *communitas*. *Liminality* is a term borrowed from Arnold van Gennep[1] expressing "in-between-ness" within a rite of passage as an individual moves from one social state to the other. Such passage rites usually consist of three stages: first, the individual has to separate from a previous group, then he/she enters the "in-between" or *liminal* phase, where many things change or get distorted and finally, his/her reintegration into the community takes place entering a new social state. *Liminality* is characteristic of the second stage/phase where the rules of normality do not apply, because it is a place between the worlds (Ross 2011, 5–26).

*Communitas*, on the other hand, names the experience of belonging to the group of those who have undergone such a rite of passage together and as a consequence now feel united. *Communitas* functions as a pattern of sociality, a mode of experiencing unity with others beyond the rite of passage. Yet, the model of sociality it offers differs from the usual rules of society in the sense that commonplace distinctions do not work here, therefore people can see each other as equal. Thus, the organization of society depends on the structure/antistructure cultural dynamic: The individual takes part in the rite of passage, experiences *communitas*/antistructure returning to the structure of everyday society as a new person (Ross 2011, 5–26).

*Liminality* and *communitas* can very well be observed in the context of indigenous passage rites in Africa, India or Japan, where the Turners conducted their fieldwork. In modern Western society it is pilgrimages that provide a *liminal* experience for the pilgrim, and this way Christianity itself could develop its particular *mode of liminality* through its own pilgrimages (Ross 2011, 6). However, there is a slight difference between indigenous passage rites and their *liminal* experience, since in today's postindustrial Western society these are rare and diminished, the phenomenon has become secularized (Ross 2011, 5–26). Thus, it would be perhaps more accurate to describe today's pilgrimages which are voluntary acts as both *liminal* and *liminoid* experiences. Although pilgrimages are part of a religious ritual, individuals can decide for themselves

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1   In his famous work, *The Rites of Passage* (1960), van Gennep states that the population of society is divided into several groups. As individuals find some groups more important than others, they might decide to change groups, leave one to enter the other within a rite of passage. The *liminal* stage is the second one, in-between states and conditions and is also called transition phase (van Gennep 1960).

whether they want to participate in the event or not, they break with society and become actors in a different play for a while (*liminoid* experience).

Following the Turners' line of thought one can distinguish four types of pilgrimages, the first two of which occur in all the historical religions, with numbers three and four being specific of Christianity (cf. Turner and Turner 2011, 26–33):

1. Prototypical pilgrimages were established by the founder of a historical religion or his first disciples; these are documented and are supported by some strong evidence provided by an authority. Examples of such pilgrim sites are Jerusalem and Rome for Christianity, Mecca for Islam, and Mount Kailas for Hinduism, or Kandy for Buddhism.

2. Archaic pilgrimages bear evident traces of syncretism with older religious beliefs and symbols, for example, Glastonbury in England with its Celtic pagan roots, or Chalma in Mexico with Aztec remnants.

3. Medieval pilgrimages are perhaps the most popular ones nowadays, also best known through the literary works of the Christian world. They have their origin in the European Middle Ages and are influenced by the philosophical and theological trends of that period. Notable examples are Canterbury in England, Chartres in France, Assissi in Italy, or Compostela in Spain.

4. The modern, that is postmedieval pilgrimages, which appeared in the 19th and 20th centuries, begin with a vision and are kept alive by the belief that a miracle is sure to happen. Their tone is devotional and characterized by the personal piety of the believers. Although the adherents consider mass technology and science as a challenge to Christian world view, they make use of it as a source of aid. The best examples are the Marian pilgrimages.

As a universal phenomenon, pilgrimages have also long been an area of literary interest. Quest literature abounds with stories of pilgrimages – understood in its widest sense, from fairy tales to classics like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Eschenbach's *Parsifal*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* to modern fantasy literature and contemporary fiction, as, for example, Paulo Coelho's *The Pilgrimage* to be discussed here. In most of the cases the main characters undertake physical journeys that are metaphors for an inner journey of self-discovery and understanding.

Coelho's novel under discussion was first published in 1987 in Portuguese with the title *O diário de um Mago*, that is *A Diary of a Mage*, and it became one of the author's bestsellers being translated into no less than 38 languages. The novel with autobiographical traces – Coelho wrote it after having completed the *El Camino* himself – got the English title *The Pilgrimage. A Contemporary Quest for Ancient Wisdom*, describing the initiation journey of the protagonist.

   The novel begins *in medias res* with the main character, the thirty-eight year old Paulo being about to receive full initiation from his Master into an ancient and mysterious religious order called RAM. Having survived many trials Paulo feels he has learnt his lessons, therefore, he buries his old sword, which stands for the knowledge gained until that point. He is confident that he is going to be awarded a new sword, the symbol of his success and of the promise that he can remain on the path of Tradition. However, when he reaches out for the new sword, his Master steps onto his hands and says that he has failed to learn the last lesson. He has become too proud of his knowledge, in fact he should have refused the sword, and then it could have been his, and he were a Magus now. Yet, because of his avidity, he has to start the journey, the quest for the sword all over again, this time taking the path of the simple folk. Seven months pass before Paulo eventually decides to follow his inner voice and begins the journey suggested to him.

   The pilgrimage his Master wants him to undertake lasts seven hundred kilometers setting out from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port in France to Santiago in Spain. This route has been followed by pilgrims from ancient times up to now and is known as *El Camino* [The Way/Road]. At the end of his journey Paulo will have to arrive in the town of Compostela/Santiago where there is the tomb of San Tiago/Saint James, an evangelist, who spread Christ's teachings after the crucifixion.
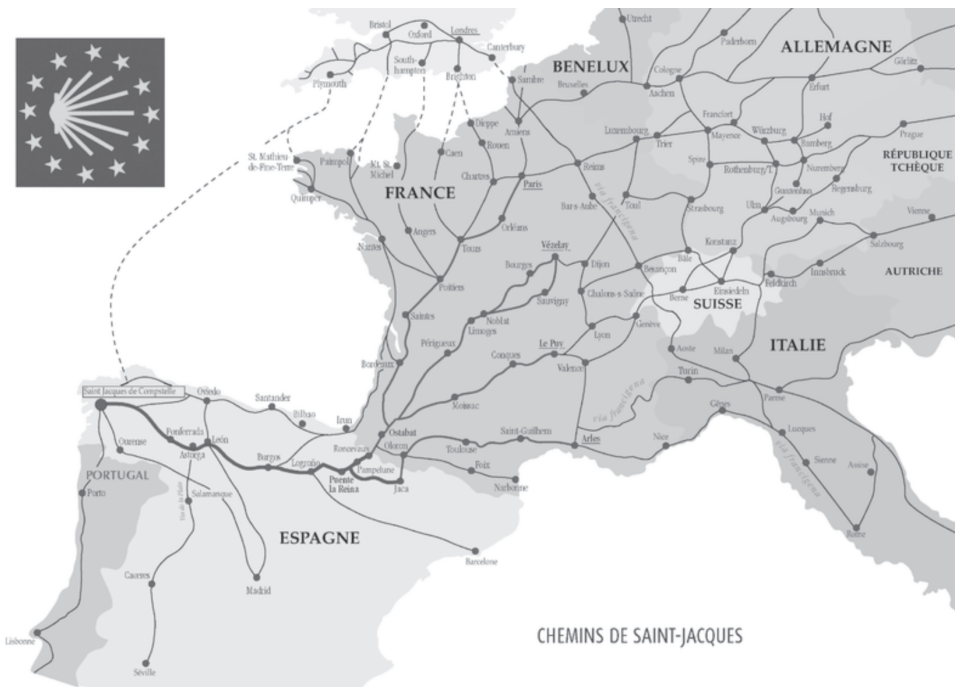


*Map of St. James' Way by Manfred Zentgraf*

Throughout his journey Paulo is being helped by Petrus, who has already achieved the title of Master and who now shall guide others in the same quest. Both Paulo and Petrus are members of RAM, a kind of Catholic sect for the study of symbols of the Opus Dei. The name of the order stands for Regnus Agnus Mundi, Rigour, Adoration and Mercy (Coelho 2004, 2). During the journey, Petrus teaches Paulo eleven RAM exercises meant to make his search for the sword easier. Among the exercises there are methods of relaxation, meditation, of calling upon a divine messenger for help, of facing death, of finding the right solution to a problem, and of developing universal love for the whole world and all human beings. The order of the exercises is not arbitrary either, Petrus teaches them in a certain sequence as they progress on the way to Santiago: the Seed Exercise – experiencing rebirth, the Speed Exercise – paying attention to the road, the Cruelty Exercise – revealing the connection between physical and spiritual pain, the Messenger Ritual – establishing communication with a divine messenger, the Arousal of Intuition (the Water Exercise) – awakening and manifesting intuition, the Blue Sphere Exercise – experiencing universal love, the Buried Alive Exercise – cause and effect, experiencing the Absolute, the RAM Breathing Exercise – experiencing harmony with the world, the Shadows Exercise – helps to find the correct solution, the Listening Exercise – learning how to distinguish among different voices and choose the right one, the Dance Exercise – dancing as a process of communication with the Infinite Intelligence (Coelho 2004). Petrus's teachings culminate when he talks about the three forms of love: *eros* as intimate love, *philia* as friendship and affection, and *agape*, brotherly love, the love of God for mankind and of mankind for God.

During his quest/pilgrimage Paulo meets Mme Lourdes, Father Jordi, Alfonso, Andrew and a lamb, who all help him and offer assistance. Yet, there are characters like Legion, a gypsy, and some little boys, who try to hinder him so that he cannot reach his goal. The figure of Astrain fulfills a double function, sometimes he is helpful, at other times his advice turns out to be bad. Nevertheless, all the places and people Paulo encounters during his journey strengthen him, he will become better and better in choosing/filtering the advice and information he needs in order to find his sword. It is not only the objective to reach that is important, but also the path itself and all the encountered details. He must endure physical hardship, besides walking the seven hundred kilometers, he has to climb a fifty-foot waterfall, fight with a demonic black dog and raise a wooden cross that has fallen. Thus, Paulo's journey is a mental, physical and spiritual one, at the end of which, having understood that the extraordinary can be found in the simple way of life of common people, he succeeds, and at last his Master hands him the sword. He constantly has had to search within himself for the truth behind the sword he so desperately wanted to receive. Parallel to the outer journey, there was an inner quest, one of discovery, finding one's own path. The secret of his

sword is his only, he wrote it down and placed it under a stone, but the rain must have destroyed it. Knowledge goes beyond palpability, though, and things happen orchestrated by some higher truth, for "people always arrive at the right moment at the place where someone awaits them" (Coelho 2004, 265).

Mysticism is one of the major themes in the novel that together with the various metaphors and symbols, the poetic language and the message contribute to the popularity of the book. In the novel we have some of the mystic rituals explained, and with a couple of exceptions we are dealing with exercises that according to the author do really work and can be practiced by the readers themselves. Thus, the novel becomes a spiritual guidebook. As such, it can be regarded as the messenger of a certain type of what we could call postmodern spiritual narrative. Since the postmodern is distrustful of meta-narratives, there is a plurality of small narratives that compete with each other (cf. Lyotard 1984). We can read Coelho's *Pilgrimage* as such a small narrative, especially if we take into consideration the relationship between postmodernism and the pagan meta-culture.

Meta-culture represents the deepest cultural layer possible and consists of a set of beliefs and symbols that originate in archaic times and that have been renewed several times throughout history (cf. Tiryakian 1996). Although it usually goes unnoticed, meta-culture functions as the operational system of civilization. There are three major meta-cultures, namely the Christian, the Gnostic and the Pagan. Out of the three, postmodern philosophy conspires with the Pagan meta-culture which manifests in form of different religious groups such as the New Age movement, neo-pagan[2] or ethno-pagan communities. One of the main ideas behind these new religious movements is pluralism concerning religious belief and worldview in general, also true of the postmodern condition, where we lack a certainty of ideas, and are left with better or worse interpretations only (cf. Lyotard 1984). In the following we shall briefly discuss some of the main characteristics of the new religious movements, as the novel presented also makes use of them. Each of these new religious movements is trying to give some sort of explanation to the phenomena around us, a genuine interpretation of the world and of the aim of one's personal life. There may be differences between these new religious groups, yet the similarities between them are far more striking, e.g. they all involve the process of re-mythologizing and are characterized by an environment-conscious thinking and way of life (cf. Kis-Halas 2005). In many aspects neo-pagan movements resemble the belief system of the New Age (cf.

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2   Neopaganism, in opposition to historical Pagans of ancient cultures, is an umbrella term covering a whole range of syncretic this-worldly anti-authoritarian nature-oriented modern urban protest religions, originating from European Mysticism as well as 18th and 19th centuries' Romanticism and reconstituted from ancient classical cults, Pre-Christian religions and non-European tribal beliefs. They are generally polytheistic or conditionally monotheistic, privileging the experience of personal ritual over belief, with some relevant common characteristics, such as re-mythologizing, ecologism, recognition of the female principle (Hubbes and Bakó 2011, 129).

Szilágyi and Szilárdi 2007). Yet, whereas New Age rarely mentions God , because the Almighty is thought of as impersonal, cosmic energy, neo-pagans believe in concrete deities fulfilling certain functions. Regarding revelation New Age adherents believe in teachings coming from supernatural beings (angels, ghosts) or chosen persons. Neo-pagan groups do not know the idea of revelation. To them mystic knowledge stems from their ancestors and personal experience gained during the rituals. Liberation is a central theme within New Age teachings; the primary goal of the followers is to achieve perfection at the end of one's life path and to become united with God, the cosmic energy. On this way one can make use of various techniques from transcendental meditation to positive thinking and Yoga. Again, this kind of perception is foreign to neo-pagan groups. The emphasis lies much more on the intensity of life, on experiencing the here and now as much as possible. The here and now perspective is also true of the mode these neo-pagan movements see history. The focus is once more on the present, while New Age people are waiting for a new era and a messiah. As far as holidays and celebrations are concerned, New Age adherents do not really hold any. There are meetings and various ceremonies, but the institution of priesthood is unknown to them, they have teachers, gurus and masters. Neo-pagan celebrations follow a certain tradition and are connected to the cycles of nature. They pay particular attention to rituals regarding birth, marriage or death. While the New Age promotes individual practice, in neo-pagan movements initiates conduct the ceremonies in closed convents with priests as leaders. Although the New Age refers to some religious traditions such as Buddhism, Christianity or Gnosticism, it borrows only a couple of elements from these and uses them in a specific way. Neo-pagan groups reach back to various archaic traditions, since their aim is to reconstruct these religious systems. Thus, we can conclude that while New Age and neo-pagan movements share a lot of similarities, they are two different phenomena both responding to the broken character of the postmodern era. New Age combines philosophies from the East with spirituality, esoteric teachings, psychology, quantum physics or biology and is more individual than neo-pagan movements that adhere to archaic traditions, have deep national roots and their adherents often undergo specific initiations (cf. Szilágyi and Szilárdi 2007).

Many of the above mentioned features of both neo-pagan movements and New Age can be found as major themes in Coelho's present novel. Therefore, on the one hand, the novel is to be read as a product of postmodern pluralism of religious, literary and philosophical trends. On the other hand, the use of a wide range of religious and mythical symbols and topics expresses precisely the same pluralism itself. As a result, the novel can best be characterized by syncretism in its use of different religious and philosophical beliefs and symbols. The pilgrimage itself as we have seen is part of the Christian tradition, according to the Turners' classification it belongs to the category of medieval pilgrimages. However, the

exercises described, the rituals presented reveal a tradition that most probably precedes Christianity and has archaic roots. According to the novel, Paulo is a member of the order of RAM, which is somehow related to Catholicism, yet the exercises he does are unknown to the majority of the everyday practitioners. There is an exclusivity surrounding RAM and the initiation journey, which bring Paulo's experience close to the ones described in neo-pagan movements. However, in many instances his path takes individual turns, he has a Master and the rituals he performs combine Buddhist meditation techniques with different esoteric practices, e.g. the seed exercise, where Paulo has to kneel down, sit on his knees, bend forward so that his head touches his knees. Then he stretches his arms behind himself, getting into a position resembling that of the fetus. He relaxes by breathing calmly and deeply. The picture arising within him is that of a seed, which will slowly start to grow. Parallel to the growth of the seed, Paulo stretches as if he wanted to reach the sun, until he became huge. This is an exercise meant to offer its practitioner the experience of rebirth, an idea which is accepted by New Age, but not by neo-pagan groups.

Thus we may conclude that the narrative abounds in elements taken from New Age and/or neo-pagan movements, which all emphasize that the novel itself is a product of the Pagan meta-culture combined with postmodern life philosophy. The protagonist's experience belongs to the *liminal* phase within the rite of passage, manifested in form of a pilgrimage. Yet, as a postmodern phenomenon involving a voluntary act it becomes a *liminoid* experience at the same time. The *Prologue* and the *Epilogue* of the novel clearly mark the beginning and the end of Paulo's inner and outer journey. The whole *El Camino* is an "in-between" phase for the protagonist, followed by his reintegration into society as a newborn person, having learnt that in order to succeed in finding his own path not only knowledge was needed but also humility towards the simple folk, towards life itself.

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# The Image of the East-Central European in Rose Tremain's *The Road Home*

## *Food, Materialism and Capitalist Faith in a Culture Clash*

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**Abstract**. In Rose Tremain's *The Road Home,* the culture clash of the British and the East-Central European is portrayed through a complex symbolism centred on images of food, consumption and waste. This literary representation may shed light on British literary auto-images, as well as hetero-images of the Eastern European immigrant. The novel's presentation of this culture shock is defined by the cultural historical and economic circumstances of the parties. Food and material provide the symbolic sphere where the relationship between Britain and East-Central Europe is characterized in terms of capitalist worldview as opposed to a post-communist existence. William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the most important intertext for Tremain's novel. Hamlet is obsessed with the vulnerability of material in light of the spiritual value attached to it in the form of human soul. Stephen Greenblatt's ideas on food, waste and the Christian belief in divine existence residing in material objects – ideas that originate in early modern times – shed light on the motif of material and food in *The Road Home.* Seen through the symbolism of food and the idea of differing values being attached to matter, the narrative identity of Lev, the protagonist of Tremain's work, experiences drastic change due to his encounter with the capitalist, British 'other'.

**Keywords**: British East-Central Europe novel, symbol of food, Tremain, Greenblatt, capitalism, material, representation

## Introduction

Contemporary British novels about East-Central Europe rarely display such an intricate symbolic web in presenting the figure of the East-Central European as Rose Tremain's *The Road Home.* This work is rich in symbolic representation of the British East-Central European culture clash drawn from the field of food, matter, waste and artistic representation. All these symbols can be understood

from the background of the cultural-economic dichotomy of capitalist and post-socialist countries.

Lev, the protagonist, who has an unspecified East-Central European identity, is an intertextual kin to Hamlet. Lev is on the borderline of eras and cultures and this makes him resemble the original Shakespearian character. Apart from overt intertextual links, the mutual abhorrence at certain aspects of matter strikingly binds the hero of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to that of Tremain. Stephen Greenblatt wrote about this issue in the context of a Renaissance religious anxiety concerning spiritual value attached to food and material (Greenblatt 2000). His suggestions about the quasi-religious aspect of modernity and capitalism have a lot to reveal in connection to the imagological issues of Tremain's novel. Throughout the painful evolution of the East-Central European hetero-image, *The Road Home* also presents a critical view of the British. All this is embedded in the symbolism of food, consumption and waste endowed with divine, spiritual or aesthetic value. While the reader gains insight into the novel's presentation of the Eastern-European, fundamental questions arise with regard to the difference between the British and the East-Central European, and respectively, the capitalist and the post-socialist ways of thinking inherent in the cultural codes of the different economic systems.

## Capitalism as a miracle for post-Socialist societies

Lev, the 42-year-old economic immigrant, arrives in Britain having just survived the severe emotional crisis of losing his wife. He works in a posh London restaurant and sends money home to his small daughter and elderly mother. Through the narrative, he comes to admire elegant and modern cuisine. He becomes very much obsessed with the "beautiful food" he never experienced at home. His dream is to open a modern restaurant in his hometown to show people there that special food, prepared with meticulous care and served elegantly gives pleasure, even happiness. All this stands in symbolic opposition to "Communist food" characterized by "stained tablecloth," "unidentifiable stew" and waiters who behave like "labour-camp guards" (Tremain 2007, 39). Consequently, the image of food gains the role of representing the symbolic chasm between "the culture of plenty and the culture of want," as expressed by Anna Maria Tomczak (Tomczak 2013, 457).

Food that lacks in poor countries and that abounds in rich countries is and has traditionally been the most important motivation behind economic migration. Food as a symbol has centuries-old roots in European capitalist ideology that dates back to the cradle of modernism and rationalism, that is, the Renaissance. In relation to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Stephen Greenblatt calls attention to early modern religious anxieties concerning Real Presence in the Holy Communion

and, consequently, material in general. In Shakespeare's time, Catholic and Protestant debates about the Holy Communion savoured the rising ideology of secular materialism. Catholics believed that the material of the bread, after transubstantiation, is one and equal to the body of Christ, whereas, Protestants regarded the Eucharist as a representation. This had further consequences and anxieties regarding the journey of Christ through the material from the mouth to the bowels and onwards (Greenblatt 2000, 150).

The continued belief that products of the human brain (materialized) can appear as independent beings endowed with life of their own influences the formation of 19th-century consumer capitalist ideology. Greenblatt cites Marx here who argued that capitalism resembles Catholicism in this respect. Marx illustrates this with the ontological sameness of the statement "This bread *is* the body of Jesus Christ" versus "This bread *is* five pennies." Both are ideas requiring faith with grave consequences to practical life. Capitalist social order should be credited (paper money is one emblematic instant of this), otherwise it breaks down into chaos (Greenblatt 2000, 166). The gesture of faith, or rather credit, a suspended version of faith, that material is more than what meets the eye is essential to capitalism.

This quintessential element of capitalist economic and cultural systems captures Lev's imagination in modern British cuisine. To him, what GK Ashe performs in the kitchen is a miracle that turns the base, lowly material into "most delicious combinations that the human mind is capable of inventing" (Tremain 2007, 101). The fact that it is then called by some posh French name strengthens its transubstantiation. Lev realizes in London that food can be much more than simple nourishment for the body. Served and prepared in a way nearing art, food can be "refreshing," "delicate," and even "beautiful" (Tremain 2007, 76-78). The terms with which he describes modern British meals create an atmosphere which suggests that entirely new feelings, such as respect, awe or admiration are aroused in Lev for the dishes themselves.

This transubstantiation of matter is what Lev intends to bring to his poor post-Communist country. However, he still has to convince his own home culture. As a postmodern, Eastern European Hamlet, he continues conversing with his deceased father's spirit. Lev remembers his father saying "things can only be what they are" (Tremain 2007, 78). In light of Lev's inner turmoil of newly-found culinary realizations in the narration's present, this flashback settles the dichotomy of the two worlds. Britain and East-Central Europe differ with respect to a fundamental attitude to faith in value attached to material. In the representation of the novel, East-Central Europe lacks the capability of believing in miracles that turn one thing into another. It may be called pessimism or scepticism. The great extent to which post-socialist societies got accustomed to not being the master of their own lives is illustrated by the words of Ina (Lev's mother): "what's the point of it [caring about anything – Á. H.] when

life takes everything away?" (Tremain 2007, 7). In contrast to this characteristic apathy, Lev seems to take on the role of the optimist dreamer. His character is the most open-minded East-Central European figure of the novel who has a natural aptitude to what is portrayed as a Western, capitalist self-fulfilling faith. A faith which, by its very existence, engenders the working of systems let that be either religious, economic, social, or art systems.[1] Although, Lev is, from the beginning, inclined to adopt the capitalist type of faith in the symbolic value of material, his conversion happens in a painful and shocking way.

## Anxiety of waste

*The Road Home* presents a development of Lev's narrative identity which may be appropriated to what the study of imagology calls the effect of the auto-image on the hetero-image. This novel may be considered, to some extent, a *Bildungsroman*. Although, Lev is not a classic youth who achieves adulthood through a series of adventures, he achieves some maturity indeed which leads him to new and life-changing inferences. His personal development models after a typical pattern in such imagologically-marked novels which may be termed 'the effect of the other.' In this pattern, as it was described by István Fried, the protagonist's waking up to a wider cultural reality happens through the influence of another particular culture (Fried 2012, 209). The 'other' in the British characters broadens the view of Lev to a more general, Western way of thinking.

Throughout this guided development, the fictional East-Central European immigrant becomes at once privy to and the victim of some of the most controversial social and cultural phenomena with which the British are forced to live. In *The Road Home*, we receive a fully-fledged tableau of British society, where dirty work with the disgusting aspect of matter is mostly done by socially-marginalized figures, foreign immigrant workers. Lev works at a kitchen sink, his Irish friend is a plumber and one certain East-Central European character expresses the statement that to the English, we as bodies are a "mystery and terror" (Tremain 2007, 96).

It seems that this Western world into which Lev is thrown has problems when facing the decomposition of matter. This phenomenon may be explained by Greenblatt's ideas on the Renaissance-originated modern anxieties regarding

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1    In fact, post-socialist societies are capable of belief, only that it is restricted to a traditional, magical, and more passive religious stance. Corresponding to this kind of belief, in the world of the novel, Eastern-Europeans have a tendency to expect miracles without their active intervention. An example of the attitudes the two distinct types of faith give rise to is how Rudi and Ina passively wait for something to happen or someone to intervene, as opposed to Lev who mostly aspires to influence his own fate. In order to fully realize this dream, he needs to encounter the West.

the vulnerability of the material which carries divinity. The early modern religious tracts were most puzzled by the issue of how to account for the body of Christ in excrement. Waste as the civilizationally shameful and disgusting side of human body was debated to have been elevated by eating Christ's physical body (Greenblatt 2000, 147). Greenblatt argues that there is a hidden Protestant polemic against the Catholic Eucharist in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Hamlet's sceptical, secular doubts about the possibility of divine presence in the endlessly circulating, decaying material are pointed with abhorrence against the Catholic discourse of suspended disbelief (Greenblatt 2000, 153). However, the always-hesitating Hamlet is rather puzzled by the coexistence of belief and disbelief in his own mind. He is preoccupied with the physical law that resists any self-fulfilling belief. No matter how strong Catholics believe, it does not preserve the transubstantiated bread from decay. Hamlet is famously lost on the verge of two worlds which later became the very root of Western civilization with all its doubts and anxieties. It seems that abhorrence at excrement and waste has been an integral part of Western culture ever since the Renaissance. The early modern religious debates created a secular world at once discarding and keeping some aspects of faith. This world persists in being embarrassed by human filth.

*The Road Home* presents this Western attitude in the form of a social critique, where British society chooses to avoid any dealings with waste, leaving it to immigrants. As opposed to the English civilizational attitude to the dark side of flesh, body, and finally food, Lev repeatedly expresses that he has no problem cleaning the toilet or washing vomit. Cleaning his ill wife's vomit, to him, is "part of her, everyday human mess, a sign that his wife was still alive" (Tremain 2007, 86). He does not share Western anxieties concerning the waste, because for him, material is not yet endowed with spiritual value.

In imagological terms, this contrast may be called the age-old nature-culture dichotomy. Moreover, this dichotomy may also be explained by the presence or lack of the early modern originated, later capitalist faith in the spiritual value of the matter. East-Central Europeans are represented in the novel as people to whom matter is matter and it carries no other significance or meaning that would link it with values or lack of values.

## Food, body, sexuality

Abhorrence at human excrement has become the indicator that Western culture has endowed material with spiritual value. Christians have taken part in God's mystic life for centuries through eating his body as a meal. However, the Western world associates excrement with evil, because it is the despised other end of the same process. Food associated with the positive pole of physicality, and waste

with the negative is a classic symbolism. In *The Road Home*, food also appears as an archetypical form of matter: flesh and body. The metaphorical link between food and sexuality is age old and it has defined centuries of British literature as well. *The Road Home*'s Shakespearean intertext, *Hamlet* also abounds in linking food and sexuality. Instances of this range from the gustatory "rottenness" linked to Gertrude's sexual appetite that disgusts Hamlet to the association of sexuality and eating rubbish (Greenblatt 2000, 156).

Rose Tremain's narrative style is also rich in metaphorical language revolving around the image of food. Lev and Sophie's relationship from beginning to end is especially defined by images of food and eating. At the dawn of their love affair, both are drawn towards each other by a mere sexual attraction characterized by appetite. Sophie's first violently devouring kiss is described thus: "he saw her mouth open and waiting" (Tremain 2007, 121). Later also, Sophie often refers to Lev as a delicious dish. Lev also expresses his desire in culinary terms, he often describes his English lover in gustatory terms, likens her to a delicious meal and finds her tasty: "she is like some exotic dish that I don't yet know how to make but yearn for in my dreams" (Tremain 2007, 176).

In terms of sexuality, the metaphor of food consumption carries the meaning of exploitation. Lev's relationship with the English Sophie is paralleled to his immigrant existence: being economically exploited and treated as mere flesh in bed gradually become interconnected. The text links Sophie's exploitation of Lev's sexual performance to his being exploited at his workplace. Both processes render Lev an animal. There is a parallel in textual references to Lev's exhaustion likened to a mule and his post-coital exhaustion when "he fell forwards on her, like an animal, spent and dying" (Tremain 2007, 193).

This link between food and sexuality leads to a more general understanding of the process of evaluation, and even more generally the appropriation of value to material. As Hamlet links eating rubbish to filthy sexuality, Tremain's novel also plays with attaching ways of eating to stages of Lev and Sophie's sexual relationship. At a turning point of their affair, Lev tells her the story of his arrival in England. Then he associates his initial loneliness with eating a hot-dog alone. By this time, Sophie seems to be tired of Lev's narratives and her position in it, so she attempts at laughing off Lev's wistful memories by a derisive remark about how heartbreaking it all is. After this, Lev feels dumbed: "He knew that Sophie had said something he should probably be laughing at, but he didn't know what it was. […] He stared at the seagull cramming its sharp beak with the dropped food. […] He sensed that something fundamental about the day had changed" (Tremain 2007, 182–183). In terms of food symbolism, the gull's eating leftovers is linked to Lev's disappointment and feeling of being refused and thrown away by Sophie's remark as if he were rubbish.

In symbolic terms, Lev's position in this love affair is characterized by an initial desired food, an interstitial tasty dish and a final state of thrown-away breadcrumbs. Sophie thus symbolically expends Lev, rendering him from a highly-valued delicious food to waste. This symbolic expenditure resembles the effects of the capitalist faith that attaches value to material being fully aware of the non-objective, non-innate and not materially-defined nature of that value. Although Lev never conceptualizes this symbolism of sexuality, when Sophie leaves him for a fashionable celebrity, his frustration may be attached to his abhorrence at consumer society's 'take it, use it, throw it' attitude.

This consumerism is rooted in attaching symbolic value to material. Lev, when encountering it in the form of attaching positive value to simple meals, passionately admires this suspension of disbelief. However, when it is directed against him, he somehow finds the attitude disgusting. There is a dynamic of the encounter with the 'other' also involved here. Sophie is deliberately depicted as an exotic dish. Her otherness first attracts him with all its consequences, whereas, later, he finds the British consumerist attitude repulsive. Their final violent sexual intercourse is also meant to indicate Lev's vengeful reciprocation of the exploitation and consumerist degradation of value that he had suffered from the girl. What Lev is experiencing here is not far from the phenomenon that is a traditional object of capitalist anxieties regarding precisely the value of work and the corresponding objectification of the person who does the work. The Marxian alienation is closely linked to consumerism which renders people material whose value can be set in consumerist terms. This happens to Lev and that is why he attempts to seek revenge on Sophie by raping her, calling her a whore, which is a classic degradation of value in consumerist terms. Then he desperately engages in nationalist denigration calling all English girls "racist, promiscuous, shameless" (Tremain 2007, 241). This is the lowest point in the novel concerning the cooperation of the hetero- and auto-image in order to achieve a fertilizing effect of one image on the other. However, by the end of the book, Lev slowly and reluctantly learns his lessons in the capitalist faith.

## Art, representation, value relativism

The discourse of suspended disbelief is not only a characteristic of capitalism, but it is strongly present in artistic representation, as it is claimed by Greenblatt (2000, 163). A characteristic British auto-image in the novel is attached to postmodern theatre. Young dramatists among Sophie's friends appal Lev with a theory one of them reveals to him on a party. The English dramatist suggests that true progressive English theatre, after the period of the 20th-century kitchen sink drama, should now turn towards the loo. This is meant as a symbolic gesture

of deconstructing what civilizational dreg is buried there. In the context of the social reality where real loos are mostly cleaned and mended by immigrants and not the English, this theory sounds ironic. But this irony is felt neither by the English theatre community, nor by Lev, the immigrant.

Together with Sophie, Lev finally sees such a naturalist 'loo' play about a paedophile father. The artist friends hail the drama for its subtle and sharp representation of reality. In contrast, Lev is outraged by its arty manners, and feels hurt in his fatherly affection. For him, like for most immigrants in London, the disgusting side of the flesh, such as excrement or some unnatural sexual desire, is neither disgusting nor a subject of art. It seems that he is unable to decode artistic, mimetic signification in such a postmodern artwork. He takes it at face value. His indignation at the play culminates in an uncontrolled rage against the whole artificial world created by the suspended disbelief of art, by the capitalist faith, by what he gradually understood as Britain, as the West. He greatly admired all of this and wanted to share it earlier, but it repeatedly seemed to refuse him and his mentality. István Fried's notion of 'Hassliebe' may also be illuminating here (Fried 2000), as there is a simultaneous attraction and repulsion in Lev's relation to the Western centre.

Turning against a world perceived unreal is a key element in his fury: "he knew he should have tried to master his feelings, but why master feelings that, in this unreal world he'd just entered, felt real and true?" (Tremain 2007, 210). In imagology, it is an often-described phenomenon that the culture of the other is perceived as unreal. This is an attempt at preserving the purity and inherent originality of one's own culture, which has the impression of being threatened by encountering the 'other'. As claiming the 'other' unreal mostly occurs in situations of cultural interaction, it seems to be a function of what Homi Bhabha terms the enunciatory Third Space, where cultures no longer exist in isolation but in organic fluctuation (Bhabha 1994, 37). In this sense, Lev's deep frustration is not only directed against what he experiences as the other in artistic representation as well as in capitalist faith. His rage is also directed against his own self which is involved in and wants to take part in this culture. In light of this, his desperate drunken ravaging in the streets when he spills out waste and rubbish onto the pavement and shouts: "I've made my life obscene" (Tremain 2007, 215) are understandable. He himself, as a would-be capitalist, a new believer in symbolic values participated in rendering his own post-socialist mentality ridiculous and his own life obscene. Two selves are raging in Lev. Two different attitudes, on the one hand, Western art conception and, on the other hand, East-Central European thinking are pitted against each other. What is art for Britain, the capitalist Lev and refined chef is reality for Lev, the immigrant and East-Central European.

Such a portrayal of the East-Central European may be associated with what Joep Leerssen calls primitivism: an exoticist image of the periphery as innocent

and authentic (Leerssen 2007, 407). *The Road Home* is often criticized by its primitivist, exoticist, or even orientalist portrayal of East-Central Europe. József Jaskulski goes as far as suggesting that Lev is an accumulation of features earlier represented by literary figures such as Caliban and Friday (Jaskulski 2009, 3). Although I think that Lev's character is much more complex and it is portrayed in the very turmoil of the Bhabhaian enunciatory site of culture as opposed to Jaskulski's idea of him as a simplistic and essentialized brute, orientalist charges also have basis. The book's depiction of East-Central Europe may be situated in orientalist traditions of portraying the margin in feminized passivity as Corina Crisu claims (Crisu 2010, 373). Moreover, Lev's country is mostly represented as a pastoral world. As Jaskulski claims, it appears as a unified rural post-communist conglomerate with unskilled manual labourers and party members to oppress them (Jaskulski 2009, 5). However, there are important characters who tinge this picture, such as Vitas, who is a university student, Lydia, the teacher and Maestro Greszler, the great conductor. What is more, the charge of orientalistically-fixed characteristics of the cultures of East and West could be refuted by the whole narrative which is after all a story of identity in transition. I think that aside from the distinctly present stereotypical portrayal, the novel is a subtle saga about the operation of the very stereotypes it seems to be finally unable to evade entirely. The most important illustration of this is Lev's personal development which cannot be simplified as a learning process, because characteristics that Lev develops throughout his stay in London cannot be attributed only to the influence of British culture. Some are already present in Lev, such as the promise of self-fulfilling belief, which is mostly facilitated by the encounter with the capitalist 'other' though.

However, the *Bildungsroman* line of the narration is still often criticized from an imagologist point of view. Critics, such as Julia Elena Thiel, disapprove of the novel's fairy-tale like, rags-to-riches archetype structure (Thiel 2014, 215) which allows the narrative to end in only the hetero-image being affected by the auto-image, and only a few, if any, reciprocal interaction happening as also pointed out by Kathleen Starck (2013, 66). By the end of the book, Lev seems to internalize the condition of crediting value to material attributed in the novel mostly to the capitalist West. This is what is manifested in his obsession to open a progressive restaurant, which he successfully does. This closing part has been widely criticized as an orientalist moment of civilizing mission (Jaskulski 2009, 215 and Starck 2013, 59), which is mostly the case indeed. Lev is about to teach his fellow countrymen the lesson he has learnt in England. He wishes to transport the condition of crediting value to simple material and thus elevating it.

An episode from the last scenes of the novel exemplifies it well. Lev and his best friend stare at a newly-opened modern art gallery in their hometown. His friend is outraged by a statue made of car components, and says, evoking Lev's

outrage at the drama: "I spent my fucking life going in search of auto-parts. I lay awake at night worrying myself to death. And now what? Some arsehole sculptor just squanders them – as though they had no value. As though nothing had any value anymore." To this culture shock at the material's symbolic value, the already-changed Lev answers: "How has anyone ever been able to calculate value? Only by the price people are prepared to pay" (Tremain 2007, 360). Again, we see the problem of food and waste. Auto-parts, which are considered valuable by Rudi, are also valued by the artist, but on another level, because of other characteristics that are not directly rooted in their practical value. At this illuminating moment of the book, capitalist ideology, Western food culture, and artistic representation all culminate in a new perspective for the protagonist. The attitude that attaches value to material, let that be a combination of food, paper money or auto parts, leads way to the Western-originated mentality which is aware of the non-objectively given nature of its own categories.

## Conclusion

Rose Tremain's *The Road Home* is a culture shock narrative in *Bildungsroman* fashion. It presents the encounter of the British auto- and the East-Central European hetero-image through the complex symbolism centred on images of food, consumption and waste. These materialistic problems are put on an ideological level by Stephen Greenblatt's seminal essay on Hamlet, an intertextual kin to Tremain's protagonist. Reading *The Road Home* through Greenblatt's reading of *Hamlet* is illuminating as to the wide scope of meanings in which this cultural interaction is depicted in this novel. This reading opens up various meanings attached to the symbol of food, which appears as a simple signifier meaning identity to some critics, such as Anna Maria Tomczak (2013, 456). Instead of being a simple signifier, the symbolic meaning of food has Renaissance roots which reveal its interrelatedness with Christian faith, later capitalist credit as well as Christian-originated anxieties concerning excrement and later capitalist anxieties concerning the exploitation and objectification of people.

Through gaining an insight into Western food culture, Lev grasps an important element from the underlying structure of what is portrayed as capitalist mentality. What is a cathartic intercultural experience for Lev is the representational thinking which is a common element in the "beautiful food" of modern cuisine, in capitalist faith, and in artistic representation. What Lev learns as part of a fictional British civilizing mission is attributing value to material.

The fact that the novel presents this gesture as typically Western renders the portrayal undeniably orientalist. However, the book's presentation of the culture clash is aware of non-essentialist elements of identity as well. Lev's development

of personality happens under the strong influence of the British auto-image, but the characters from the two cultural milieus are portrayed as more subtle and less-culturally coded. Moreover, the protagonist's transition is far from being utter and uncritical. Conclusively, the novel shows the blending of two cultures in most complex ways, being aware of the radical differences between British and East-Central European cultural heritage and some of the painful lessons that both parties have to learn during such a process. The interwoven symbols of food, material, capitalism and artistic representation are at the core of this representation and they have an illuminating effect in depicting fundamental elements of this culture clash.

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# Change of Place, Space Perception and Topographic Discourse

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**Abstract**. The paper examines the view and representation of space in Terézia Mora's prose, primarily based on her novel entitled *The Only Man on the Continent* (*Der einzige Mann auf dem Kontinent*). In the universe of the novel the perception of space basically determines the individual's space of action and highly influences his self-image as well as his attitude toward alterity. The city not only functions as space, but also forms a multicultural medium which becomes itself the subject of reflection and metanarration. In the novel the anthropological places and non-places, in Augé's sense, change their function and thus the borders of referential, mental and virtual worlds are blurred, the notion of space itself is revaluated. The protagonist is the Ulysses of our days; his journeys and adventures mainly take place in his imagination. In the virtual world he loses his sense of reality, which can also be perceived in the narrative procedures of the text: the novel is in fact the protagonist's quest for identity, his endless monologue, which is interrupted by the omniscient narrator's comments from time to time. In the meantime the evident intertextual context also gets shape: the text maintains an ironical intertextual connection with James Joyce's *Ulysses*.[1]

**Keywords:** space representation, identity, anthropological places, non-places, virtual worlds

## Referentialised and displaced space specificities

The key elements of Terézia Mora's prose poetics are the description of the scene and the representation of space. This feature seems to be more emphatically present at her than at other contemporary prose writers. Already from her first volume, both the Hungarian and the German reception assign great importance to these aspects.

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The Hungarian reception highlights the referential aspects of the setting. László Füzi goes the farthest in his conclusions; he interprets the image of the village represented in Terézia Mora's short stories at the Hungarian publication of the volume *Seltsame Materie (Strange Material)* as follows:

> "An inn, a church tower, a sugar factory. A swimming pool. A village." I preserve this village, this village-image as an indelible part of my life, as they evoke the village in which I grew up myself. "Low, two-eyed houses, green gates, a chained mongrel behind every gate. [...] I'm looking around at the end of the street for a moment, and crossing through under the gate, choosing the shorter way through the rails, on the left I'm leaving behind the railway station with red-white-green geraniums, rising above the oily sleepers" – I read at Terézia Mora, and even today I can almost feel the sleepers under my feet, as we "were climbing through" under the gate, watching if there was a train coming. And then the beach – Terézia Mora calls it swimming pool – and the square of the football pitch with the poplars, and the highway, playing such an important part also in our lives [...] (Füzi 2011)[2]

The church tower, the inn, the railway station with geraniums, however, do not have such differentiation criteria that would concretely identify the scene and would make its occurrence unique. The stereotypical character of the elements of the setting occurring in the text is much stronger than their specificity. The critic obviously projects his own memories and ideas upon the text; it becomes a referential space through the experience of recognition.[3]

The German reception calls the volume a collection of topographic short stories with an allegorical touch; it also mentions the probable reference of the scenes, but it mostly highlights the texts' power of creating atmosphere and symbolic aura. The reception considers it important to emphasise the depiction of the Central Eastern European dictatorship behind the Iron Curtain and other spatial references of life along the Austrian–Hungarian border (Prutti 2006). It even discovers in the texts elements of the dialect spoken by Germans living in the western part of Hungary.

In her second book Terézia Mora "conceives space not as an a priori entity but as cultural, social and discursive construct" (Hammer 2006, 339). The scenes "are hard to identify, they are constantly changing, [...] the emphasis is on the sequence

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

3    It is also important to note that the experience of recognition – which is supposedly formed in the mental space of the receiver as the compound of imaginary and real reference points and their emotional connotations – leads to the fact that the critic categorises the volume and its authoress as belonging to the Hungarian literary paradigm.

of strange, variegated and marvellous adventures and catastrophes as well as on the change of place" (Wagner 2006). The protagonist of the novel entitled *Day In Day Out* (*Alle Tage*) has a Serbian–Hungarian cultural background. It is one of the name-giving paradoxes also occurring later that Abel Nema (*néma* 'mute' in Hungarian) is the one who speaks ten languages. His identity is versatile and hard to define, which is reinforced by the fact that he has several names in the novel: the anagram Celin des Prados derives from Displaced Person, thus the protagonist is the literary embodiment of the dissplaced man. The scene of *Day In Day Out* is a schematic city named B., which however can be referentialised from the very first sentences and can be identified with Berlin. The identity of the characters emerges not from the fact that they are bound to a place, but from "drifting in the undefinable »here and now«" (Wagner 2006).

## The city as a topographic discourse space

Her third book, whose title – *The Only Man on the Continent* (*Der einzige Mann auf dem Kontinent*) – already refers to topographic determinedness, continues the same line: the novel is the story of the man moved from his place. This statement is apparently in contradiction with the fact that the text precisely defines when and where the storyline unfolds: in Berlin. However, this degree of referenciality does not satisfy the critics; some even go further and ascertain exactly where the protagonist's office stands and what he sees when he looks out of the window: the Potsdamer Platz (Albath 2009). Nevertheless, this kind of reading is misleading, as it excludes from interpretation the most important novel structuring procedure, namely the fact that the very notion of space is transformed in the text.

*The Only Man on the Continent* is also the novel of the present. According to László Márton, for instance, the functioning of the present reality can be best traced in urban environment. "The spatial and temporal indicators structuring the formation of the present moment (and that of the text at the same time) are situated most frequently and evidently in literary works evoking urban environment" (Márton 2006). The narrated time encompasses our days.

At the same time, it is also a city novel, which suggests with its title that this time the novel will be about the extension of space, about enlarging it to the size of a continent; the protagonist, Darius Kopp is the ruler of this huge empire, his telling name suggests his almighty position. Indeed, this strategy works at the beginning of the novel: the protagonist wouldn't exchange his comfortable life with anything else, not even for all treasures of Darius.

Little role is given to the physical description of the city, to the representation of architectural space. After waking up, Darius Kopp perceives not its spectacle but its noises, half asleep he hears how traffic is rumbling in the street; in addition

to this, the flat is situated under an air corridor, the sound of airplanes taking off and touching down can be heard.

The structure of the novel is based on the idea of network (cf. Csobánka 2011). The constant motion, the layered dynamics of space, the superimposition of the diverse aspects of hectic life are outlined in the text. The novel is but incessant change of place. Instead of travel encompassing long distances, the scarce experiences of motion as well as the change of space perception are the structuring principles of the novel. It is not travel in the literal sense of the word, but rather "the rambling of the protagonist from scene to scene (whose patterns can be traced back to the early peregrination novels)" (Márton 2006).

The narration follows the rhythm and network character of motion. Entire blocks of sentences are often repeated word by word, sometimes with the opposite sign or in form of questions. The descriptions alternate with continuous dialogues, which are the protagonist's monologues most of the time. He does not only converse with others, but also speaks to himself, what is more, towards the end of the novel he cannot make a distinction between talking to others and thinking, between cursing aloud or within himself. This is completed with the comments of the omniscient narrator. This is a spontaneous, often low-stylised language, especially in the case of homodiegetic narratorial comments and corrections in brackets. The indirect speech and direct quotation are not separated, homodiegetic narration alternates with heterodiegetic narration, which maintains the tension of the narrative. The network character is increased by the text's system of intertextual connections: whereas in *Ulysses*, by relating Leopold Bloom's ordinary story, James Joyce comprises into one day Ulysses's adventures, in Terézia Mora's novel Darius Kopp's rambling in the city involves one week's events: the narrated time lasts from a Friday morning event to the next Friday night. A character called Ulysses Kuhfuss appears in the novel; the narrator especially draws attention to this name as an ironical allusion to James Joyce's novel; Darius – whose name alludes to the ancient Persian king – goes through diverse vicissitudes, his modern age urban wanderings sometimes seem endless and hopelessly heroic like those of the epic hero.

The noise of the city imbues Darius Kopp with the feeling of homeliness. He encounters the first difficulty only when he is compelled to change place, to go to his workplace, to his office cluttered up with boxes, owned excusively by himself, as he is the single representative, in the German language area as well as in the Eastern European region, of an international company dealing with wireless network construction and network protection. In fact, he has no prescribed hours of work, he only has to monthly submit reports on his performance as well as the prognosis of the expected sale.

## The car as the space of identity

Marc Augé distinguishes anthropological places and non-places. Anthropological places are regarded as "relational, historical and concerned with identity" (Augé 1995, 77). When we enter Darius Kopp's life, we find him in the state of displacement: he has no driving licence, and the fact that he cannot lead his usual lifestyle disrupts his whole way of life. It follows from Augé's definition cited above that "a space that cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (Augé 1995, 77–78). This, however, appears to be different in Darius Kopp's case.

The basis of and reason for displacement is that he has to do without his car. The car is for him more than a simple object, more than a means of transport and even more than a status symbol. It is a temporary space, still, it secures the stability of his personality, its firmness protects him from the negative effects of the external world and provides him a sense of belonging. "As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality" (Augé 1995, 94). Although the space of the car does not create organically organized social interaction, it becomes part of his identity and individual history, so in Darius Kopp's case the place and the non-place partly overlap:

> Ever since the regime change, […] he had not travelled by anything else but his own car. – By *my* own Faraday cage, with *my* Alcantara seat cover inside it, with *my* air conditioner, with *my* radio, with *my* purity – in the widest sense of the word –, not locked up together with others' asses and aggression in the mornings and evenings. This is what I need, to feel that I'm not a loser. It is as simple as that. (Mora 2011, 17, emphasis in the original.)

The quotation reveals that the city, the external world connotes impurity and dirt, whereas the attributes of purity are associated with detachment, which is also related to the separation from the crowd, what is more, to a sense of superiority. The confined space of the car in the crowded scene of the city becomes the terrain of individual self-accomplishment, where he can distance himself from the crowd and can define himself as an autonomous subject. Darius Kopp's attachment to his car does not only provide stability for his identity, but it also relieves him of doubts. He has no problems with his self-esteem, in his thoughts he calls himself God. The ego predominates in the individual obsessed with himself. He is convinced – and the comfort equipment in his car reinforces him in this conviction – that he is "the king of the world", as he is the only man on the continent, because the multinational computer companies employ only one man on every continent, as no residence, what is more, not even people are required for their transactions.

## The train and the Other

When Darius Kopp is forced to give up the exclusivity of the car and to resort to public transport, it means for him the biggest pang, it destroys his day. The means of transport separates but also connects spaces, thus it is a kind of transitory place which contributes to the reinterpretation of the city; looking out of the windows of the S-Bahn and the U-Bahn offers a distinct perspective. He discovers that the trains are cleaner and faster than he thought, and he also gets an image of the city different from the one he used to have: from this changed angle Berlin shares the characteristics of a slowly shrinking and emptying metropolis.

"In cultural semantics the city can always be related to the foreign, in modernity it has almost become the paradigm of alterity, since its lack of transparency can be paralleled to the incomprehensible, to otherness" (Hammer 2006, 354). Darius Kopp is a lonesome traveller, however; not that he does not want to get to know the foreign, but he downright feels a deep aversion to it, as to everything that is unknown to him. He does not share space with anybody, he is repulsed by the common spaces of travelling, and he regards travelling by train inferior to travelling by car, as according to him only ordinary people travel by train. He is haunted by the filthy trains of the former GDR even when the circumstances are different as compared to his youth, when the train used to be the scene of social division:

> It is always a dark, wintertime image, the carriage is ice-cold, or on the contrary, overheated, it smells of diesel and garlic, everything is dirty, dark figures sit in the corner (in fact soaked workers, lacking sleep or exhausted again, sitting on sticky, creaky, imitation leather seats), and one could catch the connection not even once over the years. (Mora 2011, 297)

Being an outsider is part of his identity; the feeling of foreignness is not foreign to him, in fact, in his imagination he is often detached from real space: "he is no longer here but somewhere else, where he is a total foreigner, thus he can be free" (Mora 2011, 332). The train also functions as the place of memory. The present does not only evoke the past; the cultural superimposition of past and present takes place.

The ethnic mix of the characters of the novel also points at the historical and regional connections and cultural determinedness of identity. The simultaneous presence of information regarding various nations primarily illustrates globalization created by virtual space; at the same time, the figures of the book themselves form a multicultural community. There are among them English, Americans, Armenians, Greeks, Polish, Russians; the protagonist, Darius Kopp, is East German, his wife, Flora Meier is Hungarian.

Questions of ethnicity naturally arise in such a community, in form of either cultural references or ethnic stereotypes. There are hardly any German characters

in the book; if there occur some, their image is not quite favourable. Her name already characterises Frau Eigenwillig, the rigurous secretary; one of Darius's negotiation partners is also too stiff, he does not tolerate being late for their business meeting, even if it is justified – at least for Darius.

Darius is the most receptive, understanding and tolerant in the book; he does not have prejudices, this is why he is even considered a little naïve. His Russian friend, Yuri informs him that his boss, the Londoner Anthony Mills, is a "German-hater", that is why he speaks to him in an unacceptable manner, and he also lets him know that "Germans and eastern people can never be bosses" (Mora 2011, 36). Prejudices always affect the one regarded as being more lagged behind, which evidently means the more eastern one in the novel. When he asks his wife whether he can go to Armenia, the answer is this: "You go wherever you want. Just take care to drink enough vodka to disinfect the suspect meat, but to be able to stop before going blind, and I don't mean this in the figurative sense" (Mora 2011, 28).

Flora regards a certain degree of prejudicedness as natural; however, when she is affected by prejudices, she no longer considers them funny. Her mother-in-law has massive prejudices against those originating from the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, she cannot even bear the thought that her son lives together with a woman from there. She continuously insults Flora; her discussions with her son regularly end in quarrel, she regards her daughter-in-law as a swindler who wants to grab the opportunity for a good match. Sentiment and national identity are mostly interwoven in the case of Darius's mother. And the stronger the sentiments, the more it becomes clear that the emotional attachment is bidirectional: on the one hand, it is based on identification with the own national community, on the other hand, it can be brought in connection with her love of her son, with the overestimation of her son's qualities. It is the foreign recognised in the own that partly lies in the background of her attitude, in connection with the separation from the ideological community somewhat akin to the own. In this way her own identity is revealed in a correlation system which implies "a sphere of personality extending to social objects, group phenomena and social space" (Gergely 1996, 5) and "at the same time the reduced, experienced and sociohistorically inherited pattern of the conflicts of »me« and »them«, of »us« and »others« respectively" (Gergely 1996, 5).

The roots of Darius Kopp's trauma related to the train can be understood from this sociohistorical perspective. In this context, distance is not a perceptual experience and concrete fact, but a relational and relative notion: he has to travel two hours to visit his mother in the hospital, still, he feels that it takes him all day. The same sociohistorical background helps to understand the total breakdown of his personality and virtual world related to the train, when on his way home the train strands for forty minutes on the open line and he cannot contact his boss, thus he feels that he fails in his work. And soon also in his private life, when at the railway

station, after a long quarrel and giving voice to her disappointment, Flora withdraws from the city and from Darius's life, moving, in panic, from one train to another.

## Body and space

The city is transformed into lived space by corporeal, physical perception experienced during walking. The walk is Darius's rare and atypical adventure. At first he tremendously enjoys this new experience of his, perceiving space as an entity awaiting to be discovered: "It is my city. I am looking at it as the one who returns home" (Mora 2011, 147). However, people do not play a role in his perception of space. It is only the engineering plan and mechanical image of the city that gets into his field of vision; he only records the linear order of the city:

> The streets are wide, the buildings are proportionately high and sand-coloured, the roadways and the pavements are well asphalted and clean, the emanated gases are filtered, rails provide the smooth motion of trains, planes fly in the sky: it is a welfare society at a high level of technological development. (Mora, 2011, 147)

Some are on the road conscious of their purpose, while others adapt to the city lifestyle, they hang about without any purpose. "They spend their time" (Mora 2011, 147). However, adapting himself to the anthropological space proves to be only an illusion. After his shoes have blistered his feet, he enters a plaza, which will be the place of adventure for him: he desires not only new shoes, but also new stockings, what is more, he takes foot massage – consumption will turn into the space of urban excitement, into the peak of pleasures. The encounter with the city also contributes to the shaping of the image formed about himself. He convinces himself that he needs a new laptop, but he is also very proud of himself that he can resist the temptation and does not buy one. Darius Kopp feels best at the typical non-places, he represents the city dweller who "can feel at home there only in the anonymity of motorways, service stations, big stores or hotel chains. For him, an oil company logo is a reassuring landmark; among the supermarket shelves he falls with relief on sanitary, household or food products validated by multinational brand names" (Augé, 1995, 106). The plaza offers the diversity of non-places of the lonesome identity.

The city becomes a mental space through the interaction of its dwellers. Michel Onfray highlights in his essay on travel that sooner or later everyone discovers in themselves whether they are nomads or settlers; whether they favour flow, motion, change of place or are passionate about stasis, immobility and roots. Some unknowingly follow the command of moving place, others feel the desire

of taking roots; the former prefer the long, winding and endless roads, the latter favour the dark, deep, wet and mysterious soil. These two guiding principles do not exist in pure state, as archetypes, but rather as inextricable mixture in the details of all uniqueness (cf. Onfray 2011, 5–6).

This system of references also works differently in the novel. Darius Kopp is the one who was born in East Germany and does not go in for any activity demanding physical effort; travelling without his car pains him both physically and psychically. Still, he is the one who is in constant motion, although his motion, his incessant activity is only apparent; the narrator even calls him a "lazy bugger" (Mora 2011, 82). He is virtually supported by his wife, Flora Meier, a former Hungarian university student of literature and theatre emigrating from Hungary, who tried at first to find a job in the domain of film, but only became a secretary. Since she does not let herself be exploited, she rather works as a summer waitress on the city beach. The emigrant who has left her country feels the desire to take root. Her motion space is also smaller: she is actually commuting between her workplace, the beach bar and the flat. In Darius's case the intimate sphere is not separated from the place of public activity, what is more, the two merge completely. He can carry out his work at home, sitting naked on the terrace, and by the time he enters his office at noon, he gets so tired that he lies onto the floor just like that and falls asleep, as if he were in his bedroom.

This is the reason why his wife likes the weekend trips, the closeness of nature; even her name predestines her to this, and if we take into consideration, besides her first name – Flora – that her surname – Meier – can supposedly be traced back to the Hungarian word *major* 'farm, grange', the connections become quite clear. When her friend offers her weekend cottage in the forest, Flora feels immense euphoria, she drives out of the city with dangerous speed, and she also dares not to follow the GPS while driving. While Flora revels in nature and knows the plants, Kopp is afraid of the noises of nature, he perceives the atavistic power of nature. What is more, "he is overwhelmed by the feeling of exile. That he has been quasi separated from 'real' life. In other words: that he is useless" (Mora 2011, 107). The paradox situation arises that Darius Kopp can isolate himself in the crowd and can feel well; however, when he has the opportunity to leave the city, he is incapable of leaving his comfort zone, he cannot face himself as he lacks the technological means of keeping in contact. In fact he avoids real connections, but he cannot exist without the virtual ones.

## The bicycle and real spaces

During the weekend trip another vehicle, the bicycle is used. Evoking his childhood memories and the Tour de France, Marc Augé writes about what a

manly thing cycling used to be formerly. While riding a bike, we increasedly perceive our corporeality, we are overwhelmed by the feeling of freedom. However, Darius Kopp's riding a bike is different: it is a desperate struggle for the appearance, for preserving manliness and dignity. While pushing the pedals the bike obeys the body, they have an equal role, completing each other in the interaction between the vehicle and the body.

Darius Kopp's opinion about this pastime is also underlined by the fact that he calls his bike "run down"; what is more, it is a lady's bicylce. He is only preoccupied with his own prestige, his main concern is not to discredit himself in the field of bodily activity. The narrator's corporeality also employs an urban view, comparing the natural environment to city buildings and presenting a hostile image of nature: "The heat, the annoying rusty bike, and let's not forget, the paunch, this basilica – this would be the right expression, as a cathedral has a totally different form. As long as we walk in the woods, it will pass somehow, one just has to be careful lest a branch should knock down one's glasses or hurt his eyes" (Mora 2011, 102).

During cycling the view of space also changes. The space extends, it practically surrounds the cyclist, who almost becomes one with space and gets in a never experienced proximity with his environment. He is overwhelmed by the feeling of being elsewhere. Being elsewhere also means being someone else, it is a challenge for self-discovery. This is the feeling that Flora experiences. For her the bicycle and nature are an escape from reality, the scene of dreams coming true, while Darius Kopp experiences the proximity of nature as suffering. He cannot find his way out in it, he even gets lost. But what bothers him most is that in the country he is bored.

> Otherwise I am never bored. If I am bored, a) I use the Internet, b) I eat or drink something, c) I attend some kind of cultural or other event, d) I watch TV, and I don't even remember that I was bored. For me it is not embarrassing or demanding to be continuously connected to the data flow. It is demanding if I get disconnected. (Mora 2011, 84)

Once the cyclist in nature renounced the media, the network, Darius Kopp, however, is incapable of that. He feels frustrated, as his work is in fact nothing else but "getting connected" to the Internet. "It is not so bad that there are no inns and multiplex in the forest, but there is no television, no Internet, what is more, no phone either. THERE IS NO PHONE! […] Not even the mobile phone functions reliably" (Mora 2011, 84–85). Being deprived of his means that ensures his safety, he becomes lonely. He wants to outwit the order of nature: "One has to ride to the open terrain with a run-down lady's bicycle, then up onto a hill, this is how he can download his messages" (Mora 2011, 85). The use of the bicycle is

not ordinary, not functional, this is why it is of no special importance for Darius Kopp. In other words, it is important for him only to the extent that it provides him access to his regular daily activity, to the use of the Internet.

# Travel in virtual space

Darius Kopp's professional identity is also determined by virtual reality. He works for a company dealing with the sale of units serving wireless data transmission, specialised in data protection within the network. He explains his work as follows:

> The essence of the dangers threatening the wireless networks is that in contrast to traditional networks, the wireless networks are invisible. With the new central control unit of the Fidelis Wireless we get a new screen surface on which every access point can be seen in a hierarchical layout; further on, we can see their position and the graphic representation of the size of their range, which is, on the one hand, useful at configuring and handling the access points, on the other hand, it makes visible the network, with all its activities. (Mora 2011, 89)

Virtuality roughly breaks into real space in that it wants to construct itself as part of reality. This is what the slogan of Darius's company also refers to: "WE MAKE YOUR WLAN VISIBLE! TURN TO US!" (Mora 2011, 90).

The protagonist does not only "work" with virtuality, he also lives within it, he experiences it as an organic place in Augé's sense of the term. When the trade with wireless networks and with the products warranting their safety is not conceived as data transaction but as turning stories into money, Darius Kopp is infuriated and argues that the threats awaiting the everyday user in the virtual world are not at all virtual, but very real. In certain cases maintaining the capacity of communication is more important than anything else, it can be a matter of life and death.

Virtual spaces are accompanied by a virtual dictionary, not accessible for everyone (encompassing technical terms related to the functioning of computer softwares, modes of electronic purchase, expressions related to the organisational structure of large businesses); the narrative structure of the novel explores this reference to the full, making mention of access points, RADIUSServer, OFDM procedure and AES decoding (Mora 2011, 88).

The uncontrollability of language takes place on two levels in the novel. On the one hand, the Internet-related technical terms restrict understanding, on the other hand, the linguistic competence of the protagonist is not perfect. In virtual space communication is carried out in a simplified language: this is simple

English. In Darius Kopp's case it surely is. Studying others' CVs, he is envious to see that there are some who "*improved* their damn English knowledge in the damn Oxford" (Mora 2011, 154, *improved* in English in the original). Day by day he learns new words and he expresses this with code switching. The attributes allude to intercultural communication; he always mentions the residence of his company together with its English attribute: "*sunny* California" (*sunny* in English in the original). In the course of rendering the free indirect discourse, narration keeps the language of communication: "Stephany was sorry that he called on only then" (Mora 2011, 396, sorry in English in the original).

When the conversation is quoted more at length, the power relation between the interlocutors is also suggested by language use. In such a case the one who is in full possession of language gets in a superior position, unmasking the inferiority, what is more, humiliatedness of the one with a weaker linguistic competence, due to which the latter is compelled to explain himself, even to dissimulate:

> **Oh, I am sorry**, Kopp said in a gravel voice. **I did not want to hurt you. You did not *hurt* me.**
>
> Kopp was again **sorry** for not expressing himself correctly. You know, **English is not my mother tongue.** I think I should have said **harm you**. No, this is not the right expression either. I can't even harm you. You know what I mean: thirdly, I would like to express my regret. I promise to be good from now on, **But please, Anthony, never ever talk to me like this**. (Mora 2011, 34, parts highlighted in bold in English in the original)

Code switch takes place also when the narrator allows the reader, together with Darius Kopp, into the world of the Internet, where the protagonist surfs the informational space in English, and the reader can also see what he finds. After a while Darius Kopp starts to think in English and does not find the German words: "Look, a high flyer. What's the German for the high flyer? Heißluftballon" (Mora 2011, 364).

Darius Kopp gets access to information about the world through the Internet. The laptop acquires the qualities of a means of transport, as the protagonist traverses the whole world with its help. He constantly browses webpages or is preoccupied with his own thoughts, he weighs the tactics of his own workplace linked to virtuality, or perhaps "starts and keeps in motion this and that" (Mora 2011, 307). As it is all the same actually when he works, he often does not even go to his workplace. He loses his sense of order, this is why he makes a list of his duties, but he often does not even reach to the first, because it comes to his mind that he is hungry and by the time he finishes eating, he forgets what he wanted to do. He usually postpones the important things that he places at the end of the list.

Darius Kopp is convinced that there exist several realities, he experienced this already in his youth, when he used to travel home by train at the weekends. The train links not only spaces, but also time planes, and opens up the universe of the novel towards historicity. Darius doesn't like to travel by train because it reminds him of his youth, of the time of the GDR, when the idea of parallel worlds, the fictionalisation of reality used to serve the defence of his personal integrity:

> …[H]e found refuge in the thought that all this was not *real*. Of course, he was aware that it could hardly be more real. But if you are at a place where you don't want to be, everything becomes absurd. What we do here, the young Darius Kopp thought, no, rather what happens here, is nothing, it is not my life but waiting in a parallel universe, not for missing also the next connection, on the contrary: for getting off, into real life. My life will start when I never ever have to get on these trains. And as he was young, time was on his side, and everything happened as he hoped. (Mora 2011, 298)

His perception of life is simultaneous, he starts thinking on several channels; in situations of stress three parallel programs run in his head (Mora 2011, 355). As his bosses and colleagues are on other continents, in other time zones, he thinks over several times every day what time it is at various places. When he checks current time, he often thinks, "What time is it in Hongkong, what time is it in Sunnyvale?" (Mora 2011, 327). Or while planning his tasks: "Attention, time difference. London 1 hour minus, Sunnyvale 9 hours minus. They can't be informed at the same time. Sequence is needed. Let's stick to sequence, to the one that is at least to our liking: 1. Anthony, 2. Bill. Provided he is in his office at 9 already. 6pm at us" (Mora 2011, 135).

The fast accumulation of knowledge also emphasises the multi-channel, simultaneous life perception. Using the Internet starts as regeneration, but Darius is usually stuck in it. "What it gives it also takes away from me. As every drug. Stop it *now*" he tells himself (Mora 2011, 340), but he is incapable of that. The search for a workplace news gives 119 000 results, but browsing is unsuccessful, as he remembers the casually acquired information better than the information he was looking for.

Surfing the Internet also means travelling among cultures. For istance, about Armenia he only disposes of information acquired from the Internet, still, he imagines it as being gorgeous; he often thinks about foreign landscapes and foreign people, but his imagination is most moved by the information that the "position [of one little town] is ideal from the point of view of forming a wireless network" (Mora 2011, 106). Before falling asleep he thinks, in turn, of San Francisco's coastline and of the never seen, only imagined Armenian mountains.

The novel takes shape in the buffer zone of the real and virtual spheres; its starting point is the moment when Darius Kopp loses his balance, the world becomes uncontrollable for him, as he can only find his way out in virtual reality. This is why he is trapped, when he faces a real event: one Armenian business partner of his sends him forty thousand euros in a box to pay off part of his much larger debt. Darius Kopp becomes perplexed. He officially cannot transfer the sum to the company's bank account, but he cannot keep it for himself either, though this is right the sum that the company owes him. He loves money, making profit is part of his job, but it hangs heavy on his hands in its objectual reality, he does not really know the value of money, he does not even care about it, it is actually the numbers expressing money that count for him a lot, he likes the figures. This is when he definitely loses his sense of reality.

## Connection between the virtual and the real world: eating

It is only eating that connects Darius Kopp to reality. He is a corpulent figure, 178 cm tall and 106 kilos, and he often gets tired. If, by chance, he does not surf the virtual world, then he is busy with eating or digestion.

His days spent with hanging on the Internet are divided into reasonable segments by the occasions of eating. Life is segmented, albeit not regularly but rather rhapsodically, by soft drinks and coffees, croissants and substantial eating and drinking. As soon as he steps into his office, the first thing he does is go to the kitchen and pour some coffee and soft drink. Travelling by train, for instance, is made somewhat bearable by the restaurant carriage. If there is no restaurant carriage, the Snackpoint will also do. On the day when he visits his mother, he has omelette and coffee for breakfast; the two croissants do not sooth his hunger but merely cheer him up a little. Then he has a coffee together with his sister in the hospital cafeteria. The clock stops at the railway station, this is why he misses several trains; he is almost lost in space and time when he notices a coffee bar:

> **He rushed into the coffee bar,** self-service, he rushed along the tables, heading right towards the counter, he has no memories about how he found and seated onto one of the bar stools, he once was just sitting on it. He was out of breath, not because of the effort, but for the relief that he managed to reach a safe haven.
> Food, drink, Internet. It nurishes, informs, entertains, and is embarrassing only to the extent figures and pictures can be embarrassing. (Mora 2011, 333)

Darius Kopp is ripped out of time, he has a lapse of memory, when he takes a seat in the coffee bar; his eating is not merely the symptom of the consumerist society, but a real extasis, pathological addiction. He eats as passionately as his father drinks: "A bar of chocolate of half a kilo in one sitting. But not that we tear it piece by piece, but like this, like bread. It would kill me if I satisfied my appetite" (Mora 2011, 113). The ordinary maintenance of vital functions is replaced by the act of eating as compensation.

In the coffee bar he orders a tuna sandwich with egg and orange juice. Then he drinks a white coffee, a glass of soda water and eats a carrot cake with cream cheese glaze. He is in control of the situation, he takes possession of the space, he is satisfied with his environment; the atmosphere of the coffee bar is important for him. He also measures the waitress with his eye. In fact he also visits Flora every evening to discretely order food from her, keeping their relation in secret; he also gives her a tip. Meals are associated with the relationship between the waiter/waitress and the guest; in this case they are not of equal rank, Darius Kopp's superior position is evident. Besides idling away his time, he associates erotic connotations to the thought of eating.

Darius Kopp's way of eating is a typical example of compensation. His greed aims at taking possession of and ruling the whole world.


## The overlapping of the real and mental spaces

A gradual overlapping of the real, mental and virtual spaces takes place in the novel. The most illustrative example of this is a single spatial element: the wall. The fall of the wall is repeatedly thematised in the text. The story begins six years after the fall of the wall (Mora 2011, 6). The event itself is also mentioned, though the narrator refers to it as a trauma, albeit a trauma that Darius Kopp "got over easily" (Mora 2011, 9). What is more, this event meant an important turning point in his life: the fall of the wall brought his appetite (Mora 2011, 10) and it also marked the beginning of his separation from the crowd, of the rise of his social status, as "[e]ver since the fall of the wall he never got on the train again" (Mora 2011, 298). In the present time of the novel his wife, Flora, reads the book entitled *The Wall*.

The real and mental spaces are superimposed when Darius Kopp gets in a taxi, which is stuck in traffic and either way it tries to continue its way, it fails. "They tried to make detours to the north, to the south, to the east, but still they could no way move to the west, as if – Jesus, Flora, this is indeed what came to my mind, listen – there were a *wall* in the very middle of the city!" (Mora 2011, 230). This is when Darius Kopp realises that the Berlin wall fallen-demolished in its reality further determines their lives as an invisible, imaginary entity.

The layeredness of Darius Kopp's space perception is similar to Michel Onfray's concept of chorematic geography, according to which all over the world there are localisation points, connecting lines, flows causing tensions, closed and open transitions, increases and decreases, forces of attraction and repulsion, arc lights and dark strips, peaks of networks and levels of channelings; these forms are hidden in complex incarnations, in discernible and concrete figurations (cf. Onfray 2011, 98). This is what Darius Kopp also experiences when he perceives the presentness of the no longer existing, fallen Berlin wall, and also when he notices a simple natural phenomenon. Seeing the last rays of the setting sun shining on his mobile phone, he does not perceive the beneficial, life-giving power of the sun, but that "the ray directly transmitting the relevant information from the satellite to his phone […] became visible" (Mora 2011, 109). Subjective perception objectifies non-existing spaces, which get concrete, effective shapes in the world of imagination.

## The experience of transcendence and the extension of space

In the novel the modes of transport enmesh anthropological places and non-places in the real and the virtual spaces. The novel is pervaded by sarcasm; it can also be read as the parody of the everyday, Internet-addicted world. Darius Kopp appears pathetic in this world. At the same time, the change of his (world) perception, his entire world view does not become the subject of humour; narration keeps him in the domain arousing sympathy for the frailty of the common man.

Darius Kopp is capable of perceiving and experiencing the transcendence of the entire world. At such times his view of space changes; he displays space as a physical body and also as an expressive performative entity:

> Considering that it was a big city, there was remarkably hardly any life in it, and even that little could be seen less and less as they were moving outwards. After a while only the road lit by headlights, the hard shoulder, the ditch, the trunks of the trees could be seen. The edge of the world. The empty space behind. We are going round on the rim of the disc. (Mora 2011, 83)

The notion of space is transformed and opens up from real perception towards metaphorical connections. The novel turns the mode of space perception into the metaphor of peripheral existence and, beyond this, enlarges it into a cosmic metaphor of existence.

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# Quo Vadis, Homo Viator?

# Journeys in Jože Hradil's *Faceless Pictures*

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**Abstract.** In Jože Hradil's *Faceless Pictures* [*Slike brez obrazov*] the characters go astray or get into the attraction of adventures and set off for a journey. The spiritual and identity shifts can be interpreted along these eternal human desires as well. A patchwork of remembering and forgetting, the internal journeys of identity preservation, spontaneous or forced assimilation, tolerance and all kinds of politics-induced human deformations are depicted in the novel. The text traces the roles of the journey defined by Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant such as the search for justice, peace, immortality and finding the spiritual center. This study examines how the concrete physical journey changes into an internal road determining the evolution of personality.[1]

**Keywords:** 20th-century history, migration, travellers, identity

Travelling is one of the determining topoi of cultural consciousness. While travellers of the oldest epics, Gilgamesh or Ulysses, have concrete purposes, the "dialectic journey" in Platonic thinking carries a metaphorical meaning. Dante seeks the perfection of personality in the hereafter while showing the order of the world. The concept of progress in modernity is linked to travelling in a metaphorical sense, similarly to deviation characterizing Foucault's thinking. The journey takes us from somewhere and leads us to somewhere. The process of cognition can also be interpreted as a peculiar journey, since it is achieved by transgression from a narrower horizon towards a broader one. From the very rich symbolism of traveling, Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant in their *Dictionary of Symbols* find fundamental the search for values such as justice, peace, immortality and finding the spiritual centre.

Jože Hradil is a Slovenian writer, editor-publisher and literary translator. His domestic novel entitled *Faceless Pictures* [*Slike brez obrazov*], published in Maribor in 2012, follows the prose-poetics of realism. Realism, however, bears here the imprints of the twenty-first century: besides the grand stories, the microstories depicted by journeys, forced or willingly made movements are equally important. The external events generated by the great historical changes and the transformations taking place inside the characters mutually determine each other.

In Jože Hradil's novel the characters go astray or get attracted by adventures and set off for journeys. Their spiritual and identity shifts can also be interpreted along eternal human desires. A patchwork of remembering and forgetting, the internal journey of identity preservation, spontaneous or forced assimilation, tolerance and all kinds of politics-induced human deformations are depicted in the novel. The memories span over about a hundred years, reaching back from the present to the end of the nineteenth century. The plot starts at the beginning of World War II, in the childhood of the narrator, calling himself Jurij, and lasts until the present day. The generic features of domestic novel, memoir and Bildungsroman can equally be found in this text, the deeper layers of which can be explored through the analysis of journeys made by the characters as well. It is not only the protagonists who move away from their places of residence, but the place itself is also moving within the frames set by grand history. Beáta Thomka notes: "the border situation is often concomitant with the historical experience and identity of social micro-communities, ethnic groups and their members. In order for this to happen, it is not necessary to live on some border or to cross the border, since history rearranges the European borders without the generations living in the region having ever left their native place, as it happened several times during the twentieth century" (Thomka 2009, 7).

The scene of Hradil's autobiographical novel is the writer's hometown, Murska Sobota. In the course of the one-hundred-year history that the plot comprises this city became part of five countries: the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Slovenia. In the twentieth century the local population (together with the nations of Eastern Europe sharing a similar fate) could experience the disastrous effects of two extremist totalitarian systems and war-generating nationalism. The identity variations of the characters can be interpreted as individual and collective answers to the pressing historical situation. The scenes where the characters move away from or move to indicate ever extending geographical parameters from the Banat to the Don and Canada, Egres/Igris, Murska Sobota/Muraszombat, Debrecen, Budapest, Fiume/Rijeka, Voronezh, Dachau, Auschwitz, Wien, Hamilton and further.

Daniel-Henri Pageaux (1994) sees travel as an opportunity for personality development (in the case of the pilgrim and the tourist) and for cultural interactions (in the case of the traveling writer), and regards the comparatist as

the embodiment of the *Homo viator*, the *par excellence* traveller who orients himself within the spaces of imagination. The novel is connected with the topos of travel both in its specific, spatial and abstract sense as an incessant rambling in the spaces of writing and reflection. The "ambulatory" nature of travel can be observed here just like in the case of W. G. Sebald's prose; it provides the transfer from the concrete, physical space to the space of reflection (cf. Long 2007).

The abundance of stories/destinies included in Jože Hradil's *Faceless Pictures* shows that there are several characters leaving their places of birth for faraway destinations. They are confronted with newlives, with foreign languages, new circumstances and life conditions. Their reasons for leaving are rather diverse – economic, political, "historically neuralgic"ones – so that notions such as *emigration*, *escape*, *custody* and *deportation* are common indeed.

The position of reflection is predominant in the retrospective narration. The first part of the novel is told by the narrator from a child's viewpoint. The narrator of the second part is the same person, Jurij, but this time he is a conscious adult, looking back to his family members. The procedure lacks traditionally marked dialogues; the discourse of the character caught in the act of remembering includes the other characters' quotes marked by italics. This illustrates collective experience funneled through a single person. Thus, often three or four narrators' texts are layered upon one another.

The determined authorial attitude against exclusivities can be caught in the part summoning the childhood memories, when the child's viewpoint without any reflections is questioned: Jurij believes that everything the newspapers write is sacred, but there is his friend, Bagi, who always insists in favour of another possibility. The two boys are each other's opposites. Jurij's Hungarian father is the Countess' bailiff, he is rich, while Bagi's parents are poor Slovenians who would never kiss Countess Zichy's hand . Jurij is a fan of the Germans, he regards the Jews as enemies but his friend reveals to him that the veterinarian Farkas, teaching tennis to the boy, is also a Jew. Bagi is welcoming the Soviet Army and is fomenting Pan-Slavic dreams. However, as a proof of their childlike innocence, these contradictions do not overshadow their friendship. It is like reading a parable saying that opposing sympathies do not necessarily have to spoil the friendship of neighbours. The awakening consciousness of the six-ten year-old child is a clashing point for the artificially created collective identity that is often the opposite of the micro-identity, the self-interpretation of the family and individuals. Jurij, as young schoolboy, was in love with the daughter of the Hungarian gendarme despite the fact that he found the father's violence repellent. It still hurt him when the family fled from the Russians: "When Jurij realized, when he clearly saw that the wagon with Éva had left, he buried his face in his hands and thought that he should summon his courage and should run helter-skelter after the wagon" (Hradil 2013, 107).

Nostalgia is not only for the blossoming emotions but also for the lost illusion of cultural superiority.

> The Russian Army is a big zero, my dear Éva, your father told me so. You remember, right? He was telling that always and everywhere, up to yesterday. Remember how beautiful it was when you arrived in Beltinci. Not in a wagon, but by a magnificent, glittering car, that stopped right before Rituper's restaurant, where I am standing right now, here, on this place, where I can still see you – I still perceive you the way I love you. Tell me the nightmare is over...(Hradil 2013, 108)

The horror of twentieth century history is syntethised in Stanko's journey:

> Speaking about Stanislav – Vladimir's and George's cousin – means nothing but trying to find a proper definition of odyssey. Stanko lived his lonely life. Everybody knew he had never left the place he was born, not even for a short time to pay at least a visit to any other town or village. People used to say *Stanislav was a strange person who had never seen anything else but Murska Sobota and heard no other voice than the one coming from his home.*
> When he was nineteen years old, it happened that for the first time in his life he did see some other places too – while peeping through a small opening of a cattle truck which was taking him to – Dachau…
> After one year he came home. Once when everybody thought he had already recovered from the traumas he had suffered – his friends invited him to join them "to forget the past and enjoy the present." But he refused to make any contact with anybody he did not know. Following that he could not even think of any touristic excursion at all, such as proposed by his friends to take part. Usually it was rather difficult to understand his decided refusal – his explanations that in the concentration camp –: *I had no other choice but stopping my ears not to hear so many different languages which I did not understand and that I will never understand …*
> Was there anybody at all who was able to imagine the real weight of Stanislav's odyssey? Anybody to understand, for example, his constant fear that crossing the Hungarian frontier might – even thirty, forty years after the war – evoke his painful memories? Him to react even when hearing only a slight crowing of a cock or to see a simple cock feather … reminding him of the two Hungarian gendarmes who sent him to concentration camp – since their hats were decorated with cock-feathers …? To understand his opposing and not to step over the border because of the possibility to hear the melody of the strange language – to hear the few words he heard

when he was pushed into wagon – *büdös bandita?*"[2] His alienation from the society remained an incurable disease till his death in 1993.[3]

   The first part of the novel follows the events up to the end of the war, the establishment of the new social order, watching the gradual maturing of the child Jurij as his thinking is getting more sophisticated. His internal journey until the end of the novel aims to explore the truth. In a world of ideology-determined confrontations preserving humanity is very difficult. The father's fate, through the journeys made by them, becomes parable-like just like the older boy's, Vladimir's. The half Hungarian, half German father wants to emigrate to the United States for adventure, boards the ship, then throws himself into the water and returns to land. From this point on, the search for the spiritual center shapes his way. To him, honour and humanity are more important than any political success: after World War I he voluntarily remains in the homeland of his Slovenian bride. However, when Prekmurje Region is attached to Hungary (1941) and he has a steady job, he provides shelter for a Slovenian university professor. When Tito's partisans take over the reign after the Soviet Army marches through, he gets imprisoned for being Hungarian. Jurij's older brother and model, Vladimir, having a Slavic name, volunteers to the Hungarian Army out of love for adventure. He gets wounded on the front and falls into captivity, escapes to the Soviet troops and – knowing German, Hungarian, Slovenian and "a bit of Russian" as well – becomes their translator. Thus he gets home with the Red Army. However, the Yugoslavian partisans do not welcome him at all – the ex volunteer fascist soldier – so he flees over the Austrian border. He inherited his father's adventurousness, while Jurij walks the paternal road searching for truth and peace.
   The adult Jurij is interested in the fate of his mother's aunts, in the shifts that take place in the characters' identities. The processes of inclusion and exclusion, the voluntary and forced assimilation can be observed in personal destinies. (His parents and his older sister, Ilka, who remained in Murska Sobota, cast Paula off not because she changed her language in Budapest but because she married a Jewish man.)

> Jurij's father in Slovenia and his mother's relatives in Hungary both got in new circumstances, in a new language and spiritual environment. A melting pot where they adopted some and gave up on others in everyday habits or language, even changing their names and religion. The Hradil name, with the characteristic Czech *–il* ending in a Slavic environment, in the country of Serbians, Croatians and Slovenians naturally meant no trouble. The same name, however, in Hungary was annoying, therefore some of his father's siblings chose to Hungarianise it to Hragyil. Those who felt that the

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2    'stinky bandit' (Translator's note).
3    Jože Hradil's contribution.

Hungarian social and political environment and the Hungarian language did not agree with this, chose an even more radical solution, changing their names to Balsai or even Hegyaljai and Hargitai. The indisputable Slavic name of the three women from Prekmurje Region did not cause any problem. After marriage, the two Markovič sisters used the name of their Hungarian husbands [...]. (Hradil 2013, 298–299)

The career of Markovič's family, that of the narrator's mother is very instructive as well.

Paula Markovič left her birthplace, the Austro Hugarian Muraszombat (today Murska Sobota, Slovenia) for Budapest in about 1910. She married a Hungarian man. They did their best to solve several problems they had to face. Among others, the problems of assimilation. For instance: *The way Paula behaved was not what people in Budapest liked, they made fun especially of the language she spoke, saying it was a swinish blab…*
In Paula's confession to her nephew it is written:
*… All the connections with my home were disconnected and the images of Murska Sobota faded in my memories every year more and more. … They were replaced by palaces, villas and large bridges across the Danube. I must admit I did enjoy the comfortable life in the beautiful metropolis. But the unpleasant time followed as well. … Many people I met – told me straight out that my knowledge of their language was poor, ugly, uncultivated.*
'What kind of accent do you have?'
'What an odd, rustic pronunciation!'
'From where did you drag up yourself anyhow, Mrs. Vincze?'
*I clenched my teeth and did everything possible to erase the traces which did not fit into my new environment. I decided to learn the language to become nice and clean and grammatically correct. I was lucky since there was a man who helped me a great deal. You can imagine, what it was like, George, as you know him pretty well! … What was your uncle József's gallantry like! Since I was aware that the problems I had were mostly linguistic I did obey my careful teacher. And after several years I was even thinking in Hungarian so that I stopped translating my sentences from Slovene. My new language got richer and richer, while on the other hand my mother tongue increasingly sank. I firmly decided that I would never utter any Slovenian word. But it turned out to be unnecessary: Nobody came to visit us in Hungary, nobody at all with whom I could chat in Slovenian language. Who else could help me – but my husband? We were very much dependent on the society, on the lofty people. And my husband was very much aware of it so he had to protect me – as well as himself.*

*He did his best we could stay and remain in the company we needed so much. . . . Once it happened that in the middle of social chat one of the acquaintances of mine suddenly asked me where I had in fact come from.* 'Were you, she asked, at the time of the Serb-Croat-Slovene kingdom living in a town or in a village?'

*Besides, I was badly hurt too when a woman sitting next to me suddenly said:* 'Don't say you to have lived in a village?! In the company of pigs and cows?' *Soon a lot of people gathered around me, waiting for my answer. But then, of course, it was my husband who saved me. My resourceful József. Though, on the other hand, it had already happened that I asked myself whether he had saved me at all? In reality? Was it a good decision I had decided to stay …? To be assimilated by foreign people? In their country? Among people who had built a rigid wall around themselves … so that I had to remain there shut and isolated within the wall of selfishness? In the circle with tradition, with millennial history of Hungary, as they used to boast. But your uncle József loudly told the company standing around, and the curious ladies in high heels and gentlemen with monocles that I had come from Maribor.* 'From the beautiful town, he went on, by the river Drava, the very place where our Sándor Petőfi had composed a poem!!! The very poem … the one …. Which one?' *He, deadly serious, suddenly asked the bewildered ladies with professorial rigor. He was waiting silently and provokingly pretended to help lady Várady with some words:*
'Come on, say it, you know it, you who adore our poet so much,'
*And the naughty József played on as if he had heard something … someone …. He even nodded to an invisible gentleman and to a lady next to him*: 'Come on! Say it, good gracious. That's it! Yeah! You are right, buddy! The Drava river is the very title of his poem! Anyone who does not know this poem cannot claim to know the greatest poet, right? Right, Mrs. Várady? I am sure this is the answer you had known and it was even on the tip of your tongue! Wasn't it? And I am also convinced everybody knows, *József tirelessly continued*, that Maribor is a beautiful city as far from stables and pigs as Budapest is far from those we feed in Vác and Visegrad.' *My József gracefully bowed and turned in the direction he had come from. Since then I had never been hurt by them!* (Hradil 2013, 355–357)

After getting into a confrontation with her family, Paula consciously changes her language.

I gritted my teeth and made everything I could to erase the clues that did not fit into my new environment.[...] I knew it well that coping with the language would not be easy, therefore I obeyed in everything my stern

teacher and after a while I even thought in Hungarian. *My learnt language got steadily richer, my mother tongue faded away. I also vowed and decided hard not to speak Slovenian ever again.* (Hradil 2013, 359)

The forced self-surrender, however, causes psychological harm. Years later Paula recounts: "*I denied my heritage, my roots. Owing to my situation, my circumstances, I had to hide my real face. Both in Budapest and Murska Sobota*" (Hradil 2013, 359).

Paradoxically, Paula's daughter, Gizella, clings above all to her Hungarian "mother tongue" after she leaves Hungary for Canada to join her daughter's family. For her the cause of suffering is that she has to give up the Hungarian language and culture. Gizella's daughter, Judit, who emigrated to Canada, consciously severs the ties to her native land and mother tongue, just like her grandmother did.

The faceless picture, the metaphor of identity loss, is linked to Jurij's cousin, Gizella. This also appears on the book's cover. Gizi's mother, Paula, is a Catholic woman with Slovenian mother tongue; her father is a Jew with Hungarian mother tongue. She is a Hungarian Catholic, while her husband is a Jew with Hungarian mother tongue. Her daughter is a Hungarian Catholic who also married a Hungarian Jewish man, and they emigrated together to Canada. They encourage the ninety-year-old Gizella to learn English, to change language.

Gizi once remarked jokingly that her relatives, if they could, would prefer to chase her with the broom to the English dictionary, though they know that this is to no avail. *They know very well what the situation with me is: however fast I learn a word, I keep forgetting the previous one, so I am always left with one word.* (Hradil 2013, 396)

Before her death, the lonely, uprooted woman cuts the faces of lost family members out of the photographs.

The book's most memorable metaphor is a positive one, the peculiar journey toward immortality: the chain of handshakes is a beautiful, humane and reconciliatory symbol-variation. According to a grotesque and amusing version of the metaphor, its inventor, uncle Józsi, Paula's husband, was in love with Queen Sissi. They walked twenty kilometres with two of his friends to catch a glimpse of Franz Joseph's wife in the Gödöllő Mansion. When they were spotted and expelled, Józsi pleaded to be slapped too: the butler hitting him could have certainly touched the Queen's hand, and thus, indirectly, Józsi could contact the adored creature. According to the didactic and uplifting version of the handshake metaphor, uncle Józsi's wealthy American friend once gave a large sum to a beggar child who, out of gratitude, was following him everywhere. When the rich man had an accident, he accompanied him to the hospital, too and rescued his life

having just the needed blood type. As an intermediary of the metaphorical, time-spanning handshakes, uncle Józsi could transfer the greetings of Mór Jókai to Jurij, who became a writer: "[...] through my hand you touched the right hand of someone who wrote the greatest of the Hungarian masterpieces. In other words, through many handshakes you, Jurij, in a sense, touched the hands of one of the greatest classics of Hungarian literature" (Hradil 2013, 378).

The main role in Jože Hradil's novel is played by exploring the problems and looking for the path of truth. The Slovenian author succeeds in presenting the humane, reconciliatory behaviour in an authentic way and in finding the way to peace and reconciliation. Truth, peace, a special immortality through literature and finding the spiritual centre: these symbolic values of the topos of the journey all appear in the destinies of the novel's characters.

*Translated by Enikő Biró*

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# The Question of Identity in Gary Shteyngart's *Little Failure*

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**Abstract**. In my paper I want to deal with the question of identity and Gary Shteyngart's last novel, *Little Failure* (2014). The novel is a memoir that deals with young Gary's struggle as an individual of Russian Jewish origins trying to accommodate himself to the American way of life. America with its multicultural and multiethnic environment puts the immigrant Gary in a very sensitive position. He does not know how to deal with African Americans; shall he avoid them or run away? Shall he befriend Asian colleagues or not? Are Jewish friends more valuable than others? These are the questions that Gary Shteyngart has to answer and find his own voice. The protagonist of the novel under discussion tries to find his identity which is in continuous change. He tries to figure out in a world filled with cultural, racial and urban conflicts his own identity from the perspective of a former immigrant and as a member of a minority group. The task of my paper is to show how the question of identity has changed and what solution Shteyngart's novel can offer for the protagonist in the process of identity formation.

**Keywords**: identity, Jewish American identity, culture clash

In my paper I will deal with the question of different cultures in Gary Shteyngart's last novel *Little Failure* (2014). The name of Gary Shteyngart (born 1972) has become widely known since the appearance of his first novel, *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* (2002). With this novel Gary Shteyngart won the Stephen Crane Award for First Fiction, the Book-of-the-Month Club First Fiction Award and the National Jewish Book Award. *The Guardian* called it the best debut for 2002, and the *New York Times* called it a Notable Book. *Shout NY Magazine* named him one of the five best writers of 2002. I think that this enumeration already answers the question why I started dealing with Gary Shteyngart.

Shteyngart was born in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) in 1972 as the son of Russian Jewish parents. He moved to the United States at the age of 7 and started learning English. He managed to get rid of his Russian accent only at the age

of 14. He grew up in a household without a TV set and turned to literature for comfort. His novels heavily rely on the works of the greatest Russian writers of earlier times. He comes from a gigantic empire, Russia. and he is perfectly aware of this. In an interview with Sara Brown and Armando Celayo he said that his newly chosen home is another empire: "Russia – no matter what guise it's under – and America – no matter what guise it's under – will always have these messianic visions" (2009, 31). His task as an individual is to find his own identity in these two different worlds with messianic visions. Shteyngart cannot forget about his Russian identity but he has to find his own Russian Jewish American one in the United States of America.

The term 'identity' started to play an important role in the 1960s with the emergence of different minority groups. There are several interpretations of the term "identity," but all agree on one thing: that it is a complex and highly variable process. I will largely rely on the findings of social psychology and education in my definitions. Roger Brown in his work *Social Psychology* says, "identity is a concept no one has defined with precision, but it seems we can move ahead anyway because everyone roughly understands what it means" (1986, 551).

In the case of Jewish identity, the notion of "identity" refers to the objective signs of Jewishness as perceived by both the Jews themselves and the rest of the given community. Individual identity is made up of the following elements: social class, physical appearance, religion, traditions, habits, language and ethnic belonging. As Ester and Rudi Reisel say in their work *Modern Jewish Identity: A Rationalistic Motivation for Remaining Jewish*, "The trauma of the Jews, deriving from the threat to their security and the cumulative fears of the danger of persecution that were part of their lives down through the generations, taught them to learn from their history and became an inseparable part of their unique identity" (2000, 167). History, the environment in which they lived, and their ability to adapt to all the given circumstances add flavor to their identity formation. They were and are influenced by their environment and they have an influence on their environment.

Generally speaking, by identity we often mean both identification and self-awareness. If we take the former as its principal meaning, it is nothing else but the borrowing of identity from someone else or a distinct community; thus we are dealing here with the fusion of one's identity with someone else's, or an uncritical acceptance of social expectations. In more precise terms, if an individual is a member of a larger community, s/he almost unconsciously tries to absorb and adjust to the norms of that particular group. The obvious aim is to shape himself or herself according to that community's expectations. But, if we consider the second meaning of identity, we are bound to realize that it also implies self-awareness; that is, the individual's apprehension of him/herself as an individual and also of his/her relation to the world. In this latter case, the subject is likely

to see and appraise himself from a quasi-external vantage point. Hence, in the present context of literary analysis, it will be both convenient and expedient to use "identity" as a close synonym for "social identity," because identity is, after all, the way you perceive your relative position and rank – i.e. your status – in the social hierarchy.

However, the self as such cannot and probably must not be purely personal. Without the realization of social and cultural circumstances and their consideration, a personal self cannot come into being. Moreover, it is impossible to think of self as something constant: instead, it is a kind of fluid and dynamic entity that is always in motion, in a relative flux, owing to the factors that actually shape it.

The construction of social identity is indispensable for the maintenance of the self. Manfred Pütz argues that "self-definition involves interactions between world and self and individuals among each other" (1979, 30). Here the notion of search for a self becomes synonymous either with construction or assumption: searching for a self is nothing else but the building-up or the choosing of one. People are made to face a series of adversities even in the minor details of their everyday lives, and one main determining factor in their choices is what in-group priorities (formulated as codes) dictate. To find one's self-awareness, one has to cope with obstacles, such as those of self-evaluation, self-conception or self-perception. According to Ferenc Pataki, we can say that the construction of self-definition is the result of an on-going series of transactions between self and community and of repeated attempts in a long process whereby one's self perceives information drawn from experiences of one's own, and evaluates them and himself/herself accordingly (1982, 56).

Identity is a predominantly socio-cultural construction: the individual is ultimately incapable of defining him/herself in terms other than social. This also means that identity is far from being a private business of the subject. The process of searching for an identity is bound to be complex and ambiguous. On the one hand, it can signify a search for identification: search for an identifiable role, for a time-tested mode of conduct, for an approved code of behavior in a group, as we find out from Duncan Mitchell's *A Dictionary of Sociology* (1968). On the other hand, it can mean search for self-awareness as well. However, it is obvious that these two meanings are linked: we can safely claim that an individual, in the course of trying to find a self-definition, assumes roles and puts on masks to find his/her real self in the end. This is the way the philosopher Erik Erikson sees it: "the process of reaching self-awareness is [...] a series of attempts of roles" (qtd. in Atkinson 1997, 376). The takeover of roles makes man fit into society: "to create and to take over roles [...] supply the individual with forms of social identity" (Pütz 1979, 52).

Social identity is fluid; it is a changing dynamic, always in motion with fixed statuses. These fixed statuses are the roles people fulfill in life, as Pütz

explains, "an individual moves or fails between fixed points of reference" (1979, 30). Hence, when one searches for self-awareness, one is looking for something constant in one's life: permanence equals security. Nevertheless, personal identity is unthinkable without social identity, which is in constant motion – personal identity is not rigid, either. However, once found, its bases are more or less founded; but due to the constant external pressures, it is not stable. When one is able to step over the limitations of the group, that is, when one defines oneself in one's own terms, that is the beginning of self-realization. The conditions for this are not those of the group anymore, but one's own expectations of oneself.

Social identity involves the putting on of masks, faces, social roles, ways in which the persona builds up him/herself to respond to the in-group community and satisfy the impulses from the surrounding environment. But, with social identity, you are not given the chance to elaborate your own self: it is the social context that decides how worthy you are to people. Ferenc Pataki describes this process as the qualifying transactions of the social environment (1982, 59). According to this evaluation, you step into roles in the community, you identify yourself with this or that label/mask/role/status, as if testing who you are, and what your limits are. At this point, the notion of stereotyping enters the picture: certain stereotypes are associated with particular kinds of people who are unable to break out of these labels (Virágos and Varró 2002, 8). Roles demand a given code of behavior and you must respect the rules of the game, otherwise you are likely to be rejected by the group.

We can say that this construction is the result of a long learning process, wherein external factors are indispensable. These factors are present as constant pressures on one's consciousness. In a way, when one finally defines one's own self, one does not do more than choose from the alternatives that the circles of loyalty offer. This self-identity or personal identity is your own image of yourself: like a mental test so as to find who you are in reality. Personal identity is formed as an answer to an ethical and cultural context. At the same time, it is never something precise. Victoria Aaron says in her work *A Measure of Memory*:

> The individual cannot be separated ultimately from the historical or cultural context that, however unconsciously, informs his or her preoccupations. Bearing witness must also then become a process of personalizing history, of finding personal moral significance in the idea of preserved Jewish sensibility or of finding apparent opportunities for its denial in the idea of its ultimate loss. (1996, 9)

On the old continent the Jews were able to define their own identities within the boundaries of their communities. As they were living in communities set apart from the majority, the question of identity and the quest for identity did

not play an important role. But in America their need for a communal identity was not satisfied in most of the cases. This does not apply to those Jews living in Hasidic communities where the question of individual identity still does not play an important role. The rabbi decides on the role of each member of the congregation or community and they have to comply with their assigned role.

Uzi Rebhun in the *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture,* volume 2, says,

> Jewish identificational patterns must be transfigured, but a strong and coherent attachment to the Jewish heritage must maintain its distinctiveness from other faiths. The legitimacy of ethnic and religious differences, which is part of the ethos of today's multicultural United States, must turn these complicated challenges into new opportunities to ensure the strength and long-standing vitality of the American Jewish Diaspora. (2009, 591)

We can no longer speak about a religious community of the Jews but we cannot overlook its heritage to the coming generations. Being Jewish has become a question of willingness rather than a question of belonging to a different religious group.

Nathan Rotenstreich in his work entitled *Identification and Identity* speaks about

> the internalization of identity or the ongoing erosion of the semi-objective components of that identity […] Since the reality surrounding the Jews in the West is more and more of a universal character, the particularity of Jewish existence becomes more and more contracted and perhaps vis-à-vis the pattern of universality and particularity, the patters of universality proper and individuality will be retained. (1993, 54)

In the case of the American Jews the question of individual identity will be the most important idea.

It is also necessary to speak about Russian Jews and Jewishness as it represents a different kind of identification pattern. During the Soviet era it became widely accepted to view it as something rooted in ethnicity. It is totally severed from religion and religious beliefs.

> This means that Jewishness is understood as a primordial (rather than a constructed) category. For Russian Jews, biology is destiny, and neither conversion to Christianity nor complete identification with Russian culture will change it. Jews are seen as fundamentally – i.e. biologically – different. (Gershenson 2008, 176)

I think it is important to understand how Russian Jews view themselves in order to understand the identity constructed in the works of Gary Shteyngart. This is a totally different kind of Jewish identity which is based on biology, thus lacks real content, which might lead to its disappearance. It is also important to mention that for Russian Jews it was a necessity: to develop the intellectual, to keep close contact with their fellow ethnic brothers and to form a resistance group against the Soviet political system. There is also "a particular type of Jewish humour as well as a playful and verbose use of language" (Gershenson 2008, 177). This specific type of humour can be found in the works of the writer under discussion. I think it is necessary to see clearly how the question of identity is tackled by the Russian Jews in decoding Shteyngart's novels.

We can call Gary Shteyngart a Russian Jewish American writer. In his book *Out of Russia* (2011) Adrian Wanner considers that Shteyngart's Russianness started to play a role after leaving Russia. As we could see above, identity is formed as the result of a long learning process that is influenced by external factors. So Shteyngart's childhood environment, language and culture play an important role in his own self-representation. His first language to learn was Russian and in the beginning he felt alienated in America. In an interview he remembers: "[…] the Russian language is my friend. It's comfortable around me. It knows things the noisy brats around me, who laugh and point as I intone my Slavic sibilants, will never understand […] All this the great and mighty Russian language knows. All this it whispers to me at night, as I lie haunted by childhood insomnia" (2004, 6).

As for his acceptance in Russia as a Russian writer he said, "Yeah, nobody cares. It's a large society. I have friends who I visit that are nice people. It's just a very stressful society because half of its economy collapsed […] To grow up in this kind of environment is incredibly stressful, incredibly depressing" (quoted in Brown 1986, 32). His identity has been influenced by his country of origin. I agree with Adrian Wanner who speaks about a new type of emerging writers who belong to a so-called "translingual diaspora literature" (2011, 3). Shteyngart's identity is the result of a long process which was and is still influenced by his being born in Russia, by his ethnic belonging, which puts him into a different position and by embracing his host or accepted country, America. Shteyngart is Jewish because he was born one, his ethnic belonging links him to an ethnic group, but this does not mean that he follows Jewish rituals and traditions. He is not an observant Jew living according to the covenant with God. However, he is fully aware of his belonging to this ethnic group. The Jews were able to accommodate themselves much more easily than any other ethnic group to the hardships of life because of their long history of persecution and survival. For Jews the most important thing was to study and this is how Gary Shteyngart, the Jewish Russian immigrant, succeeds in life at an age when to deal with life is already very hard. As his parents refused to speak English in their household and they did not have

a television set, it was difficult for Shteyngart to find a common language with his colleagues at school: "So I find myself doubly handicapped, living in a world where I speak neither the actual language, English, nor the second and almost just as important language – television" (2004, 7). His estrangement is heightened by his being very poor and wearing old fashioned clothes. He turns to writing in English so as to heal himself and to find remedy :

> Around this time, I start writing in English with gusto. I write for the same reasons other curious children write: loneliness, boredom, the transgressive excitement of building your own world out of letters, a world not sanctioned by family and school… Thousands of sacrilegious English words pour out in a matter of days, words that aren't inflected with my still-heavy Russian accent. Impatiently, I blow on passages deleted with white-out, knowing somehow that my life is about to change. And it does […] it helps me cross the line from unclubbable fruitcake to tolerated eccentric. Tell me, is there anything writing can't do? (2004, 7–8)

Shteyngart's ardent wish to get assimilated into the mainstream American way of life culminates in the buying of a Sony Trinitron television set which after being turned on would not be turned off for the next ten years. This way he becomes a member of the American society, spending most of his free time watching television instead of writing. He says, "I become a naturalized citizen of this country" (2004, 8). Finally he has taken on the habits of other Americans and is on his way to fulfilling the American dream.

The Soviet Union's fragile historical perspectives, its economic uncertainties, and the open anti-Semitism manifested in several pockets of the Russian civilization forced thousands of Russian Jews to leave the country behind in search of more promising alternatives of existence. America, with its apparently unlimited resources, became one of the most attractive destinations for those seeking a safe haven for themselves and their progeny. Despite periodical restrictions, American society was open to immigration, and ready to absorb – in the words of Emma Lazarus – "the homeless" and the "tempest-tossed" (quoted in Hollander 2005). As she epitomized the essence of the notion of refugees seeking a haven in her famous sonnet to be read on the inner wall of the Statue of Liberty,

> Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door! (Hollander 2005)

In his memoir Shteyngart tells his story from his early childhood spent in Leningrad to his arrival and accommodation to the American reality. The hero of the memoir, little Igor and later Gary somehow tries to figure out who he is in this new multicultural world. He arrives in America, in New York to find himself in an alien world. Moreover, he finds himself among "the enemy." Little Igor used to be an asthmatic child who was afraid of everything as it can be seen on a picture from the book. Shteyngart says:

> I am scared of the photo studio. I am scared of the telephone. Scared of anything outside our apartment. Scared of the people in their big fur hats. Scared of the snow. Scared of the cold. Scared of the heat. Scared of the ceiling fan at which I would point one tragic finger and start weeping. Scared of any height higher than my sickbed. Scared of Uncle Electric Current. "Why was I so scared of everything?" I ask my mother nearly forty years later. "Because you were born a Jewish person," she says. (2014, 25)

Could this fear be something genetically encoded? Or is it only the fear of an individual who happens to be of Jewish origins and tries to find his place in the world?

After his arrival in the U.S., Gary has to face another enemy, which is the multicultural society. The so-called American melting pot with its thousand faces scares the young boy. He soon learns that he has to avoid dark-skinned people because they are all criminal. He thus also experiences a new feeling – that of being white:

> There's hatred and fear, sure, but just a little down the line, laughter and relief. The happy recognition that, as unemployed and clueless as we are, there is a reservoir of disgust in our new homeland for someone other than ourselves. We are refugees and even Jews, which in the Soviet Union never won you any favors, but we are also something we never really had the chance to appreciate back home. We are white. (2014, 109)

He learns that being black or Spanish is worse than being an immigrant. As he is white, he cannot be discovered and his disguise is perfect.

By the end of the novel Shteyngart has reached the final destination of each immigrant of accepting and liking himself as an American of Russian Jewish origins.

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# Understanding Jerusalem and its Cross-Cultural Dilemmas in Guy Delisle's *Jerusalem: Chronicles From the Holy City*

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**Abstract.** Guy Delisle's *Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City* (2011) is a nonfictional graphic novel which narrates the experiences during a year that the Canadian artist and his family spent living far from home, in the occasionally dangerous and perilous city of the ancient Middle East. Part humorous memoir filled with "the logistics of everyday life," part an inquisitive and sharp-eyed travelogue, *Jerusalem* is interspersed with enthralling lessons on the history of the region, together with vignettes of brief strips of Delisle's encounters with expatriates and locals, with Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities in and around the city, with Bedouins, Israeli and Palestinians. Since the comic strip is considered amongst the privileged genres able to disseminate stereotypes, *Jerusalem* tackles cultural as well as physical barriers, delimiting between domestic and foreign space, while revealing the historical context of the Israeli-Palestinian present conflict. Using this idea as a point of departure, I employ an imagological method of interpretation to address cross-cultural confusions in analysing the cartoonist's travelogue as discourse of representation and ways of understanding cultural transmission, paying attention to the genre's convention, where Delisle's drawing style fits nicely the narrative techniques employed. Through an imagological perspective, I will also pay attention to the interaction between cultures and the dynamics between the images which characterise the *Other* (the nationalities represented or the *spected*) and those which characterise – not without a sense of irony – his own identity (*self-portraits* or *auto-images*). I shall take into account throughout my analysis that the source of this graphic memoir is inevitably a subjective one: even though Delisle professes an unbiased mind-set from the very beginning, the comic is at times coloured by his secular views. Delisle's book is a dark, yet gentle comedy, and his wife's job at the Doctors Without Borders paired with his personal experiences are paradoxically a gentle reminder that "There'll *always* be borders." In sum, the comic medium

brings a sense of novelty to the imagological and hermeneutic conception of the interpretation of cultural and national stereotypes and/or otherness in artistic and literary works.

> I can almost tell, in set phrase, what [travellers] will say when they see Tabor, Nazareth, Jericho and Jerusalem – *because I have the books they will "smouch" their ideas from* ... The Pilgrims will tell of Palestine, when they get home, not as it appeared to *them*, but as it appeared to Thompson and Robinson and Grimes – with the tints varied to suit each pilgrim's creed.
> (Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrim's Progress*, 1869)

> Here was an object: Up and do!/ With seed and tillage help renew – /
> Help reinstate the Holy Land.
> (Herman Melville, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, 1876)

Guy Delisle is a Canadian cartoonist and former studio animator, who has become internationally known for moving to foreign places and drawing casual vignettes on cross-cultural dilemmas. Over the past decade – as a result of his wife's work with Médecins Sans Frontiéres, or Doctors Without Borders –, he has documented his travels to China (*Shenzhen*, 2000), North Korea (*Pyongyang*, 2003), and Burma, now Myanmar (*Chroniques birmanes*, 2007). Like the other three published books which had resulted from those trips, *Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City* (Drawn and Quarterly, 2011) is a travelogue, which even though it borrows from history, geography, anthropology, and social science, it is not automatically a literary reportage.

*Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City* is Guy Delisle's biggest and most accomplished autobiographical comic to date, not just because of the number of pages or because he finds himself inside the walls of one of the most secretive places on earth, but because he is approaching it from a very particular place: one where he is *as* excited to find an ancient settlement *as* he is to find a playground with a really good slide for his two young children. The cultural and physical barriers between the Jewish, Muslim, Armenian and Christian communities in and around The Old City, and the compromises and workarounds that the city's residents have been forced to contrive, become the source of a gloomy, yet gentle ubiquitous comedy: absurdity on the very edge of tragedy.

# "Homo Viator" in the Holy Land, Israel, and Palestine

In the nineteenth century, travel writings about the Holy Land were extremely popular. Travellers were thrilled to enter the holy city of Jerusalem for the first time, in addition to experiencing the exoticism of the East. There are, however, dramatic discrepancies between the nineteenth and twentieth-century travel books, attributable to the stark changes in the state of affairs in the region, from one century to the next. But their authors share certain manners of response to the complex religious and psychological encounter with the idea of a sacred land (Obenzinger 2009).

A journey to the Holy Land was a mighty theme, as Melville would advocate in his epic poem *Clarel*, and these travel accounts share a number of stylistic conventions and attitudes, as they attempt a mighty response. Mark Twain, Walter Scott, Herman Melville, Hannah Arendt, and Saul Bellow have produced some of the best literary works based on their journey to Jerusalem. This large and growing collection joins other texts and cultural objects – paintings, religious tracts, standard guidebooks, photographs, brochures, and more – within a major enthralment with The Old City, which persists during the course of both centuries.

The vast library of American and European Holy Land books perpetuated a thick textual lens. Consequently, the encounter with the actual place was relentlessly being mediated through an elaborate set of repeated travel and literary devices (Obenzinger 2009). These accounts were so plenteous and so overwrought that Mark Twain could have easily written his Holy Land travelling letters without even having to set foot in Jerusalem.

Contact with its real people and conditions conflicted with what they had visualised when they had read the Bible back home. Discovering the sacred amongst the mundane, i.e. "evidences" of biblical truth and prophetic fulfilment in the land of Palestine, invoked the believer's special relationship to the holy city.

In the study at hand I chose to focus my imagological interpretation of national and ethnic strangeness and/or otherness in Guy Delisle's graphic travelogue firstly because writing about the Holy Land in an original fashion in the twenty-first century is not easy. Traditionally, those who travelled to The Old City would *read* the Holy Land, their comprehension often confirming all of their deepest, most conventional beliefs, developing a sense of "sacred theatricality" which allowed them "to cultivate epiphanies or to stage biblical re-enactment" (Obenzinger 2009, 151). The Canadian cartoonist chose to resist the perpetuation or reinstallment of the travel writing conventions by challenging the shared orientalist stereotypes and myths of the Holy Land: "Arabs were often described as dirty, violent, and ignorant [...]; Muslims were generally regarded with disgust, while Jews were generally depicted as uncouth and pathetic" (Obenzinger 2009, 151–152). Secondly, graphic novels, similar to travel writings, are among the most hybrid

and unassimilable of literary genres. *Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City* is a "useful vehicle for cultural self-perception," a "barometer for changing views on other ('foreign', 'non-Western') cultures," and a "trigger for the informational circuits that tap us into the wider world" (Holland and Huggan 2000, XIII).

## A cartoonist's travelogue and the conventions of the genre

In the first chapter of the graphic novel, marked "August," the autobiographical protagonist is on the plane to Jerusalem. It is 2008. Next to him, he is surprised to see a cheerful Russian old man with concentration-camp serial numbers tattooed along his forearm, who manages to calm Delisle's baby daughter: "We've seen so many horrific images from that time in history," he remarks, "that my imagination just takes off. But I'm treated to a whole other picture tonight, as this old Russian plays with my daughter thousands of feet in the air" (2012, 7).[1] The scene serves an important function to Delisle's travelling narrative, as he warns himself (and, by extension, his readers) not to let the images and stories he had seen and heard about Jerusalem affect his impression of the city. By admitting a certain degree of ignorance and committing to an unprejudiced, unbiased mind-set at the book's outset, he allows himself to ask straightforward, innocent questions (e.g. from *Jerusalem*: "So … we're in Israel, right?" The answer is not as simple as one might think: "Uh… Yes… Well, it depends") (15). Delisle seems to have cast aside prior knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or even moments from the history and traditions of the Holy Land, as it has been portrayed by the media, asking his own questions and exploring the city in a more (self-)reflexive manner.

Guy Delisle has a genuine talent for visual storytelling, carefully choosing which moments to draw into sequential panels – what to leave out, what to include – and correspondingly for outlining environments: religious shrines and settlements, but also grocery stores, markets, cafés, playgrounds and checkpoints – plenty of checkpoints. "Today, we'll go have a look at the Qalandiya checkpoint. Since it's Ramadan and many Muslims want to pray at the great mosque in Jerusalem on Fridays, there could be trouble. I hadn't seen the separation wall yet. Huh…" he adds, "I didn't think it would be so high" (39).

Each community in Jerusalem (the Christian quarter, the Armenian quarter and the Jewish quarter) lives by its own rules, and Delisle and his family have to be careful enough to respect all of them: the "Christian-run store, it's closed on Sundays, but it's the only place in Beit Hanina" – in the east of Jerusalem,

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1    As follows, the quotes from Guy Delisle's 2012 graphic novel will only be referenced with the page number.

where the protagonist lives – "that sells beer and wine," another place, which is Muslim, closes on Fridays – "You'll never find alcohol here," plus one last shopping centre where, although it is in a settlement and closed for Sabbath (on Saturdays), "they do sell alcohol" (16). It may seem a rather trivial matter, but the members of these communities take themselves – and consequently the selling or non-selling of alcohol – very seriously. Beit Hanina, which is a Palestinian neighbourhood, on the East part of Jerusalem, is actually "an Arab village that was annexed [to The Old City] following the six-day war in '67" (15). The arid landscape of the area contrasts strongly with the West Jerusalem, where – to Delisle's amazement – there are "Ah! Real sidewalks!," an outdoor café, a park with a playground, a market, "and garbage cans that aren't overflowing" (25). Even though "the city is a ghost town on the Sabbath," the discrepancies between the east and the west are sometimes shocking (25).

In the course of one year, the protagonist explores the Holy City, going to the very edges of the Israeli/Arab borders and seeing what he finds there, how the cultures clash at the meeting point: "In passing, they tell us how to get to The Old City. Again, it's complicated. Jerusalem has two parallel transportation systems. There are the Israeli buses that go everywhere except the Arab quarters. And there are the Arab minivans that operate nowhere but the Arab quarters" (39). Each situation is carefully drawn in parallel panels.

Sometimes it is a physical barrier which he encounters, like the high separation wall he becomes obsessed with – and which he sketches from countless angles before he is moved on by confused officers playing it safe –, and other crossing points: "Nadège is going to Gaza today. Out of curiosity, I'm joining her until Erez, the only crossing point between Gaza and Israel" (83). Sometimes the barrier is a psychological one:

> We stop for a mint lemonade. The feel of the place is something else. To the left, police and soldiers are filling out a report. People clamour around with their version of events. In the meantime, a line of tourists clears a path through the tables to reach an ATM. And opposite, a group of Italians stop to pray in front of a small chapel. (18)

Thanks to his insightful explanations and drawings, one may observe the different modalities of acting and interacting with one another. The *strangeness* manifests itself as an impossibility to speak, to communicate, and to understand each other.

In the 300 or so pages of *Jerusalem*, Delisle skilfully presents episodes from his daily life interspersed with engaging lessons on the history of the region. For example,

> Hebron is divided into two areas: H1 and H2. H1 is controlled by the Palestinians and H2 is controlled by the Israeli army to protect the settlers, who live in houses not far away from the Tomb of the Patriarchs. […] It seems like Hebron's history ever since can be summed up by two dates: in 1929, Arabs went on a rampage and killed sixty-seven Jews; in 1994, a Jew gunned down twenty-nine Palestinians praying at the Tomb of the Patriarchs. (118)

Concluding rather penetratingly: "Each community has its massacre" (118). These comments are attached to symbolic illustrations depicting past massacres, events which Delisle did not witness first-hand, but which he imagines and shares with his reader as part of a larger cultural and historical context.

Delisle's drawing style of such moments fits nicely with his narration. His outlines are plain, clean, and casual, without being sloppy, stripping down an image to its essential "meaning," thus amplifying that particular meaning in a way in which a detailed description or a more realistic image could not exemplify (McCloud 1993). Most of Delisle's frames are in blue and brown hues, serving as backdrop for the mundane streets, with colour (bold reds, greens and yellows) used from time to time – as if to prove that the history and culture of the *Other* is never black and white, but always nuanced – to highlight and bring attention to a map ["The O.C.H.A. office is on the green line. The famous green line was pencilled on a map at the end of the first Israeli-Arab war (in 1948) by generals from both sides, dividing the territory between the new Israeli nation and a future Palestine," (33)]; a loud obnoxious noise, e.g. gunshot sounds ["Bang! Bang! Tear gas grenades to scatter people." (45)]; a memory or an intensely violent event: "Tension mounts, spectators push and shove, the chanting stops and all at once the animals' throats are slit. Blood spurts, soiling the immaculate white clothes of the slaughterers" (252). Similarly, maps perform a particularly important function in signalling the authenticity of autobiographical comics, "particularly because they seem to provide clear, unambiguous links between locations in a narrative and actual places in the real world" (El Refaie 2012, 158).

He is also a specialist in compressing these historical scenes to just a few panels, phrases, and sometimes even gestures. Most of the subchapters in *Jerusalem* are just one, two, or three pages in length. They're all vignettes, and many of them involve driving the kids to school, taking them on vacations, or simply wandering around trying to find a place to get some drawing done before they have to come home.

But there are also encounters and interactions, with other expats, with locals, with Jews and Muslims and Christians, with Israelis and Palestinians. The portraits always bear recognisable elements of their origins, nationality, religion and social status: "I learn all kinds of things. The men in the stripped coats are of

Hungarian descent. The Haredim are divided into several subgroups of which the Hassidim are the best known. Certain small details help tell them apart: a flatter hat, worn a certain way, a shorter vest […]" (296).

The protagonist is also exploring the politics of the region, which are as complex and complicated as they come, but he wisely allows these issues to be explained by locals:

> He briefly explains how they differ from Israeli Jews. 'Jerusalem isn't sacred in any way. It is just another city. Unlike the Jews, we Samaritans have never left the Holy Land. The Samaritans are considered to be Jews by the Israeli government, but not by the ultra-orthodox). They also have Palestinian ID cards, and Jordanian passports too. You could say they're at crossroads.' (220)

With so much to see and learn about, *Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City* was always going to be Delisle's longest work, but it is the juxtaposition of various points of view – Israeli, Palestinian, Christian, members of Médecins Sans Frontières, and his own – that make it his best.

## The maintenance of selfhood in a foreign land

The verbal and visual storytelling techniques of the autobiographic comic, if we take a wider definition of autobiography, were specifically chosen to convey Delisle's interest in the dynamics between *Self* and *Otherness*, as revealed in his travel books: "the cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled […] An empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm" (McCloud 1993, 36). His cartoonlike self-portrait – or *auto-image* – is comprised in a few jauntily drawn lines with dots for eyes. He carefully draws portraits of the *Other*, sometimes real situations and other times imagined characters, such as the gallery depicting the six religious orders that share custody of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre: "Ethiopian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Syrian Orthodox" (111).

But these representations – or, rather, *representamen* (Leerssen 2007) – inked tightly in perfect capital letters, carefully drawn between the lines of each panel –, are more than cultural and national stereotypes. *Jerusalem* implicitly "raises a claim of referentiality vis-à-vis empirical reality" (Leerssen 2007, 27), and the reader of *Jerusalem* is, nevertheless, likely to seek evidence of identity and of authenticity in the form of a resemblance between the drawn characters, places or sacred monuments, and their extratextual models. Yet these are "imagetext" tropes which reinscribe, within the worlds of visual-verbal representations, the

shifting relations of names and things, the *sayable* and more specifically the *seeable*, discourse (Mitchell 1994) *about* and the experience *of* living in Jerusalem. It would seem, then, that the *Self* and *Other* can be both visually and verbally described in graphic novels, which allows not only for the identification of the extratextual models within the panels and the source of the dialogue in speech balloons, but also with the verbal narrator voice-overs and the compositions within the panels.

There is an interesting dynamic between those images which characterise *Otherness*, the foreigner, the non-Western cultures – *hetero-images* (Leerssen 2007, 27) – and ones which characterise one's own national identity. Likewise, in *Jerusalem* there is an interesting shift that takes place: having been invited to the Freedom of Speech Festival in Norway, and then to a Comics Festival in Helsinki, the protagonist has to travel to Northern Europe. On his way back to Israel, at the check in for his Paris–Tel Aviv flight he is retained by the authorities for having mentioned that his wife, a member of the Médecins Sans Frontières, works in Gaza. Being a Canadian is not at all complex and problematic, but being married to someone who works and temporarily is being kept in the Gaza camps engraves a new identity of Delisle in the eyes of the French authorities. He has to reaffirm his own identity as a Canadian citizen and a cartoonist, when he is in fact treated not only like an outsider, a foreigner, but also as a possible menace to national security: "It all ends in the office with me browsing the Finnish festival site to prove that I was on the list. 'I even won a prize. A nice little statue'" (61).

Guy Delisle is a subjective, self-ironic and thus a humorous source (Leerssen 2007): "I often see a neighbour who goes out covered head to foot. She even has gloves. I don't know how she puts up with it in this heat […] And whenever I see her I always wonder: why not go all the way and wear dark glasses too?" (69–70). But the irony of his own situation is not lost on Delisle: he is supposed to play the role of a "housewife" and help take care of the two young children while their mother is out doing real work and making a difference: "For instance, since it's Ramadan this week, Alice ends an hour early. I pick her up on foot. We take a minibus. We drive downtown. We pick up Louis. We return by minibus. And we walk home. In short, the glamorous life of a housewife" (51).

The protagonist spends most of his days transporting his own children in a city of major violent conflict, with non-existing sidewalks, cratered roads, and random parking. One might have imagined that "Jerusalem would be much more modern. It sure didn't look like this in the travel guides" (14). Once again, Delisle contrasts a general perpetuated image of the Holy Land: "Bethlehem is in the west bank, so you need to drive along the wall and go through a massive checkpoint. Result: travellers set out for Bethlehem with this image in mind […]" – a warm, welcoming representation of the Nativity of Christ – "[…] and return to this one," – high, taciturn walls surrounding the Church of the Nativity.

The twelve chapters of the book contain stories of human minutiae in a place we only see in times of political strife on the news, when it blends into all the other stories of political discord and we become numb to it. Without Delisle we might never learn what it is actually like to live in a place like this, or get a realistic idea of the people we would meet if we did. Many of the vignettes are about how all these things affect him and most importantly the children, who are frequently on the rough end of a conflict they do not understand: "The guns are end-of-Ramadan gifts. Given the context, I'd probably give them Lego bricks instead" (69).

Guy Delisle's *Jerusalem*: *Chronicles from the Holy City* is a nonfictional graphic novel about being far away from home in an occasionally dangerous and precarious and confusing place. It is about living for a year in Israel while trying to be a husband, a father, and an itinerant cartoonist – "Whoa, I haven't sketched in ages." He confesses in one of his interviews that during the year he spent in Jerusalem he was not sure that this experience was going to turn into another graphic novel. That he had indeed written and published a volume based on his year spent in Jerusalem is indicative of the fact that he had a great interest in it.

An imagological interpretation does not need to discern how much fact and how much fiction exist in Delisle's travel stories in order to decide whether they are a reliable source of representation of the things they account for or not, mostly because "the demarcation between *imaginated* discourse and testable report statements is not always obvious" (Leerssen 2007, 28). There are numerous occasions in which the information comes from locals, Israeli and Arabs alike, in this way the readers are comforted that he is given first-hand facts, unprejudiced by travel writer's ignorance, misunderstanding or wrong interpretation. This also means that Delisle had meant to create as vivid a tableau of Jerusalem as possible, in order to make his account more attractive to its target audience: readers of autobiographical comics and graphic novels, as well as of contemporary travel books about the Holy City. Accordingly, it is highly plausible that the writer also embellished things with his imagination, by inventing characters to fill in his ingenious panels, as well as selecting specific events in his account which "singles out a nation from the rest of humanity as being somehow different or 'typical'" (Leerssen 2007, 28).

There is a nice cross-section of Jerusalemite society in the park, where we see Orthodox Jewish mothers, Muslim mothers, and Delisle himself watch their children run across the playground captioned by: "The kids mix easily. And sometimes adults do too" (64). People in and around Jerusalem are separated by their traditions and customs, and – with very few exceptions – they rarely mingle. Delisle seems more like a fish-out-of water everyman character, caught up in an order of things that has been going on for centuries. The chapter entitled "September" creates a vibrant image of east Jerusalem during the Ramadan: "Ramadan started a few days ago, and the local houses are all decked

out with lights. The themes look borrowed from another holiday. There's even a snowflake. At 30 degrees Celsius, the effect is a bit odd" (36). The brightly coloured decorations which the locals seem to have prepared expressly for Ramadan resemble those types of ornaments used to light up a house and decorate a holiday tree at Christmas in the Western world. He even describes Tel Aviv a "normal" city with "normal" people for favouring a more "Western" lifestyle. The similarities, however, end here.

Guy Delisle, as many other graphic memoirists, is typically less concerned with trying to capture people's outer appearance as accurately as possible and more with expressing character traits and shifting states and emotions (El Refaie 2012, 147). His work is highly self-referential, in that he occasionally addresses the process of writing comics and the lack of social status this typically affords. In the final panel of his Finnish experience, we see him desperately trying to convince the unflinching officer with a caption that reads "I really did win a prize, I swear!" (61). The self-portraits scattered across *Jerusalem*: *Chronicles from the Holy City* always reveal something "deep and incontrovertible" about the inner self of the artist and how he hopes to be seen: moments of solitude, sketching outside the Wall or by a refugee camp contemplating the Israeli landscape, on the Mount of Olives or up in the tower of the Augusta Victoria Church. Delisle's drawings of himself are sometimes able to convey much more effectively his state of mind than the speech balloons attached to the images. The focus of the visuals is more on the subjective experience of the time spent in a foreign land.

The dynamic between the written code – speech and thought balloons, descriptive tags affixed to particular people and places in individual panels –, and the pictorial code is another aspect to be taken into account in an imagological interpretation of the relationship between the sense of *Self* and the perception of the *Other*. One might tend to define the images which characterize the *Other* in terms of being "realistic" or "unrealistic," referring to Delisle's drawing style, and this distinction may prove itself useful to analyse these *hetero-images* (Leerssen 2007, 27) more precisely. For example, in his exemplification of the six religious orders sharing custody of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Delisle draws six characters (111) in the form of "amplification through simplification" (McCloud 1993, 30), where unnecessary details are left out in order to focus on the essential: the symbols of each order.

In Peirce's (1960) semiotic theory, words and images are seen as fundamentally different kinds of signs. Words are "symbols," based on arbitrary connection between a signifier and a signified; their meaning is completely dependent on conventions. Images, on the other hand, are "icons," which are founded on a close physical resemblance between signs and their meaning. According to Peirce's definitions, comics and graphic novels lack the indexical quality of photographic representations in that they do not resemble the represented objects quite so

closely. Thus, the more simplified a drawing is, the more it acquires "symbolic" qualities. What makes this approach particularly attractive to our purpose is that it suggests a way of addressing the relationship between such stylistic features and perceptions of truthfulness, which brings again into discussion Leerssen's distinction between "*imaginated* discourse" and "testable report statements" (2007, 28). The drawing of the markets and the people in the streets of Jerusalem tends toward abstraction using the "universally accepted scribbles that stand in for what mouths and noses and motion and sweat look like" (Wolk 2007, 120). There is a humorous moment where Delisle contrasts his style of drawing with what would be perceived as a more realistic one. During the municipal elections posters for the main candidates were "plastered all over the city," and "one rabbi had himself portrait in cartoon form" (145), the poster resembling the cartoonist's abstract style of drawing. Below, in an individual panel we read: "His PR team must have convinced him not to use a photo, which makes sense, since he actually looks like this" next to a fairly detailed, more realistic-looking image. Stylistic realism is not the most common cue to authentic intention: "although the visual style of a comics artist *is* an important authentication strategy, it often draws its power less from its iconic resemblance to reality than from the indexical clues it seems to offer about the artist's genuine characteristics and intentions" (El Refaie 2012, 155). Patterns of "Othering" (Leerssen 2007, 29) can be easily identified in single panels or along sequences of images, as the residents of the heavily contested territory – Jewish, Muslim and Christian – keep to their rightful place, just as Delisle acknowledges his own: the outsider, sitting on a hill, drawing or going about the minutiae of his day-to-day.

Inscribing travel writings in the field of autobiographical comics and graphic novels and attempting to circumscribe its characteristics within the sharp contours of the sequential art proves to be a profitable affair. Comics in general, and graphic novels in particular, are a multimodal medium allowing through imagological methods and perspectives to focus on both the textual and pictorial codes, redefining the specificity of literary imagology, graphic novels thus contributing to the growing interest in identity constructs.

*Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City* also won the Best Comic Album Prize (the Fauve d'Or) at the 2012's International Comics Festival in Angoulême, France, making Guy Delisle the first Canadian cartoonist to win this prestigious honour. Wisely enough, Delisle never divulges outright with whom he sympathises. The final page of *Jerusalem*, the image of the plane above the clouds, leaving Israel, reminded me of the defeated sentiments of a street vendor whom the protagonist met in the first month of his visit, and who, prompted by Delisle's mention of Doctors Without Borders, wearily responds: "There'll *always* be borders."

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