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## **János Herceg's Literary Images**

Julianna ISPÁNOVICS CSAPÓ

University of Novi Sad  
Department of Hungarian Language and Literature  
Faculty of Philosophy Novi Sad  
csapo@eunet.rs

**Abstract.** János Herceg's essays and studies are depictions of Hungarian literature in Bácska/Yugoslavia/Vojvodina throughout several decades. An important background to his short stories, novels and notes on cultural and historical events is provided by his interacting literary images.

The delineation of the Hungarian literature of Bácska sprouting under the enticement of Budapest becomes formulated in the context of cultural history in Herceg's writings within the framework of "the Bácska character." The Trianon turnover gave life to Kornél Szenteleky's model of Hungarian literature in Yugoslavia. One of the contemporary presenters of the intellectual programme and local colours was János Herceg. Herceg's literary image regarding ethnic/national character is attached to Vojvodina.

János Herceg's concepts of literary conceptions, as I can discern from his essays and studies, are graded and supple, and next to the already mentioned context of cultural history (art history, folklore, local history, etc.), they are composed in the comparative relations system of Hungarian literatures, Slavic and world literature.

**Keywords:** Hungarian literature, Yugoslavia, Bácska (Bačka), Vajdaság (Vojvodina), János Herceg, stereotype

The traditional definition in Babits's sense holds that world literature is interested in great personalities who respond to each other through ages and countries, who are continuations of each other from century to century, and hold out their hands to one another above the heads of peoples. This approach rules out

commonplace literature, and opposes the contemporary “scientific trend” of literary theory which “detects a social phenomenon” in literature, too. This view is interested in the life of a community, one of whose life functions is literature itself. The modern vision finds great personalities or outstanding works less and less important. The commonplace writer, who gives expression to the community’s commonplace soul more compliantly, is more important; community itself is more important; and sometimes the public is more important than the writer, literary life or literature itself (Babits 1979, 10).

The “handbook” of the twentieth century science of literature, Wellek-Warren’s standard work on the subject, also raises the question of whether defining literature is to limit it to “great books,” which, whatever their subject, are “notable for literary form or expression.” Aesthetic function or fictive character are considered to be a distinctive feature of literature, yet for the sake of the tip they do not disregard the iceberg.

Within the history of imaginative literature, limitation to the great books makes incomprehensible the continuity of literary tradition, the development of literary genres, and indeed the very nature of the literary process, besides obscuring the background of social, linguistic, ideological, and other conditioning circumstances. (Wellek and Warren 2006, 22)

Up to the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, our region (Bácska, Bánát/Bánság and Szerémség/Bačka, Banat and Srem) was part of Hungary. Important chapters of the prehistory of our literature are *the Hussite Bible* – a Bible translation in the Hungarian dialect of Szerémség – *The Memoirs about the Decay of Hungary* written by György Szerémi born in Kamonc (Sremska Kamenica), Mihály Szabatkai’s historical verse, the Renaissance centre of Péter Váradi at the castle of Bács (Bač) and finally, beginning with the eighteenth century, the press, book and literary culture of the developing economic and cultural centres in Újvidék (Novi Sad), Szabadka (Subotica), Zombor (Sombor), Nagybecskerek (Zrenjanin) and Kikinda. It is the printed book among others that makes our memoir and travelogue literature (Pál Jámbor, Izidor Milkó, Károly Vértesi), our first drama (Károly Csillag: *Devils Path [Sátán útja]*, 1898), and the well-known prose writers public (Dániel Papp, Ferenc Herczeg, Elek Gozdsu, Dezső Kosztolányi and Géza Csáth). From the beginning of the nineteenth century, our region’s cultural life begins to orientate itself towards the fast developing city of Budapest. As Imre Bori put it, “The provincial intellectual centres had lost their importance, the province no longer produced intellectual goods, only consumed them, and so anyone who wished to make his way had to go to Budapest; the ‘provincials’ were left out of the bloodstream of intellectual life” (Bori 1998, 69).

The literary culture of the region thus became peripheralized, yet this was not a phenomenon specific to this region. It was of universal character valid for the whole country. Apart from Budapest the whole country was considered provincial (Kósa 2006).

In Bács-Bodrog county peripheralization aided the awakening to consciousness of the region. “Love the home-country in the county” – was the motto composed by Ede Margalits in 1883. The paradigm of “the Bácska character,” of a claim for cultural and literary detachment developing from the inside is reflected in the titles of the local papers which include the name of the region (*Bácska, Bácsmegyei Napló, Bácskai Hírlap, Bácskai Gazda, Bácskai Ellenőr, Bácskai Közérdek* [...]), the activities on the reconstruction of past history of The Bács-Bodrogh County Historical Society [*Bács-Bodrogh Vármegyei Történelmi Társulat*], the editing of local literary anthologies (*Bácsbodrog-megyei árviz album, Bácskai emlény*), local folktale collections (*Bácskai dalok, mesék*), and last but not least the founding and activities of the Literary Society of Bács–Bodrog County [*Bács–Bodrog Megyei Irodalmi Társaság*] (1905). This geo-culturally tinted narrative, which brings to life the early history of the region, has created an identity which is an always unwillingly chosen, questioned or even ignored local cultic tradition (Ispánovics Csapó 2010). But it IS a tradition! And a very authentic one.

Our literary history considers the year of 1918 – the time of political, social and economic break-up – the date of birth of Hungarian literature in Yugoslavia, which started its awakening and the independent, so-called inner development in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This is the year which we mark as the beginning of the period of intellectual ripening and self-defining to which János Herceg is an active contributor. The provincial Hungarian writers had, after long inner debates, become Hungarian writers of Vojvodina/ with the attribute of Vojvodina.

The literary battle-fronts which came to the foreground in these debates were not unequivocal, and *in those days there was not a single writer who consistently remained clinging to his opinion*. We can find them now in the camp of deniers, now in the camp of defenders of this literature (...) The real significance of these debates lies in the fact that the basic questions of Hungarian literature in Yugoslavia became settled: from now on Vajdaság (Vojvodina) was not only the framework of this literature but also its native soil, and the writers accepted the fact that they had become Yugoslav Hungarian writers. [ellipsis and emphasis in the original] (Bori 1998, 73)

This *vacillation* and *long maturing* can also be traced in János Herceg's textual world. His essays and studies depict the author's literary images within the scope/relation of Hungarian literature in Bácska/Vajdaság/Jugoszlávia (Bačka/

Vojvodina/Yugoslavia). These are literary visions, which are embedded into a rich panorama of social and cultural context, keeping in mind the aesthetic quality, while at the same time also reproducing certain stereotypes of our literature. They sometimes weaken, sometimes strengthen, shade or think these perceptions further. The first one of them is: *the autochthonous, organic, intensive Hungarian culture/literature has no preliminaries*; the beginning is 1918<sup>1</sup> when Kornél Szenteleky announced his programme amid the new social and political circumstances. The second one is: *Bácska is a sick, dreary and utilitarian country*. The third one is: *There are no Understanding readers*.

In 1927, the article *Conditions of Hungarian Literary Life in Yugoslavia* [*Magyar irodalmi állapotok Jugoszláviában*] by Rezső Péchy-Horváth, a journalist working for several papers, was published in the Pandora, a paper whose editor in chief was Lőrinc Szabó; he characterizes Hungarian cultural life in Yugoslavia by depicting it as follows:

There is plenty of money to spend on merry feasting and gorging, high stakes card games, drunken champagne revelries, wedding parties lasting for several weeks or merrymaking to the accompaniment of Gipsy music, but no money to spend on culture. (Péchy-Horváth 1927, 8)

This opinion makes János Herceg pick up his pen and write his paper entitled, *A jugoszláviai magyar irodalom* [*Hungarian Literature in Yugoslavia*] (1928), trying to save the renown of the local literature and of “the good old times.” “... *there has never been an active literary life in Vajdaság*. In peacetime, too, *if a person had an ambition to become a writer, he immediately ran up to Pest*, and there he either mixed in with the rest of ordinary scum or became a Budapest writer” (Herceg 1999a, 7). And why was there no *active* literary life? There had been no suitable readers, literary journals, press or publishers. In spite of all, Herceg refers to the so much scorned greasy soil of Bácska as to humus, “a soil which, although not capable of producing a genius, has its values now as it always had;” Dezső Kosztolányi, Géza Csáth and some others, who could not be called insignificant writers, came from Bácska (Herceg 1999a, 8).

It seems that at the end of the 1920s, in the shadow of the royal dictatorship, the prospects were very much the same. “*Writers in Vajdaság orientate themselves outwards*” (Herceg 1999a, 8). *Outwards*, this time again, means Budapest. The young Herceg goes to the Hungarian capital, following the footsteps of the activist writers of the emigrants from Pécs and József Debreceni.

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<sup>1</sup> This – for a long time stereotype – date as a historical landmark has become rather questionable as a historic turning point. Just as the view which imposes the bounds of a social or political era on literary eras.



Accordingly, his confession-like literary ideal is: "(...) my goal is that the Hungarian literatures of the successor states should integrate the literature of the home country without exception, and enrich and enlarge *the sole trunk of the Hungarian intellectuality*" (Herceg 1999a, 9). Zoltán Kalapis names this mosaic stone in Herceg's life, (which is missing or has not been recorded in the literary lexicons yet), "the Budapest detour." Éva Toldi talks of the young writer as of the student of a Budapest gymnasium, "who had his passport withdrawn after the 6 January 1929 dictatorship and thus could not return to the Mester Street Realgymnasium as a private student (...)" (Toldi 1993, 16). In the view of the writer of the monograph, the loss of his passport was probably the consequence of his above-mentioned piece of writing in addition to Herceg's activist, leftist orientation.

In 1929, the nineteen-year-old János Herceg founded a journal under the title *IKSZ* in Zombor. The article formulating the programme of the journal, which had only one issue, states, "the *IKSZ* is not universal, it is not of Vajdaság (...)" it intends to be the manifest of the world view and life manifestation of a young generation brought up in a sick era (...)" (Herceg 1999b, 12).

The 'not universal' was meant to suggest – Csaba Utasi wrote – that they do not belong to the Hungarian literature, since they follow their separate autochthonous paths; the 'not of Vajdaság' referred to the provincial character and level of our average literature of the time; therefore it did not mean the rejection/negation of the region (...). (Utasi 1984, 101)

Utasi's statement could lead us to the thought that this was the time when Herceg, who was brought up on European activist and avant-garde views, started to become familiar with Kornél Szenteleky's programme of literature, the theory of local "couleur," according to which beyond the colours of the surroundings, of the local countryside of Bácska and Vojvodina, the only real sense of the region's literature is the summoning up of its actual spiritual complexion and mentality.

"You kept vigil from night to night beside the bed of the sick Hungarian literature in Vajdaság, you sacrificed your life for it [...]" Herceg wrote in 1935, in memory of the deceased Szenteleky (Herceg 1999c, 43). These are words of empathy, not only for the organizer of local literature but also for "the sick literature," whose "cure" will turn into the programme of Herceg's literary opus. Following the ill-success of the foundation of his journal, and in the shadow of "the sick literature" another break-up occurred, another intermezzo in Budapest. In 1936 János Herceg moved to Budapest again. "What could become of me here at home, I ask myself the question, not unjustifiably, and undeniably terrified from the definition itself: 'a minority writer'" (Herceg 1989, 22).

Two years later, in his work entitled *Bácska as a Literary Educator* [*Bácska mint irodalmi nevelő*] (1939), János Herceg still argues with Kornél Szenteleky's precepts. In his view the *landscapes of Bácska* are void of poetic colours. Here the culture has become domesticated by the landscape, blending into each other and fading the various colours and customs. In this place only the "the local renaissance of materialism," the power of the soil and the life laws of making one's fortune seem to work even in cultural and literary relations. Is it possible for the theory of local couleur to work here?

*Art in Bácska can have no specific colours*, for such colours do not exist in Bácska. Even ethnographically the map only shows blotches: islands, which although they have still preserved something of the outward appearances of the traditions, nevertheless, do not alter in any way the unity of the spirit of Bácska. Because, naturally, the couleur locale as a literary means of expression does not only reflect colours but an entire, organic life, whose constituent parts are: spirit and soul, the atmosphere of the landscape and cultural tradition. In the art of Bácska even spirit and soul are not able to become intertwined. (Herceg 1999d, 59–60)

This is the specificity which creates and moulds Dezső Kosztolányi's and Géza Csáth's views of the world, too. Their art buds out from the landscape.

Could the poet of *The Complaints of a Poor Little Child* [*A szegény kisgyermek panasza*] have seen here anything in this land, where nature was left without any metaphysical reminiscence, where nature has been worn away from all its outward appearances, colour, beauty, atmosphere; the outer skin has peeled off and the naked hard matter has emerged in its crude bloody reality? (Herceg 1999d, 60)

In his texts of Kornél Esti, Dezső Kosztolányi laid bare "(...) with the knife of materialism" the secret of the spirit enwrapped in matter, while Géza Csáth "searched with all his life for the unknown secret, the hidden cracks of matter." The central motif of Károly Szirmai's vision was "mud, fog, state of matter without contours" (Herceg 1999d, 61).

In the same year, "Instead of wide national horizons, regional!" (Herceg 1999e, 74) – Herceg's proclamation sounds in his writing under the title *Goal and Confession* [*Cél és vallomás*].

*Not only once had the members of the intelligentsia left Vajdaság and its people in the lurch. Twenty years have not yet passed since they fled from here with suspicious heroism and well-calculated burst of national*

*enthusiasm. And the rest of them, with shimmering hopes on the watch for Europe's bursting dams, do they care more about the people?* It is here that the intellectuals, the writers and precursors of culture ought to be, and not just swimming on the surface but plunged a little under water [...] One must live here with one's whole heart, and spend one's energy here in whatever way is possible. (Herceg 1999e, 74)

This is a break. This is a break with the county's civil servant stratum and its writers; a break with the ideals of youth days, the avant-garde artists of form and the emigrant writers from Pécs. But this is an alliance with the region and with minority existence. From this moment, the concession to tradition means treading more and more along Szenteleky's path.

In 1940, as the editor in chief of the literary magazine *Kalangya*, János Herceg wrote the following:

The Hungarians of this region have not got used to an independent life; they have never had the role of the initiator, and as people living ethnographically in the most colourful region of the Monarchy, have always been reduced to acculturation. Their board has always been – more or less well – intentionally scribbled over by others, and all they had to do was adapt to the text. (Herceg 1999g, 103)

Following from the above, although the region did have writers, *an independent Hungarian literature has never been constituted in the region*, Herceg states, “we are devoid of tradition and devoid of a past, which has never been abounding with heroic deeds in this land” (Herceg 1999h, 135). Regionalism has never become literary material, for the very reason that the local writers have become educated on universal Hungarian literature. “It is unavoidable that our literature should develop its specific aroma and taste. Our whole life exhibits significant differences compared to the life of the body of the Hungarian nation” (Herceg 1999i, 162) – the editor of the *Kalangya* declares in his regional programme.

In 1940, János Herceg wrote about *Bácska's exquisite mysticism*. He saw this land as a vast and fatalistic, stormy corner of the country, “(...) here behind the mask of prosperity a gruesome drama has been taking place in the thick atmosphere of simple-minded negligence ever since” (Herceg 1999g, 105). The source of the storm was the pre-war, peacetime Bácska, characterized by Herceg as

full of wine barrels and huge cauldrons, the lords of the county living all the time as if celebrating a public feast where one chatted only in anecdotes and the gipsy musicians played the tunes of Come back to Sorrento after the

czardas. It was in this part of the country that the frenzy of the millennium lasted longest. They might have clung onto it for the reason of its being the last occasion to let off steam, or perhaps they were watching the pink clouds with such fervour because the storm was already in the brewing. (Herceg 1999i, 156)

There were writers living here in this Bácska, “who associated themselves with this land,” Herceg said and then called on them to account for the local colours and profundity: “They lived here as if they were living in a rich colony. For them this land was only space, they could see it only horizontally, and they were not interested in its heights and depths” (Herceg 1999k, 199). It is true – Herceg added to his conclusion –, the viewpoints, and the historical, social and political background of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina are different.

From the aspect that an artist beholds, he changed to that of a scientist in other places: “The ethnographic, geographic, landscape and spiritual aspect, political stratification and past history of our region is unique” (Herceg 1999g, 108). This change in tone was due to the programme of the editor of the journal. Herceg wished to strengthen the journal’s minority policy line, and so he gave more space to scientific works (sociography, folklore, minority policy and history).

In 1943, János Herceg went beyond his own view of the landscape. “I deny that this region has no characteristics of its own differing from all other Hungarian landscapes. Our Bácska is as rich and colourful as Transylvania, all we need is to find the writer who will find his tone attuned to this landscape here (...)” (Herceg 1999o, 248).

The *re-annexed Bácska* made the *Kalangya*’s editor rewrite his task. The aim was to foster the process of the region’s becoming independent in the face of the powers of decay and breaking up. To work towards this goal *by pointing out the local variant*, the *Kalangya* “(...) from now on does not bring down from the north, but sends messages up from here to the north and all other parts of the country” (Herceg 1999r, 269). The emphasized starting point was “(...) this territory has not had intellectual traditions (...) *The Délvidék* (Southern Hungary) *has not had any intellectual tradition, it has always been dependent on Budapest* (...)” (Herceg 1999j, 172). In 1943 Herceg wrote the following lines:

Bácska was too close to Pest, why would it have reflected on its own future fate, when seemingly it had no reasons for doing so, when others up there looked after it. Its political role was also on the whole the private affair of its lords, and its cultural institutions opened their doors towards Pest. Economically, it was the Hungarians who lived at the bottom of the granary of the country. Consequently, we in Délvidék could not speak of national consciousness and cultural or economic independence. In addition, perhaps it

was in this region that the number of assimilated Hungarians was most numerous. The schools and the consequences of living together have integrated a great number of German and Catholic Slav families into the Hungarian population. Those long train lines, which carried the Hungarian civil servants out from the Délvidék in nineteen hundred and nineteen, left no doubt in anyone that the days of the Hungarians in this rich, beautiful part of the country were numbered, and if fate was not to have mercy, everything that was Hungarian would perish from here within a lifetime. (Herceg 1999n, 238)

These are lines of demarcation, just as are the following sentences which were said in defence of a sovereign community, culture and literary policy: "Hungary, the home country has liberated us, but it is we who have preserved the Hungarian population of this region" (Herceg 1999i, 171). Herceg wished in defence of the results to bring to consciousness the fact that the Hungarian population of the re-annexed Bácska could not be compared to the Hungarians of the pre-war, peacetime Bácska. This was a new, responsible self-consciousness. "We did not belong to Hungary and we did not wish to belong to Serbia. We have developed a specific kind of mentality and a *characteristic minority spirit*. History presented this Janus-face not only to Délvidék but also to Erdély (Transylvania) and Felvidék" (Herceg 1999j, 173). Herceg edited an anthology under the title *In the Shade of the Walnut Tree* [*A diófa árnyékában*] in 1942. The volume which presented short story writers from Délvidék was published in Budapest. The editor discreetly put forward "(...) that certain landscape colours and qualities distinguish us, writers from Délvidék, from our fellow writers living in different circumstances, in different parts of the country" (Herceg 1999l, 227). It was only in the light of the circumstances that the Hungarians in Vojvodina could join the flock of the Hungarian nation.

In 1943 János Herceg recalled the memory of Kornél Szenteleky "in the spirit of literary and intellectual fidelity" (Herceg 1999m, 236), and a year later talked of him as of his master: "he thought of me as of his own pupil (...)" (Herceg 1999s, 274). As Szenteleky's pupil he formulated the writers' artistic task with unequivocal unanimity: "(...) a writer's duties are not simply to his nation but also to himself and to his region; *consequently, a writer finds himself in his nation and his environment*" (Herceg 1999o, 247).

Want and shortage do not define the beginnings merely. "Next to the nightmare of traditionlessness" (Bányai 2006) there is the other usual lament to tempt: the reader, there is no understanding reader. In the thirties, the poet Lajos Fekete, who had come from Pécs, could sell twenty-four copies of his book in Vojvodina, the *Kalangya* was struggling with its five-hundred copies. Nevertheless, János Herceg was trying to tint the picture. The fault was not only in

the readers. Did literature fulfil its role? Was it in conformity with the requirements of *dulce et utile*?

The *civilians* have a negative attitude – Herceg says – they do not need ‘local’ literature. Why should they, when our literature cannot come up with the kind of tune, either in space or time, which might strike the thick ears of the bourgeoisie? It does not come up with anything that could excite interest or offer anything common to share with the readers so that they could feel: this is meant for us to read. (Herceg 1999e, 68)

If the statement “all art is ‘sweet’ and ‘useful’ to its appropriate users” (Wellek and Warren 2006, 31) is accurate, then one only has to find the appropriate reader. Or is it the artist who should accommodate himself to the requirements or readers of the region? Herceg seemed to take a stand in favour of this attitude when he wrote the following:

We must not only try to attain artistic perfection but first of all express our *people* and environment; to mould in ourselves the *folk consciousness of Vajdaság*, the outcome of the medley of influences in the regions populated with Serbian, Hungarian and German people. But in order to achieve this one does not need only self-confidence or artistic instinct, but first of all the sacrifice of the wider horizon for the narrower one. When the ropes which are holding your *people* tight cut into your flesh, your outcry will not be left without an echo (...). (Herceg 1999e, 69)

When Herceg talked about the reader, who did he have in mind? When looking into the mentality of the peasant population, he explained that bourgeois and peasants were two opposing social and economic classes of society with different mentalities. “The Hungarian peasants had a closed culture, and they ensured entailment and continuity. The bourgeois physiognomy was shaped by the world’s exchange of goods and soul” (Herceg 1999f, 89), and due to its assimilative elements Paris was often closer to them than the local Ludas-pusztá. The term “popular/folk,” “was not yet a literary definition here. The Hungarians constituted an ethnic group in this region of which everyone was part. The *Kalangya* also wished to address not only one stratum of the society but the entire Hungarian community” (Herceg 1999t, 301).

János Herceg became disappointed as the editor of the *Kalangya*. The reading public in Vajdaság turned out again and again “to be literarily uneducated, who appreciated dilettantish work much more than real values” (Herceg 1999g, 107). The local readers did not understand the *Kalangya* nor the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina, because “their education is defective” (Herceg 1999h, 134). His

viewpoint changed, shifted in 1943. It was not solely the readers who were to take the responsibility. It was also up to the writer to do something. Ferenc Herczeg, the son of the pharmacist in Versec (Vršac) "(...) proved that it was not the public to blame if it did not want to take in a writer's work. According to him, the fault is in the writer who does not know how to, or does not wish to put into words the things the audience expects from him" (Herceg 1999p, 258). In János Herceg's interpretation the writer of *The Gyurkovics Girls* was not a writer to attend to the reader with his pliability. On the contrary, both in addition to, and contrary to the refined style and romantic milieu, he asserted his critical standpoints against the Hungarian gentry with a kind of superior and cool elegance. And he did it being a celebrated, popular writer!

Another exemplary instance was Dániel Papp who, in Herceg's opinion, "(...) did not have an easy task, since a writer succeeding Ferenc Herczeg had to adapt to the taste of the readers, the fashion and the threaded path, or else an absence of interest would have swallowed him up (...)" (Herceg 1999t, 299). Viewing from the aspect of Kornél Szenteleky's objectivity and realism, Dániel Papp's exotic milieu did not make the grade. But János Herceg put his finger on the spot when he realized that Papp's textual world should not be viewed from the topography of Bácska, but from the spirit of Bácska, in order to arrive at an organic, literarily authentic, "clear image drawn with thick contours" (Herceg 1999t, 301).

János Herceg therefore broke with the stereotype which has had its influence until today when, slowly but delicately unfolding, it indicated that our region had its own prehistory sprouting from inside the region. A kind of prehistory which, now and then, independent of Szenteleky's canon, managed to find its local, understanding reader. And all this had happened in terms of Bácska/Vajdaság self-consciousness.

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## **Stereotypes of Deficiency in the Hungarian Literature from Vojvodina in the Nineties of the Twentieth Century**

Éva HÓZSA

University of Novi Sad  
Department of Hungarian Studies  
hozsaeva@eunet.rs

**Abstract.** The Hungarian literature of the wartime years in Vojvodina approaches deficiency from many aspects. The subject, experiencing a dangerous situation, loss, unsteadiness in the birthplace, possibly undertaking migration, is bound to the past, memories, mythological motifs, mytho-political or family myth, stressing the gesture of prayer and the polemicizing opportunities looking in this way for his national and/or local identity. The number of the local literary texts, of stereotypes connected to the local scenes, to the manner of minority existence and to the Balkan, increases, respectively, their ironic shifts get an outstanding role. This paper takes a close look at the stereotypes occurring in the contemporary texts in Vojvodina, at their theoretical concerns, actual occurrences, as well as at the “divided” mythization of the stereotypes. The retrospective view, the text apparently flowing backwards, the variety of private mythologies are attached to the disintegration of the homeland and family, namely to deficiency. From among the stereotypes there emerge, for example, the waste, some concrete space elements and the reinterpretation of the holiday, the blues or the edge. Besides the approach of the actual literary texts/text places, this research also focuses on the motif of the Kosztolányi cult in Szabadka emphasizing Europeanism.

**Keywords:** comparative literature, discursive strategy, communicative recollection, wartime migration, Kosztolányi cult

## Big wheel and axis mentality

The volume of Đorđe Stanković, in which the context of the historical stereotype and knowledge comprehended in the scientific sense in the former Yugoslav area is approached from several viewpoints (*Historical Stereotypes and Scientific Knowledge [Istorijski stereotipi i naučno znanje, 2004]*), lays a particularly great emphasis on the dialogue of the past and present, respectively on its permeability. An old photo can be found on the cover, which can be interpreted as a motto or the model of the discursive strategy as well.

The photo highlights the funfairs' most outstanding accessory, (if you like its stereotype) the big wheel. The ones rising into the sky and the just downward ones are observable, as well as the separating position of the spectators (below) following them attentively. The recipient of the photo does not associate it with the repetitive circular motion, or maybe with the stereotype of the wheel of the history or the fate, but rather with the game itself, with its displacement, the ambivalence, the role of the fading shadows, with the monumental, fixed metal construction of the machinery, respectively with the axis.

The lower standpoint increases the sizes of pushing off from the land. The “dizzying” look of the elegant spectators waiting around the huts and trying to observe the ones sitting above becomes problematic. Thanks to the repeated circular motion the “passengers” disappear randomly into the distance, and they even turn into distant imaginaries, and some kind of (self)-reflection may accompany the lower approach of this (for example, desire and phobia, the known and the unknown, presence and absence, etc.). In this way, the representation of the big wheel brings up at the same time the discourse of the subject's self-representation.

In connection with imagology, István Fried emphasized the importance of the “release,” the connection of imagology and intertextuality, respectively, the relation between imagology and the dynamics of the regional literary process. In his view, imagology is not a part of knowledge with ideological content, but it contributes to the interpretation of literary and intellectual story processes in a considerable measure, the substantive questions of comparative literature emerge in the course of stereotype research.

In terms of colonial discourse, the stereotype is a discursive strategy itself; the subject *turns round the axis of the stereotype* to return afterwards to the starting point of identification (see the photo of the big wheel on the mentioned cover). Homi K. Bhabha writes:

The stereotype as a complex and controversial faith announces and simultaneously rejects or hides the inequalities. Similarly to the mirror phase, the ‘completeness’ of the stereotype – the picture *as* identity – is also put at

risk by the ‘lack’. (...) It is easy to see the truth that the stereotypic marking chain is divided and mixed, polymorphic and perverse, in other words the complex faith articulates in it. The black man is simultaneously barbarian (cannibal) and the most obedient, most majestic servant (the waiter of the foods); the embodier of the unrestrained sexuality and the harmless child; mystic, primitive, plain and at the same time the most secular, the smartest liar, the most manipulator of the social strengths. In all cases his detachment dramatizes – *between* races, cultures, histories *in the course* of history –, the separation between the *before* and *after*, which obsessively repeats the mythical moment or separation. (Bhabha 2002, 638-639, 642-643)

### **“Discursive strategy,” communicative recollection, Balkan as a stereotype**

In connection with the texts of Dezső Kosztolányi and Endre Kukorelly, Marko Čudić examined the Balkan pictures of the twentieth century Hungarian literature (Čudić 2007, 59), respectively the problem of the “frozen” Balkan that became known through Maria Todorova: according to Todorova, it is more than a stereotype, and works as a separate discourse. When studying the Hungarian literature in the nineties of the twentieth century, neither the setting into motion of the Balkan stereotypes, nor the examination of the connection between the Balkan-stereotypes and the homeland-discourses bringing up the problems of identity can be ignored.

For example, the interdisciplinary approach to the problem of the Balkan stereotypes and the sense of identity yielded a discussion in *Magyarkanizsa*, where the litter heaping or the burek were equally qualified as Balkan stereotypes (52<sup>nd</sup> Author Camp in *Magyarkanizsa*, Sociographic Workshop, 2004). The stage-settings of the nineties regularly employed the sight of the litter, in the similar way as István Németh’s *Home Altar* [*Házioltár*]. In the closure of the autobiographical ‘novel,’ the storyteller forms a disintegrated country, a virtual Yugoslavia from the waste piled up in the forge, from the trade names that nearly sank into oblivion, then István Németh’s volume entitled *Hegyalja Street* [*Hegyalja utca*] continues and increases the approach to the filth deluge, namely the approach to the sights of the wartime consequences and the experience of them. The motifs of Ottó Tolnai’s volume (2001) entitled *Balkan Glory* [*Balkáni babér*], which represents a performance in the border situation of the end of the war, likewise yielded some literary talks.

Dealing with Balkan is a stereotyped activity itself, Balkan is a discursive point of comparison in the wartime literature of the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina of the past century’s nineties, it has almost become a keyword (for example, the edge of Balkan, the mouth of Balkan, Balkan’s dirt, Balkan convict, our Balkan Lady Macbeth, burek, etc.). György Kálmán C. writes:

It has become interesting and discussable in Hungary since the eighties (even before the turn in 1989) what kind of common features or different directions the Hungarian and the Balkan cultures (and within this, literature) have in respect of poetics. It seems increasingly worth getting acquainted with the Romanian, Southern Slavic and even with the Turkish cultures: however, the motivation leading to this is, again, not primarily poetical, but historical/political. Understanding that it is the common (political, ideological) past that is in the background of the contact, connexion of our cultures. (Kálmán C. 2007, 56)

The wartime Hungarian literature in Vojvodina in the nineties draws the borderline of otherness and makes the edge of Balkan and its transformation more perceptible. For example, Ottó Tolnai in his volume entitled *Balkan Glory* or Ottó Fenyvesi's poem entitled *Cantus Firmus* refers to the alternation of the previous stereotypes. The latter text comments exactly on the change, in the year of the bombardment it ironically resists the Balkan stereotype emphasizing heroism, arising from Desanka Maksimović's poem (*Bloody Tale*), which all schoolboys and schoolgirls knew on their mother tongue in the unified Yugoslavia. The binary thinking similarly manifests itself in the nineties, that is, in the recent past, for example, the duality of faithful(ness) and leaver/ leaving prevails in a number of literary texts (cf. Stanković 2004, 263).

### **How can deficiency be comprehended?**

The title of the paper does not refer to the deficiency of the stereotypes, but to the stereotypes of deficiency, namely to what arises from deficiency, from the specific viewpoint of the chain of deficiency and presence. Bhabha (2002) interprets the stereotype according to the term of fetishism, since the fetish hides deficiency and difference, and restores the original presence. The big wheel, from the sight of which we have set out, also indicated the opportunity of the game and oscillation.

If the researcher approaches the problem from the mentioned viewpoint, s/he can primarily find examples of it in migrant literature. In the nineties the major part of the Hungarian writers in Vojvodina departed from their homeland and this distance made possible the subsequent play-off onto the stereotypes, even more the interlude and at the same time the hiding of the experienced deficiency. Once these authors have arrived in Hungary, they continue writing the "southern topics," endeavour to cover and overcome the differences, although they are already creating according to the new lingual model. However, the viewpoints are diverse: they extend from the ironic one to the (de)mythicizing strategy.

The wartime texts of Ottó Tolnai proclaim the presence of the local scenes, the local stereotypes, they stress the intensive difference again and again and emphasize their anonymity abroad to an extent that an encyclopaedia-like note gets to the end of the Tolnai volumes in German language. By the objective fixations the migrant author aims for a discursive approach of the lack, for the restoration of the original presence.

The *acacia* marks out from the stereotypes arising from deficiency, about which, similarly to the Balkan, one can state that it is more than a stereotype. In the nineties the local scene indicating the formation of the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina became the accessory of a number of titles. This can be equally stated of the local and the migrant volume, and its significance has not finished with the wartime years. The locust tree becomes a fetish, it may even be the cultic tree implying redemption, absolution for the author/storyteller abandoning his homeland (see, for example, the title or the title giving novel of the story book appearing later, in 2004, though indicating the pre-war times – Sándor Majoros: *Our Locust Trees Live Long* [*Akácfaink sokáig élnek*]). The preservation of Balkan and the burek, what is more, the business perspective of the burek, which can be introduced in a prison, come into the limelight in Nándor Gion's short story entitled *Own Handed* [*Saját kezűleg*] (Gion 2004, 59-63), for example, the following stereotypes (arising from deficiency), more exactly the concepts, motifs, metaphors, etc. taking shape through stereotyping endeavour can be emphasized from the literature with home and migrant viewpoint of the nineties of the twentieth century: betrayal; barbarian; blues (e.g., István Szathmári: *Chicago Blues* [*Csikágói blues*], Ottó Fenyvesi: *Blues above the Ocean* [*Blues az óceán felett*]); (the) edge of Balkan; family; leaver(s); ex (ex), Ex-YU, Ex-YU- Ex(odus) (Thomka 2009, 35-50); wartime screen; faithfulness; infidelity; strange; identity; prayer; Indian (indicates the minority being); yoghurt; chosen; Feast (the ironic question of Attila Balázs is aimed at the historical cookbooks as well); feast gathering; junk, junk-clearance; perpendicular (perpendicular motion orbits, the breaking of the linearity); media; myth, mythical; great Yugoslavity; from over there (from Hungary); lead; edge, edge feeling, confine, centre and edge (periphery); hell (indicates the wartime situation, the country's collapse; shopping bag (at the time of the escape the individual takes it with him); refuse dump (state); filth speech; oration, festive oration; homeland (as the home and the national stereotypes being attached to it); wasting, wasteful (dad, father); mass grave culture; sea (and sea discourse as narrative heritage); holiday, celebration, feast, "everyday" holiday, the holiday as bagatelle, celebration of the sea, frequent in volume titles as well, profanation; change; blood; Leader; country; tram (mythization and metaphorization of the tram brought to an end in Szabadka (Subotica); dead end, deadlock (blind street as well).

If today's receiver looks through these concepts in a dictionary-like manner, it can be pointed out that in the nineties the Hungarian writers from Vojvodina – whether staying at home or leaving – also struggled for literary language, the regenerative endeavours are traceable. The listed concepts are connected to the confusion of identity, and may be operated as stereotypes. It is worth paying separate attention to the discursive strategies formed within an author's oeuvre and also to their combinations (for example, tracing back the *delta* in Ottó Tolnai's or in István Domonkos's opera, becoming emphasized again after the nineties) (Thomka 2009, 160-161).

### **Proper names – stereotypes with mythic and literary origins**

In the nineties the dangerous situation of the homeland ironically agitated, namely demythicized or abroad even mythicized the local scenes, more precisely those stereotype manifestations that the researchers and authors from Vojvodina equally criticized in the second half of the sixties.

The role of the stereotype may have been fulfilled/may be fulfilled, for example, by the authors' names fitting into the tradition of a city or a locality. The name of Szabadka has become interwoven with the names of Géza Csáth and Dezső Kosztolányi and with the motifs taken over from them, with repetitive turns, moments connected to their biography, in many cases with some kind of absent value, strangeness, trauma. For example, the play-off to the magician's garden can be found in Géza Csáth's *The Magician's Garden* [*A varázsló kertje*] or the denomination Palicsfürdő, which has been introduced by Ottó Tolnai in the course of the reception of the Csáth spa doctor and the world literature spa scenes. Naturally, these two names have had an effect beyond the borders of Szabadka, they mean some kind of bases and grasping of values in Bácska, at the same time they function as a stereotype (as well). Kosztolányi's hero, Kornél Esti, enters the scene in the German translation of Christina Viragh as the hero of his age, whereas in the Hungarian literature from Vojvodina he becomes rather the hero of our age. The most representative evidence of this is Árpád Nagy Abonyi's retrospective novel, *Budapest, retour* (2008), bringing up the problems of migration, emigration, the "changing ends" in the nineties, in which the hero reminds of Kornél Esti. From among the mythological names we can highlight Hephaestus and Dionysus.

## Literary cult in a stereotype?

The traditions of the Kosztolányi cult in Subotica/Szabadka (S. Gordán 2010, 18-24), which remained in mystery up to the forties, its moments that can be traced more precisely until 1960, date back to organizing the *The Sign of Life* [Életjel] living newspaper's birthday programme by moving the masses, but we can also mention 1959, when an evening programme in Szabadka was held in the memory of Csáth, later of Ernő Lányi.

However, the regular celebration of the Dezső Kosztolányi Days began in 1991 and with some exceptions is attached to his birthday in March. Of course, the cultic activity itself, the collective recollection presupposes and requires stereotypical moments. In the wartime years the cult had been consciously initiated, created almost from the very first moment and made widely known through the media, the stereotype of being *European* or of *European rank* being attached to Kosztolányi. Europeanism is not only the stereotype of world literature value, but also the outbreak, the desire of Kosztolányi's fans to break through the closed world originated from the war, the expression of the hiding of the deficiency. The visitors of Szabadka, the lecturers participating in the Kosztolányi-discussion and the articles that appeared in the press also emphasize this absent identity, Europeanism. The bibliography of the press's reaction provides an overview of the stereotypes repeated in the titles, since the journalists and representatives of other media took the idea from the toasts, festive speeches. Some titles from the press are as follows: *Kosztolányi's Europeanism* [Kosztolányi európaisága] (1993), *Remembering the Poet of European Rank* [Emlékezés az európai rangú költőre], *A Hundred Per Cent European Writer* [Ízig-vérig európai író] (1996), *Kosztolányi's Intellectual and Ethical Heritage: Yesterday on a scientific discussion people remembered the author of a European rank by laying a wreath on his bust and memorial plaque* [Kosztolányi szellemi és erkölcsi öröksége: Tegnap tudományos tanácskozáson, mellszobrának és emléktáblájának megkoszorúzásával emlékeztek az európai rangú íróra] (2001). The martial highlighting of the European identity presupposed audacity in the nineties when the Western European sanctions got stronger and stronger (Kiss 2007). Kosztolányi's birthplace, the commemorative well in Palics lacking the Kosztolányi quotation, the rite of wreathing Kosztolányi's sculpture or memorial plaque or its depraving, practically work as stereotypes. István Szathmári's short story, *The Story of My Resigning* [Fölmondásom története], coming into being in the border situation of moving to Budapest, precisely approaches the separation from the stereotype moments, pulling away from his work as a teacher in grammar school, undertaking migration with the help of sight fractions of the Kosztolányi cult. Despite the circumstances still prohibiting somehow the celebration, the storyteller focuses on the *being*, on the existing Kosztolányi sculpture in Szabadka that screens the



deficiency for a moment and means an identity crutch as well. The next text-place can be pointed out from the perspective of the fluctuation of deficiency and the present:

I did not bring my bag. What for? I am looking at the school's building, the huge, multi-storeyed, big attic (there are all kinds of odds and ends, garbage, sculpture, a flag out of fashion, tassel, shield, paper, documents up there) polar house, the oak tree gate, the black signboard on the wall. Further on Kosztolányi's greying sculpture, this lonely, jerking head as he tries to smile, laugh, but does not come in anyway, not, he cannot be here, we were staying there not a long time ago, entirely close to him, there were many people, many people, it was a feast, recitations, wreath, commonplace of course but we swaggered beside him after all, it was raining, the water was rattling in the trashy channels of the nearby houses, people roaming that way slowed down, a woman in patchy apron came out from the opposite shop, I saw it, the students also stared outward the window, though there may have been a class, I experienced all these amidst such odd feelings, I was thinking about a lot of things even then, but I was pleased to stand there entirely close to the sculpture, to know I had someone to stand near, it was so good that could not be defined, and well then there the building, the city, the rain was just pouring. (Szathmári 1995, 64)

István Szathmári's short story, respectively the highlighted text can be examined from an imagological aspect as well. The personal recollection is directed towards the border situation of the change, when the stereotype accessories of an old political, ideological identity form a rubbish heap on the attic of the grammar school (a similarly changing institution) but in the middle of the nineties the additional perspective cannot be defined yet, the direction of the transformation cannot be seen. Some trivial moments of the Kosztolányi cult mean a handhold, resistance, from the storyteller's viewpoint the fractions of the cultural and communicative recollection become interwoven, the urban context of everyday automatism becomes more and more important. The identity change brings a change in the sculpture (e.g., the disappearance of Moša Pijade's old sculpture from the grammar school's staircase), the storyteller also speaks about the old ideology with aloofness. With the consciousness of having decided to migrate, it felt good to hold on to the sculpture of the literary man born in the native town and in the town, with which he might almost have been identified, even if the lack of appreciation from certain people manifested itself.

## Distant viewpoints – the vision of a Swiss novel

The success story of Melinda Nadj Abonji (Melinda Nagy Abonyi), of descent from Óbecse, entitled *Tauben fliegen auf* (2010), from the temporal and spatial (Swiss) prospect emphasizes and repeats those local and cultural stereotypes that are accessories of this landscape and of people living here, for example, of the Kocsis family. The strangeness of the chocolate brown Chevrolet, which is uncommon in the area of Vojvodina, is not known from the Swiss perspective, however, the viewpoint can be changed and hereby it becomes clear that from the Vojvodinan or Central European viewpoint there live merely ingrown, superficial stereotypes about Switzerland. The emigrant family members are induced to commute to newer and newer homes and family reunions whenever a wedding party or a death occurs. Ildikó's narrative viewpoint focuses on the recurrences and pursuit of homeland, in some cases on the punchline-like moments not foreign to the anecdote. The novel primarily refers to the intensive, yet diverse gastronomic stereotypes, to the significance of the lowland, avenue through the woods, to the trees (locust, poplar, chestnut tree), moreover, to the air, the airflow, the tillage, to the mud and dust, to the buildings (fence, summer kitchen), to the border and border crossing, to the shreds of the Hungarian lingual identity, as well as to the eighties and the wartime period. The connection of the lowland and the sea is yet a stereotypic moment, since the lowland – according to the narrator's reflection – by its own laws devours everything like the sea.

### Is the world big in small?

It can be pointed out that in the nineties of the twentieth century the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina generated several stereotypes, respectively stereotype changes with the help of the media (Jael Lehmann 2008, 9-14). The problem of identity was intensified, the roots (the relation to the homeland, the national stereotype as the common, newer dilemma expressing itself in the Hungarian texts in Vojvodina) became more important from the perspective of the remaining and migrant authors than until that time. The cultural stereotypes, which strengthened group cohesion, deserve special attention, since the cultic activities, the literary evenings, the number of local knowledge camps, of teacher training courses was growing in a considerable measure in the nineties, and feasts moved the masses and differentiated the cultural stereotypes.

The national questions resulted in differentiating the (collective and individual) *inside* as well, and this separation manifested itself both in the literary life and in the concept of the editorial offices of the journals, publications. The process of stereotyping as the major part of the literary, cultural or sociological relations mainly arose from the deficiency of the competence, from power

cognition following from the exterior war relationships, and from sensing danger on the part of those in the situation of minority existence. In this period, in the dimension of the Hungarian literature mostly value and revaluation, respectively diverse content were attached to the stereotypes. With regard to the stereotypes concerning the outsiders, separation can be observed on the basis of warm-hearted and perceived competence (Fiske et al. 2006, 328). It can be noticed in the literary texts that the situation of the subject, the “person cognition,” the stereotypic, though vital question of whether “to go or stay” becomes stressed. If the researcher examines the Hungarian literature of the nineties, the consideration of retrospective texts from the two thousand years cannot be omitted.

From an imagological viewpoint, Attila Balázs’s novel entitled *For Some North, for Some South* [*Kinek Észak, kinek Dél*] (2008) ironically sets into motion the disappeared Tito clichés, Tito’s little America, the realm moulder, myth creator and medial endeavours of the civil war, furthermore, it labels Kornél Szenteleky’s theory about local scenes as an *adhesived* theory. The artistic view is very complex, it often becomes interwoven with politics, according to the storyteller it is still an experiment of understanding.

The examined stereotypes are primarily attached to communicative recollection. The stereotypes researched now came into existence in the wartime situations, they turn up again and again in literature nowadays, get displaced on the basis of the viewpoint changes, however, with the progress of time these disappear and are reinterpreted (Assmann 2004, 51-53). The pursuit of securing, rethinking the stereotypes of the wartime era in our days – increasingly under the pretext of the changing vision – still works powerfully.

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## **The Other Nearby. Experiences of Strangeness in Southeast Europe**

Anikó NOVÁK

University of Szeged  
Department of Modern Hungarian Literature  
uneco84@gmail.com

**Abstract.** The paper's aim is to present experiences of strangeness in Southeast Europe. The starting point for the analysis is an anthology entitled *Die andere nebenan* (*The Other Next Door*), which has been published in eight editions and countries. The Swedish editor Richard Swartz invited twenty-one authors from various Balkan countries to write essays about their relationship to "the Others." The experience of strangeness on the Balkans was strongly traumatized during the Yugoslav wars in the nineties, so the writings in the examined treasury can be read as trauma texts. The determination and construction of identity has a very important role in them. The paper deals with self-identification of Aleksandar Hemon, Dragan Velikić, Miljenko Jergović, Nenad Veličković and László Véghel. The two notions which can accurately determine these experiences of strangeness are internal strangeness and the familiar stranger.

**Keywords:** the Balkans, experience of strangeness, trauma, the Other

The Balkans – they are always the other people; Sartre's well-known sentence was wittily rephrased by Rastko Močnik Slovenian sociologist. If we examine the stereotypes about this area, it is not startling that the Balkans fill the place of Hell, but the odd thing about it is the internal, Balkan point of view. The people of this region always look eastwards the Balkans, the Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulić declares. She claims that the symbolic and imaginary boundary of the Balkans moves from the Viennese Landstrasse to Trieste and Ljubljana, then to Zagreb and Sarajevo, to Belgrade, and even further towards the

Southeast, to Pristina. This unique, plastic border in fact is not a border, but a projection (Drakulić 2009, 1074).

The paper's aim is to approach the issues of strangeness on this imaginary, swampy territory. The starting point of the analysis is an anthology entitled *The Other Next Door* [*Die andere nebenan*]. This book was published in eight editions and countries in 2007: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, and Germany. The Hungarian translation was published one year later, in 2008.<sup>1</sup> The Swedish editor Richard Swartz invited twenty-one authors from various Balkan countries to write essays about their relationship to “the Others.” (I do not want to deal with the issues of the theory and practice of translation, but it is very important to emphasize that the anthology's title in most languages is the other nearby, next to us, in the neighbourhood, but in Croatian unknown neighbour.)

The subtitle of the volume (*Writings from Southeast Europe*) urges us to clear up the boundaries of the Balkans and the confusion about the name of this region. The editor drew the lines of Southeast Europe around Albania, Bulgaria and the former Yugoslavia. Maria Todorova, who explores the ontology of the Balkans, uses the Balkans and Southeast Europe as synonyms, and her book *Imagining the Balkans* “covers as Balkan Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians, and most of the former Yugoslavs.” She mentions that although Slovenes are not included, and vassal territories as Dubrovnik were just nominally Ottoman, they “exerted such an important influence on the Balkan Peninsula that their history cannot be served from the Balkans” (Todorova 1997, 31). The Bulgarian historian outlining the phylogeny of the peninsula's name remarks that Balkan for the whole peninsula was applied by several authors just in the middle of the nineteenth century. Most European travellers preferred to use the ancient name Haemus before the nineteenth century. In 1893, and again in 1909 “the German geographer Theobald Fischer proposed that the peninsula should be named *Südosteuroopa*” (Todorova 1997, 27-28). He was not the first person to use this term, “*Südosteuropäische Halbinsel*” had been introduced in 1863 by Balkan specialist, scholar, and diplomat Johann Georg von Hahn. The geographer Otto Maull also proposed using the name Southeastern Europe in 1929. Mathias Bernath had a similar opinion as Maull; he thought that *Südosteuroopa* was a neutral, non-political and non-ideological mention contrary to the Balkans, which had been filled with a political connotation by the beginning of the twentieth century. After World War II the term *Südosteuroopa* was undesirable, but some of the German geographers continued to use it. “In the rest of Europe and the United States, Southeastern Europe and Balkan have been used

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<sup>1</sup> The citations and references from the anthology will be based on the Hungarian edition: Swartz, Richard, ed. 2008. *A közeli más. Írások Délkelet-Európából.* [*The Other Nearby. Writings from Southeast Europe.*] Pécs: Jelenkor.

as a rule, interchangeably both before and after World War II, but with an obvious preference for the latter” (Todorova 1997, 29).

The issue of boundaries is also complicated. The broadest interpretation of Southeastern Europe belongs to Karl Kaser, according to his geographical concept the borders are the “Carpathian Mountains in the north, the Black Sea in the east, the Aegean Sea in the south, and the Ionian and Adriatic Seas to the west” (Todorova 1997, 29). So Southeastern Europe includes Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, the former Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, and European Turkey. In this interpretation Southeastern Europe is a comprehensive entity and the Balkans are only its subregion. Mathias Bernath’s chiefly historical concept is very similar to Kaser’s opinion, but he omits Slovakia. Hungary’s and Romania’s positions also used to be problematic. These countries are parts of Southeast Europe, but they are usually omitted from the Balkans, especially Hungary (Todorova 1997, 29). George Hoffman, “who spoke synonymously of »the Balkan, or Southeast European Peninsula«, employed a mixture of criteria to come up with an essentially geopolitical interpretation that reflected the cold-war period when his account was written.” He defined as explicitly Balkan only three countries, the same three which were chosen to the anthology by Richard Swartz: Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia (Todorova 1997, 30). To our subject the former Yugoslav area is the most important for two reasons. Firstly, most of the authors in the book belong to this territory. Secondly, strangeness is a familiar and dominant experience to the nations of this multilingual, multicultural region, and the Yugoslav Wars in the nineties further amplified and traumatized it.

The attempt to process the trauma is a very significant phenomenon in the literature of the former Yugoslav countries. The recent past caused the dominance of self-examination, introspection, self-reflexivity, autobiographic character in contemporary Croatian literature (cf. Sablić Tomić and Rem 2009, 55-68) and it had a great impact on the literature of the other former Yugoslav countries. Jörn Rüsen distinguishes three types of historical experience: a normal, a critical and a catastrophic or traumatic one. The latter “destroys the potential of historical consciousness to integrate events into a sense bearing and meaningful narrative” (Rüsen 2004, 11). According to trauma theory, if a traumatized person wants to heal, he or she must tell the traumatic story, but this activity comes up against difficulties because of the traumatic memory (Menyhért 2008, 5). Assembling the fragments, phantasmagories to a coherent unit, linear narrative is a really difficult task. Detraumatization often results in the avoidance of the traumatic event, estrangement and falsification of the experience. Rüsen underlines that historization is the only solution to overcome trauma. “At the very moment people start telling the story of what happened they take the first step on the way of integrating the distracting events into their world view and self-understanding. At the end of this way a historical narrative gives the distraction by trauma a place in a

temporal chain of events” (Rüsen 2004, 13). Anna Menyhért very aptly remarked that the trauma could be told if the necessary language developed, which should show, articulate the trauma instead of hiding it. The trauma texts are characterized by a very strong personal tone or detachment, equidistance, their genre is usually autobiography, memoir and diary (Menyhért 2008, 6-7). The writings in the examined anthology can be considered as trauma texts, they can be classified into the genres of trauma. In the book, among others, we can find genealogies, autobiographies, confessions, interviews and theoretical essays.

The Southeast and the West are equally concerned about the Yugoslav civil wars as a “catastrophic” historical experience. The West regards the war as an unexplainable event like the Holocaust, and they attempt to understand and legitimate it. Slavenka Drakulić has a really witty answer to the questions of Western audience. She says that the former Yugoslavia collapsed because of Italian shoes. People thought that they were free if they could go away from home to buy things which they could not get at home. They did not labour to figure out and develop a democratic alternative, and the emptiness which remained after the collapse of communism has been filled with nationalism (Drakulić 2009, 1074). Richard Swartz’s questions to the authors (“Why this strife and struggle, why conflict, why the neighbour as an adversary and not as a partner? What is the relation to the »Other«?”) are also the issues of the West, and Swartz remarks that these questions are based on misunderstandings, generalizations, on the West’s shallow image of the Balkans.

The naive issues seem strange, if we know that the editor worked as the East European correspondent for the Swedish daily Svenska Dagbladet for many years, and his wife is the Croatian author Slavenka Drakulić. So strangeness is a familiar experience to Richard Swartz too, he satisfies Simmel’s requirements for the stranger, he is far away and close at the same time (cf. Simmel 2004, 56). It can be said of Maria Todorova also, whose fatherland is Bulgaria, but now she lives and works in the United States of America.

Most authors in the anthology are in a transitional, dual situation as well. Most of them live in emigration and some of them have even changed language. We can agree with Viktória Radics, who notes that it is impossible to talk about the Balkans without the theme of emigration (Radics 2008, 26). David Albahari lives in Canada, Aleksandar Hemon in Chicago, Bora Ćosić and Maruša Krese in Berlin. Several authors constantly travel from one place to another, they have several homes. Ismail Kadaré lives in Paris and Tirana, Fatos Kongoli in Tirana and Peking, Biljana Sribljanović in Belgrade and Paris, Slavenka Drakulić and her husband Richard Swartz in Vienna, Stockholm and Sovinjak. Remarkable is the case of Miljenko Jergović, whose living spaces are Zagreb and Sarajevo. Dimitré Dinev, Aleksandar Hemon, Charles Simic or Saša Stanišić changed their writing language. Even these simple biographical data reveal many things about the



authors' complex, complicated identities, so it is not surprising that determination and construction of identity play a very important role in the anthology.

The multilingual, Bosnian-American Aleksandar Hemon has been living in Chicago since 1992, and he has been publishing in English since 1995. His autobiographical short story in the anthology is about the components and formation of identity. The reader can follow the steps of the development of the narrator's identity from the attempted murder against his younger sister who risked his central position through group identity and national identity, meeting other cultures to the recognition of his own complexity. He defines himself as a tangle of unanswerable questions, a beam of otherness (Swartz 2008, 112). Very decisive questions arise in the text, such as when the acquaintance becomes a stranger, and when the stranger becomes familiar. The answer to the first question is a story from the narrator's childhood. Almir was one of his friends, together they made up the team called *raja*. When the narrator called Almir Turkish without any malice, it immediately caused a great gulf between Almir, the narrator and the *raja*. The narrator learned then that if we declared someone *other*, we would declare ourselves *other* (Swartz 2008, 103). The narrator's family in Canada experienced how strangers can become familiar. After the arrival in the foreign country they searched and kept in evidence the differences between Canadians and them to legitimate their own existence in the overseas culture. The family's growth and the increasing number of relationships ended this behaviour. Then it was more difficult to distinguish between "we" and "they," because the obviousness and relevance of differences are inversely proportional to distance (Swartz 2008, 105-106).

The self-identification of Dragan Velikić is also destitute of simplicity and certitude: he is Serbian by birth, but grew up in Croatia, in Istria, in the city of Pula, which has always been on the margin since the Roman Empire. Although it has always been a multiethnic territory where the principle of tolerance was vivid, he heard the ironic overtures of "we" and "they." The two fundamental groups were the locals (*domaće*) and the newcomers (*furešte*) (Swartz 2008, 278-279). He writes about the principle of small differences which was relevant in former Yugoslavia. It played the main role in Tito's regime, the real others were not important, they were crowded to the margin. The leaders wasted time and energy to the small differences' opposition of whom they could produce enemies without effort. This principle proved its ruinous power in the nineties, when the bloody civil war was fought by two nations which spoke almost the same language.

Miljenko Jergović Croatian writer presents a really complex identity similarly to previous authors. His short story entitled *There where other people live* [*Ott, ahol más emberek élnek*] is a colourful genealogy. The narrator's Swabian great-grandfather settled in Sarajevo, spoke Croatian with loan-words which characterized the Muslims' speech, rescued his Serbian neighbours from the Ustašas, and these neighbours saved him from the Croatian fascists. He needed his

Serbian neighbours, they were necessary part of his life, because he could only feel himself a Swabian among them, and not in Germany. The narrator experienced the same feeling later when he had to move to Croatia. His Croatian identity fundamentally differed from the identity of people who lived in Zagreb, because he learnt that hatred in a multiethnic, multicultural community was necessarily self-hatred (Swartz 2008, 135).

All these self-definitions raise the question “How can one possibly be a foreigner?,” which Julia Kristeva, in her book entitled *Strangers to ourselves*, judges as an issue which rarely comes to our mind. According to her,

when we allow the topic to cross our minds, we immediately find a niche among those entitled to a nationality and cast out into an unreasonable alienage those who belong to an elsewhere they have been unable to preserve, one that no longer belongs to them, who have expropriated themselves of their identity as citizens. (Kristeva 1991, 41)

Although this attitude is really comfortable and simple, it is wrong, we can agree with Kristeva, who states that the foreigner is not something outside us, but lives within us:

The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis. Neither the apocalypse on the move nor the instant adversary to be eliminated for the sake of appeasing the group. Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns ‘we’ into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible. The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities. (Kristeva 1991, 1)

In my opinion this internal experience of strangeness characterizes the quoted authors, the complicated Hemon, Velikić, who underlines the principle of small differences and Jergović, who considers hatred as self-hatred. We cannot omit the Bosnian writer Nenad Veličković, who thinks that the other is not Muslim, black, Pakistanian, Gypsy, Jewish, Chinese, Palestine, Albanian or Kurd, but a creature that was made from us, in whose eyes wide open fear replaced curiosity. According to him, the conversation about the Other is just an intellectual phantasm, an alibi to keep quiet about the one (Swartz 2008, 265-266).

In many respects László Végel's thoughts in his essay entitled *Familiar strangers, European bastards* [*Ismerős idegenek, európai fattyúk*] are the same as Veličković's reflections. Besides the Other, which is celebrated with grand words he mentions the Otherness, the national minorities living on the margins of European national states. He is worried about their future, their possibilities. He asks what is waiting for the European whoresons who live in more parallel worlds, but none of them is theirs, who have at least two languages, and none of them is foreign or theirs. They do not talk about differences, about the Other, because they have more serious worries, they do not want to differ, but they are constrained and convicted to be different. They do not represent the Other, they are part of it, and unfortunately their personality contains several Others, several foreign elements meet inside them. Végel calls the national minorities as familiar stranger, the Other who bears the stigma of Otherness (Swartz 2008, 245). The notion of familiar stranger will be especially interesting if we know that Végel uses this category to the victims of the Holocaust, to those Jewish people who were killed not by a foreign army, but by their fellow citizens, who had seen in them at once the familiar and the alien (Swartz 2008, 252). A particularly deep and painful experience of strangeness is unfolding from the above-mentioned authors' and Végel's thoughts. The internal strangeness and the familiar stranger can express only together something relevant about the paradox situation in Southeast Europe.

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## Intercultural Identity in Beáta Thomka's Literary Interpretations

Csilla UTASI

University of Novi Sad  
Department of Hungarian Studies  
csilla.utasi@gmail.com

**Abstract.** The author of the paper starts from the hypothesis that beyond the literary works, the interpretation carried out in the spirit of the poetics of culture can also contribute to the elimination of stereotypes characteristic of the Balkan region. In her volume of studies entitled *Southern Themes [Délvidéki témák]*, Beáta Thomka collected her interpretations of the literary works created in the region, namely, the analyses of texts and images which, at the same time, dispose of a significant identity forming potential. In the preface of her book the literary scholar of Vojvodinian, Balkan descent, investigating her own intellectual identity, conceives it with the help of the term border situation. The description of the border situation requires an interdisciplinary research: the simultaneous application of the considerations of historical science, sociology, minority research, ethnography, as well as history of religion, literature, language, folklore, culture and literature, since the interspersedness and the interwovenness, similarly to every culture, also constitute the dominant feature of the culture of the region. Beáta Thomka is convinced that the ethnic and intellectual border crossings can be made patterns of the condition of self-preservation. The description of the forces, working against the cultural habits, observed in the works of Ivo Andrić, Danilo Kiš, of the Serbian short story writers of the turn of the century, of Ottó Tolnai, Ferenc Maurits and others, creates a quality which, similarly to the primary literary works, contributes to opening up the respective culture.

**Keywords:** national stereotypes, intracultural identity, the poetics of culture, communicative memory, cultural memory

Beáta Thomka, Vojvodinian by birth, whose activity in the field of literary studies has been evolving in the Hungarian scientific medium for two decades, has gathered in her volume entitled *Southern Themes* [*Déli témák*], published two years ago, her writings analysing literary works created in the region of former Yugoslavia or presenting comprising intellectual processes characteristic of the region. A greater part of the texts included in the volume are interpretations, nevertheless, my study is not centred on the evaluation of hermeneutical procedures. Instead, I wish to expound on how the literary works, through what specificities of theirs, are capable of producing effect against the categorizing social knowledge in Beáta Thomka's interpretations. The conclusions of the *Southern Themes* are shaped by profound culture theoretical considerations, with the help of which the real extension of her argumentation and conclusions becomes discernible.

For a longer period her interest has been oriented towards the questions of cultural identity, in this way her starting point considerably differs from the standpoint of the research of stereotypes. Social psychology describes the processes, producing meaning and identity, of social communication. The individual, who always carries out his/her perceiving activity as the member of a social group, comes up against a strong contextualizing effect within the group:

Consequently, the individual gets into a strong field of homogenization within the ingroup; in order to hold his ground, further distinctions are needed until the own 'I' shows itself as unique. As a result, we perceive our own group as being more heterogeneous than the outgroup; the outgroup seems to be more homogeneous, however, the characterization of its members is confined to what separates them from our group. Ingroup heterogeneity and outgroup homogeneity are also explained by the fact that our knowledge about the outgroup is much more restricted than about our own group. And this is the moment when stereotypes, stereotypical thinking appear on the scene; they offer points of reference regarding the outer group also when we dispose of little information, serving the claim for a mentally structured environment. (*On Hungarian-Hungarian Stereotypes*)

In his lecture held at the University of All Knowledge, György Hunyady surveyed, in a remarkably comprehensive manner, the formation of the psychology of the national character and its possible orientations. He set forth several phenomena groups, among which the research into nation characterology pursued in the nineteenth century, the research of stereotypes spread from the United States from the 1930s onwards; finally he pointed out the perspective of the comparative version of national characterology. As opposed to those according to whom the historical change of time works against national togetherness, he proved the opposite of the statement through the example of the American society. The

consistently assumed individuality of the American people did not lead to a citizen-nation, as it is well discernible that the insistence on the American lifestyle, on the strikingly unified national standard resulted in a community consciousness. He designated the nation as being the greatest natural unit of transformation. At the end of his lecture he hinted at the possibility of the inner transformation of the Hungarian national consciousness, seeing an opportunity for slowly reshaping the counter-selective world view characteristic of it (Hunyady 2004).

According to the interpretations included in the volume, identity is primarily formed by the relation to the contents of culture. I would like to illustrate the identity forming character of culture through Jan Assmann's theory positing culture in relation to community memory, though his name is not referred to in the book. In his volume examining the connecting links between cultural memory and religion, Assmann (2007) calls the neuron-based individual memory, of social character from the start, with Maurice Halbwachs' term, as communicative memory; he discovers the partial, relative inner insolubility of the culture theories of Halbwachs, Nietzsche, and Freud in the fact that they regarded culture as the product of communicative memory; it remained unimaginable for them to conceive it as a phenomenon with symbolic significance. By structuring the communicative memory, of a chaotic structure, containing oblivion and memory in a contingent combination, Nietzsche created the form of memory establishing culture, namely the "memory of will." He deduced culture from man's capacity to keep his given word, thus for him every version of culture appeared as a constraint weighing heavily on the individual from the outside. Indeed, culture primarily consists of texts serving counter-presentive memory, however, these do not, or do not only, formulate connective constraints, but they also serve as identity shaping, community forming explanations (Assmann 2007, 15-16).

Assmann regards cultural memory as an archive containing the texts of collective memory, and grasps its determining feature by opposing it to tradition (and to the corresponding terms existing in other cultures). Tradition, as a textual domain simultaneously available for a certain community, is a static category, and as such, it is incapable of expressing the dynamics of inner forces making possible the renewal of cultural memory. In Assmann's approach, cultural memory simultaneously comprises all the written memories of humanity created in different periods, not only the ones publicly recorded at the respective moment, but also the transitorily marginalized ones. The assumption of the latent, subconscious layers of memory can owe much to Freud's culture theory, however, Assmann regards memory as being individual, and dissociates himself from the conception of the collective memory as a psychological unit. He indicates the forgotten, marginalized memory contents as the generators of changes. The literary and historical narratives created in different periods offer alternative memory contents for the actualization of the present.

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Assmann marks the extension of cultural memory with the term *invisible religion* of Luckmann's culture-theoretical argumentation. The invisible religion, the uneliminable value basis of every human society, does not always coincide with the *visible religion*, namely the cult. According to Assmann, with the modern-age distinction of the domains, competing with one another, of metaphysics, ethics, art, literature and science, with the secularization process thrusting into the background the validity of the visible religion, the twofold state, characteristic of a few societies of the ancient Orient was restored, again, in European culture. In the early period of ancient Egypt the invisible religion originally comprised two partial domains: distinct prescriptions regulated the relations among people as well as cult. Today the enumerated social value spheres: "on the one hand, contrary to the visible religion, constitute the domain of the profane, on the other hand, they can advance to religion substitutes or civil religions any time, as also now, as always, they are embraced by the invisible religion, that is, the – today of course more problematic, hidden and unstable – strive for the sense-universe" (Assmann 2007, 60-61).

In her disquisition Beáta Thomka inspects the questions of "intellectual legacy shaping mentality and attitude" formed in the southern region. She assigns as the task of the attitude unfolding in her volume and consistently carrying an inner viewpoint the preservation and summation of the elements having the power of forming identity in the culture of the region. As a consequence of the repeated reconfiguration of borders in the twentieth century, without leaving their homeland during their lives, the generations living in the region where she comes from, in Vojvodinian Banat, became again and again subjects of different state formations. The territory which used to be officially called border defence region has been characterized by ethnic diversity ever since the settlings taking place during the reign of Maria Theresa. The long-lasting and close cohabitation of the linguistic, religious and cultural groups of the region has resulted in the fact that the differences have also been transcribed in the inner structure of the micro-communities of families, as a simultaneous possibility of integration and disintegration from the point of view of individual identity. In each case, Beáta Thomka sees a chance for the summation preserving the differences both at an individual and a community level: "it is possible to treat the differences in every formation, way of living, at any level, and diversity can be unified in a fruitful polyphony," in this way: "by laying emphasis on the possibilities of *preservation as reinterpretation*, and treating this as an individual life mission or community programme – a historical experience of a higher order can be acquired" (Thomka 2009, 11). The essence of the cultural identity model represented by her is polyphonic identity, preserving the differences against the univocality of social choice.

At the beginning of the first chapter entitled *The poetics of cultural identity* she draws attention to the results of the international symposiums held in Athens, Finland and Canada, based on which reason can be seen in the fact that the culture

of the Balkan region, interwoven from the threads of the cultures of various nations, is not unique, as every culture “according to its own character, in itself, is intercultural from the start” (Thomka 2009, 21). Pondering the chance of intercultural identity in the Central European region, she states that since the change of regime contemporary Hungarian literature is more directly connected to the European one. The events of today’s Hungarian literature unfold in front of a European public, wider than before; as a consequence, the reception abroad discovers the literary works created under minority circumstances being on a par with those created in Hungary. The European reception receiving the literary works from Hungary as well as the Hungarian ones simultaneously, in parallel, serves as the experience of the inner interculturality of Hungarian literature. Beáta Thomka hopes the alteration of Hungarian common literary knowledge from the reception, enjoying equal rights, of regional forms of literary consciousness. The possible patterns of the outlined integrative conceptional aggrandizement of the Hungarian literature may be the researches surveying the new literary unity formed with the unification of the two Germanies. The southeastern region offers less a model to follow, as here, until the recent past, the disintegrative cultural experiences prevailed. Beáta Thomka ponders the chance whether the generations having experienced the trauma of the civil war can set about, beyond documenting the events, to reevaluate the historical events. It can be well seen from the above, that the need of forming an intercultural unity is not articulated in the volume as the exclusive task of those living in the southern region.

The second study of the volume sets forth the diversified process through which a part of the South Slavic intellectuals, expatriated together with the falling apart of former Yugoslavia, constrained into a minority situation, in spite of the extremely traumatic community experience, elaborated an attitude preserving the elements of the old, common cultural space and reorganizing them in a new nexus. Beáta Thomka is interested in the phenomena which make the equalization possible. Inasmuch as she examines the chance of integration in a medium chopped by the historical tragedies of the recent past, in the situation of divergence intensified to paroxysm the unity is created by exceptional intellectual efforts. She evaluates the literary works created simultaneously, in parallel, as well as the responses given to the crisis. Under the new, minority circumstances the South Slavic intellectuals were confronted with such challenges which they could meet by means of intensifying their intellectual capacities, of activating the opinions representing the poise, while their original speciality got politicized in a way unexpected also for them. The final result, the books, the establishment of connections against the isolating processes essentially reinterpreted the destructive processes, opposed to culture: “The edification of the historical, present and migrational processes is, among others, the alternative cultural vision deriving from the intellectual values of the former YU, which invariably carries value creating energies” (Thomka 2009, 44).



The next unit contains the interpretation of two outstanding Serbian prose achievements of the recent past. In the interpretation of the *Gravel Hour* [*Fövenyóra*] the central question is the relationship between the document annexed to the end of the literary text, the letter written by the author's father, originally written in Hungarian, published in the Serbian version translated by the author, as well as the fictitious narration, moulding the main character, Eduard Sam, bearing the features of his father who disappeared in the deportation from 1944. In the world of the novel the relations are reversed, it is not the explanation that has a documentary value, instead, the fiction takes over the role of commentary. Beáta Thomka quotes Danilo Kiš's words, in which he defines prose as *exposure*: "It discloses the fact that there is no integrity in a disintegrated world, and the only thing that we can still do with prose is to find, within its integrity, our own" (qtd. in Thomka 2009, 71). The novel, "contrary to the monological character of monocultural literary works, conveys an originally *dialogical cultural concept*" (Thomka 2009, 74). Beáta Thomka identifies the most poignant example of cultural interwovenness in chapter 66, in the allusion to Attila József, occurring in Eduard Sam's first-person confession and existence summation, about the bitter plants growing out of the heart. According to her, the covert quotation transforms the soliloquy of chapter 66, isolated from all earlier contexts linked to the figure of the protagonist, into a self-reflexive summation of the author.

In the case of the *Bridge on the Drina* [*Híd a Drinán*] she considers the world literature reception as essential, and this means also the stake of the readers from Hungary. In connection with the linguistic and stylistic diversity of the original literary works, which is lost in translations, she states the following:

The various foreign and mother tongue stylistic and lexical layers moulding Andrić's prose language resound in a rare and special combination, fulfilling various poetic tasks. Out of these, it is not only his Serbian, Bosniak and Turkish archaisms that have original connotations, exclusively characteristic of this poetics, but also the impersonal, distant, almost rigidly lucid tone and mode represented by his narrators. (Thomka 2009, 63)

In his lecture dedicated to the question to what extent the reading experience of the carefully balanced grand historical narratives can be efficient in healing the collective neuroses created by historical cataclisms, resulting in the repetition of the bloody past, manifesting themselves in the repetitive constraint of actions, Paul Ricoeur contested in the historical narratives the possibility of the *posteriorly repeated execution* of the past, but pointed out, at the same time, that if the historian understands the people living formerly as subjects resembling us, capable of looking backward and forward, it becomes possible for him to relate the events differently from the order of *retrospective fate illusion*. According to Ricoeur,

history, with its unavoidable objectivity, facilitates the “memory work” bringing the cure of communities, as long as historians “at the ‘probabilistic’ level of their own grand *narrations*, offer far-reaching alternatives besides the semi-official history which is liable to get stiffened into the grand narratives of collective memory” (Ricoeur 1999, 61). Andrić’s novel contributes to healing the traumata of collective memory with its specificity that it offers its readers orientative points differing from the contents of stiffened collective memory: it is in the situation of the repetitive constraint that the offer transmitted by carefully balanced, moderately conservative narration proves to be invariably actual.

In one of the most exciting studies of the volume she rates the short stories written in Serbian language of authors who lived in Dalmatia and Bosnia, determined by the imagery of regional belonging, to the former, real cultural environment of the Hungarian short story production created at the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth century. In the last third of the century, in these environments the former heroic epic-like viewpoint made place for a clear-out, objective view and narration. The plot of the short stories unfolds in the micro-communities of the region, presenting mosaic-like division from patriarchal, religious and ethnic viewpoints. The short prose works of Petar Kočić, Laza Lazarević, Simo Matavulj or Ivo Ćipiko are characterized by clear-out structures, preserving archaic elements, dramatic storyline, and functional poetics. In the course of the comparison, the short stories of the Hungarian turn of the century partly appear to be a parallel phenomenon, and partly get into a new value perspective. For example, the parallel reading of the works by Simo Matavulj and Kálmán Mikszáth leads to the following conclusion: “The immediacy of Mikszáth’s style, in my view, is often unnatural and follows the conventions of the written, not the spoken way of rendering the story, or it even conforms to the formed rules of his own way of writing. In Matavulj’s way of communication the tradition of the *skaz* emerges more spontaneously” (Thomka 2009, 102).

Beáta Thomka continues the series of the southern themes with the presentation of phenomena immediately forming her own identity. The paper placing the intellectual orientation of the review *Új Symposion*, which has become legendary ever since, into the perspective of the changes of the context, itself applies the technique of collage, a procedure favoured by its editors. The interpretations on the – not yet complete – oeuvre of the writers of the first Symposion-generation are open in the same way as the one above, as their identity forming potential cannot yet be recorded with a definite validity. On the pieces of Ferenc Maurits’ series entitled *Metamorphosis* of Kafkaesque inspiration, the lines seem as if they were the *cardiograms of a tragic life perception*, while in view of the anthropology of images the conclusion of the engravings offers a staggering opportunity of self-understanding. In Ottó Tolnai’s prose, often displaying alter-egos, “usually the time of narration from the foreground is characteristic, and

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neither the past event becoming the subject of speech breaks the *very moment of the present*. (...) The unified subject is dissolved in the speakers, still, the manifestations of the *narrative instance* without a focus preserve and make discernible the social context of speech” (Thomka 2009, 167-169).

The question arises in the reader how the study on the generic questions of the essay or the one on Péter Balassa's essay writing is connected to the southern themes. According to Beáta Thomka, the great literary essays are pervaded by the strive to sum up and pass on the artistic and intellectual experience lived as an elemental one. While reading Péter Balassa's essays, she refutes with two arguments the common opinion accounting for the language of the essay as a means of self-expression. Inasmuch as the essay is “a contemplative prose genre; its inherent possibility is the representation of the reflected, *backfolding* attitude in the basic sense of the term. As a consequence, it cannot resound as the speech of the person, but rather as that of the critical self-perception, of the rendering of account fulfilling the review.” On the other hand, the essay is a form of a well constructed discourse, “rhythmic, tempo changing, taking short steps, slowing down, coming near, offering perspective,” fulfilling the artistic form requirement (Thomka 2009, 191-192). The only account of a journey, belonging to the genre of the essay, does not elaborate a literary theme; instead, it offers the reading of the image of the city of Leiden. The description of the community scenes, of the space experience triggered by churches and house walls, the outlook of the interior space of the museum turns back to the southern questions, since, as a consequence of the time coincidence, the meanings of the blockade enclosing Sarajevo irrevocably mingle into the image summing up, as it were, the Holland culture, arousing the feeling of intimate familiarity in spite of the time distance, preserving the Protestant codes, namely the weekly seaside pleasure ride of the royal family.

One of the most significant contributions of Beáta Thomka's interpretations is that she describes not the abstract mechanisms of the examined Balkan and Central European cultural motion changes. In her interpretations the consistently intercultural and at the same time self-reflexive perspective authenticates the indicated orientation experience of the literary works and intellectual processes.

*Translated by Judit Pieldner*

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## **The Demystification of the Concept of Homeland in the Hungarian Literature from Vojvodina**

Erika BENCE

University of Novi Sad  
Department of Hungarian Studies  
erikazambo@eunet.rs

**Abstract.** The demystification of the cultic meaning of the homeland started already in the disillusionist Romanticism in Hungarian literature. The twentieth century modulates and enriches the thematization of the phenomenon with meanings of loss(es) of homeland within the framework of Hungarian literary representation from Vojvodina. In this context the meaning of homeland has been completed with the codes of the Trianon memory, the nostalgia for the Monarchy, the Balkan consciousness, the quest for the home/homeland, the language swap, the border novel as well as the figures of foreignness.

The change and degradation of the concept of homeland is thematized in theory/essay as well as in poetic/narrative discourses, in poems as well as in prose in the Hungarian literature from Vojvodina.

The analysis focuses on Károly Jung's (1944) poetry from the end of the twentieth century, above all, on his volumes of poems entitled *Barbaricum* (1991) and *Hephaestus the Grouch* [*Mogorva Héphaisztosz*] (2002) respectively; the time gap between their publication also marks the historical time of a poetic formation determined by social-historical factors; its formation also embedded in tradition, as well as its tendencies directed at deconstructing traditional contents (myths and cultic meanings) are indicated and created by its trope structure, allusive sign system and transcultural figures.

**Keywords:** Hungarian literature from Vojvodina, deheroization, homeland/loss of homeland, border novel, tropes of deficiency, foreignness

## Historical aspects

(*Creating homeland and heroism.*) The identification with the Homeland in its mythical-cultic sense, as well as the insecurity, change and disappearance of a (baroque) world view and form of existence based on such a kind of organicity is reflected in our nineteenth-century ode poems as one of the most important contents of new Hungarian literature: “Our homeland shed champions’ blood against other peoples / Its creator, *Árpád* on the banks of the Danube. / Oh! it were other Hungarians / whom our great *Hunyadi* repelled the power of Mahomet with!” [“Más néppel ontott bajnoki vért hazánk / Szerzője, *Árpád* a Duna partjain. / Oh! más magyarral verte vissza / Nagy *Hunyadink* Mahomet hatalmát!”] (Dániel Berzsenyi: *To the Hungarians I. [A magyarokhoz I.]*) Or: “Coming forth the land to spy, / Even a home he finds he lacks” [“... Szerte nézett 's nem lelé / Honját a 'hazában.”] (Ferenc Kölcsey: *National Anthem [Hymnus]*).

In line with this world comprehension experience both patriotism as well as defending it unconditionally (being ready to sacrifice one’s life for it) are moral categories, whereas the heroism of “acquiring a homeland” becomes the highest ethical merit: accordingly, creating a homeland is the greatest epic standard and the most heroic quality. It is no accident that – based on the Hegelian views – we regard the epic as a world literature genre about a nation’s birth, and the process of estrangement from it in terms of world view and genre as a world and genre building phenomenon of deheroization. This process – although thematized only in Romantic literature – started very early, with the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, considered by Northrop Frye as belonging to “the second epic tradition.” According to this theory, the classical Homeric epic (the *Iliad*) is the genre of an organic-heroic-poetic world state and of an original-uniform existence. The *Odyssey* is the epic of the ceasing of this world state, of trivialized existence already, more precisely, it is its altered version, an epopeia. The motif of migration (quest) appears in the *Odyssey* for the first time, then in the *Aeneid*, which is based upon the worldview of the Homeric epics. At the endpoint of the historic process of distancing from the classical epopeias we can find – and this is the young György Lukács’s theory of the novel (Lukács 1975) – novels written in prose, and their basic types respectively, *Don Quixote* [1605], the novel of abstract idealism; *Sentimental Education* [1869], the novel of disillusioned Romanticism, and *Wilhelm Meister* [1796], the novel of formation.

In his theory of myth criticism Northrop Frye conceives the formation history of encyclopedic forms originating in the epic worldview in terms of spatial topoi. Here as well, the three basic forms are the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*:

The cyclical form of the classical epic is based on the natural cycle as well as on the known mediterranean world in the middle of the boundlessness

(*apeiron*) and between the upper and the lower gods. The cycle has two main rhythms: the life and death of the individual, and the slower social rhythm which, in the course of years (*periplomenon eniauton* at Homer, *volvibus* or *labentibus annis* at Virgil), brings cities and empires to their rise and demise. The full comprehension of the latter is the privilege of gods. It begins the action *in medias res*, and with this convention it ties a knot in time, so to say. The full action which forms the background of the *Iliad* moves from the Greek cities through the ten-year siege of Troy back to Greek cities again; the full action of the *Odyssey* is a specific example of the same thing: from Ithaca back to Ithaca. The *Aeneid* moves with the household gods of Priam from Troy to New Troy. (Frye 1998, 275)

(*Creating a new Homeland, a new Troy.*) One of the most complete forms of the encyclopedic-archetypical structures is the Bible, likewise with the “heroic quest” in the centre, that is, with the figure of an individual identifying himself as the hero, who sets out on his quest as the “psychological representation of the novel-like world fallen apart” and – due to his heroic qualities and the high standard of his moral virtues – temporarily reestablishes the unity of the disintegrated world order in order to create a new Homeland, a new Troy. This gesture of creation does not necessarily refer to the heroic struggle in the objectual-empirical-factual world, but to the proclamation of the birth of certain ideologies and spiritual values (for example, in the artist-novel: in the text of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, in which, by evoking the Middle Ages, Novalis depicts a mystical-symbolical, consequently a still uniform universe [“a universal idyll”]. Contrary to this, the actual time of narration marks the fragmentary, disharmonious forms of existence, which can only be unified again through the creative power of imagination, through the magic moments of poetry. In the religious-mystical-symbolical world of the Middle Ages we can recognize the authentic medium of the birth of the world-creating, universal poetry.).

(*Deheroization and loss of homeland.*) In the formation of the nineteenth-century construct of the authentic Hungarian (historical) novel – as the birth of the genre coincides with the constellation of the historical novel, of the discourse about history – the poetic discourse of the ode from the beginning of the century in its larger sense (including the classical ode, the anthem, the appeal and the dithyramb) played an important role: the layers of meaning rendering the past and confronting past with present of Berzsenyi’s, Kölcsey’s and Vörösmarty’s oeuvre let us perceive the processes of deheroization in the present through emblematic examples of heroic qualities creating a homeland, a new Troy. On the one hand, in these modes of speech we can find the example of the great hero, who reestablishes the organic unity and sacrifices himself for the national community, that of home-creating heroic-divine quality, of “Bendegúz’s blood” that won a “beautiful

homeland” (*National Anthem*), of the homeland-flourishing “heroic offsprings of Árpád” (*National Anthem*), that of Árpád, who gained a homeland through the “champion’s blood” and that of “Our great *Hunyadi*” (*To the Hungarians I.*). On the other hand, the idea of the “wonderful things” that “not the crowd, but the Soul and the free nation” achieved (Dániel Berzsenyi: *To the Hungarians II.*), the image of the “homeland in pain” (Ferenc Kölcsey: *Zrínyi’s Second Song*) attacked and bitten by “kites, snakes, worms,” ravaged by “Morals: disgusting vipers/returned to perish” (*To the Hungarians I.*) flow into Vörösmarty’s image of the homeland struck by “the curse of hatred among brethren” (*People*), into his visionary poetry about the death of a nation, into the definition of the homeland of the distanced romantic irony, into the realization of “deheroic heroes” and of a grey age, leading to modern literature, in the second half of the nineteenth century, leading to the cultivation/revival of the disillusioned Romanticism of the age, of the Hungarian decadent poetry from the end of the century, as well as of the Hungarian historical novels written in verse rendering an ironic image of the hero and the world, presenting the process of deheroization.

The phenomenon and event system that generates the loss of heroism and homeland (the nineteenth-century historical novel, which leads up to modern Hungarian literature, also touches upon this subject) – besides the disappearance of the moral value system of heroism – also contains and thematizes the motifs of lack of intellectual power. Let us just think of József Eötvös’s *Dózsa*-novel, which presents us the image of a hero who cannot find intellectual answers to the past’s crises and the present’s questions, and thus, provokes a catastrophe in his country. This is also the case with Kálmán Mikszáth’s quasi-historical novels, where the narrow-minded violence notions deconstructing the Zrínyi- and Rákóczi myths suggest similar home and hero demystifying meanings.

## **Hungarian Literature in Vojvodina**

(*The Trianon trauma: the actually unfolding event of losing one’s homeland.*) In 1920 the Hungarian literature built upon the above-mentioned rhetorical-poetic tradition is confronted with the Trianon trauma, namely with the real spiritual contents of the loss of one’s homeland and its factual events manifested in space. The experience of losing one’s homeland and getting into a spiritual void brings to life a series of legends and experiments trying to create a spiritual home, a “new Troy” within the literatures that got to the other side of the political borders and became peripheries, such as the literature from the Southern region/Yugoslavia/Vojvodina.

The opening momentum of the events brought to life by the trauma of losing one’s homeland is the legend of Géza Csáth, who had chosen to die on the borderline. Another literary reflection is Ildikó Lovas’s Vojvodina-novel entitled



*Exit to the Adria* [Kijárat az Adriára] (2005), which thematizes the sea-metaphor specific of the Hungarian literature of the region, and deconstructs the illusion of a home built upon this topic:

This sea-affair beats me. Until when those from Bácska possessed a sea, how long they have not had it any longer, or vice versa and from the start again. I have handled it so many times and from so many perspectives. I used to work myself into many small details, and in the end I wouldn't want any of it. (...) I don't give a damn about the Adria. (...) In the end we shall discover that Csáth proceeded in the most elegant manner: he finished it off where we truly belong to: on the border, nowhere, with our heads sunk into the sand. (...) But metaphors will hit back. They hit you on the head, ungrateful carrions. (Lovas 2005, 267)

After Trianon the literature of the region was definitely, and for a period also irreconcilably peripheralized within the Hungarian literature (as a whole) divided into a center and regions. In 1924 the taking into account, the ranking, the demand to size up the possibilities led to the publication of the *First Almanac of Hungarian Writers from Vojvodina* [Vajdasági magyar írók almanachja I.], edited by János Dettre and Imre Radó. Its publication was followed by several anthologies with literary-political tendencies (to “construct” a spiritual home after having lost the homeland), accompanied not only by – mostly negative – critiques, but also by negating-vindictory polemics regarding the existence of literature (the spiritual home) in becoming, by conceptual turnabouts (for example, János Dettre's or Szenteleky's changes in conviction). The lack-context of the loss of homeland, and the demand to create a new spiritual Home placed Kornél Szenteleky into the role of “Kazinczy from Vojvodina,” “our literary grandfather” (the home founder), and brought to life the theory of the couleur local, of the separatedness of the “new Homeland.”

When in 1929 Kornél Szenteleky wrote the novel *Isola Bella*, the first Hungarian short story anthology from Vojvodina, *Under Locust-trees* [Ákácok alatt] (1933), demonstrating the couleur local phenomenon, had not been published yet. In Szenteleky's novel – in opposition to the magic world represented by the beautiful island of Sicily – we can observe the firm contours of peripheral existence, the Vojvodina-experience, traumatic both in its spatial and in its intellectual contents (homeland/losing one's homeland):

(...) people with acrid faces are shuffling along under the cloudy sky. Unhappy souls are going round the ugly, muddy streets along the wet walls, perhaps someone is preparing a loop for himself in the attic. (...) Economic crisis. (...) bent, wrinkled people are sitting at the desks, if the phone rings,

they answer rudely and unwillingly (...) burden, roughness, impatience (...) mean intents are staggering in the brain convolutions. The puny locust trees haven't even begun to blossom yet, the roses have frozen again this winter. (...) Beauty steers clear of this sluggish, indifferent landscape, just like a singing wedding ship does of a lepers' island. (Szenteleky 1993, 187)

(*The loss of homeland as a genre constituting motif: the culture-historical novel and the border novel.*) Among the genre constituting elements of the historical novel we can find the poetics of questions projected into the past “with an interest in the present,” as well as the role of the past's otherness in constituting meaning and in crisis modeling. After Trianon the Hungarian historical narrative in Vojvodina underwent a long formative process naturally highlighting these constructive procedures, which resulted in a certain type of historical novel especially accepted in the region, the so-called “channel novel” interpreted as a culture-historical novel, and in a fully specific genre, that of the “border novel.”

It is well-known that after Szenteleky's two late-secessionist (space)-novels, *Whining Love* [*Kesergő szerelem*] and *Isola Bella*, both reflecting upon the Kisfaludy-topic, the development of the Hungarian novel in Vojvodina was either deficient/elliptic or insignificant: beside the visionary short story, at the end of the fifties and among the literary processes of the sixties the Hungarian novel in Vojvodina was recreated.

At the same time, the few experiments still taking place firmly reflect upon the experience of losing one's spatial/spiritual homeland: the past events are put to work in order to render meaning, mainly figuratively, in metaphors. One of them is Károly Molter's novel entitled *Tibold Márton* (1937), which presents the common destiny of the ethnic groups living along the Ferenc-channel as a vision of a spiritual home; the other one is Mihály Majtényi's *The Caesar's Channel* [*Császár csatornája*] (1943), which renders the failure story of the Central-European revolutionary (the Jacobean ideas), of the creative genius's (József Kiss, the imperial water engineer) intellectual creative enterprises, of the enlightened creator's ideals (to build a channel to improve the life of the community in the region). In a “petrified” empire, where the “emperor's endless power” (Majtényi 1943, 222) is based upon the machinery of informers and on the rule of militarist circles, there is no need for world-redeeming plans or creative ideas any longer. Together with József Kiss they are driven to the periphery of existence, and turn up again only rarely, from the dreamland of former revolutionaries, convicts emerging from casemates. “The minute which can be experienced, recognized, the moment is life and not the year!” (Majtényi 1943, 230) – these are József Kiss's last thoughts concerning the world: the credo of modern man.

In the second half of the twentieth century Nándor Gion's novels – the reconstituted Hungarian historical novel from Vojvodina (mainly the tetralogy

known under the title *He Played for Malefactors, Too* [*Latroknak is játszott*], written through several decades, between 1973 and 2002) show how the illusion of the homeland (manifesting as both an individual-human as well as a national community space), in which national communities can live together, disappears in great history, among the events of World War II devastating this area as well. In the third part, entitled *This Day is Ours* [*Ez a nap a miénk*], published in 1997, the narrative of creating a homeland, the new Home, then that of its loss, presenting the disillusionment in the homeland-concept is especially strong. When in 1941, on Easter Sunday, the Hungarian army arrives at Szenttamás, the story of reconstructing the homeland (concept) (the establishment of a new Troy) repeats itself almost as an echo, and connects to different historical/sacred interpretations: “This day is ours” – the participants in the events exclaim. Individual fate becomes history, as underlined by the possessive form of the sentence; the demonstrative pronoun has a specifying value. István Rojtos Gallai, the main character narrating the story, asks: How long will it last? – his question raises the emblematic affirmation towards a more abstract level of interpretation, which connects the roll-back to the story of the conquest/creating a homeland. “For thousand years. We have been here for thousand years, and we are going to stay for another thousand” (Gion 1997, 12). This is also a reply to Ádám Török’s ironic remark: “(...) what if this lovely day should not last for a thousand years after all” (Gion 1997, 24). What Rojtos Gallai says, will be spelled out in common talk: “They say this day is ours. We are Hungary again” (Gion 1997, 27). Later on, it is the same Rojtos Gallai who draws the bitter morals from the situation, and then gives metaphors for the interpretation: “It is a pity that the wonderful thousand years did not even last for four years” (Gion 1997, 176). The wealthy Serb farmers formulate this in a similar way: “What have we done to God that He should pour down such hard times upon us?” (Gion 1997, 200). The conversation with the Germans bears the same moral: “We all knew that this dirty war would come to an end soon. It would not end the way we would have wanted it to, but still it would come to an end” (Gion 1997, 240).

The definition “dirty war” plays the role of creating meaning. This will be the essential content of István Rojtos Gallai’s historical experience: the liberating war, having distorted into racial-national intolerance and ideologies, is not the depository of a lasting freedom but it will trigger an even dirtier world. As the narrator interprets it:

The war came to an end, the rotation of the world slowed down, but it was still in motion, and in its slow motion it could be really seen how ugly our world had become; it had not been much prettier earlier either, yet we had sometimes succeeded in making it more enthusiastic, more generous, even proud, as there were good days and good years to come that would stand colouring, however, paint always runs out when most needed, and the people who feel at home

among the beautiful colours, and who from time to time paint wonderful pictures, will go away. They go away leaving grey patches behind. The world has defaced itself; it will be hard to love it again. (Gion 1997, 241)

(*Life on the Periphery.*) The notion of “periphery” is also one of the meaning constituting factors in the Hungarian literary culture from Vojvodina: it functions as a way of living and as a form of literary discourse. In literary circles they talk about *The Physiology of Peripheral Culture* (Szeli 1993); László Végel’s essay-novel was published under the title *Life on the Periphery* [*Peremvidéki élet*] in 2000, which through the destiny of Novi Sad tells the story of the decay of the multicultural city (as a possible form of existence). The uniform text organizing principle is represented by a spatial motif: particular segments of Novi Sad (streets, squares, buildings) and the related story of decay are presented. The negative processes pervading the whole society explain and decode the tragedy of Novi Sad. The fall of its culture based upon multiculturalism is analogous to the country’s catastrophe: “After Yugoslavia split up, Novi Sad’s tragedy unfolded: its bourgeois tradition was rooted in the ‘guilty’ nostalgia for the Monarchy, in the historical homelessness, that is, in a topos necessarily despised and labeled by the nation state as a hostile idea” (Végel 2000, 8).

The Novi Sad story ends in a cataclysmic picture: the city, thought of as a modern and multicultural citadel, sinks in the dark depth of the Balkan nation state, which the narrator completes and seals up with an even more thrilling and extreme reflection upon literary culture. The naïve citizen of the perished multicultural world becomes a homeless local patriot; his/her existence becomes peripheral forever, his/her literature belonging to a *no man’s land*. This interpretation (“no man’s land”), which is constantly and everlastingly reflected in the regional literature reduced from Yugoslavian to the literature of Vojvodina/Southern region (not as if the Yugoslavian had represented the authentic homeland-concept – but this will still be touched upon in what follows!), creates a genre specific of peripheral culture, namely the border novel. We regard Erzsébet Juhász’s *Border Novel* [*Határregény*] (2001), published posthumously, as the primary source, the genre-creating literary work.

The *Border Novel* combines the traditional methods of talking about history (such as the correspondence to causality, linearity and the different background narratives) with the metaphorization of the border-notion. It shares the particularity of historical novels, of rendering present crises through past models, achieved by *narrating and presenting the existential momentums of the political border changes*. The most concrete meaning of “border” in the texture of this novel denotes the administrative line between countries, in addition to this, we understand by it the imaginary boundary of the distance between the different identities: it is a historical establishment and a spiritual figure.

We may also address this literary work as a *family*, *travel* or *Trianon* novel. The political borders established and changed after World War I and II interfere in the destiny of the Patarcsics family by delimitation and exclusion: the family members lose touch with each other; they get stuck inside and outside the borders, and repeatedly go through the deterrent experience of losing their homeland and identity. In addition to the political borders, they also raise imaginary barriers around themselves: Ella, Emi's mother (Emi represents the narrator's perspective) is unable to show the smallest sign of love towards the members of her family, for her, being immersed in the spiritual activity of painting represents the form of isolation from the others.

The series of the narrated border stories starts with Angeline Nenadovits, who in 1910 was travelling by tram in Novi Sad for a whole day (this moment is also projected onto the lives of her descendants), and afterwards would not leave her room for at least twenty years. After losing two of her sons in the war, Sándor Sajtos's mother veils herself into silence. The tragedy of Lina Rösch from Temesvár [Timișoara] stems from emotional distances as well as from the feeling that these (imaginary) barriers cannot be bridged. The regional life stories are predestined by an anecdote; it was written about Temesvár that this would be the Siberia of the Monarchy, where people are brought to die, or "Once arrived here, one could no longer leave. Or else way around: one could move but only to the other world" (Juhász 2001, 69).

The experience of *losing one's homeland* caused by the changes of political borders triggered traumas that determined the destiny of generations, especially that of the Patarcsics brothers. Miklós, who lives in Szabadka [Subotica] and János, stuck in Pozsony [Bratislava], share the same vision for decades: they get lost in Rogina bara – which at the time of narration no longer exists – and cannot find their way out, feeling tortured because of the impossibility of the situation. Besides being separated from his brother – as the offspring of a multinational family –, Miklós is characterized by a specific lingual-national identity crisis: in opposition to the Rösch's, the family branch living in Temesvár – where multinationalism creates multicultural wealth – his multilingual family community creates tensions. For a man confused by the lack of national self-esteem, experiencing Hungarian identity would mean reaching a safe haven; when in 1944 the Russians march into Szabadka, he fears that after several decades of insecurities and alienation, his sufferings will increase because now he will have to declare himself a Russian.

János Patarcsics's wife from Pozsony relates in a dramatic manner the most powerful manifestation of the Trianon trauma: she tells the story of how one day she had to shake hands with three hundred pupils leaving school, after which she herself became redundant in the school.

A phenomenon specific of the life stories on the periphery is recurrence. Emi, the late descendant experiences the same break in unity and continuity (as Angeline

Nenadovits, the Patarcsics brothers or Ila Sajtos) in 1990, when her husband, having a Southern Balkan view – who does not know the feeling of nostalgia for the Monarchy, and consequently does not possess the consciousness of peripheral existence –, emigrates. Similarly to Angeline Nenadovits regarding her love in 1910, she herself knows that the plan to get reunited with her husband is a lie, they will never live together again. We can encounter here the unique moment of fate specific of peripheral existence: the stubborn ones who stay are those who have lost their homeland, those who do not find their home in the country, whereas the representatives of the majority, taken into the graces of the nation-state, leave without loss of identity or any feeling of alienation, and are at home anywhere in Europe.

The members of the Patarcsics family overcome homelessness and constrained separatedness (the lack of organic unity) by travelling. The narration starts from Újvidék [Novi Sad] then it roams about the places of the former Monarchy coiling the far-reaching threads of the complex family history, and finally it ends on the Vienna Express with a grotesque, yet symbolic punchline: a somewhat disturbed member of the family suddenly and unconsciously starts running on the rushing train “as if mauled about by some unknown, gigantic force. Maybe the same force that had mauled about his ancestors, throughout generations, from Graz to Szabadka, from Szeged to the valley of Isonzo, from Temesvár to Pozsony, from Újvidék to Arad, to and fro, randomly” ( Juhász 2001, 94).

(“*One’s home in the homeland ...*” or: “*There is where to escape from ...*”) “It has been finally uttered / it has made us wait for long / there is where to escape from / but there is nowhere to” – Nothing proves better that József Gulyás’s quatrain entitled *Finally [Végre]*, written in the early 1970s, has become an experience passed on from generation to generation, than the fact that the text got deteriorated, which suggests its oral form of existence and the oral character of the process of transmission. The original version is as follows:

Végre kimondhatod,	You can say finally
várattott soká:	it has been long delayed:
van honnan szökni,	there is where to escape from,
de nincs hová.	but there is nowhere to.

In other words, for several generations this poem expressed the double feeling of homelessness, experienced by the Hungarian individual from the Southern region fallen outside the political borders of Hungary (and supposedly this is the case with others fallen outside the borders too), felt on both sides of the border.

In the examined novel by Erzsébet Juhász we can realize and experience homelessness, the ironic, reversed and perverted event and thought manifestos of the demystifications of homeland as expressed in the lines “*not finding Home in the*

*Homeland*” and “*There is where to escape from, / but there is nowhere to...*” What confuses Emi are the thought of “our home” and its objectification as well as the country map. On the one hand, in her parents’ and grandparents’ stories there exists the image of a “far-away Hungary” (Juhász 2001, 16), on the other hand, in front of her there is a school atlas with a map of the country she was born into. Her bitter conclusion is that (after getting to know it) Hungary “had nothing to do with OUR HOMELAND, just as neither did the country she was born into and which finally fell apart, leaving behind the uncertainty concerning where its borders are, and how long they would stay where they are” (Juhász 2001, 16).

The prose of Ildikó Lovas, a generation younger, reflects upon this experience in a similar way:

A homeland in the heights, in the labyrinth of panties and recipes [the narrator suffered humiliation when her language use was ridiculed in the mother country; she asked for women’s trousers instead of panties and said recipe instead of prescription – E. B.]. (...) Which homeland? Everything was so complicated back then. My mother tongue was not adequate in either country. (...) A feeling of fucking shit, I can say. (Lovas 2005, 40)

In a generation novel *par excellence*, namely István Apró’s *Novel-Briquette* [*Regénybrikett*], published in 1993, the homeland concept and illusion of the region unfolded in the shadow of titoism are placed into an ironic light through the age-group perspective:

Good old times! The only thing that had value was money and we did not have to take great pains over anything else (e.g., national identity, objective history, natality, etc.) ... Under the cherry trees they would have treated each and every rumour about show trials, witch-hunts with indignation. (Apró 1993, 15)

(“*I used to be a citizen, I became a citizen of dreams ...*”) At the end of the twentieth century Károly Jung’s poetry, built upon old forms and poetic traditions (antiquity myth, barbarity and civilization, Roman elegies, sonnets, fugues, archaisms, folk poetry, superstition, etc.) effectively shows us the historical and synchronic processes of demystification regarding the regional concept of homeland (and other related notions, such as patriotism, homeliness, etc.). In his 1991 volume entitled *Barbaricum* we are presented with the historical crisis models of becoming homeless and experiencing despoliation (the feeling of being “homeless in the homeland”): the legend of the barbarian plundering a mature civilization (e.g., Rome), the significance of war, of narrow-minded violence that tramples down culture. “And opposite the limes (where the moans / reach up to the sky) the barbarian lies in ambush” [“S a limesszel szemben (ahol felérnek / a jajok

az évig) a barbár áll lesben”] (*Barbaricum*); “Yet – as it is well-known – to Rome / many roads run, everyone // seeks refuge for oneself / out of the way of thorn-bushes, / rank grass, drifting weed, / transgressing, with hands in the pocket / foreign dirt, tales” [“Mégis – mint köztudott – Róma / Felé sok utak futnak, keres // Is hát magának ki-ki menedéket / Ballangók, gazok, sodródó dudva / Útjából, idegen koszt, meséket / Áthágva, kezét zsebébe dugva.”] (*The Fasting Winds are Blowing* [*Fújnak a böjti szelek*]); “We already know, we have learnt that: armies / have marched through this land, / the din of horseshoes, the noise of armour on the lowland, / and at times even our horses give a snort. // Who dares to stay? The pitfall hides us now. / Who wouldn’t be alerted by the armies’ marching?” [“Mi már tudjuk, megtanultuk: hadak / Vonultak, vonulnak ezen a tájon, / Lópaták robaja, vértzaj a lapályon, / S olykor lovaink is felhorkannak. // Maradni ki mer? Elrejt most a verem. / Kit ne riasztana a hadak vonulása?”] (*The Marching of Armies* [*Hadak vonulása*]).

Strong intertextual allusions, on the one hand, world literature (Petrarchan sonnet), on the other hand, nineteenth-century poetic tradition (e.g., Hungarian ode poetry), as well as early twentieth-century poetic discourses (e.g., Babits’s poetry), and the barbaricum-legend presented in the 1991 volume contextualize the poems of the volume *Hephaestus, the Grouch* [*Mogorva Héphaisztosz*], published in 2002. Especially two poems, namely *In the Depths of Winter* [*Télvíz idején*] and *Song of the Homeland* [*Dal a hazáról*] focus upon the topic of losing one’s homeland, homelessness and concretize the spatial and spiritual meanings of homeland. The geographical coordinates of the homeland are situated – just as in the well-known Hungarian odes and hymns of the nineteenth century – “between the Danube and the Tisa” (*In the Depths of Winter*), “The no-name land, the Danube, the Tisa, green / Gardens, a region of fields, and that of stubborn // Peasants” [“A nevenincs föld, a Duna, Tisza, zöld / Kertek, rétek tájéka, meg a konok // Parasztoké”] (*Song of the Homeland*). In a conceptual sense it is a “land, / renamed by the centuries,” “a no-name land.” The notion of homeland itself is semantically extremely burdened, as part of speech polysemantic, stylistically extremely nuanced in both poems. On the one hand, it denotes a space well-defined geographically (“... the region [...] of the Danube, Tisa ...”), a historical establishment (“... land, / renamed by the centuries ...”), the place of existence of a social-national community (“[region] of stubborn / Peasants,” “Home / of staying crack-brained wanderers”), a cultic-sacred experience (“this land under my feet” [*Song of the Homeland*], a place where “Frozen to death in the earth the ancestors cry” [*In the Depths of Winter*]). On the other hand, it evokes meanings which induce notions of deficiency [being thrown about: “Poets are being thrown about in foreign places ...,” madness: “Madness is tempting me: to go home, home!,” emptiness: “The homeland will be empty between the Danube and the Tisa,” “The library, the manuscripts have been left to themselves,” “Man, the estate he finally



left to itself,” fault and sin; betrayal: “not to add to sinning, to almost betrayal” (*In the Depths of Winter*), further on, “he ran away in the fog;” “your running flock has left you alone,” “I could not sin more / not any longer. Who could understand the grief of the homeless?” (*Song of the Homeland*). It evokes tropes, the image constellation of metaphor and synecdoche in a spiritual sense: homeland as *tenor* attracts *vehicles* such as garden/field, house/shelter, book/library. Homeland denotes a concept (the form of existence of a social-national community), being a noun, but it can be a complement or an infinitive too (go/come home). Similarly to the nineteenth-century cultic poetry, Károly Jung’s concept of homeland gains a sacred connotation in *Song of the Homeland* (the image of the “sacred land”), it undergoes such a deconstructive process as the loss of homeland in the *Appeal* or in *Zrínyi’s Second Song* (the world of “mad mulberry trees,” of vagabonds and idiots). In a metaphorical context it gets personified: (“it ran away in the fog”), and it is marked by invocation and informal addressing.

The double entendre demystification of the homeland concept is thus also created in Károly Jung’s poems. On the one hand, there is a homeland which “spits out its flock into the frost” and which is no longer identical (as it is trodden by “fog, doom, death, war”) with the sacred shelter of our ancestors, nor with the intellectual refuge legitimizing poetry’s pantheon. On the other hand, there is the mother country, the “only homeland,” which is not welcoming either (“... who understands the sufferings of the homeless?”).

The feelings of a homeless person are sublimated in a staggeringly wonderful metaphor: “I used to be a citizen, I became a citizen of dreams / A dirty-grey sky melts above me ...” (*Song of the Homeland*).

To the same extent in which the two poems discussed above are characterized by the frequent use of repetition (the meaning of ‘homeland’ in its different variants), *Variations upon Pilinszky’s Quatrain, Postcard from Limány* [*Változatok Pilinszky négysorosára, Limányi anziksz*] [Limán/ *Limány* is a district in Novi Sad], built upon Pilinszky’s *Quatrain* [*Négysoros*], uses ellipsis/omission. The fourth part, having the subtitle *Nights Soaked in Poster-loneliness* [*Transscripcio et translatio textorum*] (*Plakátmagányban ázó éjjelek* [*Transscripcio et translatio textorum*]) is a picture poem, which by means of crossing out and deletion demonstrates the lack in the overlapping meanings of the home-homeland-shelter trio. Its bilingualism marks the happenings of the double homeland-deconstruction:

Ovo je Jugoslavija!  
Ovo je Srbija!  
Ovo je Vojvodina!  
Ovo je Liman!  
Ovo je zgrada!  
Ovo je kerov kurac!

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Ez (itt) Jugoszlávia!	This is (here) <del>Yugoslavia!</del>
Ez (itt) Szerbia!	This is (here) Serbia!
Ez (itt) Vajdaság!	This is (here) Vojvodina!
Ez (itt a) Limány!	This is (here) Limány!
Ez (itt egy) épület!	This is (here) a building!
Ez (itt) a kutyék fasza!	This is (here) bullshit!

The possessive form of the last line in Hungarian (“a kutyék fasza”) is a somewhat milder version of the Serb dialect, which is more direct and a lot harsher. I believe I am not the only reader of the poem who thinks of the rhyming pairs “fasza” – “haza.” It could even generate a saying: “Kutyá fasza, a haza!”

*Translated by Vilma Mihály*

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## **Language and Identity in Erzsébet Juhász's *Border Novel***

Erika BENCE, Mária JANOVICS

University of Novi Sad  
Department of Hungarian Studies  
erikazambo@eunet.rs  
janovic@ravangrad.net

**Abstract.** Erzsébet Juhász's *Border Novel*, which is composed of short stories and anecdotes, can be defined as a travelogue as well as a family novel. Its most important motif is the border. In this context, the border denotes a political, cultural and linguistic dissociation. By bridging the distance and the border, travelling is represented as an experiment of temporal break-up. In the family stories the language is a determining power: it is shown both as loss and gain. The Monarchy is the widest space of the novel: its towns (Novi Sad, Szeged, Pozsony, Temesvár, Linz) are identified related to the Hungarian era in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (referred to as 'the Monarchy'). This paper examines Juhász's *Border Novel* as a featured construction of Vojvodinian Hungarian literature: border novel, travel novel and post-Monarchic novel.

**Keywords:** language, border, family, story, loss of identity

### **The Genre of the *Border Novel***

The title of Erzsébet Juhász's (1947–1998) posthumous prose volume is a result of editorial choice. The text is comprised of epic forms: short stories and anecdotes (Bence 2009, 122). The seven short stories construct the episodes of the family novel which recounts the story of the Patarcsics family. The story about the family consists of linguistic and cultural codes: Hungarian-Serbian attitudes,

Serbian-Slovak, Romanian-Hungarian national political oppositions, ambitions of assimilation, and experiments for linguistic/national self-identity.

The novel recounts Emi's view as an insight perspective into the novel. In the 1990s, Emi is in a borderline situation of either staying or leaving the country. Those years were the time of disintegration of the Yugoslav state and the beginning of new wars in the Balkans. The story starts in Novi Sad, with a recollection of a memory – the grandmother, Angeline Nenadovits, spent a whole day on a tram in 1910 – to travel through the places that once belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, rolling up the confused family story's diversified strings, and to end up with a bizarre, symbolic crack on the Vienna Express. One imbecile member of the family begins a hasty and unwitting run on the sweeping tram as if “some unknown, mighty force was pulling him back and forth. Maybe it is the same force which pulled his ascendants through generations from Graz to Szabadka, from Szeged to Isonzo, from Temesvár to Pozsony, from Novi Sad to Arad” (Juhász 2001, 94). By mentioning the main points of intersection, the quoted comment of the narrator draws up the motions of a typical family. In this sense, the novel can be characterized as a type of travelogue in which the protagonists bridge distances and separations, and make their own imaginary and realistic ways toward each other. In fact, these heroes are related to the travellers in classical epics. The heroes follow in these travellers' footsteps trying to reorganize the organic unit of historical novels. They carry damnation and anxiety in their destiny, and recall the image of a dissipated wander of medieval times. The organic unit, which is realized through the protagonists' travels and encounters, refers to the world of the Monarchy before World War I, where the families lived in a united region with no boundaries tearing them apart.

The border alterations and separations structure the constellation of the Trianon-novel. The story of Angeline Nenadovits – who spent a day on a tram in Novi Sad, not long after her father had moved the family from Vienna to another town – creates the basic tone of the novel. Travelling on the tram and thinking about her love Miro, Angeline Nenadovits had by then experienced the loss of self-identity, separation, and the cultural border situation, which would later be experienced by each and every member of her family as a form of existence through centuries: “She had a deep and sure premonition induced by the effect of strange and depressively primitive environment, that she would never see Miro again. (...) Her premonition did not deceive her. She never met Miro again. She had no news of him after 1918” (Juhász 2001, 8).

The effect of destiny in the stories of “living on the margins” is that Emi, a descendant of the family, experiences the same split up of unit and continuity, in this case in 1990, when her husband, Boro, with his Southern-Balkan views and no nostalgia for the Monarchy, emigrates, leaving her behind alone, knowing that the plan of getting together is a mere deception. They would never live together again.

Emi's and her family's sensation of foreignness and homelessness is created by the post-Monarchic lack of identity: "The difference between us is that Boro has a future perspective, while I have none, and I have never had one. Just like I've never had a homeland, only a country of birth" (Juhász 2001, 16).

Numerous reflections, allusions, determinations relate to the semantic and poetic concept of border. The most concrete information is involved in the titles of episodes. Two texts bear the title *Toward the etherealization of border*, but the other titles also refer to the meaning of the border, crossing the border, distance, absence, travelling. While the title of the chapter *Fogolyvár, nicht war?* is based on a play upon words, it relates to the concept of prison. The episode about Szeged reflects the territory and the continuity of the novel: it draws up the movement of the family story.

### **Types of borders**

The novel deals with numerous types and meanings of borders. In essence, these are territorial-political borders (e.g., the stories of border alterations according to the Trianon Peace Treaty), but they can also be linguistic and cultural barriers. We cannot follow the family line all along the novel because although the boys, Miklós and János, identify themselves as Hungarians, their mother, Cecilia "did not say anything, nor a word in Hungarian all her life, while the father, Ivan Patarcsics was convinced that the Patarcsics family was from Slovenia" (Juhász 2001, 52). Real and unreal contents and events can be connected to them. In most cases, the question of linguistic identity and the lack of self-identity are recalled. As a real historical event, the formations and alterations of political borders, subsequent to World Wars I and II, intrude into the story of the Patarcsics family: the members of the family are separated from each other staying inside and outside the borders. At the same time, the Patarcsics brothers, Miklós living in Szabadka [Subotica], and János living in Pozsony [Bratislava], have the same vision. The vision of them being lost in the Rogina Swamp, and their inability of getting out of it can be seen as imaginary spiritual borders. These represent the inner, almost metaphoric fences of the self: "I am here in the Rogina Swamp alone, I can't get out, but I told János to help me, he is nowhere to be found, he can't hear me. It is no wonder; the Rogina was buried a long time ago. Now it is under the Maria-Valeria Park. It was buried a long time ago" (Juhász 2001, 39), Patarcsics quotes his father's recurring vision. With the aim of visiting his uncle in Pozsony in the future, he recalls this vision: "Anna said that they had no idea what the Rogina was. 'Miklós, Miklós,' he cried in sheer desperation. 'Miklós, Miklós, I am here in the Rogina! Help, I can't get out of here'" (Juhász 2001, 43). The two parallel monologues connect in Endre's consciousness as his single heritage – as the narrator interprets this spatial metaphor of destiny: "(...) feeling horrified he feels

that he is sinking too, already standing in Rogina, from where he can't get out" (Juhász 2001, 52).

Angeline Nenadovits builds similar imaginary walls around herself in her last decades.

(...) In 1981, she hadn't been out of the house for at least 20 years. She would stagger out into the garden only in the early morning, turning her face toward the sun, and totter back into her dusky room. (...) She was thought to have stepped out of life, and somehow by accident only her body remained here. One morning in the summer of 1998, she did not wake up any more to take a trip on the tram, whose passenger she once was for a whole day in the early autumn of 1910. (Juhász 2001, 9)

It is only Emi and Emil who can enter her special world. They are interested in Angeline's story, so they have a chance to go back into the pre-war world. Therefore, Emil is interested in Angeline's world in order to understand the past, which determined the destiny of their ancestors and of border towns. This story of destiny usually means that "they left their native land, to settle in another town, or they didn't leave it, but they became citizens of another country because of unforeseen historical events, wars" (Juhász 2001, 6). Emi is the only one who is able to decipher the metaphor of the tram, and find it in herself. The 16-year-old Angeline is on the tram all day because she feels "there is nothing left to do without Miro, it is an exile" (Juhász 2001, 8). And then she awakes to the tragedy of her life: the nonexistence of ways towards each other. The feeling of homelessness, the tragic lack of self-identity creates a spiritual and emotional border alongside with political borders. Angeline cannot escape from the fact that she loved Miro "best in this world," while "for him, she was just one of the many" (Juhász 2001, 8). Therefore, Emi cannot follow Boro into emigration, "because she had never been able to get closer to Boro's art" (Juhász 2001, 9). She has no real connections to anybody, and the concept of homelessness is related to it. The meaning of senselessness is connected to the concept of home in her mind. She was in Hungary for the first time at the beginning of the 1960s, which "became as real as mother tongue," but "it was foreign in other perspectives" (Juhász 2001, 16). But she looks at her native land as being foreign too, "which fell apart so intensely, that we don't know where its borders are" (Juhász 2001, 16). It is very interesting that experiencing the destiny of a minority community makes her get closer to her relatives from Pozsony she has never seen before.

The emotional function, activity, and locking oneself away from the world is a specific version of a border. Emi's version is reading, while her mother, who – according to family traditions – cannot produce any emotions, takes up painting (*The trap of distances*). The family-based micro-community is a perfect copy, a

repetition of the lifestyle typical of the society: it is separated by real and emotional borders: “There is no viable way toward each other” (Juhász 2001, 28).

The episode about Temesvár [Timișoara] is remarkable because the destinies are connected to two anecdotes: the marriage of Sándor Sajtos from Szeged and Lina Rosch from Temesvár, and Lina’s tragedy. Temesvár was regarded as the Siberia of the Monarchy, where people were taken to die, or rather “those who once came here could never go away. Or, it was possible to leave, but only to the other world” (Juhász 2001, 69). This predestination sheds light on the unique, multicultural Rosch family, because grandmother Fanny’s great-grandfather arrived there from Germany on the occasion of visiting his relatives, but as he could not find any of them (they had all died of malaria), instead of turning back, he settled in the town: he was the one to suffer the damnation of the inability to leave.

Lina is the lover of distances; she is driven by compulsions of travelling and searching for something. (Her customs officer lover moved desperately far, to Fiume, and was killed in action in 1915. Later Lina falls in love with Elemér Ban, a famous contemporary writer.) She has nightmares, and she overdoses herself on the day she finishes reading Elemér Ban’s novel. She wants to get out through the town gate, but it closes right in front of her. So her destiny has a tragic paradox because she, who always wanted to escape every kind of real and imaginary gates, dies crawling and lying in front of a door, shouting “Let me in!”

### **Loss of political border and identity**

The loss of identity and tragic lives are induced by the drastic border alterations and change of political power. While the Patacsics family experience the horrors of the war – the “authorities” beat Angeline’s husband to death, the Partisans dragged away Gitta’s lawyer husband and shot him in a ditch, Amalia Eichinger never uttered a word after her sons died in the war – the family’s destiny is strongly determined by the experience of losing home as a result of border alterations. János was stuck in Pozsony in 1918. Due to a nervous breakdown caused by the experience of the horrors of the war, he could not imagine or believe that Szabadka still existed. He wrote letters to Miklós, who was in Szabadka, but they were returned by the authorities.

As if the addressee would have to change as the borders and streets had been changed. János had to wait until 1932 for a benevolent soul who had the minimum of compassion and honesty to deliver the 27<sup>th</sup> letter after the 26<sup>th</sup>, which for the Patacsics brothers was the sign of life. (Juhász 2001, 34)



A lot of parallel stories about the loss that happened in Szabadka and Pozsony reflect on the Trianon trauma.

The family relatives from Temesvár, Sándor Sajtos and his family also suffer an identity crisis caused by the new borders. Lina's restlessness and nightmares were triggered by the horrors of the war. She was always afraid that her husband (whom she did not love but saw him as the only stronghold amidst chaos) would be taken to the battlefield and get killed.

After the Trianon Peace Treaty, the family felt as if they were prisoners of a nightmare they could not get out of. The greatest disappointment was that the people changed. The Romanian families looked down upon them, while a significant number of Hungarian families disappeared.

The novel contains an episode about the tragic disappearance of acquaintances:

(...) when you come around, you feel ashamed: you feel as if you were incapable and helpless. And shame cannot turn into pride or satisfaction; you see that the cowards are abandoning the sinking ship, but you are different – you hold onto your determined position. This kind of feeling cannot satisfy you; you know that where you are is a sinking ship. There is nothing to fight for. *Horror vacui*. Fear of space, the fear of the future. You miss everybody who left. Those people as well who you did not like. (Juhász 2001, 50)

The Patarcsics family experience both border alterations as landslides: "It can't be accidental that everything happens again," János concludes (Juhász 2001, 51). However, his wife's dramatic report is about how she shook hands with three hundred of her students because by their leaving the country she became a redundant employee.

### **Linguistic and cultural line of division**

The linguistic and cultural colourfulness and variety meant richness for the Rosch family until the Trianon demarcation lines. It meant intellectual coquetry and advantage, while they impressed Sándor Sajtos, the son-in-law, with the ability of mixing the languages. This was caused by their ironic superiority of possession. Fanny (the grandmother of Sándor's wife) produced 'arias' from these mixtures of languages.

Eichinger Amália had nostalgia for the German language, so she spoke to her eldest son in German, and made him read aloud from her cherished German books. Between Sándor and his mother there is a bridge created by the language and reading. Sándor complains to his brothers, who live in Szabadka, that his daughter Réka was angry when she learned that he spoke to his grandchildren in Hungarian,

and the children spoke the language quite well. Vasile, the son-in-law, solved the problem saying “They will forget it all anyway” (Juhász 2001, 89).

The mixture of linguistic and cultural codes induces insecurity and bewilderment in the Patarcsics family. Their mother was not able to identify herself as Hungarian. She looked down on them. This aversion can be traced back to an anecdote: her father, Marko Bajić, shamed Rózsa Sándor, who called him ‘Racz.’ Her mother, Cecilia, who was not a very intellectual person, deduced her views about the Hungarian nation from the story about the outlaw, who was regarded as a coward. So according to her, being cowardly and unheroic was a more serious national imperfection than her disregard of her own Serbian identity, or abandoning her mother tongue. She did not blame her sons for changing their language, but for identifying themselves as Hungarians. Cecilia could never speak to Miklós’s wife, Ila Sajtos, because she would not speak in Hungarian, and Ila had no talent for languages. She could only say one word in Serbian, “dobordan,” and this is just because she had to, and regarded it a curse” (Juhász 2001, 60). So she was unable to understand their uncertainty of self-identity and the desire for Hungarian national self-evaluation which caused her husband’s death. For a man without any Croatian or Slovenian national identity, being Hungarian would have been the desired target. When the Russians marched into Szabadka in 1944, he died because of the language and national uncertainty: he chose death instead of changing his identity again. After the Russians came in, he had a horrifying suspicion that he would have to identify himself as a Russian after all the uncertainty and aversion he had had for decades. Feeling unwell, “he never woke up into this world any more” (Juhász 2001, 63).

### **Travelling as a way of bridging the border**

The heroes of the *Border Novel* are suffering from compulsive travelling (Toldi 2009, 84). There are parts about inner trips on a tram (Angeline Nenadovits); the travels can be imaginary (Emi’s dream about travelling) as well as compulsory, like Lina the morphinist’s trips to Kolozsvár [Cluj], which were real in the beginning.

The novel contains a few descriptions of trips, but there are three significant metaphorical travel stories containing the post-Monarchic feeling of life. The first is the Patarcsics family’s postponed and cathartic journey to Pozsony. Endre has to travel to visit his father’s brother in Pozsony to understand the multiplicity of national and familial collapse caused by border demarcations. (Endre’s wife does not love him. They got married and had children, but he feels as if he had copied the scheme, the formula of being unloved, separated from his children.)

The second travel is connected to Sándor Sajtos. He begins his journey in his hometown, Szeged, to Temesvár, but he gets off in Szabadka. He visits his sisters for a redeeming speech and confession hoping that they will understand his

frustration and fall. The speech is an opportunity to unlock the status of being separated and his crisis of identity. However, his mother remains silent forever, which means her secession from the world.

The border story, which begins with a trip by tram, rounds the most significant travel which recollects a visit to relatives in Austria in 1962. Emi's aunt has the idea to travel to Linz, to get connected with Lexi living in Austria. This trip is a failure too; it is the tragicomedy of a unit destroyed both linguistically and culturally. The communication between Lexi's family and the relatives from Szabadka is like a theatre play due to the insurmountable linguistic and cultural differences as well as borders developed through decades. So their superficial connection is represented by sightseeing.

Emi and Emil can only remember the great scene of crossing the border, just as her aunt Margit says elatedly, "We are home at last."

### **Female identity and types of border**

The novel can be read as a collection of stories and destinies of women. Therefore, it can be defined as a female gender novel or a novel written by women because the coherence is created by their being. Three significant female identities should be highlighted here. The first one is Angeline Nenadovits, who spent a day on a tram in 1910. She had to see the famous places of the town. The town quarters, the streets meant a lot to her. She remembered some significant stories, in which she composed the most important movements of her life. When she was young, she moved with her family to Novi Sad, to Rákóczi Street. As time passed, the authorities changed the street names, but she called the street by its original name. This fact reflects on her identity. She was longing for the past. She lived in past times. In her last years, she did not want to remind herself of her husband, who died before World War II. So her main activity was sitting on the tram and thinking about her late husband, or reading books containing sad stories. She confessed to Emi that she had not had dreams for a long time. She had not left the house since 1981. Her main ambition was to live in the times when people did not have to think about self-identity or borders, or identify themselves according to the country or land where they lived. She experienced the actual border demarcations, and lived within imaginary borders around herself created on her own. Everyone experienced the war, political movements in a different way. She lived in her room, and her revolution was staying in it regardless of the real period in which she lived. Her name is also very interesting. It changes according to the border. Her surname is spelt Nenadovics, Nenadović, or Nenadovity.

Ella Patarcsics, Emi and Emil's mother was unresponsive to her family. In her last years, she spent her time separated from her family. She moved back to her family house, leaving her children and husband, while her parents took her in, and

regarded her moving house as a casual activity asking nothing about the reason. It is an open question whether this was an inherited behavioural pattern or she subconsciously hid behind this scheme. Her behaviour metaphorically represents the actual border demarcations. The get-togethers with her children in the Bodis sweet-shop are like compulsions, they are conducted in silence, which is the basic tone of hopelessness. When she died, her family members found her paintings. Emi and Emil, looking at their mother's paintings, had a feeling that they, the children existed only in the pictures. The paintings were as disharmonious as their real life was. They now knew why their mother left them, because while she was painting, she realized that the reality was what the pictures showed. Ella painted portraits of unknown women and men having horrific faces. Emi's mother painted herself too, as a dead person with a wrinkled face looking into nowhere. The concept of border in her context was dual. Having created the walls around herself, she made her space boundless. She made a border between herself and her family, while living a boundless life which was represented in her painting showing imaginary worlds and creatures. As she disclosed herself from the community, she opened up her own reality.

Amália Eichinger is described as a beautiful woman. After she knew that her sons died, she stopped speaking for good. Nobody could stay with her for long. Sándor was her favourite son and she made him read from her German books. Amália could not identify herself as German, she denied her German origin. The political movements and the war made her live in eternal silence.

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## Trans Balkan: Making the Public Space of Decanonization Cosy

Ottó Fenyvesi: *Reading Dead Poets from Vojvodina*

Veronika BAKONYI

University of Szeged  
Department of Modern Hungarian Literature  
vbakonyi@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** The poetic texts of Ottó Fenyvesi's volume, *Reading Dead Poets from Vojvodina* [*Halott vajdaságiakat olvasva*], explore how the traumatized, hysterical body becomes politicized, and how the space of poem becomes a *sensorium specificum*.

The dying and the mythologems of Great Serbia, the power of the dangerous tradition to create home, marking the Serbian state boundaries, the deads's loci, the new boundaries of cemeteries on border lines are confronted in Fenyvesi's volume with the principle of "we do not put alive on the dead" ["holtra elevent nem teszünk"]. Thus, in its activity of text construction it builds a multi-system canon endeavour and influences the specific space cutoffs of the poems' texts. In Jacques Rancière's formulation, they re-politicize the poem as a *sensorium specificum*, a specific detection. These poems designate their areas of activity in the splitting of representation and the sensible, in the oscillation between these regimes, and as sensible heterogeneous blocks; in spite of the narrative continuity of biographical summaries and the artists' **diaries** these poems oscillate between the linguistic element and raw presence, constantly playing with our sign reading capability. This dialectic of works, their way of being, the artistic practices link the "common" beyond the visible and thinkable regime, beyond the erosion of figurative subject's semiotics in order to reparcel the sensible again and again, to dismiss the holders of the speech again and again, and, respectively, suspend the symbolic and material constitutions that create the common as well as the forms of everyday experience of the sensible.

**Keywords:** *Sensorium specificum*, hysterical body, aesthetic regime, reconfiguration of a multi-system canon, poetic text

Although according to a statement by Guy Debord (1992) without historical consciousness (*sens historique*) we can easily be manipulated and thus no biographical truth can ever be assumed, let me quote an extract from the diary, restarted/continued and continuously published, by Ottó Fenyvesi, who moved from Yugoslavia to Veszprém in 1991. We can do so, since he himself also turns into poetry Géza Csáth's cultic diary as well as his good friend's, the painter Imre Sáfrány's diaries written in Paris. The entry is from 1998:

I'm reading dead poets from Vojvodina. I would like to write a cycle of poems ... They are all strange figures, forgotten or disinherited by almost everybody. (...) Of course, I would also include those whom I knew personally but died in the meantime: Ferenc Fehér, Feri Tóth, Jóska Podolszki, Jancsi Sziveri. The first poem has already been finished. (Fenyvesi/Orcsik 2009, 34)

The volume *Reading Dead Poets from Vojvodina* [*Halott vajdaságiakat olvasva*] was published more than ten years after this diary entry, however, the texts appearing later in the volume had been spread and published in various magazines. Through their presence the metaphoricity, uniquely experienced and bloodstained, of a minority existence in making (*devenir*) is constantly made visible. By their lines of escape they raise the Vojvodinian roots, the mulberry trees of the Great Plains into an imaginary space, reinforcing the dual context. Finally, the book appears with the tint-drawing of András Hangya on the cover – illustrating a “plundered” landscape providing a special, “sweltered” monochrome yellow background, making use of the previous working title [*Reading Dead Poets from Vojvodina*] and focusing on the loci of the dead, promising to be the first part of upcoming volumes.

However, this presence also testifies the centaur entity in Vojvodina, the modality of experiencing otherness/alterity coded as a Vojvodinian one.

Let me make a personal intermezzo. I have never seen Csáth's diary, treated as a cultic text, which Csáth perhaps wrote in the short period of abstinence in 1912–13 that he spent as a spa doctor, and which is about his morphine and trance dependence and about the ladies obtained in a considerable quantity. This diary may have broken several taboo-codes: the experiences related in the mimetic monotony, the programme of measurable delight, the experiment of “life optimum” offended the social views on drug usage/suicide. For me this diary, this hiding fetish as a subversive look showed the possibility of the line of escape from provincialism for the first time, when during every conversation in Vojvodina at least once the issue came up whether I had already seen the Csáth diary, in which hearts and plus signs are drawn as markers for the account of the female clientele. Then, in 1995, a volume appeared in Szeged, with the title *Pink Plaster* [*Rózsaszín*

*flastrom*], containing interviews with Vojvodinian writers. The idea which gave the title of the volume came from one of Ottó Tolnai's stories: instead of his permanent artistic programme, that of writing a Tisza-book, he began to write about a spa doctor. He came across Géza Csáth's diary, in which something was covered by a pink (flesh-coloured) plaster. And then, together with his master, István Domonkos, they often thought with a furtive horror that under the unremovable patch there might have been a secret that Csáth had discovered. That "beautiful horror" was formulated in Tolnai's book, in which each poem bears the title "árvacsáth." On the other hand Tolnai, in one of his stuttering, "sweet potato"-like conversations (*Poet Made of Lard [Költő disznózsírból]*), declares: "When I say gold nail, it is not the metaphor I see but I am horrified, because on the painting of Faragó, there, in Zagreb, I touched, I checked them" (Tolnai 2004, 67). Thus, the metaphors, the law of obtaining the motifs as well as the ideological inscriptions do not only serve as testimony or symptoms but are all empathy, performance, having many entrances and exits.

At Tolnai the response to the mystery behind this flesh-coloured patch is bleeding through the texts bearing the name "árvacsáth," while at Ottó Fenyvesi the traumatic response is the image of the worm gobbling the yellow humus of Bácska, engulfing the earth through the body of Nagyapáti Kukac Péter [Peter *Worm Nagyapáti*], or it can be found in the relations of his biographic and poetic texts: in the poetic programme, "action concentrate" of *poem into the vein* (quoted from the volume's first poem).

Tracking the "sweet potato" references, we should make a reference here to the relationship between Gilles Deleuze and music, since Deleuze claimed that once he would have liked to prepare a lecture the way Bob Dylan organized and created a song. In a previous volume of his, Ottó Fenyvesi hallmarks the third verse of his poem *Apparent Similitudes with Strawberries [Látszathasonlóságok földieperrel]* by Bob Dylan's song entitled *When the Dogs Run Free*. The mulberry-grafts deposited in the body of Bácska's plain, the yellow, amorphous forms of fried egg, the cloud fragments in this dog's life make the canon wriggle out of the terror of mimetic representation, thus creating a specific singular body which holds the promise of a new collective life – together with the endeavours of a multi-system canon. Along the nomadic image experience, in the acquisition of a nomadic metaphor experience, along the lines of escape from the dual context connected to the minority, in the rhizomatic text progression of further undeclinable bloody images, they draw the lines, the boundaries of the map in a way that the escape becomes an elopement as well. That is, it is the most active thing in the ideology par excellence, or, if you wish, in the contemplation of the spectacle. And this elopement (*fuite*) is never an elopement to the outside (*fuite hors-de*), while it creates a specific tension in the context of these endeavours. By initiating a dialogue, a community of dialogue, Fenyvesi writes the following in his



volume-opening poem: “You led me into literature, / and I will lead you out” (Fenyvesi 2009, 9). Instead of the apparent similitudes of pseudo-culture and pseudo-knowledge, instead of the overestimation of identities, in modeling the elimination of the dichotomy of the Hungarian-Serbian border, the metaphorization and the reconfiguration of the mobile canon and identity will result in every poem being an outburst, a harakiri, a crash, and also settling in the homeland. Thus, for example, thanks to the intense disorganization and dispersedness, Yugoslavness and, with this volume, Vojvodina become poetic *figures*, avoiding the language of the generalized separation of the totalitarian gesture (the redefined loci of the dead, the rearranged cemetery borders of the great Serbian state, the dream of Great Serbia). However, escape means suicide, too.

As an example, I have first chosen a poem from Fenyvesi’s volume entitled, before the edition in a volume, *Freely After Csáth* [*Csáth után szabadon*], although it unfortunately lost this title as well as its subtitle – *poem into the vein* [*vers a vénába*] –, which, by its mind-altering performative virtue, beyond the list of names of the volume, submitted the repeatedly designated common territory of the poems to a specific transliteration, together with the collective promise of a trip of specific perception.

The Csáth-text by Fenyvesi, just like every other text from *Reading Dead Poets from Vojvodina*, is accompanied by biographical notes (referring to Sándor Weöres’s *Three Sparrows with Six Eyes* [*Három veréb hat szemmel*]), characterizing in a few sentences the Vojvodinian artist placed in the focus of the conversation through dates, occupations, and special-arbitrary stresses. Thus, the data typologically seeming “little nothings,” hotch-potch [“gezemicék”], the facts of zones/areas of experience, their own outside begin to occupy the **own canon** as a common territory. The footnote accompanying the Csáth-text is somewhat lengthier than the other ones; moreover, within the text of the poem it is strategically repeated in the bordering verses of the poem that this is the first appearance of the circumstances of Csáth’s death. The repetition, the translocation, the hiding of the body, the total/totalitarian hiding of death and of the dead body, will be an act of lifting it to the level of the text. At the same time, it will be the act of escape too, which, instead of mimetic substitution, of the possession of representation, of the expansion of violent mythologems, will call forth the reconfiguration of public space. – I quote the note:

(...) On 11 September 1919, he escapes from the hospital, he wants to go to Budapest but Serbian soldiers arrest him at Kelebia, on the demarcation line. He takes pantopon in large quantities and dies. His body was taken back to Subotica in a peasant chariot covered by weed and grass. (Fenyvesi 2009, 14)

However, the failure of the attempt to escape at the demarcation line is resolved by the fact that a contemporary poet from Vojvodina, rejecting the

classification of metaphorization, helps to escape such clusters of the Csáth oeuvre which, with the method of the rhizomatic approach (as they call it, with their sweet potato-like mentality, or crying rootlessly) of the common terra, the humus of Bácska, resists the endeavours of the centralist work of canonization and contexts. At the same time, this is a sort of self-criticism of the earlier Fenyvesi poems.

However, the interception and getting through the demarcation line, the possibility of *trans* in the case of Csáth's oeuvre, the permanently fugitive text of the **diary**, generating dialogues from time to time and becoming verse, builds the Fenyvesi oeuvre in a similar way as Csáth makes the selection of his own, bath city female canon in the field of dating. Beyond the rule of pornographic nudity, the body-redundancy of the diary (while Fenyvesi also follows the exact history of the coitus and measurable fever), it is the text itself that answers the question hidden behind the pink plaster: by distending the similitude, the series of the singular bodies until the unbearable, the "law for obtaining motifs," the line of "receiving free line" and the omelette of the "Casanova breakfast" extracted from the rendezvous with the women reveal the lines of escape of such a text in which the multiple contexts and the rhizomorphic operation result in close reading, but the translocation takes place on several levels. The sometimes verbatim quotations of fragments of the diary, being present as intertexts, are enclosed among Fenyvesi's lines, so the **meeting** creates a common space, a specific sensation area of translocation. Instead of copying, instead of the juxtaposition of apparent similitudes and of the loci of the corpse, the encounter of Me with the Other, bypassing the terror of form, gets across ("Saving differently" – Kosztolányi).

While these texts reconfigure the literary field of canons and inspire new work on centralist canonization, they also refer to a map that we want to create with its sweet potato-likeness (Deleuze and Tolnai). Within a post-totalitarian discourse (in the diachrony of the dream of the national state of Great Serbia), the loci of the dead are not adjusted to the demarcation lines, forming other fake mythologems, instead, the texts exploit the bleeding of motifs, getting over intertextuality through the rhetoric of the war machine, and dragging the poem beyond the wounded war machine and finally, transferring through another rhetorical machinery, psychoanalysis and punk momism, the Balkan cradle. Thus, we are directed to two questions: how is meeting or dialogue possible in any kind of totalitarian narrative or mimetic display? Considering the category mermaids of thought (now of mainly artistic and cultural thought), no longer as temptation, how can we understand each other from "half-words," how is it possible to steal codes, then to spread them about, not as nomads but as bandits, guerillas?

Taking advantage of the dual context, the mulberry and strawberry snip a field from time to time (for example, the scene of becoming a poet, as part of the oeuvre), and thereby create the method of settling in a common area. It is this particular, confined sensation experience, the redistribution of the discernible that

moves and therefore mutually infects the apocryphal and aesthetical canons. “The mulberry-grafts settle / in our body, the dirt shows through the nail polish,” or “The city and the homeland are Via negative” [“Testünkben lerakódnak az / eperfaoltványok, a piszok átüt a körömlakkon,” “A város és a szülőföld via negatíva”] (Fenyvesi 2004, 66-67). These affirmations do not become lines of death, not even instead of corroding the lines of demarcation of history; they do not block the nomadic derivative, the ethics of which is to give up moving in order to experience the demands of an area until they become our blood.

Naturally, in this self-affirmation we can catch the way of speaking of the Ex Symposium period, which, instead of a centralist, essential canonization, is nourished by the art center of all nations of former Yugoslavia, moreover, it raises this tension at the level of ontology which counts with the discourse of the Yugoslav wars, that of the war machine, the violent breakup of the alliance, the violent collections of mythologems. However, during the continuous experience of converting and not lost in the demonic, it always lets itself be confronted with being disjointed by the Other, and annexing the principles of the impossibility of getting rid of alienation, it decentralizes the endeavours of canonization of Vojvodinian literature. According to Alpár Losoncz (2002), it avoids the encryption of metaphors, and the safety of ideology is contextualized as the mixture of the individual’s movement on micro-anarchical tracks. The dying and the mythologems of Great Serbia, the power of the dangerous tradition to create home, marking the Serbian state boundaries, the deads’s loci, the new boundaries of cemeteries on border lines are confronted in Fenyvesi’s volume with the principle “we do not put alive on dead” [“holtra elevent nem teszünk”]. Thus, in its activity of text construction it builds a multi-system canon endeavour and influences the specific space cutoffs of the poems’ texts.

Indeed, the closing of these poems into themselves does not support the narrative of the settled, despite the biographical summaries always preceding the poems, or the often arbitrary listing, or the poems do not become visible or thinkable in the discourse of the images of representation, but – in the formulation of Jacques Rancière – they re-politicize the poem as a *sensorium specificum*, a specific detection. These poems designate their areas of activity in the splitting of representation and the sensible, in the oscillation between these regimes; and as sensible heterogeneous blocks, in spite of the narrative continuity of biographical summaries and the artists’ **diaries** these poems oscillate between the linguistic element and raw presence, constantly playing with our sign reading capability. This dialectic of works, their way of being, the artistic practices link the ‘common’ beyond the visible and thinkable regime, beyond the erosion of figurative subject’s semiotics in order to reparcel the sensible again and again, to dismiss the holders of the speech again and again, and suspend respectively the symbolic and material constitutions that create the common as well as the forms of everyday experience

of the sensible. I quote Rancière: “The art is policy just by the fission (...) in the way it cuts, cuts off, disconnects people, the crowd and this time from this space” (Rancière 2004, 36-37). As a result, the practices and forms of art themselves intervene to reconfigure the sensible. Thus, in the very search of the sites of uncontrolled heterogeneity, beyond the law of the mimetic, this mechanism is reflected in the way of being of a literary work, and this sensorium specificum, this singular body cut out again and again in space and time – the poem in the vein or the cool body of Nagyapáti Kukac fed from the humus of Bácska – gets politicized, and this aesthetic regime incorporates its own independent area or practice in individual works of art, as well as the new forms of a collective life and their identification.

It makes all this in a way that, according to Fenyvesi’s diary, the earliest poem underlining the act of reading and thus the gesture of self-effacement reflects on that tone of Fenyvesi’s earlier volumes which imbue the strong textuality placed behind the cries of punk music, the democratic formalism, the ideological inscriptions with blasphemies: the first poem designates with its two starting lines the creation of a common consensus, the metapolitical status of the poem as a genre which disprove the space materially devoted to it: “I no longer know what and whom I can trust. / They do not give a damn to poems, poetry is in crisis” [“Már nem tudom miben és kiben bízzak. / Szarnak a versre, válságban a líra.”] (Fenyvesi 2009, 7). However, the common terrain is looking for its own legibility in the practices of art, and it treats the “commonplace,” instead of the terror of forms or the violent mythologems, by the act of smudging, by the smudging of forms to make them become amorphous. In this way the commonplace is interpreted as the locus of a new collective memory to be made public – in the metaphorical scheme of dying. We read in the opening poem: “I smudge the stars of the night, / the most beautiful clichés of literature. / Tuba mirum. The requiem refuels” [“Maszatom az éjnek csillagait, / a világirodalom legszebb közhelyeit. / Tuba mirum. Tankol a rekviem”] (Fenyvesi 2009, 9). Or in one of the long poems of the volume which initiates a dialogue with Péter Kukac Nagyapáti and with Imre Sáfrány and addresses his oeuvre that disappeared in *flaming images* (his paintings, representations had burned on an attic), and whose diary is also summoned, the commonplace and the metaphorization of dying, so the identity of anti-matter wins its presence in the heterogeneous sites, and its work creates dissensus which makes plastic the canon, thus also the collective, again and again: “Just load the luggage solemnly, bravely / The taxi arrives soon. / Sooner or later, everything becomes poor commonplace, / so let’s hear the diagnosis at last” [“Csak ünnepélyesen, bátran fölpakolni / a málhákat. A taxi mindjárt megérkezik. / Előbb-utóbb minden közhellyé silányul, / halljuk végre a diagnózist”] (Fenyvesi 2009, 130).

Thus, with the yellow background of the humus of Bácska, in the yellow summer of *Meridian Sweltering Savagery* [*Tikkasztó délköri vadság*], by the permanent reconfiguration of the canon, this volume of poetic texts summons the

bursting from the mother earth, and its symbolic implications, as the hysterical body drags another body again and again to itself, as the minority being will periodically return to the starting point of the trauma, to the hot spots of “running to waste,” as the discourse of biographies always suggests the occurrence of another tragedy at any time, and as – I quote from the poem at the end of the book before Fenyvesi locates himself at the end of the volume by his biographical portraits, and in which Bob Dylan’s protest songs are also evoked: “Navvy shovelling the yellow ground. Nimbly as a worm. P. Nagyapáti. (...) Sometimes he closed his eyes and was gone far away (...)” [“Sárgaföldet lapátoló kubikos. Fürgén, mint a kukac. Nagyapáti Pé. [...] Néha lehunyta szemét és messze járt (...)”] (Fenyvesi 2009, 168).

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## **The Turn. Liviu Rebreanu's Hungarian Drama and Drama Fragments**

Béla BÍRÓ

Sapientia University  
Department of Humanities  
bbela@planet.ro

**Abstract.** The paper focuses on that moment of Liviu Rebreanu's activity as a writer when his linguistic turn takes place. The author of Romanian nationality living in the Hungarian state before Trianon, who, according to the ambitions of the family wishing to rise, pursues his school studies in the Hungarian language, writes his first literary experiments (dramas, novel fragments and short stories) in Hungarian. However, while writing the drama fragment entitled *Gigi (Ghigi)*, the writer, dismissed from the army and going through an existential crisis, continues to write in Romanian; through a few pages he translates the text started in Hungarian into Romanian, then he continues it exclusively in Romanian. But the change of the target public – due to significant social and cultural differences – does not make it possible for him to render the selected life material of autobiographical character as originally planned. The text remains in a fragmentary form.

The adequate rendering of the autobiographical motifs chosen as the materials of the first works can take place only in his great novels (first of all in *Ion* and in *The Forest of the Hanged [Pădurea spânzuraților]*), as long as it is in these that the author and his public (implicitly the narrator of the novels and the fictitious readers) can really meet. Based on the reconsideration of the problem of form-content, the study follows the changes that the autobiographical motifs undergo in the communicative space of successive works, as well as the functional mechanisms of rendering.

**Keywords:** material and form, form-content, content-form, life material, narrative situation, target public, cultural-social contexts

## Material and form

In the study of literature the inseparability of form and content, as a matter of principle, already counts as a commonplace today, however, the view stoutly survives in the practice of literary criticism, of literary analysis and of writing literary history, according to which the most general cause of artistic failures is that the author – during the process of creating the literary work – is not capable of finding the form corresponding to the content. However, this assumption can only mean that, still, content and form differ. It is only and exclusively in this case that we can expect them to correspond to each other.

In my view, the reason for the confusion is that theory does not make a clear difference between what is usually called material and content respectively. For what we generally call content is in fact material in the case of literature and the other arts as well. Presumably everybody would agree with me in the fact that the primary *material* of the literature of all times is the authorial experience, which is also called life material usually, totally irrespective of whether the experience is real or imaginary. It is the *original form of this life material* moulded by the author during the process of creation that is traditionally called “content.”

However, in the case of the literary work, as it is observed, after Louis Hjelmslev, also by Antoine Compagnon (2008, 40), we also have to reckon with another material, namely, the *material of expression*, that is, the linguistic material in the case of literature, contours, nuances and colours in the case of fine arts and film, as well as musical sound in the case of music. The form of these *materials*, also *moulded by the artist, is the artistic form*.

The *aesthetic form* (and this is what I would add) is the consonance of the two, while the *aesthetic value* is the *degree of the equivalence* (adequacy) *between the two forms*. In this approach the material and the form are indeed inseparable, as even the most “shapeless” material (e.g., the air) also has some kind of form, in other words, it is perceptible in some way, and also the form itself can become perceptible only as the form of some material. Even the thought can appear only in a linguistic-logical or emotional form respectively, and the latter can be concretized only in thoughts.

It can also become clear that what theory understands by the terms form and content is nothing else but the artistic rendering of the original life material in accordance with the author’s artistic purposes. But we also have to see that the original form primarily shows here the particularities of the material, while in the result it is again the features of the form that seem to prevail. However, during the further treatments of the motif these form features can become themselves the materials of newer artistic renderings. Thus, it seems to be the matter of the viewpoint when and how we will (primarily) perceive that unnamable entity by which we understand form and content. Of course, this is also valid as regards the



material and the form of expression. And although in the case of literature the former *figure* – which can also be called *inner form* – can appear only in linguistic form, indeed, the mental figures of these two forms are not necessarily identical, as a consequence, so that a real work of art should come to life, they really have to correspond to each other.

The possibility of mutual correspondence (since language in itself, as sounding, cannot much resemble the life material itself) is created by the fact that the two materials moulded in distinct ways can be traced back to the same material-form complex, to the figures of imagination. The linguistic communication represented by the literary work can raise in the human mind experiences of the same nature as those raised by the original experience (the rendering of life material). This is understandable, since according to today's psychological theories, the everyday experiences (the existence of the outer world and the happenings and actions taking place within) are mind constructs similar to the world of literary works (Glasersfeld 1997, 132-149). What is more, as Paul Ricoeur proved it in his work *Temps et récit* (Ricoeur 1983-1984-1985), the everyday experiences called by him *pre-narrative* are also organized by artistic narrative schemes or by ones of analogous origin. That is, the process gets closed within itself: it is not only the life material that grounds literature, but the narrative structures worked out in literature (and in its antecedents, in the linguistic world view, and in the mythologies built on it) also have a determining role in turning the events of the outer world into life materials.

Thus, the question of the life material is impossible to ignore as regards art, also despite the fact that starting with the so-called immanentist literary theories (see, for instance, Jefferson-Robey 1995, 27-105), the study of literature prefers to exclude the question of authorial life experience, taken in the above dual sense, from the scope of literary research.

As it would be inconsistent if the life material could become the starting point of the analysis only if the moulded (more precisely, transformed) life material is of secondary, that is, of literary origin (see intertextuality!). The aesthetic performance depends, also in this case, on the transformations effectuated on the literary motif, subject, theme, topos (that is, artistic rendering).

The success can be grounded, also in this case, by the choice of material disposing of adequate form features – that is, literally offering itself to literary expression through its original form features. Just as in the case of the so-called life material.

### **The start of Rebreanu's career as a writer**

The above considerations can acquire a special significance as regards Liviu Rebreanu's activity as a writer. As it is well-known, the author's most significant

works are based, without exception, on personal or community experiences. Even in the case of works such as *The Uprising* [*Răscoala*], about which the author could not have had personal experiences, but which are based on treatments, with a documentary-like fidelity, of well-known historical events.

Several motifs of the author's biography achieve mature completeness during their occurrence in various literary genres. By surveying the author's early drama, then prose experiments written in the Hungarian language, as well as certain aspects of his mature works, the present paper tries to follow, respectively, to explore, within the length provided by the present framework, the process of mutual correspondence of the inner and outer forms.

The frame conditions of this process are set by the relationship between the author and his virtual public. The author is predestined to strong ambition by the family environment, by the social ambitions of his mother and father rising from the ranks. And as every ambitious young man, he longs for quick and spectacular success. It is well-known that in the capitals of the age of dualism, both in Vienna and in Budapest, theatre is one of the most important forums of social life, accessible also for the middle layers, on which the people from the top of social hierarchy can also appear regularly. For an ambitious, freshly assimilated young man, who gradually also has to realize that the military career, chosen as the means of social rise, cannot fulfil the hopes attached to it, the possibility of a playwright's career would naturally arise. As drama does not require lasting effort, as the novel does, and the success is immediate and direct.

Thus, it can be considered natural that Rebreanu tries out this first.

### ***The Whirl***

The basic material of the first full (three-act) and completed dramatic work is literary. It is written in 1907–1908. It is characterized by an obsolete Neo-Romanticism, by a strong epigone-like character. It contains reminiscences of Schiller, Gorkij, and Knut Hamsun, demonic and angelic figures, a live conflict focused on the inner torments of the heroine, and finally, on her desperate gesture. It is full of naïvely romantic revolutionary character, blind adherence to the given word (to some extent in the spirit of Schiller's *Intrigue and Love*). It is about the melodramatic self-sacrifice of the girl saving her love, implying the ironic futility of sacrifice.

The title versions – *The Anarchist*, *Rivals*, and finally *The Whirl* – show the gradual intensification of the tendency of psychological realism. The social and aesthetic ideology aligning with the supposed state of mind and expectations of the Hungarian viewers is well discernible. The foreignness of Grazzini, the intriguer, the Hungarian spirit of Barchay, the protagonist, the monarchist fidelity of Laár, the protagonist's uncle – are all manifestations of the assimilative mentality (to be

more Hungarian than the Hungarians). And it is this that the melodramatic style characteristic of the stages from Vienna and Budapest of the turn of the century arises from. However, so that Rebreanu should have a success, he does not know his chosen public well enough yet, and besides, so that his work should become successful and enduring from an artistic point of view, he knows it too well.

The main motifs of the play are as follows: female passion also capable of the greatest sacrifice for the beloved man under the given social circumstances (even risking the man's love), the sacredness to ad absurdum of the given word (becoming ungrounded in the meantime), the wild-romantic drama of the plotter also assuming the odium of regicide for the sake of the love obtained by extortion. The romantic life material, the realistic linguistic-dramaturgical rendering striving for psychological authenticity are opposed to each other, so instead of reinforcing each other – with some kind of aesthetic resonance –, or instead of the author's making use of the dramatic tension between them, in fact they destroy each other. The incongruence of the inner and outer forms undermines the aesthetic effect. In the theatrical world the experiment will not be welcomed, not even in spite of the author's hustle. Later Rebreanu himself writes about his first dramatic attempts: "I kept persuading the theatre directors to put them on stage. I was convinced that they were very good" (Donea 1935, 3). However, their performance was out of the question.

### **A new source: the personal experience material**

Presumably he himself is aware of the cause of failure. He tries to search for more authentic life material, also more profoundly known by him. It seems evident that in what follows he takes as a basis his own and his family's world of experiences.

The two directly experience-based conflict kernels of the early works are related to the social situation of the family. Both his father and his mother are of peasant descent. The only difference is that the mother, who is originally intended to get married to a "suitable" man, derives from a wealthier family. But in the meantime the family grows poor, the mother has to get married to a primary school teacher, which she perceives as a kind of *mésalliance* all through her life. But even the middle-class rise can be realized only partially, there is an everlasting gap between the modest primary school teacher's wages and the middle-class pretensions.

Nevertheless, they want to lift their children out of this form of existence. As concerns Liviu, the most obvious opportunity is the career of an intellectual, and within, the military career. However, the path to this leads almost exclusively through assimilation. True, the military career also implies the possibility of rising into the aristocracy. But this should also be accompanied by an aristocratic

lifestyle. And in this there lies one of the cruellest paradoxes of the peculiar liberalism of the Monarchy. The military career bearing the promise of the rise as well as the lack of material grounds of the aristocratic lifestyle compels the young officers of civilian descent into a tragic dead-end. The 1907 “embezzlement,” the forced residence, the dismissal from the army, the conviction and imprisonment known from sublieutenant Olivér Rébrán’s biography are also the consequences of this paradox.

The other family experience: the elder sister Lívia Rebreanu’s maiden passion, then forced marriage. The formation of the so-called “young lady’s” self-consciousness and – for lack of a proper dowry – the necessary failure of the marriage attempt proper for a lady can also be regarded as the female version of the failure accompanying the military career. As it is only a rich dowry that could create the possibility of a socially advantageous marriage.

The author directly converts both themes, acquiring the status of specific motifs in the following period of creation, into the basic material of narrative and dramatic texts. In both cases the basic conflict is based on the contrast between appearance and reality, and as such, it is essentially of comic character.

### ***Second Lieutenant Valkó***

The play, also planned to be a three-act one, is the dramatic rendering of the first theme. We already know the facts of the biography, and also the paradox of the Monarchy. For lack of a material background, keeping up the appearance of belonging to the upper class is possible only at the cost of norm breaking for the young non-commissioned officer. As testified by the draft of a letter addressed to a bank-clerk of Romanian nationality (Gheran 1980, 1155), Rebreanu runs into serious debt, then he is constrained to lay hands on the money of the regiment he is in charge of. However, the bank does not lend the sum of money necessary for solving the situation. Tragedy becomes inevitable.

We dispose of life facts as regards a failed love relationship (and marriage plan respectively) (Gheran 1980, 1157).

The facts of the drama fragment are as follows: second lieutenant Valkó tries to keep up with the appearances of the lifestyle of an officer. But the inevitable failure also dooms the young officer’s love passion to failure.

Thus, there is a clear connection between Olivér Rébrán’s 500 florins that disappeared “without a trace” (Gheran 1980, 1155) and second lieutenant Valkó’s lavish spending to keep up the appearances – financed from the regiment’s cashier. It suggests the relative purity of self-perception that what Rebreanu officially denies (Gheran 1980, 1155), he publicly admits it in a literary form. The main reason for the failure of the dramatic attempt is the paradoxical character of the tragic tone. What is deeply tragical from the point of view of the hero, is base from

the viewpoint of the receiver, and this is why it can count as a pitiable act at the very most. The projection upon each other of the two viewpoints would result in a comic effect. However, the view of the Chekhovian comedy seeming suitable for the treatment of the topic is unattainable for the author at the time. The melodramatic approach of the comic life material, again, results in the incongruence of the inner and outer forms. And this threatens with the destruction of the aesthetic experience ... In this way Rebreanu is constrained to give up his attempt to struggle with the theme.

Nevertheless, he does not give up the fight. He tries his wings in narrative form. He works up the topic in short stories (*The Second Lieutenant, Mr Lieutenant, The Major*), as well as in the novel fragment published in Romanian translation in no. 3 from 1975 of the journal entitled Manuscriptum under the title *Cazarma [The Barracks]* (Gheran 1980, 1156). With a modest success. Eventually he drops this too personal (and painful) motif. Similar reminiscences of *The Forest of the Hanged [Pădurea spânzuraților]* are no longer about social illusions, but about the conflicts, tragic indeed (and actual till now), of the concepts of the civil vs. cultural nation. Here the paradoxes related to the lifestyle of an officer fit into an adequate framework. History confronts the integrated officer with his renounced identity. The social problems also appear in a national perspective. The almost perfect unity of the outer and inner forms is also enhanced by the much more flexible possibilities of narrative rendering.

### ***Gigi (Ghighi)***

The story of his sister Livia's love also becomes the material of a dramatic and narrative motif, evolving in a complex manner. In the writer's legacy the manuscripts of the plans of three dramas survived (Gheran 1980, 1161-1169). In the first version there are only Hungarian names and first names. In later versions (there are several ones) there are Hungarian family and first names. In the final version only Romanian family and first names occur. The biography background is that in the meantime Rebreanu is dismissed from the army.

The fullest surviving drama fragment is also significant for us because we can catch in the act the author's linguistic-cultural turn.

The first two scenes are written in Hungarian, but there already occur Romanian text parts in it. The third scene is already bilingual, Rebreanu starts to translate the Hungarian text into Romanian, through a few replicas the Hungarian and Romanian texts run in parallel, then it continues exclusively in Romanian. And at the end of the act the play comes to an end. Rebreanu cannot write the planned second and third acts, as he realizes with a good sense that Ghighi and his mother's turnabout is impossible to carry out – on the stage – with psychological authenticity.

That is, the virtual form of the life material and the actual linguistic-dramaturgical form of the play continue to exclude each other. And Rebreanu himself also feels this. And not even stepping from one language medium into the other one proves to be suitable for solving the problem. However, the change of perspective, in a narratological sense, is illuminating by all means.

### **The Consequences of the Perspective Change**

The comic character is explicitly present already in the first version. And as it is attested by some brilliantly executed linguistic solutions as well as some well-explored dramatic ambiguity, Rebreanu would also have a comic vein. But: the Hungarian satire of the snobbishness would basically represent a social phenomenon, whereas the Romanian satire of the snobbishness automatically gains national overtones. The one who wants to “rise” into the upper class, has to assimilate at the same time. The satirical tone (thanks to the newly formed national perspective) is reinforced, but Rebreanu, the assimilant can (then not *yet*, later *no longer*) get to the phase of facing the problem of assimilation. In absence of this, he can try to find a way out only in the moralizing retorts of the wealthy paternal uncle having a great authority in the given situation. The emancipatory pathos of the free choice of the spouse and the “common sense,” based on an archaic (but at this time already hopelessly obsolete) wisdom, of the uncle are, unfortunately, not only incompatible, but also profoundly grotesque. And Rebreanu is much too talented not to perceive this (in spite of his biases – characteristic of his entire life work, in some of its features reasonable, in others not – towards the values of the peasant world) ...

### **The afterlife of the motif**

The dramatic possibility of solving the conflict would be provided this time as well, by the Chekhovian tragi-comedy. In Rebreanu’s case, if he had chosen assimilation, these chances would also have existed. If not, there would remain the recognition of the human and social values of the son-in-law preferred by the parents, the melodramatic “turn,” the revaluation of the national middle class. However, at this moment Rebreanu’s sense of reality makes not even this possible.

The figure of Ghighi from the sketch *The Row* [*Cearța*], then Laura and Ghighi from *Ion* (the first Rebreanu-novel which remains the most significant all through), realize a third, narrative version, in which Laura will act Ghighi’s role.

Laura is in love with a rich medical student called Aurel Ungureanu (the love of the model from the biography, Livia Rebreanu, is also a medical student called Aurel Sasu, and the connection of the names, Sasu, Ungureanu, is not accidental either). However, the husband chosen by the parents is a graduate theologian,

George Pinteá (it is also not accidental that his name reminds of the legendary hero of the Romanian folk ballads, Pinteá Viteazul!). And George, of course, is no longer bald as his alter ego from the play, he is only short.

The descendant of the father (the young man teaching in the state school) will be the younger daughter Ghighi's husband. But here there is no trace of the earlier conflict. What is more, the episode will be downright crystallized as one moment of the solution of the basic conflict. The new primary school teacher will have the possibility to pass on the old Herdelea's conscientiousness and honour into the nation-state looming, even unexpressedly, on the horizon of the novel.

### **The solution of the paradox**

The motif gets into a new social context, acceptable also for the reader. Laura falls in love with a man devoted to a national ideal and gets married into a great family – symbolizing the demographic foundation of the Romanian national ideal. In this context the contrast between appearance and reality can be solved for the benefit of reality (the community self-realization of the citizen of Romanian nationality), with idyllic overtones. The satire gets domesticated into a slight irony – which can hardly be perceived in the beginning, but which is reinforced by the ending (Bíró 2009, 145-164).

The problem of assimilation does not appear later on either. It is understandable why. After the formation of Great Romania the assimilation becomes questionable on the Hungarian part. However, Rebreanu's exceptionally sensitive empathy in other respects (necessarily?) escapes this question. Unfortunately, since if he had not ignored it, he could have formed a more up-to-date standpoint also as regards the Hungarians from Transylvania who had become part of the Romanian monarchy and rejected assimilation, in this way he may have influenced the relationship between the two nations in a more positive way.

Rebreanu's texts written in Hungarian perplex their readers by their impeccable Hungarian language. If we did not know that the mother tongue of their writer is Romanian, we could not realize this in any way. What is more, at the time of writing these texts, the author knows the Hungarian literary language better than the Romanian one. He has the opportunity of getting to know the latter – in a deeper sense of the word – only after he settles in Bucharest. What is peculiar is that after the text in Ghighi he never writes a word in Hungarian again. He virtually breaks off all relations with the Hungarian culture. Today we can think only with nostalgia of the fact what services a writer disposing of Rebreanu's knowledge and abilities could have done to the rapprochement between the two nations. It is, of course, not Rebreanu who is primarily responsible for the fact that this (mostly) did not take place, but mainly the Hungarian political regime, which made this rapprochement impossible within the framework of the Hungarian state by having

tried to impose assimilation, by direct and indirect means, upon its citizens of Romanian mother tongue and culture.

### **The addressee and the message**

The changed addressee (that is, the Romanian reader advanced into a majority) no longer perceives in *Ion* the basic conflict characteristic of the life material. In the perspective of the national unity the Herdelea family suddenly turns into the upper middle class. It is exactly this intellectual layer that Great Romania raises to the top of social hierarchy. At least apparently!

However, this is already another story, which others (Mateiu Caragiale, Camil Petrescu, Cezar Petrescu, Mihail Sebastian) will make the raw material of the artistic expression, for another public ...

*Translated by Judit Pieldner*

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## **Among Cultural Models. The Metaphors of Journey, Strangers and Inhabitants in Sándor Hunyady's Oeuvre**

Krisztina KOVÁCS

University of Szeged  
Department of Modern Hungarian Literature  
karanovo@gmail.com

**Abstract.** The aim of the paper is to present Sándor Hunyady's American-themed writings. He was a popular author of the periodical *Nyugat*, his novels and short stories are chiefly about the idea of the city and the countryside. The analysis deals with the categories of the experience of strangeness in the writer's American short stories. In his interpretation the United States is a comprehensive cultural model, which is similar to the Central European area. On the one hand, Sándor Hunyady's American writings draw the American town, society and culture, and, on the other hand, they present the genuine and authentic Central European atmosphere. Sándor Hunyady shows a high degree of interest in urban culture and places, so the analysis touches on the borderline situation between real and unreal, visible and invisible lines.

**Keywords:** Sándor Hunyady, space structure, strangers and inhabitants

The aim of the paper is to present Sándor Hunyady's (1890–1942) American-themed writings. The Hungarian author was a popular dramatist of the periodical *Nyugat*, and is nowadays acknowledged as an excellent short story writer. Hunyady was born in Cluj, where his mother, Margit Hunyady was a famous actress, coming from an ancient noble family. His father was Sándor Bródy, the well-known writer and journalist deriving from a Jewish family. Hunyady was his illegitimate child, and their relationship was very changeable and sensitive. It seems that this exciting situation resulted in a very complicated sociocultural identity. The experiences of

strangeness and the mixtures of cultural identity significantly contributed to the author's literary performance (Vécsei 1973, 7-15).

The idea of the city and the countryside played a very important role in the writings of the authors of the periodical *Nyugat*. Most of them came from the countryside, and because of it, permanent travel was in the focus of their life. So, the journey was the most dominant and characteristic motif in Hunyady's oeuvre as well. Cluj, Hunyady's birthplace was a special area, a mixed multicultural milieu. Hunyady, just like his father, represented in his works the differences and similarities between the special Central European city and countryside.

Hunyady travelled to the United States in 1940, he spent there a few months (Vécsei 1973, 177). Although this journey was a short episode in his life, the adventure inspired several short stories. The story of the American journey was published in several editions after the author's death. The only complete edition is *The Queen of the Ship*, which appeared in 2002, where we can find every American short story, feuilleton, as well as the novella having the same title as the book. The most important subjects include the diversity of the travel, the narrative structure of the modern lifestyles and environments, as well as the writer's vision of the modern metropolis. The spirit of modernism is in the focus of these short stories; these texts imagine and recreate the modern urban environment. The bases of this narrative model are the artefacts of the cities: passages, doorsteps, doors and streets.

From a theoretical perspective the question raises what the most important objects in the different city discourses are. Lewis Mumford mentions that the important bases of this urban structure are streets and highways. In his reflection architecture is a visual art and philosophy, and the modern metropolis seems like an artistic nature, organised by the rules of the modern Power (Mumford 1964). The world in Hunyady's short stories is highly metaphorical and artistic. In his writings the American towns and streets are often presented like a ship. The streets and the buildings are similar to the rooms and parts of the ship, the lines and partitions of these spaces are liquid.

Essentially, Hunyady's American writings figure a special Hungarian world, not a typical American one. These authentic Hungarian subjects are similar to Hunyady's other novels, short stories and feuilletons created in Hungary. The faces and identities of the American metropolis are similar, for example, to a Transylvanian and Hungarian area.

Hunyady's American-themed texts include a few culture-historical and theoretical toposes. The volume shows the traditional model of the Other and the Stranger, their image is like an exotic object. In a short story by Hunyady, entitled *Toward America* [*Amerika felé*], the classical colonialist situation is sketched. The story takes place on an emigrant ship, which is a special area, a temporary and transitory "earth." The emigrant ocean liner is a metaphor of strangeness, the perfect "non-place," where the Eastern European and Balkan types of people live

together. Hunyady writes about them: "The folk of the ship came from East Europe and the Balkans" (Hunyady 2002, 15). Hunyady's short story, *The Purgatory* [*A purgatórium*] takes place on Ellis Island, on the symbolic and invisible border of the United States of America. This borderline situation is an eternal and constant emigrant-topos, which is important in Hunyady's emigrant adventure and experience. Ellis Island, the American cultic area was a popular theme in literature and cinema. The excellent movie *The Emigrant* (Charlie Chaplin, 1917), a few scenes of the novel *Manhattan Transfer* (John Dos Passos, 1925), and the well-known mafia-epic *The Godfather II* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974) also take place in this special territory. In Hunyady's short story, *The Purgatory*, the married couple travels among the prison island spaces and partitions. This real and imaginary island is an animalistic world with lots of ancient rites.

A lot of stories from this collection are about the modern metropolis, which is mentioned as a "strange sea" or a "nostalgic native island." A few texts (*Violet's Odour and First-Class Gangsters* [*Ibolyaillat és prima gengszterek*], *Americans in a Little Hungarian Pub* [*Amerikaiak a kis magyar kocsmában*], and *Little Hungarian Things* [*Apró magyar dolgok*]) present the real Hungarian world in a really utopian, imaginary and strange context.

The story entitled *Negro Mary* [*Néger Mariska*] is about a black woman who lives in a Hungarian community in the United States. She is in an unusual situation, because she can speak Hungarian perfectly, but she cannot speak English. This didactic and simple story might not be the most excellent piece of the writer's oeuvre, however, it shows a sensitive picture of the Hungarian emigrant society (Hunyady 2002, 32-43).

The text entitled *A Beautiful Sunday in New York* [*Gyönyörű vasárnap New Yorkban*] shows the picture of the modern and contradictory town. The author is in the flaneur's position, he describes the nature of the mobile and liquid crowd, and he lists the bright and dark sides of urban life (Hunyady 2002, 44-45). The most important experience of the modern global city is this flaneur's position. According to Hartmut Böhme, this position is the dominant subject in modern urban theory. The most important symbol of the special modern and postmodern space is the street, the liquid and flexible communal scene (Böhme 2002, 59). The characters of Hunyady's oeuvre move and live in this sphere.

The examined collection contains the novella entitled *The Queen of the Ship*. Isabella Haxton, a rich and famous woman plays the main role in the story. She is a modern conqueror; her aim is to conquer the "land" of the ship. She would like to control the ship's spaces and the passengers. Isabella constructs her personality like a professional pretender, a perfect actress, who moves among orders and accessories of the colonial discourse. She thinks about herself as being a performer in the colonial world, so the novella can be read in terms of the considerations of colonial theory. In one respect Isabella's first words indicate the *conquistador's*

position; on the other hand, her body seems like an undomesticated land, the perfect *terra incognita* (Hunyady 2002, 109). The narrator of the novel names Isabella as “tiger,” “panther,” “carnivore plant,” and the ship as a monster and a playground of this character (Hunyady 2002, 163, 166, 182).

In his essay entitled *The Bridge and the Door*, Georg Simmel writes about the liminal space, which is at once real and metaphysical (Simmel 2007, 33). This visible and invisible borderline situation stays in the focus of the novella *The Queen of the Ship*. The partitions, the dominant artefacts that Simmel speaks about, in this case decks, swing doors, drawbridges, doorsteps and doors, are the popular scenes, where the protagonist meets various cultural experiences.

The novel’s personas move and live in the place of the Panopticon. Michel Foucault used Jeremy Bentham’s design of Panopticon as the archmetaphor of modern power (Foucault 1990, 267-311). In Panopticon, the inmates were tied to the place and barred from all movement, confined within thick, dense and closely guarded walls and fixed to their beds and cells. They could not move because they were under watch (Bauman 2000, 9). This structure manifests itself in Hunyady’s novel, where the modern conquistador, Isabella Haxton measures the different cultural behaviours with this method. While observing others, the characters of the text experience each other’s foreignness. The sight is the basis of power, so losing the sight means losing power. The narrator reflects on the theory and the structure of colonialism very impressively in “the restaurant scene.” The wall of the restaurant is covered with paintings, and one of them shows the conquest of America: “On the wall there was a huge fresco, which represented the conquest of America. The painting exhibited the conquerors’ vanity and the inhabitants’ humility” (Hunyady 2002, 131).

According to Michel Foucault, the ship is a swimming piece of the space, a *place without place* (Foucault 2000, 148). In Hunyady’s novel the strategy of the protagonist represents the complete Power. In this powerful place Isabella becomes a real geographer, who can use a map for orientation and reign. The protagonist can read not just the real map, but she can also follow a mental and imaginary map in her mind. She becomes a cartographer, who measures the land, and who lives constantly between liminoid places. The ship is an ideal incarnation of the “non-place,” which is indicated by the occurring utopian and mysterious signs. The text is pervaded by impressive, mystic, dark and foggy descriptions. The night, the darkness, the sunrise and the sunset are the remarkable signs of utopian literature.

The end of the story, the disaster of the liner fits this mysterious narrative. The narrator lists the colours of darkness, the shades of blue, black, purple and yellow. The story is based on a real adventure taking place in a very unusual moment of the author’s personal life. After his American journey Hunyady travelled across the Atlantic Ocean in 1940, and the road of the liner was complicated, because the ship had suffered a lot of injuries in a sea battle. So, the last scene of the novel, the

picture of the sinking ship is based on a few real life moments, but this artistic dream-scene is founded on a lot of vision. The last scene, Isabella's vision is a typical motif in this narrative. She dreams of a mining accident and the tumbling down of the Chrysler-building. Isabella's downfall is the ideal destiny of the colonizer, who must stay forever in the exploited and occupied land (Hunyady 2002, 161). She will be isolated and lonely, she will lose her own places, the ship's spaces, and her own people, the ship's passengers and finally her power, and the sinking ship will be her coffin.

In Kornélia Faragó's opinion the travel, the motion and the change are special Central European life-metaphors and life-experiences (Faragó 2005, 35). This authentic and domestic situation, so well-known to Hunyady, is present in the short novel's world. The narrator shows the novel's ship, the *Gloworm* like a melting pot, or a typical Hungarian or Central European town. The narrator shows the ocean liner as an "average Hungarian village." "There are a lot of people on the liners, such as in medium-sized villages (...) The passengers meet here like on the market on Sunday afternoons" (Hunyady 2002, 141). Noticeably, the novel is not a typical American story; the ship is similar to a place in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Sándor Hunyady's American writings draw the American town, society and culture, and, on the other hand, they present the genuine and authentic Central European atmosphere. Sándor Hunyady shows a high degree of interest in urban culture and places, so the analysis touches on the borderline situation between real and unreal, visible and invisible lines.

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## **The Space Concepts as Intercultural Experience in Contemporary Hungarian Prose**

Éva BÁNYAI

University of Bucharest  
Department of Hungarology  
banyaieva@gordias.ro

**Abstract.** In recent years a number of contemporary Hungarian prose writings have appeared in which the visualization of the interlinguistic and intercultural experience plays a highly significant role. In the prose writings which come into existence in the intercultural border-space, a heterogeneity of the cultural space unfolds. The estrangement from the narratives of self-culture and the recurrence to these give way to another culture. This phenomenon can be analysed in the short story volume by Gábor Vida, *Not free and not royal* [*Nem szabad és nem királyi*].

**Keywords:** Hungarian literature, alterity/alienage, space concepts, Gábor Vida

In recent years a number of contemporary Hungarian prose works of art (novels, short stories, collections of narratives, etc.) have appeared in which the visualization of interlinguistic and intercultural experience acquires a highly significant role, occasionally a thematized, reflective one. Because of the prose-poetical use and actuation of different linguistic, cultural and religious registers, the matter of alterity/alienage becomes determinative and determinable. The cultural and geopoetical definiteness of these registers denotes the existence of a geopoetical notion of space which is a relatively restricted but removable space structure because of the relativity of the borders. In the prose writings which were born in the intercultural border-space and which use intercultural experiences, the heterogeneity of the cultural space unfolds, hence the estrangement from the

narratives of self-culture and then the recurrence to describe it a new culture (cf. N. Kovács 1999, 10): in the interference of the “aliens” and the “indigenous people” the notion of difference appears, the portrait of the Other manifests, which as a prerequisite of an experience, expands the discursive space as a spacebuilding momentum (see also Faragó 2001, 10).

I am interested in spatiality not as a material (objective) entity but as a generative (creative) one, following Merleau-Ponty’s idea: “space is not such a medium in which things get arranged, but a medium through which things get arranged” (qtd in Faragó 2001, 7-8). I mention as examples the prose writings of Ádám Bodor, Zsolt Láng as well as the writings of some post-Bodorian authors belonging to the “Sinistra-space” like György Dragomán, Sándor Zsigmond Papp, Gábor Vida. In these writings – after the perambulation of the performing figures read from the so called name-maps – the ideas of identity generated in the intercultural space and moved by the associated spaces, the relations constituted by the space and the spatialization of the relations become elucidated. The different texts of the above-mentioned writers are related by their spatial embedment, spatial dependence and the spatial conception, which comes into existence in the language. On the border of different languages and cultures, in the prose texts which are constructed interculturally – through the matter of appellation, reticence, alterity/alienage – the spatial embedment and therefore the hardly determinable border-identity become elucidated. Focusing on this aspect the border-situation and the duality of the analyzed literary texts become visible, because the geographical names emerged from the prose texts generate such a name-map which makes their reading referenceable, but at the same time these texts emphasize their literary mediality, their born-in-language status all through.

Our proper space concept is part of the intercultural cognitional tissue, through which we approach the “self”-culture from a different point of view, from a different cultural mediator role. Turning towards the *alien*, the possibility of *translation* leads to the stripping of the till then evident borders, to the experience of alienage and urges us to face it. The (problematic and ambiguous) identity building is helped by the considerable contribution of the processing of the experience of alienage. “Because self-recognition, as self-recognition, in itself, without the involvement of the other is impossible, that is why the experience of alienage is the only way to self-recognition” – István Fehér M. claims in his study entitled *The experience of alienage as the way and the medium of self-recognition [Idegenségtapasztalat mint az önmegismerés útja és közege]* (2003, 13).

The above interpretation of translation can be completed with Stuart Hall’s meaning rendering of “translation,” which “illustrate[s] those identity constructions, which bisect and intercept the natural borders, and which refer to people who *dispersed* forever from their homeland. (...) People who belong to *this kind of cultures of hybridity* have to give up their dreams or hopes to restore the



‘lost’ cultural purity or ethnic absolutism. *They are irrevocably translated*” [ellipsis in the original] (Hall 1997, 77). As Stuart Hall remarks, quoting Salman Rushdie, the English word “translation” etymologically comes from the Latin “transfer,” so on the basis of the above-mentioned characteristics the figures have a figurative, converse identity.

The eternal-being-on-the-road existence of the characters of the Sinistra-prose and their shifts also belong here, alluding to the “inner” movements of the prose correlated to the “outer” movements, bringing in the experience of alterity/alienage which manifests itself in the perpetual foreign-language existence, in space concepts and in name-maps. The doubtfulness of the original place of the journey-narratives, the absence of a starting point may result in a home-existence rooted in the continuous experience of alienage. This alterity/alienage-experience is also the effect of the border-existence, which results in a permanent liminality, interspatiability articulated as the metaphor of being on the road.

The reticence as well as the forgotten, incommunicable but at times existent liminal cultural narratives contribute to the problematic definition of identity. That is why the language used by the characters of novels and short stories becomes problematic too. In the text a spatial and linguistic experience of inter-spoken languages comes into being. But it cannot be told what language the speakers of the Sinistra-district (or the speakers of the Dragomán- and Papp-prose) use, because there is no textual allusion to it, so the name-map is also predominated by their “mixed” and liminal entity. The mixture of the (spoken) languages, the thematization of multilingualism presupposes an interlinguistic and intercultural existence, and this urges – “constrains” – the reader to use a multilingual and polyphonic – in this way open and ambiguous – reading strategy assuming the linguistic, more precisely, the cultural-linguistic knowledge of the geocultural space.

The discourses of the creators of the Sinistra-space depend on the mutual relation provided by the system: seemingly they speak the same language, the “power and the dependant” use the same textual code – with few discrepancies: here belong the ironical remarks and the denial to speak. The linguistic variants can be caught out in their inter- and liminal-entity. In the cultural inter-liminality cultures do not show themselves separately, even though on the basis of the name conglomerate and of textual signs there may be hypothesized a common, interliminal notion of space with its cultural, historical, anthropological aspects, being the traces of a latent interwovenness of different cultural effects, of a so-called *side by side* existence. The language of the ones who speak in the texts can be circumscribed “only” on the levels of liminal existence and interlingualism, without exact information and “final report.” As Maurice Merleau-Ponty says in a somewhat radical drafting, “the idea of *absolute* expressibility is nonsense, every

language is indirect or indicative, or if you like, mute silence.”<sup>1</sup> If we look for the “original language” of the texts, we can pertain to their referential existence, that is why I find it possible to point out the liminal-entity and the perpetual “rendition-existence.” The journey-existences between the temporary spaces form an abstract space conception, a border-existence determined by liminality.

Gábor Vida’s prose – beyond the demonstrable uniquenesses and the manifested prose-poetical methods which characterize only his prose – can be elucidated by using geopoetic viewpoints too. In Vida’s short stories (Vida 2007) it is easy to observe the mixing and blending of different cultures, traditions, cultural traditions: a triple – guerrilla fighter anti-dictatorship anti-redemption – story projected on the biblical Peter-narrative (*Before the rooster ... [Mielőtt a kakas ...]*), or the appearance of an anti-Jesus in the text opening the volume, urging for departure (*Get up and walk! [Kelj fel és járj!]*), and I could enumerate the other examples too. In the same way the different ethnic groups and their traditions, languages, customs, rites and stereotypes are blended (see also Vida 2005). The spaces manifested in various texts are structured in the same way: the named or unnamed spaces can be hedged in and identified according to the expectations of referential readers,<sup>2</sup> at the same time, due to the carefully placed markers, their relativity, spaciousness and unlimitedness becomes determinant – just like in the writings of Ádám Bodor, György Dragomán, Zsolt Láng, and Sándor Zsigmond Papp.

### Space(-time)

The main space of the vast majority of the short stories of Gábor Vida’s *Not Free and not Royal* [*Nem szabad és nem királyi*] is the central square of a not free and not royal (little) town, which is just as much defined by the building of the New York Hotel Restaurant (as well as the Thermal Pension Spa and least by the world-famous secondary school) as the existence and movement of the “transhuming” aliens and the indigenous people or the constant/variable actors: the relations defined by the space and the spatiability of the relations.

We do not know the exact coordinates of the place, there is not even an outer viewpoint based on which we could locate or describe it, because the shift of space becomes the stake just like in the *stream of consciousness* of a shepherd: “For him [for the shepherd – É. B.] the road is not speech, not geography, not even

<sup>1</sup> “If we put out of our head the idea of the *original text*, whose translation our language is, or it could be its encoded version, we can admit that the *absolute expressibleness* is nonsense, every language is indirect or indicative, or if you like, mute silence.” [italics in original] (Merleau-Ponty 1997, 145)

<sup>2</sup> Without enumerating every toponym (some of them are very frequent): the Kelemen havasok (Kelemen-mountains, Munții Călimani), the Radnai havasok (Radnai-mountains, Munții Rodnei), Nagyszeben (Sibiu), Brassó (Brașov), Marosvásárhely (Târgu-Mureș), Szászrégen (Reghin), Moldova (Moldova), Bucovina, Temesvár (Timișoara), Zsombolya (Jimbolia), etc.

ethnographic argumentation, but life, millions of steps, and the concern to leave, from here to there, and sometimes he wonders what on earth this town is doing right in front of the sheep's road? Is he going anywhere?" (*The beginning of a spring story* [*Egy tavaszi történet eleje*]) (Vida 2007, 192). The narrator, chronicler consistently uses first-person plural form – “our town” – to describe this space-lost space being in a continuous spatial and on-the-way movement. In another short story, beyond the horizontal movement, a space-determining, security-giving building piece sets off vertically upwards, confronting the population with a fathomless riddle and mystery, a (post-)magical, unprocessable trauma (*Ascendent tower* [*Torony emelkedőben*]).

The “catching” smell-attribution as well as the ever-recurring chief waiter and his assistant, or the checkroom attendant, Ánizs are all the identity-determinatives of (one of) the main building(s) of the central square: “The inner space of the New York – long ago way too elegant, now ragged – is floating in the lights of yellow lamps, the cigarette smoke is thick but still fragrant and warm, the sourish flavour of the mulled wine crawls out from the kitchen, cinnamon, clove and another unidentified spice, just as if it was winter, and so it is, time or its prosaic counterpart the weather dictates everything and not the calendar” (*The beginning of a spring story*) (Vida 2007, 205-206). This area, constituted by the short stories enclosed in the volume, is not free and not royal, it is closed and dominated, but at the same time really loose, ethereal, sad and sublime. They evoke a rare tradition, the past, a space-image which lives only at times vitalized by “the edge of the collective recollection:” then with the same elegant and resigned movement they disassemble it (*The relic* [*Az ereklye*]) (Vida 2007, 124).

Not even the time definition gives a precise guideline. In the same short story time-frames evoking and presuming the Monarchy, dusty, stoned roads, traffic with horses and carts, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the computer science as a moneyed profession are mentioned. The stories from the period of the two World Wars represent the wings, but the not bygone totalitarian world is also being formed, at times in a jungle and guerilla environment. The only precise time definition<sup>3</sup> seems to be the indicator of timelessness formula: “time progresses only in ourselves” (*Get up and walk!*) (Vida 2007, 9), as well as the dripping eaves, the size and the shape of the icicles, which also show the break in time and spirit.

Although at first reading it seems that the Vida-stories are two-edged: on the one hand, the (little) town spaces and, on the other hand, the natural spaces, but these spaces/places – thanks to their attributes – are always slurred: nature is enmeshed by men, the town is manoeuvred by natural (sometimes supernatural) powers. The vision of the first short story brings an extra-spatial, apocalyptic experience: “At the swinging rope-bridge beyond the waterfall the human existence

<sup>3</sup> Except the short story entitled *King of the shepherds* [*A pásztorok királya*].

ends” (*Get up and walk!*) (Vida 2007, 13), the sound of the cascading water filters the noise of civilization (for example, the train noise), but at the same time the values and the cultural, religious determination are not influenced by the natural barrage: with the mountain climbing people the indelible mentality infiltrates. Vida’s space concept is a bourne along the nature and the culturally encoded “civilization” which can be traced with wan and dashed lines.

The mountain is a wild, unapproachable, inaccessible region, the people living there or even the tourists may “touch” it with great humbleness and obeying the rules of nature, but it is still more honest and open than the human society: “Such are these mountains that whatever happens even in the most hidden canyons people get to know it immediately” (*Get up and walk!*) (Vida 2007, 14), in contrast with those short stories which mainly illustrate (sometimes a bit didactically) a totalitarian social system with a spatial- societal- world- and human-image (*Jack Daniel’s, There was a woman in it [Nő volt a dologban], King of the shepherds [A pásztorok királya], Before the rooster...*). The adventurer may get initiated into the mountain region, even if many times he has to take part in infernal games and is at the mercy of (super)natural powers and of the landscape becoming anthropomorphous.<sup>4</sup> “There is something scary in the heavy snowing, when the space dissolves in a single whiteness, and without certain contours the man feels that this mountain is up to anything” (*Initiation [Beavatás]*) (Vida 2007, 34); “The man battles with the elements and gets nowhere” (*Initiation*) (Vida 2007, 35); but the elevation of the tower cannot be stopped by anybody/anything, and the prognostication-like space-criticism – “The composition is wrong somewhere” (*Ascendent tower*) (Vida 2007, 53) – pays off: on the one hand, the alteration of space-structure (unexplainable and magical) strips the tranquility of the town; on the other hand, the designer of the change – because of the subtleness and indelibility of cultural tradition – projects (not in this way, for sure) a totally similar tower as the main representative of the “new” space/square. Previously “he thought, that changing only just a buliding or a facade would decisively affect the image, that the great predecessors did not make a mistake with the central square, they just shifted the perfection and the accomplishment, leaving a mystery for the successors. The one who finds that point of which irrelevant but influential modification would repair everything, that would find the meaning of the square together with the meaning of the city” (*Ascendent tower*) (Vida 2007, 49). Artúr Horgas got the opportunity for a change in vain, because he cannot “repair” the square/space, that does not obey either, just like the mountain. Furthermore, the change is impeded due to the fact that the city center is doted with tasteless,

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<sup>4</sup> “The snowy peaks emerging from the marching clouds look at me startlingly, but cannot see me. This is the country of the dead, and it is not sure that I am the one who lives.” (*Initiation [Beavatás]*) (Vida 2007, 39)

ostentatious “way too much secession, fake monumentality, kitschy ornaments,” which is a “curiosity for the tourists and the homesick emigrants.” “Maybe the spirit of this place is like this – he once thought – that in every gorgeous creation and also in our vision and thinking there is mixed some wrong and bad. We feel that something is wrong, but we cannot find its place” (*Ascendent tower*) (Vida 2007, 50).

The only short story describable with precise chronotopic coordinates is *King of the shepherds*: on one of the glades of the Kelemen-mountains there is the place called “La Elicopter,” when the weather is clear one can see the Nagyhagymás-peak, the Radnai-mountains, but the towers of Szászrégen [Reghin] and Marosvásárhely [Târgu Mureș] are also visible (*King of the shepherds*) (Vida 2007, 209). The “La Elicopter” “is a very recent name of the place, that is why it does not figure on any accessible maps. It is not even indicated on the forestry-maps, although those include every gullet, hole, bigger rock or fallen out tree. It is rumoured that the triangular stone which is also visible on the snapshots made from considerable heights, and contrasts with the green of the flora and the dark grey colour of the trachit composed mountains, is unmarked even on the military-maps. But who has ever seen such airborne snapshots?” (*King of the shepherds*) (Vida 2007, 210). The well-known but reticenced name presumes the existence of the place/space, but the upcoming interrogative sentence questions its officiality (but not its authenticity). We can minutely follow the action, the dictatorial precipitation and destruction of medieval tradition, but the spatial “traces” can be found even today, to find the place we have to defeat the cultural codes: the consistent human reticence (namely, today’s shepherds) rather than assuring the frames of hiding in the nature, “but it is better to avoid that place, there is nothing interesting at all and it is not getting in the way either” (*King of the shepherds*) (Vida 2007, 234). Vida’s space concept composes, shapes, forms a region-image in a way that it enlarges the contours of border-stories and de-regionalizes the space-map.

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## **The Sounds of Cruelty, the Silence of Care. About the Novels of J.M. Coetzee**

Júlia VALLASEK

Babeş-Bolyai University  
Faculty of Political Science, Public Administration and Communication  
jvallasek@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** The essay gives a general description of the several ways cruelty and alterity appear in J.M. Coetzee's novels. The essay presents two groups of novels: those in which the writer focuses on the psychology of the colonizers/conquerors and the relationship of power between master and slave, and those presenting the theme of the suffering body, and finally draws attention to the hidden motif of human empathy and care.

**Keywords:** J.M. Coetzee, suffering, cruelty, master, slave, alterity, care

“Somewhere, always, a child is being beaten.”  
(*Waiting for the Barbarians*)

What can happen if a human soul loses the feeling of compassion? What can happen if there is not, and has never been any compassion in a soul? If we had to characterize the world of Coetzee's novels with just one word, “cruelty” would be the best one. Cruelty, in its most elementary form, inflicting physical suffering. His novels are full of naked bodies distorted by torture, disease or accidents, his heroes have to face scenes of cruelty done by people or simply by existence.

Stephen Abell (2011) writes in *Times Literary Supplement*: “in all of his fiction, he [Coetzee] is our best authority on suffering, our most credible literary authority on the body.” Of course, his “competence” is not accidental; it is directly connected to his origin, which is somehow responsible for the choice of topic in his

novels, for the modulations of his way of speaking about the body, about suffering and cruelty. In his volume of essays and interviews, *Doubling the Point*, which also contains autobiographical elements, Coetzee wrote: “in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body” (1992).

The work of the novelist, who was born in South Africa and presently lives in Australia, belongs to the mainstream of English literature; he has been given many important literary awards both in his native country and in England, among them the Man Booker prize. In 2003 he was also awarded the Nobel-prize and since then he has been considered a writer of international importance, his novels have been translated all over the world. (To the Hungarians, as it generally happens, the person of the prize winner came as a surprise, although *Waiting for the Barbarians* was already published in 1987, being translated into Hungarian by Éva Sebestyén. Due to the prize, in the following years the Art Nouveau published six of his novels.)

“Amongst this audience, his fiction has been received as embodying a powerful moral critique of apartheid,” Clive Barnett (1999, 289) stated, while analyzing the reception of Coetzee in his study.

However, Coetzee has continuously been criticized for his novels not being closely connected to any historical or political question. Before being taken aback on hearing that literature can be approached with such an expectance too, let us remember that his first six novels (*Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life and Times of Michael K.*, *Age of Iron*) were written between 1974–1990, that is, in the shadow of the South African apartheid regime, when the postcolonial view of literature gained ground firmly. It would be far from reality to say that such questions are not present in Coetzee’s novels, because practically they speak about the permanent, painful consciousness of South African existence that generates unsurpassable antagonisms. But it is true that Coetzee’s approach to these problems contains nothing of the political commitment that characterizes other white South African writers like Nadine Gordimer, Andre Brink, Breyten Breytenbach or even Doris Lessing and the works of the black “African” writers. He does not seem to be interested in the rapid healing of century-old injustices, but focuses on the work of the powers hiding behind the process and wants to unveil them. In his view the engine of these powers is human cruelty, he keeps analyzing its anatomy and the mechanisms of its causes and effects, the ways people experience it and suffer because of it. The suffering party of cruelty is always the OTHER, even the suffering self is looking at himself from the perspective of the outsider, that is, in a detached way. The narrator of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate, wants to find out “what happened to her” with an almost perverse eagerness, examining the traces of torture on the body of the barbarian girl taken into his house. He is searching for the truth by using the signs of the crippled, distorted body, but the victim refuses to take part in this, she does



not divulge anything of what was done to her in the cell, remains silent just as the awestruck soldiers who actually did the torturing. "Suffering is the truth..." the judge states at the beginning of the novel, almost making a hint to the suffering of Jesus Christ. At the end of the novel, after he himself being imprisoned, tortured and humiliated, the judge draws the conclusion that suffering is a private matter and torturing is needless, because the victims cannot speak only moan.

In the present essay I will examine the way cruelty and its subject, the "other," appear in Coetzee's novels. First I will examine novels belonging to the first period of his career, and those in which he focuses on the psychology of the colonizers/conquerors, the relationship of power that takes shape in the connection between master and servant or rather to say slave (*Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*). Next I will focus on the works presenting the theme of the suffering body (*Elizabeth Costello*, *Age of Iron*, *Slow Man*), and finally I will speak about the possibilities of doing away with cruelty, about the presentation of human empathy, sympathy and care.

1.

J.M. Coetzee's first novel, *Dusklands*, published in 1974 (in Hungarian in 1988) is a sort of postmodern play with the text, a parody of the power discourse of the colonizers and is very far from the South African realities of those times. The novel contains two stories rhyming to each other and the narrator in both of them describes the way leading towards insanity. Eugene Dawn, the narrator in *The Vietnam Project*, speaks in first person and is writing a report about the war propaganda of the USA in Vietnam, while the second one, *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee* describes the expedition of the title hero to the "land of the Great Namaqua" in the style of travel books written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The reader cannot help drawing a parallel between the language, nature and way of working of the American invasion in Vietnam and that of the Dutch colonization in South Africa.

The other to be conquered does not belong to the human race any more. In *The Vietnam Project* the coloured people appear in the imagination of the American soldiers not as enemies, but rather as mysterious "gods." Here the dominant motif is cruelty hiding in the impossible view of the conqueror, we witness a horrible process of "victimization," which offers excuse to the murderer for what he did, exemption being based on the sheer fact that the victim proved to be different from what was thought of him.

The other, who must be defeated, does not belong to the human race any more. In Jacobus Coetzee's narrative the Bushmen are evidently animalized. He calls them "males" and "females" and gives a detailed description of how the white settlers are hunting them. Dead victims are not considered humans either. "Bullets are too good for the Bushmen" (Coetzee 1983, 85), the narrator states, mentioning

how a bushman caught on their fields was roasted like a goat on fire, and offered to the servants for supper.

After such an introduction it is not surprising that, when Jacobus Coetzee turns back to the village of the natives where he was lying sick during his first voyage, he takes revenge for all his real and imagined humiliations. He sets the village on fire and kills, or puts his men to kill not only the servants who by that time abandoned him, but everybody without fail. The story that serves as a framework proves that the presentation of the relationship between the almighty master and the servant/slave considered to be an animal, does not characterize only the shadowy past, a barbaric era.

According to the contemporary secretary report the narrative of the illiterate explorer is a "boring" one, while the epilogue, which is meant to ensure background and explanation to the fictive story, with its bombastic rhetoric proves that behind the scientific language of the nineteenth-century essay, in a sophisticated and concealed form, we can find the same mentality that characterized the world of Jacobus Coetzee and of the first explorers of the Cape. The natives are still considered to be human beings of lower quality just as they used to be formerly. In the framework story the white man, who is able to denote, and accordingly, to rule the world, becomes the master of the slave, who is unable to use "white" speech, they only repeat their master's commands to show that they are accepting it.

In fact the servant's, the native's, the Other's inability to speak is a recurrent theme in Coetzee's early novels. For example, in the novel *Foe*, which can be read as a rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe*, Friday, whose tongue has been injured in unknown circumstances, stubbornly refuses to describe from his own point of view what has happened on the island. (The novel, as a Defoe rewriting, offers both a feminist and a postcolonial reading because the two disregarded characters are Susan Barton, the woman who arrives at the island after a shipwreck and the native servant, Friday, while the central question is who the one, grasping the possibility of telling and shaping the story is.) The mutilated Friday, who cannot, (or will not) speak, grows to be the symbolic figure of colonial oppression, his scars, the proofs of his physical suffering, speak instead of him just as in the case of the girl in the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*. "Can the subaltern speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, representative researcher of postcolonial literature asks and her answer is negative. The oppressed one is silent; s/he is unable to tell his/her own story. In the final scene of the novel the narrator is speaking instead of Friday, as if he was making a dream journey, dives into the sea and finds the wreck of a ship. This underwater dream world is the place where not the words, but the traces of suffering on the bodies are speaking (for example, the scar on Friday's neck left by a chain or rope): "This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday" (Coetzee 1987, 157).

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The novel entitled *In the Heart of the Country* can be approached not from the point of view of speech, as the material of storytelling, but from that of communication, of the problem of speaking to the other human being. The novel is the everlasting monologue of the heroine, the spinster embedded into the monotony of her life on a farm. The scenes of her life, her thoughts, dreams, daydreams and fears follow one another in numbered paragraphs as if she kept trying to tell something, as if she was struggling against the impossibility of opening up. In the novel silence is the dominant element, not because the few characters closed into the order of the farm have nothing to tell one another, but just because there is too much that cannot be spoken about, cannot be put into words and because there is no language in which they could be told. Miss Magda is forced to realize that she is trying in vain to build a relationship with her servants, which would make human communication possible, because her language is the one used by the white masters when speaking to their black servants, it is the language of orders and of obeying orders and not that of communication. In this relationship of domination and subordination words suffered corruption and are deteriorated for ever, physical relationship (the father's contact with the girl whom he turns into his mistress and the heroine's relationship with the servant, full of humiliation) are desperate attempts "to compel from the lips of a slave, albeit in the dead of night, words such as one free being addresses to another" (Coetzee 1982, 132). Her language is a cruel and totally sinful one, she cannot use it to talk to the servants only to give orders to them. The vocabulary of the servants is a very limited one, their answer to the orders cannot be anything else but "yes," and in this way silence is born, the silence of the foreigner that can be broken neither by words nor by deeds. Then comes the final realization: "It is not speech that makes man man, but the speech of others" (Coetzee 1982, 126).

The best-known novel of Coetzee's early period, in fact of his whole literary career, is the emblematic *Waiting for the Barbarians*. As we all know, the *barbarian* has been the most significant way of denoting the Other ever since the antiquity. Analyzing the idea of barbarianism in the ancient Greek and Roman conception, Reinhart Koselleck says that the barbarians were considered to be "stammering strangers," "savages, uncivilized, unable to conceive a constitution, they are inborn slaves who need to be taken care of." The term "barbarian" is a term to define the stranger who can always be perceived as enemy (Koselleck 1998).

Although the action of the novel takes place at the border of a not specified Empire, and racial characteristics play no significant role either in the description of the barbarians or in the presentation of the soldiers sent from the faraway capital, yet in 1980, when the novel was published, it was evident for everybody that it wanted to tell something about the political conditions in South Africa. According to David Atwell, the Empire is a parody of the apartheid order,

presenting its paranoid nature and its attempt to control history. But as we advance in time we understand that it is not only about the apartheid, but also about the illogical mechanism of any dictatorship and, generally speaking, it is a novel about human cruelty. In spite of this, the process of torture is rarely described; in the first part of the novel the judge can see mostly the traces of it, or hear its sound. The narrator of the story is almost disgustingly eager to find out something about the suffering of the people brought in out of a misunderstanding or false accusation. Looking at the scars on the blinded, crippled girl who is taken to his house he wants to find out what has happened, more precisely, what was the action he could have prevented, in what he did not take part, yet he did not do anything against it, consequently he can also be blamed for it. For a long time he is not even conscious of all this, he discovers cruelty hiding in indifference only when he himself has to play the role of the innocent, tortured victim. As a prisoner, thinking about his relationship to the girl, remembering the father of the girl who was tortured to death, he realizes how merciless he was when he could feel no pity. "They exposed her father to her naked and made him gibber with pain; they hurt her and he could not stop them (on a day I spent occupied with the ledgers in my office)" (Coetzee 1999, 109).

Colonel Joll, who comes from the mysterious Third Office, is looking for enemies and as he can find none he creates enemies of all those, who due to their "being otherwise" can fit into this role. Torture will be the device that makes, in the materialist sense of the word, enemies from the randomly chosen fishermen, the natives, who speak a language unknown to the colonel. The process of textual creation of enemies is particularly forcible in the scene in which Colonel Joll writes with ember the word "enemy" onto the back of the prisoners and then he orders first his soldiers and when they get tired, the mob maddened by the sight of torture to whip them until blood washes away the inscription (Coetzee 1999a, 140-142). The narrator wants to find the answer to the question whether the one who commits cruelty is still a human being and to what extent can those be blamed who do not take part in cruelty but do not prevent it either. Is the one who remains silent among criminals just as bad as they are? This question actually refers to his own behaviour. At the same time the writer points out the uselessness of a lonely fight: the judge, now himself a prisoner, tries to prevent colonel Joll from hitting with a four pound hammer the already unconscious men, but the only result of his attempt is that he himself is beaten until bleeding. "What would I have said if they had let me go on? That it is worse to beat a man's feet to pulp than to kill him in combat? That it brings shame on everyone when a girl is permitted to flog a man? That spectacles of cruelty corrupt the hearts of the innocent?" (Coetzee 1999a, 146). Besides the question of collective responsibility the judge also realizes that it is not enough to demand justice for the tortured Other, because it is "Easier to lay my head on a block than to defend the cause of justice for the barbarians: for where can

that argument lead but to laying down our arms and opening the gates of the town to the people whose land we have raped?" (Coetzee 1999a, 146).

When he was a free man, it was almost an obsession for him to look for the traces of torture on the body of the barbarian girl and now, as a humiliated prisoner he is wondering whether it is possible for the one who tortures other people to go on living with an unimpaired soul. First he is wondering what the training of colonel Joll was like, and then he asks his own torturer, Mandel:

How do you find it possible to eat afterwards, after you have been ... working with people? That is a question I have always asked myself about executioners and other such people. ... Do you find it easy to take food afterwards? I have imagined that one would want to wash one's hands. But no ordinary washing would be enough, one would require priestly intervention, a ceremonial of cleansing, don't you think? Some kind of purging of one's soul too – that is how I have imagined it. Otherwise how would it be possible to return to everyday life – to sit down at table, for instance, and break bread with one's family or one's comrades? [ellipsis in the original] (Coetzee 1999a, 169)

In an essay (*Into the Dark Chamber: the Writer and the South African State*) written in 1986 and included into his volume entitled *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee himself states that *Waiting for the Barbarians* is "a novel about torture," that is to say, he wanted to examine the effect of torture on human consciousness. According to him, the main problem is that by presenting cruelty in fact we reproduce it. To avoid this, the main hero of the novel is a character who keeps responding to cruelty, who is a victim, but at the same time the narrator too, that is, he can be a victim tortured in his body and soul, but he can never become an object, it is not the point of view of the torturers representing the power that becomes dominant, but his own one.

2.

In the following I will examine the ways J.M. Coetzee presents physical prostration in some of his novels, mostly written in the latter half of his career (*Elizabeth Costello, Age of Iron, Slow Man, Disgrace*). Although politics, some aspects of the South African everyday life and cruelty in its organized or institutional forms, are also present in these novels, yet the writer mostly focuses on the presentation of the suffering body.

The heroine of the earliest novel, *Age of Iron*, written in 1991, is Mrs. Curren, a retired teacher who is sick of cancer. The process of her physical disintegration is accompanied by her becoming more and more conscious politically. It can be viewed as an inverse novel of development; the "growth" of the heroine consists in the fact that, while preparing for death, she accepts physical suffering and realizes

her own unimportance. Her feeble, sick body, with “cold, obscene swellings” appears as a parody of pregnancy. Her body is not the carrier of life, but that of death. According to its technique of narration the novel is in fact a confession, although it takes up the form of a letter written by Mrs. Curren to her daughter living abroad. The heroine is searching for redemption, although not in the religious meaning of the word, and realization comes to her in the moment when the police shoot two young black men who tried to take refuge in her house. When the police is questioning her, she is showing them the wounded, distorted hands of her new acquaintance, Vercueil, the tramp, who plays the role of the angel of death. Thus, she “aligns herself with the sign of suffering in the face of the oppressor, and reminds us of the positive connotation and authority Coetzee has frequently assigned to the disfigured, scarred, or mutilated body in his novels, as the repository, and the text of colonial oppression” (Head 2009, 70).

Physical pain, mutilation and the suffering caused by violence appear in a richer and somewhat different context in the novels published since the late nineties. The theme of suffering caused by the injustices of the relationship between master and servant, generated by colonial existence does not disappear totally, but new, more general conceptions are offered by the writer, or he approaches the central theme of cruelty from a new perspective. New problems appear like that of cruelty towards animals or inability of love and compassion as a sin, the ethical questions related to the presentation of the evil in literature.

The novel entitled *Slow Man*, written after the writer moved to Australia in 2005, is seemingly the story of how an elderly, lonely man, crippled in a car accident tries to build up a new way of life for himself. Paul Rayment, who loses his legs in a car accident, falls in love with his nurse, Marijana Jokic, a Croatian immigrant, and to sublime his love, he soon becomes a sort of self-appointed grandpa to her family. Although the writer describes in a realistic way both the crippled body and a large scale of feelings generated by its sight (disgust, aversion, contempt and natural approach), the main motif of the novel is not the distorted body but the shaping of a special world of the identity. The novel draws attention to a new problem, that of the immigrants, who on the one hand try to find their new national identity, but on the other hand keep their relationship to history and continuity.

Rayment wants to donate his collection of photos taken of the immigrants at the beginning of the twentieth century and also containing some of the works of the famous nineteenth-century photographer, Antoine Fauchery, to the National Library of Adelaide, hoping that his modest present will carry him, the French immigrant, into the mainstream of Australian history. Marijana’s son, Drago, steals a Fouchery photo and, with the help of digital technology produces a sepia-coloured print with the image of his own father dressed to blend in with those “stern-faced Cornish and Irish miners of a bygone age” (Coetzee 2005, 218). He is

also posting the photo on his own blog. The manipulated photograph, the world of simulacrum points to the problem of the original and the false, and at the same time to the fact that in this digital world and in the time of global communication identity itself becomes a problem. Not only the well-known forms of national identity have become anachronistic, but it is impossible to make an authentic record of the historical facts too.

The theme of cruelty towards animals has appeared many times in Coetzee's novels since the latter part of the nineties. In the first two volumes of his autobiographic novel (*Boyhood, Scenes from Provincial Life*) it turns up as an inevitable, although scaring part of country life, presented with a somewhat bucolic nostalgia, from the perspective of a child. The boy watches with curiosity mixed with dread the castration of the lambs, the weekly event of slaughtering a ram and the animals driven to the slaughter-house, and while doing this he wonders why they accept their fate, why does not the instinct of life urge them to fight for their lives. Finally he accepts the unconscious human cruelty towards the animals as the unavoidable part of nature, of the bucolic, provincial life of the farmers.

Coetzee included into his novel *Elisabeth Costello* a text that was earlier published as an essay (*The Lives of Animals*, 1999). In it the writer examines the relationship between humans and animals. When writing the novel *Elisabeth Costello*, the writer used the postmodernist technique of loosely connecting within a vague framework academic presentations, speeches, and essays. The heroine is an elderly woman who got tired of discussing about the great problems of the world. It is a routine for her to keep lectures about the most different themes to any kind of audiences, whose members however are only interested in the coffee breaks. The only topic that deeply touches her is that of the exploitation and organized, industrial slaughtering of the animals. In a somewhat exaggerated way she compares this to the Holocaust. She keeps two lectures on this theme, the title of them being *The Philosophers and the Animals* and *The Poets and the Animals*. Costello's opinion is that man's cruel behaviour towards the animals largely resembles the way people generally behave with the defeated enemy, with war prisoners or slaves.

People complain that we treat animals like objects, but in fact we treat them like prisoners of war. (...) The prisoner of war does not belong to our tribe. We can do what we want with him. We can sacrifice him to our gods. We can cut his throat, tear out his heart, throw him on the fire. There are no laws when it comes to prisoners of war. (Coetzee 2003, 96)

This is related to another lecture of hers about the problem of the evil. Here she is interested in the question of what and how much the writer is supposed to present of human evil, of the horror that cannot be told with words. But here the

text loses its self-concerned character, the heroine speaks with more and more ardour, she desperately wishes to move her audience. She stops repeating the old, politely composed sentences and tries to find some truth for herself, to seize a valid explanation of something. While thinking about the systematic killing of the animals, about the respect towards the victim and about the right to intimacy in death she draws the conclusion that there is no justice which would entitle the writer to present some special kinds of horrors because when doing so, he will revive them on the pages of his book, that is, the writer recreates the evil (like one of Paul West's novels, *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg*, analyzed by Costello, in which the writer describes the execution of the members of the Stauffenberg conspiracy against Hitler). In this way the writer will not let those who do not want to see the humiliation of the others turn their heads away, that is, he will prevent them from expressing their protest at least by this gesture.

### 3.

Compassion seems to be the only efficient weapon against cruelty, against "the flap of Satan's leathery wings," but this is not necessarily part of the human soul. The theme of compassion and the lack of it play an important role in Coetzee's novels and the one entitled *Disgrace*, written in 1999 is a good example in this respect. Showing consideration towards a suffering human being (and, generally speaking, towards our fellow-beings) or turning suffering into a topic is not the same thing as being considerate and involved. The hero of his latest novel, *Summertime*, has a lot of autobiographical characteristics; he is even called J.M. Coetzee. He is a teacher, and one of his former colleagues mentions that He took a "rather abstract, rather anthropological attitude towards Black South Africans ... They might be his fellow citizens but they were not his countrymen ... at the back of his mind they continued to be *they* as opposed to *us*" [ellipsis, emphasis in the original] (Coetzee 2009, 232).

David Lurie, a teacher of English Romanticism, the hero of the novel *Disgrace* is also such a man. He seems to be a man without feelings, looking at everything with the eyes of an anthropologist. He is unable to build up real relationships in university life, in his rather sterile connections with women or when living at his daughter's farm. In this way he has to face his own lack of compassion and, beyond this, the inherent lack of compassion of the cold, rationalistic mind, which becomes the source of helplessness too. David is dismissed from his job because getting into relationship with one of his students, therefore he withdraws to the farm of his daughter, Lucy, to think about the possibilities of his life. The farm is a foreign world to him inhabited by strange people, he looks at it from the comfortable position of an outsider. He does not criticize them, yet he slightly despises them and makes no effort to understand them. But one day four black men plunder the farm, beat him and rape his



daughter, and this humiliation forces him to try to understand things, which he formerly simply rejected on the basis of some rationalistic arguments (for example, the fact that his daughter does not ask for the help of the police and wants to go on living on the farm). However, his attempt to understand things fails again and again, because in a sheer intellectual way, thinking only rationalistically a state that would be favourable for understanding cannot be reached. Lurie's way of thinking is firmly interwoven with the elements of the colonial scale of values that makes impossible any communication between the white and the black, the masters and the servants. His daughter, on the other hand, is the representative of a new scale of values that is favourable for getting closer to each other, to communicate. She considers violence a price that she has to pay in order to remain in the world of the lands cultivated by the black. (The beauty of her almost romantic love for the land is shown by the fact that she grows not only vegetables but also ancient plants, cycadas. Lurie realizes his own lack of compassion, his sinfulness and the fact that he has always been making use of other people, which is against Kant's ethics, when his daughter, who wants to soften the sharpness of the racist elements during the argument with her father, places the professor, who failed in the role of the careful father, beside the aggressors, as he is also a man.

Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange – when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her – isn't it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood – doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder? (Coetzee 1999b, 158)

David Lurie, Paul Rayment or J.M. Coetzee from the novel *Summertime* all demonstrate that a sheer intellectual approach, even if it is an elaborate and a daring one, is unable to face cruelty. These heroes can become victims on their turn; the simple compassion that they feel towards the subjects of cruelty proves to be not only helpless, but also useless and pointless.

For J.M. Coetzee cruelty is not an abstraction; he gives it the meaning of a performance, for him it is a human characteristic which either stirs reflection or it does not, but it is manifested through actions (or, on the contrary, through the lack of actions). In this way the opposite (and to some extent, the remedy) of cruelty cannot be any abstract idea that is close to love, humanism, mercy or compassion. Active involvement and care, shining up in Coetzee's dark world are the only means that, even if they cannot do away with cruelty, yet they can tame it to some degree. We meet the different forms of care appearing in different contexts and actions. The judge washes and rubs the legs of the mutilated girl every day; Marijana Jokic, the nurse takes care of the crippled body of her patient both with a

sort of professional indifference and with a calm naturalness, showing respect towards his human dignity; Elisabeth Costello, although she herself is surprised by her gesture, shows her naked body to the old, dying painter, whose only desire is to see female beauty; Bev, in the novel *Disgrace* cures, or, if nothing else can be done, sends the sick animals into death in a mild way.

Care itself, and taking care of the injured, suffering or actually dead body is not exclusively women's attribute, yet in J.M. Coetzee's novels, just as in common thinking, it appears like that. The magistrate in the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* is just curious, he wants to find answers, to unfold an abstract "truth," David Lurie's work in Bev's office is a kind of penitence. Maybe Coetzee presents care, the only means that can be turned against cruelty, otherwise dominating his novels, as a female characteristic only to show that fragile as it is, at the same time it is able to surpass everything and is eternal because of its capacity of reproduction.

This differentiation is very evident when he describes the cell of the prisoners who were executed because of taking part in the Stauffenberg plot.

No one to wash them, afterwards. Women's work since time immemorial. No womanly presence in the cellar business. Admission reserved; men only. But perhaps when it was all over, when dawn's rosy fingers touched the eastern skies, the women arrived, indefatigable German cleaning women out of Brecht, and set to work cleaning up the mess, washing the walls, scrubbing the floor, making everything spick and span, so that you would never guess, by the time they had done, what games the boys had got up to during the night. (Coetzee 2003, 166)

This scene, (which can also be considered as one describing the clearing away the traces of murder), leaves without answer the ethical question: is the writer (and art in general) permitted to present cruelty, and if yes, then how is he supposed to do it? All Coetzee's writings that have been published so far can be considered as an attempt to answer this question.

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