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Ecological imperatives in contemporary Hungarian poetry

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ABSTRACT

The study reviews from an ecopoetic point of view the tendencies in Hungarian poetry of recent years that emphasise the biopoetic aspects of existence. László Lázár Lövétei's eclogues, for example, renew the discourse from the perspective of the ancient tradition, while Tamás Korpa and Mátyás Sirokai transform the reader's mental consciousness by focusing on the plant life, and in doing so, reassess and rethink the concept of being embedded in nature. For example, Gábor Dávid Németh combines the mechanisms of cultural memory, the ecosystems of environmental awareness and the plant metaphor system arising from the organicity of language. Gábor Mezei approaches the question from the perspective of hybridity. Besides blurring the traditional boundaries of body and self, these authors also exploit the subversive, resistant character of ecopoetics, not once asserting the principle of what they call the ecopoetic imperative whose topological, tropological, entropological and ethnological dimensions are worth exploring.

Keywords: ecopoetics, ecological imperatives, topology and tropology, organism and environment

The embeddedness of humans in nature and their place in biodiversity has been a long-standing theme in poetry, even if the literature of modernity has primarily problematized exclusion. Vulnerability has become a central category alongside apocalyptic visionarism, and the poetry of empathy has emerged alongside crisis rhetoric. Vulnerability, linked with memory, also attracts syncretism in an almost self-evident way (Niemam 2018, 84-101). Eco-poetics links the geological and physiological memory of biodiversity with cultural memory, the question of sustainability with the philosophy of being and environmental justice, which reinforces the ethical dimensions of spatial poetics and prompts taking a critical stance (Schuster 2018, 208-227). The importance of the ecological imperative in poetry has been emphasised by Jed Rasula (2002), who has drawn a metaphorical parallel between the development of American poetry and the process of composting, but also refers to the development of poetic compositions. The decomposing

remains of plants, layers, and sediments, which then serve as a breeding ground, also model the workings of a fertile tradition. Decomposition is also a natural method of energy transfer. Each poem is part of an ecosystem of poetic history. Sarah Nolan is right to point out that the naïve conception of nature in the Romantic tradition has become untenable: we cannot speak of a distinct, pure nature, only of polluted, damaged, threatened spaces. This is why she introduced the paradoxical notion of unnatural eco-poetics (Nolan 2017), which sees garbage or pollution as an inseparable part of the ecological environment, as well as the powerful presence of the digital universe. It decomposes and permanently critiques the dichotomy between nature and culture. Lynn Keller goes as far as talking about eco-apocalyptic poetry, but she also discusses, for example, the eco-poetics of plastics (Keller 2017), while analysing poems by contemporary American poets.

Already Goethe's famous essay *Metamorphosis of Plants* (Goethe 1981, 537) anticipated many aspects of the modern relationship between nature and poetics. One of these is the model of plant life, according to which the plant as a living organism can be a model for artificial structures. In the context of rhetoric and poetics, this insight became of particular importance, since the proliferation, sprouting, and development of the text can form conscious analogies. The process is inseparable from hybridization. Adrienn Pataky has rightly emphasised the hybridising character of bio-poetic trends in contemporary Hungarian poetry: "This phenomenon is experiencing a renaissance in Hungarian poetry (and prose) in the 2000s, and is producing new directions not previously characteristic of Hungarian literature, intertwined with body poetics, animal studies, the posthuman, or the Anthropocene"[1] (Pataky 2019). Zoltán Németh speaks of the extension of the body, and recognizes new poetic possibilities in the creation of new constellations of bodily relations: the characteristics of the plant, animal, and human body create new, visible patterns of "inscription in the body"[2] (Németh 2015, 40). This idea goes back to Bate's classical thesis, which bases the tradition of eco-poetics on the idea of the "imaginative reunification of mind and nature" (Bate 2000, 245). Jonathan Skinner has distinguished several levels of the eco-poetic approach. These are the following: the topological level focuses on the place, i.e., the environment of the poem; the tropological level focuses on the figural, pictorial-rhetorical structure of the poem, its rhetorical ecosystem; the entropological level focuses on the materiality of the text; and the ethnological level focuses on the relationship between the co-existence and the history of the development of landscape and humans (Skinner 2004-2005, 128-129).

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1   English translations of Hungarian quotations in the text are the author's unless otherwise indicated. In original: "Ez a jelenség a kétezres évek magyar lírájában (és prózájában) reneszánszát éli, illetve újfajta, a magyar irodalomban korábban nem jellemző irányokat termel ki, összefonódva a testpoétikákkal, az animal studies-zal, a poszthumánnal vagy az antropocénnel."

2   In original: "testbe íródás"

The above theoretical considerations will also inform the analysis of the Hungarian ecopoetic discourse.

It is useful to start from one of the most classical nature-sensitive genres, the idyll. This genre, known from antiquity, uses elements, rituals, and the closeness to the nature of the pastoral environment to talk about humans, to put into allegories socio-political relations or, for example, dilemmas of poetic theory. This classic genre, which is proliferating and renewing itself in Hungarian poetry, thanks primarily to the strength of the Vergilian tradition, has recently been infused with new energy by László Lázár Lövétei. Instead of eclogues, he wrote, so to speak, "ecologues". In his volume *Zöld* [Green], he raises the fundamental themes of eco-poetics in the tone of the eclogue tradition (Lövétei 2011). The collection already indicates the nature of the author's thinking in its title. Lövétei engages both the ancient and the Hungarian literary tradition in dialogue: in addition to the microcosm of the characters arguing and competing in the poems, the more general nature of the textual creation also has a strong dialogic character. In addition to the obvious presence of ecological imperatives, his skillful dramatisation and humour deserve special attention. The ideals of environmentalism and attachment to the land create a strong tension. The focus of vulnerability is constantly shifting, sometimes to the plant or animal sphere, sometimes to the human component, and sometimes to the creative process. László Lázár Lövétei's eclogues revitalise an exciting poetic schema system, playing with the rites of cultural memory (Polgár 2017, 62). It is this dialogue rather than the ideology or tropology of the ecopoetic charge that gives the poems their power.

"The purest energy patterns are carried by plants",[3] wrote Mátyás Sirokai in one of the key texts of his highly acclaimed volume *Lomboldal* [Foliage side] (Sirokai 2020; Csehy 2022), which has been translated into several languages. These energy patterns also become text-generating forces. Just as the patterns, according to the poet, derive from the transformative capacities of plants in relation to the inanimate, the matrix of the text, i.e., language, becomes an experimental field for these patterns. The poems in this volume appear as foliage, reflecting on the paper on which they are written. The word *lomboldal* is also a hybrid pun in Hungarian, since it does not merely denote the spaces of the tree canopy, but also refers to the words *lomb* ('foliage') and *oldal* ('book page'). The human–plant–material existence is identical to the linguistic existence, the foliation of the plant and the text being almost analogous. Sirokai is not only a poet but also a musician, and the materiality of his wooden instruments is also closely linked to plant existence. It is this multifaceted context that gives rise to an exceptionally exciting term in Sirokai: the word *növénylés* ('plant-ing', meaning behaviour as a plant, transformation into a plant, perception

3   In original: "A legtisztább energiamintát a növények hordozzák."

as a plant), which is interpreted as the common denominator of these phenomena. The layers of Sirokai's poems are inseparable: the weaving together, the occupation of space, and the symbiosis extend to the rhetorical solutions. Plants are sometimes "instruments of the wind"[4], and sometimes puzzles: this desire to decipher is associated with reading as a process of understanding. "A foliage structure is so complex that the eye never encounters the same sight twice",[5] says the poet. Reading the poem becomes, in this sense, an expedition into the jungle of "organic attention".[6] The interpretability of the poem is an organic formation, as is its createdness. Sirokai's volume asserts the tropological and entropological aspects the most strikingly, giving voice to the trees and the secret language of plant life. This nonsensical language, at first sight meaningless but following rules of Hungarian phonotactics and syllable structure and, thus, coming through "almost meaningful" (similarly in a way to Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*, feels like an unknown or damaged human language (*Évla utaldon, bolongi bolo enyissze udd.*), or some ancient mythical incantation with a faded meaning (*sze néa tulpa, sze tulilpa*), or even a funny gibberish (*szit halanda*) to the Hungarian reader. The "en-plant-ation" of the human body also occurs, for example, when the damp warmth of marsh plants is juxtaposed with the damp environment of internal organs. Zen meditation practices and specific, almost acrobatic tree-climbing rites also appear: these symbolise the intimacy of togetherness and embeddedness.

Tamás Korpa's 2020 volume *A lombhullásról egy júliusi tölggyel* [On the falling of leaves with a July oak] takes the topological aspect and the poetics of place as its point of departure. Why are trees, flowers, and even rocks not marked on a map? Is the colour green enough to indicate the forest, yellow the desert, light brown the plateau, a darker brown the mountain range? Even an oak has coordinates. Sometimes the poems are titled with the coordinate itself (e.g., *48°37'32.5 "N 20°50'45.9 "E*), sometimes with the name of a tourist location in Slovakia, together with the altitude (e.g., *Bezvody (800 m)*). The volume is created by poetry projected on the topography of the Slovak Karst mountains. If we look at the tropological and entropological aspects, we immediately notice that almost all the texts contain at least one particular poetic solution. It is mainly a radical renewal of poetic premodifying and synesthetic structures. Some examples are as follows: *kisportolt száj* ('athletic mouth'), *kettévágott kaptár* ('beehive cut into two', lit. cut hive), *rövid gödör* ('short pit'), *választékos gondok* ('assorted troubles'), *őszi pigmentfröccs* ('autumn pigment splash'), *poszthumusz levelek* ('posthumous leaves'), *kandírozott rügyek* ('candied buds'), *kátyús fodor* ('potholed ruffle'), *falánk szirom* ('gluttonous petal'), and *fanyar folyosó* ('tart corridor'). In natural spaces, humanoid and human existence are only components of something;

4 In original: "a szél hangszerei"
5 In original: "Egy lombszerkezet annyira összetett, hogy a szem sosem találkozik kétszer ugyanazzal a látvánnyal."
6 In original: "az organikus figyelem"

valleys and mountains are metaphorical spiritual landscapes as well as natural formations. "It is as if the leaf stems are synonymous with each other",[7] Korpa writes, and this quote makes clear the close relationship between grammar and botany. We can also state that bodies of trees and the human anatomy almost claim a common poetic atlas.

Tamás Korpa's volume of poetry is at once a poetic landscape mapping and an anatomy of an unstoppable vegetative rhetoric. It is most exciting when it presents a linguistic phenomenon as a karstic spectacle or transforms certain impressions into default units of memory. Korpa is interested in the process that results in the transformation of an observed natural "part" into an organ, even a sense organ. A stream or a branch, for example, can function as a sensory organ. The dense network of synesthesia and metaphors sketches the neural network of these sensory organs to us. This is joined by the runaway machinery of anthropomorphized nature: the tree gargling with its "whole body", or the mass of interrogated logs and tree limbs, or the "court of houseplants", where, for example, objective testimony is expected from the outside observer.

In Korpa's poems, the valley bottoms and enigmatic hollows, or in other words the landscape itself, absorb time. In the poem *Havrania skala (770 m)*, for example, the poet deliberately confuses verb tenses and moods. The verb tenses grow into a mossy carpet or expand into opaque foliage. The nourishing soil of these grammatical categories is the human view of time, so their validity in a more complex eco-landscape becomes relative. In the poem *Blatnica potok*, the poet lists 3rd person singular forms of verbs throughout 48 lines in order to find the most specific one to describe a phenomenon. Cumulation and synonymy are the vegetative luxury of language. And in the poem *A köd definíciója (Okrúhly laz)* [The definition of fog (Okrúhly laz)], adjectives and pronouns are rampant. Stubborn and parasitic adjectives of the most varied registers litter the path, obscuring the direction.

Nature, which obliterates the traces of human history, appears as much as nature which has been wounded by humans: the time that shapes history in nature is infinite patience.

In Gábor Mezei's 2016 book *natúr öntvény* [natural casting], the contrast between nature and the artificial (cast) is hidden. This volume goes beyond the more traditional biopoetic conceptions that characterise Korpa's and Sirokai's volumes. Mezei is closer to the Nolan type of unnatural eco-poetics. Artificial and natural are already indistinguishable, the landscape can be modelled or model-like and artificial. Some examples of the tropological aspects of the volume are as follows: *a fűben betontojás* ('concrete eggs in the grass'), *tótükrön árnyas acélnyálka* ('shadowy steel mucus on a lake surface'), *a még meleg fű üvegszálai* ('glass fibres in the still warm grass'), *lágyan forrasztott hegygerinc szilikoncsipkéi* ('silicon lace of a softly soldered ridge').

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7 In original: "A levélnyelek mintha egymás szinonimái lennének"

Organic and inorganic, natural and industrially produced things meet and become one in these word assemblages or casts.

Constructedness and hybridity extend to everything, there is no untouched terrain. Indeed, sometimes even the tools of construction are involved in the metalepsis of the transition from the living to the object (cf. *rügyező fejű kalapács* 'hammer with a budding head'). In the case of Mezei, there are metalepsis-like movements in a tropological sense. The elements of nature are always passing into the passivity of immobile but malleable matter, and dead matter is being transported into the realm of proliferation dominated by the life principle. Yet this transgression is not grotesque or comic: it takes place as a natural act that focuses on the activity of the creator. Mezei comes close to saying out loud that nature does not really exist, that it exists only as a construct. The volume is also exceptionally carefully constructed: it consists of seven cycles, two of which contain 2 times 7, i.e., fourteen, poems that mirror each other. Each poem in the *nehéz forgács* ('heavy wood chips') cycle is 13 lines long. The role of the prime numbers is also enhanced. The mathematician Marcus du Sautoy, author of *The Music of the Primes*, makes it clear to non-mathematicians that the primes are the "atoms" of mathematics (like the notes of an octave in music) from which all the numbers can be extracted (Du Sautoy 2014). Thanks to primes, our data is saved when we pay by card, and the incompatibility of primes serves as a base when the acoustics of a concert hall is designed, but, according to Mezei, there are living beings whose biological life cycle is linked to primes. Prime numbers also become, for Mezei, the atoms of the poetic volume, of harmony, of construction, and of thought: the prime number is the defining "atom" of existence, the basic material of construction, whether it be mere inanimate matter or a living organism. In his lecture *A szavak csodálatos életéből* [From the Miraculous Life of Words] (published in 2003), Péter Esterházy says that a real writer in the world of literature is like a prime number in mathematics. In Mezei's conception, nature, writing, and existence are brought into harmony by using these allusions.

Mezei extends the notion of constructed nature to mythical registers. Early science was far less exact than today's, with a much greater role for imagination and myth-making. The *monstrorum historia* cycle uses the title of a famous Renaissance work by Ulisse Androvandi: this magnificent work of monster descriptions categorises and describes mythological creatures, natural wonders, and human freaks. Mezei's "monster descriptions", catalogued with prime numbers, extend the rhetoric of bestiaries (and herbaria) in a poetic direction. The situation is complicated by the intersection between plant and animal components: for example, in his world there are also *évelő pikkelyesek* ('perennial scaly reptiles').

The spaces of the volume are laboratory spaces: sometimes we see a table for building models, sometimes a kitchen where bizarre dishes are prepared, and sometimes a bestiary of the imagination. One can

only see the world as a model built to scale, a designed landscape, a panopticon, driven partly by exactness tending towards the mystical (the music of the prime numbers), and partly by the dynamism of the mystical tending towards the exact.

Mezei's other volume, *Száraztenger* [Dry sea] (2021), is an even stronger expression of the poetics outlined above. As he puts it, in this book he is primarily interested in the wasteful geometry of the immediate medium. It is clear that topology plays a prominent role here too: most of the poem titles refer to specific places that can be retrieved on a map, yet these loci lead to the spaces of a private geography. The mapping of the given landmarks gives rise to a network of poetic cartography. The past is replaced by the present of memory, and the texts are then subdued by subjectivity or linguistic tyranny. Another striking feature is the human body deprived of its hegemonic position (Polgár 2020). Nothing exemplifies this better than the author's portrait photograph. We see only a figure, a squatting body contour in a landscape "furnished" in a particularly innovative photo-poetic way. This is no classic portrait, there is no author's face, it is replaced by a human figure that exists in the landscape and is composed into the geometry of the view, a human figure which becomes insignificant and blends in such that it is almost unidentifiable. The contour becomes the dominant object of the poetic world. The phenomena are arranged within the contours of an umbrella term. In this world, for example, city districts have a "morphology", paired absence has "economics", and distance has a "deep structure". Sometimes these structures function as structures of negation or reductions, e.g., *nincs szintaxisa a hóesésnek* ('snowfall has no syntax').

Sometimes the geometry of the poem emphasises the presence of intertexts, e.g., the turn *hegesztett kockacsend* ('welded cubic silence') in the poem *bükkszentkereszt* [placename] sketches the first stanza of the classic poem *Passion of Ravensbrück*[8] (*Ravensbrücki passió*) by János Pilinszky into the background of Mezei's poem. The Hungarian reader perceives the allusions as organic outgrowths or destructive impurities.

The historical coordinates of the textual landscape and the cultural landscape play the most important role in Gábor Lanczkor's volume *Sarjerdő* [Coppice] (2021). The poems are usually linked to specific spaces: the topological delimitation is exact here, just like in Korpa's or Mezei's poems. What makes the places unique, however, is the cultural or literary tradition associated with them. Here, the places evoke the classical authors of Hungarian poetry and culture, cultural memory turns into space, literary tradition into topography and nature. In Lanczkor's work, the ethnological aspect becomes powerful: the interaction between human activity, which produces and gives life to texts, and the natural environment. Jed Rasula's notion of compost also captures the layering of Lanczkor's texts: the geology of landscape and

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8   English translation by János Csokits.

the processes of text formation are analogous. Today's culture grows from the compost of layers of tradition. The metaphorical forest, elevated to volume title, refers primarily to this.

An exceptional achievement of the eco-poetics line is Gábor Dávid Németh's book *Lebegő arborétum* [Floating arboretum] (2022). The word *arboretum* evokes a sense of vulnerability and protection in the reader. Vulnerability is a sign of emphasising the ecological imperative. The exceptional power of the tropological level is already pointed out by the author of the blurb, Márió Nemes Z., who calls some of Németh's word formations "fetishes of the lyrical private language"[9] (Németh 2022, footer text). Nemes Z. cites the rather uniquely formed word *kamillakényszer* ('chamomile compulsion') as an example. This formulation, which links private mythology and magic, seems almost natural in the context of the poetic world of the volume from the point of view of eco-poetics. The turn of phrase is a poetic, tropological representation of the vulnerability of living in the shelter of an arboretum. Gábor Dávid Németh is also open to the Ovidian tradition of metamorphoses – mythological syncretism is not alien to him either. Sometimes, for example, he speaks in the voice of a tree, at other times he performs plant or animal metamorphosis or plays with the role potential inherent in these metamorphoses. Interestingly, the arboretum is not bound to specific coordinates but floats, as indicated by the premodifier in the title. It is presented as a protected or imaginary space floating in a space without coordinates.

To sum up, the eco-poetic lineage of Hungarian lyric poetry is extremely rich and varied. In terms of poetic innovation, it has contributed significantly to the enrichment of the poetic arsenal of contemporary Hungarian poetry and has also created a new artistic attitude.

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9   In original: "a lírai privátnyelv fétiseinek"

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Contemporary Ecosophies and Ecorhythmology

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ABSTRACT

The present paper compares the author's original proposal called ecorhythmology with contemporary ecophilosophies. After briefly outlining the background and results of more than two decades of research, it examines the seminal theses of Object Oriented Ontology (Graham Harman), Action Network Theory (Bruno Latour) and the concept of *being ecological* (Timothy Morton) from an ecorhythmological perspective. Taking stock of interesting similarities and correspondences, this analysis also raises new questions, to which the author proposes different solutions. The paper presents two critiques of the reductionism of string theory and compares Harman's theory of metaphor with the concept of art based on gestural resonance. Further investigations connect Latour's redistribution of agency to the intersubjective relationship between the human and non-human, and relate hybridity to proximity. In the second part of the paper, Morton's different temporalities are juxtaposed with rhythmic dimensions, and finally, the article makes a difference between the casual, political and ethical approaches to the phenomenon of tuning. The stakes are always learning and relearning what kind of contact making can lead to greater peace in difficult human – non-human coexistence.

Keywords: temporalities, kinetic spaces, tuning, human – non-human coexistence, Graham Harman, Bruno Latour, Timothy Morton

Ecosophy is the chosen name of two earlier versions of ecophilosophy, initiated by the deep ecologist Arne Naess (1989) and the poststructuralist philosopher and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (2000). Their proposals are quite different, but linked by the prominent role they give to practice: for Arne Naess, a normative practice based on ecological wisdom, and for Félix Guattari, a political movement. I have chosen to use the term "contemporary ecosophies" rather than the more general term "recent ecophilosophies", in order to emphasise an approach from the perspective of practice-oriented physics that I have initiated.

Practice-oriented physics considers practice not in a normative or political sense, but as a practical orientation in time(s). Specifically, I have been investigating the rhythmic dimensions of the literary/artistic practice of reading and writing, i.e., the kinetic space of attention gestures tuned to a practical rhythm during the time of writing and reading (Berszán 2016). One of the important applications of paying attention in many different ways is learning and relearning our relationship with the non-human environment, in which artistic practices, including literary reading and writing, can be an effective ally. I call the exploration and cultivation of such contact making experiments ecorhythmology (Berszán 2018b, 2019a), and I have been developing it for the past 20 years not only in theoretical and applied studies, but also in a series of experimental *Land-rover Book* camps (Berszán 2012).

Among contemporary ecophilosophies, there are some that converge at several points with the research results of practice-oriented physics and ecorhythmology, showing that my research, which in the second half of the 1990s had to contend with the hegemony of discourse and then with the limitations of the contextualist paradigm, is finding important allies today. Fortunately, they both mutually reinforce each other and raise interesting further questions concerning their divergences. For a long time, representatives of the main schools of literary studies considered my proposals expressing dissatisfaction with the narrowness of the dominant paradigms, as having no stake. How can I not see, they asked, that nothing is outside of discourse? How can I not see that nothing is outside of cultural and/or political processes? How can I not see that nothing is outside of media history? How can I not see that nothing is outside of social history? Recently, I have finally found researchers who are not shocked at the thought that there is space, life and action outside our human reach. In this paper, I chose to consider these contemporary lines of research which I can debate without being diametrically opposed to them. On the contrary, even our arguments against each other have a common ground, so to speak. In what follows, I would like to present some of these common grounds and cause a little stir with a few questions and counter-arguments.

The three contemporary ecosophies selected in this paper are Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) initiated by Graham Harman (2017), Bruno Latour's philosophy known as Action Network Theory or ANT (Latour 1993, 2014), and Timothy Morton's conception of *being ecological* (Morton 2018). I want to show how ecorhythmology relates to and differs from these. As I indicated, my research in practice-oriented physics started in the second half of the 90s, and I only discovered these authors recently. My investigations so far are marked by the following books: *Kivezetés az irodalomelméletből* [Exiting Literary Theory] (2002), *Terepkönyv. Az írás és az olvasás rítusai – irodalmi tartamgyakorlatok* [Land-rover Book. Literary Rites of Reading and Writing] (2007), *Gyakorláskutatás. Írások és mozgásterek.* [Practice Research. Writings and Kinetic Spaces] (2013), *Ritmikai dimenziók.*

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String theory, metaphor and gestural resonance

In Graham Harman's OOO, I am going to highlight two aspects that show interesting similarities with practice-oriented physics and ecorhythmology. The first one is a critique of the contemporary physical string theory regarding its reductionism, the second one is further reflection on Jose Ortega y Gasset's theory of metaphor.

Harman summarises the reductionism of string theory in four points, and rejecting its claim for the status of a "theory of everything", he gives the following subtitle to his own book: *A New Theory of Everything*. According to Harman, the four problematic theorems are: 1. everything that exists is necessarily physical; 2. everything that really exists is necessarily elementary and simple (see elementary particles); 3. everything that exists is necessarily real; and 4. everything that exists can be stated in a literal propositional language (Harman 2017, 25-35). Against these "intellectual toxins" (Harman 2017, 39) he offers counter-arguments and counter-examples, and proposes a developed version of Ortega's theory of metaphor. The first counter-argument suggests that a historical hyper-object such as the Dutch East India Company in the 18th and 19th centuries is not a physical being. The second counter-argument denies that emergent properties of complex objects can be derived from elementary entities: a married couple, for example, is more than its component persons separately. The third counter-argument states that Sherlock Holmes and literary fiction in general exists, but is not real. Finally, the fourth counter-argument lists examples in which explicit description is less than an implied one: a partially clothed body (see lingerie advertisements) is more erotic than nudist beaches; an explained joke is less than an implied punchline, and a metaphor cannot be exhausted by explicit phrases (Harman 2017, 25-35).

In my oral and written debates with theoretical physicists Zoltán Néda and Albert-László Barabási, I resisted the physical reduction of events, too. The physical model of self-organising systems, I argued, does not reveal the event of the pilgrimage in Mecca (this was the subject of Zoltán Néda's sociophysical lecture) in its entirety, but creates its time projection into a very narrow physical space (the kinetic space of bodies with mass and extension). For the physicist, it makes no difference whether pilgrims whirling around the Kaaba stone practice their belief or tell each other mother-in-law jokes. An event taking place in several dimensions is reduced to an event described in fewer dimensions or in a different rhythmic dimension, i.e., it is a distorted time projection

(Berszán 2016, 5-6). Network theory also pretends that everything must happen in the network space, whereas the variety of kinetic spaces is much wider than networks. Things, which in Harman's philosophy can only be accessed in their appearance, while their ontological reality is inexhaustible, cannot be reduced to points and edges, as the network models and formulas of Albert-László Barabási suggest (Berszán 2016, 2-3). What distinguishes practice-oriented physics and ecorhythmology from the position of OOO and, in this respect, moves it closer to string theory, is the introduction of the complementary rhythmic dimensions (Berszán 2016, 2019: Practical Rhythm). Hence, the inner secret of the thing is not so much posited as the inaccessibility of the Kantian thing as being in-itself, but as happenings and motions in the kinetic spaces of things and living creatures.

Harman's reflection on Ortega's theory of metaphor resonates with the ecorhythmology of artistic attention practices. According to Harman, philosophy is closer to aesthetics and the arts than to the sciences (Harman 2017, 59). He does not claim that works of art reveal the mystery of life and being, but that the particular kind of pleasure we call aesthetic experience arises from an encounter with the inaccessible Kantian thing in-itself. Harman reminds us that philosophy is not wisdom in gold bars, but the *love* of wisdom, and this is the source of its vivid metaphors.

As an ecorhythmologist, I could relate to this by trying to attune precisely the attentive gestures of aesthetic appreciation in art, for instance while writing or reading literature, and letting those gestures attune me. The indecision between the two kinds of tuning we call aesthetic encounter. Ortega takes the example of the metaphor from López Pico: "the cypress is like the ghost of a dead flame" (Harman 2017, 72). Compared to the translation of the thing as appearance to sensual data or the literal knowledge of the cypress, the metaphor encounters the real thing as being in-itself. But in the experience of the metaphor, the cypress is not the real object involved in the aesthetic experience, but the author or the receiver who experiences the metaphor by becoming a compound thing made of the qualities of cypress and flame, just as an actor becomes the other person acted out in Stanislavsky's methodology (Harman 2017, 83). According to the theatricality of metaphor, the objective image that I have access to is only a shadow of the thing in-itself, but it does trigger a subjective reaction out of me, and it triggers it out of me as a thing in-itself. Consequently, I am the only real object on the scene carrying the sensual qualities of the metaphor. Aesthetic experience encounters the thing in-itself but, in Harman's view, it never confronts the other object, but (only) the reader himself/herself. To this extent, the Kantian ruse remains valid: after all, he says, it is not the roiling ocean that is sublime, but a sensual appearance of my idea of infinity in it (Kant 2002, 129-130). This time I am the only accessible being in-itself who takes the stage: I play the cypress.

In practice-oriented physics and in ecorhythmology, the relationship between the cypress and the reader is one of attunement to the shared rhythm of a happening, i.e., a resonance with the cypress's gestures (this time, all impulsive gestures are taken into account including the cypress turning green). In writing and reading the metaphor, I am in a shared kinetic space with the other: something intense is happening with us, in which the other participates as much as I do. I agree with Harman that, in addition to teaching sciences, it is also necessary to teach arts in order to encourage learners to discover a certain kind of getting in touch with things, other than using or knowing them. However, our description of what happens in this relationship shows differences. Harman's theatricality and the gestural resonance outlined by me only partially overlap. It needs and deserves further investigation to find out how they converge and how they diverge. For Harman, theatricality brings about an ontological turn (becoming something), for me, practice is an orientation in kinetic spaces, or a passage between them (attunement to events with different rhythms).

According to the OOO, the relationship between the participants in the metaphor is not reciprocal: one of them (the cypress) takes on the role of the grammatically understood subject, the other (the flame) the grammatically understood object (Harman 2017, 86). This theatrical orientation, however, completely forgets the *ghost*, even though it is also a participant in the metaphor: *the cypress is the ghost of a dead flame*. Ecorhythmology is not oriented according to the acting performance and the role to be played, but follows the rhythm of a game participants initiate in each other's company. I do not play or act out the cypress in the metaphor, but play along with the cypress, the flame and the ghost. What is created is not a common, complex object, but a common kinetic space I share with the cypress, the flame and the ghost, so that the metaphor is happening with and to us, and it is not performed by me alone. Those beings evoked here contribute to their evocation. In the metaphor, I am attuned to their impulses and I am placed in their midst or company. The result is not so much a compound object made up of cypress, dead flame, ghost and me, but a gestural resonance between us in which this metaphor takes place. This is how I understand participants' commitment in a lived metaphor.

In an approach like this, there is no substitution because no participant in the metaphor can be replaced. It is precisely because of their irreplaceability that we encounter their uniqueness which makes them cognitively and non-cognitively inexhaustible. To be in each other's company does not mean that we know everything about the other, however the act of getting in touch is as real as the collision of two rocks. One real rock does not collide with the sensual image of the other, as Harman suggests (2017, 163), because in this case it is undecidable which of the two is real, or rather it can only be said that they are sensual for each other and therefore for themselves as well, and their reality remains only hypothetical. The fact that in the collision

the two parties do not encounter each other in their totality does not mean that the collision between the real rocks is not real, or that only an indirect encounter takes place. I accept that this is not the only way of encounter, but it is real, and it is also direct, in the sense that everything by which they are given for each other in this encounter belongs to them, as much as they belong to their reality. For my part, I find the ontological separation of reality and appearance, or the ontological leap between the two problematic, since appearance is no less real than the unfathomable thing in-itself or its relations. I agree that every realistic encounter with the unknowable other makes him or her both familiar and unfamiliar: what or whom I meet is known to me as one who can be close to me in other ways too: further encounters are seemingly probable.

Similarly, the difference between the time projection of an event and its following in its own rhythmic dimension is not ontological, but rather "ethical" – not as an opposition between false belief and true knowledge, but as different practical orientations in different attempts of contact making. Such encounters are always real, but it does matter what is the occurrence with which a practical or resonant relationship is established. The Harmanian paradigm (whose unarticulated presuppositions as real qualities constitute the scientific thing as a sensual object) is equated here to the real kinetic space of time projection, whose events never coincide with the event followed in its own rhythmic dimension. Such a shared kinetic space does not mean knowing the truth about the other, it is a much closer encounter. In my view, this indispensable condition makes possible what Ortega and Harman both assume: a confrontation with the unknowable other. Otherwise, we miss the other because we mistake it for something else, we encounter in a different kinetic space.

So-called *correlationism* strips the object of all ontological depth conceiving it as a *correlatee* to its *correlators*, such as perception, interpretation, realisation or execution. According to its radical postmodern version, the supposed background of an object constructed in the process of its grasping is also a product of the same process. The OOO rightly objects that correlationism erases the object correlated to my perceptual or any access apparatus as non-existent by tracing it back to the operation of my access apparatus (Harman 2017, 55-56). And Harman similarly criticises the reduction of things to their effects or actions in Latour's theory of agency (Harman 2017, 49). According to the ecorhythmological view, I can pay attention not only to the way I access the other's activity, and not only to the effects of these actions, but also to their occurrence or rhythm. Such a relationship draws me into the company of the other, where I do not collect data, do not construct anything, and do not measure the output performance related to a network of agencies, but resonate with the proximity of the other.

Agency, hybrids and the proximity to the other

For me, there are two Bruno Latours: one with whom I am a good friend, and one to whom I am just a debating partner. I will first introduce my friend by means of two quotes. "One of the main puzzles of Western history is not that 'there are people who still believe in animism,' but the rather naive belief that many still have in a deanimated world of mere stuff; just at the moment when they themselves multiply the agencies with which they are more deeply entangled every day. The more we move in geostory, the more this belief seems difficult to understand." (Latour 2014, 7) Let me ask him to explain how he understands this: "It is not that we should try to puff some spiritual dimension into its [the Earth's] stern and solid stuff – as so many Romantic thinkers and nature philosophers had tried to do – but rather that we should abstain from deanimating the agencies that we encounter in each step. Geo-physiology as well as geo-morphology, geo-physics, geo-graphy, geo-politics should not eliminate any of the sources of agency." (Latour 2014, 14)

Latour proposes that we take stock of what does what, and it will become clear that the division that places the capable subject, society, culture and human history on one side and the incapacitated objects on the other is untenable. Just look at what sunshine and rain in springtime do to trees, grass and flowers. Notice what hoar-frost or snow does to the trees. What the wind does to the clouds and the sea. The earthquake to the city, the air and drinking water to humans, gravity to our planet, the tilt of the Earth's axis of rotation (relative to its orbit) to the seasons, the mole to the earth, wild boars to corn fields, wolves to flocks, woodpeckers to pine trunks, or how a dog, horse, dolphin or octopus is happy with another dog, horse, dolphin or human companion…

I think I am a close collaborator of Latour when I write studies on what a pond (in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*), a small wolf (in Jack London's novel *White Fang*), or "some tuft of dandelion seed" (in Wordsworth's poem), does to a person writing and reading literature (Berszán 2018b; 2019b). Further on, there are the trees of Ágnes Nagy Nemes (Berszán 2017), the estuary of the River Severn in South Wales in Philip Gross's poem collection (Berszán 2019c), young Marcel learning to listen to noises on a sad evening in Proust's *Search of Lost Time* (Berszán 2022), or Ádám Bodor's "sinistra zone", in which there is room for more than just humans (Berszán 2015). What became apparent about these non-human creatures was that they were co-authors, as skillful attention-grabbers as art itself. They are an excellent and indispensable companion in our exploration of all that could never happen to us were it not for lakes, little wolves, tufts wandering on smooth water, estuaries, trees, sounds, mountains. While trying to find out what colour a lake is, we are engaged not only in a particular form of Romantic transcendentalism, but also amazing experiments, as those

two or three pages dedicated to this can convince us in David Thoreau's *Walden* (Thoreau 1971, 175-177).

How amazing things are revealed if we really pay attention to what happens to a little wolf when it first ventures out of the den where it was born: among other things, we plunge into a wall – see Jack London's *White Fang*, chapter four on The Wall of the World (London 1906, 84-100). A generalised physics of Brownian motion offers an unheard-of study of attention (26 years before Brownian motion was discovered) – see the 4th of Wordsworth's *Poems on the Naming of Places* cycle (Brett–Jones 1991, 215). If you are interested in the secret occurrences of human thought, it is worth reading Philip Gross' poetic experiments in liquid matter – megatons of fresh and saltwater, or the mudflow of the tide – from the *Betweenland* series of the T. S. Eliot Prize-winning volume *The Watertable* (Gross 2009). If you are interested in the unfathomable actions of trees, it is worth reading the lines of Ágnes Nemes Nagy on the gestural resonance between hoar-frost and trees (Nemes Nagy 2003, 5). It is worth exploring the astonishingly subtle spaces of attention in Proust's tangled sentences and Ádám Bodor's attempts to become a local in the *zone* he describes (Bodor 2011). And, of course, one can also read my studies, which explore the rhythmic dimensions of practical orientation in all these temporalities. My research on sophisticated and intense attentional gestures of artistic practices can contribute to the re-learning of our relations with the human and non-human environment, sometimes in experimental *Land-rover Book* camps, sometimes on the mediatized battlegrounds of school and university education, sometimes in the attention laboratories of everyday practices.

When we deal with literature, we are playing with and risking our lives, just like when climbing the ice wall in the Fogaras Mountains. Otherwise, it's not worth it. Otherwise, we cannot convince others, especially young people, that it is worthwhile to be involved in literature and the arts. And we cannot convince ourselves either. What the other does is not merely an effect. Concerning agency, it is not only causality that counts, but also intersubjectivity. We do not only divide subjectivity (previously denied to things and attributed to humans alone) with non-living, non-sentient, non-conscious creatures through the redistribution of agency, but also share the company of each other.

Let us see now the other Bruno Latour with whom I am arguing. He is a hybrid. Or at least that is what he claims about himself and me and the world (Latour 1993, 1-3), while I keep protesting. There is no doubt that my body is made up of chemicals that have not always been part of my body and will not always remain part of my body. There is also no doubt that without associated bacteria, I would not be able to digest, and without air, water and food, I would quickly die. So, I have, and must have, a lot of non-self in me, not only in material or symbiotic association, but also in terms of my unconscious realms or acquired knowledge, including ideas of the friend Latour and doctrines of the discussion partner Latour. But in the same existence in which this

indivisibility is valid, so are individual things, beings, phenomena or thoughts. If there are no individual thoughts in this study, it can hardly be accepted as a research contribution to what has been discovered so far. Just as, by the same token, it should also include the thoughts of other professionals. How, then, are we to reconcile ourselves with this deceptive ambiguity? What we already know is that chronic human self-isolation, or the illusion of it, is leading to a global environmental crisis. But we also know that without individual creatures, without individual events, there is no diversity.

The proposed solution by ANT is linked to the Merleau-Ponty or Simondon line, which seeks to resolve the contradiction in the evolutionary history of a "metamorphic" or "metastable" system by referring to the "laws" of ontological, phenomenological or network processes and operations (Merleau-Ponty 1968; Simondon 2020). For me, there are two problems with this attempt: first, it narrows down the irreducible events of interconnection to a single paradigm (the hybrid model or the network model); secondly, it does little to address our responsibility, for example, to the failed, unsustainable or unilaterally self-constitutive ways of interconnection. Because either our mistakes are the result of the inescapable and irresistible laws of hybridity (and then we fight against them in vain, even within ourselves), or else the solution seems to reveal another world where there are and can be no such "sins". Yet they exist in our world. As Timothy Morton would say, global warming in the Anthropocene is not the fault of octopus species, but of humans (Morton 2018,16). And if we are responsible, then we cannot say that it just happened, we cannot help it. Inasmuch as it is possible to make wrong decisions or act wrongly in metastable states, we cannot say that awareness of the metastable system is sufficient for change. Our practical orientation must also be changed.

Furthermore, it may be narrow-sighted to speak only about the feasibility of the proposed solutions, such as the management of nature, which would be made possible by the technological control of Earth systems (Earth engineering). Maybe it is still worthwhile to leave the management of the planet to the unpredictable and unknowable cosmic, geological or biological systems. Latour argues that the human intervention that causes problems should be remedied by even greater intervention, and that it is foolish, for example, to protect national parks from human technology; it is necessary to accept that the entire surface of the planet is (or should become) cultivated land (Latour 2011). In his opinion even the most strictly protected reserves should have restaurants, post offices and bus stops. I am not so sure about that, I think it is good to have areas without these human constructions.

And I also agree with Graham Harman that, while research into hybrids is important, we must reject the assumption that all entities are hybrids of nature and culture, as Latour suggests (Harman 2017, 57-58). It is better to speak – as Harman does – of *compounds*, where hybrids are only one group. After all, it is also possible to link only natural elements

(e.g., the hydrogen and oxygen atoms in a water molecule) or only cultural elements (as the Greek and Judaic components of the European cultural tradition). It is not only the necessarily hybrid encounters of culture and nature that can constitute or provoke relations, translation, mediation or an ontology, but also the Levinasian proximity that makes the ethical relation between Me and You ultimate by acknowledging the radical otherness of the other (Levinas 1979).

Alternative temporalities, rhythmic dimensions and attunement

Timothy Morton and I have independently obtained very similar results: what I call "kinetic spaces" are close to what he calls "possibility spaces"; what I call "gesture resonance" is close to what he calls "tuning"; and my term "rhythmic dimensions" also refers to a variety of temporalities, which are equally important to him. Morton conceives of possibility space as a genre, an attitude or a way of accessing data objects, and, broadly, as an "executive" interpretation or a set of constraints (Morton 2018, XIV). Such is the case, for example, with *data dumping*, the most common way of communicating ecological information today, which induces guilt, does not tolerate contradiction, offers itself for acceptance as facts out of the sky (i.e., not constructed reality), and paralyses ecological action by reinforcing our powerlessness. This is why Morton warns that we can "live ecological knowledge" in other ways, in other genres, i.e., in other possibility spaces.

I would add that not all of these correspond to ideological tendencies. Morton also seems to accept this, but he most often associates possibility spaces with ideological critique. He asks what movement or movements can be made in the possibility space of information dumping concerning global warming, but he is also aware of the limitations of our hitherto valid mode of accessing something when it no longer goes unnoticed but comes as a surprise (e.g., winter is removed from the succession of seasons and consequently the familiar climate ceases to be taken for granted). A special form of surprise is when we encounter other ways, by which I also mean the others' way of accessing things. It turns out that other creatures also experience the things we experience, but mostly in very different ways than we do (for a fly, my wristwatch is a landing strip). "Natural is habitual", Morton concludes (Morton 2018, XXXII), which could be translated into Hungarian as: *ki mint él, úgy ítél* [one judges as one lives or: he/she who lives as he/she lives, judges as he/she judges]. This is precisely why, in my understanding, different kinetic spaces are not only shaped by prescriptive norms and ideological constraints, but also by the rhythm (or temporality) of a practice. So, it is not so much the (ideological) critical reflection that offers solution here – or at least it is not enough in itself because it is also within the kinetic space of a critical practice –, but rather the passage between

different kinetic spaces helps as demanding practical orientation in different temporalities.

Practical orientation is not equal to ideological effect, because it is not only a matter of transmitting information, not even a matter of interpretative contexts and patterns to be followed, but also the rhythmic dimensions of gestures. A possibility space both offers possibilities and sets limits, something Morton fails to emphasise. However, he would certainly agree that one can only move from one "possibility space" to another, which is exactly what I propose, when I understand them as kinetic spaces. One of the current possibility spaces is the cult of science as the worship of factoids constructed from some data, which prescribe a certain attitude and identify data with the thing itself. But according to Morton – here again a staunch supporter of the OOO –, data are only certain ways of approaching things, and never refer to things directly, but through the patterns that scientists recognize in them (Morton 2018, 74). The invention of such patterns, Morton suggests, seems to be similar to the aesthetic appreciation of works of art (Morton 2018, XXVII).

David Hume (1973) and Immanuel Kant (2003) had already warned of the variability and contingency of data. But it should also be stressed that data collection (in any broad sense) is only one way of connecting. Love is not mere data collection. The proximity of the other is not a mere given. Turning toward or tuning in to him/her/it depends not only on the selection of data, but also on gestural resonances. Morton also reserves the term "tuning" for this. The otherness of the other becomes apparent when I meet him/her/it in other kinetic spaces than the ones I have been used to. I mean kinetic spaces that the encounter with the other makes me discover, and in which the other teaches me to find my way. All things can do something, and to all things can happen something in many kinetic spaces. This discovery moves us out of our familiar kinetic spaces, without foregoing practical contact for the sake of some reflexive "background". For Morton, art becomes reflexive, it begins to speak about itself from a meta-position, because it discovers that we are locked into our own interpretations (Morton 2018, XXXV). The problem with reflection, however, is that jumping to meta levels always alienates me from what I have come into contact with. Reflection not only adds something to what it reflects on, but it takes much away from it. When I reflect on my poetry reading, it takes me out of the rhythm of reading the poem. I don't think self-reflection alone solves the problem of discovering the inexhaustibility of the other. I do agree, however, that because ecological facts are also about us (about how we are and what we do), it is difficult to see them from the outside; to inquire about how we act or see is one of the hardest tasks to do. Instead of self-reflection, this is why we need to ask the other for help, and to learn ways of making contact that move us out of our frequently practiced but problematic kinetic spaces that provoke crisis. Such experiments always call for attunement and re-tuning.

Morton also considers the aesthetic encounter as a model for what environmental ethics and environmental politics seek to achieve between the human and non-human (Morton 2018, 2). We agree that thinking is not the only, nor the most excellent way of access (as there is none). And we interpret the book of Ecclesiastes in the same way: when reading that there is a time for everything under the sun (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8), one may understand this to mean that everything has a different time, so there are many temporalities involved.[1] Morton is also right saying that when I tune in to something, it has already tuned in to me, i.e. it has started to move my attention in some way. Particularly in the perception of beauty, it is undecided where the effect starts. The English phrase "I like her/that" translates into Hungarian as "ő/az tetszik nekem" (she/it pleases me, she/it makes me like her/that).

In the aesthetic experience we encounter something/someone non-aggressively, non-violently. What I like is not liked for a specific purpose, so according to Morton, I am in solidarity with what I appreciate as beauty, regardless of whether that something is human, has consciousness, is sentient, or is a living being. That is how he thinks democracy can be extended to include the non-human (Morton 2018, 74). I think it is more likely that such experiences extend to include democracy. Because in the aesthetic encounter I discover the invisibility, the intangibility of things, including the intangibility of myself. Ecological consciousness is the discovery that there is a great variety of temporalities; which is, in fact, a profound recognition of a multiplicity of beings that are not me, with whom I live. And it is because of this multiplicity of temporalities that there is a high stake in the practical orientation concerning different times.

In the experience of the beautiful, it is undecidable who is logically and chronologically attuned to the other first: me to what is beautiful or it to me (Morton 2018, 74). I am really encountering an *other* (I am not the only real object here): "the encounter with Ice Watch is in a way a dialogue with ice blocks, not a one-way human conversation in a mirror that happens to be made of ice." (Morton 2018, 72). What Harman captures as theatricality (the theatricality of the lived metaphor) is, for Morton, "a mind meld between me and something that isn't me" (Morton 2018, 74). The company of the other cannot be a performance that replaces the other, nor is it something that dissolves the singularity of the self and the other. From Morton's description we can retain the attunement, from Harman's proposal the experiencing or living of the metaphor as commitment, but in an ecorhythmological approach there is no theatrical acting out, no fusion, but resonance. Fusion as blending dissolves the participants, the common rhythm always connects them to one another. And insofar as the actor's work is more than a performative construction, it has something in common with the resonance-connection of encountering the other, too.

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1   I mentioned this for the first time in my doctoral dissertation in 1998 (Berszán 2002, 84-86).

Morton emphasises the "givenness of data, of what is given" (Morton 2018, 74) in the beautiful, and Harman also speaks of the encounter with the inaccessible. How can I encounter the inaccessible? By revealing the mysteriousness of something that I have hitherto regarded as graspable, as a closed object; by realising its openness, its intangibility. This is what captures me in beauty, and this is what I capture in beauty, I would say, but it is no longer a question of capturing, of acquiring, but of encountering. In Hungarian '*találkozás*' (encounter) etymologically refers to one trying to find and fit the other and the other trying to find and fit one. The other is not subordinated to one's actions, nor vice versa, but what they do, what happens in the encounter, is attuned to a common rhythm that they experiment with together.

In the experience of the beautiful, Morton says, I myself also become an ungraspable other, the other who experiences, and who is not usually seen by experience: "I'm experiencing the texture of cognitive or emotional or whatever phenomena", "I magically see the unseeable aspects of a thing, including the thing called Tim Morton. I grasp the ungraspability of a thing." (Morton 2018, 76) I would rather say I am meeting the self I can only be in the company of another. If there were no trees, I would never know who I could be in the company of trees. Morton relates the experience of beauty to the unforeseeable future, to futurity itself as the coming of an unforeseeable "not yet". I am talking rather about coming close to the radically different in what happens with us as fellow participants. Morton says time flows from things: "Different objects, different futuralities." (Morton 2028, 76) I research different temporalities as additional rhythmic dimensions of happenings. Time flows out of things because what happens to them also sets us in particular rhythmic dimensions. Without them we would not discover these dimensions of happenings, for example, what happens to trees in the wind, the way they move, the music of the foliage; or what happens when they bloom, or when the hoar-frost precipitates on their branches. Without trees, these would be rhythmic dimensions that are forever locked away, but thanks to the proximity of trees, when we are in their company, our attention learns to resonate with these events. Through our attunement with the trees, these subtle rhythms/temporalities become a shared kinetic space. This is my understanding of the line: "art emits time, which tells you something about how everything emits time." (Morton 2018, 79)

I would add to what Morton says about the inevitability of our ecological existence: the recognition that multiple temporalities require a demanding practical orientation in time. Art acquires and helps us acquire proficiency in and between events with different rhythms through practical experiments. We should not speak of mere cognition or awareness, but of practical learning or learning by practice, the result of which is the expansion of the range of our kinetic spaces: proficiency in multiple rhythmic dimensions. I consider it untenable to call interpretation the way we access something, or the way we make

contact with it. This is as much a mistake or confusion as confusing a data-object with the object itself. For it is not only the data-object that we access, but also the way we come into proximity with the fellow-object, and the way the object comes into proximity with us, that is real. Such proximity is not a mere recording of data, but an exposure in which we are receptive to the otherness of the other and at the same time devoted to the other. If this is what Harman's theatricality means, then there is only a difference of terminology between us; if not, then I take proximity to be valid instead of theatricality. In the "realisation" or "execution" of things, things also intervene, and it matters how and to what extent they intervene or participate. For my part, this is where I would distinguish between kitsch and artistic approaches. Kitsch is when the things we depict have little or no say in our (depictive) practice, because we are aligned with other things (e.g., markets, ideologies). When connected, like in art (or love), we learn to align with who we are in proximity to.

Causality versus urge, politics versus ethics

Morton stresses that art is not just decorative, but causal: it always does something to me that I encounter in it. Since I cannot have direct and complete knowledge of any one thing, I can only tune in to it, more or less intimately. But in the meantime, it is already attuned to me what I am attuned to. It is a dynamic relationship, like the animal magnetism postulated by Mesmer (Morton 2018, 93). I describe this reciprocity as a highly refined and extremely intense attentional and gestural resonance, which cannot be traced back to the mapping of the data object. In reading Ágnes Nemes Nagy's poem *Között* [Between] (Nemes Nagy 2003, 59-60) and her essay *Bölénytelenül* [Buffalo-less] (Nemes Nagy 2018, 135-145), I say almost verbatim what Morton says: "the shaman follows the movements and habits of the prey, bringing them into her or his body, allowing his or her body to resonate with nonhuman capacities and qualities" (Morton 2018, 90). Doesn't it sound like Berszán?

There is a kind of oscillation or hesitation between the human and the non-human. From the moment we perceive our differences not as rigid divisions but rather as ghostly similarities, like the shaman in the hunting dance, it turns out that we are closer to the animals than we think or would like. It was while I was tracking wild animals without a gun, as my father taught me, that I had the startling realisation that there was no essential difference between a wild boar and me: we see with our eyes, walk on our feet, we have the same internal organs, we fear, struggle, experiment with possibilities... According to Morton, ecological relations are formed when the difference between the non-sentient, non-conscious, non-personal other and the subject previously reserved for humans becomes radically undecidable or wobbly (Morton 2018, 122-123). I would add: while writing and reading literature, let's

say, I enter into an intersubjective relationship with the non-human: a lake, a small wolf, trees, a landscape, like Greg Foster with an octopus in the documentary entitled *My Octopus Teacher* (Ehrlich–Reed 2020). This way I not only learn something about the other, but something happens to us in a shared kinetic space. It is always a very intense experience when I get really close to the other: be it another human, be it a bear, be it God. I get to "know" something about each of these cases – not just recordable information, but I will know something about their closeness that I could never have known if we had not been in a shared kinetic space.

If we remove the hesitation and clearly categorise ourselves and the other into separate categories, Morton argues, it is nothing but violence. "If I decide you're just a machine, I can manipulate you exactly as I want. If I decide you're a person, and person means 'not a machine,' then I can decide that other things are just machines by contrast, and manipulate them." (Morton 2018, 110) It does not mean that in ecocriticism we mix everything up. The intersubjective relationship with things is not an unformed mass; if it were, then the relationship would not be a problem, neither causally, nor ethically or aesthetically. "But connection is a big problem." (Morton 2018, 120) Morton and I agree on that, too. It is not all the same how we make contact or create a relationship: there is a difference between toleration and appreciation (e.g., liking as appreciation of something as beautiful).

Morton adopts the uncanny valley theory (Morton 2018, 121-122) which explain the reasons for our liking and disliking of robots: we dislike what is very different and at the same time eerily similar to us (see, for example, hybrid aliens in science fiction films) – this is what we find strange. Morton sees the key to the ethics and politics of tolerance, appreciation or acceptance of the strange other in ambiguity, in the undecidability of being different or similar. I, on the other hand, find it in the common kinetic spaces. With my child, with my students, with the bear, with God, it is our shared kinetic spaces that connect us, or the lack of them that divide us. If I am in a shared physical space with the bear and I shoot it from a distance, that's not a shared kinetic space. If I share a house with my child, that is not a common kinetic space. Sitting in a common classroom with my students for 90 minutes is not a common kinetic space. If I routinely say the Lord's Prayer, that is not a shared kinetic space with the Invoked One. We will only have a common kinetic space with the bear, with my students, with my child, and with God, if we are attuned to each other in a common rhythm in some kind of practice. It is enough if both the bear and I want to avoid openly attacking each other – the way we try to agree on this from a distance of about 20-25 steps. We have met several times like this, and the only chance I had was to have someone to negotiate with. Because not only do I meet a much larger and much stronger colossus than myself, but a highly intelligent and sensitive beast with an excellent affinity for making contact. I don't know if Morton would agree, but

I find it a distinguished opportunity for ecocritical or ecophilosophical inquiry when I find myself in such intense joint attention exercises with students in class or in the *Land-Rover Book* camps; when we tame each other or swim miles together with my son and the lake (most recently in the Alps); when I befriend a bear, even if it is at a distance of about 20-25 steps; or when I befriend God in prayer. What ecorythmology means is that in all the experimental fields of shared kinetic spaces, we can learn and relearn ourselves and each other.

Instead of "causality of art", which is irresistible regardless of me, I would rather use "urging", which is also highly impulsive, however it not only triggers something but also demands resonance. Resonance is not forced: I can resonate with many things, and along with the impulse, at any given moment it depends on practical choices what I actually resonate with. Alongside (and sometimes instead of) the causal network of relationships in the ecosystem, I would rather speak of a dense forest of urges, in which the only inescapable imperative is the need to orient yourself. What rhythms tune oneself in to, depends on a practical *time sacrifice,* too. Even in a concentration camp, there are always choices, which is not to say that you can choose just anything. In attunement, one can only ever choose something that makes one want to choose it. But there is never just one urge that prevails, even in the most severe cases of imprisonment or coercion. Even when one is nailed to the cross, one may choose to accuse the Saviour crucified along with him or to admire his innocence. We know that there were those who chose the first option and there were those who chose the other. Just as Jesus had to choose whether to ask for a legion of angels from heaven to crush the execution squad, or to endure the shame and suffering; he had to choose whether to take vengeance on those who defied him, or to pray for them.

For ecorhythmology, art is not so much a thing-like work of art as some kind of intense artistic practice that urges us to follow its attentional stimuli. However, these impulses do not drive us violently: resonance is a constant attunement to urges rather than a helpless co-vibration with them. Our impression that we cannot escape from an extremely strong impulse already presupposes our attunement, even if it is impossible to decide which came first: the impulse or the attunement. Morton's aesthetics exemplifies solidarity by the appreciation of the work of art, and while he exemplarily avoids the ultimate politicisation of art, he does not exclude the possibility of using art to reinforce deceptive aspirations, even in the Platonic sense, by assuming the all-encompassing causal power of the work of art. Yet, to urge and to influence by coercion or manipulation are not the same: the former seeks partners or the other's company, whereas the latter looks for instrumentalized resources or *subjects*. Art does not attack, but provokes voluntary "solidarity" resonances.

This is why I do not share Morton's thesis that "every decision is a political one" (Morton 2018, 87). I would rather speak about practical

decisions. The difference is that a political decision is a gesture of power, even as a gesture of solidarity, because in political decisions we are always either for someone/something or against someone/something. A practical decision, in comparison, can be a gesture of many kinds, depending on the contact making it is tuned to: it can be retaliation or forgiveness, hatred or love, indifference or interest, isolation or openness, and everything in between or alternatives to these. It is important, both ethically and aesthetically, that the practical decision should not be only political, and that no other "neutral" space should be assumed which can include and relate all kinetic spaces. The actual relation between kinetic spaces is created by practical passage or re-tuning from one to the other. Morton's examples of his thesis that politicises choice are: "Allowing a watch to be a landing strip for a fly. Allowing a plastic bag to be a bird murderer" (Morton 2018, 87). A practical choice may be not only allowing, but also obeying, for example, in a Levinasian exposure to the proximity of the other; or it may be navigation among the (not only political) urges that have an effect on me.

I would also extend Morton's thesis that "Because of interdependence, when you take care of one entity or group of entities, another one (or more) is left out" (Morton 2018, 87). Time sacrifice also means that I can never be in two kinetic spaces at the same time: I can only get into one by getting out of all the others at that time. The irreducibility of temporalities with different rhythms does not allow for the simultaneous experiencing of events taking place in several kinetic spaces at the same time. I accept that "veering" among different possibilities also allows for hesitation, however I would not build the conception of tuning on this notion. Instead, I think of gestural resonance as a skill or flexibility that can tune in to many different rhythms, but once entering a rhythmic dimension there is no way to deviate (or veer) from the time direction of the happening, because that would mean dropout from its kinetic space. It is true that we have to learn to resonate, and consequently resonance can be more intense or less intense, but this has more to do with combatting practical distances than with imprecise, relative or statistical approaches to the truth.

I would not rule out precise attunement, which Morton exemplifies, on the one hand, with the fatal case of an opera singer's voice completely resonating with the glass and causing it to shatter, and on the other, the smooth and controlled efficiency when everything is perfectly in tune (Morton 2018, 81, 131). Artistic practices achieve extremely sophisticated and extremely intense resonances, which can of course be shocking or distressing. I accept that reading literature is dangerous, because we are playing with and risking our lives, but otherwise it is not worth reading literature. If we never step outside our comfort zone, only shallow resonances are possible. Art is indeed a risky, precise experiment performed in order to gain skillfulness in the kinetic spaces of events and practices, but otherwise it could never reach the artistic threshold of intensity and rich temporality. The "timber" of objects as a solitary

quality or vibration/rhythmic pattern can only be discovered through precise attention exercises. But this does not exclude, nor does it make it impossible to avoid, what Morton fears: that "the dream of 'ecological' society as immense efficiency (the fantasy of perfect attunement) dampens the uneasy coexistence of lifeforms." (Morton 2018, 101) The difficulty of coexistence also arises from what Derrida calls the ethical paradox, or our dwelling on Abraham's Moriah, which I like to call the "decision sacrifice": I can only fulfil my duty towards a particular other by sacrificing my duty to many more others on the altar of my choice, like Abraham who fulfilled his duty towards God by scarifying his duty to his son and his wife (Derrida 1995, 53-81).

Beyond this, it is also difficult to live in peace with another person or another way of life. Just as it is not easy to argue, in an ethically correct way, with an ecophilosopher very close to me either. It is best to be willing to learn from all my unveiled transgressions against him, whether I recognize and admit them myself or others help me to do so. The apostle Paul has set us a great task, even though, from Morton's point of view, he is committed to a monotheistic religion based on settled agriculture, not at all ecological, and even responsible for global warming. His warning suggests that "If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all." (*The Letter of Paul to the Romans* 12:18). I don't think this is an anthropocentric principle; but rather an experiment involving our most obvious company, which can be extended indefinitely in all directions and at all scales as Saint Francis showed it. It can be extended at least as much as the Mortonian magical causality and strangeness of *charisma* indicating the power of things, from the force field of whale songs to the force field of art (Morton 2018, 105).

I do not wish to rule out uncertainty, Morton is right that it often serves us well, even in research. I hesitate only when an ecophilosopher wants to base an ethics of living in peace with other life forms on this principle. I accept that hesitation is necessary, but not sufficient. For me to succeed to some extent in living in peace with others in a difficult coexistence, it is also necessary that someone and/or something try their best to live in peace with me. To be able to not refuse, but tolerate, appreciate and embrace the uncanny similarities of the "uncanny valley", as always, I need a charismatic urge that convinces, fascinates, disconcerts, does not let me rest, and which urges me, as soon as something or someone upsets the peace (whether it is me or another person), to start (re)learning my relationship with my most broadly understood environment, made up of everything in my proximity. My experience in ecorhythmology has convinced me that it is worth learning from everything and everyone who can teach me. And unlike Morton, I do not exclude God and the practice of monotheism from this. Without wishing to give a single answer to the question how such learning can lead to greater peace in difficult coexistence, one answer I am willing to give is: among other things, through the exploration and practice of artistic attention experiments, including literary writing and reading.

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"THERE IS NO OTHER AIR HERE, WE ARE ALIVE WITH THE AIR OF THE PALTINSKY MEADOW…"

Ecocritical reading of Ádám Bodor's *The Birds of Verhovina*[1]

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is an ecocritical examination of Ádám Bodor's *The Birds of Verhovina*. The study begins with an introduction to Hubert Zapf's theory of sustainable texts and the ecocritical concept of Greg Garrard's Ecocriticism, and concludes with an interpretation of the chosen work along ecocritical tropes. The paper starts from the premise that Ádám Bodor's work employs the rhetoric of ecocriticism, thereby closely linking literature to a wider web of discourses on nature and the environment. The hypothesis of the study is that the relationship between human and nature, nature and culture, and power and the individual are emphasised in the work. The inhabitants of Verhovina live in harmony with nature; wild and untamed nature not only provides the community with raw materials, but also creeps into the consciousness of the characters, determining their behaviour, their attitudes towards each other, as well as their way of thinking about life. However, the various signs of this shift of power suggest that a rupture has occurred in the hitherto harmonious relationship between the community and nature, the individual and nature.

Keywords: collective ecological problems, ecocriticism, ecocritical literature, cultural ecology, sustainable texts, Bodor Ádám, *The Birds of Verhovina*

The ecocritical approach of Ádám Bodor's *The Birds of Verhovina* can be justified by the intrusion of the power outside the borders of Verhovina into the "untouched" life of nature, its environment-damaging interventions, the superiority of "strangers" sent by the power over nature, and its subjugating activities. The work not only reveals the agency of nature and its impact on human beings, but also questions the dominant position of human beings over nature, emphasises the links between different forms of life and highlights the possibility of linking the theoretically separate spheres of culture (language) and nature. Starting from this

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basic premise, the theoretical and methodological background of the study is provided by Hubert Zapf's ecocritical insights (Zapf 2016) and, in particular, by the ecocritical concepts and tropes outlined in Greg Garrard's book *Ecocriticism* (Garrad 2004), which allow us to approach the subject of ecocriticism more concretely, and investigate the role of nature in *The Birds of Verhovina*. According to the first hypothesis of the study, anthropogenic interventions are primarily responsible for the natural damage in the work, and these interventions together with the various precursors of the change of power cause a rupture in the hitherto harmonious relationship between community and nature, between the individual and nature. Linked to this, the second hypothesis of the study is that water, as a force above the human world, is the creator and remaker of the micro-world created by Bodor, which directly or indirectly radically changes the fate of the characters. In fact, the inhabitants of Verhovina derive their livelihood and their society from nature, and more specifically from the nine sources of heat in the area. In the textual world, water not only dissolves the boundaries between human and beast but also, at the most unexpected moments, rearranges the power relations and positions of power previously established. And although the characters' affinity with nature is reinforced by the fact that in several passages they identify with the animal world and perform miraculous deeds endowed with abilities derived from nature (especially the power over water), they are unable to fully master the forces of nature, which eventually overwhelm them and swell up like a flood, sweeping them away and subduing them. The study's hypotheses are confirmed by a theoretical and methodological framework, followed by a description of the bodorean world's relationship to nature and natural phenomena.

1. Introductory Thoughts on Cultural Ecological Model of Literature

Demographic, economic and technological processes underlying the ecological crisis are responsible for natural changes such as global warming, more frequent extreme climatic events or biodiversity loss (Buell 1995, 83-88). Related issues are also a major concern for the interpretative directions of literary and cultural studies, such as biopoetics, ecology or ecocriticism emerged as a new interdisciplinary approach in the 1980s. William Rueckert's 1978 essay brought the term *ecocriticism* into mainstream literary criticism, and although there is no consensus among theorists on the definition of the term, it is commonly agreed that it covers in particular the diverse approaches concerned with the relationships between literature and the physical environment (Rueckert 1978, 62-86).

From this it follows that ecocriticism has no well-defined conceptual and analytical apparatus, the various ecocritical approaches are only

partially identical in respect of considering culture and nature as mutually influencing factors (Kopecký 2012, 12-15). The ecocritical perspective seeks to draw attention to the processes of the coexistence of and interaction between humans and nature, cultural relations between humans and nature, wide-ranging consequences of the ecological crisis, and the causes of the disharmony between humans and nature (Campbell 1996, 124). Marián Kamenčík also supports this and adds that the ecocritical approach not only sheds light on humans' hierarchical relationship – relation of dominance – to nature but also draws particular attention to the imperative need to put an end to this relationship, thereby providing an eco-sensitive perspective for the reception and interpretation of various literary texts (Kamenčík 2012, 41-42). Although ecocriticism, as noted by Jožica Čeh Steger, reflects on the role of literature in the interpretation of ecological issues and the shaping of ecological consciousness, it does not intend to identify and explain the causes of the ecological crisis but merely takes a critical view of the environmentally harmful effects of human activities, taking care to show no signs of agitation (Čeh Steger 2012, 200-203). The social role of ecological literature is therefore mainly to explore the wide range of possibilities of human's coexistence with the living and non-living nature and to provide value-oriented alternatives to dominant anthropocentrism in relation to the natural environment.

In his monograph *Literature as Cultural Ecology*, Hubert Zapf also aims to challenge anthropocentric ideology that emphasises human domination over the natural world, basing his approach to literature on theoretical and practical considerations of cultural ecology, a relatively new direction of ecocriticism. He interprets the concept of literature as a functional-evolutionary concept, where literature, as a transformative force of language and discourse, combines civilizational critique with cultural self-renewal in ways that turn literary texts into forms of sustainable textuality (Zapf 2016, 3-10). Therefore, Zapf draws an analogy between sustainability in a biological and cultural sense due to the sustainable productivity of living systems and of the cultural ecosystem of literature. In his view, if sustainability in a cultural sense means the ways in which the life of culture can be kept in equilibrium with basic ecological support systems, then this criterion applies in a special degree to literary culture, which is characterised in its functional dynamics by maintaining a deep-rooted affinity between its modes of (re-)generation and the ecological processes of life that it both reflects and creatively transforms. By highlighting the shaping force of discourse, he outlines a concept according to which literature has evolved into a kind of discursive heterotopia. This heterotopia operates both inside and outside the discourses of the larger culture and opens up imaginative spaces in which the various forms of developments, beliefs and truth-claims of human life are being critically reflected, and literary texts can thus be the transformative site of cultural self-reflection and self-exploration (Zapf 2016, 25-28). Accordingly, literature as a cultural ecological force

not only transgresses boundaries of linguistic and social conventions, creating ecosemiotic fields in borderline situations between "identity and difference, conflict and communication, distance and empathy, climax and denouement, crisis and resolution, language and silence" but can also be interpreted as a force that "brings discourse 'alive' by enacting complex dynamical life processes in the ecocultural biotopes of language and the text" (Zapf 2016, 28). Literature in this sense is "the self-reflexive staging of ecosemiotic life processes on the boundary of culture–nature interaction. It is a sustainable form of text operating in a high-energy field of open discursive space, and gaining its ever-renewable creativity from the reflexive interactivity between natural and cultural ecosystems" (Zapf 2016, 28). The quote stressing the self-reflexive and interactive nature of literature also gives a glimpse about the possibility of creating a balance between the human and non-human world, while pointing out two traits of sustainable texts: sensitivity and attention. While the former applies in the case of multi-layered forms of relationality of the human and non-human world, the latter applies in the case of life-sustaining diversities and patterns of connectivity across the boundaries of categories, discourses and life-forms.

Zapf speaks of a literature that, in addition to its cultural ecological function, can be broken down into three other functions: literary texts can provide culture-critical metadiscourse, offer an imaginative counter-discourse, and provide solutions to resolve apparent contradictions through a reintegrative interdiscourse (Zapf 2016, 95). Literature as a culture-critical metadiscourse articulates a kind of social critique by pointing out the inadequacies and injustices of systems of power. These power structures are usually based on hierarchical binaries (self – other, order – chaos, etc.) and manifest themselves in coercive structures that prevent the experience of the diversity of life. Literary works thus focus on images of alienation and confinement. Literature, as an imaginative counter-discourse, attempts to highlight what is repressed, marginalised or neglected in cultural reality, but which is nevertheless an essential component of a holistic vision of the human world, by creating imaginary counter-worlds. New forms of imaginative approaches bring the inaccessible "Other", that is, the discourse of coded expressions of nature or other cultures, into cultural awareness and communication. By breaking away from the norms of civilization, images of corporeality, passion, wild nature, magic, etc. come to the fore. Literature as reintegrative interdiscourse, brings culturally distinct phenomena directly together, creates links between socially disconnected and ideologically isolated discourses, and contributes to the lasting renewal of cultural centres. The discursive processes that bring together the culturally distinct phenomena are often expressed in images of renewal, new beginnings or birth. In fact, the triadic model points out that literature has the power to transcend the divide between culture and nature, opening up new perspectives on the multiplicity of life, renewing both cultural and literary creativity (Zapf 2016, 64-66).

The triadic functional model is essentially based on the process of productive renewal, while also drawing attention to the need to understand the link between ecocriticism and cultural ecology in a broader sense, as well as the assumption that culture is a fundamental part of ecological knowledge. Greg Garrard makes a similar point in his book *Ecocriticism*. He argues that "environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms, because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge and its cultural inflection" (Garrard 2004, 14). In fact, Garrard identifies the subject of ecocriticism as the study of human–non-human relations in cultural history. He analyses culture as a rhetoric that creates, reproduces and transforms metaphors. His book presents different ecocritical tropes, examining their cultural representation in understanding ecocriticism, and exploring methods and approaches to represent the relationship between humans and the environment. In his view, the most common tropes in ecocritical literature include pastoral, wilderness, animals, dwelling, apocalypse, pollution and Earth, and these tropes are in fact literary representations of the intricate relationship between humans and nature. The pastoral trope is conceived as a landscape between wilderness and civilisation, symbolising a kind of rural lifestyle and idyll. While the wilderness, as a pristine, untouched part of nature, is understood as a safe environment that serves as a home for all living creatures. Animals are part of this wilderness. The human–animal relationship is divided between philosophical considerations of animal rights and a cultural analysis of what animals represent. The tropics include domesticated and wild animals, as well as biodiversity as a whole. Dwelling refers to the permanent or long-term occupation of land, i.e. the territory that people occupy and which is associated with ancestors, death, rituals, life and work. Garrard links the construction of the apocalyptic narrative to ancient civilisations. He includes both natural and war disasters. Historically, the pollution trope plays a role in both environmental destruction and redemption. From an ecocritical perspective, this trope is both a precursor to environmental disaster and a critical analysis of the antecedents and process of the problem that has developed. The Earth, as Garrard conceptualises it, is closely linked to debates on globalisation, global and local environmental problems, from ozone depletion to climate change. In doing so, it presents a picture of a self-regulating system that functions in a way analogous to living organisms.

Both Zapf's and Garrard's concepts focus on rethinking the relationship between nature and culture. In my view, Ádám Bodor's *The Birds of Verhovina*, published in 2011, is a good example of how to resolve the tensions between nature and culture. In *The Birds of Verhovina*'s plot, border situations play a prominent role, not only because of the life stories that unfold on the margins of the plot and nature, the characters' worlds constantly balancing on the edge of life and death, human and animal existence, but also because of the

work's oscillation between short story cycle and novel. The Bodor's reception has always paid special attention to the issue of cross-genre. The question of simultaneous readability as a cycle of short stories or as a novel-like narrative has already been raised in connection with almost all of the author's published works (*The Visit of the Archbishop*, *The Sinistra Zone, The Birds of Verhovina*). According to Zsófia Szilágyi, the genre-poetic characteristic of Bodor's works, which are formed into a cycle, can be identified as "that the construction of the unity will largely be the task of the receiver, that is, the construction is built in the reader" (Szilágyi 1998, 515). The elements that ensure coherence include the fictitious plot depicted by the author, thematic components that depart from real references, and the names and life stories of the characters. These ensure the legitimacy of the reader's freedom, that is, the choice of reading the texts as a cycle or as a novel. *The Birds of Verhovina* contains thirteen short stories. It is noticeable that the names of some central figures are included as chapter titles, which anticipate the possibility of a catalogue-like reading (Radics 2020, 33-34). The order of the short stories can be varied freely; thus, the reader can go against the tradition of linear reading. László Emese also notes: "the thirteen stories in the book stand their ground even as separate texts" (László 2012, 210) – since the narrator of the stories does not allow us to wander in the tangled forest of the plot (Tóth 2012, 109). On the one hand, the thematic elements – the eccentric characters, the countryside that functions as a crime camp, the dispassionate depiction of the social landscape – create unity between the individual stories, and even the well-known motifs of Bodor's previous works appear here. The short stories with a layer of sociographic meaning are perhaps washed together by the stage (*Verhovina*) and the thermal water that engulfs the countryside with its smell. Water and its various changes (teardrop, lake, mist) weave through each short story like a motivic web, as well as the fate of the characters. As an example, can be mentioned the seamstress Aliwanka, who can predict the future from any material in a liquid state, and in this way determines the fate of the characters.

Water has many symbolic meanings in literature, but in *The Birds of Verhovina* it primarily appears as a symbol of constant circulation. In this context, it can be mentioned that in the Bodor's oeuvre a prominent role is given to the lyrical landscape description and the textual presentation of motifs related to natural phenomena. The desolate landscape revealed in the work of *The Birds of Verhovina*, the Eastern European mythological Jablonska Poljana (pastoral), the appearance of strangers destroying the birds' nests (pollution), the thermal springs as a symbol of life (wilderness), the stench as the harbinger of destruction (apocalypse) or the narrative of alienation create an excellent opportunity to validate Garrard's ecocritical perspective and to apply Zapf's concept of sustainable literature.

2. Close to Nature. The Possibilities of Ecocritical Analysis

The contrast between village and city plays a fundamental role in the formation of the semantic circles of *The Birds of Verhovina*.[2] Regarding the relationship between Jablonska Poljana and the outside world, the "city" can offer the possibilities of newness, foreignness, and development that disrupts rural life. It is as if Bodor highlights the advantages of the closed community of the Eastern European settlement by contrasting it with the outside world and with the feeling of fear of the outside world. The space depicted in the volume thus not only fulfils a descriptive function but also plays a role as an integral part of the composition in the creation of the final value system of the work. The existence of the contradictions is also supported by the fact that the "birds" arriving in the Verhovina region are, in the context of the text, only passers-by, for whom the region is a forced obligation, a last refuge from which they will sooner or later flee. The locals, on the other hand, are scared away from the outside world by the intervention of strangers (buying the rails), the fear of change (the rearrangement of the landscape with construction), and due to their eccentricity, the closed community is the only possible scene of happiness and prosperity for them. In this interpretation, the countryside is therefore not only a historical background but also a defining, identity-forming space for the characters living in it. The description of this space can be helped by Garrard's concept of pastoralism. Because the pastoral as a trope – in contrast to the destructive effect of anthropogenic activities – symbolises the stability and permanence of nature, assumes a bond between human and nature, while also pointing out the contrasts between urban and rural life.

Pastoral emphasises not only the symbiotic relationship between human and nature but also the necessity of responsible treatment of natural values (Garrard 2004, 33-35). Starting from these insights of ecocriticism, the first short story (Anatol Korkodus) not only introduces an elementary motif of the composition, the closed community serving as the location of the actions, Jablonska Poljana, but also provides numerous examples of the contrasts between urban and rural life through the familiar-stranger dichotomy. The plot is set somewhere in Jablonska Poljana in the distant mountains, where no bird goes; of course, the exception is the few deluded young people who come to the dying community to get on the road to prosperity with the help of Brigadier Anatol Korkodus: "he called them birds, knowing that they always end up flying away one fine day"[3] (Bodor 2011, 6). The first-person narrator of the short stories, Adam, who used to be one of the

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2   Quotations from Ádám Bodor's *The Birds of Verhovina* (published in 2011) are presented in my own translation. The original text is given in the footnotes.

3   In original: "madaraknak hívta őket, tudván, hogy a vége mindig az, hogy egy szép napon elrepülnek."

birds, is part of this space. Thanks to the brigadier, Adam came forward as his assistant and did not strengthen the large group of those who disappeared from Verhovina like migratory birds. Not that he didn't run away, but Verhovina became a part of his nature, he developed an intimate relationship with nature, and as was not possible in the case of the young man named Stelian: "if the roaring of the wild waters penetrates his soul here, no less than the cool, cleansing northern winds, then perhaps his blood will cool down, and his temper will subside"[4] (Bodor 2011, 214); the taming power of nature proved to be very effective for Adam. Functioning as a static character (or point of view) throughout the narrative text, Adam's sameness with nature and his interpretation as a being equal to natural phenomena are also guaranteed by the synonym of glass as water.

From this perspective, window glass plays a role in sensing danger and the encroachment of civilization. In the first novella, for example, Adam seems to anticipate the death of his adopted father, who is nearing the end of his reign: "On the purple window glass, between the dripping veins of the steam, as if humming, the silhouette of my bearded counterpart trembled"[5] (Bodor 2011, 10). Glass, as a metaphor on vision provides transparency; Duhovnik's treachery is expressed, for example, by the distorted image of the window glass, which ripples and becomes cloudy like water: "The wet window glass was distorted, and behind him stood only Duchovnik, his face red with fear, peering through the glass."[6] (Bodor 2011, 122). The latter phenomenon can be observed, among other things, in the case of the strangers who come to Verhovina, whom Adam thinks he discovers as a trembling, distorted image behind the window glass. The window glass strips away, and the flow of water blurs the boundaries, revealing the real faces of the characters. The image of Delfina murdering her husband behind the mirror is paired with animal attributes: "The glass around Delfina's face had misted over with her own breath, making her eyes grow terribly large. She did not flinch, as if she had been painted on the glass."[7] (Bodor 2011, 46).

However, not only Adam but also several other characters, including the seamstress Aliwanka and the caregiver Nika Karanika, serve as good examples of the deep connection and harmonious unity between human and nature. These two actors dominate the medium of life, the mystical power of water. Aliwanka "sees the world in water, sees into the future,

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4 In original: "hátha itt a vadvizek zsolozsmázása átjárja a lelkét, nem kevésbé a hűvös, tisztító, északi szelek, akkor talán lehűl a vére és elülnek indulatai is."

5 In original: "A lila ablaküvegen a pára lecsorgó erei között, mintha bőgnék, borostás arcmásom árnyképe remegett."

6 In original: "A nedves ablaküveg torzított, mögötte csak a hátramozdító rémülettől vörös képe imbolygott."

7 In original: "Leheletétől arca körül bepárásodott az üveg, ettől szemei rettenetesen megnőttek. Meg sem rezzent, mintha csak rá lett volna festve az üvegre."

all he needs is a little water or something like water"[8] (Bodor 2011, 30). In this way, he anticipates the danger, the ominous event associated with the arrival of strangers. As a child of nature, Nika Karanika wakes up on the nearby beach one morning and later resurrects children killed by lightning with her tears. The inhabitants of Verhovina are, therefore, completely dependent on their environment, their reference to nature is also confirmed by the following passage: "There is no other air here, we are alive with the air of the Paltinsky meadow, we bathe in the water of the thermal springs, we wash our clothes in the smelly thermal waters. At night, the gases seep into our brains, occupying our dreams so that we wake up at dawn with the memory of apparitions"[9] (Bodor 2011, 238). Verhovina is interpreted not only as a re-education camp for young people from Monor Gledin but also as an almost idyllic action space and mystical living environment, symbolising the distance from the outside world, thanks to its natural features, mainly its nine thermal springs.

The external intervention of strangers that destroys the idyllic feeling of home, i.e., the rails falling into foreign hands, results in the micro-community of the settlement feeling distanced from the outside world and alienated. This distance can also be felt in the text passages about smells. In the text space of *The Birds of Verhovina*, smells predict the arrival of strangers, as well as the approach of sinister events. In this way, Mónika Dánél's statement applies to *The Birds of Verhovina*, as well as, to the Sinistra district, according to which "Smell is one of the defining mediums of the district compared to odourless and odour-producing Western cultures. […] The smell marks the boundary of the other, it is the most difficult; if at all possible, to perceive unpleasant odours as natural; the book itself confronts this disturbing foreignness through the medium of smell. It made me realise that natural is always culturally determined. And it can shape the cultural codes in such a way that, by paying attention to the olfactory perception and making it the medium of the district, this medium can also become the defining experience of reading, the fragrant, independent »logic« of the smell can guide the reading" (Dánél 2012, 53). The characters are radically different in their attitude to natural phenomena, but also in their attitude to smells. The primary source of Verhovina's stench is the suffocating smell of the thermal waters of the Paltinsky meadow, to which Daniel Vangyeluk, who appears in the first novella, comments: "There is a stench in this place."[10] (Bodor 2011, 9). The pervasive stench becomes the mark of identity of the space and the characters: "Anatol Korkodus once told me that at the weekly market in Velky Lukanar, people from Verhovina,

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8 In original: "Ő vízben látja a világot, belelát a jövőbe is, csak egy kis víz vagy vízféleség kell neki."

9 In original: "Más levegő itt nincs, minket a Paltinsky rét levegője éltet, a termálforrások vizében fürdünk, szagos hévizekben mossuk a ruháinkat. Éjjelente a gázok beszivárognak az agyunkba, megszállják álmainkat, hogy hajnaltájt jelenések emlékével ébredünk."

10 In original: "Büdösség van nálatok."

especially those who come from Jablonska Poljana, are recognized for their smell"[11] (Bodor 2011, 238). In connection with this, mention can be made of the sophistication of the locals' sense of smell, with which they can filter out the smell of strangers from the space. An example of this is the arrival of the stranger, Pope Kotzofan, who arrives with the local priest, whom the innkeeper of Két Cefre, Pochoriles, calls a spy, and for the first time thinks he detects a foreign smell, then a bug smell on his clothes. During Damasskin Nikolsky's reappearance, the innkeeper notices a sour smell. In addition to cognition, the smell also serves orientation in space and is transformed into the (pre)wind of death that touches the central and peripheral figures. An example is part of the text of *(Delfina)* where, at the request of the brigadier, Hanku visits the dam guard Duhovnik, but on the footpath leading there, he detects the scent of Delfina, the wife who committed the murder: "Where a yellow spot between two footprints indicated that the woman had crouched down to do her work, there was a heavy, suffocating animal smell"[12] (Bodor 2011, 44). But it can also be observed that after her return from foreign lands, Adam's cat, Tatjana, exudes a previously unknown, suffocating smell: "A few days ago, she reappeared under the fences, old, with a faded look, emitting suffocating smells, after wandering in unknown landscapes for years"[13] (Bodor 2011, 212). Another indication of the fear of others is that foreigners are not allowed to come into contact with the locals for two or three weeks, in one of the scenes of the first short story, for example, the narrator worries that Irina will not smell the newly arrived Daniel, after whose arrival – the bacilli brought from the outside world because of – he must go into quarantine immediately: "You are going to quarantine tonight. Round for three weeks. This is the custom here, you know, because of the germs"[14] (Bodor 2011, 15). Verhovina, approached by strangers only out of necessity bears the marks and forms of existence of bygone eras. The textual space, which functions as a 21st-century penal camp, can be interpreted not only as a training camp for the re-education of young people, but – in the absence of a prison – as the cell of the Augustin couple, as well as the cell of the debauched women of the neighbouring colony. The mentioned examples also suggest that Bodor's textual universe is the carrier of many symbolic meanings (László 2012, 210).

Water, as an environmental factor, basically determines the structure and functioning of ecological systems, and takes on a symbolic meaning

11 In original: "Anatol Korkodus mesélte egyszer, hogy a Velky Lukanari hetivásáron arról ismerik fel a verhovinaiakat, kiváltképp azokat, akik Jablonska Poljanáról érkeznek, hogy büdösek."

12 In original: "Ahol két lábnyom között sárga folt jelezte, hogy az asszony leguggolt dolgát elvégezni, nehéz, fojtó állatszag kóválygott."

13 In original: "Néhány napja bukkant fel újra a kerítések alatt, vénülten, kifakult tekintettel, idegen, fojtó szagokat árasztva, miután éveken át ismeretlen tájakon bolyongott."

14 In original: "Lakni te ma este a karanténba mész. Kerek három hétre. Itt ez a szokás, tudod, a bacilusok miatt."

in the context of the text. In Bodor's work, water is interpreted not only as a reflective surface but also as a symbol of life, existence, eternity, and untouched nature (Robertson 2019, 21-23). The description of nature untouched by civilization can be illustrated most effectively with the concept of wilderness (Clark 2019, 9-13). Within this concept, the untouched and affected dichotomy defines the ecocritical discourse. The concept of wilderness refers to the absence of human, and combines the meaning of originality, ancient untouchedness, and the mythical. Wilderness can be characterised as an environment where people who have had enough of the noise of the city can find refreshment as a passerby or visitor, while the ecological system of nature remains unchanged during their stay (Garrard 2004, 59-60). According to this interpretation, the wilderness can be seen as the natural, unfallen opposite of the unnatural, soulless civilization, thus as an environment of freedom. This also shows that through the motifs of escape and return, a parallel emerges between the narratives about the wilderness and typical pastoral narratives, but we must state that the construction of nature they propose and reinforce is fundamentally different. While the former can be characterised as a nostalgic and even sentimental representation of rural life, the latter can be characterised as a place separate from and opposed to human culture.

Due to the untouched natural landscape, most interpretations regard the wilderness as a sacred environment (temple of nature) with a kind of protective function, where travellers fleeing the noise of the city can find peace and, above all, soothing silence. As Claire Jansen notes, the rhetoric of silence is "a trope that textually turns dynamic ecosystems to stone" (Jansen 2009, 48). Verhovina's space reflects this motif through a lasting silence. The sound of nature "washes over" people's consciousness, depicted through the key motif of the short stories: "The lasting silence, when it keeps getting longer and longer, will suddenly have a voice. It begins, sighing softly, like a distant waterfall, then it begins to hiss, then when it roars, it rages unbearably, suddenly, as if you are being splashed, the whole world freezes in your ears"[15] (Bodor 2011, 16). Until the arrival of Anatol Korkodus, Verhovina's closed world, both geographically and due to his way of life, has the attributes of an untouched landscape as a refuge topos, and primarily ensures the protection of flora and fauna. However, Korkodus' intervention disturbs the ancient order of nature on several occasions. On one hand, he sets up the water office and drains the water to the public washroom, inevitably modifying the functioning of ecological systems. The consequences of this human intervention in the environment are suffered by the entire living world. This is how the nature untouched by civilization, the mythological primal nature, becomes affected through Korkodus' intervention. For

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15 In original: "A tartós csendnek, amikor egyre csak nyúlik, nyúlik, egyszer csak hangja lesz. Úgy kezdi, halkan sóhajtozva, mint egy távoli vízesés, majd sisteregni kezd, aztán amikor már harsog, tombol kibírhatatlanul, hirtelen, mintha beléd spriccelnének, az egész világ jegesen becsorog a füleden."

example, Korkodus puts up a wire net around the thermal springs, thus preventing the badgers from bathing: "Anatol Korkodus knocked down stakes around the other pools and covered them with wire netting, because the badgers came to bathe in the warm water because of the fleas"[16] (Bodor 2011, 247). On the other hand, Korkodus sells the water and puts it in the hands of others for its own maintenance – it exploits the values of nature in the first place, which in the long run can even lead to the fatal evisceration of nature: "That day at noon, he even welcomed the water tankers. He stood by the tanks without saying a word until they were full, and at the end he closed the taps with his own hands"[17] (Bodor 2011, 140). With this step, Korkodus not only puts the most important resource of the population of Verhovina into foreign hands, but also disregards the gesture of Verhovina's three-legged patron saint. Klara Burszen explains that Militzenta, the patron saint of the region, came to Verhovina in the Middle Ages, and then she made thermal water in nine places, returned to the Silent Forest, but before leaving, entrusted the region to the care of the Czervenskys for a thousand years. After a thousand years, the Czervenskys felt the wind of change and left Verhovina: "Only they, the Czervenskys, felt that something had ended here, under the slopes of Medwaya and Paltin"[18] (Bodor 2011, 66). After their departure, Milizenta reclaimed the property with the power of nature, covered her yard with weeds, and made her spaces a home for owls and owls.

However, after Korkodus cuts down the weeds with the help of Balwinder and chases away the birds with a broom (which act is a subtle representation of the various actions of the strangers who later want to drive him away, destroying the natural landscape), he arbitrarily takes possession and occupies the area: "The new resident burned it on a piece of unplanned board with a glowing knife: Water Supervision Brigade and nailed it to the gate"[19] (Bodor 2011, 67). Damasskin Nikolsky, who later planned investments in the countryside, questions the existence of this brigade when he comments on Korkodus' occupation: "Until now, I thought it flows, trickles on its own"[20] (Bodor 2011, 82). This subtly indicates that the area and thus the natural landscape are falling into foreign hands. Klara Burszen confirms this by drawing Adam's attention: "It doesn't hurt if the brigadier also thinks that it is possible that someone made a deal over our heads. We live here, but the ground

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16 In original: "Annak idején Anatol Korkodus a többi medence körül cövekeket veretett le, bevonta őket dróthálóval, mert a borzok bejártak a meleg vízbe fürödni a bolhák miatt."

17 In original: "Aznap délben még fogadta a lajtosokat is. A tartályok mellett állt szótlanul, amíg azok megtelnek, és a végén saját kezűleg zárta el a csapokat."

18 In original: "Egyedül ők, a Czervenskyek érezték meg, hogy itt, a Medwaya és a Paltin lejtői alatt valami véget ért. Hogy itt hamarosan és végérvényesen minden megváltozik."

19 In original: "Az új lakó egy darab gyalulatlan deszkára izzó késsel ráégette: *Vízfelügyeleti brigád*, és kiszögezte a kapura."

20 In original: "Eddig úgy tudtam, folyik, csorog az magától is."

beneath us is no longer ours"[21] (Bodor 2011, 81). The end of Korkodus's time and the encirclement of the countryside are also symbolised by the burning of the observations about the speed of the water flow and the composition of the water, which Nikolsky ceremoniously "burned as a city: at the four corners of the sky"[22] (Bodor 2011, 118).

The brigadier's death and expulsion from Verhovina are preceded by various harmful activities and effects affecting the natural landscape, which also indirectly evoke the trope of environmental pollution and the apocalypse. The first such destructive effect can be seen in the context of harming and torturing individuals of animal species and destroying their habitats (Mehnert 2016, 99-106). Strangers arriving at Verhovina signal their intention to take possession, rearrange and damage the area's community of life, rich in species and individuals (Šmajs 2006, 15-20). On the one hand, using water as a space for the living community, they do not spare the bird's nests, which are washed off the tops of the trees with the help of syringes. Furthermore, to prevent the return of migratory birds, their resting places are covered with pitch. This causes, among other things, the departure of jays, finches, and rust-tails, as well as the history of the naming of the Silent Forest: "Anatol Korkodus named the lot Silent Forest after the birds moved from Verhovina"[23] (Bodor 2011, 45). These interventions can actually be interpreted as symbolic moments of domestic subjugation (*nest motif*) and deprivation of freedom (*bird motif*). Nature tries to protect its living community from this subjugation, which tries to reveal and anticipate the impending danger with the help of various signs, thereby inviting the recipient and the actors to trace and read signs. For example, the appearance of Nikolsky, who assesses the natural features of the countryside and is given the epithets "big-footed" and "horse-faced" during the short stories (and his harmful actions in the knowledge of the story), is illustrated in several places as an ominous event, and these descriptions are mainly expressed through the formations of nature: a "twilight shadow" was cast on the hot springs, "footprints are dark" on the snow-covered steeps, a "stranger's footprint" appeared on the clear grass and on the edge of the river bank. But the Czervensky water mill, frozen in ice, can also be seen as such a sign, a reference to the stagnation of the wheel of time and the static nature: "If a person presses his forehead to it and looks into the ice, shading his eyes with the palm of his hand, and really wants to, he can still see the former equipment as well. Everything is in its place, as if it had just been poured into glass"[24] (Bodor 2011, 221).

21 In original: "Nem árt, ha a brigadérosnak is megfordul a fejében, hogy bizony, nem kizárt, valakik megalkudtak a fejünk fölött. Itt lakunk ugyan, de a föld alattunk már rég nem a mienk."
22 In original: "az égtájak szerinti négy sarkán fölgyújtotta."
23 In original: "A rengeteg Anatol Korkodus nevezte el *Néma erdő*nek, miután a madarak Verhovináról elköltöztek."
24 In original: "Ha az ember a homlokát rányomja, és szemét tenyerével beárnyékolva belenéz a jégbe, és nagyon akarja, még látja az egykori berendezést is. Minden a helyén, mintha csak üvegbe öntötték volna."

Heat source number two has a similar function to the ice surrounding the watermill, thanks to its preserving power the living creatures turn blue, and as time progresses – as if to reject change – they crystalize: "In source number two, everything that falls into it turns blue, and after a while some blue crystals are deposited on it in sharp spikes. A completely blue, dead wild boar has been resting at the bottom of the pool for years"[25] (Bodor 2011, 90). But all of this is also a subtle indication that humans are part of nature and cannot fully control the power of nature. Because if you treat the environment properly, it makes great resources available, but improper treatment can result in a reaction that is dangerous to human life. Such a response is evoked in the story by the topos of water, which appears in the short stories in various forms (evaporation, dew, teardrops, etc.) and meanings (constant cycle and return, rebirth, etc.). The following passage is mainly intended to show the cleansing (giving) and destructive nature of water. The purifying nature of the water is most effective in the case of the corpse of Korkodus, who, according to his last will, goes to the second heat source after his death, dives under the water, and thus becomes purified and almost resembles nature: "His hair, which floats like seaweed under the water, blue, his beard is blue, his bushy eyebrows are blue, silver-blue *lakantusz*[26] beetles around him"[27] (Bodor 2011, 209). Although the water encloses Korkodus, it does not dissolve his body, the experience of a person belonging to nature prevails here perhaps most prominently. In addition to the immersion motif, water is also the medium of death.

The destructive nature of water can also be observed in the case of Gusty, who plans investments on Verhovina. But anyone who wants to appropriate and rearrange the landscape will no longer have time to implement the plan. When he ventures into the second heat source after his camera, the water closes above his head almost immediately, completely absorbing him. In this reading, water is interpreted as a destructive power, and the quote about the rippled surface of water and then its smoothing conveys this function textually: "In its place, the water gently swirls for a while… Then the colour of the water smooths out again, and the clouds appear on it as they rush across the sky from northwest to southeast"[28] (Bodor 2011, 250). The reading of water as a destructive power is also highlighted by the arrival of the Hungarian officer to Klara Burszen. He is like the double heat source and the ice surrounding the water mill, i.e., he is the physical embodiment of nature who brings with him the smell of carrion characteristics of the

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25 In original: "A kettes számú forrásban minden megkékül, ami belehull, és egy idő után hegyes tüskékben valami kék kristály rakódik rá. A medence fenekén már évek óta pihen egy teljesen kék, elhullott vadmalac."

26 The "lakantusz" beetles in the work are fictional insects.

27 In original: "Haja, amely hínárosan lebeg a víz alatt, már neki is kék, szakálla kék, bozontos szemöldöke kék, körülötte ezüst-kék lakantuszbogarak úszkálnak."

28 In original: "Helyén a víz még egy darabig lágyan gyűrűzik… Aztán a víz színe újra kisimul, megjelennek rajta a felhők, ahogy rohannak az égen északnyugatról délkelet felé."

heat source and the icy breath prevailing in the water mill: "The guest from the other world, exuding an icy breath from himself, sways in the middle of the room, enveloped in a cloud of steam, colourful tongues of steam float around him"[29] (Bodor 2011, 191-192). This moment actually evokes the ecocritical trope of the apocalypse, as well as the approach of the "last days" read in the subtitle of the volume. Incidentally, it also refers to the central location of the death motif that connects the short stories (*The Murder of Duhovnik and Korkodus, The Suicide of the Augustin Couple and Pochoriles*, etc.). Perhaps it is clear from the examples above that the trope of the apocalypse is strongly related to the trope of environmental pollution, however, in the light of Bodor's work, the apocalypse is not primarily seen in the description of the fear of "the end of the world" (although it is expressed in the steps of Korkodus), but in the representation of catastrophe predictions (Garrard 2004, 93-105).

The work also has the proleptic characteristic of apocalyptic narratives, so it predicts the future consequences of present actions (driving away birds, damaging foliage, etc.) and events (watermill freezing, etc.). Namely, the change, which is not solely represented by the change of local leadership (after the death of the brigadier, his adopted son, Adam, becomes the head of the water supervision). The real change is represented by either the change of nature: "It seems that the direction of the wind has changed, because the steam veils of the thermal springs, which in the morning always burn the hollows of the valley and the courtyards with their suffocating, sulphurous smell, are now heading in the air current towards Nikolina's pikes or by the closer context of the order of a human and his surrounding nature"[30] (Bodor 2011, 224). This makes sense especially in one of the scenes of the final chapter, when a *lakantusz* beetle falls out of the tap, and Adam remarks: "It seems that the composition of the water in some thermal spring has changed"[31] (Bodor 2011, 254). This quote actually emphasises the constant cycle of nature and the power of nature to shape and transform everything. In this context, insects appear as messengers of nature, heralding the beginning of a new world.

3. Conclusion

The multi-faceted operation of the creative force of language can be observed in Ádám Bodor's novel *The Birds of Verhovina*, which reflects Zapf's cultural-ecological literary model not only by means of the destruction of nature and the inevitable facing up to human responsibility

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29 In original: "A túlvilágról érkezett vendége, magából jeges fuvallatot árasztva, párafelhőbe burkolózva imbolyog a terem közepén, körülötte színes gőznyelvek lebegnek."

30 In original: "Úgy látszik, megváltozott a szél járása, mert a hőforrások gőzfátylai, amelyek reggelre fojtó, kénes szagukkal mindig megülik a völgy mélyedéseit, az udvarokat, a légáramban most Nikolina bércei felé tartanak."

31 In original: "Úgy látszik, valamelyik termálforrásban megváltozott a víz összetétele."

but also through dissolution of human-animal distinction and breaking down hierarchical relations, and thus the work can be interpreted as a culture-critical meta-discourse and imaginative counter-discourse. The culture-critical approach of Bodor's novel can be justified by the intrusion of the power ruling outside the boundaries of Verhovina into the life of "undisturbed" nature and its harmful environmental intervention, the superiority of "strangers" sent by the power over nature and their activities to subdue nature. Zapf's imaginative counter-discourse can also be applied due to water belonging to the elemental world of nature, which, as a motif of eternal nature, is transformed into a devastating medium enclosing the ruling power by the end of the book. The critique of the bipolarity between human and nature and between nature and culture, caused by the different dominant ideologies and social systems, is particularly valid for the work of Ádám Bodor. The author's culture-critical meta-discourse to his volume can be justified by the intrusion of power outside the borders of Verhovina into the life of "untouched" nature, its environment-damaging interventions, the superiority of "strangers" sent by power over nature, and its subjugating activities. Human's superiority over nature is determined not only by social conditions and economic mentality, but also by an anthropocentric world view, in the name of which human subjugates nature regardless of the consequences. By selling water, Korkodus provokes the wrath of nature, thus creating a rift in the balanced relationship between the inhabitants of Verhovina and nature. The various signs of this can be traced throughout the novels, from the proliferation of plants to the appearance of animals in the interior. The shift in power and the exploitation of nature lead to the death of Korkodus, who is preserved in the water as a bad example for future generations. This fact leads us to the imaginative counter-discourse, the validity of which is justified by the elemental world of water, which, as a motif of nature that does not pass away, is transformed by the end of the work into a destructive medium that encloses the dominant power. Water (nature) in this case appears as the displaced Other, which eventually becomes a destructive but conserving force for man. The above examples confirm that the hypotheses put forward at the beginning of this paper are correct. There is a rupture in the system of relations between actors and nature, for which anthropogenic interventions are mainly responsible. It is also true that the actors are unable to fully control nature, which is an uncontrollable force that resists all harmful human attempts.

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THE OLEANDER BUSH AT DELPHI, THE MINOTAUR IN THE BULLRING: Nature, myth, and cultural memory in the works of Gábor Devecseri[1]

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ABSTRACT

This study treats literature as a reflection of cultural memory and explores how literature mediates between mythical and cultural relations to the natural world. The paper aims to promote interdisciplinary dialogue between cultural memory, ecocriticism, and literary studies and draws on foundational texts from these disciplines and previous research that seeks to link them as a theoretical basis. By analysing the works of Gábor Devecseri, chosen as representative examples, the paper demonstrates how literature reveals the return to the deep layers of cultural memory represented in myths and the defects of the relationship between humans and nature, and how it thus contributes to the understanding of a complex (and interdisciplinary) process.

Keywords: cultural memory, mythology, nature, ecocriticism, Gábor Devecseri

As a reflection of cultural memory, literature mediates between mythical and cultural relations to the natural world. Some elements of nature (e.g., trees that have survived for centuries) in themselves help to nuance the relationship with the past, and when intertwined with mythical dimensions they become part of cultural memory. Myths often depict the interpenetrability of the human and plant spheres or the complexity of the human–animal relationship (let us think, for instance, of such ritual animal sacrifices, often justified by mythical stories, which combine respect and torture). Mythology and literature drawn from mythology not only help to nuance our understanding of the past but also draw

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attention to anomalies in humans' relations with nature. An allegorical representation of the manipulation of nature is more effective when it also confronts the images of animals preserved in cultural memory, the degradation of ritual into a spectacle. "Just as certain myths have legitimised the subjugation and exploitation of nature by humankind, others reflect a will to attain a harmonious relationship with the natural environment" (Martín-Junquera–Molina-Moreno 2018, 6). This harmony, or the desire for it, which has been sadly lost, can be found in the manifestations of travel literature that draw our attention to the integration of ancient sacral architecture into the landscape, and to the interplay between Greek ruins and the vegetation that surrounds them.

"Ecocriticism is by nature transnational, multicultural, interdisciplinary and pluriform", writes, wittily, Serpil Oppermann (2015, 1). It is precisely this plurality, this diversity and openness that allows us to continue to expand the range of new readings and interpretations. In my analysis, both interdisciplinarity and pluriformity will be at the forefront: the relationship between image and text, cultural memory, and biopoetics.

Through an interdisciplinary dialogue between cultural memory, ecocriticism, and literary studies, we will be able to grasp the mythical perspectives of the relationship to nature and the defects of the relationship between humans and nature in different literary genres. In this study, I analyse the works of Gábor Devecseri, chosen as a representative example, to show the interconnections between nature, myth, and cultural memory. The analysis of his works can contribute to the understanding of a complex (and interdisciplinary) process. Gábor Devecseri (1917–1971) was a translator of ancient literature, a poet, and a prose writer. In his works, elements of myth and cultural memory are combined with motifs of nature, and the relationship to nature is always given a mythical perspective. The prominent role of natural elements is also reflected in his frequent use of animal or plant names in the titles of his works – e.g., *Epidauroszi tücskök szóljatok* [Crickets of Epidaurus, sing!], *Bikasirató* [Lament for a bull], *Öreg fák* [Old trees]. The relationship between myth and landscape is represented in Devecseri's travel writings in Greece. In his *Bikasirató*, the admired bull god is only a step away from the bull-headed monster, the human–animal hybrid Minotaur. The harmony of form of individual plants and their immediate surroundings meets the musical harmonies of ancient metrics in Devecseri's poems. In the volume *Öreg fák* [Old trees], Devecseri documents imaginary monologues and conversations with trees in poems set to photographs by Ernő Vajda.

Landscape, travel, and memory

Devecseri's travelogues, written in prose and including poetic interludes, play an important role in comparing natural and hand-made formations.[2] The structuring of the travelogues is based on the relationship between myth and landscape: the names of ancient gods and heroes are used as chapter titles (mostly in connection with their places of worship or their functions), and among them, Hermes, to whom the two chapters framing the travelogue *Homéroszi utazás* [Homeric journey] are linked, is given a prominent role. This is mainly due to Hermes' function as a guide (he is the protector of travellers in Greek mythology).[3] During the voyage, Hermes appears in the sea foam (recalling the Homeric image of the god flying above the sea as a seagull),[4] but also in everyday forms, such as that of a Greek family showing Devecseri and his wife, or of a taxi driver (Devecseri 1961, 13, 21).

Devecseri stresses the idea, later also expressed by J. Assmann,[5] that it is not the fact that something is old that makes it old, but that it necessarily has something to do with humans. It is not only artwork that contains condensed human experience but the landscape does too. In this sense, therefore, elements of nature – grasses, trees, rocks, springs, mountains, and caves, which are interwoven with humans' destiny through mythology – can be considered a part of cultural memory (Devecseri 1961, 225).

The question of the relationship between nature and humans is raised by the fancy ovoid rock called the navel of the earth, at Delphi. According to Devecseri, the landscape confirms the mythical idea, making it plausible that the centre of the earth is there, "as if the whole earth were rippling outwards from here"[6] (Devecseri 1961, 79). The counterpart of the metaphor can be found in Homer: in Greek myth, not only the navel of the earth is visible and tangible, but also the navel of the sea, although the latter cannot be visited in the context of a Homeric journey, since it is located in a mythical distance, where, according to Homer, Calypso holds Odysseus captive, on Ogygia, an island surrounded by water, which can be considered the navel of the sea.[7]

Myth acts as an instance that transforms experience into memory and preserves it (Von Jagow 2000, 7), while the memory of the modern

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2   On the encounters between the present and the mythical past in the travelogues of Gábor Devecseri, see Polgár 2021, 68-71.

3   "He is always on the move, he is the *enodios* and *hodios* that we meet on every path" (Kerényi 1984, 20). In original: "Mindig úton van, ő az *enodios* és *hodios*, akivel minden ösvényen találkozunk."

4   Cf. Homer's *Odyssey,* Book 5, lines 51-54.

5   "It is fundamental to the thesis that the past only comes into being insofar as we refer to it" writes J. Assmann, denying the widespread belief that the past is simply the result of passing time (Assmann 2011, 17).

6   In original: "mintha az egész föld innen hullámoznék szét."

7   Homer's *Odyssey*, Book 1, line 50.

traveller can also rely on visual documents. On returning home from a trip, photographs can also serve to supplement what was seen in Greece, to make up for missed sights. The entrance to the Delphi museum is described as follows: "Now, long after our trip, I can see from Zoltán Szentkirályi's brilliantly successful colour photographs what a beautiful oleander bush stands guard on one side.[8] I didn't notice it when I was there. That is, I must have seen it, it must have contributed to the whole picture, I just didn't pay any special attention to this tender and magnificent masterpiece of nature, I was running, we were running eagerly into the museum to see *human* masterpieces. Nature smiled wisely and allowed this"[9] (Devecseri 1961, 92). In this case, it is not the functioning of memory that is at stake, but the focus on the view, the photograph bringing a moment of what was seen closer, which was part of the overall effect, but as a detail did not reach the threshold of consciousness in itself. The gaze captures many things, while the consciousness selects, mainly because of its interests and motivations. While the landscape as a whole contributes to the influence of the architectural and artistic monuments of antiquity, the individual elements of the landscape do not seem interesting in themselves: "On the way out, we again did not look at the oleander bush, because then the *whole* landscape again captured us. And if we were willing to pay attention to a particular detail, that detail was, in any case, a memory of antiquity, our *special* attention was directed to it solely, even if we were not as consistent as the excellent botanist on a previous tour, of whom we heard said that he did not get out of the bus in Mycenae, or Tiryns, »because there was no vegetation there«"[10] (Devecseri 1961, 92). The landscape, with all its elements, is important to the traveller only as a carrier of cultural memory, because of its sacral or evocative character. The luxuriant vegetation in the vicinity of the Greek ruins would indicate, in the words of F. László Földényi, that "nature is claiming back its rights"[11]. Földényi draws on an essay by Georg Simmel, whose basic idea is that "the ruin is the manifestation of a cosmic tragedy", "nature is taking revenge for the rape by the spirit in the form of a

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8 Some of the photos taken by Zoltán Szentkirályi are shown as an appendix to the travelogue – in black and white.

9 In original: "Most, jóval utazásunk után, Szentkirályi Zoltán remekbesikerült színes felvételeiről látom, milyen gyönyörű leander-bokor áll őrt az egyik oldalán. Akkor, ottjártomban, észre se vettem. Azazhogy bizonyára láttam, bizonyára hozzájárult a teljes képhez, csak külön nem figyeltem rá, a természet e gyöngéd-pompázatos remekművére, rohantam, rohantunk be mohón a múzeumba szemügyre venni az *ember* remekműveit. A természet bölcsen mosolygott, hagyta."

10 In original: "Kifelémenet megintcsak nem néztünk a leander-bokorra, mert akkor ismét az *egész* táj ragadott meg. S ha hajlandók voltunk egy-egy külön részletére figyelni, az a részlet mindenképpen az antikvitás emléke volt, *külön* figyelmünk csak arra irányult, ha nem voltunk is olyan következetesek, mint egy megelőző utastársaságban a kitűnő botanikus, akiről azt hallottuk, Mükénében, Tirünszben ki se szállt a buszból, »mert ott nincs vegetáció«."

11 In original: "a természet mintegy visszaveszi jogait."

building, and forcing its own vision on it"[12] (Földényi 2018, 20-21). The botanist mentioned by Devecseri also seems to see only the violent repression of nature in the Greek architectural monuments so admired by other travellers.

Lament for a bull: Mythical animals, ritual, and mass sensation

Animal motifs with a mythical background feature prominently in several of Devecseri's poems. A small silver fish becomes a Hermetic phenomenon in the poet's sonnet *Lellei emlék* [Memory of Lelle]. Hermes, the messenger of Olympus, is at home in the deep as well as in the heights: as a god who accompanies the dead, he often descends to the underworld, but he can also soar high with the help of his winged sandals. Hermes is also associated with the abyss, the night, the demon, the animal (Mann–Kerényi 1989, 56). The silver fish mentioned in Devecseri's poem travels the depths and the heights at the same time by soaring up into the air in the belly of a seagull. Its post-absorption existence is full of paradoxes: at once motionless, it is part of a moving, crumbling process, and at once disappearing and multiplying in death. It gets into a dark place yet closer to the brilliant sunlight.

The poem *Medúza (Bulgáriai emlék)* [Medusa (Bulgarian Memory)] is not about mythological creatures but about a real jellyfish caught from the sea (a tourist, a Czech doctor, wants to put the jellyfish in a jar in front of the onlookers on the beach), but the disintegration of the creature, which is taken out of the water and out of its natural environment, and its transformation into rotting jellied mass, is played out before the tourists' eyes like a mythological metamorphosis. What is interesting and spectacular for humans is the destruction of nature and the loss of an animal's identity.

Treating the destruction of an animal as a spectacle is at the heart of Devecseri's most influential poetic composition, *Bikasirató* [Lament for a bull]. The work incorporates elements of lament poems from world literature, oratorios, and verse travelogues. The title refers to Lorca's *Lament for the death of a bullfighter*, which it turns inside out, but not in a polemical sense: although Devecseri places the lamentation of the bull in a prominent position, the work is also, by implication, a poem of pain over any form of violence, that is, including the violent death of the bullfighter (Devecseri 1974, 245-246). This is in line with the animal liberation theory of Peter Singer, who argues that human and animal suffering can be brought together (Garrard 2012, 147).

Devecseri's poem consists of 33 numbered subsections, with the mystical number 33 referring to Christ's age and the Passion. The

12 In original: "a rom egy kozmikus tragédia megnyilvánulása", "a természet bosszút áll, amiért a szellem megerőszakolta őt egy építmény formájában, s rákényszerítette a maga elképzelését."

theme of the bullfight is set within a poetic description of a journey to Spain.[13] The bullfight as spectacle and mass sensation in Devecseri's poem is both a historical allegory (evoking memories of war, killing, and violence) and a ritual act with mythical foundations. However, from the perspective of the past, it is precisely an essential element, the act of ritual purification, that is missing. The selection, breeding, rearing, and running of the bull becomes an end in itself, a means of petty planning of violence, of gruesome entertainment, of the abuse of naivety, detached from transcendence.

The *Bikasirató* [Lament for a bull] is a Dionysian work, "if we think of the killing or, even more, the attack on the helpless victim as a motif, the tearing apart, which the audience itself performs or at least watches with approval"[14] (Bircsák 2008, 92). The ancient ritual antecedents are intertwined with Christian ones, and the Bikasirató [Lament for a bull] is also an attempt to reinterpret the Passion Play, and Bach's Passions are among its models (Rónay 1986, 408).

The deepest layers of cultural memory also reveal other images of the bull. It used to be a feared and dreaded creature, exalted as a god, whom humans dared to defeat only by first praying to it, begging for forgiveness. From the admired bull-god, only one step leads to the bull-headed monster, the man-animal hybrid Minotaur, who "was the blood drinker still, that it was not / his blood the people drunk" (Devecseri 1972, 11). In the bullfight, the mythical roles are reversed, the bull-killing Theseus the Toreador and the audience cheering him on become bloodthirsty, and the bull wanders the arena like the heroes trying to defeat Minotaur in the labyrinth. In this part of the poem, Devecseri polemically relates not only to the world literary source, Ovid's Metamorphoses, but also to its Hungarian literary antecedent, Sándor Weöres' poem Minotaurus, which sees the mythical story from the point of view of a raped princess, one of the victims of the Cretan monster.

Despite the parallels that emerge from cultural memory, the narrator of Devecseri's poem denies the rite, citing the senselessness of suffering and the life spirit, while documenting the ecstasy of the crowd and the cathartic experience of killing with a reporter's detachment.

The cruel ritual of the bull sacrifice, which has become a commercial sensation, is counterbalanced by the spectacle of the images seen in the halls of the Prado. The interlocking spaces of the picture gallery are reminiscent of a labyrinth, but the beauty obliterates the proximity of

13 The trip to Spain is linked to Devecseri's friendship with Robert Graves. They met when Graves visited Hungary in 1968, and the following year Devecseri and his wife went to visit Graves in Mallorca. In his recollections, Graves writes that there was no bullfighting in Mallorca or in Madrid, where the Devecseris also spent a few days, but they saw a film about bullfighting in the cinema, which made a deep impression on Devecseri (Graves 1972, 7-8).

14 In original: "amennyiben az ölésre vagy még inkább a tehetetlen áldozatra való támadásra mint motívumra, a széttépetésre gondolunk, amit a közönség maga hajt végre, vagy legalábbis pártolva végignéz."

the Minotaur, the wandering becomes an end in itself, and we do not feel the suffocating confinement or the need to get out into the open air as soon as possible. In a way, violence is already aestheticized in the bullfight, as the bullfighter marches in picturesquely and flamboyantly, performing elegant ballet steps, as if his beauty predestines him to victory over the blundering bull. "There is this difference: in the Operetta / or in the Classical Ballet, / death is not compulsory", the poet adds (Devecseri 1972, 12). If we accept the definition that "the field of aesthetics is also the field of the struggle for control of human perception and thus the field of the domination of communication"[15] (Varga 2018, 221), the beauty of the bullfighter or of the images in the gallery becomes a means of concealing a power game.

The bull is as much at the mercy of the viewer as the objects on display. The eye motif highlighted in section 29 is a representation of the power relations dominated by vision. On one side are the motionless spectators clinging to the stone seats, on the other the bull staggering to its death, and the eye provides the link between the two. The eyes cling to the act of killing as if they themselves were killing, the immobile becomes the mover, and the moving, staggering bull, always running at it again, tips the spectators out of their comfortable position of seeming motionlessness by its forced movement.

Landscape and metre, poetry and vegetative metaphors

In Devecseri's poetry, vegetative metaphors and the images of time associated with them play a particularly important role. The poem *Erdő* [Forest] is a metaphorical description of an incurable disease: the tree of death, the consciousness of death to be born, grows in the human host. The poetic image is a combination of the cancerous sprawl and the joyous growth of nature, the passing away is not marked by withering, by wasting away, but by the proliferation of the plant. The metaphor also implies that the time of death is not winter, but summer, and that the creative human will not die in old age, of exhaustion, but while working and flourishing. The poem's point of departure is Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and here we see a reversal of the Dantean situation: in Dante, man enters a dark forest; in Devecseri's poem, the dark forest enters the man. This also indicates a loss of active participation in the shaping of events, a powerless helplessness. The human who carries the consciousness of death in their heart as a new living being to be born relates to the growing horror with a kind of parental love. According to the poem, death can only spring from life, and therefore the living must relate to it as a mother to her shamed but still cherished freak child.

The album *Öreg fák* [Old trees], the result of a collaboration between Devecseri and a photographer, Ernő Vajda, focuses on time, perceived

15 In original: "az esztétika terepe az emberi érzékelés kontrolljáért folytatott küzdelem és így a kommunikáció uralásáé is."

together with all of its space, embodied in the centuries-old trees that have witnessed the lives of several generations of human beings. This volume, one of the exciting undertakings of Devecseri's last period, is a mirror of the transformation of the visual into the pictorial, of the naturalistic documentation into a work of art, and of the images into texts. The presentation of centuries-old trees is also combined with mythical dimensions (Polgár 2020, 39-41). In the afterword, the photographer stresses that in these long-suffering trees, he sees individuals who stand out from the crowd: "their scars often bear a striking resemblance to human faces",[16] he writes (Vajda–Devecseri 1969, unnumbered). Trees are often the embodiment of plant–human hybridity, an intermediate state, and mythological parallels are often drawn with them. The poem *Intelem* [Moral warning] begins with a description of the metaphorical relationship between an oak tree (photographed in the Tőserdő nature preserve in central Hungary) and a human hand. The branches of the tree in Ernő Vajda's photograph curl like flexible fingers. In addition to the visual similarity, the accompanying poem also presents an abstract metaphor: the unyielding hardness of the tree is a sign of the moral firmness of the beckoning hand. Similarly, due to its solidity and blocky nature, *Ördögiga-fa*[17] becomes a warning sign, behind which there is also the possibility of a metaphorical transformation: the tree is the "leg of a giant on horseback",[18] and the invisible horse that it rides is, according to the poem, nothing other than time. Another pedunculate oak (this one photographed in Kismaros, in the Danube Bend region) is also associated with a metaphor for body parts: the branches of this tree resemble not human fingers but two arms (cf. the poem *Kétágú fa-óriás* [Two-branched tree-giant]). The metaphor is also given mythological dimensions, as the tree holds the sky in its two arms like Atlas. The gesture of lifting is combined with the gesture of embracing, thus making the tree caring and loving.

The dialogue written for the picture *Bükkös, ködben* [Beech forest, in the mist] sees in the adult the child of the past, and the forest emerging from the mist acts as a nurse of memories. The trees that predate our birth, and which surely outlive us, can take us back to childhood, as can the sounds, images, and smells associated with childhood. But being back is also staying here, and while retaining adult consciousness, we return to a swaddled state and now consciously grow back into ourselves, observing events from the outside. In the poem, written for a photograph of a 120-year-old Japanese acacia in a park in the small town of Szigliget, the individual memory links two very close periods, one during the day and one at night. In the memory, the darkness of midnight meets the light of day shining on the leaves of the acacia

16 In original: "beforradt sebhelyeik gyakran megdöbbentően hasonlítanak emberi arcokhoz."
17 The poem is named after the eponymous protected gigantic beech tree in Western Hungary.
18 In original: "lovagló óriás lába"

tree, and then comes the real recognition, the real glimpse of light, the sloppy and half-attentive gaze of day is replaced by the later, nocturnal illumination, and the fragment of memory finds its meaning in another dimension of time.

The harmony of form of individual plants and their narrower surroundings in Devecseri's poems also meet the musical harmonies of ancient metrics. The mirror structure of the poem *Hőség tava* [Lake of heat] (Devecseri 1964, 148-149) is expressed in Sapphic stanzas. Four of the eight stanzas are regular, but after the Adonisian coda of the fourth stanza the order of the Adonisian coda and the Sapphic lines is reversed, so that one half of the poem mirrors the other. In the poem, the contours of objects dissolve with the heat, light and heavy, and up and down are reversed. The foliage, tree trunks, people, and shops that have "fallen into" (i.e., are reflected in) the lake of heat-like water stand on their heads, and the Sapphic stanza stands on its head in the same way. Above and below also meet in the image of the sunbeam in the opening stanza of the poem *Dobospusztai bükk* [The beech of Dobospuszta]. The metre of the poem and the motif of the logs softening the winter recall Horace's ode to Thaliarchus (Carmina I, 9). Devecseri's poem was originally published in two parts, alongside photographs of the same beech tree from two different perspectives by Ernő Vajda. Accordingly, the poem is divided into two parts: the first two stanzas describe the path of the sunray wandering through the beech forest, while the other three stanzas describe the flame of the beech wood burning in the tiled stove and, in a detached way, the fire of existence and the soul's desolation. In his Afterword to the volume, Ernő Vajda speaks of the harmony of the form of individual plants and their narrower environment – through Devecseri's accompanying poem, this harmony of form meets the musical harmonies of the alcaic stanza.

Conclusion

Devecseri's works, in different genres, are all about the defects in the relationship between humans and nature. The mythical perspective of the relationship with nature adds to the sense of the disruption of harmony. The relationship between ancient sacred architecture and the landscape is foregrounded in the travelogues, with some elements of nature becoming part of cultural memory through their relationship with humans, but Greek architectural monuments can also be interpreted as violent repressions of nature. Animal motifs with mythical backgrounds warn against the treatment of the destruction of an animal as a spectacle. If Devecseri's poems are interpreted in terms of the relationship between image and text, cultural memory and biopoetics, the relationship between vegetative metaphors and temporal images, and the intersection of plant forms and metrical harmonies, also point

to an interdisciplinary and pluriform multiplicity, to the embeddedness of humans in nature.

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Interconnection between language, environment and identity in the poems of the Csángó Demeter Lakatos and the Kven Alf Nilsen-Børsskog

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to make a comparative analysis of the interconnections between language, environment and identity from an ecolinguistic point of view. It is meant to analyse the attachment of two Finno-Ugric poets, Demeter Lakatos and Alf Nilsen-Børsskog to their own cultural and natural environment.

Demeter Lakatos was a Csángó folk poet, who consciously adopted the local, popular dialect to express his loyalty to his ancestry, to his roots that lay in the Moldavian Csángó identity. Alf Nilsen-Børsskog was the first writer and poet who wrote in Kven. His literary work has been of great significance in the context of the cultural emancipation of his ethnic minority and the revitalization of their language.

The main things that keep together a minority community – especially an endangered community – are basically language, faith, and certain characteristics of their own local natural surroundings (including the place where – for one reason or another – they had to flee from). This can be practically anything: a mountain, a river, even a tree. And whatever it is, it has a special, almost sacred place in the hearts of the members of the community.

I have chosen these two poets because their poetry has not been much analysed and also because both belong to Finno-Ugric minorities whose languages are highly endangered, and this fact marks their attitude towards their environment.

This study follows a qualitative approach through discourse analysis, and the source of data are the volumes of poems written by Demeter Lakatos and Alf Nilsen-Børsskog.

Keywords: Csángó, Kven, poetry, ecolinguistics, language, identity, environment

Introduction

The term "ecolinguistics" and its related concepts "language and ecology" were first used in Einar Haugen's seminal work about language and its surrounding context (Haugen 1972). According to him, "the term *ecology of language* covers a broad range of interests within which linguists can cooperate significantly with all kinds of social scientists towards an understanding of the interaction of languages and their users" (Haugen 1972, 21). Briefly, ecolinguistics studies the interactions between a language and its environment. The concept of ecolinguistics became widely popular in linguistics in the 1980s and 90s (Fill–Mühlhäusler 2001) and the aim of the ecolinguistic research has been the investigation and documentation of the rapidly diminishing language diversity (Mühlhäusler 2003), and the attempt to save endangered languages from extinction.

I first discovered the term "ecolinguistics" at the beginning of the 2000s when I started my research on the Finno-Ugric minority languages in Fennoscandia. I read Grenoble and Whaley's book entitled *Endangered Languages* (Grenoble–Whaley 1998) and it has completely changed my initial views as a researcher.

Since then, my fundamental research question has become the following: what are the possibilities of building a dynamic harmony among stigmatised and subordinate languages themselves, their social and cultural contexts as well as their speakers belonging to ethnic minorities. Grenoble and Whaley's book was the very first research that opened my eyes to the fact that the endangerment of a language depends on many factors which are intertwined.

I do not intend to make here a survey of the history of ecolinguistics, I will just concentrate on some aspects which I will use in this study. There is no generally accepted definition of ecolinguistics as a discipline, however, for the purpose of this study, I will use the following definition: "Ecolinguistics is the study of the impact of language on the life-sustaining relationships among humans, other organisms and the physical environment. It is normatively orientated towards preserving relationships which sustain life." (Alexander–Stibbe 2014, 104). When referring to life, besides human life I also mean the life of a language and of a culture. The main focus of ecolinguistics is thus on discourses that have an impact on the way that humans interact with each other, other species and the environment (Alexander–Stibbe 2014, 8). In ecolinguistics there are many different approaches having different aims and methodologies. I have analysed lexical choices and their implications, for example how the ideology and consequences behind various discursive constructions can be expressed through images.

The notion of *discourse* is one of the operative notions I have used in my research, with the meaning of language usage in social and cultural context (cf. Jaworski–Coupland 2006, 3; Pietikäinen–Mäntynen 2009, 24-25), that is: a manner of speaking about the relationship between

languages, cultural and natural environment. From the point of view of discourse analysis, it is important to emphasise that an individual's special micro-world on the one hand, and the macro-world of their community's culture on the other hand merge in narratives.[1] For instance, in the corpora I have examined, with the help of minority poets' discourses, their community can understand and can share their experiences. By examining the discourses, the research of the dynamics between language use and social action also becomes possible (Pietikäinen–Mäntynen 2009, 108-109). It is important to notice that discourse is a dynamic process; it is not a system of static interconnection of meanings. I have analysed texts in which discourses seem to be materialised, that is, I viewed the texts as forms of language and the discourse as its practical use.

Language influences the way people both think about and treat the world. "The link between ecology and language is how humans treat each other and the natural world is influenced by our thoughts, concepts, ideas, ideologies and worldviews, and these in turn are shaped through language" (Stibbe 2015, 2). Through language we can also express how we are being dependent on other species and the environment for our continuous survival. In other words, language, culture, human cognition, stories and texts play a very important role in human ecology and they influence human behaviour (Stibbe 2015, 8).

Many kinds of discourse analysis methods can be applied in narrative analysis. Linguistics provides tools with which we can analyse the texts that surround us in everyday life, texts that shape the very society we belong to. These tools can help reveal the hidden narratives that exist behind and between the lines of the texts. When ecolinguists examine ideologies, metaphors, and other cognitive and linguistic phenomena, they reveal and uncover the narratives that shape people's lives and also the society in which we live. As for myself, for instance, I have examined the individuals' life sustaining factors (nature, language, culture, religion, other people) and the emotional charge with which words in a language relate to objects in the local environment. I have also paid attention to how the narrators represented the language minority they belonged to and what was their relationship to the majority language of their environment. More accurately, I analysed the way in the discourse of Lakatos's and Nilsen-Børsskog's lyrical text topics such as how modernisation has affected the traditional way of life of the Csángó and the Kven community and which are those components of the natural and human environment that can give the members of these communities a relatively safe and liveable background. My research proves that the narrative structure is always a representation, that is, a narratively created picture of reality.

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1   In my present research, I have started from that largely accepted idea that every text can be considered a narrative (Saaranen-Kauppinen–Puusniekka 2006). I have examined written texts considering their narrative an identity building tool.

Demeter Lakatos (1911–1974) and Alf Nilsen-Børsskog (1928–2014)

The two poets whose poems I am going to analyse lived pretty far from each other, both from a geographical and a cultural point of view: Demeter Lakatos was a Moldavian Csángó, who was also familiar both with the Romanian and Hungarian spoken languages besides his own dialect; Alf Nilsen-Børsskog, on the other hand, was born a Norwegian Kven, and also spoke Norwegian and North Sámi. The mother tongue of Lakatos was an endangered dialect of the Hungarian language while that of Nilsen-Børsskog an endangered minority language.

Their work was given little attention, especially Nilsen-Børsskog's. Both of them were approached mostly as representatives of a marginalised and stigmatised language and ethnic group.

In the case of Lakatos, for instance, the Hungarian Literary Lexicon in Romania appreciated the "folk poet" (RMIL 1994, 314) most of all and less the aesthetic level of his works. They considered him a "folk poet" (*népköltő*) because he wrote out of instinct all his life, whatever he perceived around him he immediately wanted to share with others, mostly under the form of amateur poems. His birthplace in Moldavia, the beauty of the scenery, the sad fate of the Csángós, his existence as a Hungarian – experienced as humiliating – are recurrent themes of his work; and his personal fate is intermingled in his poems with the fate of his community (Beke 2003, 4).

The North-Norwegian Kven culture was an oral culture until Nilsen-Børsskog published his first novel in Kven language (Nilsen-Børsskog 2004), followed by other prose and lyrical volumes. Both Lakatos and Nilsen-Børsskog were pioneers with their aim of building the literary language of their mother tongue, as well as the literature itself. Both attended school in the majority language – the former in Romanian, the latter in a Norwegian school. Out of the two, it was Nilsen-Børsskog who had higher studies. Lakatos was a blacksmith by profession, but he also had all kinds of other activities. For instance, when in Cluj, he worked for a while as a casual correspondent for the Bucharest conservative daily newspaper *Universul*. It was then that he met Hungarian writers, and one of them, Jenő Dsida, patronised him. He presented Lakatos in the columns of the newspaper *Keleti Újság*. In 1935 Dsida published one of his poems and urged him to write other Csángó poems (RMIL 1994, 314). Lakatos himself wanted to become a conscious Csángó poet and was proud to be the first one in the world to write Csángó poetry. The Moldavian Hungarian community was in an escalating process of losing identity when he started writing his poems in his Csángó dialect – states Gábor Farkas (Farkas 2012, 19). In the case of the Csángós (as in the case of the Kvens, as well), when speaking about "identity loss" we should think, first of all, about the weakening of their linguistic identity. There were mainly folk-researchers interested in the poems of Lakatos and, at a lesser degree, literature historians. This is how Keszeg,

for instance, characterises the functions of his poems: "The poetry of Demeter Lakatos sometimes performs historical functions, those of a chronicler, sometimes autobiographical functions and then religious/magical or scientific (ethnographic, linguistic) ones."[2] (Keszeg 2008, 254, translation by Yvette Jankó Szép)

It was only after his death that a volume of his poems was published in Budapest in 1986 (cf. Lakatos 1986). Up to now, the most outstanding publication of his works was published in only one hundred, numbered copies (Lakatos 2003). The volume, containing more than six hundred texts (poems, folk tales and letters) was edited by Győző Libisch. He classified the published texts according to their main topics and, in order to make reading easier, he also created a 34 pages register of local idioms. Demeter Lakatos wrote quite a lot of variations on a theme – a phenomenon that can be easily followed in the volume.

Lakatos wrote his Hungarian poems with Romanian spelling, while Nilsen-Børsskog was consciously and consistently working on creating the Kven literary language and its written standards. Nilsen-Børsskog's mother tongue was Kven, but he was a trilingual writer living in Northern Norway. The Kvens, a Finno-Ugric minority living in the Cap of the North (Nordkalotten), did not consider themselves a cohesive ethnic group before the 1970s, as they were mostly assimilated by the Norwegian majority. Then, in the 1970s began the period of language and ethnic emancipation, giving way to discourse on language, culture and identity correlations. During the 1970s and 1980s the main goal was to reveal traditions; then, starting with the middle of the 1990s struggle for their own language came to be the most important: first gaining official recognition and then language planning were at stake (Söderholm 2010). The Kvens were recognised as a national minority in 1996, and their language was accepted as an official minority language in 2005 (Huss–Lindgren 2005, 268; Sulkala 2010, 13).

It was Alf Nilsen-Børsskog who created the first literary works ever written in the Kven language. He wrote six novels[3] and five poetry collections[4] in Kven. Four of his novels form a tetralogy (*Elämän jatko* 'Life goes on'). When the first volume of the series was published it was hailed with the following words: "Kveenikulttuurille romaanisarja on

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2 In original: "Lakatos Demeter költészete hol históriai, krónikási, hol autobiográfiai, hol vallásos-mágikus, hol pedig tudományos (etnográfiai, nyelvészeti) funkciókat követ." The English translations of Hungarian, Kven and Finnish quotations in the text are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

3 *Elämän jatko 1. Kuosuvaaran takana* (Nilsen-Børsskog 2004); *Elämän jatko 2. Aittiruto* (Nilsen-Børsskog 2007); *Elämän jatko 3. Rauha* (Nilsen-Børsskog 2011); *Elämän jatko 4. Viimi vuođet* (Nilsen-Børsskog 2015); *Elämän alku. Varhaiset vuođet* (Nilsen-Børsskog 2018). His last novel, *Johannes*, had not yet been published (Viinikka-Kallinen 2019, 22).

4 *Muiston maila* (Nilsen-Børsskog 2008), *Älä unheeta minnuu* (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010a), *Korrui tien varrela* (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010b), *Poiminttoi* (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c), *Merimies muistelee* (Nilsen-Børsskog 2021).

kuin aamutähti ennen niin mustalla taivaalla"[5] (Etto) His novels have had a great ethnopolitical significance for the Kvens. Unlike Norwegian writers, who stress the otherness of Kvens because of their language and ethnic background, Nilsen-Børsskog focuses on the strength and the skills of the Kvens and emphasises the fact that the Kven culture is a living and self-confident culture (cf. Viinikka-Kallinen 2010, 165; 2010b; 2019, 17).

Very often, language is the most important mark of an ethnic minority culture. After the publication of his first novel, Nilsen-Børsskog said that he wanted to write in Kven, because it would have been impossible for him to write an authentic story about his Kven community in any other language than the common language of his childhood's village. According to the author he did not choose the language, but the language chose him (Viinikka-Kallinen 2010b). Because of his choice of language he had to create a written form of his spoken language and make many decisions concerning the orthography, the vocabulary, the inflection of different parts of speech.

The poems of Nilsen-Børsskog, did not receive much attention (Hansen 2017; Etto), since the public mostly turned to his voluminous novels. Concerning Nilsen-Børsskog's works, Jorma Etto emphasises that the author uses his mother tongue with great skill. Most of all, he is a master of long epics focusing on details, and, as every genuine narrator, he also uses poetical ways of expression (Etto). The topics of his poems are similar to those of Lakatos: nature, home region, everyday life in the countryside; additionally, life's important and great themes such as love, war, suffering and happiness can also be found.

The text corpus researched

The Csángó texts I have examined can be found in nine chapters in Demeter Lakatos's volume edited by Libisch (Lakatos 2003): I. *A füld küldike* [The Navel of the Earth], II. *Ember ledny* [Being Human], III. *Ős apáink nyelvén* [In the Language of Our Ancestors], IV. *Iszten odjon* [God Bless You], V. *Csodavirág (A szív)* [Wonderflower (The Heart)], VI. *Falevelek hullodoznak* [Leaves Are Falling], VII. *Ez a világ állapatja* [This Is the State of the World], VIII. *Élet legszebb stafírungja* [The Most Beautiful Trousseau of the World] and IX. *Nevet a szív* [The Heart Laughs]. The chapters contain all in all 522 poems. I have selected the Kven language corpus from Alf Nilsen-Børsskog's four volumes (Nilsen-Børsskog 2008; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c), a number of 58 poems. In spite of the fact that the Lakatos corpus seems to be much larger, it also contains a lot of repetitions since the poet wrote about the same topic many times, sometimes only with little changes.

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5 "For the Kven culture, this novel series is like the morning star appearing on the, until then, utterly black sky."

In the following, I examine the interconnections between language, environment and identity in the text corpus gathered from the volumes of poetry written by the two authors. I analyse the natural environment, their home village, their relationship with the language, the culture and with other people which are the main factors sustaining the life of the individual.

Native place, home region

In the case of both poets, their home region, their native village, has a prominent role. It is their safe, reassuring place. Home, surrounding nature mean for them the village community, its culture and the spirit of their ancestors, as well as the inherited language. In their poems, the nearness of nature and the beauty of their surroundings in every season receive an outstanding role. Lakatos reflects in his poems his home place with all his senses. He sees it, hears it, smells it, tastes and touches, feels it. He describes the Moldavian gentle landscape including Săbăoani/[6] Szabófalva,[7] his home village. Its main identification marks are the quietly flowing rivers Siret/Szeret and Moldova/Moldva, the reeds and willows swaying in the wind, the meadows, the sunshine, the sound of the wind, the smell of linden and lavender, the arrival of storks and cranes in spring, the larks singing up in the blue sky. Nilsen-Børsskog visualises in his poems the elements of far North: the flora of the rocky land along the fjords, the little flowers strongly holding on to the barren peak rock, the waves crashing against the rocks, spring – flying on light wings, the silvery rivers and lakes, the salmon swimming towards the river estuary, the white nights, the trees ornated with tears of ice, the thick, hard snow cover in winter. Both Lakatos and Nilsen-Børsskog personify the elements of nature. In the case of Lakatos, every rivulet, every blade of grass and flower knows the onlooker well (Lakatos 2003, 36, 147); the sunflower greets them (Lakatos 2003, 37); winter sends telegrams with the falling leaves of autumn (Lakatos 2003, 296); the trees wear white (wedding) dresses in winter, and the hoarfrost plants flower in the windows (Lakatos 2003, 306); the buds are smiling in the sunshine (Lakatos 2003, 317); the streams are playing the organ (Lakatos 2003, 24); the flowers close their eyes (Lakatos 2003, 374). Complex tropes are also found in his poems: "The ears of wheat ring like golden rings"[8] (Lakatos 2003, 350, translation by Betty Léb). It is not a mere comparison but also a synaesthesia connecting different senses. From among Nilsen-Børsskog's personalisations of natural elements, I'd like to highlight the following: the joyous song of the wind (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010a, 5); the little waves caressing the quiet land with gentle fingers (Nilsen-Børsskog 2008, 36); the little blue-leaved flower pining

6　The Romanian name of the village.
7　The Hungarian name of the same village.
8　In original: "kalász cseng, mint arany csengő"

in the clearing (Nilsen-Børsskog 2008, 27); the snow-flakes disporting themselves in the air (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010b, 5), and dressing the beautiful night landscape in white (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010b, 13).

In the case of both poets, beside nature the images are also inspired by village life. With Lakatos, these are work in the fields, shepherding and work around the home. In this discourse, he detailedly and vividly illustrates the area inhabited by the Csángós: the golden wheat ears in summer, the fields of corn, the sweet smell of hay, the vineyards on the hill slopes, the sunflowers, the threshing machine, the carts richly filled with crop, the wine barrels in winter. In Nilsen-Børsskog's images, the typical environment created by northerners takes shape: verdant barley in spring, the oat field wavering in the summer wind with warm tints of amber, the so few fertile fields laboured with hard work, the village built on the river bank, animal farming, potatoes stored in the cellar, salted and smoked fish, human beings struggling with the forces of nature to create a liveable surrounding for themselves.

Both poets also show the elements most characteristic for their own community culture. Folk tales, for instance, and folk songs which implicitly are created in the community's mother tongue. Folk customs of Csángós are much more alive than those of Kvens; many a time, Lakatos mentions traditional costumes, playing the flute, folk dances, winter gatherings for spinning, everything "created from the depth of people's hearts"[9] (Lakatos 2003, 41, translation by Betty Léb). They also have musical accompaniment when working (Lakatos 2003, 358), they sing, and their life is marked not only by the seasons, but also by the sequence of labour days and holidays, in a rhythm inherited from their ancestors. Metaphors are also used by Lakatos to express the importance of his home region: for him Moldova is the middle of the world ("the navel of the earth"[10]), where you can even hear the earth breathing; it is heaven – a sacred place for him all along his life (Lakatos 2003, 38).

Nilsen-Børsskog makes a comparison between the old and the contemporary image of his birthplace; he uses the adjective *golden* in connection with the former one to emphasise its value; on the other hand, albeit he considers the village reconstructed in the post-war period beautiful, he considers it sterile, since it lacks historical memories (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010b, 35). Nilsen-Børsskog also parallels autumn and old age: the way nature goes to rest, human steps become shorter, as well; they recall the ordeals of their lives, the hard work, the war and famine, goods consumed by fire, family deportation (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010b, 36). However, the last thought is suggesting hope. Life has been going on in his blessed homeland, in the beautiful trilingual village (Nilsen-Børsskog 2008, 33) for uncountable centuries (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 6). One of the keywords of Nilsen-Børsskog's work is "Life" (e.g., in his tetralogy *Elämän jatko* [Continuity of Life]); he focuses on the fact that it must survive in spite of any ordeals.

9 In original: "mit termel szívibül a nép"
10 In original: "a föld köldöke"

Environment and the human being

Both Lakatos and Nilsen-Børsskog clearly relate positively to their environment, to the natural and human-built ones alike. In the previous chapter I presented in detail the way they view and receive, perceive and understand the nature they are in daily contact with. Here I will concentrate on the feelings the two poets formulate concerning their environment. Lakatos calls himself the son of nature (Lakatos 2003, 172), who gets intoxicated by it and loves it to the moon and back (Lakatos 2003, 45). He uses verbs to express heightened emotions, repeating especially the verb *imád* 'adore' approaching a religious experience. He also writes about earthbound relations, since he holds on to his home landscape with strong roots (Lakatos 2003, 28), the sunshine heals all his sufferings (Lakatos 2003, 24) and the spirit of nature deeply penetrates his heart (Lakatos 2003, 39). He does not formulate this belonging together as a comparison but as a statement; he considers himself an integral part of nature, and equal to all beings. He loves his birthplace, since it is the apple of his eyes (Lakatos 2003, 26) and this feeling stays with him all his life.

The nature described by Lakatos is friendly and helpful and easy to identify with; on the contrary, Nilsen-Børsskog's boreal nature is grim many a time, still it teaches people to persevere and be tough, without which they would not survive. This landscape is also lovable but only by those who submit to its rules. He also uses the motif of root(s); he formulates it in the conditional: if he were a forest pine, his thick root would deeply and strongly hold on to the ground (Nilsen-Børsskog 2008, 14). Unlike the fragile human being who can be blown away by the first blow of the wind, the flowers holding on to the rocks are much more vigorous (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 13). It is from the height of the rocks that the outdoorsman contemplates the landscape stretching below and ponders on his life, then he takes an oath that he will never give it up, no matter what hardships he will have to face (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010a, 14). Attention drifting downwards from the heights makes him self-assured and humble at the same time. He feels and understands that he is part of a huge power (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010a, 32), which forms the very basis of his being. It is joy he experiences when he finds peace on the riverbank and forgets all the weight of life, the wars, the injustice and persecution (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010b, 20). The roar of the forest, the beautiful river valley and the peace of the Kuosuvuoma fjord also have a calming effect upon him (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010b, 32). His pleasure is increased by the fact that he does not experience all these alone, but with other people and friends (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010b, 32). It is a harmonious togetherness both with nature and the human world.

The positive feeling of both Lakatos and Nilsen-Børsskog extends also to the work of human hands, that is the human-created world. Lakatos formulates the pleasure and satisfaction of the work done irrespective of the type of work since everyone has a well-defined aim: to assure

livelihood. Labour and life are inseparable parts of everyday life and surroundings: "I work and live here"[11] (Lakatos 2003, 28), says the poet, the adverb *here* referring to home. A working man observes the signs of nature and plans his tasks based on them. In spring, for instance, when the temperatures are rising, the apple tree is blooming and the migratory birds arrive, he works the fields with pleasure (Lakatos 2003, 332); in summer, when the girls are harvesting crops, the boys walk behind them singing and binding the sheaf (Lakatos 2003, 42); the wilting flowers in autumn warns us about the coming of winter and reminds us that wood must be gathered for heating, that pigs need to be fattened and winter clothes should be looked after (Lakatos 2003, 297). "Everything that happens in this world, happens at the time God chooses" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, *Good News Bible*, 650) and it is conformity to this order that assures physical and spiritual welfare.

In Nilsen-Børsskog's poems, after years of wandering, a human being settles in a place where he finds fertile land and can build his cottage (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010a, 33). This will become the land of his heart and here will his soul find its peace (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 30). He looks gratefully over the fields which will provide him with cereals in the future, and he joyfully works the field (Nilsen-Børsskog 2008, 46). He also sees to it that the crop is harvested when time comes and fills up his granaries and hay barns; he fishes and preserves the fish and assures food and easy life also for his animals for winter (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 38). In Nilsen-Børsskog's poems one accompanies their wanderings and work with songs learned in school and their souls kiss with reverence the great beauty of Nature (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 21).

Besides the term "Life" mentioned in the previous chapter, "Nature" is also a keyword in his work, referring to the daily background of his and his community's life.

Mother tongue, culture, legacy

Birthplace is for both poets the specific geographical landscape with its own beauties, as well as a cultural space, created by innumerable generations. Reverence for the ancestors and their language is formulated several times, and their remembrance brings a kind of blessing to the fields. The contemporary Csángó community desires to cherish their ancestors' spirit by keeping and handing down "the beautiful dances and ballads"[12] they have inherited (Lakatos 2003, 149). Nilsen-Børsskog recalls the already forgotten mother tongue of his ancestors using it both orally and in written form (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010a, 21). Both poets wish to return into the ground where their ancestors rest (Lakatos 2003, 27; Nilsen-Børsskog 2008, 48). Mother tongue and survival of the community language are also a recurring motif with both of

11 In original: "Én itt dolgozok és élek."
12 In original: "szép táncokat, balladákat"

them. In the same way as an individual needs food for their physical survival, a community's collective spiritual and cultural survival greatly depends on cherishing their mother tongue. Both the community and the individual have their own well-defined role in it. Lakatos openly confesses his reverence and pride for his mother tongue and urges his community to stick to their spiritual heritage, he himself considering it the most valuable treasure (Lakatos 2003, 109, 119). He highlights that language braces generations and that its rich source is folk poetry; that is why he considers it extremely important to pass on the folk tales and songs to the successors. This can be done in the family, for instance, when in the summer the grandfather teaches Hungarian folk songs to his grandchildren (Lakatos 2003, 63); but the spinning gatherings are also an important occasion, where the villagers tell tales in their mother tongue and sing as entertainment, also strengthening by this the sense of belonging together (Lakatos 2003, 311). The poet himself consciously takes part in this care for tradition also by passing on his mother tongue as a heritage in his poems (Lakatos 2003, 74). In his poem *Fiamnak* (To My Son) he formulates his joy and pride concerning the fact that his child has the opportunity to study Hungarian language in school, while he himself has been deprived of this possibility (Lakatos 2003, 565).

Nilsen-Børsskog uses epithets and metaphors charged with high emotions in order to show his fondness towards his mother tongue. He calls it "wonderful language" (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010a, 34; 2010c, 28), "golden language" (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 40, 43), "the language of his heart" (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 46) and "the flower of his heart" (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 47), that is also rooted in his spinal cord (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010a, 21). Mother tongue, at the same time, is also a collective value, strengthened with love's pearls by the community where, as they say, an island is formed in the ocean of the majority language (Nilsen-Børsskog 2008, 33). Mother tongue has subsisted in the whirlwind of times, holding so deeply to people's souls that it has become impossible to be torn out (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 43).

School and the traumas they experienced there because of language discrimination and humiliation are inseparable for both poets from the cultural surrounding of their birth place. It is interesting to follow the difference between how they relate to all that happened to them in school. First of all, Lakatos does not specify who those majority language speakers are who call his ancestors' language ugly (Lakatos 2003, 118), and does not reveal that it is because of them that the Hungarian language cannot be taught in school. He speaks about them in the third person plural (*ők* 'they') but does not qualify them in any way. He feels shame and openly apologises for not spelling Hungarian correctly due to the fact that he attended Romanian schools (Lakatos 2003, 108). At the same time, he proudly confesses that he learned to write Hungarian all by himself with the aim to write poems in this mother tongue. He speaks up in the name of his community when formulating that they often had to suffer because of the way their mother tongue was treated,

however, they managed to remain Hungarian (Lakatos 2003, 118). In order to resist language assimilation, the main tool was to consciously learn and use the mother tongue, both at individual and community level.

Nilsen-Børsskog does not express shame. It is with the tools of militant rhetoric that he formulates how his mother tongue was banned from school. In his long epic poem *Kantaatti pienele kansale* (Cantata For a Small Ethnic Group), the poet uses different metaphors to illustrate the way they cast the "dung-words" (*sontasana*) of his mother tongue upon "frosty bridges" (*jäisile siljoile*) and left them there to die. He expresses what had happened to his mother tongue using verbs in the passive voice, and in the following part of the poem he explicitly formulates that it was the majority language that wanted to "sterilise" (*kuohiit*) the minority language, to deprive it of its fertility. In the following verse, which begins laconically with the word "No", the image changes abruptly, as if editing a film: the language sentenced to death has survived and is still spoken. The poet also personalises the language which seeds itself in people's hearts (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 41).

Mother tongue and birthplace are inseparable in Nilsen-Børsskog's poems. The words of the language spoken at home, bearing a strong emotional charge, always resound in his ears wherever he is in the world and remind him of his parents, his grandparents and his siblings. It is his mother tongue that re-creates for him the warmth of home and all the other values he has brought along from the family: love, benignity, peace – everything he used to feel in summer evenings in his home environment (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 28). Mother tongue tastes in his mouth like a delicacy, like honey and bread cheese[13] (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 44), meaning that it festers and delects the soul at the same time.

It is his own religion beside his own language that appears in Nilsen-Børsskog's poems as symbols of permanence. No doubt, the preservation of the mother tongue is also supported by the minority religion being different from that of the majority and its language being the mother tongue of the community. The Kven language has survived due to the Laestadian[14] religion being practised by Kvens in Finnish, which is a very close language relative of Kven.[15] In the case of the Csángós it was the roman catholic religion which had the same role in the preservation of the Hungarian language. In his poem *Kantaatti pienele kansale* Nilsen-Børsskog names two pieces of heritage which his community

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13 Fresh cheese made from cow's beestings, rich milk from a cow that has recently calved.

14 Laestadianism came into being in the middle of the 1800s, as a wakening movement inside the Lutheran Church. Nowadays, it still has a lot of followers in North-Europe. Its founder, Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861), was born in Sweden, his father having Swedish, and his mother Sámi mother tongue.

15 From a purely linguistic point of view Kven has been considered a Finnish dialect, but it received the status of a minority language in 2005 within the framework of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

cherishes: "Two gifts we were left/ faith and our dear mother tongue."[16] (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 40). With the help of religious discourse he continues stressing the sanctity of his mother tongue: it is Heaven that left its dear, beautiful language to the love-worthy northern region (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 47).

For Nilsen-Børsskog, the home village is the place of peace and continuity up to the point when those who speak a foreign language break the harmony (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 6-7). The years of the world war had a malefic effect upon the culture of the village, as regards language and religion, too. Beside financial losses, it also caused losses that could not be made up for ever since: namely linguistic decline (Nilsen-Børsskog 2008, 33). The author hints at the foreign language speaking enemy whose "most cruel" (*armottommiin*) men of culture accomplished "the most dreadful" (*kauheimiita*) destruction in the ancient settlements inhabited by the Kvens (Nilsen-Børsskog 2010c, 5, 7). His adjectives express anger, and the expression "men of culture" (*kulttuurimiehet*) bear a negative connotation in the context, since those meant to defend minority culture have destroyed it.

Conclusions

In my study, I have examined in the poems of Demeter Lakatos and Alf Nilsen-Børsskog – Csángó and Kven poets, respectively – the way natural and human surroundings connect to minority language and identity, as well as the way all these together create the feeling of homeliness for both the individual and the community. The two poets present their own natural and cultural surroundings with such accuracy that the reader can receive the most vivid picture of them. I have analysed the discourses as language use from the point of view of ecolinguistics, and concluded that two different linguistic narratives can be built from these. These narratives hide behind and between the lines of the poems; and – in spite of the obvious natural/geographical and cultural differences – they also show similarities in their attitude toward nature, mother tongue and the community speaking it. Both the Csángó and Kven communities are characteristically poor; at the same time, they live their lives in diligence and faith, that is why their basic life feeling is contentment. There is the same feeling of joy they walk nature with; the same fight with labour to make both ends meet; and they similarly enjoy the periods of rest in winter. The discourses I analysed here have an important impact on the way that humans interact with each other, other species (mainly plants, in our case) and with the environment. The analysis of the lexical choices and their implications show how the ideology and stories behind various discursive constructions can be expressed through images. The main

16 In the original: "Kaksi meille on jääny lahjaa/ usko sekä kultakieli."

principles that I have found are the principle of a strong interconnection between humans, their environments and their cultures based on their minority mother tongue; the ideology according to which one should turn the negative causes which he encounters into positive effects; and the ideology of the mother tongue's priority under all circumstances.

I have examined how words in the two languages relate to objects in the local environment and I paid closer attention to the tropes (personifications, metaphors, synaesthesias) used in the texts. Both Lakatos and Nilsen-Børsskog personify the elements of nature with which they have contact every day and they use metaphors and other cognitive and linguistic tools to reveal the narratives that shape people's lives and also the society they live in.

The Kven poet also uses a strong physical picture to make us perceive the importance of the language for the individual: his mother tongue is strongly rooted in his spinal cord. There are some keywords which have a strong emotional charge in the poems of both authors: sacred (referring to their home village, mother tongue, peace), ancestors, proud (of their own language and culture and of the work people do) and gold (about the words of the language in Nilsen-Børsskog and about the grains which feed the people in Lakatos). We may also notice in the case of the Kven poet that he sometimes capitalises the words Nature and Life. In the case of Lakatos, natural surroundings are in close connection also with the technical world: he praises the agricultural machines which make labour on fields easier. Lakatos mainly presents the positive side of modernisation, while in the case of Nilsen-Børsskog modernisation brings along language and culture loss.

Language and faith are the most important marks of the ethnic minority culture of both poets. In the text corpus I have examined, through their discourses, the minority poets intend to help their communities understand and share their experiences. I have also paid attention to how the poets represent the language minority they belong to, and how they relate to the majority language of their environment mainly through the discourses about school experiences. More accurately, I analysed how in the discourse of Lakatos' and Nilsen-Børsskog's lyrical texts topics like how the acculturation brought along by modernisation has affected the traditional ways of life of the Csángó and the Kven community and which are those components of the natural and human environment that can give the members of these communities a relatively safe and liveable background.

As Johanna Domokos states in her book referring to endangered literatures, if a language is endangered, the literature written in that given language is also endangered (Domokos 2018, 11). This correlation has not been paid enough attention until recently, although it is of great importance to emphasise that ethnolinguistic vitality supports literary diversity, while the endangerment of a language means a risk factor for the whole literary field (Domokos 2018, 11). Nilsen-Børsskog wrote in a highly endangered language and Lakatos in a dialect which

is used by less and less people. What Domokos says about the Sámi literature (Domokos 2018, 60) is equally true for the Kven and Csángó literatures: their literary fields are extremely dependent on political and social factors. Their "cultural ecosphere" (Domokos 2018, 60) can only be reconstructed by taking into consideration multiple factors, among others the ones I have focused on in this article.

In the text corpus I have examined, nature, human environment, culture, history, traditions and human beings are in synchronic and diachronic connection, building by this an integrated and dynamic, life-maintaining unity. I have thus presented the ecological balance between the human and the natural worlds of the two poets. In the narratives behind and between the lines of the texts people become positive actors within and for the natural environment, and the narratives that shape their environment and their identities are represented through the discourses I have analysed. Finally, it is important to mention that the main message of both poets is the joy of life, as well as the expression of life affirmation and gratefulness.

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"IT IS POSSIBLE TO WORK WITH THEM AND DEVELOP SUCH A MUTUALLY GOOD RELATIONSHIP…"

Ecological knowledge and the raw milk method among contemporary Hungarian cheesemakers

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ABSTRACT

In this study, I examine the complex intertwining of the relationship between man and nature through the activities of a typical group of farmers dominated by urban-rural farmers, the artisan cheese makers of Hungary. I focus on a specific issue, raw milk cheese making, where humans and microbes work together on a daily basis to produce a sellable product. In this context, I will describe how the complex, hybrid nature of the knowledge required for this process of cheese making is produced, and then review the different narratives of Hungarian cheesemakers about the method. I will then show how this method and the particular perspective it entails affects the daily practice of farming, and how working with invisible microbes transforms the fundamental way these farmers think about the relationship between humans and non-human actors.

Keywords: artisan cheesemaking, raw milk cheeses, small scale farmers, microbes, man – nature relationship, ecological knowledge

Introduction: ecological knowledge and contemporary small farms

There are different paradigms and research traditions in contemporary cultural anthropology regarding the topic of local and ecological knowledge, with some theoretical debates between them. For ethnographic-anthropological research on agriculture, a paradigm shift has recently been brought about by the conscious examination of

relations with non-human actors, the focus on interspecies relations, and the emergence of a multi-species ethnographic perspective (Bubandt–Tsing 2018; Haraway 1991, 2003, 2007; Haraway et al. 2016; Kirksey–Helmreich 2010; Kohn 2013; Neimanis 2015; Tsing 2012, 2015).[1] The question is how novel this paradigm shift is, given the abundant examples of human-nature relations studies in both ethnography and cultural anthropology. Ontological anthropology also plays a major role in reinterpreting the relationship between man and nature. It argues that there are major cultural differences even considering the level of basic ontological concepts, and therefore different responses to the problems posed by their locality, which, in accordance with the basic paradigm of anthropology, must be taken equally seriously. Thus, the dualistic separation of man and nature is not a universal human constant, but is specific to certain cultures, and elsewhere this relationship is framed in a completely different way (Descola 2013; Ingold 2000; Kohn 2014; Viveiros de Castro 2014). At the same time, a newfound interdisciplinary perspective led to the emergence of the field of the research of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). Born from the meeting of biology and conservation and ethnography-anthropology, these studies are very strongly oriented towards ecological sustainability perspectives, looking for ecological management knowledge which can also be applied in contemporary economic practices (Berkes 2018; Borsos 2004, 76-81; Borsos 2020).

These research trends attribute different validity to different forms of knowledge. The research of traditional ecological knowledge has started from validating the knowledge generated by scientific methods and has gradually moved to recognise and legitimise local and indigenous knowledge, creating a common ground between the two knowledge systems. In ontological anthropology, the boundaries between the concepts of man and nature, and between humans and other species, are blurred in certain cultures, or interpreted in a completely different set than these terms of duality. Multispecies ethnography, on the other hand, seeks to include the agency and perspectives of non-human beings in its analysis, with regard to their radical otherness, although confronting a number of methodological problems as a result, since the methodological and analytical tools of anthropology are essentially designed to analyse man as a cultural and social being, and the study of other species is not in its focus, and thus its methods are not sufficient for this topic without including some other disciplines.

Despite their different starting points and approaches, I believe that all three approaches seek a new approach to the complex relationship between man and his environment, and human knowledge about the ecological environment. In doing so, they can provide a good conceptual

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1 For the purposes of this study, we focus on living beings as the non-human agents with agency, but recent anthropology also studied the relationship between humans and the non-living environment, and the agency of objects e.g., Gell 1998, Latour 1993b, 1996, 2005.

framework and point of reference for the interpretation and ethnographic analysis of contemporary agricultural knowledge and practices of farmers who are pushing these very radical questions through their own practical practices. In what follows, I will use ethnographic and anthropological methodologies in an attempt to show, through the example of contemporary cheese-makers, what a farming practice that allows space for the agency of other species and takes into account their well-being looks like in their case, how they push the boundaries of human and other living beings, and question the dualistic relationship between humans and nature, and create a new hybrid and integrative knowledge that transcends the boundaries of existing knowledge systems.

It is important to clarify what is meant by *traditional* in this case, which has been problematized very strongly in the contemporary research practice for decades, and it is also important to grasp the *non-traditional* ecological knowledge of contemporary farmers.[2] In addition to the notion of TEK, a more comprehensive notion of local knowledge has been proposed (Brosius 2009), and the equally comprehensive notion of indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) has also been introduced (Brondízio et al. 2021), but the terms traditional and local knowledge are also used (Varga et al. 2020). TEK research has thoroughly analysed the ways of knowledge access and knowledge transmission (Berkes 2018, 227-249; Turner–Berkes 2006, 497-504; Varga et al. 2017, 252-253), addressed the relationship and intersections between different knowledge systems, both scientific and traditional (Ahnström et al. 2009; Agrawal 1995; Hill et al. 2020; Tengö et al. 2014), and the differences and links between the knowledge of conservationists and farmers, and methods of building of bridges between them (Carr–Tait 1991; Knapp–Fernandez-Gimenez 2009; Molnár et al. 2016; Molnár et al. 2020; Natori–Chenoweth 2008; Raymond et al. 2010; Ujházy et al. 2020). However, significantly fewer studies have focused on the knowledge of contemporary farmers who are not part of a traditional indigenous community or who have acquired their knowledge in non-traditional ways, although there is a body of research on farmers' relationship with nature and ecological knowledge in general (Beckford–Barker 2007; de Snoo et al. 2013; Ingram 2008; Morris 2006, 2010; Raymond et al. 2016; Riley 2008).

The following study focuses on a specific group of contemporary farmers who have a strong, conscious intention to move beyond industrial agriculture, which subjugates nature and focuses on profit, and to pursue an ecologically committed economic practice that seeks harmony with nature, produces quality products, and is ecologically aware, considering the perspectives and well-being of non-human actors. I am focusing my research on one particular type of alternative livestock farms,

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2 There is also an intensive process of inventing traditions (Hobsbawn–Ranger 1983) among contemporary farmers, which makes the question even more complex. I will discuss the issues of tradition and contemporary farmers further in my upcoming PhD thesis.

cheesemakers, which is suitable to demonstrate many tendencies typical of such alternative farmers.[3] My questions are: What are the sources of ecological knowledge and how is it developed on these contemporary farms? What is the place of ecological knowledge in shaping economic practice, and how does it interact with other factors?[4] How and by what methods do they try to develop an economic practice that cooperates with non-human actors and takes their agency into account? How does it affect farmers to consciously attend to non-human actors, and try to cooperate on creating a product together? To what extent are they able to do this in practice, and to what extent do their own human goals and considerations still dominate their practice? To explore this question, I will illustrate the complexity of contemporary ecological knowledge through an examination of a specific topic, raw milk cheese making and knowledge about microorganisms. The human–microbiological relationship has been the subject of a vast interdisciplinary perspective in the anthropological literature in general (Benezra et al. 2012; Benezra 2023; Helmreich 2009; Latour 1993a), and in the research on cheese making in particular is also quite extensive, both from social and natural science and from explicitly interdisciplinary perspectives (Boissard 2003; Donelly ed. 2014; Donelly 2019; Paxson 2008, 2013; Percival–Percival 2017). However, these studies have not considered joint work with microbes as an ecological knowledge as such, and the two fields of study have not been linked so far. In the second half of this paper, I attempt to interpret the knowledge of Hungarian cheese makers about raw milk cheese processing as an example for a new kind of complex contemporary ecological knowledge and to show its impact on farming and other aspects of farmers' lives.

About the research

The research is a sub-theme of my PhD thesis, and I will explain the methodology in more detail there. The subject and field of the research is the network of cheesemakers in Hungary, on which I have created four research "cross-sections" using anthropological and ethnographic methods. So far, I have conducted interviews and observations in 65 farms in the vicinity of Budapest, in the Balaton Highlands and in

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3   The practices of contemporary Hungarian cheesemakers come from a diverse social and historical background, the details of which I will present in my forthcoming dissertation. However, they are heavily over-represented by first-generation farmers moving from the city to the countryside, the spread of which is a global phenomenon and is becoming increasingly prevalent in Hungary (Van der Ploeg 2018, 21-27, 91-122; Bali 2014; Bartulović 2022; Csizmady–Csurgó 2012; Csurgó 2013; Farkas 2018; Nemes et al. 2022; Svetel 2022; Turk Niskač 2022)

4   Along this line of questioning, the topic fits into the main question of my doctoral dissertation, where my main question, which frames the topics, is what factors shape the economic practice and decision making of a farm, how it is composed, and what influences the decision-making of an economy.

Baranya County, and with key actors in the Hungarian cheese makers' network.

Layers of cheese-making knowledge

Before we look at the knowledge of dairy practices of Hungarian cheesemakers closely linked to the ecological environment, I think it is necessary to show what other factors shape their specific recipes.[5] The product range and recipe set of contemporary Hungarian cheesemakers is formed by a series of interrelated, often difficult to disentangle factors, of which the interaction with the ecological environment is an integral shaping factor, but only one of the issues that influence complex decision-making. The knowledge of the cheesemakers contains but a few elements of oral or practical knowledge transferred within the family, and therefore has weak links to the traditional knowledge system in the above sense. At the same time, there is a conscious process of reconstruction of the cheese-making tradition in the Carpathian Basin under way, using both written and oral sources. The specific individual cheese varieties are developed in a global space where a very broad range of global knowledge of dairy processing and cheese making is potentially available.

A novice cheesemaker can take the first steps in the craft from a very wide accessible range of sources, with great differences in both approach and practice. In all of this, of course, there is some contingency as to what knowledge reaches a particular farm and forms the basis of one's own practice, and is also very much embedded in one's own life history, so that specific recipes are often strongly linked to a distant but important point in one's personal life story in the global space. The most important sources for getting started are the internet and specialist books, especially dairy textbooks available in Hungarian, often in local libraries. Among the Internet resources, videos are particularly valued, where the practical steps can be learned more experientially through the use of moving images than through text alone, although this is of course no substitute for personal, hands-on learning.[6]

At the same time, it is clear that, after a while, when immersed in the practice of the craft, such more easily accessible sources are not sufficient to provide the depth of knowledge required by cheese makers. Many cheesemakers have developed a need to better understand and thus use the

5   A detailed analysis of the cheesemakers' knowledge acquisition is only included in my forthcoming dissertation, here I will only outline the most important factors that are key to understanding the place of ecological knowledge.
6   Knowledge on the internet is part of a sense of oral knowledge in a new media space, which can be approached as mediatised orality (Zumthor 1990) or "digital orality" (Lafkioui–Merolla 2005). However, the scope of knowledge transferred via the Internet is limited due to the highly physical and sensory nature of cheese-making, which makes generative transmission an important way of passing knowledge (Goody 1977).

microbiological processes in milk to develop more complex and exciting flavours, to improve product development and to achieve consistent high quality. There is also a growing demand for the development of cheeses with a unique flavour, more embedded in the farming location, based on local traditions and thus more in harmony with the ecological environment, with a local character and uniqueness, which will lead us to the theme of raw milk cheese making. A number of providers of deeper and more specialised layers of knowledge acquisition have thus emerged in the knowledge economy market.[7] The gap left by the end of the autonomy of the former Csermajor vocational school, which had a long history, was filled by the formal training of people with an OKJ qualification,[8] but this was often not able to meet the knowledge needs of small-scale, family farms, so that several specialised "private" providers have appeared on the market. Among them, there is one that offers market-based training specifically for beginners, with the possibility of practical training, which can be used to acquire skills that cannot be acquired through written or video training. This entrepreneur also sells tools for cheesemakers as part of his business. One of the protagonists of our story, a leading figure in the national raw milk cheese-making industry, has also been involved in the practical transfer of knowledge, but he has not been doing this on a market basis and has abandoned the activity some time ago due to a lack of capacity and, as we shall see, a different approach. In addition, due to the increasing demand for knowledge, the Cheese Makers' Association regularly invites international cheese making specialists to give practical demonstrations of the techniques of a well-known international cheese type.

These official sources of knowledge, too, convey knowledge from very diverse and complex sources, much of which comes from the global arena, for example, the learning of established internationally known cheese varieties that are in line with global gastronomic fashions, and inextricably mixes traditional ecological knowledge with modern scientific and food knowledge about cheese-making technology. The cheese varieties, which originated in the global area and which have now become absolutely international, were also once learned in formal forums, and were developed through practical learning in cooperation with the ecological environment, using natural scientific methods to understand the processes developed in a specific local area, reproduced and transformed over time (for example, by microbial cultures analysed and cultivated under laboratory conditions and then commodified as such, available for purchase on the market and integrated into global value chains). A significant proportion of them are still strongly linked to the localities that originally created the cheese

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7   A detailed analysis of the cheesemakers' knowledge acquisition is only included in my forthcoming dissertation, here I will only outline the most important factors that are key to understanding the place of ecological knowledge.

8   National List of Qualifications (OKJ for short) – this lists the qualifications that can be officially obtained in Hungary. The so-called OKJ courses are one of the most widespread forms of adult education in Hungary.

varieties, and are even legally protected by systems of origin protection, so that even after the process has been reproduced, their local variety cannot be officially marketed under the name of the original cheese variety, but only with the term "like". Completely new, original cheese types are also regularly created: *"for example, a hit out there* [...] *is a cheese called amnesia, which... One, I had an extra cheese wheel, a fresh cheese wheel, which didn't fit in the thermo-box, and I put it in the fridge... we use Parajd salt. And three weeks later I noticed it was there, and it was fucking delicious. One... it was cold, it didn't sizzle as much, it was softer, but it wasn't that stinky rouge. And then I recreated the occasion or the circumstances several times, and then I got it, same taste, same texture, everything, it came out. And then I called it amnesia, because I left it, and now I have a fan base."* (man, Hajdú-Bihar county, 2022)

For them, the basic measure of knowledge is basically its practical applicability, that is to the extent to which it serves the ongoing sustainability of economic practice, the creation of a product that satisfies their need for creativity but is also tasty and sellable. In this context, it makes no difference to them whether this knowledge is the result of natural sciences and laboratory methods, social science analysis, the experiential knowledge transferred through generations of local shepherds, a textbook, or their own practical experience. They do not distinguish between these categories, if the element of knowledge proves to be useful in their practice. Each layer of knowledge and each category, is equally valid or invalid from their very practical point of view, judged solely by its practical utility. This knowledge, dominated by practicality, is very hybrid, where elements from different sources "react" with each other and dissolve into a new, synthesised knowledge.[9]

However, it is a common practice – and approach – that the cheesemaker has to adapt these "general" knowledge elements and procedures to his own environment, farm and raw material, which is why there are no really stable recipes on a farm, as all these factors are constantly changing and have to be adapted to. Practical learning, the continuous development and acquisition of knowledge related to one's own locality, is therefore a constant task on every farm. The elements of general knowledge are adapted through the practice of daily work, where a highly practical, site-specific knowledge is developed, embodied through repetition, movement patterns, and generated through the senses of the cheesemakers.[10] Through all this practice, every farm is constantly working with non-human actors and producing specific knowledge that is specific to and related to the locality and valid there. In comparison to this, however, raw milk cheese making brings a qualitatively different, even more complex, relationship of cooperation with the non-human environment.

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9 It is no coincidence that hybridity is a characteristic concept of Bruno Latour's thinking (Latour 1993a).

10 Very similar processes take place creating other fermented products, see Hey 2021.

"It is possible to work with them and develop such a mutually good relationship…" The question of raw milk cheeses

One of the central themes within the network of cheesemakers, which is also a major determinant of specific economic practices, is the use of raw milk cheesemaking, i.e., the use of locally grown microbial cultures from the local natural environment in the ripening of dairy products. The topic was "offered" by the field itself: it had already come up spontaneously in the first interviews and was often mentioned at various events, so I soon consciously included it in the interviews, even for those cheesemakers who did not mention it themselves. During the research period, the cheese-makers who were committed to the subject also set up their own organisation, the Raw Milk Cheese Makers' Guild.[11] The Guild also runs its own regular event, the Raw Milk Picnic, but the Cheese Makers' Association has also become increasingly involved in the theme, for example, at its annual major event, the Cheese Showcase, and the members of the Guild have also included the theme.[12] Based on the fieldwork, I see that the more connected someone is to the network of cheese makers, i.e., the more central and opinion-forming position they occupy in the network, the more likely they are to take a stand, to form an opinion either for or against the use of raw milk cultures. Virtually all of the actors I identified as node actors had extensive knowledge of the topic and expressed strong, reflective opinions on it. In what follows, I present these distinctive narratives about this complex ecological knowledge, which are important because they shape economic practices, specific recipes, product ranges, and marketing strategies, but also have other, personal effects on their bearers. Those who operate in relative isolation, producing some of the simpler types of cheese, often take no position at all, are not familiar with the defining narratives described below, or opt for the safer, more predictable method requiring less expertise and practice, preferring to work with heat-treated milk and purchased factory-made colour dairy products, following the simpler recipes they know.

The method of raw milk cheese making is that the cheesemaker does not heat the milk before making the cheese, but lets its own culture work, and produces the microbial cultures used in the cheese making process from the milk itself, and often allows microbes from the local natural environment to take over during the ripening process. The importance of this method lies in the fact that, on the one hand, the culture comes from the natural environment of the farm, as opposed to industrially produced colour cultures, and, on the other hand, it

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11 https://www.facebook.com/Nyerstejes.Sajtkeszitok.Cehe/ (Accessed 29 April 2023) This topic is also discussed in the chapter on association life and the network of relationships in my dissertation.

12 https://www.facebook.com/sajtkeszitok/posts/pfbid0sAHHAFsSrfc3KZoubni R2fK2mwZyewkAvkGqckGc1NQWFfBvPx8ujfVmEJPcy51Hl (Accessed 29 April 2023)

produces a much more varied and necessarily different flavour of the place, which is typical of each cheese. Microbes are thus derived from the local ecological environment itself, not produced in a laboratory and not introduced into the economy through global value chains. At the same time, because few people are engaged in pure grazing, the issue of raw milk does not arise at all in many places: *"And there are not really any milking animals in Hungary at the moment that really only feed on feed from grazing, because they could not provide milk of that quality, because there is not that diverse a flora here in Hungary anyway, precisely because of the climate."* (woman, Veszprém county, 2019).

The idea is also in line with international trends and has been taken up on the global stage, with much international literature on the subject (Enticott 2003; Paxson 2008, 2013; Percival–Percival 2017; Donelly 2019). There is a close link with the ideas of the various trends in organic farming (permaculture, bio-dynamism), and terroir, the latter being a topic that is also very much in touch with the domestic public discourse and is often raised.[13] The topic also raises complex legal and regulatory issues, to which different responses have been developed in different countries over the past decades, strongly influenced by different economic and social historical backgrounds. Two typical examples: in France, where cheese-making has a strong historical tradition, the production of raw milk cheeses is legally established, while in the United States, where industrial agriculture is a much more dominant trend and small-scale cheese-making is a relatively new phenomenon, there is a serious struggle to establish the legal status of raw milk cheese-making. In Hungary, however, the trend has not come from the global arena, although the global trend is clearly contributing to its spread. In the domestic network, it is clearly linked to the activities of one farmer who is central to contemporary Hungarian cheese making, and who I will refer to hereafter by the code LG.

Layers of raw dairy knowledge

The knowledge of raw milk cheesemaking itself consists of several closely related layers, the mixing and syncretic nature of contemporary cheesemaking knowledge in general applies to this particular, separate body of knowledge, but at the same time, additional sources emerge beyond the general ones. I will illustrate how the complex and, in its complexity, unified knowledge of microbiology is created through the life history and the development of the knowledge base of the leading Hungarian figure of this movement.

LG comes from a multi-generational family of farmers in Békés County, and a significant part of his agricultural knowledge comes

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13 For example, among the themes of the II, Raw Milk Picnic: "the role of terroir in cheese making" https://www.facebook.com/Nyerstejes.Sajtkeszitok.Cehe/photos/a.930152064378547/930151384378615. (Accessed 29 April 2023)

from here. This traditional agricultural knowledge has been developed over the decades through practical learning from his own production and dairy processing, as well as through professional food industry expertise and teaching activities, while at the same time his knowledge of ethnographic and food industry literature on the subject and his own conscious work in the search for the carriers of traditional dairy processing knowledge, in fact through ethnographic methods, were decisive in his move towards raw milk. Much of his knowledge also comes from pastoralists and farmers in the lowlands and Transylvania, and he combines this with modern food, dairy and microbiological knowledge. He is also open to international cheese-making knowledge, having spent a considerable amount of time studying with a French cheesemaker. Her knowledge is therefore very complex, synthesising elements from the local and global scene, and the results of a professional, scientific-food industry knowledge set and a traditional and practical learning knowledge set. The modern, industrialised food and dairy processing system, with its knowledge and recognition of its virtues, is deeply criticised by him, particularly for extreme practices (e.g., food adulteration, raw materials of a very poor quality), and he has been guided by moral principles, as discussed earlier, towards small-scale, close-to-nature forms of farming. His central role in the network was largely due to the fact that he shared this complex knowledge over decades, an activity which has been discussed in an earlier chapter, and which has had a considerable impact on contemporary cheese-making in the Carpathian Basin. Farms with a narrative and farming practices committed to raw milk cheesemaking that I know of also have a concrete personal connection to him, often learning the basics of the craft from him, or even more complex knowledge, making him personally influential in their views on raw milk. In general, those who reflect on their own farm practice and work with a different method based on their knowledge of raw milk practice also recognise his knowledge and importance in shaping the present and future of domestic cheese making. His charismatic influence is also demonstrated by the fact that his son, a geographer with a degree in town planning, is continuing the cheese-making workshop, his father's legacy, with the same approach, while his daughter is carrying out scientific research into microbiology.

Among the sources of ecological knowledge, we therefore see the farmer's own knowledge, based on the transfer of practical knowledge from his family, on which he builds his own daily practice and thus develops it further. At the same time, he has consciously collected and used the knowledge of other bearers of traditional ecological knowledge (shepherds, elderly farmers) in his own practice. However, this is not sharply separated from the scientific, food and natural science, microbiological knowledge, the two together forming this new kind of ecological knowledge, where natural science has helped to discover the microbiological background and explanation behind the former practical discoveries and methods and experiences. All this results in a new kind

of syncretic knowledge, radically different from traditional ecological knowledge based on practical learning and personal knowledge transfer, and also from scientific knowledge based on experimental methods, but using elements of both, and reconciling the two in the daily, practical knowledge creation process of farming, where a kind of highly applied knowledge is created, where a saleable, tasty product and a livelihood are at stake.

Discourses on raw milk

This ecological knowledge is clearly a major determinant of economic practice, but it is also intertwined with a range of other internal and external factors, and together they result in the concrete methods used in daily practice. One significant narrative in this context, which is of course clearly linked to LG himself, is in favour of raw milk cheese making and wants to *create* a Hungarian cheese culture based on it. This approach closely involves the quality of the milk, i.e. *hay milk*, which is also linked to the grazing and feeding of the animal. If the animal does not graze or is not fed with fibre feed from the local environment, which is appropriate to its natural physiological function, then there is no point in raw milk concepts that seek local characteristics and flavours from the local area, where the milk produced in this way is the source of the microbial stocks needed for processing. LG himself stresses that this method is suitable for small-scale farming, is strongly linked to this scale, and is understood as an environmentally friendly method that works with nature. The essence of the discourse is summarised by LG himself: *"A small movement has started in Hungary, and that is the Raw Milk Cheese Makers' Guild. It's about the fact that we're fed up with Danisco cultures, this kind of culture and that kind of culture. And we think that the traditional… so a nation… When did it survive, when did it become great? A cheese nation, great? When it took on itself. It took its own cows, its own pasture, its own microclimate, and made the traditional product out of it. We missed that era because, well, there are many reasons. But we've got to the point where… 150 years ago the French… now we've got to the point where maybe we can create something. Based on our tastes, based on our culture, based on our animals.*

Because I believe that Hungarian cheese starts with pasture, Hungarian herds and our own, home-grown cheese. Which means that we can produce mesophilic strains from, for example, plain sheep's milk, and the thermophilic strains we cook, so to speak. So, from the whey, from the fresh whey, we thermophilize it and that's how we make the strains. And so, this raw milk movement is now gaining quite a lot of momentum and more and more supporters. And so, something's started. And it turns out that you can make these products well. They taste good, they're unique. It just takes a different approach. […] Small farms that, for example, work with, I don't know, ten or twenty cows, they can do these things.

I lived in the world of industrial cultures as much as anyone else. And it's actually a philosophy of life, that we want a sustainable economy. And the idea of a sustainable economy is, you know, to take only what we need from nature. Now, that's the approach that made me, for example, think that it's important for cattle to graze outside. And I sleep here for six months, and I'm here when I could be living in much better conditions in the village. But it's important to me that the cows are comfortable out here. And then the direct consequence of that is, well, don't be a breeder.

No, but I beg you! I, if I were to put it very simply. If I want to make an Emmental cheese here, with the technology that is in Emmental, with exactly the same technology, with exactly the same strains, interestingly enough, it won't taste the same. It won't be the same. It will be something similar, but not the same. Why is that? Because the terroir is not the same. The pasture, the breed of animal, the composition of its milk... so the amino acid sequence, or the fatty acid composition is not the same. So, it's not the same product. So, what's good? Is it to mimic the world and try to follow it... Or we can make a product by ourselves, for ourselves. And to do that, we have to have the world of the raw milk that we represent. So, it's an absolute difference in approach. And a lot of people don't understand that. Well, if you don't understand, you don't understand. It's none of my business. Those who do understand, they'll manage. [...]

And then one of the people, one of the journalists, asked me once... what's the difference between an industrial cheese and an artisanal cheese? And I said, »Well, it's a difficult question, but I'll try to answer it.« With an industrial cheese, when you make an industrial cheese, what do you do? First, we pasteurise the milk. What do we do with that? We kill all the microbes in it. We take it, we put an industrial culture in it. The industrial culture, by the way, will usually contain two or three, four or five species at the most. Each species has its own enzyme, specific enzyme. Because the point is that they each give a different enzyme. And if you have a different enzyme, then you'll have a different amount of substances produced, or substances produced, and a different taste. Now, these five will always be the same. And usually these are not so dispersed strains that they give you a horribly broad spectrum of flavours. And when one of the customers comes and says to me at the market, »Listen here, young man«, he says, »I buy cheese at the store. And when I buy cheese, a regular cheese, whatever variety or name you see, it tastes pretty much the same. Why is that?« Well, I tell him, »it's because they're made with industrial cultures«. »And I taste your cheese, it tastes completely different.« I say, »because in our raw milk cheeses, nature gives us a million and one variations of which microbes are in it.« Now, it follows from this that only what is given there, in the conditions there, with the technology there, with the climate there, will proliferate. And, therefore, the flavours will be specific. Only the specific flavours that are specific to that place will develop. And that's the difference. That's the difference, and a very big difference." (man, Békés county, 2019)

The motivation behind the practice is the need for cooperative farming with nature and the closely related moral principles, as well

as the creativity experienced in *experimentation*, and closely related to this, the search for *exciting*, *unpredictable* and *natural* flavours: *"this is when, that's why raw milk is good in cheese making, it might not turn out the way it should, and it will turn out better than it should. Well, this raw milk cheesemaking, it doesn't always work out that way, but it still turns out something, and it's very much liked. There's a lot of randomness factor here, so no two cheeses are really the same. […] We do it on purpose, we don't do anything with it. But we leave it as it is, and then, and then all sorts of stuff gets on it, and then it gives the whole cheese a nice wild taste, actually."* (man, Békés county, 2019). Another important factor is that there is indeed a niche market for these products. If this were not there, the whole system would be tipped over on the sales and livelihood side and would not be sustainable. The starting point for this ecological thinking is also to create products that are both suitable for the ideas of their maker and at the same time sellable, and in this sense economic sustainability is a necessary condition for the implementation of ecological principles. Some consumers are particularly attracted to and demand products made in this way, precisely because they have a stronger, more distinctive flavour than cheeses made with milk, but raw milk cheesemakers themselves stress that not all consumers will be able to accept these products, and that the market can therefore only absorb a limited number of cheesemakers who use this method. However, without a real market demand, this method would be limited to home cheesemaking and would not be able to cross the market penetration threshold. In addition, the need for a deeper knowledge of raw milk use is stressed, and the lack of it not only makes the result unpredictable and difficult to produce any consistent quality, but also potentially dangerous if the cheesemaker does not recognise the presence of pathological microbial strains in the product.

Another identifiable narrative is equally aware of these aspects, recognises and acknowledges the role and activities of raw milk producers, but does not apply them in its own practice. This is generally due to the different scale and volume of production, the incorporation of consumer needs and marketability into practice, and the addition of moral, sustainability and individual principles to market considerations. This approach does not reject raw milk principles either, but only questions the market value of the products so produced and does not consider them to be compatible with its own established marketing practices.

"The raw milk producers are very nice, I like them, but some of their products are inedible to me. So it's not enjoyable and it's not stable. Because we are not in that culture. It's no coincidence that we didn't have that culture of aged cheesemaking back then. Sour cream, cottage cheese, button cheese… our bacterial culture is different. Whether we will be able to swim against the tide and find our own way in this is still to be seen." (man, Veszprém county, 2019)

This other narrative does not clearly define itself in opposition to the raw milk approach, but it does bring in economic, market aspects, the question of marketability. It is a widely accepted fact that the result is more difficult to predict when making raw milk cheeses, and this is what gives raw milk cheeses their beauty and interest. At the same time, there is even a risk of health hazards: this is because the method presupposes the cheese maker's knowledge to be able to identify potentially dangerous micro-organisms for the consumer and to separate them from cheese cultures that are merely exciting and hitherto unknown flavours. According to raw milk producers, this risk can be minimised, and this minimal risk is necessary for life: *"It's there, so there is a risk, I won't say, but, for example, my father used to say that acidification eliminates half the risk, salting eliminates the remaining 25 %, another 25 %, and then there's seasoning, surface treatment, and, and he used to say, 1 % is left. But you have to leave that."* (man, Békés county, 2019) However, the lack of consistent quality is a major threat to the service of consumers who are looking for familiar, predictable tastes (and who are basically socialised on the offer of retail chains). This narrative also draws attention to the fact that although large Western cheese factories, often using professional technology, also worked with rennet from nature and former smallholder farms, they have stabilised it over the years and have been able to create a consistent, familiar quality – in which, it is stressed, the consistent and predictable quality of milk, consistent over a large geographical area, has also played a major role, which is also not yet a given in this country.

A third identifiable narrative on the issue focuses on the individualistic approach to economies, bringing in the issue of individual taste. In the previous chapter, I showed that cheese makers potentially already have access to a global market of recipes, from which they are free to choose, constrained only by their individual capital, and thus make conscious choices about the type of cheese they make. The use of raw milk rennet limits this and determines the outcome, giving a greater role than individual creativity to the local microbiological environment, as it were, at least in part, "passing the baton". However, if one wants to produce a typical, for example Swiss, cheese to one's own taste, and in *a stable way, one* has to use a different method and cannot leave so much of the control to the local microbes:

"Milk has all the bacteria in it that… that make it suitable for making cheese. That… that makes it suitable. But if you rely on these… these bacteria, you'll have a different cheese every day. And because I like these Swiss cheese flavours, so I… And in the cheese making process, one, I prefer the more intense, longer-aged ones. I realised that I had to have technology with it […] No, it really has so much deep biological background and so much terroir and everything. So, you could say a lot of mystery, so we don't know how these beautiful cheeses have turned out and are now relatively stable. Of course, we're always learning, always consulting. Now we can make a

stable, consistent quality, which again, I think is a relatively big thing among artisans." (man, Pest county, 2022)

The use of the raw milk cheese-making method, the extent to which one lets go of the reins and hands over control to local cultures, is therefore, as with all other issues, the result of a very complex, individual and multifactorial decision-making process on a particular farm, determined by the contingencies of one's own life history, individual moral and economic principles, and the opportunities presented by the external environment. At the same time, raw-milk cheese-making is still a legal grey area in this country, too, and is not really well regulated, so whether farmers have the legal and regulatory freedom to implement their own practices in the given legal environment with regard to the issue of raw milk is questionable.[14]

"I always want to be a micro-organism for a moment…" A change of mindset in farming

Attitudes towards raw milk cheesemaking therefore range from complete, categorical and conscious rejection, through sympathy with the idea in principle but not applying it in practice for their own human-economic reasons, to conscious and full validation and integration in the economic practice. In the following, I will use concrete examples to show how this change of mindset and how this new approach is manifested in the concrete methods of making cheeses among Hungarian raw milk cheese producers.

The raw milk method cheese makers thus have the experience of working with other beings on a daily basis to create products, they enter the imagined perspectives of other beings, and they partly hand over the baton to non-human actors, giving them space to shape the finished product, which leads to a less predictable outcome. While the end goal is of course very much framed from the human perspective, as it gives them new, exciting, previously unprecedented, ever-changing tastes. In order to achieve this goal these farmers are trying on a daily basis to "think" radically with the minds of non-human actors: microbes. They are also trying to understand the microbe's acts by comparing it to human behaviour, by human analogies, and thereby trying to build a new kind of relationship with them.

The approach also sees the microbiological environment as one with agency that shapes its activity, which in fact communicates through the flavours it produces. In this interpretation, the final product is not solely the creation of the farmer, the result of the mere use or domination of nature. Rather, it is a co-creation, a co-production of the environment and man, where the environment also shapes the final product:

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14 I will discuss this issue in more detail in the chapter on the relationship to the regulatory environment in my thesis.

"I also saw through the whole system of bacteria working… How I… so it's a… how do I say this? It's a bit like, say, permaculture, that I don't cut all the trees out of the plant, but I look at the… I look at the whole thing with transcendent serenity and I see through the workings of it, and I don't kill the whole thing, but I understand the processes and I help the good processes. Or the processes that are important to me. That it's possible to work with nearly 1000 different kinds of bacteria. Yes, at first, I also write in these cheese groups that I need the… the bacteriological knowledge. No, not a… not a, I don't know, cardiac surgery or nuclear physics. You have the bacteria, you have the role of the bacteria, and if you understand that, then you can… you can work with them and you can have a mutual good relationship. Obviously, it's different if you have a… a girlfriend, obviously that's a different relationship, but… but you can have a similar good relationship with bacteria. So yes, yes, yes, that's what I see in my picture, this whirling together, this dance… You can do this together, and then it can be good…" (man, Hajdú-Bihar county, 2022)

This results in a kind of insertion into the perspective of other natural agents with agency – in this case, microbes: *"But here I am more interested in the activity of processes, micro-organisms… It's such an eternal thing. I always want to be a micro-organism for a moment, to jump into the milk, to wonder, my God, what does it feel like to be cold? Do you want warmer? How does it reproduce? What helps it reproduce? It's so fantastic, and especially with moulds, it's so… I could sing ode to it. I think it's a wonderful thing."* (woman, Pest county, 2022)

Raw milk cheesemakers also leave more room for microbial and, more broadly, environmental influences in their process, strongly affecting the types of cheese they make. In the following, I will show what this means to their practice, using the example of a raw milk farm in Békés County. The milk comes from their own herd of Hungarian Simmental cattle, grazed and fed with alfalfa, so that the raw material is adapted to the conditions and microbiological environment of the local area, and its properties determine the processing and the range of products. The cheese-making workshop is not designed as a sterile environment, free from environmental influences, but to encourage the microbes in the environment that are involved in the cheese ripening process to thrive: *"and in fact they are the ones that give us the taste that we have. So, we don't want to wipe them out. That's why it's in the front, it's not tiled in the front. Everything sticks to that brick, so there's no point in cleaning it."* They don't use any external culture, they just rely on the microbes from the milk and the environment. *"So, we don't even make yoghurt, well, here, there are no other bacteria than ours. So, it's also interesting that, for example, in the ripening or processing plant, it's still, even if you clean up, but there are still different bacteria and fungi everywhere in the air."*

In addition, rather than trying to reproduce established cheeses as faithfully as possible, they often create their own new varieties. This is also part of a general attitude that sees chance not as a mistake but as an opportunity: *"That's why raw milk is good for cheese-making, because*

it might not turn out the way it should, and it will turn out better than it should. […] There are a lot of random factors, so no two cheeses are really the same. […] It doesn't always turn out the same, but it still turns out something, and many people like it." When a recipe is used as a starting point – which is usually some local recipe from the Carpathian Basin, not a global one – there is also room for deviation: "*So now it's turned into a sort of sticky goo, but otherwise it should be drier. Well, it's raw-milk cheesemaking: it doesn't always turn out that way, but it turns out something, and they love it.*" Other times there is no recipe at all, they just experiment to see what happens with different processes:" *But you can see that it's flat, so it's made that way because it's a different kind of cheese because of the shape. Even though it's made the same way, almost the same way as the knob, but it's going to have a different shape, it's going to have a different water content. I treat it differently because it's been washed, it's been packaged. And even though it's made almost the same way as this, it's still going to be this.*" They will then try to reproduce in the future the ones that suit their own tastes and the public's and are therefore sellable. Two examples of how they arrive at a stable, named and regularly produced cheese of their own: "*It's not really made as a soft cheese, because it was developed – that's the story – when we weren't here with the cheese, but in another house, a small house, my mother left a* gomolya *in the fridge and it got some rouge mould on it. And then my dad had a card party and they took all the shit out of the fridge that was wrapped, and everything. And then they said that this cheese is fucking great, and that's how* […] Büdöske ('Little Stinky') *came to be* […] *But there are other cheeses that I make, maybe I can only show you one of them, this kind. We used to make it on purpose, without doing anything with it. We just leave it as it is, and then, and then all kinds of stuff get on it, and then it gives the whole cheese a nice wild taste, actually. And a nice rustic look.*" (All quotes in this chapter: man, Békés county, 2018.) The knowledge to recognise potentially dangerous microbes and to eliminate their effects is very important in this.[15] Humans are not left out of the story, they are basically in charge, but microbial activity is playing an increasingly important role.

Raw milk cheesemakers often consciously, and sometimes unconsciously, try to adopt a multi-species perspective in their everyday economic practice and thinking. All of this, I think, has a broader impact on their outlook, their world view. The outlines of a new, deeply lived ecological identity emerge from the interview quotes above, where these farmers give evidence of a whole new narrative and way of living that goes beyond the simple, dualistic dichotomy of human-nature. Raw-milk cheesemakers invest non-human actors with human-like agency, talking about them as equals, listening to their signals, and allowing

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15 It is a far-reaching question that cheese makers are also pondering is what constitutes a microbe that is dangerous to human health. Increasingly, biological evidence suggests that humans are not uniform in this respect and that there is extreme individual variation in the way people are affected by exposure to different microbes (Donelly, 2014).

space for their actions to shape their own economic practices, creating radically new relationships. At the same time, the human is posited as a part of nature rather than as its master. Through eating and perceiving tastes, he comes into contact with the microbes, and at the same time he brings the external microbes into himself, which thus become part of his own organism. A new image of economy is also outlined, where the well-being of non-human actors, even of the microbes, becomes a matter of fact, an important question, in addition to the aspects of human subsistence. All this leads us to questions and issues that go beyond the remit of anthropology. It raises the question: what are the psychological effects on human consciousness of this daily connection with the aspects of other living beings, of imagining in the situation of radically different living beings? Although there are obvious limitations to our knowledge and understanding of the perspectives of non-human actors, a kind of cross-species empathy is beginning to emerge here, which may be particularly relevant in the context of the ecological crisis and may also play a role in its resolution.[16] In many ways, their practice can serve as an example and model for a more sustainable approach and practice of agriculture.

Summary, perspectives

This paper, specifically based on the perspective and methodology of cultural anthropology, aimed to show the evolution of farmers' perspectives and knowledge in the process of working with non-human actors. At the same time, similar research opens up enormous interdisciplinary perspectives: human activity in this arena shapes the microbiological environment itself, creating a kind of self-domestication, a symbiotic coexistence, from which humans, as supra-organisms composed of symbiotic cooperation between human cells and microbes, can benefit, gain a better understanding of their own existence, and even take steps towards a healthier way of being, in greater harmony with their environment. This opens the door to research directions where the natural scientific method can be used to explore the interaction of microbes and humans, humans and farm animals, humans and ecosystems, in the context of contemporary small farms. This approach can also make a major contribution to the development of new, more sustainable farming, and its practical benefits have enormous potential for application. At the same time, however, I believe that anthropology must always take account of its field of competence when it comes to the issues and terrain of interspecies relations and the relationships between human and non-human actors, and that if it does not want to move into the realm of pure fiction, it must concentrate on the areas where

16 Similar questions are also addressed by Csaba Mészáros in his study on the possible role of ontological anthropology in the search for solutions to the ecological crisis (Mészáros 2020).

it has methodological and theoretical competence: the interpretation of human perspectives, where intersubjective understanding also has its limitations, but does not require a radically different methodology than that of non-human actors. If human and non-human actors are to be interpreted within the same interpretive framework, this requires both a genuine natural scientific method and approach, so the future of the subject clearly points towards interdisciplinary, joint research. Such research has a huge perspective and relevance, not only for the surviving traditional knowledge, but also for the contemporary practices presented in this paper and the development of a new, sustainable agriculture for the 21st century. Developing forward this present research can also be best imagined along these lines.

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Rewriting – Republishing – Distribution

The publication networks of László Cholnoky between 1900–1914. A case study[1]

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary press networks played a significant role in shaping the literary career-building strategies of Hungarian writers at the fin-de-siècle. Several of these writers served as journalists or maintained ties with numerous newspapers concurrently. The networks involved in the publication of an author's text reveal valuable information on the operations of the literary institution (the literary establishment) during the era, particularly in the careers of relatively unknown authors like László Cholnoky. During the early years of his career, Cholnoky's strategies diverged from those of his contemporaries in several ways: he refrained from publishing his first volume for an extended period, withdrew from publishing intermittently, and revised his work more frequently than others. This paper will investigate the publication networks Cholnoky utilised between the years 1900 and 1914, shedding light on the unique aspects of publishing and networking relevant in three periods.

Keywords: László Cholnoky, publication network, Hungarian literature, text-distribution, literary agency

The modern Hungarian literary establishment took shape during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (also known as the dual monarchy, 1867–1918). The structure, which was rather ambiguous and a combination of nationalist and liberal-capitalist elements, was sustained by three primary pillars. The first pillar consisted of a variety of laws and regulations, including the first Hungarian copyright law from 1884. These regulations established the authority of individuals such as authors, editors and translators within the institution. The second pillar was made up of official "authorities", which included the Academy of Sciences (established in 1825), the various literary organisations (such as the Kisfaludy Society, the Petőfi Society, the Association of Budapest Journalists) and the National Theatre. The third pillar was

the literary marketplace, comprising numerous newspapers, journals, literary agencies and publishing houses. The second pillar was defined by conservative and nationalist tendencies, whereas the market was characterised by business motives and capitalist dynamics. Mass alphabetisation, which was the prerequisite for the institutionalisation of literature and revolutionised reading in Western Europe around 1800, served crucial nationalist purposes in the eastern part of the continent (Stråth 2015, 14). Ironically, it was this "liberal reform" that, by creating a mass of readers, "slowly decentralised" the "older practices of elite composition and coterie circulation" (Mee-Sangster 2022, 1).

The literary establishment needed to manage not only the large number of readers, but also the vast array of writers. The quantity of newspapers consistently publishing fiction rose significantly, and even daily papers were populated with feuilletons and serial novels. (For the significance of feuilletons and the daily press see Bachleitner 2019, 37-38 and Pietrzak 2018.) In the literary marketplace, two primary career paths existed: the novelist-journalist and the freelancer. The former involves working for a fixed salary as in-house editorial staff, whereas the latter, as explained by a significant contemporary writer, Lajos Nagy, "had no employment, association with any newspaper, and depended entirely on how much they wrote, how many pieces they could place, and the fees they could gain from it" (Nagy 1977, 474-475; for similarities to the Victorian press, see Law 2000, 152-170). A typical Hungarian fin-de-siècle author created their debut volume before the age of thirty, which generated a publication network simultaneously through republications. In this regard, László Cholnoky was atypical because he did not publish a book until 1918 and he generated a unique network based on self-plagiarism and distribution.

László Cholnoky was born in 1879 in Veszprém, the centre of Veszprém County, populated by 12,575 inhabitants (according to the 1880 census). One of his elder brothers, Viktor, became a novelist-journalist in Budapest, while the other, Jenő, became a renowned geographer. László moved to Budapest in 1900 and started studying law at the university, but did not complete his studies. He briefly worked as an official in the Hungarian State Railways Company, but he left his job in 1906 to become a freelance writer. Biographical fragments indicate that he became addicted to alcohol and ended up becoming homeless by the 1910s. He recovered from his addiction during WWI and was quite active in the literary marketplace for a few years. In 1918 he published a volume of short stories named *Bartholomew's Day* and a novel titled *Piroska* in 1919. After the Hungarian Soviet Republic, a short communist regime (March 1919 – August 1919), he failed to find a place in the new Hungarian literary establishment. He became persona non grata in literary circles because he was caught forging texts many times. His later books went unnoticed and he lost contact with the literary world. He took his own life when he realised that he would not receive the Baumgarten Prize, the first Hungarian civil literary

award for impoverished but talented writers, in 1929. (For Cholnoky's life see Nemeskéri 1989 and Wirágh 2022.)

The incomplete biography above does not paint Cholnoky as an exceptional author, but his attempts to become part of the literary establishment reveal several little-examined interesting facts. This is because, when we consider an author's oeuvre, we typically aim to make aesthetic observations. Consequently, scholars rarely concentrate on the first few years of a writer's literary career because they usually include works that did not get published in book format. (Although including these works is practically mandatory in monographs, chronologies, and critical editions.) A more in-depth examination of an author's first years in a literary institution can uncover new information about the institution itself. Such research can help us understand the hierarchy of different publishing platforms, the fixed and adjustable opportunities of a novice author within the system, or possible ways of publishing and republishing texts through the multifarious actors in the establishment.

What were the primary standards for publishing around the turn of the century? In the Austro-Hungarian monarchy over a hundred years ago, when an author published a text in a periodical, they typically did not have an exclusive contract. This meant that they could republish their work in other periodicals and even modify their work, including the title. With so many periodicals available, the editors could not possibly verify the originality of the short stories, poems, and essays published in the feuilleton column "below the line" (Bengi 2016, 80-87; Bezeczky 2015, 63-72). In addition, distribution networks sent texts from popular Budapest authors to rural periodicals with the permission of the authors and journalists. Many periodicals, however, unlawfully published essays to fill their column inches; thus, authors could be ignored with ease within the fin-de-siècle Hungarian literary institution (they were not informed about the fact of the publication).

Around 1900, republication was a common practice. In particular, "republication in book form" made it possible "to place texts into a new constellation and to present them as a unified whole reflective of the author's aesthetic intentions" (Franzel 2023, 26). It was possible to republish a text with no obstacle until it was included in a volume. Cholnoky's practice, self-plagiarism, was an act with serious consequences. It is true, as Ruthven stated, that "since writers tend to be readers, what they have read is likely to show up in what they write" and "tolerance of plagiarism is aided by the fact that the law takes no interest in self-plagiarism, which is the use of bits of one's earlier writings as unmarked components of a 'new' text" (Ruthven 2001, 170). Cholnoky's extreme writing practice, persistent self-plagiarism, resulted in a lack of literary output.

This paper explores the first part of Cholnoky's career through his publication networks, but before doing so two issues need to be examined in more detail: the number of original and fake texts in the first fifteen

years of Cholnoky's career and a specific example of Cholnoky's unique text-editing processes.

The first fifteen years of Cholnoky's career can be divided into three periods. In 1900 Cholnoky began to publish his writings in journals; he soon found his first important contacts, but did not begin to publish continuously until 1906. Between 1900 and 1905 only three of his 30 texts were republished by the daily *Hazánk* [Homeland], entitled *Az Ország* [The Country] until 1906. He started self-plagiarising in 1906 (previously published texts were republished under a different title, but with almost the same body). In the second period, 1907 Cholnoky published the most original texts in a single year. The third period began in 1908, when the rate of publication of original texts began to decline slowly, with his last known original short story published in June 1912 and last known original article published in November 1913. He did not publish anything between August 1914 and September 1915. Between 1908 and 1914, Cholnoky greatly expanded his network and made it more complicated by entering a nationwide network of text distribution that had links to almost 170 rural newspapers. Thus, the zero point in publications in 1914 was the result of the low number of publications, not a lack of connections. The figures show this slow decline in the following way:

	1900-1906	1907	1908-1914
original texts	64	54	77
republished texts	12	109	635
self-plagiarised texts	16	34	56
total number	92	197	768

Table 1. Cholnoky's original and non-original publications between 1900 and 1914

In the first period Cholnoky's annual average was 9 original, 2 republished and 2 self-plagiarised texts, while in the third period it was 11 original, 91 republished and 8 self-plagiarised texts. The figures for 1907 far exceeded those for the other years: 54 original texts, 109 republications, 34 self-plagiarised texts. In another sense, these averages are striking because of the number of texts that were republished/self-plagiarised at least once. 59% of the original texts (118 out of 195) were never republished and/or self-plagiarised. This means that republished texts were reused an average of 12 times. (Total publications of 1058 minus the original texts of 118. The result – 940 – divided by the number of texts republished at least once – 77.)

Nevertheless, only a few texts were self-plagiarised many times. An extreme example is *Scannadio szobrai* [Scannadio's Sculptures], which appeared nine times between 1906 and 1914 and was included in the author's first book in 1918. There were seven versions of this text, but the main plot remained almost the same.

This short story was first published in *Az Ország* in 1906 and six months later it was republished in the Catholic weekly *Magyar Szemle* [Hungarian Review] under a new title, *Az élő szobrok* [Living Sculptures]. The text remained almost the same in the third (*Nyomorúság* [Beggary], February 1907) and fourth versions (*Morphi szobrai* [Morphi's Sculptures], August 1907), although the latter was republished under the name of Cholnoky's wife. In January 1908, Cholnoky rewrote the text (shortening it and changing the names of the protagonists) and sold it to the daily newspaper *Magyar Állam* [State of Hungary] as *Agyagemberkék* [Clay Figures]. The magazine distributed the story to seven rural newspapers between 1908 and 1910, possibly without Cholnoky's permission, as these rural publications were all anonymous (this anonymity was often a sign of stolen texts). Ten days later, the short story was republished in the daily *Független Magyarország* [Independent Hungary] under the title *Megéledt figurák* [Living Figures]. Cholnoky did not develop or expand the story nor did he retain the changes made to the earlier versions: the 1909 republication of *Szobrok* [Sculptures] had only a new title, while the final version of 1912 was a republication of the 1906 version. This is how the publication history can be drawn:

Az Ország (A1) ➔ *Magyar Szemle* (B1) ➔ *Budapest* (C1) ➔ *Ország-Világ* (D1) ➔ *Magyar Állam*, **distributor** (E1) ➔ *rural distribution* (E2–E5) ➔ *Független Magyarország* (F1) ➔ *rural distribution* (E6–E7) ➔ *A Család* (G1) ➔ *rural distribution* (E8) ➔ *Tolnai Világlapja* (B2)

Along the way, the author of *Scannadio's sculptures* changed often (Mrs. Cholnoky, anonymous), as did the medium (newspaper, journal or magazine) and the names of the protagonists. This scheme, the serial republication of a short story, was a legal method in Hungarian literature at the beginning of the 20th century, but Cholnoky's use (or frequency) of this method was extreme. He often modified the latest version, for example, by deleting whole paragraphs, so that his creative process cannot be interpreted philologically as a linear genealogy. (Authors usually correct and expand their texts in a "linear" manner when republishing rather than deleting words or paragraphs as Cholnoky did. This is why it is sometimes difficult to choose the "best" versions of Cholnoky's short stories. In comparison, in the cases of other authors the final version, the so-called *ultima manus*, is usually a complete one.)

How can the publication network be mapped using the data above? A publication network is a network that shows the different newspapers, journals, and other media (almanacks, books) in which an author has published at least one text, thus showing the path of a text that has been republished in one or more media. Publication networks show the links between an author and the periodicals in which they are published, established by legal means (when an

author legally sold a text to a periodical or a distributor) and illegal means (when a periodical simply copied a text without the author's permission). In order to create a network, at least one republication must be known, along with the titles of both the original publication and the republication. This figure can help one understand how the various individual literary connections of a single author fit into the literary establishment.

Publication networks are made up of nodes and edges. In this research, the nodes represent different periodicals (newspapers, magazines, almanacks) and books. If we know that a text was first published in one journal and later republished in another, we can draw an edge between these two nodes. Nodes without edges represent journals with original texts that were never republished. Nodes and edges indicate the number of original texts published in a periodical, the importance or hierarchical rank of different periodicals (the number of edges linked to a single node) and the strength of the connection between two periodicals (showing the number of republished texts in periodical B that come from periodical A). These factors make it possible not only to construct the network, but also to show indicators of hierarchy, such as the most important journals in an author's career. Publication networks consist of three main parts. First, at the periphery there are nodes that have no edges. These journals contain texts that were not republished in this period. This part can also be called the absolute periphery because of the lack of connections with other nodes. Second, external nodes can be understood as a relative periphery because these journals "sent to" and/or "bought" texts from Cholnoky. Third, internal nodes represent only "sent" texts to other journals. In other words, the centre of the network consists of the periodicals where Cholnoky published only original texts, which he also treated as a kind of archive (an archive of texts that could be republished or recycled in another periodical).

Although important knowledge can be extracted from tabular data, graphic visualisation and graph analysis can add extra information about the publication process. In addition to providing a clearer overview, a diagram clearly shows the links between each node and their strengths. Furthermore, the arrangement of nodes and edges also reveals the type of network, which clearly shows the advantages and disadvantages of publishing practices in different periods. Because of its many functions, Gephi, an open-source network analysis and visualisation software package, is a suitable tool for visualising and customising data.

If we have sufficient data, the method described below will enable us to discover hidden correlations between each period's literary establishments and publishing practices. Constructing hierarchies of various publishing forums, establishing the relationship between press and publishing, and comparing writers' careers becomes possible by plotting the circulation trajectories of texts.
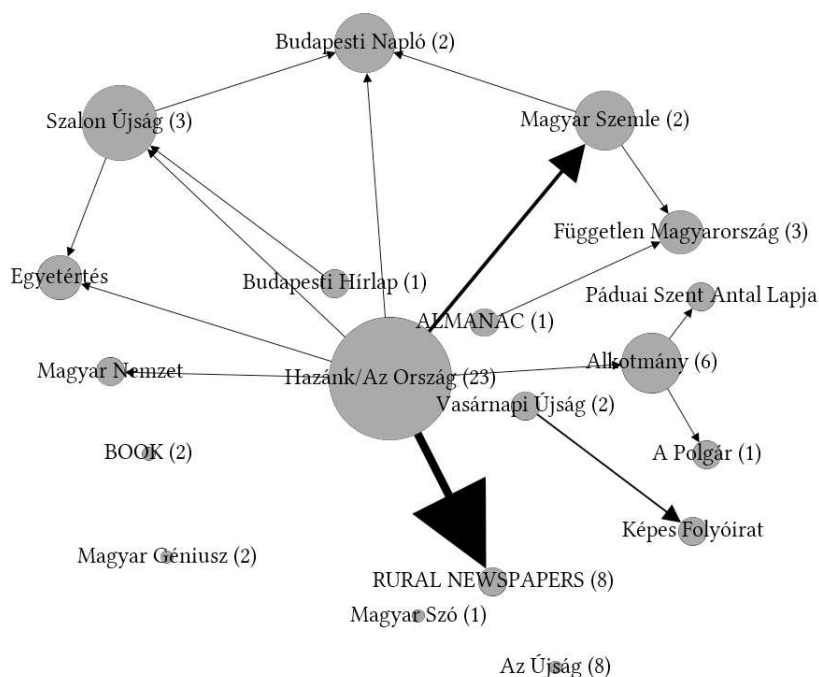
1. 1900–1906

Figure 1. Publication network of Cholnoky at the end of 1906

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Hazánk/Az Ország	D	1904–1906	23	–	23	7	–	7
Az Újság	D	1904–1906	8	–	8	–	–	–
Rural newspapers (11)	**D/W**	**1900–1906**	**7**	**9**	**16**	**–**	**1**	**1**
Alkotmány	D	1901–1906	6	1	7	2	1	3
Szalon Újság	W	1906	3	2	5	2	2	4
Független Magyarország	D	1906	3	2	5	–	2	2
Rest (13)	**D/W/Y/O**	**1900-1906**	**14**	**14**	**28**	**5**	**10**	**15**
TOTAL			64	28	92	16	16	32

Table 2. Data of Cholnoky's main publication forums between 1900 and 1906 (1= title of periodical; 2=publication frequency: Daily/Weekly/Yearly/Onefold; 3=years of participation; 4=number of original texts; 5=number of republications; 6=total number of published texts; 7=out-degrees; 8=in-degrees; 9=total degrees)

The initial network is founded on 92 works authored by László Cholnoky, dating from 1900 to 1906. The system comprises 19 nodes, mainly newspapers and journals, including an anthology (*Agrár-album*) and a book authored by László Cholnoky and Sándor Tonelli and published under the name of Viktor Cholnoky, the author's brother.

The edge connecting *Hazánk/Az Ország* and "rural newspapers" shows the exchange of articles outside of Budapest. The periphery of the

network comprises four periodicals. Only authentic works of Cholnoky were printed in these periodicals due to Cholnoky's reluctance to offend eminent editors by reprinting or self-plagiarising there. This was especially true for *Az Újság* [The News], which had a daily circulation of 28,000 copies around 1906 (half of all daily papers sold in Budapest at the time).

The network comprises eleven external nodes, which are arranged in a hierarchy based on the number of original and republished texts. Four periodicals – *Egyetértés* [Consent], *Képes Folyóirat* [The Illustrated Journal], *Magyar Nemzet* [Hungarian Nation], and *Páduai Szent Antal Lapja* [Anthony of Padua's Newspaper] – only published republications without original content. Rural newspapers were passive components in the system and only received republications through the process of distribution. In addition, six periodicals only received texts – some self-plagiarised – from Cholnoky and, in addition, the author also published original texts there. Three internal network nodes bought and sold texts by Cholnoky; the centre of the network consists of *Hazánk/Az Ország*, the almanac, *Budapesti Hírlap* [Budapest Gazette], and *Vasárnapi Újság* [Sunday Newspaper], whose publications were redistributed to other periodicals. Between 1900 and 1906, a quarter of Cholnoky's texts were published in *Hazánk/Az Ország*.

Overall, one third of all original publications, and almost half of all publications, are found in the central and "internal" periodicals. The strongest connection is between *Hazánk/Az Ország* and *Magyar Szemle*, since Cholnoky republished four short stories in the latter that had been sent to *Hazánk/Az Ország* earlier.

The inner section of the network is modelled on a *star network*, which has the significant advantage of being relatively easy to expand, but the main disadvantage of having strong dependence and vulnerability. In the "classical" arrangement of a star network, a single central distributor sends information to connected participants that are not connected to each other. To sell his self-plagiarised work, László Cholnoky had to first find a primary periodical in which he could publish only original content, and where the editors did not closely scrutinise these publications for other periodicals. Cholnoky accomplished his goal when he discovered *Hazánk/Az Ország*; unfortunately, by the end of 1906, both *Az Ország* and *Magyar Szemle* had ceased publication, forcing him to rethink his publication tactics to maintain his method of publication. He had to locate another significant periodical that would accept all of his texts but not scrutinise rewritten or self-plagiarised versions.

Moreover, due to the relatively low number of texts, mutual connections between periodicals (i.e., when periodical A sends a text to periodical B and also receives a text from it) were absent at this stage, and the key factors such as the number of original texts, total number, or strength of the connections did not correspond. There was only one exceptionally significant periodical (*Hazánk/Az Ország*), which served as the "archive" of republications. Cholnoky submitted his short stories

and other texts – which had been originally published in *Hazánk/ Az Ország* – to seven other periodicals.

In summary, based on his publication network, we can characterise Cholnoky's literary career from 1900 to 1906 as uncomplicated. During this period, Cholnoky published or republished 92 pieces, including 64 unique texts, and placed them in 19 different periodicals with 16 connections. This volume of work over a span of seven years cannot be considered highly productive. One can argue, however, that the establishment of this publication network is evidence of successful branding strategies starting from 1906. If 1906 were excluded from the analysis, then the network would display a mere 10 nodes connected by two edges, since most of Cholnoky's literary connections were established during that year. Moreover, he published double the number of texts compared to previous years. Given that *Hazánk/Az Ország* regularly published Cholnoky's work, he attempted to widen his readership by exploring other periodicals and by re-purposing his texts published there. Another important aspect of *Hazánk/Az Ország* was its distribution of texts to rural newspapers. These advantages came to an end unexpectedly, however, when the newspaper closed, Nevertheless, László Cholnoky managed to readjust his network.
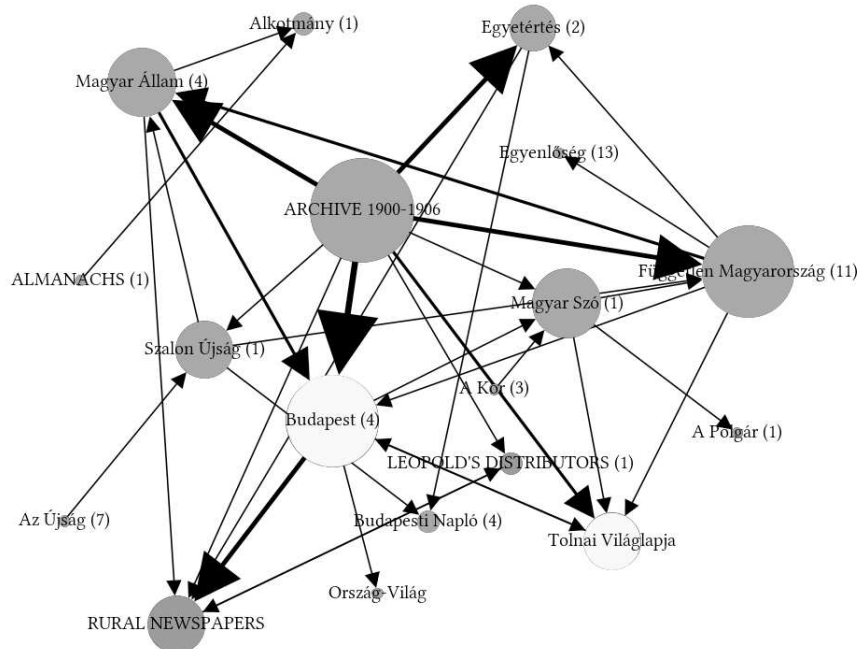
2. 1907

Figure 2. Publication network of Cholnoky in 1907

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Egyenlőség	W	13	1	14	–	1	1
Függ. Magyarország	D	11	5	16	5	3	8
Az Újság	D	7	–	7	1	–	1
Budapesti Napló	D	4	2	6	–	2	2
Budapest	D	4	9	13	4	4	8
Magyar Állam	D	4	6	10	3	3	6
Rural newspapers (61)	**D/W**	**–**	**103**	**103**	**1**	**5**	**6**
Rest (11)	**D/W/Y**	**11**	**18**	**29**	**21**	**17**	**38**
TOTAL		54	144	198	35	35	70

Table 3. Data of Cholnoky's main publication forums in 1907 (1= title of periodical; 2=publication frequency: Daily/Weekly/Yearly/ Onefold; 3=number of original texts; 4=number of republications; 5=total number of published texts; 6=out-degrees; 7=in-degrees; 8=total degrees)

In terms of the total number of published works and original compositions, 1907 was one of the most productive years of Cholnoky's career. Out of the 198 texts that Cholnoky published in 77 periodicals, although only 54 were new compositions. The considerable number of publications is due to Cholnoky entering a unique distribution network founded and run by Gyula Leopold, a successful businessman of his time. Leopold pioneered an innovative way to exchange articles, poems, short stories, and other publications by Budapest authors and journalists with rural newspapers. He published a weekly lithograph filled with advertisements from large corporations. These advertisers were the financial foundation of Leopold's commercial partnership with small rural newspapers that lacked a steady supply of current news due to the deficient nationwide news system. Subscribers (rural editorial staff) were compelled to publish the advertisements, but had the liberty of omitting the literary content provided by Leopold. Rural newspapers could subscribe to the lithograph supplements, called *Általános Tudósító* [General Reporter] or *Munkatárs* [Colleague], in order to obtain information and entertainment content. In 1907, Cholnoky sold Leopold seven short stories, and their association persisted until 1912.

The network for the year 1907 comprises 18 nodes without any periphery, as each node has at least one edge. Compared to the period of 1900 to 1906, the number of external nodes increased, with seven periodicals purchasing only, while another seven bought and sold texts. *Az Újság* published many original texts by Cholnoky, unlike the almanack published by the daily newspapers *Budapest* and *A Kor* [The Age], which had fewer of his original texts. While these nodes could be construed as semi-internal (central) nodes, they only have one or two edges and therefore cannot be described as extremely dominant nodes

in the network. Although there is no absolute network centre (such as *Hazánk/Az Ország* in the previous network), *Budapest* can be considered the primary newspaper of the year as it was connected to eight other periodicals. The network of publication strategies in 1907 was complex, meaning that the flow of texts would continue even if one or more nodes ceased to function. For instance, daily newspapers such as *Független Magyarország* or *Magyar Állam* could have effortlessly replaced *Budapest* in Cholnoky's system.

The strongest connections were observed between the archive, the virtual centre of the network, and several periodicals. Although only a virtual archive, it clearly indicates that Cholnoky relied heavily on his already published texts at that time not related to individual periodicals. Apart from this virtual hub, Cholnoky diversified alternate routes. The addition of eight new connections in 1907 led to a more complex network. Despite having almost the same number of nodes, the number of edges in the network increased from 16 to 35. The status of some former components changed *Magyar Szó* [Hungarian Word] and *Az Újság* became external parts of the network instead of being at the periphery, and other periodicals doubled the number of their connections. In addition, two mutual connections emerged.

Cholnoky placed great importance on two periodicals that were active between 1900 and 1906. I consider that *Hazánk/Az Ország* was the ideal networking medium for him because he could continuously send original and republished texts to it. Another newspaper, *Az Újság*, also published his articles, but due to its fame, Cholnoky could not use it for networking or republishing. Many daily newspapers took over *Hazánk/Az Ország*'s position, and the previous role of *Az Újság* was divided between *Az Újság* and *Egyenlőség* [Equality]. *Egyenlőség*, a weekly Jewish journal, sold around 1,500 copies in 1910. Cholnoky was able to publish his articles there anonymously. Cholnoky operated a balanced network in 1907; there were only two journals where he did not send any original texts.
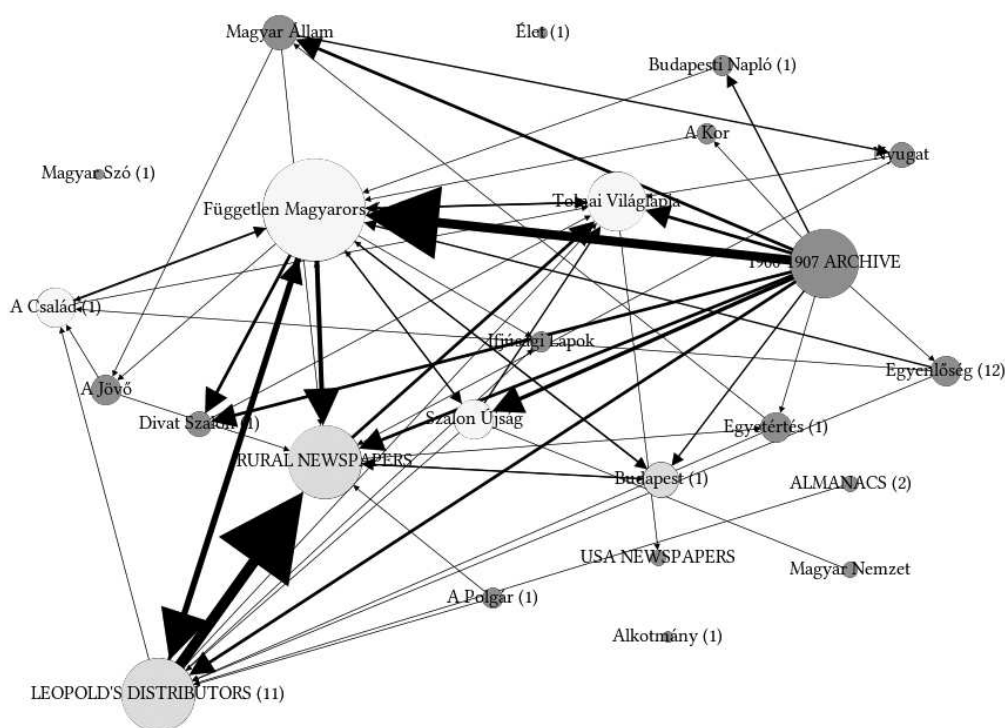
3. 1908–1914

Figure 3. Publication network of Cholnoky between 1908 and 1914

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Független Magyarország	D	1908–1913	43	29	72	9	10	19
Egyenlőség	W	1908–1909	12	1	13	3	1	4
Leopold's distributors	D/W	1908–1912	11	22	33	5	8	13
Rural newspapers (165)	**D/W**	**1908–1914**	**–**	**610**	**610**	**5**	**8**	**13**
Rest (19)	**D/W/Y**	**1908–1914**	**11**	**51**	**62**	**37**	**32**	**69**
TOTAL			77	713	790	59	59	118

Table 4. Data of Cholnoky's main publication forums between 1908 and 1914 (1= title of periodical; 2=publication frequency: Daily/Weekly/Yearly/Onefold; 3=years of participation; 4=number of original texts; 5=number of republications; 6=total number of published texts; 7=out-degrees; 8=in-degrees; 9=total degrees)

Between 1908 and the end of 1914, Cholnoky's publication processes declined gradually. Despite broadening his network, he produced fewer original texts. Several times, he reprinted a variant of a short story in a periodical where he had already published a previous variant of that text. His work ethic (and opportunities) gradually began to diminish.

The years 1908 to 1914 resulted in complete exhaustion of the network. In 1908, Cholnoky published 271 texts, but only 24 of them

were original. By 1910, the proportions of total and original texts were quite similar at 187:22. This changed dramatically when it became 104:7 in 1911 and in the following year was reduced even further, to 33:1. Cholnoky's last known original text was published at the end of 1913. In the same year, he submitted texts to two Budapest magazines, but the rest of the publications were the result of Leopold's distribution networks. In 1914, thanks to distribution, two rural newspapers published two of his older short stories. There was almost a two-year gap between Cholnoky's last publication activity in December 1913 and the resumption of his career in September 1915.

The publishing process network between 1908 and 1914 bears a resemblance to the 1907 network, but extra "strong" nodes can be found along all the edges (which are an indicator of an especially dynamic traffic of texts between two periodicals). Moreover, the number of nodes and edges increased. Although nearly a third of all publications were republications of old texts from 1900 to 1907, *Független Magyarország* became the largest customer and user of Cholnoky's literary production, functioning as a distributor of sorts. The high ranking of *Tolnai Világlapja* [Tolnai's World Journal] is also clear. The main attributes of this magazine, initiated in 1901, comprised images and news sourced from every corner of the world. It had a lengthy literature section, consisting mainly of republished short stories from the finest modern Hungarian authors. Moreover, the significance of Leopold's distributors in the network increased due to Cholnoky sending them nearly seven short stories each year. This is why rural newspapers could become significant elements of the network, even though other Budapest newspapers and magazines also sent texts to the countryside on occasion.

Cholnoky did not improve his network after 1910. The final new node was *Élet* [Life], a Catholic literary journal, where Cholnoky published an essay under a pseudonym. Cholnoky is unlikely to be associated with the emergence of the final node. The short story *Naokalli* was sent by *Tolnai Világlapja* to *Szabadság* [Liberty], a daily newspaper founded by Hungarian immigrants in Cleveland (1891). Before the First World War, the primary route for republication of Cholnoky's short stories was from the archives to rural periodicals, usually through one or more intermediaries. Between 1908 and 1914, however, it was *Független Magyarország* that was able to meet all the requirements: the daily newspaper published a significant number of Cholnoky's new and old short stories but did not want to be the exclusive receiver of these feuilletons.

As the pathways for the short stories became more straightforward and automated, it is more evident that the primary path for the archive of the old stories would pass through *Független Magyarország* and Leopold's distributors, finally reaching the rural newspapers. Additionally, the significance of interconnectedness increased: *Független Magyarország*, *A Család* [The Family], *Szalon Újság* [Saloon Journal], *Budapest*, *Tolnai Világlapja*, Leopold's distributors, and rural newspapers usually

exchanged short stories and articles amongst each other, becoming the primary context of Cholnoky's career and poetics
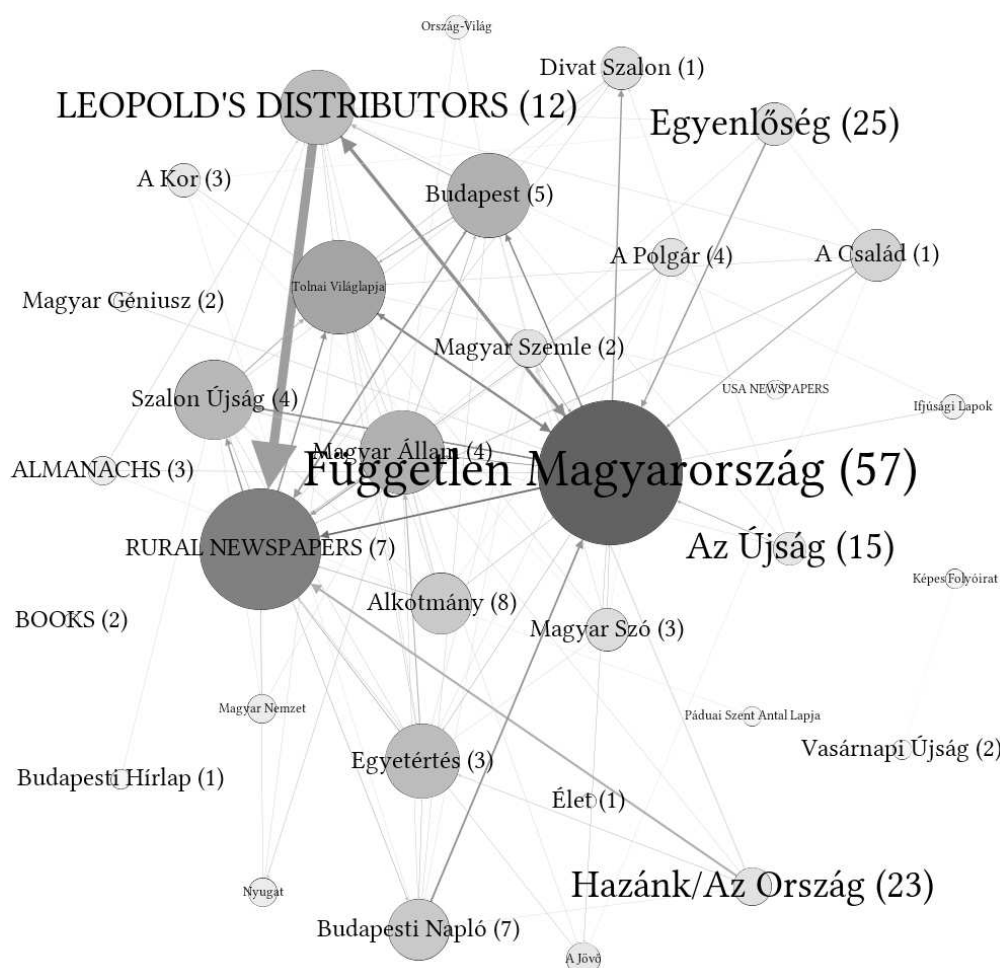
4. Summary

Figure 4. Publication network of Cholnoky at the end of 1914

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Független Magyarország	D	1906-1913	57	36	93	13	15	28
Egyenlőség	W	1907-1909	25	2	27	4	2	6
Hazánk/Az Ország	D	1904-1906	23	–	23	5	–	5
Az Újság	D	1904-1907	15	–	15	4	–	4
Leopold's distributors	**M**	**1907-1914**	**12**	**23**	**35**	**5**	**8**	**13**
Alkotmány	D	1901-1909	8	3	11	7	3	10
Rural newspapers	**M**	**1900-1914**	**7**	**722**	**729**	**10**	**13**	**23**
Budapesti Napló	D	1906-1908	7	7	14	4	6	10
Budapest	D	1907-1910	5	14	19	7	8	15
Magyar Állam	D	1907-1908	4	11	15	7	8	15

Szalon Újság	W	1906-1910	4	11	15	9	5	14
Egyetértés	D	1906-1908	3	8	11	6	7	13
Divat Szalon	W	1908-1913	1	9	10	1	5	6
Tolnai Világlapja	W	1907-1913	–	23	23	5	12	17
Rest	**M**	**1901-1911**	**24**	**28**	**52**	**26**	**23**	**49**
TOTAL		1900-1914	195	897	1092	113	115	228

Table 5. Data of Cholnoky's main publication forums between 1900 and 1914 (1= title of periodical; 2=publication frequency: Daily/Weekly/Yearly/Onefold; 3=years of participation; 4=number of original texts; 5=number of republications; 6=total number of published texts; 7=out-degrees; 8=in-degrees; 9=total degrees)

Független Magyarország, as the centre of the network, had the highest number of connections and original texts; however, due to dispersion, those connections were not very strong. In contrast, Leopold's distributors mainly dispatched texts to rural periodicals; this pattern can be attributed to the nature of the distribution. When we search for Cholnoky's crucial periodicals, our attention should be drawn to nodes with numerous original texts but fewer connections. From this perspective, *Egyenlőség* (and *Hazánk/Az Ország*, as interpreted earlier), where Cholnoky's contemporaries often published. could be regarded as holding the position of a Modernist journal. Starting from 1906, he collaborated with many daily newspapers simultaneously, primarily periodicals aligned with the left-wing Party of Independence and '48, the ruling party in Hungary from 1905 to 1910.

Three obstacles hindered Cholnoky's ascent to fame during this era. To begin with, he was unsuccessful in releasing his inaugural volume, which could have provided him with recognition from current critics. Second, he did not manage to establish contact with well-known and/or popular daily newspapers and journals. Last, he did not have personal contact with the Hungarian rural press. In the early years of his career, Cholnoky sent a few texts to rural newspapers, and later he managed the rural distribution through Gyula Leopold. Several individuals from his generation published literature in rural newspapers. (For instance, after moving to the capital city, both Kosztolányi and Krúdy, two canonical figures of Hungarian literature, continued to publish in the newspapers of their hometowns.) Leopold controlled the interaction between Cholnoky and the rural press, but publication was at the mercy of country editors since it was not mandatory to publish the literary texts they received.

The bulk of Cholnoky's texts appeared in "rural newspapers". This group includes 165 rural periodicals where Cholnoky published at least one text between 1900 and 1914. The rationale for joining these periodicals into a single network is to circumvent the overwhelming size of the network. Despite some Budapest newspapers and journals having rural associations, Cholnoky's texts seldom bypassed the primary

distribution route. Rural newspaper readers only recognized Cholnoky through Leopold's contribution, however. Several newspapers, both local and national, published all of Cholnoky's short stories that were distributed, thus giving a significant fraction of the country access to his work.

From 1881 to 1920, Hungary had a total of 64 counties. Every county had numerous newspapers that subscribed to Leopold's distributors. This was particularly true for towns or settlements with a smaller population. (At one time, the county capitals had several daily newspapers, but these periodicals practised authorship independence and rarely subscribed to the distributors or took over texts.) Between 1907 and 1914, Cholnoky's publications appeared 710 times in 180 newspapers across 52 counties. Thus, three-quarters of the country had access to his works through contemporary periodicals. Counties like Bihar, Bács-Bodrog, and Komárom (now predominantly in Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia) had a significantly higher representation. These cultural hubs (Nagyvárad and Szabadka, now Oradea and Subotica) had many newspapers, two of which subscribed to both of Leopold's distributors. Between 1907 and 1912, readers from 10 to 15 towns could access a "complete volume" of Cholnoky's stories.

During the decades leading up to WWI, the production of literature was industrialised. Authors during this period used different approaches to publication. The tables and networks above reveal that Cholnoky established only temporary links with primary periodicals, whereas he had a permanent connection with secondary periodicals. *Független Magyarország* was also significant for authors who published in *Nyugat*, as was *Budapesti Napló* [Budapest Diary], although the latter connection disintegrated in 1908. Cholnoky did not establish any lasting connections, with the exception of *Független Magyarország*, *Tolnai Világlapja*, and Gyula Leopold. He either did not want to or could not form meaningful and relevant business relationships. Some of the connections ended in a relatively unexpected way. It is unclear why Cholnoky stopped sending his texts to *Az Újság*, *Magyar Állam*, and *Egyetértés* after 1908. Perhaps Cholnoky's self-plagiarisms were uncovered, which consequently could have impacted the workings of his publication network, which was a unique mixture of imagination and reproduction. (For the consequences of later plagiarism, see Kołodziej 2021.)

The fundamental changes in Cholnoky's publication process can be outlined as follows: The importance of rural newspapers grew significantly as a result of their cooperation with Leopold's distributors. Between 1900 and 1906, Cholnoky had one main connection, *Hazánk/ Az Ország*. Despite finding many other "partners", his re-publications typically originated from this newspaper. Following the elimination of *Hazánk/Az Ország* in 1906, Cholnoky had to reconstruct his network. In other words, he created a complex network from a star-shaped system. While this network had a significant number of equally

important edges, *Független Magyarország* became the central focus after 1908. Despite the growing numbers of vertices and edges, which causes the network to broaden at a predictable rate, the number of original texts drastically reduced. The significance of having a broad network was to sell re-written and self-plagiarised short stories easily. WWI and the 1918–19 revolutions demolished these publication methods. The Treaty of Trianon brought about a transformation of the Hungarian rural press, resulting in the relocation of prominent newspapers and journals to other countries. Cholnoky's career from 1915 to 1918 was an extension of his previous path, but he had to adjust to a different media network after publishing a few papers in rural networks. This transformation necessitated the development of new skills.

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Popular historical films as collective memory-work in Eastern Europe: from Polish *KATYN* to Romanian *AFERIM!* and Hungarian *BET ON REVENGE*

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ABSTRACT

Historical film – a film genre supported in the Cold War era – has re-emerged in the 21st century in Eastern European cinemas, its success signalled by popularity, dedicated state financing funds or political support. This article frames the phenomenon within the Assmannian model of three communicative generations, suggested to be interlinked on the level of both the creative staff and the audience of Eastern European historical films. Based on box-office data of the Lumiere Database of the European Audiovisual Observatory, and research referring to further elements of canonization, it is argued that titles such as Polish *Katyn* (2007), Romanian *Aferim!* (2015) or Hungarian *Bet on Revenge* (2016) – the first majority production historical films to achieve significant audience, and, consequently, critical success in their domestic markets in the 21st century – signal a successful collective memory-work process. While in the major Polish market this may be inscribed within the three communicative generations of the victims, the forgetters and the mourners doing memory-work – possibly processing collective traumatization too –, the two small national examples fall outside the validity of the Assmannian model. In order to somewhat refine this apparent opposition between 21st century Eastern European major and small national collective memory-work through historical films, further examples from the Polish, Hungarian and Romanian top lists are examined. Poetic-medial features – the actualization of "trauma narratives" (Alexander 2012) or of postmodern irony, the employment of cinematic and/or televisual visuality – seem to facilitate collective memory-work differently for major and small national domestic audiences, activating or not their belonging to the three communicative generations with respect to the historical events represented in the films.

Keywords: communicative generations, historical film, Eastern Europe, 21st century, popularity

Historical films instead of black comedies and visceral social dramas?[1]

The 100th anniversary of the First World War's 1918 ending was celebrated in most European nation-states. Several (small) national film industries dedicated special lines of financing – in the stage of script development or in the subsequent one of actual production – to historical films addressing this topic. This was the case with Lithuanian, Romanian[2] or Hungarian state film funding structures too[3] – even if the genre of historical film gaining centre-stage positioning cannot be solely linked to the 2018 anniversary. One could argue that cultural political stakeholders in Eastern Europe somewhat intuitively sensed that the explicit transition era – from communist planned economic and one political party structures to post-communist market organisation and democratic political processes[4] – came to an end as their respective countries' entered NATO and EU structures throughout the first decade of the 2000s.[5] This "impression" of one era closing and a next, unknown

2 The 2017 Call for Applications of the Romanian Film Centre (Centrul National al Cinematografiei) dedicates a special section and sum to short films and features "Celebrating the Centenary of the Great Union in 1918" in reference to Romania's closing the First World War with considerably enlarged territories. English translations of Romanian quotations in the text are the author's unless otherwise indicated in the Bibliography.
3 In the case of Hungarian film production historical films basically became the favoured genre since 2019 – as journalist Iván Vaszkó summarises in Hungarian *Forbes Magazine* "funding exclusively went to historical and/or political course films" (Vaszkó 2023). English translations of Hungarian quotations in the text are the author's unless otherwise indicated in the Bibliography.
4 Presented in detail from political, economic, and environmental perspectives in *Environmental Transitions: Transformation and Ecological Defense in Eastern Europe* (Pavlinek–Pickles 2000) for example.
5 To a certain degree, the European Union's Eastern Enlargement contributed to the partial erosion of the "the (post/communist) East" vs. "the (liberal/non-communist) West" (in Europe) dichotomy. In their introduction to the 2018 special issue on Europeanization of *Studies in European Cinema*, Pârvulescu and Turcuș suggest that the process started much earlier, since a "European belonging through industrial and commercial activities gesture towards the embedding of East-Central European socialist creativity within the deeper cultural layers of a real-existing European unconscious" (Pârvulescu–Turcuș 2018, 4-5). Therefore "Europeanization displaces the date of the inception of transition further in the past, before 1989, perhaps closer to the signing of the Helsinki accords in 1975, or even earlier, as Tony Judt has is [it], toward 1968 or even 1956," "reframe[ing]

one starting might have contributed to the renewed interest in 21st century Eastern Europe in commemorating through historical films – even preceding the 2018 anniversary of the 1st World War. Furthermore, this drive has more often than not been backed by momentary political party motives (too): in the wording of film critic Géza Csákvári "[the reigning right-wing Hungarian] government considers paramount the depiction of the past and [awards] pro-government filmmakers to paint Hungarian history on cinema and television screens – events such as the [issue of the] 1222 Golden Bulla ("Aranybulla"), the 1990 Blockade [of Budapest and major cities] by taxi drivers, or the leakage of the "Őszödi" discourse [of (then) leftwing prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány]" (Csákvári 2021).[6] Finally, and perhaps just as an important a factor as the previously mentioned ones, the genre was a dominant one throughout Eastern Europe in the preceding communist period too: be it represented by the 1960s–1970s limited historical television series in Hungary and the Czechoslovak Republic; the grandiose historical epics made in 1970s Romania; or the historically underpinned auteur cinema of Poland in that era. As observed by Hungarian political and film historian Ádám Paár in a statement that can be applied to Eastern European cinemas overall: "heritage cinema covering historical topics raises a great interest in Hungary, both in public opinion and in the political arena, and it is engendering a lot of discussion in cultural and memory politics too" (Paár 2022, 17).[7]

Contextualised within this 21st century, multi-layered authentication of the historical film (genre) in Eastern Europe this article focuses on such films that have been met with success primarily within their domestic markets, and, occasionally, also internationally in Poland, Romania and Hungary. The analysis is fuelled by the insight that the complex decisions and policies of the Polish Film Institute (and Televizija Polska), or the Romanian Film Centre (and TVR/Romanian Television), and the Hungarian National Film Fund – currently renamed National Film Institute – to foster the writing, production, distribution and canonization of such titles as *Katyn, Cold War, Son of Saul, Aferim!, Bet on Revenge* or *The Moromete Family/The Edge of Time* needs to be also considered from a perspective more sunk in time than pressing historical anniversaries or momentary party political interests. The decision of the mentioned Eastern European film financing bodies to steer the mainstream of their national industries towards a more volatile genre than the – black, burlesque, "Eastern European" – comedy most

the way historical scholarship compares the artistic imagination of East-Central Europe to that of Europe as a whole" (Pârvulescu–Turcuș 2018, 6).

6 In original: „Kormányközeli nyertesek sora a kormánynak oly fontos múltábrázolásban – avagy a magyar história a mozivásznon és tévéképernyőn az 1222-es Aranybullától az 1990-es taxisblokádig vagy a 2006-os Őszödi beszédig."

7 In original: „Magyarországon mind a közvélemény, mind a politika részéről nagy érdeklődés övezi a történelmi tárgyú kosztümös filmet, sok kultúr- és emlékezetpolitikai vitával körítve."

beloved by audiences and/or the social problem film/drama embraced nearly unanimously by Eastern European arthouse auteurs in the transitional post-communist era[8] might benefit from being inserted into the cultural studies framework referring to the constitution of collective memories, including the processing of possibly traumatic events too: that is, cultural memory studies and inter-, transdisciplinary trauma studies.

In the third decade of the 21st century there is widespread consensus that the relationship to our individual and collective pasts is an ongoing process often mediated through audiovisual creations, often fictional and narrative in nature. Or as historian Marnie Hughes-Warrington observes "[o]urs is a world in which films rank second only to photographs as the means by which people claim to connect with the past" (Hughes-Warrington 2009, 1). In his 2005 monograph *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* Thomas Elsaesser even goes as far as to differentiate European film from the Hollywoodian one based on what he names "cinematic historical imaginary" (Elsaesser 2005, 21). Much inspired by Thomas Elsaesser's argument according to which European cinema may be conceived of "as a dispositif that constitutes, through an appeal to memory and identification, a special form of address, at once highly individual and capable of fostering a sense of belonging" (Elsaesser 2005, 21), the interpretative framework thus situated derives from cultural memory studies and cultural trauma theory as they are combined with the analysis of fictional feature films. Ann Rigney's differentiation forwarded in *The Routledge Handbook to Memory Studies* between "sociologist's [preference for] the term 'collective memory' (or 'social memory'; see Olick et al. 2011)" and interest in "who is doing the remembering and with what impact on social relations" on the one hand, and "scholars in the field of cultural memory studies focus[ing] on the cultural foundations of collective memory" is an important methodological guidance (Rigney 2016, 66). The question followed is, again, that of Rigney: "using which media technologies and with the help of which cultural models and forms, do particular stories become constituted, shared and linked to identity?" (Rigney 2016, 66).

Collective memory formations: a survey

Linking feature films, and more specifically historical films, to collective memory-work – often of the trauma-processing kind – has become an established interpretative paradigm in cultural memory studies in the first decade of the 21st century. From the direction of film studies this development may be related to the medium specificities of filmic narration and diegesis having become the object of more distanced analysis,

8 A conclusion of contemporary Hungarian film history, summarised and demonstrated as for its validity in the author's *Film Genres in Hungarian and Romanian Cinema: History, Theory and Reception* too (Virginás 2021).

parallel to how its lingua franca position in contemporary audiovisual communication was overtaken by computer-generated audiovisual moving image formats. A number of groundbreaking concepts and analyses pursued contributed to connecting collective memory-work and fictional historical films: Janet Walker's "trauma cinema" (2001),[9] Susannah Radstone's "cinema/memory" (2003),[10] Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory (2004), Marianne Hirsch's postmemory (2008), or Astrid Erll and Stephanie Wodianka's "Erinnerungsfilm/memory film" (2008).[11] These models that re-think collective remembering and trauma processing through paying attention to the medium specificities and historical development features of (fictional) filmic narration rely to a greater or lesser extent on the paradigm of cultural memory studies that we may name classical by now, and that relates to the major referring monographs of Jan and Aleida Assmann.

Grounded in Jan Assmann's research horizon of millennia of human history encoded in material representations, the seamless functioning of cultural memory-work aided by communicative memory is more in the focus of *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*.[12] Meanwhile, it enters a phase of problematization in Aleida Assmann's *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*,[13] where the author states that "[c]ommunication between eras and generations is broken when a particular store of common knowledge disappears" (A. Assmann 2011, 4). It is within this field of reference of "degradation" that the historian of culture and literature introduces the description of communicative memory as functioning through three generations, differentiating between "the *cultural memory* that transcends eras and is supported by normative texts, and *communicative memory,* which generally links three generations

9 "The stylistic and narrative modality of trauma cinema is nonrealist. Like traumatic memories that feature vivid bodily and visual sensation over 'verbal narrative and context', these films are characterised by non-linearity, fragmentation, nonsynchronous sound, repetition, rapid editing and strange angles. And they approach the past through an unusual admixture of emotional affect, metonymic symbolism and cinematic flashbacks." (Walker 2001, 214)

10 "In place of formulations that give primacy to cinema or to memory, what emerges is a liminal conception of cinema/memory, where the boundaries between memory and cinema are dissolved in favour of a view of their mutuality and inseparability." (Radstone 2003 cited by Collenberg-Gonzalez 2016, 249.)

11 Or "films that thematize memory and are seeped within a memory culture as demonstrated in the types of documentaries, making of, and marketing paraphernalia that encourage remembering." (Summarised by Collenberg-Gonzalez 2016, 248.)

12 The monograph was originally published in 1992 in German, becoming a paradigmatic work for the field of cultural memory studies.

13 The same needs to be mentioned: the monograph was originally published in 1999 in German, nowadays considered another paradigmatic work in cultural memory studies. The intended relationship between the two monographs is foregrounded in the very first paragraphs of Jan Assmann's preface: "The 'past' and 'identity' were the two focal points around which we tried to build our concept of cultural memory. My task was to deal with the ancient world whereas Aleida's was to pursue the topic up to modernity and postmodernism." (J. Assmann 2011, xii)

through memories passed on by word of mouth" (A. Assmann 2011, 4 – emphasis in the original).

An even more streamlined model of these "three generations [linked] through memories passed on by word of mouth" emerges when elements of cultural trauma theory and media technological developments are introduced (in)to the original theoretical setup. Given the lifespan of human beings, these three generations cover a temporal distance of approximately 100 years.[14] Thus within (current) European communicative memory the two World Wars, the ensuing communist dictatorships under a Cold War umbrella, and the 1989-1990 regime changes, including the Balkan wars, may be mentioned as such collective, most often traumatic, experiences, that are remembered and processed differently by those who remember based on their belonging to one of the mentioned three generations forming communicative memory-work. Positioned as successive generations in relationship to the collectively traumatic happenings – like the events mentioned – a chain of first-generation actual victims, second-generation forgetters, and third-generation mourners is established (A. Assmann 2012). If media technological developments are joined into the constellation – a variable already suggested, as we have seen, by Jan Assmann in 1992, and then reinforced by Aleida Assmann in 1999[15] – we are introduced to *the first generation of the victims* who, in their capacities of media technological users too, had direct, actual experiences of a given collective and (subsequently) cultural trauma. They are followed by *the second generation of forgetters* – whose "task" is to forget, also as creator(s) and audiences existing amid the "partially connected media systems" (Johnston 1997,

14 "The concept of generations as originally proposed by [Karl] Mannheim […] (first translated into English in 1952) […] In his view, historical context had strong experiential effects on the formative years of a birth cohort (those who were born and grew up in the same period), effects which persist over the life course. In addition, Mannheim proposed the idea of generations as units, by which he meant the ways in which a birth or age cohort responds collectively to a set of social conditions and the ways in which each generation develops its own consciousness and sense of belonging and identity. At the same time, Mannheim was clear that generations were not subjected to the same experiences and that divisions of class and gender were significant." (Muñoz-Gutierrez–Brannen 2021, n. p.)

15 In *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination* Jan Assmann introduces his key term as a sum of its components, arguing that "[i]t is 'cultural' because it can only be realised institutionally and artificially, and it is 'memory' because in relation to social communication it functions in exactly the same way as individual memory does in relation to consciousness" (J. Assmann 2011, 9). On her turn, in the majestic continuation to *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, the 2011 *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, Aleida Assmann gives a more detailed description of cultural memory, highlighting its fundamental "dependence […] on particular practices and media", as "[t]his type of memory does not come into existence or persists of its own accord: it has to be created, established, communicated, continued, reconstructed, and appropriated", with "[i]ndividuals and cultures construct[ing] their memories interactively through communication by speech, images, and rituals" (A. Assmann 2011, 10-11).

5-6) of the 21ˢᵗ century – and, finally, by *the third generation of memory restorers* – who need to remember and mourn the dead using the available media technologies (A. Assmann 2012 – emphasis by me, A. V.).

From this perspective of cultural memory-work (studies) such a regionally and collectively binding choice as that of Eastern European state film funds opening specific financing lines for historical films with the onset of the 21ˢᵗ century and the 100ᵗʰ anniversary of the 1st World War is more than logical. Since, as Aleida Assmann formulates in the written version of a 2012 plenary lecture published in Hungarian: "Within the timespan of communicative memory it is evidently the task of the third generation to mourn and bury the dead, fulfilling thus the last ritualistic obligation one has towards the grandparents through remembering."[16] Making historical films about the 1ˢᵗ World War in a 2000s or 2010s Eastern European (small) national film industry context definitely places the filmmaker (creative crew) in the position of the third generation of mourners, who devise a specific audiovisual narrative framework, constructed as a film diegetic world, through which "to mourn and bury the dead". Consequently, the audience that decides to watch the respective historical film(s), possibly in high numbers and with positive reaction and enthusiasm, shall also become a part of such a community "mourning, burying, remembering" the dead.

Is this neat hypothesis re-confirmed by the most popular historical films in Poland, Romania and Hungary as they are identified through the combined framework of audience and/or critical success mentioned in the abstract? In what follows the question shall be addressed while differentiating between major and small national film industries in Eastern Europe, and also between the first most popular, and subsequently popular historical films in the 21ˢᵗ century in Poland, respectively Romania and Hungary.

Memory-work through 21ˢᵗ century Eastern European historical films: the case of (major national) Poland, *Katyn* and *Cold War*

One of the first Eastern European film titles that resulted from this post-transition, 21ˢᵗ century era engagement with the historical film genre and (was) simultaneously met with great audience and critical success – somewhat surprisingly, given the previous orientation of Eastern European national film industries towards black comedies and social problem films – was the 2007 Polish production directed by Andrzej Wajda, *Katyn*. A two-hour long representation of Poland and Polish citizens' ordeals during the autumn 1939 – autumn 1945 period, when the country was

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16 In original: „A kommunikatív emlékezet időtartamán belül nyilvánvalóan a harmadik nemzedékre hárul a feladat, hogy meggyászolja és eltemesse a halottakat, és a megemlékezés által eleget tegyen a nagyszülők iránti utolsó szertartásos kötelességének." (A. Assmann 2012, 14)

torn between a German, respectively a Russian/Soviet occupation(al zone), the film "naturally" emerged as the newest masterpiece of Polish cinema's ancient master and prominent (Polish) New Wave filmmaker. *Katyn* proved to be hugely popular with the Polish audience, and it was also well received on an international audience and critical level, having been included on the Oscar 5 shortlist in the category of the Best Foreign Language Film of the year 2008 (2008 Academy Awards).

Currently, *Katyn* is in the 4th position on the list of Polish films produced since its inception year (2005) and up to the year of writing this article (2023) as far as the (Polish) films' earnings in EUR are concerned in the Lumiere Database of the European Audiovisual Observatory (LO). This evidently is a direct indicator of the film's (domestic) popularity as measured by classical box-office data. Furthermore, this 2007 historical epic is the only film among the first ten on this LO list which is a fully Polish production, has been rewarded with global critical praises as the film's inclusion on the Oscar shortlist attests, and it is also directly related to the Eastern European and Polish film historical continuity through its belonging to Andrzej Wajda's oeuvre. This short analysis of *Katyn*'s canonical positioning shows that Wajda's film succeeded in both short- and long-term perspectives to create a halo of positive audience reactions domestically and internationally, popular/mass- and more highbrow/critical canon-wise too. These are such features that might sustain the suggestion that *Katyn* emerged as one of the first successful examples of post transition, and post postcommunism Eastern European historical films that were "consciously set in the past" (Părvulescu–Rosenstone 2013, 1) defined as "not a vague past but a past considered as historical" (Sorlin 2009, 14-15) – somewhat in contrast to the social problem/drama type films of the 1990s-early 2000s and that referred to the then recent, "vague" past of the communist dictatorship.[17]

Thus, *Katyn* can be considered to engage in what this article refers to as "successful" collective memory-work and, possibly, trauma processing, and specifically mediatized through the filmic/cinematic apparatus in the Eastern European region. This aspect may be conceptualised as relating the film's generic and aesthetic aspects to primarily positive reception (data) on the short and long term. Or looking at those films that 1. Acquire the historical generic stamp thanks to "deliberately set[ing] out to depict a past" as the genre is defined by Părvulescu and Rosenstone[18] and Sorlin

17 A genre not easy to define, historical film is circumscribed by its relationship to history as well as the creative staff and the audience's "historical capital" converging so that it will be "enough to select a few details from this for the audience to know that it is watching an historical film and to place it, at least approximately" (Sorlin 2009, 14-15).

18 "In the broadest sense, and in what would seem to be the common assumption of scholars, the term [historical film] seems to apply to any film [being] consciously set in a past, some time before the production of the specific work itself (of course, all films, like other cultural artefacts, eventually become historical documents; but this book is devoted to films that deliberately set out to depict a past)." (Părvulescu–Rosenstone 2013, 1)

(2009); 2. And their proposal has been met with the approval of both local/regional and global, also amateur, and professional audiences – as attested by the mentioned markers of various types of success. What are then the aesthetic-poetic specificities of *Katyn* thanks to which it might have acquired this status, becoming a forerunner of historical filmic engagement in 21ˢᵗ century Eastern Europe?

Wajda's film breaks down the collective trauma narrative of Poland subjugated simultaneously – and thus torn between fascist/Nazi German occupation and communist Soviet occupation – by employing the panels identified by Jeffrey C. Alexander in *The Social History of Trauma*. This model of how trauma narratives should develop in order to gain effect outside the finite circle of those who actually have participated in the collective disaster that initiated the (collectively) traumatic experiences highlights the importance of "*[p]ersonalizing the Trauma and its Victims*", bringing "the trauma-drama 'back home' due to "portray[ing] the events in terms of small groups, families and friends, parents and children, brothers and sisters. In this way, the victims of trauma became everyman and everywoman, every child and every parent." (Alexander 2012, 65 – emphasis in the original). Several small units of people, closely or more loosely related to each other constitute the ensemble cast of Wajda's epic film so successful with the Polish audience, the main role of the method being that of "bringing trauma back home", making it accessible for later coming communicative generations too.

The family of a Polish army captain, Andrzej, constitute the nucleus: his wife Anna, daughter Nika and (widowed) mother are struggling to survive in the Soviet and/or German occupied parts of Poland. The army unit – its commander, gen. Smorawinski, captain Andrzej and his close ally-friend, Lt. Jerzy, the only to survive the war – form another circle whose strategies of passive survival differ from the more active attitude of women. The Polish soldiers are transported and kept captive in detention camps, their only aim being that of resisting until the days of waiting are over. General Smorawinski's aristocratic wife, his daughter nearing adulthood, and the household maid may be envisaged as another apparently harmonious unit of survival – the changes in the power structures among them especially evident when the well-dressed, happy maid visits the other two after the communist take-over (had already) happened, with his husband earning an important position that comes with shiny clothes and a big car. Finally, a fourth unit whom we follow throughout the temporally fragmented narrative of *Katyn* is another family bordering upon the previous three: a young engineer soldier commanded by the general, the captain and the lieutenant, and his two sisters – the latter two only appearing after the war ends and the old world order is replaced by the new, Soviet-type communist re-structuration and social engineering.

The first three units described represent the downfall of the Polish elite, its military segment literally massacred in the forest near Katyn by the Soviets, with none of them re-emerging unscarred after the war.

This aspect reflects the realities of the film director's own autobiography too, whose father, captain Jakub Wajda, was also a victim of what came to be known as the Katyn forest massacre (*Andrzej Wajda Biography*). The fourth unit of the engineer and the two sisters are of a humbler origin, occupying a more peripheral social position when the 2nd WW starts in 1939. With their brother killed at Katyn similarly to the elite officers, Agnieszka, an Antigone-type character, goes at lengths to offer their deceased brother a funeral stone showing the historical truth of his deathplace. In contrast, Irena, the elder sister, joins the ranks of communist functionaries and officials, her melancholic character showing the gains of adhering to the new world order, but also the losses that need to be accepted if such a decision is taken – like not fighting for the burial of a brother killed by the Soviets/Russians in 1941 in a strategic move to destabilise the enemy Nazi camp.

Through this intricately structured, nevertheless micro-level social tableau, Wajda's film reminds one of the cosiness and little risk that historical television dramas take. The victim perspective and standpoint occupied by the helmer-director of the creative team is being communicated through small scale intimacy and dramas of humans meant to become familiar, even too familiar, as the film progresses.[19] That this is a way of achieving successful collective – and possibly trauma-processing – memory-work within a Polish cinema audience interlinked as communicative generations is also demonstrated by another popular example, a decade older than 2007 *Katyn*.

The close(d), intimate, and small-scale approach to historical turning points and collective traumas – such as the 2nd World War, the Katyn massacre or the violent communist take-over in postwar Eastern Europe – is to be re-found in another Polish historical film met with combined critical and audience success in the 2010s: the 2018 *Zimna Wojna/ Cold War*, directed by Pawel Pawlikowski. On the list of the Lumiere Database of the European Audiovisual Observatory comprising Polish majority film productions that have gathered the biggest box office data since *Katyn*'s year of inception, 2005, *Cold War* occupies the tenth place – with the 2015 Oscar-winning *Ida* only the 32nd most viewed Polish film on this list based on the cumulated box-office admissions earnings. Thus, *Cold War* qualifies more as an example of successful memory-work and possible cultural trauma-processing through the cinematic/ filmic apparatus in the Eastern European region and in the modelling of this article, having been more successful with its domestic audience than the globally and critically more successful *Ida*. Still, *Cold War*'s canonical positioning is hugely different from *Katyn*. A three-times Oscar nominee in 2019, *Cold War* is a European co-production between

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19 As one of the anonymous reviewers rightly suggested, a stronger correlation of poetic-medial characteristics and communicative generational positioning of creators and audiences would strengthen the argument considerably – an aspect that definitely deserves further research besides the hypothetical suggestions advanced currently based on textual analysis.

Poland, Great Britain, and France – approaching, even production-wise, the ideal of European arthouse, second cinema.[20] Meanwhile *Katyn* should be rather categorised as domestic popular, or even more precisely, domestically dominant cinema[21] – or a combination of first and second cinema characteristics.[22] *Cold War*'s director, Pawel Pawlikowski, has another canonical place value, different from Wajda, in reference to the Polish New Wave and also within European arthouse film history, given the two directors' belonging to different sociological generations. However, and interestingly, the different sociological generational belonging does not impede Wajda and Pawlikowski to occupy a similar communicational generational position – somewhere between that of the victim and that of the forgetter of a collectively significant traumatic happening as depicted in their films.

Definitely diverging from Wajda's engagement with official historical narratives and objects authenticated by history with a great H, Pawlikowski's film nevertheless is comparable to *Katyn*'s narrative-dramaturgical structure. *Cold War* is a (also) chamber melodrama of four people: two musical directors, Irene and Wictor, an apparatchik, Kaczmarek, and a rural-origin singer-dancer, Zula. The two love triangles revolving around the radiant beauty of Zula unfold starting 1949 and until the 1960s in Poland, Yugoslavia, and France, shot in black-and white, filmed and edited on the rhythmic principle of diegetic and non-diegetic musical soundtrack and the accompanying dances: folk, jazz, and rock-and-roll. The film is dedicated to the director's parents, and it has been inspired by their lives and the love story that developed between them. Or, as it is summarised in the description of the film on the Criterion Collection website: "Photographed in luscious monochrome and suffused with the melancholy of the simple folk song that provides a motif for the couple's fateful affair, Pawlikowski's timeless

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20 In concordance to how Getino and Solanas define second cinema: "'The first alternative' to first cinema arose with the so-called 'author's cinema', 'expression cinema', 'nouvelle vague', 'cinema novo', or, conventionally, **the second cinema.** This alternative signified a step forward inasmuch as it demanded that the filmmaker is free to express himself in non-standard language and inasmuch as it was an attempt at cultural decolonialization. But such attempts have already reached, or are about to reach, the outer limits of what the system permits." (Getino–Solanas 1969, 120 – emphasis in the original)

21 This is a most useful concept introduced by Susan Hayward in her widely used manual, *Cinema Studies: Key Concepts*, where she defines it in the following manner: "All countries with a film industry have their own dominant cinema and this cinema constantly evolves depending on the economic and ideological relations in which it finds itself. Given the economic situation, the film industry of a particular country will favour certain production practices over others." (Hayward 2001, 93)

22 "The 35 mm camera, 24 frames a second, arc lights, and a commercial place of exhibition for audiences were conceived not to gratuitously transmit any ideology, but to satisfy, in the first place, the cultural and surplus value needs **of a specific ideology, of a specific world-view: that of US financial capital.**" (Getino–Solanas 1969, 120 – emphasis in the original)

story – inspired by that of his own parents – is a heart-stoppingly grand vision of star-crossed love caught up in the tide of history." (*Cold War)*

In the case of this memorable and path-breaking Eastern European film – as far as the rethinking of the era and concept of Cold War is concerned, reshaping longings and lives across borders that can be crossed but once – the communicative generational position of the main creative decision-maker, the director, could be said to be that of the second generation of "forgetters". Indeed, the evanescent, nostalgic tone of the visual world and the actors' performances, also the features of the characters of Zula and Wiktor, can be described as always on the verge of disappearing, becoming lost, or simply ending. Like the archaic folk songs that the musical team records – and thus saves from full cultural oblivion – in the beginning of the narrative; or the various melodies and songs that quickly fade away as the performances end, and as the characters travel back and forth within Poland and between various European countries.

What we need to point at within the framework of suggesting that these outstanding Polish historical films have been (in) the avantgarde of the 21st century Eastern European revival of historical films is the intense presence of the first communicative generational memories and/or experiences in the case of both *Katyn* and *Cold War*. The autobiographical memories of film directors Wajda and Pawlikowski – and referring to the hardships and ordeals that (primarily) their parents endured in the collectively traumatic 1940s to 1960s period in Eastern Europe – evoke the (communicative) generation of the victims in their interconnection to the second communicative generational forgetter children in the traumatic remembrance process. Both films reach out to, respectively start from the aftermath of the 2nd WW, the late 1940s – positioning the years 1947-1949 as pivotal for European history and for the represented personal microhistories and remembering strategies too – and they do that from a 21st century perspective. Given this, it is highly interesting that they maintain a personal connection to those years and experiences on the part of the directors, who are considered the main creative decision-makers, given that both co-wrote the screenplays too. Wajda and Pawlikowski decide to make the generation of their parents, and, quite literally, their parents the main hero figures and protagonists of *Katyn* and *Cold War*. Their creative-narratorial position is thus a combination of first-generational victim and second-generational forgetter standpoints in what concerns the 1940s, respectively the 1950s (and 1960s). As we shall see in the next subchapter, in the small(er) national Eastern European production contexts this neat modelling cannot be applied to the historical films – most popular on the level of audiences and criticism – that pre-figure the genre as a relevant one even before the cultural-political policies that set off with the 2018 anniversary of the 1st World War. What is, therefore, the communicative generational positioning of publicly and critically relevant small national, Hungarian, and Romanian historical films in the 21st century?

Memory-work through 21st century Eastern European historical films: the case of (small national) Romania and Hungary

A short summary of the concept of small national cinemas helps in advancing the argumentation: these are cultural formations different from major ones like the previously analysed examples of Polish cinema. Pioneered in the work of Mette Hjort, the full-scale analysis was presented in the 2007 volume *The Cinema of Small Nations* (co-edited with Duncan Petrie), defining "small" a national cinema based on the (smaller) geographical territory, the (lesser) number of inhabitants and the (fluctuating) GDP/GNI per capita (in evolution), and complemented by the qualitative aspect of a given nation's collective identity having been developed in the knowledge of domination by another nation or empire (Hjort–Petrie 2007, 6-7). Small national cinemas – such as the presently considered Romanian (within certain parameters) and Hungarian ones – may be referred to as peripheral film cultures, with little (domestic) resources at their disposal[23] in our present era of Global Transformation (Johannessen 2019). And, as we shall see, the material and symbolic elements contributing to shaping small national collective identities – different from that of major national cinema(tic) formations – leave their trace on modes of collective memory-work too, operationalized in the present article at the intersection of communicational generational positioning and – amateur and critical – audience success of historical films.

The popularity of Eastern European, and specifically Romanian and Hungarian historical films in the 21st century – as measured in cinema attendance numbers or streaming presence for non-professional, and in critical opinions, festival inclusions and prizes for the professional audience segment – might be taken to signal a success in "connecting to a mediated past", as proposed previously. We could therefore suggest that with popular historical films the necessary pitchings happen between the collective remembering strategies favoured by the creative crew of the films and the remembering strategies mobilised by the non/professional audiences within the respective domestic markets. In such cases the act and process of collective remembering goes on smoothly amid the functioning of communicative generations (Assmann 2012) and the construction of "shared memory" – which "is not a simple aggregate of individual memories. It requires communication. A shared memory integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode […] into one version" (Margalit 2002, 51-52).

The Assmannian model of communicative generations creates the chain of actual victims, forgetters, and mourners, positioned as successive generations in relationship to the collectively traumatic happenings. As already mentioned, referring to such mid-twentieth

23 A detailed examination of Romanian and Hungarian cinemas in the small national framework is presented in Virginás 2021.

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century happenings in an (Eastern) European setting as the 2nd World War and/or the instauration of the communist dictatorships would position older filmmakers of historical films as victims of the represented events, while those a generation younger could fall in the category of forgetters, and the youngest ones to the third-generation memory restorers, lacking autobiographical, personal experiences of the depicted era. A similar generational positioning may be, of course, envisaged, for the audience as well. However, if we enter the problem field from the other proposed direction, that of Eastern European historical films that are authenticated by collective recognition – be that based on material capital gathered by high (domestic) audience numbers or symbolic capital offered by critical recognition in the form of awards and festival listings – the neat algorithm of communicative generations working on their collective traumas within the reach of communicative memory-work is blurred. In two neighbouring Eastern European countries, Romania and Hungary, the mid-2010s meant the primarily domestic audience success, but also regional and/or global critical recognition of two – apparently very different – historical films that, nevertheless, both return to the 4th, respectively the 7th decades of the "long" 19th century.

The 2015 Romanian audience and critical hit *Aferim!* was directed by Radu Jude: the third feature of an internationally emerging director, who has been "loosening" the seriousness of the Romanian New Wave social dramas with comical or absurd interludes, and whose oeuvre has since evolved into one of the most heterogenous and acclaimed ones in (Eastern) Europe.[24] *Aferim!* gathered nearly 80.000 viewers in a domestic market characterised by a 50.000 threshold defining (a) box-office standards,[25] and it was also awarded a Silver Bear for Best Direction at the 2015 Berlin International Film Festival. On the list of Lumiere Database of the European Audiovisual Observatory (LO) referring to Romanian majority productions made between 2005 and 2023 and having gathered the biggest amount of verified box office Jude's film currently sits on the 21st place. Two other historical films, the 2018 *The Moromete Family – The Edge of Time* (Stere Gulea) and the 2019 *Queen Mary of Romania* (Alexis Cahill, Brigitte Drodtloff) precede it. However, just like Wajda's *Katyn*, the Romanian *Aferim!* also may be named the "prototype-hit" (Grindon 2012) of Romanian historical films made in the 21st century, being the first of its kind: "consciously set in a [historical, not vague] past" (Pârvulescu–Rosenstone 2013, Sorlin 2009), and doing it successfully.

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24 I thank the anonymous reviewer for suggesting that – even if this aspect is not in focus in the article – *Aferim!* still needs to be retroactively re-inserted in Jude's practice that emerged since this 2015 historical film with respect to challenging official political memory – like addressing the silencing of Romanian Holocaust memories in the experimental documentary *Dead Nation* (2017), in the feature *I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians* (2018) or in the documentary essay *The Exit of the Trains* (2020).

25 An aspect discussed in detail in *Film Genres in Hungarian and Romanian Cinema: History, Theory, and Reception* (Virginás 2021).

Conversely, the 2017 Hungarian domestic hit *Bet on Revenge* directed by Gábor Herendi is a film that gathered more than 400.000 viewers in a small national market where the box-office threshold throughout the 2010s may be placed somewhere at 100.000 viewers. On the list of the Lumiere Database of the European Audiovisual Observatory (LO) referring to Hungarian majority productions made between 2005 and 2023 and having gathered the biggest amount of verified box-office amount *Bet on Revenge* is the third historical film – being preceded by both the Oscar-winning *Son of Saul* (László Nemes, 2015) and *Fateless*, the prestige adaptation of Hungarian Nobel Prize laureate Imre Kertész' novel (Lajos Koltai, 2005). However, both *Son of Saul*[26] and *Fateless* are multiparty European coproductions, similar to Pawlikowski's *Cold War*, and can be also characterised in terms of European arthouse "second cinema" (Getino–Solanas 1969). Furthermore, both *Son of Saul* and *Fateless* gathered fewer domestic viewers than *Bet on Revenge* did, a production helmed by the director of perhaps the most popular Hungarian films of the 1989 era (Virginás 2021, 116-122) – qualifying thus *Bet on Revenge* as "dominant" domestic (Hayward 2001) or "first cinema" (Getino–Solanas 1969).[27]

The two historical films under scrutiny currently – as such small national historical examples that gathered the biggest domestic audience numbers for the first time in the 21st century,[28] signalling thus the "successful pitching" of collective memory-work and trauma processing on the part of both filmmakers and their audience(s) – depict the "long" 19th century. *Aferim!* places its diegesis in 1835, when current-day Romania did not even exist, and the eastern and southern provinces were dominated by Greek and Turkish (land)lords. *Bet on Revenge* envisages happenings in the 1860s–1870s, when present-day Hungary did not exist either, as it was more and more integrated in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, also as a result of the unsuccessful war for independence fought in the late 1840s, early 1850s.

Besides addressing an era when the present-day states created on nationalistic principles were not there either in Romania or Hungary,

26 A comparative narrative and cultural critical analysis of the two neighbouring country hits of the year 2015, *Aferim!* and *Son of Saul* is presented in Virginás 2020.

27 It needs to be mentioned that in both studied small national contexts the LO list of materially most lucrative majority and minority co-productions differs considerably – supporting Dina Iordanova's description of small national film industries as doubly channelled towards the lower budget majority domestic and the higher budget minority co-productions and outsourced creations. Hjort and Petrie also attribute this feature to small national cinemas in particular: "Whereas one of these [parallel] industries is small and both locally focused and anchored, the other is externally owned and run, and in every way part of the global film industry." (Hjort–Petrie 2007, 18).

28 Although Jude's *Aferim!* also has "second cinema" arthouse features, it still occupies the position of the first best viewed Romanian historical film of the 21st century – considered currently a "dominant", "first cinema" characteristic.

the two films share two further characteristics that need to be examined from the combined framework introduced – that of communicative generations – and that of collective – audience or critical – success. *Aferim!* and *Bet on Revenge* short-circuit the Assmannian model, making it irrelevant from the horizon of the films' period of production and that of the actual audience seeing them, showing that the other types of social recollection are extremely relevant too. The period that they address need four, five or even six generations of going back in time, which thus indicates the limits of the communicative generations model – even in the case of historical film as a formal-aesthetic dispositif culturally authorised to operationalize these generations of communicative memory. This limit is even more accentuated by the fact that these are extremely successful historical films within their respective domestic markets – *Aferim!* being the first Romanian historical film that surpassed the 50.000 threshold in official box-office numbers in the 21st century while the domestic audience numbers of Hungarian *Bet on Revenge* were not surpassed by any of the other popular historical films of the 21st century, e.g. *Fateless* and *Son of Saul*.

We could suggest that Romanian and Hungarian audiences of the 21st century – who should mourn and remember the historical collective traumas of the 20th century to which they have a communicative generational link as victims, forgetters, or mourners – prefer to encounter such eras and happenings that fall outside the Assmannian chain of communicative memory. It is by no mistake that I wrote "to encounter" instead "to remember", because both films fall under the validity of Robert Rosenstone's observation that "in favouring the visual and emotional data while simultaneously playing down the analytical, the motion picture is subtly – and in ways we do not yet know how to measure or describe – altering our very sense of the past" (Rosenstone 2009, 35). Both films perform this feat through a highly interesting mode of combining irony and playfulness, as well as consequently and explicitly being anachronistic regarding the depicted era: linguistic puns and cultural recodings, betraying contemporary sensibilities abound in both creations. Addressing the present, 21st century social ideologies is strongly advocated in the anti-racist stance of the Romanian film uncannily pre-figuring such recent global trends as Back Lives Matter. The story of a fugitive Roma slave chased by a mercenary policeman and his son, *Aferim!* is a picaresque taking us through the meanders of 19th century Southern Romanian micro-society, its pre-emancipation standards cruelly represented. The policeman and his son meet a lonely travelling Orthodox priest who addresses them with a long and adorned soliloquy, in which he derides non-Orthodox and non-Romanian inhabitants, from Roma and Jewish to Armenian and Hungarian population: the black-and-white, tightly framed imagery and the slightly overdone actor's performance in the scene creates a distancing effect

from the past through the value system of our 21ˢᵗ century present.[29] A similar feature of the Hungarian film is the pronouncedly aesthetical anachronism of the steampunk features present in colourful leather costumes and accessories such as sunglasses; furthermore, dances choreographed to the symphonic versions of current musical hits; and the self-conscious, ironical actors' performances – especially that of edgy Andrea Petrik playing the disabled female protagonist Klara von Oettingen in a proto-feminist tune.

Based on these two highly relevant examples we could, for the moment, draw the conclusion that a great part of the small national audience segment in Eastern Europe 1. Participates "happily" in such memory-work that goes beyond the three communicative generations as these are positioned regarding collective historical traumas; 2. Their "happiness" is definitely enhanced by the postmodern poetic strategies employed by the two films – which thus perform a profound re-coding and re-thinking of the historical film discourse.

To further refine a series of such bold statements, it makes sense to take a transitory look at the other popular historical films from the mentioned corpus, in order to see: are these specific Eastern European audiences fully reluctant to do mediated and collectively significant, also successful memory work related to the Assmannian three communicative generations? And the answer is definitely no: a few years before and after these two "prototype hits" (Grindon 2012) there are other Romanian and Hungarian historical films still gathering more than average audience numbers.[30] Even a superficial consideration of these titles mentioned already – *The Moromete Family – The Edge of Time*, *Queen Mary of Romania, Son of Saul, Fateless* – makes it evident that no playful, ironic, postmodernist features are present in these Romanian and Hungarian film historical titles that are among the best viewed ones within their 21ˢᵗ century domestic markets. These poetic-aesthetic aspects – identified in *Aferim!* and *Bet on Revenge* as playful, ironical, anachronistic, and ultimately pertaining to postmodernism – together with the feature of short-circuiting the communicative generations model seem to contribute to the generating the highest audience numbers in the Romanian and Hungarian domestic markets for the 2015 *Aferim!* and the 2017 *Bet on Revenge*.

Would this be a sub-case of the phenomenon identified as early as 1991 by Fredric Jameson as "the nostalgia film", paraphrased by Marnie Hughes-Warrington as when/how "the surface sheen of a period" is

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29 Jude's artistic practice is examined in depth in Gorzo–Lazăr 2023.

30 Of which one at least definitely needs to be related to the 100ᵗʰ anniversary of the 1ˢᵗ World War too: namely *Queen Mary of Romania* narrating the Trianon Treaty, with Laszlo Nemes' 2018 *Sunset* also placed in the loose timeframe of the 1st World War and the Austro-Hungarian milieu. The low domestic audience numbers and poor box office performance, also ambivalent critical reception of the latter suggest a blockage in the collective memory-work of Eastern European, Hungarian filmmaker and audience collectivities.

transformed into a commodity as a "compensation for the enfeeblement of historicity in our own time" (Hughes-Warrington 2009, 3)? To convincingly argue for such a suggestion, the corpus of titles examined with the combined methodology of textual analysis and reception studies placed within a framework of cultural memory and trauma studies – accounting for communicative generational positioning also – definitely needs to be widened.

As a matter of fact, the 1987 *The Moromete Family* (Stere Gulea), the 2015 *Aferim!* and the 2019 *The Moromete Family – The Edge of Time* may be seen to participate in the same black-and-white universe of rural day-to-day existence, where jovial attitude is the sole antidote to ruthless state authorities, with the 1830s (*Aferim!*), the 1930s (*The Moromete Family*), and finally the mid-1940s (*The Moromete Family – The Edge of Time*) showing the eternal fresco of the Romanian peasant helpless in the face of political/state terror and financial power. An audiovisual depiction already familiar and associated to Romanian historical films pervades these titles: this is black-and-white, often open-air, grandiose, and masterful cinematography, in high contrast to the petty human tensions represented within a poor rural family milieu. That such different decades as the 1830s, the 1930s and the mid-1940s are represented similarly has an effect of (audiovisual) mannerism and may be considered an authorial signature as well as explicit pastiche too. However, style overwrites historical specificity, with the feudal state looking similar to ripe monarchism and early communism, only the plight of the Romanian peasant remaining eternal. Making such a decision in the late 2010s – and here I am referring to the filmmaker crews of *Aferim!* and *The Moromete Family – The Edge of Time* – definitely recalls the concept of the Jamesonian nostalgia film (at work) while "altering the past" as Rosenstone suggests, however in a mode that is not fully equalling "the surface sheen of a period" transformed into a commodity as a "compensation for the enfeeblement of historicity in our own time" (Hughes-Warrington 2009, 3). Since what we see here is exactly the lack of any "surface sheen" specific of a historical period, and a strong audiovisual composite style of its own standing, which, instead of "the enfeeblement of historicity" as formulated by Jameson could be rather described as a wish for a-historicity, for being posited outside of actual, historical time and space.

In order to advance the argument in the Hungarian context and also in a comparative mode such popular historical films of the 21st century may be considered as *The Exam* (Péter Bergendy, 2011), *Eternal Winter* (Attila Szász, 2018), or *Those Who Remained* (Barabás Tóth, 2019), titles which engage with the early years of communism. These are well-known examples within their domestic markets, the latter two also thanks to their prestigious Emmy and Oscar-nominations and/or wins, films which display the dominant specificities of how this era is currently remembered by a mix of mourners and forgetters in both the camp of creators and audiences. Created throughout the 2010s and

(also) made for television, the latter aspect preformats these creations, even if in a mode different from that seen in the case of the a-historical and open-air Romanian black-and-white. These creations are conceived of as chamber dramas, short-span narratives with one or more breaking points, mostly filmed within interiors recreated with a painstaking historical precision as far as furniture, decors and household objects go, and usually in/with coordinated and (warm) colour palettes. [31] The late 1940s and the early 1950s are frequently recreated in the 2010s Hungarian historical film discourse with a mass/popular domestic appeal in modes reminiscent of the successful template of Polish communicative memory-work characterised previously, also in terms of "personalised" trauma narratives as theorised by Alexander (2012). The question of "the surface sheen of a period" transformed into a commodity as a "compensation for the enfeeblement of historicity in our own time" (Hughes-Warrington 2009, 3) in these 21st century Hungarian historical films – also somewhat in opposition to the "ahistoricizing" choices made in the black-and-white Romanian examples – is definitely worth raising. However, suggesting a sharp opposition between the second-tier of popular historical films in the Romanian and the Hungarian market in terms of "ahistoricizing black-and-white cinematography" vs. "surface sheen in warm colour televisuality" is definitely not the case. Exceptions may be mentioned from both contexts: Hungarian *1945,* a black-and-white Hungarian Holocaust film (Ferenc Török, 2017) with fairly good audience and critical reception fits the critical framework of the current article, while the already mentioned Romanian *Queen Mary of Romania* shares many similarities with the Hungarian productions preformatted for television, given its positioning in the streaming landscape. What these aspects definitely allow, however, is highlighting the importance of what I previously referred to as cinematic, respectively televisual preformatting in reference to the historical film genre and the collective memory-work thus enabled. [32]

Processes described above as "appealing to memory and identification" or "fostering a sense of belonging" (Elsaesser 2005, 21) while passing through the meanders of mediation are hardly unidirectional, superficial or univoque, not to speak of the aspect signalled by Rosenstone, referring to how the motion pictures alter "our very sense of the past" (Rosenstone 2009, 35). The implicit research question, organising the whole examination above, is definitely the one that asks: how can we operationalize the communicative generational belonging of filmmaker crews and audiences while paying attention to mediatized memory-work and collective trauma-processing through the historical film genre "altering our very sense of the past"? Within a composite framework of cultural memory and trauma studies combined with

31 Often the work of the same groups of visual and costume designers.
32 The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewer for mentioning Ferenc Török's *1945* as a pertinent example, an observation that was fundamental in developing the argumentation on the media(l) aspects.

contemporary film historical and poetical analysis such 21st century Eastern European historical films have been examined therefore that have been successful with domestic and/or international, also amateur/ movie-going and professional/critical audiences too. In contrast to the robustness and the major size of the Polish film market – (apparently and primarily) activating 1st communicative generational memories of victimhood in both sample films, historical panoramas of the 2nd WW, respectively of the Cold War – differences emerge on the level of communicative generational belonging and memory-work if the most popular 21st century historical films are examined in two small national Eastern European cinemas, the Romanian and the Hungarian one. A temporary conclusion enabled by this limited corpus suggests that narratives of first generational victimhood are less accessible for the studied small national audiences, with postmodern aesthetics and cinematic and/or televisual preformatting stronger factors in popularity than memory-work enabled by positioning within the chain of the three communicative generations.

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The "Giant Role Model": the "Serbian" Petőfi

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ABSTRACT

The reception of Sándor Petőfi's poems and the critical discourse on them in German by bilingual German poets and publicists in Hungary began during the poet's lifetime and ran parallel to the development of his career. In the same period, however, from the mid-1840s, a very intense interest in his person and his poetry, which was even deeper and more diverse than in German, was awakened in southern Slavic, especially Serbian, literature. This paper explores the possible reasons for his integration in Serbian poetry and public poetry. Among the most important factors is the fact that in the 18th and 19th centuries, strong centres of Serbian culture developed in Hungary, including Buda, and that in the northern part of present-day Serbia, in Vojvodina, the population had for centuries been of mixed nationality, including Serbs, Hungarians and Germans. As a result, a large part of the Serbian intelligentsia spoke Hungarian, and many of the Hungarians in Vojvodina had spoken Serbian since the last century, so they could read each other's literature in the original. Petőfi's poetry, like much of 19th century Hungarian literature, was translated by renowned authors, sometimes of European quality, and his poetry was an inspiration for Serbian Romanticism in terms of form, theme and poetics (Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Đura Jakšić). Finally, it is worth mentioning the historical circumstances, the fact that, although the two peoples were on opposite political sides in the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848 and several times later, Petőfi's figure transcended political differences and his reception remained unbroken even in the most difficult periods. The belief that Petőfi, who originally went by the name Petrovics, was of Serbian origin – a belief that is difficult to verify biographically – and which dates back to Petőfi's own time, has contributed to this. The layers and trends in the history of Petőfi's reception in Serbia also shed light on the mechanisms of intellectual relations in the common cultural space of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.

Keywords: Central and Eastern European and Western Balkan Romanticism, 19th century Hungarian and Serbian poetry, Sándor Petőfi, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Đura Jakšić

The Serbian reception of Petőfi and his poetry is a well-established subject in both Hungarian and Serbian literary history, even if the research is limited to a narrow professional arena: the publications of former and

current lecturers and researchers at the Hungarian Department in Novi Sad/Újvidék,[1] Serbia, the studies of scholars investigating Hungarian–Serbian contacts in Hungary, and the writings of a few Serbian literary scholars with closer ties to Vojvodina and the Novi Sad/Újvidék academic society, Matica Srpska, are the most important sources on the complex and multifaceted mechanism through which Petőfi gained a place in Serbian poetry.

However, compared to the intensity of the research and the number of translations, the results seem to be poorly known both among the Hungarian and the southern Slavic literary public. This is illustrated, among other things, by the reception of a 1973 edition of a selection of Petőfi's works in Serbian, published jointly by Matica Srpska and Nolit in Belgrade (Petefi 1973). The volume was compiled for the 150th anniversary of Petőfi's birth by Mladen Leskovac, a literary historian from Sivac/Szivác in Vojvodina, former director of the Matica Srpska and member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, and includes, in an appendix, a bibliography of Petőfi's translations and publications in Serbian/Croatian by Desanka Bogdanović. This list shows clearly that Petőfi was a constant presence in Serbian literature almost from the beginning, from the 1850s, and that his texts were translated and his poetry was studied by such renowned poets, writers, literary scholars, and historians such as Đura Jakšić, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Veljko Petrović, Jovan Popović, Dobrica Cesarić, Danilo Kiš, Ivan V. Lalić, Mladen Leskovac himself, and many others, up to the present day. One of the most renowned Serbian translators of Hungarian literature, Sava Babić, the founder of the Department of Hungarian Language and Literature in Belgrade, in his review of the volume, pointed out that Petőfi, in his versatility and completeness, was only partially received in Serbian literature, despite the large number of translations. He saw the virtue of the jubilee selection precisely in the fact that it showed all the facets and features of the oeuvre in a chronological overview – from naive, cheerful play to tragic tone, from genre scenes to real, serious poetry, from poignant self-portraits to fervent patriotic poetry or role-playing poetry (Babić 1973, 21-22).

At a conference held in 1973 at the Hungarian Language and Literature Department and the Institute of Hungarian Studies of the Faculty of Humanities in Novi Sad/Újvidék, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Petőfi's birth, János Bányai came to a very similar conclusion as Sava Babić based on the bibliographical material of the same jubilee volume (Bányai 1973). The first Petőfi poem to appear in print, *The Ruins of the Inn*, was translated by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj in

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1　Names of places of Hungarian cultural and/or historical relevance that are outside the political borders of modern Hungary are given in two variants throughout this paper: first, in their official present-day name, and, second, in their traditional Hungarian name.

1855 (Petefi 1855),[2] and from then on some two hundred and fifty of his poems were published in South Slavic by various translators, all of them being reprinted several times, some of them up to 10 to 15 times in different publications. Although the translated poems include *End of September*,[3] *The Song Calls for Funeral*,[4] *One Thought*[5] and many other masterpieces of Petőfi's poetry, scattered in journals or anthologies, they did not give a complete picture of him. Before the mid-20th century, only *John the Valiant*, translated by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, appeared in book form (Petefi 1860).[6] The first edition of Petőfi's poems was published only in 1946; this volume of about 150 pages contained mostly translations by Zmaj and another important Petőfi translator, Blagoje Brančić, but it was a highly thematic selection, focusing on the (world) revolutionary and patriotic aspects, in keeping with the post-war situation, together with the complete publication of *The Apostle* (Petefi 1946).[7] In 1969 a new, much thinner volume was published under the title *Sloboda i ljubav* [Freedom and Love], edited by Ivan Ivanji, a writer, poet, and literary translator born in Veliki Bečkerek/Nagybecskerek (today's Zrenjanin/Nagybecskerek, Serbia), who aimed to present Petőfi in a more nuanced way, with three themes (homeland, love, and freedom), but this booklet of barely ninety pages was clearly inadequate for the task (Petefi 1969). Finally, the 1973 jubilee volume followed, which also contained few poems, only forty-one of them, mainly from among the more recent translations. According to János Bányai, it was primarily intended to show the modernity of Petőfi's poetry, but at the same time, as Bányai puts it, the undertaking provided a "relatively reassuring insight" into Petőfi's oeuvre (Bányai 1973).

The three editions also show that Petőfi's Serbian translation history – though it has waxed and waned in waves – has been continuous and always updated, according to the historical circumstances, cultural impulses, poetic trends, and academic interests at the time. As far as I know, after 1973, a single volume of Petőfi's poetry was published, translated by Miklós Maróti (Petefi 2009), but it did not meet with any response. At the same time, new translators in journals and anthologies have constantly attempted to render Petőfi's texts into Serbian, and Sava Babić wrote his doctoral dissertation on the history, nature, and poetics of these translations in 1981, which was published four years later in book form (Babić 1985).

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2   *A csárda romjai*; Serbian translation as *Razorena čarda*. Translated into English by William N. Loew. Throughout this paper, titles of Petőfi's poems in English and/or Serbian are given together with the translator's name if they have been published in translation before, and without it and in square brackets if they have not.

3   *Szeptember végén;* English translation by George Szirtes, and also, as *At the End of September*, by William N. Loew.

4   *Temetésre szól az ének*; English translation by Sándor Főfai.

5   *Egy gondolat bánt engemet*; English translation by George Szirtes.

6   *János vitéz*; English translation by John Ridland.

7   *Az apostol*; English translation by Victor Clement.

However, Petőfi's reception in Serbia, despite its partial and variable nature, can be measured not only in terms of the number of translations but also in terms of its impact. As a result of the work of the greatest translators, especially Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Petőfi became, so to speak, an integral part of Serbian literature, his poetry influencing the whole of southern Romanticism, its themes and forms, as well as entering Serbian popular poetry, and Petőfi himself became a model and inspiration for the use of folk elements in Serbian poetry in the 1850s. In his study, Imre Bori, for example, points out that in addition to the adoption of the Serbian ten-syllable narrative form, the *deseterac*, in Hungarian poetry and its use in Vörösmarty's historical and fairy-tale romanticism, the Hungarian *felező tizenkettes* "half-twelfth" verse became established in Serbian poetry as the *dvanaesterac* following the poetry of Petőfi and Arany, becoming the basis of "epic poetry with a folk spirit" associated with the folkloric movement of Vuk Karadžić (Bori 1973).

If we look for reasons as to how Petőfi could have made such a deep impression on Serbian contemporaries and posterity – before any great Western European culture could – three arguments emerge almost immediately from this very complex process. One concerns the mixed ethnic and cultural relations that had characterised the history and society of these peoples for centuries. It is well known that in the 18th and 19th centuries, a large part of the Serbian intelligentsia was brought up in Hungarian centres and schools, as well as in Vienna. In Buda, a Serbian scholarly society, the Matica Srpska, was founded in 1826 and operated here until its move to Novi Sad/Újvidék in 1864, together with a boarding school for Serbian speaking students, the so-called Thökölyanum, founded by Száva Thököly-Popovics. Serbian scientific, and literary journals, and newspapers were also published in Hungary around this time. As a result, the Serbian intelligentsia knew Hungarian and German well, and Hungarian literature was read, known, and popularised in the original. Knowledge of the Hungarian language was a characteristic feature of this intelligentsia until the end of World War I, and in some cases even between the two world wars, even after the cultural centres were moved to Novi Sad/Újvidék and then to Belgrade. However, quite a few Hungarians, especially in the South, spoke Serbian, and their numbers increased after WWI and then after WWII, as political borders changed. Bilingualism among Serbs, Croats, and Hungarians had thus been ongoing for centuries, mutually enabling their cultures to have direct access to each other's intellectual products. But while Serbian literature was little integrated by Hungarian intellectuals in Hungary, despite its extensive translation, Serbian/Croatian literature developed a "genetic connection" with Hungarian poetry, to use István Fried's turn of phrase (Fried 1984, 677). Of the greatest figures of Serbian romanticism, there are numerous parallels with Vörösmarty even in the works of Branko Radičević, who studied in Sremski Karlovci/Karlóca and presumably did not know Hungarian (Veselinović-Šulc 1975).

The other reason is that Petőfi, whose original surname was Petrovics, was believed by many of his contemporaries – Hungarians and Serbs alike – to be of Serbian origin, based on his own comments. He was described as characteristically Serbian in appearance and temperament by the Hungary Serbian writer Jakov Ignjatović, who met him in person in early 1848, although he was not enchanted by him (Ignjatović 1973, 57-60). Describes him as a Serb Jovan Jovanović Zmaj (Petefi 1855) and Anton Hadžić in his preface to Jovanović's translation of *John the Valiant*, in 1860 (Hadžić 1860, XXXV-XXXVI). The belief was so widespread that Blagoje Brančić, in his 1900 study of Petőfi written in Serbian, writes almost apologetically that Petőfi was of Slovak origin but does not deny that if the Serbian people believe him to be their own, he must remain so. He concludes in a section of his paper that the name of "Šandor Petrović" is as well known among the Serbian people "as that of any other Serbian poet" (Brančić 1900, 5-7). Despite the biographical facts, which have since been clarified and which allow only a vague assumption of the southern Slavic origin of the paternal line (Kerényi 2008, 16), it is interesting that both Croatian and Serbian Wikipedias, and many other online sites in their wake, still claim with certainty that Petőfi was of Serbian origin.

Perhaps the most important factor in Petőfi's establishment in the Southern Slavic world was the fact that – in addition to translations of extremely high quality – two great figures of Serbian Romanticism, Đura Jakšić and Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, integrated his entire poetic program and oeuvre into their own poetry. Both were a decade younger than Petőfi: Jakšić was born in 1832, Zmaj in 1833, and both were still teenagers in the mid-to-late 1840s. Jovan Jovanović completed his secondary and part of his university education in various places in the Habsburg Monarchy, in Pozsony (Pressburg, today's Bratislava, Slovakia), Pest, Prague, and Vienna; from 1863 he was director of the Serbian Thököly Institute in Buda, and, as a result, spoke Hungarian and German well. His translations of Petőfi, János Arany, Mór Jókai, Imre Madách, János Garay, Gergely Czuczor, Károly Szász, and Kálmán Tóth are more or less recorded in the literature (Popovics 1913; Póth 1972; Csuka 1938; Babić 1984; Veselinović-Šulc 1984; Fried 1987, 1988; Németh 2014), but there are also many quotations of and allusions to Hungarian poetry in his works. For example, in his love cycle *Roses* (Đulići), published in 1864, various themes, motifs, and verse passages from Petőfi's poetry can be recognized, and later, in *Starmali* ["Little smarty-pants", in contemporary translation], a humorous children's magazine he edited, in one of his poems from 1882 *Spram meseca* [Facing the moon][8] he also sketches Petőfi's figure, or, more precisely, the statue inaugurated at the time, as well as his own relationship to him: "Šešir skidam – ne pred kipom / (Na kipu je dosta mana), / Šešir skidam pred spomenom / Uzorita velikana." ["I raise my hat – not to the

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8   Vol. 5, no. 28 (10 October 1882).

monument / (I find too many faults in the statue), / I raise my hat to the memory / Of the giant role model"]. Petőfi's words resound in Zmaj's patriotic poetry, for instance, elements of Petőfi's cycle *Felhők* [Clouds] in his elegies.

He lived in Pest until 1870, when he completed his medical studies, and from then on he worked as a doctor in various villages and towns in Vojvodina and Serbia, including Novi Sad/Újvidék, Pančevo/Pancsova, Futog/Futak, Kamenica, and Belgrade, in addition to his literary, editorial and translation activities. He edited several satirical and children's magazines and took the last name *Zmaj* (Dragon) in 1864 when he launched his satirical magazine of the same name. In 1872, his life took a tragic turn: he lost, to illness, four of his five children as well as his wife Euphrosina, or Ružica as he called her, to whom he wrote his cycle *Roses*. Zmaj was left alone with their fifth child, the infant Smiljka, and two adopted daughters, but when he moved to Futog/Futak in the mid-1870s, Smiljka also died. Years after this tragic event, in 1882, he wrote the second part of his earlier love poetry, the elegy cycle titled *Đulići uveoci* [Wilted roses].

His work as a translator as well as his versatile poetry was highly appreciated by the Hungarian literary life of the time. In the commemorative album published in 1874 on the occasion of the quarter-century anniversary of his literary work, there are letters of greeting from János Arany, Pál Gyulai, and Kálmán Tóth (*Album* 1874, 53-55); Hungarian newspapers regularly reported on him and occasionally published translations of his works, and he was elected an external member of the Kisfaludy Society, which congratulated him on the occasion of his 40th anniversary as a writer. In 1883, the literary daily newspaper *Fővárosi Lapok* [Capital City Newspaper] emphasised that Zmaj was a poet of European spirit and importance. Despite all this, the only Hungarian-language selection of his works that was published in the 20th century was an anthology edited by Károly Ács and with an introduction by Mladen Leskovac, entitled *Hol megálltam…* [Where I Stopped…] (Jovanović 1983).

Đura Jakšić and Zmaj are often compared by historians of Hungarian–South Slavic relations to the Petőfi–Arany poet duo. This parallel is true in the sense that Zmaj was more serene and pursued a middle-class lifestyle, and his poetry was more complex but also more meditative and elegiac, not built on the momentary heat of intense and exciting experiences but using many shades of naive and bitter humour, and, through his editorial work, he was also known as the father of Serbian children's literature. He was also, indeed, much more open-minded and viewed the diverse, multi-ethnic, mixed-culture world of the Habsburg Monarchy perhaps with more enjoyment than Jakšić, and, in this respect, was like Arany, but in many respects also like Mór Jókai. His knowledge was also broader than Jakšić's; his intertexts, references, and translations include German, French, English, Russian, Polish, and other European authors, and in 1861 his own first volume was entitled

Istočni biser [The pearl of the East], in which he translated into Serbian the poets of Hafiz, Mirza Shaffy and other Arabic and Persian poets. In the late 1840s, he also discovered Petőfi earlier than Đura Jakšić, but, as Sava Babić points out, he could not identify with the revolutionary layer of his poetry. It is clear from his translations that he stopped in late 1847 and early 1848, this being the limit to which he could follow the thoughts of his favourite poet. "The last poems that Zmaj translated reflect the moderate Petőfi", writes Babić, although he also points out that Zmaj could only become acquainted with Petőfi's post-1848 poems much later (Babić 1993, 27).

In contrast, Đura Jakšić, who also did not have the opportunity to read all of Petőfi's revolutionary poetry, seems to have had an instinctive grasp of this layer. Jakšić's affinity with Petőfi was first pointed out by Blagoje Brančić in his aforementioned study of Petőfi, written at the turn of the century. He attributed the similarities in their poetry to their shared spirituality, eruptive temperament, sincerity of feeling, depth of ideas, and the power of their poetic imagery and language, and believed that this was the reason why, especially in their patriotic, freedom-fighting poems, there was often a similarity of thought and expression, and, as he puts it, "Jakšić and Petőfi are comparable" (Brančić 1900, 28). From this point of departure, the later researcher of the parallels between the poetry of the two of them, Magdolna Veselinović-Šulc, juxtaposes several texts and passages by them: in Jakšić's version of Petőfi's *Freedom and Love*,[9] the main idea changes to *Srbin, sloboda* [Serbs and freedom]; but motifs from the *National Song*,[10] *Föl!* [Up!], and *A nemzethez* [To the nation], as well as from his love poetry, lyrical poetry, and "wine songs" appear in Jakšić's texts (Veselinović-Šulc 1973).

This may be due to their similar living conditions. Both were constantly on the move, Jakšić's personality, like Petőfi's, was "shaped by student life, cafés, pubs, and the life of a wanderer. They went to school little and travelled a lot, they wandered, and deprivation was their constant companion" (Veselinović-Šulc 1973, 195).

Jakšić was born in Srpska Crnja/Serbcsernye, not far from Kikinda in the present-day Banat/Bánát region, and his father was a Serbian priest. He completed the first three years of his schooling here, but from then on he, like Petőfi, moved frequently. He studied in Szeged beginning with 1842, in Timişoara/Temesvár (today in Romania) in 1846, in Pest for a short time in 1847, and in Veliki Bečkerek/Nagybecskerek after his military service in 1848. In the latter, he studied drawing and painting, which also raises another parallel with Hungarian literature: it recalls the dilemmas of the young Jókai between painting and literature, and his later, novelist's fascination with painting topics. Unlike Jókai, however, Jakšić stuck to the fine arts, and in the process became a poet, sometimes working in parallel, with brush and pen at the same time. Among the two hundred or so of his surviving paintings, the best known and most

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9 *Szabadság, szerelem*; English translation by Leslie A. Kery.
10 *Nemzeti dal*; English translation by Alan Dixon.

beautiful are his portrait of Mila Popović, the daughter of a Kikinda innkeeper and later Belgrade actress *The girl in blue* (1856), and a love song written to/about her titled *Mila*, one of the most widely loved love songs in Serbian literature.

From 1851 to 1853 Jakšić continued his studies of painting in Vienna and then in Munich, returning to Kikinda in 1855 not staying long. In 1857 he worked as an art teacher in various Serbian villages and towns. He married in Požarevac, but his wife and three children did not bring peace to his life. He spent his later years as a teacher, and when he was dismissed from his state post in 1871, he worked as a proofreader at the state printing office in Belgrade and was a regular visitor to the inns, leading a bohemian lifestyle, until he died in 1878, ill, but as a direct result of physical revenge from an insulted general mocked by him in a pub. In his last days, his doctor and poet friend from his young days, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, tried to cure his illness and injuries. The biographies also tell us that Jakšić lived in constant financial difficulties and debt, and in his last years in a state of poverty: his life was thus similar to that of Pusztafi, a fictional Petőfi-like character who (would have) survived the War of Independence, as depicted by Mór Jókai in his 1862 novel *Politikai divatok* [Political fashions].

Jakšić's literary oeuvre consists of some fifty lyrical and epic poems, about forty short stories, a few dramas, and an unfinished novel (Đurić 1984). His turn to poetry in the early 1850s is documented as being due to Petőfi's influence. He met Jovan Jovanović Zmaj in Vienna, where the latter was also studying at the time, and, as a letter from Zmaj attests, they shared a room and read Petőfi together in the original, presumably the second edition of the *Complete works* of 1848: the first volume of Zmaj's copy is still in the library of Matica Srpska in Sad/Újvidék, with Zmaj's translator's notes and comments (Kovaček 1973).

Jakšić's first poetic experiments, as mentioned above, were written in the spirit of Petőfi's poetry. His poems were first published in 1853 in the Matica Srpska journal *Letopis*, but shortly before that, in October 1852, he sent his father a letter in which he sent a Petőfi translation, 'a short poem' (quoted from the correspondence of Jakšić's, which was prepared for publication by Milan Kostić in 1951, see Veselinović-Šulc, 1973, 94). From then on, the Petőfi experience would define him for the rest of his life. In the many hundreds of pages of Jakšić's bibliography, prepared by Silvija Đurić in 1984, several of the entries quote his recollections of 1848–49, addressed to Jovan Jovanović Zmaj in 1871, in which he also mentions Petőfi: "[…] Oh how beautifully this sad nature matches the sadness of the human heart, as rendered so beautifully and poetically by Petőfi in one of his poems:

A szomorú égen űz
Csepp cseppeket
Az én sápadt arcomon
Könny könnyeket…

[In the sad sky
Droplets of droplets
On my pale face
Tears of tears…]
Now I have no Petőfi – I have lost him…"[11]

In his study, István Póth lists other passages from Jakšić's prose that might be evidence of his experience of Petőfi, but this quotation takes their relationship further towards another, more political, problem. It is well known that in 1848–1849 Serbs and Hungarians confronted each other and fought bloody battles in Vojvodina as part of the failed Hungarian War of Independence. But the 1850s brought sad disappointment and difficult years of reprisals for both peoples. In his memoirs of 1848–49, Jakšić provides a detailed sketch of the upsurge that inspired the Serbs to fight for their independence, and which was followed by the great disillusionment that followed in 1849. In the text quoted above, Jakšić paints a picture of his broken father, a priest from Srpska Crnja/Szerbcsernye who, on hearing of the death of a friend, a fellow prisoner and fellow sufferer, said the following bitter words: "Ah, how we have fallen and suffered – and what we have received for it!… Our brothers and our children have dived into blood to fish out for their posterity the most precious pearl shell – only … instead of freedom they have received [bullet] pierced coats and bronze crosses … Oh, oh, oh! What a sacrifice, and what a reward!" (Jakšić 1978, 87)

Although Jakšić wrote down his memoirs two decades after the War of Independence, in his changed circumstances, it is a fact that in 1848, at the age of 16, he volunteered to join the Serbian army rebelling against Hungarians, and it was pure chance that he did not have to face Petőfi in these battles, as he did, for example, face János Vajda in the battle of Srbobran/Szenttamás, in which both of them took part and in which Jakšić was wounded. There is thus a great contradiction between his early, poet's enthusiasm for Petőfi and his young, almost childish Serbian patriot's armed struggle against Hungarians. In their attempts to resolve this contradiction, literary historians argue that Jakšić was not yet familiar with Petőfi and Hungarian poetry at this time. The conditions and events of the Hungarian War of Independence, his misunderstood and mismanaged nationalist policies, and even the Serbian principality's conflicting public and background political intentions may explain this confrontation, and Jakšić himself offered a key to understanding his youthful stance in retrospect when, in his memoirs, he highlighted the disappointment, misguidedness, and fatal features of the imperial policies of both nations concerning this period.

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11 Translated by Vujičić D. Stojan, quoted in Póth 1973. Although this part of Jakšić's letter and the "Petőfi" poem is cited by many literary historians, it should be noted that such a text does not exist in Petőfi's oeuvre. Jakšić may have misremembered and read or heard this poem somewhere else. Based on my research, however, no such poem can be found in the middle of the 19th century, not by any author.

A contextualised view of the early years is thus as necessary as a historical background for reading Jakšić's later poems, which have Petőfi parallels, but also for his oeuvre as a whole. From the 1850s onwards, Petőfi's freedom-fighting poetry and his role as a Tyrtaean poet became topical for Serbia, and thus for Jakšić himself, on several occasions, as Serbia continued to struggle for three more decades for liberation from Turkish occupation and for an independent Serbian state, while internal dynastic political conflicts flared up repeatedly. Despite the apparently neutral policy of Prince Aleksandar Karađorđević, who had estates in Pest and Timișoara/Temesvár, among other places, and who had managed the rebellion against the Hungarians in Vojvodina in 1848, Serbian units were partly involved on the side of Russia in the Crimean War of 1853–56, and partly, using the conflicts between the great powers, the fight against the Turks became a topical issue for Serbia once again. Later, under French and Sardinian encouragement, the Serbs also contacted Kossuth and the Hungarian emigration. After the ousting of Prince Karađorđević in 1858, Miloš Obrenović was restored to power, and between 1860 and 1868 his son Mihajlo was enthroned as prince, who in 1866 established a short-lived anti-Turkish Balkan alliance; from 1876 onwards, battles with the Turks followed, and in 1877 the Russo–Turkish War broke out, in which the Serbs again fought on the Russian side. At the same time, not only under the pretext of the connection with the Kossuth emigration but also due to other circumstances, there was a Serbian–Hungarian rapprochement in the late 1850s and early 1860s, which has been discussed in detail in several studies (see, for example, Ress 2004, esp. 164-168).

The main reasons include the rise to power of Miloš and Mihajlo Obrenović in 1858 and 1860, respectively, who spent part of the preceding period, i.e. part of their exile, in Vienna. It should be noted that in 1848 both of them used all their power and influence to prevent a Serbian uprising against the Hungarians. In 1853, Mihajlo married the Hungarian Countess Júlia Hunyady of Kéthely, and from then on he lived on his Hungarian estate in Ivanka/Ivánka, near Pozsony/Pressburg (today's Bratislava, Slovakia). In this way, he maintained direct contact with Hungarian aristocratic circles and saw a much better chance for the independence of Serbia and Vojvodina in an alliance with Hungarian policies opposed to absolutism than in a reconciliation with imperial centralism. It is known, however, that Prince Mihajlo was assassinated in 1868 and succeeded on the throne by his cousin Milan, barely fourteen years old, who effectively took over from the regents appointed to his side in 1872. It was during his reign – and in the year of Đura Jakšić's death – that the Berlin Peace Treaty of 1878 declared Serbia's independence and ended the Russo–Turkish War. Jakšić survived the peace treaty of July 13 by barely half a year, dying on November 16, and thus did not live to see Serbia become an independent kingdom in 1882, through a secret agreement with the

Austro-Hungarian Empire, with King Milan I at its head and politically and economically connected to Austria–Hungary.

Many of Jakšić's poems explicitly reflect on internal political events, the battles with the Turks, and the independence struggles in Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Bosnia. In the 1873 edition of his poems, he addressed the dedicatory poem to Milan Obrenović, followed immediately afterward, in a separate chapter, by poems welcoming Miloš Obrenović at the change of prince in 1858, a poem mourning Mihajlo Obrenović, and then again poems welcoming Milan, who began to rule in 1872 (Jakšić 1873). His long poem *Prve žrtve* [The First Sacrifices] dates from 1860; in 1862, he wrote a series of poems on the clashes with the Turks, in 1867 the poem *Jevropi* [To Europe], in 1871 *Bojna pesma* [Battle Song] and *Straža* [Sentry]; later poems include the 1875 *Karaula na Vučjoj poljani* [The Watchtower on Vučja Poljana] – (see Jakšić 1882, II, 140-146) and *Pozdrav* [Salutation] (Jakšić 1882, I, 107), both reacting to the Serbian–Turkish battles of 1876, which preceded the Russo–Turkish War. One of his last poems, written in 1878, is *Straža* [Guardian] (Jakšić 1882, II. 126-131), a poem of extreme disillusionment, presumably in response to the Berlin Peace, which supposedly thwarted the unification of the southern Slavs and recognized the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which he called Europe a "deformed creature".

Among the poems of the period – which also outline the Serbian, Hungarian, and European history of the time and are only listed selectively here, and which strongly evoke Petőfi's political poetry – are such wonderfully beautiful pieces of private and mood describing lyricism as the aforementioned poem *Mila* from 1856, *Through the Midnight Air*[12] and *The Stream Flows*[13] from 1862, *Na Liparu* [On the Lipar] from 1866, to mention only a few of the texts that were translated into Hungarian. A new layer of his poems is formed by the impersonation songs and those diary-like, self-portrait-like works which – as in Petőfi's case – document his wanderings, changes of place, snapshots of his life: *Spomen* [Remembrance], *Na noćištu* [Place to Stay for the Night], *Putnik* [Wanderer], *Još* [Another]; self-metaphorical or ars poetica-like poems: *Ja* [I], *Orao* [Eagle], *Ja sam stena…* [I am a Rock]; the representation of mystical stories of folklore: *Put u Gornjak* [The Road to Gornjak], *Noć u Gornjaku* [Night in Gornjak]; narrative poems of shorter or longer length, sometimes bearing Byron's influence, sometimes referring to other versions of European ballad and legend literature, or satirical stories, life images, and epigrams (Milosevits 1998, 170-184).

Đura Jakšić is a powerful, autonomous poetic personality, and it is no coincidence that works on the history of Serbian literature or on its Hungarian relations emphasise that Petőfi was his inspiration rather than his model, which is why it is so difficult to find concrete parallels or intertextual links between their art. Jakšić, however, could in his

12 *Kroz ponoć*; English translation by Pavle Ninković.
13 *Potok žubori*; English translation by Gordana Janjušević-Leković.

"own right" be of interest to Hungarian readers and literary scholars. Apart from a few anthologized Hungarian translations, his poems are hardly available in Hungarian. In 1998, Károly Csala published a selection of his poems (Jakšić 1998). This booklet of barely sixty pages is itself partly based on a 1972 Serbian anthology for Yugoslav schoolchildren and hardly reflects the poet's original beauty. These translations can only capture elements of Jakšić's mastery of form, the musicality and wit of his poems, his visuality reminiscent sometimes of Rembrandt, other times of Biedermeier style, his descriptions referring to Dürer's brutality, his realism reminiscent of Netherlandish painting, his romantic horizons, his misty and mystical scenes, the pastel-like colouring of his lyrical poems, and his almost impressionistic features. Almost none of his narrative poetry or prose is available in Hungarian.

(Translated into English by Anna Fenyvesi)

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Favoured subjects. The myth of the Middle Class and the imaginary of Cluj IT

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ABSTRACT

Romanian IT professionals are marketized as young, highly skilled, and full of potential individuals. However, there is a contradiction in their image. In the discourse of international outsourcing, they are presented as cheap labour, while on the national and local level they are considered high earners. Under the privilege of income tax exemption, the IT sector is continuously growing and attracting labour, providing well-paying entry-level jobs and bringing in foreign capital. At the same time, on a symbolic level, it also developed a reputation as a facilitator of social ascension and of importer of European ideas. In this paper I aim to examine what drives people towards professional reorientation to IT. How is the idea of the middle class being used? What is the imaginary that makes people take on the risky and arduous road of re-professionalization and what are its consequences?

Keywords: IT sector, re-professionalization, Cluj-Napoca, middle class, neoliberalism, imaginary

Introduction[1]

> "The well-paying jobs are in this field [IT], we all know that through education we can have solutions to individual and societal problems – the way out of poverty, the way towards a better salary is through education."
>
> (Emil Boc, cited in Preda 2022).[2]

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1 This article is an edited and supplemented version of Chapter 3 of my master's thesis, titled *"This job saved me": The Subjectivity and Imaginary of Cluj IT*, defended at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, at the Central European University.

2 Original in Romanian. All translations are mine.

The average wage of a person working in the information technology (IT) service sector[3] in Romania is more than twice as much as the national average wage, making the industry rank the highest in the country (INS 2023, 1). Represented by 22 thousand workers (Petrovici–Mare 2020, 51), the IT sector of Cluj-Napoca (hereafter, Cluj) is especially large and dominant, both from an economic and a social point of view. As any post-socialist city transitioning from a post-industrial to a service-based economy, Cluj has been intensively privatising and repurposing its infrastructure, while its labour force is getting refashioned as well (Mateescu 2022). The IT sector became the strongest sector in the city, having gained momentum in the 2000s but continuously growing and attracting labour ever since (Ionescu-Heroiu et al. 2013). By providing good wages and developing its very own "informal" educational system,[4] but also employing many unskilled workers, it has built a reputation as a facilitator of socio-economic ascension.

While the sector and the phenomenon of professional reconversion has already been examined from the point of view of political economy (Guga–Spatari 2021) and through the lens of ethnography (Mateescu 2022), it can also be analysed as an outcome of shaping social imaginary. As sociology must also deal with "a sociology of construction of visions of the world" (Bourdieu 1989, 18), I aim to uncover what is the imaginary that is driving people's decision towards professional reconversion to this specific field. What kind of image is being created about the sector? What drives people towards professional reorientation to IT? How are ideas associated with the middle class being used? What is the imaginary that makes people take on the risky and arduous road of re-professionalization? To answer these questions, I will present my

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3   For this paper, I am primarily taking Guga and Spatari's (2021) definition of *IT* as an umbrella term for the categories "Information technology service activities" and "IT service activities". In the classification of Romanian Nomenclature of Economic Activities these jobs fall under divisions 62 and 63. However, due to a lack of precise data, in some cases I reference statistics dealing with more broad definitions, too.

4   To deliver a constant flow of labour, a couple of IT schools have appeared in the city, offering courses that in the duration of a few months promise to teach the fundamentals for getting a job in various fields within IT. Paula Buta, in her thesis about one of the biggest IT schools present in the city, with programs running across Romania, provides an overview of the demographic data of students who enrolled in 2016. Out of the 2185 candidates that enrolled nation-wide, between 1st of May 2014 and 1st of May 2016, the biggest proportion was between 26–30 years old (850 persons), followed by the age group 31–35 (601 persons). 61,60% were males, 38,39% being female. At the moment of enrollment, 66,20% of students were employed, 11,20% were students in formal education, and 9,60% were self-employed, leaving the remaining 13,00% as unemployed. As of fields of origin, the most prominent (31,8%) group was coming from a technical field, followed by finance and banking (10,60%), and services, business/management, marketing/advertising/PR, construction, education and others, all being below 10% (Buta 2017, 19-22).

empirical findings and provide relevant concepts from the literature to build my argument.

In April of 2023, I interviewed 19 workers of the sector who all share the experience of professional reconversion, meaning either having gained higher education in an unrelated field, and/or having worked in non-IT jobs previously. At the time of interviewing, one interlocutor had a nontechnical job, while all the others were in technical positions, working either as software testers, software developers, web developers, DevOps engineers, or in tech support positions. By conducting semi-structured in-depth life-history interviews, I aimed to get an understanding of my interlocutors' professional and educational background, their class positionality and original aspirations, as well as their narrative of why they pursued professional reorientation, what trajectory they took within IT, and how they view their future. To protect their identity, I gave them pseudonyms, eliminated the names of the companies they work for, and all other information that might lead to identifying them. In addition to interviewing, to understand the broader discourses, I also engaged in limited semi-systematic browsing of Linkedin and social media pages of IT companies and schools, as well as media statements of the municipality of Cluj.

In my master's thesis (Gondos 2023) I argue that the constituting elements of the imaginary of IT are threefold: the ideologies of technological solutionism (Morozov 2013), zombie socialism (Chelcea–Druță 2016) and the myth of the middle class (Weiss 2019) are synergically contributing to it. In this paper I elaborate on the aspect of middle-classness, building on the newer literature theorising the myth of the middle class, and expanding on the consumption patterns attached to working in the IT sector, together with the ambiguous flexible stability and its associated lifestyle that my interlocutors seek in their new profession. I explain how the promise of social mobility through re-professionalization is feeding into a myth of meritocracy. Finally, I argue that in addition to a locally established middle class position, my interlocutors also share a positionality that is assumed on a global scale, in accordance with their place in the global value chain of outsourced digital labour. This understanding of a global self-positioning is reinforcing the "catching up" ideology (Böröcz 2012), which in turn facilitates the appropriation of neoliberal subjectivities. Ultimately, I aim to show that it is a facet of neoliberal governance to overemphasise the importance of one sector in providing well-paying jobs, as a way to outsource social functions onto the market. Creating an illusion of social mobility reinforces the myth of meritocracy and individualises the struggle for a decent life, while reproducing social inequalities.

Neoliberalism, transnational migration and outsourcing

For my primary framework, I situate my argument in the literature tackling neoliberal capitalism as a political economic regime. From this approach, scholars have coined neoliberalism as a system of upward redistribution, a solidification of capitalist power against worker solidarity, with the state as an ally in safeguarding private property and fostering free market activity (Harvey 2007). While a common feature of neoliberalism is economic redistribution in favour of capital, actively intensifying uneven development (Brenner–Theodore 2002, 352), scholars have argued that post-socialist states are prone to a particularly radical form of this, due to their anti-communist stances (Kofti 2016), meaning a general suspicion towards social functions of the state (Chelcea–Druță 2016).

Cornel Ban (2016) shows that in the case of Romania, neoliberalism did not immediately bloom right after the fall of state socialism. However, once it started to nestle in, it quickly manifested in the state disembedding the economy, favouring market rationality while disregarding social cohesion. Amid a massive wave of deindustrialization throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the state engaged in aggressive privatisation and liberalisation processes, leading to a society-wide state of precarity. The result of this was the biggest migration wave of the period within the EU, involving more than one-third of the country's labour force. Working abroad became a safety valve for extreme social dislocations, and through the remittance flows, migration solidified and became part of the very structure of the Romanian welfare system (Ban 2016, 66-68). As sociologist Dana Domșodi puts it, the country started "exporting its social contradictions" (Mateescu 2022, 245). However, despite the uniqueness of scale in Romania's case, this tendency itself fits nicely into a global trend of international migration becoming an attempt in trying to even out inequalities and reduce poverty (Boatcă 2016; Milanovic 2011), while through the process of neoliberalization, the state is changing its role from the caretaker of people to the supporter of the market (Harvey 2007). This is an important idea for the purposes of this article, since re-professionalization to IT is commonly framed as possessing some of the same functions as migration.

Looking at professional reconversion to IT through the lens provided by the transnational migration literature can bring important insights, considering there are many similarities between the two phenomena. First and foremost, both promise wages set to a Western European standard to be spent in the local Romanian market, creating economic advantages for those implicated. Second, the phenomenon of "brain drain" can be observed in both cases, meaning a flow of highly educated populations to new contexts, leaving a shortage of skilled labour in their original environment. While in the classic sense "brain drain" refers to individuals physically emigrating in search of a better livelihood, changing careers to IT is often discussed within the same framework:

"Here in Transylvania, or in Romania, basically […] it is for sure the case that whoever was good for something either emigrated or became an IT developer" (Csaba, tester, MA in Philosophy, 35).[5] At the same time, neither migration nor career reorientation are merely economically driven. One specific socio-cultural element prevalent in the post-socialist semi-periphery, shared by both of these processes, is an ideology of "catching up" (Böröcz 2012). This manifests in imagining the goals of both individual self-improvement and state governance in acquiring the values and life conditions attributed to the "West." The positive hero of this discourse becomes the character of the creative, ambitious, self-developing, self-disciplined subject (Zincă 2011; Petrovici 2012; Mihály 2015; Simionca 2016; Petrovici–Deneva-Faje 2020), who brings forward the ethical project of capitalism (Szabó 2016; Troc 2019).

It is in line with this ideology that there exists a tendency of post-socialist neoliberal states to favour the support of a few selected areas of development that are associated with "Europeanization" (Chelcea–Druță 2016). I argue that one, if not the most favoured such area in Romania is the IT sector, making IT workers "the favourite subjects" (Crăciun–Lipan 2020, 426) of the state and especially of the local government of Cluj.

IT in Romania and in Cluj

> Cluj is really supporting the IT sector. The city itself supports it a lot.
> /But how?/
> I don't know […] this is the consensus, that they are propping IT. But maybe it's just that everyone is telling themselves this, and that makes them feel better.
> (Szabolcs, developer, former seasonal worker, 32)

Romanian IT professionals are marketized both in national media and on international outsourcing platforms as young, highly skilled, and full of potential individuals (Herman 2011). The difference between the two discourses, however, is that in the international discussion, they are presented as cheap workers, while on the national and local level they are considered high earners.

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5   This remark on the other hand also highlights an important difference between transnational migration and the re-professionalization to IT, namely the socio-economic background of people turning to these alternatives. While migrant workers primarily provide blue collar labour (Ailincăi 2016), the masses that change careers to IT are mostly highly educated (Buta 2017). However, there is a significant overlap between the two groups. Just in my – limited-sized – subject group, four people out of twenty-one have had seasonal jobs abroad before starting their career in IT.

The average net salary of an employee working in IT in Romania reached 10 478 RON in May of 2023 (INS 2023). In the context of the average monthly net wage for the same month being 4 543 RON (INS 2023), these statistics do create wide public interest. At the same time, since most IT professionals in the country work in outsourcing, we also have to take a look at the other side of their labour relation and see their positionality in the global labour market. As addressed by companies offering outsourcing consultation services, Eastern European cities such as Cluj are a good choice for Western capital because they "provide a great opportunity to tap into a pool of highly qualified individuals, at lower costs, at a nearby location" (Andras 2017). Indeed, the average hourly cost of a Romanian IT&C[6] employee in 2019 was 14.3 euro – providing the second-lowest figure in the European Union for the sector (Guga–Spatari 2021, 36). What enables and even facilitates this contradiction is an interplay of national and local policies – and imaginaries.

In 2001, a government ordinance came into force providing exemption from payment of income tax for individuals engaged in computer programming activities. Apart from minor alterations to the ordinance, it remained in force ever since and facilitated an almost continuous growth of salaries within the field (Guga–Spatari 2021, 32). While the public attitude towards the exemption slowly transformed from outrage to neutrality, employees of the sector started to perceive it as an "inalienable and vested right," justified by the moral and economic argumentation stating IT as the leading sector of the country (Guga–Spatari 2021, 35). This understanding is still prominent, despite the losses the exemption creates in the country's economy, as highlighted by a recent report of the World Bank (Roman 2023). In the case of Cluj, the nation-wide support of the IT sector also aligns with the municipality's own focus on technology and innovation, as part of building its brand as a smart city. As the mayor of the city, Emil Boc emphasised in a recent conference of the American Chamber of Commerce in Cluj: "Romanian authorities should not »touch« the field of technology for 20 years" (Reștea 2022).

It should be pointed out however that the future withdrawal of the tax exemption would not necessarily affect labour cost as much as it would affect workers' net salaries, so its preservation does not support the sector in a direct, economic sense. Rather, it provides an aura of exceptionality and makes IT work extraordinarily desirable for prospective workers. Guga and Spatari point out that one of the main arguments present in the public discourse in favour of the tax exemption is in fact the stimulation of the local consumption of IT workers. It is argued that if there is a high earning sector that spends its money locally, then other sectors will also benefit – indirectly – from perpetuating the tax exemption. Another popular framing criticised by the authors is that IT professionals should

6   IT&C refers to a wider category of economic activities under the NACE section "Information and Communications", including non-related fields such as book publishing, film production, television, radio, and other telecommunication services.

be awarded with their exemption-fueled higher wages because of their outstanding productivity (Guga–Spatari 2021, 36). I would argue that such favouritism can be understood as a manifestation of the tendency of post-socialist neoliberal states to endorse a few selected areas of development as outlined by Chelcea and Druță previously.

A final reason why it is beneficial and profitable for the state to support a specific sector is that the idea of the IT sector providing enough jobs and wages for those motivated enough to learn creates an allegedly secure path for social mobility, seemingly solving social inequality. As the mayor of Cluj framed it, since well-paying jobs exist in the IT sector, it is merely a question of individual willingness and education to solve economic disadvantage (Preda 2022), hence it is no longer considered to be the responsibility of governance.

Although economists contend that Cluj "has succeeded in managing a transition from a predominantly manufacturing town to a city with a strong and balanced economic mix" (Ionescu-Heroiu et al. 2013, 122), the general conception of working possibilities discussed in everyday conversations in the city under examination – Cluj – is, in fact, a reduced view of either leaving the country for seasonal work in the West or re-professionalizing to IT. As an IT worker with a graduate degree in translation studies voiced it poignantly in Mateescu's research, "I don't know what I would have done after graduation, if not for the IT corporations. Probably picking strawberries in Spain." (Mateescu 2022, 244). My interlocutors looking for jobs during the last 10 years have also experienced Cluj as a "mono-industrial" city for IT (Csaba, tester, MA in Philosophy). "I didn't feel like I had many options", said Kinga, a tech support worker with an MA in Humanities.

"*Bezzeg* the IT-ists…" – What makes IT workers middle-class?

As a social media post of a Hungarian IT school based in Cluj states: "One of the best future-proof investments: learn how to code! Join our Cluj-based course held in Hungarian if you too seek knowledge and a profession that is marketable."[7] On the picture accompanying the text it says "Bezzeg the IT-ists…"[8] *Bezzeg* is an expression mostly used in spoken Hungarian that conveys a feeling of envy combined with resentment and moral judgement. Voicing an opinion about the IT sector in an everyday conversation in Cluj so often starts with *bezzeg* that it became unnecessary to even end the sentence. It instantly evokes the high wages, the easy life, and the "pamperedness" (Mateescu 2022) of IT workers, as perceived by non-IT people.

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7   Original in Hungarian: "Az egyik legjobb jövő-álló befektetés: tanulj programozni! Csatlakozz a kolozsvári, magyar nyelvű képzésünkhöz, ha te is piacképes tudásra és szakmára vágysz."

8   Original in Hungarian: "*Bezzeg az IT-sok…*".

IT schools, the institutions that feed off these exact emotions, instrumentalize this already existing discourse for their marketing purposes, while, at the same time, they also reproduce it. The message of this social media post is clear: if you re-professionalize – with our help – and start a career in IT, you can join the privileged group, the object of envy, and you will earn more than you do now. In addition, the caption of the post places this assumption in an investment language, emphasising not just the possibility of quick ascension, but a promised long-term profitability and stability provided by skills that will stay relevant in the labour market – an understanding that my interlocutors also share. "There was a time when – I think I also felt this when I was thinking about starting – that I felt envy towards these people, because it's a very different sum, what they bring home every month" (Dániel, developer, MA in Music, 33).

In addition to monetary remuneration, working in IT also bears an attributed prestige, providing a second aspect of middle-class positionality. Passion, intellect, problem-solving skills and talent are topoi producing the high status of tech jobs. A manifestation of the institutionalisation of this idea is the fact that HR departments now have "Talent Recruiters" looking for and attracting possible applicants for open positions. Klára, former secretary, after completing a course in testing, was approached through Linkedin by such a recruiter. Not having to look for a job, instead the job finding her, gave a sense of accomplishment and reassurance. Especially since her initial motive for changing her career was that her previous job as a secretary, while providing stability and financial safety, left her with a sense of "lacking… a lack of using my brain, I didn't stimulate it." (Klára, tester, BSc in food engineering, 43). For Ioana, former accountant, similarly, changing to IT "wasn't a decision of financial nature. It was instead of intellectual nature."

The third aspect that constitutes the middle-classness of IT work is the consumption imaginary that is built around it. The "IT worker" is produced as "a rare (if not the only) profile that aligns with the socio-economic desires" of the general public (Guga–Spatari 2021, 3). In the public's eye, this turns IT into a bubble, that provides an alternative, detached, pampered way of living (Mateescu 2022).

> Well, the elite of the IT is not living in the real world. They don't know what kind of material difficulties a common Romanian citizen has. I saw this, I remember, when we were doing the catering business, that they receive a lot of free *shit*,[9] you know, events, food, and so on and so on. And they are not aware, they don't value the services they get, that no one else in other fields get.

9   Italics marks words that the interviewees themselves said in English, in the context of a discussion otherwise held either in Hungarian or Romanian.

(Viktor, tester, former chef, 31)

The final aspect of the modern middle-class lifestyle that IT supposedly allows one to lead is a combination of flexibility and stability. Scholars of the post-socialist block argue that after the fall of state socialism, with the arrival of corporate capitalism, workers had to start developing new personas, interiorizing the "doctrines of flexibility" (Dunn 2004, 7; Chelcea 2014, 38). Most of my interlocutors being in their late 20s or early 30s are socialised with this post-Fordist idea of work, an "insecurity culture" (Pugh 2015) normalising flexible working hours, project-based employment or external contracting, and a boundaryless perspective on their career (Greenhaus et al. 2008).

Like many platform workers (Vallas–Schor 2020), the digital workers I interviewed also seek freedom and flexibility in work. As Csanád, 33, a developer said, "I have always been looking for freedom, freedom on the level of time, or money-wise, or I don't know, generally." Flexibility is so central, that it changes the way Balázs, 30, a developer and musician, even thinks about work. Having experience as a call centre operator, he now resents the idea of a nine-to-five job, saying "I realised that the only way I can work is if I don't work." Márk, 29, developer and former actor, similarly framed the time-sheet at his previous workplace as a remnant of socialism, and welcomed the flexible working hours that his current employer provides: in IT he can work when feeling productive, and can go home or make use of the PlayStation available at the office when feeling tired.

On the other hand, unlike in the case of platform work, being employed by one of the big IT companies of Cluj also means stability, predictability and reliability for my interlocutors. However, under these circumstances, stability gets defined in relational terms. Compared to seasonal work abroad, working in IT means having a job throughout the year. Compared to taking translating gigs on a platform, it means social benefits and a reliable constant workload. Compared to a career in the entertainment industry, it means safety if a pandemic hits and communal gatherings are prohibited. Compared to being a lawyer, it means a clear career trajectory and an assurance of progress. Szabolcs, 32, developer, who has worked abroad on and off for the last 10 years even frames starting a career in IT as "the new beginning of his life", providing the stability he never knew he needed. In contrast to Szabolcs, Kinga did feel a lack of stability in her life, feeling like a loser for not being able to sustain herself, even with her parents providing an apartment for her.

> The stability, that really was missing before. From this point of view, especially back then, I felt like this *job* saved me, a bit, but at the same time probably any other *job* would have saved me, if it was stable.
>
> (Kinga, tech support, MA in Humanities, 33)

The stability she is emphasising here can also be understood regarding social status reproduction. While her parents were able to afford granting her an apartment in the city, with her humanities degree she couldn't secure a job that would keep her in a middle-class position, economically speaking.

While my interlocutors mostly highlighted the stability aspect of their new profession, the literature emphasises its precarious nature. The "cybertariat" (Huws 2014) or cyber-proletariat (Dyer-Witheford 2015) is generally understood as the sufferer of the ultimate neoliberalization of labour conditions, its labour being "footloose", its occupational identities being destroyed, forced to remain permanently flexible (Huws 2014). In accordance with this idea, my interlocutors reported having experienced unexpected layoffs, being pushed around between projects or forced to change positions as well as employers frequently.

> And then the project became more and more stressful, it was running out of money, we had to be more productive, and then they saw that I'm only a junior, and that they need someone more experienced. And they were looking for another project for me, to be placed into. […] Then the guy called me one day and said, took a deep breath, »The thing is, we have to fire you because there's no suitable project for you.«
> (Balázs, developer, musician, 30)

> And then they hired us […] and we worked for 8 months in total, because the new project didn't please the first client, and they closed the whole Romanian branch. That was interesting. They called me before Christmas, saying, well, this didn't work out.
> (Csanád, developer, BA in Mathematics, 33)

The workers I interviewed face unpredictability due to the tendency of tech companies to change locations, and thus workforce, habitually. While locally based companies have to compete with a global market that is now available to most IT professionals through the popularisation of the home-office, they are going to great lengths to provide a job environment that stays attractive to the workers. At the same time, they are also constantly pursuing lower labour costs and higher profit. Mechanisms of what scholars describe as capital's will to constantly relocate in search for cheap labour (e.g. Harvey 1975; Henderson 2004), or the "footlooseness" of labour in a digital age (Huws 2014) are known to some of my interlocutors. Csanád for example framed his observation and indirect worries about losing his job due to IT companies moving further away from Romania in a way that blames the flow of unskilled labourers joining the sector, "watering down" the prestige of Cluj IT.

> There are places, where they hire people, cause there's money for it, but they don't put out quality work. And this is a problem, because sooner or later if the companies get saturated with people like these... if someone says, "an IT company from Cluj", that won't mean high quality anymore. And then they will move away. Cause, I don't know, in Bulgaria it's cheaper.
> (Csanád, developer, BA in Mathematics, 33)

However, the professionals I interviewed ultimately consider working in IT a safe path. As Csaba traces back the roots of this understanding, "everyone's been told, right, in the late 80s, early 90s […] that technology is the future, you should understand and process this, and choose your job or school according to this." (Csaba, software tester, MA in Philosophy, 35). In addition, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the IT sector in Romania stayed relatively stable, buttressing the idea that tech jobs are reliable. Zalán, DJ and former project manager at a big regional company reconsidered his aspirations of becoming a full-time entrepreneur in entertainment services during the lockdown, and instead started learning to code. When asked if he sees IT as a firm field, he half-jokingly replied "Well, yes, for quite a few more years, until I retire for sure, yes. Then let's hope AI doesn't take over" (Zalán, developer, former project manager, 26).

This ambiguity between stability and precarity in IT work means an altered understanding of the middle-class positionality: an acceptance of its volatility in the context of a global labour market and continuous technological development. This vulnerability makes both scholars (Mateescu 2022; Guga–Spatari 2021) and IT bloggers (McGrath 2016; Vijoli 2018) contemplate whether Cluj IT will be able to upkeep its growth and solidify in the long run.

The "myth of the middle class"

In her book *We Have Never Been Middle Class*, Hadas Weiss argues that the adjective *middle-class* is constructed to mean "normal", a state supposedly attainable by anyone, devoid of any kind of group-antagonism (Weiss 2019, 22). In the anti-communist post-socialist context, while the concept of class has been eradicated from the public discourse, the "middle class" remains a popular notion, utilised in a normative way. The "myth of the middle class" has been mobilised in post-socialist countries as "a benign category, free of implications of exploitation and social struggle." (Ost 2015, 614) As Crăciun and Lipan argue, such a notion of a middle class captures political potentials and turns them into consumption patterns. Aspirations of the middle class are presented as inherently ethical, and the middle class itself takes on the role of "the favourite subject" (Crăciun–Lipan 2020, 426) of neoliberalism. The

implicit, or sometimes even explicit, conclusion of this discourse is that the state should support and reward those doing well in the market, while it should punish those not fit to be successful (Crăciun–Lipan 2020). This shows the same logic of upwards redistribution with an ideological touch that Chelcea and Druță point out to be a characteristic of post-socialist neoliberal states (Chelcea–Druță 2016).

Márk Áron Éber in his book about the class structure of the Hungarian society argues that the middle class is an illusion that is used to construct the myth that under capitalism, the ideal lifestyle can be achieved by anyone who is willing to work hard (Éber 2020). However, it is harder and harder to see how the social ascension that is promoted by this idea can be achieved. As discussed in recent literature on social mobility, education has lost its potential for facilitating it (Durst–Huszár 2022, 5). "If the credentials we get from school and university ever were entry tickets to gainful employment, they certainly no longer are." (Weiss 2019, 102).

While the phenomenon of mass re-professionalization to IT itself shows the failure of formal educational institutions to bestow young people with professions that lead to stable, well providing jobs – to ascend or to stay in the so-called middle class – it is also reproducing the idea that achieving a decent livelihood is a matter of willingness to adapt, smartness to invest and thus, individual responsibility. While social mobility is generally considered desirable within a society, it is also a marker and solidifier of broader socio-economic inequalities. By suggesting that "whatever your social position at birth, society ought to offer enough opportunity and mobility for »talent«, when combined with »effort«, to »rise to the top«" (Durst–Huszár 2022, 1), the concept of social mobility is putting emphasis on individual effort. That in turn reinforces the myth of meritocracy, nurturing the acceptance of inequalities.

Representing the strata of society that can afford a "good life" (Crăciun–Lipan 2020), the middle class has been produced and is being produced through the convergence of personal aspirations and national and transnational capital interest, "as part of regional and global processes associated with neoliberal politics" (Troc 2019, 89). In his analysis of the suburbanized middle class of Cluj, Gabriel Troc argues that the global capital flow, in search of possibilities of profit maximisation, is creating "opportunities for certain strata of workers to live and define themselves as successful social groups" (Troc 2019, 90). Two main facets of this process on the level of urban development are the transformation of the housing market for the construction of American style suburbs (Troc 2019), and the gentrification of the inner city, making space for centres of consumption, ready to serve and generate the needs of the middle class (Petrovici–Faje 2019).

In this context, Gabriel Troc contends that homeownership is also a part of the middle-class imaginary. While it is rooted in legitimate desires for stability, it is also exploited and inflated by Western capitalist

investors in the city (Troc 2019). While increasing housing prices are a problem in most European cities, in the case of Cluj,[10] this wider tendency is locally being framed as a consequence of the emerging IT sector and the relatively high wages it provides. Thus, both the source of and the solution to this inequality is identified to be the IT sector.

> /And what do you think about Cluj focusing so much on IT?/
> I think it's bad for the city, in the long run.
> /How come?/
> The prices skyrocketed because of it, especially talking about housing. Both for rent, and if you want to buy an apartment. There will be such a huge gap between, there already is, but it will get even bigger I think, between the IT and the non-IT world, that the non-IT world soon cannot afford to go out in the city.
> (Viktor, tester, former chef, 31)

While Viktor contends that paying rent is in itself a struggle for those working in less profitable fields, his main motivation for joining the IT sector was the pursuit of homeownership. He voices a discrepancy between an expected life-trajectory and the reality of living in a present-day housing market, but frames it in an individualised way, a personal struggle, for which joining the sector was the solution, even if it means temporarily giving up on the pursuit of his passion of advancing as a chef.

> In my case, there is a big conflict between, you know, when you're a kid, you imagine where you will be when you're thirty, and where you are in fact. And Cluj is quite an expensive city. And for you to progress, with your own little personal projects, I'm thinking about material things, to own a house and stuff…
> (Viktor, tester, former chef, 31)

Multiple IT professionals highlighted however that, while they are aware of their privileged local positionality in terms of buying power, their wages acquired through outsourcing jobs will only enable them to either buy a house that is "not very beautiful" (Csaba, developer, BA in Mathematics, 33) or that is acquired through a mortgage, having to "keep paying the bank until I turn 70" (Balázs, developer, musician, 30). To avoid this, Balázs's aspirations are to find a job at a tech giant like Google or Facebook – get out of the indirectness of outsourcing and move one step further up on the virtual ladder. Since in order to do

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10 The fact that the minimum wage does not allow inhabitants of Cluj to pay for rent in decent living conditions has been at the centre of the struggles of the city's housing movement for years now (Vincze–Liță 2021; Căși sociale ACUM! 2021).

that, he no longer has to physically move abroad, this shows that while in the public discourse it is considered to be homogeneous, the sector itself shows signs of inner stratification, intersecting and contrasting local class positions and global value chain positionalities.

Social and economic remittances

> "I have to thank you for bringing innovation and modernity to Cluj […] for the fact that you contributed to the creation of the unique *vibe* that this city has, based on innovation, based on a quality of life, based on a capacity to work and to be together and to construct a tolerant, European community."
>
> > Emil Boc, Mayor of Cluj, addressing the representatives of a large IT company on the tenth anniversary of their arrival to the city (Preda 2022)

The mayor of Cluj thanking an IT company for importing European values and vibes is an epitome of the convergence of the myth of the middle class with the post-socialist discourse. In his framing, multinational tech companies directly contribute to a supposed heightened quality of life and a more tolerant, "European" attitude in the city.

Similarly, for Csaba, Philosophy graduate and tester, the lifestyle associated with working in a corporation is not simply a consequence of the material conditions provided by a high earning job, but a cultural coping mechanism learnt from the West to substitute having a meaningful job. While he was growing increasingly disenchanted by his tech job, he started picking up the hobbies he had previously associated with Westerners.

> So, listen to me, while all this happened, I started swimming, I started reading, I started drinking, I started writing. Heavens! So, you know, in the late 90s we were watching TV and saw how many things Westerners do. They do jogging… Well, this is why! […] Everyone is becoming marathonists, triathlonists now. Everyone is trying to do something that doesn't require thinking, but still validates that they are good for something.
>
> > (Csaba, tester, MA in Philosophy, 35)

Csaba understands lifestyle changes as a consequence of a combination of economic and cultural factors. He sees the changes in his own habits and leisure time activities as a consequence of acquiring what he sees as "Western culture", which in turn was a consequence of having a job

that provides high remuneration but low levels of meaningfulness. To provide further insights into this argumentation, I again turn to the scholarship about transnational migration. Scholars who engaged with the notion of "social and economic remittances" (e.g. Kelly 2020; Levitt 1998) argue that by transferring money from the destination countries to their countries of origin, migrants are also sending home values and concepts, creating a flow of ideas with its direction opposite to the flow of labour. Krisztina Németh (2022) similarly makes the case that returning migrants come home with a changed habitus, resulting in altered values and thus ways of consumption. This process is not free of ideological implications. Polina Manolova characterises the socially mobile arriving to the middle class in Bulgaria as having acquired a feeling of entitlement for living a "good life" due to their educational background, entrepreneurial spirit, European values and overall "Western mentality". However, she argues that many feel that to live a "good life" constructed this way, they must migrate to a "civilised" Western society (Manolova 2020). Relocation on the other hand comes with several detriments, among them is a loss of social capital accumulated in the original social context. But this is where working in outsourcing resolves a conflict that migration cannot. What it makes possible is to get the Western wages and ideas in the context of the work life, without actual physical mobility. Creating the IT sector's image as a bubble (Mateescu 2022) serves the purpose of producing a place where "Western" ideas can flourish and get implemented, enabling people to live the "good life", while staying at home.

A final aspect of contextualising consumption patterns and lifestyle choices in the framing of Western vs. non-Western countries is voiced both by Csaba and Dániel. They both expressed an understanding of Romania not being ready for such a socio-cultural leap that the IT sector is providing. Csaba contends that "Central-Eastern Europe is not ready for this", "we are not culturally prepared" for an individualistic corporate lifestyle (Csaba, tester, MA in Philosophy, 35). On the other hand, Dániel, a developer, points to a discrepancy on the level of management of state funds. Compared to other countries where the economy is more balanced and embedded, and social spending is more defined, he sees the Romanian governance faulty for supporting the IT sector but letting the cultural field struggle.

> What I feel like is that it's quite outrageous how there is no other field – and again, I'm mostly thinking about art – that is this well supported. In a lot of other countries where IT is working, it is already sorted out, cause they know that they have to spend on it, and what is happening here is that theatres and theatrical companies are closing up.
>
> (Dániel, developer, MA in Music, 33)

His remark shows a conflict between a classic meaning of middle classness and a neoliberal understanding of it. In the classical sense, the middle class would be the one to promote and support the artistic field, but what is happening in Cluj is the destruction of the cultural sphere in favour of technological development and capital accumulation. The situation that Dániel is referring to is exemplified by a symbolic event in the neoliberal transformation of the city. In March of 2022 the Paintbrush Factory, a well-established contemporary art space operating for 13 years, was shut down. This event was a culmination of a long process of degradation of the independent cultural scene of Cluj (Braniște 2022). What took over the space that became unaffordable to the cultural centre – is offices of IT companies. This brings us back to the other side of the sector's ambiguous status, being part of the creative destruction of the urban milieu both on an infrastructural and on a population level, as a facilitator of a "brain drain". Having gone through these processes personally, despite the high status Dániel associates with working in tech and the benefits he draws from it, he also feels shame for being part of these transformations.

> We have [an office], and, well, for someone who's very close to art, it is a pretty big… *shame*, to say it like that, that the [company's] Cluj headquarters is in the building of the former Paintbrush Factory. Pfff. And I have to work here? And not as an artist?
> (Dániel, developer, MA in music, 33)

Besides a sense of injustice, Dániel also communicates a discrepancy between having a classic middle-class habitus that values art highly, and a neoliberal middle-class practice that is transforming the urban landscape, pushing non-profit fields out of the picture. As scholars have previously pointed out, neoliberal transformations have started guiding urban development. The inner city of Cluj already lost its function as a place for the reproduction of life, and instead became a place of consumption for the new middle class and of offices (Petrovici–Faje 2019). Starting in 2012, and increasingly after 2015 when the city won the title of European Youth Capital, the city's rebranding through "festivalization" began, meaning a refashioning of public spaces in order to host and attract more and more commercial festivals. Companies and politicians' interest in temporal outbursts of economic and social activities (i.e., festivals) were aligned with the local creatives – especially those working in IT (Țichindeleanu 2019). The city government became committed to creating an environment pleasing to the "creative classes" (Florida 2002). Growth and innovation-oriented buzzwords like "talent, technology, trust and tolerance" are the new focus of the discourse of the municipality, referring to no other than the IT sector (Boc 2019).

Conclusion

The post-socialist cities are great targets for digital services outsourcing, since they can provide cheap labour without great cultural and geographical distance from Western European companies. The municipality of Cluj has been tapping into this fact, building an image of a European and "smart" city, for the sake of being attractive to foreign direct investment. The IT sector is the poster child of both the country's and the city's government. On the one hand it is said to provide a supposedly sure way of social ascent or a way to remain within a decent socio-economic positionality for the individual, feeding the myth of the middle class. On the other hand, it symbolises technological progress and economic and cultural connections with the West.

In this paper I argued that the "myth of the middle class" is a constituting element of the "myth of IT", adding a consumption imaginary and a normative lifestyle as a driving force to professional reconversion to IT. While being aware of their semi-peripheral positionality, the workers of the sector do reproduce the ideological discourse of having to "catch up" to the West by putting their own context in opposition to the countries where the products they develop are being sold. The myth of the middle class is contributing to this idea by setting up a normative view of the ideal lifestyle, associated with historically capitalist societies.

While the IT sector has some real impact on the local society, providing jobs and high wages, changing the urban landscape and driving up the cost of living, it is also discursively constructed as a means for social mobility. The "IT professional" stereotype fits into the broader image of the young, motivated, open minded emerging middle-class individual described by Chelcea and Druță, who is put in opposition to the post-socialist working classes (Chelcea–Druță 2016, 530).

Drawing a parallel between labour migration and professional reconversion helps us see how ideas and ideologies get transferred alongside the wages coming from the West, and how the consumption imaginary of the workers of the sector is being shaped by the benefits they get as well as the lifestyle their corporate job allows them to have. Unpacking the myth of the middle class makes it visible that, because of their advantageous socio-economic situation, IT professionals are seen as the protagonists of the local society, setting the terms and the prices of urban life.

It is in the interest of IT companies, the city and the state governance to create an image of IT that is associated with socio-economic ascension to have an answer for questions about inequality, while in fact catering to the interest of transnational capital. Just like how Romania has been exporting its social contradictions through facilitating labour emigration, now outsourcing is another way to do that. Outsourcing also reinforces a dependent development model and reproduces the semi-peripheric positionality, which in turn fosters a specific kind of

subjectivity that is always constituted in relation to the richer and more developed "West". The IT sector being a selected field for state support is most prominently expressed by the tax exemption regarding income taxes of workers engaged in software creating activities. The arguments surrounding the tax exemption reinforce an idea of the sector that is legitimising a dependent development model, while effectively making IT workers "favoured subjects", chosen engines of consumption.

The myth of the middle class on the one hand suggests an imaginary that sets standards for a "good life": eating out, going on vacations, going to festivals, owning a home. On the other hand, it implies a promise, that anyone who's working hard can achieve that. Both of these aspects are prevalent in the discourse surrounding IT, the professionals being one of the main targets of the city's rebranding as a caterer for the "creative classes" and the myth of easy entry to the field and a straight trajectory to high earning jobs serves as a discursive tool for disregarding questions about social inequality. While the consumption imagery surrounding the middle class, such as house ownership, have a legitimate basis, they are also instrumentalized by investment capitalism. There are contradictory effects of the sector on the city that my interlocutors experience. Cluj is becoming an expensive city due to the very same logic that is promised to make it livable for the individual.

My interlocutors share an understanding of their value chain positionality, completing tasks that Westerners would not, for the same wage. They are able to lead comfortable lives on their salaries in the local context, however if they are fostering ideas about owning their housing, outsourcing is not enough for that, they have to consider changing to work for a tech giant, directly. Between stability and flexibility, working in IT means a possibility for moving into the city or moving out of it, of working whenever they feel the most productive but overworking when it is expected. They find stability in their employment contracts and a secured middle-class position. However, they fear their futures being hijacked by capital's moving nature and the very same technological evolvements they help to create.

The case of Cluj is, in many regards, not special. Being an outsourcing heaven, a "smart city", or even "the Silicon Valley" of something are not unique to it. However, the combination of neoliberal governance with anti-communist ideological undertones, and the glorification of the middle class, in the backdrop of a nation-wide migration issue makes it an interesting case of, and scale for, studying neoliberal transformations framed as technological innovation and development, forming neoliberal subjectivities and depoliticizing collective struggles. Understanding what makes a developing industry more than a provider of jobs and an attractor of foreign capital, and seeing how an imaginary is being created that has very materialistic consequences is, I think, useful for other contexts as well.

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