

SPECTRUM HUNGAROLOGICUM

István Dobos

Autobiographical Reading

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PREFACE

In my book, I have attempted the elaboration of a system for re-reading 20th-century Hungarian autobiographies, by way of putting the emphasis on theoretical considerations. (From the "Death of the Author" to the Resurrection of the Author, Stereotypes in Autobiographical Reading) The major analytical aspects of the Autobiographical Reading focuses on the language based means of the representation of the Self. (Language and Subject, Staging the Self, Inter-Replacing Play of Image and Representation, Relationship between the Narrating and the Narrated Autobiographical Self, Memory and Identity) The choice of this subject matter is justified first of all by the fact that the conditions for the interpretation of autobiographical texts of belletristic value went through a fundamental change at the turn of the millennium. This development was due partly to the deliberating of language and subject aspectual insights prompted by a turn in interpretation possibilities in literary scholarship, and partly to the postmodern rewriting of the self-interpreting genre. In this context, it is the destruction and re-creation of binary concepts related to the genre that prescribes the aspectual framework for the reading of autobiographies. The legitimacy of the contraposition in literary works between the factual and the fictitious, between recollection and imagination, between denominations and the denominated, between language and reality, between image and representation, and between the intratextual and extratextual worlds has become questionable.

The theoretical insights of the meaning of autobiography serve, in this book, as the starting point for the analysis of autobiographical texts. I will focus upon four paradigmatic personality constructions of Hungarian autobiography in the 20th century. The choice of Zsigmond Móricz, Gyula Illyés, Sándor Márai and László Németh as examples is due to the fact, that their works are representatives, but since their rhetorical strategies are quite different, make them particularly resistant to a reading that not follows the stereotypes in interpretations of autobiographical

works, I could argue, that the analytical aspects of my reading approach would be true for adhere writers.

I wrote the main part of the book during the period when I was invited as a visiting professor at the University of Jyväskylä by Prof. Lahdelma Tuomo. I wish to thank his support and I'm indebted to Gergely Dusnoki and Kristóf Fenyvesi for copyediting.

Budapest, 15. 12. 2008.

Dobos István

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL READING

In my paper, I will propose one potential way for reading 20th century Hungarian autobiographies¹, by way of putting the emphasis on theoretical considerations. The choice of this subject matter is justified first of all by the fact that the conditions for the re-interpretation of autobiographical texts of belletristic value went through a fundamental change at the turn of the millennium. This development was due partly to the deliberating of language and subject aspectual insights prompted by a turn in interpretation possibilities in literary scholarship², and partly to the postmodern rewriting of the self-interpreting genre. In this context, it is the destruction and re-creation of binary concepts related to the genre that prescribes the aspectual framework for the reading of autobiographies. The legitimacy of the contraposition in literary works between the factual and the fictitious, between recollection and imagination, between denominations and the denominated, between language and reality, between image and representation, and between the intratextual and extratextual worlds has become questionable.

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- ¹ Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály: The Life and Times of the Autobiographical Novel. *Neohelicon*, 1986. 13/1. pp. 83–104. Szávai, János: *Magyar emlékirók*. Szépirodalmi, Budapest, 1988. Kulcsár Szabó, Zoltán: *A személyiség-konstrukció alakzatai a Tücsökzenében avagy egy antihumanista olvasat esélyei. Az olvasás lehetőségei*. Kijárat, Budapest, 1997. 87–109. Séllei, Nóra: *Tükröm, tükröm...* Íróknak életrajzai a 20. század elejéről. Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen, 2001. Bónus, Tibor: *Garaczi László*. Kalligram, Pozsony, 2002. pp. 98–178. Mekis, D. János: *Az önéletrajz mintázatai*. FISZ, Budapest, 2002.
 - ² Bruss, Elizabeth W.: *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976. Derrida, Jacques: *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*. Galilée, Paris, 1988. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Ed. Olney, James. Princeton, New Jersey, 1980. Schneider, Manfred: *Die erkaltete Herzesschrift. Der autobiographische Text im 20. Jahrhundert*. Hanser, München-Wien, 1986. *Studies in Autobiography*. Ed. Olney, James. Oxford University Press, New York, 1988. Nalbantian, Suzanne: *Aesthetic Autobiography. From Life to Art in Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin*. The Macmillan Press LTD, London, 1994.

The readers' expectations concerning the referentiality of literature have also gone through a significant modification. They have invalidated the grounds for contrasting between reflection, mimesis, and creation, and they have also canceled the basis for the distinction between the intratextual and the extratextual. Thus, the purpose of reading can hardly be a restoration of a perfect correspondance between the text and the previously established image about the author, since it is also far from obvious to what extent the autobiographical subject may be considered definite and particular prior to the narration. The texts affixed to the autobiographies, the books published under the name of the author, and the interpretive systems constituting the entire lifework of the author may not replace the kind of reading that focuses on the poetic qualities of autobiographical writing(s). In the following, I will give you a quicklist; delineating the major analytical aspects of the reading approach that focuses on the language based means of the representation of the self.

1. Language and Subject

Taking the notion of a personality existing in the medium of language for a point of departure does not necessarily entail the acceptance of the theoretical insight about the nothingness of the subject³, yet it triggers the concept of the *autobiographical self forming in a text of recollection*.

Human memory retains the acquisition of the surrounding world in the form of language, in which process the image of reality (*l'image du réel*) is created by acts of imagination and the experience obtained through the learning of the names of entities, together with perception. According to Lejeune, the opening question in the case of autobiographical reading is not fully

³ Sprinker, Michael: Fictions of the Self: the End of Autobiography. In: *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Ed. Olney, James. Princeton, New Jersey, 1980. pp. 321-342. Bürger, Peter: *Das Verschwinden des Subjekts* – Bürger, Christa: *Das Denken des Lebens. Fragmente einer Geschichte der Subjektivität*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main, 2000. p. 211.

legitimate from the aspect of the nature and the recording of memories. An image recorded in our memory can hardly be made to correspond with the object of contemplation prior to the written language form. Language is the source, the carrier, and the re-creator of memories, so it would be a mistake to assume that, as opposed to fiction, autobiography reports about events that preceded language. The items in the following list, among others, all support that we keep the possibility of rhetorical reading open. Metaphorical descriptions of the world gone with the passing of childhood (an ever-recurring setting of autobiographical stories), the variations of language based self-reflection, its forms reacting to the readability of the text and to perceptual modes towards images substituting the autobiographical self. In short, all those language based events that restrict the anthropomorphic reading⁴ and, eventually, demonstrate the unpredictability of the forming of meaning⁵.

It is exactly through attempting a unity between language and the subject that autobiography intending to present the self achieves its unstated goal, when it makes the *gap* between the forms announcing about the narrator and those created within the narration accessible for interpretation as a language based act. The examination of the use of language makes the rift between intended meaning (*meaning*) and actual saying (*saying*), or the incomparability of *sagen* and *Meinung*, accessible for the readers, which is closely related to the difference between the *said self* and the *intended self*⁶. The tension arising between the self that has been made the cognitive object of narration and the self forming in the text calls for an epitaphic reading of the autobiographical subject doubled by the creative operation of language. This can be illustrated by the

⁴ Derrida, Jacques: Le ruban de machine à écrire. Limited Ink II. In: *Papier Machine*. Galilée, Paris, 2001. pp. 33-147.

⁵ de Man, Paul: *Autobiography as De-facement*. Modern Language Notes, Dec. 1979. vol. 94. pp. 919-930.

⁶ de Man, Paul: Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics. Critical Inquiry 1982/8. p. 767. Warminski, Andrzej: *Readings in Interpretation: Hegel, Heidegger, Hölderlin*. Theory and History of Literature Series, Volume 26. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987.

imposing prosopopoeia-book of Bettine Menke, just to give you an example⁷.

As regards the manifestations of the assumed referential relationship between the author and his/her equivalent in the text, the sameness of the two subjects cannot be granted because of the representation. Thus, even the author cannot take full responsibility for the statements made in the text. After all, the referential value of confessional forms of pronouncement is unidentifiable by referring language beyond language⁸.

2. Staging the Self The Inter-Replacing Play of Image and Representation

I believe that it is almost essential that narrators reproduce the narrated Self in the state of *crossing the border* towards changing their identity⁹. Writers of autobiography reach their own selves through the other, or the double. For one who recollects, the *staging* (la mise en scène, Inszenierung) of *the Self*¹⁰ offers an opportunity to re-live his/her old self while changing his/her own identity through facing the possibilities surfacing in it. It would be a mistake to consider this production a simple role-play, which would weaken the impression of the factual credibility of the narration. The fact is that the changing self-understanding of an autobiographer postulates a continuous process of losing and re-creating the identity in the course of recollection. The “recollector” establishes his/her identity *through the staging* of the recollected Self, the fundamental condition for which is exactly the need to get

⁷ Menke, Bettine: *Prosopopoeia. Stimme und Text bei Brentano, Hoffmann, Kleist und Kafka*. Fink, München, 2000. pp. 192–203.

⁸ de Man, Paul: Excuses (Confessions). In: Paul de Man: *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*. Yale University Press, New Haven–London, 1979. pp. 278–303.

⁹ Fischer-Lichte, Erika: *Geschichte des Dramas. Epochen der Identität auf dem Theater von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*. Francke Verlag, Tübingen–Basel, 1999.

¹⁰ Iser, Wolfgang: *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1993.

to some distance from him/herself. What happens in the process of autobiographical reading is the mutual substitution of the doubled subjects. The mirror metaphor is somewhat misleading for the purpose of identifying the persons generated during these recurring metamorphoses, as we may assume the presence of much more complicated relationships between images and their representations when in the context of language than in the case of simply facing a mirror.

Fictitious events occurring in life, which are almost inseparable from a writer's *modus vivendi*, become essential parts of the world of an autobiographer who alternates between his/her roles. It is not unusual that even the narrated autobiographical self is willing to change roles, too, and concomitantly, to create an *alter* that replaces and expresses the *ego* in order to be able to contemplate itself in that other. In this case, the self generates itself with the help of what is an imaginative act for others.

The above argumentation can be summed up in the following statement: the basic endeavor of an autobiographer to re-understand his/her own identity can be carried out as an act of staging.

3. The Relationship between the Narrating and the Narrated Autobiographical Self's Encountering the Inconclusiveness of Self-Interpretation

None of the 20th century Hungarian autobiographies making up the canon would fully satisfy the most important requirements of "the autobiographical contract"¹¹. The criterion of the sameness of the author, narrator, and protagonist cannot be satisfied among the overall conditions of the rhetoric's of the forms in the case of autobiographies which render the personal life of the narrator in the form of recollections. Depending on the wandering span of recollections, the changing time relations, and the reviewing or evaluating systems, we need to assume the presence of a multiplicity of constructed and destructed Self-formations in the

¹¹ Lejeune, Philippe: *Le pacte*. In: Lejeune, Philippe: *Le pacte autobiographique*. Seuil, Paris, 1975. pp. 13-49.

narrative. The shared identity of the persons involved in the “autobiographical contract” also presupposes the sameness of the narrating and the narrated Self’s. In the case of narratives of recollection, this effect can be best achieved through introducing the perception and way of thinking of the recollected consciousness into the perceptual reach of the recollecting self. However, the gap between the two separate self’s will not disappear because of the unyielding difference resulting from temporality. Any present tense recollection of past events can withdraw the narrator from the course of recollection only temporarily, while the doubling of the narrators (i.e. the termination of the continuity of the recollecting and recollected consciousnesses) seems unavoidable when returning to the present of the writing

Instead of representing the personal life of the narrator, autobiographies can also be about something else, namely, about roles and parts played in belletristic and critical works and writings. The veracity of these may not be compared to the authenticity of actual events, so the author cannot accept the responsibility for them by providing his/her own signature. According to Lejeune, the suspicion about the contentions of the individual authors is a constant concomitant of the reading process. In the case of autobiographies, it is the stated identity of the persons that becomes doubtful, while in the case of the reception of fictitious stories, it is the difference between the author and the protagonist that gets questioned. The declaration of shared identity prompts the readers to look for differences, while the assumption of separateness inspires them to search for similarities. The interpretation of autobiographies can be significantly influenced by the reader’s recognition of the fact that the narratives do not necessarily state the presence of a continuity between the formations of the autobiographical subject. The readers can hardly find a way to verify the similarities or resemblance (*ressemblance*) among the narrator, the narrated self, and the authorial self, outside the narrative. The so-called referential contract or agreement with the readers does not mean that the autobiographer guarantees the verisimilitude of the image created about reality (*vraisemblance*). Instead, it rather refers to the notion that the narrator reconstructs

the story of *his/her own* life from the unique perspective of the entity that actually *experienced* it. (“la vérité sur tel aspect de ma vie, ne m’engageant en rien sur tel autre aspect.” Philippe Lejeune: *Le pacte autobiographique*. Seuil, Paris, 1975. 36.) Lejeune does not go further than this when he draws the borderline between biographies and autobiographies. In my personal opinion, the distinction between the factual and the imagined and the real and the veritable ultimately depends on the *personal perspectives* of the person who actually lived through and now looks back on the events.

The most important token of the contract/agreement is the analogy present in the names which, according to Lejeune, constitutes the basis for the similarity between the author in the biographical sense and the person speaking in the text. Unfortunately, I do not have enough space in the present paper to provide detailed arguments for the contention that the problem of the identity of voices in autobiographies poses much more complicated questions than this. I would just like to note briefly how Derrida, on the one hand, distances proper names from their origins by referring the “spatialization” of the sign to the name and, on the other hand, opens up a way for the double readability of the signatures by assuming the existence of fictitious and real signatures. The readers, by taking just the signatures for a point of departure, cannot convincingly decide whether they are reading a belletristic or an autobiographical text. The dual readability of the signatures deprives the name of the author of its unconditional authority, the utmost token of the autobiographical contract/agreement, as long as it connects the voice speaking in the text and the author in the biographical sense on the cover of the book. (Jacques Derrida, *Signature événement contexte*. the same author, *Marges de la philosophie*. Minuit, Paris, 1972.) I personally believe that the kind of autobiographical writing that stages the self necessarily overwrites the factual biographical elements. The fact of birth, or even one’s proper name, are not exceptions to this either. In sum, we can say that the source of truth *expressed* in autobiographies is not the factual veracity indicated by the signature provided.

It seems necessary that we reinterpret the relationship between the narrating and the narrated autobiographical selves, based on the

experience of the inconclusiveness of self-interpretation. For a proper distinction of the meanings of the notions, one point of departure could be Georg Misch's comprehensive history of autobiographical writing. According to the approach of the author of this widely acknowledged manual, a normative characteristic of the works of St Augustine, Rousseau, and Goethe, as providers of fundamental patterns for the European brand of the genre, is that the autobiographers undertake the task of introducing the facts of the life path and that of illustrating its symbolic meaning at the same time. The value or merit of representing life in its complete form is determined by the expansiveness of the world-view and the depth and the universal quality of self-understanding. In short, by the so-called "objective truth-value" of the work. The moral truth manifested in the empirical events of the life experience is provided with a symbolic meaning when it is summarized in the closing of the life story. This symbolic meaning is based upon the a balanced and harmonic relationship between the I and the world, i.e. subject and object, the comprehension of which leads the autobiographer to the climax of his/her life in the work. In the works that satisfy the autobiographical requirements, the metonymic and metaphoric conclusions overlap one another, the ending of the story coincides with the symbolic ending point of the self-narrative, the consummated self-understanding. All the above may be summed up from the aspect of the opening question as follows: the narrator undertakes the task of representative self-portrayal following the summary of the meaning of the life story.

The experience of the inconclusive quality of self-interpretation has a different application in de Man's reading of Rousseau. Here, it recognizes the mechanical functioning of the text in the paradigmatic act of accidental and incidental events that do not fit the system, by following an infinite sequence of mutual replacements. This mechanical functioning displays no decipherable operating principle. As he points out, the consequent language based incident cannot be deduced from the system of tropes, and thus the meaning remains separated from the text. The uncontrollable creative functioning of language exerts some influence on the confession,

too, as it becomes a textual allegory of the mechanical acts of apologizing in the reading.

4. Memory and Identity

The autobiographical narrator *creates* his/her identity in his/her personal recollections and, by signing his/her name, vouchsafes for the re-understanding of the heritage that belongs to it.

In the complex perspectual movements of recollections, an interaction of recollecting and recollected consciousnesses has to be assumed, as a result of which, memory and imagination may not be distinctly separated from one another. From the aspect of *the demand for the expression* of the autobiographical subject, it is an issue of secondary importance whether the truthfulness of the narrated events can be factually verified. Fictitiousness and factuality, imagination and recollection, are not mutually exclusive notions when we consider the recollected consciousnesses and the memory of the narrated autobiographical self's. As regards the accessibility of texts, it is perhaps more expedient to refer to various language based, rhetorical, and narrato-poetical modes and methods of *establishing* a personal past in the examples of Hungarian autobiographical writing in the 20th century. The borderlines for the fictive quality are not set by the authenticity identified with factuality but only by the realization of the *expression* of the narrated autobiographical self created in the text.

The origins are connected to the names, and a study of this requires the autobiographer to learn the meaning of the names. The actual goal of the inclusion of narratives of family history into the course of recollections is to search for substitute representative images. The autobiographers create their self-portraits through an examination of the representative portraits retained from the familial store of recollections. In the play of mutual substitutions and replacements, the personality of the autobiographical narrator is divided among the representative selves, as it were. As I have pointed out above, the distinction between the factual and the imagined and the real and the veritable depends on the personal

perspectives of the person who actually lived through the events and now looks back on them.

Autobiographical writing stages the genuine difference we may assume to be present between the recollecting and the recollected self's, and is not satisfied with the reflection of the dissimilation of the two different self's. The changing identity of the autobiographical personality reveals itself in the collisions and conflicts of language based worlds that express various consciousnesses. The difference in the language versions of autobiographical writings can also be traced back to the fact that the (self-)identity of the narrator is inseparable from his/her recollecting activity, and that memory recollects and preserves not only the stories but also the languages which can be used to give voice to them¹².

The interactions among time, memory, and identity can be illustrated by the fact that autobiographers may relate individual stories in several different versions. The possibility of re-writing personally related stories may call our attention to the fact that there are sense possibilities unfolding in the act of recollection which are complex formations in the process of establishing personal identities.

¹² Düsing, Wolfgang: *Erinnerung und Identität: Untersuchungen zu einem Erzählproblem bei Musil, Döblin und Doderer*. W. Fink, München, 1982. Forster, John Burt: *Nabokov's art of memory and European Modernism*. Princeton University Press, Princeton (N. J.) 1993. Guerard, Albert Joseph: *The touch of time: myth, memory and the self*. Stanford Alumni Association, Stanford (Calif.), 1980. Roediger, Henry L.: *Memory illusions*. Journal of memory and language. New York Academic Press, New York, 1996. 76-100. Morse, Jonathan: *Word by word: the language of memory*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1990. Ricoeur, Paul: *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. Seuil, Paris, 2000. *The remembering self: construction and accuracy in the self-narrative*. Ed. Ulric Neisser and Robin Fivush. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998. *Theoretical perspectives on autobiographical memory*. Edited by Martin A. Conway, David C. Rubin, Hans Spinnler, Willem A. Wagenaar, Dordrecht, NATO Scientific Affairs Division and Kluwer Academic Publishers. 1992. 502 pp. *Autobiographical Memory*. Ed. Rubin, David C. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986.

5. Inserted Autobiographical Discourses and Self-Interpreting Configurations

It is through the gaps between the narrated self-interpreting of the narrator and the text of the autobiographical narrative that readers can find the path towards perceiving the conflicts resulting from the *opening up* of the sense possibilities of what has been narrated. The dramatization or the staging of the changes in personal thinking is worthy of special attention in the examination of the relationship between the perspective and the voice that can be rendered to the narrator.

The autobiographical writings of the time period in question almost without exception contain the self-interpreting formations¹³ and configurations which allow for the possibility of a kind of reading that focuses on the poetic qualities of the texts. These inserted discourses multiply the potential referential systems of the narrative. As a piece of embedded discourse, an actual or recollected diary makes the boundaries between the textual worlds created at different points in time relative and easy to cross.

A section of an earlier autobiographical text cited in the recollection, or the summaries and interpretations of the works of the "author" present in the story being narrated, are to be considered as other texts and not simply as mirrors in which the autobiographical narrator rediscovers him/herself. The autobiographers devise a role of a co-creator for the readers in the process of the reading of the faces/images reflected in one another. The re-reading of the sections of diaries, notes, or autobiographical drafts, which tend to surface unexpectedly, allow for a play among the different perspectives of interpretation.

The preliminary announcements concerning the modes of the narration of the autobiographical subject, together with their potential inherent contradictions, direct the attention of the readers to the relationship of the rhetorical strategy of statement and text. From a narrato-poetical perspective, this first of all means the

¹³ Waugh, Patricia: *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious fiction*. Methuen, London-New York, 1984. pp. 1-19. *Métalepses. Entorses au pacte de la représentation*. Ed. Pier, John-Schaeffer, Jean-Marie. EHESS, Paris, 2005.

study of the relationship between the narrator's self-interpreting activity, the narrator's articulation or pronouncement, and the narrated consciousness.

6. The Experience of Estrangement

Paul de Man¹⁴ noted that it is in one's mother tongue, considered to be the most familiar medium, that the estrangement of language can be experienced in the most powerful fashion. Shoshana Felman¹⁵ considered the failure of translation as a transposition of our own irreducible estrangement to the otherness of languages. The ideas selected for points of departure are intended to refer to works born on the borderline between rhetoric's and psychoanalysis. The reason for this is that they jointly provide us with such a language and subject based foundation for accessing autobiographies that can be the starting point for the interpretation of the rhetoric's of estrangement.

At this point, I would wish to remind us to the fact that Freud called the strange *subconscious*, and he likened it to a strange language that is impossible to understand.¹⁶ It was from the direction of the estrangement experience in psychoanalysis that Lacan faced the question of language or rhetoric's. According to the contemporary theoretical approach to the rhetoric's of estrangement, the concept of estrangement is a rhetorical phenomenon, which can be explicated through the mutual replacement (displacement) of the psychoanalytical school represented by Lacan and the rhetorical reading related to de Man. The strangeness of the original language for the users of the

¹⁴ de Man, Paul: *Conclusions, On Walter Benjamin's: The Task of the Translator*. Yale French Studies, 69. Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 25-46.

¹⁵ Felman, Shoshana: *Writing and Madness (Literature / Philosophy / Psychoanalysis)*. Cornell University Press, New York, 1985. p. 19.

¹⁶ *Literature and Psychoanalysis - The Question of Reading: Otherwise*. Yale French Studies 55/56. Ed. Felman, Shoshana. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977. p. 2. Felman, Shoshana: *Writing and Madness (Literature / Philosophy / Psychoanalysis)* Cornell University Press, New York, 1985. p. 18.

mother tongue is exactly as threatening as the experience about the unconscious for the subject that has lost stability. Shoshana Felman notes that Freud likened the operation of *suppression* to translation, and understood it as the failure of translation. Lacan emphasized the possibility of the mutual enlightening of language and estrangement, or unconscious. De Man was reluctant to appreciate the rhetorical transpositions of psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, this way of thinking was not totally alien to him, as long as rhetoric's led him to posing the question concerning the relationship between *language* and *the unconscious*. As he pointed out, language serves the discourse of neither the conscious nor the unconscious, as it is exactly language that determines both: "Far from seeing language as an instrument in the service of a psychic energy, the possibility now arises that the entire construction of drives, substitutions, repressions, and representations is the aberrant, metaphorical correlative of the absolute randomness of language, prior to any figuration or meaning."¹⁷ Put in the perspective of reading, this means that the recipients themselves are also participants in the rhetorical structure of the text.

In my opinion, making a distinction between the rhetorical and the not primarily rhetorical reading of the rhetoric's of estrangement may be quite legitimate. The latter one, in its most comprehensive sense, undertakes the task of interpreting the rhetorical configurations that convey estrangement as an aesthetic experience. The narrato-poetical approach does not dismiss the examination of language based functioning, and renders the rhetoric's of estrangement as aesthetic experience. First, it builds up the system of regulations that control autobiographical operation in such a way as Derrida identified the rules of the genre¹⁸. Next, with the help of this interpretation, it finds the signifying processes that reorganize the principles of the genre. Regarding their effect, and depending on the context, the so-called disseminative language based poetical procedures can also be

¹⁷ de Man, Paul: Excuses (Confessions). In: de Man, Paul: *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*. Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 1979. p. 299.

¹⁸ Derrida, Jacques: *La loi du genre, Parages*. Galilée, Paris, 1986. p. 264.

understood as the manifestations of the rhetoric's of estrangement. In this case, the interpretation conveys the experience of estrangement with the help of the genre identification. Obviously, this depends on which genre concept is taken by the interpretation for its starting point. However, the interpretation of cultural estrangement appearing in autobiographical writings presents yet another new way of reading, the analysis of which should be the subject matter of a separate, upcoming paper.

FROM THE “DEATH” OF THE AUTHOR TO THE “RESURRECTION” OF THE AUTHOR

The notion of disengagement from the author has been a common platform for the major influential schools of literary theory during the past couple of decades. The traditional critical effort of shedding light on the intention of the author has been subject to strong criticism among the most diverse approaches. We could very easily put together a long list of the schools of interpretation that have received theoretical incentives from the critiques against the notion of the author. They range from structuralism through hermeneutics to post-structuralism and deconstruction. It seems that the so-called “death” of the author has become a cliché or commonplace in literary theory.¹⁹ At the same time, it is also an indubitable fact that the significance of this theoretical premise, which has not been reflected upon with due thoroughness of consideration from quite a number of aspects, has moved considerably beyond the scope of the influence of the basic texts produced by Barthes and Foucault, to which it is related by many.²⁰

The majority of the theoreticians explain the enormous success of the notion about “the death of the author” exactly through the fact that it comes from a wide variety of sources and that there is quite a number of various critical interests merging in it. These

¹⁹ Barthes, Roland: *Oeuvres Complètes*. Ed. Marty, Éric. 3 vols. Seuil, Paris, 1993-95. pp. II. 491-5. The essay is available in English in such anthologies as: *Authorship: From Plato to Postmodernism: A Reader*. Ed. Burke, Sean. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1995. pp. 125-130. and *The Death and Resurrection of the Author?* Ed. Irwin, William. Conn. Greenwood Press, Westport, 2002.

²⁰ Barthes, Roland: *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. Cape, London, 1974. Barthes, Roland: From Work to Text. In: *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. Ed. Harari, Josué V. Methuen, London, 1979. pp. 73-81. Barthes, Roland: Theory of the Text. In: *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader*. Ed. Young, Robert. London and Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. pp. 31-47. Foucault, Michel: What is an Author? In: *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. Ed. Harari, Josué V. Methuen, London, 1979. pp. 141-160.

include, for example, the critiques of the intention of the author and those of intentionality in general, the concepts of the structuralist view of language, the turn concerning the theory of reading and of deconstruction about the *écriture*, and the political and psychoanalytical critiques of the concepts concerning the subject. As regards the Hungarian aspects, I should add that, from the 1990s up until quite recently, any self-respecting critic would have reluctant to involve the notion of the author into their interpretations, while on the international scene it was exactly the experiments towards resurrecting the author, and the “institution” of authorship that increased significantly from the 90s onwards.²¹

Among these latter efforts, one of the seminal works was published in 1992.²² Sean Burke’s *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* had a quite remarkable reception in Great Britain, What Burke wanted to do was to “clean” the terrain of theory for the return of the author by furnishing a critical analysis of the French theoreticians. Burke is right in contending that it is far from certain that there is only one single author-concept that can be related to the ideas of *Barthes*, *Foucault* and *Derrida*. Furthermore, the critiques of the author cannot cover all aspects of authorship. Thus, according to Burke, and I fully agree with him in this respect, it would be much more worthwhile if we discussed the changes, re-definitions, or multiplication of the author and the different statuses of the author in the theories of literature rather than trying to “bury” the author hastily and prematurely.

I personally would agree with those who do not generally divide the field of literary theory into two parts (that is, to those

²¹ Debates over authorship have been intense in Hungarian criticism during the last decade. Gács, Anna: *Miért nem elég nekünk a könyv. A szerző az értelmezésben, szerzőség-koncepciók a kortárs magyar irodalomban*. Kijárat Kiadó, Budapest, 2002. and *What is an Author?* Ed. Biriotti, Maurice-Miller, Nicola. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993. Kamuf, Peggy: *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1988.

²² Burke, Sean: *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1998.

who are for and those who are against the author) but rather pose the question of how, bearing in mind the lessons available from the theories of the past decades, the notion of the author changed or what kind of role it can play now in literary theory.

The issue of the author concerns a number of other categories, too, that are traditionally related to it. These are as follows: the intention of the author²³, the notions of biography, the autobiographical aspect²⁴, authority²⁵, responsibility, life work, and pen name or signature²⁶. In my opinion, the critiques concerning the employment of the notion of the author in text-interpretation are far from eliminating the above categories related to the author-issue. What is more, I do believe that the discussion of these notions within the more recent theoretical frameworks represents a fruitful and profitable challenge.

²³ Beardsley, Monroe C.: Intentions and Interpretations. In: *The Aesthetic Point of View: Selected Essays*. Ed. Wreen, Michael J.-Callen, Donald M. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1982. pp. 188-207.

²⁴ I believe that it is almost essential that narrators reproduce the narrated Self in the state of *crossing the border* towards changing their identity. Writers of autobiography reach their own selves through the other, or the double. For one who recollects, the *staging of the Self* offers an opportunity to re-live his/her old self while changing his/her own identity through facing the possibilities surfacing in it. It would be a mistake to consider this production a simple role-play, which would weaken the impression of the factual credibility of the narration. The fact is that the changing self-understanding of an autobiographer postulates a continuous process of losing and re-creating the identity in the course of recollection. The "recollected" establishes his/her identity *through the staging* of the recollected Self, the fundamental condition for which is exactly the need to get to some distance from him/herself. What happens in the process of autobiographical reading is the mutual substitution of the doubled subjects. Dobos, István: Stereotypes in Autobiographical Reading. *Neohelicon* XXXII. 2005. I. 25-33.

²⁵ Minnis, A. J.: *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. 2nd edition. Scolar, Aldershot, 1988.

²⁶ Derrida, Jacques: Signature événement contexte. In: Derrida, Jacques: *Marges de la philosophie*. Minuit, Paris, 1972. pp. 365-393. Derrida, Jacques: *On the Name*. Ed. Dutoit, Thomas. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995. Derrida, Jacques: *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*. Trans. Rottenberg, Elizabeth. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000.

The principle that the author has to be excluded from the analysis of literary works is coeval with modern literary theory. The intention of a clear-cut separation between the author and the interpretation of a literary work appears in the views of both Russian Formalism and Anglo-Saxon New Criticism, where it primarily means a departure from the Positivist concept of biography and from the psychology-based interpretation of literature. The separation of the literary work from the author in this period however appears to be a *methodological* question and not the result or consequence of the ontological statement concerning the literary text or language itself, as in the case of the French Structuralism of the 1960s. According to Barthes, linguistics and studies about language greatly contributed to the theory about the "death of the author." From the point of view of linguistics, the expression of ideas in language comes from a subject and not from a person. The author is simply the entity who does the writing. From the 1960s on, the question of authorship has not been restricted to the field of belles-lettres but rather embedded into the issue of expressing ideas through language, more specifically into the question about the subject of writing. The philosophical criticism about the subject is linked to the critique of the concept of language considered as an instrument. The interpretation of the subject as a construction in language clashes with the Cartesian tradition, according to which the subject can be considered as a consciousness present for its own self. The subjection of the consciousness to more comprehensive structures questions the legitimacy of the procedure of text interpretation that examines the author's biography, psychological mindset, and either explicit or assumed intentions. Thus it becomes questionable about the author whether the authorial subject manages to appear in the language and, furthermore, if the creator of the text has any creativity or originality, that is to say, that special ability of the author to create something that has not existed before by using language for this purpose. The ideas concerning the use of language as an instrument, the presentation of the creating self, the expression of the personality, creativity and originality themselves had been connected to the concept about the author for centuries in the modern age.

The development of the image about the modern author can be traced very well in the so-called copyright debates. Both the French and the English legal practice used to consider the literary works as connected to the individual personality of the author. They used to grant the rights reserved for the author to the person in whose works the traces of creativity, originality and their own unmistakable personality could be located.²⁷ Foucault's already classic essay titled *What is an Author?* criticizes the concept of the author as the owner of the text: "In our culture and undoubtedly in others as well discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risks before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values. But it was at the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century) that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature. It is as if the author, at the moment he was accepted into the social order of property which governs our culture, was compensating for his new status by reviving the older bipolar field of discourse in a systematic practice of transgression and by restoring the danger of writing which, on another side, had been conferred the benefits of property."²⁸ According to Foucault, language is not at the disposal of the author to be shaped at will in order to serve the expression of the self. Within the order of the discourse, the "something" called subject may appear among specific circumstances or under certain conditions. Even a distinct line of demarcation cannot be drawn between the individual works. It is impossible to pinpoint where one text ends and another one starts. The texts permeate one another and their boundaries get blurred in an infinite intertextuality. Thus a piece of literary work may not belong just to one

²⁷ Rose, Mark: *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1993.

²⁸ Foucault, Michel: *What is an Author?* Trans. Bouchard, Donald F.-Simon, Sherry. In: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca-New York, 1977. p. 124.

single person, as it is not a piece of property since it has no boundaries that could be unanimously set. Barthes goes even further than this when he contends that there is nothing in a text that could be owned, including even its quality of being created in language and its meaning. For Barthes, a text is “not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.”²⁹ After a text is published, it gets dispersed and becomes impossible to retrace in other texts. Consequently, it loses its status as “property.” Yet, at the same time, its author also receives some benefit through this process, as s/he becomes exempt from the obligation of direct responsibility. At this point, I ought to refer to the ethical dimension of the problematics concerning the author, that is, to the fact that the *responsibility* of the author keeps reemerging in the structuralist-poststructuralist discourses on the question of authorship.

I believe that the ethical dimension of the concepts related to the “death” of the author is very significant, complex, and intricate indeed. As an aside here, I would just like to call your attention to the fact, Barthes used to take a more balanced viewpoint on the responsibility of the author a couple of years before *The Death of the Author*. In his collection *Essais critique* he distinguishes between two interpretations of authorship through the introduction of *écrivain* and *écrivain*.³⁰ An *écrivain* is a figure who excludes him/herself from society and practices writing not as referential function. S/he is the one who supports literature as an enterprise doomed to fail. According to Barthes, in this case “whether s/he is responsible for his/her opinion is not interesting, and even that is of secondary importance if – more or less in a forward-looking fashion – s/he takes into consideration the ideological implications

²⁹ Barthes, Roland: *Image, Music, Text*. Ed. and trans. Heath, Stephen. Hill, New York, 1977.

³⁰ Barthes, Roland: *Essais critiques*. Coll. Points Essais, Seuil, Paris, 1981. pp. 147-155.

of his/her works.”³¹ As opposed to this, for an *écrivain*, writing is an act, language is to serve practice, and the writer is a member of society.³² Even as early as in the primary school, we learnt that we must not directly identify the statements and views in a book as those of the author, since the author as good as disappears in a literary text. As an insertion here, I need to make it clear that anonymous textuality is a typically eurocentric idea. When analyzing the concepts about the “death” of the author this time we cannot go into listing all the differences between the European culture(s) and those outside Europe, but these can be quite clearly demonstrated through the famous-infamous case of Salman Rushdie, who was excommunicated by the offended religious leaders of the Islamic faith and a prize was announced to the person who would take his life for the publication of *Satanic Verses*. The reception of post-colonial literature can offer numerous examples for the illustration of the differences between cultures and even for clashes between them that are related to the concepts about the “death” of the author, however, for lack of space, I cannot go into details about them now.

Following the train of thought offered by Barthes, we can see that the ideological basis of the “death” of the author discourse is the restriction or the downright questioning of the *authority* of the author. The death of the author is the refutation of the concept that says that the author is that ultimate instance to whom we need to turn when we contemplate literature or when we assume the presence of meaning in a text, as s/he is the one who ensures the legitimacy of the statements made about that text. This critique of authority can be considered to be part of a much broader *cultural*

³¹ “que l’écrivain soit responsable de ses opinions est insignifiant; qu’il assume plus ou moins intelligemment les implications ideologiques de son oeuvre, cela même est secondaire.” In: Barthes, Roland: *Essais critiques*. Coll. Points Essais, Seuil, Paris, 1981. p. 150.

³² “Les écrivains, eux, sont des hommes ‘transitifs’; ils posent une fin... dont la parole n’est qu’un moyen; pour eux, la parole supporte un faire, elle ne le constitue pas. Voilà donc le langage ramené à la nature d’un instrument de communication, d’un véhicule de la ‘pensée’”. In: Barthes, Roland: *Essais critiques*. Coll. Points Essais, Seuil, Paris, 1981. p. 151.

tendency. The modern world, especially the 20th century was characterized by an ever deepening crisis of authority in the field of culture, and this process also expanded to cover tradition and religion. In Barthes' essay, the author, who has been sentenced to death, seems to have an almost divine authority. By the act of de-sacralizing the author, Barthes denies that the author would be the sole source of the literary work and its sole nominee, too. If this were true, then – just like in the case of the relationship between the created world and the Christian God – each and every part and parcel of the text would be permeated by the presence of the author. According to this traditional conception of authorship, as Barthes remarks in *S/Z*, “the author is a god”.³³

Apart from de-sacralizing the author, Barthes also aims at criticizing the man/woman-and-his/her-work type of approach to literature. According to Barthes, the author is also dead as an *institution*: it is the private person with a biography that has disappeared, who does not any more have that enormous power above his/her work that literary history, education, or the public opinion granted to him/her in creating the literary work and in the interpretation of the literary work. “It is language which speaks”, Barthes declares, “not the author”.³⁴

The contemporary theories attacking the authority of the authorial subject diagnose the loss of *sincerity*. This phenomenon is a part of a cultural process of a broader scope of effects. The loss of the possibility of sincerity and of the personal self-expression is connected to the concept of the non-expressive and pre-figurative quality of language for Barthes. He likens language to a theatrical system where compulsion gets the upper hand all the time and from where the author cannot break out. The author can not in any way defeat the absolute “terrorist quality” of language. Foucault also interprets the altered quality of writing in a way that is similar to the above. Writing (*écriture*) is not the manifestation or laudation of the act of writing (*écrire*) any longer, nor is it the placement of the subject into language. Primarily, it serves to open

³³ Barthes, Roland: *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. Cape, London, 1974. p. 174.

³⁴ Barthes, Roland: *Essais critiques*. Coll. Points Essais, Seuil, Paris, 1981. p. 126.

up space here, where the authorial subject keeps disappearing. For Foucault, the “author-function” is not formed “spontaneously through the simple attribution of a discourse to an individual. It results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author. Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author (or which comprise an individual as an author), are projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice. In addition, all these operations vary according to the period and the form of discourse concerned.”³⁵

Modern philosophy, from Nietzsche through Freud to Heidegger, robs the subject of its position that is transcendent compared to truth or language, and also of the idea that a human being could be his/her own author. Discarding the central position of the subject means the deconstruction of the Cartesian cogito tradition, the deconstruction of the notion of the transcendental self which would be a subject accessible for him/her own self. These latter critical theories emphasize that notions like the subject or the author are historical developments and that they can look back on a relatively short past existence. Thus, it is by no means impossible to suppose that they will also disappear with time from the field of human thinking or at least from the center of human thinking. As regards Foucault, it is very important to note that – unlike Barthes – in his concept of the author he never really excludes the possibility of using the notion of the author in our interpretation of certain texts that we read. However, he stresses the point that only a certain group of discourses are equipped with the author-function, and that we should not extend the practice of reading these to every epoch or to all the texts. As a summary of Foucault’s relevant works, we can say that the author cannot be regarded as the source of his/her works even in the texts equipped with the author-function.

³⁵ Foucault, Michel: *What is an Author?* Trans. Bouchard, Donald F.–Simon, Sherry. In: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca–New York, 1977. pp. 124-127.

A complex criticism of the concept of the author-subject as considered being outside the language, creative, and a source can be located in Derrida's works. Here, I wish to refer to only one of his trains of thought, the one in which he deconstructs the engineer- *bricoleur* opposition propagated by Lévi-Strauss. Derrida argues that "If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concept from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*."³⁶ Derrida opines that it is tinkering that makes it possible to create the myth of the engineer. In this false opposition, the engineer is the absolute beginning and creator of his/her own discourse, the "creator of the word." Derrida denudes the author of his/her divine attributes: "In this sense the engineer is a myth. A subject who would supposedly be the absolute origin of his own discourse and would supposedly construct it 'out of nothing,' 'out of whole cloth,' would be the creator of the *verbe*, the *verbe* itself. The notion of the engineer who had supposedly broken with all forms of *bricolage* is therefore a theological idea."³⁷

According to the major contentions of his critique of the author, the author is not the source of his/her work, therefore, s/he cannot determine its meaning either.

As a summary of the critical lessons of deconstruction theories, we can say that the author cannot be regarded as a wholesome biographical-psychological subject who would guarantee the wholesomeness of the literary work. The structure of the literary work cannot be traced back to the biographical-psychological structure of the author. The presenting role of language is doubtful, and the assumption of the wholesomeness of the subject prior to language is unfounded. Due to the lack of a central position of the author, the meaning becomes free, and the infinite play of the denominators makes the writing impossible to close down.

³⁶ Derrida, Jacques: *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*. In: Derrida, Jacques: *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Bass, Alan. Routledge, London, 1978. p. 284.

³⁷ Derrida, Jacques: *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*. In: Derrida, Jacques: *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Bass, Alan. Routledge, London, 1978. p. 284

The “death” of the author concepts grant rights to the *creating* activity of the recipient of a literary work. Barthes concludes his notable essay with the following words: “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.”³⁸ At this point, I must underline that the recipient-centered theories also make use of the findings of the post-structuralist criticism of the author. That is to say, they do not bestow the divine attributes of the author upon the creating, “co-authoring” reader. According to basic assumption shared by the reader-centered theories, reception cannot be separated from the operation of the text. What is more, it has to be taken into consideration as one of the factors in the birth of meaning.

The proliferation of pen names or pseudonyms in Hungarian literature in the 1980s and 1990s can be regarded as a critique of the modern interpretations about the author, while it can also be taken as a manifestation of playing with the role of the author. The writers seem to discover the potential in incorporating the aspects of authorship into the text and into fiction. This phenomenon also has important, typically regional historico-sociological aspects. The games played about the identity of the author represent a departure from the tradition related to the role of the author, which prescribes that the author should take responsibility for whatever s/he writes and assumes that the author has an authorization from the community. On the other hand, the authors who use a pen name consider the political expectations that were posed for literary works before the change of the political regime as a burden, namely, that literature should compensate political publicity for the readers. These works “re-discuss” the question of the interrelationship between the personality and the literary work in a frivolous, manipulative, and provocative way. The explanation for the fad of pen names lies in the internal development of literature, the novel concept about the subject and language, and external historico-sociological factors at the same time. Up until 1989, that is, to the time of the political change of the regime, the

³⁸ Barthes, Roland: The Death of the Author. In: *Authorship: From Plato to Postmodernism: A Reader*. Ed. Burke, Sean. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1995. p. 130.

idea of publishing under a pseudonym had had political connotations primarily. It was customary to use pen names mostly in the realm of the so-called secondary publicity, that is, in *samizdat* literature. In the eighties and the nineties, fiction re-conquers the prestigious field of using pen names and makes it serve the cause of creating literary selves. An example for this could Péter Esterházy, one of the most significant representatives of Hungarian literature, who published his novel titled *Tizenhét hattyúk* [Seventeen Swan(s)] under the pen name of Lili Csokonai. This novel first appeared in sequels in a literary magazine in 1996, then in a book form in 1997, which was then followed by the “revelation” of the actual author, Péter Esterházy. As regards the genre of the novel, it is a fictive autobiography. The lady writer, whose name reminds us of Mihály Csokonay Vitéz, a classical Hungarian poet from the 18th and 19th centuries, was introduced by the same critic in a literary magazine who had also helped Péter Esterházy in his efforts to find recognition as a writer way back when. He recommended the lady writer for the readers pretending to be a very conscientious editor, putting up an air of seriousness all the while.

Esterházy’s book started a virtual avalanche of pen names in Hungarian letters, for a while these pseudonymic publications attracted great attention, almost irrespective of the aesthetic value of the individual books. The primary explanation for this seems to me to be the fact that they provoked the contemporary institutional system of literature. Of course, the editors were initiated, yet the publication under a pseudonym highlighted those external frames among which literature gets revealed to the public, the writer becomes an author, and the piece becomes part of the literary canon. Considerable attention was attached to the changing gender role as well. The name Lili Csokonai is ostensibly a pseudonym, and it calls our attention exactly through this quality to the importance of a pen name that is used by the actual author in the reading process of a text, and also to the importance of the gender of the author.

Tizenhét hattyúk is a text that does not lend itself very easily to reading, as its language is archaic, mostly going back to the 17th

and 18th usage, while the plot evolves in the 1980s. The primary task of the reader is the philological reconstruction of a “readable” text. The story is rather banal. It is about the hard life of a girl who is a worker but the effort to reconstruct the story would need a disproportionately huge amount of energy invested while it keeps the reader in a state of constant uncertainty. The thing is that whatever we find out about Lili will slip out of our hands in the next moment and it seems to be in conflict with the information we received a couple of passages earlier. Furthermore, the doubling of the author, that is, the puzzle of who’s talking, opens up almost all sentences towards a dual interpretation in the first place: one related to Lili and another one, which is self-revealing: (Here is a passage to illustrate this duplicity. The Hungarian text is in heavy archaic vernacular) “Melly lehet vajon a tetöme? Nem igaz, hogy a nőket ez nem érdekli. Vagy akkoron nem vónék nő? [Pray, which one could be the dead body belonging to her? It can’t be true that it don’t interest women. Or is it possible that I ain’t no woman then?]

The text keeps confronting us with the uncertainty of rendering, that is, with the question of whether the person speaking is a woman or a man. The utterances of the narrator cannot be related explicitly to a person who has a sexual identity and who lives in a given historical time period easy to identify.

What kind of theoretical conclusion can be reached on the basis of this phenomenon in relation to the problematics of the authorial identity then? Primarily, one that means that a connection to an author does not necessarily mean the restricting of the interpretation of a text. In a given situation, the text can prove to be a lot richer if we also search for indications in it that allude to its actual author. In *Tizenhét hattyúk*, there are quite a few such easily identifiable indications. For example, in one of the chapters of the fictive autobiography, Lili lists the names of those historical personalities with whom she “went to bed” (she slept with). There are two proper names in the list that contain the name of the author: Miklós Esterházy and Péter Pázmány. Referential reading however is made impossible by the incompatibility between the archaic language and the personality of the narrator. What is happening is that a worker girl in the 1980s presents her life story

full of suffering to us in the language used by one of the most significant 17th-century theologians, the prose writer Péter Pázmány. Lili is unable to develop into a real character in the novel. The narrator's identity cannot find a way to realization. Lili gives herself to the great figures of Hungarian history, among them to Miklós Esterházy, an 18th-century aristocrat of Baroque grandeur, whose descendant is the actual writer himself. Here the fictive author, Lili Csokonai, that is Péter Esterházy's creation appears as the ancestor of the actual writer. So Lili is the fictive *creation* of the actual author and his fictive *creator* at the same time. There is a prime figure in the title. Figure 17 can be divided by one and its own self, and this fact can also be interpreted as a desire for the irreplaceable and indivisible uniqueness of the personality when related to the constant metamorphosis of the authorial subject.

Eventually, I would wish to refer to the fact Esterházy's work, published under a pseudonym, also addressed the criticism that is interested in the subject matters of women and writing, and the language and gender roles. This interest was as good as abused by Esterházy when he released his self-revealing announcement. The act of dual authorship expresses an approach according to which we always ascribe male or female characteristics to the utterances according to whether we suppose a male or female character to be behind them. In the novel, the roles of the fictive female and the actual male authors keep switching all the time, as if the author were toying with the idea of "what if I had been borne a women." The type of thinking along the line of "what if" or "let's suppose that" and the creation of potential worlds, different identities, or the multiplication of the subjects make up an important aspectual

element in Esterházy's prose fiction in general.³⁹ Furthermore, the process of making the authorial identity less and less certain may also be regarded as a part of this game.

In sum, we can say that the "death-of-the-author" concepts in effect stand for the reinterpretation of the role of the author. These considerations are then also reflected upon by literature. What is more, through liberating the potentials of reading, literature recreates the composition of the author, thereby rewriting it into the discourses of criticism.

³⁹ In Péter Esterházy's novels, it is the conditional aspect that is considered the guiding principle. In his *Harmonia caelestis* (published in the year 2000), he renders a fictitious history of the Esterházy family through creating an infinite number of imaginary father figures. Esterházy's narrator rejects the possibility of making a distinction between the autobiographical and the fictional aspects. The following are just a few examples to support this claim: first of all, he obliterates the differences between the actual and the fictitious, between the remembered and the imagined, and between language and reality. For the narrator, who was born at the beginning of the fifties, the real challenge is not represented by the act of precisely evoking the actual events of the past or that of exercising control over his recollections, let alone by the linguistic representation of personal memories, but by the plausibility of creating the self. The novel examines the possibilities for representing the self from a multitude of angles.

STEREOTYPES IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL READING

Stereotyping (and stereotypy) appear to be an indispensable condition and an obstacle – at the same time – of interpreting literary works. Stereotypy, in this paper, is used to indicate the traditional preconceptions and operations within textual interpretation that are created as a result of repetition. We know that there are certain preconceptions attached to individual genres.⁴⁰ Thus, starting out of these preconceptions, literary thinking has abstracted, or rather, established the poetic rules and regulations derived from the works that represent the classic examples of the given genres. Then, and as a result of repetition, these peculiar brands of the individual genres become more and more simplified and, with time, evolve into stereotypes, as a part of the readers' anticipations. Unfortunately, these repetitive formulae of interpretation are responsible for developing partially unconscious and unreflected tendencies in the readers. This lack of contemplation or reflection is preeminently manifested during the shifts occurring in the given literary canons. What happens at such times is that it becomes more and more difficult to address classic works of art with the help of the old stereotypes that are inherent in the reading process. Yet, on the other hand, depending on the available sets of stereotypes in reading, it is also possible to alter the canon and to receive and accept radically new works. It is only in relation to stereotypes responsible for precursory anticipations in the readers that a new literary piece is able to debunk and re-create the concepts of text creation and reception. And, it is in this context that my introductory statement about stereotypy being simultaneously an essential condition and an obstacle for the understanding and interpretation of literary works makes sense, which process, by the way, is one of the factors that guarantee the continuity of literature through its intermittent and cyclic quality.

In what sense am I going to use the term autobiography in this paper? Please allow me to start with an outline of the theoretical

⁴⁰ Vö. Szegedy-Maszák Mihály: *The Life and Times of the Autobiographical Novel*. Neohelicon, 1986. 13/1. pp. 83–104.

framework that I am going to apply in my approach to this issue. This theoretical framework is supposed to prepare the introduction of two pieces taken from Hungarian literature which, in my opinion, did re-write the fundamental stereotypes inherent in reading autobiographical works in 20th century Hungarian literature.

Autobiography can be defined as a narrative genre whose narrator gives an account of his or her own life story in the form of reminiscences. Autobiography is closely related to the genres of memoir, diary, and biography. What differentiates it from these other genres is that a memoir does not take one's personal life for its subject matter, a diary is not necessarily characterized by a look back upon past events, while in the case of a biography, the author and the narrator is not the same person. However, a common feature shared by all these four genres is that they are not purely literary genres. The reason for this is that their authors are not automatically classified as belletrists. In the canonization of autobiographies, the aspect of literary artistic creation frequently turns out to be of secondary importance only, especially when compared with the psychological, historical, or other aspects at work.

The genre presupposes at least three kinds of selves: the self of the author, the self of the autobiographical narrator, and the narrated autobiographical self. According to Philippe Lejeune, autobiography, as a genre, is based on a kind of a contract or agreement.⁴¹ The most important condition and guarantee for this agreement is that the author, the narrator, and the protagonist should be fully identical. In order to comply with the agreement, the reader is supposed to read the text as a reliable account of events that have actually happened, given by a real life, responsible person. On the one hand, the liberty of fictitiousness in autobiographies is restricted by the factual quality of the events related. On the other hand, there is yet a constant suspicion of fictitiousness present in the reading that adheres to the letter of the "autobiographical pact." Namely, in the case of fiction, the text does not state that the author, the narrator, and the protagonist are indeed identical. In this case, the reader, in opposition to the

⁴¹ Lejeune, Philippe: *Le pacte*. In: Lejeune, Philippe: *Le pacte autobiographique*. Seuil, Paris, 1975. p. 13-49.

author, tries to establish similarities among them. As regards autobiography, the sameness of the author, the narrator, and the protagonist is clearly stated. At the same time, the reader is inclined to find discrepancies (defects or distortions) among them. That is to say, the perspective of the author and that of the reader do not necessarily overlap. Even the autobiographical pact cannot fully force the reader to accept the prescriptions of the text arising from the common identity of the names. After all, everything depends on what the reader decides to accept. If, for some reason, the name of the author is not known, the consequence concerning the situation of the genre can easily be as uncertain as in the case of a protagonist who is not named or identified.

According to one of the most important stereotypes in autobiographical reading, the events related are not created by language but instead they are immortalized as it were through the recording of the object of reminiscence or observation in the text. The realm of experience and events in this case is prior to language.⁴² Thus, in autobiography, the role of language is constative rather than performative or productive, unlike in the case of fictional genres. In autobiography, the factual quality of events can be theoretically substantiated. However, the process of arranging the events into a life story presumes a perspective that is irreplaceable. The reason for this is that it is only me who can relate the story of my life from the point of view of the person who has experienced it.⁴³

The need for self-expression and self-interpretation comprises an organic part of the autobiographical venture. It is therefore not incidental at all that, in the histories of the genre, one frequently

⁴² Cf. "Par opposition à toutes les formes de fiction, la biographie et l'autobiographie sont des textes *référentiels*: exactement comme le discours scientifique ou historique, ils prétendent apporter une information sur une 'réalité' extérieure au texte, et donc se soumettre à une épreuve de *vérification*. Leur but n'est pas la simple vraisemblance, mais la ressemblance au vrai. Non 'l'effet de réel', mais l'image du réel." Lejeune, Philippe: *Le pacte autobiographique*. Seuil, Paris, 1975. p. 36.

⁴³ Cf. "la vérité sur tel aspect de ma vie, ne m'engageant en rien sur tel autre aspect." Lejeune, Philippe: *Le pacte autobiographique*. Seuil, Paris, 1975. p. 36.

encounters the metaphor of the mirror. The mirror, according to Georges Gusdorf's theory, stands for a psychological analysis of the self, when it is related to autobiography.⁴⁴ The person desiring self-analysis can contemplate his or her soul in the mirror. As an aside, I must admit at this stage that the feminists rightly apply strong criticism on Gusdorf's theory. The fact is that, according to him, the only worthy subject of autobiography can be someone who has substantially contributed to the systematic development of world history, i.e. an outstanding man. The mirror metaphor is nevertheless important, since autobiography, according to this view, can actually be considered a genre reflecting and exploring the spirituality of the self. Arising from the definition of autobiography as self-scrutiny, all the theoretical declarations are made almost exclusively about western culture.

What is it then that makes the "unified" concept of autobiography, or better to say, stereotypes, in autobiographical reading problematic? First of all, it is due to the fact that post-structuralist theories on the subject have challenged the plausibility of the formulation of the self through language. The concepts about the vanishing of the personality are fairly widely known, so it should suffice if I only very briefly allude to some of the more decisive contexts in this respect. Lacan's work and the related psychoanalytical language criticism belong here in the first place. Roland Barthes has pointed out the impossibility of establishing the foundation for the unity of the text that exists as fabric of languages. He is the one who has canceled the principle of the author and that of the origin. We can also note Foucault, who has challenged the traditional referentiality of the author's name and replaced it with the concept of the function of the text. Thus he undercut the validity of the concept of the artist, of the

⁴⁴ Cf. Gusdorf, Georges: Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie In: *Formen der Selbstdarstellung: Analekten zu einer Geschichte des literarischen Selbstportraits*. Festgabe für Fritz Neubert. Ed. Reichenkron, Günther - Haase, Erich. Dunker-Humbolt, Berlin, 1956. Gusdorf, Georges: Conditions and Limits of Autobiography. Trans. Olney, James. In: *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Ed. Olney, James. Princeton, New Jersey, 1980. Gusdorf, Georges: *Auto-bio-graphie*. Odile Jacob, Paris, 1991.

unmistakable authorial personality so much revered a century before.

There is no doubt that the self, i.e. the narrating subject is by all means the central point of the autobiographical work, which can be approached in a number of different ways. One of the extreme examples of these approaches considers him/her a real-life person, while the other extreme would simply make do with a rhetorical trope. In the case of this latter position, it is questionable if a relationship can be established among the author, the narrator of the autobiography, and the narrated autobiographical self. Consequently, there is a risk that the self becomes nothing else but a textualized sign, and thus the autobiography becomes indistinguishable from all other fictional texts.

Nevertheless, the completely identical quality of the author, the narrator, and the protagonist in autobiographies does not mean that there is also a perfect continuity between the reminiscing self and the recollected self. On the contrary, one of the essential guarantees of the authenticity of autobiographies is a distance between the two selves, as long as we accept that the human personality inevitably undergoes certain changes in the course of time.

The rising interest about the theoretical considerations around stereotypes in autobiographical reading is not entirely independent of the recently available international research findings, which frequently involve the re-interpretations of the classics of autobiography, to which I can only allude briefly in the rest of my paper.

One of the recurring questions in the critical literature on autobiographies concerns the issue of the authenticity and verifiability of autobiographical stories from the aspect of the world outside the text. In my opinion, the verification of texts from the aspect of facts, even in the case of contemporary authors, can only be partially carried out. Paul Ricoeur's book called *Soi-même comme un autre* can assist in accepting the fact that there can hardly be a way for verifying the events that occur in one's soul.⁴⁵ The reference of spiritual events is available even for the person experiencing them

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, Paul: *Soi-même comme un autre*. Seuil, Paris, 1996.

as verbal reference and not as factuality prior to language. The fictive and the actual are textually conditioned.

There exist certain scholarly texts which are focused on the discursive undermining of the genre of autobiography. These efforts provoke a revision of the readers' expectations. Because it is fairly widely known, it should suffice if I only allude to the rhetoricity theory of Paul de Man, which claims the unidentifiability of fictive and non-fictive in autobiographical narratives.⁴⁶ Beside the uncontrollable mechanisms of language, we can also see quite frequently that a number of contemporary literary texts do not validate the traditional story-focused quality of autobiography. Instead, they suspend the goal-oriented process of the narrative, loosen the discursive logic that connects the individual elements of the story to one another, and break up the temporal and spatial relations corresponding to the experience of verisimilitude. I think that these features of the texts can also be the result of conscious artistic efforts. They exploit the possibilities of language that allow for the free reign of productive reading and thus rewrite the stereotypes in autobiographical reading. The way I see it, referentiality should not be defined as opposed to textuality. By textuality, here I mean the way the poetical-rhetorical mechanisms of the texts work. In my opinion, it is not at all just in the sense of the free and uncontrollable play of the meaning that we can discern textual dynamics in the autobiographical text. The fact is that the textualizing processes do not only withdraw rules from the interpreter of the text but also impose new rules, which force the readers to follow textual movement. Therefore, the functioning of the text cannot be subordinated to the subversive arbitrariness of the readers either.

⁴⁶ "Far from seeing language as an instrument in the service of a psychic energy, the possibility now arises that the entire construction of drives, substitutions, repressions, and representations is the aberrant, metaphorical correlative of the absolute randomness of language, prior to any figuration or meaning." de Man, Paul: *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 1979. p. 299.

Following this brief theoretical elucidation of the meaning of autobiography in this paper, I will focus upon introducing two paradigmatic personality constructions of Hungarian autobiography in the 20th century, which did re-write the stereotypes in reading autobiographical works.

The dissolution of the boundaries of the self is manifested in Lőrinc Szabó's *Tücsökzene* [Cricket-Chirping], while the postmodern multiplication of the self is illustrated through *Harmonia caelestis* [Celestial Harmonies] by Péter Esterházy.

Lőrinc Szabó's grand composition called *Tücsökzene* [Cricket Chirping] was published in 1947, and it came with the subtitle *Rajzok egy élet tájairól* [Drawings about the Landscapes of a Life]. The title refers to one summer night when, prompted by the chirping sounds of crickets through the open window, the lyric self begins reminiscing about past moments. What follows is the poet remembering the course of his life with the purpose of contemplating on the meaning of life. The first poem removes the poet from the "superior" position of a creator of texts. According to its self-reflexive code, it is the text that produces the self and not the self producing the text. The chirping of crickets, as a reflection on the process of remembering, keeps recurring in the text, while the self appears in a number of different versions.

In *Cricket Chirping*, the guiding principle of the genre of remembrance and autobiography is implemented in such a way that the self is present in its split quality, acting or speaking at different points in time, and the reminiscing self and the recollected self are not identical.⁴⁷ There are various kinds of voices that emerge in the text, and even the reminiscing self is not identical with himself. Thus the recalling-reminiscing entity cannot be circumscribed since the owner of the voices cannot be pinpointed. So the personality in *Cricket Chirping* is vocal in a multitude of voices, however, sometimes it is quite impossible to decide in which temporal position. The texts emphasize their own linguistically and rhetorically created quality. The treatment of one

⁴⁷ Kulcsár Szabó, Zoltán: A személyiségkonstrukció alakzatai a *Tücsökzenében* avagy egy antihumanista olvasat esélyei. In: Kulcsár Szabó Zoltán: *Az olvasás lehetőségei*. Kijárat, Budapest, 1997. pp. 87-109.

and the same topic in several consecutive poems creates a structure of utterances built upon compound shifts of point of view. Consequently, the personality is not at all homogeneous, and it cannot be characterized with the help of a single comprehensive strategy. The speakers do not control the entirety of the memories prompted to be recalled by the chirping of the crickets: “életem beszél, s amint hallgatom, / mondom, amit mond” [my life is talking, and as I listen to it / I say what it says]. The subtitle “rajzok egy élet tájairól” [drawings about the landscapes of a life] refers to the fact that, in order to represent a re-created life, more than one voice is necessary. The linear structure of autobiography becomes decomposed in this piece. The text is unable to reconstruct the personality in the form of stories. The de-centered structure indicates exactly the fact that the past has not come together in one single unity, i.e. it has not “recorded itself,” and thus the position of the self can be assumed to be more like a plausibility than the virtual space reserved for the self.

Péter Esterházy, the author of the second piece selected for the purpose of analysis is reputed to be a significant innovator of form in the history of Hungarian autobiography in the twentieth century. In his recent *Harmonia caelestis* (published in the year 2000), he renders a fictitious history of the Esterházy family through creating an infinite number of imaginary father figures. Esterházy’s narrator rejects the possibility of making a distinction between the autobiographical and the fictional aspects. This narrator first introduces and then duly debunks the basic stereotypes inherent in reading autobiographical works. The following are just a few examples to support this claim: first of all, he obliterates the differences between the actual and the fictitious, between the remembered and the imagined, and between language and reality.⁴⁸ For the narrator, who was born at the beginning of the fifties, the real challenge is not represented by the act of precisely evoking the actual events of the past or that of exercising control over his recollections, let alone by the linguistic representation of personal memories, but by the plausibility of

⁴⁸ Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály: *Újraértelmezések*. Krónika Nova, Budapest, 2000. 185–194.

creating the self. The novel examines the possibilities for representing the self from a multitude of angles. In the narrative, it is the conditional aspect that is considered the guiding principle. Therefore, the text is worth reading chiefly as a specimen of continuous playful border crossings between the individual genres. The binary opposition between truth and lying, as well as the one between image and likeness is invalidated as early as in the first three numbered sentences of the novel. The text thus emphasizes the made-up quality of the characters featured in the Esterházy's saga. Esterházy's narrator never ceases to search for the personal meaning of the lives invented. He keeps on probing the feasibility of writing autobiography. The way he does this is by imagining father figures and continuously re-creating himself along with, and through, these ever-changing figures.

At the most basic level of the story-telling, the presence of the conditional aspect, or the *als ob* quality, is due to the fact that the fictional narrator of the novel treats fancy and memory on equal terms. At the same time, the novel also gives the impression of being an example of literature about literature. The narrator's reflections focused on a novel which is being written simultaneously have a very important role in it. Esterházy re-writes the various types of autobiography in an ironic fashion with the help of the literary figure called "a novel about a novel." It appears that the novel incorporates the stereotypes of reading autobiographical fiction only to suggest that these are mere clichés and, as such, unsuitable for the interpretation of the same text which has been just read. Apart from the conventions of autobiographical writings, the novel also incorporates the re-interpreted versions of family sagas, historical novels, tales, legends, genealogies, and of several minor genres, such as jokes, anecdotes, and short stories. Similarly to the earlier novel called *Bevezetés a szépirodalomba* [Introduction to Belles-Lettres], *Harmonia caelestis* can also be dubbed an introduction, in the sense that it first debunks and then re-creates the conventions of the genre of recollections-based autobiographies, and the related stereotypes attached to them, and thus prepares the readers for the reception of narrative forms hitherto absent from autobiographical writing in Hungary.

Esterházy's book questions the validity of the most basic rules of the genre of autobiography. With some exaggeration, one could say that even the actual starting point of the novel is not evident either. The book allows for several potential beginnings, thus ironically evoking the unresumability of the autobiographical convention of the original starting point as such. The narrative opens up free passageways among the realms of recollection, self-interpretation, and the novel form. However, it remains to be decided which one of these realms can be considered the primary one.

Personally, I would think that it is the representation of the attempt at understanding one's self from the father's point of view that makes it possible to read the novel in the spirit of reinterpreting the conventions of autobiographical writing. The narrator consistently refers to himself as "édesapám fia" [my father's son]. As I have mentioned above, he offers a catalog of various father figure portraits. Regarding these portraits, he fails to provide an answer to the question who this person actually is ("ki is ez az ember"). It also remains undecided whether it is the son or the father that the Hungarian question word "ki" [i.e. who] refers to in the novel. *Harmonia caelestis* [Celestial Harmonies] is still connected to the tradition of autobiographical writing if we accept one of the potential interpretations suggested by the book. According to this, the boundaries for self-understanding and self-narrative are always set for the individual by the inaccessibility of the meaning of another person's life. "Apám fia vállat vont, nem értette apámat." [My father's son shrugged his shoulders, he did not understand my father.] (50) The sentence cited here can be perceived as the summing up of this experience in understanding.

The self, or the "I," which the narrator refrains from uttering, appears to be temporarily identifiable only in a relationship with the unfathomable meaning of a fictitious other person. Even so, the narrative parts intermingling with self-interpretation are incapable of erasing from the text the question of "ki vagyok én" [Who am I?] related to the notion of the autobiographical subject. This autobiographical subject is a divided entity in Esterházy's book, where the schism between the narrative self and the narrated self seems to be insurmountable. The doubt concerning the identity

and the linguistic representation of the self can be illustrated through the ironic sentence 207 in the book made up of numbered sentences. “Eltűnt közte és a világ közt a különbség, és édesapám úgy érezte, most ő az Ich-Erzähler.” [The difference between him and the world disappeared, and my father felt that it was him who was the Ich-Erzähler.] The portrayal of the image of the father as a figure means supplying various faces and removing them, and this process of constant defacement proves to be infinite. The character that is supposed to serve as the structural focus keeps losing or blurring his own outlines. One wonders if the fiction of the evolving novel is able to create a distinct personality for the narrator. How much can we possibly find out about a narrator who is reluctant to pronounce “I” directly? Who can provide the meaning for the cycles of figure and role changes? The actually open question posed by the novel is about the issue of the identifiability of this “who,” i.e. the essence of the autobiographer’s self.

Esterházy provides a re-interpreted version of one of the important stereotypes in autobiographical reading through exempting himself from the autobiographer’s obligation to directly expose himself.

A reference to the above issue is also present in the subtitle of the book. *Egy Esterházy család vallomásai* [Confessions of an Esterházy Family] rejects perhaps the only enduring rule about the genre of *confessio*: confessions can be made only by individuals and never by communities.

The novel challenges one of the stereotypes in autobiographical reading, i.e. the unity of the autobiographical self in a number of different ways. However, the invented narrator fights an uphill battle against the language that refers back to the subject that performs the narrative task. This feature again demonstrates that the images of the father figures basically reveal his own self, even if he replaces first person singular with third person singular forms. The appellation my father’s son is forced to comply with the constraints imposed by the language, and thus it re-enters the mark of the subject of autobiography into the text.

Finally, I would like to stress and underline that I do not in any way whatsoever wish to set any sort of linear historical direction through the sequence of the two pieces discussed in this paper based upon the logic of how they use and debunk at the same time the existing stereotypes available in reading a given genre. The history of Hungarian autobiography in the 20th century also demonstrates the fact that, in literature, one should assume a historical interaction between stereotypes, forms and languages rather than a linear progress. The conditions for these interactions change from time to time. The direction of the dialog between the individual pieces cannot be exactly identified and, from a lot of aspects, the process of literary history is unpredictable.

I think that it is crucial that we clearly see the following. In any given time period, there is not just one dominant literary discourse. It also seems obvious that the conditions for the dialog with the past change from time to time as well. It is contemporary literature that is especially capable of adding innovative aspects to traditional interpretations and of revising the stereotypes in reading. The historical identity of works of art is not established once and for all, and this goes also for the pieces presented above.

PARABLE AND REMINESCENCE THE RE-WRITING OF THE FAMILY HISTORY (ZSIGMOND MÓRICZ: *THE NOVEL OF MY LIFE*)

1. The Scene of Existence of the Autobiographical Self Rhetoric and Representation

The title of the first chapter of the book, *Csécse, Boldog sziget* [Csécse, Blissful Island] contains an identification between the name of the village as the birthplace and the “island of bliss” that “sinks” with the passing of childhood. The birthplace is presented through a system of tropological transpositions. A system of similes, images, and metaphorical configurations *makes up the setting for the narrative* in the opening scene. The tropological movement establishes a mutual exchange between the spatial components of the settlement and the local natural entities. The main street turns into a river, parallel to which runs the actual river, called *Tisza*. The houses pressed close together on the lots are like huddled horses, expressing the fact that the people living in them depend on one another. Nothing can withstand the might of the water storming the ground. The spectacle of the coffins floating on the surface of the river that has flooded the cemetery suggests that the dead are as powerless as the living when facing the blind forces of nature. The homes of the latter resemble catafalques.

This opening picture concentrates the notions of threat and destruction. In contrast, autobiographical narratives in general tend to evoke the images of the place of birth in their opening sections. “The novel of life” with a first person singular possessive ending in Hungarian (*életem*) begins with a manifestation of inescapable death or, to be more precise, with the demonstration of the fact that you cannot turn back the time. The recollection of the birthplace is what prepares the birth of the narrated autobiographical person in the prelude of *Életem regénye*, while the narrator projects a cessation in the continuity of the generations by validating a historical perspective: “As if life were closed down with this present

generation, and there is no room any more for new ones.” (23)⁴⁹ [all the cited passages in the text are my translation]

This autobiography in the form of a novel is made up of three parts. In the (sub)titles of the parts, there are metaphors taken from nature, related to the settings of the life, and these metaphors are supposed to summarize the meanings of the parabolical / allegorical recollections. The inserted autobiographical discourses produce rhetorical combinations / associations which undermine the meaning of the mimetic tropes of representation.⁵⁰

2. The Reinstatement and Reproduction of Family History Inserted Discourses and Self-Interpreting Configurations

The autobiographical narrator here conducts research in the archives on the history of the particular settlements. It is the results of this research that he uses for complementing and for adding time-related depth to his personal recollections. A special feature of the book is that the analysis of the archival sources and the narration of the family history are treated as equals and actually interpenetrate each other. Both activities necessitate in establishing a dialog between past and present for spanning the temporal difference. The reason for this is that there is no private tradition for a start. In order to unearth it, the recollecting self must acquire or appropriate it first. He must interpret it or, rather, he must find some sense in it. Thus, the autobiographical narrator, in the role of the author-commentator, undertakes the task of liberating the meaning of the historical memories handed down to him. The fact is that the message of the source texts is far from being self-explanatory. The appropriation of the tradition requires a diagnosis or an interpretation of itself. The autobiographical narrator becomes the

⁴⁹ The page numbers in parentheses after the cited passages in the text refer to the following edition: Móricz, Zsigmond: *Életem regénye*. Szépirodalmi, Budapest, 1953.

⁵⁰ de Man, Paul: Excuses (Confessions). In: de Man, Paul: *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*. Yale University Press, New Haven–London, 1979. pp. 278-303.

“historian” of his own family history in order to access the historical heritage “found” by him through counterposing the perspectives of past and present: “How are we supposed to make sense of the statement in a 16th century tax assessment that *Csécse* comprises one and a half tax-paying lots... when today, according to the 1930 census, the population of *Csécse* is 371 people...” (23) It is characteristic of the attitude of the writer of the self that his historical explanations take real-life experience and a concept of the surrounding world for points of departure. “What kind of mysterious forces can be at work in the life of peasants that make them live in the same proportion and style and under the same law for thirty generations?” (Móricz 1953, 23) goes the question of the re-collecting self. The autobiographical narrator attaches crucial importance in the survival of this lifestyle to the fact that customs and value-systems are handed down from one generation to the next.

It is through the strict order of reproduction that he explains the permanence of life in the village. The time and space of existence in the village are as unvaried as those living in them: “no family has ever left these narrow parallel parcels in order to try their luck somewhere else. You find the same names in the school attendance registers or in the real estate register today as thirty or sixty years ago, and each generation repeats these same names.” (Móricz 1953, 24)

The writer of the autobiography collects data to fill in the gaps in his family history. He records the narratives of others and attempts to put together the puzzle out of the shards of memory inherited by word of mouth.

The father and the mother of the autobiographer are two people with diametrically opposing characters. The father came from among the poorest peasants, while the mother grew up in the family of a relatively well-to-do parson. The writer of the self investigates the reasons for his parents’ mysterious encounter with each other with such a resoluteness that is familiar to us from detective novels based on ratiocination, which is indeed an investigation into the origins of his own personality. It is with the meticulous methods of archaeologists that he tries to fill in the missing parts of the family history of his father, an orphan from

the age of three. He devotes an equal amount of attention to each and every detail, as he may not know for sure which part or component could prove to be significant in the restoration of memories. He presents the familial genealogy by listing as many names, locations, and personal data as possible. The lengthy lists of the relatives serve the purpose of consolidating the notion of his identity. He is especially proud of his father, since the latter could become independent and promote himself despite the fact that he had been an orphan.

The collection and the most detailed presentation of the traces of origin evoke an opposite reaction in the readers than expected. The recording of the data about the ancestors in a catalog form becomes almost incomprehensible after a while, since the writer simply reports what his sources say, and he does not recognize the connections between the individual data within the pile of information gathered. The uncertainty of the writer may also be illustrated by the introductions to the words of informants recorded in indirect speech, which invariably make the truth value of the statements relative. There is simply no referential but only a verbal means of proving the validity of the recollections that start with the words "as far as s/he knows."

Due to reported quality of the speech of the informants, there is a fairly large number of different discourses included in the recollections. The writer achieves a polyphonic quality through the reproduction of these different language variants. He cites the words of the popular storyteller as well as he quotes gossips and rumors, too. The same way, he pays attention to the mimetic possibilities present in the language of the archivists, the experts on physiological constitution, the ethnographers, and the experts on community history. These latter serve the purpose of intensifying the referential effect of the non-fictional biographical data. The possibilities for a mapping-oriented reading in the case of *The Novel of My Life*, however, are pretty much restricted.

As early as in the opening section, *The Novel of My Life* puts special emphasis upon the language-rhetorical conditioning of the world depicted in the narrative. Even in the opening of the novel, there are diverse speech variants voiced. It is also discernible that

the writer renders language roles to the individual subject matters of speech. For him, the various tones, and even the vernacular words, serve as the media of self-exposure. As an example, I could offer the fact that the memories related to the maternal side in the family are presented in a rudimentary and impoverished language. This corresponds to the faded familial memories, yet, at the same time expresses the desire of belonging there, as the writer is strongly attached to his scarce and, metaphorically, “destitute” heritage. This is the explanation why his language use assimilates to the “faded” and meagre memories.

It is difficult to coordinate the autobiographical expectation about the narration of actual past events with the articulation of the voice liberating the notions of the freedom of fictionalizing. The latter of the two points out the malleability or adaptability of story-telling: “The parsonage of *Csécse* also had its own novel, and it was this novel that launched further life-novels.” (Móricz 1953, 32) By leaving open the possibility of a life that follows the conventions of belles-lettres, the writer suggests that story-telling in a sense adapts to its own rules and does not comply with the actual course of events in life: “This is how the minor family legend went, and it turned out later that it had an expanded deluxe version, too.” (Móricz 1953, 33)

The repetitions also direct our attention to the textual configuration of the writing of the self. The status of being an orphan emerges in several versions in the novelistic autobiography. Both the father and the mother of the writer appear to be orphans, and even the grandfather on the mother’s side, the old parson of *Csécse*, marries an orphan girl.

The intrusion of the conceptual elements of legends into the narrative does not invalidate the genealogical scheme, yet it establishes a multitude of narrative versions. Through this effect, it highlights the fictive relativity of the stories, as long as they appear to be the products of inserted discourses, conveying memories.

The autobiographical narrator emphasizes in his self-interpretations that he only receives and forwards the inherited memories. The consequence of this, however, is that he refuses to take any responsibility for the authenticity of whatever has been said

which, basically, is tantamount to suspending the autobiographical contract.

3. Identity and Cultural Estrangement The Parabolic Quality of the Narrative

The symbolic sense of the genealogical order is already suggested in the opening section. There are two houses that stand out among the others, both physically and symbolically, in the world of the village: "My mother's house is on the east: this is the nest, the origin, the *ex oriente lux*. My father's one is on the west, which is the direction of the future and of culture ... and how moving and pleasing it was for me to see when, as a young student, I returned to the village from where I had been taken as barely six years old, that the once deserted house of my father had become the school building of the village." (Móricz 1953, 24) As I have pointed out before, the autobiographical narrator creates a tension similar to the one used in ratiocinative novels while searching for an explanation for the marriage of his parents. Since his parents were of opposite extraction and of contradictory stature and mind, he needs to find an explanation for his own birth, too, which poses a puzzle for him to solve. He hopes to understand his own nature and personality, inherited from his parents, by way of decoding the symbolic contents expressed in the objectified memories of the parental heritage. This is the reason why he undertakes the study of his father's and his mother's genealogies to a much greater extent than in average family sagas.

The spatial metonymies and notions of movement used to describe the different lineages of the parents match perfectly, as every element of the system fits like a puzzle. The ascending paternal family is situated on the east, at the cardinal point of the rising Sun, whereas the descending maternal ancestors are located on the west, where the sun goes down.

The father is reluctant, and even unable, to hand down the memories about his own family, since he was only three years old when he became an orphan, and his rough and profane stepfather

never respected the memory of the boy's parents. This childhood instance of humiliation on his part may be the reason why he wants to interrupt the narrative of the family history. From another angle, the father's silence may also embody the intention to keep his lowly origins in secret. As a matter of fact, the writer of the autobiography intends to unveil the secret of his own birth, and this is why it is important for him to get to know the ancestry of his father. He is compelled to collect everything, including even the most inconspicuous remarks and dropped hints, in order to rewrite the small stories preserved in the memory of his relatives. He hopes that, by mapping up the collective familial memory, he can reinstate the continuity of the previously interrupted family tradition.

The *repetitions* can also strengthen the *parabolic quality* in *The Novel of My Life*. The author-commentator identifies the basic difference between the paternal and the maternal heritage in economizing, where the former is associated with the compulsion to produce the daily necessities, as part of the peasant ethics, and the latter with the "fixed salary clerical morality." A characteristic feature of the writer is that he identifies morality with lifestyle and, in a certain sense, contrasts it with intellectual activities. He *idolizes* his paternal ancestors who chose the peasant lifestyle. Conversely, he makes the rumors concerning the alleged ethical blunders of his clerical ancestors public.

He tries to make sense of his aversion to the intellectual branch of his ancestors on his mother's side by a conditional acceptance of the narratives that show them in an unfavorable light and by considering other versions when weighing the moral implications. At these parts of the text, the first person singular narrative shifts into third person singular, that is, into utterances that reflect an external point of view, by representing a narrator outside the story. This kind of shift in angle and point of view can be taken for the expression of repugnance towards the offsprings of the ancestors with ecclesiastical affiliations.

It is an unveiled estrangement that the reminiscing self encounters in the milieu of the maternal family, while the presentation of the other side offers him the possibility of full

identification. He is always enthusiastic when elaborating on his father. Trying to leave behind destitution, the father purchases a threshing machine but his enterprise goes bankrupt. The failure of the father results in the collapse of family safety and a complete change of lifestyle. The boy, who looks upon his father as role model, has to put up with the shame resulting from the sameness of their surnames and also has to suffer from getting into a strange environment. After the home, representing safety and protection for the child's consciousness, the involuntarily chosen place of residence is stored in his memory in its threatening spatial strangeness. His most humiliating recollection is about a mocking expression, *Cic móríc*, which was given to his failed father as a nickname. It stays with him for his entire life, undermining his self-appreciation, hurting his self-esteem, causing an irredeemable inner trauma. For the puerile consciousness, it is senseless that the whole village denounces him and his family despite the fact that they are innocent. It is through his own exclusion that the narrator understands the gravity of the bill on the segregation of Jews debated in Parliament on April 18, 1939, at the time of writing the autobiography: "'*Cic móríc*' and we had to be prepared for death, for excommunication, for exile: this is why we had to disappear from the village, we had to emigrate so that we would never again hear the chorus of old and young, kids and graybeards, starting to laugh, bark, and guffaw when they happened to catch sight of any one of us: '*Cic móríc*'" (Móricz 1953, 309)

4. The Relationship between the Narrated Autobiographical Self and the Autobiographical Narrator The Parabolic Quality of Recollection

In the first part of the book, the narrator of *The Novel of My Life* offers the readers a selection not from the events of his own life but from family legends and reminiscences that exist as parts of various vernacular or language worlds. In a similar fashion, the consciousness of a child would also get to know the surrounding world through these mediating vernaculars or language uses. For

an understanding of the relationships between narrators and narrated consciousnesses, or between recollection, inserted language, and identity, it is expedient to resort to the speech theoretical disquisitions of Mikhail Bakhtin, who contended that the language of novels was genuinely multi-dimensional (*heteroglossia*): “Originally, I come to my senses through others: it is from them that I receive words, speech patterns, and tones, and I use these to create my original assumptions about myself.”⁵¹

The writer of the self emphasizes the significance of the familial memory identified as language inheritance. Through this, with a little bit of exaggeration, he also offers the interpretation possibility of *staging the self* according to which the autobiographical personality is represented through *preliminary or prior* discourses. What this means in its complexity is that the autobiographical self is staged or produced by precedent languages for his/her own self.

The need for a special listening to language in *The Novel of My Life* expresses the desire of the reminiscing self to face his own self. In this textual frame, however, language does not primarily convey or report stories, events, or actual utterances but rather interpretation possibilities embedded in discourse, which make it possible to access memory as such.

In *The Novel of My Life*, the issue of the possibility of establishing the autobiographical subject is inseparable from the languages reporting the family legendary. For the recollecting self, it is not factual credibility but the *truth*, finding expression in the precedent discourses, that is important. This truth actually means personal validity. Practically, everything happens in the narrative with the aim of assisting the recollecting self to understand the marriage of his parents.

The autobiographical narrator seldom uses his own voice, as he basically borrows languages most of the time. However, the sameness of the names of the author and the narrator, through the course of a most detailed narration of the origins of the family, continues to enforce the notion of the sameness of protagonist, narrator, and author, a consequence of the autobiographical

⁵¹ Bakhtin, M. M.: *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. McGee, Vern W. University of Texas Press, Austin (Texas), 1986.

contract. When he discusses his father, it is actually the confirmation of his own consciousness of his identity that controls the recollection, because of the priority of the paternal heritage in his case. The reason for this lies in the fact that his father was able to get the upper hand over the fate that befell to him. The actual role of the writer's diversions or commentaries is displayed in the fact that the narrative keeps returning to the figure of the father. The disquisitions on the immobility and rigid social structure of village life and on the strict rules and regulations in the community essentially highlight the extraordinary quality of the father's lifepath, which was an exception to the rule. The reason for the boosting awareness of the father's separation is that the son, who bears the name of his father, gets a share in the appreciation. Indeed, the narrator bases his novelistic autobiography upon the story of his father.

The Novel of My Life is a story of separation and detachment: the writer of the self moves out of the existence of poor peasants, the basic law of which seems to be exactly the predestination by birth. He becomes a writer and, as a witness, he recognizes the function of his novelistic autobiography exactly in the maintenance of a kind of remembering that maintains cultural continuity. More importantly perhaps, he intends to provide a parable in the form of his personal fate that overwrites the validity of inevitable predestination by birth. According to the narrative of the father's story, the determining factors in the formation of one's personality are talent and courage, rather than upbringing. In the environment of humble and lowly origins, dominated by the rough and profane stepfather, there is no one who could teach the orphan kid about proper behavior and respect for work. From the perspective of looking back on that time though, the orphan's status is not only a drawback but also an advantage, since it makes the father free and places him outside the scope of the village law and conventions.

5. The Division of the Staged Autobiographical Subject

Having presented the course of events leading up to the marriage between *Bálint Móricz* and the daughter of the parson's widow, based on the accounts of the relatives, the autobiographical narrator decides to recall the same time period also from the perspective of the two protagonists, who are now close to the end of their lives. By giving voice to his parents' words, he becomes simultaneously the audience for and the interpreter of their recollections. Nevertheless, he does not unite the independent parts in his own narrative. On the contrary, he seems to quote even his own words next to the utterances of the other two. As a result, the readers get biographical reminiscences from various perspectives taking turns in this part of the book. The writer of the self appears as a companion in the conversations but, at the same time, he also helps to shape the recollections, as his parents are opening up before him. This speech situation resembles the arrangements for soul-redeeming confessions, in which the son has his parents relate and relive the events in order to offer them deliverance from their sufferings. Also, this way he does not focus on his own self-exposure, which forces us to recognize in the narrative of the most loved persons about their irredeemable sufferings that the understanding of our own selves is always dependent on others. This interpretation of the reciprocity of understanding corresponds to the anthropological conclusion which contends that the self is formed through references to the others: "Facing every self, there is another self... You comprehend the other in the other self as yourself, because your self is the other, too."⁵²

It must be noted that, after the the autobiographical narrator has recalled individual confessions of his parents from his memory and returns to the present tense of the narration, he starts coming up with impersonal disquisitions on the history of education. He elaborates on diverse topics, ranging from the sanctity of marriage through the spirit of the village and the formalities of social life to ethical education. In the meanwhile, he never fails to emphasize

⁵² Plessner, Helmut: *Der Mensch als Lebewesen*. In: Plessner, Helmut: *Die Frage nach der Conditio humana*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1976. p. 116.

the fact that he is just the recorder of his parents' recurring recollections. He turns his attention towards himself only when, while re-reading his notes, he finds an illuminating explanation of his inherited nature reflected in the other lives.

6. The Inter-Replacing Play of Image and Reflection / Representation

The narrative of family history follows the order of origin, descent, and inheritance, and its objective is to search for and find substitute reflections or representations. With the accomplishment of the narrative, the characters are reflected in one another, while producing a system of mirrored images. The writer of autobiography then composes his own portrait through studying the mirrored images recollected from the familial memory archives.

In the infinite movement of mutual replacements and substitutions, the personality of the autobiographical narrator is divided or distributed among the likenesses of his figure, while the narrative executes a spiraling movement as it follows the chain of inherited features. The genealogy is constantly re-started and, as a consequence, repetition becomes one of the chief formulating disciplines of the narrative. The speech situation of the self, attempting an act of self-interpretation, is defined by the shifts between the future projected forward from the past and the past re-interpreted from the perspective of the present. The study of his inherent mental and spiritual features prompts the writer of the self to realize that there are actually others continued in the self he has thought of as his own. Thus, his personality seems to be more like a replica than a single individual entity: "When I want to find my self, the more authentic information I come across about the ancestors and their ancestors, the more difficult it becomes to find something that is me, that is new, that is individual." (Móricz 1953, 55) In the inter-replacing play of image and reflection, the recollecting youth seizes every opportunity to show both his father and himself in the inseparable unity of *alter* and *ego*.

7. The Re-Writing of Family History The Inconclusiveness of Self-Interpretation

The posing of the unanswered question "To whom am I telling about myself?" in the book is made possible by the re-writing of the family history, which serves as a medium for the narrative of the autobiographical self. The characters in the series of recollections are all dead but it is certain that the writer of the autobiography talks about himself all through the time he is discussing them. The images of recollection become the mediators of the confession of the narrator with which he attempts to answer the questions concerning the foundations of his existence. In *The Novel of My Life*, these are the following: "What is the love of the homeland?", "How can a village remain in the same condition it has been in for so many centuries?", and "In what way do the personalities of the ancestors live on in their descendants?"

The opening up of the symbolic meanings of the memories and the search for the parabolic message of reminiscing do not come to rest in *The Novel of My Life*. The "writing of life" seems to begin anew, suggesting the inconclusiveness of self-interpretation from the direction of the origins.

THE INTERTEXTUAL CONFIGURATION OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING (LÁSZLÓ NÉMETH, *FROM GLOOM INTO GLOOM*)

“I myself used to be a taboo for my own self”
(László Németh)

1. The Relationship between Title and Text The Staging of the Self

With a few exceptions, the autobiographical writings comprising *From Gloom into Gloom* had been published before the book came out under this title. The individual chapters of the text, titled *Man and Role* and *Instead of Myself*, foreshadow a personality dispersed in several roles whose identity or sameness also depends on the understanding of the relationships among the texts. From the comments on the act of creating texts, we can draw the conclusion that the narrative for the writer of the autobiography is identical with searching for sense and finding sense. Consequently, he considers the system of relationships between the individual parts of the autobiography especially important.

In the present tense of the narrative, the writer of the autobiography imagines that he is just a living corpse, in the sense that everything which is essential in life has already happened to him. He thinks that, as an “idea-person,” he has failed to bring about harmony between his external life and his high ideals. This basic experience is very important for us to note, since László Németh thought of himself primarily as an essayist, and considered the “creation of ideas,” the transformation of social thinking, and the exertion of intellectual influence to be his calling in life. A characteristic example for his sense of vocation is that, as early as at the age of twenty-three, after the publication of his first short story in the most prestigious periodical of the age, he defiantly informed the living literary classics of his time that he wished to become “the intellectual organizer of Hungarian life.” So, the basic conviction of the writer of autobiography is that he is not going to be able to fulfill

his plans any more. A specifically sore point for him seems to be that he is not able to accomplish his *final account*, which would be his “real” *autobiography*. The title *Instead of Me* thus also means from this aspect that writing for him, as “the substitute of life,” is the medium of the authentic presentation of the existing self.

The autobiography suggests that, while writers of novels get to understand others by using themselves as points of departure, writers of autobiographies undertake the task of directly understanding themselves by attempting to sum up the symbolic meaning of their lifepath up to the point of writing about it. According to Németh’s work, writing of one’s life in the sense of *preserving* it is actually the verbalization of reinstating the values that have been deleted from real life. Its objective is not simply a victory over the crisis of the autobiographical subject but the *creation* of a personality. Therefore, *Instead of Myself* means that the writing stands in for the person. In other words, it creates a world, which is a world in which the autobiographical subject can come to *life*, as it were.

In the spirit of the self-interpretation recurrent in the narrative, the title *From Gloom into Gloom* means that the crucial parts of the works are shaped in gloom, i.e. deep inside one’s conscious. The comprehensive title at the head of the collected volumes, *Instead of Myself*, can be interpreted from the aspect of the text as an indication that the writer of the self talks about *something else* instead of his most personal spiritualistic experiences. From this perspective, the title means that the inner world of the autobiographical subject is practically inexpressible. All that he can talk about instead, including the family, the writer’s vocation, and the character, are indeed supposed to *cover*, to hide his real self. From yet another aspect, *Instead of Myself* also expresses the idea that the subject is a product of the interrelationship between sociocultural impacts and natural determinations. What the writing of the autobiography virtually does is that it offers inconclusive interpretation possibilities for the definition of this self. This can be the explanation for the fact that the collection contains diverse kinds of texts.

The text incorporates the point of departure for the mode of linguistic existence of the subject. The reason for this is that it is the

continuous act of writing that the autobiographical self accepts as a valid form of existence for him/herself. Thus, the events occurring during the gaps in the course of writing are considered to be of secondary importance, and they are included only instead of the events of the inner life of the self. To give you an example: the author is shocked by the news of his father's apoplexy but, at the same time, regards illness among such events in life that pull together, in order "to hide me from my fate." Retrospectively though, these life events recall some of this quality of being hidden when they *become parts of the writing of the autobiography*. In other words, they express some of the truth of *the self coming to life* in the writing. This mentality may offer some explanation for the fact that the author considers his most controversial essay, titled *Kisebbségben* [In Minority], in the present of the writing to have been a mistake when it was written, but regards it nonetheless valid as "an act of conscience." (In order to see the essence of this example more clearly, a brief explanation should perhaps be necessary at this stage. Németh has been most extensively attacked because of his essay called *Kisebbségben*. The opening question of this essay, written in 1939, goes: "Hogyan veszett el a magyar a magyarban?" [How has been Hungarianness lost in Hungarians? or How have been Hungarians lost in Hungarian? or How has been lost what used to be Hungarian/Hungarians in what is Hungarian? etc. – actually, a play on words at several levels, very difficult to translate...]) As a consequence, the author was accused, mostly from the left, of being an adherent of racism and antisemitism. The pursuers of the so-called "népi" [populist, peasant, folksy, or people's] literature, however, accepted Németh's basic ideas without any criticism whatsoever. The representatives of these two extreme viewpoints were involved in a debate which obviously was not professional but rather ideological. In essence, these standpoints in the debate did not change even after the transformation of the political regime in 1989. In any case, it is certain that Németh's essay differentiates between the so-called "mélymagyar" [verbatim: deep Hungarian] and "hígmagyar" [verbatim: diluted Hungarian] representatives of Hungarian culture on the basis of his investigation concerning the "harmful" influences on our culture. In his opinion, deep

Hungarians endeavored to preserve important values, without real success. Diluted Hungarians, in turn, undertook the task of modernizing culture by following western examples, with success. For example, Németh regards the language reform at the beginning of the 19th century an overall mistake, as it weakened the expressive force of the Hungarian language by borrowing foreign examples. For this reason, Ferenc Kazinczy, one of our classic poets, the leading figure of the language reform is classified as a “diluted Hungarian.” The development of a culture that expresses Hungarian spirituality has been distorted, due to the assimilation of foreign influences. This is the basic idea of the cultural historical fiction of *Kisebbségben*.)

Returning to the analysis of the text of the autobiography, we notice that, according to the recommendation in the preface for the reading of the book, the author’s subject directly is not “worthy” of being expressed. What is worthy of being directly expressed is only the role acted out by him, which is supposed to express the mission determined for him. The reason for this is the fact that the role is the epitome of the accomplished life. The role is a measure of value, it is a manifestation of standards, and transcends the personality concept of the lonely self or of the self that is sufficient for him/herself. The specifically shaped life, which is subordinated to the role that controls one’s behavior and intellectual activities, can also be taken for a piece of artistic creation. However, the subject can never be fully dissolved in his/her roles, so the events of the personal biography gain their significance as the parts of some sort of a life-plan. The autobiographical subject of László Németh, broken up and distributed among various roles in the writing, represents a distance from the European tradition of writing autobiographies between the two world wars. This tradition in the given time period still used to attach a central importance to the expression of the self, to confession, to honesty, to the exposure of the soul, and to personal interpretation of the self. The word “homály” [gloom] in the title of the book is thus a simultaneous reference to a desire to go into hiding and to the unknown in which the invisible role must be found. In this sense, the writing of the self relates the story of one’s searching for, finding, and fulfilling the right authentic role.

The staging of the self seems to be inseparable from the doubling of the self. This means that the recollecting self imagines replaying his former parts or roles and, as a consequence, also distances them from himself in a certain sense. An example for this is when he makes the sensation of his own estrangement accessible in the quality of a reader. He recalls the characters of individual protagonists created by him. These are mostly figures of personalities who were in conflict with the surrounding world. As a result, he indirectly exposes the sources and components of his own self-perception. What he actually achieves through this is re-creating the characters from his fictional works in the process of autobiographical writing, so that he can engage in an examination of his conscience through others, "instead of himself." An example for this is the recollection of the times and the circumstances in which he wrote his play titled *VII. Gergely* [Gregory VII]. It is the most personal reasons for writing an autobiography that the narrator seems to reveal when he admits that the most crucial scene of the play for him is the one about the confession of Gregory VII, right before the latter's death. As you may recall, Gregory VII does not admit that he is guilty. What's more, in his moral indignation, not only does he retire forever, but he also condemns the world that would brand as mavericks and outcast those who stand out among the rest of the herd. Pride and the lack of patience and understanding in the face of human weaknesses are such accusations that even the writer of the autobiography has to come to terms with, too. It is for the staging of this inner conflict that he uses his own fictional creations as mediums.

The urge to stage the subject is also related to the desire of the writer of the autobiography to expose his vision about the world as fully as possible. The excessive increase of his writing projects is also connected to this issue; hence it reveals not only dissatisfaction but also despair. He keeps escaping into writing incessantly, in order to maintain, and even to expand, his continuous intellectual presence, since he aspires to exert some influence directly on his own age.

The writer of the autobiography confronts himself in the "roundabout" way of the other, in the quality of the visualized

reader of his own book. He frequently undertakes the task of analyzing the mental and spiritual features of literary and mythological figures. For example, the female characters created by Sophocles are certain to have had a very deep impression on his works. By investigating the nature of Artemis-like creatures in the myths, he reaches an understanding of the identical quality of his own character. The fact is that he, himself, is unable to “mingle” in a world that is about to crush his soul.

2. Time, Memory, and Self-Identity

From Gloom into Gloom, while constructing the narrated conscious through alternating among the perspectives of recollection and producing complex time relations, also calls for intertextual reading.

The re-reading of diaries written for the purpose of preserving memories sheds light upon the mutual preconditioning or presupposition between recollection and self-identity. The narrator is surprised to re-read the parts about the images recorded of himself in his notes. As a *reader* of the images created about himself in different time periods, he presumes a co-ordinate relation among the self-configurations preserved in his memory.

A general feature of autobiographies is that the readers normally get a chance to encounter the same stories in various versions, so the recollecting self gets portrayed through a series of variants. The basic incidents in the life of the autobiographical personality tend to recur in a number of different versions. In our case, an example for this is that the author is afraid of reprisal after the Second World War, he is scared of potential revenge or punishment. He keeps carrying a capsule of poison with him all the time, as he is afraid that the communist regime might either put him in jail or sentence him to death for his rebellious ideas. A recurring scene in the autobiography is the one when, before answering the doorbell, the writer routinely puts the capsule of cyanide into his mouth, just in case. Even earlier, in the interim period between the two world wars, he often gets the feeling that

he is constantly persecuted for his convictions and that the literary circles in the country join forces against him. This is the reason why he decides to found a one-man periodical, called *Tanú* [Witness]. He is not able to establish good a relationship with the populist writers, despite the fact that they regard him as their fellow-comrade. At the same time, he is extremely strict with himself, too. He is constantly dissatisfied with his own output, yet, he is reluctant to accept any criticism. He regards virtually everything as a malicious personal insult against his personality. As a parent, he is a passionate educator of his daughters, but he is frustrated about their lack of intellectual interest. He keeps failing in putting his pedagogical ideals into practice within the circle of his own family. For example, he purchases a parcel of land near the city of Debrecen, so as to test the concept called "Kert-Magyarország" [verbatim: Garden-Hungary] on his immediate family members. The concept based upon the unity of mental activities and physical labor and the harmony of culture and nature is not taken favorably by the family, who revolt against it and shortly move back to Budapest. Németh is very conscious and consistent in composing his lifework, and fully subordinates his personal life to the task of writing his works.

The metamorphosing self-configurations written into and getting deleted from the autobiography, produced "instead of myself," make the cryptic operation of replacements between the creator of the self-portrait and his likeness(es) inconclusive. A telling detail to cite would be what the author considers worthy of being handed down from among the distinguishing features of his own intellectual stature: "first of all, the passion for truth, the whole controlled and comprehensive interest and attention, the unity of knowledge and attitude, and sensitivity about Hungarianness and the Hungarian character." (I. 486)⁵³ As a result of his idealism, the autobiographical narrator always subordinates his life to the idea found, yet, he can experience the authenticity of the latter only in the form of writing.

⁵³ The page numbers in parentheses after the cited passages in the text refer to the following edition: Németh, László: *Homályból homályba. Életrajzi írások. I-II.* Magvető és Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1977.

3. The Otherness / Strangeness of One's Own Self The Appropriation of Otherness

The writing of his autobiography assists the author in recognizing how his self-perception changes: "I can understand it now, while writing, that it was this racionalistic overestimation of myself that surrounded my youth, too." (I. 261) It is revealing how he relates to the images that others come up with about of him. In his writings about his critics, we mostly feel an acknowledgement of his superiority and contempt towards them. A threat of extreme spiritual homelessness starts haunting him, first, when he moves away from the periodical called *Nyugat* [West], and then, after his total separation from it. This is the time when the concept of the so-called "third way" emerges in respect to his personal choice of a role. He wants to exert some influence through his works, and this is why he wishes to create an expert receptive medium through his one-man periodical for his writings. He considers criticism to be a means of persecuting writers. The confession of the teacher at conflict with others shows no consideration for them. Looking back on his career as a lecturer, he can recall a series of humiliating failures. He is unable to establish a friendly relationship with any of his contemporaries, despite his repeated attempts. He also gets into a conflict with "Hungarianness" as well, as he reckons its moral condition distressing.

In the self-perception of the autobiographical narrator, the decisive factor is the experience of his own otherness. He feels most ostracized among those whose attitude in principle is closest to his own. Following the war, he becomes alienated from the most personal characteristic features and roles of the thinking of the "idea-man." His former role in the intellectual life of the country cannot be maintained any longer, and his historical utopias disappear. The former "idea-man" simply loses the ground that would be necessary for his proper existence and activities. He blames his own self-enforcing nature for the demise of his marriage, as it cannot respect the privacy of others, either as an educator or as a man. The thing is that, for him, the precondition of understanding is the elimination of the strangeness of the other.

4. The Relationship between the Narrator and the Narrated Autobiographical Self

The narrated autobiographical person was a confirmed believer in the constant need for developing the personality, its knowledge, and its abilities. Even at a very early age, he was aware of the fact that he was exceptional and cut out for greatness: "I am nine years old, and I still have not achieved anything. This anguish has got a new name now. Can I add anything to overall progress?" (I. 95) Consciousness about the importance or significance of his own self is present all the way through his autobiographical narrative. This is why he believes that his personal life-story and the process of his education can offer some lessons that could be shared with others. The narrator calls his autobiography, written in 1943, his "last work." He regards the self-interpretations that accompany his personal reminiscences as a struggle whose objective, which points well beyond him, is nothing less than "the universal definitive explanation of human life." (I. 213) This wording of the writer's objective is void of any irony, and is uttered twenty years after the story related.

The narrative displays features of essays when the writer of the autobiography provides us with a concise summary of his basic ideas. Such sections of the autobiography are supposed to express the dominant idea of individual segments of the author's life. Németh considers the profound transformation of Hungarian intellectual life as his primary aim, and this huge task fills him with an exceptional sense of responsibility. He regards the acceptance of his role in public life to be an inspiring battle, which he did not choose to fight out of his own accord but was put into "by fate," despite his personal interests. The recollection at this stage is interspersed with sacral notions, as the autobiographical narrator suggests that he has actually received a commission to represent the genuine intellectual values.

There is an alternation between intellectual self-enforcement and self-sacrifice, and between a consciousness of commitment and an offended self-respect in the attitude of the writer of the autobiography. The common scope of the recollections is

designated by the expression of the consciousness of commitment and the determination of the exceptional role in the re-organization of intellectual life in Hungary. There is a pedagogical passion pervading the articulation of his credo as a writer: "I want to achieve that only the very base people could sleep tight in this country, and that each and every drop of excellence should be known by the name remorse." (I. 520). It seems that reproach is far from being out of the question for him when he addresses the readers. What's more, he reckons that it creates a feeling of community and assists mutual understanding. In the present of the narrative, the writer of the autobiography is aware that he has not been able to fulfill his plans, yet, he identifies with almost all of his ideas and concepts. This attitude presupposes such an "idea-man" who measures his ideals and utopias not by the immediately discernible historical time but who still fully devotes his intellectual mode of existence to the improvement of the future.

5. Autobiography as Literature about Literature

The autobiographical self is brought to life through the recollections about him in the process of writing. This is what is indicated by the diary sections quoted in the narrative and by the autobiographical notes recorded at various other times. The following self-interpreting part of the text brings home the priority and the embeddedness in traditions of the institution, the conventions, and the inherited language-based configurations of autobiographical writing: "as in all of our encounters with love, we follow conventions in describing our very first love, too ... which I regard to be disguising the truth. Whether I am wright or not should be decided by the individual readers, who do not have to issue a statement concerning it. They are either going to recognize in my narrative something that has already happened to them, too, or just say that this man is a chip of a different block and his memory for us is but a curiosity from an exhibition of wax-works." (Németh 1977, I. 105)

The experience about the unavoidability of inherited literary stock is manifested in the instances when the same story is related in several different ways. (I. 303, 331) From yet another aspect, through the disarrangement of the chronological order of writing and reading, the autobiographical subject gets written “apart” in several narrative versions, and thus the writing of the autobiography creates an impression of being literature about literature. In a certain sense, the logic of palimpsests is not entirely detached from the textual world of *From Gloom into Gloom*, as long as there is another text written over the original text, due to the inserted discourses, and it regularly turns out to be the case that there is another text hidden underneath the text of the autobiography, revealing the existence of yet another text in turn.

6. Language and Subject

Ways of Representing the Self in Language

Németh frequently approaches psychological phenomena with a physician’s interest, and the inserted essay-type commentaries are heavily laden with the indications of a thorough background in exact sciences. The self-interpretation of the recollecting self reflects the influence of an anthropological orientation. Here, this means first of all the research of the universal laws of human behavior and thinking, which can incorporate and, at the same time, surpass personal experience.

László Németh was very well-versed in the theories of psychology, yet he kept a distance from them in his autobiography, as he attempted to create a language of his own. He seldom mentions the subconscious, never discusses an instance of the Oedipus complex, and as good as exiles the vocabulary of analytical psychology from his disquisitions. Instead, he prefers *metaphors* of his own. The language used for the representation of the subject and for the characterization of his spiritual features is generally interwoven with notions of biology or anatomy, in short, life sciences. The writer of the autobiography presents the intellectual operation of his own as a living organism, with the

help of metaphors evoking bodily notions. His pronouncements preserve language-based memories of medical case studies and, as such, can be seen as further examples of the medial conveyance of the personality.

It seems as if the autobiographical narrator represented a series of his own personality-versions. The intertextual reading results in a complex system of self-configurations. Accordingly, in the autobiography we can find the recollecting and the recollected selves, the self writing the diary and the self recorded in the diary, and, last but not least, the writer of the autobiography who, by citing his former diary in the present of the narrative, becomes a reader of his own self-narrative. For the recollecting self, his own existence is but a “distressing puzzle.” “An astonishment about myself” is how the autobiographical narrator defines his routinely recurring basic sensation.

7. Incidents within the Language Establishing the Autobiographical Self

A characteristic example for the generating force of language could be an unexpectedly surfacing confession within the commentator’s sphere of action, which upsets the objective use of language and exposes the autobiographical subject in his unconcealed quality: “You hate your mother? But, no, this was not a bodily aversion; it was a moral distancing. ... I have not read about such a thing in books...” (I. 28) In Németh’s autobiographical writing, there are frequent occurrences of ambiguous uses of metaphors, figures of speech with hidden meanings, or overcomplicated anthropological and/or physiological explanations of psychological phenomena.

The autobiographer looks upon his fate as a mission. We may easily notice the desire of augmenting the self in the instances of accumulations of his special metaphors that are supposed to denote self-expression. For example, the word for witness in Greek means “martyr,” hence it can be the metaphorical expression for the fate of the editor of the one-man periodical called *Tanú* [Witness].

In his critique, Mihály Babits, the most respected elder figure among Németh's contemporaries, calls the author of *Kisebbségben* a mad gardener, who mangles Hungarian letters. As an act of self-defense, the autobiographer attempts to interpret his own intellectual behavior with a self-illuminating metaphor, while inadvertently smuggling back into his writing the most controversial figure of speech from his essay: the opposition of "híg" [diluted] and "mély" [deep]: "I was more like a dredging-machine, deepening the channel of the Hungarian soul." (I. 591)

In the closing of his work, the narrator announces that his autobiography is to be continued, which indicates the compulsion of the constant rewriting of autobiographies and, ultimately, suggests the impossibility of completing the process of self-interpretation.

THE RHETORIC OF ESTRANGEMENT GYULA ILLYÉS: *PEOPLE OF THE PUSZTA*

1. The Narrating and the Narrated Self

It might not seem very obvious why I have chosen the piece called *People of the Puszta* as a text especially expedient for discussing the topic set forth in the title of the article. Perhaps, it should not be amiss to emphasize the fact that literary history in general notes this work of Illyés primarily as a carrier of cultural values.⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, I could very easily try to explain and support my choice by saying that the autobiographical form here, completing the genealogical narrative in this case, also provides the researchers of cultural anthropology with a useful idea about the world of poor farm laborers living on the estates of big landowners, secluded from the impacts of what we call civilization. And it does so by presenting a detailed and clear picture of the quotidian diet, the processes of work, the customs and habits related to eating; and by introducing us to the income levels, the health conditions, the sexual habits, and the world of beliefs of these people. A more convincing argument from the perspective of focused re-reading would be that *People of the Puszta* appears to be indispensable first of all from the aspect of its *rhetorical structure conveying a sense and experience of estrangement*. To me personally, the basic query of the book may be summed up in the question whether estrangement can or cannot be accurately conveyed. Or, to be more precise, whether the autobiographical narrator is able to do away with the apparent tension between acquisition / assimilation and the

⁵⁴ Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály: Többértelműség a Puszták népében. *Alföld*, 1982/11. pp. 53–61. Kulcsár Szabó, Ernő: Az epikai tárgyiasság új alakzata. In: *Műalkotás – Szöveg – Hatás*. Magvető, Budapest, 1987. pp. 94–119. Németh, G. Béla: Erkölcsi autonómia – Művészi autonómia. A Puszták népe műfaji kérdéseiről. In: *Hosszmetszetek és keresztmetszetek*. Szépirodalmi, Budapest, 1987. pp. 339–350. Tamás Attila: *Illyés Gyula*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1989. pp. 68–82.

maintenance of estrangement.⁵⁵ The pronouncement of the objective of writing autobiography (or writing about the self) projects a crucial dilemma of re-reading. Namely whether the recollections staged or produced in such a way can actually prove more important than the concept of the priority of descent and of the acquired system of customs and habits. That is to say, whether these recollections prove to be more important than the exclusive authority of the inner viewpoint of the experiencing self in the process of self-interpretation: "I do not want to describe my own life here; ... rather, I wish to depict the character and nature of a layer of people, that is all I wish to achieve. If every now and then I happen to include my own experiences, they are only cited for the purpose of illustrations. Whatever memories I happen to unearth, I shall do so for the sole purpose of delving into that deep and seething stratum which intends to hide its swirling world from every strange view, even from objective daylight, which - and I know this from experience - even if an outsider should get a chance to get to know, is understandable only for those who do come from its midst." (Illyés 1964, 33)⁵⁶ [my translation]

This book by Illyés represents a uniquely individual personality construction in Hungarian letters. What the author does is that he creates an autobiographical subject of unfixed identity by simply multiplying the narrative perspectives. In other words, his subject comes together from the alternating narrating roles of the essayist, the genre-painter, the artist-ethnographer, the confessor, the contemplator, and that of the participant. The text keeps diverting in the directions of various genres, including sociography, treatises, snapshots or genre-paintings, reports, or confessions. These frequent diversions or changes in the narrative perspective then force the readers alike to shift their individual viewpoints in turn. The estrangement forming here as part of the aesthetic

⁵⁵ Wierlacher, Alois: Kulturwissenschaftliche Xenologie. Ausgangslage, Leitbegriffe und Problemfelder. In: ders. (Hg.): *Kulturthema Fremdheit. Leitbegriffe und Problemfelder kulturwissenschaftlicher Fremdeheitsforschung*. Ed. Wierlacher, Alois. München: iudicium, München, 1993.

⁵⁶ The page numbers after the cited passages in the text refer to the following edition: Illyés, Gyula: *Puszták népe*. Szépirodalmi, Budapest, 1964.

experience is indeed an imperative formation for the understanding of this shifting identity of extended interpretation possibilities.

People of the Puszta may be considered an autobiography as long as the narrative in it is characterized by a position contemplating past events and its narrator reconstructs his own personal life, presenting it in a form of recollections. However, this book by Illyés does not observe the conventional story-centered quality of the other contemporary autobiographies of the age. Rather, it suspends the goal-oriented process of the narration, diminishes the discursive logic connecting the individual elements of the storyline, and dissolves the temporal and spatial frames which correspond to our conventional experience of verisimilitude. What he basically does is that he takes advantage of certain possibilities offered by the open structure, created through the multiplication of the narrative perspectives, which allow for a more creative reading process at will. Omissions, chronological inversions, accidental linkings of chunks of text, co-ordinated relationships among stories, alternations between disquisitions and snapshots of daily life, all produce a system of rules in the book that significantly differs from our conventional expectations concerning the traditional genre of autobiographical writing. Nevertheless, Illyés's writing about his self in the process of staging his recollections takes advantage of the potential possibility that the type of reading directed by the so-called *autobiographical contract* is apt to be suspected of a quality of fictitiousness, while in the case of fiction, the readers tend to try and find similarities between the narrator and the (chief) character. "I am not only relating what has happened to me; I am also relating what might have happened to me because it did happen to my friends and mates; in my memory, the events that I actually participated in and the ones I only witnessed get all mixed up and confused." (189) [my translation] Illyés's book is definitely able to maintain the tension between these two different kinds of autobiographical contracts. To give you an example of how this is done, let me mention the playful treatment of the two differing verisimilitudes achieved directly by the mixing up of the first person singular and plural personal pronouns. "my words flowing in first person expand so, when

they do expand, to become confessions about long-forgotten, strange lives.” (Illyés 1964, 190) [my translation] In other instances, this tension is increased by the contrast between the two different roles of the disquisitive and the recollecting narrators: “Us, kids... kids generally live on the Puszta so, so freely as the domestic animals wandering around among the houses without any supervision. (Illyés 1964, 189) [my translation]

The perception of the alternating distance between the narrated and the narrating selves, which inevitably results in the experience of estrangement, is an important meaning-generating component of the text. The conduct and the behavior of the autobiographical narrator is determined by the dynamics between separation and identification even in respect to the autobiographical self.

What do I mean then by the term mobile or dynamic identity in respect to the autobiographical self? First of all, a willingness to transform or metamorphose, which is an integral part of the self's excruciating efforts towards achieving stability. While searching for his/her roots, the recollector / recollecting self is thus able to get rid of the *genuine* compulsion to do away with estrangement.

The narrator presents a world to us that provides the experience of a place between strangeness and familiarity for the reader. This place here is an indication not only of *spatiality*, that is the special scenes of the childhood of the autobiographical self, but it also determines the interpreting position of the recollecting self. This complex mental position is characterized on the one hand by constant rational and emotional movement: it actually is the manifestation of the ongoing alternation between belonging and detachment, then between separation and return. On the other hand, a constant motional effect is created between the individual horizons of the observing self and the experiencing self by the fact that the rather impersonal perspective of the writer is complemented and authenticated by the personal perspective of the recollector. “The people of the Puszta, I happen to know out of experience, out of rather personal experience, are a servile people.” (Illyés 1964, 10) “they instinctively know every domestic custom, they are willing to do whatever is asked of them, and when the work is done, without getting any hints, they saunter out of the

room, just as they would move out of life or history.” (Illyés 1964, 11) [my translation] Creating the autobiographical self is inseparable from the acquisition of historical and cultural traditions in *People of the Puszta*: “- this is how the times live on in my memory. They comprise a count’s estate and five or six villages, and if I recall them now, I can clearly see that fate had already placed around my cradle what I had to learn for a lifetime about history and about Hungary.” (Illyés 1964, 25) [my translation] The memories of this broader tradition have faded, just like the personal past of the autobiographical self had, and thus, in the process of understanding these two traditions, the recollecting self has to face fairly similar difficulties to the ones that the narrating self has to come up against in the course of writing and interpreting.

The establishment of the personality on the level of language takes place in an even more complex system of references, especially if we note the fact that the utterances of the recollecting self and those of the recollected participant of the events occur in unconventional time frames. The deliberate confusion of the chronological order indicates the complex situation of the narrated self, resulting from the changes in his mental relationship dependent on the given perspectives, as illustrated in the following passage. “Had I identified myself with the people of the Puszta, if only for a little reflex-movement of the soul? No, a was still too far from that. Anyone who comes from among the dwellings of poor agricultural laborers, would slough off and forget about his self related to the Puszta as naturally as a snake would get rid of its skin. This is the path towards development and there is no other way around. Those who leave the air of the Puszta behind must replace their hearts and lungs, or else they would perish in their new surroundings. And they almost have to walk around the world if they want to get back to their origins.” (Illyés 1964, 17) [my translation] According to what the autobiographical self suggests, the precondition of identification is an initial detachment, while that of the return is separation. Autobiographical writing means a return to the world of one’s childhood: the metaphor used in the book for the writing activity incorporates the reason for the multiplication of the narrative perspectives. “The storks returning in spring, having

flown as straight as an arrow across continents, tend to circle over their old nest for hours before they decide to touch down at last. What are they afraid of? They inspect every tiny twig in it. This is how I was coming back, too. This is how I scrutinized the bed of my childhood, and it has to turn out spontaneously for what purpose." (Illyés 1964, 18) [my translation] It is through extending this metaphor that the writer of the autobiography provides an explanation for the alternating perspectives that dynamically follow the continuous transformations and re-assimilations of the narrator: "Any provincial person, when starting to talk about his or her mother country, will sooner or later end up speaking about the homeland in a more restricted fashion: focusing first on a village, then on a front yard and, finally, through a kitchen, on a room with two windows in which s/he learnt his/her mother's tongue. That is to say, they unconsciously retrace the etymological history of a word, flavoring that ancient moment when *ház* [house / home] and *haza* [home country] used to refer to one and the same thing." (Illyés 1964, 20) [my translation] Through the poetics of mental states projected into space, the writer of the autobiography suggests that "the aura of the landscape is identical with the soul of those who live in it, that is, everybody belongs to their birthplace both in a geographical sense and in terms of the way one thinks." [my translation] This explains why moving from one place to another elicits a feeling of estrangement from the narrator: "We were strangers now, drifters or outlaws. When someone looked at us, it felt as if they wanted to drive us out of the world through their gaze. We did not dare to stand the stare of people. (Illyés 1964, 308)" [my translation] The recollecting self considers spiritual states inseparable from spatiality and, as a result of moving into the village, a quotidian movement from one place to another, it feels as if secluded from the space of its own existence for good. The change of lifestyle is accompanied by an irresolvable feeling of estrangement. Thus the unending argumentation that the author pursues with himself about the possibility of conforming the notions of development and the keeping of traditions, the issues of personal and strange, or the possibilities of separation and return remains unsettled. The rather loose chronology, alongside the mosaic quality

of the recollected memories, are due to the mode of perception of the narrator who shifts from lecturing to recollecting, thus attaining a spatializing comprehension. In my opinion, the looser structure can also be related to the tendency that the guiding principle of parabolic story-telling becomes less and less certain: "I would not be able to tell any longer when it occurred that I stopped on the dangerous upward staircase and turned towards those who desperately struggled with the flood around the small island of the family, sometimes even hanging on to it. This was the flood of poverty, misery, and repression which, in my childhood, inundated the Puszta anew in its proper, historical form." (Illyés 1964, 97) [my translation]

By way of multiplying the narrative perspectives and presenting a multitude of plastic examples, the recollecting self can surely convince the readers about the fact that the lifestyle of the poor agricultural laborers and servants is undeniably unique. Furthermore, this mobile perspective is also able to withstand the idolization earmarked by Rousseau's name. From the aspect of the effect on the readers, these perspective shifts also play a role in making the receptors share the experience of the experiencing self. The world presented by the writer of the autobiography is made up of series of closed and almost inaccessibly isolated small worlds: "Ten or twenty kilometers away from the old Puszta, and they experience such an extent of strangeness as if they had gotten on another planet, snowy and cold, populated by creatures with alien hearts." (Illyés 1964, 301) [my translation]

I, personally, think that, even in the sections of the text where the inner perspective rules, the recollecting narrator refuses to fully share his identity with the poor agricultural laborers and servants. Nothing could be further away from him than the exaltation for the home of those grand returnees. The existence on the Puszta in his case does not remind us of a sort of paradise lost, with the original order of things retained. However, the author undoubtedly gives voice to his suspicion, or even aversion, in his diversions of cultural criticism concerning modernization: "Production tends to shed more and more of its patriarchal feudal vestiges and dons the garment of capitalism. On the feudal

demesnes, there appear the plowing machines and the modern age, educated employees of rationalistic agricultural enterprises, who talk to the poor laborers in a formal fashion but treat them in such a cold way as if they were machines or factory workers. The Puszta turns into a factory site. The swamps get drained, the trees in woods get torn out. However, the soul has deeper roots than that, it still resists." (Illyés 1964, 50) [my translation]

The story-teller keeps an equal distance from his visions of memory, basically depending on how his contemporary attitude can be evaluated from the present perspective of the narrating self. There is a possibility for transition opening up between the times of past events and the time of recollection, since the reflections of the recollecting self, the remembering self, the writing self, and the story-telling self deeply penetrate one another. These reflections are mostly determined by the acceptance of opposing truths, as it is prompted by the Catholic-Protestant upbringing of the narrator: "I have become amphibious—and I realized this only when it was too late for me to change it: I have been hired at both parties. ... They have taught me that, of two opposing sides, both can be right." (Illyés 1964, 67) [my translation] I reckon that the overall world-view of the book can also be seen as a manifestation of transcending this approach, as long as it is the understanding of properly analyzed and acquired strangeness that gets the upper hand and not the acceptance of the equal validity of diametrical truths. This understanding approach keeps prompting the narrator to conduct incessant self-inspections. "Before a fight, I always have to clash with myself." (Illyés 1964, 67) [my translation] These kinds of pronouncements, in which the narrator appears to be willing to recognize otherness, or strangeness, in himself, caution us that, despite the fact that *People of the Puszta* may undoubtedly be considered an example of eye-opening sociography, or can be taken for a pamphlet that purports to rouse the conscience of society, the book is definitely more complex in its meaning than we would normally suppose.

We must admit that the central question of the book focuses on the homelessness of an intellectual, separated from, and unable to return to, his humble, peasant-type background, and on his struggle

for finding his self-identity. In my opinion, the complexity of the rhetorical procedures, conveying the perception and experience of strangeness / otherness, curb the accomplishment of the parabolic quality, which is clearly present in the text. Furthermore, the issue of one's identity is somewhat modified if the readers interpret the effects of separation and return in *People of the Puszta* in terms of understanding one's own strangeness or otherness.

2. Rhetoric and Understanding

In this part of my article, first, I will point out and offer a quick-list of the basic rhetorical formations that convey the feeling of strangeness or otherness, and then I will discuss how the narrator attempts to come to terms with his own otherness. All the quoted parts are my translation.

Perhaps the most striking and easy-to-recognize rhetorical formation in this respect is when *the style of the ethnographer calls the readers' attention to a definite perception of strangeness*. The author-narrator considers the description of the life of the people of the Puszta more difficult than studying a tribe that lives in Central Africa: "one day the dogs brought in a gnawed foot to the Puszta. ... The world was mysterious and awesome." (Illyés 1964, 251) The holidays were odd, for example, a wedding party "resembled some barbaric, self-mutilating, and savage human offering." (Illyés 1964, 192) "Like the people of the *csurunga-s*, we live exactly like the descendants of savage peoples." (Illyés 1964, 197) "It seemed as if there had been three totally strange tribes living in the villages that did not even know each other's language." (Illyés 1964, 302) Here, it is common to refer to the factual way of presentation so much characteristic of the author, relying mostly on the directions discernible in the self-interpretation of the narrator: "how many people can survive on the Puszta, if the puszta-s survive at all? This cannot be calculated, and, perhaps, it is not a literary or a political but rather an economic question and, an impolite one at that. Let us continue to stay on the grounds of objective statements." (Illyés 1964, 300) Contradicting the above attitude,

there is a noticeably high proportion of the occurrence of hyperbole in the text. The pretending of indifference, as a partially controllable language act, foreshadows that the rhetorical source of the tension between the form and the content of expression is actually the impulse that upsets the language position of the levelheaded author. This breaks to the surface as an unexpected language action, and proves to have an eye-opening force in its undisguised quality. The involuntary self-exposure is an expression of the strangeness of language, when the passion that demands reparation gets the upper hand over the impersonality operated as the mode of expression of concealment. In other words, the rhetorical complexity of the text makes it palpable for the readers that the autobiographical narrator is at the mercy of the creating force of language: "It happens every now and then that an impoverished farmer from the village decides to become servant. There are hardly any amongst them who can stay put, as they cannot stand the new ground. ... They try to accommodate themselves to the work schedule on the Puszta, but only one out of ten manages to do so. And sooner or later, it is either some illness or the other poor servants themselves who would cast them out of the Puszta. True, they exaggerate frugality, and their ingenuity seems infinite. It is certain that, with the help of a different work schedule and a different overall treatment of the servants, not only the landowning class, whose interests the author does not directly observe here, as the discussion of those interests would exceed his knowledge and the framework of the present work, but also the overall national production would unquestionably become more efficient." (Illyés 1964, 148) On the other hand, the irony applied by the author also creates an upsetting effect. "It befell that there were preparations going on simultaneously for a wedding party and for a burial and, in the meanwhile, the swineherd was chasing his daughter with an ax in his hand among the throng of people gathering for the event. The people of Úrgepuszta were living their everyday life." (Illyés 1964, 175)

At other times, it is the shocked consternation of the recollected self of the child that conveys the experience of strangeness. One example for this would be when the nine-year-old kid, who gets to see a real village

for the first time in his life, "is amazed and awed to no end" by the fact that there is such a structure of settlement where there are "houses built in a regular fashion next to one another with streets among them." The distrust towards spatial strangeness or otherness here shows in the form of an anthropological quality how a child growing up in isolation from civilization is attached to his homeland. For him, it is the familiar terrain that promises safety, and the spatial representation of the threatening other elicits a feeling of fear in him. "even after several days ... they could only make me come outside if they held my hand." (Illyés 1964, 7)

In yet another formation of the rhetoric of estrangement, *it is on the horizon of the narrated childhood self that the experience of estrangement, consciously recognized only at a later stage, appears*. In this case, the intermingling of the recollecting and the recollected selves creates a horizontal movement. "Out of some vague instinct, or feeling of shame, for a long time I did not even consider the people of the Puszta to belong to the nation of Hungarians. In my childhood, I simply could not identify them with the heroic, fierce, and glorious people whom I learned about in the school of the Puszta as Hungarians." (Illyés 1964, 9) The experience of strangeness is also conveyed by the narrative about what sort of image there is in individual travelers from western countries to Hungary about a different culture. *Considering the opinion of foreign travelers to Hungary*, he has to face unexpected and shocking recognitions "What kind of Hungarians must have they got into contact?" (Illyés 1964, 9) From this point on, I will restrict myself to just listing the basic rhetorical formations that convey a sense of estrangement in a more economical fashion. *A stranger comes into this closed world*. The stranger appears from the perspective of the people of the Puszta, and this acquired experience leads the narrator to a different kind of understanding of the people of the Puszta.

Through the perspective of the child as a witness, the grown-up narrator recalls an experience that elicits a feeling of shame. It is the recollected self that recognizes estrangement here. As an example, we could pick the story about a distant relative of the adolescent narrator, who has become a judge and, when he visits his parents sitting at the kitchen table, "they look at him as if he is 'creature

from the nether world, an envoy of God'. To me, the most wonderful part was how the young boy behaved. He accepted and took it for granted that he was admired. Consistent with the ancient instinct, he also respected himself and behaved accordingly." ... "It was only later that it occurred to me, and that I started to feel ashamed for the fact, that I had also behaved the same way. I played in the lowly comedy with the warmth of glowing around my heart, which was attended by the audience without any understanding but with a pious joyfulness, perhaps for the same reason." (Illyés 1964, 15) Here, the identification debases the narrator and elicits a feeling of shame in him. The desire to belong to the community is accompanied with fear, as long as it threatens with the loss of individual personality, and presents the possibility of dissolving the self-boundaries as an anthropological quality: "There were Homeric fits of laughter stirring the dense cigarette smoke. 'NOW, we should drink to this!' And I also laughed with them ... and I was shocked to realize how little would be necessary for me to become one in their company, how little would be necessary for my share of this joy to be quite genuine. Maybe, this is what they call real life. Is it possible that it is this unconscious acceptance of sadism and my remorse that are insalubrious? Fortunately, there was always somebody who would go over the top. They took me by the arm, and with that schmaltzy affection that ill-educated people put on when talking to a writer (since writers understand everybody all the same and, as bohemians, they are the gourmets of dirt), they told me such stories, while covering their lack of prudery with guffawing, and revealed such details when answering my questions, that, if nothing else, it was my good taste and decorum that warned me about my task. 'You can really make a neat little story out of this!' ... I could hardly listen to them. 'Do you allow me to take notes?' I asked. The person asked squinted at me. 'Of course, without a name, old chum.' 'Of course', I answered." (Illyés 1964, 212)

At other times, it is exactly the second-hand anecdotes, situations, and explanations that convey a sense of estrangement. Characteristically, the narrator would complete the supercilious and cheerful anecdote

with a disturbing personal encounter and, by multiplying the perspectives, he exceeds the attitude that looks down on otherness.

The narrator of the family-story usually provides an account of a definite perception or experience of estrangement. The families of the parents of the narrator distrust one another on a mutual basis. "although they put out their tentacles towards one another, they would always pull them back suddenly as soon as there was any interaction" (Illyés 1964, 52) The father, who is striving to break out, is looked down upon by the relatives of the mother: "Both families were distinct countries, with different customs, strikingly differing kinds of people; I could even draw the precise geographical boundary between them." (Illyés 1964, 60)

The recollecting self discovers the other in himself when perceiving the actions, the way of thinking, and the language use of the recollected self as strange or estranged. "Grandfather would have us call him 'old father', and our grandmother 'parent', but all this is so thickly folksy that, even if way back then I could say it with no problem whatsoever, it is rather difficult for my nib to accept it first now." (Illyés 1964, 33) In Illyés's autobiographical writing, we can also find examples for the recognition of the performative potential in language for creating events or experience. One such example would be when the recollecting self brings about an estranged effect through words of unknown meaning, while the meaning of these words and expressions remains hidden from the readers. "Bregócs. ... This expression is not understood by the villagers. This could be said only by one of my mates from the Puszta." (Illyés 1964, 329) The understanding of otherness within his own self and the occasional failure in transforming himself urge the narrator to continuously redefine his own identity: "depth and height seem to have their own atmosphere in society, just as in nature. Following a sudden shift of position, I always noticed the same symptoms in myself as the ones I experience when descending into the shaft of a mine or when reaching the peak of a mountain in the Alps in an elevator." (Illyés 1964, 242)

In sum, we can say that Illyés's autobiographical writing exposes an estranged world through the multiplication of the perspectives of perception and interpretation. Furthermore, he

cancels the fixed position of the subject facing an unfamiliar subject matter in the respects of the narrating activity and that of the reading as well. What he suggests to the readers is that strangeness or otherness in this kind of autobiographical writing is the result of interpretation. The activity of the narrator focuses on making the estranged quality of the other accessible for us.

However, the autobiographical narrator is unable to diminish the tension between assimilation and the maintenance of otherness.

The book does not fulfill our expectations coming from its quality of a parable about the anguishing beauty of elevation, as it does not determine to what extent the life-path of the recollector embodies the mythic fate of the boy extracted from the "prehistoric" existence on the Puszta: "I went where I was carried." (Illyés 1964, 332) This is the closing sentence, yet even the bitter epilogue of the book fails to dissolve the freedom of the recipients' attitude.

SÁNDOR MÁRAI: CONFESSIONS OF A MIDDLE-CLASS CITIZEN (*EGY POLGÁR VALLOMÁSAI*)

Following the favorable international reception of his *A Gyertyák csonkig égnek* [The Candles Burn Themselves Out], there has been a positive increase of interest in the works of Sándor Márai (1900-1989) both in Europe and overseas. For the foreign readers interested in Hungarian culture, it might not be a well-known fact that this classic writer of universal Hungarian letters was for several decades excluded from the literary history of those who interrupted the continuity of national culture in Hungary after 1948. For more than forty years, Márai lived in voluntary exile: first in New York City between 1952 and 1967, then in Salerno, Italy, until 1968 and, finally, in San Diego from 1979 on. There is not much known about his life, despite the fact that, according to Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, the author of the first monograph on him, "There is not any author in Hungarian letters who would be more autobiographical than Sándor Márai". (1991)

Márai was born in the city of *Kassa* [present-day Kosice, Slovakia] on April 11, 1900. He considered himself to be of German extraction from the region called *Szepesség*. His Saxon great-grandfather on his father's side was raised to the status of nobility, and the family adopted Hungarian ways. His Moravian ancestors on his mother's side followed suit but they did not give up the middle-class way of life either. *Kassa*, at the turn of the century, had approximately forty thousand inhabitants and four daily newspapers. Márai's first article was published when he was 14 years old. A year before the Great War broke out of, he ran away from the family circle. His father, who was a lawyer, then sent his son to study in the capital, Budapest. Upon the request of the family, Sándor first studied law but soon switched to the humanities. At the age of eighteen, he was a regular contributor of feuilletons to *Budapesti Napló*. Following 1919, a longer stay abroad ensued, which had a decisive impact on his attitude as a writer. One of the best and most prestigious newspapers of the Weimar Republic, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, published articles written by him

quite frequently in the 20's. He was pretty close to becoming a German writer but he chose a different path, since he became convinced that he was supposed to write only in Hungarian. In 1923 he moved to Paris for a number of years. As the peace treaty following the lost war annexed his hometown to Czechoslovakia, Márai was reluctant to settle in Hungary for quite long. The decade of the 1930's was his most prolific period as a writer. His popularity grew quickly but he could not find a spiritual-intellectual community with which he could have identified himself. He was a passionate believer in the value-generating force of the middle-class way of life, this is why he pointed out with relentless consistency how the bourgeois middle-class was deteriorating. A long-standing guardian of the old values of this middle-class, he was doomed to loneliness by the destruction and self-determining concept of history: "if you want to answer the questions of the world, you can only do it out of loneliness, which is complete like life and death." He unconditionally respected the dignity of the individual personality, and considered the self-denial of intellectuals a fatal mistake, when it meant the sacrifice of independence for personal success. He had strong doubts concerning all mundane teachings of redemption. At the same time, he was convinced that, in a debate of incomparable beliefs, *compassion* was an acceptable central value. For him, the political system that had pulped the closing part of his novel called *Sértődöttek* [The Offended] in 1948 was totally alien. In the solitude of his voluntary exile, he had to face the question about what related him to Hungarianness as a writer. "He contended," writes Szegedy-Maszák, the author of the monograph on him, "that it was inseparable from the *modus vivendi* of literature that its cultivators should live in a community that speaks their mother tongue, yet literature itself could only serve the nation through reviving the language."

Márai's most significant autobiographical novel, *Confessions of a Middle-Class Citizen*, is perhaps less known by foreign readers, therefore, it makes sense that we focus our analysis on this book now. The indefinite article in the title indicates that the author in the text is a representative of an entire community. The person who is about to make a *confession* grows up in a wealthy, strict, middle-

class family of German extraction. It is the middle-class environment that determines his overall behavior and character but, at the same time, he rebels and breaks out of the inherited way of life. The first volume of the book discusses the topic of breaking away from home, while the second volume argues that separation is pointless. Yet Márai does not simply delineate his own and his family's life story but he also gives a portrait of the age. Through this portrait, he presents the changes that occurred in the historical position, culture, and attitudes of the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, he does this in such a way that the confessing autobiographical self becomes confronted with the questions concerning his own personality, system of values, and objectives. Thus, all of the actions, decisions, and human relations of this reminiscing self are coupled with the feeling of *being an outsider*: "I don't belong to anyone. As regards my views, my lifestyle, and my spiritual attitudes, I am a middle-class person, and yet I feel more at home anywhere else than among middle-class people; I live in anarchy, which I feel to be immoral, and I can hardly bear this situation." (Márai 1990, 155)⁵⁷ Through staging the recollecting process, the narrator of Márai's autobiographical novel seeks an explanation for his turn of fate that leads him into solitude. This means that the autobiographical self "produces and directs himself," that is, he gets his "double" (who can be considered the contemplating self of the recollecting narrator) on stage, whom the readers can join in discovering the world opening up in the memory. The experiencing self attempts to get outside himself through the creation of the fiction of the self, i.e. through the division of the narrating voice. Even as early as in the opening section of the book, there are already *two voices present*, and *two narrated consciousnesses merge together*. One of them belongs to the child recalled, who is amazed by the sight of the parental home. He is filled with self-consciousness and even pride by the notion of possessing something. He identifies with the building that appears as *the metonymy of the home*. Another example that we could cite here would be that of the cathedral towering over the city, as the spatial metaphor of the absolute central point in the first volume. In the

⁵⁷ The page numbers after the cited passages in the text refer to the following edition: Márai Sándor: *Egy polgár vallomásai*. Akadémiai, Budapest, 1990.

system of values of the narrator, this latter entity is nothing else but the embodied or manifested idea “stands out to be seen from far away out of the surrounding quotidian and perishable confusion.” The other voice belongs to the recollecting writer, who begins the course of his reminescences as if he was writing a novel: he starts with a snapshot and a description. The attention permanently focused on the objective environment and the scenes of life presupposes such an autobiographical self who would wish to recognize himself “through another or the others,” so he makes the recognition of his otherness or the understanding of what he already knows depend on the distribution of the experiences of the encountering self. “Life passes in gloom, made up of unspoken words and gestures aborted in due time. Silence and fear are what life is all about, the real life, that is.” (Márai 1990, 64) This sentence, fixing itself deep into our memory, interprets the detailed description of the outside world as a research of events that bring about some revelation with them. Other acts belonging to the same category include the representation of the scenes and props of family life and the rearticulation of all the issues that are well-known for the narrator.

According to the definition in the first volume, an unmistakable sign of a writer’s *modus vivendi* is when the contemplator’s own life appears to him/her as an opportunity for expressing ideas. In several chapters of the book, the principles of creating the genres of portraits and snapshots come to the fore. There are series of the life stories of friends and family members created, and it seems as if the original autobiography were written apart, almost multiplying itself. What may be concluded out of this fact is that the autobiographical self attempts to access his own self through the detour of creating others, by staging the lives that open up in his memory. The family genealogy offers the reading possibility of the genre of the parable, as long as the lifepaths of family members who are unable to fit in and thus become homeless is summed up in the fate of the narrator.

According to the concept of the narrator, the passing on of reminescences, of the recollecting act, i.e. of the traditions, is compulsory for all those who have received intellectual goods as a

heritage. Furthermore, the staging of common memories gives some sense to solitude. The fact is that the appropriation of tradition is the key to the accomplishment of individual personality and the condition for elaborating one's individuality. Is the narrator able to contemplate himself from the outside? This primarily depends on whether he is able to see behind his inherited family characteristics. It is far from being a simple task, as the narrator is convinced that "'individuality' is that little novelty that people add to their own selves, and is minuscule when compared to what we inherit from the dead." (Márai 1990, 65) Márai's narrator cannot fully identify with the bourgeoisie and is filled with awe at the possibility that individuals get dissolved and lost in their own communities. For the autobiographical narrator, it is *constant running or fleeing* that determines the position of man. Remembering and forgetting are notions that belong together, as they mutually presuppose one another for the autobiographer who attempts to explore the genealogy of the individual personality.

As the basic question in the first volume seems to be "*What does it mean to be lonely at home?*" the second volume can be read as a response to the question "*What does it mean to be lonely in foreign countries?*" At the beginning of the second volume, the narrator is twenty-three years old and he has been married for only a few weeks. Consequently, almost ten years have passed since the news about the breaking out of the First World War blew up the family idyll, an event chosen for a final tableau at the end of the first volume. How are the two volumes interrelated? The second one is about the futility of trying to escape and about the failure resulting from moving from one place to another. It offers an interpretation of the autobiographical narrative of the first volume in retrospect, and it reviews and reevaluates some of its details. All the phenomena, resembling the logic of simulacrum, that are empty in the middle-class way of life, or functionless in its everyday objects, or illusory in its quotidian scenes, are all added up gradually for the narrator as an experience of the involuntary recognition that the appropriation of western culture is impossible from the perspective of the way of thinking inherited by him.

The *time concept* of the recollecting self is closely related to his *system of values*. For him, the passing of time results in a loss of values. He considers the ever faster-running time to be a destructive force that separates people from one another. He also regards the effects of modernization and technical development to be ambiguous, as they do not necessarily improve the quality of life. In the time concept of the narrator, the past is overestimated. He is far from being convinced that whatever is new should necessarily be more valuable than whatever is old. In the "own house" "there are castes, classes, and congregations living already. In the old houses, in the one-storey buildings, there used to live families. It did not matter whether they were friends or enemies: they were people who were inseparably related to one another." (Márai 1990, 11) This wording indicates that the narrator finds the chief reason for the deterioration of the quality of life in indifference. War and the loss of his homeland mean an irreversible break in the life of the narrator, as they damage his personal space of existence. According to the autobiographer's judgement, up-to-dateness in art depends on flexibly changing perspectives of interpretation: "'Man' and disgraced humanity used to be as common elements in the new German literature then as seals in a variety show." (Márai 1990, 204)

Reminiscing writers usually check on their memories, search for some reason in past events, discover some meaning in details hitherto unnoticed. When our autobiographer undertakes the task of evaluating, he generally adds ironic comments in the present tense of the narrative to the past family stories. "Whoever belonged to the class, and had good qualifications, could start the day in a fairly easy-going way." (Márai 1990, 33) However, when referring to his father, he suspends the ambiguous modality. Provinciality, just like inorganic and unappropriated culture, along with the rejection of traditions in the name of modernity, are all alien to the narrator. He does not believe that the key to improvement is in sudden and unexpected historical changes or in the interruption of continuity. At the same time, he is rather strict in his judgement of the Hungarian middle-class. In the second volume, the narrator brings his confession close to the status of a

testimonial. For this purpose, he undertakes the task of becoming a reporter, who provides an account of the decline of a culture: "I viewed everything, including the objects and the people, as if I had been an 'eyewitness', and if I had seen it for the first and perhaps also for the last time, feeling that I had to record an account of what I saw for the posterity of a later age."

The feeling of being constantly threatened forces him to physically escape all the time. The continuous movement from one place to another might explain the looser structural framework of the second volume and the piled-up arrangement of the miscellaneous stories in it: "I was interested in the unintelligibility and confused quality of the world; how no one observed the rules of the game in anything ... I was interested in the world and in myself." (Márai 1990, 208) As if he was afraid of the coming of the age of the simulacrum, the narrator explains the requirement of providing a witness' testimony as a finally discovered task of the writer: "I had a very urgent thing to do: I wanted to see something in its 'original condition' before that dreadful and undefinable change would take place. I set off on my journey."

The narrator of *Confessions of a Middle-Class Citizen* recognizes gradually that, as a writer, he can only live and work in the medium of his mother tongue. The thought surfaces in the recollecting self that language is inappropriate for expressing what happens in the soul: "the words are lame, imperfect, and insufficient for proper composition." The changing identity of the autobiographical personality reveals itself in the distance between the language-worlds of the recollecting and the recollected consciousnesses. The interpretation of the differences of the subjects created by the individual cultural grammars plays a decisive part in the self-interpretation of the narrator: he discovers what is foreign in what he previously thought to be his own when he compares different cultures. The narrator realizes that it is not enough for him to make up his mind to "get a top grade in the exam on Europe." In fact, he has to be permanently prepared for the possibility that all that he believed to be his own as a fugitive can become strange and foreign to him through the influence of the experience he has acquired abroad: "In *Kassa*... we used to be very

diligent in trying to satisfy the requirements for the status of middle-class citizenry... whereas in Nantes, people probably just lived within a form of life, without any special class consciousness or ambition." The ceaseless comparisons gradually undermine the foundations of the thinking of the autobiographer, and force him to exercise constant self-scrutiny: "Everything was 'different' - and I felt that it was time for me to take a standpoint in this chaos of surprises." (Márai 1990, 220) The narrator realizes that, even in his marriage, the cultural ties and the linguistic background had an unquestionably important role. The recognition of his own otherness / strangeness and the appropriation of otherness define the years that the autobiographer spent abroad. The limits of understanding the other culture are indicated with ruthless honesty at the closing section of the individual chapter on their stay in Paris: "Several years have passed, and we still have not unpacked all our suitcases; although on a few occasions I have managed to recognize jokes and punchlines and laughed at the right times." (Márai 1990, 343)

Nonetheless, the closing of the recollections resembles the ending of Proust's *A la Recherche*. Like Proust's protagonist, the autobiographical narrator also asks the question of what he is going to write about from this point on, and the readers hold the finished product of the work in their hands which the writer, who has found himself, decides to write about the staging of the recollecting process.