CONFRONTATIONS AND INTERACTIONS
Essays on Cultural Memory

CONFRONTATIONS AND INTERACTIONS
Essays on Cultural Memory

Edited by

Bálint Gárdos – Ágnes Péter – Natália Pikli – Máté Vince

L'Harmattan

Contents

4. Multimedia constructions as sites of remembering: stages, maps, cemeteries

5. Psychology, aesthetics and the sociology of memory

Preface

In the very busy thirteenth district of Budapest there is a park with a playground called Szent István park (St. Stephen's Park) that seems to be immune to the incessant flow of cars, buses, trolley-buses outside its gates. The park is very popular with young parents in the area because of its spaciousness, and the ideal combination it offers of freedom for spontaneous movement and order: nearly geometrical, it radiates a pleasurable sense of security within the cast-iron fences. It is a perfect "cultural space" which as a national *lieu de mémoire* contains the sediment of time. Cultural spaces often have topographical reality; we encounter them in our everyday lives but seldom if ever do we become conscious of their complex reference to our shared histories. The park actually encapsulates the several ways in which recent history as a sequence of events recollected is monumentalised and memorialised, thus it also anticipates most of the main arguments of the essays which follow. Several myths, developed from the historical records by the cultural memories of various communities or disseminated by political power groups, manifest themselves in the objects of the park and its environment. As ideologies – wishful images of the future and nostalgic reveries of the past – have succeeded each other, emblems of intentional remembering have been placed in the park over the past sixty-three years, and, something quite exceptional in Budapest, have been left to stand where they are.

Walking from north to south one first encounters a stone statue in the typical socialist realist style, the *Stevedore* by Zoltán Borbereki Kovács, erected in 1948. It was shaped both by the local demand for art representing the ethos of the working people and by the memory of Meunier's eponymous bronze statue which is housed in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. Next there is a monument in limestone by Ferenc Kovács from 1970 which is dedicated to *Szir*, the partisan "who together with his group fought heroically against the German occupation and its local accomplices". Further south there stands a statue in bronze, the *Serpent Slayer*, an athletic naked male with one hand holding the throat of a snake, the other high up in the air ready to smite it with a stick while one of his legs pins down its body. The statue is dedicated to the memory of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat and humanitarian who saved the lives of tens of thousands of Jews between June 1944 and February 1945 in Budapest. The buildings, established as Swedish territory, in which a

hiding place was found by a great number of Jewish Hungarians, were scattered through the nearby streets. The area around the park is permeated by the memory and the presence of Jewish cultural traditions. Wallenberg was taken into detention by the Soviet army after they entered Budapest and the circumstances of his death remain unknown. A few months after the liberation of Budapest – when nothing was known about his whereabouts – a Wallenberg Committee was established, which commissioned Pál Pátzay, one of the leading artists of the time, to design a monument as a token of the city's gratitude to the Swedish diplomat. When, however, the statue had already been erected in St. Stephen's Park and the date of the ceremony of its unveiling was set for 17 January 1949, on the instruction of the Communists (who, after merging with the Social Democrats in June 1948, were soon to take full control of the political life of the country) it was dismantled under cover of the preceding night, and later moved to Debrecen to stand in front of a pharmacology factory where it was resemanticised: Pátzay himself had defined it as symbolic "of the victory over fascism", but in its new milieu it was seen as a figural representation of the victory of medical sciences over sickness. In 1999 the Metropolitan Council of Budapest erected a new pedestal – this time designed by László Rajk Jr., the son of László Rajk, the Communist politician executed in October 1949 after Rákosi's most dramatic show trial – and placed a replica of Pátzay's statue on it. Not far from the *Serpent Slayer* there stands a larger than life-size statue in bronze of György Lukács, whose involvement in the political history of pre- and post-war Hungary is one of the most intriguing questions of twentieth-century Hungarian intellectual history. The statue, which was erected on the site in 1985, is the work of Imre Varga, who had been a student of Pátzay, and whose own monument in honour of Wallenberg, commissioned by an American diplomat, and unveiled, after lengthy negotiations with Kádár, in 1987 in the second district, evokes the memory of the *Serpent Slayer*. Varga's figure of Wallenberg stands between two huge granite blocks which display the outline of the statue on their inner sides: thus it is a monument of disjuncture which commemorates remembering and forgetting simultaneously. At the end of our walk we reach András Sándor Kocsis's bust of Ferenc Fejtő erected in 2008. The political philosopher, historian and literary critic, Fejtő contributed to the journal *Nyugat* and co-edited with the poet Attila József the anti-fascist literary journal *Szép Szó*. In 1938, following a sentence of six months in prison for an article criticising the pro-German stance of the government, he left Hungary for France. During the Second World War, he took part in the French Resistance. After the trial and death of his friend László Rajk, he severed his ties with Hungary to return only after 1989 for short visits as a welcome guest. After his death in Paris he was buried in the National Pantheon in Budapest.

Close to Fejtő's bust you can see several hundred small rose plots with roses developed by a Hungarian floriculturist, Gergely Márk, who has defined his

roses by a nomenclature that was apparently devised to create a text of memory which can be read as a narrative of all the different individual ambitions and collective endeavours that have made up the history of the country. The name tags attached to the plots carry topographical, historical, literary and religious names. Most of the appellations have very intensive emotional associations, like the name of the Transylvanian town in Romania, Kolozsvár/Cluj, and – connected with the history of the town – the name of the Renaissance king Matthias Corvinus, an easily available source of national pride. The nineteenth-century poets, János Arany and Sándor Petőfi have their own roses. Arany's present stance in the critical consciousness is the result of heated debates initiated by the journal *Nyugat*, the main intellectual force that created modern Hungarian literature; whereas Petőfi is very deeply imbedded in the Hungarian mind as the poet who laid down his life in the name of what he called, using a typically nineteenth-century term, "the liberty of the world". A small plaque in one of the plots carries the name of the actress Róza Laborfalvy, celebrated leading lady of the National Theatre. She was the wife of the novelist Jókai, whose historical novels are probably still definitive in terms of what Hungarian means for a lot of people. Another plaque evokes the memory of the actress Éva Ruttkai, the most popular icon of femininity in the 1970s. Her relationship with the actor Zoltán Latinovits – who figured famously in multicultural events, like innovative post-1956 films and poetry readings that attempted to sensitise the public to the necessity, indeed the ethical imperative, of doubt and self-quest – is one of the legends of the modern Hungarian theatre. A new species of rose is dedicated to Antal Szerb's memory who was a novelist, essayist, literary historian and a representative of the transnational values of the journal *Nyugat*. Late in 1944 he was deported to a concentration camp, and was beaten to death there in January 1945. And there is another new species bearing the name of the disturbingly popular Transylvanian author, Albert Wass, whose work conveys a belief in Hungarian cultural supremacy and instigates nostalgia for the pre-Trianon boundaries of Hungary. Wass was sentenced to death in absentia for war crimes by the Romanian People's Tribunal in 1945.

On three sides it is the façades of buildings erected in the 1930s, the most vigorous period of the urbanisation of this part of the district, that serve as backdrop to the park. The fourth side of it flanks the Danube: from the park benches you can see the international liners cradled by the waves. For centuries the Danube corridor has mediated the encounter of the different cultures in the Danubian basin; it has been submitted to both the idealisations of the multicultural character of the area, and to one-sided lamentations of national wounds.[1]

---

[1] Marcel Cornis-Pope. "Mapping the Danubian Literary Mosaic," in Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, eds., *The History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004–2010), II, 217–224, p. 222.

In the Hungarian literary memory the river is associated first and foremost with
Attila József, who, in one of the greatest poems of remembrance in twentieth-
century Hungarian poetry, "By the Danube", looks at the river as a memento
of history. In his contemplation, private and collective memories are fused, and
in the final stanza he reaches out towards the hope that through creative work
and a realistic assessment of the traumas of the past, the antagonisms between
the nations of the region, "the miseries of the small Eastern European states"
as István Bibó called them,[2] might be pacified in the collective memory. At the
same time, in a desperate effort, he conquers "the hopeless sadness within him",
to use the words of one of the Proust essays of Walter Benjamin,[3] and psycho-
logical equilibrium is attained:

> The Danube, which is past, present and future
> entwines its waves in tender friendly clasps.
> Out of the blood our fathers shed at battles
> flows peace, through our remembrance and regard…
>
> (Translated by Peter Zollman)

Although this vision of peace still seems utopian, recently the park has been the
venue of demonstrations of reconciliation: in February this year the liberation
of Budapest from the Nazi occupation was commemorated here, and in May a
mass rally organised on Facebook was held in the park to protest against racial
ideologies, and to demonstrate solidarity with the Roma.

The two concepts, *Confrontation* and *Interaction*, are collocated in the title of
the present volume to create the intellectual context in which each of the in-
dividual essays in the collection can find its place. In 2007 *The New York Times*
published a profile of the novelist, dramatist and essayist Péter Nádas under the
title "A Writer Who Always Sees History in the Present Tense", in which Nádas
is defined as a writer and thinker who has been concerned with the obligation
of the writer as well as the political citizen to confront the consequences of their
own compromised morality, and is quoted as claiming that this confrontation
is exactly what Hungarians, among others, have not done. Some of the essays
published here are concerned with "what amounts to trans-generational haunt-
ing"; with the moral conundrums of private and collective memory, with the
duty to mourn. The traumas of the twentieth century "need, as in the relation-

---

2   István Bibó, *A közép-európai kis államok nyomorúsága* (Budapest: Új Magyarország, 1946).
3   Walter Benjamin, "On the Image of Proust," in Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead,
    eds., *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007),
    119–129, p. 121. Translated by Harry Zohn.

ship between patient and analyst, to be worked through by acts of talking and of listening, acts of writing and reading" (Alistair Davies).

Confrontation is also used with reference to the boundary between different cultures, which can be crossed in the bold act of translation, transposition or allusion: the translator or borrower has to confront what Percy Shelley called "the burthen of the curse of Babel". The transposition of literary items is recreation "according to another cultural heritage […] from a new perspective, hence, with a difference" (Péter Dávidházi). This difference generates a productive *interaction* between the two cultures, in other words, a semantic enrichment of the original and the target tradition at the same time.

And finally *confrontation* also describes the attitude of innovators in all fields of culture who are aware of the needs of the consumers of culture and create spaces of collective contemplation where knowledge can be possessed or repossessed, tradition can be assessed and redefined, or tradition can actually be established. The new paradigm emerges in an *interaction* between the memory of the past and the pressures of the present, it is the outcome of "an act of recovery and an act that marks a decisive rupture with the past" (Richard Cronin).

The term *cultural memory* in the title is used in what is proposed by Astrid Erll as a provisional definition: "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts."[4] Such an understanding of the term has allowed the inclusion of a broad spectrum of studies ranging from essays on the historical processes of transmission, reception, appropriation, i.e. the problem of cultural border-crossings through which traditions on both sides have been altered; on monuments of collective remembering which face or replace each other as collective truth has been asserted or subverted over the years; and on texts of national memory with its invented traditions, which are often rooted in trauma. Most of the articles are the outcome of discussions triggered by their authors' presentation of their material and hypotheses at a conference organised by the Department of English Studies at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, in September 2010. The response elicited by the questions raised at the conference, as well as editorial comments in a later phase in the development of what constitutes the contents of this volume, have resulted in a degree of intertextual restructuring so that eventually the individual essays cohere into more or less congruent arguments in five overarching themes.

---

[4] Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory: An Introduction," in Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 1–15, p. 2

1. PATHOS FORMULAE OF MEMORY
– THE RHETORIC OF EMOTIONAL INTENSITY

The three nodal points of history that the essays in this volume are connected to are the two world wars and 1956. Mementos to these events are ubiquitous in Europe, signs to recall them appear everywhere; they are, however, not very easy to read. We are surrounded by figures fashioned at times by historical individuals, and, more often and more powerfully, by popular, social, or national collective imaginations. The recent past, a period that in the overall impression these essays create goes as far back as the beginning of the twentieth century, seems to stand in a space that is as illegible and as fragmented as the historical memories in the name of which its several narratives have been created.[5] The great traumas of the twentieth century have not receded into the past. The past becomes past when it is constructed in the present as absence by historians. It is impossible as yet to write a uniformly acceptable historical narrative of the period, which could offer up the events of the century for dispassionate examination.[6] The dominant presence, indeed the cult of unbridled violence, has proved to be inexplicable in the objective terms of positive historiography. Organised violence, the unique characteristic of the period, was first unleashed in the events of the First World War, but it surfaced in its most threatening form in the Second World War and it is still the greatest problem that has to be faced by the post-communist systems.[7] The mutually exclusive ways in which the events are remembered by individuals and communities raise crucial questions about the relationship of reality and fiction as well as the dynamism of recollection and amnesia.[8] Alistair Davies explores the ways in which the First World War – which he terms the most decisive political event and cultural period in Britain – has been remembered since the 1960s in British culture, including film, music, poetry and fiction. Katalin G. Kállay defines symbols of remembering traumatic events, in a discussion of Faulkner mourning his troubled southern heritage, Attila József recollecting his tragic childhood, and Dan Pagis commemorating the trauma of the Holocaust. László Munteán collates conflicting memories of the siege of Budapest and takes account of some of the most symbolically charged hieroglyphics of the devastating months, like the bullet-ridden façades of the buildings in the city and the arrows guiding citizens of the time to shelters. János Kenyeres gives a survey of the involvement of the Hungarian writers in staging the Revolution of 1956

---

[5]   Péter György, *A hely szelleme* [The spirit of the place] (Budapest: Magvető, 2007), p. 149.
[6]   Gábor Gyáni, "A 20. század mint emlékezeti 'esemény'" [The Twentieth century as an "event" remembered], *Forrás* 41 (2009) 3–15, pp. 7–8.
[7]   Endre Bojtár, "Pitfalls of Writing a Regional Literary History of East-Central Europe," in Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, II. 419–427, p. 427.
[8]   Ferenc Erdős, *Pszichoanalízis és kulturális emlékezet* [Psychoanalysis and Cultural Memory] (Budapest: Jószöveg Műhely Kiadó, 2010), p. 28.

and defines the great variety of the literary responses to it abroad and at home by Hungarian and non-Hungarian authors.

2. CULTURAL BORDER-CROSSINGS: INTERTEXTUALITY AND TRANSLATION

In arguably the most famous essay of Modernism T. S. Eliot said: "No poet […] has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead".[9] In the simultaneous order of the great works of art defined by the constant memory of the past in the present some dominant patterns of interaction can be seen, a continual dialogue between poets and a continual attempt at cultural border-crossing, which stems either from affinity of minds or antagonism of conflicting affiliations. Elinor Shaffer, Series Editor of the now nineteen-volume project in the reception of British and Irish authors in Europe, discusses a hermeneutic and an impositional pattern of reception, and offers some cross-European examples that will, predictably, open up new vistas in, and refine the method of, Reception Studies. Péter Dávidházi analyses the nature and the use of allusion in poetry and shows how two major Hungarian poets', István Vas's and Sándor Weöres's translation of Eliot's "The Waste Land" is defined as well as enriched by the translators' different cultural backgrounds and how the transhistorical Ezekiel passage in "The Waste Land" allows us to probe our shared cultural memory and to explore divergences. Gabriella Hartvig traces the history of how, through affinity, Ferenc Kölcsey, one of the main men of letters of the period which developed the concept of Hungarian national identity at the beginning of the nineteenth century, transformed the image of Sterne as a satirical writer into the aesthetic idea of the whimsical writer. Géza Kállay investigates images of crime, punishment, madness and shame in the ballad "Mistress Agnes" by János Arany (the ballad is quoted in the author's own translation) to show the operation of the memory of literature in literature: how Arany remembered *Macbeth* when he wrote his own poem. Benedek Péter Tóta examines the operation of cultural memory as it reflects the adaptation of British literature in Seamus Heaney's poetry; Heaney's creative recollection of T. S. Eliot is analysed side by side with Ted Hughes's image of Eliot as remembered by Heaney and the indebtedness of all three of them to Dante. Tóta shows how the latent and active presence of what is remembered is responsible for the polymodality of modern poetry as well as music. Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* is offered here

---

[9] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1974), 47–59, p. 49.

as a case study of how cultural dispossession is turned into cultural repossession by the work of literary recollection. In her discussion of "Tam o'Shanter" Veronika Ruttkay argues that Burns's heteroglossic work shows a remarkable awareness of the possibilities and challenges of translation, both in a strict sense (translation from one language to another) and in the wider sense of translation between cultures. The poem's self-conscious refusal to provide a smooth crossing from oral culture's popular pleasures to the norms and values of a polished literary world anticipates Coleridge's concept of untranslatability as the essence of poetry. Another case of cultural border-crossing is discussed by Éva Péteri: she claims that the Hungarian painter, Lajos Gulácsy's appropriation of motives and methods used by Dante Gabriel Rossetti shows no intention of hiding the gap between past and present, but by clearly doing away with any reference to the present Gulácsy creates a dream world populated by spectres evoked from a visionary past, from a shared cultural memory.

3. SOCIAL FRAMEWORK OF MEMORY:
THE IDEOLOGY OF REMEMBERING

A number of essays in the volume focus on ways in which the political history of the country has shaped cultural memory. On the one hand, the shifting historical and social conditions have continually redefined the meaning of already existing literary works, the relationship of the community or the individual with the mechanism of political power; on the other, they have delimited the space in which memory can operate. Ágnes Péter shows how the artistic imagination is released, and at the same time controlled, by the anxieties of the artist (Jókai's memory of the revolution of 1848 and its aftermath) and how cultural memory is retrieved if and when appropriate cues that stimulate remembering are present (the political debates of the period preceding and following the Compromise/Ausgleich/Kiegyezés with Vienna). Jókai's image of Milton in his drama on the English poet's life is also shaped by the interplay of international precedence and personal psychological drives. Géza Maráczi discusses how in the 1950s Dickens elicited two radically different treatments in Hungarian criticism. Critics in Hungary, who were expected to strictly conform to ideological orthodoxy dictated by the cultural policy of the Socialist Workers' Party, defined Dickens as a radical critic of the social conditions in England and as a sentimentalist who could offer no agenda to change the conditions of life in his country, whereas in his essays László Cs. Szabó, a former critic of the journal *Nyugat*, who lived in exile from 1948 till his death in 1984, created an alternative image of Dickens, thus protesting against the ideological use Dickens was put to in Hungary. Zsolt Czigányik scans the readers' reports on Orwell and Burgess used by Európa Publishing House, which had the monopoly of foreign literature in the 1960s, to

show how censorship operated indirectly and shaped the reception of the authors in Hungary. Natália Pikli charts the different strategies Hungarian institutions apply when targeting young audiences to make Shakespeare accessible for them; her analysis includes a discussion of textbooks, artistic and commercial expedients used by the theatres as well as new translations and the teachers' response to the problem.

4. MULTIMEDIA CONSTRUCTIONS AS SITES OF REMEMBERING: STAGES, MAPS, CEMETERIES

Multifaceted research approaches are used in this cluster of essays (analytical criticism of literary, historical and political discourses as well as the historical context of the theatre and the use of folklore) to indicate that in a number of media, in which cultural memory is channelled toward those who are either ready to remember or inclined to forget, the past and the present combine to constitute the experience of deep time which has a cathartic effect. The role of the theatre is ambivalent since it can serve both as an instrument of elucidation and indoctrination, and it has been used as a means of critique and dissent as well as a space in which the audience's mind is numbed into amnesia.[10] John Drakakis reads *Hamlet* as a "memory" play in which it is the struggle between forces that seek to preserve and erase the past that is at stake. His essay places "memory" and "forgetting" in a larger historic and cultural context that links the central theme of the play with the larger issue of the role of the theatre as an agent of cultural memory. Eglantina Remport treats the theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century as a collective site of memory in which the modern Shakespeare cult was instituted in the spirit of modernism under the influence of Gordon Craig's revolutionary scenographic concepts, which had an impact on Stanislavsky in Moscow, Sándor Hevesi in the National Theatre in Budapest and W. B. Yeats in the Abbey Theatre in Dublin at around the same time. Máté Vince claims that three mutually exclusive narratives of the Revolution of 1956 contend in present day public discourse; all the three of them have been dismantled, however, by the most provocatively controversial play of János Térey and András Papp, *Dungeons*, which was composed for the 50th anniversary of the events and which raises crucial moral questions ignored by all the three narratives. Andrea Hübner discusses maps not only as memory aids and a medium of transmitting knowledge but also as means of control and possession; she also demonstrates that the emerging "knowledge" of modernity was predetermined by the "prejudice" of the Middle Ages. Andrea Velich surveys the history of the

---

[10] See Dragan Klaić, "General Introduction to Part II. Theatre as a Literary Institution," in Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, III. 143–145, p. 143.

forms of remembering the dead and the burial rituals from the Middle Ages up to our own culture.

5. PSYCHOLOGY, AESTHETICS AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF MEMORY

Memory emerged as a central concept in the aesthetic speculations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the literature of the same period has become the object remembered in post-modern texts. A completely new approach to the literature of the first two decades of the nineteenth century in England is adopted by Richard Cronin when he claims that Walter Scott's popularity and the large circulation of the literary magazines can be explained by the radical expansion of the reading public which now for the first time comprised a significant number of readers "without grandfathers" – the Cockney, the metropolitan lower middle class – whose demand for a vicarious experience of a past rooted in the countryside in living memory was satisfied by the historical novel and the periodical literature of the time. The notion of memory, either productive or reproductive, was bound up with that of the imagination in the eighteenth century: in his essay Zsolt Komáromy claims that it is the self-validating capacity of memory that distinguishes it from the imagination. Andrea Timár discusses two representative and interconnected texts of the Romantic period, Wordsworth's *Peter Bell* and Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to demonstrate that whereas Wordsworth's concept of the memory formation staged by *Peter Bell* easily inscribes itself into Coleridge's politics of *Bildung*, it is impossible to reconcile the Mariner's failure to construct memory with Coleridge's aesthetic ideology of nation-building. Veronika Végh analyses a cluster of post-modern texts, including cyberpunk and steampunk fiction, all connected with the cult figure of canonical Romanticism, Lord Byron, to show how the present defines itself by remembering the past. In her essay Andrea Kirchknopf discusses the changing concepts of the Victorian ethos in the national and cultural narratives of the last thirty years as reflected in Post-Victorian fiction as well as in the response to the cultural memento of the Crystal Palace and its late-twentieth-century re-imagining, the Millennium Dome.

★ ★ ★

The editors hope that the present volume will contribute, however modestly, to the international scholarship engaged in clarifying the mechanism of cultural memory. At the same time it is offered as a tribute to English Studies in Hungary. It was one hundred and twenty five years ago today that the first lectureship in English was created in this country by order of the Minister for Religion

and Education.[11] This volume is dedicated to the memory of the scholars who founded the discipline and those who have maintained it through the years and established the academic traditions in which most of the authors of the volume have been educated.

We also wish to express our gratitude to Judit Friedrich, Head of the Department of English Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, and to our colleagues for the support they have given to our research project funded by OTKA (Hungarian Scientific Research Fund: NK 71770). Without the full support of the Department it would have been impossible to hold the international conference, "Literature and Cultural Memory" in September 2010 and to publish the present volume.

The Editors

---

[11]   Aladár Sarbu, *The Study of Literature. An Introduction for Hungarian Students of English* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2008), p. 344.

1. Pathos formulae of memory – the rhetoric of emotional intensity

ALISTAIR DAVIES

British culture and the memory of the First World War

We shall soon be marking the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. How the war is remembered in Britain and in the other combatant nations of Europe will, of course, be an intriguing subject for comparative research. In many countries in Europe, the significance of the First World War has long been superseded by the significance of the Second; but in Britain it remains the key political, economic and social event of the last century. It is also seen as the key cultural event since the birth of British modernism – which still has a profound influence on current cultural thought – and literary practice is impossible to disentangle from the outbreak and the impact of the war.[1] "High Wood, Delville, Mametz," Geoffrey Hill writes in *The Triumph of Love* (1998), naming sites on the western front where British soldiers fought in the Battle of the Somme (1916), "We have been there, / and are there still, in a manner of speaking." Few towns or villages are without a war memorial; few public institutions without a roll of the dead of the First World War. This may not be surprising given the numbers of those killed in the war – 765,000 in total; but the number is far below those from France or Germany or Russia and as a proportion of the population, far below those in many other countries. Why in Britain should the war remain such a central event in public memory, kept alive by Remembrance services throughout the country each year? Why should its memory be maintained by the annual sale of poppies? Why have we recently restored the observation of two minutes silence at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the date at which the Armistice was signed? Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* (1993), with the western front as its focus, remains one of the best-selling novels of the past twenty years and has recently been adapted for the stage. Michael Morpurgo's short novel for children, *War Horse* (1982), about the relationship between a young man and his horse sold for war-service, has had one of the most successful runs of any recent stage production in London (2007–11) and is currently in production as a film directed by Steven Spielberg. Paradoxically,

---

[1]   Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) remains the classic account of this. See for a more recent account, Michael J. K. Walsh, ed., *London, Modernism and 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

the First World War seems to figure more comprehensively in British cultural memory the more remote it becomes.

When I read the broadsheets for August 4th, 1964, (Britain entered the war on that day fifty years before), I could find no editorial or article about that anniversary. Indeed, I could find no discussion of the war at all in the weeks preceding or following that date. This in itself is worthy of comment since one of the features of contemporary British culture is its extraordinary readiness to remember historical anniversaries with newspaper articles, books, documentaries, pageants and public commemorations, as has recently been the case with the seventieth anniversary of the Battle of Britain and of the Blitz. In "Victory Weekend May 1945/May 1995," the poet Peter McDonald writes of the cultural events, the firework displays, the fly-past of aircraft from the Second World War used to mark the half-centenary of VE or Victory in Europe day: "All fantasy: their fantasies, my own; / the show an exercise in make-believe / disguised as memory; all the overblown / music and glitter of a coarse, / naive history-carnival." For some, including McDonald, such events suggest that British culture has entered the post-modern realm of the historical lightness of being, where history has become entertainment and empty display; for others, such events suggest a Britain caught in a condition of post-imperial melancholy, its only relief to be found in revisiting the imagined glories of the past.

Of course, the half centenary of the outbreak of the First World War did not go unremarked. Philip Larkin's "MCMXIV", published in 1964 in *The Whitsun Weddings*, remains by far the best known of the poems written in the 1960s to commemorate the First World War. The poem (its title is '1914' in Roman numerals) opens by describing the enthusiasm with which young men queued to enlist as if they were attending a sporting event: "Those long uneven lines / Standing as patiently / As if they were stretched outside / The Oval or Villa Park, [the first a famous cricket, the second a famous football ground] / The crowns of hats, the sun / On moustached archaic faces/ Grinning as if it were all / An August Bank Holiday lark." The world they leave behind is apparently an unchanging one, the children reciting rhymes made up of the names of kings and queens, the landscape "Shadowing Domesday lines". The poem ends: "Never such innocence, / Never before or since, / As changed itself to past without a word." Is Larkin's poem, in the guise of a commentary upon a photograph, an elegy for a world destroyed, with its assumptions of order, rule and continuity? Is it a satire on just such a myth of pre-war tranquillity and order, on the illegibility of the past (encapsulated in the title's indecipherable numerals) which the photograph somehow promises to make available to us? Or is it, with knowledge of Larkin's private horror at the mass immigration which began in the 1960s, a powerful instance of post-imperial melancholy, a lament for a lost, ethnically homogeneous English world? If that is the case, Larkin's poem raises a centrally important question about the function of cultural memory in a modern

multi-ethnic culture. Does British culture still remember the First World War because this is memory from below, the spontaneous combination of millions of individual family histories? Or is the war remembered more instrumentally through the culture's dominant institutions because it provides a convenient narrative of belonging, a core identity for a culture becoming ethnically and culturally diverse?

In his hugely successful play *The History Boys* (2004), set in an English grammar school for boys in the 1980s, Alan Bennett dramatises different attitudes to and ways of teaching the past: on the one hand, we have the sentimental English teacher Hector, who introduces his pupils to the language of suffering and of loss (his pupils study the poets of the First World War and know Larkin's poem by heart); on the other hand, we have the cynical history teacher Irwin, who trains his pupils to turn convention on its head, to strike provocative poses in order to stand out and win places at Oxbridge. He suggests they argue in their examination that the English poets of the First World War were not the poets of pity; on the contrary, they thoroughly enjoyed warfare. Is it possible, Bennett asks, to know the truth of events and to remain in touch with the feelings of the past? Or is the past always invented? And must it, in the modern era, always be invented in deliberatively iconoclastic ways in order to get ahead, to make a name? Bennett was trained as an historian and in the programme note to the play made clear that his play was in part inspired by the career of the historian Niall Ferguson, who made his reputation with an iconoclastic study of the First World War, *The Pity of War* (1998). Britain, Ferguson argued, had no reason to become involved in the First World War and did not serve its own imperial self-interest by doing so. Moreover, the war lasted so long because many of the soldiers involved in it were not victims but actually enjoyed the violence of combat. All acts of memorialisation are interpretative acts; but why do they, in respect to the First World War, cause such unease in British culture when they are also disconnected, as Ferguson's study was, from remembrance and from its rituals designed to cope with loss, when they ignore the suffering of the trenches and the status of the cemeteries of the western front – visited each year by thousands of British school children – as national sites of mourning?

Iconoclastic memorialisation of the First World War is nothing new – indeed, it was the distinctive mode of the interpretations of the war in the 1960s. In the autumn of 1964, the BBC broadcast an epic documentary series called *The Great War* (it is still regarded as the masterpiece of large-scale historical documentary).[2] There were many reasons for the impact of the series. Conceptually, it had a global sweep, covering the war on the eastern as well as the western front, in

---

[2]   For a recent excellent discussion of the contribution of television to the cultural memory of the First World War, see Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen: Representing the First World War in Contemporary Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

the Middle East, Africa and the Pacific. Historical footage from the period was re-shot so that each episode had the freshness and fluency of contemporary documentary. Above all, it was pioneering in the use of the oral history of veterans (from all sides) who recounted their experiences. The audience was reminded that the events described were still vividly within living memory. Indeed, the use of oral history in historical studies of the First World War and in museums dedicated to the First World War stems from the use of oral testimony in this series, as perhaps the subsequent emphasis on sympathetic identification in the study and teaching of history in Britain. Yet the series as a whole, written by two young military historians John Terraine and Correlli Barnett, advanced what was at the time an iconoclastic thesis. The conduct of the war by the allies, they argued, had not been hopelessly inept. The terrible losses were not without purpose. In the end, British and French generals mastered the strategy of offensive warfare and by so doing were able to win the war.

By advancing this thesis, the series contradicted the view – it began during the war and became widespread by the 1930s – that the allied generals had through incompetence and heartlessness caused needless deaths and suffering. In 1961 Alan Clark revived this view in his study of the British generals of the war, *The Donkeys* – the title comes from the judgement of a German general that British soldiers were "lions led by donkeys". Clark was on the right; but his sentiments were echoed on the left, in Joan Littlewood's Brechtian play on the blindness, stupidity and moral inadequacies of the generals, *Oh What A Lovely War*, produced in 1963 and made into a film of the same name in 1969 by Richard Attenborough. "This is not war, sir" complains one British general to General Haig, Commander in Chief of the British Army, "it is slaughter." Haig's reply is characteristically obtuse: "God is with us. It is for King and Empire." [Act II: p. 59] We have already learned about his unfitness for senior rank. "How did that man Haig get his pips," asks one character in the play, "if you tell me he failed all of his staff college entrance examinations?" The answer, quite starkly, is nepotism: the Duke of Cambridge, a friend of the family, "waived the formalities and let him in." [Act II: p. 57]. In *The Illustrated History of the First World War* (1964), which sets the style for later revisionary readings of the war, the Oxford historian A.J.P. Taylor argued that once war had broken out in central Europe, it could not be contained because leaders throughout Europe were not, as they liked to believe, completely in control of events: the war was regulated by the demands of the railway timetable. Concern about the calibre of those in charge, about the risk of miscalculation, of technologies beyond human control: these were very much the anxieties of the early 1960s. Many feared that a catastrophic war would break out simply through mishap, as had been the case in 1914 after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo, although in this case it would be a nuclear one. Here memorialisation very explicitly read the past through the preoccupations of the present; but the BBC series – like the other works I

have mentioned – was also very explicitly an act of remembrance, the score of its soundtrack intense and moving, its commentary read by the leading classical actor Michael Redgrave in a voice half-way between astonishment and heart-break.

In a foreword to the revised edition of *Oh What A Lovely War* published in 2000, one of the actors involved in the original production, Victor Spinetti, wrote movingly of the educational value of his participation in the play:

> We all knew something of the background to that war but I never knew that all the fuses for the shells were made in Britain and that the Germans bought their share from us, during the war. I didn't know that the women who worked in the munitions factories had their hands dyed yellow, permanently, from the saltpetre. Nor did I have any idea of our losses in that war. Ten million dead. Twenty-one million wounded. Seven million missing. At Passchendaele alone, thirteen thousand men were lost in three hours. [General] Haig's comment was, "Mostly gamekeepers and servants." They'd gained one hundred yards.

"Our losses" – Spinetti takes here a pan-European view of the war, just as he reads the war as coercive and class-based, staged for the benefit of capitalist interests. In the 1960s and early 1970s, much of the finest fiction of the period shared a radical reading of the war as a moment of continuing and unresolved crisis linked to the history of western imperialism. Doris Lessing's five volume *Children of Violence* sequence (1952–1969)*,* for instance, linked the unleashing of violence within the twentieth century to the individual and collective damage caused by the First World War, a topic to which she has returned in her most recent work, *Alfred and Emily* (2008). Part fiction, part autobiography, Lessing imagines in the fictional part another and happier life for her parents to the one they actually lived described in the autobiographical part, overshadowed by the effects of her father's psychologically damaging service in the First World War and by the bereavement her mother had suffered in the war. In *Troubles* (1970), the first of a trilogy of ironically written and brilliantly delineated novels on the fate of the British empire from its height in the mid-nineteenth century to the Second World War, J. G. Farrell explored the disintegration of British rule in Ireland in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, a war in which his central character had served. In *G* (1972), which he said had been six years in the making, John Berger (whose father, like Lessing's, had served as an infantry officer in the First World War) took a pan-European and an anti-capitalist view of Europe just before and after the outbreak of the war. In a novel reflecting throughout on different modes of temporality and inspired by the narrative innovations he had found in the modernists, Berger's bourgeois anti-hero Giovanni (a modern Don Juan) finds liberation first through sexuality, then through revolutionary action. He is ultimately destroyed at the conclusion of the novel

(while participating in an uprising) in the violence released by the outbreak of the First World War.

In 1962, Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* was performed at the dedication of the new cathedral in Coventry, built to replace the cathedral which had been destroyed in the blitz of 1940. Britten's profound and moving work, composed to commemorate the dead of the First and the Second World Wars, combined the Latin requiem mass with poems written by the First World War poet Wilfred Owen. On the one hand, Britten's subtle and intense rendering of the poems helped to re-establish the poetry of Owen as one of the most important and significant literary achievements of the century; on the other hand, it subsumed the tragedy of the Second World War, when British losses were much fewer than in the First World War, within the larger tragedy of the First. "The First World War goes on getting stronger – our national ghost," Ted Hughes wrote in 1965 in a brief but revealing review of an anthology of poetry of the First World War, one of a number published in the 1960s as academic interest in the poets of the First World War grew and the poets of the First World War became widely taught within British schools and universities. "It's still everywhere," Hughes continued, "molesting everybody. It's still politically alive, too, in an underground way. On those battlefields the main English social issues surfaced and showed their colours. An English social revolution was fought out in the trenches."[3] Hughes' father had fought in the disastrous Gallipoli campaign, one of only seventeen survivors of his regiment. Hughes wrote about the First World War throughout his career, at length in four volumes *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), *Wodwo* (1967), *Remains of Elmet* (1979) and *Wolfwatching* (1989). Some of his most memorable poems deal with the losses of the war, with his father's traumatic war-time experiences and with the ways in which the son was absorbed by that trauma. In "The Dream Time," the first section of "Out" (1967), Hughes begins: "My father sat in his chair recovering / From the four-year mastication by gunfire and mud." He was still psychologically buried "under / The mortised four-year strata of dead Englishmen / He belonged with." It is to this world that the four year child also imaginatively belongs, his father's "luckless double", conscious that his father's memory was an "immovable anchor," buried "among jawbones and blown-off boots, tree-stumps, shellcases and craters." Nevertheless, in 1967, the war and its seemingly empty rituals of remembrance remain a source of anger for the poet, as we see in the final section of the poem "Remembrance Day" where he refuses to wear the memorial poppy: "that bloody-minded flower."

The anger is caused by more than his distress at his father's suffering; it lies in his distress at the suffering of a generation of young men, slaves to class-based industrial Britain, who obediently met their deaths in the war. His poetry is

[3] Ted Hughes, "National Ghost," in William Scammell, ed., *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose* (Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 70.

haunted by their loss, the subject of his most celebrated single poem on the theme of the war dead, "Six Young Men" (1957). Like Larkin's poem, Hughes responds to a photograph. He sees "six young men, familiar to their friends," whom he vividly describes. "Six months after this picture they were all dead." But in his later and more sustained sequences on the war written in the 1970s and 1980s, he returns to the view he expressed in his review. For four years, he argues, France was like Britain's dream world, "a previously unguessed fantasy dimension, where the social oppressions and corruptions slipped into nightmare gear." The next step, "logical but unimaginable", would have been a rising of the ranks, "a purging of the mechanical generals, the politicians, the war-profiteers, everything brass-hat and jingoistic both civilian and military."[4] Of course, this did not happen but what remains in areas like the one in which he had grown up and which had suffered huge casualties in the war was a profound sense of haunting, at once melancholy and yet conscious of a vanished world.

In *Remains of Elmet: A Pennine Sequence* (a collection of poems accompanied by the work of the landscape photographer Fay Godwin), Hughes describes the contemporary emptiness and dereliction of the Yorkshire landscape of his child-hood from which countless young men had gone off from the railway station to their deaths in the First World War: "First, mills and steep wet cobbles / Then cenotaphs. / First, football pitches, crown greens / Then the bottomless wound of the railway station/ That bled this valley to death." The Calder Valley is one of the original sites of the industrial revolution. A mixture of the rural and of the industrial, its factories are now ruins but the history of factory-work and of the hierarchy of the factory enables Hughes to understand the enslavement of soldiers in the military machine and their failure to revolt. "But happiness is now," he writes in the opening poem of the sequence "Hardcastle Crags," "broken water at the bottom of a precipice"; but even this scene contains the ghosts of the men who had died at Gallipoli: "And the air-stir releases / The love murmurs of a generation of slaves / Whose bones melted in Asia Minor." For Hughes, the First World was, as it was for D. H. Lawrence whom he resembles, an unprecedented break in western history when all was called into question: "Four years was not long enough, nor Edwardian and Georgian England the right training, nor stunned, somnambulist exhaustion the right condition, for digesting the shock of machine guns, armies of millions, and the plunge into the new dimension, where suddenly and for the first time Adam's descendants found themselves meaningless."[5]

In a rare television interview given in 1988, Geoffrey Hill spoke about the First World War in terms which very strikingly resemble those used by Hughes, with a similar focus on the local and regional losses suffered by the decimation

---

[4]   William Scammell, ed., p. 70.
[5]   Hughes in Scammell, p. 72.

of the so-called Pals Battalions (those made up of local recruits from a particular town) on the Somme. In the First World War, Hill said, "something very decent was torn out of the heart of English society; English learning was torn out, English moral consciousness, a great deal of it, was torn out – the great common people of this country had the heart torn out of them in the slaughter of those Pals battalions, and it seems to me something that must not – must *not* – be forgotten – it must be remembered with gratitude. And the anger, as I say, flares up from time to time when one considers some of the social evils, the cruelty, the injustice, the sheer thoughtless mayhem of our time, and one thinks, was it for *this* that they died – and I think that one must honour decency and sacrifice."[6] Throughout a long and celebrated poetic career, from his first volume of poems, *For the Unfallen* (1959), to his more recent collections of poetry *Canaan* (1996)*, The Triumph of Love* (1998), *Speech! Speech!* (2000) and *Orchards of Syon* (2002), Hill has returned to the injustices of the First World War and of its outcomes, including the even more terrible events of the Second, and to the culture's failure to remember these in the terms they require. The title of his first volume was an ironic response to Laurence Binyon's famous poem "For the Fallen" (1914), written as the war broke out, which provides the language still used at Remembrance ceremonies: "They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old: / Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. / At the going down of the sun and in the morning / We shall remember them." This is the language of false consolation for a writer whose work both as a poet and as critic has shown the most rigorous deconstruction of the poetic modes of consolation from requiem to elegy. In this volume, Hill melded the angry voice of Pound, who had denounced Britain's senseless involvement in the war in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1920), "There died a myriad, / And of the best, among them, / For an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilisation", with the mournful voice of the collapse of civilisation in Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922)*,* with its language of loss, its work of mourning ever-incomplete. While Hughes was concerned with the effects of the war on England and on the England of his childhood, Hill takes a pan-European view, examining the origins and the effects of the war in the biblical culture shared alike by the participant nations. In *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* (1983), for instance, he devoted a long poem to the life and death at the Battle of the Marne of the French Catholic poet and controversialist Charles Péguy, exploring through the life and death of a French poet the nationalism and the quest for martyrdom shared by English poets of the First World War. In *Canaan* he explored the importance of concepts of the covenant and of the apocalypse in both British and German culture – in the First World War, in the rise of Nazism and in the German resistance to it; but the poem's remembering takes place in the face of a contemporary England

---

[6]   Quoted in Andrew M. Roberts, *Geoffrey Hill* (Tavistock: Northcote, 2004), p. 67.

which, in choosing to forget these discourses and their consequences, both posi-
tive and negative, has lost its substance: "England – now of genius / the eidolon
– / unsubstantial yet voiding / substance / like quicklime." "Let her wounds
weep," he continues, "into the lens of oblivion."

In his great study of the English elegy, Peter Sacks reminds us that the right
to inheritance was originally tied to the duty to mourn; and in observing that
duty, I would argue that those who remembered the war in the 1960s were also
establishing their right to inherit, at the very moment when the veterans of the
war – Clement Attlee, Sir Winston Churchill, Sir Anthony Eden and Harold
Macmillan – were relinquishing political and cultural power.[7] On one level, this
was a political question, since the debate then as now concerned the question of
coercion and consent: if the generals and the politicians had coerced millions of
men to die needlessly, (as would also be the case with nuclear war), then they
and the system which supported them needed to be changed; if, however, men
had consented to fight, the war confirmed the efficacy as well as the resilience
of democratic politics and democratic rule, even if it also revealed the power and
influence of ideology and propaganda. After all, as the *Great War* series made
clear, the British army had avoided the mutinies and the insurrections seen in
almost all of the other combatant nations. But the right to inherit was a generic
question as well – was the epic television documentary, or the didactic theatrical
ensemble or the revolutionary novel or the elegiac poem the format best suited
to the task of containing and reproducing the cultural memory of this central
national event?

For Hughes and Hill, the question of cultural memory is a moral and ethi-
cal one – a question of justice to the dead; and this is also central to the work
of more recent writers who have chosen to write about the First World War.
Indeed, what marks much of the most admired recent English fiction written
about the war – from J. H. Carr's now classic *A Month in the Country* (1980) to
Pat Barker's ambitious, Booker prize-winning trilogy *The Ghost Road* (1994–8)
– is an underlying concern with restoration, with the uncovering of the stories
of those excluded from the dominant narratives of the war: not just the stories
of women, conscientious objectors, gay men or shell-shocked soldiers we find
in Barker but the stories of those caught up (as in William Boyd's *An Ice-Cream
War,* 2004) in the war in Africa or (as in Louis de Bernières' *Birds without Wings*
(2004)) in the war in the Ottoman empire. In *The Missing of the Somme* (1994),
for instance, part essay, part travelogue and part autobiography, the novelist
Geoff Dyer examines the poetry of remembrance written as the war began
and suggests that the war was from the outset destined to be remembered in a
certain way, according to reassuring conventions of the kind Binyon employed

---

7   Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Eliot* (Baltimore: John
     Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 36–7.

in "For the Fallen" which hid its social, emotional and metaphysical complexities and effects. As he tells the story of his near-illiterate grandfather, who had served as a stableman on the western front and who enjoyed after the war none of the benefits promised to those involved in the war, Dyer provides an act of counter-memory and it is one, as with Hill, concerned to explore the failure of subsequent generations, including his own, to re-pay its proper debt to the dead. The term counter-memory was coined by the French historian Michel Foucault to describe the recovery of the histories of the hidden or the powerless and this is what Dyer, like Barker, undertakes. Yet they do so with a profound sense of historical distance. Dyer reflects on his own privileged status as his grandfather's Oxford-educated grandson and stages self-consciously in and through his writing a different performance of masculinity to that of his grandfather, while Barker's historical novel is framed throughout by a meta-historical irony which makes us aware that she is re-presenting the past very much within the gender-inflected terms of the present. Looking back, in the light of our knowledge of what happened, contributes to the irony or the meta-historical reflection of Isobel Colegate's subtle *The Shooting-Party* (1980) set in an English country house in 1913 or Adam Thorpe's complex *Nineteen Twenty-One* (2001) set, as the title suggests, in the immediate aftermath of the war, including the world of Flanders where the work of recovering bodies carries on.

In *The World As I Found It* (1987), the American novelist Bruce Duffy published what David Leavitt, who adopts the same mode, terms in the introduction "fiction about real people", fiction devoted to the lives of real authors or intellectuals but mixing biographical fact with sheer invention.[8] Duffy's novel concerns the lives of the philosophers Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, explored against the background of pre-war Cambridge and war-time Cambridge, London and Vienna. In some chapters, the novel remains close to the known facts; in others, as with brilliantly realised accounts of Russell's involvement with an American actress and of Wittgenstein's period as a sergeant in the Austrian army, it invents situations and characters. Leavitt also wrote a "fiction about real people" set in war-time Cambridge, *The Indian Clerk* (2007), albeit one devoted to the relationship between the mathematician G.H. Hardy and the self-taught Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan whom he encouraged and supported. Like Duffy, he also represents the world of war-time Bloomsbury, whose members opposed the war, and the doomed attempts by Russell and D.H. Lawrence to combine forces in an anti-war alliance. Leavitt suggests that Duffy's novel was the model for Barker's own fiction about real people, *Regeneration*, with its dramatisation of the relationships between Siegfried Sassoon and his doctor W. H. R. Rivers, Sassoon and Owen and some of the early pioneers

---

8   David Leavitt, "Introduction" to Bruce Duffy, *The World As I Found It* (New York: New York Review Books, 2010), p. vii.

in the treatment of shell-shock and their real and imagined patients. Certainly, recent British fiction has been marked by an extraordinary number of works in this sub-genre, many focused on the writers or painters of the First World War. In *Zennor in Darkness* (1994)*,* for instance, Helen Dunmore deals with the life of D. H. Lawrence and his German wife Frieda von Richthofen in war-time Cornwall, while in *Zodiac Light* (2008), Robert Edric deals with the case of the shell-shocked poet and composer Ivor Gurney who spent his life after the war in an asylum. In *The Great Lover* (2009), in a novel otherwise sticking closely to the facts of his life, Jill Dawson provides the charismatic poet Rupert Brooke who died in the war with an imagined pre-war love affair with a working-class girl. In *Life Class* (2007), Barker returned to the First World War to explore the emotional and aesthetic conflicts faced by a generation of young British painters during the war. These include Paul Nash, Christopher Nevinson and Dora Carrington (who appear under other names and as figures who combine elements of some of their pre-war contemporaries at the prestigious Slade School of Art in London); but the novel is otherwise peopled by real figures from the period, such as Henry Tonks, the leading professor at the Slade in the period.

In *Regeneration*, Barker introduced a key invented character, Billy Prior, a working-class, bi-sexual man who had been appointed an officer – a so-called "temporary gentleman" – because so many young middle and upper middle class men had been killed in the war. In the subsequent novels of the trilogy, Prior spies on groups of working class friends and gay associates opposed to the war and what happens to him – will he go back to the trenches – is the source of the trilogy's narrative drive. Throughout, Barker is interested in the relationships between insider and outsider, between belonging and not belonging, relationships she finds in conflict in the central male figures of her trilogy. But she also uses Rivers' work as a neurologist, psychologist and anthropologist for her intellectual and symbolic frameworks – not least her comparative study of masculinity, violence, patriarchal succession and the relationship to the dead in the primitive societies Rivers observed in the Pacific and her representation of these in modern industrial Britain. But what interests her most (Rivers was one of the first in Britain to use Freud's "talking-cure") is the way in which the past haunts the present. In her trilogy and in her subsequent fiction dealing with the First World War and its after-effects, she suggests that since the First World War collective memory in Britain has been marked by trauma – in what amounts to trans-generational haunting; a trauma which needs, as in the relationship between patient and analyst, to be worked through by acts of talking and of listening, acts of writing and reading. What has become paramount since the 1980s in the memory of the First World War has been the concern with restitution and with healing.

Nowhere has this been more obvious than in Ireland, north and south. In 1985 at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Frank McGuinness staged his play *Observe the*

Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme. He wrote the play, he writes in the introduction to the published version of the play, after he had left the south to live in the north of Ireland and became aware that each town and village there had its memorial to the dead of the First World War, something which was largely absent in the south. The play focussed on the lives of eight men of the Ulster Division who took part in the Battle of the Somme on July 1st, 1916, when 19,000 British soldiers died in the first day of battle. The act of sacrifice of Ulsterman in the Battle of the Somme – McGuinness presents it as the founding myth of modern Unionism – is contrasted by the soldiers to the act of betrayal they see committed by those who took part in the Easter Uprising in Dublin in May 1916, in turn the founding myth of nationalist Ireland. While his main focus is the distorting effect of the experience of the Somme on the Protestant community, enforcing in his view one exclusionary identity in the place of many different ones, he is also concerned that Protestant Unionist and Catholic nationalist myths hide the more complicated truth that Protestants and Catholics served and died together in the First World War. That the nature of their suffering and sacrifice had not been remembered – had not been properly observed – was a moral and ethical question. It would be wrong to make the play the single origin of subsequent developments – the bombing by the IRA of a Remembrance Day ceremony at Enniskillen in 1987 (eleven people were killed) drew rather more immediate and direct attention to the contested politics of memorialisation in Ireland – but it played a significant role in making present truths long repressed from official memory in the south and in the nationalist community in the north.

In 1995, Sebastian Barry explored in another play, *The Steward of Christendom*, his own grandfather's past as a Chief Superintendant in the police under British rule, a so-called "castle Catholic" loyal to the Crown. Using the same device as McGuinness, Barry frames the past – the play is set in 1932 – through the memories of an old and sometimes confused central figure Thomas Dunne who remembers the part he played in quelling a left-wing demonstration in pre-war Dublin in which four protestors had been killed. Yet what is most haunting about the play is the occasional presence on stage of his (invented) thirteen year old son Willie, born in the late 1890s and killed in the First World War, whose tender letter from the front is read out aloud at the end of the play by one of those looking after Thomas: "The plain truth is, Papa, this is a strange war and a strange time, and my whole wish is to be home with you all in Dublin, and to abide by your wishes, whatever they be. I wish to be a more dutiful son because, Papa, in the mire in this wasteland, you stand before my eyes as the finest man I know, and in my dreams you comfort me, and keep my spirits lifted." [Act 2: 59]. When the play was staged in Dublin, Barry suggested in the introduction to the published version of the play, the audience was led into the play by the treatment of the demonstration, in Britain by the treatment of the First World War, "although you can't be sure." The Irish audience, Barry writes, may have been

reminded of a socialist tradition in Irish politics which De Valera had wished to write out of Irish memory – "in this at least he was a playwright, the lost play-wright of Ireland";[9] but it is difficult not to conclude that it was also reminded that many Catholic Irishmen like Willie Dunne had fought in the war on behalf of the British: "I had a first cousin in it," says the man who reads out Willie's letter to Thomas, "a lot of men went out" [Act 2: 56]. In *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* (1998) and *A Long Long Way* (2005), a novel with Willie Dunne, the soldier son of the earlier play, as its central character, Barry examined the moral and existential dilemmas of the two hundred thousand Irish soldiers who fought for Britain in the First World War but who found, after the Rising of 1916, that they were regarded at home in Ireland as traitors. In 1998, the Irish President Mary McAleese took part, with the King of Belgium and Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, in the dedication of the Island of Ireland Peace Tower at Messines in Belgium, built to commemorate the Irish dead of the First World War and, in the President's words, intended to redeem the memory of the Irish who had died in the First World War.[10]

---

[9] Sebastian Barry, "Following the Steward," in *The Steward of Christendom* (London: Methuen, 1996), p. xiv.

[10] See D. G. Boyce, "Nationalism, Unionism and the First World War," in Adrian Gregory and Senia Paseta, eds., *Ireland and the Great War: 'A War to Unite Us All'?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 212.

KATALIN G. KÁLLAY

"Memory believes before knowing remembers"

These enigmatic words – which could, in fact, make a beautiful line of poetry – constitute the opening sentence of Chapter 6 in William Faulkner's *Light in August.* Taken out of context, the sentence has the power of a wise proverb, an incantation or even a magic spell: it says something about memory that renders it prior to knowledge. It addresses the listener's primary perception, as if we could taste or even smell the words, prior to any form of consciousness. The five-word sentence is symmetrical in structure, with the word "before" as its middle and axis. It is embraced on both sides by "believes" and "knowing", and, from an equal distance, enveloped by the other, challengingly contrasted pair: "memory" and "remembers". Also remarkable is the dynamic nature of the utterance: although semantically the mirror-contrasts mentioned above could be relevant, syntactically the juxtaposed words are "memory" vs. "knowing" and "believes" vs. "remembers".

Whereas "memory" (according to Webster's *Dictionary of the English Language*) refers to the *power* or *ability* to recall past events, "remembrance" would indicate the *act* or *process* of the same. This distinction would allow that in Faulkner's sentence a non-conscious possibility precedes and to a certain degree, overpowers a conscious procedure. "Re-membering" might imply a former analytical process of "dis-membering", as if something that had fallen or had been taken *apart* had to be put *together again*. But the non-conscious possibility seems to be based on *trust*: memory – be it personal, collective, cultural or even intercultural – is more likely to be at work along the lines of faith than according to the rules of evidence. Consequently, the relating, the telling and re-telling of what memory believes creates a relationship between the fields of history and literature.

In their introduction to the volume entitled *Literatures of Memory,* Peter Middleton and Tim Woods point out the following:

> Contemporary historical studies have […] become deeply concerned with the troubling persistence of modes of thought that have traditionally been the preserve of the arts and literary study: narrative, imagination and memory. "Is it not possible," asks Hayden White in the final sentence of an essay on narrative in history, "that the question of narrative in any discussion of historical theory is

always finally about the function of imagination in the production of a specifi-
cally human truth?"[1]

Perhaps it is not going too far to suggest that the concept of a "specifically human
truth" might also be something which needs faith as its basis, something which
"memory believes."

Taken out of context, the sentence can also reflect on the structure of my
paper: it is, indeed, my own memory which believes that the four short texts
by the three authors I wish to examine side by side somehow belong together;
before any knowing could ever remember any direct influence. I doubt that
Attila József (1905–1937), the Hungarian poet who, among many other things,
excels in commemorating his troubled childhood in beautifully complex im-
ages of the down-to-earth and the ethereal, would have read or even heard of
William Faulkner (1897–1962), more or less his American contemporary who,
among other things, excels in commemorating his troubled Southern heritage
in mythologically inspired, powerful storylines; and it is quite unlikely that Dan
Pagis (1930–1986), a post-war Israeli poet and professor of literature who, among
other things, excels in commemorating the trauma of the Holocaust in strong,
painful and elliptical lyrics about identity would have been traceably influenced
by either of the other two authors. Still, it is my conviction that the words of the
four short texts, referring to different aspects of memory are capable of entering
a dialogue, at once beautiful, powerful and painful.

In its context, the full paragraph introducing the description of the first strong
childhood memory of Joe Christmas, the protagonist of Faulkner's novel, is as
follows:

> Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects,
> longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes a corridor in
> a big long garbled cold echoing building of dark red brick sootbleakened by
> more chimneys than its own, set in a grassless cinderstrewnpacked compound
> surrounded by smoking factory purlieus and enclosed by a ten foot steel-and-
> wire fence like a penitentiary or a zoo, where in random erratic surges, with
> sparrowlike childtrebling, orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and
> out of remembering but in knowing constant as the bleak walls, the bleak win-
> dows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacenting chimneys streaked like
> black tears.[2]

1   Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, *Literatures of Memory. History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing.* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 8.
2   The first paragraph of Chapter 6, in William Faulkner, *Light in August* (Vintage Books edi-
tion, New York: Random House, 1972), p. 111.

The confinement of the orphanage thus described foreshadows other images of imprisonment, and the vulnerability of the uniformed children is further emphasised by the impersonal, inhuman surroundings. Coinages like "cinderstrewnpacked", "sparrowlike" and "childtrebling" abound in associative power. Though "trebling" is obviously a sound, through its resemblance to "trembling", one might imagine some vague stirring movement – and "sparrowlike" might also indicate winglike limbs. The despair over the image of the neglected children as caged birds is manifested in the tear-like raindrops running down the windows, markedly sooty from the nearby chimneys. The garbled, confused corridor leads Joe Christmas to the memory of how he unwillingly witnessed a love-making scene at the age of five, sitting concealed in a closet, munching on sweet toothpaste until he had to reveal himself because of vomiting. This primal scene of exposure is unpleasant and remains a burden, forever forcing him to identify with the outcast, the outsider, depriving him of a sense of belonging. It seems that in Faulkner's world, "memory believes" in a surprising way, going against one's expectations. Instead of beautifying the past, making it pleasanter and more smoothly adjustable to the present, it conjures up uncanny, conflicting sensations, at the core of which the self is defined through confinement, and continuity can only be imagined as being chased into and away from successive experiences of piercing loneliness. The other protagonist, Joanna Burden has a telling name: she, too, carries the burden of never becoming fully integrated into the Southern community. There is a slight possibility in the novel that the two of them find a sense of belonging in finding each other – however, alienation has different effects on different personalities: Joe becomes a murderer and Joanna becomes his victim. (The word "cinderstrewn" might also be imagined in the context of the burning Burden house.)

Interestingly enough, the unwelcoming Southern society itself, as has often been pointed out, is a community strongly knit together by a sense of common defeat. In Faulkner's time, two attitudes to the past could be simultaneously observed: the nostalgic longing for a cultural heritage to be treasured, and the horrifying sense that the specific Southern tradition is poisonous: it has a backward, doomed, even suicidal quality which makes it dangerous to study and even more dangerous to identify with.

It is at this point that I feel a common trait between a specific Hungarian or East-European sense of the past and the Southern duality of attitudes. The feeling of having been beaten together can create a stronger sense of belonging than common victory – on this basis many literary works, for instance the symbolic poems of Endre Ady, could be examined.

Attila József's poem "By the Danube" seemed to me to be relevant to show and suggest a way in which "memory believes" for the Hungarian poet. The excerpt is the central, second part of the three-part poem; in the first part of which the flow of the river and the flow of time are presented through concrete images such

as the floating rind of a watermelon, the "laundry" of the city washed by the Danube, and, since the poet's mother was a washing woman, the river is presented as a mother tending to the playing waves.

The second part of the poem runs as follows:

I am made thus: what for a thousand ages
I've looked upon, now suddenly I see.
A flash, time's tally is wound up, the pages
a thousand ancestors have read with me.

I see what they could not in their distraction,
who delved, killed, kissed, wrought under time's duress.
And they, sunk in the matter-world of action,
see what I do not see, I must confess.

We know each other, as do joy and sorrow,
what's presentness for them is past for me.
They hold my pencil – we, together borrow
this poem from their present memory.

(Translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner)[3]

This seems to be the case when, in the flash of a moment's encounter, memory believes that the private, individual past might participate in and witness the past of the others, creating and forming a community and continuity, so much so that the ancestors become co-authors of the poetic text. The most powerful image is the most concrete one: "they hold my pencil". Especially after the motherly attributes of the river, the reader can envision a mother-figure, holding the pencil of a young schoolboy, teaching him how to write the letters of the alphabet. The

---

[3]   Én úgy vagyok, hogy már száz ezer éve
nézem, amit meglátok hirtelen.
Egy pillanat s kész az idő egésze,
mit száz ezer ős szemlélget velem.

Látom, mit ők nem láttak, mert kapáltak,
öltek, öleltek, tették, ami kell.
S ők látják azt, az anyagba leszálltak,
mit én nem látok, ha vallani kell.

Tudunk egymásról, mint öröm és bánat.
Enyém a mult és övék a jelen.
Verset irunk - ők fogják ceruzámat
s én érzem őket és emlékezem.
Attila József, *The Iron-blue Vault. Selected Poems*, translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1999), pp. 125–126.

translation makes a twist in the last two lines – there is no talk of borrowing: literally the Hungarian words mean "I feel them and I remember". What is exciting and thought-provoking in the translation is the idea of the ancestors' present memory being borrowed when a poem is born. In the original, the structure is less complicated but the image is just as complex: instead of "what's presentness for them is past for me", Attila József would simply say: "the past is mine and the present is theirs". This attitude to time could be shared by William Faulkner as well, who acknowledged his interest in Henri Bergson's theory about the fluidity of time,[4] and once stated: "There is only the present moment, in which I include both the past and the future, and that is eternity."[5]

But another text by Attila József could also start a meaningful dialogue with the Faulkner excerpt: I have in mind part 5 of the poem entitled "Consciousness" (Eszmélet). The title *consciousness* may indicate the case when "knowing remembers" – here we have the adult poet's recollection of a childhood event. The proletarian family consisting of the overworked mother and her three children were so poor that Attila frequently had to steal coal from the freight trains at the station in order to have a little heating in their miserable home. The mother died when the poet was 14, so the event remembered must have happened when he was younger.

> As a child at the freight station I lay
> in wait, flattened against a tree
> like a piece of silence. Gray
> weeds touched my mouth, raw, strangely sweet.
> Dead still, I watched the guard's feet,
> his passing shadow on the boxcars
> stubbornly kept falling over my prize,
> those scattered lumps of coal, dewy and bright.
>
> (Translated by John Bátki)[6]

4 Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* [Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience, 1889] (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2001).
5 James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., *Lion in the Garden: interviews with William Faulkner, 1926–1962* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980 [1968]), p. 70, quoted in: A. Nicholas Fargnoli, Michael Goley and Robert W. Hamlin, *Critical Companion to William Faulkner: A Literary Reference to his Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), p. 86.
6 A teherpályaudvaron
   úgy lapultam a fa tövéhez,
   mint egy darab csönd; szürke gyom
   ért számhoz, nyers, különös-édes.
   Holtan lestem az űrt, mit érez,
   s a hallgatag vagónokon
   árnyát, mely ráugrott a fényes,
   harmatos szénre konokon.
   Péter Dávidházi et al., eds., *The Lost Rider: A Bilingual Anthology* (Budapest: Corvina Books,

Hiding in silence, afraid of the guard, and sensing the sickening sweet taste of something not normally edible as well as the industrial urban surroundings might link this child's experience to that of the young Joe Christmas, and the passing shadow might also foreshadow something related to the boxcars that can be pointed out only retrospectively: the poet committed suicide at the age of 32 by throwing himself under a train in Balatonszárszó. Silence is tangible and distributable in this excerpt, it comes in pieces: the image of the "flattened" child and the "piece of silence" indicates that the uncanny nature of primal memories applies to József as well. Whereas in the other poem the river and the memory of the ancestors gave the speaker some metaphysical protection, in "Conscious-ness", in spite of the successful shelter protecting him from the guard, the boy's vulnerability is completely exposed to the reader.

In the texts examined so far (all written in the 1930s, well before the Second World War) many images point toward the experience of confinement, resem-bling the imagery later commemorating the Holocaust: in Faulkner's paragraph it is the emphasis on soot, smoke, cinder, the steel-and-wire fence, the chimneys and the tears running down the windows; in Attila József's "Consciousness", it is the guard, the "dead" stillness and the freight train that bring to our memory pictures and scenes described in memoirs of survivors and poems inspired by unspeakable suffering. The limited length of this paper makes it impossible to go into detail concerning questions of the legitimacy of literature after the Holocaust – I may briefly allude to the three different stages Theodor Adorno had to go through concerning the matter: first he suggested that it was impos-sible to write poetry after Auschwitz, then he stated that all such poetry would necessarily be barbaric, and finally, he went so far as to acknowledge that it was only through the language of poetry that anything could be said about the Holocaust.[7] Recent studies of trauma point out the necessity of the construction and reconstruction of memory (Dominick LaCapra, for example emphasises the importance of the Freudian notions of "acting-out" and "working-through").[8] Still it remains a painful question whether one has to or can ever be able to face parts of the past that, to one's best understanding, deserves to be lost. Dan Pagis, who was born in Bukovina and sent to a concentration camp in Ukraine at the age of 11, was liberated three years later and moved to a kibbutz in Israel to become a teacher and a Hebrew poet, presents two opposing imperatives in his poem entitled "Instructions for Crossing the Border".

1997), p. 299.

[7]   Shoshana Felman quotes and comments on this in: "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 33–34.

[8]   Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 43.

Imaginary man, go. Here is your passport.
You are not allowed to remember.
You have to match the description:
your eyes are already blue.
Don't escape with the sparks
inside the smokestack:
you are a man, you sit in the train.
Sit comfortably.
You've got a decent coat now,
a repaired body, a new name
ready in your throat.
Go. You are not allowed to forget.[9]

(Translated by Stephen Mitchell)

The situation might refer to a case of "passing," still during the war, a case of successfully having obtained false papers and having to acquire a new, necessarily false identity – but it might also be something happening after the war, when the survivor has to learn anew what it means to be a human being. The poem is supposedly about freedom, about liberation, yet it is far from giving relief: there are orders and prohibitions. Both remembering and forgetting come up in the negative structures: "You are not allowed to remember" – "You are not allowed to forget". What *is* allowed then? Perhaps something that "memory believes": the unconscious possibility that precedes the conscious procedure, which might be quite similar to the working of the imagination. The man is called "imaginary", has a new name (its readiness in the throat might indicate the suffocating nature of the experience), and, as an artificial creature or rather an artistic creation, is sent out to the world (the pithy imperative resembling the orders of the camp guards, "Go" is repeated in the text). The instructions are given in secret, hence the urgency of the matter, yet the aim of the process is to be sent out as a potential witness. Whether border-crossing is a crime, a transgression, a necessary

---

[9] דן פ גיס: הוראות לגנבת הגבול

אדם בדוי, סע. הנה הדרכון.
אסור לך לזכור.
אתה חייב להתאים לפרטים.
עיניך כבר כחולות.
אל תברח עם הנצים מתוך
ארובת הקטר:
אתה אדם, ויושב בקרון. שב נינוח.
הרי המעיל הגון, הגוף מתוקן,
השם החדש מוכן בגרונך.
סע, סע. אסור לך לשכוח.

means of liberation or a way of getting to know more about the world through travelling, depends entirely on the historical situation. What borders are there to be crossed in this poem? Borders between countries, between the world of war and the world of peace, but the borders that confine the self in any type of a prison seem to be stronger. I am persuaded that those confining borders can only be crossed when there is meaningful dialogue, when, for example, strong literary texts participate in conjuring up what collective memory believes before knowing remembers.

László Munteán

Under the urban skin

Counter-monumental configurations of the bombing of Budapest in the Second World War

Stories about places are makeshift things. They are composed with the world's debris.
Michel de Certeau[1]

At first glance, there is nothing unusual about the façade of 29 Szentkirályi Street. Built in the style of the late 1920s, it attests to no outstanding artistic or architectural characteristics. Like many of its peers in Budapest, it is covered with layers of dust and riddled by bullet holes and shrapnel scars from the Second World War or perhaps 1956. Such a description may easily fit a great many buildings in Budapest's 8th and 9th districts. Upon closer inspection, however, the façade yields more than scars and layers of soot. A vertical line that must have been bright white when it was painted on the surface of the wall runs from one of the first-floor windows almost all the way down to a metal hatch at ground level. Next to the window where the line starts, contours of the letters "O" and "H" can be deciphered. In addition to this long white line, a small arrow, painted right above the ground floor storefront points downward to the same metal hatch and sports the letters "V" and "K" on either side. Although these letters and lines are hardly discernible, it is evident that they all have to do with the function of the metal hatch, which opens to the street and seems to be a later addition to the building. Research reveals that what unfolds behind the layers of dust is the remains of Second World War air raid precautions, preserved in the façade by more than sixty years of neglect. The abbreviation "OH" stands for the air raid shelter (*óvóhely*) and indicates the extent of the shelter in the basement, while "VK" designates the emergency exit (*vészkijárat*).

Since my discovery of this "archaeological layer" in the building's façade some years ago, I have made many more similar discoveries all over the city. This essay is predicated on my quest into this submerged pattern of lines, arrows and letters (which I shall refer to as arrows) that lie hidden in the façades of so many buildings in Budapest. Just as this quest is a project of what I will call plaster archeology, it is also, as I will demonstrate, a project of self-reflection in which

---

[1] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 107.

my "imagined memories" of the bombing of Budapest take centre stage.[2] In the first part of the essay I will contextualise the arrows within a larger framework of panoptic systems. The second part will focus on the practice of plaster archaeology and examine its relation to imagined memories. Lastly, I will turn to the official memorial dedicated to the victims of the bombing of Budapest and explore its uninviting location and idiosyncratic design as expediencies whereby the memorial engages other buildings in its immediate environment and invites multiple readings of the relations forged among these buildings.

FORTRESS BUDAPEST

Budapest, 3 April 1944. The sound of the air raid sirens at 10:15 a.m. did not take people by surprise. They had heard it a number of times over the past weeks and nothing really happened afterwards. Those who did not descend into the shelters thought this one would be yet another false alarm. This time, however, the shrieking whine of the sirens soon changed into the monotonous hum of four-engine aircraft of the 15th US Army Air Force headed towards the southern districts of the city. Once they released their payload over the Ferencváros Marshalling Yard and the oil refineries on the island of Csepel, it became evident that distance from the frontlines no longer meant safety for the population of Budapest.[3] The American raid was followed by a second wave carried out by the British during the night. The 1,073 lives lost, as well as the considerable material damage suffered on that day, portended far more devastation to come. Over the next months American and British bombers attacked Hungarian targets with increasing regularity disrupting transportation and industrial facilities vital to the German war machine and preluding the all-out attack by the Soviet Red Army. Although not nearly as destructive as the area bombings of Hamburg, Berlin, and Dresden, the bombing of Hungary's industrial and transportation hubs took a heavy toll on civilians in spite of the relatively advanced system of air raid shelters, whose construction had been well under way ever since the late 1930s.[4]

How did this system work and what purpose did the arrows serve in the system? In his seminal work entitled *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*

---

[2]   My use of the term "imagined memories" is indebted to Andreas Huyssen who reminds us that all memories are, by definition, imagined, but the term "allows us to distinguish memories grounded in lived experience from memories pillaged from the archive and mass-marketed for fast consumption." *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 17, 166n. In my use of the term, "imagined memories" refers to those memories passed down to me by my mother, which I wish to appropriate in space.

[3]   Iván Pataky, László Rozsos, and Gyula Sárhidi, *Légi háború Magyarország felett* (Debrecen: Zrínyi Kiadó, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 126–69.

[4]   Pataky, Rozsos, and Sárhidi, p. 160.

Michel Foucault describes the safety regulations to be obeyed in a seventeenth-century plague-stricken town. The measures to be taken included the partitioning of urban space in order to keep the plague at bay. Wardens and intendants were in charge of keeping every nook and cranny of the city under control. As Foucault's description of the safety measures unfolds, filling page after page, a complex system of "disciplinary mechanisms" is revealed, designed to ensure the perfect functioning of centralised surveillance.[5]

The air defence regulations devised in the face of the aerial bombardment of Budapest reverberate the painstakingly detailed seventeenth-century checklist for catastrophe management in many respects. In order to prevent chaos from taking hold of the city the regulations were predicated upon the imperative that catastrophes are to be met with order. With the advance of aviation technology after the First World War the bombing of targets far behind the frontline came within reach of the air forces – a concern realised by air defence analysts years before the breakout of the Second World War. Haunted by the tormenting memory of the devastation that rudimentary bombers inflicted upon civilian-populated areas in the First World War, the safety regulations conceived in the light of the new threat required that the existing network of streets and building stock be transformed so as to absorb the disastrous effects of the impending catastrophe. The new task that evolved from such concerns consisted not only in the construction of bombproof shelters but also in the establishment of a disciplinary mechanism capable of ensuring the effective mobilisation of the urban population through the enforcement of the safety measures. The measures applied to the plague-stricken town were imbued with "the haunting memory of 'contagions,' of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder."[6] Likewise, the numerous public drills, instruction booklets, and even prayer-books intended to be read during the fearful hours of bombings, bespeak memories of the ruined cities of the First World War, of people buried underneath the rubble due to the absence of proper means of protection.

In preparation for the impending air raids, Vienna and a number of German cities resorted to building gigantic towers as strongholds in the network of air defence.[7] Reminiscent of medieval keeps, these *flak towers* (*Flaktürme*) had been designed to serve multiple purposes. While the lower floors were to accommodate thousands of people seeking shelter from the falling bombs, the top section would serve as a bastion of air defence artillery, where radar equipment, searchlights, and anti-aircraft gunnery were mounted. Although such mega-

---

[5]   Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 197.

[6]   Foucault, p. 198.

[7]   See: Luftschutz-Bunker, <http://www.luftschutz-bunker.de/> (last accessed: 16 December 2010)

lithic above-ground complexes were never built in Budapest, the systematic training of the civilian population for proper conduct during air raids, as well as the 1939 revised edition of the Budapest Building Code, conformed to what Foucault describes as a *spatial arrangement* designed "to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them."[8] The building code stipulated the construction of gasproof and shrapnel-proof air raid shelters in each apartment block under the supervision of engineers trained for the task.[9] In addition, as early as December 1937 the National Air Defence League (*Légoltalmi Liga*) was established, which functioned as a "government-controlled social organisation for civil defence, [and] established central, intermediate, and local branches for the education of the masses" on the practicalities of air defence.[10] As Francis S. Wagner describes it:

> Centrally guided public drills were held frequently, in some places almost bi-weekly, in apartment houses, industrial, public, and school buildings years before the bombardment of the city began. […] Instructions on correct behavior in air raids were printed and posted in each shelter. Among them, the simplest but most significant were those which stressed the application of the following rules: "Maintain your composure", "Do not start or spread rumors", "Do not smoke", "Do not ignite and open flame", etc. In order to encourage shelter occupants to do their best to obey these rules, a special air raid protection medal (*légoltalmi jelvény*) was established and awarded to those who excelled in this field. House and block wardens, along with their deputies, attended special eight-hour courses every year. These were designed to improve their theoretical and practical knowledge.[11]

As stated in an instruction booklet published by the League as early as 1938, it was imperative that "each flat, building, workshop, and factory be a bastion, and each village and city a fortress of air defence".[12]

The shelters were designated compartments of buildings' basements remodelled in such a way as to provide relative safety even if the building above collapsed. Structural modifications included the installation of shrapnel-proof metal

---

8   Foucault, p. 172.
9   Francis S. Wagner, "Human Behavior in Disaster: The Siege of Budapest," in *Survival and the Bomb: Methods of Civil Defense,* ed. Eugene P. Wigner (Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whitehead Limited, 1969), 79–104, pp. 81–82.
10   Wagner, p. 82.
11   Wagner, pp. 82–3.
12   "Elkerülhetetlenül szükséges, hogy minden lakás, minden ház, műhely, gyár a légoltalom egy-egy erődje legyen, minden falu és város pedig a légoltalomnak egy-egy vára." Légoltalmi Liga, *Hogyan védekezzünk légitámadás ellen? – A lakóházakon belül végzendő munkálatok – A lakosság magatartása* (Budapest: Globus, 1938), p. 2. Translation mine.

doors for entrances (usually opening from the courtyard) and similarly massive hatches for emergency exits placed in areaways opening onto the street. Other openings would be walled up, with small holes left for the air inlets of the gas-proof ventilation system. In case these openings were blocked by fallen debris, routes to shelters and emergency exits were indicated by white arrows which were supposed to be painted in a clearly visible way so that fallen debris would not cover them completely. This way, rescue workers could easily remove the rubble blocking the emergency exits and help trapped civilians leave the building.

Regardless of the age, material, structure, and outer appearance of the buildings, these arrows endowed them with a sense of uniformity insofar as they were uniformly vulnerable to aerial bombardment. Once the sirens went off, the arrows were meant to take precedence over all other signs in the street and form a vocabulary of catastrophe, the proper reading of which was ensured by the systematic training of the public.[13] Although many of the sturdy metal hatches of emergency exits are still in place, what used to be air raid shelters have long been turned into storage or put to other uses. Most of the arrows have been plastered over long ago, providing "clean slates" for new inscriptions. Even where they are still discernible, they mostly remain unnoticed by the passersby. Bereft of their signifying power and unrecognised by the heritage industry as worthy of attention, these traces reveal themselves only to the one looking for them.[14]

UNDER THE URBAN SKIN

Of the many submerged texts that lie hidden in the chaotic bricolage of plaster I feel compelled to seek out these arrows. Apart from the actual functions that they once served, the arrows epitomise a decidedly new relationship between the city and the aeroplane in which the vulnerability of the former most lucidly comes to the fore. The arrows gesture toward a new form of dwelling conceived in the crucible of the air war – the experience haunting the bunker-like structures that Le Corbusier designed after the war, as well as the "brutalism" of such British architects as Peter and Alison Smithson.[15] With Paul Virilio, who studies the

---

[13] I am using the term "landmark" in Kevin Lynch's sense. Based on his research on cognitive maps that people unconsciously use when navigating the city, Lynch identifies five major categories that serve as reference points for navigation: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. The latter ones are "signs, store fronts, trees, doorknobs, and other urban detail, which fill in the image of most observers. They are frequently used clues of identity and even of structure, and seem to be increasingly relied upon as a journey becomes more and more familiar." *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979), p. 48.

[14] Although alternative city tours have come into vogue in the past decade, I do not know of any guided tours specialising in such relics.

[15] Anthony Vidler, "Air War and Architecture," in *Ruins of Modernity,* eds. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 29–40.

shapes of concrete bunkers that the Germans left behind in France, we could ask, "Why continue to be surprised at Le Corbusier's forms of modern architecture? Why speak of 'brutalism'? And, above all, why this ordinary habitat, so very ordinary over so many years?"[16] To some degree, the drive that compels me to trace arrows in the texture of façades stems from an archaeological interest similar to the one that informs Virilio's extensive study of the bunkers of the Atlantic Wall, which he documents in his emblematic work *Bunker Archeology.* In the preface he offers the following reading of the German bunkers:

> These heavy gray masses with sad angles and no openings – excepting the air inlets and several staggered entrances – brought to light much better than many manifestos the urban and architectural redundancies of this postwar period that had just reconstructed to a tee the destroyed cities. The antiaircraft blockhouses pointed out another lifestyle, a rupture in the apprehension of the real. The blue sky had once been heavy with the menace of rumbling bombers, spangled too with the deafening explosions of artillery fire. This immediate comparison between the urban habitat and the shelter, between the ordinary apartment building and the abandoned bunkers in the hearts of the ports through which I was travelling, was as strong as a confrontation, a collage of two dissimilar realities. The antiaircraft shelters spoke to me of men's anguish and the dwellings of the normative systems that constantly reproduce the city, the cities, the urbanistic.[17]

When Virilio embarked on the survey of the coastal fortifications in 1958 the remains of the bunkers were still part of active memory,[18] rooted in the time of the German occupation. As a result, his interest in the bunkers was considered by locals to be peculiar at the least.[19]

Although the arrows that lie beneath layers of debris are far from being as obtrusive as the concrete structures that Virilio studied, my plaster archaeology also has the potential to raise eyebrows.[20] The reason for this is that the object of my scrutinising gaze makes no sense to the one who does not know what I am looking at. If my activity looks peculiar to passersby, it is because I am blocking pedestrian traffic; I stop where one is supposed to move or follow other signs with identifiable referents in the present-day city. I will call this outer, most conspicuous and most recent layer of signs *urban skin*. If Virilio's bunkers

---

[16]   Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archeology,* trans. George Collins (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), p. 12.

[17]   Virilio, p. 13.

[18]   I am using the term in J. B. Jackson's sense. See: "The Necessity of Ruins," in *The Necessity of Ruins and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 89–102, p. 101.

[19]   Virilio, p. 13.

[20]   By using the term "plaster archaeology" I also mean brick, stone, terracotta and all the materials that constitute the outer crust of buildings.

in the France of the 1950s constituted sites of taboo, my practice of studying arrows is obtrusive precisely because of their inertness in relation to the urban skin. When I interrupt my walk to take a photograph of an arrow or touch the texture of the paint that lies hidden but is still decipherable under layers of dirt, my activity can easily be perceived as senseless insofar as the object of my gaze has no particular historic, artistic, or architectural relevance. More often than not several passersby mistake my plaster archaeology for the documentation of the dishevelled condition of the city's old buildings which many perceive as a shameful sight, unworthy of photographing. Archaeology of this sort is thus an activity "out of place" inasmuch as it cuts across conventionalised codes of seeing and walking in the street. My gaze pierces through the skin of the façade and appropriates an unmarked trace of the past. There is no sign of restoration, no plaque, no protective Plexiglas to incorporate the arrows within the urban skin. In the two-dimensional surface of a wall the plaster archaeologist (a term which I use in this essay as a *dramatis personae*) sees depth, sedimentation, residue – apocryphal texts of the city's material culture that have not been canonised as valuable. In what follows, I will attempt to draw up a scheme for a theoretical grounding for my project.

In many respects the gaze of the plaster archaeologist is comparable to Michel de Certeau's notion of the traveller. By interrupting my walk and observing a detail that has no signifying value in the context of the urban skin, I step out of conventionalised patterns of movement and start travelling. "What does travel ultimately produce if it is not, by a sort of reversal, 'an exploration of the deserted places of my memory,' the return to nearby exoticism by way of detour through distant places, and the 'discovery' of relics and legends [...]."[21] Indeed, the joy felt over the discovery of an arrow on a wall transforms the texture of paint that has survived over six decades into a *relic*. Shrouded by the outer layers of the urban skin, it now serves the plaster archaeologist with a portal to "produce anti-texts, effects of dissimulation and escape, possibilities of moving into other landscapes, like cellars and bushes [...]".[22] The intoxicating joy of discovery is immediately suffused with an insatiable desire to read on, to travel further and deeper into the topography of the field that the relic inhabits.

Allow me to apply two concepts from photography, Walter Benjamin's *optical unconscious* and Roland Barthes's *punctum,* to illustrate the relation of De Certeau's notion of travelling to the idea of plaster archaeology. Walter Benjamin conceives of photography as a technological device that captures details that the naked eye would not be able to register otherwise. In this sense photography offers a portal into a reality of which the photograph survives as a literal trace. This virtual realm of the photograph, the realm that escapes perception, is what

---

21 De Certeau, p. 107.
22 De Certeau, p. 107.

Benjamin calls the *optical unconscious*. It is through the unconscious optics of the camera that certain "physiognomic aspects, image worlds, which dwell in the smallest things" may materialise in the photograph.[23] To apply Benjamin's frame of thought, the work of the plaster archaeologist resembles that of the camera, insofar as he uncovers elements from the *optical unconscious* of the city. The arrows, for instance, are such hidden elements. Benjamin's use of the term "image worlds" is of special importance when applied to plaster archaeology. For the image worlds entail not simply the archaeological find as positive form, as an object conserved in the photograph, but also as negative form, an object that manifests itself always in the form of absence. Barthes's reading-apparatus of photographs offers a useful terminology to explore these image worlds.

In his emblematic work *Camera Lucida,* Barthes introduces the terms *studium* and *punctum*. Whereas the *studium* is "that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: *I like / I don't like*",[24] the *punctum* is the element of the photograph that "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an

[23] Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," in *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2., ed. Howard Eiland and Gary Smith. Trans. Edmund Jephott and Kingsley Shorter (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 507–530, p. 512.

[24] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 27. For a detailed discussion of Barthes's concept of the *punctum* see also: Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 453.

arrow, and pierces [the viewer]."[25] Be it a particular detail in the photograph, or the spectator's knowledge of a past of which the photograph speaks as a future yet to come, the *punctum* is the element that disturbs the *studium* inasmuch as it points to something that is left invisible in the photograph.[26] It is "a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see."[27] Insofar as desire is propelled by the absence of the object of desire, the *punctum* is that very absence that remains unfilled, a void of signification, the element through which the photograph looks back at the spectator.

Applied to the field of plaster archaeology, the arrow "piercing through" the texture of the urban skin may instantly be identified as a *punctum*. Discovering an arrow, however, entails more than that. For what is discovered is not simply a detail, a palpable, positive form in the *optical unconscious* of the façade but a detail that launches desire "beyond what it permits us to see." Herein lies the spectral quality of the arrow. Even if I know what function it served in the panopticon of air defence, this knowledge reveals nothing more than the *studium*. The *punctum* is what the arrow offers as *negative* form, a "blind field" of vision whereby the arrow points back at me, identifying as its sole referent my wish to read it.[28] In this relation, the Benjaminian "image worlds" are those terrains where plaster archaeology folds back on itself and renders the archaeologist, rather than the arrow, a site of excavation. Read in this context, De Certeau's sentence about travelling receives a deeply poignant edge: "What does travel ultimately produce if it is not, by a sort of reversal, 'an exploration of the deserted places of my memory,' the return to nearby exoticism by way of detour through distant places, and the 'discovery' of relics and legends […]".[29] Once the discovery of relics takes place in the deserted places of my memory, the discovery of arrows is imbued with the power of the uncanny.

In what sense do the arrows constitute deserted places of my memory? If plaster archaeology accords the arrows the status of *place,* they are places of memories that are not mine. These are places of my mother's memories that I came to appropriate as *imagined memories* in an effort to "spatialise" the stories she has passed on to me. None of these stories feature descriptions of the arrows, however. Stories about rigorous wardens that guarded the doors of the shelters, about the whine of the air raid sirens that preceded the explosions are abundant

---

[25] Barthes, p. 26.
[26] To demonstrate this latter aspect of the *punctum*, Barthes turns to Alexander Gardner's photo of a boy sitting in shackles, awaiting his execution: "The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake." Barthes, p. 96.
[27] Barthes, p. 59.
[28] Barthes, p. 57.
[29] De Certeau, p. 107.

– particularly in connection with the 3 April 1944 bombing, which my mother and my grandparents endured in close vicinity to one of the main targets, the Ferencváros Marshalling Yard. Still, there is no mention of the arrows in her recollections. The arrows, then, are absences in my mother's stories. What she has seen as a seven-year-old child but does not remember, I appropriate as a portal to the past which never really leads anywhere but back to myself, the traveller, the archaeologist. The texts that unfold in the "image worlds" behind these portals are in fact texts in which I recognise my own handwriting.

THE MEMORIAL

If the arrows lie hidden in the *optical unconscious* of the city, one might wonder if there is any memorial in Budapest dedicated to the victims of the bombings. The Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche in Berlin and Coventry Cathedral in England are illustrative of communal efforts to keep the memory of the Second World War bombings alive. The annual memorial services held within the walls of these churches transform the ruins into what Jan Assmann calls "figures of memory" – those reference points of cultural memory that mark "fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)".[30]

Due to the fact that Budapest was never exposed to the level of devastation by aerial bombardment that German cities had to suffer, as well as to the fact that the devastation inflicted by the allied bombing raids was never tabooed – as it was and, to some extent still is, in (West) Germany[31] – the memory of the bombings lacks the edge that it has in contemporary German discourse. In fact, the memory of the bombing raids is largely eclipsed by the siege of Budapest by the Red Army, which claimed many more civilian lives and inflicted far more damage upon the city's building stock during the winter of 1944–45. Unlike in Germany, where the bombings had reduced many of the larger cities to ashes even before the military operations on the ground commenced, the bombing of Budapest by the British and American air forces is generally perceived as a prelude to the siege. Because the working through of the traumatic effects of the siege had been silenced by the succeeding Communist regime, it is no wonder that it received significant scholarly attention immediately after the political

---

[30] Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (Spring–Summer 1995), 125–133, p. 129.

[31] See: W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction,* trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2004) and also Andreas Huyssen's discussion of Sebald's argument on the repression of the trauma of the air war in his "Rewritings and New Beginnings: W. G. Sebald and the Literature on the Air War," in *Present Pasts*, pp. 138–157. Also in: Andreas Huyssen, "Air War Legacies: From Dresden to Baghdad," *New German Critique* 90 (Autumn 2003) 163–176.

transition of 1989.[32] With the upsurge of interest in the siege, a number of books have been published on the operations of the Hungarian Air Force during the Second World War. As early as 1992 the first comprehensive two-volume history of the air war over Hungary came out,[33] which still serves as the number–one reference material on the subject. In addition, stories written by former aviators that would have been censored by the previous regime then became abundant in bookstores.

Along with the Hungarian soldiers who had been denied recognition as heroes for over forty years, the Second World War pilot also emerged as a cult figure. Most significantly, the autobiographical works of Tibor Tobak, a renowned veteran pilot of the "Puma" squadron, emerged as bestsellers shortly after the political change.[34] The public interest in the Second World War was further amplified by the 50th anniversary commemorations taking place throughout the first half of the 1990s. Alongside the memoirs of soldiers and pilots, a number of personal diaries, written by civilians during the months of the bombings and the siege, found their way to publication in the wake of the political changes.[35]

It was in this climate that a memorial to the "civilian victims of the bombings" was erected – as the plaque in front of it laconically states.[36] It was commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior and the Civil Defence Command (*Polgári Védelem*) – a legal heir to the National Air Defence League in 1998.

The memorial stands in the middle of an empty lot encircled by a ramp leading up to Lágymányosi Bridge. In the absence of crosswalks leading to the site, pedestrian access is not easy. Indeed, the memorial is located in what Marc Augé describes as a *non-place*. "If a place," Augé contends, "can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place."[37] According to Augé, places such as bus stops, airports, and undergrounds are transitory zones that do not cater for the construction of a sense of identity.

32 A culmination of which is Krisztián Ungváry's monograph on the subject: *Budapest ostroma* (Budapest: Corvina, 1998) / *The Siege of Budapest* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).
33 See footnote 2.
34 Tobak's memoire *Pumák földön-égen* (*Pumas on Ground and in the Air*) has seen a number of editions since its first publication in 1990. The book would share the shelf with novels about and memoires by German, British, and American pilots fighting in the Second World War. The legendary German ace Adolph Galland's book *The First and the Last*, the American airman Len Deighton's *Goodbye Mickey Mouse,* as well as the British fighter pilot Richard Hillary's *The Last Enemy,* were all translated into Hungarian immediately after the Change – along with a number of semi-scholarly works on the individual squadrons, pilots and operations.
35 One prominent example of these diaries was published under the title "Anka naplója – feljegyzések a háborús Budapestről," *Budapesti Negyed* 37 (Fall 2002) 21–216.
36 "*A bombázások áldozatainak emlékére állíttatta a HM Polgári Védelmi Országos Parancsnokság és a Magyar Polgári Védelmi Szövetség.*"
37 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity,* trans. John Howe, (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 77–78.

As a space delineated by the circulation of traffic, the location of the memorial perfectly fits Augé's definition of the *non-place*.

If memorials constitute "figures of memory," as Assmann argues, what pur-poses does the memorial serve in such a space? Due to its location, hardly anyone goes to the site. This does not mean, however, that there are no institutional commemorations at the memorial. Every year on 8 May, in observance of VE Day, representatives of the Civil Defence Command visit the site and lay wreaths there. Colonel Gyula Fekete's commemorative speech in 2009 ascribes a dual function to the memorial: on the one hand it is a site dedicated to the memory of the victims, while it also serves as a monument to the heroic efforts of the air defence units that risked their lives to save civilians.[38] The choice of VE Day for the annual commemorations is also significant in that it inscribes the memory of the bombings into a larger trajectory of events: the date marking the end of the war in Europe.

[38] "II. világháborús bombázások polgári áldozatai emlékművének koszorúzási ünnepsége," Fővárosi Polgári Védelmi és Katasztrófavédelmi Szövetség <http://fpvsz.hu/new/?p=49> (Last visited: 16 December 2010).

The memorial's positioning in relation to its environment, however, invites a number of alternative readings concerning the space that it inhabits. For all its unappealing features, the choice of such an unlikely location might not be accidental after all. The memorial stands in the close vicinity of the Ferencváros Marshalling Yard, the main target of the first Anglo-American air raid on 3 April 1944. Once the memorial is perceived in relation to the marshalling yard the space in between them becomes "infiltrated" by the memory of the first bombing raid. Significantly, if the memorial were located at the marshalling yard itself, its relation to the site would be much more obvious and therefore reductive. Through the physical distance between them, however, an interstitial space is formed whereby the memorial is anchored into a specific moment of history and at once unmoored from it.

This nexus is supplemented by yet another building in the immediate proximity to the memorial: the slaughterhouse on Soroksári Road (*Vágóhíd*). In the context of the memorial, the slaughterhouse allows Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* to "enter" the site as an intertext. Within the triangle defined by the marshalling yard, the slaughterhouse, and the memorial, a palimpsest of potential relations are formed in which the bombing of 3 April 1944 emerges as a spectral *punctum,* a reference never expressed in positive form but rather alluded to in the form of a marked absence. To use Benjamin's term again, the relations between the individual landmarks that inform my reading of the site emerge in much the same way as the photograph's *optical unconscious* yields insight into "image worlds." By dint of entering these image worlds the archaeologist puts these landmarks in relation to each other, imagines arrows that engage them in multiple networks of signification which ultimately, in turn, point back to his own reading apparatus, to his own desire to anchor the memorial into the events of 3 April 1944.

The memorial's design is no less polyvalent than its location. Instead of employing such monumental clichés as the obelisk, the designers (Árpád U. Szegedi, Zsuzsa Stekly and János Sávolyi) used a different memorial vocabulary in their design. A wall of glazed tiles attached to a surface of concrete rises above the site, while a pile of stones scattered around the base of the wall gives the memorial an unfinished look. The glazed tiles form an image in which a cacophony of faces, interspersed with white, skull-like shapes lurking in their midst, can be seen. Besides evoking Picasso's *Guernica,* the iconography of the memorial exudes an unsettling feeling of claustrophobia that stands in stark contrast to the open terrain around the memorial. The tiles are installed in a concrete supporting structure with its reverse left undecorated. Although one may instantly assume that this is a surface intended to remain hidden, it is certainly not so, as the location of the memorial in open space makes it just as visible as the front. Indeed, the tiles with the faces are "sheltered" by these slabs of concrete, interspersed with stones here and there, and a larger heap of rocks lying around, as though it were

the remains of a collapsed building. What we have here is a representation of an inverted air raid shelter, one that rises above the debris and is turned inside out, so that its exposed interior becomes the memorial's front.

If the tumult of the faces evokes the inferno of the air raid shelters where death lies in wait in every corner, it does so in a rather perplexing way. The image lends itself to being perceived as an apocalyptic vision of a carnival in which screams and laughter, life and death coalesce into an uncanny continuum of body and building, value and waste, glazed tile and raw concrete. The cipher for this uncanny combination of body and building is the modern ruin. Although each and every face has a unique countenance, the shades of orange, yellow, and brown lends them a sense of uniformity, which is further accentuated by the absence of eyeballs. Even if they do not look back at the spectator, the empty eye sockets do just the opposite: it is precisely by *not* looking back that they come to return the gaze of the spectator. These vacant orbits render the faces disembodied, ghostly. What looks like an expression of pain and horror could just as well be a sign of exuberant joy. As the narratives that the design activates run side by side without overwriting each other, the memorial withholds any easily digestible narrative of the past that a traditional monument would offer. Instead, the memorial dramatises the ambiguities of memorialising the past by inviting a multiplicity of readings.

CONCLUSION

If *place,* as opposed to *non-place,* is a space infused with a sense of identity, the memorial to the victims of the bombings creates a place whose identity as a site of memory is essentially polyvalent. This polyvalence stems from the memorial's capability to function as a screen for multiple narrative inscriptions, as well as a nexus connecting buildings in its surrounding area. But as long as these relations are not offered by the memorial in a didactic fashion, it encourages the viewer to become an active participant, rather than a passive recipient, of memorialisation. Foreclosing prepackaged narratives, it operates by absences and aporias and as such it subscribes to what James Young calls *counter-monuments.* As Young explains, *counter-monuments* dissent from the didacticism of traditional monumental spaces by way of embodying "architectural forms that would return the burden of memory to those who come looking for it."[39] The burden is, of course, the absence of a ready-made narrative that would centralise polyvalent readings and "musealise" the finds that the space of the memorial holds in store for the spectator. On the contrary, memory, as we can say with Michel de Certeau, "is a sort of

---

[39] James Young, "Memory and Counter-Memory: The End of the Monument in Germany," *Harvard Design Magazine* 9 (Fall 1999) 1–10. p. 9.

anti–museum: it is not localisable. Fragments of it come out in legends. Objects and words also have hollow places in which a past sleeps, as in the everyday acts of walking […]".[40] The memorial to the victims of the bombings, then, embodies an architecture that encourages travelling in both the physical and metaphorical senses of the word. It is through travelling, after all, that the hollow places of objects and words, the *optical unconscious* of the city, might be explored.

Plaster archaeology, then, is a form of travelling that renders the entire city an anti-museum by dint of the excavation of the hollow places of façades. In much the same way the memorial transforms *non-place* into *place,* the plaster archaeologist appropriates the object of his gaze and renders it a relic, a place inscribed with identity. This place, inasmuch as it constitutes an object from the past, gains its identity through the act of discovery. But as much as the memorial is a *counter-monument* that reverts the burden of memory onto the spectator, the arrow discovered on a façade, as we have seen, constitutes a portal to "image worlds" that, as the *punctum* of discovery, offer no resolution to the quest. In the same way the *counter-monument* leaves the work of memory as an unresolved task, and my project of uncovering arrows in buildings' façades is destined to remain unfinished – there is always another arrow to find.

---

[40] De Certeau, p. 108.

JÁNOS KENYERES

1956 in cultural memory

The testimony of literature

In Yann Martel's short fiction "The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios" the narrator and his dying friend suffering from AIDS pass the time by making up the story of an imaginary family in Helsinki while recalling important events of the twentieth century – one event for each year. The year 1956 is dedicated to Hungary: "1956 – The Soviet Union invades Hungary to bring to heel a country reluctant to march to the drumbeat of communist totalitarianism. Material damage to the country is heavy, and two hundred thousand refugees flee the country for the West."[1] Dry, factual words in a story otherwise steeped in emotion. As demonstrated by Martel's story, in the cultural memory of the world 1956 is closely connected to the Hungarian revolution of that year, and if Martel's short story is any kind of yardstick, Hungary in the twentieth century is largely remembered for 1956 (in the story, the only other Hungarian reference is made to "Lazlo Biro", who, in 1938, invented the ballpoint pen).

The present discussion aims to describe the nature of the memory of 1956 as portrayed in literature. This literature is far from being uniform, whether created inside or outside Hungary. It incorporates elements of suffering and heroism, misrepresentation and falsification, shame and guilt, silence and paralysis. I will look at some of these memory patterns, placing them in their literary and historical context.

It is historical fact that from 1949 the Hungarian Workers' Party started to exert a direct influence on the arts and literature in Hungary. Such basic rights as the author's creative freedom, the free choice of themes and styles and the criticism of the political and economic situation were severely restricted and rapidly eliminated. Several poets and writers were arrested on various ideological and political charges,[2] while the works of others could not appear. For example, the poetry of Sándor Weöres and Ágnes Nemes Nagy, and the music of Béla Bartók were condemned to long years of silence. Artists were forced to support party policies and to wage ideological wars against those whose works were considered out of line with the current communist agenda.

---

[1]   Yann Martel, "The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios," in *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2004), 1–72, p. 62.
[2]   Such as Géza Béri, György Faludy, Kamil Kárpáti, Tibor Tollas and Bálint Tóth.

I will not discuss in detail the essential role of Hungarian writers in the flow of events that led to the revolution; it must however be mentioned that in 1953, with the death of Stalin and the arrival of a less stringent ideological wind from Moscow, several writers expressed a growing desire to get rid of the political control over literature and to be allowed to write freely about the country and the problems it was facing. *Irodalmi Újság* (Literary Journal), established in 1950, provided an important forum for this open discussion. In 1953, *Irodalmi Újság* started to publish critical essays on current political practice, albeit together with party-line articles, calling for ideological reforms and the abandonment of the rigid framework of socialist realism. However, despite the new political wave from Moscow, writers who voiced such critical sentiments had to face fierce resistance from the communist hardliners within the Party, whose attacks sometimes manifested themselves in aggressive political campaigns against these authors and the Hungarian Writers' Association. Nevertheless, the writers' movement for more artistic freedom greatly contributed to the political climate that paved the way for the revolution.

Turning to 1956 and literature proper, the famous 2 November issue of *Irodalmi Újság* deserves special attention. The first page of this "revolutionary" issue published a work by the nineteenth century poet Sándor Petőfi, followed by poems by Lajos Kassák, Lajos Tamási, Lajos Kónya, József Fodor and Károly Jobbágy. In the same issue of the journal, Tibor Déry, Tamás Bárány, Imre Szász, Milán Füst, Lőrinc Szabó, Áron Tamási, Sándor Dallos and Miklós Hubay published prose writings, all in support of the revolution. Perhaps the most eminent (and, undoubtedly, most famous) poem published in this issue of the journal was Gyula Illyés's "Egy mondat a zsarnokságról" (One Sentence on Tyranny). Written in 1950 in the darkest days of the Rákosi regime but remaining unpublished until 2 November 1956, the poem depicts the nature of tyranny as it spreads to everything and everyone, finally overwhelming and engulfing the individual and the human soul.

This poem is generally regarded as one of the most outstanding literary monuments of the 1956 revolution despite the fact that it had been written six years beforehand; it is a rare example of poetry's ability to evoke the essence and fundamental nature of an important historical event. Also, Illyés's poem compellingly represents the mechanism and consequences of dictatorship, and as such it is of universal significance. Following the suppression of the revolution, the poem was not published in Hungary until 1986. Although it was circulated in samizdat copies and there were attempts to publish it officially in 1966 and 1972, respectively, Illyés did not want it to be published by those who had previously prohibited its publication for years.[3] Moreover, giving consent to the publication

---

[3] Cf. Béla Pomogáts, "Egy mondat a zsarnokságról", *Korunk* 7 (2006) 2 May 2011 <http://www.korunk.org/?q=node/8&ev=2006&honap=7&cikk=8250>

from 5 continents and 43 different countries, and is the largest existing collec-
tion of its kind, presenting the original works together with their Hungarian
translation.

Although the proper assessment of all the poems in *Gloria Victis* requires good
knowledge of virtually all European languages, as well as Vietnamese, Malaysian,
Siamese and Chinese, it is evident that the Hungarian revolution has prompted
the creation of literary works representing considerable variance in poetic talent.
Therefore, while some poems are aesthetically less valuable than emotionally
supportive, others show great poetic facility. In what follows I will discuss some
poems originally written in English.

The motive of guilt felt by the bystanders appears in several of these poems,
most strongly in E.E. Cummings's "Thanksgiving 1956," which ridicules the
official reaction of the USA to the Hungarian cause, as demonstrated by the
following stanzas:

"be quite little hungary
and do as you are bid
a good kind bear is angary
we fear for the quo pro quid"

uncle sam shrugs his pretty
pink shoulders you know how
and he twitches a liberal titty
and lisps "I'm busy right now"

so rah-rah-rah democracy
let's all be as thankful as hell
and bury the statue of liberty
(because it begins to smell)

John Knoepfle's "The Hungarian Revolution" concludes on a more solemn tone,
demonstrating the speaker's guilt and pangs of conscience, depicting the rest of
the world, the onlookers, in the form of the statue of an ancient tyrant:

We were watching,
great stone hands on our knees.

A similar sentiment of shame and guilt, mingled with the ironic act of forgetting,
is echoed in Paris Leary's poem "Budapest":

Never relent in your task
of forgetting it – when suddenly

> in the supermarket a child cries,
> do not be tempted to remember
> the cries of children against the tanks;
> do not look up. You can do
> nothing, it means nothing, nothing.

In other poems the revolution prompted the use of an elevated language found in Greek tragedies, as illustrated by the Canadian Watson Kirkconnells's "Gloria Victis," describing the revolution in terms of a mythical battle between the forces of evil and innocent youth craving freedom, while also illuminating the indifference and idleness of the western world:

> The West was silent; and the Brontosaurus,
> Bellowing down the streets of those dark days,
> Trampled to blood and death the youthful chorus
> That sang but now in Liberty's high praise.

Moving from poetry to drama, mention must be made of the American Robert Ardrey's *Shadow of Heroes: A Play in Five Acts from the Hungarian Passion* (1958), which focuses on the tragedy of László Rajk, the faithful communist ex-minister who was executed on trumped-up charges in 1949. The play follows the hardships of his family up to the final days of the revolution. The dramatic composition is enhanced by the unfinished story – in the concluding scene we have no certain information about the whereabouts of Prime Minister Imre Nagy and other leading figures of the revolution, who had previously found refuge at the Yugoslav Embassy, and this uncertainty is explicitly brought to the knowledge of the audience by the otherwise omnipotent Author. It is the irony of fate that by the time the drama was first performed at the Piccadilly Theatre, London, on 7 October 1958, the ex-refugees of the Yugoslav Embassy, Imre Nagy, Pál Maléter and Miklós Gimes had been executed.

Also, there are a number of historical novels discussing the Hungarian freedom fight in world literature, such as *The Bridge at Andau* (1957) by James Michener, *The Best Shall Die* (1961) by Eric Roman, *Ein Ungarischer Herbst* (A Hungarian Autumn, 1995) by Ivan Ivanji, and novels by émigré Hungarian authors published abroad, which were translated into English, such as *Történelem: kitünő* (Teaspoonful of Freedom, 1966) by Kata Értavy Baráth and *Minden idők (*A Time for Everything, 1978) by Thomas Kabdebo.

The English Vincent Brome's novel *The Revolution*, published in 1969 in England, has an imaginary hero, Gavin Cartwright, an American correspondent witnessing the revolution in Budapest, and taking part in the heat of the events. Another English novel, *Under the Frog*, by Tibor Fischer, first published in 1992 in England, contains a series of interrelated stories about the 1950s in Hungary,

exhibiting an abundance of black humour and irony, with the last chapter depicting the revolution from the tragic perspective of Hungarians.

Returning to the situation in Hungary, although writers who remained in the country and were not imprisoned could not openly write about the revolution for many years (at any rate, they were prohibited from publishing such works and were thus condemned to silence), the political regime – after securing power – showed a certain degree of tolerance for works which did not explicitly refer to the revolution and used a sufficiently metaphorical language to allow for various interpretations. This metaphorical language could most effectively be achieved in the language of poetry. Poets dedicating themselves to the memory of the freedom fight included László Nagy, István Eörsi, József Tornai, Márton Kalász, Gyula Óbersovszky, György Petri, István Ágh, István Bella, Attila Szepesi, József Utassy and Gáspár Nagy.

Although some novels on 1956 appeared soon after the revolution, these expressed the interests and requirements of party-line propaganda.[8] Similar party-line ideology was present in some dramas as well.[9]

In this oppressive political atmosphere, there was no room for real catharsis. Works that were allowed to be published on the revolution had to represent a tragedy, but this tragedy was false, based on untrue social and historical grounds.[10] Moreover, there was a tendency to pretend that nothing had happened and to discuss issues which deliberately diverted attention from the recent past of the country. In March 1957, the journal *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Literature) was launched, replacing *Irodalmi Újság*, and in September of the same year the first issue of the journal *Kortárs* (Contemporary) appeared. Edited by József Darvas and Gábor Tolnai, *Kortárs* proclaimed its reluctance to commit itself to an agenda; however, the introductory article of the journal contained a nicely phrased but unmistakable threat: "It is our firm belief that the thinking of our socialist writers has become more profound as a result of the past events and most of those who had not been socialist have now come closer to socialism."[11] At this time, the writers mentioned earlier were under arrest. The second, October issue of the journal also manifested some form of ambiguity: it published works by writers who had been previously sidelined, such as Sándor Weöres, János Kodolányi, János Pilinszky, Zoltán Jékely, Miklós Mészöly, but in parallel with a critique

---

[8] For example, András Berkesi's *Októberi vihar* (October Storm, 1957), Imre Dobozy's *Tegnap és ma* (Yesterday and Today, 1960), László Erdős's *Levelek Bécsbe* (Letters to Vienna, 1958), Lajos Mesterházi's *Pokoljárás* (Descent to Hell, 1959) and József Darvas's *Részeg eső* (Drunken Rain, 1963) represent this line of prose.

[9] Such as *Szélvihar* (Storm, 1958) by Imre Dobozy, *Pesti emberek* (Budapest People, 1958) by Lajos Mesterházi and *Kormos ég*, (Sooty Sky, 1959) by József Darvas.

[10] For a more detailed analysis, focussing on the first two issues of *Kortárs*, see Zoltán Kenyeres, "Az első évforduló," *Kritika* 4 (1997) 51–54. My comments on the first two issues of *Kortárs* are indebted to this work.

[11] My translation. Cf. "A 'Kortárs' Olvasóihoz," *Kortárs* 1 (1957) 3–4, p. 4.

of a recent book of verse, *Szárazvillám* (Heat Lightning) by Ágnes Nemes Nagy, disapproving of the poet's "doubts and distrust."[12] The attempt to turn away from 1956 and relegate the issue was manifested by the commemoration of October 1882, the death of the poet János Arany, which was an obvious escape into the inner spheres of literature, an ivory tower shielding from reality. The only truly astounding publication in this second issue of the journal was a short story by László Tóth (today known as László Kamondy), entitled "Fegyencek szabadságon" (Inmates on Vacation), about the liberation of convicts from a prison in the last days of October 1956. Going beyond any reasonable daring, the short story contained the following dialogue: "'What's this?!' asked Venczák in an increasingly loud and sharp voice, as by this time the wing of the building had resounded with bangs and he could hardly hear his own words. – 'This, papa,' said one of the civilians joyfully, who had been recently released from the detention camp in Oroszlány, 'this is a revolution.'"[13] Kamondy's short story is perhaps the only literary work in the span of some 30 years or so which used the word "revolution" for the events and still succeeded in being officially published in Hungary. To my knowledge, the next literary work that mentions this word is Péter Nádas's *Emlékiratok könyve* (A Book of Memories), published in 1986.

The role of Tibor Déry in the 1950s in the efforts to break away from the dogmatic party control of literature is well known; he had a key role in the Writers' Association and the Petőfi Circle. At the last meeting of the Writers' Association on 28 December 1956, before the Association was dissolved, he made a passionate speech in response to the accusations of the renowned Soviet writer, Mikhail Sholohov, who claimed that Hungarian writers should have opposed the counter-revolution. Déry, who was incidentally a leftist at heart throughout his life, replied with these words: "The noblest tradition of the writer is to strive for truth, to search for truth unrelentingly. I am asking Sholohov whether he has not considered that there might be another reason why Hungarian writers were not brave enough to make war against the counter-revolution. The answer is as simple as this: there was no counter-revolution."[14] Déry asserted that the events of the past days amounted to a "national revolution." As he claimed, "We, Hungarian writers, are of the unanimous view that the greatest, purest and most unified revolution of the history of our nation, including the working–class movement, has been oppressed […]."[15] Déry was one of the first authors to be subsequently arrested; he was sentenced to nine years in prison and released only after being granted a pardon in 1960. His short story "Szerelem" (Love), as well

---

[12] My translation. Cf. László Kardos, "Nemes Nagy Ágnes: Szárazvillám," *Kortárs* 2 (1957) 314–316, p. 316.

[13] My translation. Cf. László Tóth, "Fegyencek szabadságon," *Kortárs* 2 (1957) 210–223, p. 211.

[14] My translation. Cf. Tibor Déry, "Déry Tibor felszólalása," in *A szabadságról és a zsarnokságról*, ed. Béla Pomogáts (Nagyvárad: Pro Universitate Partium Alapítvány, 2006), 142–145, p. 143.

[15] Tibor Déry, p. 143.

as his novel *Niki* published in the summer of 1956, were outspoken proclamations on the sinful nature of Stalinist dictatorship, and after his discharge from prison in 1960, Déry continued to maintain his integrity as a writer. The short stories "Számadás" (Reckoning), "Philemon és Baucis" (Philemon and Baucis) and "Két asszony" (Two Women) all drew on the recent past, containing direct but sophisticated allusions to the events of 1956 and the ensuing repression and reprisal.

In addition to the metaphorical language of poetry, and the sophisticated, but unmistakable allusions in prose, the absurd or grotesque was another literary tool in the hands of writers to recall the days of the freedom fight; Déry's novel *G. A. úr X-ben (*Mr. G. A. in X, 1964) uses Kafkaesque absurd to this end, and a similar technique is followed in Ferenc Karinthy's novel *Epepe* (1979) and István Örkény's drama *Pisti a vérzivatarban* (Stevie in the Bloodbath, 1983). Although these works had an elusive, intangible storyline, each of them had to wait years before they were given green light for publication. The confusing story-line and the possibility of multiple interpretations owing to the absurd finally caused these works to serve as, to use Marshall McLuhan's phrase, "the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind", the mind of the censor.[16]

In the second half of the 1980s, with the rapidly changing political system and, eventually, the collapse of communism, all political and ideological obstacles were removed from the way of discussing the memory of the 1956 revolution. A number of works have been published since, drawing on the theme of the revolution, such as György Konrád's *A cinkos* (The Accomplice), Károly Szakonyi's *Bolond madár* (Silly Bird), Károly Szalay's *Párhuzamos viszonyok* (Parallel Relations), András Simonffy's *Rozsda ősz* (Rusty Autumn), Ágnes Gergely's *Stációk* (Stages), Géza Ottlik's *Buda*, Péter Nádas's *Emlékiratok könyve* (A Book of Memories), and Ferenc Juhász's *Krisztus levétele a Keresztről* (Christ's Descent from the Cross).[17]

However, these recent works show it would be fallacious to conclude that confronting the memory of the unsuccessful revolution has become easier, or less problematic, as a result of the freedoms provided by the new democracy. The armed protagonist of György Konrád's short story "Álmerénylő hosszú kabátban" (Bogus Assassin in a Long Coat, 1992) is aimlessly roaming about the streets of Budapest on 4 November and the days to follow, incapable of using his gun. In Péter Nádas's novel, *Párhuzamos történetek* (Parallel Stories, 2005), the narra-

---

[16] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 18.
[17] Literary anthologies on 1956 published in Hungary since the regime change include *Ezerkilencszázötvenhat, te csillag* (Nineteen Fifty-six, You Star, 1991), entitled after György Faludy's famous poem; *A szabadságról és a zsarnokságról* (On Freedom and Tyranny, 2006); and *1956: magyar írók novellái* (1956: Short Stories by Hungarian Writers, 2006).

tor decides not to take part in the street–fighting, even though he supports the armed resistance in theory: "But I had to get some bread and other stuff," the hero admits, "my family was submerged in paralysis."[18] Similarly to the people who are paralysed when, standing in line for bread, a Soviet tank appears and shoots into the house above them.

While in the past the revolution was almost unutterable because of the ideological restrictions, and any work that truthfully referred to 1956 exhibited an act of courage by its very existence, in these recent works the heroism is gone, replaced with the invocation of a sense of paralysis in the narrative. It has now become clear, with the political and ideological constraints gone and the freedom of speech re-established, that the crushed revolution with all its inevitable consequences for the ruined and distressful lives of a whole generation is truly unspeakable and unutterable, which, quite paradoxically, is recounted so accurately in literature.

---

[18] "De nekem kellett kenyeret szereznem, meg mindent, mert a családom tagjai tehetetlenségbe menekültek." Péter Nádas, *Párhuzamos történetek* (Pécs: Jelenkor Kiadó, 2005), vol. 2, p. 208. My translation.

2. Cultural border-crossings: intertextuality and translation

ELINOR SHAFFER

Affinities and antagonisms
The processes of reception

We are all familiar with, and perhaps most at home with, the model of "genial affinity", according to which Romantic poets and thinkers were enabled to understand each other fully and were able to communicate their inmost and most original aesthetic insights and feelings. The "genius" was defined in relation to this capacity for new insight and for the ability to communicate it with other geniuses. Based on the capacity of individuals (usually two male friends but also groups or specially defined communities) was also the hermeneutic model adopted by Friedrich Schleiermacher for the form of communication appropriate to the humanities, later adapted by Wilhelm Dilthey for all the human sciences as a contrast to the scientific mode of understanding. Thus, in English, Wordsworth and Coleridge (who met as young men in Bristol in 1795 and formed the plan of the poems that became the *Lyrical Ballads*) have been regarded in this light, as have in German Friedrich Schlegel and Schleiermacher, who met as young men in Berlin in 1793 and formed the plan of translating all of Plato's dialogues into German, Socrates and his disciples being a major model for hermeneutic understanding and communication. Schleiermacher completed the project in 1810, and it still stands as the canonical German translation of Plato. There are many other examples, both within a particular country and across national boundaries. Schleiermacher's new theory of translation (1813) was also based on the capacity to understand the "foreign" and to accommodate it in one's own language and thinking in such a way as not to conceal or domesticate it but to highlight its foreignness. Only so could it be genuinely assimilated in such a way as to extend the capacities of the language.

"Friend" is a key word in the affinity model, as is "genius" and "dialogue". Coleridge indignantly rejected charges of "plagiarism" on the grounds of "genial affinity" with those he agreed with and therefore gladly cited, for example Schelling, whom he quoted so devotedly in crucial passages of *Biographia Literaria*. Less genial critics called it "plagiarism". He also published a periodical entitled *The Friend*, whose small circulation underlined the intimacy of the circle. Coleridge invented another kind of intimate communication: he borrowed his friends' books and annotated them with all his best midnight thoughts (and as a letter to Charles Lamb – his best and lifelong friend – testifies, also with crumbs

of cheese marking his favourite passages). Forms such as intimate personal letters, journals and diaries, the periodicals of small groups of friends, acquired increasing importance as literary works, and in more recent times have been collected and studied as, for example, in the multi-volumed *The Shelley Circle*.

Congenial though this model of affinity is to the literary mind, and vital for the understanding (and the self-understanding) of Romanticism, we need to consider the model of "antagonism" as equally important for reception studies, and indeed for Romanticism too. The vital conflicts of the period of the French Revolution, which can be seen as the beginning of the modern political age, also contain models for more recent political-literary fluctuations.

Let's start with an example from the period itself of a writer and a work clearly and explicitly motivated by antagonism, one which was widely and immediately translated and disputed everywhere in Europe and may fairly be claimed to have influenced events: Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*, published in November 1790. He was animated by an urgency of antagonism, the certainty that the Revolution was a mistake, and that the consequences would be disastrous. Moreover, he was a convert to his own antagonism: having been a lifelong Whig, a supporter of the American Revolution, he came forward urgently not as a Tory, but as a conservative, to defend the values he felt were being betrayed. Like most converts, his antagonism was further inflamed by what he felt were his own former errors.

His book was instantly met by both antagonism and affirmation; either way it was imperative to read, consider, reply, attack, or bring up supporting forces. In England, major commentators of the time wrote in the press and in pamphlets and books; cartoonists had a field day. In Germany and France the response was immediate; there was none of the lag that often characterises "reception" and carries a work into a quite different political era where it assumes a quite different meaning. The important German translation (1794) was by Friedrich Gentz (1764–1832), who went on to oppose the French Revolution with a series of books and as editor of influential journals, and as an independently influential political analyst of Burke's ideas and of the British and French forms of government – a figure whom C.P. Gooch in his study *Germany and the French Revolution* called "by far the most informed German writer on the French Revolution". That is, Gentz was an authoritative, not an anonymous translator or "hired pen". The status of the translator is always a vital factor in reception. Later, in 1808, the right-wing thinker Adam Müller (1779–1829) also took up Burke via Gentz, writing *Die Elemente der Staatskunst* (The Elements of Statecraft), and this had an impact both on current politics and on long-term social theory in Germany. Burke, as a lifelong and high-profile politician, intended his book as an urgent action, and it was received as such. That he was already famous and influential (he was sixty-two at the time of publication), a leading figure in the Whig party, a formidable and practiced parliamentary orator and stylist, increased the impact of

the book. He spoke at the dispatch box of the world. If the book was an attack, it also served to line up the forces on both sides who would soon in fact be at war.

The famous passages of Burke echoed down as historic even as they were uttered. Nineteen thousand copies of the book were sold in the first year after publication. They could not quite yet gain him the title of "philosopher of Anglo-American conservatism" which he is now rather patly accorded;[1] indeed, part of the power of his antagonism to the Revolution was his personal history as a Whig: he spoke as a highly placed convert to a new cause, as one whose duty and calling in an unprecedented emergency was suddenly to convert the members of his own side. In fact, he split his own party. Charles James Fox, leader of the Whigs, supported the Revolution. Shock value of the first order attached to Burke's onslaught. A leading authority on Burke has entitled his book *The Rage of Edmund Burke. Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative.*[2] It was, of course, the Tory party under Pitt that at that time represented conservatism. Moreover, of course, "Anglo-American conservatism" is not a single entity; English and American conservatisms need to be distinguished, never more than at this period, when the then revolutionary United States included many strong sympathizers with the French uprising against the monarchy. Burke seemed to be retracting his own earlier support for the rebellious American colonists. He also turned against the Dissenters, whose right to toleration he had previously defended. To many at the time, in and out of his party, he appeared to be a Whig turncoat, not a "philosopher of conservatism".[3]

One consequence of his attack was that in splitting his party he also rallied the defenders of the Revolution and provoked a number of eloquent and thoughtful replies. Either negative or positive responses draw forth their opposites. Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791–2) took up cudgels in what was both a personal attack on Burke and a powerful statement of the fundamental principles justifying the Revolution. Paine, a British-born émigré to the American colonies, returned to Europe in 1787 and in the 1790's played a role in French politics. Paine directs a great deal of his polemic at Burke. At first he addresses him with apparent respect, but gradually, as he feels he has refuted him, he becomes increasingly mocking. He calls him "metaphysician", "play actor", and "pensioner" (that is, one who took payments from the court – an unjustified insult). He is not a master of style, like Burke, but in his conviction and passion often strikes out a telling phrase or slogan. He has hopes for the French Revolution,

---

[1] Isaac Kramnick, "Introduction," *The Portable Edmund Burke*, ed. Kramnick (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. ix-x.

[2] Isaac Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke. Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

[3] For a detailed account of the effects of the *Reflections on the French Revolution* on party politics see the major biography by F.P. Lock, *Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), vol. II. 1784–1797, chapters 6–10.

and tries to correct Burke's account of what has happened so far. More ambitiously, he sets up a counter history and theory of society, basing his position on a theory of the natural rights of man, together with a stinging condemnation of monarchy (depending as it does on the lottery of heredity, which often leaves the nation with an incompetent ruler). He takes as his model instead the forms of the new American government and constitution, giving first-hand accounts of the consultations. He sets out to undermine the Burkean notion of the British constitution, which relies on a subtle interpretation of the peaceful parliamentary process by which James Stuart was replaced by William of Orange in 1788 (an interpretation which indeed still rules in Britain today and sits uncomfortably with the EU Convention on Human Rights). Paine argues that the English nation and hereditary succession began with the Norman Conquest in 1066, and thus was never based on the consent of the people, and that neither the well-known concessions to the barons at Runnymede known as "Magna Carta" nor the Settlement of 1788 constituted a recognition of the right of the people to form its own government. For Paine, England had no constitution and the government no legitimacy: he declares that "[t]he ragged relic and its antiquated precedent, the monk and the monarch, will moulder together."[4]

In May 1792 a proclamation against seditious writing was issued, and Paine was prosecuted for seditious libel; he left for France in September, and was found guilty *in absentia*. His pamphlet sold very well indeed. By early 1793 the French Assembly had declared war on Britain, and Britain on France (with Fox still dissenting). Paine and Burke were to agree on one thing: their low opinion of Napoleon, Burke having predicted in his *Reflections* that the Revolution would fall into the hands of a ruffian military leader, and Paine calling the upstart "the completest charlatan that ever existed".[5]

Paine's may be the most famous of the responses, but it was only one of many. Richard Price, for example, wrote eloquently against Burke, and indeed Burke considered him one of the main thorns in his flesh.[6] Another vital aspect of antagonism may be perceived in his opponents, who in the degree to which they opposed him were acutely aware of his persuasive power. The young Coleridge, then a student at Cambridge, and at that time "a radical in politics and a Unitarian in religion", was immensely affected by the power of Burke's prose, and Burke's cadences are still detectable in the later, more conservative Coleridge's

---

4   Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1995), p. 249.

5   Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 317–18; Paine, quoted in Henry York, *Letters from France,* 2 vols. (London: 1804).

6   Martin Fitzpatrick, "Patriots and Patriotisms: Richard Price and the early reception of the French Revolution in England," *Nations and Nationalisms: France, Britain, Ireland and the Eighteenth-century Context*, eds. Michael O'Dea and Kevin Whelan (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1996; Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century), pp. 211–229.

political writings.[7] The enemy's persuasive power may be an object almost of superstitious fear and admiration. As warriors ate the heart of their opponents to internalize their courage, so Burke's opponents had to make his ringing style their own, or at least raise their rhetorical game.

From the point of view of reception, this is as important as the initial on-slaught: antagonism elicits opposition and so increases discussion of the topic, whatever it may be. It also increases general awareness of the subject and the indi-viduals involved. Newspaper coverage, public meetings, coffeehouse discussion, broadsides, parodies, songs, and cartoons (including Cruickshank's now classic anti-Burke cartoons) multiply. The phenomenon of "twitter" is hardly new.

Translation leading to foreign coverage, reception and response is a distinct and vital topic; in this case, because a foreign country's politics were the imme-diate subject, and political action across national boundaries was called for, the translations followed initial publication with unwonted speed. Thus antagonism may create what is understood as an emergency and as a concern affecting a wide swathe of nations, groups and individuals abroad. "Reception" is thus ad-vanced at a much greater than usual rate. It would be important to find a mode of measuring or reckoning this rate, fast or slow, apart from Jauss's rather vague "generations" of readers (especially given that different countries measure a "generation" differently), and apart from records of print runs, sales, circulating library records, and private book clubs, which have received much attention in recent years. William St Clair, a historian of the book, who has made a useful attempt to gather such numerical measures as copies printed and sold, and at what prices, for the English Romantic period, has to conclude that the great eighteenth-century classics dominated, "the Romantics" are scarcely visible, and it is a misnomer to speak of "the Romantic period".[8] Any movement not named after a ruler's reign or political period of office runs this risk.

The longer-range impact of Burke's polemic was hardly less than its immedi-ate impact; but that carries us into other territory, the process by which a contro-versial act of antagonism gradually over several generations of reception becomes a "classic". The fact that the French Revolution gave way to a Restoration of the monarchy is no doubt one factor; that is, the book in question seemed to have "won its battle". In the German case we have briefly outlined, the Prussians were defeated by the French; but in the slightly longer run the Austrians helped to win the field at Waterloo. Another powerful factor was the stature of those who took up the cause and their capacity to transform the immediate response to crisis into a long-term intellectually articulated and defended political position. This transformation into a "classic" is a process itself in need of documentation; our

7   A. C. Goodson, ed., *Coleridge on Language* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998) vol. 3. of *Coleridge's Writings*, gen. ed. John Beer.
8   William St Clair, *The Reading Public in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

research has shown that it is often marked by formal adoption in secondary school curricula, for example, the list of "European classics" established and translated for secondary school pupils by the new state of Bulgaria in 1870; by organized translation projects whether by publishers or by governments (as with communist state translation projects), or by publication in "shelves" or collections of classics by publishers either recognising or attempting to create the classic status. Studies of the relations of Cesare Pavese, the writer, translator and editor working for the influential publisher Einaudi with the Italian state under Mussolini – there is extant correspondence between Cesare Pavese and Mussolini – show that the shrewd Pavese successfully argued that the education of the new Italian reading public established by Unification would proceed much more effectively through translations of English and American modern classics than through the much revered and therefore intimidating Italian classics. There was considerable general discussion of these issues.[9] We may also cite Annick Duperray on the authoritative editions of the French Pléiade, where a particularly enterprising and witty editor set out to ensconce some surprising authors in the pantheon, so that Henry James and St Exupéry take their places beside (and outsell) Ronsard and DuBellay.[10] This form of recognition as a "classic" may in part depend on the historical outcome of the *agon*, as well as the quality of the thinking and writing. But a "lost cause" may have permanent status precisely because of the loss; this is very familiar in literature, where epic poems, for example, are often the monument of a lost civilisation, lost but imperishable values, or lost but glorious battles. There is a special quality of memorial attached to events and values that a defeated group may continue to cherish. This effect, though hardly confined to Romanticism (think of the cherished memory of the defeated Trojans that echoed down the ages from Homer onwards to Shakespeare's Troilus), was an important element in the "folk memory" regained by the Romantic movement (represented for example by the epic by Ossian, whether the ancient bard is considered an authentic oral folk memory or an invention – antagonists call it a "forgery" – by a single Scottish poet in the eighteenth century) and on which a number of small-nation claims were based in the nineteenth century.[11] Burke's own book has a note of elegy for a threatened set of values, a civilisation on the brink of being lost, if action is not taken. This elegiac note has also ensured its endurance, for although his side defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, and the monarchy was restored, the restoration was brief, and the civilisation he wished to safeguard was in fact largely lost. Taken together with Chateaubriand's resonant

---

9   Francesca Billiani, "Gli Anni Trenta," *Culture nazionali e narrazioni straniere: Italia, 1903–1943* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2007), pp. 149–208.
10 Unpublished Conference paper, London, June 2010.
11 Joep Leerssen, "Ossian and the Rise of Literary Historicism," *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, ed. Howard Gaskill, series ed. Elinor Shaffer (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 109–125; and Gabriella Hartvig, 'Ossian in Hungary', in the same volume, pp. 222–239.

memoirs, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, written in 1833, looking back over a long life (though he died only in 1848), it becomes a Romantic lament for a lost civilisation. Thus antagonism too may achieve not only the call to arms but the note of threnody and yearning so associated with musical embodiments of Romanticism.

On the other side of the political fence, Blake's poem "The French Revolution", written just after Burke's book appeared, is by a poet for whom antagonism and affinity (in the sense of opposites) were concepts on which his own poetics turned. If he is in favour of the French Revolution, where Burke is against it, it is in the context of his antagonism to the "Ancien Régime", the old regime, the oppressors of the poor, the downtrodden, the forgotten, the lost children, already signalled in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1791).[12]

Blake's aphorisms are also built on the principle of antagonism and opposition – his "Contraries …" – though sometimes he suggests that antagonism can create a new unity. The aphorism itself was adapted as a Romantic form widely used for new and challenging ideas both in philosophy and in aesthetics; Blake's friend the Swiss artist Fuseli introduced him to the practice, which became best known in Europe through Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic manifesto in the form of aphorisms. Blake's mythological cycle of 1798–1800, *The Four Zoas*, carries out this theme of "Contraries" on a large, indeed epic scale. Antagonism becomes a creative principle. It has been pointed out that "creation" and "reaction" in English are anagrams of each other. New creation can be seen as part of a dynamic process rather than a fresh starting point. This notion has been applied to literary periodisation, so that for example the Victorian age is seen as a period of creation through recycling of past material, in contradistinction to the "making it new" mentality of the Romantics.[13] But historicism in Vico and in the later eighteenth century through Herder had already suggested this retrieval or recycling as a dynamic possibility of renewal, even before it was turned into explicit dialectic. Blake's Contraries, however, at their best give the sense of an utterly dynamic new process.

Despite the apposite nature of Blake's poetry and art in his own time, the tale of his reception was a long and gradual one, and mainly conducted by fellow artists and poets, including Rossetti and Yeats; *The Four Zoas* and his other mythological epics had to wait until the twentieth century. The reasons for this delay lie in his class (working), his trade (engraver), and in his originality and obscurity. Only a long period of time and effort has brought Blake to the front line of opposition to Burke.

---

[12] Elinor Shaffer, "Secular Apocalypse: Prophets and Apocalyptics," in A*pocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World,* ed. Malcolm Bull (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp.137–158.

[13] Robert Douglas Fairhurst, "Among the poets" (on Tennyson), *TLS*, 25 September 2009, 20–21, p. 21; for a fuller version see "Introduction" to *Tennyson Among the Poets: Bicentenary essays*, eds. Robert Douglas Fairhurst and Seamus Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

If the case of Burke is an egregious example of "antagonism", which rallied the forces against the Revolution, but also rallied its defenders, and led both to victory and a nostalgia for the lost, there are other cases, where the antagonism is not that of the author, but of the receivers.

The Romantic movement throws up a number of examples of the antagonism of the receivers: Byron in Catholic countries (Spain), where for a long time Spanish Romanticism was thought to have begun late, in the mid 1830's, with the conservative Duque de Rivas, and in Orthodox Slavist circles, as demonstrated in our volume, *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, which contains Orsolya Rákai's rousing article "This Century Found its Voice in him", on Hungary, and Martin Procháska's chapter on the Czech Lands, which shows the extent of the intense Pan-Slavist indictments of Byron.[14] If at home Byron seemed a bit of a scapegrace who ran away across the Channel to avoid gossip, abroad he earned an extraordinary amount of serious denunciation, and in Hungary translations of Byron often had to be carried out in prison. That Byron was taken seriously as a political figure, whether pro or con, also led to his permanent reputation as a hero who fought and died for Greek liberty – even if in fact he died of a fever and leeching and never saw combat. This is a case (unlike Burke's) where the response abroad was completely different in character from the home reception. That Byron had many enthusiastic followers abroad, compared with his reputation at home (where despite the popularity of *Childe Harold* he was seen as fleeing into exile because of his own bad behaviour), is well known; but less familiar is the powerful opposition he aroused in some quarters abroad. He was taken seriously as a political force. If the classic antagonist methods of state censorship and damning attacks by authorities were to the fore, there were subtler effects: the falsification of literary history, whereby Spanish Romanticism was held to be of the right wing and exemplified by Rivas only.[15] Only now is the full record of the Liberal émigrés of the 1820s being researched by Spanish scholars in London and Paris and their publications (sometimes in Latin America) traced. Early censorship had disguised the fact that the influential British pre-Romantic texts, Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres* (1783) and Ossian's epic poem – which next to Shakespeare has been the most widely received British work abroad – had been imported and drawn an early response, while the liberal emigration from Spain had disguised or obscured the continued links of Span-

14 Orsolya Rákai, "'This Century Found Its Voice in Him': Some Aspects of the 'Byron Phenomenon' in the Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Literary Criticism", and Martin Procháska, "Byron in Czech Culture", in *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, 2 vols., ed. Richard Cardwell, series ed., Elinor Shaffer (London: Continuum, 2004), vol. II, pp. 306–316; and pp. 283–304.

15 Derek Flitter, "'The Immortal Byron' in Spain: Radical and Poet of the Sublime,' *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, vol. 1, ed. Richard Cardwell, series ed. Elinor Shaffer (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 129–143.

ish figures with literary Romanticism elsewhere in Europe (even while in fact multiplying them through personal contacts abroad).[16]

The study of émigré figures is a very well developed form of reception studies, but some emigrations are much better covered than others. Moreover, émigrés may be studied only for what impact their works had in their home country, their lives abroad being ignored. The White Russian émigrés in Paris after the 1917 Revolution, among them notable writers, are only now being researched. Active antagonism of this kind can suppress, obscure, or delay reception, and still further delay acknowledgement of reception. Distortion of the reception may become the authoritative version of history. Textbooks repeat the falsification and it is learnt by rote by subsequent generations. Here "antagonism" shades into oppression and suppression, not only of writers and works, but of whole movements. Censorship is an institution of antagonistic reception which works not only in the moment but in the long term. Historical falsification affects not only the public record but also people's own personal responses, experiences, and memories, as told in works like Milan Kundera's brilliant *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (written in Paris after his departure from Czechoslovakia and published in 1979). Whole nations may seem to be lost, such as that strange entity now known as "the former Yugoslavia", living on in the fiction of the exile Dubravka Ugrešić. The machinery of censorship in Eastern Europe in the twentieth century is only now being authoritatively recounted, after the many shocks and scandals of the process of opening the files (for example, of the Stasi in East Germany in the 1990's, a process of successive revelations culminating in the opening of the archives to the general public in September 2010). I witnessed the opening on German television in Budapest the evening before this lecture. In these instances repression may stamp out or greatly distort and delay "reception"; yet in the long run antagonism to the repression will unearth the facts and bring their history back.

Even now minority literary cultures of East-Central Europe are being recovered.[17] There are always those like Nadezhda Mandel'stam who had her husband's poems by heart when he died in a Russian labour camp for writing a poem against Stalin that he had dared to put down on paper. When the time came she could recommit the poems to paper. The antagonism is, then, incorporated into the processes of history.

Again the memories, true and false, fact and fiction, take on a mythic status in art. They may become "fixed" for the individual. A recent instance is given

---

[16] See the two chapters on Spanish Romanticism by M. Eugenia Perojo Arronte, in *The Reception of S.T. Coleridge in Europe*, eds. Elinor Shaffer and Edoardo Zuccato, series ed. Elinor Shaffer (London: Continuum, 2007), on the nineteenth century, pp. 135–166; and on the twentieth century, pp. 197–212.

[17] Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, eds., *The History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004).

in an interview with Imre Kertész. Kertész, who won the Nobel Prize for his novel *Fatelessness* (1975), based on his time in concentration camps, has continued to write on the subject, brushing aside journalists' questions as to the appropriateness to our time of his novel *Kaddish for a Child Unborn* (first English translation 1999) with the terse comment that the Holocaust still seems of paramount importance to him.[18]

"Cultural Memory" has become a major object of study in our own time, in which so much has been buried. "Cultural memory", like memories and dreams produced in psychoanalytic sessions, may represent not a real retrieval of lost history but a new artefact.

Taking the longer view, the antagonisms may arise in a later period than that of the events, a period where the issues are very different. This is one of the most interesting kinds of reception by antagonism. The battle over Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), now considered the greatest German poet of the Romantic era after Goethe, was a battle not only over his reputation but also over his very text. But the battle took place more than a century after his death in 1834. Again the French Revolution was a cataclysm in his own life, in which his traumatic experience of testifying at the court case of a close friend, Isaak Sinclair, accused of treason (that is, collaboration with the French) in 1805 may have led to his later 'Umnachtung', the mental condition that kept him living in private confinement in Tübingen, or as some have speculated, including the prominent twentieth-century playwright Peter Weiss in his play *Hölderlin* (1971), led to his concealing his dangerous personal and political views behind his supposed "mental condition". But the battle took place in the twentieth century: the battle lines were drawn by the claim made by the Nazis that the great Romantic poet Hölderlin was far from being, like his friend Sinclair, a supporter of the French Revolution, but was rather, like them, a champion of 'Blut und Boden'.[19]

Here prominent individuals like the philosopher Heidegger and the academic editors of the *Grosser Stuttgarter Ausgabe* of Hölderlin's works played a major role in what was the making (through falsification) of a national poet, and the remaking of the same poet through prolonged and detailed "cleansing" of the edited text took place at the expense of immense effort during the fifty years after the end of World War II.[20]

The cleansing process did not unmake Hölderlin's reputation, but on the contrary gave him still higher status. His value was enhanced by the struggle of the

---

18   Kertesz's complaints against this attitude are cited in a review in *Le Monde Des Livres* (Friday, 12 October 2010): "J'entends dire que j'arrive trop tard avec 'ce sujet', qu'il n'est plus d'actualité. Qu'il fallait traiter 'ce sujet' plus tôt, il y a dix ans au moins, etc'. (*Journal de Galère*, trans. from Hungarian into French by Natalia Zaremba-Huzsvai and Charles Zaremba; Actes Sud.)

19   For an account of this process, see Elinor Shaffer, "Michael Hamburger: Voice of Lost Poetry," *Comparative Critical Studies*, Special Issue: Legacies, 7 (Autumn 2010) 285–296.

20   Shaffer, "Michael Hamburger".

antagonists over his reception. The battle was not for an individual's reputation only, but for a nation's. The stakes in reception are very high, not only in the heat of battle, but in the judgement of history. Even after a book or an author is once-for-all-times declared a "classic", renewed conflict may break out over which current (or even past) set of antagonists has the better claim to him. One of the current conflicts in Shakespeare studies is, surprisingly, Was Shakespeare a Catholic?

If these are the "big guns" of antagonism – war, censorship, trial, imprisonment, exile, death, the suppression and rewriting of history (and the institutions that govern these weapons) – there are also the individual struggles of writers themselves with their predecessors. Reception of a writer (or other artist) is most importantly carried out by those who attempt to follow him.

Harold Bloom's account in *The Anxiety of Influence* of the various measures taken by the 'ephebes' or young acolytes of a great writer to overcome, absorb or transform him are accounts of antagonism, even if concealed behind genuine admiration or buried in the unconscious.

Here we are dealing at one level with the need that Bloom identified in the heirs and "ephebes" of a major writer to make room for themselves by creating a style that refines, reverses or veers away from that of the master. Here the famous case of Coleridge and Wordsworth with which we began may serve: these two close friends and "geniuses together" were also rivals, and if Wordsworth jockeyed Coleridge's name and his long but unfinished poem "Christabel" out of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) gave an account of their creative relationship and of the greatness and defects of Wordsworth's poetry and conception of poetry which turns the tables and establishes his analysis as a classic of criticism. If as poets they may today be considered equals (though Wordsworth much the more prolific), Coleridge now ranks among the half dozen greatest poet-critics in English: Sidney, Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge, Arnold, Eliot – and a book will shortly appear detailing how much Eliot derived from Coleridge. Of course these "classic" status attributions may themselves be subject to fluctuations, but only as a function of the claims and counterclaims of new movements striving to establish themselves.

"Lives" of the poets are an essential step in reception; these may at first consist only of a handful of facts. Early lives are more likely to have an affirmative than an antagonistic import, because they signal a possible newcomer of importance, whether they occur in handbooks to Eminent Men, as both Coleridge and Wordsworth appeared in a biographical compendium of English worthies in Germany as early as 1804,[21] or in urgent "lives" such as those the Protestant Huguenots wrote of John Locke, champion of "Toleration", after they had been

---

[21] Jeremias David Reuss, ed. *Das Gelehrte England* (Göttingen, 1804). See "The Reception of Coleridge in Germany to World War II", *The Reception of S.T. Coleridge in Europe*, p. 89.

subjected to "intolerance" by the Edict of Nantes.[22] But there are pettier individual instances of antagonism like the biased biographies of, for example, Oscar Wilde's "friends": his ex-lover, "Bosey", who abandoned him in his greatest need, but more especially his rival, the erotic novelist Frank Harris.[23] But Wilde is by no means the only writer whose early biographers were negative, and where actors in the drama of his life who were only concerned with self-defence and self-aggrandizement. Some early biographers, taking stock of the actions of their friend, may feel bound to judge him negatively, as Thomas Love Peacock did Shelley, after Shelley's first wife committed suicide; Peacock's judgement was of a fellow human being and equal, who could not be exculpated on the grounds of his genius. Later biographers may be overawed by the acknowledged "genius" of their subject into condoning actions that contemporaries would not and finding complex justifications for them.

Later biographers, however, still seeking new scandal, may also be antagonistic, like the recent American biographer of Byron who claimed to have found evidence that he had seduced the eleven-year-old daughter of one of his mistresses. The biographer, the advertised speaker and guest of honour, was subjected to intensely antagonistic personal comment by the chairman and successive questioners at a meeting in London of the Byron Society at which I was present. The "reception" is a continuing *agon* over the reputation of the author, and the Byron Society has a vested interest. Yet in the case of a figure like Byron whose fame is established the biographers may feel they can share in a reflected glory even by attacking him. This is particularly the case with one like Byron whose notoriety in life has an attraction for the biographer, who is prepared to bask in borrowed notoriety. Fresh scandal about the firmly famous becomes a form of public accolade for the author and the biographer.

Beyond more and less responsible biographers, we have now entered a period of free-for-all praise and particularly blame. In one sense, this is not novel. There have often been slanging matches between writers in competition with one another: as Baudelaire called George Sand a "latrine", the brothers Goncourt called Baudelaire "*une mouche à merde*" (an expression fit only to be translated into Latin). Indeed, last year two young French scholars, Anne Boquel and Etienne Kern published *Une Histoire des haines d'écrivains* (Flammarion), a history of writers' hatreds. In a similar vein, a dictionary of literary insults has recently appeared: *'Ta gueule, Bukowski!' Dictionnaire des injures littéraires* (published by Pierre Chalmin). The criteria for entrance into this reference work are "the notoriety of the insulted individual, the high standing of the insulter, and the outrageousness, wit, or the absolute *mauvaise foi* of the insult". Thus the

---

[22] Mark Goldie and Delphine Soulard, eds, *Early Lives of Locke*, forthcoming, 2011.
[23] See Joseph Bristow, "Picturing his Exact Decadence: The British Reception of Oscar Wilde," in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe*, ed. Stefano Evangelista, series ed. Elinor Shaffer (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 20–50.

insult is relished for itself, rather than for its effect on the reputation of either the insulter or the insulted. All three – insult, insulter and insulted – may gain by the publicity. And the insult is transformed into a free-floating and transferable "bon mot".

There is also, though, a sense in which "insult" is being given a more philosophical turn, for example in a new book (based on a Cambridge Graduate Conference) on threats ranging in time and type from the Renaissance threat of the foreign in Montaigne's "De la phisionomie" to modern existentialist and phenomenological threats, for example, Jeffrey Kirkwood/David Logan Wright, "Between Being and Otherwise: Lacunae, Lévinas and the Threat of Totality".[24] The specific, directed quality of 'antagonism' gives way to an encompassing state of being under threat. To understand how reception might work under "threat" and to indicate its Romantic roots one might have to go back to Kierkegaard's existential essay on "Fear and Trembling". God's law commands the commission of an inhuman act: God orders Abraham to give his own son Isaac as an offering; Abraham prepares to sacrifice his own son; in effect he has given the boy up to become another being, to be in another state and condition, to be a sacrifice. In his will this has taken place. That the angel intervenes supplying a sheep for sacrifice before the deed is done is during the whole course of Abraham's submission to God's will an unknown. The child has become a sacrifice. So the passage of a work of art from its original state and place entails a change of being.

By focussing on the period of the French Revolution it has not been difficult to show the looming presence and operation of antagonisms on a vast and long-lasting scale. Insofar as literary history and reception studies continue to follow the model offered by historical periodisation even periods of peace will find their place in the larger model of antagonism.

But we must ask ourselves: Is historical periodisation the correct framework for literary reception studies? Historical periods may overlap with literary periods, and often they gradually move into synchrony with each other over time, as a "pre-Romantic" figure like Blake, born in 1749, a generation before Wordsworth (b.1770), has been moved forward gradually so that his career is made to coincide with the French Revolution: thus his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789–1791) now appears as if it were his first publication, rather than his excellent *Poetical Sketches* written between 1769 and 1776, printed 1783. Such a relocation procedure works well if one is employing the model of antagonism, for the arts are deployed as troops in political struggles including the fight to the death and the poets are moved like so many cannon up to the front lines. This, however, tidies the history of the arts into a reflection of historical struggles (which of course in turn may be seen as reflections of economic forces or evo-

---

[24] Georgina Evans and Adam Kay, eds., *Threat: Essays in French Literature, Thought and Culture*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010)

lutionary processes). Both these latter approaches are currently back in vogue.[25] For our current purpose, however, both fall under the rubric of "antagonism": the struggle for (economic) existence or for life itself.

To conclude: Of all the examples of antagonism and affinity, my favourite is a Hungarian one. I refer to the witty victory of the Hungarians over James Joyce's Leopold Bloom and Budapest over Dublin and Central Europe over Western Europe. Of course it took a Hungarian novelist and short-story writer, Pál Békés, to bring this off. It is an inversion of what might be thought, at least by English-language critics, expecting that an English-language author of major world rank like Joyce would deploy some minor characters from the remote eastern reaches of Europe perhaps because of their linguistic peculiarities deserving of a learned footnote in the now minutely annotated masterpiece *Ulysses*. Thus Leopold Bloom, the Dublin journalist and "wandering Jew" who is Joyce's "Ulysses", is given a central European ancestor, his father, Rudolf Virág, who came from Szombathely. But lo! It emerges now that Rudolf Virág, unlike the seedy Leopold, was a real writer, with an impressive oeuvre, from the Central Europe of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Dublin is by contrast a poor, outlying second-rate capital of a subject nation and Bloom a hireling journalist. Thus the tables are turned: the Hungarian ancestor of the shuffling Poldy is the eminent Central European man of letters with an impressive list of publications to his credit. Our reception studies have shown that readers across Europe often identified their own capitals with the provincial and peripheral Dublin – for example, the gifted young Finnish poet Pentti Saarikoski who after a pilgrimage to Dublin translated *Ulysses* (1964) and made his Helsinki in a similar image.[26] Not so the Hungarians: Poldy is the sad scion of Virág, and has fallen upon hard times and lives by voyeurism on the westernmost remoteness of Europe. This is of course quite in keeping with Joyce's own intention. Joyce's own source for the "reduced", ironic Odyssey is Samuel Butler's book, *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1895), in which he related that a young woman who lived in Sicily and only knew the Sicilian landfalls (and probably couldn't sail) wrote the Odyssey. Butler's target had been the solemn classics critics, including the Prime Minister William Gladstone, who held that Homer was a practical handbook for the young men who would rule the Empire on land and sea.[27]

Further research in Hungary and Trieste has now shown that Joyce while teaching at the Berlitz School in Trieste in fact came to know a Hungarian (one

[25] Nicholas Saul and Simon J. James, eds., *The Evolution of Literature. Legacies of Darwin in European Cultures* (Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2011) gives an overview of current criticism in this mode.

[26] "The Translations of Ulysses in Finland and Sweden," in *The Reception of James Joyce in Europe,* eds. Geert Lernout and Wim van Mierlo, series ed., Elinor Shaffer, vol. I. Germany, Northern and East Central Europe (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 135–139 (on Saarikoski).

[27] Elinor Shaffer, *Samuel Butler: Painter, Photographer and Art Critic* (London: Reaktion Books, 1984).

of a considerable community of Hungarians in the city, then part of the Aus-
tro–Hungarian Empire), the probable model for his Rudolf Virág, who was a
quite prominent speaker on matters literary and a poet. This man was Marino
di Szombathely, whose family had emigrated from the town of Szombathely in
Hungary and assumed the grander surname, romanized, of 'de Szombathely'.
To cap all, this di Szombathely was working on a translation of the Odyssey at
the time Joyce knew him, and began to publish it in 1918.[28] Here is a wonder-
ful example of antagonism (or is it affinity?) winning the battle by sheer wit! In
honour of this triumph of wit – both Joyce's and Pál Békés's – both Ireland's and
Hungary's – over the British Empire I have travelled to Szombathely and back,
and seen the statue of Joyce lurking in the doorway of Virág's manse.[29] All's fair
in love and war – and reception studies. But we may conclude that in literary
periodisation and their attendant reception studies way must be made not merely
for kings or generals or parliamentarians, or for movements and generations, but
for the sheer out-of-time wit and imaginative force of literary genius.

---

[28] John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom. James Joyce in Trieste, 1904–1920* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press,
        2000), pp. 96-97. This book, so illuminating of Joyce's links with Hungary through his long
        residence in Trieste, has recently been translated into Hungarian.
[29] Marta Goldman, "Belated Reception. James Joyce's Works in Hungary," *Comparative Critical
        Studies*. Special Issue on Comparative Reception Studies Today. 3.3 (2006) 227–248.

Péter Dávidházi

"Can these bones live?"

"The Waste Land," Ezekiel and Hungarian Poetry

Commentators on T. S. Eliot's celebrated poem "The Waste Land" (1922) have always been fascinated by its allusions. Hence generations of scholars and critics have joined the common pursuit to identify its sources, such as the haunting vision of the valley of bones in Ezekiel 37:1–14. Though necessary and productive, such a preoccupation with tracing back a poem's motifs to their precedents or presumably ultimate origins was also limiting because it tended to become an end in itself. Eliot's notes to the poem stimulated what he himself was to call, looking back from 1956, "the wrong kind of interest among the seekers of sources", an interest confined to explaining a poem solely by its antecedents, its origins, "the causes that brought it about," without trying to grasp what it "is aiming to be", its "entelechy".[1] Although some critics deciphered the allusions in order to see the way they functioned in Eliot's poem, and Northrop Frye made good use of the allusion to Ezekiel 37 in his interpretation several years before any studies were published on the subject,[2] one cannot but agree with the complaint of one scholar, voiced as late as 1984, that the tracking down of sources usually stopped short of interpreting the allusions in their new context.[3] Until quite recently a different preoccupation constrained some Hungarian scholars reviewing the translations of Eliot's poem: they kept trying to grade the analogous lines by such essentialist norms as "faithfulness" or "precision" versus "inadequacy", and were concerned mainly with concluding which "solution" of any given (supposedly linguistic) problem was, or would have been, preferable to the others.[4] This approach, both prescriptive and counterfactual, was more occupied with how a given phrase should have been translated than with why and with what implications or poetic consequences it *was* translated the way it was.

---

[1] T. S. Eliot, "The Frontiers of Criticism," in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2009), pp. 121, 122.

[2] Northrop Frye, *T. S. Eliot* (Edinburgh, London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p. 65.

[3] Marianne Thormählen, "Dry bones can harm no one: *Ezekiel* XXXVII in "The Waste Land" V and *Ash-Wednesday* II," *English Studies* 65.1 (February 1984), 39–40.

[4] Olga Rózsa, *T. S. Eliot fogadtatása Magyarországon* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1977); József Szili, "A *Waste Land* magyarul," *Kritika* 8.10 (1970) 26–34. For a different approach, cf. András Kappanyos, *Kétséges egység: Az* Átokföldje *és amit tehetünk vele* (Budapest: Janus/Osiris–Balassi, 2001).

As in the case of source-hunting, the narrowing of focus led to the exclusion of several relevant contexts, such as the translators' own poetry or the wider poetic (and any other) traditions of their culture, and left no opportunity to intimate the way Eliot's allusions might relate to allusions in his translators' own poems or in the prevalent traditions of Hungarian poetry at large.

Moreover, the narrow focus of both methodologies ignored a fascinating aspect of Eliot's allusions: their working as a test of cultural memory. Beyond their fascination as objects of source-hunting or critical interpretation, allusions are worth studying as units of cultural memory. Thus in addition to the usual explorations of where they are taken from or what they are serving in their new context, it is worth investigating what happens to them in the process of reception, that is, what fate awaits them in the hands of readers, editors and translators. It is especially worth exploring how they survive and work, or disappear and fail to work, in translation, because their vicissitudes can indicate the latent divergences of what is often referred to as *the* cultural memory of a community. Hence it is worth taking a different approach to "The Waste Land," raising a different set of questions. What happens when two translators of the same language and the same period, Sándor Weöres and István Vas, themselves major poets of widely different backgrounds, meet the dry bones reminiscent of Ezekiel's vision, on the transhistorical site of "The Waste Land"? How far can their treatment of allusions reveal the bifurcation of their cultural memory? How do their translations relate to, confirm or challenge their attitudes to the Bible, their belief in the miraculous, their commitment to an inherited or chosen tradition, and, last but not least, their own poetry? What does a Hungarian translation of "The Waste Land" reveal about the role of biblical traditions in the context of twentieth-century Hungarian poems alluding to the same prophet, including István Vas's own poem "Ezékiel"? A comparative study of how two translators cope with the same biblical allusion may help us to generalise not only about the necessary and sufficient conditions for an allusion to survive in another culture, but also about the precariousness of cultural memory in literature.

THE SMALLEST EXAMINABLE LINK:
THE WORKING OF ALLUSIONS IN CULTURAL MEMORY

Allusions can be examined as the smallest functional units of cultural memory in literature. Their use is an attempt to establish links in order to transmit, however precariously, some textual remnant from (and of) the past to the present, and thereby to preserve it, encased in the new text, for the future. As they can be very small and fragmentary, occurring in a much later text written in a different language and in a new cultural context, their fragility is like that of memory itself in Sándor Petőfi's 1846 poem "Emlékezet" (Memory), a sole plank that

once belonged to a sinking ship but now is tossed ashore by the fighting waves and winds. This haunting image, a single board left from an edifice once so impressive, is applicable to allusions, especially to those known as phraseological adaptations,[5] because they too can look small and insignificant compared to the whole text they used to belong to; they too are easy to overlook and may easily get lost, temporarily or for good; and they, too, are difficult to identify (that is, first to realise that they have been isolated from an elaborate structure now out of sight, then to tell which particular structure they have been taken from and where exactly they belonged within that structure). Hence we need painstaking analyses to explore the mechanism of what looks like the arbitrary fate of many a fragile and vulnerable allusion, to see through the surface of what looks like haphazard chance governing the recognition and survival, or the ignoring and disappearance, of allusions, and to discern the conditions of their survival and the causes of their perishing.

It is the very uncertainty of this transmission that makes our study of it revealing, because the survival or disappearance of allusions may shed light on the factors that influence the actual (divergent) workings of cultural memory. T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" would be eminently suitable even in itself, without taking into account its translations, to reveal the fragility of this transmission. As early as 1938 László Országh, one of the founding fathers of modern English studies in Hungary, observed that the poem was full of hints at historical and literary figures *assumed* to be known, full of hidden references to parallel events of former cultures, and full of suggestive, yet unmarked citations, all of which would require sustained study to unravel and coordinate.[6] Indeed, whereas allusions in poetry always assume and expect that the reader knows the text alluded to and will remember it well enough to recall it by association, Eliot's poem is often very near to making this an unwarranted assumption. The assumption or expectation implied in alluding is the gap we are to bridge when reading any poem, but it can be hidden and barely discernible (with no such warning as the London underground's "Mind the gap"), and it is precisely by detecting the successes or failures of discernment that we can understand the intricate workings of allusions. This uncertainty was felt by Eliot himself, too, and he responded to it with either easy-going self-assurance or worrying anxiety, or, more characteristically, with both. However manifold his motives were for supplying authorial notes to "The Waste Land," the sheer realisation of the need to do so reveals his awareness (or dim presentiment) of the hiatuses, fadings, and uncertainties, hence the fragility and precariousness, of cultural memory. True, in 1922 "The Waste Land" was first published without any notes in *The Criterion* on 16 Oc-

---

[5]   Gregory Machacek, "Allusion," *PMLA* 122.2 (March 2007), p. 526.
[6]   László Országh, "A legújabb angol líra," in *Országh László válogatott írásai*, ed. Zsolt Virágos (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2007), p. 246.

tober, and also in the *Dial* around 20 November, so the famous notes, however ineradicable a paratext they have become since their first appearance with the poem in book form at the beginning of December, cannot be considered a part of the original composition.[7] But whatever their overall purpose was meant to be, whether to avert the charge of plagiarism or to make the sheer volume of the book more respectable,[8] some of the notes indicate that Eliot wanted to aid and regulate the unreliable workings of cultural memory, partly by providing relevant information about the source texts, and partly by revealing some of his own associations and thereby orienting his readers. In his correspondence there are indications that he considered the notes helpful for even the most knowledge-able readers: when W. B. Yeats read the *Criterion* text and voiced his difficulties in understanding certain of its passages, Eliot promptly promised to send him a copy of the annotated book version.[9]

Yet sometimes he felt that it was sufficient for the readers just to *recognise* an allusion to ensure that its intended meaning is duly understood. His introductory passage to his notes on "The Waste Land" ends with a sentence which made the issue look so simple that it may have deceived many a reader, including some of his critics. "Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recog-nise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies."[10] The troubling question is not only whether Eliot's assertion, referring to Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, was right or wrong when he assumed that anyone familiar with them would immediately recognise those references in his poem. (Most probably he was wrong because knowing the work alluded to is a necessary but not sufficient condition of recognising an allusion.) This problem is aggravated by Eliot's carefree use of the term *recognising* an allu-sion, because it implies that an allusion is something immutably given, waiting but for an all-or-nothing discovery, and requiring aught but a familiarity with the alluded text to ensure an immediate, effortless, automatic act of perception. The implication is that the reader either realises the allusion or not, that is, takes it as it really is and as it was meant to be or ignores it altogether, and in either case the act requires no interpretation, let alone construction, on the reader's part. The problems with this implication are obvious: even in those rare cases when we do know what an allusion was meant to be, an allusion cannot, by

---

7   Cf. T. S. Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, Second Edition, ed. Lawrence Rainey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 32.

8   T. S. Eliot, "The Frontiers of Criticism," p. 121. Cf. Kappanyos, pp. 200–201.

9   T. S. Eliot to W. B. Yeats, 23 January 1923 in *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, general ed. John Haf-fenden, vol. 2, *1923–1925*, eds. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 22.

10   T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1963), p. 70.

definition, be known as it really is, and the verb *recognise* does not suffice when trying to signify the mental processes required here.

Even just to spot the allusions requires the reader's active, constructive participation: they are shaped by an interaction between some clues in the text and the reader's creative associations, hence allusions have to be *recreated*, and as recreating means creating again at a later historical moment by somebody else and according to another cultural heritage, they are always recreated from a new perspective, hence, with a difference. (For such creative associations to happen, the readers must be sensitive to the resemblance, whether imaginative or verbal, between the alluding text and the alluded one, hence they should have a keen eye for resemblances and a feel for metaphor, abilities Aristotle considered a gift of the good poet, and I. A. Richards argued to be the common inheritance of everybody using language.[11] As we possess these abilities in unequal measure, the survival rate of allusions may differ even when a poem is read by people who know the alluded text rather well.) Though later in the notes Eliot remembered that the making of his allusions was bound to be associative, he did not think that their reception would require a significant, let alone decisive, imaginative contribution by the reader. Yet he had some doubts about whether the readers can be trusted to recognise the allusions for themselves without any hint of either orientation or reassurance. By hindsight (in 1950) he still remembered that he had felt the need to add reassuring notes to those lines of "The Waste Land" which were borrowed from Dante. "And I gave the references in my notes, in order to make the reader who recognised the allusion, know that I meant him to recognise it, and know that he would have missed the point if he did not recognise it."[12] If we can rely on Eliot's memory of his own motives nearly three decades earlier, he added the notes to confirm that what may have looked like allusions were meant to be just that.

He seems to have needed such a safeguarding note not only when the borrowed line was altered, hence more difficult to identify. His repeated and emphatic use of "recognise" when mentioning his allusions indicates that he was thinking about them as something an author meant to control and would always be able to keep under control. Yet we can spot here Eliot's latent worries about their actual controllability. His caveats about alluding could not eliminate them any more than his rather similar caveats about expressing emotion could. In terms of his famous model the "only way" for a poet to express emotion was to find an "objective correlative", that is, "a set of objects, a situation, a chain

---

[11] Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Stephen Halliwell in Aristotle, *Poetics,* Longinus, *On the Sublime*, Demetrius, *On Style* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999) 1459a, pp. 114–115; I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 89–95.

[12] T. S. Eliot, "What Dante Means to Me," in *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), p. 128.

of events" by which a particular emotion can be "immediately evoked" in the reader,[13] yet he had ample opportunities to realise that the objects, situations and events in his own poems evoked very different emotions in his readers. The common assumption that readers should "immediately recognise" an allusion and that specific emotions should be "immediately evoked" in them by their objective correlatives implies the perception of something given and taken intact, something that will not be altered by the very act of perceiving, yet Eliot was often aware of the latent problems of this, and needed his notes, partly at least, to safeguard his allusions by notifying his readers that their association is no mere coincidence. He seems to have apprehended that what we call an allusion is not simply something intended and controlled by the author, nor is it something constructed by the reader, but a confrontation of the two, leading to results that are unique, creative and unpredictable.

At times Eliot was alerted not only to this twilight zone of creative, personal, even idiosyncratic interpretation between a phrase in the text and the reader's awareness of it, but he had to realise that some of his own allusions in writing "The Waste Land" were based on his own arbitrary associations and could just as easily pass unnoticed without his explanatory notes. His note to line 46 of part I (*The Burial of the Dead*) reveals that he considered some of those associations indispensable to the meaning he wanted to convey. "I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V. […] The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself."[14] His emphasising of the verb "associate" three times (just as he repeated the verb "recognise" more than three times above) and his admitting its self-serving arbitrariness reveal an insight which seems to dovetail with F. H. Bradley's tenet, quoted in Eliot's note to the line "We think of the key, each in his prison", about the intrinsically personal nature of sense perception. "My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside […]. In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul."[15] This is one of the philosophical aspects of the problem that I. A. Richards would explore some years later when trying to separate various

---

[13] T. S. Eliot, "*Hamlet,*" in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 48.

[14] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, pp. 70–71.

[15] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 75.

types of "irrelevant associations" of a poem's interpreters.[16] Eliot would not go so far as to call his own associations downright irrelevant, but decades later, when (in 1959) a worried Hungarian translator, István Vas, asked him about the referential or allusive lines of his poems, he answered that his allusions were not indispensable for an understanding of the poems.[17] At about the same time (in 1956) he made a remorseful remark about those of his notes that interpreters took far too seriously as a wholesale authorisation for source-hunting. "It was just, no doubt, that I should pay tribute to the work of Miss Jessie Weston; but I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail."[18] Although this is not necessarily a condemnation of every kind of source study but rather a warning not to give exclusive attention to the Grail-quest as a frame of reference, Eliot was annoyed by the vogue of taking his own notes as the ultimate guideline to orient the interpreters' imagination, to dictate their associations, and to justify their solutions. If, to his dislike of such an unduly limiting and homogenising method, we add his no less explicit worries about unlimited social heterogeneity, worries that would turn into phobia by the mid-1930s,[19] we begin to grasp how crucial the cognitive problem of allusions must have been for his poetry.

His anxieties were not unfounded. Allusions expect us to know and remember the text alluded to, hence they test the workings of our cultural memory. Moreover, they test whether we have a cultural memory homogeneous enough to be *ours* and to justify the *we* of a cultural or interpretative community. The failures of knowing and remembering reveal the latent cultural divergences of a community, and the readings and translations of a poem with as wide a range of intricate allusions as "The Waste Land" may provide a case study of how the haunting memories of our personal histories and the secret erasures of our reminiscences determine our attempts to make sense of a poem, and how the differences of our assumptions undermine the seemingly unproblematic *we* pronoun of reception studies. Valid as it may be for some readers, it is misleading to declare that "when Eliot talks of the Rock, we are reminded of the Rock of Israel, the God of the prophets", or to take it for granted that "[w]hen he speaks of the Hanged Man, we are reminded of Christ", and it is useless to confirm these generalisations by the timeless assertion that "[i]f ever these names had validity and meaning in the past, they have validity and meaning now and always, and their meaning becomes part

---

16 I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 235–240.
17 István Vas, „Vallomás Eliotról: 2. Látogatás Eliotnál (Feljegyzés 1959-ből)," in T. S. Eliot, *Válogatott versek, Gyilkosság a székesegyházban*, trans. István Vas (Budapest: Európa, 1966), p. 11.
18 T. S. Eliot, "The Frontiers of Criticism," p. 122.
19 T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1934), pp. 19–20.

of the poem".[20] Such statements are not only begging a series of hidden questions but they are pretending that there is none whatsoever to worry about.

The first moot question, however, is who exactly is included in this casual "we", and what the implied criteria of its membership are. Even if some of us know, associate and remember uniformly enough to revive a particular allusion and make it work, each of us does it differently, due to differences in our respective cultural backgrounds, individual histories, and mental dispositions, so by the Rock we are reminded, at best, of the rock of different biblical Israels; similarly, by the Hanged Man, at best, of different Christs, leading to different interpretations of the poem. Eliot was aware of this problem even in his most confident moments: when he asserted that anyone acquainted with Weston's and Frazer's works would recognise certain references in his poem,[21] he implied that there would be others not acquainted with them and hence unable (or not necessarily able) to recognise those references. By the same token one may agree with the above-quoted scholar inferring that in Eliot's poem a "Judeo-Christian perspective in Time prevails",[22] but then let us concede that those not familiar with that perspective may have difficulties in picking up some of the hints, and even the inheritors of that perspective may differ in their basic concepts, for example, regarding their belief, or lack of it, in resurrection. Allusions may have been meant to *unite* or to confirm the unity of an interpretative community, but often they cannot but *divide* the readers because some of them, coming from a different tradition or lacking the sufficient level of learning, simply do not have the knowledge required as a precondition to notice the allusion. As a recent study concluded, "one of the effects of allusion may be to divide an audience into those who have a cultural kinship with the author and those who do not".[23] The second difficulty is that there is no such thing as names or words having a fixed and universal denotation for the past, present and future, so we should not expect (as one scholar of "The Waste Land" expected) the same "validity and meaning now and always".[24] True, in order to recognise an allusion, especially the type recently termed "phraseological adaptation", both the author and the readers "must have been exposed to the same text, which therefore must be highly valued by the author's and the reader's cultures – valued, moreover, in a way that encourages minute attention to verbal detail and remembering of such detail".[25] But the high cultural esteem in which a text is held, high enough to revere and memorise verbal detail, may change in ages to come, and the fluctua-

---

[20] Florence Jones, "T. S. Eliot Among the Prophets," *American Literature* 38.3 (November 1966) 285–302, pp. 285–286.
[21] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 70.
[22] Jones, p. 286.
[23] Machacek, p. 526.
[24] Jones, pp. 285–286.
[25] Machacek, p. 526.

tion of its cultural status may jeopardise our understanding of its allusions. In the late 1950s a Hungarian poet, István Vas, wrote a reworking of Ezekiel 37:1–14 titled "Ezékiel" (Ezekiel), at a time when the secularised post-war ideology and its new system of education were trying hard to reduce the cultural status of the Bible; after three more decades, in 1986, he was astonished by the widespread ignorance of the Bible, and about the unashamed, almost proud admission of it among the young;[26] we may safely infer that the meaning of his "Ezékiel" could hardly remain intact all through these times, and the changes of intellectual climate threatened the workings of all such allusive poetry, especially of the allusions built on but tiny fragments of the sourced text.

Whatever its epistemological status nowadays, Berkeley's principle *esse est percipi* is fully applicable to allusions: "Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them."[27] One can hardly get access to "the allusion" or to "the poem" any more than to other abstract entities such as (Berkeley's own example) to "matter" as opposed to the concrete material objects that can be perceived. Allusions exist only in concrete authors' or readers' minds, and in the various shapes given by them, serving their widely different interpretations. Studies of allusions may call the bluff of the definite article "the" attached to "cultural memory" as such, or to "the" cultural memory of a nation (as in the title of our conference "British Literature in the Hungarian Cultural Memory"), the definite article whereby we tend to reify and homogenise widely different phenomena in a self-deceiving way, an age-old practice that was elegantly deconstructed long before the term deconstruction was coined.[28] The history of a poem's allusions may reveal the latent differences in "the" cultural memory, or in "our" cultural makeup, far more effectively than any analysis of its more independent (less intertextual) statements would do. To read about dry bones in "The Waste Land" is a case in point.

"DRY BONES CAN HARM NO ONE":
ELIOT'S EZEKIEL AND THE OSSIFICATION OF EUROPEAN CULTURE

Significantly, Eliot's very first note to "The Waste Land" refers to Ezekiel. It relates to the phrase "son of man" amidst a landscape suffering from utter dryness in lines 19–24:

---

[26] István Vas, "Ajánlás a Bibliához," in *Biblia: Válogatás a Vizsolyi Bibliából*, trans. Gáspár Károli, selected and introduced by István Vas, eds. Zsigmond Gerencsér, László Király (Budapest: Európa, 1986), p. 5.

[27] George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge; Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, ed. G. J. Warnock (London, Glasgow: Collins, 1975), p. 66.

[28] Cf. Northrop Frye, "Myth as Information," in *Culture and Literature: A Collection of Review Essays* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 70–71.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of the water.[29]

This passage is crucial in its context, and was rightly characterised as the first prophetic turn in the poem: "after the timid voice of one who is afraid that spring will bring him life, and the fragmentary voices of a Europe in decline, the voice of an Ezekiel emerges".[30] Eliot's note to line 20 says "Cf. Ezekiel II, i." In the King James Bible Ezekiel 2:1 is as follows: "And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee."[31] It is a sublime verse, yet it cannot explain why Eliot's note specified this one, out of the approximately one hundred occurrences of "Son of man" in the book of Ezekiel alone, and out of its many occurrences elsewhere, including those in the New Testament. But "Son of man" as the phrase meant to indicate an allusion, or (to adopt a newly introduced term) as the *spur* of an allusion,[32] is distinct enough, at least for readers who are used to the King James Bible's word-by-word rendering of the Hebrew phrase, and not to those new translations that replaced it with "Mortal" or "Human". Reading Eliot's second note, attached to line 23 in the same passage, "Cf. Ecclesiastes XII, v.", the verse it refers to is longer ("Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets") but it turns out to be a more obvious choice because of the telling contrasts it offers with line 23, for example the one between the flourishing almond tree and the dead tree that gives no shelter. As both of the first two notes refer to the Old Testament, readers may feel reassured enough to expect further motifs from that part of the Bible.

Hence it is all the more baffling to find that Eliot did not add a note to the "dry bones" of lines 386–391 in Part V:

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel

---

29 Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 53.
30 Cf. Louis L. Martz, *Many Gods and Many Voices: The Role of the Prophet in English and American Modernism* (Columbia, London: University of Missouri Press, 1998), p. 26.
31 In this paper I quote an edition of the King James Bible that could have been used in Eliot's childhood. *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments* (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1881).
32 Machacek, pp. 528–530.

There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
It has no windows, and the door swings,
Dry bones can harm no one.

The passage could evoke Jeremiah 31:40 ("The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes […] shall be sacred to the Lᴏʀᴅ"), but the *dry* bones would sooner recall Ezekiel 37:1–14, especially because the first three verses of Ezekiel 37 contain both the former spur, "Son of man", and several references to dry bones: "The hand of the Lᴏʀᴅ was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lᴏʀᴅ, and set me down in the midst of the valley which *was* full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, *there were* very many in the open valley; and, lo *they were* very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord Gᴏᴅ, thou knowest." (Ezekiel 37:1–3.) Yet the allusion could be easily overlooked, partly because line 391 and the whole passage seems to make sense without it just as well, and partly because Eliot's earlier reference to Ezekiel in his note to line 20 may have backfired, making readers think that any lack of a similar note elsewhere must be a clear indication that there was no reference intended. This shows how deceptive even the most reliable authorial notes can be, and how Eliot's notes direct and divert the recreation of allusive links, or indeed how they become (to borrow one scholar's apt phrase) "something between a hindrance and a help".[33] With or without Eliot's first note having attributed the phrase "Son of man" to the Book of Ezekiel, readers familiar with the Bible would be sufficiently responsive to the "Dry bones can harm no one" in line 391, because the highly evocative "dry bones" is just as clear a hallmark of Ezekiel's language as is "Son of man", and it recalls Ezekiel 37:1–14, one of the most haunting visions of the Old Testament. Indirectly it may also recall the spiritual song "Dem Bones, Dry Bones," the music of which was composed by the African-American song-writer James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938), but the lyrics of that song were based on Ezekiel 37:1–14, so the ultimate source is the same.

The connection between "dry bones" and the text of Ezekiel 37:1–14 is both grammatical and logical. Any mentioning of "dry bones" would imply that formerly some bones were said (or should or might have been said) to exist somewhere and that those existing bones were declared to be dry, hence Eliot's abrupt reference to "dry bones" in line 391 *can be derived from* exactly this type of statement in Ezekiel 37:1–14. First, if the "dry bones", figuring in both "The Waste Land" and Ezekiel 37:4 ("Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD"), presuppose the assertion that the bones *were* dry, we find it in Ezekiel 37:2, referring to the bones in the valley: "and, lo, *they were* very dry"; second, if the assertion

---

[33]   Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 181.

that the bones were dry presupposes a prior assertion that there were bones, we find it in Ezekiel 37:1–2: "the valley which *was* full of bones, […] and, behold, *there were* very many in the open valley". The juxtaposition of Eliot's line 391 and Ezekiel 37:1–14 can illustrate the difference between presuppositions in poetry more compellingly than Jonathan Culler's example taken from Ted Hughes's *October Dawn*, which begins with the direct assertion "October is marigold" and may provide an opportunity for discussing the issue, at best, by counterfactual reasoning. ("To have begun 'In marigold October' would have been to treat the conjunction of *October* and *marigold* as presupposed, to have relegated to a prior text the creation or discovery of that relationship, and to have suggested (even though we know of no other poem which treats October as marigold) that he was using a metaphor already implicit in poetic vision, in poetic discourse."[34]) When mentioning the "dry bones", Eliot's poem logically *refers* to previous existential statements asserting that there were bones and that they were dry, yet it also *alludes* to these two statements in Ezekiel 37:1–2, and it *appropriates* the two statements, together with their original context, for purposes of its own.

Resonating with a long biblical tradition, Ezekiel's haunting question "Can these bones live?" looms large in the background of "The Waste Land" and may claim a decisive role in its interpretation. Once the poem has used the phrase "Son of man", and confirmed it by a note reminding the reader of Ezekiel, the mentioning of "dry bones" could evoke the great question not only because the two occur together in Ezekiel 37:3 but also because the poem as a whole seems to visualise European culture as no longer alive but ossified, turned into dry bones, hence not only as "a heap of broken images" but as a heap of dry bones, or rather dry bones scattered all over the valley. This is an *ossified* culture, and not merely a *petrified* one, although "stony rubbish" and "dry stone" are also part of the imagery around its first reference to Ezekiel in lines 19–24; ossification may produce the same rigidity but its outcome is more fragile and suggests a greater contrast with some living organism of the past. Moreover, the ultimate question of the poem is whether these bones, these remnants of dead bodies symbolising the lifeless remains of a glorious European past can still be revived or not, and it is in this context that Ezekiel's question can be seen as the epitome of the poem's concern. This interpretation dovetails with the poem's initial functioning, back in 1922, as cultural critique in the first issue of *The Criterion*: as was pointed out, it assumed the political role of a quasi–editorial, and even its fragmentariness "could be taken as indicative of the cultural malaise the poem was seen as diagnosing […]: that European culture was now only a heap of broken images, a case of battered books, so decayed and sterile that poetry could no longer be written,

---

[34] Jonathan Culler, "Presupposition and Intertextuality," in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London, Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 113.

that cultural creativity was no longer possible".[35] "The Waste Land" does not suggest a solution to this problem, but it is an embodiment, a poetic reworking of the problem itself, and it is this dilemma, if any, that integrates all its disparate motifs. Some argue that its motifs from vegetation myths and biblical prophecy are equally relevant but they are ultimately irreconcilable and threaten to tear the poem apart,[36] another maintains that the influence of the biblical prophets, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and especially Jeremiah, is so paramount that the poem as a whole is a coherent reworking of themes culled from the prophetic writings of the Old and New Testaments, and *not* from the myths of fertility cults emphasised by Eliot himself at the beginning of his notes;[37] I think that the question of whether the dry bones can be revived or not makes sense in both systems but it is due to Ezekiel that it can acquire a *historical* significance after World War I, the "Great War", for a culture traumatised by unprecedented masses of scattered bones in the trenches and battlefields.

Thus Ezekiel, the prophet after the destruction of Jerusalem, the post-traumatic voice boosting the morale of a people in Babylonian captivity, has a special relevance for the modern poet trying to find an authentic voice in the aftermath of the modern catastrophe. The common implication of the question in Ezekiel's context and in Eliot's is that the bones can live again, if at all, against the odds: for Ezekiel it is God alone who can accomplish this unprecedented mass-resurrection, for Eliot's poem the situation is not very promising either, because at this point of the text we have already learned that the dead had lost their bones, and now we learn that "dry bones can harm no one", that is, they do not make much difference any more. Scholars differ on this line, but whether it was meant to be "tongue-in-cheek",[38] or as not ironic but signalling a catastrophic failure,[39] it contains "dry bones", the spur of the allusion reminding us of Ezekiel's vision and the interpretative problem of how its meaning can be relevant to the poem. The two texts are almost too different to compare: the metaphorical message of Ezekiel's vision is self-explanatory and almost as explicit as an allegory, hence it is very far from the enigmatic suggestiveness of "The Waste Land". In Ezekiel 37:11 God Himself reveals the exact correspondence between tenor and vehicle ("these bones are the whole house of Israel"); what He makes the dead say is hardly less than explaining the symbolic meaning of the dryness of their bones ("Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off"). It is a difficult question how much of this meaning can be preserved in the new context,

---

[35] Bernard Sharratt, "*Dayadhvam:* Looking for the Key," in *CIEFL Bulletin*, New Series 11.1–2 (December 2001), p. 37.

[36] John Richardson, "After The Imagination of Our Own Hearts: Biblical Prophecy And 'The Waste Land'", *English* 48.192 (Autumn 1999) 187–198.

[37] Jones, pp. 285–287.

[38] Jones, pp. 296–297.

[39] Thormählen, p. 42.

and how much of it is altered; there is a possibility of a gloomy ultimate meaning ("we are clean cut off"), but on the other hand there is the promise of the Lord to resurrect the bones, since He says in 37:12: "Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves". Current interpretations of "The Waste Land" differ in hearing the hopeless or the hopeful side of this dual message. Yet at the very least the hope, so forcefully suggested by Ezekiel, is not entirely absent from Eliot's poem either: who knows, maybe the Lord will revive the dry bones, however harmless and insignificant they may seem, and will bring rain to water the overall dryness as well. After all, the introduction of Ezekiel by the usage of his signature phrase "Son of man" was coupled with the biblical reminder: you cannot know ("Son of man, / You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images"). And this is exactly what the prophet, humbled by the Lord's question "Can these bones live?", can answer: "O Lord God, thou knowest." Lines 19–24 and 386–391 allude to Ezekiel and both passages rely on Ezekiel's contrast between divine omniscience and the limits of human knowledge, a contrast offered as a source of fear and hope.

Moreover, the same question is lurking in the background of Eliot's essays at the time of writing "The Waste Land". Ezekiel's question "Can these bones live?" is indeed the crucial issue at stake when any new literary work enters the system of its predecessors, the moment of vital importance in Eliot's *ars poetica* and *ars critica*, with references to the dead, to revival, and sometimes even to bones. In his classic essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) he maintained that the significance of any poet or artist can be appreciated only in "his relation to the dead poets and artists", moreover, to value a poet (aesthetically) "you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead." Not just by dint of the sheer idiomatic usage of the word, here bones symbolically represent the depository of temporal sensitivity within the body: the poet has to be aware of both the pastness and the presence of the past, and this requires a historical sense which "compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer [...] has a simultaneous existence".[40] Critical reflection, he argues in an essay on Andrew Marvell (1921), is much more than "the resurrection of a deceased reputation", it is "an act of piety" which resurrects the poet's essential uniqueness. "To bring the poet back to life – the great, the perennial task of criticism – is in this case to squeeze the drops of the essence of two or three poems; [...] we may find some precious liquor unknown to the present age."[41] But in addition to criticism visualised as resurrecting, Eliot's essays at the time gave this image a more comprehensive relevance. When contributing to a symposium on

---

[40] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 14.

[41] T. S. Eliot, "Andrew Marvell," in *The Annotated Waste Land,* p. 146.

the subject of poetry in prose in 1921, he started by explaining why there was a need for cultural revitalisation. "The present condition of English literature is so lifeless that there surely needs no extenuation of any research into the past or possible forms of speech; the chief benefit of such a symposium as the present is […] an enquiry which might help to stimulate the worn nerves and release the arthritic limbs of our diction." Characteristically, this essay ends by assessing the "attempt to impart motion to this lifeless condition".[42] The latent central metaphor in these and other such arguments is not far from the biblical notions of resurrection, and it is no exaggeration to say that Ezekiel 37 as a latent subtext informs Eliot's whole vision of culture.

The interpretative significance of the "dry bones" makes the allusion to Ezekiel 37:1–14 vital to the poem, hence important to preserve in translation. Yet this is endangered by the great difference in effectiveness between the phrase "dry bones" and (if there is such a thing) its literal Hungarian rendering, "száraz csontok" as spurs to evoke Ezekiel's valley of bones. Their different efficacy is due to the fact that the text of Ezekiel 37:1–14 in the King James Bible foregrounds the image of bones much more than the most influential Hungarian translation does. The Hebrew עצמות, the plural of עצם ("bone, substance, self"), is always rendered into English by "bones", thus the English word occurs in the passage no less than ten times and dominates the imagery (acoustically even more than עצם does in the Hebrew text where the vowels vary in the different forms of the same word), whereas the most influential Hungarian translation, that of Gáspár Károli first published in 1590, renders it either as "csontok" ("bones") or, much more often, as "tetemek" ("dead bodies"), so here bones occur only twice but the dead bodies no less than eight times. (It is, however, not clear why Károli did this; certainly not because of the Vulgate, which mentions "ossa" everywhere throughout the passage.) This applies not only to the 1590 text but also to its revised editions up to the present day, though in Károli's time the meaning of "tetem" was not yet as far from that of "csont" as it has since become, and in the new meaning of "tetem" ("dead body") one could still feel its original meaning, that is, "bone", (similarly, the word's cognates used to mean "bone" in other Finno-Ugric languages before they acquired the new meaning of "remains" and "dead body"), so "csont" and "tetem" may have been almost synonymous.[43] This explains why the plural "tetemei" ("his/her remains", "his/her dead body") or the plural "tetemimre" ("to my remains") in Sándor Petőfi's poetry sounds not only archaic and solemn today but also strange and somewhat obscure after the disappearance of its now obsolete meaning, which in the nineteenth century could be visualised in the plural with no difficulty. More to the point, this

---

42   *The Annotated Waste Land*, pp. 158, 164.
43   *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára*, ed. Loránd Benkő, Vol. 3 (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1976), pp. 909–910.

explains why Ezekiel 37:7, in which the King James Bible has "the bones came together, bone to his bone", could be translated by Károli in 1590 as "és egybe-menének a tetemek, mindenik tetem az ő teteméhez" without risking any reference to a coupling of bodies, which is the unfortunate present-day meaning of the text. Whereas in the King James Bible the dominant image is that of *bones*, in the present-day reading of the Károli Bible it is that of *dead bodies*. Other things being equal, when those brought up on the King James Bible read about "dry bones" in "The Waste Land" they would sooner recall Ezekiel's valley of bones than those brought up on the Hungarian Károli Bible would.

Though less decisive for the efficacy of "dry bones" as the spur of the poem's allusion to Ezekiel, the other conspicuous difference between the respective visions of the King James Bible and Károli's 1590 translation is that the former suggests the image of a valley, whereas the latter suggests that of a meadow. The Hebrew original in Ezekiel 37:1 is בתוך הבקעה, which means "in the middle of a valley-plain", but in Gáspár Károli's first complete Hungarian translation of the Bible (first published in 1590 in a place called Vizsoly, hence called the "Vizsoly Bible") it became "az mező közepett" ("in the midst of a meadow"). Although the twentieth-century revised editions of Károli's text resorted to "völgy" ("valley") instead of "mező" ("meadow"), István Vas, the most influential Hungarian translator of Eliot's poetry preferred the original Vizsoly text. Editing his own selection from the Bible in 1986 he endorsed the vote of a committee of poets, linguists, divines, and publishers to publish the 1590 text with only minimal corrections, hence in Ezekiel 37:1 we still read the initial version "az mező közepett". (Maybe partly to compensate for the loss or to redress the balance, in Vas's edition there is a newly inserted title for Ezekiel 37:1–14, "Csontvázak völgye" (The valley of skeletons), which foregrounds the bones and the valley, unlike in modern editions of the Károli Bible, which use "Izráel feltámadása" (The Resurrection of Israel) as the title of the whole chapter 37. (In the 1590 first edition there was no title to this chapter, only a brief summary.) Vas seems to have been satisfied with the image of "meadow" altogether because he kept it in his poem "Ezékiel", a reworking of Ezekiel 37:1–14, just as he kept here the word "tetemek" ("dead bodies") wherever the Károli translation used it

BEFORE TRANSLATING ELIOT:
WEÖRES'S "LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH" AND VAS'S "EZÉKIEL"

Pierre Nora's term "les lieux de mémoire", used as the title of a seven-volume collaborative project, came to be translated into English as "realms of memory", which captures its most comprehensive meaning, but the term also refers to the actual places or sites of memory where we go to remember or where, no matter what our intention, we cannot help remembering. This latter case is very near

to what happens when we read an allusion in a poem: texts have always been realms, or places, or sites of remembering, but especially when they confront us with an allusion, and discovering the "dry bones" on the site of a written text is a case in point. Yet even if the readers of Eliot's poem discover the dry bones on *his* site of remembering, the allusion recalls chapter 37 in the book of Ezekiel, and we can just as well say that those who recall that text eventually meet on *Ezekiel's* site, and they look at the valley of bones there, on the site of a biblical narrative once composed as a parable to be remembered amidst the adversities of subjugation and exile. Eliot's text recalls Ezekiel's, and lives on our remembering the book of the prophet whereas Ezekiel's text comes to life by being remembered; but Eliot's allusion to Ezekiel leads the Hungarian reader to further sites as well, because one of the Hungarian poets who translated "The Waste Land," István Vas, is also the author of a poem entitled "Ezékiel", a reworking of the vision about the valley of bones. Moreover, Vas's poem, written in the late 1950s, was followed by other Ezekiel poems in Hungarian literature. Thus the Hungarian reader who encounters Eliot's allusion in a Hungarian translation of "The Waste Land," is invited to visit several other sites of remembering as well, including Eliot's poem in English, different versions of Ezekiel's biblical text, and several Hungarian poems. One cannot but agree with the tacit assumption behind the playful verdict,[44] if not necessarily with the verdict itself, that the most beautiful Hungarian poem is Árpád Tóth's translation of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind": poetic texts, whether written or translated, constitute the same intertextual frame of reference. While reading them, our associations can just as easily cross other lines of demarcation as well, such as the one between literary and religious texts. The dry bones of "The Waste Land," whether read in English, in Hungarian, or both, can remind the Hungarian reader of a whole range of texts, sites of remembering no longer divided by the usual barriers. Yet what we do or do not recall at a textual site of remembering is defined by the long road each of us has traversed before.

In 1958 and 1961 respectively, Sándor Weöres and István Vas met the dry bones alluding to Ezekiel on the site of "The Waste Land". Characteristically, the site had different meanings for them: Weöres translated the title as "A puszta ország" ("The Barren Country"), revealing that for him it meant something like the Hungarian "puszta": barren, flat, desolate; Vas translated it as "Átokföldje" (The Cursed Land), which offers a potential connection to the curses of the Old Testament prophets. To translate poems meant very much for both of them, and was closely connected to their own poetry, but in different ways,[45] and their approaches to Eliot were no

---

[44] Cf. Lőrinc Szabó, "Tóth Árpád, a versfordító," in *Tóth Árpád összes versfordításai*, ed. Lőrinc Szabó (Budapest: Révai, 1942), 7–15.

[45] Cf. Sándor Weöres, "Milyen szerepe van a költő életében a műfordításnak?" *Filológiai Közlöny* 3–4 (1972) 467–473; István Vas, "Eliot fordítása közben" (1965) in *Az ismeretlen Isten: Tanulmányok 1934–1973* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1974), 632–640; István Vas, "Mit nehéz

less different. Weöres discovered Eliot's poetry for himself at an early stage, and considered it worth studying, but initially had no intention to dwell on this site of remembering for long. Vas, on the other hand, visited Eliot in 1959, translated his poetry extensively, wrote an essay about their meeting and another one on his experiences in translating his oeuvre, and long after publishing his translations he was ever ready to acknowledge errors and to correct them. His respect for the poetry of T. S. Eliot is reflected as late as 1970 in a letter emphasising that he considered Weöres a great poet but he thought no living Hungarian poet, Weöres included, to be as great as T. S. Eliot, Saint-John Perse or Nelly Sachs.[46] As a translator of "The Waste Land" he felt the greatness of the challenge, especially because of the poem's hidden allusions to the entire European civilisation as a synchronic system, hence he studied scholarly commentaries, sought Eliot's advice about how to translate the allusions, and when asking the poet to recommend somebody for occasional assistance, he was pleased to hear that Eliot offered his own help.[47]

Significantly, both Weöres and Vas started their poetic career as admirers of Milán Füst, the most prophet-like of contemporary poets, who not only wrote in a prophetic vein but who actually looked more and more like a prophet as he advanced in years. (His photograph juxtaposed with Michelangelo's painting of the prophet Joel is telling: the resemblance is uncanny.[48]) Both Weöres and Vas corresponded with him, both wrote a review of one of his volumes (Weöres in 1942, on Füst's novel *A feleségem története* (The Story of My Wife), though it was not published; Vas in 1934, on Füst's selected poems), both were attracted to the artistic excellence of the great maverick of contemporary Hungarian literature. But they respected his work for different reasons. Weöres was interested in the techniques of assuming the mask and voice of a predecessor; characteristically, his own first publication in the periodical *Nyugat* was a pastiche of Füst's poetry, "Levél Füst Milánnak" (An Epistle to Milán Füst) in 1935, but the piece was admittedly inspired by both attraction and repulsion.[49] Weöres was also fascinated by how Füst reworked and published the poetic output of a contemporary woman poet, Ilona Kaszab, and this may have been one of the early influences that eventually led to Weöres's own *Psyché*, a splendid collection of poems and letters by a fictive Hungarian woman poet of the late eighteenth

fordítani?" (1979) in *Igen is, nem is* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1987), 169–197; see also István Vas's poem *A fordító köszönete* (The Translator's Gratitude).

[46] István Vas to Ágnes Nemes Nagy and Balázs Lengyel, 1 January 1970 in *Lengyel Balázs, Nemes Nagy Ágnes és Vas István levélváltása*, ed. Klára Monostory, *Holmi* 7.3 (1994), p. 376.

[47] István Vas, "Vallomás Eliotról: 2. Látogatás Eliotnál (Feljegyzés 1959-ből)" in Eliot, *Válogatott versek*, pp. 9–12.

[48] Cf. György Somlyó, *Füst Milán: Emlékezés és tanulmány* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969), pp. 84–85.

[49] Sándor Weöres to Milán Füst, 6 April 1935 in Sándor Weöres, *Egybegyűjtött levelek*, 2 vols., ed. Imre Bata and Erika Nemeskéri (Budapest: Pesti Szalon – Marfa Mediterrán, 1998), II, pp. 221–224.

and early nineteenth century. Vas's review, on the other hand, hailed Füst's poetry as a lonely and stubborn voice resembling that of the Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament, noting that the religiosity of Füst's poems was dominant, a rarity among major Hungarian poets, and that it was distinctly Jewish in not believing in an afterlife or any other consoling promise. More importantly, Vas quoted the closing line of one of Füst's poems, "A magyarokhoz" (To the Hungarians), "I descend from prophets", and found the claim justifiable on account of a profound dissatisfaction with society and of a poetic intonation reminiscent of Ezekiel.[50] Vas could have added that Füst actually wrote a poem, "A jelenés" ("The Apparition"), which took as its motto Ezekiel 1:24, "És hallám az ő szárnyaik zúgását" ("I heard the noise of their wings"), and its imagery, especially its image of a meadow full of bones, harks back to Ezekiel 37:1, and is characteristic of Füst's poetic world where bones play an important part in connection with old age and death, as in his great poem "Ha csontjaimat meg kelletik adni" (If my bones have to be surrendered). True, Füst's prophetic diction is poles apart from the casual everyday idiom that was to characterise most of Vas's own poetry, or from the sparkling metrical virtuosity of Weöres's verses, but Füst inspired both of them (and many more) by his courage to break new grounds in Hungarian poetry.

The text alluded to, Ezekiel 37:1–14, could not mean the same for the two of them either. Born in 1913, Weöres came from a Transdanubian family that was granted noble rank in the seventeenth century. The son of a military officer of great integrity and a mother who read in four languages and gave him classical works to read at the age of six, he was soon taken by her to the meetings of the local "Anthroposophical Circle", and could listen to the discussions of tenets and symbols deriving from Oriental and European mysticism, which awakened his lifelong interest in mystical literature.[51] He started out as a child prodigy in Hungarian poetry and was eager to find models for his vastly comprehensive poetic aspirations. Striving to transcend the boundaries of personal consciousness, and striving to integrate Western and Far-Eastern influences, he was interested in the cultural heritage of Egypt and India, and went on a study trip to China. Characteristically, when enumerating the cultural influences that shaped his work he started the list with Tao-Te-Ching, then came the epic Gilgamesh, thus the Bible was mentioned only as the third, followed by Mallarmé, Mihály Babits, and "mathematics, music, the fly on the windowpane, just about everything I perceived".[52] Of course he was no less affected by the Bible, though he was not overawed by it: coming from a Lutheran family, in 1932 he contemplated a conversion to Unitarianism and thought of becom-

[50] István Vas, "Füst Milán olvasásakor," in *Az ismeretlen Isten*, p. 744.
[51] Zoltán Kenyeres, *Tündérsíp: Weöres Sándorról* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1983), pp. 12–27.
[52] Sándor Weöres, "Önvallomás," in *Írói vallomások*, ed. Lóránt Kabdebó (Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 1971), p. 190.

ing a priest only because Unitarianism seemed to fit his own bent of mind in being relativistic, not too serious, not defining God accurately, and not being uncritical of the Bible.[53] When asked about it, he would answer that the Bible exerted a great influence on him,[54] but in most cases he would mention it together with very different sources of inspiration. In 1944 he confided to a friend that in order to write truly modern, that is, "orphic" or "orphean" poetry, the new poets have to learn "from the Sanskrits, from the benin-negroes, from folk poetry, from the compositions of primary-school pupils, even more from the inarticulate sounds of children, from the insane, from bird-songs, from the prophets."[55] He had a strong affinity to some prophetic texts of the Old Testament, but when (in 1932) he wrote his poem "Jajgatás" ("Wailing") reworking the Lamentations of Jeremiah 3:1–18, he published it, characteristically, together with a series of his poems called "Ó-egyiptomi versek" (Old Egyptian Poems), written at about the same time in 1931 and 1932. Some of his poems reworked biblical stories, such as "Ábrahám áldozása" ("Abraham's Sacrifice"), "Dávid tánca" ("David's Dance"), "Ének a teremtésről" ("A Song of Creation"), "Józsefet eladják testvérei" ("Joseph is Sold by his Brothers"); some alluded to biblical themes and used biblical metaphors, such as "Mennyekzői kar" ("Wedding Chorus"). This last poem, written in 1944 and published in his volume *Elysium* (1946), relies on The Song of Songs so much that an awareness of its allusions was considered a necessary, though not sufficient, condition of any authentic interpretation of the poem.[56] Even more characteristic of Weöres's system of biblical, mythical and cultural allusions is the poem "Téli reggel" ("Winter Morning"), which refers to The Song of Songs, to the "Der Cherubinischer Wandersmann" ("The Cherubic Pilgrim") of Angelus Silesius, and to some essential features of oriental myths such as the implications of the male and female principles in *Mahabharata*, all of which were needed for making sense of its motifs.[57] This compositeness is not far from Eliot's technique: as "The Waste Land" unites allusions to Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* together with allusions to the Bible and to diverse myths and cultural motifs, Weöres's "Téli reggel" unites motifs from all sorts of mystical writings together with biblical elements. Weöres's absorption in diverse mythical and mystical lore was so complete that it gave him immunity from the contagious political epidemics around him. He was one of the very few Hungarian authors who

[53] Sándor Weöres to Dezső Kosztolányi, 13 October 1932 in Weöres, *Egybegyűjtött levelek*, vol. I. p. 163.
[54] "Beszélgetés Weöres Sándorral", interviewed by Sándor Győr in *Egyedül mindenkivel: Weöres Sándor beszélgetései, nyilatkozatai, vallomásai* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1993), pp. 108–109.
[55] Sándor Weöres to Imre Kenyeres, 29 February, 1944 in Weöres, *Egybegyűjtött levelek*, vol, II. p. 382.
[56] Kenyeres, p. 102.
[57] Kenyeres, pp. 102–103.

could sustain his productivity during the most oppressive post-war regime, the late 1940s and most of the 1950s, when there was scarcely any hope of getting his work published. His independence, unassuming, natural and elegant, was more than the authorities could tolerate; in 1962 one of the heads of the Szépirodalmi Publishing House turned down a collection of his poems with a telling admission: "All in all, it is infuriating that someone is not even scratched by the age in which he lives."[58]

However, one of the biblical reworkings in Weöres's poetry, the 1932 "Jajgatás" ("Wailing") was immediately rated the best poem, in 1934, of his first volume *Hideg van* ("It is cold") for its outburst of immense power.[59] Although later Weöres explored the treasure house of early Hungarian poetry and discovered the jeremiad as one of its genres prevalent from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, in this poem he did not apply the biblical text to any specifically Hungarian topic or moral. Instead, he reworked verses 1–18 of chapter 3 of the Old Testament lamentations attributed to Jeremiah. Using the Károli translation as the source text throughout the poem, his deviations from it are characteristic of his own poetic vision. He omits 3:7 altogether, with its imagery of confinement, he omits 3:12–13 with its bow and arrow; he inserts the refrain "jaj, jaj" (woe, woe) after every second line. He modifies 3:6 which was "Sötét helyekre ültetett engem, mint az örökre meghaltakat" (He has set me in dark places, as those who have died for ever), by omitting "örökre" (for ever). This alteration is an improvement not only because "for ever" was erroneous anyway (the Hebrew text had עולם, "in the old times") but also because the omission averts the notion of eternal death, hence it implicitly and indirectly regains the *possibility* of resurrection and thus the prospect, always important for Weöres, of transcending the limits of finite existence. His interpolations range from those amplifying the original to those introducing new elements. The former can be exemplified by his suggestive image in 3:1, the opening lines of his poem, where the Bible has simply "I *am* the man *that* hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath", but in Weöres's poem we are confronted with the sufferer's body wriggling and writhing in pain. Yet the other type is even more significant, especially the inserted motif of drying out in verse 3:4. The biblical text does not make dryness explicit, and contains the image of broken bones in a living body ("My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones"), but Weöres collated the pre-1908 and post-1908 editions of the Károli Bible, and interpolated the verb, "kiszárította", "[he] has dried it out", hence his version is "megfonnyasztotta testemet, kiszárította bőrömet, mozsárban zúzza a csontjaimat" ([He] has emaciated my body, dried out my skin, and

---

[58] Mátyás Domokos, *Leletmentés: Könyvek sorsa a "nemlétező" cenzúra korában 1948–1989* (Budapest: Osiris, 1996), p. 136.

[59] Gyula Illyés, "Hideg van: Weöres Sándor első könyve," in *Öröklét: In memoriam Weöres Sándor*, ed. Mátyás Domokos (Budapest: Nap, 2003), p. 42.

is smashing my bones in a mortar). Whether or not he accepted the traditional (though refuted) assumption that this book of the Old Testament contained the lamentations of the same prophet we know from the Book of Jeremiah, he may have known that the latter has a reference to the valley of dead bodies, though not specifically to their bones (Jeremiah 31:40). All in all, he seems to have been alert to the motif of dryness and bones, and dry bones, for reasons both personal and biblical, the latter connected to Lamentations 3:4, Jeremiah 31:40 and Ezekiel 37:1–4.

Vas's personal history made his route to the Old Testament prophets very different from that of Weöres. Descendant of a Jewish family which counted several rabbis among its members in the past,[60] he owed his first decisive child-hood experiences of both poetry and religion to a grandfather he had stayed with one summer in Bátaszék, a small town near the Danube in southern Hungary. This old man, the rabbi of the local Jewish community, introduced the little boy to the Hebrew language and the Hebrew Bible, both of which were soon to become the ultimate source and symbol of poetry for him. However, Vas converted to Roman Catholicism in 1938, not just willy-nilly as Füst did, but out of a genuine religious need, and he died as a Catholic in 1991. Some of his later poetry deals with New Testament themes, yet his attachment to his former heritage never diminished. In 1942 his friend, the poet Miklós Radnóti, also of Hungarian Jewish extraction, made the point that Vas's poems had more to do with a Jewish cultural heritage than his own work had.[61] On the other hand his ironically down-to-earth poetic persona or casual everyday idiom had little in common with the Old Testament prophets. As early as 1935 Weöres observed that Vas's poems were not "dreamt up" but "thought up", and were dictated not by "sacred madness" but by logic.[62] At the beginning of his poem *Ultima realitas* there is a characteristic admission, sounding like an *ars poetica*, of his not being interested in apocalyptic and transcendental greatness. Poets and critics agree that he never claimed any kind of prophetic role for himself.[63] Thus his "Ezékiel" ("Ezekiel"), published in 1960 and written between 1957 and 1959,[64] not long before he started to translate "The Waste Land," is both exceptional and characteristic in his oeuvre. This poem, a paraphrase of the biblical text in the form of a dramatic monologue by the prophet himself, uses not only the elevated diction of Old Testament prophets but also a form that resembles the

[60] George Szirtes, "Introduction," in István Vas, *Through the Smoke: Selected Poems*, selected by Miklós Vajda, trans. Bruce Berland, Gerard Gorman and others (Budapest: Corvina, 1989), p. 8.

[61] Miklós Radnóti to Aladár Komlós, 17 May, 1942 in Miklós Radnóti, *Ikrek hava – Napló*, ed. Győző Ferencz and Tibor Melczer (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), p. 191.

[62] Sándor Weöres to István Vas, 15 September, 1935 in Weöres, *Egybegyűjtött levelek*, II, p. 47.

[63] Cf. Győző Ferencz, "Ami a fontosabb," *Holmi* 4 (1992), p. 542.

[64] First published in *Élet és irodalom*, 15 (1960), p. 5, then in István Vas, *Rapszódia egy őszi kertben: Versek és úti jegyzetek* (Budapest: Magvető, 1960).

long, sublime, grandiose poetic lines of Milán Füst, his former mentor in poetry, about whom he wrote in 1934 that some of his poems could have been written by Ezekiel. A few years after Füst wrote a glowing article supporting the 1956 revolution at its most decisive turning point,[65] Vas wrote his poem presumably to come to terms with its tragic defeat.

Vas's "Ezékiel" is a poetic paraphrase, at some points almost a close translation, of Ezekiel 37:1–14, taking on its sublime diction, and turned into Vas's own poem mainly by a few subtle but decisive interpolations and omissions, and partly by being published as such, first in a literary weekly, then among his collected poems. His most telling omission is that he cuts (or radically alters) Ezekiel 37:11–12, which in the scriptures was offered by the Lord as the key to the parable: "Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel." Vas cuts all references to Israel and its land, and substitutes for them the much more general phrase "my people" with the Lord's confirmation of his promise to resurrect the dead. ("E tetemek, ez az én népem, és megtartom, amit igértem – Ember Fia, mondd nekik. / És megteszem a sosevoltat, kijönnek a sírból a holtak, és vagyok, aki vagyok.") There is no hint as to what purpose this resurrection is meant to serve, because the last clause ("és vagyok, aki vagyok", that is, "and I am that I am", taken from Exodus 3:14) is not offered as the purpose of the act, it only points out why it is bound to succeed. Thus Vas turns the allegory of the Lord into a poem, moreover, he makes the *tenor* of the metaphorical core of the poem so general that its remaining *vehicle* becomes a metaphor in itself,[66] hence he turns a self-explanatory system of correspondences into something ambiguous and thereby open to different interpretations. Furthermore, cutting 37:11–12 and the mentioning of Israel, he likewise omits that part of 37:14 which would have confirmed the Lord's promise ("and I shall place you in your own land"), thus he obliterates the very parts which could have been interpreted as the legitimating basis for political claims to own the territory in question up to our own day.[67] The references to Israel, ancient or modern, would not have been welcome to the ideological establishment of the Kádár regime, yet Vas's omission was probably

[65] Milán Füst, "Emlékbeszéd Thykididész modorában az elesett hősök sírja felett" (A funerary oration in Thucydides' manner: over the tomb of the heroes who fell on the battlefield), *Irodalmi Újság*, 2 November, 1956, p. 3.

[66] For these terms see Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, pp. 95–96.

[67] Cf. Benjamin Netanyahu's speech on 27 January 2010, commemorating the 65th anniversary of liberation in Auschwitz: standing on the site of the former death camp he declared that out of the ashes there and elsewhere the Jewish people was resurrected just as the dry bones had been promised to be revived and their land restored in Ezekiel 37, and thus the prophecy has been fulfilled.

motivated not by the predictable requirements of censorship but by his intention to make the parable applicable to Hungary.

However, Ezekiel's vision is so well-known, at least to readers familiar with the Bible, that to omit a crucial part of it cannot go unnoticed. On the contrary, its very absence is conspicuous enough to look like a negative allusion: remembering the original text, we recognise the deviation from it, and the missing part becomes all the more emphatic. Vas must have been aware of this; moreover, he knew that occasionally the Bible itself resorts to the device of not mentioning the affiliations of somebody in order to give universal validity to a message. (Introducing his selections from the Bible he says that the Book of Job is more elevated and more universal than the mentality of the prophets because the name of Israel does not occur in it, nor does Yahweh, and there is no reference to Job's Jewishness either, so here, simply, one man stands before God.[68]) Preserving the phrase "Ember fia" ("Son of man") in his poem, Vas retained a phrase the Lord used to address his prophet only in the Book of Ezekiel, a phrase that foregrounds the prophet as universally human, that is, neither Jewish nor exclusively prophetic. It is this aspect that Vas liked to emphasise in his own poetry, for instance, in the title of his collected poems in 1970, *Mit akar ez az egy ember?* ("What does this one man want?") Besides, stylistically Ezekiel tends to be less poetic than some other prophets, and uses more of the "plain language", which is the most appropriate and effective when speaking to a humiliated people in captivity.[69] Ezekiel's usual language is the prophetic idiom nearest to Vas's poetry, and the Book of Ezekiel was especially near to his heart.

Yet in the attempt to appropriate Ezekiel's vision for a hidden message about the 1956 revolution in Hungary, Vas needed more than just to disentangle the text from its original context. Fully aware of the original meaning of Ezekiel's vision (in 1986 he interpreted it in historical terms as an ancient parable of national revival[70]), he alters the text just enough to ensure its wider historical applicability. The possibility of reading the ensuing text as alluding to 1956 is provided by the foregrounding of Ezekiel's reference, in 37:9, to the bones of not simply the dead but of the *killed*: "Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live". Vas retains this phrasing ("Jőjj és lehelj ezeknek tetemébe, kik megölettek, hogy megéledjenek"), just as earlier in the poem the Lord refers to the bones as "elesett vázak, tetemek" ("skeletons and corpses [of those who] fell in combat"), where "elesett" refers to heroic death on the battlefield. The dead bodies and graves of the killed, and the haunting (real or fantasised) images of their exhumation were on the

[68] Vas, "Ajánlás a Bibliához," p. 18.
[69] S. Fisch, "Introduction" in S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London, Jerusalem, New York: Soncino Press, 1994), p. xii.
[70] Vas, "Ajánlás a Bibliához," p. 17.

mind of people after 1956 as well, just as after 1945, and Vas knew only too well the smell of rotting that surrounded even a mere exercise-book unearthed from the mass grave together with a human body that used to be his friend Miklós Radnóti.[71] The phrase "kik megölettek", just like the biblical "these slain" does not say *when* those bones or bodies were killed, so by omitting the reference to Israel Vas could make it applicable to any recent or past casualties in Hungarian history, and hence the phrase "my people" could also acquire a new and manifold meaning. The poem's application to 1956, suggested by the date of its first publication, is reinforced by the imagery which indicates, be it ever so subtly, that the bodies were young when killed: the Lord promises to provide, and by implication, *restore* the "flying" hair and "young" skin of those who "fell" in battle. ("Mert húst, ínakat, lobogó hajakat hozok én csupaszult tagokra, / S majd lesznek az elesett vázak, tetemek fiatal bőrrel beborítva.")

Among Vas's interpolations the most conspicuous is when he makes the revived bodies ask for where the tree of life is. ("Az élet fája hol van? Kivágattunk magunkban! A Halálnak völgye ez itt!": "Where is the tree of life? We have been cut off, just ourselves! This is the valley of Death!") There is no such exclamation in Ezekiel 37:1–14, and although in 47:7 and 47:12, trees collectively and by implication may signify a tree of life,[72] *the* tree of life, meaning a tree whose fruit provides eternal life, occurs only in Genesis and Revelation. It is mentioned first in Genesis 2:9, immediately after the newly created man has been placed in the Garden of Eden ("the tree of life also in the midst of the garden"), later in Genesis 3:22–24, after the fall, when man is driven out of Eden to prevent him from eating the fruit of the tree of life, and finally in the New Testament, in Revelation 2:7 and 22:1–2. Of these loci the early ones, especially Genesis 2:9 must have been deeply imprinted in Vas's memory since childhood, because they were part of those memorable early lessons on the Hebrew Bible, lessons by his rabbi grandfather whose recital and explanations focused on the story of creation in Genesis and inspired a poetic way of perceiving the world.[73] But the real question is not so much the origin of, or authorial motivation for, interpolating the tree of life in Vas's poem, but the possible meaning or significance of it in its new context. Why do the revived souls ask where the tree of life is, and why are they so disappointed when they begin to speak? Did they expect to be back in the Garden of Eden, where they had seen the tree of life? Reading this interpolation with the Book of Genesis in mind, as we are prompted to do by the allusive biblical phrase "the Tree of Life", we may assume that the revived, coming back from death, think of, and ask for, the tree of life either because

---

[71] István Vas, "A boldog költő: Jegyzetek Radnóti Miklósról," *Holmi* 19.6 (2009), p. 704.

[72] *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts*, ed. Stephen D. Renn (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), p. 985.

[73] Cf. István Vas, *Összegyűjtött munkái*, vol. 11, *Nehéz szerelem*, 2 vols (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1983), vol. I, p. 97.

they seek an explanation for their unexpected life after death or because they had, immediately before their death (in the 1956 revolution), seen phenomena they would imagine could happen only in Paradise. Whatever their motivation, in the subsequent part of the poem the Lord commands Ezekiel to tell the revived that He will keep his promise and make them come out of their graves. ("E tetemek, ez az én népem, és megtartom, amit ígértem – Ember Fia, mondd nekik. / És megteszem a sosevoltat, kijönnek a sírból a holtak, és vagyok, aki vagyok.") Though the clause "és megteszem a sosevoltat" ("and I will do what has never been done") is entirely Vas's interpolation, it sounds authentic in the biblical context because the Lord had never revived a legion of people from their bones before. But the word "a sosevoltat" ("that which has never happened") also means something unheard of, something unexpected and miraculous, and this suggests that the Lord is about to do something neither Ezekiel nor the revived would have expected or thought possible without the tree of life, that is, after the Fall. When applied to 1956, this hidden message of the poem must have been very reassuring, because once the revolution was crushed by military force, even to think of any kind of retribution or justice seemed utterly hopeless, and the great question was whether there was any rationality in the attempt at all. In the post–1956 depression the Lord's confirmation of his promise to revive the dead (and hence to justify their very sacrifice) was not only something against the odds, but a restoration of faith, courage and dignity. Weöres's *Jajgatás* (Wailing) offered an alleviation of pain by the sheer act of lamentation; Vas's *Ezékiel* boosted the morale of sufferers by reminding them of the divine promise of resurrection.

Whereas for Eliot the relevance of Ezekiel's question "Can these bones live?" was whether the scattered bones of an ossified European culture could be revived or would be reduced to the status of harmless mementoes of times past ("Dry bones can harm no one"), for Vas the ultimate issue underlying Ezekiel's question is whether all that sacrifice of life was in vain or not. What is at stake for Vas is whether 1956 as a historical event, in spite of its military hopelessness, inevitable defeat and all its casualties, can be invested with a positive meaning. Moreover, just as after earlier historical disasters on Hungarian soil, the great dilemma after 1956 was whether the brutal suppression of the revolution could be interpreted in a transcendental frame of reference. The ultimate question of whether the casualties can be interpreted as sacrifice and justified in terms of later rewards in the nation's history was the same as after 1848, when the most prominent literary critic of the period, Pál Gyulai, answered it in the affirmative,[74] or after 1945, when another literary critic, Aladár Komlós, commemorating the Hun-

[74] Pál Gyulai, *Bírálatok, cikkek, tanulmányok*, eds. Gyula Bisztray, Aladár Komlós (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1961), pp. 23–24, 195–196, 440; Pál Gyulai, *Emlékbeszédek*, 2 vols (Budapest: Franklin, 1902), vol. II, p. 38; cf. Péter Dávidházi, "Gyulai Pál történelemszemlélete," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 5–6 (1972), p. 583.

garian Jews killed in concentration camps passionately denied the possibility of a transcendental interpretation, remembering that the 1755 Lisbon earthquake similarly challenged the belief in providence,[75] or during the 1956 revolution when Milán Füst anticipated the question both in an article of sublime rhetoric, "Emlékbeszéd Thukydidész modorában az elesett hősök sírja felett" ("A funerary oration in Thucydides' manner: over the tomb of the heroes who fell on the battlefield") and in a poem titled "Szózat a sírból" ("Oration from the Grave").[76] In Vas's "Ezékiel" the disappointment of the revived victims is answered by the affirmation that the Lord will keep his promise, and this implies the belief that whatever happened can still make sense within a transcendental framework.

THE SURVIVAL RATE OF AN ALLUSION:
TRANSLATING THE "DRY BONES" INTO HUNGARIAN POETRY

By the late 1950s both Weöres and Vas were well-disposed to discover the spur of a biblical allusion in Eliot's poem, in spite of their differing cultural backgrounds. For Weöres, an eager student of Eastern wisdom, the "Shantih" of "The Waste Land" may have meant just as much as its allusions to Ezekiel; for Vas, allusions to Ezekiel were of paramount importance. Weöres may have had more affinity with Eliot's notions of impersonal poetry; he articulated very similar views in his early correspondence, and in doing so he sometimes explicitly referred to Eliot. In 1939 he advised a poet friend to read T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (together with Carl Sandburg and Robinson Jeffers) in the original.[77] More importantly, in 1946 he advised another young poet to go beyond the poetry of personal feelings and biographical events because its possibilities were practically exhausted by the nineteenth century, and to break through to new territory, following the example of authors like Eliot (together with Mallarmé, Valéry, George, Rilke, Joyce, Lawrence, Wilder and Sartre), that is, to set aside the individual components of his being, and explore the basic powers of humanity in the common, unchanging, impersonal and elementary substratum.[78] Béla Hamvas's 1944 review of Weöres's new volume of poems titled *A Medúza* was not the first to alert him to the significance of Eliot. Yet the review was an eye-opener because it revealed how Eliot's impersonal poetics suited the revival of orphic poetry, a poetry of

[75] Aladár Komlós, "In Memoriam… A fasizmus és a háború magyar-zsidó író áldozatainak emlékünnepélye, 1946. február 17-én," in Aladár Komlós, *Magyar-zsidó szellemtörténet a reformkortól a holocaustig*, ed. József Kiss, 2 vols. (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 1997), vol II. pp. 312–313, 317–318.

[76] Füst, "Emlékbeszéd"; cf. Gábor Nyárády, "Szívükre hajtott fejjel – Füst Milán ötvenhatja," *Új Tükör*, 24 September, 1989, pp. 5–6.

[77] Sándor Weöres to Gyula Takáts, 20 January 1939 in Weöres, *Egybegyűjtött levelek*, vol. II, p. 121.

[78] Sándor Weöres to Győző Csorba, 10 February 1946 in Weöres, *Egybegyűjtött levelek*, vol. II, p. 382.

sacred rapture, of cultivating the internal, of metaphysical substances and of the transcendental. and altogether the latest poetic mutiny against what Mallarmé labelled the Homeric deviation, that is, against the traditional mimetic poetry of the external, of light and texture, of the sensible and the sensuous, hence of the well-crafted, brightly deceptive illusion. To Weöres's immense satisfaction, Hamvas's review hailed the revival of ancient orphic poetry which had been prepared by Whitman, Mallarmé and Rilke, and now reached the point of no return with Valéry in France and Eliot in England, and suggested that the best poems of Weöres's new volume were unwittingly going in the same direction and he should proceed further.[79] This encouraging demonstration of orphic kinship between Eliot's poetry and his own must have been one of the major reasons why two decades later Weöres dedicated one of his most important poems, "Merülő Saturnus" ("Saturn Sinking") to Eliot's memory. Published in 1968 as the opening piece of a collection of his new poems titled the same, this poem is both prophetic in the Old Testament sense and sounds much like Milán Füst in diction, sentiment and vocabulary, but its disillusionment also resembles that of "The Waste Land". Weöres's immense poetic talent could always find authentic words and rhythms to approximate the diction of a biblical prophet, and even if he had a less personal resonance to the cultural heritage of such an allusion, his sensitivity could be expected to rediscover its relevance.

Whereas lines 19–24 were translated by both Weöres and Vas so as to preserve "Son of man" (both of them used the same biblical phrase, "Embernek fia"),[80] lines 386–391 were rendered by them very differently, and only Weöres translated the first and the last line ("In this decayed hole among the mountains […] Dry bones can harm no one") so as to allude to Ezekiel's valley of bones: "E málló katlanban hegyek között […] S a száraz csontok jámborak."[81] Unlike practically all subsequent Hungarian translators who would render "hole" as "üreg" ("cavity"), Weöres used the word "katlan", meaning both a fireplace dug in the ground and a steep valley surrounded by mountains. ("Katlan" is just like the more explicit compound "völgykatlan" in which "völgy" means "valley," and it is the noun used in Ezekiel 37:1–2 by modern editions of the Károli Bible.) Weöres facilitates the allusion by preserving the grammatical form of the "dry bones" intact, and by using the definite article: "a száraz csontok", "*the* dry bones", referring to something already known, or at least (to return to

---

[79] Béla Hamvas, "A Medúza," in *Öröklét: In memoriam Weöres Sándor*, pp. 116–120. Cf. Sándor Weöres to Imre Kenyeres, 29 February 1944 in Weöres, *Egybegyűjtött levelek*, vol. II, pp. 381–383.

[80] T. S. Eliot, "A puszta ország", trans. Sándor Weöres in Sándor Weöres, *A lélek idézése: Műfordítások* (Budapest: Európa, 1958), p. 527; T. S. Eliot, "Átokföldje", trans. István Vas in T. S. Eliot, *Versek, Drámák, Macskák könyve*, trans. Győző Ferencz, András Fodor, László Kálnoky et al. (Budapest: Európa, 1986), p. 47.

[81] Weöres, *A lélek idézése*, pp. 538–539.

the observation of a great Hungarian scholar[82]) *assumed* to be known. It would be futile to speculate whether Weöres remembered the biblical allusion or just considered the phrase too important to alter. His solution seems to dovetail with his avowed general principle that the verbal structures and even the word order of the original are to be preserved by the translator as much as possible, a principle he kept in mind when translating languages as different from Hungarian as Sanskrit or Chinese.[83] Moreover, dryness, and especially the danger of drying out in an intellectual or spiritual sense, was a problem Weöres knew from many a personal experience,[84] and this sensitivity may have prompted him to preserve Eliot's phrase intact, hence it can work as the spur of the allusion for Hungarian readers.

Contrasted with this, Vas was either unaware of the allusion or found it not worth retaining. In lines 386–391 he eradicated it by turning the plural "bones", so characteristic and evocative of Ezekiel's vision, into the singular, and replacing the adjective "dry" with a Hungarian word meaning "mere" or "barren": "A hegyek közt e beomlott üregben […] Nem árthat puszta csont."[85] First published (in its entirety[86]) in 1966 in his own translation of Eliot's selected poems and *Murder in the Cathedral*,[87] Vas's version soon acquired a great reputation, hence it is all the more significant that the lapse in line 391 was not spotted by its reviewers. In 1970 József Szili published a comparative analysis of the first two translations, and made the general point that any rendering of this poem should aim at literal accuracy because every single word may turn out to be a carrier of allusions or symbolism; yet Szili thought that Vas succeeded in preserving the allusions in his translation, and that his accomplishment was altogether better than Weöres's.[88] Moreover, Vas was not alerted to this mistake either by László Kéry, the editor of the 1966 volume, or by Ferenc Takács, a younger scholar who warned Vas that he had overlooked some other allusions.[89] Hence the new, 1986 edition of Eliot's poems and plays, publishing "The Waste Land" in Vas's translation, still contained line 391 uncorrected, although in the meantime several scholarly works (Northrop Frye's book in 1963, Florence Jones's paper in

[82] Országh, p. 246.
[83] Sándor Weöres, "Milyen szerepe van a költő életében a fordításnak?" *Filológiai Közlöny* 3–4 (1972) 467–473, p. 468.
[84] Sándor Weöres, "Milyen szerepe van a költő életében a fordításnak?," pp. 472–473.
[85] Eliot, *Versek, Drámák, Macskák könyve*, p. 84.
[86] Part of it ("A tűzbeszéd. Részlet *A pusztaság*-ból") was published in 1961, in the June number of *Nagyvilág* 885–888.
[87] T. S. Eliot, *Válogatott versek, Gyilkosság a székesegyházban*, trans. István Vas (Budapest: Európa, 1966), 57–86.
[88] József Szili, "A *Waste Land* magyarul," *Kritika* 8 (1970), p. 34.
[89] Ferenc Takács to István Vas, 22 October 1984; István Vas to Ferenc Takács, 31 October 1984 in Ferenc Takács, "'Shakespeare a sláger…' Egy levélváltás emléknyomai," *Holmi* 9 (2010) 1130–37, pp. 1132–1134.

1966, Marianne Thormählen's paper in 1984) explored the allusion to Ezekiel 37 and could have been consulted. One can assume that they were probably not yet known to Hungarian scholars at the time. As was argued recently, Vas failed to pick up on another allusion, the one to a 1912 ragtime hit in the line "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag", because he was not aware of this particular meaning of "rag", did not know that particular ragtime, and had no access to the paper by B. R. McElderry titled "Eliot's 'Shakespeherian Rag'", published in the *American Quarterly* in 1957, when Hungarian intellectuals had no opportunity to get acquainted with the material and verbal requisites of English and American culture.[90] But Vas himself was exempted from this confinement (he was allowed to visit Eliot in London and could buy scholarly books required for the task), and the isolation of Hungarian translators and scholars was only relative (in the 1970s some obtained scholarships to English universities), and it cannot explain Vas's failure to preserve the allusion to the "dry bones" of Ezekiel 37, because the phrase itself was very easy to understand and Vas had constant access to its biblical source, a text he knew well and paraphrased a few years earlier in his own poem "Ezékiel". Besides, he could have noticed that Weöres and subsequent Hungarian translators of "The Waste Land" translated Eliot's line "dry bones can harm no one" practically verbatim. He must have seen Weöres's rendering in or after 1958, and János Szász sent him a dedicated copy of his 1970 translation in 1972,[91] but this did not make him revise the line in the 1986 edition either.

Considering the usual factors that influence the survival rate of an allusion it is remarkable that Vas would have *needed* to be reminded. His case shows that neither the verbal competence to understand the language of an allusion nor the sheer acquaintance with the text a poem is alluding to is enough to ensure survival in translation. They are necessary but not sufficient conditions for recognising an allusion because they cannot guarantee the *association* required. Vas, reading about the hole between the mountains, the "tumbled graves" and the "dry bones", did not associate the scene with the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1–14. Given his insistence on the importance of allusions in general and in "The Waste Land" in particular, had he noticed this one, he would have preserved it in his translation. Characteristically, when he was warned that he had ignored an allusion, he was quick to amend, so one can safely conclude that most probably he did not spot this one. His translation was rightly celebrated for having performed the "cultural imprinting" of Eliot's poetry in Hungary,[92]

---

90   Takács, p. 1136.

91   See the dedication ("Vas Pista bátyámnak megkésve, de a régi szeretettel küldi Szász János. Bukarest, 1972 május") in Vas's copy of *T. S. Eliot legszebb versei*, trans. László Lőrinczi, János Szász, Ferenc Szemlér, ed. Domokos Szilágyi (Bukarest: Albatrosz, 1970). Vas's books are preserved as a separate collection in the Tudásközpont (Knowledge Centre) at the University of Pécs. My thanks to Eszter Szakács, librarian and poet, for all her kind assistance.

92   Takács, p. 1136.

but if so, the allusion to Ezekiel was not part of that imprinting. (Neither were the notes: just as Weöres in 1958, Vas in 1966 translated the poem unannotated; the notes were first published in the 1986 collection of Eliot's poetry in Hungarian, and here they appeared under the separate title *T. S. Eliot jegyzetei az* Átokföldjé*hez* (T. S. Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land*) and with no translator's name attached to them, so we can infer only by stylistic evidence that they were translated by Vas, too.) Although later translations, especially those of János Szász and Adrian Krudy, retained (consciously or otherwise) the allusion in line 391 (Szász: "A száraz csontok nem zavarnak senkit";[93] Krudy: "Száraz csontok nem bántanak senkit"[94]), they could not retrieve it for cultural memory because they went virtually unnoticed, especially when compared to the ongoing debates, continuing up to our own day, on the respective merits of Weöres's and Vas's work. An otherwise interesting attempt, József Szili's translation kept the adjective "dry" ("száraz") but also lost touch with the allusion by turning the plural "bones" into singular ("Száraz csont senkinek sem árt"[95]) and hence weakening the spur of the allusion. (Long before this, in 1962, József Szili had already translated and published Part V of the poem,[96] but then the last line had no connection with the wording of Ezekiel at all: "aszott tetem senkit se bánt": "an emaciated corpse harms nobody".) It seems that Vas was the only translator who had an opportunity, back in 1966, to preserve the allusion for cultural memory in Hungary. In one of his essays on Eliot he reckoned that the available Eliot criticism *usually* saved him from ignoring or misunderstanding the allusions of "The Waste Land,"[97] implying that it could not *always* save him, yet he would have been surprised to know that it was an allusion to the vision in Ezekiel 37, of all biblical texts, that he failed to notice.

The loss of this allusion had invisible yet far-reaching consequences, because Vas translated Eliot's poem not just into Hungarian but also into Hungarian *poetry*, both in the sense that his translation exerted a great influence as a possible model of what modern poetry can be like and that its very text became part of the intertextual system of *Hungarian* poems as well. Translating poetry has been considered (ever since the late eighteenth century) a very important device of Hungarian poets for experimenting with their own poetry and with the possibilities of poetic language in general; moreover, translated poems were often

---

[93] T. S. Eliot, "A puszta ország", trans. János Szász in *T. S. Eliot legszebb versei*, p. 56.

[94] T. S. Eliot, "A Kopár Föld", in T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land" / *A kopár föld*, trans. Adrian (Kégl) Krudy (Hunting Valley, Ohio, 2006), p. 35.

[95] T. S. Eliot, "A Kopár Föld", trans. József Szili in *Angol költők antológiája*, ed. András Kappanyos (Budapest: Magyar Könyvklub, 2000), p. 446.

[96] *Világirodalmi antológia*, vol. VI/1, eds. Tibor Lutter and Albert Gyergyai (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1962), pp. 308–310. Cf. József Szili, "Pound-recepciónk pikantériái", *Literatura* 4 (2009) 459–479.

[97] István Vas, "Vallomás Eliotról: 1. Eliot fordítása közben," in Eliot, *Válogatott versek*, p. 11.

considered an integral part of poetry written in Hungarian.[98] Hence it is to this integrated system of poems both written or translated that we can apply Eliot's classic view of the modifications that take place when a new work of art enters the existing order of all the previous ones,[99] and we can reconsider the arrival of a new translation by focusing on the changes brought about by its allusions, which I take to be the most telling examples of all the negotiations and mutual adjustments between the old and the new. To allude is to let predecessors speak in a new context and establish new contacts; hence Weöres's and Vas's respective translations of "The Waste Land" had very different chances to establish contacts (in readers' minds) with other Hungarian poems, especially with those which were reworkings of Ezekiel's vision or other prophetic texts. Just as the reference in "The Waste Land" to Ezekiel's vision may be read as belonging to those poetic texts in English that allude to it, from Dryden's "To the Pious Memory of the Accomplisht Young Lady, Mrs. Anne Killigrew" ("When rattling *Bones* together fly / From the four Corners of the Skie, / When Sinews o'er the Skeletons are spread, / Those cloath'd with Flesh, and Life inspires the Dead;") to W. B. Yeats's play *The Dreaming of the Bones* ("Have not old writers said / That dizzy dreams can spring / From the dry bones of the dead?"[100]), the allusion to Ezekiel in a Hungarian translation of "The Waste Land" may be read as belonging to a rich poetic tradition of alluding, in various ways, to the same prophetic text.

If preserved in Hungarian translation, the "dry bones" can establish contacts not only with Vas's own poetic reworking of this biblical scene in "Ezékiel," but with earlier references to Ezekiel in Milán Füst's poetry, and with some later Hungarian poems such as Dezső Tandori's "Ezékiel lordja" ("Ezekiel's Lord"), published in 1996, and Flóra Imre's "Ezékiel," in 2003.[101] The latter is especially relevant because it starts with the well-known scene ("Látám akkor a száraz csontok völgyét" "And then I saw the valley of dry bones"), but only for the purpose of undermining the authority of Ezekiel's God: at the end she has him declare that he would resurrect the dry bones only for the sake of his own great name, not for their benefit ("Nem timiattatok / teszem ezt, csak önnön nagy nevemért"). To some extent this relies on Ezekiel 37:13–14, where the Lord says that He would do something only He could do and this would make Him recognisable ("And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you out of your grave, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord"), but the

[98] Cf. Szabó, pp. 7–15.
[99] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," p. 15.
[100] My thanks to Anna Kőszeghy, a PhD student of Eötvös Loránd University, for discovering this allusion.
[101] Dezső Tandori, *A Semmi Kéz* (Budapest: Magvető, 1996); Flóra Imre, "Ezékiel," *Holmi* 12 (2003) 1508–1509.

paraphrase exaggerates it so as to make the resurrection of the bones a mere act of self-aggrandisement, something He would do *only* in order to be recognised and praised. Vas did not live to see this poem, but he appreciated Flóra Imre's early poetry; likewise Flóra Imre admired Vas's poetry and reworked some of his poems. The difference between their respective reworkings of Ezekiel 37 is telling: he uses it for a sublime, if muted, celebration of the potential new life inherent in the tragedy of 1956 and his own ultimate reconciliation with his nation; she paraphrases it to give voice, however indirectly, to her playfully yet bitterly mutinous sentiments against an insensitive and egocentric God.

The allusion in "The Waste Land" could have entered this intertextual system of allusions to Ezekiel in modern Hungarian poetry. In a wider context one can also argue that Vas's allusion to Ezekiel could have established contacts with classic nineteenth-century Hungarian poetry, too, especially with Vas's own favourite, János Arany's *Keveháza* (published in 1853), an epic poem that visualised the death and revival of the Huns' army by metaphorically alluding to archetypal scenes of resurrection, both that of Jesus and of "an exceeding great army" in Ezekiel 37:10.[102] Moreover, Ezekiel's question "Can these bones live?" had a special relevance for Hungarian poetry after the suppression of the 1848 revolution, just as after the Second World War or 1956, conjuring up images of a resurrection both desired and feared, thematising wishful memories of departed friends, and evoking not only an atavistic fear and abhorrence of the return of the dead but also a sense of shame and guilt in the survivors themselves. (János Arany's poems after 1849 were haunted by images of his friend Sándor Petőfi killed in the fight for independence; the poems of a later survivor, István Vas, were haunted by Miklós Radnóti's death in 1944 and the exhumation of his body from a mass grave.) What these poems have to negotiate is dangerously near to "the return of the repressed", in a psychoanalytical sense, all those images the survivor tries not to see, and all the unavoidable guilt, shame, anxiety and self-accusations that surface in a dim awareness of something unsettled and unsettling.

And it is at the moment of entering Hungarian poetry that we can see how greatly "The Waste Land"'s allusion to Ezekiel differs from the way twentieth-century Hungarian poems incorporate texts borrowed from Ezekiel and other Old Testament prophets. The allusion to Ezekiel's vision is one of the important motifs in "The Waste Land," one of the prophetic voices strengthened by Pound's excisions of other parts of the poem,[103] but there are other discernible voices, too, including that of a narrator, in sharp contrast with the modest way twentieth-century Hungarian poets withdraw or disappear when they give the

---

[102] István Vas, *Összegyűjtött munkái*, vol. 11, *Nehéz szerelem, Második rész: A félbeszakadt nyomozás* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1983), pp. 173–182.
[103] Cf. Martz, pp. 24–30.

floor to Ezekiel or any other major prophet. Eliot's allusions to Ezekiel, whether by the phrase "Son of man" or "dry bones" rely on tiny fragments of the biblical text, and not on sustained quotations or paraphrase, yet the title of an essay on "The Waste Land," "T. S. Eliot among the Prophets", is witty but not grotesque, because Eliot's poem is still within the citational discourse of the biblical tradition, and it can indeed be read, among other things, as a latter-day condemnation of the state of the world, a curse in a different idiom but not far in format and self-assurance from that of the biblical prophets. This is partly because this poem seems to display the scattered and fragmentary ruins of a civilisation, and (as Leavis pointed it out in 1932[104]) it seems to suggest that we cannot make any comprehensive or integrated sense of the remnants of this civilisation any more. Frank Kermode rightly criticised the facile habit of using this poem merely as "a myth of decadence", an occasion for the "chatter about breakdown and dissociation", and rightly insisted that we can read it both as "an image of imperial catastrophe" and as "an imperial epic",[105] but one could add that its fragmentary allusions to prophets are also enigmatic enough to be read both ways. Vas, on the contrary, paraphrases Ezekiel at length, the entire meaningful unit of 37:1–14, but this is precisely what would have made it very difficult to set the paraphrase in a text of the poet's own style. Quoted at length, the utterance of a biblical prophet is a hard act to follow, and this may explain both the sense of inferiority and the anxiety of influence[106] in modern Hungarian poets who, being aware of the perils of cultural memory, would rather be silent than make their voice comparable to that of Ezekiel, Isaiah or Jeremiah.

Twentieth-century Hungarian poets reworking the biblical utterances of the Hebrew prophets tend either to downgrade their own comments in the poems or simply abstain from any utterance of their own in the text. Endre Ady, arguably the greatest Hungarian poet in the first two decades of the twentieth century, was cut out for the prophetic role in his disposition and diction alike, yet his poem titled "Ésaiás könyvének margójára" ("On the margin of the Book of Isaiah") reveals a gesture both ambitious and deferential, juxtaposing his text with that of Isaiah yet at the same time confining his own work to the status of marginalia. Similarly, Ady claims to have taken the motto of his poem "Mai próféta átka" ("The curse of a present-day prophet") from Ezekiel 7, envisaging what the condemned state of the world will look like, but the poem itself talks about the speaker's lack of strength to curse the infernal, humiliating present

---

[104] F. R. Leavis, "The Waste Land," in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Hugh Kenner (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962), pp. 89–90.

[105] Frank Kermode, "A Babylonish Dialect," in T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land"*: A Casebook*, eds. C. B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 231–234.

[106] Cf. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 140–141.

state of the world, to curse it as the prophets had done. The speaker of Ady's celebrated poem at the beginning of his *Új versek* (New Poems) in 1906 declares himself to be the son of Gog and Magog (from Ezekiel 38:1–23 and 39:1–29), and challenges his environment to persecute him for his nonconformist poetry, but this poem contains no textual citation of any prophetic book, hence the poet's own utterances have no formidable rival from the past. On the other hand in István Vas's poem "Ezékiel" it is Ezekiel himself whom we hear speaking, he is quoting God as well, and the entire text is a paraphrase of the words of Ezekiel 37:1–14, so the authorial presence of the poet is revealed only indirectly, in cuts, additions and substitutions. In his own poetry Vas is very far from the role and language of the prophets, but (or therefore) here he is eager to give the word to Ezekiel and let him speak, without blending his own characteristic utterances with the sublime words of the prophet. Sándor Weöres uses the same method in his poem "Jajgatás" ("Wailing"), reworking a chapter from the Lamentations of Jeremiah. At first sight Miklós Radnóti's poem "Töredék" ("Fragment") seems to do just the opposite, ending exactly when Isaiah would (or could) start pronouncing his formidable curse. Finally the poet gives the word to Isaiah,[107] but Isaiah does not begin to speak. Moreover, as the last lines actually say that *only* Isaiah could find a curse appropriately formidable here, this counterfactual statement would allow, at most, the *quoting* of a curse by Isaiah from the Bible, but not the *inventing* of one worthy of him. There is a difference between just alluding to an Old Testament prophet and letting him speak by quotation or paraphrase; in the latter case it is difficult to continue the poem because it would require a poetic language strong enough to live up to the preceding text. The steepness of this challenge was felt by many, and the ensuing sense of inferiority surfaced in various ways in self-reflections as well.[108] It is in this context of modern Hungarian poetry that the allusion in "The Waste Land" to Ezekiel's valley of dry bones reveals a wholly different approach to biblical texts.

---

[107] Győző Ferencz, *Radnóti Miklós élete és költészete: Kritikai életrajz* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005), p. 655.
[108] Cf. Komlós, p. 312.

Gabriella Hartvig

Shandean originality and humour in Ferenc Kölcsey's "Foreword"

Laurence Sterne's narrative strategy of experimenting with the digressive manner of writing was marked by Hungarian critics shortly after he came to be known in European national literatures as the prototype of the humorous writer. His famous explanation in *Tristram Shandy* of digressions without which his work cannot function was commented upon by literary historians and philosophers as influential as Johann Joachim Eschenburg, Friedrich Bouterwek or Jean Paul Richter. Eschenburg, for instance, in his nine-volume *Beispielsammlung* (1794), cites chapter 22 of the first volume of *Tristram* to define the *witziger Schriftsteller*, that is, the witty writer: "Digressions, incontestably, are the sun-shine;– they are the life, the soul of reading; take them out of this book for instance,– you might as well take the book along with them …"[1] Ferenc Kölcsey (1790–1838), politician, poet, philosopher, and literary critic, received Sterne's works through the filter of early German aesthetics, which established Sterne's extraordinary fame as the founder of the humorous novel.[2] Largely relying on and copying from German early Romantic thinkers, Hungarian critics developed their own theory of the humorous writer. The first extensive aesthetical approach to the discussion of humour belongs to József Dessewffy ("A kedvi-csiklandról, vagy Kedvi-csapongásról," 1825) who adopts Lessing's theory of the humorous character.[3] The quotation from *Tristram Shandy* in Dessewffy's text illustrates the point of a whimsical work: "Sterne, for example, wrote a book where one can only find prefaces

---

[1]   Johann Joachim Eschenburg, *Beispielsammlung zur Theorie und Literatur des schönen Wissenschaften* (Berlin and Stettin: Friedrich Nicolai, 1794), vol. 8, p. 245. Also see, Melvyn New and Joan New, eds. *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne* [*Florida Sterne*]*,* 8 vols. (Gainesville, Florida: University Presses of Florida, 1978–2009), vol. 1, p. 81.

[2]   See Gabriella Hartvig, "Sterne and German Aesthetics," *The Shandean* 18 (2007) 23–32. In the Reception volume on Sterne, John Neubauer and Neil Stewart describe in detail the influence of Friedrich Schlegel's concept of humour in Jean Paul ("Shandean Theories of the Novel," in *The Reception of Laurence Sterne in Europe*, eds. Peter de Voogd and John Neubauer (London: Continuum, 2004), 259–279, 315–316 (notes), pp. 259–265.) I am grateful to Noémi Najbauer for her helpful comments on the text.

[3]   József Dessewffy (1771–1843), politician, writer of *Bártfai levelek* (Letters from Bártfa), editor of the journal *Felső Magyar Országi Minerva*, and a prominent exponent of the Hungarian language reform.

and digressions."[4] Humour, as is also explained in German moralizing theories of character, refers to that unique disposition of the mind which creates whimsical works. The character's abrupt changes of feelings and his ruling passion are also mirrored in the unconventional form of the text. In Dessewffy's reading, *Tristram Shandy* becomes a genuinely humorous work where the reader encounters humorous and at the same time whimsical characters whose nature is marked by comical as well as noble features. The mingling of humour with sentimental feelings is what constitutes humorous characters, and, as Dessewffy points out, that is how Yorick's sympathetic feelings towards the begging monk, for instance, become the metaphor for true sentimentalism in *A Sentimental Journey.*

The earliest mention of Sterne by Kölcsey can be found in his oft-quoted 1815 letter to Ferenc Kazinczy where he lists his favourite authors and, at the same time, notes with regret that the best foreign authors will not be properly read, least of all imitated, until the beginning of the following century. Speaking of Kazinczy's Ossianic translation (in which he calls Ossian a "Caledonian German"), Kölcsey complains bitterly that only a few will understand the French spirit of Marmontel. Then he continues: "For the same reason, I cannot promise much popularity of the English Yorick among our countrymen. I say this with all the more pain because *Cervantes*, *Swift*, *Pope* and *Sterne* are especially dear to me."[5] Although Sterne's works cannot be found in the reconstructed list of Kölcsey's personal library,[6] by the time he wrote his pieces either on humour (see, "A leányőrző" [The Guardian of the Young Lady]) or in the humorous manner ("Előbeszéd" [Foreword]), he must have had thorough knowledge of Sterne's works. In the narrative piece entitled "Foreword," one can find a serious attempt at ironic elaboration and a profound interest in the tradition that came to be labelled "humorous writing." Kölcsey borrows the distinction between "humour" and "whim" from Jean Paul but his views are heavily indebted to the aesthetic concepts of other German thinkers, too.[7] It is Jean Paul, Schmidt-Hidding argues, who offers the earliest explanation of the true correspondence between "wit" and "humour," stating that "wit" is the counterpart of "humour."[8] In what follows, I would like to

---

[4] [József Dessewffy], "A kedvi-csiklandról, vagy Kedvi–csapongásról," *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* 4 (1825), 63–84, p. 67. "Sterne p. o. eggy merő Előljáró-beszédekből, és eltérésekből álló munkát irt." All translations are my own.

[5] Ferenc Kölcsey, "Kazinczy Ferenchez," in *Kölcsey Ferenc összes művei*, 3 vols., eds. József Szauder and Mrs. József Szauder (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1960), vol. 1, 169–172, p. 171: "Ezen az okon igérek, még az angol Yoriknak is kevés keletet hazánkfiainál, s ezt annál fájdalmasabban mondom, mivel *Cervantes*, *Swift*, *Pope* és *Sterne* nekem rendkivül kedvesek."

[6] See Zoltán G. Szabó, *Kölcsey Ferenc könyvtára és olvasmányai* (Budapest: OSZK–Gondolat, 2009).

[7] See Béla Kelemen, "Kölcsey a komikumról," *Egyetemes Philologiai Közlöny* 18 (1894), 649–662, p. 652. Kelemen draws special attention to Kölcsey's borrowings from Bouterwek's *Aesthetik* (2 vols., Leipzig, 1806), and he even compares passages where Kölcsey starts out from Bouterwek's chapter on the comic ("Vom Komischen"), in order later to deviate from him: see Kelemen, p. 656.

[8] Wolfgang Schmidt-Hidding, *Europäische Schlüsselwörter: Humor und Witz* (Munich: Max Hueber

closely analyse Kölcsey's "Foreword" in an effort to show how the image of Sterne was understood in the context of the aesthetic idea of the "launiger Schriftsteller" (whimsical writer) and how Kölcsey tried to imitate Sterne's manner of writing in his own narrative piece by applying German aesthetic ideas.

THE THEORETICAL BASIS FOR KÖLCSEY'S APPROACH TO HUMOROUS WRITING

Bernhard Fabian points out the transition between contemporary English and German interpretations of Sterne's works: "From novelist, Sterne had turned philosopher […] The dissociation of the philosophical message from the mimetic medium appears to be a distinctive feature of the German reception of Sterne. It can be accounted for by the fact that, while *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey* were post-classical literary events in England, they were pre-classical ones in Germany. In the English perspective *Tristram Shandy* appears as an attempt to parody, and thereby to destroy, neo-classical norms and forms. […] In the German context such associations disappeared. Instead, 'original' qualities (in the contemporary German sense of the word) came into prominence."[9] Sterne's works, Fabian explains, were read as the most fitting examples of Edward Young's explication of "original composition" in his *Night Thoughts*.[10] Jean Paul's concept of humour elaborated in his *Vorschule der Aesthetik* (1804, 1816) makes a philosopher out of Sterne in the German reception and his works start to be discussed in the context of Romanticism. Margaret Hale, the English translator of Jean Paul's *Vorschule*, points out the individual nature of Sterne's experimental style: "Jean Paul comes closest to defining a literary mode, one which his own works frequently exemplify […]. Here the poet becomes what he ridicules, making himself ridiculous […]. And this is what saves Sterne's writings for the romantics: this reflexive and subjective way of writing becomes the 'romantic' form of the ridiculous."[11] Since Sterne is one of the chief examples in Kölcsey's study on wit and humour, the English satirist, we might say, becomes a Romantic writer, which probably contributes much to his success in European national literatures (including Hungarian literature), which wanted to establish their own canon of

---

Verlag, 1963), p. 173. Also see Jean Paul, *Horn of Oberon. Jean Paul Richter's* School for Aesthetics. Translated with an introduction by Margaret R. Hale (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1973), p. xxxiii.

[9] Bernhard Fabian, "Tristram Shandy and Parson Yorick among some German Greats," in *The Winged Skull. Papers from the Laurence Sterne Bicentenary Conference,* eds. Arthur M. Cash and John M. Stedmond (London: Methuen, 1971), 194–209, p. 203.

[10] Fabian, p.197.

[11] Jean Paul, pp. xxxi–xxxii. *Tristram Shandy* also appears several times in Jean Paul's *Kleine Nachschule zur ästhetischen Vorschule* (1825), an extension to the enlarged second edition of the *Vorschule* in 1813.

the modern novel. Kölcsey, I shall argue, intended to import the originality of Sterne's humorous way of writing into Hungarian.

Two years after Dessewffy's analysis of humour, there appeared a study on the comic by Kölcsey entitled "A leányőrző. A komikumról" (The guardian of the young lady: on the comic), in which a few allusions to the English humorist can also be found. Kölcsey's theoretical introduction to the art of the comic was occasioned by the play *A leányőrző*, a comedy written by his contemporary Károly Kisfaludy. As Béla Kelemen points out, Kölcsey's critical approach is largely a patchwork of definitions and ideas borrowed from Jean Paul's *Vorschule* as well as from Bouterweck's *Aesthetik* (1806).[12] Curiously, humorous writers, Sterne included, do not fare well in Kölcsey's analysis: he refers first to that category of the comic which is the naive comic, the humorist wearing the mask of a child. However, if the humorist's deceptions are too transparent, his allusions too pointed, he becomes ridiculous and cannot fool the reader. To these all too artificial modes of the comic belongs purely verbal wit, which is an unnatural and exaggerated effort to seek the ridiculous.[13] In a reference to Sterne, Kölcsey, to illustrate his disapproval, draws a parallel between the misshapen nose of the narrator in one of András Fáy's short stories and the flattened nose of Tristram Shandy. He remarks that "the story of the unfortunate nose reminds me of Tristram Shandy and that type of the comic to whom we have often referred recently, namely the humorous".[14] Here Kölcsey alludes to the beginning of Fáy's *Mesék és allegóriák* (Tales and Allegories), where the narrator introduces himself as a whimsical writer. Similarly to Tristram, who traces all his misfortunes back to his unfortunate conception and subsequent birth during which his nose was flattened by a misapplication of the forceps, the protagonist in Fáy's tale ascribes his eccentricity to an accident that had befallen him before his birth: his brother accidentally dropped a big pumpkin on his mother's belly when she was pregnant with the narrator. The pumpkin fell on the very part where he was lying with his nose protruding.[15] Sterne's novel was one of Fáy's favourite books and this short story is one of the few early imitations of *Tristram Shandy*, together with some of Kölcsey's pieces, which also show parallels with the Shandean manner of writing.

---

[12] See Kelemen, especially pp. 651–659. Kelemen adds that while Kölcsey derives much from his German sources many of his ideas and conclusions must be regarded as original.

[13] See Kölcsey, *Kölcsey Ferenc összes művei*, vol. 1, p. 610: "Ezen megjegyzés alá tartozik gyakran a csupa szóbeli elméskedés is, ha benne visszatoló útálattal érezteti magát a nevetségnek keresése."

[14] See Kölcsey, *Kölcsey Ferenc összes művei*, vol. 1., p. 610: "[…] a szerencsétlen történetű orr Tristram Shandyre emlékeztet, s ezen név által a komikum egy oly nemére, mely közöttünk bizonyos idő olta emlegettetni kezd: arra tudnillik, mely a *humortól* neveztetik." Also quoted in Kelemen, p. 655.

[15] András Fáy, "A mese-költő és maecenása. Életrajzaik," in *Fáy András szépirodalmi összes munkái*, 8 vols. (Budapest: Geibel, 1844), vol. 1, VIII–XXII, p. XI. Also see, Gabriella Hartvig, *Laurence Sterne Magyarországon 1790–1860* (Budapest: Argumentum, 2000), pp. 126–133.

KÖLCSEY'S APPLICATION OF THE THEORY OF HUMOUR: "ELŐSZÓ" (*FOREWORD*, 1823, 1826)

Kölcsey's "Előszó" (Foreword), written three years before his critical piece on the comic, is an imaginary introduction to a never-written work offering a humorous description of the difficulties of writing and also a complaint about the infinite lack of understanding on the part of the audience. In its narrative manner and self-referential commentaries, the piece shows striking similarities to the digressive and eccentric style, as well as to the metafictional commentary, found in *Tristram Shandy*. Although the text has been analysed on narratological as well as deconstructive grounds,[16] here I would like to argue that Kölcsey exploited much of what he had learnt from his favourite British author, who, as Melvyn New points out,[17] also borrowed the idea of misplacing his preface, probably from Swift.

The "Foreword" consists of three parts with three different narrative voices: the chief part of the text is written in the name of Andor Dörgényfalvi Dörgény (Mezei guesses that the character was most probably modelled on Gábor Döbrentei)[18] which narrative then shifts into an "anti-critical" response to, or rather, "non-review" of Dörgényfalvi's composition, signed by one "Cselkövi," written at the request of the journal *Élet és Literatúra* (1826). Linked to Dörgényfalvi's narrative, we can also find an annotation, a footnote, which expresses his ambivalent feelings toward the author of the "Foreword," suggesting that he may not wish to ever complete his odd narrative. The impersonal voice identifies itself in the footnote as "A' Redactio," which might mean the editorial board of the journal, whose obligation it seems to be to inform the reader of the incomplete nature of Dörgényi's "Foreword" and also to appeal to the reader's patience.

László Gyapay, the editor of Kölcsey's critical and aesthetical writings, found no information as to the authorship of the different parts: Cselkövi, the writer of the review-attachment stands for Kölcsey (it is an anagram of his own name, and he sometimes used it as a pen-name), and, for lack of evidence to the contrary, "A' Redactio," is also assumed to be Kölcsey's composition, and an organic part of the narrative.[19] The *topos* of a misplaced foreword dates back to the early forerunners of the novelistic tradition in prose fiction. One can find parallel examples, for instance in *A Sentimental Journey*, where, after several chapters on

---

[16] See Márta Mezei, "Az *Előbeszéd* és a *Vanitatum Vanitas*," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 107.2–3 (2003) 297–316; Csaba Onder, "Retorika és irónia (Az Előbeszéd Kölcsey kritikai beszédmódjában)," *Alföld* 61.1 (1999) 41–61.

[17] See *Florida Sterne*, vol. 3, p. 236.

[18] Mezei, p. 301. The name Dörgényfalvi can also be interpreted as a high-flown exaggeration of Döbrentei's name.

[19] Ferenc Kölcsey, "Előbeszéd," in *Kölcsey Ferenc. Irodalmi kritikák és esztétikai írások I. 1808–1823,* ed. László Gyapay (Budapest: Universitas, 2003), 111–21, 477–93 (notes), p. 479.

Calais, Yorick composes his preface while sitting in a "desobligeant," or in the third volume of *Tristram Shandy,* where Tristram eventually finds a little time to take a rest from his characters: "All my heroes are off my hands;— 'tis the first time I have had a moment to spare, —and I'll make use of it, and write my preface".[20] That Sterne's narrative strategy is also a borrowing is pointed out by Melvyn New, who, in a note on Sterne's displacement of his preface, quotes Swift's opinion about the removal of a preface from its normal place:

> In *Tale of a Tub*, Swift comments on the fact that the matter of his "Digression in the Modern Kind" (sec. V) would have been better suited for a preface; but, he goes on, "I here think fit to lay hold on that great and honourable Privilege of being the *Last Writer*; I claim an absolute Authority in Right, as the *freshest Modern,* which gives me a Despotick Power over all Authors before me. In the Strength of which Title, I do utterly disapprove and declare against that pernicious Custom, of making the Preface a Bill of Fare to the Book."[21]

Kölcsey's "Foreword", as the title in itself proves, was meant to be a critical preface to a larger work which was probably never written. For want of an existing book, however, it must stand on its own, self-consciously calling attention to its presence, which – if the missing text meant to accompany the preface never existed – seems to be a narrative strategy even more radical (and more humorous) than can be found among the great examples of the early English novel.

If we accept Gyapay's argument and read Cselkövi's ironic review and the editorial footnote simply as two additional narrative voices belonging to the same writer, the text of the "Foreword" can be contextualized as a part of the tradition of footnotes in fictional texts where literary annotations appear as the counterparts of scholarly references in critical discourses.[22] The impossibility of identifying the different speakers in the seemingly extra-authorial annotations in Kölcsey's "Foreword", once again, leads us back to *Tristram Shandy*, where we can also find instances of writerly notes keyed to the story which do not merely shift into third person but also question the authority of the narrator as, for instance, in Sterne's note – another fine example of his unacknowledged borrowings – in volume two where he corrects Tristram: "the author is here twice mistaken […] the second mistake is, that this *Lithopaedus* is not an author, but a drawing of a petrified child."[23] The footnote signed "A' Redactio" in Kölcsey's text serves not

---

[20] Sterne, Laurence, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Paul Goring (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 10; *Florida Sterne*, vol. 1, p. 226.

[21] See *Florida Sterne*, vol. 3, p. 236.

[22] See Shari Benstock, "At the Margin of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text," *PMLA* 98.2 (1983), 204–225.

[23] *Florida Sterne,* vol. 1, p. 176. Benstock also refers to the note (p. 209). In his scholarly commentary, Melvyn New offers the fantastic history of Sterne's allusion: "In particular, Sterne's

only to undermine the reliability of the narrator but also to call into question the seemingly serious tone of the narrative, and to subvert its status by casting doubt on its credibility. The writer's comments on his own book, his detailed inventory of problems emerging during the creative process, his ironic manner of addressing the reader, and his self-deprecation are the narrative techniques that together constitute the main characteristics of whimsical, in other words, humorous writing.

The self-referential narrative of Dörgényfalvi, the main portion of the "Foreword", consists largely of the narrator's rather pessimistic statements about the impossibility of coming up with a good story. He also prophesies the negative, or rather, the lack of reception of his not-yet-written work which will most likely, he conjectures, be read by no-one. Those few who might read it will only find faults with it. He divides the critics of his future book into different types of non-reader: the first group will not even open the book, telling themselves that only "their mighty selves"[24] can write good books. The second group will merely cast a glance at the title page to find out whether it was written in Hungarian because they are interested solely in foreign works. The antiquarian will open the book at the back, where the Index can be found, and will then throw the book under his desk. Grammarians, "palaeologists" and "neologists" will read the book backwards, from the end to the beginning, looking only for the "iotas" and "ypsilons" and will complain about the lack of Hellenisms and French expressions.[25] Yet another group of critics will miss the obligatory expression of "glorious" attached to the phrase "our nation." The uneasy narrative stance reflected in the shifts between the narrative locutions on the textual level is also revealed in the anxiety expressed by the narrator, Dörgényfalvi, concerning the quality of his work. He ponders the merits and fate of his writing, in an attempt to decide whether or not he should consign it to the flames. In the end he chooses, here quoting "the great professor from Bologna," to have it printed because, "when I die, all that is good will perish with me!"[26] Dörgényfalvi then explains why he decided to become a writer: the prospect of eternal fame and

---

footnote here alludes to Burton's having caught Smellie in the rather unfortunate error of mistaking the title of an illustration for the title of a book […]. For Sterne, whose penchant for index learning is nowhere more apparent than in this chapter of *Tristram Shandy*, a parody of Burton's irate attacks must have seemed particularly appropriate[…]." (*Florida Sterne* vol. 3, p. 200).

[24] Kölcsey, "Előbeszéd," p. 110: "Lesz valaki, ki a' könyvnek tábláját sem üti fel, szentűl hívén azt, hogy az ő becses *Énjén* kívűl senkiben másban nincs idvesség."

[25] The reform of the language formed part of a larger cultural programme by which György Bessenyei and other writers of the Hungarian Enlightenment, under the leadership of Ferencz Kazinczy, tried to modernize the language through linguistic debates and translations made from the finest pieces of Western European literature.

[26] Kölcsey, "Előbeszéd," p. 111: "[…]'s azon sohajtással kellett volna meghalnom, mellyel ama' Bolognai Professornak: *hajh, mi sok jó vész el együtt velem!*"

self-love induced him to start writing about diverse subjects which happened to appeal to his mind. As to the nature of his narrative he confesses:

> But, alas! I am often possessed by humour wherefore I cannot follow any fundamental principles in my writing. At one moment I am more in love with a certain idea than Belurgerius was with his Homer: the next moment I choose the contrary as my standard. …. In short, every single page of my writing is at odds with the next in the manner of two, contrary judicial allegations; or the different parts of eclectic philosophy.[27]

Sterne's most noticeable narrative techniques are his digressions and uncertainty about how to proceed: this kind of narrative became labelled as "whimsical writing." Tristram, like the narrator of the "Foreword", does not have any idea in which direction his story progresses and the only principle of his story-telling seems to be its unpredictability:

> What these perplexities of my uncle *Toby* were,— 'tis impossible for you to guess;—if you could,—I should blush; not as a relation,—not as a man,—nor even as a woman,—but I should blush as an author; inasmuch as I set no small store by myself upon this very account, that my reader has never yet been able to guess at any thing. And in this, Sir, I am of so nice and singular a humour, that if I thought you was able to form the least judgment or probable conjecture to yourself, of what was to come in the next page,—I would tear it out of my book.[28]

Another oft-quoted example in *Tristram Shandy* to illustrate the same point is found in the fourth book, in chapter X, which is about chapters and which Tristram holds to be his best chapter in the whole book:

> The duce of any other rule have I to govern myself by in this affair—and if I had one—as I do all things out of all rule—I would twist it and tear it to pieces, and throw it into the fire when I had done—Am I warm? I am, and the cause demands it—a pretty story! is a man to follow rules—or rules to follow him?[29]

---

[27] Kölcsey, "Előbeszéd," p. 113: "De, fájdalom! engem a' humor gyakorta megszáll, 's így lőn, hogy írásaimban állandó principiumokat nem követheték. Most egy bizonyos gondolatba szerelmesb voltam, mint Belurgerius a' maga Homérjába: majd épen az ellenkezőjét választottam sinórmértékül. […] Szóval írásomnak minden lapja úgy állott a' másik után: mint két ellenkező Prokátori Allegatió; vagy mint valamelly Eclectica Philosophiának szakaszai." In his note (p. 486, see note 113.6) Gyapay traces the meaning of the word "humour" as far back as the Galenian theory of humours although Kölcsey must clearly have had the Jean Paulian understanding of humour in mind.

[28] *Florida Sterne* vol. 1, p. 89.

[29] *Florida Sterne* vol. 1, p. 337.

In addition to making use of the above techniques and thematic elements, Kölcsey also wishes to call attention to the Shandean tradition of typographical pranks, the abundance of dashes and punctuation marks: if one wishes to make his criticism more biting and has run out of breath, Kölcsey recommends the use of twice as many question marks, lacunae, exclamation marks and dashes:

> Deletions are—oh, deletions excel all! Do you find yourself incapable of squeezing any more thoughts into your lines? You do not need to stop. A deletion or two will make up for four times as many thoughts. It is a priceless art, especially for dramatists. Without it, how many scenes would remain empty! How many soliloquies would turn into mere walking and snuff-taking!! how many– – –!!![30]

The difficulty of understanding Sterne's unfinished sentences, aposiopeses and ekphrases, was remarked upon as soon as the first translation of *Tristram Shandy* into German was prepared by Johann Friedrich Zückert – the original of the last volume of his German translation, characteristically, later proved to be based on a spurious English imitation. Zückert's translation was severely criticized and was held to be an unfortunate undertaking full of mistranslated parts. In his "Vorrede" to the seventh and eighth volumes (1765) Zückert confesses that he would never have undertaken such an enterprise if he had foreseen the problems that he was to encounter during his work. He refers to Sterne's peculiar way of writing: his broken sentences, complicated structures, provincialisms, and his allusions to undetectable and long-forgotten authors and events about which even an Englishman must have been at a loss.[31] The significance of Zückert's preface lies in his introduction of *Tristram Shandy* as a humorous ("lächerliche") and whimsical ("mit einer ihm ganz eigenen Laune") work which, in turn, makes its writer the prototype of the English humorist on the Continent.[32] Kölcsey may

---

[30] Kölcsey, "Előbeszéd," p. 118: "A' Húzások pedig – oh, a' Húzások mindenek felett vagynak! Nem tudsz többé gondolatot tömni soraidba? Nem szükség elakadnod. Egy vagy két Húzás négy annyi gondolatnak helyét is kipótolhatja. Megbecsülhetetlen mesterség kivált Drámaírónak. Hány scénák maradnának e' nélkül üresen! Hány Monolog változnék puszta sétálássá és tobákszippantássá!! hány – – –!!!"

[31] On Zückert's translation see also: Harvey Waterman Thayer, *Laurence Sterne in Germany* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), pp. 12–18.

[32] "Vorrede des Uebersetssers." In *Das Leben und die Meynungen des Herrn Tristram Shandy.* Second edition (Berlin: Gottlieb August Langen, 1771), vol. 7: "Wenn der Uebersetzer alle die Schwürigkeiten vorausgesehen hätte, die er nachher bey der Uebersetzung häufig gefunden, so würde er sich nie an ein critisches Buch gewagt haben. Der Verfasser desselben, welcher der verstorbene Sterne in London gewesen ist, hat ohne Zweifel die Absicht gehabt, die unter seinen Landesleuten eingeriffenen Thorheiten auf eine lächerliche Art, mit einer ihm ganz eigenen Laune, zu schildern, und zugleich ernsthafte Wahrheiten unter seinen Scherzen zu verbreiten" ("Vorrede des Uebersetssers"). The second, revised edition of Zückert's translation, with the spurious last volume, is available at the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, under the shelf mark "Akad Germ. Ir. 0.1078".

have been well aware of the German reception of the book and, when imitating Sterne, he explored the text with a keen sense of his own competence in testing new techniques of eccentric, and therefore humorous, ways of writing.

In Cselkövi's review-attachment to Dörgényfalvi's narrative, we can also find an allusion to Swift, in which he likens Dörgényfalvi's pompous manner of speech to that of Emperor Charles V and Lemuel Gulliver. The passage is about how Dörgényfalvi, because he was raised to such a high position, decided to neglect the cultivation of Hungarian literature in the future, so much so, that, being now accustomed to the German language, he speaks only broken Hungarian and even that only when it is absolutely necessary. The reviewer then begs the reader, "not to lose heart regarding the publication of the work that was promised in the Foreword."[33] The intertextual reference is to a notable passage in the fourth voyage of Gulliver where – in a comparison of the Houyhnhnm language with German – he mentions Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, who said, "That if he were to speak to his Horse, it would be in *High Dutch*" (IV, iii, 2).[34] The parallel, Gyapay points out, is drawn by Kölcsey because Charles V did not speak German.[35] In 1823 Gábor Döbrentei (if we accept the view that he embodies the character of Dörgényfalvi) moved to Vienna and lived there for two years, which may have been the basis for Kölcsey's assumption that Döbrentei preferred the German language. *Gulliver's Travels* is also mentioned in the piece written on the comic ("A leányőrző", 1827) in which Kölcsey emphasizes the domestic nature of comedy, as opposed to the universality of tragedy. Comic authors are bound by the time in which they live and also by the nation for which they write. To illustrate his point, he refers to Gulliver's voyage to Laputa, emphasising that Swift's satire was always pointed at England: "Swift, even when he sets up his scenery on the floating island, incessantly keeps his eye on the English."[36] The reason Kölcsey offers examples from the English humorists' works instead of providing a critique of Kisfaludy's play, as the title of the piece would indicate, was to avoid Kisfaludy's anger: "This misunderstanding became a torture. I speak about the comic in general in order not to offend him, yet he sought to find hidden arrows shot at him everywhere. Did I ever say that his piece was not domestic? I only maintained that what is comic has to be familiar regarding its subject."[37]

---

[33]   "Kérettetik azért a nemes közönség, hogy az előbeszédben megígért munkának megjelenése felől kétségbe esni ne terheltessék" (p. 452).

[34]   See also: Gabriella Hartvig, "Swift in Hungary," in *The Reception of Jonathan Swift on the Continent of Europe*, ed. Hermann J. Real (London, New York: Continuum, 2005), 225–37, p. 236; and Gyapay's note in *Kölcsey Ferenc. Irodalmi kritikák és esztétikai írások*, p. 491.

[35]   *Kölcsey Ferenc. Irodalmi kritikák és esztétikai írások*, p. 491.

[36]   Kölcsey, *Kölcsey Ferenc összes művei*, vol. 1., p. 606: "Swift még akkor is, midőn a levegöi szigetben üti fel szcenáriumát, szüntelen az angolokon tartja pillantatait."

[37]   Kölcsey, *Kölcsey Ferenc összes művei*, vol. 3., p. 320: "Kín az a félreértés! Én azért beszéllék a komikumról generaliter, hogy őtet valahogy bántani kénytelen ne legyek, s íme ő mindenütt rejtett nyilakat keresett maga ellen. Mondám-e én, hogy az ő darabja nem honi? Én azt

The parallel examples taken from early English humorists and their Hungarian imitators may prove that Kölcsey, albeit indirectly, most probably drew on Sterne's narrative techniques in his own creative re-writing. Undoubtedly, in his "Foreword" he is indebted to the narrative self-reference, inventions, and extravagance of Sterne's manner of writing which, in turn, owes much to the "first English Rabelais," his fellow Anglo-Irish satirist, Swift.

The immediate reception of Kölcsey's "Foreword", summed up by Gyapay, testifies that this was perhaps the most significant piece of his writing to make its writer known also as a humorist. The fragmented narrative was soon referred to as a "Foreword without a book."[38] That Kölcsey became well known as a humorous writer among his contemporaries, too, is testified by a review of 1846 in which Sámuel Balogh praises the author as an original writer:

> Moreover, from this criticism […] we learn to know another side of Kölcsey, the humorous, which becomes noticeable at various points. However, it is most conspicuous in the critical composition entitled "Foreword" found at the end of this volume. From beginning to end, it distinguishes itself for its most original and most amusing humour, for its competitive and lively wit, and for an intense and powerful subject.[39]

The text of the "Foreword" was published in the first volume of the literary journal *Élet és Literatúra* three years after the editor, Pál Szemere, received the first version of the text. Kölcsey's theoretical text on the comic ("A leányőrző") was published one year later in the same journal. The principles that he elaborated in the latter theoretical piece seem to have been realized in the whimsical narrative of his "Foreword" and they also create a stylistic as well as a thematic relationship between the Shandean way of writing and the digressive manner of Kölcsey's text. While much was borrowed from Sterne, the text of the "Foreword" must be regarded as a new and original, as well as a domestic example of humorous writing.

---

mondám csak, hogy a komikumnak mindenütt hazainak kell lenni tárgyára nézve; de ha ő mindazt, amit én a komikumról mondék, így érti magára, úgy megvallom, éppen azon bajba estem, amit leginkább kerültem, azaz autoringerlésbe. Megvallom neked, nagyon elundorodtam a magyar írókkal való foglalatoskodástól, nagyon, nagyon!" (Letter to Szemere, 12 Dec, 1826)

[38] See Gyapay's note in *Kölcsey Ferenc. Irodalmi kritikák és esztétikai írások*, pp. 483–484.

[39] Quoted by Gyapay in *Kölcsey Ferenc. Irodalmi kritikák és esztétikai írások*, p. 483: "Egyébkint e birálatban . . . Kölcseyt egy új oldalról t. i. a humoristicairól tanuljuk ismerni, melly e recensióban több helyeken mutatkozik. De leginkább kitündöklik az e kötet végén álló „Előbeszéd" czimű kritikai szellemű értekezésében, melly eleitől végig a legeredetibb 's legmulattatóbb humorral, egymást űző élénk elmésséggel és dús tartalommal jeleli ki magát. (Balogh S. 22 Dec, 1846, no. 512)."

A stain of blood
as cultural transmission

Lady Macbeth and János Arany's *Goodwife Agnes*

Arany János: *Ágnes asszony*	János Arany: *Goodwife Agnes*
Ágnes asszony a patakban	Goodwife Agnes in the streamlet
Fehér lepedőjét mossa;	Is washing her white bed-sheet;
Fehér leplét, véres leplét	Her white linen, bloody linen
A futó hab elkapdossa.	The running foams catch and beat.
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
Odagyűl az utcagyermek:	Round her urchins gather and watch:
Ágnes asszony, mit mos kelmed?	Goodwife Agnes, what's it you wash?
„Csitt te, csitt te! csibém vére	"Go to, go to! My chicken's blood
Keveré el a gyolcs leplet."	Smudged my linen; and now you hush!"
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
Összefutnak a szomszédnők:	Neighb'ring women herd together:
Ágnes asszony, hol a férjed?	Goodwife Agnes, your husband's in?
„Csillagom, hisz ottbenn alszik!	"Yes, asleep inside, my dearest,
Ne menjünk be, mert fölébred."	Let's not go in, lest we wake him."
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
Jön a hajdu: Ágnes asszony,	The bailiff comes: Goodwife Agnes
A tömlöcbe gyere mostan.	To the dungeon now you'll be seen.
„Jaj, galambom, hogy' mehetnék,	"How could I go, my dove, darling,
Míg e foltot ki nem mostam!"	Till of this spot this sheet is clean?"
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
Mély a börtön, egy sugár-szál	Deep's the prison: one ray of light
Odaférni alig képes;	Can hardly find th'way to enter;
Egy sugár a börtön napja,	One ray of sun's the prison day,
Éje pedig rémtül népes;	And its night a swarming spectre;
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

Szegény Ágnes naphosszanta
Néz e kis világgal szembe,
Néz merően, – a sugárka
Mind belefér egy fél szembe.
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

Mert, alighogy félrefordul,
Rémek tánca van körűle;
Ha ez a kis fény nem volna,
Úgy gondolja: *megőrülne.*
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

Ím azonban, időtelve,
Börtönének zárja nyílik:
Ágnes a törvény előtt
Megáll szépen, ahogy illik.
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

Öltözetjét rendbe hozza,
Kendőjére fordít gondot.
Szöghaját is megsimítja,
Nehogy azt higgyék: *megbomlott.*
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

Hogy belép, a zöld asztalnál
Tisztes őszek ülnek sorra;
Szánalommal néznek ő rá,
Egy sem mérges, vagy mogorva.
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

„Fiam, Ágnes, mit miveltél?
Szörnyü a bűn, terhes a vád;
Ki a tettet végrehajtá,
Szeretőd ím maga vall rád.”
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

„Ő bitón fog veszni holnap,
Ő, ki férjedet megölte;
Holtig vízen és kenyéren
Raboskodva bünhödöl te.”
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

All day Agnes keeps an eye on
This narrow light, so slender, small,
Her gaze holds it – it's so tiny
It fits into one eye-ball.
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

For when she turns, right around her
Their dance spectres up they wind,
If that tiny light were not there,
She believes she'd *lose her mind.*
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

Yet, behold, as time passes by
She's ushered out of her cell,
Facing the Law Agnes's standing,
As 'tis fitting, as 'tis well.
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

She takes pains with her attire,
Her kerchief neatly arranged,
Her straight hair adjusted also,
Lest they think something's *deranged.*
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

As she enters, hoary elders
Sit around a table green,
They look at her full of pity,
None is angry, none is mean.
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

"My child, Agnes, what hast thou done,
The crime's appalling, the charge weighty,
Who has done the deed, thy lover
Has testified right against thee."
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

"Alas, he'll be hanged tomorrow,
He who committed the murder;
Thou shalt suffer a life-sentence,
Subsisting on bread and water."
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

Körültekint Ágnes asszony,	Goodwife Agnes, to make certain
Meggyőződni ép eszérül;	She's not insane, now looks around;
Hallja a hangot, érti a szót,	Sounds she can hear, words do make sense,
S míg azt érti: „meg nem őrül."	While this is so, "her mind is sound".
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
De amit férjéről mondtak,	But what they said about her husband
A szó oly visszásan tetszik;	That word seems to be so weird;
Az világos csak, hogy őt	One single thing is clear for her:
Haza többé nem eresztik.	Homeward a way will not yield.
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
Nosza sírni, kezd zokogni,	Thus, she resorts now to weeping,
Sűrü záporkönnye folyván:	Showers of tears flow from her eyes:
Liliomról pergő harmat,	Rolling droplets on a swan's wing,
Hulló vízgyöngy hattyu tollán.	Pearls of lilies of dew-drop size.
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
„Méltóságos nagy uraim!	"Most noble, reverend Masters,
Nézzen Istent kegyelmetek:	For God's sake, look at my plight,
Sürgetős munkám van otthon,	Home I've got a pressing deadline,
Fogva én itt nem űlhetek."	I can't sit here, chained up tight."
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
„Mocsok esett lepedőmön,	"A blot's besmirched my sheet of linen,
Ki kell a vérfoltot vennem!	That I must take out, you see,
Jaj, ha e szenny ott maradna,	If that blood-stain were to stay there,
Hová kéne akkor lennem!"	Pray, what might become of me?"
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
Összenéz a bölcs törvényszék	Hearing this plea, knowing glances
Hallatára ily panasznak.	Send around the court the note.
Csendesség van. Hallgat a száj,	There is silence. The mouths are shut.
Csupán a szemek szavaznak.	Only wise eyes cast the vote.
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
„Eredj haza szegény asszony!	"Go, poor woman, go home and wash
Mosd fehérre mocskos lepled;	That sheet of filth clean and white;
Eredje haza, Isten adjon	May God take pity on thee and
Erőt ahhoz és kegyelmet."	Give thee strength, with all His might."
Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.	O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

S Ágnes asszony a patakban
Lepedőjét újra mossa;
Fehér leplét, tiszta leplét
A futó hab elkapdossa.
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

Goodwife Agnes in the streamlet
Once again washes her sheet,
Her white linen, spotless linen
The running foams catch and beat.
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

Mert hiába tiszta a gyolcs,
Benne többé semmi vérjel:
Ágnes azt még egyre látja
S épen úgy, mint *akkor éjjel.*
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

For in vain is the linen clean,
No sign of blood offered to sight:
Agnes can still see it clearly,
Just as she did, *then*, on *that night.*
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

Virradattól késő estig
Áll a vízben, széke mellett:
Hab zilálja rezgő árnyát,
Haja fürtét kósza szellet.
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

From early dawn to late evening
By her stool she stands in water:
Foams perturb her hov'ring shadow,
Wayward winds her soft hair moulder.
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

Holdvilágos éjjelenkint,
Mikor a víz fodra csillog,
Maradozó csattanással
Fehér sulyka messze villog.
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

When at night the moon-shine glazes
The top of the water-ripples,
From afar her heavy mallet
With deferred thumps looms and glitters.
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

És ez így megy évrül-évre,
Télen-nyáron, szünet nélkül;
Harmat-arca hő napon ég,
Gyönge térde fagyban kékül.
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

So it goes on, incessantly,
Every year, all summer, winter,
The sun scorches her dewy cheeks,
Her soft knee-caps crisp frosts splinter.
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

Őszbe fordul a zilált haj,
Már nem holló, nem is ében;
Torz-alakú ránc verődik
Szanaszét a síma képen.
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.

The ruffled hair has turned hoary,
No strand is dark, none is raven,
Freakish wrinkles creep all over
The smooth face moulded misshapen.
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.

S Ágnes asszony a patakban
Régi rongyát mossa, mossa –
Fehér leple foszlányait
A szilaj hab elkapdossa.
    Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.
               (1853)

Goodwife Agnes in the streamlet
Is washing her old, ragged sheet –
The long shreds of her white linen
The reckless foams catch and beat.
    O, merciful Lord, never leave me.
        (trans. by Géza Kállay)

"It is an accustomed action with her" the Gentlewoman says about the sleep-walking Lady Macbeth in Act 5, Scene 1, lines 23–4,[1] – "to seem thus washing her hands." What becomes Goodwife Agnes's "accustomed action" is "washing her white bed-sheet" "in the streamlet,"[2] "from early dawn to late evening," "every year, all summer, winter." Yet, as the Gentlewoman's precise formulation runs, the Lady's action is "to seem" to be washing her hands, which indicates, compared to Agnes, that the Lady's rubbing her hands (cf. 5.1.23) lacks the direct materiality of water, while Agnes is standing and washing in the "real" water of the streamlet, the running foams becoming a symbol in the course of the narrative of the ballad-poem. Agnes's world gradually transforms the two basic liquids, blood and water into metaphors, according to the logic of a narrative, whereas by the time Lady Macbeth makes her dramatic entrance in the sleep-walking scene, Duncan's blood has moved from her (and her husband's) hands into her imagination; it has been soaked up by her fantasy, as much as the potential remedy: "all the perfumes of Arabia," which could "sweeten" that "little hand" (43) have been "absorbed" by her imagination, too. In both cases, however, the metaphorical process, the breaking away from direct materiality, the symbol-creation and myth-construction will not make the blood vanish, as today's detergents would boastfully claim: for Lady Macbeth, just as for Agnes, the blood dried on the mind is "more real" than ever. In what follows, I will be concerned with what we find in the matrix of the similarities and differences in Lady Macbeth's and Goodwife Agnes's respective plots: the sign, the blot, the spot, the smudging, besmirching stain, the stain of blood *on the hand*, and on *the white linen sheet,* and the desperate task: to erase the stain, to rub it off, to wash it out, to make it *not be.* A red or dark stain on a light surface is, as Paul Ricoeur argues in *The Symbolism of Evil*, one of the first symbols of sin, guilt and evil in the European cultural heritage, to be found in the most ancient Babylonian, Egyptian, Jewish and Greek mythological stories and songs, giving rise to conceptual, moral reflection (to "thought") much later than the point in time when the metaphorical-symbolic representation was established.[3] From

---

[1] Throughout this paper, I quote the text of *Macbeth* according to the following edition: A. R. Braunmuller, ed., *Macbeth*, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[2] I quote the English text in my own translation, prepared for the sake of this paper. My translation is based on the following Hungarian edition: Tamás Vekerdy, ed., *Arany János: Kisebb költemények* [János Arany: Shorter poems], (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1986), pp. 255–8. I know of two other translations: one was done by Peter Zollman under the title "Mistress Aggie", the other by William N. Lowe and Adam Makkai: "Mistress Agnes". Both can be found in the anthology *In Quest of the Miracle Stag: the Poetry of Hungary from the Thirteenth Century to the Present in English Translation,* Vol. 1., ed., Adam Makkai (Chicago–Budapest: Atlantis-Centaur, M. Szivárvány and Corvina, 1996), pp. 344–348 and pp. 349–353. I would like to thank Brett Bourbon for his very kind help with my translation.

[3] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), especially the first three chapters.

Ricoeur's philosophical point of view one could claim that conceptual–moral reflection becomes possible precisely if the stain does *not* become a source of obsession and madness, if it is able to break out of the mesmerising, fixating, self-generating, and self-perpetuating process of the mind, and there is enough space for a proper distance from which the meaning of the stain can be assessed not only from within but also from without, from the very distance indispensable for what we call "reflection."

In the sleepwalking scene Lady Macbeth puts the rhetorical question, referring to King Duncan: "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" (5.1. 33–34). European culture (like Duncan, and, it seems, Agnes' husband, too) has a lot of blood in it indeed, and in more than one sense, yet it still might seem bizarre to single out a blood-stain which has fastened onto the British and Hungarian cultural memories to celebrate cultural kinship. Is a spot of blood the place where some aspects of cultural heritage might flow together?

I consider the allowing of this possibility justifiable for at least two reasons. First of all, since 1776, when we find the name "Shakespeare" set down by a Hungarian author – namely György Alajos Szerdahely – for the first time, in a text written, ironically, in Latin,[4] Shakespeare has proved to be a blood-transfusion for Hungarian poetry, drama, and theatre. It is equally widely known that János Arany (1817–1882), one of the most renowned figures of Hungarian literature, made an acquaintance with Shakespeare, first in German and in the early Hungarian translations, both as reader and a strolling player during his college years in the mid-1830s, but then later he read Shakespeare also in the English original, and produced brilliant translations of it. As Arany himself relates the story of his first encounter with Shakespeare in English in a letter to a friend, he received an English grammar from his first patron and friend, István Szilágyi, in 1842,[5] and this grammar contained one of Hamlet's soliloquies (most probably "To be or not to be"), which he felt inspired to compare with the German translation.[6] We may have little doubt that by 1853, when he wrote *Goodwife Agnes*, working as a grammar-school teacher at the time in Nagykőrös, he had read *Macbeth*, probably even several times.[7] We also know that Arany himself started to translate *Macbeth*

4   Péter Dávidházi, *"Isten másodszülöttje" – A magyar Shakespeare-kultusz természetrajza* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1989), p. 72.

5   This grammar has been lost, cf. Gusztáv Abafáy, "Arany János széljegyzetei a szalontai Arany-könyvtárban", In Sándor Iván Kovács et al., eds., Arany János, *"Tisztelt írótárs!" Kötetben még nem szereplő kritikai írások, glosszák* (Budapest: Magyar Irodalomtörténeti Társaság, 1993), 89–102, p. 98.

6   Kovács et al., p. 98.

7   In his "Széptani jegyzetek" which he prepared for the students of the grammar school, in paragraph 30, discussing the genres of plays, Arany gives the example of Macduff exclaiming "He has no children" (4.3.218) as a typical instance of "the language of passion," i.e. "*pathos in the good sense*" of the word (János Arany, "Széptani jegyzetek" in Arany János, *Tanulmányok*

(although we cannot tell exactly when) but the manuscript was destroyed during the Second World War[8] and the play's first canonical translation[9] was eventually done by Károly Szász (unfortunately a very mediocre poet), for the first complete Hungarian Shakespeare but it was Arany who reviewed Szász's work, correcting several errors; that review is extant, but was done in 1864, so a good ten years after *Goodwife Agnes* had been written. As a result, Arany may well have had Lady Macbeth's blood-stain in his (cultural) memory when writing his ballad, and Shakespeare's influence on Arany, and eminently the effect of Shakespearean tragedy in shaping Arany's understanding of what the "tragic" might be, was noted already in Arany's lifetime.[10] However, the two female figures could of course be juxtaposed without assuming or documenting any direct or indirect influence as well, although then the actual cultural transmission would perhaps lose that "smell of blood" that Lady Macbeth, at least, is apparently still feeling ("Here's the smell of the blood still," 5.1.42).

Like almost all of Arany's published works, this ballad, too, is carefully constructed: for Arany structure was an inherent and indispensable part of the content itself. We have four structural units along a time-line which at first sight seems linear. We start out with Agnes in the streamlet and with the three external voices: the voices of the children (the urchins); some women from the village; and the bailiff who sees Agnes to "the dungeon." Following this Agnes is in prison; then in front of the "hoary elders," a kind of court of law – highly problematic in my view; and finally we revisit and eventually leave her in the

---

és kritikák, ed., Pál S. Varga (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, Csokonai Könyvtár: Források, Vol. 4., 1998), 283–309, p. 308. Unfortunately, we do not know exactly when this work was written; most probably over the years he spent in Nagykőrös, so between 1851 and 1859 (cf. Varga, p. 565).

8   In the January of 1945, the villa in Ménesi street, Budapest, owned first by János Arany's son, László Arany and later by Géza Voinovits, was hit by a bomb and many of Arany's original manuscripts, as well as several letters and part of his private library (some books with valuable marginal glosses) were consumed by the ensuing fire. Most probably the English Grammar mentioned above was destroyed then, too (cf. Pál Gergely, "Jegyzetek Szász Károly 'Macbeth'-fordításához", in Kovács, et al., 73–83, p. 74).

9   "Canonical" here means that Szász's translation can be found in the edition of the Kisfaludy Society, which first published the Complete Works of Shakespeare in Hungarian (1864–1878). However, Gábor Döbrentei had translated *Macbeth* much earlier, first into prose in 1812 (he consigned this translation to the flames), and then in iambic pentameter in 1825 (published in 1830), cf. Sándor Maller and Kálmán Ruttkay, eds., *Magyar Shakespeare-tükör* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), p. 30.

10 As other sources of inspiration, the Hungarian folk ballads, the English and Scottish ballads, circulating widely in Hungary at that time, and the German ballads especially those of Goethe, Schiller and Bürger are usually mentioned. For an overview of those surveying Arany the ballad-writer, starting with Ágost Greguss, Pál Gyulai and Frigyes Riedl, always a favourite topic among literary critics, see Ferenc Kerényi, ed., *Arany János: Balladák, "Őszikék"*, (Budapest: IKON Kiadó, 1993), pp. 14–16, pp. 188–189, and László Imre, *Arany János balladái* (Budapest: Műelemzések kiskönyvtára [Tankönyvkiadó], 1988). The latter book is a brilliantly comprehensive and relatively recent treatment of the ballads.

streamlet again. The four units, at the same time indicating the transformation Agnes's mind is going through, are also ear-marked by the recurring image of the sheet in variations: as "white linen, bloody linen" (stanza 1), as "white linen, spotless linen" (stanza 20) and, finally in the last stanza (stanza 26) as an "old, ragged sheet." Here in principle I should compare the narrative of Agnes's story with the dramatic structure of *Macbeth*, but that is well beyond the scope of this paper. I confine myself to pointing out that, within the sleep-walking scene, two devices are used to glimpse into the Lady's mind: one is the chiefly narrative commentary of the Gentlewoman and the Doctor describing the Lady's behaviour, the other is the words she utters, which amaze and shock the two bystanders, the two witnesses representing an external point of view. The Doctor first decides to "set down what comes from [the Lady] to satisfy [his] remembrance the more strongly" (28–29), but when he finally concludes: "My mind she [i.e. Lady Macbeth] has mated [stupefied], and amazed my sight. I think but dare not speak" (68–69), there is little doubt he at least surmises that the Lady re-enacted the most hideous murder-scenes of the play and their aftermath, scenes the audience was able to see in their "original version" in Act 2, too. What I find especially remarkable is that Lady Macbeth has two amazed interpreters, whereas though the narrator of the ballad does describe, even in highly suggestive, and astonishingly small details, Agnes's behaviour (e.g. that she adjusts her straight hair, lest the elders think "that something's *deranged*," Stanza 9), this is also done by showing, throughout the poem, all incidents from her perspective. Thus, in Arany's poem we have a masterful balance of a quasi-objective narrative and some passageways into Agnes's subjectivity, opening up, and thus marking important turning points in the story. The detached narrative, the mere recording of "facts" will, towards the end of the ballad, create the opportunity for the narrator to show Agnes increasingly from a distance, and thus to transform her into an iconic figure of mourning, shame and atonement (a kind of Danaid, or Sisyphus), while the entrances into her mind (at instances such as "she believes she'd *lose her mind*" (Stanza 7) or "what they say about her husband, / That word seems to be so weird" (Stanza 14)) present her more intimately, reminding the reader that she is not an object but a sensitive human being, a victim one may sympathise with and pity. When Agnes speaks (to the children, the women, the bailiff, and to the hoary elders), her speech is the speech of concealment, of repression, of denial, while what Lady Macbeth says is highly revelatory and illuminating, like the taper in her hand but she is in a trance and she is precisely unaware of the significance of her own words; one could almost venture to say that she does not understand them. What Agnes tells the external world is coherent and makes full sense but it is indicative of a reality that exists only for herself: the monomaniacal fixation of the spot of blood transports her beyond the reality that surrounds her, inducing even comic effects: for example, what she answers the bailiff: "How could I go, my dove, darling, / Till of this spot this

sheet is clean?" (Stanza 4), might also sound like her declining an invitation to a dinner-party, while in fact she is being summoned to prison. Lady Macbeth's mind works within the confines of the halo of the taper: the two witnesses (and here the audience, too) can see as much as one may by the light of that candle.

In Agnes's case, it is precisely the spot of blood which is replaced, in the prison cell, by one single ray of the sun, which Agnes continually fixates on, and which fills one of her eyeballs just as much as her whole day (and here Arany uses a pun in the Hungarian original, which the translator could not render: in Hungarian the same word: *nap* is used for both the "sun" and for "day"). This ray of sun is richly ambiguous: Agnes's fixation on it is just as much a sign of her madness as it is the remedy against madness (because if she turns away, spectres start their dance around her), but the ray may also be taken as an emblem of the revelatory technique of the ballad; the ray emblematises the merciless focus into which Agnes's "parts" are brought: her eyes, clothes, kerchief, hair, tears (also as a pre-figuration of the water in the streamlet), later her "ruffled hair" and its colour, her knees, her cheeks, her face, her wrinkles. Agnes is methodically taken apart, almost mutilated; she becomes an icon of re-*memb*-rance through dis-*member*-ment. Towards the end of the ballad, the role of the ray of the sun is taken by the beams of moonlight, which projects her hovering shadow onto the surface of the water of the streamlet, and that shadow is perturbed by the foams of the water, creating an aberrant mirror-image of her gradual disintegration as a self. One image, in a metonymical focus, stands out as a part for the whole: her white mallet, glittering "from afar" (stanza 23) is significant not only for the sight, the vision of the reader but also for the ear: the heavy mallet strikes down with "deferred thumps" or "claps". Thus the narrator builds our distance from the figure by allowing us to see the mallet earlier than its sound would reach us. We leave Agnes in the vain activity of washing: her suffering seems to be endless, she cannot die, and this is underscored by the poem returning to its beginning, coming full circle. This circle surrounds and traps, as much as it reinforces the endless, straight flow of the streamlet, the narrative flow, which, in turn, is further reinforced by the prayer-like, mechanically returning refrain ("O, merciful Lord, never leave me"), indicating, on the part of perhaps all the characters of the ballad, that kind of helpless astonishment which is represented by the Doctor and the Gentlewoman watching Lady Macbeth.

Goodwife Agnes, who is a good wife in her intentions of cleaning – though she does wash her dirty linen in public – but a bad wife for getting involved in a crime committed against her husband, is usually read as an emblem of the "crime and punishment" theme.[11] In connection with the ballad Arany's contemporary,

---

[11] For a significant alternative opinion, interpreting, similarly to my reading, the figure of Agnes not so much as a sinner but as a victim, a "sacrificial lamb," whose words should not be taken as "mad gibberish" see Róbert Milbacher, "Az áldozati bárány? Az *Ágnes asszony* példája", in *Arany János és az emlékezet balzsama. Az Arany-hagyomány a magyar kulturális emlékezetben*

Dostoyevsky is almost as frequently mentioned as Shakespeare. However, I think that in the story of Agnes, *shame* plays a far more significant role than the actual crime. To support this, I take one of my clues from the poem itself, and one from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

While we have no doubt that Lady Macbeth is an instigator and an accomplice in Macbeth's crime of murdering Duncan, what Agnes has actually done remains obscure throughout. This sheds some light on the highly suspicious assembly of the elders. This is not a "normal" court at all: what kind of a trial is it (though it must be painfully acknowledged that such trials are not unheard of in Hungarian history), where the accused has no defence lawyer, where she is not asked to plead guilty or not guilty, where she cannot relate her own interpretation of what happened, where the judges accept the testimony of the murderer himself against the accused, where no investigation is made into the question of why Agnes kept a lover, what her marriage was like, whether she had been sexually abused by either husband or lover, etc. In several interpretations I have read that the elders, who are reminiscent in some way of tribal society, are there to emphasise that earthly justice acquits Goodwife Agnes in order to hand her over to a more severe judge: her own conscience, or Fate, or God, her punishment being precisely that she is *not* punished "on earth" by having to subsist on bread and water for the rest of her life.[12] But since we do not know how guilty Agnes is, we cannot tell whether what proves to be the eventual punishment is proportionate to the crime committed. There are so many fairy-tale like elements in the presentation of these old, hoary men that it is tempting to *imagine* that they exist only in Agnes's *imagination*: perhaps she has in fact *never* left the streamlet, and prison-cell and court-scene alike are just as much a part of Agnes's fancy (though of course the crudest possible reality *for her*) as the blood-stain in the already spotless linen-sheet. There can be no doubt that her husband was murdered by her mysterious lover (who is never shown but only referred to). Yet it is my view that Agnes's case is more complicated, and her trauma deeper, than usually assumed.

My second clue comes from *Macbeth:* the childlessness of the Macbeths is legendary, just as the problem of how many children Lady Macbeth, who asks the spirits to "unsex" her there, had.[13] How many children did Goodwife Agnes

(Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2009), pp. 214–223. Milbacher summarises the critical reception of the ballad from Arany's time to the present day as well. It is here that I would like to thank Péter Dávidházi for calling my attention to Milbacher's article and for further very helpful comments.

12 Milbacher rightfully remarks that the interpretative tradition of the poem tends to mirror this attitude, and is inclined to repeat the verdict (sentence) of the elders; although the ballad is *enthymematic* on several layers, i.e. the text of the poem demands that the reader hunt out the "missing links" and "dark spots" in Agnes's story, interpreters approach the ballad taking the guiltiness of the woman for granted. Cf. Milbacher, p. 215.

13 Cf. L. C. Knights' epoch-making article: "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" (1933)

have? It seems she had none, and it is only the *urchins*, the *children* to whom Agnes gives any kind of explanation for the blood-stain at all: "my chicken's blood / Smudged my linen". But how does chicken blood get onto a sheet which is usually in the bedroom? Are the children and we supposed to believe that Agnes cut the throat of the chicken she wished to cook for dinner above the bed already made for sleeping? Rather, I would like to recall that Hungarian *csibe* or *csirke*, the equivalent of *chicken*, especially in some Hungarian dialects, may also mean "child,"[14] so *chicken's blood* can be read as a euphemism for the menstrual blood,[15] which is far more likely to appear on a bed-sheet, and which is indicative of the lack of conception and might be read as a sign of childlessness. My conjecture is that the husband's blood was blotted, and took the place of the menstrual blood in Agnes' mind; that the sight of the husband's blood, "*then*, on *that night*" (Stanza 21), the blood Agnes will see forever, triggered the sight of blood that had previously been seen on other sheets over the course of the years. Thus, Agnes feels far less guilty about the crime (the weight and real content of which, as the narrative clearly states, she does not comprehend: "But what they said about her husband / That word seems to be so weird," Stanza 14) than about her childlessness, her infertility; she mourns for, and she tries to recapture and regain something or somebody she has lost but never possessed. Lady Macbeth goes mad instead of her husband: she tries to save him by taking Macbeth's insomnia, as it were, on herself in her sleepwalking.[16] Agnes does *not* suffer for the crime of her lover, and certainly not for her husband, but for a missing child, the lack of children. Lady Macbeth's tragedy is to have lost all she desired and acquired by force, through being an accomplice in a murder; Goodwife Agnes's tragedy is that she has been deprived of somebody she never had. Both female figures are painfully lonely: the last time we see the Macbeths together is after the banquet-scene where Banquo's ghost is present as well, and not even the dead bodies of the Macbeth couple are put side by side (unless the director of the play decides otherwise).

in *Explorations* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), pp. 33–49.

14 Especially in sayings: "*Többet akar tudni a csibe, mint a tyúk*": "the chicken wants to know more than the hen" i.e. the child wants to know better than the grown-ups; cf. Éva B. Lőrinczy et al., *Új Magyar Tájszótár*, Vol. I (A–D) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979), p. 813 and pp. 859–860.

15 It is at this point that Milbacher (p. 222) refers to an article I wrote in Hungarian (Géza Kállay, " 'Semmi vérjel': Arany János: *Ágnes asszony* (verselemzés)", *Liget* 17.2 [2004], pp. 56–68). Milbacher's only remark about my reading is that I also interpret the bloodstain as menstrual blood. In fact in this article I already interpret the bloodstain as a spot where the (long repressed) shame of childlessness (symbolised by menstrual blood, and also used as an excuse in response to the inquiring children) and the blood of the husband (as an "immediate" result of the crime, in which Agnes's precise role remains hopelessly obscure) "flow together" and merge in Agnes's "doubly guilty" mind.

16 For a powerful argument making this point see Balázs Szigeti, *Metaphorical and meta-theatrical patterns in Shakespeare's* Macbeth (MA Thesis, Budapest: ELTE, 2010), p. 63. This thesis also contains a very helpful summary of recent criticism on *Macbeth*.

Lady Macbeth dies alone and behind the scenes: according to the (not necessarily reliable) report of Malcolm – the new King after Macbeth – she committed suicide: "his [Macbeth's] fiend-like queen, / Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands / Took off her life" (5.9.35–38).[17] Goodwife Agnes can never die, yet in the timeless, repetitive act of washing, she might also be interpreted as becoming either a mythological figure, or even a part of nature: she is standing in the streamlet like a tree that has grown in the bed of the streamlet, or like a mossy rock. Whether to grow into an object of nature (and to lose one's mind) is too high a price to pay for regaining one's innocence is debatable, especially on the grounds that a tree or a rock is not a human being (similarly, neither is a mythological figure), and thus it makes little sense to talk about "innocence" here. Yet it is certain that the iconicised figures of Lady Macbeth and Goodwife Agnes respectively are just as difficult to erase from our cultural memories as the blood stains they try, in vain, to get rid of.

---

[17] On the problems of Lady Macbeth's death see Braunmuller, pp. 33–34.

Benedek Péter Tóta

"the cud of memory"

British literature and cultural memory in Seamus Heaney's poetry

CULTURAL MEMORY: RUMINANT GROUND

Seamus Heaney's phrase "the cud of memory" is an integral part of his poem "Funeral Rites", the first part of which commemorates the victims of the late twentieth-century Troubles in Northern Ireland, against the background of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 in the second part, and in the third the tenth-century presence of the Vikings in Ireland represented by Gunnar Hámundarson from an Icelandic saga.[1] The ceaseless recurrence of the rites of war, violence and funerals together with the temporally and spatially deepening acts of commemoration turn homes, sepulchres and burial mounds into what Heaney calls "[r]uminant ground"[2] – the fertile soil of culture in general and the field of literature in particular.

Commemorating the dead is, as Jan Assmann puts it, the seed and archetype of cultural memory. Commemorating the dead is "communicative" in so far as it appears as a general human form of behaviour, and it is "cultural" in so far as it creates its special institutional forms.[3] The primary institutional forms of cultural memory are rites. These celebrations secure conservation through poetic forms, retrieval through ritual representations, and communication through collective participation and sharing. The regular occurrence of these celebrations and the repetitive nature of these rituals simultaneously permit the transmission of the knowledge of identity and the spatial-temporal relationship of the target group. In this sense, cultural memory serves as the means of remembering that which is beyond the ordinary.[4]

The following sections of this paper investigate the operation of cultural memory as it reflects the adaptation of British Literature in Seamus Heaney's poetry according to the pattern established in his "Funeral Rites": starting from

---

[1] Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber, 1975), 15–18, p. 17. Jón Karl Helgason, *The Rewriting of Njáls Saga* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999), pp. 16–17. Floyd Collins, *Seamus Heaney: The Crisis of Identity* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), pp. 88–89.

[2] "Kinship" in Heaney, *North*, p. 41.

[3] Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1992), p. 61.

[4] Assmann, pp. 56–59.

the present, commemoration is retraced through recent past into remote periods of the distant past. This inverted order could ultimately be reversed for the sake of re-presenting the commemorated ones in consort with the commemorating ones, thus providing future for the departed ones in recalling and recollection.

BURIAL AT SEA

What Heaney seems to have primarily learnt "from Eliot is the double-edged nature of poetic reality: first encountered as a strange fact of culture, poetry is internalised over the years until it becomes […] second nature. Poetry that was originally beyond you, generating the need to understand and overcome its strangeness, becomes in the end a familiar path within you, a grain along which your imagination opens pleasurably backwards towards an origin and a seclusion."[5] Heaney's familiar path or grain can be retraced in "Stern", a poem written "in memory of Ted Hughes".[6]

> "And what was it like," I asked him,
> "Meeting Eliot?"
>   "When he looked at you,"
> He said, "it was like standing on a quay
> Watching the prow of the *Queen Mary*
> Come towards you, very slowly."
>
>   Now it seems
> I'm standing on a pierhead watching him
> All the while watching me as he rows out
> And a wooden end-stopped stern
> Labours and shimmers and dips,
> Making no real headway.

As to the origin of this poem, in an interview Seamus Heaney recalls how Ted Hughes recollected his meeting Eliot: "he said it was like standing on the quay watching the prow of the *Queen Mary* come towards you, 'very slowly'".[7] Ted Hughes consistently describes Eliot in this way. He recalls T. S. Eliot's "physical presence" in a letter to William Scammell on 15 August 1993: "when he spoke, I had the impression of a slicing, advancing, undeflectible *[sic!]* force of terrific mass. My image for it was – like the bows of the Queen Mary." This letter echoes

---

5   Seamus Heaney, "Learning from Eliot," in *Finders Keepers* (London: Faber, 2002), 26–38, p. 28.

6   Seamus Heaney, *District and Circle* (London: Faber, 2006), p. 46. If it were not obvious, one can also think of Eliot's middle name: Stearns.

7   Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber, 2009), p. 393.

Hughes's letter to the editor of the *Observer* on 17 January 1972: "The main impression [Eliot] left with me was something moving with indeflectible *[sic!]* force and weight – moreso *[sic!]* than in anyone *[sic!]* I ever met." The aspect of moving slowly may originate from Ted Hughes's memory recorded in a letter to his former teacher of literature John Fisher on 31 July 1960: "[Eliot] speaks just as he reads his poems, funereal & measured."[8] The solemnity of the vocabulary chosen by Hughes – "funereal" – may adjust his description of Eliot, lending it the tones of a funeral celebration. This image is almost a death mask. If it were a portrait, it would be stern.

By virtue of auditory imagination – the faculty Heaney regarded the "most important of all" he learnt from Eliot[9] – the homophonic *stern* creates a situation for commemoration and evokes the portrait of the commemorated person in the mind's eye. Since Heaney commemorates Hughes who in turn commemorates Eliot, we are virtually faced with two portraits in one. In addition, however, because in the speaker's figure Heaney himself is present in the composition as well, we can discern three portraits. Nevertheless, what makes this trinity special is the speaker's stare,[10] which ends almost in a vision: there is watching in which there are three agents watching each other, or rather the watching of this triad coincides and coexists in one. However, the portrait in this poem is neither simple nor single. The audience can see the composite portrait of the Eliot–Hughes–Heaney trinity: Heaney reflecting on and reflected by Hughes remembering Eliot.

This kind of a complex portrait has its precedent in Heaney's oeuvre. Heaney acquired the skill of creating mirroring portraits from Dante. In his translation "Ugolino (*from* Dante, *Inferno*, xxxii, xxxiii)"[11] we can read:

"I stared in my sons' faces and spoke no word.
[…]
… I saw
The image of my face in their four faces

Dante is a shared source of poetic energy for both Eliot and Heaney.[12] The way

---

8   *Letters of Ted Hughes*, selected and edited by Christopher Reid (London: Faber, 2007), pp. 167, 328 and 645.
9   Heaney, *Finders*, p. 34.
10   According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, eds. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1911, reprint 1956]) the origin of *stern* is "Old English *styrne*; perhaps cognate with *stereo-, stare*."
11   Seamus Heaney, *Field Work* (London: Faber, 1979), 60–63, p. 62.
12   Dante's indelible character appears in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", Eliot's first idiosyncratic poem. Dante's authentic compositional technique has been present in Heaney's art since his first volume of poetry (cf. "The Early Purges" and "Mid-Term Break" in Seamus Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist* [London: Faber, 1966, reset with amendments 1991], pp. 11 and 15.). Heaney studied the relationship of Dante and the modern poet in the art of T. S. Eliot and the

Heaney describes Eliot's approach to Dante may hold true for himself as well: "recreating Dante in his own image."[13] We should not be surprised then that when Heaney discusses the "equally formative experiences" of "[r]eading T. S. Eliot and reading about T. S. Eliot," we may think that we might have found the germ of "Stern" latently conceived. "There is a *stern* and didactic profile to the Dante whom Eliot conjures up and, as he embraces a religious faith, it is to this profile he would submit in order that it be re-created in his own work."[14]

While Eliot and Heaney recreated Dante in their own images, Ted Hughes, in 1988, recreated Eliot in his own image, that of a shaman.[15] "Eliot too looks not a little shamanic." Hughes takes "Death of Saint Narcissus" (a poem composed by Eliot in early youth) "as the first portrait, perhaps the only full-face portrait, of Eliot's genius. […] Eliot's poetic self caught a moment of tranced stillness, and became very precisely aware of its own nature, inheritance and fate, and found for itself this image." It is the tranced stillness of Hughes's portrait of Eliot that makes it shamanic. As Hughes goes on, we learn his view of the poet, namely that "the entire life of his organism has been sucked up into that burning, sacred but far-removed and fugitive existence of the poetic self […] who lives in a language […] saturated with that of Holy Scripture". Taking it all as "an 'objective correlative' for Eliot's poetic Self,"[16] Hughes sees Eliot's self being immersed in some specific language as if it were some liquid. This vision of the poetic self perceived by Hughes in 1988 echoes in a letter of his in 1998 recalling

---

oeuvre of Osip Mandelstam. At one point, in articulating the allegorical force of language, he writes as follows:

To listen to Eliot, one would almost be led to forget that Dante's great literary contribution was to write in the vernacular and thereby to give the usual language its head:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
che la diritta via era smarrita.

(Seamus Heaney, "*from* Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet" [1985] in Heaney, *Finders*, p. 172.)

    Eliot alludes to Dante "In the middle, not only in the middle of the way / But all the way, in a dark wood" (T. S. Eliot, "Four Quartets" in *The Complete Poems and Plays* [London: Faber, 1969, reprint 1978], p. 179.). Heaney also composed "An Invocation" in units of three lines as if imitating and appropriating Dante's *terza rima* when he was "in middle age" (Seamus Heaney, *The Spirit Level* [London: Faber, 1996], 27–28, p. 27). Eliot's compositions, *The Waste Land, Ash-Wednesday* and *Four Quartets* and Heaney's *Station Island* ([London: Faber, 1984] Part One starts with "The Underground" – Part Two documents a series of purgatorial dream visions – Part Three is entitled "Sweeney Redivivus") may follow Dante's scheme.

[13] Heaney, *Finders*, p. 173.
[14] Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue* (London: Faber, 1988), pp. 91 and 98. (Emphasis added.)
[15] Ted Hughes, "The Poetic Self: A Centenary Tribute to T. S. Eliot," in *Winter Pollen* (London: Faber, 1994), 268–292.
[16] Hughes, *Winter*, pp. 272, 280, 282 and 283.

his memories at Yaddo, a writer's resort in Saratoga Springs, Upper New York State, in the autumn of 1959: "For about an hour each day I would read Dante's *Divine Comedy* to myself – aloud, in the Italian. The sound of Dante's language is unique, and ties his words together in the most powerful and incisive way. His whole mentality is wonderful to sink yourself into."[17] In this instance Hughes visualises his self being dipped in Dante's unique language as if in some liquid. In both Eliot's and Hughes's case the existence of the poetic self becomes extinct when exposed to the vast flow of some extraordinary performance of language use as if it were an instance of death by water.

This accumulated image of death by water is presented by Heaney through a unified vocabulary: *stern*, *quay*, *prow* and *Queen Mary* in the first part, *pierhead*, *row*, *stern* and the implied image of a boat in the second part. In this way the ones evoked by the poem are also dipped into a deeper form of memory by the outlined pattern of being buried at sea. In "the middle years of the 1980s" Heaney tried his hand at translating *Beowulf*.[18] The passage first published by Heaney covers lines 26–53, entitled "A Ship of Death".[19] When he published the translation of the whole epic poem in 1999, it carried the dedication "In memory of Ted Hughes". Heaney pays tribute to Hughes by replacing *bow* in Hughes's letter of 1993 with the rhyming synonymous lexical item *prow* in the first part of "Stern", borrowing it from his *Beowulf*-translation.[20] The waving diphthong of "–ow" with the intrusion of the liquid "–r" returns with some phonetic alteration in the lexical item "row" in the second part as if imitating how the commemorated person is launched "out alone over the waves".[21] In contrast to *bow* and *prow*, *row* serves as an eye-rhyme in the tranced stillness of shared watching.

Hughes experienced this tranced stillness being spellbound by Eliot's lasting presence in his commemoration, and likewise, Heaney is entranced by Hughes's abiding presence in his. In Hughes's vision Eliot is ever-approaching though never-arriving; in Heaney's scene Hughes is ever-departing yet never-leaving.[22] The dynamism of this duality imparts life to this poem of commemoration and those incorporated into it. In this way Heaney and his work meet one of Eliot's criteria of "Tradition and the Individual Talent", namely, "that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead

---

[17] *Letters of Ted Hughes*, p. 708.
[18] Seamus Heaney, "Introduction" in *Beowulf* (London: Faber, 1999), p. xxii.
[19] Seamus Heaney, *The Haw Lantern* (London: Faber, 1987), p. 20.
[20] Line 7 in "A Ship of Death" and line 32 in *Beowulf*.
[21] Line 21 in "A Ship of Death" and line 46 in *Beowulf*.
[22] When Dennis O'Driscoll asked Seamus Heaney "[w]hich parts [of *Beowulf*] proved the most enjoyable to translate", in his answer Heaney referred to "all the rituals of arrival and depar- ture", "[t]he two great funeral scenes" including "the ship of death at the beginning", and "what was most mournful or most majestic". (O'Driscoll, p. 441.)

poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."[23] This is the way literature – either works of art or the history of literature – operates as ruminant ground: a field of cultural memory.

SEED-WORDS

The archaeological findings from the ruminant ground also reveal the excavated victim's "last gruel of winter seeds / Caked in his stomach," as Heaney puts it.[24] In this spirit Heaney is aware of seed words preserving and nourishing cultural memory. In his translation of *Beowulf* Heaney puts into operation cultural memory, because it is shared by literary communication and philological representation, transcending frontiers throughout centuries. Heaney records in his introduction to his translation of *Beowulf* how a poet can "come to terms with that complex history of conquest and colony, absorption and resistance, integrity and antagonism, a history that has to be clearly acknowledged by all concerned."[25] Heaney demonstrates this with lexical items as if they were archaeological findings, philologically speaking.

Heaney retraces the fate of the Old English word *þolian* meaning "to suffer" in *Beowulf*. Transcribing the *thorn* symbol as the familiar *th*, Heaney recognised that his aunt would use (*tholian*) speaking "about some family who had suffered an unforeseen bereavement." The word reached Ireland through Scotland, and was transferred by planters. It even gained currency in the American South when the Scots Irish settled there in the eighteenth century. Heaney met the word again in John Crowe Ransom's poetry. By virtue of Heaney's translation the word's "modernity" and "venerability" became united and was returned into Modern British English. This philological archaeology of this seed word taken from the ruminant ground of literary history served Heaney as a "little epiphany" that can illuminate cultural memory.[26]

Heaney's other example of philological archaeology is the fate of the English word "bawn" referring to Hrothgar's hall. For Irish historic consciousness, "[i]n Elizabethan English, bawn […] referred specifically to the fortified dwellings that the English planters built in Ireland to keep the dispossessed natives at bay," however, the lexical item originally comes "from the Irish *bó-dhún*, a fort for cattle."[27]

---

[23] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1961), p. 14.

[24] "The Tollund Man" in Seamus Heaney, *Wintering Out* (London: Faber, 1972, reprint 1973), p. 47.

[25] *Beowulf*, p. xxx.

[26] *Beowulf*, pp. xxv–xxvi.

[27] *Beowulf*, p. xxx.

These exemplary seed words in the ruminant ground can help to overcome "cultural dispossession"[28] by the operation of cultural memory as cultural repossession. Such inter-cultural exchanges integrate, incorporate and operate cultural memory. It is in this sense that Heaney's words on his translation are edifying:

> Let *Beowulf* now be a book from Ireland. Let it function in the world in the same way as the Venerable Bede tells us that books from Ireland functioned within the Britannic and Hibernian context of his times in the eighth century. Ireland, he tells us, in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, is far more favoured than Britain by its mild and healthy climate, and goes on:
>
> > There are no reptiles, and no snake can exist there; for although often brought over from Britain, as soon as the ship nears land, they breathe the scene of its air, and die. In fact, almost everything on this isle confers immunity to poison and I have often seen that folk suffering from snakebite have drunk water in which scrapings of the leaves off books from Ireland have been steeped, and that this remedy checked the spreading poison and reduced the swelling.
>
> […] it is an example of a writer calling upon a fiction in order to cope with differences between two islands linked and separated in various degrees by history and geography, language and culture. As such, it prefigures much of the work that would be done by Irish poets in the coming times and much that will continue to be done.[29]

Heaney's words qualify the operation – the function and effect – of cultural memory: it is nurtured by a book, text, words, a magical formula, charm, spell, gospel, incantation. The outcome, which resembles the enchanted experience of a shaman, is dedicated to Ted Hughes.

WORD-HOARD

Heaney's shamanistic character is reflected in the abundance of his description of the effect Ted Hughes had on him. Because Eliot was "a kind of superego" for Heaney, early in his career he had to turn towards "more familiar, more engageable writers" like Ted Hughes among others.[30] Heaney's references to Ted Hughes illustrate that Hughes's example was vital for him.[31] Hughes's work

---

28   *Beowulf*, p. xxiv.
29   Seamus Heaney, "Through-Other Places, Through-Other Times: The Irish Poet and Britain," in *Finders*, 364–382, pp. 381–382.
30   Heaney, *Finders*, pp. 36–37.
31   O'Driscoll, p. 166.

"had an almost magic effect" on him.[32] Hughes was the one who fortified him most; Heaney felt secured by his work and his way of being in the world, and that gave their friendship "a dimension that was in some sense supra-personal."[33] After the poet laureate's death Heaney called Ted Hughes "a guardian spirit of the land and language" in his commemoration.[34] Following the Ted Hughes Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey on 13 May 1999, Heaney also found that "Ted's language worked in the same register as the language of the liturgy."[35] This lifelong experience spurred Heaney – "in memory of Ted Hughes" – to contemplate writing "On His Work in the English Tongue."[36]

This poem was written while Ted Hughes was still alive. Heaney tells us that he was given a manuscript copy of Hughes's *Birthday Letters* in confidence before it was published. Setting aside his own tasks, Heaney dedicated his attention to Hughes's poems (or word-hoards), and wrote most of his poem (or word-hoard) "in the intensity of the moment" – having *read* the poems *quickly*. Heaney learnt about Hughes's cancer from Hughes himself, who "reported the facts with characteristic directness." Heaney "got a terrible shock" when the news of Hughes's death reached him at the end of October 1998.[37] Hughes's directness suggests that he must have had patience as a patient – he endured his disease with *passive suffering*. Heaney's shock must have been due to the fact that he could be of no help – he was also overwhelmed by *passive suffering*.

Ted Hughes's funeral was held in North Tawton on 3 November 1998. Speaking at the funeral, Seamus Heaney said: "No death outside my immediate family has left me feeling more *bereft*. No death in my lifetime has hurt poets more. He was a tower of tenderness and strength, *a great arch under which the least of poetry's children could enter* and *feel secure*."[38] The emphasised parts echo in the second movement of the poem:

> *I read it quickly*, then stood looking back
> *As if it were a bridge I had passed under –*
> […] –
> So intimate in there, the tremor-dip
> And cranial acoustic of the stone
> With its *arch*-ear to the ground, a listening post
> Open to the light, to the limen world
> Of soul on its lonely path, the rails on either side

---

[32] O'Driscoll, p. 189.

[33] Cf. O'Driscoll, p. 395.

[34] Heaney's words are quoted in "Ted Hughes: 'A born poet' remembered" on *BBC News*, 13 May 1999. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/343059.stm>

[35] O'Driscoll, p. 474.

[36] Seamus Heaney, *Electric Light* (London: Faber, 2001), pp. 61–63.

[37] O'Driscoll, pp. 390–393.

[38] <http://www.answers.com/topic/ted-hughes#Death> (Emphasis added.)

Shining in silence, the fretful part of me
So steadied by their cogged and bolted stillness
I felt like one come out of an upper room
To fret no more and walk abroad confirmed.[39]

It was in "the upper room" (Acts 1:13; cf. 2:1) that the apostles were filled with and confirmed by the Holy Spirit and began to speak hitherto unknown languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech (Acts 2:4). This inspiration is anticipated in the first movement.

[…]
Pounded like a shore by the roller *griefs*
In language that can still knock language sideways.[40]

Having taken liberties with the rules of language by inspired poetic licence, "*griefs*" evokes the feelings of suffering at the death of a loved person; either that of Sylvia Plath in Ted Hughes's *Birthday Letters* commemorating her, or that of Ted Hughes being commemorated by Seamus Heaney. The shared experience is *passive suffering*, which returns in the third movement.

Passive suffering: who said it was disallowed
As a theme for poetry? Already in *Beowulf*
The dumbfounding of woe, the stunt and stress
Of hurt-in-hiding is the best of it –
[…]

And the poet draws from his word-hoard a weird tale
Of a life and a love balked, which I reword here
Remembering earth-tremors …
…
Under the heath, as if our night walk led
Not to the promised tor but underground
To sullen halls where encumbered sleepers groaned.[41]

The weird tale of a life and a love reluctantly drawn from one's word-hoard may allude to *Birthday Letters* that Heaney essentially rewords here. At the same time, it may also refer to *Beowulf* in Heaney's translation. The lines in question are those which tell the tragic though accidental fratricide of King Hrethel's sons

---

[39]   Heaney, *Electric*, p. 61. (Emphasis added.)
[40]   Heaney, *Electric*, p. 61. (Emphasis added.)
[41]   Heaney, *Electric*, p. 62. (Emphasis by Heaney.)

in lines 5–9 of the third movement in Heaney's poem, corresponding to lines 2435–2443 in *Beowulf*, and the ones that tell the father's lament in the fourth movement of Heaney's poem, corresponding to lines 2444–2466 in *Beowulf*. Concerning the fratricide the reworded word-hoard comes from a third person whose exclusive activity is expressing his *passive suffering*, which by the end of the fifth movement turns out to be "[a] thing allowed". However, the beginning of the central third movement poses the question: who said that passive suffering was disallowed as a theme for poetry?

The term of "*passive suffering*" was applied by W. B. Yeats as a reason to exterminate poems from anthologies, from collections of cultural memory.

> I have a distaste for certain poems written in the midst of the great war; they are in all anthologies […]. The writers of these poems were invariably officers of exceptional courage and capacity […]; their letters are vivid and humorous, they were not without joy – for all skill is joyful – but felt bound, in the words of the best known, to plead the suffering of their men. In poems that had for a time considerable fame, written in the first person, they made that suffering their own. I have rejected these poems […]; *passive suffering is not a theme for poetry*."[42]

The opening question of the central movement alluding to Yeats's problem is responded to by the concluding line alluding to a poem by Wilfred Owen ("Strange Meeting"[43]) in Heaney's work.[44]

What actually takes place in Yeats's anthology is that Owen is passed over, excluded from literary history, eradicated from cultural memory. Yeats's assumed amnesia commits literary "fratricide", rendering Owen anonymous. This literary oblivion created by Yeats leaves Owen unburied literarily. This is Owen's passive suffering in literary history.

In terms of cultural memory, an anthology functions as a literary cemetery. Yeats's literary sin was to be amended by Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes in another anthology, *The School Bag*.[45] Heaney and Hughes corrected Yeats's omission by including Wilfred Owen's poem, "Strange Meeting" on page 52. The excommunication caused by cultural amnesia has been replaced by re-canonisation owing to cultural memory. The corpus of the literary canon

---

[42] W. B. Yeats, ed., *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892–1935* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936, reprint 1955), p. xxxiv. (Emphasis added.)

[43] C. Day Lewis, ed., *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931, reprint 1977), pp. 35–36, lines 9 and 4.

[44] In an essay of 1964, Ted Hughes clarifies how he learnt what passive suffering was. In his view Wilfred Owen's work is "a version of old-style prophecy: *apocalyptic scenes of woe*" providing the experience of "*immediate suffering*" in his lines. (Ted Hughes, "Unfinished Business" in Hughes, *Winter*, pp. 42–44.) Ted Hughes also alludes to Owen's "Strange Meeting" in "A Picture of Otto" in *Birthday Letters* (London: Faber, 1998), p. 193.

[45] Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, eds., *The School Bag* (London: Faber, 1997).

has been cured by restoring cultural memory. Yeats's word-hoard has been reworded and reordered by Heaney and Hughes. What Yeats wronged has been amended. Heaney's poem and *The School Bag*, which he edited together with Ted Hughes, have become the representative and communicative places of literary burial, a ruminant ground by virtue of the rite of poetry – the act of writing itself.

THE ACT OF WRITING

In Heaney's view Owen is "the 'poet as witness'" who "represents poetry's solidarity with the doomed, the deprived, the victimised, the under-privileged." Heaney explains that "[t]he witness is any figure in whom the truth-telling urge and the compulsion to identify with the oppressed becomes necessarily integral with *the act of writing* itself." Heaney understands that Owen's works represent a "*field of force*" having the power of "human testimony" and of a "*martyr's relics*."[46] Heaney celebrates Owen's art in a short poem, "The Party".

> Overheard at the party, like wet snow
> That slumps down off a roof, the unexpected,
> Softly powerful name of Wilfred Owen.
> Mud in your eye. Artillery in heaven.[47]

Although Heaney says that concerning Owen's poetry "any intrusion of the aesthetic can feel like impropriety", and that "the beauty consideration is made to seem irrelevant,"[48] it is precisely the poetic aspect that is worth observing in order to witness the actual operation of cultural memory.

   Owen's characteristic poetic technique is the acoustic effect of para-rhymes, rhymes with identical consonants and slightly different vowels like the ones in "Strange Meeting" (e.g., groined – groaned; grained – ground; moan – mourn; laughed – left). In Heaney's poem, line 1 ends in "snow", which may come from Owen's "Futility" (rhymes in lines 5–7: "snow" – "now" – "know" preceded by other combinations of the same consonants in lines 1–4: "sun" – "once" – "[un]sown" – "[Fr]ance"). Transferring the liberty of such combinations to Heaney's poem, the rhyming pair of "snow" is provided by the end of line 3: "Owen". Such combination of sounds – or their disorder – can be regarded as the outcome of the visual and acoustic event of the enjambment sliding between lines 1 and 2: the mass of "<u>snow</u>" is restructured in "<u>Owen</u>." The quick and heavy fall of snow

---

46 Heaney, *Government*, pp. xiv and xvi. (Emphasis added.)
47 Heaney, "Ten Glosses: 5. The Party" in Heaney, *Electric*, p. 55.
48 Heaney, *Government*, pp. xiv.

anticipates its rhyme in the position of the third word in line 2: "down." This phenomenon is not unusual in Heaney's poetry. The rhyme-scheme of the sestet part in "The Forge" seemingly misses its third item: "music" − "nose" − "clatter" − "rows" − "flick" − "bellows" (e-f-x-f-e-f).[49] The expected item has been carried away by the flow of speedy "traffic" in line 12, thus: "music" − "nose" − "clatter" − "traffic"/"rows" − "flick" − "bellows" (e-f-x-e/f-e-f). In "The Party", to make Heaney's quatrain acoustically complete, line 4 can contribute the last rhyme: "heaven."

With "The Party", this highly visual, acoustic and epigrammatic work of art, Heaney celebrates and commemorates Owen by recalling his dominant poetic technique in a delicately renewed way. In the last instance of Heaney's para-rhymes it is not only the vowel that slightly changes, but also the consonant (w − v). This imagist poem ritually resurrects Owen by virtue of this technical innovation. The *act of writing* demonstrates the operation of cultural memory.[50] In this way the act of writing preserves the creativity of a martyr's relics.

---

[49] Seamus Heaney, *Door into the Dark* (London Faber, 1969, rpt. 1972), p. 19.
[50] For Hungarian readers Heaney's quatrain may evoke two poems.

János Pilinszky, "Quatrain"

Nails asleep under frozen sand.
Nights soaked in poster-loneliness.
You left the light on in the corridor.
Today my blood is shed.

(János Pilinszky, *The Desert of Love*, Selected poems translated by János Csokics and Ted Hughes [London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1989], p. 42.)

Miklós Radnóti, "Razglednicas − 4"

I fell beside him and his corpse turned over,
tight already as a snapping string.
Shot in the neck. "And that's how you'll end too,"
I whispered to myself; "lie still, no moving.
Now patience flowers in death." Then I could hear
"*Der springt noch auf*," above, and very near.
Blood mixed with mud was drying on my ear.

(Miklós Radnóti, *Foamy Sky*, Selected and translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992], p. 118. "*Razglednica* is Serbian for 'picture postcard'; in the original poem with a Hungarian plural." [p. 123.])

A MARTYR'S RELICS

A martyr's relics may radiate *force well below the surface.*[51] Relying on archaeology, philology and poetic technique in the period of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in the late sixties and early seventies of the twentieth century, Heaney became engaged by a book entitled *The Bog People* by P. V. Glob, published in English translation in 1969. It introduced Heaney to the bodies of Iron Age people ritually sacrificed to the Mother Goddess of the earth, one of whom is known as the Tollund Man. Heaney realised that "in relation to the tradition of Irish political martyrdom for the cause whose icon is Kathleen Ni Houlihan, this is more than an archaic barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern." The images of "these victims" evoked in Heaney's mind "the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles." When Heaney wrote his poem "The Tollund Man", he took "a vow to go on pilgrimage" to Aarhus in Denmark where the Tollund Man's head is preserved:

> Some day I will go to Aarhus
> To see his peat-brown head,
> The mild pods of his eye-lids,
> His pointed skin cap.
>
> […]
>
> … a saint's kept body …

After having fulfilled his vow and gone to Aarhus ("the holy blissful martyr for to seke"), he read about a symbol that "sums up the whole of Celtic pagan religion and is as representative of it as is, for example, the sign of the cross in Christian contexts. This is the symbol of the severed human head […]".

With his vow, pilgrimage, act of praying and presence at the Tollund Man's enshrined head, Heaney realised that the act of bringing the present into significant relationship with the past had to be renewed and directed well below the surface. For this reason, Heaney, the son of Irish literature in English, made his poem reflect the radiation of the father of English literature, Geoffrey Chaucer, and did not refrain from having the Tollund Man radiate the glory of Saint Thomas à Becket. Out of a martyr's relics, this radiance of cultural memory creates a *field of force.*

---

[51] Section 6 draws extensively on Seamus Heaney's essay entitled "Feeling into Words" in Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations* (London: Faber, 1980), pp. 41–60, especially pp. 57–60.

A FIELD OF FORCE

In 1966 Heaney commemorated the Easter Rising of 1916 and its victims by recalling the peasant rising of 1798. The title of the poem is "Requiem for the Croppies".[52]

> The pockets of our great coats full of barley –
> No kitchens on the run, no striking camp –
> We moved quick and sudden in our own country.
> The priest lay behind ditches with the tramp.
> A people, hardly marching – on the hike –
> We found new tactics happening each day:
> We'd cut through reins and rider with pike
> And stampede cattle into infantry,
> Then retreat through hedges where cavalry must be thrown.
> Until, on Vinegar Hill, the fatal conclave.
> Terraced thousands died, shaking scythes at cannon.
> The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave.
> They buried us without shroud or coffin
> And in August the barley grew up out of the grave.

Heaney's sonnet appears to be a response to Geoffrey Hill's "Requiem for the Plantagenet Kings" (1959) of identical rhyme-scheme. The slightly latent Plantagenet allusion in Heaney's sonnets is not surprising. In "The Seed Cutters"[53] at the *volta* point which prepares the concluding couplet of the English sonnet, "the broom" appears. The Latin term for this bush is *Planta Genista*, hence the name of the royal family.[54] Helen Vendler attributes significance to the fact that Heaney appropriates an aristocratic poetic form in order to support rural values.[55]

The rhyme-scheme of this sonnet seemingly combines the Italian and the English patterns: *ababcdcdefefef*.[56] However, the octave and the sestet are not clearly separated by syntactic punctuation. Nevertheless, contrary to the smooth flow of alternating rhymes, the broken sounds of "infantry" at the end of line 8 and the adverbial "Then" at the beginning of line 9 imply the start of a new unit. Although in the easily recognisable sestet the consistent –ave syllables in lines 10, 12 and 14 would reinforce the sestet structure, the equally consistent change

---

[52] Heaney, *Door*, p. 24.
[53] Heaney, *North*, p. 10.
[54] Terence Wise, *Medieval Heraldry* (London: Ospray Publishing, 1980), p. 20.
[55] Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 21–22.
[56] Cf., Thomas O'Grady, "The Art of Heaney's Sonnets," *Dalhousie Review*, 80.3 (2000) 351–364, p. 354. See also: Jason Hall, "Heaney's *Requiem for the Croppies*," *Explicator* 61.1 (2002) 56–59.

of the para-rhymes of the vowel plus "n" syllables in lines 9, 11 and 13 raise the readers' awareness that some surprise may be in store here. The two sequences of consistency merge in the last two lines. This formal merge might be supported by the fact that in the first twelve lines the grammatical agent is the first person plural, while the last two lines move to the third person plural (line 13), or third person singular (line 14) and the former agent is rendered by a subordinated pronoun (line 13), which disappears in line 14. Owing to this division there are three quatrains of alternating rhymes (*ababcdcdefef*) and a "couplet" with "coffin" and "grave" in rhyming position (*xx*). These last two words (referring to the immediate components of a burial) belong together conceptually: they practically rhyme. Their abstract, absolute rhyme-value is *GG*. However, neither the Italian type, nor the English pattern would negate the other one.

The latent but active presence of these sonnet forms demonstrates the simultaneity of two modes – also known as bimodality or polymodality[57] – whose dynamic co-existence intensifies the operation of cultural memory in a field of force that is the cemetery of literature where we can taste, consume, digest, assimilate and synthesise the cud of memory in rumination.

FUNERAL RITES – RITES OF MEMORY

The preceding sections have investigated the operation of cultural memory as reflected by the adaptation of British Literature in Seamus Heaney's poetry according to a pattern established in his "Funeral Rites": starting from the present, commemoration is retraced through recent past into remote periods of faded past so that this inverted order may ultimately be reversed for the sake of representing the commemorated ones in consort with the commemorating ones thus providing future for the departed ones in recalling and recollection.

Ultimately it transpires that the soil of culture, literature – having the right of memory to write memory as a rite of memory – is a ruminant ground. Rewording the word-hoard of cultural memory is rewarding: the past revives vigorously, culture is recreated, and memory enjoys ruminative recovery.

---

[57] Polymodality was first discussed by Béla Bartók in his Harvard Lectures in 1943. (Béla Bartók, *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff [London: Faber, 1976], pp. 354–392.) The polymodality of a composition means that the work of art in question assumes many simultaneously effective modes characteristic of the art-work.

VERONIKA RUTTKAY

In other tongues
"Tam o' Shanter" and translatability

In 1896, William Jacks, Glasgow businessman, translator and politician published a book entitled *Robert Burns in Other Tongues*. In spite of its suggestive title, this was not a prescient celebration of the "heteroglossic" or "polyglossic" Burns, hailed by many critics today.[1] It was, however, an extraordinary enough book in its way, containing translations of poems by Burns in eighteen different languages, including not only all major European languages and Latin, but such less studied ones as Frisian, Gaelic, and Hungarian. Jacks had multiple aims in compiling the volume: first, he wanted to demonstrate Burns's international fame; then, to provide students of foreign languages with a sort of textbook, for, as he remarks in the "Preface", committing to memory "a good deal of prose and poetry" of a given language is the best way "to impress the spirit and idiom of the language" on one's mind.[2] Beside his strong sense of the immediate usefulness of the project, today's reader is struck by the author's enthusiasm about the sheer possibility of translation as such. His "Introduction" celebrates that, against all odds, works of literature *can be* translated: "Great minds are the common property of all nations, and it would bring an eclipse on literature did translations cease. The world of thought would lose its grandeur, and man become poorer in all his being" (p. xvi). Reading Burns in translation enriches foreign nationals, while (as Jacks makes equally clear) translations also pleasurably increase the cultural wealth of the original "producer", i.e. Scotland (or Britain). The book, in other words, is as much a monument to the powers of translation as it is to "the stalwart figure of Burns," who, as Jacks is happy to proclaim, "in these various costumes stands 'colossal seen in every land'" (p. xviii).[3]

---

[1] Murray Pittock uses "polyglossic" in his *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 155. Nigel Leask refers to the "heteroglossic play of voices" in Burns in his *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4. See also Jeffrey Skoblow, *Dooble Tongue: Scots, Burns, Contradiction* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press/London: Associated University Presses, 2001).

[2] William Jacks, *Robert Burns in Other Tongues: A Critical Review of the Translations of the Songs & Poems of Robert Burns* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, Publishers to the University, 1896), p. ix. Subsequent references to this edition will be made in the main text in brackets.

[3] The lines allude to Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of *Wellington*" – an interesting gloss on Burns's usefulness for the Empire.

As a practicing translator (he published Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* in English) Jacks is also keenly aware of the losses and failings that translations regularly display when compared to originals. An original may be analogous to financial capital, in that its value increases with each foreign "transaction", but translations themselves can offer only small change when compared to the richness of originals. Jacks himself evokes a less mercantile metaphor, quoting a line from Burns's "Tam o' Shanter: A Tale" – "You seize the flower, its bloom is shed" – in order to suggest that some poems can only prosper in their native soil. Or, as he puts it, there are "works which are the glory of their native language, and which it is impossible to convey through the imagery of another tongue without losing the charm which makes them what they are" (p. xv). Does he imply that "Tam o' Shanter" is one of those works? In any case, he presents each foreign version of a Burns poem with precise comments on what went wrong in the translation. In this sense, his book is a long list of mistakes, a record of what was not, or could not be, rendered "faithfully". The translator's failure, he suggests, is ultimately inevitable. In fact, even before looking at actual translations, he offers examples of "the highest power and vigour" in Burns, "which seem absolutely impossible of translation" (p. xviii). The reasons for this impossibility are various: Jacks knows that languages just as individual poems have unique "spirits", and that it is not sufficient to convey simply "the thoughts of the author": a good translator should be "at home in both languages", and he should possess "a mind that can feel the spirit and full inspiration of the original". He should also have "a poetic instinct, with perfect insight and sympathy with the writer sought to be translated" (p. xvii). In short, "fidelity" should be complemented with sympathetic "poetic flow" (p. xviii), in order to ensure that Burns's "lofty genius, his force, his tenderness, his deep sympathetic nature, and the music of his verse are strongly felt", even in languages "essentially different" from his own (p. xviii).

These requirements seem to apply in all cases of translation (although the breadth of Burns's genius might be especially hard to reproduce in a different language). What makes Burns a unique challenge for translators, however, is that many of his works were "written in a rough, though terse and expressive language – often in a local dialect, the use of which is confined to the peasantry of a small portion of the British Isles" (p. xvii). Why should this be a problem? – one might ask. Theoretically, a translator may well learn Burns's dialect, just as he (or she) may learn Frisian, Hungarian, or any other language. I suspect that by mentioning Burns's dialect Jacks is in fact alluding to a more complex problem, one that made the translation of Burns's poems, by his time, proverbially difficult. Another aspect of the same problem might be indicated by a simple question: how can a text be translated that is written in more than one language? Recent criticism has emphasised the fact that Burns was a polyglossic poet, who used several linguistic registers often in the same poem. As Seamus Heaney most eloquently put it, he "opened his door to a great variety of linguis-

tic callers" and "let his lips and hands be stolen at one moment by the language of Beattie and Thomson and at the next by the voices of his neighbours".[4] As a result, many of his most interesting works seem to raise questions about the possible connections between the two (or more) languages he used, and about what is gained – or perhaps lost – by bringing them into contact. In this paper I would like to argue that Burns's heteroglossic work also (perhaps inevitably) shows a remarkable awareness of the possibilities and challenges of translation, both in a strict sense (translation from one language to another) and in the wider sense of translation between cultures. Burns published the first Kilmarnock edition of his works (*Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, 1786) with a glossary, providing English explanations for his Scots words. In a sense, then, his career begins with an appended call for translation. My contention is that his later narrative masterpiece "Tam o' Shanter: A Tale" – written in several voices and more than one language – is an unusually sophisticated take on the problems of both translation and, more generally, of cultural border-crossing. What is at stake when the speech of Burns's Ayrshire "neighbour" is answered in literary English? What is lost – and can anything be gained – when popular tradition enters the orbit of print?

CURIOUS ANTIQUITIES

The epigraph to "Tam o' Shanter" gives the reader early warning about the poem's concerns. "Of Brownys and of Bogillis full is this buke" is taken from the Middle Scots poet Gavin Douglas, and refers to Virgil's *Aeneid* in Douglas's 1513 translation, or more precisely, to Book VI, which recounts Aeneas's descent into the Underworld (*Eneados* VI, prologue l.18). The quotation thereby alerts readers to the poem's important classical source,[5] and to the central theme of crossing and re-crossing thresholds (indicated in both works by rivers). The "Brownys and Bogilis" at the same time clearly point towards the crucial role that Scottish dialect and folklore are going to play in Burns's poem. The epigraph, in other words, calls attention to the poem's affinities with both Virgil and earlier Scottish literature; however, the text itself diverges from its models in characteristic ways. For one thing, the quoted line from Douglas's prologue "translates" the

---

[4] Seamus Heaney, "Burns's Art Speech," in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. Robert Crawford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press / Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1996 / 1997), 216–232, p. 228.

[5] On the significance of the epic and mock-epic traditions in the poem see Kenneth Simpson, "Robert Burns: 'Heaven-taught ploughman'?", in *Burns Now*, ed. Kenneth Simpson (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994), 70–91, pp. 86–87. On the epigraph and Douglas's significance see also Kenneth Simpson, "Poetic Genre and National Identity: Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 30 (1998) 31–42, p. 39.

(under)world of the *Aeneid* into the (supposedly more familiar) terms of Scottish culture and specifically, Scottish superstition, whereas Burns's poem is about to perform its work in the opposite direction. That is, "Tam o' Shanter" in its original context promised to carry over fragments of Scottish folk superstition – or "popular antiquity", as they were called – into a polished literary culture where they could only appear as unfamiliar or even exotic.

The "buke" of the epigraph might be taken to refer not only to the sixth book of Douglas's *Eneados*, but also to the handsome quarto in which Burns's poem was published: Francis Grose's *The Antiquities of Scotland*. Burns wrote "Tam o'Shanter" expressly for the second volume of The *Antiquities*,[6] in order to accompany a sketch of Alloway Kirk, and to provide some illustration of the popular superstitions of his native Ayrshire.[7] As a result, the poem is entwined in a whole array of complications resulting not only from cultural difference, but also from the antiquarian context to which Grose's publication clearly belonged. As Susan Manning and others have shown, the 18th-century antiquary had often been characterised as a whimsical amateur lacking in philosophical insight and possessed by an ungovernable curiosity to collect bits of incoherent data in order to preserve the past, even if only in fragmentary or ruinous forms.[8] However, as she adds, antiquarian researches were also indispensable for the development of the histories and anthropologies of the Scottish Enlightenment – they were the sustaining "other", on which their far more prestigious theoretical discourse rested. Most importantly, antiquaries produced facts about a past that official histories could in turn incorporate into their own philosophical narratives. What the antiquary described in suspiciously loving detail was a world that was available only in ruins: a tradition and culture as belonging to the past. Situating Burns's work in this context has become almost obligatory in recent discussions of "Tam o' Shanter". However, it may be worth rehearsing some of the details here in order to see where the discourse of antiquarianism intersects with the problematic of translation.

---

[6]   Grose emphasises that Burns "wrote, *expressly for this work,* the pretty tale annexed to Aloway church". Francis Grose, *The Antiquities of Scotland,* 2 vols. (London, 1789–91), II, p. xx; emphasis added. This was important because, previously to its publication in the book, the poem had appeared in two Scottish magazines.

[7]   Gerard Carruthers describes this particular section of the book as follows: "Grose provides a very short and vague description of the ruin at Alloway", and "[i]n a limp footnote to his discourse, [he] says of the kirk, 'the church is also famous for being wherein the witches and warlocks used to hold their meetings.' The text of 'Tam o' Shanter,' itself a (very large) footnote to Grose's description, is *in toto* a kind of staged over-excited response to the real, physical scene which Grose's book ostensibly surveys." See Gerard Carruthers, "'Tongues turn'd inside out': the Reception of 'Tam o' Shanter'," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 35–36 (2007), 455–463, p. 457. See Grose, *The Antiquities of Scotland,* II, pp. 32, 31.

[8]   Susan Manning, "Antiquarianism and the Scottish Science of Man," in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism,* ed. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 57–76, p. 68. See also Leask, *Burns and Pastoral,* p. 257.

Among many other things, *The Antiquities of Scotland* was also a book of symbolic and literal border-crossings. One in a series of richly illustrated volumes, it served as a guidebook to the country's monuments for a mostly metropolitan readership.[9] For the sake of literary (and potentially real) tourists, it even contained a glossary of its "Scotch terms [...] explained for the use of the English reader", similarly to Burns's Kilmarnock volume. In this sense, the book is structurally linked to one of Grose's earlier projects, entitled *A Provincial Glossary, with a Collection of Local Proverbs and Popular Superstitions* (1787), which was also known to Burns.[10] The preface to the *Glossary* forges a clear link between the provincial, the old, and the prestigiously literary. In fact, in spite of his palpable relish for the irregularities of vernacular expression, Grose justifies his venture on emphatically literary grounds, by referring to "our ancient poets", whose works would be difficult to understand without such aids.[11] He also includes popular superstitions in the same volume because, as he argues, they "tend to illustrate our ancient poems and romances", among them Shakespeare's plays.[12] This suggests that all the vernacular data of the book are collected in order to shed light on the past – what is more, on an essentially literary past. They are "preserved" because they represent, in various ways, facets of the past. While some of the superstitions included in the book are said to have been derived from prestigious printed sources (King James I is explicitly mentioned), many of them have been directly collected

> from the mouths of village historians, as they were related to a closing circle of attentive hearers, assembled in a winter's evening, round the capacious chimney of an old hall or manor-house; for, formerly, in countries remote from the metropolis, or which had no immediate intercourse with it, before news-papers and stage-coaches had imported scepticism, and made every plowman and thresher a politician and free-thinker, ghosts, fairies and witches, with bloody murders committed by tinkers, formed a principal part of rural conversation.[13]

---

[9] Captain Francis Grose had published previously a six-volume *Antiquities of England and Wales* (1773–87), and was starting to collect material for his *Antiquities of Ireland* when he died in 1791.

[10] The *Glossary* is discussed in connection with "Tam O' Shanter" in Nigel Leask's *Burns and Pastoral,* p. 268 and *passim*. See also Marilyn Butler, "Burns and Politics," in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority,* ed. Robert Crawford, 86–112, p. 111. Leask discusses radical antiquarianism in connection with the vernacular revival in Nigel Leask, "Burns, Wordsworth and the Politics of Vernacular Poetry," in Peter de Bolla, Nigel Leask and David Simpson eds., *Land, Nation and Culture: Thinking the Republic of Taste* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 202–222, p. 207.

[11] Francis Grose, Esq. F.A.S., *A Provincial Glossary, with a Collection of Local Proverbs and Popular Superstitions* (London: S. Hooper, 1787), p. iii.

[12] Grose, *A Provincial Glossary,* p. vi.

[13] Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, pp. vii–viii.

This passage evokes an indeterminate past, before the advent of stage-coaches and "free-thinking ploughman".

This golden age, however, could only be captured through fragments of collective memory, from the "mouths of village historians", and – in Grose's later collection – through the densely historical atmosphere that the Scottish ruins synechdochically evoked in his illustrations.

Susan Stewart has forcefully argued about 18th-century ballad collection (an important antiquarian activity) that it could only produce a vision of an oral culture as always already ephemeral and, ultimately, absent. The idealised world of past wholeness could only appear as a "ghost" in what was often presented as the stable and permanent medium of the printed text. However, for Stewart, "the notion that writing endows the oral with materiality is another fact of the collector's interest in establishing the ephemerality of the oral, an interest that puts the oral in urgent need of rescue".[14] In other words, the collector's written culture has an overriding interest in presenting oral traditions as on the verge of extinction. This type of "collective" memory can thus be equally described as an agent of forgetting, as eager to preserve a given tradition as to suggest that, thanks to its efforts, it is finally safe to forget it. These considerations seem to be relevant to Burns, not only because in his later career he re-conceived the practice of ballad collecting, as Steve Newman has recently shown,[15] but also with respect to the poem he wrote for Grose's antiquarian collection – a poem that slyly subverts the antiquarian dynamics of cultural memory and forgetting.

"Tam o' Shanter" begins almost precisely where Grose's superstitious stories are said to have come from: the fire-side in the ale-house (however, the contrast with Grose's more prestigious manor-house is telling). Journeying with Tam from these cosy surroundings, we encounter a more archaic popular culture in the ruinous Alloway Kirk – a world that appears attractive and forbiddingly other-worldly at the same time.[16] At its narrative heart, the poem presents a singing and dancing folk (a favourite antiquarian notion, as Stewart remarks)[17]

---

[14] Susan Stewart, "Scandals of the Ballad," in *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 102–131, p. 104. The figure of the ghost is used by Stewart in connection with ballads: "The scandal of the ballad is in its very revival: the production of a ghost, freed of a history that scholarship will take on as its duty to supply" (108).

[15] Steve Newman, *Ballad Collection, Lyric, and the Canon: The Call of the Popular from the Restoration to the New Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 44–96.

[16] As Murray Pittock points out, Burns's mentioning in this section of the "boddle" (l. 110) – a Scottish copper coin demonetized since 1707 – "indicates Tam's re-entry into the Hidden Scotland of ancient days"; see Pittock, p. 161.

[17] Cf. Stewart: "We find that the literary tradition, in rescuing a 'folk' tradition, can just as surely kill it off. We find that in order to imagine folklore, the literary community of the eighteenth century had to invent a folk, singing and dancing 'bellow the level' of 'conscious literary art.'" Stewart, p. 103.

in the peculiar form of a witches' sabbath, where the music is provided by Satan, the dancing is done by the witches, and dead bodies hold the candles. Popular culture is thus linked to the sacred, the transgressive and the dead. Although the dances are all emphatically "authentic", the fact that they are *described* as such by the narrator is a reminder of historical and cultural difference:

> Warlocks and witches in a dance;
> Nae cotillion brent new frae *France*,
> But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
> Put life and mettle in their heels. (ll. 115-118)[18]

Burns's important precursor Allan Ramsay in a preface to his collection of medieval Scottish poetry *The Ever Green* (1724) protested against new-fangled fashions in a very similar manner: "When these good old Bards wrote, we had not yet made use of imported trimmings upon our Cloath, nor of foreign Embroidery in our Writings. Their Poetry is the Product of their own Country, not pilfered or spoiled in their Transportation from abroad".[19] In both of these passages, just as we are invited to admire the purity of a native culture, we are reminded of the spatial and temporal distance that separates the speaker and his audience ("we") from what he is describing ("their"). However, while Ramsay allows his reader a glimpse of that distance only in the preface (in order to further emphasise the purity and antiquity of his book's contents), Burns introduces it into the very heart of his own "ancient" (under)world.

In fact, the antiquities of Ramsay were far from uncontaminated by the collector's present: as Priscilla Bawcutt has argued, his collection has been hailed for creating an interest in Dunbar and medieval Scots poetry, but it was also unapologetically full of "deliberate re-writings, omissions and additions of his own".[20] Burns's case is even more interesting: "Tam o' Shanter" is generally perceived as an adaptation of a "popular tale", but in spite of the joint efforts of many critics, the "original" of the supernatural story has remained vague and elusive. Before writing the poem, Burns sent a letter to Grose containing three anecdotes as possible poetical subjects, and he uses elements of two of these in the finished work. However, as Gerard Carruthers has argued, the "diffuse collective" Burns offered in his letter interestingly speaks of "no particularly cogent local folk tradition prior to Burns's composition of his poem". Instead of collecting and recording his native traditions, Burns can be seen as admix-

---

[18] *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968). Further references to Burns's poem will be based on this edition.
[19] Allan Ramsay, ed., *The Ever Green: A Collection of Scots Poems. Wrote by the Ingenious before 1600* (Glasgow: Robert Forrester, 1876 [1724]), vol. I, p. vii. Quoted in Stewart, p. 111.
[20] Priscilla Bawcutt, "Dunbar and his Readers: From Allan Ramsay to Richard Burton," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 35–36 (2007) 362–381, p. 364.

ing a number of "highly generalized parts of the folk past of Scotland rather than the folk present of Ayrshire"[21] – in other words, he is creating his own "original" tradition, in ironic reversal of Grose's earlier scenario, in which legends of the past strictly pre-dated the appearance of "free-thinking ploughmen". The antiquarian premise, according to which a popular tradition can be safely preserved in print – or, to put it differently, the illusion that collected fragments can be kept unaffected by the collector's culture – are proved utterly wrong by the poem.

Grose in fact proved exceptionally accommodating towards Burns's poetic "antiquities". Apart from producing a sketch of the otherwise rather insignificant monument of Alloway Kirk and thereby giving his friend an opportunity to publish his poem in the *Antiquities of Scotland,* the second edition of his *Glossary* (1790) incorporated data Grose "collected" from Burns (who has thus been implicitly raised to the status of "village historian"). As the new "Preface" proudly declares: "The Topographical Proverbs and Vulgar Superstitions have [...] received several additions, particularly the latter, from the well-known Poems of my ingenious friend Mr. Burns, the Ayrshire poet."[22] Grose, it seems, found it perfectly acceptable to draw his traditional material from contemporary poetry. A new section on popular superstitions he added to the second edition is simply entitled "From Burns's poems", and contains a description of folk customs appearing in Burns's "Hallowe'en".[23] Similarly, a long section on "Witches" has been enlarged to include the important information that "A Witch cannot pursue any one beyond the middle of a running stream, so as to have any power over them beyond that limit."[24] This is something that Grose must have learnt from "Tam o' Shanter" itself. Nigel Leask has recently argued that the "Witches" of the Glossary should be regarded as important sources for Burns's narrative poem[25] – curiously, the second edition of the same work shows how bits of the poem have in turn been re-collected by the antiquary. Literary creation and collection thus mutually re-enforce each other, blurring the boundaries between past and present, fact and poetic fiction.

---

[21] Carruthers, p. 457.
[22] Francis Grose, *A Provincial Glossary; with a Collection of Local Proverbs, and Popular Superstitions,* The Second Edition, corrected and greatly enlarged (London: Printed for S. Hooper, 1790), p. viii.
[23] Grose, *A Provincial Glossary,* Second Edition, p. 49.
[24] Grose, *A Provincial Glossary,* Second Edition, p. 23.
[25] Leask, *Pastoral,* pp. 270–273.

TRANSLATING SCOTLAND

The editors of the *Canongate Burns* have recently described "Tam o' Shanter" as a poem that "translates" Burns's own prose account of Ayrshire folk superstitions into the idiom of poetry.[26] This is an important reminder that processes of memory and recording in Burns's specific Scottish context often entailed a change of language – or a change *in* language; that is, that these processes were usually entwined with problems of translation and linguistic transformation. Burns in fact literally translated the popular vernacular stories into standard English in his letter to Grose. The third tale he recounts for his friend provides an interesting example: beginning with a bucolic description of "a summer evening, about the time that nature puts on her sables to mourn the expiry of the cheerful day", it continues in a similarly Augustan vein. However, towards the end of the same narrative – one about a shepherd boy who miraculously flies off to Bordeaux and gets very drunk there – the reader is suddenly reminded of the tale's original language: Burns writes that the boy could safely return to Alloway because he had found "Somebody that understood Scotch". This remark, as Murray Pittock argues, might have been meant as a reminder for Grose that the real meaning of the tale could only be "brought home" for Scottish readers.[27] In what remains of my paper I want to suggest that translation – both as "carrying over" and as transformation – can be taken as one of the key concerns of "Tam o' Shanter", and that it is closely linked to the problematic of preserving fragments of the past. In order to show this, I will propose to interpret Burns's poem in the context of an important Scottish debate on translation that unfolded in the second half of the 18th century.

James Macpherson's publication of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* in 1760 – "Collected in the HIGHLANDS of SCOTLAND, and Translated from the GALIC or ERSE Language," according to the title-page – generated a long-drawn-out debate in Scottish letters about cultural distance and the possibilities of translation, which intensified with each of Macpherson's additions to the Ossianic corpus.[28] Susan Manning has shown in intricate detail how various Scottish writers of the age responded to Macpherson by attempting to answer fundamental questions about the possibilities of translation.[29] Can a translation be true to the original? Is it possible to preserve the "spirit" of an oral culture through translated written discourse? The rhetorician Hugh Blair was one of the most influential proponents of

[26] Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg, eds., *The Canongate Burns: The Complete Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p. 261.
[27] See Pittock, p. 156.
[28] See the title-page in James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and related works*, ed. Howard Gaskill, intro. Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 1.
[29] In her *Fragments of Union: Making Connections in Scottish and American Writing* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002).

Macpherson's work, which would suggest that his answer to both these questions could only be an unqualified 'yes'. However, while he was clearly and openly devoted to Ossian, he was also convinced that the "vigour" of an earlier oral culture necessarily faded away from later polished writing, so with the increase of "correctness," the captivating immediacy of speech was necessarily lost. In "A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian" he explains:

> Irregular and unpolished we may expect the productions of uncultivated ages to be; but abounding, at the same time, with that enthusiasm, that vehemence and fire, which are the soul of poetry. For many circumstances of those times which we call barbarous, are favourable to the poetical spirit. That state, in which human nature shoots wild and free, though unfit for other improvements, certainly encourages the high exertions of fancy and passion.[30]

Paradoxically Blair, Professor of Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres and a great authority on written style, was also a firm believer in the primacy of "barbarous" spoken language when it came to expressive force.[31] He did not dwell on the consequences of this for Macpherson's publication – ultimately a modernising translation.[32] However, he did note in his "Dissertation" that when reading the prose texts published by Macpherson, "we are examining a poet stripped of his native dress: divested of the harmony of his own numbers" – in other words, that a significant ingredient of the original poems' "sublimity" might be missing from the book.[33] After Macpherson's death in 1764, critical voices grew stronger and doubts about the authenticity of the Ossianic texts multiplied, which led the Highland Society of Scotland to set up a Committee to investigate the original sources. According to Fiona Stafford, the investigation "concluded that, although Macpherson had not produced close translations of

---

[30] Hugh Blair, "A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal," in James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and related works*, 345–399, p. 345.

[31] Liam McIlvanney comments on Blair's simultaneous espousal of propriety and primitivism and connects it to Burns and the vernacular revival in "Hugh Blair, Robert Burns, and the Invention of Scottish Literature," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29.2 (Spring 2005), 25–46, pp. 30–31. On Blair's preference for the spoken and natural see also Fiona Stafford, "Hugh Blair's Ossian, Romanticism and the teaching of Literature," in *The Scottish Invention of English Literature*, ed. Robert Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 68–88, pp. 80–81.

[32] Fiona Stafford uses the term "translation" (in more than one sense) to describe Macpherson's work in her "Introduction" to James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and related works* (v–xviii). Cf. p. viii: "For Macpherson's 'translations' involved acts of interpretation not only between Gaelic and English, but also between the oral culture of the depressed rural communities of the Scottish Highlands, and the prosperous urban centres of Lowland Britain, where the printed word was increasingly dominant. Once seen in the context of 18th-century Scottish history, *The Poems of Ossian* seems […] a sophisticated attempt to mediate between two apparently irreconcilable cultures."

[33] See Manning, *Fragments*, p. 171.

individual poems, he had nevertheless drawn on the traditional tales collected in his tours, using certain recognisable characters, plots and episodes".[34] However, the official report that Henry Mackenzie composed for the Society also clearly showed the pitfalls of Macpherson's project: "All the Gaelic-speaking authorities consulted in the Highland Society's inquiry agreed that the translation – any translation – might only distantly approach the grandeur of the original epic as it continued to exist in their imaginations."[35] Macpherson's translation, at least in hindsight, could be regarded as a venture that had been doomed from the start. Translating the "spirit" of the original was deemed hopeless, although Macpherson may be credited with making the world aware of the existence of that "spirit" in the first place.

In the last decades of the 18th century, the possibilities of translation were also discussed on a more general level. One of the most influential attempts at systematic theoretical discussion was Alexander Frazer Tytler's *The Principles of Translation* (1791). According to Manning, Tytler himself was greatly influenced by the *Ossian* controversy.[36] In his work he is very much aware of the difficulties of translation: he emphasises the inherent differences between languages, which are related to different ways of thinking. He dwells on the near impossibility of translating "those very delicate shades of distinction in the signification of words, which nothing but the most intimate acquaintance with a language can teach; but without the knowledge of which distinctions in the original, and an equal power of discrimination of the corresponding terms of his own language, no translator can be said to possess the primary requisites for the task he undertakes".[37] In other words, a good translator should be intimately familiar with both languages, but even then the outcome is uncertain. What Tytler calls a "perfect translation" is given a stringent twofold definition: it should preserve all the "ideas of the original" and at the same time convey an identical emotional effect in a different language. A perfect translation should be "as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs, as it is by those who speak the language of the original work".[38] In short, the best translation should read like an original.

Although these views were still circulating a hundred years later (William Jacks can be seen as agreeing with many of them in *Robert Burns in Other Tongues*),[39]

---

[34] Stafford, "Introduction", in James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and related works*, p. xiii.

[35] Manning, *Fragments*, p. 170.

[36] Manning, *Fragments*, p. 169.

[37] Alexander Fraser Tytler, *Essay on the Principles of Translation. Second edition* (London: Cadell and Davies / Edinburgh: Creech, 1797), p. 23.

[38] Tytler, p. 14.

[39] According to James S. Holmes, "[t]hroughout the nineteenth century, and far into the twentieth, the best known and most read of books in English on the nature of translation" was Tytler's. See Holmes's introduction to his abbreviated version of Tytler's *Essay*, in *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 43 (Autumn, 1981) 27–46; reprinted in Daniel Weissbort and Astradur Eysteins-

Burns, who wrote "Tam o' Shanter" precisely at the time when Tytler was work-
ing on his *Principles*, seems to have worked out a very different strategy, possibly
also in response to the *Ossian* controversy.[40] Following the example of earlier
poems of the vernacular revival, "Tam o' Shanter" plainly refuses to deliver a
"perfect translation" of its Scottish material; it even refuses to be confined to a
single language.[41] If anything, it is an incomplete, or partial translation – Tytler
might even have called it "imperfect", although he otherwise showed great
enthusiasm for the poem, comparing its supernatural scene to Shakespeare.[42]
However, his admiration did not prevent him from recommending to Burns the
omission of four satirical lines from the same much-praised scene, on the ground
that he found them "misplaced".[43] G. Ross Roy presents Tytler's intervention
as one bordering on censorship, although it was probably (also) motivated by
aesthetic concerns.[44] It may not be irrelevant to remark here that the suggestion
to omit the four "offending" lines was at the same time perfectly in line with
Tytler's own translation theory.

Despite the fact that Tytler believed in completely faithful translations, he
also allowed the translator the liberty of "cutting off" the odd "idea" in some
cases – albeit "only such as is an accessory, and not a principal in the clause or
sentence. It must likewise be confessedly redundant, so that its retrenchment
shall not impair or weaken the original thought."[45] His example of what exactly
might be allowed to be "cut off" is telling: he cites Pope's translation of the

---

[40] son, eds., *Translation: Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 189.

[40] Macpherson's influence on Burns is discussed by Peter T. Murphy in "Burns, Ossian and Real Scottish Genius," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 30 (1998) 67–75. Murphy argues that Burns found his poetic voice by diverging from the Ossianic model – a claim I find very plausible.

[41] As Kenneth Simpson demonstrates, Burns's technique of using both the vernacular and stand-ard English in the same poem owes a lot to the makars and to poets of the vernacular revival, Ramsay and Fergusson. See his "Robert Burns: 'Heaven-taught ploughman'?," pp. 78–79; and "Poetic Genre and National Identity: Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns". See also R. D. S. Jack, "Which Vernacular Revival? Burns and the Makars", *Studies in Scottish Literature* 30 (1998) 9–17.

[42] Quoted in *The Canongate Burns*, p. 270.

[43] The lines are as follows: "Three Lawyers' tongues, turned inside out, / Wi' lies seamed like a beggar's clout; / Three Priests' hearts, rotten black as muck, / Lay stinking, vile, in every neuk." Tytler argues that "though good in themselves, yet, as [these lines] derive all their merit from the satire they contain, [they] are here rather misplaced among the circumstances of pure horror" (quoted in Kinsley, III, p. 1362).

[44] G. Ross Roy, "Editing Robert Burns in the Nineteenth Century," in *Burns Now*, ed. Ken-neth Simpson, 129–149, pp. 130–131. Gerard Carruthers considers the publication history of the excised passage up to the present, suggesting that "Future editors of the poem might well turn serious attention to re-inserting the missing lines". See his "Tongues turn's inside out", p. 463. It is a curious fact of Hungarian cultural memory that the lines in question have "always" been part of the body of the poem for Hungarian readers, that is, ever since its canonical 19th-century translation by János Arany.

[45] Tytler, p. 39.

Iliad's parting scene between Hector and Andromache, where Pope omitted a seemingly innocuous reference to the nurse's waist and garments – an omission perfectly laudable, according to Tytler, on the grounds of "good taste".[46] As this shows, in spite of his championing of "faithfulness", Tytler also maintained that a good translator should make the translated work conform to the norms and forms of decorum prevalent in his own culture, which meant that the translator was licensed to make significant alterations and could even stand in for the censor in certain cases.[47] In this context, Tytler's recommendation to "cut off" the four "misplaced" lines from Burns's poem – lines that, ironically, speak of the severed tongues of lawyers and rotten hearts of priests – can be regarded as an attempt to complete the poem's "imperfect" translation, and carry over the text to a safer and more decorous literary territory. However, even if Burns accepted Tytler's strictures (he omitted the four lines from the 1793 Edinburgh edition of his works), the poem in other respects still seems to refuse to know its place.

BORDER CROSSINGS

Refusing to be confined to a single language, Burns's text fails to fall neatly into the category of either an unmediated "original", or of a proper "translation" (which, according to Tytler, should replicate the original effect). It is, in more than one way, a text of border crossings, and often of trespasses. One of its most glaring points is, in fact, how clearly and openly its acts of mediation are displayed. The passage about the local dances is instructive in this respect: we are not meant to believe that the encounter with an "authentic" Scottish popular culture could be anything other than indirect, even if the narrator is sometimes lured dangerously close to his subject matter. In the moment when he comes closest in terms of language and affect – when he exclaims in sexual excitement that he would give his "breeks […] off [his] hurdies / For ae blink o' the bonie burdies!" (ll. 157–158) – the phantasmagoric aspect of his narrative is also the clearest: he gets excited by the alluring young women he *imagines* in place of the old witches. The narrator gets involved in what he himself has made up – the momentary immediacy of the presentation is achieved at the cost of a marked loss in authenticity.

When pretty "Cutty Sark" is caught sight of among the dancers (in partial fulfilment of the narrator's wishes), the narrative distance has already been reestablished, and instead of the narrator, it is Tam the protagonist who exclaims on seeing her dance: "Weel done, Cutty-Sark" (l. 189). This ejaculation (Tam's only words to be directly quoted in the poem) breaks the magic spell of the

---

[46] Tytler, p. 56.

[47] According to Weissbort and Eysteinsson, Tytler's translator "in effect, functions as a kind of censor, who always has the true interest of author and reader in view". Weissbort and Eysteinsson, eds., *Translation: Theory and Practice*, p. 188.

witches' sabbath and turns all the witches against him, suggesting the dangers involved in immediate participation and thus, the necessity of mediation. However, the particular register of this line (Burns is using broad Scots, as a number of commentators observe) also indicates that the poem's acts of mediation can never be quite complete: chunks of passages in dialect remain unexplained and seemingly unintegrated into the poem's literary body, bursting its decorous framework similarly to Tam's excited cry. Gerard Carruthers notes that "Burns is often a 'poet of the gaps,' conjugating different registers that will not simply cohere" – an insight that is eminently true of "Tam o'Shanter".[48] The poem's characteristic pattern of "episode, commentary, episode, commentary" generates repeated clashes between incommensurable modes;[49] the transitions effected in the more elevated narratorial sections are notoriously bumpy. Most glaringly, the poem ends with what Robert Crawford has called a "po-faced mock-moral": an injunction that is palpably inadequate to the tale that goes before it.[50] Pursued by the witches, Tam crosses the bridge on the river Doon and escapes at hair's breadth; his mare Maggie, however, loses her tail, which had been grasped by the most vigorous witch. As critics have pointed out, this episode of "joke-castration" has a wealth of ironic and sexual implications about tails and riding.[51] It seems also to comment ironically on the missing "tail" to Tam's "tale" – that is, on the strangely unfinished quality of the text, which is made even more emphatic by the forced moral. In the end, readers are admonished to "Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare" any time they are tempted by too much drink or illicit sex – a rather flat-footed conclusion to such an energetic and complex poem. The moral of the moral may be that the unruly pleasures of Scottish popular culture cannot be "carried over" into polished letters – and by making this evident, paradoxically the poem in a more devious way manages to accomplish exactly that.

It was perhaps the poem's refusal to deliver a complete "translation" that made Carlyle (who was himself a translator) reject "Tam o' Shanter" almost viscerally. As he explained in the *Edinburgh Review*, "the heart and body of the story still lies hard and dead", because Burns "has not gone back […] into the dark, earnest, wondering age, when the tradition was believed."[52] In the light of the above interpretation, this could be translated as a complaint about the imperfections of Burns's "translation": the effect of the poem is not the same as that of an original (as Tytler would also prefer), because readers are made constantly aware of their distance from the culture represented in the poem. "Tam o' Shanter" is unashamedly set in an "other-world" in which no-one is quite at home; perhaps

---

[48] Carruthers, p. 458.

[49] See Simpson, p. 87.

[50] Robert Crawford, *The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), p. 328.

[51] Robert Crawford, "Robert Fergusson's Robert Burns," in Crawford, ed., *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, p. 19. Quoted in Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, p. 274.

[52] *Edinburgh Review* 48 (1828), p. 285 – quoted in Kinsley, III, p. 1351.

that is why it could be described, in spite of all its vitality, as essentially "dead". Carlyle also complains that Burns brings different realms side by side without providing adequate crossings between them: "The piece does not properly co- here; the strange chasm which yawns in our incredulous imaginations between the Ayr public-house and the gate of Tophet, is nowhere bridged over".[53] This subliminally evokes the bridge in the poem, and specifically Tam's final jour- ney across the river Doon. It seems that Carlyle is keenly aware that the poem's crossings – its acts of translation or "carrying over" – can only be imperfect.

Ironically, this might even be taken as evidence for how perceptive a reader he is, for Burns deliberately halts the reader's progress through exactly this passage. In his 1793 Edinburgh edition he added the following learned footnote to the line about the bridge's "key-stane" (which Tam must pass in order to escape):

> It is a well known fact that witches, or any evil spirits, have no power to follow a poor wight any farther than the middle of the next running stream. – It may be proper likewise to mention to the benighted traveller, that when he falls in with *bogles*, whatever danger may be in his going forward, there is much more hazard in turning back.[54]

The second sentence here ironically presents the reader as a "benighted travel- ler", who should go on reading (while the footnote works as retardation in this moment of maximum suspense). The writer's mock-serious tone, at the same time, together with his polished English style, can only be a reminder of the unbridgeable gap that Carlyle found so troubling, between the reader's modern scepticism and the "well known facts" of popular superstition.[55] What appears to be a passage on transition (even on the necessity of "going forward") turns out to be demonstrating disconnection, similarly to the stump of Maggie's lost tail.

For today's critics, the poem's self-conscious refusal to provide a smooth cross- ing from oral culture's popular pleasures to the norms and values of a polished literary world makes it, instead of a failure, a resounding success. In Pittock's view, the poem offers a scathing critique of Enlightenment antiquarianism and its "reduction of orality's hidden and elusive nature to the dimensions of cultural codification and collection".[56] What I have been trying to add is that the "elusive nature" of oral culture was itself an important tenet of later-18th-century Scottish literary discourse, and that it was often linked to the idea of the difficulty (or

---

[53] Quoted in Kinsley, III, p. 1351.
[54] Kinsley, II, p. 563.
[55] As Nigel Leask observes, the proliferation of notes was a notable characteristic of antiquarian works (David Hume, by contrast, published the first volume of his *History of England* without any). See Leask, *Pastoral*, p. 258. Burns's footnote in the Edinburgh edition may be taken as a gesture evoking the antiquarian context, even outside Grose's *Antiquities*.
[56] Pittock, p. 155.

impossibility) of translation. Burns might have taken this cannily into account as he worked out his own polyglossic strategy in "Tam o' Shanter" – a strategy that assured that the pleasure of the poetry could appear as both elusive and triumphant at the same time. Interpreting the poem, tentatively, as an imperfect or incomplete translation – a translation in the making, a text moving "between languages" – enables us to see how it flaunts the impossibility of a perfect translation (from spoken to written text, from Scots vernacular to literary English, from prose account to poetry) and at the same time subverts the very imperative of providing such a (full and perfect) translation.

In other words, the poem that has been cited to illustrate the untranslatable aspects of Burns's poetry can be taken as engaging in sophisticated ways with fundamental questions of translation. Its most characteristic pleasures are generated by changes in medium – with a strong sense of their incommensurability – which the text both enacts and reflects upon. One of these moments comes when, after the highly Scotticised description of Tam's "glorious" pleasures in the ale-house, the reader is reminded of their transience in a quasi-Augustan passage:

> But pleasures are like poppies spread,
> You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed;
> Or like the snow falls in the river,
> A moment white – then melts for ever. (ll. 59–62)

For Coleridge, who was to theorise untranslatability as the essence of poetry in *Biographia Literaria*, these lines offered the best example of the workings of poetic imagination. The metaphor of the snow falling in the river speaks of loss – but, according to Chapter 4 of the *Biographia*, the sharp perception it offers produces a novel kind of pleasure through "that freshness of sensation which is the constant accompaniment of mental no less than of bodily convalescence".[57] The (un)translatability encoded in Burns's poem might well be responsible for this singular effect.

---

[57] Donald A. Low, ed., *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 110. See S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Nigel Leask (London: J. M. Dent, 1997), p. 54.

ÉVA PÉTERI

"Older than the rocks"

On Lajos Gulácsy's *Lady Playing on an Ancient Instrument* and
Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *La Ghirlandata* and *Lady Lilith*

To talk about cultural memory is especially apt in relation to Lajos Gulácsy's art,
which is often nostalgic and remote in character, belonging to the past as much
as to the present. "My art is not a definite expression of what I see," he claimed,
"I never aim to portray the objects of the surrounding world around."[1] "[My
works are r]eminiscences, songs, illusions, memories and vibrations."[2]

The basic characteristics of Gulácsy's art – the evocation of the past, the
visionary character of his painting, the suggestiveness and the musicality – all
indicate an escapist attitude and all correspond to his appreciation of late-nine-
teenth-century English art: of the Pre-Raphaelites and aestheticism. Gulácsy
believed that "Burne-Jones, Millais, Whistler, Rossetti […] created their works
with far greater intimacy than the great painters of the Renaissance, as masters
they are less, but in spirit and sensibility and in the essence of their art they pro-
vide far more."[3] Spiritual in approach and synaesthetic in character, the works
of these English predecessors embodied what Gulácsy believed to be genuine
art. Likewise, the turning to an idealised past, to an age believed to have been
more spiritual and sincere is also a gesture that connects Gulácsy and the Pre-
Raphaelites. Burne-Jones was famous for his claim that the "more materialistic
science becomes the more angels [he would] paint,"[4] and "dream" as a way of
fleeing into a more spiritual, more beautiful world was a central topic of his art.
Rossetti's only painting depicting contemporary society was, quite characteristi-
cally, left unfinished,[5] he rather dwelt in the medieval world of King Arthur and
Dante. Yet in Gulácsy's art the past is a living tradition: not only did he revive
past ages and bygone heroes in his paintings – as did Rossetti and Burne-Jones –

---

[1] "Művészetem nem a pozitív látás kifejezése, törekvésem sohasem oda irányul, hogy a termé-
   szetben látott tárgyakat leábrázoljam." Lajos Gulácsy, "Művészetem," in Lajos Gulácsy, *A vi-
   rágünnep vége*, ed. Judit Szabadi (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1989), 43–6, p. 43.

[2] "Reminiszcenciák, dalok, káprázatok, vibrációk […]." Gulácsy, "Művészetem," p. 45.

[3] "Egy Burne-Jones, Millais, Whistler, Rossetti […] sokkal több bensőséggel alkották műveiket
   a reneszánsz nagyjainál, mint mesterek kisebbek, de lelkük és érzékük vibrálása és művészetük
   eszenciája sokkal több azokénál." Gulácsy, "Művészetem," pp. 44-5.

[4] In Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist–Dreamer* (New
   York: Abrams, 1999), p. 237.

[5] He worked on the painting *Found* from 1854 till his death in 1882.

but he roamed the streets of Venice in Renaissance costumes, dressed as Hamlet and painted his self-portraits in different masks, assuming different roles in the manner of Oscar Wilde.[6] Though more closely linked to his surroundings, to late-nineteenth-century London, Whistler distanced himself in style, finding inspiration in the exotic realm of Japanese art and in the suggestiveness of music referred to in many of his titles. The appreciation of Japanese art creates a further link between Whistler, Rossetti and Gulácsy, the latter praising Japanese pictures for their "extremely charming, ethereal quality […] that entirely conceals execution, [as if they would] not be set to paper but hover above it."[7]

On the basis of these common traits it is not surprising that Gulácsy is remembered as the Hungarian Pre-Raphaelite,[8] and "[a]lthough Hungarian, [he] seems to belong to that doomed and decadent world of the European fin-de-siecle," as Christopher Wood claims.[9] Concerning Gulácsy's English orientation, his *Lady Playing on an Ancient Instrument* (Régi instrumentumon játszó hölgy, 1908?) is of particular interest, especially in its close correspondence to Rossetti's *La Ghirlandata* (1873) and *Lady Lilith* (1868). Both depicting alluring ladies plucking the strings of ancient instruments, Gulácsy's painting and *La Ghirlandata* evoke visions and sensations remote from the ordinary, enchanting and ominous at the same time. Lady Lilith is even more enticing: her narcissistic complacency makes her kindred to Gulácsy's lady. Discussing Gulácsy's art Katalin Gellér observes that "most of [his] paintings were conceived as poetic revivals of earlier paintings and past times."[10] In the case of his *Lady Playing on an Ancient Instrument* Rossetti's *La Ghirlandata* and *Lady Lilith* might have been such predecessors.[11]

6　His novel *Pauline Holseel* also bears witness to his indebtedness to the legacy of Oscar Wilde. For more on this connection cf. Éva Péteri, "A viktoriánus kulturális örökség Gulácsy Lajos művészetében," in Bálint Gárdos, Ágnes Péter, Veronika Ruttkay, Andrea Timár, Máté Vince, eds., *Idegen költők − örök barátaink: Világirodalom a magyar kulturális emlékezetben* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2010), pp. 67–76.

7　"… végtelenül bájos leheletszerű valami […], mely a kivitelt teljesen elfödi […]. Szinte nincs is papírra rögzítve, mintha fölötte lengene." Gulácsy, "Művészetem," p. 44.

8　"12 November 2003 – 18 January 2004: Painted Dreams –Tales, fantasy and dreams in Hungarian art of the early twentieth century", Freud Museum, London, Exhibition Archive. 2011. 03. 26. <http://www.freud.org.uk/exhibitions/10527/painted-dreams-tales-fantasy-and-dreams-in-hungarian-art-of-the-early-twentieth-century/>

9　Christopher Wood, "Gulácsy – the European," in *Painted Dreams*, exhibition catalogue (Budapest: Ernst Múzeum, 2003), 31–3, p. 31.

10　Katalin Gellér, "Hungarian Art Nouveau and its English Sources," in *Hungarian Studies* 6.2 (1990), 155–65, p. 159.

11　Gulácsy was not able to see the paintings themselves. *La Ghirlandata* was in private ownership in England until 1927, and *Lady Lilith* was sold to the Bancroft Collection, Wilmington Society of Fine Arts, Delaware in 1892 (cf. Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Catalogue Raisonné* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971], pp. 117, 130), and Gulácsy visited neither England – though he very much wished to study there – nor the United States. Reproductions of these pictures, however, were available.

The close affinity between Gulácsy's *Lady Playing on an Ancient Instrument* and Rossetti's *La Ghirlandata* goes far beyond the obvious similarity of subject. The depicted scenes are more emblematic than real: on closer inspection the performances fail, no music is produced. The harmony suggested at a cursory glance is also deceptive: behind the smiles of the women a sense of impending doom prevails.

The harp has been the symbol of music from ancient times. It was the instrument of Orpheus, the Thracian poet, whose wonderful music could transcend the laws of nature: trees were uprooted and wild beasts grew tame under the spell of the sound of his harp.[12] He could even regain life after death, for softened by his music, Pluto and Proserpine, king and queen of Hades, granted him the privilege to take his wife, Eurydice back to the land of the living. In the Christian tradition King David, the author of the Psalms, is associated with the harp: he was able to expel the evil spirit from Saul by playing on the instrument.[13] The

---

[12] Concerning the legend of Orpheus some sources describe his instrument as a harp and some as a lyre. Musicology makes a distinction between them, regarding the lyre as a U-shaped instrument with strings fixed to a crossbar and the harp as one with a triangular shape. In literary and artistic tradition, however, this distinction is insignificant. One of the Pre-Raphaelites, Burne-Jones for example, depicts Orpheus with a harp (*The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice* [1879], *Poesis* [1880]), whereas Rossetti with a lyre (*Orpheus and Eurydice* [1875]).

[13] See: 1 Samuel 16. King David's instrument is, again, controversial. It is claimed to be a harp, yet is regarded as identical with the Greek lyre. (Peter Gammond, *Klasszikus zene* [Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1994], p. 172.) Consequently, its visual presentation is varied: Burne-

harp, then, is not only the symbol of music but also that of divine potential, that of transcending mortal bounds.

A closer look at Rossetti's and Gulácsy's paintings reveals that both are concerned with this emblematic quality rather than with the exact presentation of particular musical performances. The scenes are not related to the present; rather, they linger in the past or in a vague realm of timelessness. Both painters associated the harp with the passing of time. Rossetti refers to the instrument he depicted as a "queer old harp"[14] and decorates its neck with blue wings symbolic of the flight of time.[15] To Gulácsy the harp and its music were also related to the past as well as to memory. In the first scene of his novel *Pauline Holseel* he envisions one of the characters, Marquesa Favelio as sitting in a beautiful garden in the shade of magnolia trees playing on her golden harp. Its music is "like memory,"[16] it recreates the colours and the foliage of the trees, and under its effect the Marquesa's face regains its youthful freshness; at the same time, however, it also evokes the vision of future bliss. Thus, the harp and its music transcend the limits of time.

The pictures' emblematic character is also emphasised by the fact that neither of them is a realistic rendering of music-making. The dubious element in Rossetti's painting is the musical instrument itself. Though Rossetti refers to it as a "queer old harp," it is, in reality, a clavicytherium, an early keyboard instrument.[17] It is played laid on the knees or on a table, but Rossetti sets it vertically as if it were a harp and shows the woman as if she were about to twang the strings. The action and the tuning pegs are hidden in the folds of her dress; only the strings, the sound holes, the elaborately carved tip and the painted neck are visible. Rossetti might have had no idea what the instrument actually was and how it was to be played, though he – as well as his notorious friend, Charles Augustus Howell – had a collection of old and exotic musical instruments. These were, as Rossetti's assistant, Henry Treffry Dunn recalled, "of antiquated construction"[18] that could not be played upon, "only to be looked at,

---

Jones depicted it as a harp (e.g. *King David, the Psalmist*, Morris & Co. stained glass, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; *King David in Armour*, Morris & Co. stained glass, St. Paul's Cathedral, Calcutta and Coddington Church, England), as well as the twelfth-century Westminster Psalter (The British Library). However, in artistic tradition it is often shown as a lyre (e.g. *King David with Lyre, and Musicians with Harp, Horn, Panpipe and Rebec, Saint-Germandes-Prés* manuscript, c. 1070. Reprinted in John Henry van der Meer, *Hangszerek az Ókortól napjainkig* [Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1988], p. 15. Strangely enough, Rossetti depicted David with a psaltery (*The Seed of David*, water-colour [1856] and oil [1858-64]).

14 Letter to H. Treffry Dunn, Kelmscott, 1873, in Surtees, p. 130.

15 Russel Ash, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), Plate 31, Alaster Grieve in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Alan Bowness (London: Tate Gallery/PenguinBooks, 1984), p. 223.

16 Lajos Gulácsy, *Pauline Holseel* (Budapest: Ferenczy Könyvkiadó, 1994), p. 10.

17 I am grateful to Róbert Mandel for identifying the instrument for me. All the details concerning the clavicytherium are due to his expert help.

18 Henry Treffry Dunn, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and His Circle: Cheyne Walk Life*

and talked about in a hushed whisper of admiration for their workmanship and adornments."[19] A year before the completion of *La Ghirlandata* Rossetti wrote to Howell that "[i]f any musical instrument (such as I had from you before for instance) were to turn up I would like to have them, as one can often make pictures out of them."[20] Rogers points out that the harp was an "instrument much admired by the Victorians as it was considered to show female hands and wrists to a great advantage."[21] Karen Yuen claims that Rossetti was aware of the "feminine potential" of "portraying the woman – music combination" and that it was part of the "construction of his masculine identity" as well as his object to cater for the tastes of his male customers.[22] Yet, as far as music-making is concerned, *La Ghirlandata* is completely nonsensical. Gulácsy's painting falsifies music-making in a different way. Less minutely detailed in presentation, yet this harp seems to be a genuine one. Here the woman's act of playing is rendered impossible. Though she seems to be sounding the strings of her instrument, closer observation reveals that she is holding roses in her left hand and a mirror in her right. Both hands being occupied with something else, she

---

(London: Elkin Matthews, 1904), p. 46.

[19] Dunn, p. 46.

[20] Letter to Charles Augustus Howell, 18 December 1872. In *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti 5: The Chelsea Years, 1863–1872, III. 1871–1872,* ed. William E. Freedman (Trowbridge: The Cromwell Press, 2005), p. 367.

[21] David Rogers, *Rossetti* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), p. 41.

[22] Karen Yuen, "Bound by Sound: Victorian Masculinity and Dante Gabriel Rossetti," in *Critical Survey* 20.3 (2008), 79–96, pp. 91–2.

certainly cannot perform music. Despite its title, it is a picture in which "nothing happens"[23] as Judit Szabadi remarks. Likewise, Matteo Fabbris's comment that the late-Rossettian oils depict "rest or meaningless action" applies to *La Ghirlandata*, too.[24]

Strangely enough, while they hinder music-making, both paintings are essentially musical.[25] Current studies challenge the view based on a remark by William Holman Hunt that Rossetti found music "positively offensive."[26] Researching Rossetti's attitude to music Yuen claims that he "was […] the most musically inspired Pre-Raphaelite, producing countless paintings with colour harmonies and musical instruments and numerous poems with musical structure, song-like rhythms, and complex interpretations of the Orpheus and Siren myths."[27] Likewise, Tim Barringer argues that Rossetti "proposed that the pattern of tones and textures by which [music] produces aesthetic pleasure provided an exact analogy with what he was trying to do in his paintings. It is as if each of the opulent colours he used represented a note in a chord, the total effect being a rich harmony."[28] Conscious of colour harmony Rossetti referred to his *Veronica Veronese* (1872) as a "study of varied greens,"[29] to *Proserpine* (1874) as "a gradation of greys"[30] and to *La Ghirlandata* as "the greenest picture of the world."[31] The circular composition of *Monna Vanna* (1866) and the symmetrical and even gyratory arrangement of *Bower Meadow* (1871–72) also show his affinity with music. In *La Ghirlandata* Fabbris emphasises the circularity of the depiction of the woman's right hand "resembling the twisting of the gyre",[32] "her sinuous limbs"[33] and "the twisting and waving lines and arabesques" of her body and "the natural world created around her."[34] Hipkins even claims that Rossetti has

23 Judit Szabadi, *Gulácsy Lajos* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1983), p. 87.
24 Matteo Fabbris, "Writing the Pre-Raphaelite Body," in *The Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society* 15.2 (Summer 2007), p. 9.
25 Apart from being musical, both paintings are strongly synaesthetic, incorporating reference to vision, sound, smell and touch alike. Cf. Yuen, p. 87, and Attila Rum, "Modern magyar festészet 1900–1945 – Gulácsy Lajos – *Őszi vasárnap Normandiában* 1912," < http://www.piktura.eoldal.hu/cikkek/gulacsy-lajos/gulacsy-lajos-_1882__8211_1932__-oszi-vasarnap-normandiaban_-1911-1912-korul.html>, retrieved 30 June 2010.
26 "Music Rossetti regarded as positively offensive; for him it was nothing but a noisy nuisance. It may be that this opinion was not permanent." William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. 2 vols.* (London: Macmillan, 1905), vol. 1, p. 152.
27 Quoted in "2010 Fellowship in Pre-Raphaelite Studies Awarded," in *The Pre-Raphaelite Society Newsletter of the United States* 23 (Winter 2009), p. 2.
28 Tim Barringer, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Calmann and King, 1998), p. 150.
29 Letter to F. R. Leyland, 25 January 1872, *Art Journal*, 1892, p. 250, in Surtees, p. 128.
30 In *Art Journal*, 1892, in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 232.
31 In Rosalie Glynn Grylls, *Portrait of Rossetti* (London: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), p. 157.
32 Fabbris, p. 17.
33 Fabbris, p. 17.
34 Fabbris, p. 17.

also noticed "the harmony of line and proportion […] inherent in [the] essential configuration" of the musical instruments themselves.[35] Gulácsy also proposed that form and colour might give musical quality to a painting. He – like Whistler and even Rossetti – favoured musical titles, and according to Attila Rum such titles as *Song of the Rose Tree* [Dal a rózsatőről], *Song in the Open Air* [Dal a szabadban] and *Minuet* [Menüett] suggest that painting becoming one with music is a "truly tangible experience."[36] His critical writings also reveal this identification of the one art with the other. Commending the art of Gustav Klimt he claimed that in his paintings "we see music" and that the music of his "lustrous, profuse colours" evokes "a wonderful ecstasy."[37] He believed that "[t]he one who is really sensitive to a symphony of Beethoven, Wagner, Mozart or Gluck, can also enjoy its colours and lines; at the same time he also delights in a picture of Burne-Jones or Böcklin for the music of the lines and the colours."[38]

Gulácsy's words echo those of Walter Pater, who in his essay "The School of Giorgione" claims that "some of the most delightful music seems to be always approaching to […] pictorial definition,"[39] and that "the possession of the pictorial gift" means an "inventive or creative handling of pure line and colour, which […] is quite independent of anything definitely poetical in the subject it accompanies."[40] According to Pater "it is the constant effort of art to obliterate" the distinction between matter and form,[41] and as "[i]t is the art of music which most completely realises this artistic ideal, this perfect identification of matter and form."[42] Thus "[a]ll art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."[43] The correspondence cannot be accidental: Gulácsy was familiar with Pater's aesthetic. In his fictitious story "Nasi", the hero Fülöp is an aesthete "with Paterian views,"[44] who "has written his first […] essay on La Gioconda,"[45] a clear reference to Pater's famous description of Leonardo's painting. Pater's interpretation

[35] A. J. Hipkins, "The Musical Instruments in Rossetti's Paintings," in *The Musical Review* (3 February 1883), p. 27. In Dianne Sachko MacLeod, "Rossetti's Two Ligeias: Their Relationship to Visual Art, Music, and Poetry," *Victorian Poetry* 20.3/4 (1982), 89–102, p. 98.

[36] Rum, <http://www.piktura.eoldal.hu/cikkek/gulacsy-lajos/gulacsy-lajos-_1882_8211_1932_-oszi-vasarnap-normandiaban>

[37] "A zenét látjuk. A színek csillogó, dús, gazdag muzsikája, mely belélopkodja érzetünkbe azt a csodálatos extázist, [melyet csak egy mai, intenzív kulturéletet élő individuum tudhat élvezni,] […] ." Lajos Gulácsy, "A Kunstschau kiállítása: Wien, 1908," in *A virágünnep vége*, 61–2, p. 62.

[38] "… aki Beethoven, Wagner, Mozart, Gluck egy-egy szimfóniáját átérzi, szín és vonalbeli határait is élvezni tudja, viszont egy Böcklin, Burne-Jones dolgánál a vonalak és színek dalát is élvezi." Gulácsy, "Blanka," in *A virágünnep vége*, 52–7, p. 53.

[39] Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione," in *The Renaissance* (New York: Random House, The Modern Library, n.d.), 107–28, p. 111.

[40] Pater, "The School of Giorgione," p. 108.

[41] Pater, "The School of Giorgione," p. 111.

[42] Pater, "The School of Giorgione," p. 114.

[43] Pater, "The School of Giorgione," p. 111.

[44] Lajos Gulácsy, "Nasi," in *A virágünnep vége* 131–6, p. 132.

[45] Gulácsy, "Nasi," p. 132.

of the painting must have made a deep impression on Gulácsy, since in his essay "Dreams on a Sleeping Gallery" he again evokes the enigmatic figure of Leonardo's lady, whose vision emerges, quite characteristically as a "tranquil sonnet."[46]

Rossetti too was impressed by Pater's study on Giorgione. In November 1869, on its first publication in the *Fortnightly Review* he wrote in a letter to Swinburne: "What a remarkable article that is of Pater's Leonardo!"[47] Pater himself found a kindred spirit in Rossetti, referring to him in "The School of Giorgione" as a poet "whose […] painted work often comes to mind as one ponders over these precious things [the character of Giorgione's art]."[48] The abstract musicality of many of Rossetti's paintings even precedes Pater's theoretical proposition on the proximity of music and painting. Being abstract, music is detached from the particular, thus more capable of approaching the transcendent. William Michael Rossetti assumes that *La Ghirlandata* "indicate[s] […] the faculty of art [here more precisely: music] worthy of a celestial audience" represented by the two angels.[49] On this basis, D. S. MacLeod claims that in Rossetti's paintings music has "celestial associations": it should "elevate the viewer from the mundane to the spiritual."[50] Neither Rossetti, nor Gulácsy would have been satisfied with anything less.

Like the "harps", the women depicted are also emblematic: they are fetishes rather than ordinary women. Even more: they are *femmes fatales*, alluring and destructive at the same time. Being in possession of their "harps", they are also in possession of transcendental power. They rule over life and death, as the symbolic details indicate. In Rossetti's painting the calicytherium is garlanded with a wreath of roses and honeysuckle, Rossetti's favourite flowers, the emblems of love and sexuality respectively.[51] Yet there is a reference to death as well, as the decorative carved swans indicate. Similarly, Gulácsy places his harp into the embrace of roses at the top and a skull reflected in the mirror at the bottom. These ladies offer pleasure as well as pain.

The lavish surroundings, Rossetti's profuse garden and Gulácsy's more blurred, yet rose-overgrown greenery are also deceptive: they incorporate ominous references. The lush vegetation together with the two angels of *La Ghirlandata* recalls the Garden of Eden. Still, Rossetti wished to make it baleful: he intended to paint poisonous monkshood into the foreground – though mistakenly depicted the innocent larkspur instead.[52] The blue bird on the right is borrowed from an

---

[46] Lajos Gulácsy, "Álmok egy alvó tárlaton," in *A virágünnep vége*, 63–5, p. 63.

[47] Letter to Algernon Charles Swinburne, 26 November 1869, in *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, eds. Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–67), p. 765.

[48] Pater, p. 119.

[49] Surtees, p. 130.

[50] MacLeod, p. 99.

[51] Cf. Alaster Grieve in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, pp. 208–9.

[52] As William Michael Rossetti, the painter's brother wrote: "[The picture] must be intended to have a fateful or deadly purport, as indicated by the prominence given to the blue flowers

earlier painting, *Venus Verticordia* (1864–68), where (as explained in the sonnet Rossetti wrote to accompany the picture) it is expected the "woe [to] foretell." Despite all these references, the painting does not really lend itself to being regarded as the depiction of Eve or the Fall. The lady's sensuality – her bare neck, thick lips and the delicate touch of her elongated fingers – portray her as an enchantress, a seducer, temptation herself, rather than the one tempted. Lilith, Adam's first wife might be, then, associated with her, especially given Rossetti's general interest in her character and myth. The sonnet accompanying his painting *Lady Lilith* (1868) describes her in the following way:

> Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told,
> (The witch he loved before the gift of Eve)
> That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive
> And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
> And still there she sits, young while the earth is old,
> And, subtly of herself contemplative,
> Draws men to watch the bright net she can weave,
> Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

According to Jewish folklore, Lilith "was banished from the Garden of Eden for refusing to make herself subservient to Adam."[53] Her self-contained and narcissistic character ("subtly of herself contemplative") is reflected in the traditional belief that she "makes her home in every mirror thus getting possession of girls looking at it."[54] Consequently, Rossetti depicts Lilith admiring herself in an oval-shaped hand mirror, the very same type that is shown in Gulácsy's *Lady Playing on an Ancient Instrument*.

There are further affinities between these two paintings, giving the impression that Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* might be regarded as another "poetic predecessor" to Gulácsy's work. Although in *Lady Lilith* there is no reason to suppose that the mirror shows anything else than the beauty of the sitter, the reference to death is present in the poppy standing in a vase next to Lilith in the foreground; Gulácsy's painting likewise has a black, dead flower, similarly in a vase in the foreground. The climbing roses and the green garden in the background (though the latter is a mirror-reflection in Rossetti's painting) are also akin. The surroundings are ambiguous in both cases: the flowers suggest an outer, while the furniture an

---

of the poisonous monkshood. Monkshood this plant was, in Rossetti's intention; but I am informed that he made a mistake (being assuredly far the reverse of a botanist), and figured the innocuous larkspur instead […]." in Surtees, p. 130.

[53] Sylvia Chong, "The Myth of Lilith," ed. Alan Humm, <http://jewishchristianlit.com/Topics/Lilith>, retrieved 3 March 2011.

[54] "Lilith's Cave", in Howard Schwartz, ed., *Lilith's Cave: Jewish Tales of the Supernatural* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), in Chong, retrieved 3 March 2011.

inner space. In J. B. Bullen's opinion Lilith is "set in [a] realm between art and nature [where t]he woman preens herself into a work of art."[55] Jerome McGann too describes Lilith as "a symbol of Art" adding that she is also "an artifice [and] an artefact."[56] Gulácsy's woman is also associated with art: Szabadi suggests that "hovering between open and closed space" the lady appears as if on stage in the theatre,[57] thus luring the spectators into a world of illusion. She is "the ordained priestess of poetry and the alluring, licentious queen of love at the same time," embodying art and sensuality.[58] Her image, she claims, is "hovering between the sublimity of art and […] narcissism"[59] – the two obviously belonging together in late-nineteenth-century aestheticism. Rossetti's *La Ghirlandata* carries a similar duality: the impersonal name given in the title "the garlanded lady" evokes both the wreath of poetry and that of the bride.

Narcissistic, self-absorbed and transcendental, all three women belong to the realm of timelessness. Despite their youthful freshness and beauty, they are all sisters to Leonardo's La Gioconda, in Pater's words "older than the rocks, […] hav[ing] been dead many times, [and having] learned the secrets of the grave."[60] They are "spectres which haunt the mind of their creator[s],"[61] evoked from a visionary past, from a shared cultural memory.

55   J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 136.

56   Jerome McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game that Must Be Lost* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 133.

57   Judit Szabadi, "Gulácsy Lajos: Régi instrumentumon játszó hölgy," in *12. Aukciós katalógus* (Budapest: Mű-Terem Galéria, December 2002), 50–3, p. 53. I am grateful to Attila Rum for drawing my attention to this article.

58   Szabadi, p. 52.

59   Szabadi, p. 50.

60   Walter Pater, "Leonardo da Vinci," in *The Renaissance*, 81–107, p. 103.

61   Bullen, p. 148. (Bullen's claim refers only to Rossetti.)

3. Social framework of memory: the ideology of remembering

Á g n e s P é t e r

The Romantic myth of Milton
in Hungary

Mór Jókai's *Milton*

Produced by Ede Szigligeti (1814–1878), a highly appreciated all-round man of the theatre, and with a cast including the leading actress (Mari Jászai, 1850–1926) and actor (Ede Újházi, 1844–1915) of the time, the National Theatre presented Mór Jókai's four-act blank-verse drama *Milton* to a full house on April 3, 1876. The first night had been prepared for by the author, the most popular novelist and a celebrated public figure of the period, with carefully calculated finesse. Rumours had been spread of the well-known German actor, the blind Josef Weilenbeck having asked Jókai to write a part for him in a new play; excerpts of the play had been read by the author at public readings; and the dialogue between Milton and Charles II in Act III had been published in the Sunday issue of Jókai's paper, *A Hon*, a day before the first night, on 2 April. The first night was a great success. The author received several curtain calls from the grateful audience, and eventually he was presented with two laurel wreaths.[1]

Jókai must have felt confident that the single word *Milton* in the title would be an enticement powerful enough to fill the theatre. And indeed, the second part of the nineteenth century is one of the peaks in the history of the reception of Milton in Hungary. In the present essay I want to create a European as well as a national framework in which the emergence in Hungary of the Romantic concept of Milton can be discussed.

During the period of the Enlightenment Milton was canonised by Hungarian men of letters as one of the major poets of the European tradition. Most representatives of the Hungarian Enlightenment were educated in Vienna and could take advantage of the cosmopolitan, stimulating atmosphere of the imperial city as well as the access the city provided to centres of learning and publishing in Western Europe; they discovered Milton and introduced his epic to the Hungarian readers in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. György Bessenyei, a major figure of the Hungarian Enlightenment, lived in Vienna from 1765 to 1782. In 1777 he published a letter written in French to a fictitious friend, in

---

[1] Andor Solt, "Jókai Milton című drámája," *Irodalomtudományi Közlemények* 3 (1975), 297–306, p. 297.

which he says: "You want to know my opinion of the English authors. I have read some of them in French, and I can tell you that they are very sensible and sublime in their reasoning, sometimes they go so far that they seem to transcend the boundaries of human imagination. Read Milton, Shakespeare, Young, and you will see how the human mind can be both majestic and terrible."[2]

One characteristic of the Hungarian reception is that the Milton cult among the writers of the Enlightenment emerged simultaneously with the cult of Shakespeare, although for obvious reasons, not being supported by the growing popularity of the stage, it was restricted to a smaller community of readers.[3] Another feature of the Hungarian attitude to the English tradition is that the canonisation of Milton and Shakespeare went chronologically in parallel with the enthusiastic discovery and translation of Alexander Pope's and Edward Young's major works. Indeed there is no significant difference in time between the translations of Pope (György Bessenyei: *An Essay on Man*, 1772, second version: 1792; Mihály Csokonai: Pope's pastoral "Winter" ["Daphne"], 1801, see also his admiration for "the divine English bard" in the Preface of *Dorottya*, Csokonai's mock-heroic poem avowedly modelled upon *The Rape of the Lock*) and Young's "Nights and Other Works" published in the translation by Ferenc Faludy in 1787, or the first Hungarian prose translation of *Hamlet* by Ferenc Kazinczy (from Schröder's version) in 1890.

It was György Bessenyei's brother, Sándor Bessenyei, who translated *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* from French prose into Hungarian prose in 1796, much belatedly compared to the first Italian, French or German translations, probably due to the cultural isolation of Hungary till about the last two decades of the eighteenth century. The facile collocation of Shakespeare, Milton and Young in Bessenyei's statement of 1777 suggests that the Enlightenment view of Milton lacks the specificity of a thinker and poet defined by his historical ambience.

Bessenyei's translation had been published again twice a few years before Jókai wrote his drama, in 1866 and 1874.[4] And two years before the successful production of Jókai's *Milton*, in 1874, *Paradise Lost* was published in the metrical transla-

---

[2]   "Vous demandez mon avis sur les auteurs anglais. J'en ai lu quelques-uns en français; et je puis vous dire que ce sont des gens très sensés et sublimes dans leur raisonnement, où ils vont quelques fois si loin, qu'ils semblent passer les bornes de l'imagination humaine. Ils ont de tems an tems [sic] des pensées effrayantes, mais toujours sublimes… Lisez *Milton, Shakespear, Young,* et vous verrez comment la raison humaine peut devenir à la fois majestueuse et terrible." Quoted in French in Sándor Fest, *Skóciai Szent Margittól a walesi bárdokig. Magyar–angol történeti és irodalmi kapcsolatok.* eds. Lóránt Czigány and János H. Korompay (Budapest: Universitas Könyvkiadó, 2000), p. 322; quoted in French and translated into English by Péter Dávidházi, *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), p. 126.

[3]   Jenő Szigeti, "Milton Elveszett paradicsom-a Magyarországon," *Irodalomtudományi Közlemények* 1 (1970), 205–213, p. 205.

[4]   Szigeti, p. 212.

tion of Gusztáv Jánosi, a high-ranking priest of the Catholic Church. During the period between the first (1796) and the second (1874) Hungarian *Paradise Lost* a completely new image of Milton emerged in the cultural memory of Europe. That image was not monolithic, but multifaceted: from about the 1820s Milton was generally seen as a political and religious thinker as well as a poet forged by the intellectual milieu of the second half of the seventeenth century in England. This change in the concept of Milton was due to the "the increasing conscious-ness of the historical character of development", a new understanding of the past after the traumatic experience of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars.[5] Contrary to the philosophers of the Enlightenment, the Romantics saw history as a process that necessarily incorporated interruption and crisis. For them the difference between the present and the past was accentuated; at the same time, however, the present was seen as a necessary outcome of the past. In the nineteenth century the period of the English civil war was increasingly seen as a paradigm of historical experience that might bring into focus the nature of the acute conflicts and the distressful moral dilemmas of the period.

In the crisis created by the armed conflict between England and the repub-lican army of France, the Romantic poets of England found Milton's austere intransigence cathartic. In their judgment, Milton's life and writings encom-passed intellectual and moral virtues, and through them he had enquired boldly into established moral and religious issues. He was admired for the spirit of his unorthodox theology and political stance (Blake, Percy Shelley), for the unity of his life and work (Wordsworth), for his imagination intuiting the sublime (Coleridge).

In Europe, however, the most general Romantic concept of Milton stemmed from identification with the loneliness of a poet who had fallen victim to the aggressive political forces which controlled the sequence of historical events. When Jókai wrote his four-act drama this iconic European image already had some currency.

There are three pictorial representations, identical in theme, which can be seen as typical of the image of Milton dominating the cultural memory of the Continent. Eugène Delacroix was the first to present that sublime but fragile "Milton" in his oil painting *Milton Dictating Paradise Lost to his Daughters* in 1826, which defined the approach to Milton for the whole nineteenth century. In a typically Romantic gesture, Delacroix accentuates the division between the physical and the spiritual condition of Milton as well as between the temporal and the universal. There is an emphasis on Milton's blindness and also on the components of what can be seen: the detailed, historically appropriate represen-tation of costume and objects in the completely sealed-off interior. At the same

---

5   Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*. Translated by Hannah and Stan Mitchel (London: Pen-guin Books, 1969), p. 23.

time Milton's inner vision is recreated in a panel above his head in which the universal human condition is defined by the explicit reference to Adam and Eve leaving the Garden of Eden with the distressed Archangel Michael behind them and with no brandished sword of God before them.

In the history of Hungarian painting there are two pictures that can be supposed to have been to some extent indebted to Delacroix. Soma Orlai Petrics (1822–1880), a painter interested in historical painting and portraiture, was very well known to Jókai.[6] Orlai studied in Vienna and Munich, travelled in Italy, and consequently had access to the main trends in European art. His *Milton with his Daughters Dictating Paradise Lost* was painted in 1862 to be shown at the Great London Exposition. Here Milton is seen in a static Biedermeier setting, which is executed in clear-cut contours and colours without any depth. Space is divided in conventional terms by the presence of a window behind which a classical landscape can be seen. Milton is placed in the centre of the group of placid female figures, who hold emblematic objects in their hands (the cittern, the book and the pen); all three daughters gaze intently at their father. Milton is youthful, though blind, with a face that has the serenity characteristic of the whole composition, in which tranquillity prevails. It is an idyllic genre-painting, although there is some dramatic contrast between the landscape behind the

---

6   They had been fellow students in the famous School of the Reformed Church in Pápa. In 1880, when Orlai died, one of the obituaries was written by Jókai, in *A Hon* 6 (1880), p. 8.

window and the completely self-absorbed face of the poet. Orlai may have been moved by the drama of the artist preoccupied with a world which he cannot see.[7]

The other Hungarian painting of the same period is Mihály Munkácsy's well-known oil canvas, which today hangs in the New York Public Library. Munkácsy painted his *Milton Dictating Paradise Lost to his Daughters* in Paris in 1878. His concept of Milton is much more tragic and far more dynamic; the position of all the figures shows arrested movement. Here the emphasis shifts from the decorative components of the setting to the inner struggle of the prophet–poet, and the dramatic tension built up between the figures. With a clavichord in the dark background there is a delicate hint at Milton's interest in music, which seems to have become an international motif by then. In technical terms Munkácsy's portrayal of Milton is ages ahead of Orlai Petrics: the painting shows tremendous concentration, it eliminates all episodic details and gives an insight into the complex psychology of father and daughters; it is colour and tone here that create form, and not the line.[8] Critics today tend to read the painting as self-definition: "[Munkácsy] longed for themes that could express his own solitude and despair. In this mood he embraced the topic of Milton with great interest since the tragedy of the lonely English poet must have offered him an appropriate subject to give artistic form to his own feelings."[9] The painting received effusive praise

7   Katalin Keserü, *Orlai Petrics Soma* (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Kiadó, 1984), pp. 58–59.
8   Lajos Végvári, *Munkácsy Mihály 1844–1900* (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Kiadó, 1983), p. 25.
9   „Olyan témára vágyott, amelyben magányérzete, kétségbeesése kifejeződhet. Ebben az állapotban érdeklődéssel ragadta meg a Milton-témát, mert a magányos angol költő tragédiája alkalmasnak tűnt saját érzéseinek művészi kifejezésére is." Végvári, p. 69. (Unless otherwise indicated all translations are by the author.)

and was shown in all the great centres of European art before it was shipped to America to the art collector who had bought it and who eventually gave it to the New York Public Library. Today art critics do not seem to share the enthusiasm of the contemporary response,[10] but Munkácsy certainly grasped the lonely poet's tragedy and grandeur, which haunted the imagination of artists and poets in Europe. Like Delacroix and Orlai Petrics before him, Munkácsy shows Milton in retirement from the political arena, he also lays the main emphasis on his isolation as well as his heroic concentration on the stupendous work of the epic poet. His blindness is seen as a metaphor of poetic vision in all the three pictures.

The period we are concerned with was discovered by the historical novel as well. In English literature Walter Scott highlighted the period of Cromwell as a time heavy with problems enduring into his own time, e.g. in *Old Mortality* (1816) and in *Woodstock* (1826). In France it was Alfred de Vigny who, in admiration for Walter Scott, composed the first French historical novel, *Cinq-Mars, ou une Conjuration sous Louis XIII*, which tells the story of an abortive plot organised by a young man, Cinq-Mars against Richelieu who, through his influence on the unmanly and irresolute king, exercises unlimited tyrannical power for his own self-seeking interests; the plot is revealed and Cinq-Mars is executed. The novel was published in 1826, and was very favourably received in all critical forums. In his prefatory essay, *Réflexions sur la vérité dans l'art*, Vigny emphatically distinguishes between "Truth in art" (*la VÉRITÉ de l'art*) and "the True in fact" (*le VRAI du fait*).[11] He seems to be interested not in historical fact, though the novel has compelling graphic truth, but first and foremost in universal human nature, that is, the psychological motivation behind human behaviour. "The idea is everything; the proper name is only the example and the proof of the idea."[12] Despite his insistence on the superiority of the universal to the particular, he diagnoses in a remarkable way the emergence of the historical consciousness in the mind of his own generation and attributes it explicitly to the French Revolution: "Of late years (perhaps as a result of our political changes) art has borrowed from history more than ever. All of us have our eyes fixed on our chronicles, as though, having reached manhood while going on toward greater things, we had stopped a moment to cast up the account of our youth and its errors."[13] He

---

[10] Végvári, p. 70.

[11] Alfred de Vigny, *Cinq-Mars ou une conjuration sous Louis XIII* in Vigny. Œuvres complètes. vol. 2. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), II. 3–337, p. 6. William Hazlitt's English translation is available online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3953/3953-h/3953-h.htm>

[12] "L'IDÉE est tout. Le nom propre n'est rien que l'exemple et la preuve de l'idée." Vigny, vol. 2, p. 11.

[13] "Dans ces dernières années (et c'est peut-être une suite de nos mouvements politiques) l'art s'est empreint d'histoire plus fortement que jamais. Nous avons tous les yeux attachés sur nos Chroniques, comme si, parvenus à la virilité en marchant vers de plus grandes choses, nous nous arrêtions un moment pour nous rendre compte de notre jeunesse et de ses erreurs."

understands that the present is an organic product of the past, but in his recreation of the past he claims freedom for his artistic imagination. Unlike Walter Scott, he is interested in historical figures, the foremost protagonists of the history of the 1630s in France. In the typical Romantic concept of the binary opposition between the meditative and the active man Vigny introduces Milton among the perpetrators of the political intrigues of the time. In his capacity as a foil to the historical figures' ambitions prompted by love or thirst for power, he is the very embodiment of the sublime divine potential of the human mind, a dedicated spirit fully possessed by the divine inspiration that grants him the visionary power evinced by his great epic. One of the characters says of Milton's poems: "I admire them before they are written […] I see in them the God whose innate image I have found in my heart."[14] Vigny makes it obvious that, in his concept of history, continuity is the decisive factor and also that the most pressing problem of his own time is the moral responsibility of power. In the last paragraph of the novel Milton makes another appearance to comment upon the events. "The love of power is very puerile […]. Since Richelieu only aimed at power, why did he not […] make himself absolute master of power? I am going to see a man who is not yet known, and whom I see swayed by this miserable ambition; but I think that he will go farther. His name is Cromwell!"[15]

It is, however, Alfred de Vigny's close friend at the time, Victor Hugo, who had a decisive influence on the way Milton's age was seen in Europe in the nineteenth century. His revolutionary drama, *Cromwell*, with its provocative Preface, marks the beginning of the rise of the Romantic drama in France. Victor Hugo distinguished between *drame d'histoire* and *drame historique* and claimed he had never written any historical drama;[16] it was the drama of history, the drama of the history of his own time that he focused on. The intrigues and the conspiracies of the time of Cromwell as well as the Protector's own ambition to assume supreme power by accepting the crown seem to have offered a plot through which he could articulate his own view of the political questions that plagued his own generation. The central issue of the play is the legitimacy of power, a response to the disillusionment of intellectuals all over Europe with the aftermath of the French Revolution. Hugo's Cromwell is a prototype of Napoleon. In the context of the dramatic events he is depicted as a self-seeking egotist, and both the Puritans and the cavaliers are shown without any illusions,

---

Vigny, vol. 2, p. 5.

[14] "[…] je les admire avant qu'ils ne soient écrits […] j'y vois le Dieu dont j'ai trouvé l'image innée dans mon cœur." Vigny, vol. 2, p. 236.

[15] "L'amour de pouvoir est bien puéril […]. Puisque ce Richelieu ne voulait que le pouvoir, que ne l'a-t-il donc pris par le sommet […]? Je vais trouver un homme qui n'a pas encore paru, et que je vois dominé par cette misérable ambition; mais je crois qu'il ira plus loin. Il se nomme Cromwell." Vigny, vol. 2, pp. 336–337.

[16] Quoted in Anne Ubersfeld, "Présentation" in Victor Hugo, *Théatre I. Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Guy Schoeller (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1985), I–XVII, p. II.

either as misguided lunatics or unprincipled cynics. Hugo's vision of the turmoil of the period is expressed in terms of the grotesque: "In a world where power is ridiculous and self-indulgent, the grotesque is their norm."[17] Eventually, in a psychologically far from convincing manner, at the very end of the play, before the moment Cromwell reaches the top of the pedestal of the throne, when the leader of the plot is supposed to stab him to death, to escape that undignified end, Cromwell declares himself to be a staunch defender of the Commonwealth and thus his life is spared.

Hugo uses the actors in history for his own purposes: he is not interested in "the True in fact", nor even in the truth of character. In one of his notes to the play he says: "All who know the period in depth will be ready to justify the play by admitting that everything that happens in it, did happen, or, which is very much the same thing, could have happened in actual reality."[18] The plot is driven by blindness resulting from mistaken identity: costume, as well as language, serves to hide identity. Milton is the only character in the drama that is always recognised for who he is whenever he appears; consequently he can have no real influence upon the development and eventual resolution of the dramatic conflict. He is ignored by the other characters, if not ridiculed outright, even by the court jesters. He is a blind, infirm old man who throughout the play proves to be ineffective.

In all European countries a number of historical novels and dramas were composed along the lines sketched out by Walter Scott, Alfred de Vigny and Victor Hugo. There were, however, two famous critics of Victor Hugo's concept of history and human nature, who raised objections against Hugo in the name of what they considered to be an adherence to the truth of nature. They were Goethe and Pushkin: both are significant as they had an exceptionally comprehensive view of the past and of the contemporary movements in literature. On 27 June 1831 in conversation with Eckermann, Goethe declared:

> He [Victor Hugo] has a fine talent [...]. But he is altogether ensnared in the unhappy romantic tendency of his time, by which he is constrained to represent, side by side with the beautiful, the most hateful and intolerable. I have recently read his "Notre Dame de Paris", and needed no little patience to endure the horror that I felt. It is the most abominable book ever written! And one is not even compensated by truthful representation of human nature or character. On the contrary, his book is totally destitute of nature and truth. The so-called acting personages whom he brings forward are not men with living flesh and blood, but

---

17 "Le grotesque est la loi d'un monde où la puissance a le visage ridicule et mesquin." Ubersfeld, XI.

18 "Les personnes qui connaissent à fond l'époque lui renderont cette justice, que tout ce qui se passe dans ce drame s'est passé ou, ce qui revient au même, a pu se passer dans la réalité." Hugo, *Théâtre I*, p . 380.

miserable wooden puppets, moved according to his fancy and made to produce all sorts of contortions and grimaces. But what kind of an age is this, which not only makes such a book possible, but even finds it endurable and delightful![19]

Pushkin's critique is even more interesting in the present context, since he makes specific references to Hugo's portrait of Milton in *Cromwell*. Pushkin, the driving force behind the renewal of Russian literature, was very critical about the achievement of the early Romantics in France. In his judgment it is not "the disgusting banality of contemporary French literature"[20] that might have a salutary effect on the fermentation of the new aesthetic concepts in Russia, but the English influence. He is especially disdainful when he discusses Hugo's "dull and monstrous play", *Cromwell*, in an essay on Chateaubriand's translation of *Paradise Lost* published posthumously in *Sovremennik*. His venom against Hugo is also fuelled by his very radical political sympathies. "There is no action, and even less of interest",[21] he claims, and he seems to be quite outraged by the portrayal of Milton: "He is an old buffoon whom everybody despises and to whom nobody pays the slightest attention". Then he offers his own admiration for Milton's advanced political views:

"No, Mr Hugo! This is not what John Milton was like, the friend and champion of Cromwell, the austere fanatic, the stern author of the *Eikonoklastes* and of *Defensio populi*. He who addressed to Cromwell his famous and prophetic sonnet, 'Cromwell, our chief of men', would not have spoken to him in this

---

[19] "Er ist ein schönes Talent […] aber ganz in der unselig-romantischen Richtung seiner Zeit befangen, wodurch er denn neben den Schönen auch das Allerunerträglichste und Häßlichste darzustellen verführt wird. Ich habe in diesen Tagen seine 'Notre-Dame de Paris' gelesen und nicht geringe Geduld gebraucht, um die Qualen auszustehen, die diese Lektüre mir gemacht hat. Es ist das abscheulichste Buch, das je geschrieben worden! Auch wird man für die Folterqualen, die man auszustehen hat, nicht einmal durch die Freude entschädigt, die man etwa an der dargestellten Wahrheit menschlicher Natur und menschlicher Charactere empfinden könnte. Sein Buch ist im Gegenteil ohne alle Natur and ohne alle Wahrheit! Seine vorgeführten sogenannten handelnden Personen sind keine Menschen mit lebendigem Fleisch und Blut, sondern elende hölzerne Puppen, mit denen er umspringt, wie er Belieben hat, und die er allerlei Verzerrungen und Fratzen machen läßt, so wie er es für seine beabsichtigten Effekte eben braucht. Was ist das aber für eine Zeit, die ein solches Buch nicht allein möglich macht und hervorruft, sondern es sogar ganz erträglich und ergötzlich findet!" *Goethes Gespräche mit Eckermann* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1950), pp. 636–637. Translation: <http://www.archive.org/stream/conversationswit00goetuoft/conversationswit00goetuoft_djvu.txt>

[20] "[английская словестность] будет полезнее влияния французской поэзии, робкой и жеманной." In A.S.Pushkin: *Mysli o literature*. (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1988) p. 398. English translation in Tatiana Wolff, ed. and trans., *Pushkin on Literature*. Revised edition with an introductory essay by John Bailey (London: The Athlone Press and Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 331.

[21] "[пьеса] скучная и чудовищная", не умеющая "ни исторической истины, ни драматического правдоподобия", Pushkin, p. 321. English translation in Wolff, p. 454.

language. He, who 'though fall'n on evil days […] and evil tongues', in poverty, persecuted, and blind, retained an inflexibility of soul and dictated *Paradise Lost*, could not have been made a laughing-stock by the dissolute Rochester and by the court jesters."[22]

In the same essay he derides the absurd and historically false representation of Milton in *Cinq-Mars* by the "prim and mannered Count de Vigny"[23].

Both Pushkin and Goethe seemed to be unwilling to sympathise with Hugo's quest for means to convey what he termed the more elevated and extensive view of the modern Muse, which included the ugly, the distorted and the grotesque as well as the beautiful, the graceful and the sublime.[24] In Hungary the French Romantic School exercised a most powerful influence. Still, in the 1830s two interesting statements were published by József Eötvös in defence of the grotesque in Hugo's poetic vision of the world. Novelist, playwright, critic and political thinker, József Eötvös, thanks to his education and extensive travels in Europe and England, had a refined understanding of the dynamism of the literary events in the West. Through his own influence on public events and public opinion his dominant ambition was to modernise the political and literary culture of Hungary drawing on the more advanced patterns of England and France. He was deeply involved in the political and literary debates of the time, and soon became the target of attacks by conservative critics for the commitment of his writing to progressive political ideals. In the 1830s, when Hugo was known in Hungary only as a playwright, Eötvös's interest in him was very intense, as demonstrated by his translation of *Angelo*, published with an Introduction in 1836, and by two critical essays on Hugo's dramatic and poetic works. In the first essay (1936) he declares that it was the mind of the people and not that of the reading public that Hugo expressed and quotes from the Preface to *Angelo*: "The drama […] should give philosophy to the people, form to the ideas, muscles, blood and life to poetry, disinterested explanation to those who think, medicine to the sick souls, balm to the secret wounds, a council to each, a law to all."[25]

---

[22] "Нет, г. Юго! Не таков был Джон Мильтон, друг и сподвижник Кромвеля, суровый фанатик, строгий творец «Иконокласта» и книги «Defensio populi»! Не таком языком изъяснялся бы с Кромвелем тот, который написал ему свой славный пророческий сонет Cromwell, our chief of men! […] Не мог быть посмешищем развратного Рочестера и придворных шутов тот, кто *в злые дни жертва злых языков*, в бедности, в гонении и в слепоте сохранил непреклон-ность души и продиктовал Потерянный рай." In Pushkin, pp. 321–322. English translation in Wolff, p. 457.

[23] "чопорный, манерный граф Вини", in Pushkin, p. 183. English translation in Wolff, p. 457.

[24] "[…] la muse moderne verra les choses d'un coup d'œil plus haut et plus large. Elle sentira que tout dans la création n'est pas humainement beau, que le laid y existe à côté du beau, le difforme près du gracieux, le grotesque au revers du sublime, le mal avec le bien, l'ombre avec la lumière." "Préface du *Cromwell*" in Victor Hugo, *Critique. Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Guy Schoeller (Paris: Robert Lafont, 1985), p. 9.

[25] "Le drame […] doit donner à la foule une philosophie, aux idées une formule, à la poésie des

In 1837 Eötvös published a longer essay in response to attacks on Victor Hugo in the English *Athenaeum*.[26] "[He is accused of] following wrong, immoral tendencies, and, ravished by a miraculous love for the ugly, of introducing all kinds of physical and spiritual monsters into literature. It was he, so the noise they make goes, who led the serious person of Cromwell as a vain weakling across the stage; the Cromwell whom we loved as a hero fighting for his country, whose austere greatness we admired, is now seen in the drama to leave his path and hanker after the crown, and thus he is reduced to a pigmy size."[27] Eötvös understands Hugo's interest in the ugly and the vile: "He commends to our hearts and minds not the ugly, not the vile, but the beauty which we fail to discover in the ugly form, the virtue that we would never have searched for in the vile, and in his every work he cries to us 'Be merciful, you happy ones' […]. As poetry glows underneath his prose, so does a most beautiful moral reality gleam under the rough plot."[28]

Most of the above must have been familiar to Jókai at the time he wrote his four–act drama on Milton in 1875. He was at the peak of his career as undoubtedly the most popular novelist of the country with an amazingly broad readership, and his novels had been translated into a number of European languages. The critics of the day were impressed by the poetic splendour of the language and the dramatic effect of the scenes as well as the sublime thoughts attributed to Milton, but, as one contemporary reviewer remarked, "even a most prejudiced respect for the author cannot prevent us from admitting that there is hardly any drama composed by Jókai weaker and more lifeless than this one, if it is to be seen as a drama, (and so it is, since it appears on the stage)."[29] Still, it was produced once again in the National Theatre; later on it was staged in Kolozsvár

---

muscles, du sang et de la vie, à ceux qui pensent une explication désintéressée, aux âmes altérées un breuvage, aux plaies secrètes un baume, à chacun un conseil, à tous une loi." [Hugo, *Théâtre I*, p. 1190.] Quoted in Hungarian in József Eötvös, *Tanulmányok* (Budapest: Révai testvérek, 1902), p. 226.

[26] It was probably the April 1835 issue of *The Athenaeum* Eötvös had in mind, in which Goethe is quoted on Victor Hugo and the Romantic School of France. I would like to thank Bálint Gárdos who helped me to identify the review.

[27] "[…] rossz, erkölcstelen tendenciákat követ, s a rútnak egy csodálatra méltó szerelme által elragadtatva minden testi s lelki szörnyeket hozott be a művészetbe. Ő az, így zajonganak, ki Cromwell komoly személyét mint gyenge hiút vezeté a színpadon által; ki vitézt, a kit hazájáért csatázva szerettünk, kinek rideg nagysága előtt hódoltunk, mihelyst útjáról eltért s korona után vágyódik, oly kicsinynek mutatja." "Hugo Victor mint drámai költő" in Eötvös, p. 233.

[28] "Nem a rút az, nem a vétek, hanem épen azok a szépségek, melyeket a rút alakban nem gyanítánk, épen az erény, melyet annyi véteknél nem kerestünk volna, mit figyelmünknek és szeretetünknek ajánl; s 'legyetek könyörületesek, a ti boldogok' szó, melyet minden mívében ránk kiált. […] Miként a próza alatt rejtve lángol a költés, úgy él a durva cselekvény alatt egyike a legszebb erkölcsi valóságoknak." Eötvös, pp. 234–235.

[29] "[…] a legelfogúltabb tisztelet sem tagadhatja, hogy gyöngébb, élettelenebb drámát, ha mint ilyet tekintjük (pedig ilyennek kell tekintenünk, amint szinpadra tart igényt) Jókai még nem írt." In the daily *Pesti Napló*, 3 April 1876, quoted in Berta Vnutsko, *Jókai drámai munkássága* (Budapest?: Neuwald Illés utódai Könyvnyomda, 1914), p. 41.

and Szeged. In 1895, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Jókai's debut as a writer, a Jubilee edition of his works was published in 100 volumes with *Milton* in volume XXXIX.

To understand Jókai's concept of Milton, some grasp is necessary of the author's own moral and political commitments, his position in the critical context of the time as well as his divided mind in the face of the political challenges of the period. The year 1875, when the play was written, is seen as the beginning of the last phase in his career. In the judgment of contemporary academic criticism, this was a period of slow decay in his creative vigour. This view was never seriously challenged till about the 1980s, when, for the first time a radical shift in the assessment of the elderly Jókai set in. Recently a number of scholars have put forward convincing arguments to propose that 1875–76 actually represented a new beginning, the start of a new, experimental period in the development of Jókai. In the light of this thesis all his work has been reassessed: the aging Jókai seems to have an influence on Jókai in his prime. It has been suggested that in his most popular novels he adjusted his narratives to the expectations of the new reader. His popularity has been explained succinctly in recent critical discussions by the singularity of his relationship with his readers: it has been attributed to the fact that the real reader of his works and the intended reader constructed by his text were identical.[30] In Hungary it was during Jókai's lifetime that the new readership emerged in significant numbers, a phenomenon which had also changed publishing policy and the concept of writing in eighteenth-century England. For the first time, readers appeared who had hardly crossed the borderline between oral and written culture, with no formal education, and no systematic training as readers of novels or consumers of plays.[31] Both as a journalist and as a writer Jókai was fully aware of the presence and the demands of the new readership and managed to satisfy both the educated and the naive readers. He deliberately used naive patterns, and reverted to modes of writing prior to the nineteenth-century novel such as the tale (*das Märchen* as defined by Wieland, with the marvellous grounded in human nature, particularly in sensuality), he conveyed a naive moral view (which today is seen as corresponding to what Schiller called the naive vision of the world[32]), and his novels have been recently redefined as romances or myths. The romance or myth offered a simple framework for the plot in which the polarity of good and evil could be maintained and the absence of psychological depth was compensated for by the richness in variety of the world of fantasy. I would like to argue that this new critical approach can clarify the novelty of Jókai's portrait of Milton and its unique status as a radical revaluation of the Hungarian Enlightenment Milton.

---

[30] László Szilasi, *A selyemgubó és a „boncoló kés"* (Budapest: Osiris/Pompeji, 2000), p. 212.
[31] Mihály Szajbély, *Jókai Mór* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2010), p. 53.
[32] Szajbély, p. 59.

Jókai's concept of the past cannot be defined without taking into account his various responses to the decisive political events of the time. He was deeply involved in political events, though he had no consistent political philosophy. He supported wholeheartedly the demand for reform and the modernisation of the country. On 15 March 1848 he was instrumental in organising public opinion and inciting mass demonstrations in Pest and Buda, which enabled the reformists in the Hungarian Diet to push through a list of twelve demands which eventually brought about a comprehensive legislative reform codified in what became known as the April laws. During the war of independence, however, Jókai embraced a more moderate line, he was alienated from Kossuth when the House of Habsburg was dethroned and Hungary was declared a republic under Kossuth's presidency. When the Croatian, Serbian and Romanian peasantry were induced by fractions loyal to the Habsburgs to turn against the revolutionary army, Jókai supported the policy of the so-called Peace Party led by Pál Nyáry, who opposed the declaration of independence and urged the government to start negotiations with Austria. Jókai probably realised that the move of the Hungarian government to proclaim minority rights in July 1849 was painfully too late. And indeed, when the Russian czar was invited to mobilise the Russian armies and invade Hungary, the outcome was inevitable: Kossuth delegated all power to General Artúr Görgey, who surrendered in August 1849. This was followed by the execution of thirteen leaders of the Hungarian army as well as Prime Minister Batthyány. Kossuth left the country and as soon as he was free to move about he started to seek international support for his plans to rekindle efforts in Hungary to achieve independence. Following the defeat of the war of independence Jókai had to go into hiding. After he returned to Pest, during the period of absolutism, he had no illusions about the émigré politicians and the hope cherished by them and their sympathisers in Hungary that a new revolution could or should be staged. At the same time the policy of passive resistance was unacceptable for him. He believed in a realistic assessment of the chances of liberal politics and in constructive work.[33] He was a liberal in principle, and genuinely believed that a liberal approach to the minority question, to religion and in economic policy as well, might improve the morale and the international position of the country.[34] As a candidate for Parliament in one of the districts of Pest he summed up his political ideals in 1861 in a speech of which I quote two short paragraphs:

What I demand for my own nationality I would not refuse to grant to any other, I would like to be good friends with my brothers and not their oppressor, I want the world to acknowledge that the Hungarian nation is as eager to gain consti-

---

[33] Szajbély, pp. 166–7.
[34] Szajbély, p. 205.

tutional liberty as they are eager to give the same to other nationalities. I will
never assist violent oppression of any national aspirations in any form inside or
outside my country.

I will never discriminate against anyone on religious grounds, I know no dif-
ference between one citizen and the other, and I wish that everyone who lives
on the territory of this country should feel that this land is his own land.[35]

Jókai did not endorse the policy that led to the Austro–Hungarian Compromise of
1867, which laid the legal foundation of the dual Monarchy of Austria–Hungary,
because the settlement reached was a far cry from the 1848 April laws.[36] As an
MP and as a public writer he supported the moderate nationalist party. When,
however, in order to avoid the chaos that might have ensued as a result of the
government's mounting financial difficulties and the increasing ethnic tension, his
party merged with the ruling party in March 1875, he felt stranded, and from that
time on his interest in the political debates slackened considerably. Notwithstand-
ing this disillusionment he never ceased to exercise substantial influence upon
public opinion: through his novels and public writings he disseminated the naive
trust that from about this time he seemed to put in the benevolent intentions of
the ruling family – with some of them, indeed, he was on friendly terms; thus
the aging Jókai actually contributed to the emergence of the image of the good
monarch that distorted the critical judgment of the Hungarian middle classes.[37]

Jókai's indebtedness to Victor Hugo the novelist has been defined already by
criticism. It is his linguistic polyphony, the use of the familiar and the surpris-
ing side by side in the language of his novels as well as his ambition to combine
the mythic and the realistic, image and perception that have been attributed to
Hugo's influence.[38] Unlike Pushkin, Jókai admired the novel methods and ap-
proaches of the French Romantics. Remembering the beginning of his career
and his association with young poets bent on regenerating Hungarian letters
(and politics), in 1872 he said: "In every respect we were the pupils of the French

---

[35] "A mit saját nemzetiségemnek követelek, azt nem tagadom meg a másétól, jó barátja akarok
lenni testvéreimnek s nem meghódítója, azt akarom, hogy a világ elismerje felőlünk, hogy a
magyar nemzet a milyen buzgó megszerezni az alkotmányos szabadságot, épen olyan buzgó
azt kiosztani. Semmi nemzeti törekvés erőszakos elnyomására, sem e hon határán belül, sem
ezenkívül segédeszközt nem nyújtok.
Senkit vallása miatt sehonnan ki nem rekesztek; honfi és honfi között különbséget nem is-
merek; s azt kívánom, hogy mindenki, a ki e hon földén lakik, ezt a földet hazájának vall-
hassa." *Jókai Mór Összes Művei. Cikkek és beszédek.* vol. 6, eds. József Láng and László Rigó
(Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975), p. 51. Quoted in Szajbély, p. 206.

[36] Szajbély, p. 220.

[37] G. Béla Németh, *Türelmetlen és késlekedő félszázad* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó,
1971), p. 119.

[38] Németh, p. 119. Quoted in Anna Fábri, "Az értelmezés változatai és nehézségei. Jókai elbe-
szélései 1848–1849-ről" in *A magyar irodalom történetei 1800-tól 1919-ig*, eds., Mihály Szegedy-
Maszák and András Veres (Budapest: Gondolat, 2007), 330–340, p. 338.

school. The pupils of that school which, from Lamartine to Victor Hugo and from Dumas to Béranger, combined in itself all that is beautiful in conception, brave in execution, inspiring in feeling, all that fires the heart and lifts the soul; the noble enthusiasms of the French writers (those writers of long ago), the strength of their creed, their glorious dreams ravished all who was young and had noble ideals. We were all French."[39]

In his drama Jókai makes use of most of the innovations that Hugo clarified in the Preface to *Cromwell*. For Jókai, both in his historical novels and his plays, historical incident serves as a pretext to promote his own ideals. Probably encouraged by Victor Hugo, he introduces historical characters side by side with fictitious ones, and ignores "the True in fact", although before writing the play in haste he had studied a number of historical sources.[40] In a note to his novels, he says: "Clio is the only one among the Muses who is not saintly. She is human all through. She is more inconstant than Venus. She flirts with all nations. The way she tells a tale to the French is different from the way the same is told by her to the English. The Maid of Orleans is presented by her as a saint to Schiller and as a fallen woman to Shakespeare, but the work of both is a poetic masterpiece."[41]

In the plot of the four-act blank-verse drama Jókai applies the romance or myth pattern that has been identified in his novels. The dichotomy of good and evil is crudely simplified: the secondary characters are set in pairs, the daughter of Milton, Deborah is a paragon of filial love, compassion and purity, Lady Milton, on the other hand, is demonically dominated by lust and knows no moral code. Deborah has two suitors. Lambert is a disinterested and noble-minded Puritan who remains heroically loyal to his religious affiliation and also to Milton. Morton is a self-seeking cavalier, and a sexually obsessed man with obvious sadistic tendencies. The plot is developed along two strands, which never completely fuse. On the one hand, Bora's intention is declared at the beginning: she is going to marry whichever of the two suitors remains faithful to her fragile father up till he dies. On the other hand, Milton is first seen as powerless in the face of Cromwell's cynicism in Act I; in the subsequent acts he is shown, after the Restoration, as being exposed to the thirst for revenge of the mob as well as to the

---

39 Quoted in Vnutsko, p. 7.
40 See Solt, p. 298, who mentions T. B. Macaulay's *Milton* (first published in the early 1860s in Hungarian in two editions) and his *History of England* (published in Hungarian in 1853); F. P. Guizot's *History of the English Revolution* (published in Hungarian in 1866), F. Chr. Schlosser's *Weltgeschichte*, vol. 15, and A. F. Villenain's *Études de la litérature ancienne et étrangère* (1858). The biography of Milton in Villenain's literary history was published separately twice in Hungarian in 1861 and 1863 in popular periodicals.
41 "A múzsák között egyedül Clio az, aki nem szent. Ő nagyon is emberi lény. Vulgivagább Vénusnál. Kacérkodik minden nemzettel. Ugyanazt a történetet másképp mondja el a franciáknak, másképp az angoloknak. Az orleansi szűzet Schiller szentnek, Shakespeare bukott leánynak mutatja be, s mindkettőnek a műve költői remek." Mór Jókai, *Egy az Isten* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1970), p. 178.

aggressive demand of Charles II, who wants him to deliver up his associates from Commonwealth times. Eventually he is accused of high treason: to invite divine disclosure of truth, a duel is staged between defence, Lambert, and prosecution, Morton, in which the latter dies. Naive moral expectations are gratified, just as in a tale; independently from the historical facts poetic justice is done: Lambert is raised to the nobility, and as events unfold Milton himself is developed into a heroic, mythic character.

Jókai makes an interesting use of Hugo's concept of the grotesque: for the first time in the history of Hungarian drama the sublime and the vulgar are collocated and the outcome has a grotesque effect: when the absurd duel is staged and the combatants fight in front of the audience, there is a running commentary on the events by the on-stage audience seated upon mounted chairs. The cynicism of their remarks counterpoints the death of the morally destitute Morton as well as the final minutes in the life of the saintly Milton, who dies with a vision of a Paradise regained in his fading eyes.

In his portrait of the historical characters Jókai draws upon important European precedents and his own reading of history and psychology. Like Orlai Petrics and Munkácsy, he also ignores the political engagement of the historical Milton: he is interested in the poet, who is a lonely figure and is motivated primarily by his dedication to his vocation as a poet. Jókai was probably influenced by Thomas Macaulay, whose Milton essay had become fairly well known by 1875.[42] His Milton is also an idealised, heroic character with an emphasis on "hard work, high principles and single-minded endurance".[43] There is, however, a very important respect in which Jókai deviates from what he may have found in Macaulay, or indeed anywhere else in Europe. His Milton is fully humanised by the intensity of his private feelings: his love for his daughter and his pathetic entanglement in his erotic dependence on his wife make him much more life-like than either the puppet dragged around the stage by Hugo, the empty allegorical persona created by Vigny, or the iconic great man celebrated by Macaulay.

Jókai's treatment of Cromwell also strikes the reader as a combination of European post-revolutionary, disillusioned interpretations of the main agent responsible for the bloody turmoil of seventeenth-century English history and Jókai's own personal distaste for violence and disruption in history. Macaulay recognises and admires the historical service Cromwell rendered to his country: "in circumstances […] extraordinary, […] gave the country a constitution far more perfect than any which had at that time been known in the world".[44] Jókai's Cromwell,

---

[42]   When he died, Ferenc Toldy, president of the Hungarian Academy, defined him as "the greatest historian of our time": Solt, p. 299.

[43]   Richard Bradford claims that Macaulay "heaps praise [upon Milton] in a manner that can best be described as bland hyperbole". See Bradford, *John Milton* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 144.

[44]   Thomas Macaulay, *Milton* in *Lord Macaulay's Essays and Lays of Ancient Rome* (London: Long-

on the other hand, appears to embody Jókai's evident mistrust of violent political agendas. His portrait of Cromwell seems fairly close to Hugo's Lord Protector, would-be king: he is a cynic, who uses Milton as a tool to achieve his own self-seeking ends.

In Act I, where Milton appears as an old man completely lost in his great work, Cromwell cajoles him into signing the King's death sentence as Secretary of State, by repeated reference to the noise made outside his house by the rabble demanding the blood of the king. (In Act IV after the Restoration they will cry for the blood of Milton.) Milton is horrified at the idea, he believes in Charles's legal right to have appropriate defence, and he would have proposed banishment instead of death.

> CROMWELL:
> Did not you say
> The king is also subject to the law?
>
> MILTON:
> I never meant that he has no defence.
> Though boldly I my people did defend
> And the timeless rights of liberty,
> I did not kindle passions wild, insane:
> It was liberty I proclaimed, which lifts
> Its head wherever the slave is prostrate,
> And not uncurbed passion that stamps upon
> The head of the one who has fallen.[45]

The phrase "uncurbed rage" is a characteristic expression of Jókai's horror of extremism. Similarly to Victor Hugo, Jókai attributes Milton's tragedy, and indeed the capitulation of the Puritan cause, to the vagaries of the mob, as Milton in *Cromwell* says in despair: "Le peuple! – Toujours simple et toujours éboui."[46] [The people – Always simple and always misled.] In Jókai's play the rabble is not only "simple and misled" but also most aggressive and there are several references to the threat of uncontrolled violent impulses, to the responsibility of the intellectuals (to use the modern term) who are supposed to shape public opinion but also to contain the energy unleashed.

---

mans, Green, and Co., 1889), p.21.

[45] "CROMWELL: […] Te mondtad azt, / Hogy a király fölött is áll a törvény. // MILTON: De nem azt, hogy számára nincs védelem. / Ha én merészen védtem népemet, / És a szabadság örök jogait, / Nem gyujtogattam bőszült szenvedélyt… / Szabadságot hirdettem, mely fejet / Emel, a hol a szolga hizeleg, / Nem féktelen dühöt, mely rátapos / Annak fejére, a ki elbukott." Mór Jókai, *Milton* in *Jókai Mór Összes Művei*. Nemzeti díszkiadás (Budapest: Révai testvérek, 1895), vol. XXXIX. 1–87, p. 18.

[46] Hugo, *Théâtre I*, p. 327.

Next Morton, in a bravado speech, anticipates that the old order will be restored with its altars and thrones if Charles lives. In response Milton signs the document. And it is at this point that he enters "his eternal night".

In Act III Charles II appears on the stage in front of the now totally blind Milton. He wants to have the documents of the Commonwealth period in order to be able to round up all who were responsible for the regicide. In the voice of Milton's faithful old servant he tries to convince Milton that to cover up for his comrades is a futile endeavour, for the battle he supported has been completely pointless. It is in this dialogue that Jókai voices his own pacifist and liberal views. The historical Milton's political and religious radicalism is greatly tempered so that he can be used as a mouthpiece for the author's general support of minority rights and religious tolerance:

> CHARLES II:
> Times evil do we have my poor old friend. […]
> Our freedom of religion is in peril.
>
> MILTON:
> Good friend, this moves me not.
> How the liturgy should be sung?
> How the host should be taken, seated or on the knees,
> That is no religion for him who has learned
> To adore God in His infinite power and love.
> My religion strives not to dominate,
> It only loves, works good and forgives.
> Why should I care for the troubles of the church?
> Give schools to the people: with thatched roofs,
> There they will learn to be good and unite.[47]

Charles II blames "the King" for suspending religious toleration:

> CHARLES II:
> One country oppresses the other,
> Catholics are subdued in Ireland,
> In Scotland Protestants are oppressed. […]

---

[47] "KIRÁLY: Rossz század ez, szegény öreg barátom, […] / Vallásszabadságunk veszélybe' van. // CROMWELL: Jó barát! Engem meg nem indít ez. / Hogy énekeljék a liturgiát? / Az ostyát ülve, vagy térden fogadják? / Nem vallás annak, a ki a teremtőt / Hatalma és szerelme végtelen / Világában tanulta meg imádni. / Az én vallásom nem uralkodik, / Az csak szeret, jóltesz és megbocsát." (Jókai, *Milton*, pp. 63–64)

MILTON:
If he is free to do so, we only can be blamed:
Why do we see a foe in our brother?[48]

It is in this crucial scene that Jókai expresses his hope in the "good king". When, in order to save him before he says anything incriminating, Lambert warns him that he is speaking to the king, Milton is incredulous:

MILTON:
No. Impossible. You cannot be the king.
A royal soul will never do a thing like this,
Will never mock a blind man's lack of sight.
A peasant, nay a yeoman, if he meets
Anyone lost in the forest, will take him by the hand
And lead him by removing every stone
That impedes his passage, so that he can
Move smoothly; he will help him over
Ditch and thorn he cannot shun.
You have entrapped someone who cannot see,
You have led him on to the marsh, the swamp.
You put your foot before him so that
You could catch him. No, you are not the king.[49]

Milton preserves his equanimity even after he mistakenly believes that his only support, his daughter has died. The most humanly moving lines belong to Milton the father talking about his beloved daughter. The intensity of his love for his child is as eloquent as his love for liberty. In Act I he addresses Bora in the following words:

MILTON:
What if the whole world is now in darkness hid,
Thou art a world complete yet in my sight. […]
And I still long to see the world,
The lovely earth that was created

---

[48] KIRÁLY: Egy országát elnyomja a másikával. / Irhonban a katholikust igázza, / Skothonban a protestánst. // MILTON: […] Önmagunk / Vagyunk hibásak, ha ezt teheti: / Miért tekintjük ellenségnek egymást?" (Jókai, *Milton,* p 66).

[49] "MILTON: Nem. Te nem vagy a király! / Királyi lélek nem teheti azt, / Hogy csúfot űzzön egy világtalanból. / Egy pór, egy yeoman, hogyha rá találna / Az erdőn elhagyottra, kézen fogná, / És elvezetné, és minden követ / Elhárítgatna útjából, hogy abban / Meg ne botoljon, átsegítené / Árkon tövisen, mit ki nem kerülhet, / S te azt, ki nem lát, kísértetbe vitted, / S vezetted ingovány, mocsár közé. / Keresztbe tetted lábadat előtte, / Hogy őt megejtsd. Te nem vagy a király." (Jókai, *Milton*, p. 68).

By God and given growth by Man:
The glimmering dew upon the green grass;
And tears of gratitude in my nation's eyes;
The tree in blossom, decked with ruddy fruit.
And that single tree I raised from the seed,
The tree of holy liberty, shaken
By the wind, dropping its ready fruit,
The fallen crown.[50]

When, however, he understands that he is abandoned by his young wife for the false protestations of love made to her by the villain, Morton, he collapses under the blow. What makes Jókai's portrait of Milton unique in a European context is the erotic dimensions of the representation of the poet. Milton appears to be a sage pathetically entangled in the web of his private emotional–erotic obsessions. This emphasis upon the erotic in his later novels has been commented on by recent criticism, and Jókai's own statement has been quoted: "I did have as much of the erotic disposition, of the humour of a satyr and of the sensual fantasy in me as any of those [the French realists], but I did not use them because I was writing for the Hungarian public".[51] His aged Milton is a man deeply motivated by his erotic fantasy. Now that he knows he has been deceived by his wife, he dies on stage, but even in dying he uses a most eloquent language. Indeed, the rhetorical magnificence of the drama reaches here a Miltonic peak. And it is also at this point that the supernatural appears in conformity with the mythic dimensions Milton assumes in this last scene:

From the distant depth of the brightest skies
New, brighter beacons approach upon me fast.
Suns, worlds! Lo, globes encircled by light
Come fast upon my sight! One over there,
Like a green island, swims rapidly toward me,
Swiftly like a comet shooting down.
What a lovely world! All covered with green plants,
With blue oceans which some fairy boats

---

[50] "Ha az egész világ sötét is immár, / Te még világ vagy benne énnekem. […] / S én még óhajtom látni a világot, / A szép földi világot, a mit Isten / Teremtett s az ember folytatott: / A harmat ragyogását zöld füvön / S hálakönnyet nemzetem szemében. / A fát virágival, gyümölcsivel, − / S melyet magból neveltem én magam, / A szent szabadság fáját, a midőn / Megrázza a szél és érett gyümölcs / Esik le róla: hulló korona." (Jókai, *Milton,* p. 19).

[51] "erotikus láng, szatír véna és luxuriózus fantázia bennem is volt annyi, mint azokban [a francia realista írókban] de nem használtam − azért, mert magyar közönségnek írtam." Mór Jókai, *A tengerszemű hölgy* Budapest: Unikornis Kiadó, 1992), pp. 179–180. Quoted in Imre Bori, "A magyar *'fin-de-siècle'* írója: Jókai Mór" in Bori, *Varázslók és mákvirágok. Tanulmányok* (Újvidék: Forum Könyvkiadó, 1979), p. 54.

Do rock beneath all purple sails. […]
I see again, my sight has been restored,
And all those myriads of lights blind me no more.
I too am lifted as on pinions soft.
Come closer, closer! My beloved land,
My Eden, I have so often seen in dreams,
Thou lovely paradise long lost of mine,
Receive me. – Here I have found thee again.[52]

The aging Jókai, with his political illusions discarded, here creates an immaterial non–world, a transcendent utopia which is the only place where his hopes might come true. With the memory of the savage retaliation following the war of independence, and after what he considered an unacceptable compromise concluded with Vienna by the dominant political representatives of the Hungarian nation, after he had lost his party, he was inspired not really by the militant Milton, the Milton "who could give us manners, virtue, freedom, power",[53] whose memory was cherished by the English Romantics, but by the gloom of Milton's fate. With blatant disregard for historical or biographical fact, in the Milton he created he released his own suppressed anxiety engendered by the memory of the part he played in initiating the process that had led to the intense passions and bloody events of the war of independence. But he sticks to his own first principles: his Milton has supreme independence of mind and spiritual integrity. If there is anything that circumscribes this sublime autonomy of the mind, it is the Eros–ridden constitution of man and woman. With the bold juxtaposition of the sublime and the vulgar, Milton's divine inspiration and Cromwell's self–seeking cynicism, with the erotic impulse used as a driving force behind the events, with reference to violence looming large behind civilisation, in *Milton* Jókai brings into focus those attributes of the mythopoeic Romantic imagination that anticipate the *fin-de-siècle* and Modernism.[54]

---

[52] "A fényes égnek távol mélyiből / Még fényesebb pontok közelgenek. / Napok, világok! Fény övezte gömbök. / Oly sietve jönnek! Egy amott, / Mint zöld sziget, hogy úszik ott felém, / Rohanva, mint közelgő üstökös. / Mi szép világ! Befedve zöld viránnyal, / Kék tengerekkel, mik tündér hajókat / Ringatnak bibor vitorlák alatt […] / Már nem vagyok vak, látok újra mindent / És ennyi fénytől szemem el se húny. / Ah nékem is szárnyam keletkezik, / Közelb, közelb! Imádott új hazám, / Te annyiszor megálmodott édenem, / Te elveszett szép paradicsomom / Fogadj be. – Újra föltaláltalak." (Jókai, *Milton*, pp. 86–87)

[53] Wordsworth, "London, 1802", line 8.

[54] In the novels of his last period tendencies that connect him thematically and aesthetically with the *fin-de-siècle* and modernism have been discussed by several critics; see e.g. István Fried, *Öreg Jókai nem vén Jókai. Egy másik Jókai meg nem történt kalandjai az irodalomtörténetben* (Budapest: Ister Kiadó, 2003), Bori, pp. 5–121, and Szajbély, pp. 279–283.

Géza Maráczi

László Cs. Szabó on Dickens

A case study on a "Western Hungarian" perspective

The history of the Hungarian reception of any foreign literature or culture is enriched to no insignificant degree by the responses that culture has elicited from literary intellectuals who, at some point in their careers, were forced or felt compelled to establish a new home and existence in a foreign country.

Research into the twentieth-century afterlife of one of the canonical authors of the Victorian period, Charles Dickens, suggests that there was a powerful alternative to the critical approach taken to him by criticism and cultural politics in the Hungary of the time. In this context, the expatriate cultural historian and essayist László Cs. Szabó's work appears to be the best example of such an enriching perspective on the novelist. It may even become a rewarding subject in a move towards a larger theme: a study in the receptive processes of English-language literatures as articulated by postwar and post-1956 expatriate Hungarian intellectuals; authors of what is now known as "Western Hungarian" literature.

Cs. Szabó, whose work testifies to a life-long passionate engagement with Dickens, left Hungary in 1948, when the Hungarian Workers' Party began to control all aspects of culture – a control from which his works are refreshingly free.

Of Transylvanian background, and a member of what has come to be called the second generation of Hungary's arguably most influential and significant literary journal, *Nyugat* (West, 1908–41), as well as belonging to its so-called essayist generation (of which Antal Szerb is the emblematic figure) and a recipient of the prestigious Baumgarten-prize, Cs. Szabó left behind an already significant oeuvre in modern Hungarian literature and criticism, as well as a career as renowned chief of the Radio's literary programme and a lectureship in cultural history. The latter was cut short by the onset of the communist regime, provoking his emigration. Having preserved his intellectual independence throughout the interwar period (a rare achievement in the Hungary of the time), subsequently, after settling down in London in 1951, he was compelled to assume a new identity that was to serve him well for the 33 years of the rest of his life spent in exile.

As *Hungarian Quarterly* editor and translator Miklós Vajda writes, "he saw himself as a linking figure and envoy who fled to the freedom of creation or was

forced to choose it". He developed a sense of mission as "an author entrusted with preserving the legacy of an independent Hungarian spirit".[1]

He was to become an acknowledged intellectual "father figure" of what came to be called Western Hungarian literature. Along with Sándor Márai, Zoltán Szabó and Győző Határ, the latter two of whom also settled down in Britain, he also became one of the most significant Hungarian expatriate authors.

To understand the full meaning of the Western Hungarian perspective provided in Cs. Szabó's essays it should be added that the term "Western Hungarian" carries the implicit qualifier "European," since the cultural-intellectual orientation he saw himself as preserving and upholding in his writing in the Hungarian language, was seen by him as a legacy inherited from his peers who had been killed during the war or were compromised by an ideologically governed regime at home.

Zoltán Kenyeres, a leading authority on *Nyugat*, emphasises the heterogeneity in the aesthetics of the authors who published in the journal but contends that "[a] cultural perspective on humanism, a conception of humanity embedded in an awareness of cultural history united the league of authors otherwise radiating towards all points of the literary compass".[2] He locates its fundamental principles in "the attention unconditionally devoted to young talents", "the protection of the independence of literature" [from incursions by politics and journalism], and "a perspective on the nation informed by a European outlook".[3]

"For *Nyugat*, 'Nation and Europe' – as [the editor Mihály] Babits insisted in an essay of that title – were complementary, rather than mutually exclusive terms", writes Richard Aczel.[4] Kenyeres's assessment of "the tastes and the culture of reception" that *Nyugat* had "fostered and established" applies to a considerable extent to the Hungarian public's tastes in world literature as well: these tastes and culture "survived the journal's years of publication by decades, defining the concept of the so-called cultured reader in opposition to conservative as well as avant-garde modernist literary trends".[5] As József Szili makes clear:

---

1 "a szabad alkotás megmaradt lehetőségébe menekült vagy kikényszerült közvetítőként és küldöttként látja magát [….] a független magyar szellem jogfolytonosságát őrző és képviselő író". Miklós Vajda, "Cs. Szabó László – Egy író, három élet," *Újhold-Évkönyv* 2 (1987), vol. 1, 222–248, p. 225.
2 "Egy kulturális humanizmus-felfogás, egy művelődéstörténetbe ágyazott emberkép tartotta össze az egyébként minden irodalmi égtáj felé kiáramló szerzőgárdát". Zoltán Kenyeres, *Etika és esztétizmus: Tanulmányok a Nyugat koráról* (Budapest: Anonymus, 2001), p. 40.
3 "A tehetségek minden feltétel nélkül való felkarolása […], az irodalom függetlenségének védelme […], és az európai tájékozottságú nemzetszemlélet […]". Kenyeres, p. 34.
4 Richard Aczel, *National Character and European Identity in Hungarian Literature 1772–1848* (Budapest: Nemzetközi Hungarológiai Központ, 1996), p. 250.
5 "megszilárdítani azt az ízlést és befogadáskultúrát, amely évtizedekkel túlélte a folyóirat működését, meghatározva az úgynevezett művelt olvasó fogalmát a konzervatívsággal, de egyben az avantgárd modernséggel szemben is". Kenyeres, p. 37.

Nyugat has been criticized for its reluctance to support radical experimental writing. Yet the *Nyugat* circle of writers was keen to comprehend, reinterpret, and refashion poetical traditions. For them, the relationship to cultural tradition involved a discriminating approach, careful selection, rediscovery of past values, and elimination of waste.[6]

Antal Szerb and Cs. Szabó (together with art and social historians, among others) formed the core of what has come to be known as the essayist generation of *Nyugat* most active in the second half of the interwar period, a group who were influenced by the *Geistesgeschichte*-school and reacted against Positivist literary scholarship, but still strove for the encyclopaedic knowledge of all classic and not least modern European literatures. Mediating between, or synthesising the European and Hungarian dimensions of cultural heritage took on the shape of a mission to these liberal intellectuals. They tailored the genre of the essayistic portrait to the articulation of their commitment to powerful icons in Hungarian culture and history, chosen on the basis of the endeavours of those models to bridge the gaps (abysses even) separating Hungary from the West, gaps that were rooted in the country's history. The dedication of these essayists to Western ideals provided the essay in their treatment with a specific subject matter.

Dickens was definitely foremost among Cs. Szabó's Western heroes. His first essay on the novelist, "Az érett Dickens" (The mature Dickens) (also printed as preface to the 1942 translation of *Hard Times* by the literary historian and fellow essayist István Sőtér) was published in *Magyar Csillag* (Hungarian Star, 1941–44), the war-time successor of *Nyugat*.

Already a full portrait in miniature, it shows, nevertheless, that Cs. Szabó would have to live longer to value the "mature Dickens," for at this stage he could only admire the first six novels, created by the "genius of budding youth", with "the carelessness of giants", up to the mid-1840s, which is still regarded as the break separating Dickens's two phases.[7] Cs. Szabó was not yet drawn to the later Dickens who was so keen on refining his methods as a writer, and he cites critics of the time who support his own limited view. The only novels by the matured Dickens that he seems to be interested in are *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* and *Hard Times*. He was able to exploit his background in the history

---

6 József Szili, "The Uncompromising Standards of *Nyugat* (1908–1941)," in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, eds. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004), vol. 3., 70–79, p. 76. Szili also points out that "[t]he artistic character of the '*Nyugat* movement' was a post-symbolist and post-secessionist Modernism, which sharply differed from the traditional conception of literature privileged by the Establishment, a mere rehash of nineteenth-century folkish romanticism and unrestrained nationalism. *Nyugat* was a striking provocation to conservative taste and political ambition […]". (Szili, p. 72.)

7 "Az óriások nemtörődésével írt, a duzzadó fiatalság volt a lángelméje." László Cs. Szabó, "Az érett Dickens," *Magyar Csillag* 2 (1942) 147–57, p. 149.

of economics (in which he held a doctorate) in illuminating the socio-historical context behind *Hard Times*. Continually trying to define the source of Dickens's popularity, he emphasises that Dickens based the texture of his early fiction on long-established popular emotion and opinion (as well as what Cs. Szabó calls "folk humour") along with the comic genres of the previous century: he was an "unconscious traditionalist" persevering, at the same, in his radical principles as a token of a clear political stance, for which Cs. Szabó commends him already at this stage.[8]

To understand the development of Cs. Szabó's concept of Dickens over the next decade, we need to examine the role allocated to the novelist by the politics that formed a new profile for Hungary's intellectual life in the communist early 1950s.

While politics banished modern and contemporary Western and American literature from the cultural scene until "a general easing of tension, called in contemporary jargon 'the thaw'" set in following the death of Stalin (1953),[9] both Thackeray (who was more uniformly commended in criticism shaped by cultural politics) and Dickens survived wide-ranging book withdrawals in the field of pre-war Hungarian and modern European and American literature.[10] It has to be remarked that even at the outset of the decade, at the height of dictatorship, new translations of *Bleak House* (1950), *Dombey and Son* (1951) and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1952) were published.

The first and third of these were the earliest contributions to the Hungarian reception of Dickens (to be followed by several others) by the novelist Géza Ottlik, one of a younger generation who saw themselves as would-be successors to *Nyugat*. Members of this generation, named after their short-lived journal *Újhold* (New Moon, 1946–48), were "prevented from reaching [their] readers except as a translators" in many cases for most of the 1950s, since translation was seen as ideologically safe ground.[11] (In Ottlik's case this lasted until the aftermath of the 1956 revolution, which brought about considerable change.) Today Ottlik may clearly be seen as the creative writer who engaged with Dickens in the most serious and sustained manner in later twentieth-century Hungary; he also maintained a productive friendship with Cs. Szabó across the continent and transcending political barriers.

---

[8] "a néphumort", "Öntudatlan tradicionalista volt". Cs. Szabó, p. 149, p. 147.
[9] Lóránt Czigány, *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), <http://www.mek.oszk.hu/02000/02042/html/70.html> (para. 6 of 23).
[10] Zsófia Gombár, "The Reception of British Literature under Dictatorships in Hungary and Portugal," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 15 (2009), 269–84.
[11] Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, "Culture in the Interwar Period," in *A Companion to Hungarian Studies*, ed. László Kósa (Budapest: Corvina, 1997), 429–53, p. 458.

At the same time, *American Notes* was also considered for publication, and the reader's report on it deposited in the archives of the Európa publishing house provides us with the only case (discovered to date) of a reviewer suggesting specific cuts to prune the errors in Dickens's positive or generally balanced assessment of American life, the humanity of social institutions and workers' housing, for instance. Dickens's attack on corruption in politics, on the press, and on slavery, was found too lightweight when compared to his sympathy and praise. Any maiming of the text was avoided, however, for the work was not translated, presumably because it would have entailed too many risks in 1950.

Dickens's art was problematic from the point of view of concepts like literature of social concern and "critical realism." The comments in the 1956 volume of the new anthology of world literature intended to be used in higher education, which printed extracts from *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*, echo the words of the 1950 reader's report on *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and are in turn echoed in the assessment of a prominent critic, written as much as twenty years later.[12] Though this did not hinder Dickens in "serving social progress" (to quote the anthology's commentary), for he used a wide range of means to disparage the cruel institutions of capitalist society, Dickens "was prone to a belief in the power of bourgeois liberalism" and "to placing human relations in a sentimental moralising light".[13] He is acknowledged to have been a meticulous, accurate observer of social conditions that contributed to the rise of Chartism and the socialist agenda, but was considered to have misrepresented the outcomes and complexities of these movements due to naive illusions that resulted in benevolent solutions in the plot.[14]

Nevertheless, the facts that the first series of *A világirodalom klasszikusai* (The classics of world literature) was launched in 1956 including Ottlik's revision of a translation of *The Pickwick Papers*, and that an elegant set of Dickens's selected works was published at the end of the decade (1959–61) – although it included only five titles instead of the projected fourteen and was discontinued due to the lack of readers' interest, as its editor Tibor Bartos was later to highlight[15] – show that Dickens was consistently enlisted to serve a chief segment of the ideology of the state: the preservation and educatory "redistribution" of an artistic heritage that manifests itself in world literature. As research by editor and book historian István Bart testifies, the publishing of the loosely defined broad range of "classics"

---

[12] Pál Pándi, *"Kísértetjárás Magyarországon: Az utópista szocialista és kommunista eszmék jelentkezése a reformkorban"*, vol. 1 (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1972).

[13] "a haladást szolgálta" […] "hitt a polgári liberalizmus erejében" […] "hogy az életet, az emberi viszonylatokat érzelgős-moralizáló megvilágításba helyezze" László Kardos, ed., *Világirodalmi antológia*, vol. 4 (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1956), pp. 529–30.

[14] Pándi, pp. 365–69.

[15] Tibor Bartos, "Szép remények," in *Huszonöt fontos angol regény*, ed. Júlia Kada (Budapest: Lord, 1996), 16–23.

(compared to a narrow spectrum of modern and contemporary authors) was to remain a privileged domain of cultural politics, even after the control exercised on translation gradually weakened, along with the decrease in state-funding, as the decades of socialism drew to a close.[16]

All through his London decades, Cs. Szabó used what towards the end of his life he would revealingly call his "frightful freedom for a writer" to speak out against what to him clearly appeared as the dogmatic impoverishment of Hungarian literature;[17] to point to every single infringement of intellectual freedom and to all manifestations of dogmatism and hypocritical orthodoxy. The lasting mark of his art of the essay, this opposition to all ideologies and extreme abstractions, had already been germinally present in the youthful diatribes against the manipulations for which Nazism was responsible, in his travelogues written in the 1930s. Their author valued individual rights and the choice of cultural orientations above all else.

As the central figure of expatriate literary circles, starting from as early as 1950 Cs. Szabó used their organs to regularly publish reviews and scathing commentary on the cultural policy of the Soviet Union as well as communist, then post–1956 socialist Hungary.

One of these only recently collected and republished texts is the note "Irodalmi emberrablás" (Literary kidnapping), published in 1952 in Munich, in the journal *Hungária* (Hungary). Here he chooses the example of Dickens to deplore the cultural politics of communist regimes for putting authors working in realist modes to ideological, manipulative uses. He identifies with bitter humour the role allocated to Dickens by Stalinist criticism: he was summoned "from his ashes to bear witness behind the iron curtain against his own country".[18]

It is here that Cs. Szabó's concern with Dickens as cultural icon or at least a luminary with commendable purposes emerges, as he defends Dickens's commitment to the working class in terms of humanism above all, as that was what prevented him from succumbing to Utilitarianism or the allure of other abstract ideas. Steering clear of these, and guiding his readers along a similar path, proves to be the chief merit of Dickens's art. Cs. Szabó draws close parallels between what Dickens singled out as the ills of his capitalist society and the ways people's individual existence was devalued and marginalised by the so-called "state-capitalist" regimes.

The gem that testifies to his life-long passion and admiration is Cs. Szabó's long, confessional late essay "Dickens-napló" (Dickens diary), which was elevated to a special position by its contexts, perhaps merely by chance. It was his

16 István Bart, *Világirodalom és könyvkiadás a Kádár-korszakban* (Budapest: Osiris, 2002).
17 "félelmes írói szabadságában". Vajda, p. 223.
18 "haló poraiban s a vasfüggöny mögött hazája ellen tanúskodik". László Cs. Szabó, "Irodalmi emberrablás," in *Hódoltsági irodalom: Az irodalom államosításától a forradalomig*, ed. Lóránt Czigány (Budapest: Mundus, 2008), 62–65, p. 62.

first work to appear in Hungary, in 1980, after 31 years of exile and almost as many of being anathematised at home. After being rejected ten years earlier, it was published in *Nagyvilág* (The world at large, 1956–), the review of foreign literature, to comply with the request of the author, who was willing to pay a formal visit home for the first time after his emigration on condition that one of his essays written abroad be published in Hungary.

The 1980 "Dickens-napló" (the synthesis of notes accumulated during the time spent in London from 1951) shows more about the nature of Cs. Szabó's affinities with the ethical commitments of Dickens's art, but less about his ethical reasons for engaging with him, than his previous essay. In a tone not lacking in subtle irony, he locates the rhetorical ambitions of Dickens's works, their social and moral themes, within the context of the images nineteenth-century authors projected of themselves, as "conceited *and* self-sacrificing champions of national freedom, public morals, social conscience and the fraternity of nations", as "unerring and sometimes unbearably onerous benefactors" and "secular apostles".[19]

The essay bears all the traits of the London decades: it is an excellent example of Cs. Szabó's redefinition of the essay as a genre which in his treatment is a non-academic, often (but never downright) colloquial all-round portrait of a (chiefly literary) artist. Within the inner context of the work of the essayist, his meticulous concentration on biography (Dickens's way of life and working methods, his personality and passions, loves and friendships and connections to his contemporaries); and his explication of social and economic background with respect to the novelist's writings may appear as a routine exercise, though they are unique among what had been written on Dickens in Hungarian to date. Its strengths are in presenting the work, the author and the age in a unified vision paying attention to the visionary in Dickens himself, and conveying this in a text of great literary merit.

Intriguingly, the essay also reveals that while Cs. Szabó's reading of Dickens had visibly profited from the major scholarly and editorial projects conducted in Britain from the 1960s onwards,[20] his outlook on the novelist seems to have evolved along an internal course, independent of the contemporary context of Anglo–American criticism, shaped in those very decades by landmark reassessments of Dickens's oeuvre by a range of critics of the rank of Edmund Wilson, Humphrey House, J. Hillis Miller, Angus Wilson and the Leavises.[21]

---

[19] "Ők a nemzeti szabadság, közerkölcs, társadalmi lelkiismeret, néptestvériség öntelt *és* önfeláldozó fáklyái, kopószimatú, s olykor az elviselhetetlenségig terhes jótevők." László Cs. Szabó, "Dickens-napló," in *Őrzők* (Budapest: Magvető, 1985), 408–95, p. 409.

[20] The landmark scholarship whose impact may be detected in Cs. Szabó's essay comprises Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*, 2 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952); and John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (London: Methuen, 1957).

[21] Here I am referring to the following influential studies: J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958); Angus Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1970); and F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis,

It is the first Hungarian study based on the reading of *all* the works, including the letters and journalism as well. Cs. Szabó points out (like Orwell, whom he refers to at other points, but whose essay would not appear in Hungarian until 1990), that Dickens singled out particular social ills, being complacent with the system itself. Cs. Szabó is the first to call attention to Dickens's flair for producing best-sellers and for smoothing over the paradox inherent in being "the 'celestial conscience' of the ruling privileged", while also striving to belong to them.[22] He sheds light on important explanatory details not mentioned before in Hungarian: examples are Forster's and Carlyle's personal influence on Dickens; the theatrical qualities of his works; and an extensive treatment of Dickens's relationship to the city, pointing out the tensions between the promoter of reforms in the conditions of city life for the poor on one hand, and his art and characters rooted in his locale as well as in a fascination with the metropolis of his childhood on the other. These lively speculations are interspersed with *détours* on Dickens's relevance for Cs. Szabó's life in contemporary London, and these are particularly valuable.

A unique feature is that having lived for thirty years in London, Cs. Szabó incorporates a few of his earlier reviews on theatrical productions based on Dickens's works, including a 1951 series of imitations of his public readings by Emlyn Williams, and its second run in 1975. He also meditates on the psychological motives behind the public readings and on how and why Dickens let the performer in him put so much strain on the writer and the man that his health could not bear it.

More clearly than Antal Szerb had at the time of Cs. Szabó's first essay, Cs. Szabó locates Dickens's contemporary relevance in the darker shades, "the shadowy aspects" of his art.[23] It is the mysterious and demonic, frightening element, what he calls black comedy, that is more effective in our period, no longer the caricature and sentimentalism that provokes laughter and tears. However, he defends even the melodramatic vein and the presentation of suffering in the novels, since these were matched, and formed, by the readers' experience of the health conditions of the age, unparalleled in the late 20th century – to mention just one example of how he discusses texts in their historical contexts.

Not surprisingly for the first work of its author to appear in his home country after 31 years, this essay is apparently non-political. A reader familiar with Cs. Szabó's work to some measure, attuned to his sensibilities and not the least knowing the past that fed into his personal, confessional late essays, may sense a commitment underlying the educational explanations, unifying his vision. This

---

Dickens the Novelist (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970). In the previous decade, the following works had initiated the re-evaluation to which these books contributed: Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," in *The Wound and the Bow* (London: W. H. Allen, 1941); and Humphrey House, *The Dickens World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941).
[22] "az uralkodó kiváltságosok 'égi lelkiismerete'". Cs. Szabó, "Dickens-napló," p. 412.
[23] "óriássá […] már inkább az árnyékos oldala teszi". Cs. Szabó, "Dickens-napló," p. 481.

is a commitment to the importance of reading Dickens's works principally in terms of their own contexts. This he maintains even in addressing the several Dickens adaptations he had first-hand knowledge of, tracing through them, re-constructing in an affective approach, the effects the author's original, novelistic techniques and public reader's performances had had on their contemporary audiences.

In its exceedingly modest way, "Dickens-napló" may still be viewed as a project whose aim is to further his previous concern of saving the reputation or integrity of Dickens as non-ideological. This is continued to preserve an image of him as a novelist resisting schemes laid out by his later readers, a writer who opens up only to those who are willing to come to terms with what his art meant to *his* audience; with Cs. Szabó inadvertently projecting his own image as this model reader.

One has to concede, however, that in retrospect, this perspective might prove refreshing rather more for being published *in* Hungary and still within the con-text of state-governed culture, than solely for its discussion of Dickens. Besides, Cs. Szabó had similar commitments when writing about others, abroad. How-ever, it is tempting to ponder the coincidence that three decades after a politically motivated outcry not unusual at its time, it was the next occasion of writing on Dickens that Cs. Szabó chose as the occasion for a gesture that should convey his unwavering stance in a more implicit and sophisticated manner when he first published an essay in socialist Hungary. And this gesture served as well to usher him back into the literary life of his home country, while the dates of the two essays, 1951 and 1980, mark out the period of his life spent in London as framed, as it were, by his concern and engagement with Dickens.

Finally, it is rewarding to glance at this brief "third life" and the afterlife of the author, since in the five years between the 1980 printing of "Dickens-napló" in *Nagyvilág* and its inclusion in a 1985 volume of essays, two weighty collections of Cs. Szabó's essays and one of his short fiction written in exile were published in Budapest; and he visited Hungary five times until his death in Budapest in 1984.

The first act of homage on the part of criticism written in Hungary was paid to Cs. Szabó in 1987, when *Újhold-évkönyv* (the annuals of *Újhold*, 1986–91) printed Miklós Vajda's portrait of him.[24] This publication was itself a token of homage and a link to the short-lived journal of the same title swept away by communist

---

[24] The first tentative assessment of Cs. Szabó's work on the part of the writing of literary history may be found in: Miklós Béládi, Béla Pomogáts, László Rónay, *A nyugati magyar irodalom 1945 után* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1986), 103–18. The best example of the few engagements with his writings and concerns written more recently, is: László Füzi, "Az esszéíró," in *A középpont hiánya* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2008), 84–99. From among the works published in Western Hungarian quarters, see: Lóránt Czigány, László Cs. Szabó, *"Angol az útlevelem, de magyar a büszkeségem": A "Mikes" nevében Czigány Lóránt emlékezik a 100 éve született Cs. Szabó Lászlóra* (The Hague: Mikes International, 2005) <http://mek.oszk.hu/03200/03288>.

cultural politics forty years before. Vajda's essay, an overarching critical apprecia-
tion of Cs. Szabó's oeuvre, appeared alongside valuations of Sándor Márai and
Győző Határ. Even at this point when the fact that the cultural policy of isolation
was a failure had been fairly apparent for years, the public acknowledgement that
links had never been actually relinquished in private (when Márai and Határ
were still alive), had its own significance.

Zsolt Czigányik

Readers' responsibility

Literature and censorship in the Kádár era in Hungary

The problem of censorship is only indirectly linked to the field of cultural memory, yet it can hardly be overlooked that the role a foreign author can play in the cultural memory of a nation depends largely upon the availability of his or her works in translation. After the nationalisation of Hungarian publishing houses in 1949, the publication of foreign literature became an issue strictly controlled first by the Hungarian Workers' Party, then, after the revolution of 1956, by the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Besides literary qualities, ideological issues and moral considerations exerted considerable influence on publishing policy in Hungary – and thus the reception of foreign authors – up until 1989. As the first step towards more extensive research into the mechanism of censorship in the field of British literature during the era of the one-party system in Hungary between 1949 to 1989, this paper examines the reader's reports on George Orwell and Anthony Burgess to be found in the archives of Európa Publishing House, which was established by the cultural authorities in 1956 for the publication of foreign literature. My aim is to investigate the manner in which aesthetic principles and ideological as well as moral judgments are conflated in these reports, which often have the quality (and sometimes the length) of a critical essay. The reports were not intended for publication, consequently the readers' names, in accordance with the policies of the publishing house, will not be disclosed unless the reader has given his or her permission. István Géher, poet, essayist, critic, translator, Professor of English at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, who was an editor at Európa between 1965 and 1972, and who has published some of his own reports, states that "a reader's report is not a scholarly publication, nor a critical essay, nor a literary genre. The reader's opinion is the property of the publishing house; it is confidential material."[1] This strict policy of the publisher, apart from concealing the names of censors, results in the fact that a number of nuanced and professional literary analyses remain unknown to the public. One can only hope that this confidential status will change, and that in the future not only the contents of the reports but also the names of the readers can be

---

[1] István Géher, *Mesterségünk címere* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1989 [1978]), p. 21, my own translation.

revealed – a practice that is natural in some countries with a dictatorial past such as Spain or Portugal.

The period of Soviet-style dictatorship in Hungary can be divided into two distinct eras: the Rákosi era, that is the Stalinist period between 1949 and 1956, and the Kádár regime between 1956 and 1989. The cultural policies of the first period can be characterised in Zsófia Gombár's words by a "narrow-minded arrogance and repressive censorship" in order to "remould all spheres of life according to a […] Soviet type of model."[2] According to Csilla Bertha "[b]asically, all Western literature, including English, was suspected of being ideologically dangerous for Socialist readers."[3]

"In contrast to the Rákosi regime's sectarian close-mindedness, the cultural policy of the Kádár era finally brought a certain opening up in ideological and cultural terms to the country."[4] Ferenc Takács, critic, essayist, translator, Reader in English at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, claims that Kádár's cultural policy, indeed, brought about "the greatest and most productive era of literary translation in the history of the country"[5] – ironically very often due to the availability of authors who, unable to publish their own works, turned to translation out of necessity.[6]

THE STALINIST ERA

To describe the complex and direct mechanisms of censorship in the Rákosi era, I rely on an unpublished interview from 1990 by literary historian Ágnes Kelevéz with Mátyás Domokos and Pál Réz, two editors of Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, a publishing house of high standing with a focus on Hungarian literature from the early 1950s.[7] It is apparent from the interview that the publishing industry was under very strict political control in the 1950s. Publishing houses had to seek approval of their yearly publication plans by the Kiadói Főigazgatóság (General Directorate of Publishers), a body established in 1953 to coordinate the policies

---

[2] Zsófia Gombár, "Dictatorial Regimes and the Reception of English-Language Authors in Hungary and Portugal," in *The Censorship of English Literature in Twentieth-Century Europe*, eds. Alberto Lázaro Lafuente and Catherine O'Leary (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, forthcoming).

[3] Csilla Bertha, "The Hungarian of the West: Yeats's Reception in Hungary," in *The Reception of W. B. Yeats in Europe*, ed. Klaus Peter Jochum (London: Continuum, 2006), 150-161, pp. 153–154.

[4] Gombár, p. 6.

[5] Ferenc Takács, "The Unbought Grace – Literature and Publishing under Socialism," *The Hungarian Quarterly* 43 (Spring 2002), 75–78, p. 78.

[6] Cf. Gombár, p. 6.

[7] Available in Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum (Petőfi Museum of Literature), Budapest, audiovisual section, ref.: PIM K886/1. Date of interview: 2 October 1990.

of the various publishing houses. The editors of Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó reviewed all books] intended for publication. These long and detailed reviews (and, when the Directorate demanded, full manuscripts) were sent to the Directorate, which acted as an instrument of direct political control. After approval, the Ministry of Culture issued the *printing permit,* which was the key to the system: no printing office was allowed to print a manuscript without the Ministry's permit. The permit functioned as a "nihil obstat" up until the 1980s, when, with the appearance of private enterprises in the printing industry, the overall power of this permit diminished. The printers first produced two proofs: one for the publishing house, one for the Ministry – providing a further opportunity for censorship. Once the proofs had been checked and the book finally printed, one copy had to be submitted to the Ministry for the issue of a *permit for distribution.* Were the book to fail this last test, it was not sold but pulped. This system meant that all books published went through an extremely complex fivefold censorship regime from publication plan to distribution.

It may be unclear to the present-day reader why so much effort and sophistication was employed to control the publishing industry. In his book on the publishing policy of the Kádár era, István Bart, editor, translator and critic, examines the question of publication in the framework of the cultural policy of the period, which he describes as "planned mental manipulation." He claims that, because on Marxist grounds literature was considered to be an ideological construct, publication was looked on as an important cultural, political and theoretical issue.[8] Indeed, since "the Communist rulers of Hungary were firmly convinced of the educational power of literature in the process of building Socialism, literature […] was given an almost exaggerated significance."[9]

However, even this complex system did not always prevent the publication of politically problematic texts. According to Réz, the problem within the sophisticated system of censorship was that the sense of individual responsibility was reduced by the multiple layers.[10] In the same interview Mátyás Domokos calls the mechanism of censorship in the Kádár era a system of "Asian mistrust"; in practice the complex organisation became numb, as none of the individual officers felt the burden of final responsibility – they all supposed that somebody else would be careful enough. Apart from the structural problem, the

---

[8] István Bart, *Világirodalom és könyvkiadás a Kádár-korszakban* [*World Literature and Book Publishing in the Kádár Era*] (Budapest: Osiris, 2002), p. 11. All quotations are my own translation.

[9] Gombár, p. 6.

[10] Réz, in the 1990 interview by Kelevéz, also claims that scandals concerning books were deliberately organised, and he mentions the case of the second volume of Tibor Déry's *Felelet* (*Answer*) in 1952. It was harshly criticised by József Révai, Minister of Culture for not towing the official line in its depiction of the illegal communist movement. This book, just like any other, went through the fivefold filter, but Réz claims that such scandals could not be foreseen because they were created on purpose, and as a well-known communist writer of Jewish origin, Déry was the perfect target for such a scandal.

most important factor in the system's inability to faultlessly filter out politically unwanted material was the professionals' passive resistance. In principle the editors and readers were prejudiced against the authors, who were viewed with suspicion by the authorities. According to Réz, the editors were supposed to represent the state or communist ideology, but this was often not the case. In Réz's view the greater part of the apparatus joined the "enemy" (that is, the authors): those who remained uncritical of communist ideology and practice in the fifties were usually not learned enough to be the partners of the writers, whereas those members of the apparatus who were at least tacitly critical did not act entirely according to party directives. Often enough the editors and readers tried to mislead the higher authorities, i.e. the officials responsible for political control. These reports therefore can only be viewed within the context of intellectual resistance, which remained a factor to be taken into consideration until censorship ceased to exist.

It must also be noted that in this period (and according to Bart, basically until the mid-1970s) economical considerations were not taken into account.[11] Once it was decided that a book should be printed, it was published quickly in great numbers, and sold at a price level that reflected neither the costs of publication nor the value of the book. The interviewees also mention that the editorial offices of the publishers were large, and that by the 1960s, the publishers employed highly trained professionals.

THE KÁDÁR ERA

János Kádár (First Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party from 1956), in order to maintain the illusion of democracy, preferred indirect methods to control the publishing industry. Censorship officially disappeared from the legislative system, the word itself was rarely used (it was often replaced by the expression "administrative methods"), but the Ministry's printing permit remained necessary, even though it was denied to be a form of censorship. The complex system described above was simplified, but partly because editors and readers within the publishing houses were expected to exercise self-censorship without direct interference from the Ministry. Sándor Révész claims that the duties of editors and censors overlapped, and prohibition formed a part of the selection

---

[11] Cf. Bart, pp. 22–23. The change in economical considerations is also reflected on by Géher. In the 1978 edition of his book he mentions only as the fifth (that is, least) important characteristic of the reader the ability to evaluate the expected success of a book (pp. 19–20); he adds to the 1989 edition of the volume (written in 1988) that by the end of the 1980s this skill has become the most valued one (pp. 28–29).

mechanism.[12] According to Takács, the "system was based on an elaborate ritual of tacit negotiations and the constant testing of limits."[13]

This taciturnity poses problems for research into censorship methods in the Kádár era. Even though written directives and proposals existed, communication was often intentionally not in written form, so the reasons that lay behind the decision to publish (or not) a foreign author cannot always be traced.[14] However, great numbers of reader's reports are undergoing research in the archives of Európa Publishing House, and even though they in themselves cannot account for all levels of decision making, an analysis of them provides useful insights into censorship methods.[15] The study of reports confirms the opinions of experts such as Bart or Gombár, who assert that the reports reflected both practical considerations and party directives. Bart divides the Kádár regime into two periods regarding cultural policies.[16] The first one, up until the mid-1970s, can be characterised by ambitious plans and basically sufficient financial means to carry these plans out (even though a shortage of paper remained a problem throughout the period and funds in foreign currency for copyrights also remained insufficient – in fact these material problems led to the classics being given greater weight than contemporary literature). Bart also claims that in this period the real commissioner behind the publishing industry was not the potential readership, but the Directorate for Publishing, and through it, the cultural policies of the state.[17] From the mid-1970s until the end of the 1980s increasing financial problems forced all participants in publishing to take economic considerations more seriously, which meant that the demands of the market were also taken into consideration (this is reflected in the efforts to publish books by Anthony Burgess). At the same time the disillusionment of the officials grew and plans for changing the way people thought became less and less ambitious. As reflected in reader's reports, the potential success of a book was also calculated, and it was with a view to its commercial potential that the otherwise despised popular culture also appeared on the market. These factors together led to the easing of political control over the publishing industry (or to the diminishing effectiveness of political control) by the 80s. Nevertheless, as we shall see, this control was present until late on in that decade. The slackening of ideological control is reflected in the fact that in the late 70s and early 80s editors often tried to publish books that had been rejected in the 60s.

---

[12] Sándor Révész, *Aczél és korunk* (Budapest: Sík Kiadó, 1997), p. 346.
[13] Takács, p. 77.
[14] Cf. Bart, p. 13.
[15] The archives of Európa Publishing House are housed in the Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum. I would like to express my gratitude to the staff of the manuscript archive, especially Katalin Varga, Mária Gróf and Csaba Komáromi.
[16] Bart, p. 18.
[17] Bart, p. 23.

The system of censorship throughout the Kádár era rested on two pillars. One was the firm conviction of the morally and intellectually constructive influence of literature (which is why pessimism or decadence was seen as a major argument against the publication of a book). The other pillar was the exclusion of political taboos, the most important of which were the following: criticism of the Soviet Union or the one-party system, anti-Marxism, and ironically, the existence of censorship.[18] Other expressly prohibited issues were the revolution of 1956,[19] the Treaty of Trianon after the First World War, and the difficulties faced by Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries. Gombár adds, "[n]on-political censorship categories were 'graphic description of sexuality' and abusive language. However, as years passed, the public attitude towards sex, obscenity and verbal vulgarity gradually changed".[20] Yet descriptions of sexuality or abusive language in literature remained a extensively discussed topic in reader's reports until the end of the 80s.

READER'S REPORTS

The gradual softening of the dictatorship after the 1956 revolution did not mean the lack of control: rather, it gave rise to the "three Ps" system: the party promoted, permitted or prohibited the works of an author.[21] What this system meant for *prohibited* foreign authors can be shown by the examples of Arthur Koestler and George Orwell. They also represent the adage "once a thief always a thief."[22] Nothing, not even politically neutral works, could appear by any author who had ever written politically or otherwise suspect books. Accordingly, the first reader's report on Koestler that can be found in the archives dates from 1988. Prior to this date Koestler's name could not be printed in Hungarian – and he remained relatively unknown to the public.

George Orwell's name probably appeared to be less dangerous, as a number of reports can be found on him – yet no book by Orwell was published until 1989. Orwell's name is first mentioned in a report in 1963, when a collection of

---

[18] Cf. Gombár, p. 9. and Bart, pp. 44–45.

[19] Gombár claims that Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World Revisited* was not published because of a brief reference to the Hungarian revolution in the preface ("The chapters that follow should be read against a background of thoughts about the Hungarian uprising and its repression […]" <http://www.huxley.net/bnw-revisited/index.html>; retrieved on 27 August 2010). This fact might have contributed to the low number of Hungarian versions of Huxley's works in print in the period.

[20] Gombár, p. 9.

[21] The "three Ts" in Hungarian: *támogat, tűr, tilt*; translated into English as the three Ps (promote, permit, prohibit) by László Kontler. See László Kontler, *Millenium in Central Europe: A History of Hungary* (Budapest: Atlantisz, 1999), p. 445.

[22] Cf. Bart, p. 47.

English essays was being edited. His name appears in the first draft, but a later reader claims that none of his essays has literary merits that would justify its translation. Anyone familiar with some of Orwell's essays might suspect that this is not the real reason, and even though the reader claims that it is not a political question, this statement cannot be taken at face value.

Twelve years later in 1975, the publication of the minor work *Down and Out in Paris and London* was considered, and two readers argued for its publication; they also mentioned that the reading public would expect a different book by this author. However, no work of Orwell was published until 1989, and no report was written on him until 1988. Even in that year one of the readers found the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* too early and politically dangerous, as the public "would not understand it as a fictive negative utopia, but as a realistic description of their everyday lives." Exaggeration though this statement may be (everyday life in Hungary in the 80s hardly resembled the distressing fictional world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*), the fact remains that all through the Kádár era political implications were taken very seriously in the publication of English fiction.

Anthony Burgess is a writer who, compared to the authors discussed above, is not politically exposed, nevertheless only one book of his exceptionally large oeuvre could appear in Hungary during the Kádár era (which coincided almost exactly with Burgess's career as a writer). Despite the fact that only one book by this prolific writer was translated into Hungarian during the Kádár era, his oeuvre is well represented by the large number of reader's reports that were written on his books. A table listing all the available reports is to be found in the end of this paper; in what follows I shall discuss the most interesting reports.

The first report on Burgess dates from 1966 and the subject is the comic novel *The Doctor is Sick* (first published in 1960). The reader praises the book for its style and the superb combination of reality and imagination. Despite the positive report, the publisher seems to have dropped the idea of publishing this book; in 1972 three more reports were written on this novel – unfortunately two of them were negative. One reader claims that the book is of poor literary quality, not even witty. So the publication of *The Doctor is Sick* was postponed another decade, when Ferenc Takács was commissioned to review it. We learn from an editor's note that it was this review that opened the gate for the publication of the book, after earlier reports had been unappreciative of Burgess's humour. Takács praises both Burgess and this novel; he finds *The Doctor is Sick* a superb comedy and an embryonic satire of the life of ease – which can be read as a criticism of western society, something that party propaganda was eager to hear. Less crucially from a political point of view, Takács praises the book for its postmodern features: Spindrift, the protagonist exists *in* words and *through* words after having become an object instead of a subject in the hospital. Takács interprets this procedure as an initiation into the lack of personality. *The Doctor is Sick* appeared in a series called "Vidám Könyvek" (Funny books)

only in 1990, in the translation by the recently deceased Pál Békés under the title *Beteg a doktor*.

Despite the fact that the publication of *The Doctor is Sick* was delayed twenty-four years after the first reader's report, another book by Anthony Burgess was published in Hungarian. As the first book by Burgess in Hungary, *One Hand Clapping* was translated by Gabriella Prekop and published in 1979 under the title *Egy tenyér ha csattan*. It took five years after three positive reports in 1974, all of which praise the book as a witty satire of the consumer society. One reader points out that (in 1974) it is high time at least one book by the author were published – a remark frequently made by readers. Often mentioned is the fact that despite the lack of political problems, in many cases there are technical difficulties in translating the language-based humour of Burgess. *One Hand Clapping* is a challenge for the translator, but the reader considers it worth the effort because the book is a minor masterpiece, and Burgess published nothing more significant in the mid-70s. As Ákos Farkas reminds us in his article on the reception of Burgess in Hungary, *One Hand Clapping* was also turned into a moderately successful musical comedy in Hungary, a fact that Burgess also mentions in his autobiographical *You've Had Your Time*.[23] Burgess points out that he believes the success of this particular book in the Soviet bloc owes to the fact that "Socialist critics had mistaken the work for a blanket condemnation of 'the whole capitalist Western life.'"[24] Indeed, contemporary Western authors, who were generally viewed with suspicion by the authorities, were rarely published in Hungary unless they were thought to be critical of capitalism.

Burgess's most famous book, *A Clockwork Orange* could only appear in 1990 alongside *The Doctor is Sick*, after the state monopoly of book publishing ceased. (Nor was Kubrick's movie screened.) In the archives only one report can be found, from 1974, which recommends the publication of the novel – in vain, it would seem. A particularly interesting feature of this report is the reviewer's remark on language: "After careful reading I report that the Russian vocabulary has neither open, nor indirect, political implications." On the other hand, he recommends the use of a different language in the translation. It was an important statement: readers were expected to look for political implications,[25] and a number of cases prove that the Soviet comrades were careful and unforgiving if any critical remark of the Soviet Union appeared in Hungarian.

---

[23] Ákos Farkas, "Orange Juice for the Bears: Anthony Burgess in Hungary," *Anthony Burgess Newsletter* 7 (2004) 5–17, p. 8. <http://bu.univ-angers.fr/EXTRANET/AnthonyBURGESS/NL7farkas.htm> retrieved on 27 August 2010.

[24] Anthony Burgess, *You've Had Your Time: Being the Second Part of the Confessions of Anthony Burgess* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 29; quoted by Farkas, p. 8.

[25] Géher (pp. 24–25) mentions the reader's duty to draw the attention of the publisher to ideological or moral factors that could make the reviewed book "debatable" – a statement that can be understood as an allusion to censorship.

No other work of Burgess was published under the Kádár regime, yet a number of other interesting reports were written. The reader of *The Wanting Seed* in 1967 opined that in socialist literature utopian novels do not exist, that the utopianism of this book determines its world view, which is considered cynical. Indeed, the obligatory optimism of socialist realism made negative utopias an anomaly unsuitable for publication. When this view of utopian writing was challenged in and around 1990, a huge number of books belonging to the genre appeared: not only Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published, but also Zamyatin's *We* and Rex Warner's *Aerodrome*. Burgess's *1985* might also have fitted into this wave, and two positive reports were written in 1989, but the book was not translated. *The Wanting Seed* was not considered again in the 80s (though the book continues to be unavailable in Hungarian). For the 1967 reader of this novel, Burgess's theory of the cyclical nature of history (the constant reoccurrence of Augustinian and Pelagian phases) is particularly problematic, as it expresses mistrust in any form of state, including socialist states, and shows too much respect for liberal bourgeois politics. The circumspect reader considers it important to point out a marginal feature, the relatively greater freedom enjoyed by the proles; he identifies this as an Orwellian influence, making the novel unsuitable for publication.

The Malayan Trilogy also received some negative reports. The greatest problem, according to one reader in the late 60s, is that this series cannot be fitted into social realist categories: it treats social and political problems on the psychological level. The *Enderby* quartet received a number of negative reports as well, and has only recently been translated (even though Ferenc Takács finished almost all his reports of other novels by Burgess with the remark that the *Enderby* series should be translated). Particularly telling are the remarks of a 1969 reader, who claims that *Enderby,* just like most works by Burgess, provides a wonderful reading experience, however her conscience prevents her from recommending it because of its destructive nature.

Honey for the Bears, a novel set in the Soviet Union, could not be translated according to its 1973 reader: it transmits direct anti–Soviet ideas, which was anathema and no further argumentation was needed. A similar problem was encountered by the readers of *The End of the World News* in 1985. One part of the book is a satirical musical featuring Trotsky in New York. Both readers point out this feature, claiming it to be problematic or "prickly" ("kényes", a phrase that often occurred in reports), yet hoping that it would not be an obstacle to publishing the book. Otherwise the novel's technique is praised by Ferenc Takács, who points out that its three stories with their different realities reflect on the very nature of fiction. In 1985 Trotsky may or may not have been an obstacle; all we know is that both readers considered it important to mention and that the book was not published; whether this was because the easing of political control did not go this far or because of other reason cannot be proved.

However, the problems with Burgess were usually not political, but either linguistic (many readers were of the view that Burgess's language could not be translated into Hungarian, a claim that many translators have disproved) or moral. *Beard's Roman Women* was considered too naturalistic in 1979, and even though one reader praised its structure and wit (which are recurring statements in the reports), both the description of sexuality, despite its non-pornographic nature, and the frequent use of swearwords are "more than the Hungarian reading public can tolerate." The same claim was made about *Tremor of Intent* in 1981.

Another taboo in socialist morals was homosexuality, especially when homosexuals appeared as positive characters. According to the reader in 1981 this had been the main problem with *Earthly Powers* – which was translated only in 2008.

In conclusion it can be stated that political caution in publication was present until the very end of the period, and this is well reflected in the reader's reports, which are the best documented facet of the censorship mechanisms. Major concerns of reviewers and editors alike were lack of optimism (that was often described as a "destructive nature"), descriptions of sexuality and abusive language. Political references or allusions were closely scrutinised and books with features that could be labelled as critical of Marxism or the Soviet Union could not be published. An important argument for the publication of twentieth-century fiction is the criticism of capitalistic society – in such a case the book could be labelled as progressive or humanist. The literary ideal being socialist realism, non-realist traditions of modernist or postmodern fiction faced difficulties in finding their ways to the Hungarian audience. These issues lie behind the fact that not until the very end of the Kádár regime could any book appear in Hungarian bearing the name of either Koestler or Orwell, and only one by the politically less problematic Anthony Burgess. Despite the fact that a superb translation industry helped the publication of classic foreign literature, the reception of twentieth-century authors was highly influenced by non-literary factors. And since, in large-scale terms, national culture will only receive a foreign author when at least some of their major works are available in Hungarian, these non-literary factors influenced not only modern English authors' available translations, but also their place in Hungarian cultural memory.

Reader's reports from the archives of Európa Publishing House
on Anthony Burgess

Date	Title (original publication)	Suggestion (+ recommended; – not recommended)	Remarks
1966	The Doctor is Sick (1960)	+	
22 April 1967	The Wanting Seed (1962)	–	cynical, yet ideologically not problematic
4 June 1967	The Wanting Seed (1962)	–	
1967	Malayan Trilogy (1964)	+	
1968	Malayan Trilogy (1964)	+	without the third volume
–	Malayan Trilogy (1964)	–	psychological treatment of social–political problems
1969	Enderby Outside (1968)	+	
1969	Inside Mr Enderby (1963)	–	
1971	Shakespeare (1970)	–	witty but superficial
1971	Devil of a State (1961)	–	witty, but not worth translating
7 June 1972	The Doctor is Sick (1960)	+	
27 June 1972	The Doctor is Sick (1960)	–	
30 July 1972	The Doctor is Sick (1960)	–	Low quality, narrow-minded humour
1972	Nothing Like the Sun (1964)	–	gossip instead of art
1973	Honey for the Bears (1963)	–	
1973	Nothing Like the Sun (1964)	–	
8 March 1974	One Hand Clapping (1961)	+	
2 May 1974	One Hand Clapping (1961)	+	
30 Oct 1974	One Hand Clapping	+	**published in 1979**
1974	Napoleon Symphony (1974)	–	It should not be the first Burgess novel to appear
1974	A Clockwork Orange (1962)	+	
30 May 1978	The Clockwork Testament or Enderby's End (1974)	+	The trilogy together
18 Aug 1978	The Clockwork Testament or Enderby's End	–	Not as the first volume by Burgess
10 March 1979	ABBA ABBA (1977)	–	impossible to translate
11 April 1979	ABBA ABBA	–	topic not interesting

8 July 1979	Beard's Roman Women (1976)	−	
30 Sept 1979	Beard's Roman Women	+	abusive language
9 Feb 1981	Tremor of Intent (1966)	+	it could be a popular success
14 April 1981	Earthly Powers (1980)	+	homosexuality
10 Aug 1981	Earthly Powers	−	not well structured
10 Sept 1981	Tremor of Intent	−	
1983	The Doctor is Sick	+	
1984	Napoleon Symphony (1974)	−	chaotic
1984	Enderby's Dark Lady (1984)	−	linguistic problems
4 Jan 1985	Enderby's Dark Lady	+	difficult to translate
3 July 1985	Enderby's Dark Lady	+	
29 July 1985	The End of the World News (1982)	−	
15 Sept 1985	The End of the World News	+	
31 Oct 1985	The End of the World News	+	
1989	Tremor of Intent (1980)	+	
13 July 1989	1985 (1978)	+	
28 Aug 1989	1985 (1978)	+	

NATÁLIA PIKLI

Teenagers in focus
– classic/popular Shakespeare?

A case study of present-day Hungarian reception

The present study attempts to reconstruct the reception of Shakespeare by Hungarian teenagers, mostly aged 14–18 (i.e. grammar school students), considering more or less the last decade (2000–2010). The adjective classic/popular refers to the nature of this investigation: the main concern of this research is how Shakespeare is perceived on a classic–popular cline, i.e. as an inalienable part of the literary and cultural canon on one hand and as part of mass culture and mass media on the other. The approach suggested does not presuppose a strict dividing line between classic and popular, but investigates the Shakespearean phenomenon as continually in motion on this axis, shifting its place according to the particular cultural context, most of the time containing elements of both elite and popular culture, thus providing a potentially successful strategy of transmitting components of elite culture to an age group mostly immersed in popular culture.

Emphasis is laid on the actual phenomena influencing reception with only passing references to theoretical considerations, although the nature of this research means that it leans more towards the sociological approach in reception studies, recalling some tenets of the polysystem theory.[1] As aspects of literary cults invariably emerge when Shakespeare's name is mentioned in any context, interpretation of certain phenomena will invite considerations of the nature of literary cults and especially of Hungarian literary cults. The main concern of the research is how teenagers in present-day Hungary see Shakespeare and his works, so this paper charts the different contexts in which they may encounter Shakespearean phenomena, and examines how reception works in the institutions influencing this age group.

---

[1] Elinor Shafer writes: "Central to the polysystem theory is the assumption that a culture consists of a system of subsytems; i.e. groups of actors who share repertoires of cultural knowledge, values and conventions." Shaffer also emphasises that "[S]uch analysis of the cultural polysystem is present in any reception study", which should take into account translations, publishing, critical yardsticks, etc. Elinor Shaffer, "Introduction," *Comparative Critical Studies* 3.3 (2006) 191–198, pp. 192–193.

Because teenagers spend a considerable part of their life at school, the first and foremost context of this research is grammar school education – although one needs to consider that due to their compulsory and authoritative nature school curricula and teaching practice might not be the most effective tools to foster an appreciation (and love) among students for Shakespeare.[2] This research focuses on grammar school textbooks of literature, teachers' experience in teaching Shakespeare (based on anonymous surveys, conducted in August–September 2010), and the appearance of Shakespeare in canon-forming final exams. From here I shall move on to consider supplementary education and book publishing, after which some remarks will be made on contemporary theatrical practice (artistic vs. commercial attempts, [post]-modernist performances versus box-office success musicals), and also on popularising and modernising attempts in translation (for instance, those by Ádám Nádasdy and Dániel Varró), with a brief overview of films and advertising. The focus will be on giving a rough outline of different contexts and ways of transmitting the Shakespearean oeuvre to a young audience in the past decade.[3]

SHAKESPEARE AND THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL CURRICULUM

In Hungarian grammar schools Hungarian as a subject entails approximately 25% grammar and linguistics and 75% literature, traditionally with a strong emphasis on the history of literature, and especially on Hungarian literature. Nevertheless, due to the influence of persistently dominant Humanist ideals and Hungarian High Modernist ideas of education, according to which Hungarian literature is an inalienable part of Goethe's "world literature," the literature of other European nations is taught quite extensively in Hungary, a fact to which all the textbooks attest with their sections devoted to the Bible, Greco-Roman literature, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque periods, nineteenth-century Romanticism, Realism, and Symbolism, High and Postmodernism with works mostly by Italian, French, English and German authors. However, in reality teachers consider these sections of secondary importance, therefore they usually devote less time

---

[2]　Cf. a similar opinion regarding compulsory attendance at theatre performances in Attila Nyulassy–István Ugrai–Balázs Zsedényi, "A színház középiskolába megy" (Theatre goes to grammar schools) *Színház* (November 2008, http//www.szinhaz.net, retrieved 15 August 2010), saying that "in most cases collective theatre-going made compulsory by schools works as mere compulsion, so the effect is contrary to what was intended". ("a kollektív iskolai színházlátogatás az esetek többségében kényszerként hat, ezért a szándékozottal ellentétes hatást ér el").

[3]　Here I ought to state that I worked as a teacher of Hungarian language and literature and English as a Foreign Language in a grammar school for thirteen years in a small town north of Budapest (Radnóti Miklós Grammar School, Dunakeszi, 1996–2009), so I too have some first-hand experience about the context and practice of teaching Shakespeare to teenagers.

and care to presenting them, largely because the curriculum is vast: in four years the students are supposed to learn about "everything important" in the history of literature from myths of creation and the epic of *Gilgamesh* to Postmodernism (although this is somewhat challenged by the national curriculum, the majority of textbooks and teachers remain traditional in this respect).[4] The other reason for a partial neglect of non-Hungarian literature is that the compulsory final exams at both levels (ordinary and advanced) place a very strong emphasis on Hungarian literature: out of the twenty compulsory topics at the oral exam (chosen each January by the teacher for the ordinary level and by the Ministry of Education for the advanced level[5]) only two are based on world literature. At ordinary level the choices include the Bible and Greco-Roman literature and nineteenth- and twentieth-century European authors; however, at advanced level students may in theory be asked to talk about authors from any literary period taught (although it is never actually the case even for advanced level students). A further two or three topics from the fields of "Theatre history" and "Borderlands of literature" may include the interpretation of foreign authors, but the teacher can choose to base these themes on Hungarian works as well, as is traditionally the case. Therefore, a minimum of two and a maximum of six topics out of twenty are devoted to non-Hungarian authors at the ordinary level final exam in literature, which the majority of students take (only very few students choose the advanced level exam in literature: never more than 4–5% in the best schools, and even fewer nationwide). As the official "output" of teaching literature is so emphatically nationalist, teachers and schools usually dare not deviate from these highly canonical norms, which give one usual place to Shakespeare at final oral exams: he is mentioned as a potential candidate for "Theatre history" along with Sophocles and Molière at ordinary level and Ibsen, Chekhov, Brecht and Beckett at advanced level. In sum, a grammar school graduate might not have to give a report of his knowledge of Shakespeare at all. In practice, however, it is usually a Shakespearean drama which is chosen as a topic for "Theatre History."

---

[4]   Due to a landslide change in political power in the spring of 2010, a new law of general education is currently being drawn up. The information available regarding the new law shows an even stronger emphasis on classic and canonised Hungarian literature in the new obligatory general curriculum as opposed to a more Europe-centred and liberal view of literature and open discussions regarding interpretation.

[5]   School-leaving final exams fall into two categories in Hungary: ordinary level exams and advanced level exams. All students have to sit for exams in five subjects (Hungarian language and literature, Mathematics, History, one foreign language and one freely chosen subject), and they enter for either ordinary level or advanced level exams when finishing their studies (therefore this system of O-levels and A-levels does not exactly correspond to the former British one). Universities and colleges prescribe what level exams in what subjects are needed for application, and students choose according to this. However, in higher education there has been a strong tendency to prescribe only ordinary level exams for most majors, mostly due to financial reasons.

CANON-FORMING TEXTBOOKS

The majority of textbooks support the approach outlined in the final exams. Teachers of literature are relatively free to choose one of the textbooks available on the market, usually titled "Literature" – but only from the ones which have been sanctioned by the official committee at the Ministry of Education and have been "declared a textbook." (It is possible to use an alternative textbook but this is extremely complicated: all the parents have to formally agree, these textbooks are usually very expensive, etc.) I have examined seven "official" textbooks which are available and used in today's grammar schools, though they enjoy varying degrees of popularity among teachers.[6] The most popular and most widely used textbook is still the so-called "Mohácsy" (unofficially named after its author). This is actually quite an old book, with a first edition from 1988,[7] but it was revised and "enriched" with illustrations in 2009 (this is unofficially called "The colourful Mohácsy", official title: *Színes irodalom*, "Colourful Literature"). The fourteenth black-and-white edition, which came out in 2001, even boasts being a "textbook granted the Prize of Approval" ("tetszésdíjas tankönyv"), advertising in block capitals on the title page that it corresponds to the (then new) national curriculum. I have no exact data as to the precise numbers, but Mrs Pethő's book is usually preferred with advanced level students, and the remaining five books are used less frequently in schools. All the books devote roughly 15–25 pages at the end of the Renaissance section to the English Renaissance theatre (with a brief overview of medieval theatre as well), Shakespeare's life and times (quite short in the latest textbooks) and his career. The close reading and interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Ham-*

---

[6]   The following editions of textbooks were used in this study (the date in square brackets indicates the year they were declared official textbooks for grammar school students): Károly Mohácsy, *Irodalom I.* (Budapest: Krónika Nova, 2001, 14th edition [1988]); Károly Mohácsy, *Színes irodalom 9.* (Budapest: Krónika Nova, 2010, [2009]); Tibor Gintli – Gábor Schein, *Irodalom tankönyv 14–15 éveseknek* (Budapest: Korona, 1997 [1996]), prepared by the ELTE Faculty of Arts Committee; Csilla Nagy, Mrs Pethő, *Irodalomkönyv 9.* (Budapest: Korona Kiadó, 2005 [2003]); Zsigmond Ritoók – Mihály Szegedy-Maszák – András Veres – Iván Horváth – Ferenc Zemplényi, *Irodalom I.* (Budapest: Krónika Nova, 2004 [2001]); István Bánki – Anna Forgács – Károly Pála, *Irodalom a 9. osztály számára* (Celldömölk: Apáczai, 2006 [2001]); Péter Domonkos, *Irodalom I. négy- és hatosztályos középiskolák számára* (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2005 [2000]).

[7]   The proof for its mostly pre-change of the regime (pre-1989) conception is its persistent latent and simplistic Marxism, which appears even in new editions, e.g. attributing the prosperity of drama in Elizabethan times to the class struggle, saying that "the historical–social changes, the struggles between the bourgeoisie and the land-owning aristocracy became the most prevalent in this age here, in England, where the premonitory signs of the forthcoming middle-class revolution were the most apparent" ("a történelmi-társadalmi változások, a polgárság és a nagybirtokos arisztokrácia küzdelmei itt hatoltak e korban a legmélyebbre, Angliában lehetett leginkább érzékelni a közelgő polgári forradalom előszelét." (Mohácsy 2001, p. 256.)

let dominate, and there are some remarks on other plays as well. In the more modern textbooks (Mrs Pethő, Bánki-Pála, Domonkos) a lot of questions and exercises are designed to help students to discover the text for themselves, but even in these there are very few questions to incite the teenagers to relate the problems to their own personal experiences. Old-style textbooks, such as Mohácsy, Gintli–Schein and Ritoók et al. prefer a prescriptive (and sometimes very subjective, though consistently so) interpretation of the plays. As visual aids, besides the ever-present model of the Globe and Shakespeare's First Folio portrait, most textbooks offer black-and-white pictures of past performances in an archival fashion. For instance, Szegedy-Maszák, the author of the Shakespeare section in Ritoók et al. illustrates *Hamlet* with a grainy black-and-white photo of Tamás Major in the Hungarian National Theatre in 1952, a performance which was not even iconic. The 1968 Zeffirelli film of *Romeo and Juliet* is also a favourite illustration, and only the "colourful Mohácsy" gives more space to up-to-date visuals, corresponding to the general experience and preference of the target audience with an abundance of colourful photos from a wide range of productions, films, costume designs, etc. (although the text was lifted from the previous editions almost completely unaltered).

Before going into more details concerning the image of Shakespeare presented to students via textbooks, one may safely make the preliminary assumption that all of these textbooks correspond to final exam criteria (affirming Shakespeare's status in theatre and literary history) by laying considerable emphasis on data about Shakespeare's theatre, with the ever-present illustration of the Globe or the interior of the Swan theatre. However, visual stimuli are used very sparsely, if at all, and in most cases they provide mere illustration instead of inviting open discussion. This approach represents an outmoded though cultic attitude to Shakespeare as opposed to the idea of an "open work" serving as inspiration for students. These textbooks were not designed to win over a generation brought up in a world of vivid and ubiquitous visual stimuli.

Another general characteristic of these textbooks is the prevailing open or latent cultic attitude to Shakespeare, which corresponds well to the findings of Péter Dávidházi and István Margócsy, scholars of literary cults in Hungary. Dávidházi proposes the following description:

> a threefold definition of cult as a specific *attitude*, as a certain *ritual*, and as a peculiar way of using *language*. The attitude characteristic of cults is unconditional reverence, a commitment so total and devoted, so final and absolute that it precludes every conceivable criticism of its object. Their ritual may include pilgrimages to sacred places, relic worship, the celebration of sacred times, and all sorts of communal festivities permeated by transcendental symbolism. Their use of language is marked by a preference for such glorifying statements that can

be neither verified nor falsified because they are not amenable to any kind of empirical testing whatsoever.[8]

Although the ritualistic attitude is hardly tenable in the Hungarian context because of a lack of specific memorial loci,[9] the attitude and the language of cult is clearly perceptible in textbooks. This will be shown in the following quotations, which also attest to a special Hungarian cultic discourse, recalling a nineteenth-century high Romantic style characterised by Margócsy as follows:

> Cultic imagery, conceived, blooming and extended in the period of Romanticism, once having been formed, has lived on in its circulation and phraseology essentially unscathed to the periods of modernism and postmodernism, to our days – even if it is detached from its Romantic roots and nineteenth-century scenery.[10]

Margócsy cites examples from twentieth-century authors and scholars in his study on Hungarian literary cults, and also draws attention to the special rhetorical structuring of cultic utterances, emphasising that cultic imagery is most apparent in titles and introductions or in conclusions, functioning as *laudatio* or *captatio benevolentiae* if at the beginning of a text. He attributes this to hidden authorial intent, perceivable even in scholarly studies, which relies on scholarly and rational analysis but still deems it necessary to be enveloped in a cultic attitude to justify its *raison d'être*. This cultic attitude to Shakespeare, conceived in 19th-century Hungary, where it was ubiquitous,[11] is evident both in the initial

---

[8] Péter Dávidházi, "Cult and Criticism: Ritual in the European Reception of Shakespeare," in *Literature and its Cults/ La litterature et ses cultes*, eds. Péter Dávidházi and Judit Karafiáth (Budapest: Argumentum, 1994), 29–45, p. 31.

[9] In Hungary there are no specific "lieux de memoire," i.e. places for remembering Shakespeare: there is one lesser known statue of him in Budapest in front of a luxury hotel on the Danube embankment (more as part of the tourist attraction of the river than in memory of the playwright), and one Budapest restaurant is named after him (with corresponding interior design). Consequently, theatres have been associated with Shakespeare and high culture as symbolised by his works. However, Gyula, a country town has become associated with him since the "Gyula Shakespeare Festival," an annual multi-faceted theatre–community–tourist event, was first organised there in 2005. This festival deserves a separate study in reception; however, as it is organised in a remote part of the country and tickets are relatively expensive, it is not primarily directed at teenagers.

[10] "A romantikában kivirágzott és szétterjedt kultikus képzetkör, ha kialakult, ha elszakad is romantikus gyökereitől, ha elhagyja a 19. századi díszleteket, önmozgásában is, de egyes nyelvi fordulataiban is megmarad, lényegében sértetlenül tovább él, egészen a modernitás és posztmodernitás korszakáig, egészen napjainkig." Margócsy, István, *"…Égi és földi virágzás tükre…" Tanulmányok a magyar irodalmi kultuszokról*. ["…Mirror of heavenly and earthly bloom…". Studies on Hungarian literary cults] (Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 2007), pp. 48–49.

[11] Cf. Péter Dávidházi, *"Isten másodszülöttje". A magyar Shakespeare-kultusz természetrajza* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1989).

presentation of Shakespeare[12] and in the often romantically idealised interpretations offered in textbooks, as will be seen in the following detailed analyses. The highly cultic attitude of several textbooks presents a problem for teenagers: the image of Shakespeare remains for them frigid, fossilised in cultic images, hindering a direct and personal relation to his works, not to mention the usual anti-authority stance of students who tend to revolt against any authoritative-sounding cultic utterances. Unless an enthusiastic and spirited teacher overcomes these attitudinal and authorial problems, Shakespeare is doomed to the unquestioning official adoration conveyed by most textbooks.

Mohácsy's textbook deserves special attention because it enjoys the greatest popularity among more traditional teachers, i.e. it is the most widely used textbook even today despite its outmoded authorial intent and attitude. Its highly Romantic style is evident in its phraseology: the author repeatedly uses key terms of Romanticism ("[t]hese dramas met the sensationalist need of audiences: the human *passions liberated* by the Renaissance raged in them with *tremendous force*"[13]). The analysis of *Romeo and Juliet* is possessed of a curious mixture of Romantic and Marxist thought, for instance concluding that "The young ones unwillingly clash with the old feudal morals, thus involuntarily they become the carriers and heroes of the Renaissance desire for freedom".[14] His imagery is imbued with poetic and highly metaphorical statements, which characterises most teachers of literature even today: "On one side the darkness of feudal anarchy looms with its senseless, chaotic impulses – on the other side the new morality of Renaissance order sparkles, with the moving beauty of love and freedom of emotions."[15] Mohácsy's analysis consists of a re-telling of the story according to a structuralist approach, emphasising plotline, conflict, and catastrophe, to which remarks are

---

[12] Cf. the chapter title in Bánki et al. "Shakespeare, 'Star of Poets'", which – although explained as Ben Jonson's poetical phrase – clearly calls for a laudatory, uncritical attitude concerning Shakespeare's greatness from the start. Mohácsy's introduction to Shakespeare echoes the same: "The universal nature of William Shakespeare's oeuvre can only be compared to the greatness of Homer, Dante and Goethe" (Mohácsy 2010, p. 209.) or in the conclusion to *Hamlet*, which is also the final sentence of the Shakespeare section by Mohácsy: "The corruption and mendacious hypocrisy of the world, against which the Danish Prince tries to fight, may have been Shakespeare's own fatally tragic experience." (A világnak az a romlottsága, hazug képmutatása, amely ellen a dán királyfi próbálja felvenni a harcot, Shakespeare megrendítő egyéni élménye lehetett." Mohácsy 2009, p. 232.). These two statements from 2010 repeat the 2001 and 1993 editions (which I also consulted) word for word.

[13] "A drámák maradéktalanul kielégítették a közönség szenzációéhségét: a reneszánszban felszabadult emberi szenvedélyek tomboltak bennük hatalmas erővel". (Mohácsy 2001, p. 260, Mohácsy 2010, p. 213). The italics in the translations are my own.

[14] "A fiatalok akaratlanul is szembekerülnek a régi, feudális erkölcsökkel, s önkéntelenül a reneszánsz szabadságvágy hordozói és hősei lesznek". (Mohácsy 2001, p. 262., Mohácsy 2010, p. 214.)

[15] "Az egyik oldalon a feudális anarchia sötétlik a maga értelmetlen, kaotikus indulataival – a másikon ott ragyog már az új erkölcs, a reneszánsz rend a szerelem megható szépségével és az érzelmek szabadságával." (Mohácsy 2001, p. 263., Mohácsy 2010, p. 216.)

added in a Romantic vein. The lyrical and linguistic virtuosity of the play also deserves some pages. To sum up, both the style and method of analysis attest to a cultic, laudatory attitude to the drama.

Mohácsy's treatment of *Hamlet*[16] is somewhat less Romanticised though not entirely free of similarly simplistic oppositions, such as the clash of "medieval feudal morals and a more purified humanist concept"[17] in the figure of Hamlet, completely disregarding for instance his and Claudius's strongly Machiavellian policy, mostly relying on Goethe's reading of a sensitive Hamlet, who perishes in an "unequal battle" as "bloody revenge is alien to his being".[18] Altogether his interpretation of *Hamlet* is less personal than Goethe's and takes into account not only the context and predecessors of the play, underlining an attitude based in literary history, but it also offers a more thorough character analysis (even of supporting characters), and calls for a separate comparison of the play and "the world-view" of "Sonnet 66". He even mentions Hungarian critic Marcell Benedek's view, which is a welcome link to more scholarly analysis – although it ought to be mentioned that Benedek's monograph on Shakespeare is rather a popular-educational account than a strictly scholarly work.[19]

Mohácsy's authorial attitude is ambivalent: in the preface he emphasises that the main purpose of his textbook is for "students to re-live literary works",[20] however, this supposed personal consideration of works by students is under-mined by his authoritative and repetitive style, and the dominance of biographi-cal matter (in the case of Hungarian authors); yet his highly Romantic, enthu-siastic and simplified treatment of works might appeal to some students. Peda-gogically this textbook is definitely outdated, offering little or no interaction between student and text.

In the "Colourful Mohácsy" the text remains mostly the same, although the layout of the material is improved: the text is arranged in different blocks to help structuring and memorising learning material, and it incorporates many histori-cally significant illustrations (e.g. the title page of Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy,*

---

[16] For a close reading of Mohácsy's interpretation of *Hamlet* cf. Henrik Csepreghy, "Shakespeare a magyarországi középiskolai tankönyvekben" in Tibor Frank and Krisztina Károly, eds. *Anglisztika és amerikanisztika. Magyar kutatások az ezredfordulón* (Budapest: Tinta, 2009) 117–122. Csepreghy reads three textbooks from a literary point of view and not for their pedagogical value, although he also emphasises their latent Romantic idealism.

[17] "Kétféle erkölcs, kétféle világnézet szembenállása, ellentéte ütközik össze itt: a középkori, a feudális és a tisztultabb humanista felfogás." (Mohácsy 2001, p. 271, Mohácsy 2010, p. 225).

[18] Mohácsy 2001, p. 334. Mohácsy 2010, p. 232.

[19] Marcell Benedek: *Shakespeare.* (Budapest: Magyar Könyvklub, 2001). Though written in 1952, it had only been published twice by 1963, and later only in 2001. The author was a member of the essay-writing generation of Hungarian High Modernism between the world wars, and his monograph is also written in this vein: a highly readable book but most of its comments seem simplistic after Peter Brook and Jan Kott. Mohácsy's choice of critical mate-rial thus corresponds to his overall attitude to Shakespeare.

[20] "újraéljék az irodalmi műveket", Mohácsy 2001, p. 5.

Hamlet Quarto 1) or modern ones. Attempts to modernise are detectable in the choice of visual aids – with stills from Baz Luhrmann's 1997 *Romeo+Juliet*, Zeffirelli's 1990 *Hamlet,* costume designs and film posters (e.g. Almarayda's adaptation of *Hamlet*, 2000), or images from other *Hamlet* performances, ranging from Olivier in 1948 to Tom Rooney in 2004. Some improvement is to be found in the pedagogical attitude as well: although analytical passages do not deviate from the "old Mohácsy" save some minor alterations,[21] there are open questions addressed to the students, asking them to compare illustration and text, collect data about adaptations or performances, and there is one question to prompt students to relate the story of Romeo and Juliet to their own real-life experiences. This question would signify a laudable shift towards the professed authorial intention of making students "re-live" the story of Romeo and Juliet; however, the phrasing of the question still retains latent judgement: "What opinion may be formed about the young lovers, *who thrust aside their families, names, customs and good manners*? Would such behaviour be considered *shocking* in our days? *Let us* discuss!"[22] The first person plural reveals a certain mistrust of teenagers: the implication is that they cannot form their own opinion independently of the teacher, and the "we" tacitly entails a compromise between adult and adolescent views.

For all its shortcomings, Mohácsy's textbook is the one most widely used in Hungarian grammar schools, nevertheless, his sometimes naïve approach seems more student-friendly than the scholarly gravity of the Schein–Gintli or Ritoók et al. textbooks (the latter is even less approachable for students because of its highly authoritative and affirmatively rigid style). The Schein–Gintli textbook deserves special attention because they are also the authors of a recent academic monograph on world literature,[23] in which the section devoted to Shakespeare repeats the approach embodied in the textbook. With no more than three black-and-white illustrations (a portrait, the Globe, and a nineteenth-century performance) they give a precise and scholarly account of Shakespeare's life, theatre, sources, periods, and even publishing conditions. Their longer textual analyses include *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, and as optional (small print) material, that of *The Tempest*, to which the Hungarian Modernist author Lőrinc Szabó's poem *Caliban* is added for comparison. Surprisingly, *Romeo and Juliet* never enters the scene, and

---

[21] Marxism had clearly become embarrassing by 2009: in the revised version the downfall of Romeo and Juliet was no longer caused by "feudal anarchy" but by "outdated, anti-human traditions", although in the analysis of *Hamlet* the opposition to the "medieval and feudal" appears, albeit to a lesser extent. However the text given as learning material is essentially unchanged. The reference to Benedek is cut, though, and apart from Mohácsy's no other scholarly opinion is present.

[22] "Milyen vélemény alakítható ki a családjukat, nevüket, a szokásokat és az illemet is félrelökő fiatal szerelmesekről? Korunkban is megütközést válthatna ki az ilyen magatartás? Vitassuk meg!" (Mohácsy 2010, p. 215)

[23] Tibor Gintli and Gábor Schein, *Az irodalom rövid története I. A kezdetektől a romantikáig* (Pécs: Jelenkor, 2003).

there are neither any substantial references to the comedies nor any questions directed at the students. Their surprising disregard (and possible dislike[24]) of *Romeo and Juliet* and preference for *Hamlet* and *King Lear* returns in their monograph as well. This textbook – together with Szegedy-Maszák's account of Shakespeare – attests to a decent scholarly attitude, but with no intention to encourage students to discover the texts for themselves, or discuss the views expressed. Their style is not tempered to meet the needs of teenagers, with such concluding remarks as for instance "Existence only ascends to human standards if the personality is driven by inner moral norms."[25] The same might be said about the Ritoók et al. textbook, where Szegedy-Maszák gives a scholarly account of Shakespeare's career, and besides the usual staple of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, he devotes larger sections to "less popular plays" such as *Troilus and Cressida*. His overall approach attests to a pre-Kottian High Modernist and markedly structuralist approach, providing only very few questions with ready-made answers.

Three textbooks devote more attention to the students' individual interpretation and discovery of texts, though even they do not deviate largely from a mostly structuralist approach, and exhibit a strong tendency to base literature on historical grounds. The style of Domonkos's textbook is less authoritative: he emphasises uncertainties regarding Shakespearean authorship, data, etc., mentioning different interpretations from mostly early or mid-twentieth-century Hungarian writers and scholars (László Németh, Ferenc Móra, Arnold Hauser, Lajos Fülöp, Bernát Alexander), and asking the students to discuss these views. However, his interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* remains subjectively dominated, though it is definitely a more complex reading of the play than Mohácsy's, denying facile bipolar conflicts in the play. He devotes a large section to the Zeffirelli film, and while he draws attention to problems of adaptation, his uncritical adoration of this version is evident. His use of illustrations includes contemporary drawings of Verona, Elizabethan clothes, fencing and alchemy; but the fact that these historical images are complemented by romantic stills from Zeffirelli's film and a picture of "Juliet's house" in Verona attest to a latent cultic approach. Domonkos's longer treatment of *Hamlet*, and short schematic inter-

---

[24] One may suspect some scholarly snobbery in such a disregard of a play which definitely calls to younger audiences both in topic and style. Cf. Szegedy-Maszák's remark on *Romeo and Juliet*: "The merits of the work can rather be found in smaller details", or "the master of poetry [ie. Shakespeare] is not able to create a dramaturgical structure determining the whole text yet" ("A mű értékei inkább a részletekben találhatók meg" Ritoók et al., p. 214., "a versírás mestere még nem teremt a szöveg egészét meghatározó drámai felépítést", p. 215.) It is revealing to see that notwithstanding his latent dislike of the play, he still does not dare to disregard the play completely, it being a staple of the Hungarian curriculum. (It might be important to note that the authors of these two textbooks are outstanding literary scholars, employed by the university with the largest and most prestigious faculty of arts in the country.)

[25] "A létezés csak akkor emelkedik az emberi szintre, ha belső erkölcsi norma mozgatja a személyiséget" (Gintli–Schein, p. 286)

pretation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provide a solid structuralist framework both in text and image, to which some aspects of reception history are added (sources, revenge tragedy, structure; Olivier, Kozintsev, J. E. Millais, Delacroix). They also address students more in some direct questions (e.g. "If you were the director, how much would you cut of the text of *Hamlet*?" "How would you stage this scene?", "Write a diary entry on…"). He even makes an attempt at bringing into the discussion other plays (*King Lear, Macbeth, Troilus and Cressida, Richard III, The Tempest*, and Falstaff as a character) in two pages either with a two-sentence reference to the play, or only with an image and a caption, or with a quotation from eminent Hungarian Shakespeare scholars (László Cs. Szabó 1980s, István Géher 1990s). Generally speaking, his intention to provide a "full view" of Shakespeare is laudable though rendered impossible by the limits of the curriculum; his pedagogical openness for discussion is clearly discernible, though undermined by his evident and uncritical adoration of Zeffirelli and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Mrs Pethő's textbook targets advanced level students, and promotes a highly intellectual approach with its outlook on the context of literary, theatre and film traditions ranging from the anti-theatrical tracts of Shakespeare's day to Stoppard and Alfred Jarry, from Asta Nielsen to Zeffirelli. Not committed to giving visual stimuli (with only four illustrations), on the whole she calls for a merely intellectual attitude from students, providing a solid framework for the complex though closed interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. The questions invite discussion of thought-provoking quotations by eminent contemporary Hungarian scholars (Ágnes Heller, Géza Kállay) and by those of the broader European Shakespeariana: Voltaire, Goethe, Schlegel, G. B. Shaw, T. S. Eliot, Jan Kott. Her attitude supports the still lingering Modernist idea of world literature, laudably trying to connect the Hungarian and the European. However, even her treatment of Shakespeare remains elitist and an appeal for direct (emotional) reaction from the students is lacking.

Bánki–Forgács–Pála's textbook steers a healthy middle way for ordinary level students between providing a sound framework for interpretation (on the Renaissance, Shakespeare's theatre, sources, contemporaries) on the one hand and open discussion enabling individual interpretation on the other, allowing for alternative readings of the two staple plays with short quotations from both Hungarian and English authors (István Géher, Elemér Hankiss, T. S. Eliot). Although there are some minor factual errors and few visual stimuli, this textbook offers solid ground for the effective teaching of Shakespeare to teenagers, while its greatest merit and novelty is the special emphasis on different Hungarian translations of *Hamlet* from Kazinczy's late eighteenth-century to Nádasdy's present-day translation, thus inviting reconsideration not only of the play but of Hungarian literary tradition and problems of translation.

QUESTIONNAIRES

Though providing some insight into actual teaching practice in the way Shakespeare is presented, this anonymous survey, conducted in August–September 2010, proved not to be as wide-reaching as originally planned. Teachers' willingness to respond was not very high: only twenty filled out survey forms were returned. As such, though they cannot be said to be representative in general, they reveal much about the way teachers think of Shakespeare in secondary schools. The schools that returned forms are usually rated highly among Hungarian grammar schools: two are famous grammar schools in the capital, two are denominational schools, one maintained by the Roman Catholic Church, one by the Lutheran Church, and the remaining schools, in the provinces, also have a good reputation. Another factor influencing the results is that the teachers who devoted time to responding do not represent the average, and one can safely assume they are among the more motivated and enthusiastic teachers of literature. Therefore we might say with some certainty that what we see in the forms represents the highest standard of teaching Shakespeare – in most schools the situation is probably even less auspicious.

The data concerning the status of schools are as follows:
• 90% grammar school
• 10% vocational secondary and grammar school
• 35% in the capital
• 65% in the country

The results to closed questions were as follows:

1. Which works of Shakespeare do you teach? To which age group? How many lessons (of 45 minutes) are devoted to this?

Teaching *Romeo and Juliet* (age groups[26] and numbers of lessons devoted to it): 100% of respondents taught it to the 14–15 age-group, taught for 1–10 lessons, an average of 5 lessons.

Teaching *Hamlet*: 80% for the 14–15 age-group, in one case: at the age of 17 together with Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, taught for 1–6 lessons, with an average of 4 lessons.

Teaching other Shakespearean plays:

Optional, mostly *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest*: 25%, to the

---

[26] Due to recent changes in numbering forms in Hungary with the introduction of a 0. grade (form) before starting grammar school, I rather refer to age groups than grades to avoid confusion.

13–14 or 14–15 age-groups, or for optional classes for the 16–17 age-group, in 1–8 lessons, with an average of 3 lessons.

King Lear 20%, aged 14–17, 2–3 lessons or watching a theatre performance.

Much Ado About Nothing: taught by watching Branagh's 1995 film.

In one case (in one of the most famous schools in the capital, also the centre for The Society of Teachers of Hungarian Language and Literature): no *Romeo and Juliet* – only as opposed to *Troilus and Cressida*; in addition *Hamlet* taught for 2–4 lessons; *Troilus and Cressida, The Merchant of Venice, Richard III, Much Ado about Nothing* or *Twelfth Night* in English, also as a foreign language class (*The Merchant of Venice* and *Richard III* taught to 17-year-olds, in optional classes, the rest to 14–15 year olds).

As a tentative conclusion one can safely assume that *Romeo and Juliet* is still the most popular text for teaching, and that this is because teachers realise the age correspondence. *Hamlet* usually appears but with a little less emphasis (I believe it would be more suited to the interests of a later age group of 17–18-year-olds, but the strictly chronological curriculum of literature usually does not promote this). Other plays usually feature less prominently or only in film versions mostly because of time limitations. It is interesting to note, however, that in one case a teacher (most probably elderly) remarked that 25–30 years ago he/she also analysed *Julius Caesar.* In many cases other Shakespearean dramas are only glossed over in a few minutes when presenting the literary career of the author. The *Sonnets* are usually not treated in depth at all (or if they are, only *Sonnet 75* is covered, the canonical Hungarian translation of which is a "beautified" Modernist version). However, in one case the teacher celebrates the *Sonnets* as being even more dramatic than the plays: "Sometimes in 7–9th grade [age-groups 13-16] I read out 6–8 sonnets […]. The children are astonished to see what these poems are about, what a profound and interesting life glows in the depth of these works […] which are even more dramatic than the plays, providing real and MEMORABLE catharsis for the students"[27]. The romantic and cultic attitude to Shakespeare is evident in the teachers' remarks as well.

2. What textbooks do you use?

Pethőné: 50 %; Mohácsy: 20 %; Szegedy-Maszák: 10%; Bánki: 10 %; other: 10%.

Also mentioned: István Géher's, László Cs. Szabó's scholarly essays as teachers' aids.

Because these teachers probably represent the most motivated group of teachers, a more modern textbook aimed at advanced level students (Mrs Pethő's) is

---

[27] Emphasis is the teacher's, the translation mine.

used by the majority of them, and some of them also incorporate scholarly studies by eminent Hungarian Shakespeare scholars.

3. What extra material do you use in class?

Responses show that teachers mostly use films but self-dramatised scenes also feature within class as a team project and sometimes as a short performance for others. Some classes make costume- and set designs for specific scenes in the drama. Most teachers take their students to watch a performance of a Shake-spearean play. Films feature prominently as extra material, the most popular ones being:

Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet*: 50%
Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*: 40%
Norman–Stoppard's *Shakespeare in Love*: 25% (for historical background)
Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*: 15 %
Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing*: 10%
Other films mentioned: L. Olivier's *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliette (musical), West Side Story,* Kapur's *Elizabeth 1 and 2,* Polanski's *Macbeth*, a British documentary about theatre history (no title given by respondent)

Teachers seem to have realised that this age-group responds particularly well to visual stimuli, because the use of films or filmic excerpts in class seems widespread, however, it is striking to see that the 1968 Zeffirelli version still occupies a prominent position in Hungarian schools: this might be attributed to the teachers' nostalgic preference for the highly Romantic Italianate Zeffirelli version, fittingly corresponding to the nature of the Hungarian Shakespeare cult. In general, many teachers express Romantic views when talking about Shakespeare, as will be evident in the following quotes. The general statement of Margócsy's monograph regarding the markedly Romantic and "florid" style of Hungarian cults of literature seems to be justified even in personal teaching practice.

The open questions of the survey were intended to chart a more personalised attitude on the part of teachers. The results are as follows:

a, Which of the following two approaches do you consider more important: the teacher is to inform students about Renaissance drama and theatre OR he/she is to make them like and appreciate Shakespearean works through the close reading of several plays?

The majority of teachers replied that text comes first, i.e. although theatre history is an important and indispensable part of understanding Shakespeare, students

can better appreciate and form a picture of the age through the works themselves – an opinion which is in direct conflict with final exam requirements.

b, Romeo and Juliet seems to be the only Shakespearean play being taught in every school in Hungary. What important aspects of the play do you consider the most significant to be transmitted to or discovered by the students themselves?

The results show that fortunately teachers place a greater emphasis on aspects closer to students, rather than relying on the traditional topos of a clash of the medieval and Renaissance world views, which is fossilised in Mohácsy's textbook. What they tend to stress are the following:
  – it speaks to this age-group directly: they can see themselves in the characters and the problems presented
  – the nature and experience of love ("to tell them to look for this all-consuming wonderful emotion, and never be satisfied with less" by one respondent, translation mine)
  – problems of coming of age
  – realising that every decision has consequences
  – communication problems
  – generation gap
  – individual needs versus society's needs
  – role of fortune, dramaturgical excellence, female versus male problems, Renaissance features

c, Do you use contemporary translations in class (Nádasdy, Varró), or do you prefer classic and canonical translations in student or "classical" editions?

The replies here emphasise that it is almost impossible to ask the students to bring a specific (especially a new) translation to class. Contemporary translations (if available) are not published in cheap editions, but half of the teachers try to compare some different translations in class, handed out in excerpts. As a result, most of the teachers rely on classical, canonised translations, i.e. on János Arany's nineteenth-century translation of *Hamlet,* Kosztolányi's early twentieth-century (1930) or at best Mészöly's 1955 version of *Romeo and Juliet* as opposed to Nádasdy's 2002, or Varró's 2006 translation of the play. Some of them express their preference for contemporary modernised translations, which students understand more easily, but there was one teacher who remarked, "I categorically refuse to deal with Nádasdy's or Varró's translations – the plays are current and fresh as they are, we do not need new translations to realise this." Although some of them still complain about the difficulty of understanding the

highly poetical and condensed text, they do not seem willing to deviate from canonised translations.

4. Do you think Shakespeare and his works are a necessary part of the curriculum because they are a "classical," indispensable part of culture or for other reasons?

The aim of this question was to draw attention to the problems of canon formation. Most teachers replied in the spirit of the following direct quote: "obviously Shakespeare is a classic but students like him DESPITE this" (emphasis is the teacher's), in other words, besides admitting his place in the canon as an important cultural text, and one that is quoted and alluded to in later works by other authors as well, they mostly emphasise the topicality and freshness of his works as "common European experience," expressing "eternal moral values," or "the essential human experience," and first and foremost as "something which can truly address this age group" and "yields a good opportunity for valuable discussion with teenagers". Or to sum it up, one of the teachers closed his/her questionnaire with the words: "Just because he is simply GREAT!" (emphasis is the teacher's).

GRAMMAR SCHOOL FINAL EXAMS IN LITERATURE

The final exams do not support the welcome approach expressed by most teachers in the questionnaire, according to which Shakespeare is presented not as fossilised material to be memorised and respected but as something fresh and up-to-date that teenagers can relate to. One written ordinary level exam in October 2008[28] set an excerpt from *Hamlet* (from Act III Scene 4) for comparison with contemporary Hungarian author Csaba Kiss's adaptation of the same bedroom scene between Hamlet and his mother (Csaba Kiss, *Return to Denmark*, 2000*)*, which reflects a modern and liberal approach, however, the official correction sheet sent out to teachers recalled a strangely outdated and idealistic interpretation of *Hamlet*, saying that "in Shakespeare's tragedy the relationship between mother and son is never harmed by the passionate outbursts of Hamlet, it remains based on love" and "between the two characters the possibility of physical aggression is unimaginable" (sic!), underlining that "the characters in Shakespeare's play are examples of classical tragic heroes, endowed with greatness". According to the official correction sheet, the expected comparison by the students should

---

[28] Available at the webpage of the Hungarian Ministry of National Human Resources, under the auspices of which the Office of Education (previously Ministry of Education) works at present. All data are from this source: <http://www.oh.gov.hu/letolt/okev/doc/erettsegi_2008/oktober/k_magyir_08okt_ut.pdf> retrieved 10 July 2010.

emphasise that Shakespeare's language is "poetic, refined, choice, select and taste-ful, corresponding to tragic decorum". Although it used the canonised, highly poetical and precise nineteenth-century translation by János Arany as opposed to the slangish modern language of the adaptation, it is hard to overlook the fact that Arany's language is not free of vulgar and brutal phrases either ("Hah! egy zsíros ágy/ Nehéz szagú verítékében élni; / Bűzben rohadva mézeskedni ott / A szurtos almon"), which is definitely a non-refined version of Shakespeare's words, conveying Hamlet's loathing of the filth and corruption of the "nasty sty".[29] Although on the surface the comparison of a classic and a contemporary text invites free discussion, the official view still emphasises a rigid and one-sided solution, with a cultic and uncritical attitude to Shakespeare.

BOOK PUBLISHING

Targeting this age group, book publishing regarding Shakespeare serves two masters: on one hand there are cheap students' editions of Shakespearean plays as compulsory or recommended reading, on the other hand popularised, com-mercial and more expensive versions dominate, which try to ride the waves of such marketing vogues as the *Twilight* series or the Japanese comic books, the mangas. Students' editions are cheap and easily available paperback editions, often reprinted, and most of the time conserving a classical view of the plays.

The most widespread, prestigious but inexpensive "Európa Student Library" features ten dramas in two volumes (2006, 2010): *Hamlet, Julius Caesar, A Mid-summer Night's Dream* in nineteenth-century canonised translations by great nine-teenth-century poets (Vörösmarty, Arany), *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet* in mid-twentieth-century translations (Radnóti–Rónay, Mészöly) and *Richard III, As You Like It* in mid-twentieth-century translations (Vas, Szabó), and the three remaining Bradleyan great tragedies in new translations by Mészöly – which, incidentally, are much criticised by scholars for their amateurish nature.[30] The covers do not dazzle the potential buyer: the first volume features Shakespeare's portrait, the second a scene from a visibly traditional performance of a history play. "Talentum Student Library" publishes one-volume editions of *Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet* (2006), with some notes and ex-planations but in the classical translations. The series "Compulsory readings with value" (M-érték Publishing House, 2004) brings a welcome change by juxtaposing two compulsory texts from different periods by different authors,

---

29 "Nay, but to live / In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, / Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty,–" William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. The Arden Shakes-peare. Ed. Harold Jenkins. (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1997.) III.4. 92–95.

30 Nádasdy's translations are available but only in a prestigious and quite expensive two-volume edition, similarly to new translations by Imre Szabó Stein.

which might inspire students to discover new perspectives: Sophocles's *Antigone* is coupled with *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* with Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. The approach is laudable, but the translations remain the canonised ones, and the covers (with a sketchy mask, a female figure, a partly blurred moon and a human skull) do not appeal to young readers either.

On the other hand, three recent books merit attention for their attempt to combine popular culture with high culture as related to Shakespeare: the so-called "Twilight Romeo and Juliet" (Szeged: Könyvmolyképző, 2010) and the series of "Manga Shakespeare" with two volumes already published (*Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, both in 2010, Budapest, by Agave, a publishing house of high-quality popular fiction). Even one of the teachers remarked in the question-naire how closely the highly popular *Twilight* series mirrors the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, and the book market seems to respond to this new vogue of vampire romanticism. In 2010 *Romeo and Juliet* was published as paperback, quite an inexpensive edition with a striking cover recalling the cover art of the *Twilight* series,[31] positioning Shakespeare's play among the highly romantic love stories of vampires, werewolves and teenage girls. The advertisement on the ink-black back cover in alternating white and red lines is worth quoting in full, as it recalls not only the sentimentalism of the *Twilight* series but also the flowery, hyperboli-cal and romanticised style of the Hungarian cult of Shakespeare:

"Special edition! Shakespeare's *evergreen* love chronicle in translations by two Hungarian *geniuses*, Dezső Kosztolányi and Dezső Mészöly. By now both trans-lations have become *ennobled*, refined classics. Which version *enchants* you more? Choose *freely*!" [there follow two short excerpts emphasising the aspect of ro-mantic love from either translation] Have you been in love? Will you be in love? Then this book is for you. Be careful though, just like true love, this book is no easy prey, it only yields itself to you piece by piece. But, from *twilight* to the *break of dawn* you can discover its secrets. *Open up your heart*! Recommended from the age of 14!" (emphases mine)

While the publishing house of the *Twilight* version professes the decent edu-cational aim of making their readers bookworms ("könyvmolyképző" means "bookworm-trainer"), such an unusual coupling of classic and popular is a no-velty in the Hungarian book market. The other highly interesting experiment, the Manga Shakespeare series, was imported from London. Manga, a Japanese style of cartoons is highly popular among teenagers even in Hungary, which

---

[31] The *Twilight* volume has a back cover with two hands holding a blood-red apple. The title and the author's name appear in white, while the trademark "fine selection" is in white with a striking red dot. The cover of the "Twilight Romeo and Juliet" features the same black background with a blood-red rose and leaves in the centre, penetrated by an ornate dagger, with a similar white print for title and author, and the same trademark.

must be the main reason for such a strange combination and the entrepreneurial incentive behind it. This edition is a definite deviation from such openly educational projects as for instance presenting *Macbeth* in the refined, classical style of Hungarian cartoons.[32] The most interesting fact is that the series editor, who is also responsible for the Hungarian text in speech bubbles and the advertisement on the back cover, is Ádám Nádasdy, one of the eminent contemporary Shakespeare translators and scholars. Besides the obvious benefit of popularising Shakespeare for teenagers, the quality of the Manga Shakespeare is outstanding both in visual and textual rendering, which might account for its being quite expensive, priced as a regular volume of popular fiction. The possible educational impact of such attempts can only be surmised at this stage but they might be incorporated into the curriculum any time, and the final examination theme "Borderlines of literature" certainly invites discussion of such adaptations.

THEATRE AND FILM

Romeo and Juliet is a popular asset in theatre programmes, but not all performances that target this age group prove successful. For instance, the young and celebrated Hungarian director Róbert Alföldi's production in Új Színház in 2006 never did become popular with teenagers (it only ran for two seasons), although it was based on the new translation by Dániel Varró, a young contemporary poet, much favoured by teenagers for his closeness to them. Neither the translation nor the actual performance catered for this age group; Varró's translation is less modernised than Nádasdy's, it preserves much of a traditional poetic style and the vocabulary rarely reflects today's use of language.[33] His usual virtuoso skill in rhyming and language use is hardly detectable in this translation, and Alföldi's strong directorial emphasis on a more mature Juliet and Romeo undercut the fresh and very active use of theatre space, where actors and actresses ran long distances along long slopes above the audience or in the enlarged backstage area. Thus for all his intended modernity, Alföldi seemed to subscribe to a classical, artistic view of Shakespeare, which failed to target teenagers successfully.

---

[32] Before 1989 the classically refined and artistic style of graphic artists (e.g. Ernő Zágon) attracted a wide readership of serial comics appearing in cheap puzzle magazines (*Füles*). Usually the stories were adaptations of European adventure and romantic novels (Hugo, Dumas), and this attitude seems to be preserved in such adaptations of "European classics in comic books". However, only *Macbeth* appeared in this form so far, in a small number of copies and it has been out of print for some time.

[33] His translation has not been published yet but I could read it by courtesy of Ildikó Lőkös, the dramaturge of the theatre. A new performance of *Romeo and Juliet* opened in April 2011 in Vígszínház in Varró's translation, which also targets this age group already with its poster, which features Romeo and Juliet in facebook profiles, inviting the spectator to "like" them.

The performance which has proved immensely popular with teenagers was Gérard Presgurvic's musical version, imported from France (2001). The official Hungarian version has been on non-stop since 2004, being performed both in the capital and in the provinces, in both permanent theatres and in sport stadiums. Although it is a reworked adaptation of the story (using almost none of Shakespeare's text, mostly preserving only its scenic structure with not a few major differences), it is easy to see why it has become so popular with this age group: beautiful young actors and actresses dominate the spectacularly lit and decorated revolving stage, dancing and singing at the top of their lungs, expressing the characters' emotions in a heartfelt, passionate way with active physicality. It has all the dazzle and impetus of a good old 1950s Hollywood musical or a Disney movie. Even the poster foregrounds the beautiful half-naked young bodies of the protagonists, with a striking blue background. The costumes and the makeup are expressive, creative, very modern (sometimes a bit vampire-like even), songs switch to rap easily – it successfully targets an audience with high sensibility to musical and visual impact.

Among alternative performances Krétakör's *hamlet.ws* (2007) deserves a special place; as it intends to prepare a grammar school audience not only for a postmodern interpretation of the play but also for a postmodern approach to the theatre, acting and the actor's body.[34] It is an experimental performance by three actors playing different parts in a circle formed by spectators–students, with intertextual modifications. However, because the company only go by invitation to the school, it unfortunately cannot be considered a general theatrical experience for present-day teenagers.

Regarding films there is little to say here. Luhrmann's international success with a hyped-up but congenially faithful *Romeo+Juliet* was notable in Hungary, too, as well as the popularity of *Shakespeare in Love*. There is only one Hungarian animated film, Áron Gauder's *Nyócker,* which adapts Shakespeare and Luhrmann's gangster-style feud to a specific Hungarian environment, i.e. to the particularly crime-infested and problematic 8ᵗʰ district of Budapest. It was shot in 2004, and was celebrated as the Best Animated European film in 2005 at the Annecy Festival, but it never reached a really wide audience, for many reasons. Both the nature of the alternative music and the highly fantastic events in the story (e.g. discovering a Texan oil field in Budapest) evoke an underground, alternative atmosphere, which speaks only to a limited audience among teenagers.

---

34 Cf. Nyulassy–Ugrai– Zsedényi, or Katalin Palkóné Tabi's unpublished doctoral dissertation on postmodern performances of Hamlet (*A Hamlet színházi szövegkezelésének posztmodern paradigmaváltása. Magyarországi Hamlet-szövegkönyvek összehasonlító elemzése a nyolcvanas évektől napjainkig*, ELTE, 2009)

CONCLUSION

Shakespeare is a well-known and appealing cultural commodity in present-day Hungary. One striking example is the TV advertisement of Erste Bank, which presents Romeo and Juliet as members of the Hungarian Pantheon together with other national folk heroes, such as Ludas Matyi, the clever and cunning boy who beats the oppressive landlord three times, King Mátyás, the just king of Hungary and Miklós Toldi, the strong hero of a national epic – of course, all asking for a loan to help them along their way to love, fame, or justice. Romeo and Juliet seem to be ingrained in Hungarian cultural memory, to which both textbooks and popular adaptations have probably contributed. Even today, however, teenagers mostly face an archival and canonical view of Shakespeare's plays, though there has been a definite shift towards a more lifelike and up-to-date appreciation, in which (at least in my opinion) the creative combination of popular and classic culture (such as the Manga Shakespeare) may prove a valuable asset. Shakespeare being present everywhere at intersections of popular and high culture is the hoped-for start of a new and fresh approach to his works by the coming generations.

4. Multimedia constructions as sites of remembering: stages, maps, cemeteries

JOHN DRAKAKIS

Acts of memory and forgetting
in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's *Sonnet 122*, as Nigel Alexander reminded us, some 30 years ago, is "about" *memory* and *forgetfulness*.[1] Recently, the Arden 3 editor of *The Sonnets* has painted a naturalistic scenario for the poem in which the speaker parts with a book or manuscript that encapsulates one version of the "memory" of the addressee, preferring to rely on his mental powers of recollection:

> Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain
> Full charactered with lasting memory,
> Which shall above that idle rank remain
> Beyond all date, even to eternity   (ll.1–4)[2]

The poem's effectiveness depends upon its generation of a tension between the defective capacity of "writing" to retain traces of the past, and the longevity that is claimed for their retention in the mind, "the brain". It is, we might say, the difference between recalling the past to mind and giving life to it in the present – a form of "presentism" – and deferring its meaning and its vital immediacy through the secondary mechanism of writing. The written "tables" to which the speaker refers are, in the final couplet of the poem exposed as agents of "forgetfulness":

> To keep an adjunct to remember thee
> Were to import forgetfulness in me.   (ll.13–14)

The Arden editor glosses the context of the poem by means of a comparison with *Hamlet*:

---

[1] Nigel Alexander, *Poison, Play and Duel: A Study in Hamlet* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 48–9.
[2] Katherine Duncan-Jones, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Arden Shakespeare: Third series. Revised Edition, (London: Thomson Learning, 2010), p. 355.

The speaker has parted with a notebook or manuscript volume given him by his friend, but claims that his own memory provides a more lasting memento. The sonnet recalls *Ham.* 1.5.95–110, in which Hamlet needs no external help to retain the memory of his father "Within the book and volume of my brain", but turns to his *tables* to note down the smiling villainy of Claudius.[3]

It is, perhaps, a truism to assert that *Hamlet* is a "memory" play, stimulated briefly, some forty years ago by the publication of Frances Yates's *The Art of Memory* (1966). In the recent Arden 3 edition of the play, despite its glossing of Hamlet's speech at 1.5.98–110 as an engagement with the processes of "memory" the general issue remains undeveloped. Following the appearance of the Ghost, who exhorts the Prince to "remember me" (1.5.90), Hamlet embarks on a series of observations that distinguish critically between the different forms of memorialisation. He makes a distinction between inclusive and selective memory, and between what we might call "habit", and the recalling to mind of a very particular event that is, as is often the case in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, replete with an affective charge:

> Remember thee?
> Aye thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
> In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
> Yea from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
> That youth and observation copied there
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain
> Unmixed with baser matter.   (1.5.95–104)[4]

What kind of memory is in play here? There is, of course, the reference to "this distracted globe" as a possibly theatrical site of memory. But more than that, the Ghost is not, nor indeed is Hamlet, proposing here a mechanical act of "remembering" that for Aristotle was a capacity apparently attributable to animals. But rather, they are involved in an act of "recollection" that involves the coupling of a past event with an affective charge. Aristotle makes the distinction in the following way:

---

[3]   Duncan-Jones, p. 354.
[4]   William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series. Eds. Ann Thomson and Neil Taylor. (London: Thomson Learning, 2006) All references are to this edition.

> Memory is not identical with, but subsequent to, perception and conception. It is a state of affection connected with these. Only those animals which can perceive the time-lapse can remember. Therefore memory is not perception or conception, but a state of affection connected with one of these, when time has elapsed.[5]

This mode of remembering also distinguishes itself from "habit" that is little more than a repetition of the observations of past experience. The Ghost, by contrast, functions in the play as a "spontaneous recollection" in its sudden and unexpected appearance in a very specific bodily image.[6]

The distinction I am working towards is one that was formulated by Henri Bergson in his book *Matter and Memory* when he observed:

> Spontaneous recollection is perfect from the outset; time can add nothing to its image without disfiguring it; it retains in memory its place and date. On the contrary, a learned recollection passes out of time in the measure that the lesson is better known; it becomes more and more impersonal, more and more foreign to our past life. Repetition, therefore, in no sense effects the conversion of the first into the last; its office is merely to utilise more and more movements by which the first was continued, in order to organise them together and, by setting up a mechanism, to create a bodily habit.[7]

This goes some way to explaining the two modes of memory that Hamlet traverses in his soliloquy, and helps towards an understanding of the play's numerous "repetitions". The "spontaneous recollection" whose purity Hamlet strives to maintain for the remainder of the play, is to be distinguished from the "habit" that he learns from experience and that will be subject to the "impersonal" repetition (although here with qualification) of generally accumulated experience: "My tables! Meet it is I set it down / That one may smile and smile and be a villain − / At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark" (1.5.107–9). This is a form of "writing" that aids memory rather than substitutes for it, and it is associated with "custom". The repetition, through time, of social practice, as we shall see, impinges upon the sphere of language and representation,[8] and is challenged by Claudius's repeated violations. All of this is something a little more straightforward than the tortured prose of Derrida's *Specters of Marx* might suggest; although his observation that "being-with specters, would also

---

[5] Richard Sorabji, ed., *Aristotle on Memory* (London: Duckworth, 2004), p. 48.

[6] Cf. Alexander, p. 42, who describes the Ghost as "a 'historical' character" and "one of the means used by the dramatist to make Hamlet a 'historical' character by dramatising his past."

[7] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 83–4.

[8] Bergson, p. 151 and p. 236.

be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations"[9] is something that requires further detailed consideration. In the case of Hamlet (the "character") Derrida's "being-with-specters" points us towards Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholy" for one of a number of possible explanations for the hero's behaviour in relation to his dead father. Psychoanalysis teaches us that the loss of "the loved object" and the resistance to the demand "that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object", involves the hero's refusal to abandon "a libidinal position"; the result is "a turning away from reality […] a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory psychosis."[10] I want to argue that as a result of the play's representation of the problems of "memory" this is an unnecessarily reductive view of the dilemma that the hero faces. But before bidding *au revoir* to the Ghost we need to consider Hamlet's father as a symbol of Denmark's current propensity to "forgetfulness", as this motif surfaces in the play from time to time.

The Ghost sets its masked face against the act of forgetting, an act whose profound consequences threaten its namesake, Hamlet, and appear to have spread, like a disease, throughout the entire realm of Denmark. Long before the son is called upon to "recollect" the memory of his father, the sentries Barnardo and Marcellus wonder about the Ghost's provenance. Marcellus quotes the disbelieving Horatio who thinks that:

> 'tis but our fantasy
> And will not let belief take hold of him
> Touching this dread sight twice seen of us.   (1.1.22–24)

Horatio's doubt seems to represent a distinctly Protestant objection to the possibility of Purgatory as a Catholic "fantasy",[11] although the issue here seems to be more one of dispute about the specter's *materiality* and *corporeality*. What links the Ghost to "memory" and to "forgetting" is its embeddedness in a past "Time",[12] and its stubborn refusal to be forgotten. In other words, the Ghost's appearance (and its re-appearance) is contingent upon a politics of memory operating in the present negatively as a form of general cultural amnesia, rather than as an index of individual psychosis, but one that *infects* Denmark both at a public *and* at an interpersonal level. It is, in other words, a repressed memory that refuses to remain repressed. The Ghost sets itself against the selective account of the past

---

9   Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. xix.
10   Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholy", in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. The Pelican Freud Library vol. 11 (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 253
11   See Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 35–6.
12   Greenblatt, p. 17.

and against what Paul Ricoeur describes as a "selective function of the narrative that opens to manipulation the opportunity and the means of a clever strategy, consisting from the outset in a strategy of forgetting as much as in a strategy of remembering".[13] There are two elements to this strategy as it appears in the play: firstly there is the "effect" which is the court of Denmark, that collectively appears to have drawn a veil over the past. And secondly there is Claudius, who, as we shall see, manages to "suspend" what Slavoj Žižek calls "symbolic efficiency" and indulges in a "fetishistic disavowal"; the villain is caught in the simultaneous acknowledgement of the horror of the past, but also refuses "to fully assume the consequences of this knowledge, so that [he] can continue acting as if [he doesn't] know it."[14]

When he appears, and once he has seen the Ghost, Horatio's "narrative" recollects a specific historic event that provides a circumstantial account for its appearance. It is, curiously, an event that unites, in an action validated by writing, a historic present and a longer, habituated past:

> Our last King,
> Whose image even but now appeared to us,
> Was as you know by Fortinbras of Norway –
> Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride -
> Dared to the combat, in which our valiant Hamlet
> (for so this side our known world esteemed him)
> Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a sealed compact
> Well ratified by law and heraldry
> Did forfeit with his life all these his lands
> Which he stood seized of to the conqueror;   (1.1.79–88)

Old Fortinbras's "emulate pride" recalls a particular feudal spirit of rivalry that is represented in the "sealed compact / well ratified by law and heraldry" that legitimises the action of both parties by embedding it in a continuous past. The terms "law" and "heraldry", established practice and socio-cultural identity, will reverberate throughout the play, sometimes, in the case of young Hamlet and young Fortinbras, as the basis of a comparison, but also, as in the case of Claudius, in the form of a contrast. Young Fortinbras is a warrior, and hence is associated with a heroic past. But his having "Sharked up a list of *lawless* resolutes" (1.1.97, emphasis mine) draws him into the present and invokes a contradictory response (as he does throughout the play) to the extent that he violates the feudal principles that his father and Old Hamlet shared.[15] However, as a consequence of the

---

[13] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 85.

[14] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2009), pp. 45–6.

[15] Cf. Alexander, p. 42.

embassy of Cornelius and Voltemand, Young Fortinbras returns to the feudal fold and "Makes vow before his uncle never more / To give th'assay of arms against your majesty" (2.2.69–70). Claudius, we later hear, by contrast, violates custom; the player-king's "wassails" culminate in a "pledge" – significant in a play where "vows" will become critical to the process of legitimising the act of representation – but Hamlet asserts:

> though I am native here
> And to the manner born, it is a custom
> More honoured in the breech than the observance.   (1.4.14–16)

It is Hamlet's claim that already Claudius is guilty of "manipulating" the past through a process of representational inversion. This observation has the status of an axiom of the sort that Hamlet will file away in his "tables", but it is also a practice to which the audience, both onstage and in the theatre, has already been exposed. Even at this early stage in the play, "writing" already figures as a pejorative term, authenticating "presence" but also, as we shall see, substituting for it, deferring its authority.

In the first of a number of ostensible repetitions in the play, the appearance in Act 1 scene 1 of the Ghost of the "real" king, is followed in Act 1 scene 2 by a "player" king, and a prince dedicated to his father's remembrance, and who bears his name. Moreover, Horatio's plausible circumstantial narrative of the "cause" of the Ghost's appearance is set against Claudius's revisionist narrative of the past which is as much a "strategy of forgetting" as it is "a strategy of remembering". The two accounts overlap, but they also differ from each other. Claudius's rhetoric, regarded with suspicion by modern audiences and directors alike, effectively relegates the past to oblivion with its sequence of balanced conditional clauses:

> Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
> The memory be green, and that it us befitted
> To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
> In one contracted brow of woe,
> Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
> That we with wisest sorrow think on him
> Together with remembrance of ourselves.   (1.2.1–7)

All of the features of manipulation are in play in these seven lines. The "memory" of the dead king, and its effect upon the realm produces one "contracted brow of woe": "contracted" in the sense of shrunken or contained, but also "contracted" in the sense of a formal, quasi-legalistic, (but limited) public gesture. Already acts that were in Act 1 scene 1 "well ratified by law and heraldry" are, here, subject to drastic (not to say formal) revision. Indeed, and with a partiality of which the

audience is ignorant at this stage, the "memory" of Old Hamlet stimulates, so the new king asserts, "remembrance of ourselves". Here what Paul Ricoeur calls "individual memory" is folded into "collective memory", and in such a way as to invert the process of cause and effect, thus interfering with historicity itself.[16] Indeed, Claudius's objective seems to be to head off any degree of "reflexivity" with regard to the events of the past, but its inadvertent effect, to adapt Ricoeur's formulation, is the exposure of a "consciousness turned back upon itself, to the point of a speculative solipsism."[17] In short, Claudius's speech is a demonstration of what Ricoeur calls "ego-ology"[18] or what Žižek would later describe as "fetishistic disavowal". I use these terms instead of Freud's term "Nachträglichkeit" because Claudius shows no sign of investing the past events in which he has been involved with any kind of present significance, or with what Laplanche and Pontalis call "apthogenic force."[19] On the contrary, he rearranges the past when he narrates it *in public*, but in "private" later at Act 3 scene 3, he names his offence with disarming candour although his archetypal unease reveals few traces of a wider causal logic beyond: "It hath the eldest primal curse upon't – / A brother's murder" (3.3.37–8). We should note in passing that Claudius is not entirely without a "conscience" – that is to say, a *memory* of the moral and ethical significance of his own past actions. Even before this moment in the play, Polonius's observation of the deadly effects of "habit": "that with devotion's visage / And pious action we do sugar o'er / The devil himself." (3.1.46–8), provokes an aside that recalls an habitual duplicity born of those past actions with which he is "burdened" and that he would rather, in an act of "fetishistic disavowal" that is implicated in the act of representation, forget:

> How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
> The harlot's cheek beautied with the plastering art
> Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
> Than is my deed to my most painted word.
> O heavy burden.   (3.1.49–53)

It is against the background of a public manipulation of the past that carries with it its own anxieties and disavowals, that Hamlet is given the task of setting right a "time" that is "out of joint". And if we are critical of his reluctance to take up the Ghost's injunction, or if we think that the cause of his inaction is *primarily* psychological, then we are in danger of underestimating the difficulty that he faces. Also, Claudius's strategy guarantees that no "memory" can ever be

---

[16]   Ricoeur, p. 95.
[17]   Ricoeur, p. 94.
[18]   Ricoeur, p. 94.
[19]   Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 111–12.

free from manipulation, and that its source must always be the acquisition and the securing of "personal power" that is absolute in the figure of the king and conditional in the case of his subjects. For example, we have only to compare the dealings of Old Hamlet and Old Fortinbras with those of Claudius in relation to the ambassadors Cornelius and Voltemand to illustrate this. What in the former was a direct confrontation with an enemy of equal status authenticated and legitimised by a "sealed compact / Well ratified by law and heraldry", in the latter case becomes a document that aspires to legitimacy and is paranoid at the prospect of delegating real monarchical power:

> and we here dispatch
> You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand,
> For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,
> Giving you no further personal power
> To business with the king more than the scope
> Of these delated articles allow.   (1.2.33–38)

But it is also more than that. In her article on "'Dilation' and 'delation' in *Othello*", Patricia Parker has argued that these two terms, often interchangeable in Shakespeare, "can summon up the sense both of accusation and of the provision of a narrative in response to interrogation."[20] We never know what these "delated articles" are, but the limitations on the power of the two ambassadors are not in doubt, and are of a piece with Claudius's revisionist agenda. We can see how far that agenda erodes memory in Denmark, firstly by the air-brushing of Old Hamlet out of history, and also later by Claudius's own unconsciously ironic invocation of a biblical past as he implores Hamlet to curtail his mourning:

> Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven,
> A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
> To reason most absurd, whose common theme
> Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried
> From the first corpse till he that died today
> 'This must be so.'   (1.2.101–6)

The "fault" here, of course, is in Claudius's public display of "faulty" memory – later corrected in private, as we have seen – and it presents a challenge to Hamlet's express desire to keep alive the memory of his father. Indeed, he enjoins the prince to look to the future and to forget the past: "think of us / As of a father, for let the world take note / You are the most immediate to our throne" (1.2.107–9).

---

[20] Patricia Parker, "'Dilation' and 'delation' in *Othello*", in *Shakespeare and The Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 56.

FORGETTING AND FORGETFULNESS

Claudius's injunctions to "forget" are exemplified in the behaviour of Gertrude and Polonius. Let us consider Gertrude first. Her public display at the beginning of Act 1 scene 2 is a substantial, perhaps unconsciously mechanical, repetition of the strategy of Claudius. Gertrude "echoes" his sentiments, and her articulation of what we might call a habitual, if banal, observation: "Thou knows't 'tis common all that lives must die, / Passing through nature to eternity" (1.322.72–3), suggests that she does not suspect the circumstances of Old Hamlet's death. Subsequently, critics, theatre and film directors, and at least one novelist, have all tried to provide an explanatory back-story alleging a protracted "affair" with Claudius. What Hamlet laments in his soliloquy later in the scene is not only her failure to mourn her dead husband, but also the speed with which she has forgotten him:

> Within a month,
> Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
> Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
> She married. O most wicked speed!   (1.2.153–56)

We should, I believe, credit this "amnesia" *not* to Gertrude's callous indifference, but to the satanic power of Claudius's rhetoric that holds her in its thrall. Indeed, so powerful is it that Gertrude remains under the spell of its "damned custom" (3.4.35) until Act 3 scene 4 when Hamlet unleashes upon her a series of verbal "daggers" that pierce her ears and cut through to her very soul. What Hamlet does here is to re-awaken Gertrude's *memory* with a comparison between the dead king and his living brother. The two pictures, "the counterfeit presentment of two brothers" (3.4.52) are iconographic representations and their specific function is to recall to presence a phenomenon (and its affect) that is absent:

> See what a grace was seated on this brow,
> Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
> An eye like Mars to threaten and command,
> A station like the herald Mercury
> New-lighted on a heaven kissing hill,
> A combination and a form indeed
> Where every god did seem to set his seal
> To give the world assurance of a man;
> This was your husband.   (3.4.53–61)

Set against that wholesome past is the diseased present: "Here is your husband like a mildewed ear" (3.4.62). The past is organic, integrated, and borrows its

human integrity and identity from a universal classical order. By contrast, the present is fragmented, reductive, and a departure from true "sense" that destroys both integrity and identity in a vision of hell:

> What devil was't
> That hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?
> Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
> Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
> Or but a sickly part of one true sense
> Could not so mope. O shame, where is thy blush?
> Rebellious hell,
> If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones
> To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
> And melt in her own fire;   (3.4.74–83)

From a post-Freudian psychoanalytical perspective we might read this as Hamlet's disgust at stumbling into a version of the primal scene: of his persistent re-imagining of his mother's sexual congress with her lover who is not his father. But this explanation misses the point entirely. The focus of the scene is Gertrude's "amnesia", her having *forgotten* Old Hamlet whose authority and demeanour conferred identity upon her, and whose entire being has become fragmented as a consequence of the replacement of one genuinely "authoritative" source of meaning with another whose claim to authority is bogus. Gertrude needs to have her eyes "turned inward" "into" her "very soul" where she will see "such black and grieved (grained) spots / As will leave there their tint. (As will not leave their tint)." (3.4.87–89). Here I prefer Harold Jenkins' Folio reading to the Arden editors' Quarto 2 reading of these lines, mainly because the Folio emphasises the indelibility of the "spots" that Gertrude now identifies in her "soul". These blemishes are grafted onto her soul from the outside: they do not stem from her "character". Hamlet persists with the contrast, speaking "daggers" to his mother until the Ghost enters. He sees the Ghost but Gertrude does not, and we should ask the question: why not? The answer only makes sense in terms of the conflict between memory and forgetting that has now become focussed on Gertrude. She cannot see the past clearly because she is not fully awakened to its connection with the present; in short she is confused, caught in a limbo between an emerging past whose effects she is only beginning to perceive "inwardly" and a satanically inspired present. It is this debilitating conflict that the Ghost acknowledges: "But look, amazement on thy mother sits! / O step between her and her fighting soul" (3.4.108–9): in fighting the contradictory imperatives inscribed on her "soul" *as though it were a material object*, Gertrude's external gaze (outwards towards the symbolic figure of the Ghost), is impeded. For her, while her soul is now a material object, the past is still "th'incorporal

air", hence her question to Hamlet: "Whereon do you look?" (3.4.114 and 120). Gertrude thinks (like Horatio, initially) that what Hamlet has seen is a fantasy: a "bodiless creation ecstasy / Is very cunning in" (3.4.136–7). But Hamlet, who is, like Horatio, and like the theatre audience, more directly in touch with memory, can *see* the past as it materialises before their eyes and as it impinges upon the present. Important here too is Hamlet's rejection of the allegation that he is "mad": "Lay not that flattering unction to your soul / That not your trespass but my madness speaks" (3.4.143–4). He urges Gertrude to "throw away the worser part" of her heart, and to "live the purer with the other half" (3.4.155–6), but he then offers her the following advice:

> Assume a virtue if you have it not.
> That monster Custom, who all sense doth eat
> Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,
> That to the use of actions fair and good
> He likewise gives a frock or livery
> That aptly is put on.   (3.4.157–63)

This is a difficult passage to unpack, but we can read it as an analeptic reference to the earlier claim that in Denmark "custom" is "more honoured in the breach than the observance", and that nothing is what it seems. The "monster Custom" (oddly capitalised by the Arden 3 editors)[21] is the inverse of living memory, engaging as it does in the devouring of "habit" – and by implication, of the past. But just as it usurps the processes of authorising meaning, so "actions fair and good" (3.4.161) might borrow its techniques to mount a resistance. Here the Machiavellian "end justifying the means" shows that even deception can be recuperated for ethically and morally justifiable purposes.

The difference between "deception" and "truth" in the play is, in part, the difference between language as "presence" and language as representation, or the *deferment* of presence. In the latter case temporality enters into the equation, making possible what Ricoeur claims actually "constitutes the existential precondition for the reference of memory and of history to the past."[22] Here the figure of Polonius is crucial, since in the play he is preoccupied with "reading" and "interpretation", *and* forgetting, and he dies – as do four other of Claudius's intermediaries – as a "substitute" for, or a representative of, the king. At the beginning of Act 1 scene 3 Laertes offers Ophelia advice on how she should deal

---

[21] See Thompson and Taylor, p. 350, 162n for a different reading of this passage in which they claim, tentatively that "The assumption seems to be that if the Queen *put[s] on* the clothing or appearance of virtue, custom will make it habitual (i.e. real), just as custom has made her insensitive to sin." Thompson and Taylor confuse two radically opposed forms of "custom" in the play, the one opposed to the memorialising of the past, and the other committed to it.

[22] Ricoeur, p. 347.

with Hamlet's protestations of love. He notes a distinction between "occasion" and political imperative:

> Perhaps he loves you now,
> And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
> The virtue of his will; but you must fear,
> His greatness weighed, his will is not his own.
> He may not, as unvalued persons do,
> Carve for himself, for on his choice depends
> The safety and the health of this whole state,
> And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
> Unto the voice and yielding of that body
> Whereof he is the head.   (1.3.14–23)

Hamlet, alleges Laertes, is not lying in his protestations of love, but those protestations are hedged about with qualifications whose political implications extend far beyond questions of individual choice. In short, Hamlet is not his own man, he is a "representative" figure who incorporates the realm into himself and whose personal choices will therefore have decidedly public consequences. Ophelia is urged, therefore, by her brother not to open her "chaste treasure […] / To his unmastered importunity" (1.3.30–1). Polonius then enters and proceeds to advise Laertes to behave in the way that we might assume "unvalued persons do" (1.3.27). But where the son had emphasised the political complexities and consequences surrounding Hamlet's perfectly honourable declarations of love, Polonius reveals a much darker "unauthorised" subterranean libidinal energy at work that drives language into a dangerous labyrinth of representation. To Ophelia's claim that Hamlet "hath importuned me with love / In honourable fashion" (1.3.109–10), Polonius responds scornfully:

> Ay, springes to catch woodcocks – I do know
> When the blood burns how prodigal the soul
> Lends the tongue vows. These blazes, daughter,
> Giving more light than heat, extinct in both
> Even in their promise as it is a-making,
> You must not take for fire […].
>   In few, Ophelia,
> Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers
> Not of that dye which their investments show
> But mere implorators of unholy suits
> Breathing like sanctified and pious bonds
> The better to beguile.   (1.3.114–30)

Polonius's observations drive a wedge between "utterance" and "performance", language and presence, that anticipate Claudius's distinction between his "deeds" and his "most painted word", thus putting into question the relationship between language and the mechanisms that authenticate and legitimise meaning. The Quarto 2/Folio reading "pious bonds" (as opposed to Theobald's "pious bawds") emphasises the dislocation between the contractual imperatives of language. Indeed, Polonius exposes the principle of "forgetfulness" inaugurated by Claudius through his uncoupling of the relationship between words and their referents. This extends later, in his exchange with Reynaldo, to a startling example of forgetfulness, that couples the ideologically over-determined subject's behaviour with the actor's function (which is, of course, the imperative to "remember" his lines). In instructing Reynaldo in the devious art of eliciting information from unsuspecting informants, Polonius "dries" and needs to be "prompted":

> And then, sir, does 'a this, 'a does-
> What was I about to say? By the mass, I was about to
> say something! Where did I leave?   (2.1.48–50)

In the following scene, and in dialogue with the Queen, Polonius is accused of elevating "art" over substance, invoking the response from Gertrude: "More matter with less art" (2.2.95). As in the case of Claudius, art has the capacity to gild reality thereby distorting (effacing even) its temporal structures and its mimetic potential.

HAMLET'S MEMORY

It is against this larger strategy of systematic forgetfulness that Hamlet strives to preserve an organic past, and to reinstate the protocols of language. Urged by the Ghost to "remember", Hamlet demonstrates the efficacy of his own memory, initially through his interaction with the Players and subsequently through his capacity to emend the letters that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern carry to the English king. Mary Carruthers has argued that from St Augustine onwards,

> The proof of a good memory lies not in the simple retention even of large amounts of material; rather it is the ability to move it about instantly, directly, and securely that is admired.

She goes on to suggest that the trained memory possessed "a calculative ability, manipulating letters, bits of text, and commonplaces in addition to numbers."[23]

---

[23]   Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge:

The arrival of the Players re-establishes, even at the most trivial level, a connection with the past: "What, my young lady and mistress! By'r Lady, your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw you last by the latitude of a chopine." (2.2.362–64). But it also demonstrates the efficacy of Hamlet's memory in that he has the mental capacity to recall a speech from one of the players that "was never acted, or if it was, not above once" (2.2.371–2). He then proceeds to quote the account of King Priam's "slaughter" and invites the First Player to proceed where he leaves off. The play itself, we are told, was "an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning," wholly without "sallets in the lines to make the matter savoury," indicative of "an honest method, as wholesome as sweet and by very much more handsome than fine." (2.2.379–83). In this exchange Polonius is the "practical" critic, preoccupied with an ahistoric formalism that judges only by impressions: ''Fore God, my lord, well spoken – with good accent and discretion" (2.2.404–5). By contrast Hamlet recalls both a historic context *and* a particular speech in a demonstration of how an active memory functions both mimetically and allegorically. This example is, of course, connected to the larger purpose that the theatre fulfils: "whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature to show Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." (3.2.20–24). As in Hamlet's earlier description of the players as "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time" (2.2.462–3), theatre is advanced as the guardian of "memory", with a capacity both to deal with the present *and* to record the past, to "bring it to life". Indeed, the play that Hamlet commissions, and contributes to writing, is within the larger context of the action, a "memory" play insofar as it re-enacts what Claudius would rather forget. "The Murder of Gonzago" demands to be read allegorically, but the precondition of an allegorical reading is an active memory that is available to some members of the stage audience but not to others. Gertrude's response recalls that of Polonius earlier in its emphasis on momentary impression: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." (3.2.224). It is the response of an auditor whose memory has been "wiped", but one that the theatre audience reads symptomatically. When we recollect her behaviour earlier in the play, we cannot but conclude that Gertrude has not "protested" at all at the situation in which she finds herself. Indeed, like the remainder of the Danish court she has "freely gone / With this affair along" (1.2.15–16). Unlike Claudius, however, she appears to have no "conscience", where this faculty is not simply the capacity to distinguish right from wrong, but is also a means of recalling the past as a yardstick for any act of judgement in the present.

Claudius's response to the play-within-the-play is much more sophisticated. He *is* one of Hamlet's "guilty creatures" (2.2.524) whose "occulted guilt" the

---

Prince hopes to "unkennel in one speech" (3.2.76–7) by jogging the king's memory. Claudius does not respond to the dumb show in which the murder of Gonzago is enacted by administering poison through the "ear". Generations of critics have sought to explain this failure naturalistically, but within the context of the struggle to activate *and* to suppress memory Claudius's response requires no additional explanation. He is himself a "player" king and his performance at this point in the play is also a "dumb show", although his silence is one of *resisting* utterance, and must also be read pejoratively. He is the "guilty creature" who has performed the crime of regicide but who stubbornly refuses in a public demonstration of "fetishistic disavowal" to proclaim his "malefactions" (3.1.527). At this point it is indeed questionable whether "murder, though it have no tongue, will speak / With most miraculous organ." (3.1.528–9).

It is Hamlet's belief in the indestructibility of memory set against Claudius's determination to destroy memory that provides the central dramatic tension of the play. In this context, the "player" king's suppression of performance with the demand: "Give me some light, away." (3.2.261) seems understated compared with Polonius's melodramatic "Lights! Lights! Lights!" (3.2.262). It is only within the larger fully memorialised framework of the drama, to which Hamlet, Horatio, and the theatre audience are party that Claudius's gesture has deeper meaning, although, at this stage, not one that would give us full access to his interiority. In the interval between the performance of *The Mousetrap* and the activation "in private" of Claudius's conscience, it is left to the two villainous intermediaries, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to point up the political danger that Hamlet now represents. Laertes' earlier account of the Prince's public obligations is now curiously reformulated in terms of the ideology of divine right, but also indicative of a political paranoia that has been projected onto them by Claudius himself:

> The single and peculiar life is bound
> With all the strength and armour of the mind
> To keep itself from noyance; but much more
> That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests
> The lives of many. The cess of majesty
> Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw
> What's near it with it; or it is a massy wheel
> Fixed on the summit of the highest mount
> To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
> Are mortised and adjoined, which when it falls
> Each small annexment, petty consequence,
> Attends the boistrous ruin. Never alone
> Did the king sigh but with a general groan.   (3.3.11–23)

What is remarkable about this speech is that it is a gesture of deference, but it also amplifies in terms that expose their ideological foundation, what Claudius has identified as the "Hazard so near us as doth hourly grow" (3.3.6). There will shortly be another occasion when the discourse of divine right is invoked to *defend* the position of the regicide, and there, as here, the ideology gapes to reveal the contradictions that it was designed to obscure. Moreover, Claudius's strategy here, and later, effectively inverts, or, to use Frances Yates' term (from another context) *occults* the theatre as an agency of memory insofar as it seeks to obstruct the very activity of memorialisation for which the theatre, according to Hamlet, was primarily designed.[24] The threat that Hamlet now poses catapults "politics" into the arena *against* the process of memorialisation in that it figures a contest for a discourse that is both "legitimate" in its capacity to undermine or "de-legitimate" the "borrowed" majesty of Denmark, *and* that is currently being appropriated in the service of regicide. We can now begin to see what exactly the "mighty opposites" in this play are, and how they are represented.

CLOSET SCENES

Rosencrantz's reprise of the ideology of divine right is a preface to what we might think of as the first "closet scene" in the play. Claudius's "private" assessment of his predicament rectifies what had earlier been a manipulative public display of faulty memory. The "natural" death of the "first corpse" is now correctly described as an offence that "hath the primal eldest curse' upon't" (3.3.37). There follows a frank confession with the theatre audience cast in the role of "confessor", but the consequence is very far from the alleviation of guilt that confession is designed to produce. Juxtaposed against Claudius's "gesture" of prayer is Hamlet's soliloquy that appears, from one perspective to place revenge firmly outside the purview of any moral order. It is important at this juncture to recall the "public" role that Hamlet occupies, and to remember that his "revenge" cannot be either private or personal. Indeed, what Hamlet wants is a public reckoning: "And how his audit stands who knows, save heaven" (3.3.82). When Hamlet exits, Claudius's final couplet confirms that he is incapable of prayer, but he has also effected a divorce between interiority and exteriority that it is the function of language, especially performative language, to broach:

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.   (3.3.97–8)

---

[24] Cf. Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 353–4.

In the following scene Hamlet makes some attempt to put the fragments back together by forcing Gertrude to turn her "very eyes" into her "soul", thereby reinstating the relationship between language and "custom", between the present and memory. The death of Polonius is then, in this context, symbolic of the death of an instrumentalised forgetfulness, just as it provides the impetus for the ultimate exposure of all that Claudius represents in the play.

THE END OF IDEOLOGY

I have suggested that Rosencrantz's orthodox statement of the effects of political upheaval is unwittingly ironical. The return of Laertes, hell-bent on revenge, exposes fully the inadequacy of the ideology of divine right to cope with the realities of political power. Act 4 scene 5 opens with a display of "real" madness, that of Ophelia robbed of two of the principal supports of a stable identity: father, and prospective marriage partner. The feminising of madness here is significant in that it offers a demonstration of the very fragmentation that Hamlet earlier analysed when he confronted his mother. Ophelia is a walking example of fragmentation:

> Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
> Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
> Or but a sickly part of one true sense
> Could not so mope. (3.4.76–79)

Ophelia's allusions perform the melting of "virtue" in the sexual ardour of "flaming youth" and provide a mirror of the promiscuity, of which Hamlet had earlier accused Gertrude. Ophelia's songs are shards of memory erupting through the uneven surface of a shattered sensibility, and they speak of infidelity, illicit sexual activity, emotional deprivation and death. She is, as Claudius points out, and in a formulation that might also be applied to himself: "Divided from herself and her fair judgement, / Without the which we are pictures or mere beasts" (4.5.85–6). But this is a prelude to a confrontation that focuses the conflict between memory and forgetfulness that supports the entire infrastructure of the play. It is the anonymous Gentleman, who announces the entry of Laertes:

> The ocean overpeering of his list
> Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste
> Than young Laertes in a riotous head
> O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord
> And, as the world were now but to begin,
> Antiquity forgot, custom not known,

>   The ratifiers and props of every word,
>   The cry, 'Choose we: Laertes shall be king!'   (4.5.98–106)

The return to the origins of the world is significant in a play that invokes first causes in a variety of contexts. The challenge to monarchy heralds a return to primal chaos, and a time that pre-dates language itself, a time before the sovereign act that inaugurates cultural memory and the process of memorialisation. Language, custom, and "antiquity": representation, practice, and legitimised history – the stuff of theatrical "chronicle" – are the means whereby every "word" is "ratified". "Vows", performative language, are axiomatically synonymous with "action" and "custom", and it is this complex organic process, "more honoured in the breech than the observance" that Claudius's regicide and Laertes' rebellion threaten. It is the moment in the play when rebellion confronts itself as in a mirror, and it is the moment when it distorts the reflection in that *camera obscura* that Marx identified as 'ideology'. Laertes attempts what Hamlet is prevented by his obligations from undertaking, a "revenge" that is "wild justice". But not only that, his abandonment of "allegiance", "vows", "conscience" and "grace" (4.5.130–31), places him on the side of the very "forgetfulness" that Claudius has sought to instil in his subjects. Laertes at this point is the embodied *effect* of the erasure of memory that makes him not a type of Hamlet, but an inverted image of Hamlet's cause; one who like Osric, later in the play, narcissistically becomes a mirror of his own cause: "his semblable is his mirror, and who else would trace him, his umbrage, nothing more" (5.2.104–5). What stops Laertes in his tracks, however, is Claudius's audacious appeal to the very doctrine of divine right that he himself has violated:

>   What is the cause, Laertes,
>   That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?
>   Let him go, Gertrude, do not fear our person,
>   There's such divinity doth hedge a king
>   That treason can but peep to what it would,
>   Acts little of his will.   (4.5.120–25)

In the mouth of an "actor" who is the persona of the king this rhetoric is persuasive, and Laertes relents. In the mouth of Claudius, who is a player king "actor" acting the role of an "actor", its demystifying effect discloses the contradiction between rhetoric and political reality. It did not protect the exemplary figure of Old Hamlet, who lived according to the dictates of "law and heraldry", vows, conscience and the integral connection between language, thought and action. It will not, of course, protect the mendacious Claudius, whose plan to use Laertes as another instrument becomes the very means by which his guilt will ultimately be brought into the open. It heralds the exposure of ideology as the (dubiously)

efficacious means of smoothing over political contradiction, even though the agent of that exposure is demonised.

HAMLET'S SPECIAL PROVIDENCE

As *Hamlet* draws to a close, the fragmentation that follows from the assault on language and memory is exposed to view. It would, however, be a mistake to conclude that the play, therefore, seeks aesthetically a return to a conservative organic past. Indeed, the protagonist Hamlet's dilemma is that he is unable to set the "time" right in a manner that would align the past in all its purity with the present. The play itself is a "Tragicall Historie", a "chronicle" of the time, and a chronicle of time. But the gap that is opened up between words and meanings, "antiquity" and "custom" as the ratifying and authorising mechanisms of language, is too wide to be breached, and it is the resultant frustration that this impasse produces that so exercises and frustrates Hamlet. The integrity of the Ghost cannot initially be believed without corroborating evidence, and the trajectory of a fragmented existence is not easy to recognise or to anticipate.

Significantly Hamlet's epiphany occurs offstage, out of the gaze of the audience, and on board the ship that is to take him to execution. All we have is his narrative that is characterised by incompleteness, but that attributes coincidence to the ordinance of "heaven": his possession of the true king's seal allows him to alter the letters carried by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "Why even in that was heaven ordinant" (5.2.48). What this has taught Hamlet is that knowledge of the operations of Providence that will permit a transparent reading of causality is not available to the human subject. Confronted with Horatio's misgivings about the impending "play" with Laertes, Hamlet defies "augury" – the practice of reading the future from the flight of birds or the operations of Nature – and he asserts that "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (5.2.197–8). This evidently Calvinist sentiment requires an act of personal faith in the face of what seems random and the source of Hamlet's anxiety: a pattern of events that has not been available to him throughout the play, and even at the point of death he will leave behind that parcel of "Things standing thus unknown" (5.2.329). It is this randomness rather than the pattern woven by Providence that Horatio will communicate to "th' yet unknowing world" (5.2.363), and it is that randomness that counterbalances the final claim by Fortinbras: "I have some rights of memory in this kingdom / Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me" (5.2.373–4).

If memory, the capacity for memorialisation and cultural memory itself are restored at the end of *Hamlet* then the threat that Claudius has posed throughout does not die with him. Once the Pandora's box of representation is opened then those institutions that seek to establish a continuity with a past that legitimises

the present are placed at risk. Just as forgetfulness is engineered in the play by a demonic regicidal force, so the fate of the theatre itself as the repository of cultural memory is threatened by those who would undermine its claim to represent "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (3.2.23–4). It is, perhaps no small irony that the first printed quarto of *Hamlet* should have been an imperfectly memorialised printed text necessitating the issue of "the true and perfect Coppie" (Quarto 2: 1604–5). Quarto 1 (1603) mirrors a forgotten past that Quarto 2 retrieves, in which the act of printing is both an injunction to forget *and* an aid to memory.

EGLANTINA REMPORT

Re-imagining Shakespeare
at the beginning of the 20ᵗʰ century

Edward Gordon Craig, Sándor Hevesi, and William Butler Yeats

This essay examines the co-ordinated efforts of Gordon Craig, Sándor Hevesi and William Butler Yeats to revolutionise traditional European theatrical practices at the beginning of the twentieth century. It considers Craig's production of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at Constantin Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre in 1912, Hevesi's Shakespeare cycle staged at the National Theatre in Budapest in 1911, and the performance of William Butler Yeats's plays at the Irish National Theatre in Dublin also in 1911. In doing so, the essay investigates the influence of Craig's revolutionary design arrangements on contemporary staging practices and offers a re-appraisal of the interest in Shakespeare's work at the dawn of the new century.

LONDON: CRAIG, IRVING, AND THE PRE-RAPHAELITES

Gordon Craig started his career as a Shakespeare actor, playing leading roles in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Richard III* and *Henry VIII*. During the 1880s and 1890s he toured English and American playhouses with the W. S. Hardy Shakespeare Company and Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre, appearing in late-Victorian adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. Some of Irving's Lyceum sets were later used for Craig's own Shakespeare productions, performed by his company. Craig had the honour of being asked to direct *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Imperial Theatre, one of the leading *fin-de-siècle* playhouses in London. He was asked to design sets for new adaptations of Shakespeare plays by some of the most highly regarded theatre personalities of his time, including his mother, Ellen Terry, for *The Merchant of Venice* in 1908, director Beerbohm Tree, for *Macbeth* in 1909, and Max Reinhardt, for *King Lear* in 1909.

The Pre-Raphaelite painters' re-discovery of Shakespeare's work as pictorial subjects significantly contributed to Victorian appreciation of the plays. Throughout their careers, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt emphasised the intertwined nature of the Sister Arts. Their aim of bringing into limelight the poets of English Romanticism by

providing illustrations of their works underlined their aspiration to disseminate their views on the close relation between the Sister Arts. The Moxon edition of Lord Alfred Tennyson's *Collected Poems* (1857) – illustrated by Pre-Raphaelite engravings – was one of the most striking examples of Rossetti, Millais and Hunt realising their aim, first put forward in their literary manifesto, *The Germ*. For years the picture-poems of John Keats, Percy Shelley, Robert Browning, and Alfred Tennyson proved to be the most profound source of inspiration for the Pre-Raphaelites as the poems lent themselves easily to pictorial inter-pretation.

In the *List of Immortals*, drawn up by Holman Hunt and Gabriel Rossetti in 1848, William Shakespeare received three asterisks (as sign of the degree of his importance) with Tennyson receiving only one, and Browning, Keats and Shelley being honoured with two asterisks each in the long list of artists. The significance attributed to the works of Shakespeare was further highlighted by the fact that "[t]wo of *The Germ's* four etchings and one of its major articles […] were drawn from or about Shakespeare."[1] This interest in the work of the English bard continued on the pictorial canvas. Millais's famous painting *Mariana* (1851), an illustration of Tennyson's poem of the same title, was based on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. The scene of Millais's *Ophelia* (1851–2) depicting the floating body of the drowned Ophelia, was taken from *Hamlet*. Holman Hunt's picture of the two departing lovers, entitled *Claudio and Isabella* (1850) was inspired by *Measure for Measure*. W. Moelwyn Merchant argues that Dante Gabriel Rossetti was heavily influenced by William Blake's Shakespeare colour-prints, *Pity* and *The Triple Hecate*, which drew on the great tragedies of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.[2] Rossetti's sketches *Hamlet and Ophelia* (1858) and *The First Madness of Ophelia* (1868) were his interpretations of the Shakespearean tragedy. While Pre-Raphaelite artists did not themselves paint set-designs for Shakespearean productions in London in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, the themes they drew directly from Shakespeare's plays for subjects of their paintings were an important source of influence on set-designs for Shakespeare plays of this pe-riod. For example, the painter Ford Madox Brown, who was heavily influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, drew the sketches for the set-design for Henry Irving's production of *King Lear* at the Lyceum in November 1892.

The early-Victorian picturesque settings, which relied heavily on the art of the painter, evolved into more elaborate stage designs throughout the nineteenth century. The painted canvas, the sole means of stage decoration, was exchanged for new, three-dimensional sets which allowed designers to create more illu-sionist effects on stage. As a result of the availability of increasingly complicated

---

[1]   Carl Dawson, *Victorian Noon: English Literature in 1850* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 215.

[2]   W. Moelwyn Merchant, "Artists and Stage Designers," in *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*, ed. Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 14–22, p. 18.

mechanical devices, such as sophisticated forms of lighting and stagecraft, a new tendency emerged. By the end of the century, the creators of the so-called "realistic sets" forced directors to employ real trees, live rabbits and water tanks to create the right illusions for forest or lake scenes. Craig remembered that during the 1894 tour of the W. S. Hardy Shakespeare Company a large segment of the stage area was taken up by a water-tank which was needed for the final scene of *Ida's Escape or the Last Leap*, starring Miss Ida Millais, daughter of the famous Victorian painter.[3] Given his own experience on the road, Craig realised that such arrangements were impossibly uncomfortable for touring companies. Carrying around elaborate stagecraft proved one of the major difficulties for the touring companies, as well as for the actors, who tirelessly complained about the lack of ample dressing space.

In these elaborate sets the actors' work and the original Shakespearean texts were subordinated to the scenery. Richard Foulkes explains that "[t]he recurring debate about Shakespearean production during the Victorian period centred on the conflicting demands for spectacular scenery and for the restoration of Shakespeare's texts."[4] Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre, where Craig learned his craft, championed the idea that the audience of a Shakespeare play should be treated to a visual spectacle of awe-inspiring, monumental three dimensional scenery and breathtaking costumes. The movement of the complicated monumental scenery required long pauses to be introduced between the various scenes and in order to shorten playing time, as Foulkes points out, the original Shakespeare texts were cut and rearranged to fit the design.[5] In his review of Henry Irving's production of *Cymbeline,* published in the *Saturday Review*, George Bernard Shaw was adamant that Irving simply had gone too far with his experiments. Irving "does not merely cut the plays," complained Shaw, "he disembowels them."[6] He lamented that actors' movements and their delivery of dialogue were subjected to what he regarded as the pomposity of the visual spectacle.

Michael R. Booth emphasises that as the century came to an end "no longer did the actor perform on a forestage in front of a scenic background of wings and shutters; he was integrated with a scenic unit, a part of a pictorial composition in three dimensions, as well as a dramatic unit."[7] As integral part of this process, it became a convention for actors and actresses to resemble pictorial figures both in the manner of their dressing and acting. As a result of this tendency, Ellen Terry

---

[3]   Christopher Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 14.

[4]   Richard Foulkes, "Introduction," in *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*, ed. Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1–9, p. 3.

[5]   Foulkes, p. 3.

[6]   Qtd in Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 354.

[7]   Michael R. Booth, "Pictorial Acting and Ellen Terry," in *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*, ed. Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 78–86, p. 81.

– Craig's mother, Irving's love interest and leading actress at the Lyceum – fashioned herself on stage as the personification of Pre-Raphaelite pictorial beauty. The novelist and critic Henry James observed that in Tom Taylor's *New Men and Old Acres* the actress looked like a figure in a Pre-Raphaelite painting and George Bernard Shaw, agreeing with Charles Hiatt, believed Terry's Ophelia in *Hamlet* to have been inspired by the powerfully beautiful Pre-Raphaelite picture by Millais of 1852.[8] In order to create the most striking resemblance between painting and the stage, Terry took to using Rossettian gold for her costumes. The contemporary critic, Graham Robertson, hailed Terry for her ability to form a perfect unity of the dramatic and the pictorial arts at a time when a late-Victorian flowering of Pre-Raphaelitism dominated the artistic scene.[9]

As a director of several major Shakespeare productions in the 1890s Gordon Craig was obviously familiar with earlier nineteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in London. As stage sets became increasingly lavish in the mid-19th century period, the standard practice of placing actors in front of a tapestry of painted scenery evolved into more elaborate forms of stage design. The intertwined nature of painting and of staging had become characteristic of London productions in the 1830s and 1840s, painters of the Royal Academy being commissioned to work for the theatre. W. Moelwyn Merchant points out that artists such as Clarkson Standfield and W. R. Beverley, responsible for the scenery of the famous Macready and Phelps productions, "were as much at home in the Royal Academy as in the theatre."[10] In these scenic arrangements, the actors' roles were limited to reciting the text of the play in front of the painted picture and body movements were severely regulated. It is against this broad historical evolution during the course of the century that the unique forms of theatre production that Craig contributed to English theatre began to emerge from the 1890s.

BUDAPEST: HEVESI, KÉMÉNDY, BÁNFFY

The reviewer of *Vasárnapi Újság* (*Sunday News*) identified similar tendencies in Hungary to those characteristic of the London theatre scene at the time. The review, published after the 1909 premiere of *Anthony and Cleopatra* at the National Theatre, vehemently questioned the choices made for the cuts and rearrangements of scenes required for the staging of the famous play. The reviewer made the following critical remarks:

---

[8]   Booth, pp. 84–5.
[9]   Booth, p. 86.
[10] Merchant, p. 19.

This diffuse play of Shakespeare's could only be performed in its entirety in his age, when the audience's expectations towards scenery and production were next to naught and scenes could follow one another rapidly. Today plays have to be shortened and abridged to suit the needs of modern theatre. This also happened in our national theatre when the new version of the play was first staged on the 12th of this month [Febuary].[11]

The reviewer praised Emilia Márkus, in the role of Cleopatra, but raised a number of questions over the performance of the young actor Somlai who played Antonius. In the article the critic went on to declare that Shakespeare's plays were impossible to perform in their entirety on any twentieth-century stage.

All the greater was the surprise at the Hungarian National Theatre two years later. In a review published in *Világ* (*World*) the Hungarian poet and theatre critic, Dezső Kosztolányi, hailed the new *Hamlet*.[12] He was impressed by Sándor Hevesi's original idea of re-inventing Shakespearean staging for the play. According to the new scenic arrangements, the stage was divided into three playing fields by a wooden framework, similar to that originally employed at the Globe Theatre in London around 1600. Various coloured draperies and lighting were used as decorative elements to create different moods and vary scenery.

In charge of staging *Hamlet*, as part of the Shakespeare cycle performed over 25 days in the spring of 1911, was Sándor Hevesi, a visionary Hungarian director to whom Edward Gordon Craig dedicated his famous book, *The Art of Theatre*. Hevesi understood and supported Craig's aim to restore the supremacy of the poetic language of the Shakespearean text over contemporary monumental stage designs. In his book entitled *Az előadás, a színjátszás, a rendezés művészete* (*The Art of Performance, Acting and Directing*), Hevesi criticised English directors – in particular Henry Irving – for taking the liberty to re-shuffle Shakespeare's text for theatrical ends.[13] During his *first* term as director of the National Theatre – between 1902 and 1907 – he cut back heavily on the amount of stage props and theatrical devices. He emphasised that the setting of a play was clearly indicated in Shakespeare's text, therefore there was no need to use signs or monumental historicist designs. In his view, these types of sets only overburdened the audience

---

[11] "Shakesperenek ezt a szertefolyó drámáját, csak az ő korában lehetett előadni egész terjedelmében. A mikor a közönség igénye díszletek és kiállítás tekintetében úgyszólván semmi volt, és mikor a szin pillanatonként változhatott. A modern szinház úgy segít magán, hogy összevonja, megrövidíti a darabot. Így segített magán nemzeti szinházunk igazgatósága is, mikor e hó [február] 12-ikén új betanulással hozta szinre a darabot.' "Antonius és Kleopatra," *Vasárnapi Újság* 56.8 (21 Feb 1909) 152–3, p. 152. (The original Hungarian punctuation is retained in all quotations.)

[12] Dezső Kosztolányi, "Hamlet shakespearei szinpadon" *Világ* 2.106 (6 May 1911) 14.

[13] Sándor Hevesi, *Az előadás, a színjátszás, a rendezés művészete* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1965), p. 328.

and undermined the playwright's original intention to help viewers internalise the play.

Internalising the play meant internalising the beautiful Shakespearean text. In his review of *Hamlet*, published in *Magyar Színpad* (*Hungarian Stage*) in 1911, Hevesi wrote proudly that actors and designers alike succeeded in decorating the stage solely by the means of poetic language.[14] According to him, the wooden framework and the dark-coloured draperies used for his new production heightened the audience's experience of internalising Shakespeare's carefully crafted lines. Kosztolányi himself was ecstatic about the use of János Arany's translation of the play:

> What lyrical depth. How well Arany's weighty language works on the stage. It really is a Hungarian treasure. There are a few masters of the language amongst our new poets. Would anyone be able to match this unique translation?[15]

Calling it a "Hungarian treasure," Kosztolányi emphasised the lyrical quality of the Arany text, which helped convey the drama inherent in the original lines.[16] Kosztolányi also points out that the minimalist staging of the new production created a scenario in which Hamlet became a type of Universal Man, with whom all members of the audience could identify.[17] He claimed that new layers of Hamlet's personal drama became manifest as the oppressive, old-style monumental design, characteristic of the late-Victorian and Edwardian period, finally disappeared from the stage.

The critic Bernát Alexander praised Hevesi's *Hamlet* for leaving a strong impression on theatre-goers and for making the Shakespeare cycle at the National Theatre the social event of the 1911 season. His enthusiasm for the new theatrical enterprise saturates the review:

> Shakespeare does not have to settle for second place in the soul of the cultured masses, he undoubtedly owns the first. This love was awakened by the declaration of the National Theatre. We possess so many treasures that we forget! The National Theatre seduced us with them. There was something there for everyone. The younger generation was thirsty for first impressions, the elder searched for their old memories. A real interest in art took hold of the audience at the National Theatre. Attendance at shows of the [Shakespeare] cycle became fashionable.[18]

---

[14]   Sándor Hevesi, "'Hamlet' Shakespeare-színpadon," *Magyar Színpad* (5 May 1911) 5–6.

[15]   "Mennyi lirai mélység. Milyen beszélhető és szinpadi az Arany terhes nyelve. Ez igazán magyar kincs. Az uj poétáink között van néhány ragyogó nyelvmüvész. Ki adja párját ennek a páratlan fordításnak?" Kosztolányi, p. 14.

[16]   Dezső Kosztolányi, Mihály Babits and Lőrinc Szabó later became canonical Shakespeare translators.

[17]   Kosztolányi, p. 14.

[18]   "Shakespearenek a művelt emberek lelkében nem kell beérnie a második helylyel, övé vitat-

Alexander applauded Hevesi's intentions to revive a love for the English bard's work. He also hailed Hevesi's *Hamlet* for reviving the old Shakespearean stage design:

> This is the only way to produce Shakespeare without cuts, condensations and time-consuming pauses. Even so, the performance of *Hamlet* lasted almost four hours. But we saw the play in its entirety and it left a great impression. It had become clear that there was no use in being deceived by the magic of elaborate decoration. *Hamlet* was produced without decoration or lighting and the impression it left was greater than ever before.[19]

The sentiment in Alexander's review is resonant with Kosztolányi's feelings regarding the employment of the original stage design. It seemed that Hevesi's concepts defied the *Vasárnapi Újság* critic quoted above who claimed in 1909 that Shakespeare's plays were unsuited for the modern stage.

Hevesi's letter to Craig reveals that the director was satisfied with the way the viewing public responded to the new theatrical enterprise.[20] In order to further simplify staging, Hevesi took steps to introduce some of Craig's theatrical concepts in Budapest, which revolutionised scenographic practices around Europe. After Craig's production of Yeats's *The Hour Glass* in the Irish National Theatre in Dublin and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at Constantin Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre in 1911–12, Hevesi wrote enthusiastically about the new experiments. He considered Stanislavsky's experiments with Shakespeare the work of an inventive genius. Contemporary artistic circles considered the productions of Sophocles, Shakespeare and Lessing at the Moscow Art Theatre revolutionary as *fin-de-siècle* theatre enthusiasts in Moscow could only avail of productions of Russian authors, such as Chekhov and Tolstoy. In Moscow the plays of Shakespeare provided a platform for the creation of alternative theatre. Hevesi

---

hatatlanul az első. Ennek a szeretetnek a lelkiismeretét ébresztette föl a Nemzeti Szinház bejelentése. Mennyi kincsünk van, melyről megfeledkezünk! A kincseknek ezzel a szemléjével hódított a Nemzeti Színház. Mindenki megtalálta, a mi neki a legkedvesebb. A fiatal generáció első benyomásokat szomjazott, az öregebb kereste az első emlékeit. Igazi művészi érzések domináltak ezen idő alatt a Nemzeti Szinház óriási közönségét. Szinte divattá lett a cziklusnak néhány előadásán megjelenni." Bernát Alexander, "Shakespeare-cziklus," *Vasárnapi Újság* 58.21 (21 May 1911) 418–9, p. 418.

19 "Valóban csak így lehet Shakespearet kihagyás nélkül, mesterséges és önkényes összevonások nélkül és időtrabló szünetek nélkül, szinte egyhuzamban adni. Igaz, hogy Hamlet előadása így is közel négy óráig tartott. De láttuk az egészet és nagy benyomást kaptunk. Egyszersmind kitűnt, hogy nem kell túlságosan a dekoráczió babonájában hinni. Ime, minden fény és dekoráczió nélkül adták Hamletet és nagyobb hatással, mint bármikor annak előtte." Alexander, p. 418.

20 György Székely, ed. *Edward Gordon Craig és Hevesi Sándor levelezése, 1908–1933* (Budapest: Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, 1991), p. 76.

argued that modern art was indebted to Stanislavsky's efforts to free art from schematisation.[21]

Hevesi would have liked to see Craig's designs in Budapest, the correspondence between him and Craig clearly indicates this.[22] Because of time restraints this could not be realised, but Hevesi found two creative minds who translated Craig's modernist theatrical experiments for the stage of the Hungarian National Theatre. Jenő Kéméndy and Count Miklós Bánffy designed sets that followed the new European scenographic trends. Andrea Bartha maintains that Kéméndy's designs were influenced by the work of Craig, Appia, Koller and Orlik.[23] He introduced new decorative stylized motives and stylized architectural designs. Kéméndy's sets were known for his use of unified colour schemes, created by large, homogeneous surfaces and decorative lightning.[24] In his talk given to the Magyar Mérnök és Építész Egylet (Hungarian Engineering and Architectural Society) in 1912, Kéméndy emphasised the need to create sets in which the design is secondary to the actor. During this talk, entitled "The Ideal Theatre," Kéméndy spoke with enthusiasm about the performance of *Hamlet*: no elaborate staging distracted from the quality of the poetic speech delivered in the most highly artistic manner.[25] The fact that Kosztolányi wrote so highly about the play in his review is indicative of the ways the intention of the theatre maker and the reception of the theatre-goer were resonant at the time.

DUBLIN: YEATS, GREGORY, CRAIG

Some months prior to Hevesi's production of *Hamlet* in 1911, Gordon Craig's revolutionary design arrangements were introduced to the European stage at the Irish National Theatre in Dublin. The friendship between Gordon Craig and William Butler Yeats, the co-founder and co-director of the theatre, started in the 1890s, when Yeats was first drawn to Craig's repeated calls to restore the supremacy of poetic speech on stage. Their shared interest in the production of poetic drama brought the two theatre practitioners into collaboration during the 1900s. Gordon Craig became one of many designers, including the financier Annie Horniman, the actors Willie and Frank Fay, and the painters Robert Gregory and Charles Ricketts, to be offered the chance to stage William Butler Yeats's poetic plays. As a result of their close friendship, Yeats proposed to Craig to use the Abbey Theatre as an experimental platform to test his new design

---

[21] Hevesi, *Az előadás*, p. 371.

[22] Székely, pp. 188–9.

[23] Andrea Bartha, *Színpadi látvány a századelőn: Kéméndy Jenő munkássága* (Budapest: Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, 1990), p. 18.

[24] Bartha, p. 19.

[25] Bartha, p. 53.

arrangements prior to his production of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre later on that year.

The early plays of Yeats were late-Victorian flowerings of the Pre-Raphaelite sentiment blossoming at Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre. As mentioned earlier, Ellen Terry, the Lyceum's leading actress, was a living personification of the Pre-Raphaelite beauty dreamt by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in paintings such as *Venus Verticordia* and *Proserpine*. Terry masterfully alluded to the pictures of the English painter, which became immensely popular both amongst *art connoisseurs* and the wider public after the posthumous double exhibition held in honour of the painter at the Royal Academy and the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1882–3. Throughout much of his career Rossetti had refused to put his paintings on public display, such as the celebrated annual Royal Academy exhibitions, preferring to sell the pictures by private dealers. It was only during the 1880s, following Rossetti's death, that the general public gained access to his paintings. The posthumous double exhibition displaying his masterpieces instigated a new wave of interest in Pre-Raphaelite art.

In *Autobiographies* Yeats confessed being "in all things a Pre-Raphaelite" around the time of his introduction to London literary circles in the 1880s.[26] In London the young poet came under the spell of the Brotherhood's Romantic enthusiasm for the works of Shakespeare, Blake, Keats and Shelley. He was fascinated by Rossetti's representation of sensual female beauty, as his 1902 essay "The Happiest of Poets" indicates. He wrote that Rossetti "drunken with natural beauty, saw the supernatural beauty, the impossible beauty, in his frenzy".[27] Many years later, the poet remembered in his *Memoirs* that when he was a young man his head used to be "full of the mysterious women of Rossetti".[28] Yeats was also mesmerised by what he considered to be Maud Gonne's Pre-Raphaelite beauty. At the beginning of her career, Maud Gonne, the aspiring young actress, modelled herself on the late-Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic ideal which was made famous by leading London actresses, including Ellen Terry. Her hairstyle followed the fashionable Pre-Raphaelite trend of letting her hair fall lightly on the drapery of the costume, creating the stylised version of classical beauty infused with erotic undertones, an image which evoked Rossetti's sensual women. Terence Brown points out that Yeats was deeply fascinated with Rossetti's art due to "its powerful evocation of a life lived for art itself and in the service of a spiritualized eroticism."[29]

James Flannery draws attention to the fact that Yeats's submergence in Pre-Raphaelite sensuality in the 1880s–90s was also a reaction against the strictly

---

[26]   William Butler Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 114.
[27]   William Butler Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 64.
[28]   William Butler Yeats, *Memoirs, Autobiography – First Draft, Journal*, ed. Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 33.
[29]   Terence Brown, *The Life of W. B. Yeats* (Dublin: Gill&Macmillan, 1999), p. 13.

technical approach to art propagated by the Dublin School of Art where Yeats was enrolled to study art.[30] According to Flannery, the Yeats family moved to London to live in an aesthetic community in Bedford Park between 1888 and 1891 and it was at the playhouse of the community where Yeats was first introduced to experiments in contemporary staging. The form of drama employing ritualistic movement and patterned scenic décor went on to influence the productions of his first plays in London, for which he collaborated with the English painter and designer Charles Ricketts.[31]

Flannery remarks that in Ricketts's productions "[t]he actor was not seen as a three-dimensional, flesh-and-blood figure. Instead, he was but another element in the overall stage pattern – a symbol of human perfection rather than a reflection of life as it existed in the stalls and pit of the theatre."[32] This concept echoed the supremacy of the visual spectacle of the staging over the role of the actor, as propagated by Irving, but also drew heavily on the ritualistic form of performance disseminated by the esoteric circle of the Order of the Golden Dawn, of which he was a member. Costumes blended in the overall pattern of the stage design and actors performed a ritual in front of the painted scenery.

Yeats's repeated calls for the restoration of the true value of poetic speech on the painted stage was well matched by Craig's concept of modern stage design. Archival material held at National Library Dublin reveals the production details of Yeats's revised version of *The Hour Glass*, produced by Craig in January 1911. Critics applauded the arrangement of the screens, the combination of colours and the ways lightning was used to elaborate the emotional progress enfolding in the drama. *The Freeman's Journal* pointed out that with the screens, Craig and Yeats succeeded in creating a unity of the spoken words, the acting and the setting, with the colours blending it all together to form "a harmony of mood."[33] In his introductory talk before the play, Yeats himself complimented Craig on his success "to invent decorative and ideal scenery for poetic work," and on his daring to avert from the realistic scenery employed by Irving at the Lyceum.[34]

Craig's vast and abstract setting for Gregory's *The Deliverer*, produced on the same night, proved to be a less successful marriage of words and scenery, it not being a poetic play. According to the reviewer of *The Irish Times*, the stage at the Abbey consisted of several square pillars "ranging obliquely across the stage"

---

[30] James Flannery, *W. B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 240.

[31] Interestingly, Ricketts was responsible for designing the set for Reinhardt's production of *King Lear*, for which Gordon Craig also provided staging arrangements.

[32] Flannery, p. 242.

[33] " 'The Deliverer' at the Abbey Theatre," Review, *The Freeman's Journal*, Henderson, NLI, MS. 1734.

[34] "The Abbey Theatre – Important Scenic Invention," Review, *The Mail*, Henderson, NLI, MS. 1734.

before a plain background.[35] The critic of *The Freeman's Journal* remembered the screens being placed slantwise across the stage, suggesting the pillars of the Egyptian temple.[36] The screens, which opened and closed when desired, were the length of the proscenium and were arranged according to a mathematical plan. The pillars were flooded with amber light from the top and the sides. Both the colours and the pyramid employed for the Abbey production anticipated those of the Moscow production of *Hamlet,* when during the famous court scene the royal couple, Claudius and Gertrude, were seated on a golden throne above their courtiers who were standing on a wooden platform which formed a pyramid symbolising the hierarchy of the royal court.

Yeats was pleased to see his poetic plays receive unanimous critical appraisal. From very early on he had set himself the task to write plays in the manner of Shakespeare. Yeats objected to the representation of the Irish people as insensible and untrustworthy in the productions of the English visiting companies, who performed the plays of Shakespeare and Boucicault at the Queen's Theatre and the Theatre Royal in Dublin. He believed their agenda to have been the sustaining of the tradition of representing Irishmen as buffoons in order to support a narrative of English imperialism. The type of stereotypical representation of the stage Irishman to which Yeats most objected was best perceived in the character of the drunken soldier in William Shakespeare's *Henry V.* Andrew Murphy argues that within the "four captain scene" of *Henry V* the stock character of the drunken Irish soldier was inaugurated, subsequently figuring in English drama in the form of the drunken Irishman right up to George Bernard Shaw's Tim Haffigan from *John Bull's Other Island* of 1904.[37]

Since the Irish National Theatre opened its doors in Dublin in 1904 the playhouse staged many adaptations of non-Irish plays, including those of Molière, Maeterlinck and Sudermann, but Shakespeare's plays were never performed. The intention of the founders of the theatre was to initiate a new theatrical tradition in Ireland which fostered the talent of Irish playwrights. Playwrights were required to adhere to the principles laid down in the mission statement of the Abbey Theatre, composed by Yeats and Gregory. According to this statement, the new theatre was to restore the old dignity of Ireland and do away with the stereotypical English theatrical representation of Irishmen as laughable irresponsible drunkards.

---

[35] "New Scenery System – Lady Gregory's Latest Play," Review, *The Irish Times*, Henderson, NLI, MS. 1734.

[36] "'The Deliverer' at the Abbey Theatre," Review, *The Freeman's Journal*, Henderson, NLI, MS. 1734.

[37] Andrew Murphy, "'Tish ill done': *Henry the Fift* and the Politics of Editing," in *Shakespeare and Ireland: History, Politics, Culture*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (London: Macmillan, 1997) 213–234, pp. 213–4.

Despite all this, Yeats the poet–playwright had hoped to revive the poetic language of Shakespeare in his own plays. In 1902 Yeats went to see the Shakespeare cycle of the History Plays at Stratford–Upon–Avon. In an article of the same title written after the visit to England he highlighted the importance of bringing back the old English idioms into the contemporary theatre. Yeats's aim was to re–create the poetic theatre of Shakespeare; critics have observed the significance of his use of Elizabethan English in this respect. Philip Edwards considers Yeats's Cuchulain cycle as having originated in the poet's Stratford experience and examines it in relation to Shakespeare's history plays.[38] Edwards claims that, in a circumspect way, Yeats's Cuchulain cycle of plays brought to an end the nation-building project upon which Shakespeare had embarked in the History Cycle. Yeats found in those plays a model of national representation for an Irish theatre movement emerging into self–consciousness at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was Shakespeare's theatre that laid the foundation stones of an English National Theatre in the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century period. Yeats used this as a springboard to create a particular form of National Theatre in Ireland that, coupled with the peasant plays of John Millington Synge, would exert a significant influence on theatre practice and theatrical vision in subsequent generations. Reviving the Elizabethan idioms of Shakespeare through which an historical mythology might be given life on stage in Ireland, Yeats's Cuchulain plays drew on the canonical figure of English literature, even as he sought to create a distinctively Irish theatre movement in English. Engaging those experiments with light, shadow, mask, voice and movement he had developed in collaboration with Craig, the Shakespearean aspects of Yeats's Cuchulain cycle of plays – including *On Baile's Strand* (1904), *At the Hawk's Well* (1916) and *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939) – were at once revolutionary and traditional in the cultural contribution he made to the direction of an emergent independent Irish nation–state.

MOSCOW: CRAIG, STANISLAVSKY, SHAKESPEARE

Denis Bablet explains that Craig was preoccupied with the ideal way of staging *Hamlet* for a considerable period as "he was for ever making new designs for the play".[39] After receiving Stanislavsky's invitation to stage the play in Moscow, he dedicated much of 1911 to the project. Staging the famous play at the Moscow Art Theatre proved to be a long process; at the time Craig was deeply involved in the publication of *The Mask*. He had established a friendship with Hevesi

---

[38] Philip Edwards, *Threshold of a Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 205–11.

[39] Denis Bablet, *The Theatre of Edward Gordon Craig*, trans. Daphne Woodward (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), p. 133.

years earlier and the two had been in regular dialogue about recent theatrical developments in Dublin, Berlin, Paris and Florence. Hevesi was aware of the Irish theatre scene, including the work of Yeats, whom Craig described as "the lovely Irish poet," and both directors were invited to contribute to *The Mask* in 1911.[40] Alongside with Yeats, Hevesi stressed the originality of Craig's theatrical endeavour.

Since the Moscow *Hamlet* was to be Craig's first production of the Shakespeare play for which he could use his original minimalist geometrical stage designs, it was to be the theatrical culmination of his revolutionary ideas. He spent almost the entire year working on the production. This was due to the fact that his attempts to break away from Irving's monumental realist designs were only partly successful. He managed to break away from the illusionist realism of the Lyceum stage but he continued to adhere to the idea of employing monumental stage designs. The screens that Craig had designed for Moscow were intended to be more mobile on stage than the elaborate and detailed scenery decorating the Lyceum. However, as Innes recounts, Craig's experiment with the modernist designs were accident-prone.[41] During the rehearsals falling screens injured the Russian actors and Craig was obliged to continually modify the arrangement of the screens. Also, staging seemed to have been more important for Craig than the text as he often asked for the original scenes of *Hamlet* to be cut or rearranged for the sake of scenery.

Craig also learned the use of lighting from Irving, as the sketches of the 1912 Moscow production of *Hamlet* testify. In the royal court scene a diagonal golden light fell on Claudius and Gertrude, who were seated on the top of a series of steps forming the structure of an Egyptian pyramid, a design intended to represent the feudal hierarchy of the court. Both the royal couple and the courtiers were dressed in gold and a big golden cloak was wrapped around them to symbolise unity. The background was lit by dull yellow light, Hamlet crouched on the floor in front of a light black tulle curtain which "cut him off sharply from these gold-draped figures, giving them a misty effect."[42]

The idea of the pyramid, consisting of a series of steps on which the actors are placed, brings to mind Craig's earlier production of Gregory's Parnellite allegory, *The Deliverer.* In Gregory's play the architectural structure of the pyramid highlighted the difference in personal and political goals which divided the figure of Moses/Parnell and the Jewish slaves/Irish rural poor. In Craig's *Hamlet,* the same structure was employed to symbolise the opposition between the Danish Prince and Claudius's court. As Innes points out, many aspects of Craig's architectural designs were copied from Irving's scenery for *Macbeth*, with which Craig was

---

[40] For the reference to Yeats see Székely, p. 78; for Hevesi's article written for *The Mask* see pp. 85–86.
[41] Innes, p. 170.
[42] Innes, p. 152.

more than familiar.[43] For the castle scene a monumental architectural design was put on stage, steps were winding round a broad column on the left, and there was a steeply mounting staircase on the right, which the characters used to climb to their beds located in the upper part of the stage.

In "Architecture as Craig's Interim Symbol" Paul M. Talley states that the English designer was obsessed with architecture and his magazine, *The Mask*, was "crowded with historical architectural plans."[44] In support of this claim, Talley draws on biographical information about Craig's youth. As Talley points out, Craig was the illegitimate son of E. W. Godwin, a well-known Victorian architect and theatre designer, whose career plummeted after Craig's mother ended their relationship. Throughout his youth Craig maintained a strong emotional attachment to his father, he felt a "need to prove himself Godwin's son and to secure for Godwin's unpopular ideas the honour they deserved."[45] For this reason, Talley goes on to argue, the young Craig "dramatizes himself as Prince Hamlet haunted by filial duty to his father" in his autobiography.[46] The playwright Oscar Wilde supported Craig in his quest to restore the dignity of his father. For this reason, he wrote an essay, entitled "The Truth of Masks," in support of Godwin's ideas about the necessity of architectural accuracy in the productions of Shakespeare.

The simple architectural scenic arrangements were not the only echoes of the 1890s in Craig's modernists experiment. His use of the colour gold so prominent in the court scene suggests a hint of Ellen Terry's Pre-Raphaelite sensitivity. Craig himself provided the following explanation to Stanislavsky regarding his choice, adequately placing the question in the larger theatrical scheme: "[i]n this golden court, this world of show, there must not be various individualities as there would be in a realistic play. No, here everything melts into a single mass."[47] Craig was adamant that

> [i]n a poetic play the figures–faces–costumes–and all should be so much *one* that they actually resemble each other. *Unity is necessary* […]. All the parts of the play should so adhere one to the other that they make up the play.[48]

The effect of all parts of the play adhering to one another in one unifying scheme – an idea also disseminated by Yeats and Hevesi – induced immediate

---

43 Innes, p. 20.
44 Paul M. Talley, "Architecture as Craig's Interim Symbol," *Educational Theatre Journal* (1967) 52–60, p. 53.
45 Talley, p. 54.
46 Talley, p. 54.
47 Innes, p. 152.
48 From Craig's notebook qtd in Innes, p. 152.

ovation from those present at the premiere and Craig's designs were hailed in contemporary magazines.

The fame of the Moscow *Hamlet*, as well as his ardent work as editor of *The Mask*, carried Gordon Craig's name around the world. Vsevolod Meyerhold, Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Aurélien Lugné-Poë, André Gide, Jacques Copeau, August Strindberg and Maurice Maeterlinck collaborated with him later on. He also worked for Johannes Poulsen at the Danish Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, for Angelo Scandiani at La Scala in Milan, for the American Stage Company in New York and for the Habima Company in Jerusalem. His influence continued to show itself in British and Irish theatre after the Second World War, evident in the staging of works by Sean O'Casey, Julian Beck, Peter Brook and Kenneth Tynan. The influence of his revolutionary ideas, formulated in his many theoretical books and essays on theatrical practice exercised a lasting influence on European art. Most emphatically, Craig's practice and critical reflection were hugely instrumental in facilitating dialogue between theatre practitioners in Ireland, England, Hungary and Russia as well as the Soviet Union from the late nineteenth century to the mid-nineteen twenties.

Máté Vince

'The one single story falls to 1956 pieces'

Papp & Térey's *Kazamaták* and the memories of the Revolution

That *Kazamaták* (Dungeons) is an unusual play is evident from the amount of attention and emotionally charged criticism it provoked. Nevertheless, this could not have come as a surprise to the authors of the play, given its rather provocative choice of topic. The play dramatises an anomalous, but extremely unsettling incident during the Revolution of 1956 against the oppressive communist regime: the events of 30 October, when some 500 armed insurgents besieged the Headquarters of the Budapest Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party on Republic Square, killing 25 party members and soldiers (most of them serving their compulsory military service), and lynching twelve of those who had already surrendered.[1] It simply serves to make the play even more relevant from the perspective of cultural memory that it received praise and condemnation from both sides in the politically divided world of Hungarian literary criticism. Let me therefore begin by quoting a few responses from the unusually abundant critical reception of the play.

> "There is no single 1956. There are as many [1956s] as we are," said Ferenc Gyurcsány two years ago, who has since then become the prime minister [...] It is only symptomatic that a play that has been on the stage for months in one of the major Budapest theatres, and that is about the incidents on Republic Square (a clash in 1956 in which the majority of the victims were communists), ends with the line "And the only one story has fallen / to nineteen fifty six pieces."[2]

---

[1]   The siege came after a rapid spread of the rumour that the State Security Service (ÁVH) was holding revolutionaries as captives in the secret underground prison cells and torture chambers under the Party Headquarters on Republic Square. The title is a symbolic reference to these "dungeons", which, in fact, never existed. For a concise treatment of the events in English, see Chapter 9 (The Dams are Breaking) in Paul Lendvai, *One Day That Shook the Communist World. The 1956 Hungarian Uprising and its Legacy*, translated by Ann Major (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 101–108.

[2]   [Anon.], "Megosztott rosszkedv," *Magyar Nemzet*, 25 September, 2006. <http://mno.hu/portal/375491> Retreived 21 September 2010. "'Nincsen egy 1956. Annyi van, ahányan vagyunk' – mondta már két évvel ezelőtt Gyurcsány Ferenc, azóta már kormányfő. Az értelmiség jelentős része pedig – amely évtizedek óta sulykolt sajátos történelmi tudattól vezérelve retteg a 'csőcseléktől' – buzgón visszhangozza ezt. 'S az egyetlen történet széthullt ezerkilencszázötvenhat darabra' – jellemző módon így fejeződik be a Budapest egyik vezető színházában

What is perhaps just as symptomatic, one may feel tempted to add, is that the unnamed journalist of this conservative paper misquoted those two lines from the play. The reviewer of another conservative weekly magazine, less interested than his colleague in using the play as an excuse to denounce the prime minister at the time, praised *Kazamaták* in the following terms:

> According to Albert Camus, even though in 1956 the Hungarians didn't gain their liberty, their blood liberated everybody. And that is true, even if the blood shed on Republic Square tainted all of us. This play doesn't belittle the memory of 1956. The audiences may like it or not. I did.[3]

Historian Attila Szakolczai, in a left-leaning weekly magazine on politics and culture, is no less angry about the play's attitude to history than the author of the first quote, although for a very different reason:

> In order to get closer from myth to what actually happened on Republic Square, we need to peel off the forged elements from the Kádár-era narrative. Only then will it become possible to avoid what happened: that our best theatre should stage a play written in the spirit of 1957 [i.e. when the retaliations started].[4]

Finally, Péter György, a cultural critic, in his article about why another controversial instance of the memory of 1956, the monument erected for the 50th anniversary of the Revolution, is a terrible failure, wrote:

> Apart from György Jovánovics's funeral monument in the National Graveyard, the only memorial monument that stands worthy of the Revolution to date, is a work of literature, András Papp and János Térey's *Kazamaták* […].[5]

hónapok óta játszott Kazamaták című darab, amely a Köztársaság téri eseményekről, 1956 egyik olyan összecsapásáról szól, amelynek során az áldozatok nagyobb része kommunista volt." The misquoted lines – the title of this paper – in the original: "Az egyetlen történet szertehull / Ezerkilencszázötvenhat darabra."

3   Csaba Horváth, "Vér a téren: Kazamaták a Kamrában," *Heti Válasz*, 11 May 2006. <http://hetivalasz.hu/kultura/ver-a-teren-a-kazamatak-a-kamraban-13971> Retrieved 21 September 2010. "Albert Camus szerint 56-ban a magyarok nem nyerték el a szabadságot, de vérük mindenkit felszabadított. S ez akkor is igaz, ha a Köztársaság téren kiontott vér minket is bemocskolt. A *Kazamaták* nem kisebbíti 1956 emlékét. Vagy tetszik a közönségnek, vagy nem. Nekem tetszett."

4   Attila Szakolczai, "Népköztársaság Tér 2006," *Élet és Irodalom*, 51.20 (18 May, 2007). <http://www.es.hu/index.php?view=doc;16644> Retrieved 21 September 2010. "Annak érdekében, hogy a Köztársaság térről szőtt mítosz helyett közelebb jussunk a valóban történtekhez, maradéktalanul le kell fejteni a kádárista narrációról a koncepciós elemeket. Akkor elkerülhető lesz, hogy legjobb fővárosi színházunk 1957-es szellemiségű művet állítson színpadra."

5   Péter György, "Az emlékezet szétesése – az olvashatatlan város," *2000* (October 2006) 3–12, p. 11. "Jovánovics György 300-as parcellában álló síremlékén kívül 2006-ban 1956-nak egyetlen méltó monumentális emlékműve van, egy irodalmi mű (Papp András–Térey János *Kazamaták*

What is common, albeit unusual, in these responses is that they all treat the play from the point of view of present-day politics, history, and the politics of commemoration. In this paper I will examine what the play and the critical responses reveal about current attitudes to history and the memory of the Revolution in Hungarian critical and political discourses.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND 1956: THE THREE NARRATIVES OF THE REVOLUTION

Not all the reactions to *Kazamaták* were so extreme and passionate, but the attention it received was quite unusual for a work of contemporary literature, let alone a play.[6] Published in the literary monthly *Holmi* in 2006, the year of the 50th anniversary of the Revolution of 1956, and performed in Katona József Theatre, the play is provocative in a number of ways. Its choice of topic – the dark side of the Revolution – and its near-naturalistic representation are definitely among the reasons why the play received so many and such mixed responses. Apart from

---

című darabja), amely persze csak színházban nézhető, vagy otthon olvasható."

[6] Borbála Sebők, "Esztétikán innen és túl," *Ellenfény* 1 (2007), <http://www.ellenfeny. hu/archivum/2007/1/esztetikan-innen-es-tul>. Retrieved 04 January 2011. The article is an overview of the critical reception of the play in the approximately six months after its publication and premiere. It is based on the following articles: Erzsébet Bogácsi, "Tömeg és személytelenség," *Criticai Lapok* 5–6 (2006), <http://www.criticailapok.hu/index. php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20104>, Retrieved 21 September 2010; Judit Csáki, "Halálra halmozott halál," *Magyar Narancs*, 11 May 2006. <http://www.mancs.hu/in-dex.php?gcPage=/public/hirek/hir.php&id=13117> Retrieved 21 September 2010; Georges Baal, "Kazamaták – Történt-e valami a Katona József Színház színpadán?" *Színház* 10 (2006), pp. 19–22. <http://szinhaz.net/pdf/2006_10.pdf> Retrieved 21 September 2010; Csaba Horváth, "Vér a téren: Kazamaták a Kamrában"; Tamás Koltai, "1956 darab," *Élet és Iroda-lom*, 50.19 (12 May 2006) <http://www.es.hu/index.php?view=doc;13408>. Retrieved 21 September 2010; István Margócsy, "Papp András–Térey János / Kazamaták," *2000* 11 (2006), <http://www.ketezer.hu/menu4/2006_11/margocsy.html>. Retrieved 21 September 2010; Gergely Nagy, "A tér visszavétele," *HVG*, 17 May 2006, <http://hvg.hu/hvgfriss/2006.20/2 00620HVGFriss154> Retrieved 09 June 2011; Péter P. Müller, "1956 újraértelmezései a Ká-dár-korszak drámáiban és színpadán," *Híd* 10 (2006); János Pelle, "Az elfojtott múlt – Interjú Gothár Péterrel," *hvg.hu*, 13 June 2006. <http://hvg.hu/velemeny/20060613gotharinterju> Retrieved 09 June 2011.; Sándor Radnóti, "A sokaság drámája – Megjegyzések Papp András és Térey János színművéhez kitekintéssel s visszatekintéssel" *Holmi* 3 (2006) 394–406; Sándor Radnóti, "A magyar Bastille," *Színház* 7 (2006) 3–7, <http://szinhaz.net/pdf/2006_07. pdf>, Retrieved 09 June 2011.; Ákos Teslár, "Megvan és mégsem," *Beszélő* 10 (2006) <http:// beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/megvan-es-megsem> Retrieved 09.06.2011.; György Vári, "Válasz Teslár Ákos kritikájára," *Beszélő* 10 (2006) <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/valasz-teslar-akos-kritikajara>, Retrieved 09 June 2011; Ákos Teslár, "'A megértendő mindig mi magunk va-gyunk…' – Válasz Vári Györgynek és a Beszélő olvasóinak," *Beszélő* 12 (2006), <http://beszelo. c3.hu/cikkek/a-megertendo-mindig-mi-magunk-vagyunk> Retrieved 09 June 2011; László Zappe, "Ugyanazzal a szemmel. Dráma az 1956-os, Köztársaság téri lincselésről," *Népszabad-ság*, 2 May 2006 <http://nol.hu/archivum/archiv-402466>, Retrieved 09 June 2011.

the usual reviews of the performance in theatrical magazines and all the major newspapers (the majority of them positive) the play received the Critics' Award for the best new play in 2005/6, nevertheless, it was a failure with the audiences. According to theatre critic Tamás Koltai, "You can sense the shocked resistance of certain audience members. Some stand up in the middle and leave, others protest by not applauding at the end. Something is happening. András Papp and János Térey are not moved by history, they do not pay tribute to patriotism. What Péter Gothár has produced is theatre, not national commemoration. Is something really happening? Oh, no, not at all. Only a few people care to see the play. No comment."[7] Finally, the play-text itself induced a heated debate in three major cultural-political magazines: two of them between literary critics (in *2000* and *Beszélő*), and one between historians (*Élet és Irodalom*).[8] All in all, the play was kept on the agenda for about a year after its publication, although the lack of debate in the conservative media is also noteworthy.

Dealing with the Revolution of 1956 (especially on its 50th anniversary) has extraordinary significance. The memory of 1956, with all the names, streets and dates that have become symbolic, is inseparable from the genesis of the third Hungarian republic. The officially licensed (but still closely watched and controlled) public reburial of the political leaders of the Revolution took place on 16 June 1989, the same day that they had been originally buried in unmarked graves; the new republic was eventually declared on 23 October the same year, on the 33rd anniversary of the outset of the Revolution. The events of 1956 are at the core of the founding myth of the new democracy.[9] Thus any act of remembering the Revolution also concerns the affirmation of the idea of the republic. To revive the memory of the struggles and the failure of 1956 is at the same time to remember the struggles and success of 1989. Any cultural act of remembering 1956 (works of art, the commemoratory rituals and the places of memory) is seen as reminding present and future generations of not just the people who participated in the Revolution, but also what they fought for.

---

[7] "Érezni egyes nézők döbbent ellenállását. Van, aki közben feláll és kimegy, mások tüntetően nem tapsolnak a végén. Valami történik. Papp András és Térey János nincs meghatva a történelemtől, nem adózik a hazafiasságnak. Gothár Péter színházat rendezett, nem nemzeti megemlékezést. Csakugyan történik valami? Dehogy. Alig van nézői érdeklődés. No comment." Tamás Koltai, "A létező színházi világok legjobbika," *Élet és Irodalom* 50.33 (9 June 2006) <http://www.es.hu/index.php?view=doc;13666>, Retrieved 09 June 2011.

[8] Cf. Margócsy's article and the marginal notes by the other editors; the controversy between Teslár and Vári in *Beszélő*; Szakolczai; László Eörsi, "Köztársaság Tér 1956–2007," *Élet és Irodalom* 51.22., (1 June 2007) <http://www.es.hu/index.php?view=doc;16723>, Retrieved 09 June 2011, Éva Standeisky, "Így azért ne!" *Élet és Irodalom* 51.22., (1 June 2007) <http://www.es.hu/index.php?view=doc;16724>, Retrieved 09 June 2011.

[9] Radnóti, pp. 394–396., György, p. 8.

However, as is often pointed out, there is little agreement on what actually happened in 1956,[10] and the memory of 1956 is controversial ideologically,[11] which makes it difficult to commemorate the Revolution in a way that everybody can identify with it. According to Péter György,

> One question remains: how can we make a story accessible to collective memory that is about a world which has been transformed from palpable reality into dry cultural historical knowledge and has become the source of nostalgia? In theory the legitimacy of the present day Hungarian republic is founded on the implanting of the Revolution into the Constitution, and consequently into the canon. However, I do not think it is an exaggeration to claim that, by now, the legal integrity of political rule has nothing to do with the tradition of the Revolution. The rhetoric of 1956, its political and cultural memory are no more than one way of establishing the political demand for a "national consensus" that springs sometimes from hypocritical rhetoric, sometimes from sincere desperation; and the continual realisation that such consensus is completely impossible.[12]

Historians and literary critics who discuss the play distinguish three contending narratives in present-day public discourse.[13] One, originally fabricated as official state propaganda by the communist authorities, presents the Revolution as the upheaval of an organised mob incited by anti-democratic, reactionary fascist forces that aimed to restore the pre-war regime.[14] This (usually called the Kádár narrative) is hardly ever heard today, and when it is, it provokes general contempt. It still has to be mentioned because, firstly, elements of it are integrated into the other two narratives (notably in unfounded or long disproved

---

[10]   See Radnóti, pp. 395–396; György, p. 5; The extent of this disagreement can be grasped by taking a look at the above-mentioned debate between the two historians of the period, Eörsi and Szakolczai, who are nevertheless still the representatives of the same general narrative, as Éva Standeisky pointed out in her reply to Szakolczai's article.

[11]   Mink, "The Revisions of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution," In *Past in the Making. Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989*, ed. Michael Kopecek (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 169–178, p. 169.

[12]   György, p. 8. "A kérdés ma csak annyi: miként tudjuk a kollektív emlékezet számára elbeszélhetővé tenni egy olyan világ egyik történetét, amely élményvalóságból mára száraz kultúrtörténeti tudássá, illetve nosztalgia forrásává lett. Holott elvileg a mai magyar köztársaság legitimitása a forradalom alkotmányba, s így kánonba iktatásán alapszik. Ám azt hiszem, nem túlzok, ha úgy vélem, a politikai uralom legalitásának már gyakorlatilag semmi köze nincs a forradalom hagyományához. 1956 retorikája, politikai és kulturális emlékezete mára semmi egyéb, mint a 'nemzeti egység' iránti politikai igény hol álságos retorikából, hol őszinte kétségbeesésből fakadó megteremtésének egyik lehetséges formája, illetve annak a folyamatos belátása, hogy az mégis teljes képtelenség."

[13]   Cf. Mink; Radnóti, pp. 395–396; Margócsy, pp. 66–67.

[14]   Mink, p. 170; Radnóti, p. 395; László Eörsi, *Köztársaság tér 1956* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2006), "Bevezetés" [Introduction] and passim, but see especially pp. 138–148.

legends);[15] secondly, the other two narratives define themselves primarily in opposition to this one; and thirdly, because the play too has been accused of endorsing it.[16] The second narrative, most often associated with left-leaning discourses, emphasises the role of the progressive communist leaders and the intellectuals, and through their idealisation depicts the Revolution as a struggle for a reformed socialist democracy.[17] The third narrative, embraced by the political right and until the early 1990s repressed by the "elitist" or reform communist narrative, idealises the people who fought in the streets ("the crowd that marched, rallied, protested, that was shot at, that besieged the radio, demolished the Stalin statue, stood up against the Soviet tanks"),[18] resulting in a somewhat romantic representation of freedom fighters (the "Pest Lads") that joined forces against communist oppression and the Soviet presence in Hungary. The proponents of this narrative see the Revolution as a kind of return of the "organically" Hungarian political sentiments, the ideology of the nationalist, anti-communist right wing movement before and during the war.[19]

The latter two narratives, while incessantly vying with each other for the domination of the public and cultural discourse, share a fierce hostility towards the slightest evocation of any element of the Kádár propaganda version, and anybody who attempts this is immediately denounced as the apologist of the old system – though often not without good reason. At the same time, the representatives of both dominant narratives accuse one another of falsifying history by hushing up certain facts while overemphasising others.

These narratives not only influence political discourse, but also underlie cultural products such as memorial monuments, commemoratory rituals (and even the location where they are performed),[20] or works of art. The reason why *Kazamaták* triggered so many and sometimes such extreme responses is, I believe, that it performs its memorial function by provoking both narratives in their views of history in a number of ways, while it also violates the more or less

---

[15] See Eörsi, *Köztársaság tér*, pp. 143–149 on legends about the events on Republic Square; Mink, p. 169.

[16] For instance, by Szakolczai and Teslár.

[17] Mink, p. 173; Radnóti, p. 395.

[18] Radnóti, p. 395.

[19] As Mink, pp. 176–177, points out, this is one of the "perverted" ways in which the Kádár narrative influenced the counter-narratives: what the rightist narrative considers the "real character" of the revolution is eerily reminiscent of the way the Kádár narrative described it to emphasise its dangerousness.

[20] Cf. György, pp. 5–6, who describes how, among other reasons, disregard for the objections of the 1956 memorial organisations, the political interests of the right and the uneasy conscience of the then governing Socialist Party, led to the erection of a second, unofficial monument in another symbolic space of the Revolution, in front of the Technical University, also in 2006. As a result, the right-wing commemorations of the Revolution take place here ever since, instead of the monument on the newly renamed 56-osok tere ("Square of the Revolutionaries of 1956").

general agreement in present day Hungarian literary criticism, also evident in the presuppositions of the reviews, that (good) literature is not political, it does not entertain a social agenda openly, and the effect it seeks to achieve on its audience's lives is not immediate. It is an unsettling experience to read or watch *Kazamaták* partly because even though the human values it prompts the audience to reflect on are universal, they are presented in connection with unusually concrete and topical issues.

HISTORY IN KAZAMATÁK

In its representation of the events, the play follows the historical accounts in an almost documentary fashion.[21] It is divided into nineteen scenes, the location alternating between the street and the interior of the house, the Party Headquarters. This way, both the "people from the street" (this is how the insurgents are labelled in the play) and the "people from the house" (that is, members of the Hungarian Workers' Party [MDP] and the militia of the State Security Service [ÁVH]) are introduced in an equal proportion – and with equally little sympathy. If the people from the street are physically violent, then the people from the house are no less violent psychologically: they represent the silent non-violent oppression associated with the following era, the Kádár regime. One of the most striking features of the play is its complete lack of heroes and villains,[22] even though the playwrights call it a tragedy. All the action in the play seems to be governed by coincidences and short-sighted decisions;[23] the existence of fate or a higher regulating purpose is denied again and again,[24] which deprives both sides, and the play as a whole, of the possibility of reaching a tragic dimension. The dramatic action consists of scenes in which different people are seen to *happen to* end up shooting Red Cross nurses or lynching people who bear white flags. The play conjures up history for the present audience as it normally seems to unfold for those who take part in the events, "as the confusion of forces where anything could happen in some other way than it actually does".[25]

The documentary-like style is enhanced by lines that are directly taken from the transcripts of the historical participants' confessions at court. On the other

---

[21] In particular, the authors follow Eörsi's book very closely, taking and reworking a number of original speeches that Eörsi quotes from contemporary sources. They are indebted to Eörsi's account to an extent that it would not be unfair to analyse the play as the dramatisation of that specific book, resembling the way Shakespeare's plays are dramatisations of the chronicles.

[22] Radnóti, pp. 403–405. Margócsy, p. 69.

[23] cf. Radnóti, pp. 399–400; Margócsy, 69; Teslár.

[24] Cf. Radnóti, p. 403: "The story – and history – consists of accidental events; the causal chain is impossible to describe. Everything has a cause, but there is no final cause. Everything is contingent."

[25] Radnóti, p. 405.

hand, this historical accuracy is counterbalanced by alienating elements in the play's language, like anachronisms,[26] direct quotations from and recognisable allusions to political discourse of the audience's present. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the play is an imitation of the Shakespearean form. It is written in rhymed and unrhymed iambic pentameter alternating with prose. There are references to *Macbeth* (the moving branches that conceal the insurgents who attack the house), verbal echoes of *Hamlet* (one of the insurgents claims that "Hunnia's a prison"), and the very first lines of the play, spoken by a secret service officer disguised as a rebel, evoke *Richard III*'s opening soliloquy: "Now is the silver of our past turned into / gold by our testing October".[27] Imitating and evoking the Shakespearean history play is another gesture towards the play's claim for topicality. Shakespeare's histories investigated topical issues projected into the past, and at the same time shaped the shared memories of both the past and the actual events depicted for his contemporaries. The language of the play thus distances pure history, revealing the authors' intention to shape cultural memory, and also the fact that the play's apparent historical accuracy is just another dramatic convention. The most obvious alienating element, however, is undoubtedly a character called The Spokesman, who throughout the play explains and comments on the action, occasionally passes ethical judgements, and comments on history.

The play's probably most provocative feature is its choice of topic.[28] *Kazamaták* represents the events with unusual crudity, ending with on-stage mob violence over the dead bodies, and the bitter realisation that the *dungeons*, the secret underground prisons and torture chambers for "enemies of the state", that rumour treated as a fact, and that served as the immediate cause for the insurgents' attack on the Party headquarters, never existed.[29] At first sight, the play seems to subscribe to the propaganda version of the Kádár era by commemorating the Revolution through the dramatisation of the events of the only day that both the right- and the left-wing narratives would like to keep silent about. The propaganda supporting and justifying the retaliations presented the events of this day as the general nature of the whole Revolution, while "the positive memory of '56 struggled to forget about it as marginal, an atypical excess… 'If only it had

---

[26] It is ironic that some of the actual historical quotations appear so absurd that they are taken as anachronisms by some commentators. E.g. Mátyás János Kovács believes that the name "Beszkártos" is an anachronism, while it in fact was the nickname of one of the insurgents.

[27] "A múlt ezüstjét színarany jövőre / Cseréli próbáló októberünk." Translations from the play are mine throughout. Papp András–Térey János, *Kazamaták*, *Holmi* 18.3 (2006) 292–384, p. 293. I.1.

[28] At the beginning of his analysis, Margócsy (pp. 64–67) and the other editors commenting on the article explore the tradition of Hungarian revolution literature, and especially how the "dark side" tends to be "forgotten" in these classics. Ákos Szilágyi's long note, giving an explanation from the perspective of collective memory is especially relevant. See also Radnóti, p. 398.

[29] Eörsi, *Köztársaság tér*, p. 41.

not happened!'".[30] According to Radnóti, "none of the representative [counter-] narratives of '56 justified the lynching; the most they could do is hunt for excuses, or, in extreme cases, attribute it to the enemy [i.e. the communists] through some intricate conspiracy theory."[31] The play aspires to be a commemoratory piece by representing nothing else but the event that appears as the least typical in the memories of most audience members, irrespective of which of the two major counter-narratives they endorse.[32] But the play also provokes fundamental but distinctive elements of these two narratives.

An important component of the leftist narrative is its idealisation of and emphasis on the reform communist leaders (the members of the revolutionary Nagy government),[33] accompanied by the almost complete neglect of the thousands of ordinary people who participated in the demonstrations and the fights. The party members represented in the play are all loyal to the old system, they oppose the reforms that the "revolutionary" party members like prime minister Imre Nagy

---

[30] Margócsy, p. 66. "melyről '56 pozitív emlékezete olyannyira szeretett volna mint marginális eseményről, mint nem jellemző kilengésről elfelejtkezni, hogy most a 2006-os emlékezések során, ha jól hallottam, sehol még csak említést sem nyert. De jó lenne, ha nem történt volna meg!"

[31] Radnóti, p. 398. "A Köztársaság téri október 30-i népítéletet (amelynek a *Life Magazine*-ban publikált megrendítő és viszolyogtató képei bejárták a világot) '56 egyetlen reprezentatív narratívája sem igazolta, legföljebb a megelőző provokációkkal mentegette, vagy – szélsőséges esetben – valamifajta bonyolult összeesküvés-elméleti kombináció révén az ellenfélnek tulajdonította." (The words in square brackets are my additions.)

[32] It has to be acknowledged, on the other hand, that the play clearly distances itself from the claim by the propaganda narrative that what happened on Republic Square was characteristic of the whole revolution. "The siege is over, and on the grey square / A black carnival begins / And man kicks, and whips man: / The Arch-Evil takes off his mask. / On my lips, the beautiful name of revolution… / Its day is over, now comes the night. / And where are the Pest lads now? / For I can't see any in the square. / This is not Corvin Close, but the Pest scum, / Not Baross Square, but its scum, / Not Práter Street, but its scum – / An instance of good intention turned hideous…" ("Az ostrom véget ért, s a szürke téren / Fekete karnevál kezdődik éppen, / És ember embert rugdal, ostoroz: / Eldobja álarcát az ősgonosz. / Számon a forradalom szép neve… / Letelt a napja, itt az éjjele. / S hol vannak ilyenkor a pesti srácok? / Mert én a téren egyet sem találok. / Nem a Corvin köz, csak Pest hordaléka, / Nem a Baross tér, csak a hordaléka, / Nem Práter utca, csak a hordaléka – / A csúfra fordult szép szándékra példa." Papp–Térey, p. 367., III.9.) It is in this context that, in the Spokesman's long speech after the lynching, the mob is described as consisting of criminals and turncoats who served the pro-Nazi Arrow Cross movement before the war, and will end up as informants of the emerging Kádár system that justified the retaliations and its own existence with what happened on Republic Square. The Spokesman's speech is probably the passage that contains the greatest density of allusions in the play.

[33] Imre Nagy's government came to power as a result of the spontaneous uprising that started with the student protests on 23 October 1956. Initially it consisted of reform communists, but soon became a coalition government when representatives of the formerly abolished democratic parties also joined them. During the twelve days of the Revolution they quit the Warsaw Pact, initiated steps toward consolidating domestic policy and the abolishment of autocracy. The government and the Revolution was crushed by the Soviet military intervention that begun on the night of 4 November. The communist party was reinstated in government under the leadership of János Kádár, who remained in power until 1988.

supported. But the most obvious challenge to this narrative is the complete and painfully ironic absence of the revolutionary Nagy government from the whole play: the martyred heroes of this narrative are never even mentioned.

Kazamaták challenges the right-wing narrative most obviously by its unflattering representation of the insurgents. The people in the street do not gather on Republic Square for any noble cause: they either happen to be there by accident, or they seek revenge. Even when they have a motivation, it is irrational and misplaced: "While I was in prison, a state security serviceman seduced my girl," says one of them as justification for his cruelty. What is exposed here is the distorted logic that finds it acceptable to punish any member of an arbitrarily defined group for the actions of another member of the group. As Radnóti remarks, there were so many dungeons in so many actual places in the 1950s, that they seemed to be everywhere, but in their physical reality there happened to be none on Republic Square. This is what, in hindsight, transforms the defenders of the House from "sinners suffering their punishment to more or less incidental – if not always innocent – victims".[34]

CRITICS' RESPONSES TO THE REPRESENTATION OF HISTORY

So far, I have discussed the play as the representation of actual events. However, as Radnóti argues,

> [t]he authors of the play wrote a historical drama with the ambition that it should, as far as possible, accurately follow the actual events of a tragic episode of the Hungarian Revolution that is especially suitable for dramatic representation. Indeed, they raise questions specifically related to history, but these questions do not include either the historical relevance of this event in any sense, or identification with the events or any of its heroes.[35]

According to him, and other critics, it is missing the point to demand historical accuracy from the play, because it is, after all, just like any other play, a work of fiction. In the stage directions that immediately follow the *dramatis personae* the authors also emphasise that their play is fictional: "The people that appear in the play are not identical with those who did, at the same place, at the same time,

---

[34] Radnóti, p. 401.
[35] Radnóti, p. 397. "A darab szerzői történelmi drámát írnak, amelynek ambíciója, hogy a lehetőség szerint híven kövesse a magyar forradalom egy drámai megformálásra kiváltképpen alkalmas tragikus epizódjának valóban megtörtént eseményeit. Sőt kifejezetten történelmi kérdéseket vetnek fel, de ezek közé a kérdések közé nem tartozik magának az ábrázolt történelmi eseménynek a bármilyen értelemben vett történelmi aktualitása, nem tartozik hozzá sem magával az eseménnyel, sem bármelyik hősével való identifikáció."

become historical figures. Their theatrical presence, that is, their names, gestures and language, are entirely due to imagination."[36] However, this may well be read as just another twist on the well-known postmodern trick of exposing the fluidity of the distinction between real and literary by presenting fiction as fact and fact as fiction. A number of the fictitious names are in fact barely disguised versions of the real ones: the historical figure who was in charge of the house on that day, Imre Mező is called Imre Mérő in the play; the ruthless insurgent János Mesz (nicknamed "Club-foot") is called Meszena (or "Compass"); a less inhuman revolutionary appears as Nikkel on the stage, while his real name was László Nickelsburg (he was the last person executed in 1961). This, and the fact that all the historical figures that are mentioned but never appear on stage bear their own names, suggest that the stage direction is in fact there to call the attention to, rather than deny, historical accuracy. Their statement that the "theatrical presence" of the figures "is entirely due to imagination" can be read as a challenge to the idea of the accurate and unbiased historical narrative: this play is no more and no less true to what actually happened than any textbook on history.

Apart from this, very prominent in the play are the Spokesman's comments on history and historical narrative. I will point out only the two most obvious instances. In the four lines that end the play (and where this paper's title comes from) the Spokesman emphasises the subjective element in what is remembered and what is forgotten, leaving the audience of the play with the suggestion that an unbiased and "complete" remembrance is a fiction.

Voice of the Spokesman:

But the past always turns out well.
And if our judges' whim so wishes,
The one single story falls
to 1956 pieces.
Bells toll
Curtain[37]

At another point in the play, the Spokesman comments explicitly on how historical remembrance works.

The guards discharge their guns.
"Who shot first?", soon their bosses will

---

[36] "*A drámában szereplő személyek nem azonosak azokkal az emberekkel, akik ugyanitt, ugyanekkor a történelem szereplőivé váltak. Színpadi létüket, vagyis nevüket, gesztusaikat és nyelvüket egytől egyig a képzeletnek köszönhetik.*" Papp–Térey, p. 293.

[37] "A szóvivő HANGJA // 'Hanem a múlt mindig jól alakul.' / S ha bíráink szeszélye úgy akarja: / Az egyetlen történet szertehull / Ezerkilencszázötvenhat darabra. // *Harangok* // *Függöny*"

demand, and the squad will speak their minds…
There are too many witnesses
who retell how it all began:
one scores, the other misfires,
and it is the winner who decides who fired first.[38]

This is not merely the recasting of the truism that history is written by the victors. On the surface the Spokesman seems to suggest that the way an incident will be seen by later generations is determined by those who dominate the discourses after the incident. But that is, of course, very ironic in connection with a series of events that over time have been called Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Revolution again (with at least two interpretations as to what it was a revolution for and against). The Spokesman talks of the winners as if it would be possible to tell who the winner is. But such a comment in the light of the whole play is highly ambiguous: at the imaginary moment it is uttered, the insurgents seem to have won the day. A few days later in actual history it would be the other way round, as for another thirty years afterwards. And over the past twenty-two years? It is probably even more difficult to tell.

Both quotations describe history as an always already constructed narrative that serves the purpose of the speaker whose intention is to plant *his/her* version of the event into memory. The play's view of history as necessarily subjective, particular, and its claim that historical memory is composed of contending narratives (which means historical *truth* is not truer than any other narrative truth) should not have to be provocative. The intention to deconstruct the historical narrative is not exceptional in recent Hungarian literature: for instance, László Márton's *Testvériség* (Brotherhood) trilogy, Esterházy's *Harmonia Caelestis*, Nádas's *Párhuzamos Történetek* (Parallel Stories), or Spiró's *Fogság* (Captivity) all seek different ways to explore historical narrative and undermine its reliability.[39] But the fact that major analyses of the play (such as those of Margócsy and Radnóti) find it indispensable to explain this view, and that other analyses attack the play on the grounds that history is truth while a play is merely a version of that truth (and as such, it is a moral imperative to take a clear standpoint) show that this reflective concept of history is not yet generally recognised.

The play is either accused of historical inaccuracy and misrepresentation, or defended as a commentary which has no moral obligation to be true to actual

---

[38] "Az őrség máris kiüríti tárát. / Ki kezdte, kérdezik majd nemsokára / A főnökeik, és színt vall a gárda… / A történteknek túl sok a tanúja, / Aki a kezdetet meséli újra: / Az egyik tarol, a másik becsődöl, / S a győztes mondja meg, ki lőtt először." I.12. (Papp–Térey, p. 320.)

[39] Probably the closest to the Papp–Térey play in its concept is Spiró's novel in presenting its time and events, the lifetime of Jesus Christ, from the synchronic perspective of his insignificant contemporaries, for whom what happened was an unpredictable present, rather than the long chain of significant events and actions that it seems to be for those with historical hindsight.

facts (with reference to the aesthetic autonomy of literature), or claimed not to be a commentary on the actual events but on human nature in general. Radnóti, for example, does not deny that the play is about the historical events of 1956. However, he insists that even if *Kazamaták* is inaccurate in some respects, it should not be censured on that ground, since, as a work of fiction, it has no obligation to follow history on every point. The real problem is how historical accuracy could be defined in connection with a play that explicitly challenges the concept of universal truth, and represents history not as teleological, but as unpredictable, lacking the certainty of causal relationships.

The common feature of all three ways of looking at the play – criticising or defending its "inaccuracies", and claiming it not to be about a particular historical moment – is the critics' unease at how the play relates to a historical event important in cultural memory. The first approach results in an ethical judgement on the play, which presupposes that there is one right interpretation of the Revolution, while the other two approaches seek to shield the play from such ethical appropriations while they reveal an awareness that the way the play relates to history and politics will inevitably invite such judgments. Regarding literature as an autonomous way of engaging with human problems (that is, asserting that there is no ethical obligation on the author to represent reality in a fair or faithful way) can be a fruitful approach in many cases. However, it is doubtful whether it works for a play that is so self-consciously provocative in its statement about history in general and in particular, about social tension, present–day discourses of politics and national remembrance. The authors of the play have chosen as their topic one of the most controversial episodes (the siege on Republic Square) of an event in Hungarian history (the Revolution of 1956) that is controversial in itself, nevertheless unanimously regarded as crucial.

The immediate reaction to the play – anticipated by some of the articles, evidenced in others, and, more importantly, intended by the authors – is that its representation of 1956 is unfair, that *Kazamaták* besmirched the memory of the Revolution, and that therefore it is unethical. Even if it is acknowledged that the events it depicts did actually happen and exactly the way they are represented, the whole play is nevertheless fundamentally wrong. This view, in a more radical form, contends that the defenders of the Party Headquarters *deserved* what they got: they served the regime that ordered the mass shooting of the protesters on 25 October, asked for Soviet help, and then tortured, and imprisoned or executed those that fought for a freer Hungary. Ákos Szilágyi's critical description of how cultural memory tends to work in such cases summarises the view that the play attacks:

Where the soteriology of the modern, that is, political nation becomes the frame of society, there will always be Historical Truth as well; and it will be One and Indivisible, and that truth will coincide with the cause of the Nation. Anything

that serves the birth and survival of the nation can be justified with it. From that perspective, historical actions cannot be judged morally in themselves: there will be just, meaningful, necessary (because history has justified it), justifiable and justified immorality and inhuman violence (if it serves the nation); and there will be unjust, meaningless, unnecessary violence, bloodshed, trespassing, and frenzy (if it is against the nation). The bloody scenes of revolutions, their repulsive excesses (lynching, destruction, the breaking free of the mob) are not deleted from historical memory (and its literary representations), but are reinterpreted as they become parts of the Whole, lose their independent potential to produce meaning, and become dominated by the Historical Truth that monopolises all other claims for truths.[40]

What the play seems to suggest is that even though the present sentiments towards the defenders of a regime, now seen as inherently evil, are understandable, just like the particular emotions of the particular people on the day on Republic Square, they are misplaced. The actual people on that day in the house are no more (but neither less) accountable for the crimes of the regime than the ones on the square. According to the ethics suggested by the play, the murderous sentiments of the mob, as long as they remain merely sentiments, are comprehensible because they spring from real injuries, but once actual violence is carried out on people, most of them innocent, it becomes a sin, as inhumanity is always a sin.

KAZAMATÁK AND PRESENT-DAY POLITICS

The most intriguing aspect of the reception of the play (page and stage version alike) is an easily discernible tendency to deny its topicality, as if such relevance would be shameful or as if it would diminish the aesthetic value of the play. One may only have guesses at the reasons for this tendency. Since it is the result of a number of interrelated causes, I can only attempt to outline a few that I think may be relevant. First, there is ample precedence since the fall of communism for

---

[40] "Ahol a modern, azaz politikai nemzet üdvtörténete lesz a társadalmi történések kerete, ott Történelmi Igazság is van, méghozzá Egy és Oszthatatlan, és ez az igazság egybeesik a Nemzet ügyével: minden igazolható általa, ami a nemzet megszületését vagy fennmaradását szolgálja. Innen nézve a történelmi cselekedetek önmagukban már nem ítélhetők meg erkölcsileg: van jogos, értelmes, szükséges, mert történelmileg igazolódott, igazolható és igazolt erkölcstelenség, embertelen erőszak (ha ez a nemzet érdekét szolgálja) és van jogtalan, értelmetlen, szükségtelen kegyetlenség, vérontás, túlkapás, téboly (ha ez a nemzet ellen irányul). Azt állítom tehát, hogy a forradalmak véres scénái, visszataszító megnyilvánulásai (lincselések, rombolások, a csőcselék elszabadulása stb.) nem törlődtek a történelmi emlékezetből (és ennek irodalmi leképeződéséből), hanem átértelmeződtek azáltal, hogy részletté váltak az Egészben, elvesztették önálló jelentésadó erejüket, a Történelmi Igazság minden más igazságot kisajátító uralma alá kerültek." Szilágyi's comment to Margócsy's article, pp. 72–73.

works of art (and authors) to be attacked, purely on the basis of the political stance of the author (without actual consideration of the work itself), most frequently as "anti-Hungarian." Second, the middle and older generation of critics began their careers in an era when books and authors could be put on the "banned" list, or simply denounced by official state propaganda, if they were too critical of "socialism," or not "progressive enough" in endorsing what they regarded as the Marxist idea of literature. As a leftover from that era, a play that deals explicitly with present-day social issues is by default suspicious. Third, since the only officially accepted critical trend was self-professedly Marxist, and the standards of present-day literary criticism were formed as a reaction to that, anything that is ever so slightly reminiscent of the Marxist criticism of the communist era is often regarded with mistrust. Discourses of contemporary literature are consequently still dominated by structuralism, hermeneutics, deconstruction and, to a lesser extent, feminism, while politicised critical schools like new historicism, post-colonialism or ideology criticism, are only just gaining acceptance, and even these are mostly applied to non-contemporary literature. These circumstances may at least partly explain why critics would be more willing to interpret a work in terms of aesthetics rather than politics, especially a play that does not even disguise the fact that it is political.

As theatre critic Borbála Sebők points out in her overview of the literary and theatrical reviews of the play, almost all of them contain a more or less explicit defence of the play from some actual or anticipated attack.[41] All the articles mention that the play is full of anachronisms and expressions borrowed from present-day political discourses, but at the same time declare that the play should not be perceived as a commentary on contemporary politics: even if the play brings contemporary references into a dramatisation of the past, this should not be read as if it intended to draw parallels between the actions represented and the reality of contemporary vocabulary *with which* they are represented.

As the almost embarrassed way in which critics downplay the significance of such anachronisms suggests, the play, apart from being provocative in its representation of the Revolution (and history in general), is also unsettling because of its engagement with contemporary politics. Almost every article mentions the abundance of expressions that are clearly anachronistic in the play (e.g. references to reality shows, to notions of the Kádár era), or that are taken from the political debates of the audience's present and recent past. Ákos Teslár takes them as nothing more than (occasionally rather lame) jokes: "The text abounds in (sometimes too far-fetched, inorganic) references to the present, like the Certificate of Hungarian Nationality, two Hungaries, 'The Real World,' 'István, a király,' what you will – moreover, it seems these devices are more reminiscent of political comedy

---

41   ld. Sebők (http://www.ellenfeny.hu/archivum/2007/1/esztetikan-innen-es-tul)

shows than of the polylogical mechanisms of postmodern intertextuality."[42] In one of his marginal notes to Margócsy's article, Mátyás János Kovács also sees them as jokes, and his annoyance at contemporary references is also obvious: "As for myself, the only reason why I did not fall asleep while reading was that I was waiting for more jokes to come – even if, alas, in most of the cases, they worked *merely* by bringing the present in: György Surányi, 'The Real World', 'Is you a gay,' 'Hungary deserves more'."[43] Radnóti wants to make sure that the political references are not seen as political references, but as theatrical devices that are related to the simultaneity of the performance and its reception:

> There are anachronistic bits […] everywhere in the play. […] these aside-like remarks [that are taken from the reader's present political discourse], are far from making the reader see a complicated political allegory in the play, in which the people inside and the people outside the house should have to be identified in some unnatural way with the two people of the politically and socio-culturally divided present-day Hungary. No, this has to do with the base, vulgar, scandalous and admirable nature of theatre – that, every day, the performance is simultaneous with its audience.[44]

Radnóti's claim that the play's contemporary references do not constitute an allegory of a polarised Hungary is acceptable, however, his broader implication that the play is not a political allegory at all, is a bit more dubious. The almost unanimous refusal by critics to read the play referentially, both in terms of history

[42] "A szöveg tele van (olykor már túlhajszolt, szervetlen) aktualizálásokkal, van itt magyarigazolvány, két Magyarország, a *Való Világ*tól az *István, a király*ig minden, ami kell – méghozzá, úgy tűnik, ezeknek a megoldásoknak több közük van a politikai kabarék kikacsintásához, mint a posztmodern intertextualitás polilogikus működésmódjához." Ákos Teslár, "Megvan és mégsem." *The Real World*: a TV reality show, approximately the Hungarian equivalent of *Big Brother*; *István, a király*: a musical containing an obvious political allegory from 1983.

[43] "Pedig, ha magamról szólhatok, kizárólag azért nem aludtam el olvasás közben, mert vártam az újabb – igaz, többnyire sajnos mindössze aktualizáló – poénokat: Surányi György, Való Világ, buzi-e vagy, Magyarország többet érdemel stb." Note 18. to Margócsy, p. 70. *György Surányi*: Director of the National Bank of Hungary and target of political accusations. *'Is you a gay'*: Title and refrain (repeated after every line) of a rap song against homophobia by Sickratman, on whose role in the play, see below. *Hungary deserves more*: election slogan of the right wing Fidesz party in the 2006 Spring elections.

[44] "Az anakronisztikus elemek, amelyeknek stiláris csomópontja a Szóvivő (ő még *rappel* is), mindenfelé fölbukkannak a drámában. Amikor egy nemzetőr-igazolványt „magyarigazolvány"-nak neveznek, majd megjegyzik, hogy „Piros-fehér-zöld itt és ott – de két nép", s mindennek a tetejébe valaki megkérdezi, hogy „Melyik karton a jobbik Magyarország?", akkor ezek az aktualizáló kiszólások távolról sem indítják arra az olvasót, hogy komplikált allegóriát lásson a drámában, amelyben a kint és bent két népét valamilyen nyakatekert módon a mai Magyarország politikailag és szociokulturálisan megosztott két népével kellene azonosítania. Nem, ez minden igazi színház alantas, közönséges, botrányos és nagyszerű természetével áll összefüggésben – azzal, hogy a játék egyidejű aznapi közönségével." Radnóti, p. 404.

and current politics, I think, reveals that one of the central problems of the play may be its disturbingly obvious appeal to be interpreted referentially.

If, as critics indeed believe, these anachronisms are not the results of the poor historical knowledge of the authors, then what other reason could there have been for scattering them all over the play than to suggest that the play *is* about the present day, just as much as it is about the events 50 years earlier, and about the problems of our shared memory, that is, how we, again in the present, see those events? Since anachronisms are to be found throughout the play, Mátyás János Kovács's implication that they are the occasional lapses of taste seems untenable. It is not easy to conceive, either, how an anachronism could ever be anything else than "inorganic", as Teslár's "sometimes too far-fetched, inorganic" seems to suggest, when an anachronism is essentially *out of place* (or rather time). The way critics treat the references to topical political issues is misleading: they present them as if they were anachronisms in a new performance of an old play; as if they had been added by the director to update the play with present day issues in the hope that this would bring an old play closer to its audience. On the contrary: this play was written with the knowledge that these expressions are anachronistic, and that the audience will recognise that they are anachronistic. These anachronisms, therefore, are deliberate and self-conscious gestures of provocation that emphasise that the play is embedded in two historical moments simultaneously: the time of the events it represents, and the time of the audience. The anachronisms and topical political references are integral parts of the play's text, and just like the critics, the authors also anticipated that they will provoke politicised reactions that will not be easily fended off by reference to the aesthetic autonomy of literature.

Therefore, Koltai's description of the play as a "political pamphlet in the form of tragic historic horror and dramatic poem"[45] seems, in many though not all respects, more apt. A short detour will hopefully illustrate how deeply the play's language is penetrated by present-day politics. The last two lines of the Spokesman's explicit commentary (III. 9.), in which he expresses his disgust at the mob's inhuman behaviour, are originally from a poem by the poet-rapper Miklós Paizs, better known as Sickratman. Both Radnóti and Teslár quote this final part of the Spokesman's speech as one of the many intricate ways in which ethical judgement is woven into the play's language, but neither of them mentions the fact that it is an allusion.[46]

The implications of quoting Sickratman's lines are complex. On Christmas Eve, 2003, a drunk radio presenter in the underground radio station Tilos made distasteful remarks about Christians, and said he would like to "kill them all."[47] His

45 Koltai, "1956 darab": "tragikus történelmi horror és drámai költemény formájában megjelenő politikai pamflet"

46 Radnóti, p. 404.; Teslár "Megvan és mégsem".

47 [Anon.], "Barangó: Nincs mentségem" <http://index.hu/belfold/barango0115> Retrieved 04 January 2011.

co-presenters protested immediately, the station published an apology and fired the presenter; the Association of Hungarian Journalists condemned the broadcast. Notwithstanding, right wing extremists claimed that the presenter was Jewish and held a demonstration in front of the radio station. Speakers, among them poet Kornél Döbrentei, vice president of the Writers' Association, delivered anti-Semitic speeches,[48] protesters held the one-time flag of the Hungarian Arrow-Cross Party, and a group of them burnt an Israeli flag – an action unprecedented in Hungary. As a response, Lajos Parti Nagy,[49] followed by over a hundred renowned writers (e.g. Péter Esterházy, László Krasznahorkai, Péter Nádas, Magda Szabó) and critics (e.g. István Margócsy, Sándor Radnóti),[50] left the Writers' Association, because it refused to recall Kornél Döbrentei from his position, and to condemn his anti-Semitic remarks.[51]

There was a counter-demonstrator in the crowd, Sickratman, who held a sign with the inscription: "[it is] not the truth, / merely the merciless mass of the flesh",[52] the lines that end the Spokesman's denunciation of the lynching crowd. Among the anachronisms, there are other quotes from Sickratman ("Is you a gay?"), and his former band, Bëlga, whose first hit was "National Hip-hop", a hyperbolic parody of nationalist discourse ("We want Hungarian stars over the Hungarian sky [etc.]"). Citing Sickratman's lines, therefore, commemorates a double trauma of the recent past: the disintegration of the Writers' Association, and in its symbolism, a landmark event of anti-Semitism in the history of post-communist Hungary.

As this example illustrates, the play's references to contemporary politics have to be taken just as seriously as its insistence on utmost historical accuracy, because

---

[48] E.g. "In a way, we, benevolent people, gathered here to protest for peace. For it is a good thing that we have the will and inclination to protest against this unforgiving war in religious guise, whose aim is to exterminate our people! Against this moral holocaust of the Hungarian race, which is led by false prophets in disguise and camouflage – *nothing but their beard is real* [laughter in the audience]." ("Voltaképpen béketüntetésre gyűltünk itt össze, jóakaratú emberek. Mert az a jó, ha végre van akaratunk és késztetésünk tiltakozni a népünk megsemmisítésére törekvő, vallási köntösben folytatott engesztelhetetlen háború ellen! A magyarság erkölcsi holokausztja ellen, amelyet álpróféták, álruhában, álorcában – csak a szakálluk a valódi [hangos, gúnyos nevetés] – vezényelnek."). "Szemelvények Döbrentei Kornél nyilatkozataiból," *Élet és Irodalom* 48.10 (5 March 2004.) <http://www.es.hu/index.php?view=doc;6871> Retreived 21 September 2010.
[49] Lajos Parti Nagy, "Kilépés," *Élet és Irodalom* 48.4 (23 January 2004.) <http://www.es.hu/2004-01-26_kilps> Retreived 21 September 2010.
[50] "Kilépőlevél a Magyar Írószövetség elnökségének," *Élet és Irodalom* 48.11. (12 March 2004.) <http://www.es.hu/index.php?view=doc;6933,> Retreived 21 September 2010. The list grew afterwards: "SZOLIDARITÁS," *Élet és Irodalom* 48.12 (19 March 2004.) 19 <http://www.es.hu/2004-03-22_szolidaritas> Retreived 21 September 2010.
[51] "Kilépőlevél a Magyar Írószövetség elnökségének"
[52] András Földes, "Az ember, aki meghackelte a tüntetést," *Index*, 14 January 2004. The article contains a photo of Sickratman holding his sign among the protesters. <http://index.hu/belfold/tiloshack/> Retreived 21 September 2010.

they form an equally integral part of the texture of the play. Radnóti's account of the play's representation of the crowd is very accurate: "The *depraved hoard of people* is the upshot of so much suffering, injury, deprivation, hatred, vengeful-ness, base instinct, desperate desire to do justice, desire to become significant."[53] But, if the play's insistence to be read politically is also taken into account, then its judgment of the crowd becomes not only a universal statement about human nature, as Radnóti claims, but a judgment of similar crowds of the audience's present as well. *Kazamaták* is about how a crowd turned into a mob in 1956, how that can happen even today, and how it is possible at all. The crowd of the anti–Semitic protesters of 2004 is evoked through the judgment of the single counter-protester. Sickratman's words about the crowd in 2004 are used to judge the mob in 1956, and that judgement, radicalised by the inhumanity of the 1956 mob, is universalised, and by implication refers back to the people in 2004, turn-ing them also from *crowd* into *mob*.

THE MONUMENTS OF 1956 AND
THE PROBLEM OF THE NATIONAL CONSENSUS

Let me conclude with a few remarks on the 1956 Memorial Monument on the Square of the Revolutionaries of 1956.

This monument, erected in 2006 (the same year *Kazamaták* was published),[54] consists of 2006 metal blocks of different height, scattered over a wide area in the back, while situated closer and closer together towards the front, eventu-ally forming a wedge that bursts out of the park behind, and ploughs into the concrete of the square. The iron blocks in the back are covered with fake rust, while the sharp edge that breaks the ground is made of shiny stainless steel.[55]

---

[53] "A züllött emberhorda megannyi szenvedés, sérelem, megfosztás, gyűlölet, bosszúvágy, aljas indulat, kétségbeesett igazságszolgáltatási vágy, valakivé lenni akarás eredője." Radnóti, pp. 404–405. I have italicised the expressions taken from the play.

[54] The monument was inaugurated on 23 October 2006 at 19.56. It was designed and erected by the "i-ypszilon Group" (Tamás Emődi-Kiss, Katalin György, Csaba Horváth, Tamás Papp).

[55] The present Mayor of Budapest, István Tarlós in his campaign promised to demolish "that scrap metal" of a monument. Had he taken a closer look he would have realised that it merely *seems* to be made of scrap metal (thus unworthy of commemorating the revolution), and that it is part of the – however shallow – concept of the monument. This gesture is another episode in the battle of the contesting memories of the revolution (treated in detail by Péter György): to remove from the street, and from memory, the monuments erected by the "other side". In this context, Tarlós's latest action of renaming Republic Square as Pope John Paul II Square can be regarded as an attempt to delete another symbolic space, and consequently, delete from cultural memory the unsettling event the place symbolises: 30 October 1956, the siege of the Party Headquarters. *Kazamaták* seeks exactly the opposite effect: to reintegrate the suppressed event into the broader memory of the revolution.

Surely, not too subtle symbolism for the glory of a revolution in which people from a wide range of backgrounds join forces.

Apart from serious criticism expressed by, among others, Péter György and Sándor Radnóti levelled at this monument for being a failure both as an aesthetic object and as a memorial, I think it is problematic for at least one other reason.[56] It takes for granted that the spectators will read it from the back to the front. It relies heavily on our tendency to view history in a teleological way, to instantly construct unified narratives out of particular events, to see everything that occurs always already as part of something greater, as an element leading up to the "true end" of a series of events. But what keeps us from reading the monument backwards, from stainless steel to rust-covered scrap metal? This reversed narrative would emphasise a darker memory of the Revolution, that what from a historical hindsight looks like a homogeneous mass of people united behind a noble cause, was in fact a very heterogeneous crowd consisting of very different people with very different (and sometimes not so dignified) ideas and aims.

But since the story of 1956 is so inextricably intertwined with the establishment of the republic in 1989, such an interpretation seems hardly desirable for a memorial monument. András Papp and János Térey's *Kazamaták*, nevertheless, seeks to contribute to our memories of the Revolution by challenging the ways in which the Revolution is remembered, and thus reminding the audience of the events that are suppressed in cultural memory. The question that the reader of the play has to face is whether it is possible to do so without blemishing the remembrance of the noble cause.

Even though the two dominant (post-communist) narratives disagree on what exactly the purpose of the Revolution was, they share the presupposition that it *had* a purpose, which united all the people for thirteen days. From the perspective of these narratives, every event makes sense only with reference to the final purpose. What happened on the 30 October on Republic Square cannot be reconciled with either of these narratives: it is an error, an anomaly, something that is so uncharacteristic of the Revolution that it is best disregarded; all the more so, since this incident served as a basis for the communist narrative. Therefore, it is worthy of being forgotten since it unfairly distorts the noble picture of the Revolution. It is precisely this view that the *Kazamaták* challenges: it subscribes to the postmodern view that history is always only one of many possible narratives, a fiction, an order imposed on a chaotic turbulence of events by the inevitably biased hindsight of the present day observer. When reminded of such anomalies as the events on Republic Square, the audience is forced to look at

---

[56] György, "Az emlékezet szétesése – Az olvashatatlan város"; Sándor Radnóti, "Kis emlékmű-esztétika", *Beszélő* 11.10 (October 2006), <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/kis-emlekmu-esztetika>, Retrieved 21 September 2010.

their own remembrance of the Revolution with a fresh eye – and perhaps they will be able to better understand the other narratives.

The play has already had obvious influence on cultural memory: it has produced an unusual number of responses in widely read papers. The play reached a much wider audience than most contemporary literature does. The issues were approached from various perspectives, and raised for various audiences. Some of the symbolic events, places and names that had been undergoing erasure from memory were disputed again as a response to the play. The lynching on Republic Square is another of those moments in history that we would prefer to forget. In fact, the only way to come to terms with such events is discussion, even heated controversy. But that is only possible once it is no longer suppressed from the collective and cultural memory.

ANDREA HÜBNER

The role of medieval maps in the interpretation of the New World

The oldest, and most original means of mnenomic technique is spatialisation: the ability to remember words with imagined spaces. The art of memory situates places into the natural space. Spaces and territories become semioticised, cultural memory becomes the topographic web that Maurice Halbwachs called mnemotopoi. For Halbwachs the experimental topic was Palestine in his "The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land" (1941).[1] This paper examines the role medieval maps played in cultural memory and cultural heritage.

What is a map? What size, what system of signs, what codes, decoding register and above all what directions and orientations characterise it? A map is a graphic location of places in the most concrete sense – or is it? Maps are a minority form of graphic expression, which have never been considered sacred items and are culture-specific: many societies never felt the need to produce maps. Mapping the world has often been thought to be strongly influenced by doctrinal rigour and dominant belief systems, for maps are not simple representations of reality.

The European Medieval Ages was one of the few periods in history when the human tendency towards mobility was severely curtailed. Humans may indeed be the most restless creatures on the face of the Earth, their desire to travel being prompted by a variety of activities including foraging, exploration, warfare, socialisation, tourism, commerce, pilgrimage, and diplomacy.

Maps cover and symbolise the totality of historical space and are important means to controlling (and taxing) it: one cannot own what one cannot see. Maps are also figures in the landscape of empire, "the narratives and actions put them into motion. The caravels of Vasco da Gama […], Cook's *Discovery*, along with all their cargoes (spices, sugar, breadfruit, tobacco, silver, porcelain, gold, maps, sextants, […]) flow through the spectacle of empire in the rearview mirror of history."[2]

Medieval maps isolate the known or imaginable world from its unknown or inconcievable other, but they also illustrate the desire to control space. Unions

---

[1] Maurice Halbwachs, "The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land," in *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 191–236.

[2] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Empire and Objecthood," in *What Do Pictures Want? The lives and loves of images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 154.

of text and image, they are, in fact, the most concrete and tangible examples of what we mean by the theory of *ut pictura poesis*, although the concept has never actually been applied to this field since maps are not considered art.

Without raising the question of what constitutes art, it can be stated that the magnificent wall maps, with their intermixture of large blocks of texts with pictures, are very much like portable medieval picture books where text and image are inseparable. In fact one of the few theoretical texts coming down to us about medieval world maps, by Boccaccio's friend, Paulus of Venice, makes the following point:

> I think that it is not merely difficult but impossible without a world map to make oneself an image of or even to hold in the mind, what is said about the generations of Noah and the nations and areas of the earth, as these are mentioned by doctors and divines. What is necessary is a twofold map containing both painting and writing. Nor can one be sufficient without the other, because painting without writing indicates regions of nations unclearly, and writing without the assistance of painting does not delineate an area's boundaries for them to be taken in at first sight.[3]

Friedmann considers Medieval maps texts,[4] whereas Schwartz claims maps, in their desire to control, are time made space,[5] and Campbell argues they are transformations of place into event.[6]

The orientation of a map is of course artificial and mirrors the meaning of dogmatic conviction which in the Middle Ages naturally inclined towards the east. Patristic thought had placed the Garden of Eden and the creation story in the east. Isidore of Seville, in his *De Natura Rerum*, noted, in a metaphor based on the world's anthropomorphised body, that "the world's head and so to speak its face, is the eastern region."[7]

Cosmography, geography, and the direction faced during prayer had long been related, and the cardinal points had symbolic as well as geographic significance. The Old Testament contains a number of injunctions that men should pray towards the east because God is to be found there. In Ezekiel 43:2 we learn that "the glory of the God of Israel came from way of the east." And indeed, the

---

3 Paulus of Venice, "Prologue," in *Satyrica Historia*, Vatican Library, MS Lat (1960), fol. 13.
4 John B. Friedman, "Cultural Conflicts in Medieval World Maps," in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 95.
5 Stuart B. Schwartz, "Introduction," in Schwartz, p. 11.
6 Mary M. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World, Exotic European Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 53
7 Isidore de Seville, *Traité de la Nature*, ed. Jacques Fontaine (Bordeaux: Féret et Fils, 1960) IX.3, p. 207.

ancient Hebrew word KEDMA (Misrah) indicating the easterly direction also indicates that which is "in front of the man." In the Apostolic Constitutions we read: "Let us rise up […] and looking towards the east […] pray to God eastward, who ascended up to the heaven of heavens to the east."[8]

Already in early Christian churches the altar, and with it the congregation, was oriented toward the east, and thus towards Paradise. The liturgical centre of the church and the centres of cartographic history are the same, thus maps illustrate how the church gives meaning to history as well as to space and time.

Traditionally, west was the direction Christ was believed to have faced at his passion and thus it was thought that newly baptised converts by that action symbolically looked towards the west, where the sun sets, renouncing the ruler of darkness. Lactantius in *The Divine Institutions* contrasted east and west: God rose out of the east and flourished, because He Himself was the source of light, whereas the west brings darkness, and makes people die and sin.[9]

East was also the direction from which salvation came, an idea that was made official by the Council of Nicaea. The salvation of the world, according to Halbwachs, gains its "memory formation" through the sacrificial death of the incorporated God. The remembrance of Jesus is reorganised and reinterpreted from the direction of the crucifixion and the resurrection, and this is the point where Jerusalem, the *locus sanctus* is reconstructed in a new system of localisation.

The orientation towards the Orient rhetoricises the territory in the form first of pilgrimages, then in the movement of the Crusades, which has recently also been labelled colonisation.[10] The Holy Land was the localisation of memory the European pilgrims invented while journeying. "The making of the Holy Land, Halbwachs contended, was a colonisation of culture as well as of the terrain" writes Patrick H. Hutton in *History as an Art of Memory*.[11] The eyewitness narrator in a religion, where the sacred territory is emphatically elsewhere, not only reconstructs the past through memory, but is also a witness of the "other world."

The medieval "*T–O mappae mundi*" (so called because of the T-shaped arrangement of the three known continents Asia, Europe, and Africa in a rounded form with Jerusalem in the middle) is oriented towards the east. On the best-preserved Hereford map (from the thirteenth century), above the inhabited world in a triangular arrangement is the Last Judgement scene with the Maiestas Domini familiar from the tympanums of medieval cathedrals.[12] There is a definite

---

8 *The Apostolic Constitutions in the Ante-Nicene Fathers*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York, 1907), VII. Book II, sec. Vii, p. 421.

9 *Lactantii Divinarum Institutionum Libri VII*, Book II, c 10, PL 6, p. 507.

10 Peter Feldbauer, Gottfried Liedl, John Morrissey, *Mediterraner Kolonialismus: Expansion und Kulturaustausch im Mittelalter* (Essen: Magnus-Verlag, 2005).

11 Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993), p. 81.

12 Meryl Jancey, *Mappa Mundi, the map of the world at Hereford Cathedral* (Hereford: Hereford Cathedral Enterprises, 1995).

visual axis between the Last Judgement scene and Jerusalem, the place of the Crucifixion, and the Redemption located in the middle of the map. This axis runs through the description of Paradise, formed as a small circle inside the circle of the world. Circles create a further reference structure within the picture: the world itself is a large circle, Jerusalem is the middle circle, and Eden is a small circle roughly of the size of Jerusalem. Thus the salvation story is formally encoded in two circles inside a third one, which is the World itself. The salvation story from the Original Sin to the Crucifixion is arranged along an invisible axis: both events are located in the inhabited world while the Last Judgement scene – structurally and theologically also arranged along this axis above – is outside the inhabited world. The Divine Power is in the east of the map.

The idea that Paradise is topographically located on this earth, far away in the east was popular in the Middle Ages and initiated several personal journeys. The legend of Prester John well-known from Mandeville's *Travels* is an example of this tradition.

On the Beatus map dating from 1086 in the cathedral of Burgo d'Osma there is a radical separation of the known, Christian world and the dubious far-off places. In the portion of the map representing the known world there are names of peoples and geographical features of the earth's surface, such as mountains and rivers, while the antipodal region contains nothing but western descriptions that fill the void.

On the Hereford map, the "Cultural Other" the grotesquely fabulous monsters, also called Plinian races (headless or big-eared, etc.), are listed on the margin, whereas some others, like the troglodytes, the cynocephali, the Sciapodes, and most importantly, the cannibals, this basic European stereotype, are situated inland.

The visual representation of this people, called Essedenes, who were supposed to eat the flesh of their dead parents can be interpreted backwards from early modern versions of the cannibal scene. The arrangement of the figures, and the striking image of humans eating other humans' limbs definitely prefigures later cannibal scenes. The inland situation of the anthropophagi in opposition to the marginal arrangement of the Plinian monstrous races might carry a meaning of the topos's more inward nature, as a representation of the internal Other.

Many of the elements of the medieval world maps were inherited by the age of the great discoveries: they were taken for granted, and the stereotypes lived on well after actual personal contacts with the indigenous people. Two of the main preconceptions, i.e. that Paradise is to be found topographically in Asia, and that western man could at any time be eaten by the native cannibals merged in Columbus's mind creating a contradictory, but coherent construction.

Armed with Mandeville's travel book and mindful of the *mappa mundi* tradition Columbus was convinced that the place he reached, which he thought of as the eastern coast of Asia, must be Paradise. "These lands," he wrote, are those

"in which I am assured in my heart that the Earthly Paradise is".[13] Later he adds "that the sacred theologians and learned philosophers were right in saying that the earthly paradise is at the end of the East, because it is a very temperate place, so those lands, which we have now discovered, are […] the end of the East."[14]

This quotation proves that it is not only the topographical evidence that leads one to look upon the place as Paradise, but also the temperate climate. Elsewhere too, his description abounds in references to Eden. The most notably unusual focus of attention of his journal is on the natural beauty of the places he visits. Some descriptions turn into a rambling topographical fiction that tends to provide the Caribbean islands with features from the Pastoral genre, or the descriptions of Eden rather than to the actual place (he mentions nightingales, spices, and harmony).

> All these islands are very beautiful and distinguished by various shapes, accessible, full of great diversity of trees touching the stars, which I believe are never bare of leaves. For I saw them as flourishing and adorned as they usually are in Spain in the month of May, some blossoming, some bearing fruit, some in other states thrived according to their nature. The nightingale chattered, and other sparrows, various and innumerable, in the month of November where I myself went strolling among them.[15]

Columbus is usually credited with discovering not only America, but also cannibals. During the first month in the Caribbean, Columbus reports that the native inhabitants of Cuba speak of a land to the east called Bohio, which, they say

> is very large and has people there with one eye in the forehead, as well as others they call cannibals, of whom they show great fear. When they saw I was taking that course, they were too afraid to talk. They say that the cannibals eat people and are well armed. […]
> Moreover, he understood that, […] far from here, there were one-eyed men, and others, with snouts of dogs, who ate men, and that as soon as one was taken they cut his throat and drank his blood and cut off his genitals.[16]

The contradiction that Cannibals may inhabit the earthly paradise is of course not unique to Columbus, but a cultural mixture of two traditions concerning the East: the marvellous and the fearful. The cannibal scene is described on

---

[13] Cecil Jane, ed. and trans., *Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1960), vol. 1., p. 64.

[14] Jane, vol. 1., p. 82.

[15] Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, ed. and trans., *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), pp. 167–170.

[16] Dunn and Kelley, pp. 167–170.

the Hereford map, but contrary to the Plinian fabulous creatures, here they are placed not on the margin but inland, in Asia.

The invention of the cannibal is a crucial move in European writing, because the establishment of the triadic relationship it made possible enables the European observer to enter into a series of antagonisms and identifications with non-Europeans. That move is situated on the centre stage of the colonial theatre, creating, or rather strengthening, the cannibalistic potential of the East. "The cruel savagery of the 'cannibales' was at the centre of the European imagination which tried to justify the violent colonial enterprise".[17] In a chivalric value system and code "the Caribs were demonised into an equivalent of the animal opponents of the knights".[18]

For Columbus and his contemporaries the dog-headed Plinian monster, the *cynocephalus*, seemed to be the legendary ancestor of the newly discovered cannibal, the modern myth answering that of antiquity. On the Hereford map they are even physically close to each other. This recognition was mingled with an understandable feeling of alarm as if the creatures of a long-suppressed nightmare were to come into being. The description of cannibals as dog-headed made its way into English accounts as well. In his oral testimony to Richard Hakluyt, the sailor David Ingram claims to have met cannibals.[19]

Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is referred to as the "puppy headed monster", thus the popular lore of the anthropophagus but potentially servile *cynocephalus* is evoked here as well. According to M. A. Skura, "Caliban's figure […] reveals man's timeless tendency to demonize 'strangers'". She adds that "*The Tempest* itself not only displays prejudice but fosters and even 'enacts' colonialism by mystifying or justifying Prospero's power over Caliban."[20]

The expectation to find monstrous races in the New World lived on well into the period of scientific geography. As Greenblatt put it: "Europeans had, for centuries, rehearsed their encounter with the peoples of the New World, acting out, in their response to the legendary Wild Man and others, their mingled admiration and revulsion, longing and hatred."[21]

The cannibal was prefigured by the European experience of the internal other: the hairy witches, heretics, etc. The internal other was, by means of the

[17] Ted Motohashi, "The Discourse of Cannibalism in Early Modern Travel Writing," in *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, ed. Steve Clark (London: Zed, 1999), p. 86.

[18] Peter Hulme, "Tales of distinction: European ethnography and the Caribbean," in Schwartz, p. 17

[19] Richard Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (London, 1584).

[20] M. A. Skura, "Discourse and the Individual: The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*," in: *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader*, ed. Peter Childs (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 77.

[21] Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 126.

eastern tradition of the Plinian races, projected on the newly found lands. We can conclude that the discourse about America appropriated more than one race out of Europe's store of imagination of monsters.

The cannibal gained a place at the centre of the colonial experience. Columbus's dilemma that the cannibals are the inhabitants of the earthly Paradise, which feeds even into the *noble savage* theory, is itself deeply rooted in medieval tradition. The east as the territory of the abnormal, of dubious and frightening monstrosities, and as the place of marvels, always had a double meaning in the west. Not only was the Christian belief considering the location of the Garden of Eden in the east pregnant with this meaning, but also the closely related legends about the country of Prester John and the Alexander legend.

The marvellous eastern tradition could in turn very easily mingle with the classical Pastoral tradition. It is this longing and hatred Greenblatt mentions that could bring together the pastoral image with the tradition of monstrous savages, and condense them into one complex image of the noble savage (the term itself was first used by Dryden in his *Conquest of Granada* of 1672).

The utterly strange was translated into to what might be termed the familiarly strange. In the image of the noble cannibal the vegetarian Golden Age was contrasted to and mixed with monstrous table manners. Montaigne's essay "On Cannibals" is considered the *locus classicus*, concerning nostalgic cannibalism, where the honourable cannibal appears as the extreme case of the noble savage. "So we may call these people barbarians, in respect to these rules of reason, but not in respect to ourselves, who surpass them in every kind of barbarity."[22] Without going into the historicity of the concept we can state that Montaigne is looked upon as a precursor to the development of later ideologies of cultural relativism, opening up the topic to the fields of cultural anthropology and ethnology.

The archaeology of Europe, by way of interposed America, was intended less to support the idea of a continuous progression from one era to another, than that of a fundamental rupture between two ages: those before and after the Christian revelation. The Indians had not been admitted to the era of grace. Their separation from truth was expressed in a very concrete manner, by their manifest poverty and barbarity. Nudity and cannibalism, the gendering and the devouring of the body were the two most tangible signs. Sometimes the two tropes come together in texts as well.

For example, in Guillaume le Testu's *Cosmographie Universelle* we read: "Those who live upstream near the equator are evil and vicious; they eat human flesh [...] all the said savages, both upstream and down, go naked."[23] Not only the

---

[22] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 156.

[23] Guillaume le Testu, *Cosmographie Universelle* (Bibliotheque nationale Paris, 1556), qtd. in *Handbook to Life in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Sandra Sider (New York: Facts on File, 2005), p. 225.

naked body, but also the cannibal body served for theological speculation and
debate. In general terms, the colonial encounter with indigenous bodies in all
forms induced obsessive speculation about the boundaries of the human and the
non-human or savage, and the notion of monstrous and abnormal.

However, there was an ambivalence concerning the cannibalistic in European
traditions, especially as a mode of mystical experience. The writings of Martin
Luther were perilously provocative in their interest in the "flesh" of Christ. The
potentially sensual nature of Eucharistic cannibalism, the consumption of the
divine food, persisted in European traditions. The practice of ritual cannibal-
ism became the colonial mirror of the theological dispute over the meaning of
the Eucharist.

The Plinian creatures on the Hereford map are represented naked, on the one
hand to better demonstrate their monstrosity, and on the other hand possibly
to prove their prelapsarian naturalism and the fact that they are outcasts, dislo-
cated from the Salvation story. Marginalised concretely by being located on the
margins of the inhabited world their fleshly being is made exotic. The Christian
Eden and the classical pastoral tradition are partially responsible for the interest
in the exotic. The difference seems to lie in the supposedly neutral, allegedly
scientific and innocent eye of the observer. But is it innocent? Pagden claims
that "[t]he observers of anything ultimately unfamiliar for which there exist few
readily available antecedents had to be able to classify before they could properly
see, and in order to classify in any meaningful sense they had no alternative but
to appeal to a system that was already in use".[24]

More than anything else, it was anthropology that contributed to the intellec-
tual justification of the colonial enterprise. The Cultural Other – anybody whose
appearance or habits differ from one's own – is determined by a marginalisation
process through which people are perceived as such. These processes are at the
same time sufficiently mythic to insulate the holders of power: western myth-
making has always been characteristic of the colonial encounter, it serves, to use
the Saidian term, to oriantalise, that is to push something or someone eastward.[25]

The location and representation of the structural distinctions requires margins
and centres.[26] In Anthony Fothergill's words: "[d]efinitions tend to proceed by
negation. 'They' is not 'us'. The means by which we come to know the unknown
other will always be determined by our own terms of reference, our own ho-
rizons of understanding. Even the absolutely alien is our alien, the negation of

[24] Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man. The American Indian and the origins of comparative
      ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 124.
[25] Friedman, p. 66
[26] Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham and London:
      Duke University Press, 1996), p. 36

our normality. In this sense any writing of the Other, whether it acknowledges or not, is a writing from within, a reinscribing, via negation, of the writer."[27]

On maps, the *nostra zona habitabilis*, the *terra cognita*, clearly circumscribes and insulates the location of power and by marginalising the points of meetings, mutual interpretations, implicit understandings and misunderstandings, it creates the space of intercultural communication, signifying the frontiers, the contact zones, even visual contact zones. The oriental body is made different; it is, as Homi K. Bhaba says *othered*.[28] The alien is seen and shown as different, and by its nature also as the same, according to Greenblatt, they are made *others and brothers*.[29]

Marginalisation will necessarily create standardised images of people who signify territories: bodies are specialised and spatialised. Their "basic essence" and the territory they "belong to" are made to signify the same. Marginalisation is central to what we mean by the exotic. We could say that the exotic is the discourse of the margin effectively manufacturing otherness by domesticating it and by a surrender to its immanent mysteries.

Exoticism might be described as a semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity. The relation between them may be decoded to serve political needs and ends. The exotic is also uncanny: "but the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation [...]. At some level the feeling of the uncanny may be bound up with the most extreme nostalgia or 'homesickness', in other words the compulsion to return to an inorganic state".[30]

The exotic functions dialectically as a symbolic system domesticating the stranger, the culturally different; it is a control mechanism of cultural translation and a highly effective instrument of colonial power. "The wonder beheld in exotic peoples may precede their violent subjugation."[31] "[T]hose terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy are the signal points of identification and alienation, fear and desire in colonial texts [...]. [They are created] by affixing the unfamiliar to something established, in a form that is repetitious and vacillates between delight and fear".[32]

The exotic rhetoric makes a fetish of otherness and masks, by a symbolic identification, the inequality of power relations without which the discourse could not function. The exotic fosters the construction of cultural values by which the

---

[27] Anthony Fothergill, "Of Conrad, cannibals and kin," in *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous Peoples*, ed. Mick Gidley (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992), p. 198

[28] Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 194.

[29] Greenblatt, p. 42

[30] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). pp. 1–2.

[31] Greenblatt, p. 192

[32] Bhaba, p. 76.

pain of expansion is converted into spectacle. Resituating conventional exoticist paradigms (the pastoral, prelapsarian happiness) enables a dislocation and transplantation of the utterly alien into a domestic space and time.

However, the exotic may, in turn, reaffirm cultural difference, the culturally othered body. Potentially totalising abstractions risk reinforcing the very otherness that they wish to call into question. Keeping the margins exotic is an attempt to forestall that.

The aestheticism of diversity is manipulated for the purpose of channelling difference into areas where it can be attractively packaged and safely contained. The exotic is a cultural translation through which the marginalised other can be apprehended and described in familiar terms, but it is perhaps not a cross-fertilisation moving between two cultural registers, but rather the superimposition of the dominant way of seeing, speaking and thinking onto marginalised persons. It is the discourse of marginality, immediately local, but potentially global, the discourse of knowledge and ignorance. To understand the discourse does not necessarily mean to understand the event, but on the other hand "events, weapons, and even sickness are always set in cultural contexts and are intimately bound up with discourse".[33]

The visual and textual tradition circumscribes and insulates the point to relate to the powerful self. The authoritative texts and representations of exploration and expansion confuse new American phenomena with known European ones: "existing things [were found] anew, and […] once defined as new, they [served as] the *icons of identity*."[34]

To locate or even to praise the other is not perhaps possible without the privileging of the self, which raises the question of whether it is possible to account for cultural difference without at the same time mystifying it.

[33] Schwartz, p. 7.
[34] Frederick E. Hoxie, "Discovering America: An Introduction," *The Journal of American History* 79.3 (1992), p. 835.

ANDREA VELICH

The cemetery as a space of remembering and forgetting

The pollution of burial grounds in England and Hungary

According to the guiding principle of Human Rights and by the Hungarian civil law (cf. Cemeteries and Burial Services Act 1999 c. 43) as well as by common sense and moral everyone has the right to be decently buried and to have one's name and memory kept up. We might, then, be taken aback when confronted with the growing discrepancies today between basic human rights and social reality concerning our dead ancestors and the state of our cemeteries. We might also wonder about the reasons for growing cemetery "pollution" including vandalism both in Hungary and Europe at large, and for our abandoned cemeteries. In this paper, as an introduction to a research project on English and Hungarian cemeteries, I would like to address the issue of pollution, what it meant in the Middle Ages and what it is today; to examine possible explanations for it and call attention to the role cemeteries and graves play in national heritage and cultural memory.

We are all certain to die one day, but attitudes to death, dying, burials and cemeteries vary a lot, not only in different ages, religions and cultures, but also according to social, political and economic-financial considerations. While at present there is a growing interest in Western Europe and in the USA in protecting cemeteries as part of the national heritage and cultural memory (though sadly vandalism is also growing all over Europe and worldwide), in Hungary this field is neglected. Some of the cemeteries in Hungary are abandoned and decaying, often vandalised and not protected (except for random and sporadic, mostly civilian and local attempts to preserve them). However, in Britain by the 1990s a renewed interest emerged to stop the decline of cemeteries, mostly due to local councils, volunteers, charities and local neighbourhoods. Moreover, there is a growing concern for "green burial" as part of the environmental movement. Besides American, British and other EU movements advocating cemetery protection, the *Lo Tishkach*, the European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative (established in 2006) is also a positive example. This initiative, identified by the Hebrew phrase "Lo Tishkach" ("do not forget"), is establishing a comprehensive publicly accessible database of all Jewish burial grounds in Europe and a compendium of the different national and international laws and practices. Jewish tradition still

regards burial grounds as sacred sites which must never be disturbed.[1] This could also set an example for protecting other Christian, non-Christian or secular national cemeteries as part of our cultural heritage and memory.

This writer is inclined to concur with the Hungarian thanatologist, folklorist and anthropologist Ernő Kunt that cemeteries can be decoded as the model of the structure and order of society.[2] The study of thanatology, "death culture" and cemeteries can reveal a lot about a society. Let us begin facing contemporary social reality with some sad facts concerning cemetery vandalism both in Hungary and in Europe from the recent past. One of the most recent acts of vandalism while this essay was being written dates from 28 February 2011, when tombs were vandalised in the Hungarian cemetery of Jászkisér. Trees in the cemetery were cut down using tombs as workbenches.[3] A month earlier, on 29 January 2011 three teenagers (aged 14–15) vandalised the graves of the Marcali Jewish Cemetery to "demonstrate their strength". They claimed they had ruined the 75 graves "on the spur of the moment" causing an estimated HUF 1.5 million financial damage not to mention more important (cultural, emotional, social etc.) harm.[4]

These examples in Hungary are not exceptional, however. Similar shocking incidents of cemetery crime and vandalism are on the increase in Europe. A Jewish cemetery was vandalised in Strasbourg on Holocaust Remembrance Day last January. There was extensive damage done to a number of tombs in the Cronenbourg cemetery. In addition to the swastikas drawn on eighteen gravestones, the words "Jews out" were written on one of the tombs. Another thirteen tombs were overturned, a horrible sight, which probably stems from rising anti-Semitism in Europe.[5]

Also, youths on motorbikes vandalised 73 German grave memorials in a First World War cemetery in France in the summer of 2010. Drunken youths broke and uprooted 72 grave crosses and damaged one Jewish stele at the cemetery in

---

[1] The *Lo Tishkach* was established for the effective and lasting preservation and protection of Jewish cemeteries and mass graves throughout the European continent. A key aim of the project is to engage young Europeans, to bring Europe's history alive, to encourage reflection on the values that are important for responsible citizenship and mutual respect, to give a valuable insight into Jewish culture and to mobilise young people to care for our common heritage. In Hungary much is owed to Alaine Polcz who has done a great deal in the field of thanatology as well as to Ernő Kunt. Concerning the Jewish heritage of Budapest cf. Kinga Frojimovics – Géza Komoróczy, *Jewish Budapest: monuments, rites, history* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999).

[2] Ernő Kunt, *A halál tükrében* [In the Mirror of Death] (Budapest: Magvető, 1981), p. 10.

[3] <http://www.hirado.hu/Hirek/2011/02/28/13/Brutalis_sirrongalas_kepekkel_.aspx>. Retrieved on 1 March 2011.

[4] <http://www.hirado.hu/Hirek/2011/01/29/13/Harom_tizeneves_rongalta_meg_a_marcali_zsidotemeto_siremlekeit.aspx>. Retrieved on 1 March, 2011.

[5] David Sophrin, "Jewish cemetery vandalized in strasbourg on holocaust remembrance day", *Impunity Watch Law Journal*, 31 January, 2010. <http://impunitywatch.com/?p=3335>. Retrieved on 1 March 2011.

Laon (a seat of army high command and a strategic outpost for German forces during the First World War) in the Picardy region by hurtling around the grave-yard on motorbikes.[6] The European Commission equally condemned vandal-ism and the extensive damage inflicted on Panagia Greek Orthodox Cemetery in Imvros, in October 2010. It was not the first time: according to Apostolos Papapostolou similar incidents had occurred in other cemeteries of the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey.[7] Similarly, vandals destroyed 74 graves in a Catholic cemetery in the western Belarusian city of Berastse on 27 August 2010. The cemetery had never been vandalised before and had been designated a his-toric site by the Belarusian government, with the oldest graves dating from 1836.[8]

Vandalism, however, does not only affect Jewish and Christian graves; Mus-lim graves are also targeted. The graves of as many as 500 Muslim war veterans have been vandalised in northern France (at France's biggest military graveyard near Arras in the north–east) with swastikas and letters spelling out anti–Islamic slogans. The attack took place on the eve of Islam's Eid al-Adha festival, when Muslims visit the graves of their loved ones. This was the third time that the Muslim sector of the Notre Dame de Lorette cemetery has been attacked.[9]

According to *The Telegraph* on 5 March 2011, a dozen British First World War graves were vandalised with swastikas and SS runes in northern France, in an act described as an "insult to the memory" of the fallen soldiers. Vandals covered twelve graves and a monument in pink swastikas, SS insignia and other graffiti in the cemetery of Loos–en–Gohelle (near the towns of Arras and Lille), containing more than 2300 tombs, mostly British, which hold the remains of British and Canadian soldiers fallen in an October 1915 battle there.[10]

I also found a shocking example of a different type of vandalism and disrespect toward the dead and cemeteries. A vanload of dangerous asbestos was dumped at the gates of a Hampshire cemetery in October 2010. The fly-tippers left piles of rubbish, bin bags and roofing near the graves at West End according to the *Southern Daily Echo* of October 25 2010. And sadly this is not the end of the list of instances of disrespect and vandalism all over the world, including Hungary.[11] In my paper therefore I shall look into the different functions of funerals and cem-eteries and the different ways of polluting cemeteries from the Middle Ages till today. I shall also try to examine the reasons for the change of cultural and social

---

[6] <http://www.dw–world.de/dw/article/0,,5936810,00.html>. Retrieved on 1 March 2011.

[7] <http://eu.greekreporter.com/2010/12/21/ec-condemns-vandalism-at-panagia-greek-or-thodox-cemetery-imvros>. Retrieved on 1 March 2011.

[8] <http://www.rferl.org/content/Catholic_Cemetery_Vandalized_In_Belarus_/2139536.html>. Retrieved on 1 March 2011.

[9] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7771491.html>. Retrieved on 1 March 2011.

[10] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/7821475/Sarkozy-apologis-es-for-vandalism-in-British-war-cemetery.html> Retrieved on 1 March 2011.

[11] <http://asbestosindustrynews.co.uk/2010/10/asbestos-waste-asbestos-dumped-at-west-end-cemetery-by-fly-tippers>. Retrieved on 1 March 2011.

attitudes toward dying, the dead and cemeteries resulting in abandoned – and even vandalised – cemeteries. I think this might help to raise further awareness of the size of the problem as well as of our responsibility and might boost some action to protect cemeteries.

In the Middle Ages death, and therefore cemeteries, were in the focus of people's attention because of their traditional closed communities, short life-expectancy, living in or close to nature, threatened by epidemics, famine, and because of other religious, social and economic reasons. In the words of Johan Huizinga: "No other age has so forcefully and continuously impressed the idea of death on the whole population as did the century, in which the call of the *memento mori* echoes throughout the whole life. There was a constant preoccupation with death. It did not deal with the sadness over the loss of those beloved, but rather with regret about one's own approaching death, which can be seen only as misfortune and terror."[12] R. S. Wieck, however, argues that death in the Middle Ages was not something people feared; it was something they hoped for.[13] The ideal end of one's life was death attended by all that the Church, one's family and friends could give: the sacraments, proper burial and prayer.

Neither were cemeteries necessarily daunting places in the Middle Ages: they could serve as places for socialising. According to the lexicographer Charles du Cange (1610–88) quoted by Philippe Aries, the word "cemetery" did not always denote the place of burial – it could also mean a place of asylum, a kind of sanctuary. People became accustomed to meeting within this asylum as did the Romans in the forum or the Mediterraneans on the Plaza Major to carry on business, to dance and gamble or just to be together. Although the Council of Rouen in 1215 forbade dancing in cemeteries or in churches under pain of excommunication, an injunction repeated in 1405 forbidding dancing, carrying of arms, gambling etc., the cemetery still remained a popular meeting place. It was common property and people took advantage of it for different purposes.[14]

The consecration of the cemetery was not only a precondition of its creation but also profitable for the church.[15] However, a distinction should be drawn be-

---

12 Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), p. 43.

13 R. S. Wieck, "The Death Desired: Book of Hours and the Medieval Funeral," in *Death and dying in the Middle Ages*, eds. E. E. DuBruck and B. I. Gusick (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 342. Huizinga saw the appearance of the cadaver tomb in the fifteenth century also as proof of his thesis about the moral crisis during "the waning of the Middle Ages".

14 Philippe Aries, *Western attitudes toward death* (London: John Hopkins Press, 1974), p. 23.

15 Some Italian woodcuts from the 1520s show the process: there should be a cross at each corner of the cemetery and one in the middle. Before each of the crosses, which appear to be over head-height, were lit three candles. The bishop made his way round the churchyard, and sprinkled holy water on to the cross and then censed it. He, then, using a ladder in the illustration, placed three lit candles on top of each cross. Cf. W.E. Riley, *St Olave's Southwark* (London: London County Council, 1918), p. 15.

tween the possible profit the clergy could make from cemeteries and burials and the social and psychological benefit of sacred places and sanctuaries for the community. The Synod of Prague (1389) ordered a cross to be set up in each cemetery, and for the cemetery to be enclosed (walls to be erected against animals). All entertainment and profit making inside the cemetery had to be excluded, no orchards could be planted, and the graves and monuments had to reflect religion.[16] Ágost Miskolczy states that in Hungary even in 1901 it was still banned by law to take prams into the cemetery, or to set up indecent or distorted grave monuments, and the upkeeper of the cemetery was to keep the graves and monuments in good condition.[17] Ernő Kunt collected different warnings, bans and exhortations from peasant societies concerning behaviour in cemeteries to prevent infections or to show respect for the dead. People, for example, should take a bath before going to a cemetery, and clean their hands on return; children were banned from cemeteries, and according to a superstition one should not eat in cemeteries as one's teeth would start rotting. Nor could flowers be taken home from cemeteries.[18]

According to canon law, cemeteries, like churches, could be "polluted" by crime or by burying the outcast or non-believers.[19] In England the Statutes of Salisbury of 1217 and of 1219 listed those who should not receive burial along with the Eucharist, confession or other sacraments. These included usurers, excommunicated or indicted members and strangers to the parish, as well as the concubines of clergy according to the Statutes of Winchester of 1224. The Statute of London of 1245 and of 1259 included denial of burial of those who married illegally. Those killed in a tournament or duel could not be buried in a church or churchyard either, nor could they be given the extreme unction. Canon law forbade normal burials and funerals for suicides except for madmen.[20]

Pollution meant that no one could be buried there until the pollution had been spiritually removed by reconciliation. Reconsecration thus meant further profit for the clergy as a formal ceremony had to be performed if the cemetery had been polluted by bloodshed or some other offence. In this case the archbishop

---

[16] Ágost Miskolczy, "Temető és vandalizmus," [Cemetery and Vandalism] in *Városi Szemle* (Budapest, 1934), p. 9.

[17] Miskolczy, p. 13.

[18] Ernő Kunt, *Az utolsó átváltozás. A magyar parasztság halálképe* [The last transition. How the Hungarian peasants viewed death] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1978), p. 230. Two years ago on All Hallows Day in the Budapest Farkasréti Cemetery pretzels and sweets were sold for visitors, while equally sadly, flowers are regularly stolen from graves and resold, "recycled" at the cemetery gates, thus the conclusion might well be drawn that we have strayed rather far from these traditional beliefs.

[19] Miskolczy, p. 10. Cf. Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066–1550* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 104.

[20] Cf. the *Statutes of Salisbury, 1217–19,* <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/tnhc15n.htm>, the *Statutes of Winchester, 1224.* <www.medievalists.net/…/the-custom-of-the-english-church-parish-church- maintenance-in-england-before-1300>, the *Statute of London, 1245, 1259,* <www.british-history.ac.uk/place.aspx?gid=83…1.>. Retrieved on 15 March 2011.

blessed the water for sprinkling in a tent which was fixed to the ash-tree at the churchyard gate, facing towards the archbishop's manor. The archbishop was paid 40 shillings, the marshal 5 shillings and the clerk 2 shillings. After bloodshed or pollution it was possible for cemeteries to remain unreconciled for one or two years.[21] Unlike today, a polluted churchyard was a serious matter in the Middle Ages, as it disrupted the life of the community and also meant that the church lost burial and funeral fees. Normally it was required that public penance should be performed by the perpetrator, which could not be bought off with money payment. The attacker may have been expected to pay the reconciliation fees: e.g. in 1320 William of Colburn asked absolution for the pollution of the churchyard by violent assault on John Cresse. As he had no money, he swore on the Gospel that when he came into a fortune, he would pay 3 shillings by instalments.[22]

In the Middle Ages the process of socialisation took place more rapidly than today. However, socialisation did not separate man from nature. Familiarity with death is a form of accepting the order of nature. Death cannot be avoided by any civilisation, though it can be "tamed" in the words of Philippe Aries.[23] Although at the end of the seventeenth century signs of intolerance toward the dead began to appear, the fact remains that for more than a thousand years people had been perfectly adapted to this coexistence of the living and the dead. The spectacle of the dead was as natural for people as socialisation.[24] After the eighteenth-century population boom there was more concern for the one to remain than for the one to die, and by the nineteenth century there was growing concern of overpopulation and of overcrowded cemeteries. The first outside-the-wall cemetery in London opened in Bloomsbury in 1714, due to the growing population pressure.

While in the Middle Ages it was important for everyone to inform and be informed of somebody's death, today far less importance is ascribed to these facts. Moreover, in the Middle Ages burial was a genuine social concern, and although death was theoretically the great "social leveller", burials followed strict social hierarchy, mostly in the form of so-called concentric circles: important people were buried either in the church or the churchyard (the closer to the centre of the church or the high altar one was buried, the more prestigious it was), while "the outcast" were not allowed into these inner circles, mostly not even into consecrated cemeteries.[25] It was, then, an honour to be a member of a community and this honour carried with it the right to be buried inside the parish (community) church or in the local cemetery; likewise it was a matter of shame to be publicly humiliated in one's life (to be defamed or to put into stocks or on the pillory for example) as part of one's punishment or to be excluded from the

---

[21] Daniell, p. 90.
[22] Daniell, p. 89.
[23] Aries, pp. 28, 56.
[24] Aries, pp. 23–25.
[25] Daniell, p. 96., cf. Kunt, *Az utolsó átváltozás*, p. 234.

local community, the cemetery, when dead. Exclusion was applied precisely to preserve social coherence, to enhance respect for life and the community, and thus respect for death and the dead, too.[26]

In Hungary the practice of burying the dead around churches came to an end after the "waning of the Turkish crescent," in other words the end of the Turkish occupation of Hungary in the seventeenth century; only a few of the tombstones erected in earlier centuries survived sporadically as most of them were carved over and reused as construction material. Even in church crypts it is the relics of later periods that we can now find, for the simple reason that in Hungary medieval churches themselves had mostly been destroyed.[27]

The most desirable place for burial in the medieval church was the choir. Most people, however, were not buried either in the choir or beneath the church floor. Following the absolution, a second formal procession escorted the deceased from the church to the graveyard. The cortege was usually headed by the ordained (monks in habits were followed by priests in albs) including those that carried the coffin itself and included lay mourners, dressed in black. The lay mourners and the monks at the front bore torches. The cortege passed by the birthplace and the parish church of the dead, too. The route of procession was intended to symbolise the different stages of life from birth to the final resting place.[28] A procession – even the funeral procession or the cortege – was not only about escorting somebody to his final resting place, and expressing sympathy for the mourning relatives, it was also about mobilising and reuniting the community; while by obvious visual aids (colours, symbols, banners) and by other means of social identification (for example with identifiable robes worn by different representatives of ecclesiastical organisations like priests and parish confraternities or lay members of guilds and municipal authorities, etc.), it reinforced the social hierarchy.[29]

---

[26] Mervin James, "English Politics and the Concept of Honour 1485–1642," in *Past and Present*, 1978, pp. 22–23. A medieval church can be described as a series of concentric circles. The most holy area was the high altar at the east end, holiness lessening towards the west end and into the churchyard. All the holy areas were enclosed within the boundary of the cemetery. The concentric circles were not uniform and even within the cemetery some areas were more holy than others (and therefore more desirable). Within the church the east end of the church (nearest to the high altar) was the most desirable, followed by the rest of the chancel, and then the nave. In the nave there were further divisions: altars, the font, rood screen and votive candles, which also acted as local foci of holiness. In some of the larger churches a favoured location was to be buried near a saint's shrine. Daniel, p. 95.

[27] Lukács Csernus – Zsigmond Triff, *The Cemeteries of Budapest* (Budapest: City Hall, 1999), p. 4.

[28] Wieck, p. 439. Cf. Kunt, *Az utolsó átváltozás*, p. 165

[29] There were even mock funerals. For example, William III's 1690 Act, which encouraged the distilling of brandy and spirits to boost the grain market and benefit farmers resulted in excessive gin-drinking, and when Walpole in his 1736 Act restricted the sale of gin, there was a mock funeral procession for Queen Gin, and black drapes were hung over gin shops. Cf. Hogarth's engraving *Gin Lane in Holborn* (1752). Ed Glinert, *London's Dead. A guided tour of the capital's dead* (London: Collins, 2008) p. 52.

However, from the nineteenth century onwards, the population boom "lev-elled" people in garden cemeteries due to a lack of room in churches and their yards. There was growing pressure on municipal authorities in London as well as in Budapest (also in Paris, where the first garden cemetery, the Père Lachaise cemetery was opened in 1815) to open new cemeteries. The cholera epidemic of 1830–31 emphasised the urgency of opening new cemeteries, therefore in 1832 in England a bill encouraged establishing cemeteries outside the City of London. The cemeteries opened over the subsequent nine years include cemeteries in: Kensal Green (1832), West Norwood (1837), Highgate (1839), Brompton (1840), Nunhead (1840) and Tower Hamlets (1841). Today they are referred to as the "Magnificent Seven". Unlike churchyards, these cemeteries were independent of parish churches, being located outside the city, in the suburbs; they were built by joint-stock companies like the London Cemetery Company (founded in 1836) as private enterprises and were privately run. Growing population pressure and demand for new cemeteries were also reflected in the new cemetery architec-ture. In 1842 John Claudius Loudon published a book "On the Laying out of Cemeteries" advocating a grid-like structure as more efficient in use of space.[30]

The first district cemeteries in Budapest, similar to those of our time, emerged after the expulsion of the Turks from Hungary. Legislation regulating funeral practices in Hungary (that is, in the Habsburg Monarchy) was passed under Em-press Maria Theresa (1740–1780), ruling for example that crypts should contain a separate cell for each dead body and that the cell should be walled in as soon as the corpse was deposited in it. Those who died from a contagious disease were only allowed to be interred in separate graveyards designated as plague cemeter-ies, where the bodies were covered with lime, since public safety took priority over respect for the dead. Funerals inside city walls and in graveyards surround-ing houses were discontinued and plots in outlying areas were to be acquired, preferably out of public funds, for the establishments of new cemeteries. Records of tombs were to be kept by parish priests or ministers. The expiry of tomb plots was set at 30 years. In order to avoid premature burial, it was found expedient to enact that the physicians' quarter should be built by the cemeteries. Thirty years after the cemetery was filled to capacity, it was to be levelled to the ground.[31]

The most famous of the present-day Budapest cemeteries is the Kerepes Cemetery, one of the biggest national pantheons in Europe, where several Hun-garian notables are buried in ornate monuments. The Kerepes Cemetery was opened on 15 June 1847, but the first funeral took place in 1849, since the in-habitants of the city had an aversion to the huge new cemetery, which they also found difficult to get to. In 1861 the cemetery was surrounded by a high stone wall. Later a row of vaults was built alongside the wall, and were then sold at

---

30 Glinert, p. 75
31 Csernus – Triff, p. 4.

a good price. The vaults enjoy protection under the Historic Monuments Act. For the purposes of funeral services, a small chapel, a building still in use, was erected at the main gate in 1857. In 1885 the municipal authorities designated the Kerepes Cemetery as a burial ground of honour, where prominent figures of the Hungarian nation could be laid to rest. The first famous person to be buried in the Kerepes Cemetery was the Hungarian poet Mihály Vörösmarty in 1855. A monumental obelisk was erected for the martyrs of 1848–49, whose mortal remains were transferred here from the Józsefváros Cemetery in 1870.[32] The second most significant Budapest cemetery may be the Farkasrét Cemetery (opened in 1894), including the graves of further illustrious people. The largest cemetery in Budapest (and one of the largest ones in Europe) is the New Public Cemetery (Új Köztemető). It was opened in 1886 and was enlarged several times: in 1914, 1933, 1938, 1942 and in the 1950s. It includes the infamous Plot 301, the furthest point of the cemetery, where the "rebels" of the 1956 Revolution were also "buried" in an unmarked grave.[33]

It might seem shocking that not even in the Middle Ages were wills on burial respected. Sometimes relatives did not consider the will, one example of non-compliance can be the treatment of his father's body by the English king Edward II. While Edward I wanted his heart to be sent to Palestine and asked for his body to be boiled in a large cauldron, his flesh then to be buried and bones to be carried into battle against the Scots, Edward II simply buried his father in an unremarkable tomb in Westminster Abbey.[34] Nor were grave sites to last forever. "Forever" was initially taken to refer to a hundred years, then with growing population pressure it was reduced to 50 years, and by today 20 to 30 years. The bones of previous occupants were continually disturbed in the constant digging and redigging of cemeteries in the Middle Ages. However, once the flesh decomposed, the bones were collected and stored in charnel houses, open-air structures surrounding the churchyard. Interring a corpse in a coffin is basically a modern practice which became prevalent only at the end of the eighteenth century. In the Middle Ages, the coffin was a means of transporting the dead from home to the church and from the church to the cemetery. Burying the coffin would only have delayed the process of decomposition.[35]

---

[32] Cf. <http://www.wikipedia.org/…/List_of_cemeteries_in_Budapest>, for Kerepesi Cemetery: <http://www.btirt.hu/index.html>, for Farkasréti Cemetery: <http://www.agt.bme.hu/…/farkasreti/farkasreti.html>, for Kozma Street or New Public Cemetery: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kozma_Street_Cemetery>. Retrieved on 15 March 2011, see also Csernus – Triff, p. 10.

[33] The earliest Budapest Jewish cemetery dating from the thirteenth century is likely to have been in the vicinity of Laktanya utca. The last burial here took place around 1870 and the facility closed down in the 1920s. Now the main Jewish Cemetery of Budapest is also to be found next to the New Budapest Public Cemetery in Kozma Street. Csernus – Triff, pp. 3–7.

[34] Daniell, p. 88.

[35] Wieck, p. 440.

Despite their secular and entrepreneurial nature, garden cemeteries still remained sacred places until quite recently. When necessary, efforts were even made to solve problems of desecration, if, for example, a secular road had to be built across the cemetery. For instance, in the London Highgate cemetery, when dead bodies had to be taken across from the eastern part to the western part of the cemetery, bodies were taken through a tunnel. The tunnel was built for this special purpose, so that the dead person should not leave sacred ground and get desecrated.[36]

According to Michael Vovelle, a significant change occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century in the secularisation of death, and this is reflected in wills: the pious clauses, the choice of the tomb, the funding of masses disappeared, the will became what it is today, a legal document distributing heritage.[37] There is also an obvious change in the mourning of the dead, not only the rituals enacted but also the aims ascribed to it. From the end of the Middle Ages, mourning had a double purpose: it constrained the family to demonstrate sorrow (not necessarily felt), but also relieved the sincerely grieving survivor from the excesses of his grief, it imposed on him a certain type of social life, with visits not supposed to exceed a certain level. However, from the nineteenth century, mourning became hysterical (even sometimes reaching madness showing that in the nineteenth century people accepted death with much greater difficulty than in the past). And death was no longer considered "somebody's own death", but rather the death of *the other person*. This is the origin of the modern cult of tombs and cemeteries. A new idea was born: that society was composed of the dead and of the living. The cemetery once again gained a place in the city, a place both physical and moral. Those who no longer went to church still went to cemeteries to place flowers on tombs. The cult of memory spread from the individual to the social level. Cemeteries were intended to function both as parks and as museums, like St Paul's in London.[38]

It is true that while Victorian cemeteries were educational, contemplative and dignified places, post-war cemeteries put less emphasis on graves and memorials and thus became less attractive, and the growing population (London reaching 2.5 million by 1850 and 5 million by 1900) resulted in the decline of garden cemeteries.[39] At the beginning of the twentieth century, one could still see neo-Baroque funerals, people were still buried as if they were heroes. However, with the two world wars and the Holocaust in the twentieth century, on the one

---

[36]   Glinert, p. 83.

[37]   Michael Vovelle as quoted in Aries, *Western attitudes toward death*, p. 65.

[38]   There the tombs of great heroes would be venerated by the state. This was different from the dynastic chapels or crypts of Westminster, St Denis or the Escorial. Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), pp. 68-74. Today the cult of the dead is one of the forms or expressions of patriotism. Thus in France, for example, the anniversary of the victorious conclusion of the First World War is considered the feast-day of the dead soldiers. It is celebrated at the Monument to the Dead to be found in every French village, perpetuating the memory.

[39]   Peter Acroyd, *London: the Biography* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 341.

hand, their massacres and mass graves tended to scale down the significance of an individual's death, while on the other hand, with the decline of religion, in the profane world the idea of consecration and sanctity is losing or has almost lost significance.[40] In Hungary this tendency was further enhanced by the compulsory highly secular (indeed, anti–religious) ideology of the post–war Soviet era.

What can we see today? The human body is described as clinical waste and as such it cannot be disposed of except under the provision of the Control of Pollution Act of 1974 and the Environmental Pollution Act of 1990 of the UK. It is quite a long way we have gone from the original sanctity of life, respect of the dead and the idea of consecrated cemeteries.[41] In the Middle Ages the identity of the dying person was important. Today with cremation and rarer steles the identity of the deceased is secondary, and the lower numbers of relatives or mourners, loose social and community ties aid neither a sense of identification, nor the nurturing of the memory either. If there is no self–realisation and no real identity, funeral monuments lose their significance. There seems to be a self–contradiction in our inflated "self," love of life, compulsory happiness and our disregard for the dead, who thus lose the chance for a decent memory. It seems that the more selfish and individualistic we get, the less we are finally to be remembered. Because a funeral is a communal action, and because we are becoming increasingly isolated, it is no wonder that the future and the state of our tombs, or rather urns, are not very promising. Today the high and growing rate of cremations and cemetery vandalism instead of leaving our ancestors to "rest in peace" might simply be an indication of the size of the problem.[42]

Facing the end of life and life as a single opportunity may not necessarily be a clerical argument, it might just be common sense. The earlier we try to cope with our fear of death, the better. The more respect we try to express for our ancestors, the more sociable and socialised we are, and the more honourable members of society we might become. Therefore to raise death awareness and to protect our dead and our cemeteries is in our common interest.[43]

---

[40] Judit Lakner, *Halál a századfordulón* [Death at the turn of the century]. (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 1993), p. 14.

[41] Aries, *Western attitudes toward death*, p. 49. cf. *Pollution Act of 1974* <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1988/818/contents/made>, *Environmental Protection Act of 1990* <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/43/contents>. Retrieved on 12 September, 2010.

[42] Kunt, *Az utolsó átváltozás*, p. 84. A "fine death" is to be deserved by one serving the community and society well in one's life. Communities would have a vested interest in preparing their members for death and therefore it is their task to do so. It is also quite interesting that in parallel to forbidding death and suppressing "death culture", there is a greater emphasis laid on birth and youth

[43] I would like to express my gratitude for my colleagues at the Department of English Studies of ELTE University (especially for Professor Ágnes Péter, Dr. Bálint Gárdos, and Dr. Natália Pikli) for their efforts and patience in organising the conference and editing this volume. I would also like to say thanks to Professor Péter Dávidházi and Dr. Ákos Farkas for assisting my work with their books.

5. Psychology, aesthetics and the sociology of memory

RICHARD CRONIN

The 'history-ful' and the 'history-less'

Deep and shallow time in the Regency

Tom Nairn distinguishes between two kinds of people, the "history-ful" and the "history-less" and he has no doubt to which category the Scots belong: "there was nowhere else more […] 'history-ful' than the Scotland of Sir Walter Scott".[1] It seems an obvious enough point but it has been influentially challenged by Colin Kidd. For Kidd, Scott's novels mark a rupture with rather than a recovery of Scotland's past. Scott's novels enact in their plots the central tenets of the historical sociology that Scott had imbibed as a student at Edinburgh University. For Scott and his Enlightenment predecessors Scottish history could offer no explanation of their own modernity; that is, of their intellectual sophistication, their enjoyment of civil and political liberties, and their economic prosperity, social conditions that they could trace back no further than the Act of Union (1707) or perhaps to a still more recent point of origin in the defeat of the 1745 uprising. The earlier history of Scotland was picturesque, but it was not instrumental: it did not issue in the identity to which the Scots of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment wished to lay claim.[2] Walter Scott encapsulates the issue neatly enough in his very first novel, in which Fergus McIvor, whose Jacobitism is represented as an attempt to preserve in the eighteenth century an obsolete feudal social system, is fondly remembered by Edward Waverley, but remembered as he appears in a painting in which Fergus and Waverley are represented "in their Highland dress; the scene a wild, rocky, and mountainous pass, down which the clan were descending".[3] The canvas is proudly displayed but it has become a decorative object in which Waverley's appearance, it has become clear, is a kind of fancy dress. It does not modify the civic identity that he has chosen. Waverley had grown up despising his own father as a turncoat, because he had seen "no practicable road to independence save that of relying upon his own exertions" and had, in consequence abandoned the Jacobite loyalties that he had inherited

---

[1]   Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain* (London: Verso, 1981), p. 144.
[2]   See Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity 1689 – c. 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[3]   Walter Scott, *Waverley*, ed. Peter D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 361.

and "entered life as an avowed Whig, and friend of the Hanover succession,"[4] but by the novel's end Edward Waverley has emerged as his father's true son.

Kidd's case seems to me entirely persuasive, except for one thing. It does nothing to explain Scott's overwhelming popularity, and that popularity is surely the most important fact that needs to be accounted for. According to Kidd, Scott's purpose in writing his novels was "to complete the Union by educating the English nation in Scottish history".[5] It my have been so, but is seems impossible to credit that the English found the lesson so fascinating as to make sense of William St Clair's extraordinary calculation that "during the Romantic period, the 'Author of Waverley' sold more novels than all the other novelists of the time put together."[6] It may be that a more persuasive explanation is offered by Sarah Green in her mildly amusing burlesque of 1824, *Scotch Novel Reading*, in which she offers as Scott's representative admirer Alice Fennel, the Cockney daughter of a retired apothecary. Alice admires the novels so much that she wears tartan and affects to speak Scots in a Scottish accent even though she has little notion what the words she uses might mean. Alice Fennel is offered as the representative of the newly expanded readership that decisively changed the character of the literary market in the first decades of the nineteenth century by making possible a new literary phenomenon, the best-seller, of which according to Peter Garside the very first example is *Rob Roy,* Walter Scott's fifth novel published in 1818.[7] What, we need to ask, was the attraction of Walter Scott's novels for readers such as Alice Fennel, for readers who, to use Scott's own expression, "had no grandfathers"?[8]

The first point to make is that the novels are more sympathetic to the class to which Alice Fennel belongs than one might suppose. *Redgauntlet*, for example, has two heroes. Darsie Latimer may be directly descended from "Fitz-Aldin", "a valiant knight of Norman descent' and from "Alberick Redgauntlet", "the first of his house so termed," who was eminent in the baronial wars.[9] But then there is Allan Fairford whose father, like Scott's, was a writer to the signet, although Fairford himself has risen to be an advocate. Asked by a man he takes to be a disguised priest – he later turns out to be the Pretender – whether he could "count kindred" with "a family of birth and rank called Fairford", he admits that his

---

4   Scott, *Waverley*, p. 7.

5   Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, p. 266.

6   William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 221.

7   *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, gen. eds. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2, 45.

8   Walter Scott, *Saint Ronan's Well*, ed. Mark A. Weinstein (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 140.

9   Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet*, ed. G. A. M. Wood with David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 190. Subsequent page references are included in the text.

"father's industry has raised his family from a low and obscure situation," and that he has "no hereditary claim to distinction of any kind" (277). The two men are not separated by the social division: indeed Latimer feels for Fairford a love that "surpasses the love of woman" (113). It may be that the novels, by accommodating relationships like this, allow readers such as Alice Fennel to experience if only vicariously the flattering pleasure of just such an aristocratic embrace. Latimer lodged with Fairford's family when they were students together in Edinburgh, so that Fairford's father has become Latimer's foster-parent, and in the course of the novel Fairford in return is received into Latimer's family, a process that reaches its proper conclusion at the novel's conclusion when he marries Latimer's sister. Allan Fairford, a man who has no grandfather, wins entry into a family that can trace itself back to the Conquest. He supplements the shallow time, to which his father's low and obscure birth had confined him, with the deep time to which an aristocrat like Latimer can lay claim, and the novels, it may be, offered their first readers a similar gift. Their Scottishness was essential to this, because, as Hazlitt noted and as Scott himself often intimates, in Scotland time could be represented spatially, so that to ride north from Edinburgh or to ride south into the Borders was to travel through time, to travel backwards through the centuries.[10] In Scotland a novel set in the 1750s like *Redgauntlet* could still offer its reader an experience of deep time.

The same readership that valued Scott's novels so highly were also devoted readers of literary magazines, the number and the circulation of which rapidly increased in the period. The two tastes seem antithetical, because, as the magazines themselves often pointed out, they occupied a very shallow time indeed:

> Each of our monthly appearances may be considered as a death-blow to the one which preceded it. We lay no claims to posterity; or, if we look to a longer immortality than "one calendar month," it is through the friendly instrumentality of a good bookbinder.[11]

But the character of the new magazines was in reality more complex than this. The *New Monthly*, after it was re-launched in January 1821, under the editorship of Thomas Campbell, quickly established itself as the market leader. Campbell himself, despite the large salary that Colburn paid him, delegated most of his editorial duties to Cyrus Redding. His own principal contribution to the magazine, apart from occasional poems, was a series of "Lectures on Poetry" of surprising dullness: "The subject of Greek poetry may be treated

---

[10] Hazlitt speaks of "a hundred miles to the North of the 'Modern Athens' [that is, Edinburgh] or a century back". *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930–34), hereafter Howe, vol. XI, p. 62.

[11] 'The Literary World', *New Monthly Magazine* 10 (April 1824), 364–8, p. 368. The contributor was Sir Thomas Charles Morgan.

either by describing its most interesting authors in chronological succession, or by grouping them without regard to time according to their respective classes of composition."[12] It is hard to imagine any reader likely to find such observations enthralling. But Henry Colburn was an astute publisher who recognised that his magazine needed at once to recognize his readers' absorption in their own historical moment and their desire to be redeemed from it. Papers such as Campbell's "Lectures on Poetry", and the many other papers that the *New Monthly* included, on classical artefacts, the older literature of England and elsewhere, and similar topics, balanced the other material (designed to be bound in a separate volume) that was frankly topical; the list of bankrupts, the notices of new theatrical productions, the weather reports. The appeal of the new magazines to the new readership lay, I suspect, precisely in their dual character, a duality nicely indicated by Charles Lamb: "I would not dress a set of Magazines, for instance, in full suit. The dishabille, or half-binding (with Russia backs ever), is *our* costume."[13] Thomas Campbell was for Colburn an ideal choice because his occupation as newspaper editor was supplemented by the secure reputation that *The Pleasures of Hope* and *Gertrude of Wyoming* had earned him as one of Britain's major poets. He was the editor of a monthly magazine and yet could claim to have contributed to the permanent literature of the nation. As Byron warned the poet laureate, Robert Southey, "Scott, Rogers, Campbell, Moore, and Crabbe, will try / 'Gainst you the question with posterity." ("Dedication" to *Don Juan*, 55–6).

One contributor observed, with a disregard for the sensitivities of his metropolitan readership that was surprisingly common in the magazine, "It is the want of link with the soil, of attachment to a particular spot, which gives the life of a metropolitan that ideal insignificance so happily embodied in the term Cockney."[14] The *New Monthly* set about redeeming metropolitan life from its "ideal insignificance" by showing how the city might offer an experience as thick and as deep as the English shires. Wordsworth, Hazlitt reported, believed that city life inevitably stunted the humanity of those who lived it,[15] but in his Elia essays Lamb had shown how London's public and semi-public spaces, the Inns of Court, the South Sea House, Christ's Hospital, Drury Lane, are places that can stage emotions as intense and as intimate as any that might be experienced in country churchyards. A series such as Henry Roscoe's "Literary Recollections of London" is designed to link metropolitan experience with the writers who have lived in the city. To walk through the city as Roscoe describes it is to feel oneself rooted in the nation's literature.[16] This is, I suspect,

---

[12] *New Monthly Magazine* 4 (January 1822), p. 193.
[13] "Detached Thoughts on books and Reading," *London Magazine* 6 (July 1822) 33–6, p. 33.
[14] *New Monthly Magazine* 2 (November 1821), p. 449.
[15] Howe, vol. XII, p. 76.
[16] *New Monthly Magazine* 4 (January 1822) 29–34, and 5 (August 1822) 118–24.

the context in which the extraordinary success in Britain of Washington Irving's *Sketch-Book* should be understood. In his "Account of Himself", Irving (writing as Geoffrey Crayon) explains that he travelled to Europe in search of "storied and poetical association", in search of places and people possessed of a historical depth that somehow made them more substantial than the people and places of America.[17] Hazlitt thought, reasonably enough, that Irving was approved by the English because they found his representation of them flattering,[18] but it may also have been the case that many of Irving's English readers, and especially his deracinated metropolitan readers, shared his plight. The lives of Cockneys had in common with the lives of Americans an ideal insignificance for which Irving provides an antidote. In reading him Cockneys could discover the unexpected depth of their own everyday experience. Little Britain must have seemed a rather unprepossessing district of London until Geoffrey Crayon's account of it, which invests it with historical depth. Even the glass panes of Irving's lodging house windows are scrawled with "scraps of very indifferent gentleman-like poetry" celebrating "the charms of many a beauty of Little Britain, who has long, long since bloomed, faded, and passed away" (213). In Little Britain the national life is maintained in the form of "pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, hot-cross-buns on Good Friday, and roast goose at Michaelmas." In Little Britain, Valentine cards are sent, bonfires are lit on November 5, girls are kissed under the mistletoe, roast beef and plum pudding are "held in superstitious veneration," and in consequence of all this Little Britain transcends its status as one of the cheaper districts of London to become "the strong-hold of true John Bullism," not only in its name but in its nature a just epitome of the whole nation (213–4).

Byron's *Don Juan* was by far the most popular poem of the day, and it might seem that *Don Juan* inhabits a time almost as shallow as the magazines. Wordsworth certainly thought so. Hazlitt reports that when Wordsworth was asked how long Byron's reputation would survive his death, he replied, "Not three days, Sir."[19] No doubt professional jealousy sharpened Wordsworth's tongue, but, in *Don Juan*, Byron goes out of his way to invite such responses. It is not just that he holds up to ridicule, as in Canto 12, stanzas 18–9, the Wordsworthian claim that the great writer characteristically appeals to the judgment of posterity rather than the contemporary readership, he repeatedly employs in the poem a diction recklessly localised both in time and place. "Where are the Lady Carolines and Franceses?", he asks (xi.80, 1). Lady Caroline Lamb was a public figure. She had an affair with Byron and then published a novel about it ("Some play the devil, and then write a novel" (*Don Juan*, ii.201, 8)). She even

---

[17] Washington Irving, *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, ed. Susan Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 12. Subsequent page references are included in the text.

[18] Howe, vol. I, p. 183.

[19] Howe, vol. XVII, p. 209, note.

produced a "New Canto" of *Don Juan*. But Lady Frances Webster's only provocation seems to have been that in 1813 Byron had decided not to seduce her even though she was "young, and religious, and pretty" and her husband was Byron's "particular friend".[20] Most of the proper names that make an appearance in the poem – Gurney (i.189), the inventor of a system of shorthand, Ransom, Byron's banker (xv. 8), even publishers like Longman and Murray (vii.26) – would have been readily identifiable by Byron's first readers, but Byron could have had no confidence that they would remain familiar names to readers of later centuries, any more than he could have foretold that "bubble and squeak" (xv.71) would have continued a popular dish, or that "macassar" (i.17) would remain a celebrated hair dressing. Wordsworth chose, he tells us, to write in the language of "low and rustic life" in part because that language was "more permanent" than the language of artificial society, and Byron's diction seems chosen to act as a satire on the pretensions implicit in Wordsworth's decision. But it was a satire that threatened to deny poetry any claim to permanent value.

Poems once promised immortality to those they celebrated, but this is a role that has been usurped, Byron suggests in *Don Juan*, by the newspapers, where for example Lord Henry's and Lady Adeline's departure from London is recorded:

> A paragraph in every paper told
> Of their departure. Such is modern fame.
> 'Tis pity that it takes no further hold
> Than an advertisement, or much the same,
> When ere the ink be dry, the sound grows cold. (xiii.51, 1–5)

Poems seem scarcely to take firmer hold. Even the "greatest living poet" has a tenure of only a decade: the title has passed in Byron's memory from Scott to Byron himself, and now rests, he supposes, with George Croly (xi.55–7). Poetry, it seems, is as subject to fashion as dress, so that the poets even of the recent past have proved as evanescent as the dandies: "Where's Brummell? Dished. Where's Long Pole Wellesley? Diddled." (xi.78, 1). Everything in these last cantos of *Don Juan* is subject to the law of change, and change has become increasingly, dizzyingly, rapid:

> Where is the world of eight years past? 'Twas there –
> I look for it – 'tis gone, a globe of glass,
> Cracked, shivered, vanished, scarcely gazed on, ere
> A silent change dissolves the glittering mass. (xi.76)

---

[20] *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols. (London: John Murray, 1974), vol. III, p. 122.

In seven years Byron has seen changes that "might suffice a moderate century" (xi. 82). He is sounding here the *ubi sunt* theme, but with a crucial difference. Previous poets asked, where are the snows of yesteryear? They chose emblems of transience – snow, the rose, the violet – but made sure that, though the objects named were transient, their emblematic significance was permanent: snow melts, but it has always melted. Byron prefers emblems that are themselves transient. Who was "Long Pole Wellesley?", the reader of the future would surely ask:

> Where is Lord This? And where my Lady That?
> The Honourable Mistresses and Misses? (xi.79)

It is the transience of the emblems of transience that qualifies the comedy of the passage with a fragile pathos which is the more affecting because it infiltrates the very texture of the poem. This is poetry that does not pretend to be safely removed from the world in flux that it contemplates, but offers itself rather as a "glittering mass" that is just as prone to dissolution as its subjects. To be modern, Byron seems to suggest in *Don Juan*, is to occupy a present that disappears almost as quickly as it can be apprehended. To be modern is to recognize and even to celebrate the shallowness of time.

In *Don Juan*, as in newspapers and magazines, the past is rigorously subordinated to the present. Juan's affections are buoyant, not weighed down by his former loves: Julia is not a ghostly presence at the feast he shares with Haidée. His sympathies are at once strong and short-lived. Juan feels for the highwayman that he kills, but he does not feel for long, and it is this more than any other trait that makes him close kin to the narrator: "But Tom's no more – and so no more of Tom." (xi.20, 1). When Haidée dies the narrator's voice merges with the sound of the sea–swell as it "mourns o'er the beauty of the Cyclades," but only for a moment before swiftly passing on:

> But let me change this theme, which grows too sad,
> And lay this sheet of sorrows on the shelf;
> I don't much like describing people mad,
> For fear of seeming rather touch'd myself –
> Besides I've no more on this head to add;
> And as my Muse is a capricious elf,
> We'll put about, and try another tack
> With Juan, left half–kill'd some stanzas back. (iv.74)

Juan may be armoured against Gulbeyaz's advances by memories of Haidée's "soft Ionian face" (v.117, 3). "However strange," Byron remarks, "he could not yet forget her," (v.124, 3) which seems tartly ironic, except that thoughts of his

former love are of no avail that same night when Juan is put to bed with Dudu in the harem.

Wordsworth cultivated an aesthetics of depth. His poetry invites its reader to slow contemplation of ordinary sights, an unfinished sheepfold in *Michael*, a broken bowl in *The Ruined Cottage*, and the effect of that lingering gaze will be to carry those objects far into the heart, or, as he puts it in "Tintern Abbey", he offers his reader sensations that will be felt "along the heart", selecting a preposition that give the heart depth, makes of it a landscape through which sensations can pass almost as the river Wye rolls through Somersetshire, flowing with a "deep inland murmur". Byron's poem seems by contrast

> a globe of glass,
> Cracked, shivered, vanished, scarcely gazed on, ere
> A silent change dissolves the glittering mass.

But Byron's poem has throughout its length a double character. Almost whenever he speaks of it, Byron reveals his pride. In *Childe Harold* Byron had acknowledged, "I twine / My hopes of being remembered in my line / With my land's language" (iv.9, 76–8), and those hopes were still more heavily invested in *Don Juan* than the earlier poem. He may in *Don Juan* cultivate a playful, sardonic relationship with his "epic brethren gone before" (i.202, 2), but *Don Juan* remains a poem that negotiates a place for itself within a literary tradition that stretches back more than two thousand years, and it is a poem that often obtrudes that long literary history on the reader's attention. A phrase in Greek is neither translated nor transliterated (xvi.109); "'Tantaene!' Such the virtues of high station!" he writes (xii.33, 5), a reference incomprehensible save to those who can supply the line from Virgil from which one word is quoted. Byron, just as much as Washington Irving, plays between deep and shallow times.

It is worth remembering that both were writers admired by Walter Scott, who even invited Irving to edit a weekly anti-Jacobin newspaper that he was planning. The affinity between Irving and Scott serves to indicate that Scott's novels and magazines might not be as different as they might seem. Walter Scott's namesake, John Scott, maintained the conventional position in the *London Magazine*. In comparison with Walter Scott all contemporary writers, even Byron, were "wonders of the day rather than lights for all time."[21] But that was in 1820. As the decade wore on dissenting voices became more vociferous. The Scotch novels, it was pointed out, appeared almost as regularly as magazines, and they seemed scarcely more unified. Indeed it was rumoured that the novels, like magazines, were the work not of an individual but of a committee, "a few master spirits,

---

[21]   *London Magazine* 1 (January 1820), p. 12 and 2 (November 1820), pp. 515–6.

each perfect in its part and calling".[22] Like the magazines, it began increasingly often to be hinted, Scott's novels were better thought of as market commodities than as contributions to literature. My point is that Scott's popularity is best explained by his appeal to a new readership represented in this paper by Alice Fennel, the heroine of *Scotch Novel Reading*, and that readership made contradictory demands. It wanted at once to be confirmed in, and relieved from its own modernity. The historical novel, as developed by Scott, was a genre uniquely designed to meet such demands. It offered its readers an experience of deep time, sometimes as in *Ivanhoe* (1820) very deep time, but it did so in the form of the novel, and the novel of all literary genres had the shallowest past. Scott's young heroes, heroes such as Edward Waverley, or Frank Osbaldistone in *Rob Roy*, or Roland Graeme in *The Abbot*, are characteristically naïve, often awkward and embarrassed, and, despite their prickliness, are much given to blushing. They seem in a more direct line of descent from Evelina than from Tom Jones,[23] and if this is granted then they take their place in a novelistic tradition that had its origin less than fifty years before, in 1778.

There is an odd discrepancy between the content of the novels, that may reach back through the centuries, and their form, which had only been established in Scott's lifetime, and it is a discrepancy that the novels themselves sometimes make a joke of, as in *The Antiquary*, when Jonathan Oldbuck takes the initials 'A. D. L. L.' which he finds engraved on a shallow vessel as confirmation that he has located a Roman encampment – the initials, he argues, "may stand, without much violence, for *Agricola Dicavit Libens Ludens*" – only to be dumbfounded when the beggar Edie Ochiltree remembers that the letters had been carved at a wedding only twenty years before and properly interpreted read "Aiken Drum's Lang Ladle".[24]

The point becomes still clearer if the focus shifts from the content of Scott's novels to their production methods. Scott quickly discovered that he could maximise his profit by stipulating in his contracts with his publishers that his books be printed by the Ballantyne brothers in whose firm Scott himself had a controlling interest. The result was that he received profits not simply for the sale of his manuscript but of the books printed from it. The historical novel gave rise to a

---

[22] *Knight's Quarterly Magazine* 1 (June 1823), p. 203. The suggestion is canvassed in a review of *Quentin Durward*.

[23] Ina Ferris suggests a similar lineage when she observes that a hero such as Edward Waverley is "best understood as a Gothic heroine in male form" in *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 100. Fiona Wilson argues that Scott's heroes of this kind – Frank Osbaldistone of *Rob Roy* is her preferred example – should be understood as male hysterics. See Fiona Wilson, "He's come undone: Gender, Territory, and Hysteria in *Rob Roy*," in *Romanticism's Debatable Lands*, ed. Claire Lamont and Michael Rossington (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 52–63.

[24] Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 29–31.

350 | Richard Cronin

distinctively modern business practice, a practice that one might compare with the discovery by publishers like Henry Colburn and William Blackwood that the magazines that they set up might prove profitable ventures in themselves and at the same time generate further profit by advertising the firm's other publications in notices masquerading as reviews.

Walter Ong has made the bold claim that "typography was interiorized in the Western psyche definitively at the moment in Western history known as the Romantic Movement."[25] Walter Scott is by this account the representative novelist of the first age of print, and his most powerful tool is the Scots that his best-loved characters speak, a language that acts so powerfully to persuade his readers that the novels allow access to a culture sustained by a community of speakers that they are likely to forget that they are sharing an experience made possible only by a sophisticated print industry. Clearly the effect the novels give of initiating their readers into an oral culture is illusory, because in the novels Scots is not really a way of speaking but a typographical phenomenon, prized not least by English readers entirely unfamiliar with the language of Scotland or its pronunciation, readers like Alice Fennel, who finds much of what she reads incomprehensible.[26] But it was an illusion that the new readership prized, and again it is the magazines that provide the best evidence of this. The very first issue of the *London Magazine* carried Octavius Gilchrist's "Account of John Clare, an Agricultural Labourer and Poet",[27] and Clare went on to become the most prolific contributor of verse to the new magazine. It may be that the *London* championed John Clare as an appropriate counterpart to James Hogg. *Blackwood's* might have its Ettrick Shepherd but the *London* could claim as its own the Northamptonshire peasant, and the *London* also secured, from *Blackwood's*, the services of Allan Cunningham, stonemason, neighbour of Burns and friend of Hogg. Magazines, precisely because they were so completely a product of an urban print culture, cultivated a nostalgia for the rural, oral culture of the past. In *Blackwood's* Hogg appealed to that nostalgia in his "Tales and Anecdotes of the Pastoral Life", and in his "Shepherd's Calendar" series in which he presented himself as the conduit through which the folk wisdom of the Borders might be transported into the new world of print. In the *London Magazine*, Allan Cunningham's contributions often served a similar purpose.

---

[25] Walter J. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution and Consciousness of Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 283. W. J. T. Mitchell usefully underwrites the pivotal nature of the cultural moment by arguing, contra Ong, that "Wordsworth's claim that a poet is a man 'speaking' (not writing) to men is no casual expression, but a symptom of what Derrida would call the 'phonocentric' tendency of romantic poetics." See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), p. 115.

[26] Sarah Green, *Scotch Novel Reading; Or, Modern Quackery. A Novel Really Founded on Facts* (London: A. K. Newman, 1824), pp. 2, 110.

[27] *London Magazine* 1 (January 1820), pp. 7–11.

My point is that the preservation in print of oral traditions represents at once an of recovery and an act that marks a decisive rupture with the past that it purports to preserve. James Hogg himself makes the point, a little knowingly perhaps. He claims that his mother was displeased with Scott's first exercise in this area, his publication of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* where Hogg's mother found all the border ballads that she had held in her memory translated into print. Scott had "broken the charm" of poems that were "made for singing and no' for reading." Hogg adds that his mother had been proved right, "for from that day to this, these songs, which were the amusement of every winter evening, have never been sung more."[28] Scott's novels share with the magazine papers I have been referring to and the *Minstrelsy* this double character. For Hazlitt they are exclusively concerned with the past: "His is a mind brooding over antiquity – scorning 'the present ignorant time'": "if you take the universe, and divide it into two parts" Scott only knows what "it *has been*".[29] But Coleridge read Scott's novels quite differently. For him, they represent the restless, unsatisfied pursuit of wealth and status that was for Coleridge the defining character of modernity. No matter the period in which the novel is set Scott depicts "an age of anxiety from the crown to the hovel, from the cradle to the coffin; all is an anxious straining to maintain life, or *appearances* – to *rise,* as the only condition of not falling."[30]

Colin Kidd may be right to argue that the double action characteristic of Scott's novels by which they at once recover the past and mark a rupture with it has its origin in the Scottish historiography that Scott read at university and that continued to organize his thinking. But it is not an explanation that does much to explain Scott's extraordinary popularity. For that one needs to think not so much of the Scottish Enlightenment historians, of David Hume, John Millar and William Robertson, but of Alice Fennel, the London apothecary's daughter, the reader without a grandfather, the representative reader in the new literary market that developed in the decade after Waterloo. Alice Fennel values most highly novels that can perform an odd wizardry, at once supplying her with the deep past that she yearns for, and offering her the reassurance that her emancipation is best secured not by a knowledge of the past but by the energy with which she inhabits the present. Scott's novels became the publishing sensation of the post–Waterloo years because they performed that wizardry more powerfully than any other writing of the period.

---

28 James Hogg, *Anecdotes of Scott*, ed. Jill Rubinstein (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 38.
29 Howe, vol. XI, p. 57.
30 Written on the fly-leaf of Scott's *Peveril of the Peak*, quoted from *Scott: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John O. Hayden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 183.

ZSOLT KOMÁROMY

Memory and the "Pleasures of Imagination"

Problems in eighteenth–century aesthetics demonstrated
by Akenside's poem[1]

In his *Observations on Man*, of 1749, David Hartley describes the pleasures of-
fered by works of art in the following terms. Artefacts are "something inter-
mediate between the real object [that they depict] and the idea [of that object],
and therefore in case of sufficient likeness more vivid than the idea, [so they]
cannot but please us by thus gratifying our desire of raising up a complete idea
of an absent object."[2] Whether raising a complete idea of an absent object is the
work of memory or of the imagination is a rather muddled issue. As for Hartley,
we may actually find him arguing that the sufficient likeness that makes works
more vivid than ideas is explained by their similarity to "those [ideas] which
are chiefly laid up in the memory."[3] This would suggest that aesthetic pleasure
has to do with our recognition of what is represented as if it were a memory.
Nonetheless, specifically "aesthetic" experiences were in the eighteenth century
generally referred to the "pleasures of the imagination."[4] It may appear curious
that while the imagination took centre stage in explanations of the nature of
aesthetic experiences, characteristic modes of literary expression in mid– and
later-18th-century literary culture display a penchant for nostalgic longings and
for the various ways of recalling the past. The return to the origins of mankind
or to the time and scenes of childhood, the musings over historical ruins, the
brooding over landscapes of past pleasures, the general cultivation of melancholy
reminiscing that permeates so much of the literary sentiments of the time all
suggest that in the period when aesthetics focuses on the pleasures of the imag-
ination, the powers of memory also offered an important avenue for widely
cultivated aesthetic experiences. Indeed, to what extent the "pleasures of the

---

1   We acknowledge the permission of Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group to reprint
    material in this essay from Zsolt Komáromy, *Figures of Memory. From the Muses to Eighteenth-
    Century British Aesthetics* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011).
2   David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*. 1749. 2 vols. A fac-
    simile of the 1791 edition with an introduction by Jonathan Wordsworth (Poole and Washington:
    Woodstock Books, 1998). vol. 1, p. 427.
3   Hartley vol. 1, p. 427.
4   On this, see Peter Kivy, *The Seventh Sense. Francis Hutcheson and Eighteenth-Century British Aesthe-
    tics*. Second edition: Revised and enlarged. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 88.

imagination" are also the "pleasures of memory" is an insufficiently explored issue of eighteenth-century aesthetics.

That the intricacies of the relation of the concepts of imagination and memory have not attracted much critical attention has to do, I believe, with the dominant narratives in histories of aesthetics and criticism. These narratives focus on the increasing importance of the imagination in eighteenth-century aesthetics mainly as a form of the development of the "creative" – as opposed to the "imitative" – view of artistic production. This historical process greatly determined views on the role of memory in critical theory. Because memory was generally described as a power that stores and retrieves past impressions unaltered, that is, as a power confined to re-production, it attracted little if any attention in historical narratives concerned with the emergence of the "productive" or "creative" sense of the imagination. As the uncreative counterterm to the creative imagination, memory is thought to have been marginalized in critical theory. Historical narratives that suggest this build on the dichotomy of reproductive and productive powers, but a closer look reveals that this dichotomy obscures the relation of imagination and memory in eighteenth-century aesthetics. Nominal definitions of memory and imagination may normally have contrasted the two notions as reproductive and productive respectively, yet their relation is characterized, above all, by their virtual inseparability. Indeed, Hartley's cited comments on pleasure that is derived from works resembling ideas of memory and that he himself attributes to the imagination exemplify that in the eighteenth century the pleasures of memory and of the imagination were not readily separable. The main reason for this seems to be that the notions of memory and imagination themselves failed to be clearly separated from one another, and this suggests that memory can hardly be put down to being some kind of counterterm to the imagination – a recognition that calls for a more nuanced understanding of the critical role of memory that moves beyond the productive–reproductive dichotomy.

In this essay, I want to explore the relation of these powers in eighteenth-century aesthetic speculation through the example of Mark Akenside's philosophical poem *The Pleasures of Imagination* (first published in 1744, five years before Hartley's cited work). My points, however, are not peculiar to Akenside: they merely demonstrate what I suggest is generally true for eighteenth-century critical thought. Akenside's poem is of special interest here only for strategic reasons, since it is a poem that has been seen as providing terms that later Coleridge was to exploit in his accounts of the imagination, and as anticipating views of the imagination as an originating power creative of what we perceive.[5] By pointing

---

[5]   On this, see e.g. the discussion of Akenside's poem in William Keach's study "Poetry, after 1740," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 4: The Eighteenth Century*, eds. H. B. Nisbet and Claud Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 154. For a discussion of Akenside's sense of the imagination as anticipating Coleridge's, see James Engell, *The Creative Imagination. Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA. and London:

out that the poem works with two contradictory understandings of memory, and by attempting to make sense of these opposing impulses in the poem, I seek to show that the relation of memory and imagination is by no means merely an antithetical one even in a poem that is generally regarded as an important early stage in the development of aesthetic theory centered on the notion of the imagination.

Akenside's poem has many intellectual sources; one of them is Joseph Addison, whose essays of 1712 in the *Spectator* on "The Pleasures of the Imagination" were responsible for the popularity of the phrase that Akenside adopts in his title. These essays are generally credited with having initiated British, or even modern aesthetics.[6] This makes it all the more significant that the blending of imagination and memory observed in Hartley was already present in the Addisonian seeds of aesthetic speculation. Addison himself may have complained of the "loose" use of the term "imagination," and promised to determine its meaning, but as Walter Hipple has shown, "he really employs it to designate a conglomerate faculty of presentation, of memory, of conception, and of association."[7] The presence of memory in what is meant by the notion of the imagination is everywhere visible in Addison. For instance, he explains the secondary pleasures of the imagination (the pleasures we gain from the arts) as arising from "the Idea of visible Objects, when the Objects are not actually before our Eye, *but are called up into our Memories* or formed into agreeable Visions of Things that are either Absent or Fictitious."[8] Perhaps a difference is intended here between *calling things up* into our memories and *forming* mental visions, but this may only be suspected on the basis of the structure of the sentence, rather than on any clearly formulated argument stating that what we "call up" are indeed only "absent things" that can be distinguished from "fictions." And even if such a distinction were made, both calling up and forming are said to produce the pleasures of the imagination – much as in Hartley, already in Addison the extent to which such pleasures are also the pleasures of memory is unclear.

The blending of the two notions is readily discernible in Akenside as well. In terms of its philosophical orientation *The Pleasures of Imagination* is a highly eclectic poem, indebted to both empiricist and rationalist thought, relying as

---

Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 45.

[6] See e.g. William H. Youngren, "Addison and the Birth of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics," *Modern Philology* 79.3 (February 1982) 267–283, p. 268: "At least since Basil Worsfold's *The Principles of Criticism* (1897), Addison has been called the founder of British (and even of modern) aesthetics." For an authoritative confirmation of the claim see e.g. Kivy, *The Seventh Sense*, p. 266.

[7] See *Spectator*, No. 411 (in Donald F. Bond, ed. *The Spectator*. 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. 3, p. 537); Walter John Hipple, Jr., *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), p. 14.

[8] See Number 411 of the *Spectator*, in Bond, vol. 3, p. 537, italics added.

much on Plato as on Addison and Locke.[9] But this eclecticism – or its occasional boldness that has led critics to see the poem as a forerunner to later, even Romantic notions – does not alter the fact that it very often displays adherence to conventional critical tenets and relies on some traditional views. Among these is Akenside's understanding of the term "imagination," which, throughout the history of Western thought, has formed a conceptual cluster with the notion of memory. Generally speaking, there are three reasons for the close conjunction of the two powers that renders them virtually indistinguishable.[10] First, these powers may be said to occupy an identical position among the basic categories of cognition, because both of them are seen as the means of mediating between sensory experiences and conceptual knowledge, processing mental contents that are not given for sensation, thus occupying a position between sensation and intellection. Second, the description of the operation of the two powers is also identical: both are held to be able to present to the mind what is not immediately given to the senses, or to feature in the transmission of sense–data into concepts by their capacity to offer the mind representations of some original – imagination and memory are equally powers processing representations of the world. Third, they are also linked by the way in which their apprehension of representations is envisaged: their representations are characteristically regarded to be images, figurative copies of ideas or sensory data, and consequently the way the mind confronts the images of imagination and memory is based on the model of perception. Mental representations are viewed by the mind (or soul), just as the bodily eye views external objects; memory and imagination thus operate on the same principle, both being a kind of perception that views representations. Akenside's explanation of his subject matter in "The Design" prefacing his poem places him squarely in this tradition of understanding. "There are certain powers in human nature," he begins, "which seem to hold a middle position between the organs of bodily sense and the faculties of moral perception: They have been called, by a very general name, *The Powers of Imagination*."[11] Akenside

---

9   The subject of the eclecticism of Akenside's intellectual orientation is covered in detail by Robin Dix, *The Literary Career of Mark Akenside, Including an Edition of His Non-Medical Prose*. (Madison – Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006).

10 A clear instance for awareness of this indistinguishability is Hobbes's statement that "Imagination and Memory are but one thing, which for diverse considerations hath diverse names." Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civill*. 1651, ed. by C. B. Macphearson (London, etc: Penguin Books / Pelican Classics, 1968), p. 89. But an example exactly contemporaneous with Akenside may also be cited: Giambattista Vico claims that "memoria" is "the Latin term for *fantasia*, or imagination," and consequently states outright that "memory is the same as imagination." Giambattista Vico, *The New Science. Unabridged Translation of the Third Edition (1744) with the Addition of "Practice of the New Science,"* translated by Thomas Goddhard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), see 2.7.2, § 699., p. 264.

11 Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination. To which is Prefixed a Critical Essay on the Poem by Mrs Barbauld*. London, 1795. Facsimile reprint. (Otley, Washington D.C.: Woodstock

speaks of a "very general name" and uses the plural because what he means by "imagination" is a conglomerate of "powers" that work with mental representations – it is, in other words, a term that is not distinguished with any clarity from memory. That memory is one of these "powers" in question is confirmed as Akenside goes on:

> As [these powers] are the inlets of the most exquisite pleasures with which we are acquainted, it has naturally happened that men of warm and sensible tempers have sought means to recall the delightful perceptions which they afford, independent of the objects that originally produced them. This gave rise to the imitative or designing arts; some of which […] as music and poetry bring [external appearances] back to remembrance by signs universally established and understood.[12]

For the perceptions of the imagination to be able to exercise their "exquisite pleasures," they have to be recalled, that is, memory has to be active when the imagination is at work; so much so that Akenside's explanation of the pleasures of the imagination (including the way poetry offers such pleasures) explicitly refers to a mnemonic process (recalling delightful perceptions, bringing back signs to remembrance), thus blurring the distinction between imagination and memory.

The blending of the two powers that eighteenth-century aesthetics inherits from philosophical tradition has two opposing results. First of all, it enables neo-classical criticism to exploit the powers of memory for validating the makings of the imagination. The imagination's creative potential was seen to consist in its power to rearrange mental images. This power, however, had to be controlled by other faculties, lest its products lost all conceivable connection with reality (whether empirical or ideal) – according to the customary warning, an excessive, uncontrolled imagination is oblivious of nature, produces illusions, and leads the mind into a world of chimeras.[13] Beside judgment, memory also had such a controlling function, by virtue of providing the images that the imagination could shape. In Dryden's classic phrasing, later to be echoed by Addison, wit or imagination "ranges through the field of memory […] or, […] searches over all the memory for the species or ideas of those things which it designs to represent."[14] The fact that the images the imagination arranges into new orders

---

Books, 2000), p. i. References to the poem itself will be indicated in the text by book and line numbers.

12 Akenside, pp. i–ii.

13 For a classic summary of these ideas, see Donald F. Bond, "The Neo-classical Psychology of the Imagination," *ELH* 4 (1937) 245–265, esp. pp. 247–248, 258–260.

14 "Preface to *Annus Mirabilis*," in John Dryden, *A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Keith Walker (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 26. For tracing this image of the imagination raging over the fields of memory from Hobbes through Dryden to Addison, see Martin Kallich, "The Association of Ideas in Critical Theory: Hobbes, Locke, and

are stored in and derived from memory guarantees their connection to nature. Because memory, by definition, holds mental contents that derive from external reality, by being grounded in memory, the makings of the imagination can be ascertained to derive from observed reality, and in this way, memory can help the imagination to avoid creating senseless phantasmagoria. This controlling function of memory, however, presupposes that memory itself preserves and reproduces impressions unchanged. That is, this psychological grounding of critical ideas presupposes that memory is a reliably reproductive power.

Despite claims for its breaking new grounds, Akenside's poem reiterates these critical commonplaces when it explicitly asserts the need for the reliability of mental representations. At the beginning of Book 3, Akenside argues that action follows opinion, and opinion is based on what the imagination presents to the mind – thus, opinion "can never there be true / Where Fancy cheats the intellectual eye, / With glaring colours and distorted lines" (3.23–30). By contrast,

>   … where the powers
> Of fancy neither lessen nor enlarge
> The images of things, but paint in all
> Their genuine hues, the features which they wore
> In nature; there opinion will be true,
> And action right.   (3.18–23)

Here, the shaping of the forms of nature in mental representation is seen as deception. No wonder that later, after having described the creative process, Akenside claims that the artist's work "becomes to eyes or ears / An object ascertain'd" (3.413–414). This ascertaining is based on the work's "expressive semblance" to "nature's great original," to the fact that the work can be referred "To that sublime exemplar whence it stole / Those animating charms" (3.419–424). Now, this reassuring semblance has to be based on something other than just the imagination, for when Akenside describes the creative process, he describes it by repeating almost verbatim what here is the malfunctioning of the imagination: as the child of fancy goes to work on the shapes of nature, he

>   … compares
> Their different forms; now blends them, now divides,
> Inlarges and extenuates by turns;
> Opposes, ranges in fantastic bands,
> And infinitely varies …   (3.391–395)

The word "enlarge" is repeated here from the earlier passage, but with an opposing sense, for what is creative work here was there said to corrupt the features things wore in nature. However, because the imagination relies on and blends with memory, the constructive process can be harmonized with the "genuine hues" of things, for the reliable reproductions of memory will ensure that the creative process produces an "object ascertain'd." Indeed, when Akenside speaks explicitly about memory, he praises it for its trustworthiness:

> not the sculpture'd gold
> More faithful keeps the graver's lively trace
> Than he whose birth the sister powers of art
> Propitious view'd …
> … his attemper'd bosom must preserve
> The seal of nature. There alone unchanged,
> Her form remains.   (3.361–368)

The child of fancy can preserve the forms of nature unchanged even while enlarging and varying them because he is inspired by the Muses, and because mnemonic traces are as stable as a text graven into gold. The objects the artist produces are thus reliable semblances of nature and the imagination is prevented from malfunctioning because fancy blends with the trustworthy power of memory.

This, broadly speaking, is also the role memory has been recognised to have in the production and reception of artifacts in neoclassical critical theory, and it is as a power of reliable reproduction that it came to be contrasted to the productivity of the imagination. However, the blending of the two powers does not only enable exploiting the trustworthiness of memory, but has another, more troubling result as well. For as long as memory and imagination are interlocking notions, the view of memory as offering unaltered representations of past impressions is always threatened – if imagination is to a degree mnemonic, memory, too, is to a degree imaginative, which means that its representations may be constructions. Indeed, the customary distinction between the two parts of the memory/imagination conceptual cluster does its job very poorly. This distinction is based on the view that while the imagination is able to alter the order and arrangement of what it represents, memory represents the originals it works with in an unaltered manner. The nature of memory, however, undermines such a distinction. Because memory's images are by definition representations of things no longer present (for we can only remember what is past), the order and arrangement of the original is not available to verify the correspondence of the mnemonic copy and the original.[15] Thus, there is no way to tell if a mnemonic representation

---

[15] David Hume states the problem in clear terms. The only difference between memory and

does or does not alter the original. The originals of mnemonic copies are in fact only available through the copies themselves. This means that memories are self-sufficient facts of consciousness, rather than copies dependent on past originals; while mnemonic copies are supposed to reliably represent originals, in truth they themselves posit and thus produce the originals. And once this constructive nature of memory is acknowledged, the representational understanding offers no means of distinguishing it from the imagination. As a result, such a conjunction of memory and imagination disallows reducing memory to its purely and reliably representational or reproductive sense, and makes way for its constructive sense. That memory is a constructive (or even: a productive) power is by no means a modern insight; awareness of the problems with the idea of memory as a store-house of verifiably reliable images is as old as philosophy. Nominal definitions in eighteenth-century philosophical and critical texts describe memory as just such a storehouse, but this does not mean that writers would have been unaware of the constructive nature of memory. This awareness is discernible in countless instances, for even when writers sought to suppress or overlook the possibility, the kinship of memory and imagination that they maintained perpetuated the constructive sense of memory – the blending of the two powers always recalls the insufficiency of their customary distinction, keeping memory's constructive nature in critical memory. Akenside's poem also exemplifies that despite insistence on a reliably reproductive sense of memory, the adherence to the tradition in which memory and imagination are kin concepts makes way for a potentially constructive sense of memory.

This can be gathered from the way the operations of memory are merged in Akenside's account with artistic creativity. This account begins with describing memory as an associative power. Associative links are those "mysterious ties" by which "the busy power / Of memory her ideal train preserves" (3.348–349). Memory is said to guide the imagination "backward through her mazy walks" (3.341–342) and to collect "The various forms of being to present / Before the curious aim of mimic art" (3.353–354). This "collecting" of forms may perhaps refer to the conventional view of memory offering images for the imagination's work, but collecting is a more active – because selective – activity than merely presenting what is to be found in the storehouse of the past. We may also consider that in the mid-eighteenth century, accounts of artistic production were still governed by the terms of rhetoric, and the collection of materials in rhetoric

---

imagination, he says, is that memory can "preserve the original order and position of its ideas, while the imagination transposes and changes them at will" – but then he also adds that in truth, this difference is "not sufficient to distinguish them in their operation, or to make us know the one from the other" because it is impossible "to recal the past impressions, in order to compare them with our present ideas, and see whether their arrangement be exactly similar." David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. and introduced by Ernest C. Mossner (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 132–33 (1.3.5).

is the stage of what is called "invention," a process eighteenth-century writers sought to attribute to the imagination. Indeed, in a later passage dealing with the interaction of nature and mind, we find a comparable activity of collecting, now assigned to the imagination: we are "blest of heav'n" if nothing can seduce us "to leave / Those ever-blooming sweets, which from the store / Of nature fair imagination culls / To charm the enliven'd soul!" (3.571–574). Here, nature appears to be the "store" (or storehouse) of memory from which the imagination culls things, and in terms of the processes described, this closely resembles the process in which memory collects forms. Such overlap of terms is not surprising in the light of the blending of memory and imagination observed in Akenside's prose introduction. We may therefore also suppose that when Akenside writes that it is the "sister powers of art" (the Muses, emblems of memory) who "Shed influence to the seeds of fancy kind" (3.363–365), he is not simply applying some conventional ornament of poetic language, but making a point. His argument is then enhanced by the seamless modulation of the passages on memory into the description of the work of the creative artist. Having been led through the mazy walks of memory, "The child of fancy" observes its "treasures" and "resolves / To frame he knows not what excelling things" (3.375–378). The poet is then "with loveliest frenzy caught" (3.383) and "ten thousand shapes / Like spectres trooping to the wizard's call, / Flit swift before him" (3.385–387). Although this may already seem to be the work of the imagination, since this is still an act of calling up, however magical, it still seems to coincide with the work of memory. We then read the already cited passages about the poet blending, enlarging, ranging and varying the shapes he has called up, until, at the end,

> … Lucid order dawns;
> And as from Chaos old the jarring seeds
> Of nature at the voice divine repair'd
> Each to its place …
> … his entire design
> Emerges. Colours mingle, features join,
> …………………………………….
> And every image on its neighbour smiles.   (3.402–409)

The creative process involves constructive mental operations, but there is really no way to tell if these operations are or are not still those of memory. The last line quoted above suggests that they may well be, since the completed work in which all forms have found their place is described in terms of associative links (images smile on their neighbours because those belonging together have been happily joined) – and the creation of these was earlier said to be the task of memory.[16]

---

[16]   Robin Dix confirms the point that memory remains part of the creative process as described

The imagination's collection and arranging of images in the course of creating a work of art appears to be the constructive re-collection of what is stored in the mind. We find, then, not only that imagination and memory are hardly distinguished in Akenside's prose explanation of the powers he is to describe, but also that this lack of distinction produces a potentially constructive sense of memory.

While such metaphors as the graver's trace express a trust in the reliability of reproductive memory, this reliability is implicitly surrendered when memory is suggested to belong with the "powers of the imagination," and when these powers are depicted as exercising mental construction. For it hardly needs to be pointed out that if memory constructs its own contents, it may furnish the imagination with images and connections that are themselves already rearrangements with no necessary ties to observed reality – as a result the constructive sense of memory undermines memory's function of validating the makings of the imagination, for this is a function that is itself based on the reliably reproductive sense of memory. This, however, is not something Akenside (or, indeed, any other eighteenth-century theorist of the imagination) would openly acknowledge. A concession to the constructive nature of memory can at most be covert for two related reasons. First of all, if memory is allowed to be constructive, its reliability in representing the past comes into question. In the Lockean framework, personal identity depends on the continuity of consciousness, which is maintained by memory – if memory is unreliable, personal identity cannot be maintained, and the self becomes morally unaccountable. The unreliability of memory also threatens an epistemology that depends on a process of mental representation to which memory's power to retain and reliably reproduce impressions is crucial (and this epistemological demand pertains not only to the empiricist, but also to the Platonic contexts of Akenside's poem). This moral and epistemological need for the trustworthiness of memory is reflected in the critical demand for a reliably representational memory to validate the makings of the imagination.

Nonetheless, the sections of the poem I have discussed reveal that Akenside describes memory *both* as reproductive and as constructive. Such a coexistence of memory's constructive and reproductive understanding is philosophically problematic, yet it is not peculiar to Akenside: it is discernible virtually everywhere in eighteenth-century critical theory, and this, I have suggested, is the result of the continuing conjunction and blending of memory and imagination. For this reason, in conclusion I want to suggest that it is not either of the conflicting views that Akenside more or less overtly puts forth, but rather the contradiction itself that expresses, in a covert way, what we may learn about the aesthetic function of memory.

There is, in fact, reason to suppose that memory can have a validating func-

---

here, when in reference to these passages he writes: "Akenside […] also uses [associations held in memory] to explain early stages of artistic creativity." Dix, p. 73.

tion despite its constructive potential, although this reason is a philosophically troubling one. The fact that the originals of mnemonic copies are by definition absent not only renders memory constructive; it also means that the correspondence of the mnemonic copy to the original is unverifiable – with the original being by definition always absent, there is no external criterion that could verify the validity of mnemonic claims. However, as long as we speak specifically of *mnemonic* representations, we do assume the validity of such claims, because the very meaning of claiming to remember something is to claim the correspondence of the mnemonic copy and its original. Thus, although memory on the one hand may be unverifiable and potentially constructive, on the other hand the very act of remembering amounts to a truth-claim concerning the contents of memory. In Gilbert Ryle's succinct phrasing, just as a misquotation is not a quotation, so remembering incorrectly is not involved in what is meant by remembering – remembering always means remembering correctly.[17] The validity of mnemonic claims, in other words, depends on the claim being a mnemonic claim. This is to say that memory is a self-validating power.

It is, I think, this self-validating nature of memory that is exploited when eighteenth-century writers simultaneously assume memory to be reliably reproductive and constructive. Memory can remain reliable and can validate mental construction even when it is itself constructive because of its self-validating nature. This, of course, is not an argument that could be found directly expressed in texts of eighteenth-century aesthetics; however, it is one that reckons with the problems that such texts reveal in their accounts of memory. Eighteenth-century British critical theory stands in a philosophical tradition that conjoins the notions of imagination and memory, and exploits this conjunction in order to have memory control fancy. However, the interaction of the two powers cuts two ways: it not only enables memory to validate the makings of the imagination, but also makes way for the constructive operations of memory. And if memory is presented both as reliable and as constructive, its reliability can be based on nothing but its self-validating nature. When we find – as we do in Akenside's poem – that memory is *simultaneously* presented as constructive and as validating the makings of the imagination, we may conclude that what validates the makings of the imagination is the self-validating power of constructive memory.

Such a view of the critical role of memory is a far cry from the received historical account that assesses this role in terms of the dichotomy of reproductive and productive powers. Thinking in terms of this dichotomy, as I have hoped to indicate here, not only overlooks essential features of memory, such as its constructive and self-validating nature, but overlooks also the problems which reveal that eighteenth-century writers did not – could not, even despite their declared intentions – reduce memory to the reproductive counterpart of the productive

---

17   Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949), esp. pp. 248, 278.

imagination. The coexistence of mutually exclusive senses of memory in critical thought – as demonstrated by the contradictory impulses in Akenside's poem – reveals that memory's constructive and self-validating aspects were also at work in aesthetic theory focusing on the imagination.

VERONIKA VÉGH

Reinventing Romanticism

Postmodern Byrons

Elizabeth Bennet on billboards, Neo-Victorian novels, the vampire renaissance, Sherlock Holmes in films, William Blake in pop songs, John Keats in a steampunk novel: the nineteenth century has been a blossoming cultural industry, a source of inspiration and the subject of reinterpretation in the last three decades. Postmodern texts have engaged in a dialogue with nineteenth century literary phenomena and in that dialogue they have redefined the spirit of a past age as well as contributed to their own image. An interpretation of the way contemporary culture has repeatedly defined itself by the use of nineteenth century literature must take an enormous amount of texts into consideration; texts that can easily be seen as participants in a significant conversation, forming patterns, answering the questions of each other, actively adding to the understanding of their (and our) own age as well.

The study of the relationship between the nineteenth century and Postmodernism has resulted in thought-provoking research, especially in the last decade. The thesis that some patterns of Romantic culture and literature had long-distance influence, reaching even to the Postmodern age is certainly not new. It is, however, in the last decade that, after the Victorian revival of the 1980s and 1990s, the deeper, latent connection between the Romantic and the Postmodern has also been foregrounded by criticism. Terminology has been in the focus of attention as well, contemporary criticism and theory concerning the phenomenon uses the term *Neo-Victorian*.[1]

In their introduction to a collection of essays, *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the 19th Century*, the editors John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff present the Victorian age as the privileged historical "other" of the Postmodern,[2] and connect the resurgence of interest, among others, to the emergence and

---

[1] Andrea Kirchknopf, however, convincingly argues for the term *Post-Victorian*, as it evokes the *Postmodern* and the *Victorian* simultaneously. Andrea Kirchknopf, "(Re)workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Definitions, Terminology, Contexts," *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1.1 (2008) 53–80.

[2] Dianne F. Sadoff and John Kucich, "Introduction," in *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the 19th Century*, eds. John Kucich, Dianne F. Sadoff (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000), ix–xxx, p. xi.

continuing dominance of cultural studies. They claim that the "rewritings of Victorian culture have flourished, because the Postmodern fetishizes notions of cultural emergence, and because the nineteenth century provides multiple eligible sites for theorizing such emergence."[3] The title of the book states that it focuses on the Victorian age, but, as the subtitle indicates and as one of the authors of the collection, Jennifer Green-Lewis observes, "contemporary cultural allusions to the Victorians sweep generously if inaccurately from the late eighteenth century (Romantics and Jane Austen therefore included)".[4] The term Neo-Victorian very often seems, indeed, to comprise the redefinition of the Romantic period as well.

The Age of Romanticism is also highlighted in Jay Clayton's *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture*.[5] It focuses on the latent connections between the two eras and explores the historical dimension of cultural studies, while attempting to build a bridge between science and literature. Clayton sketches how earlier theories of Postmodernism constructed the importance of previous periods, and he sees three major stages that were supposed to be in close relationship with the Postmodern: the Enlightenment, the early twentieth century and the information age (or advanced capitalism as he calls it). What is missing is Romanticism, "as if the circuit that led from the Enlightenment to the high modern era, to Postmodernity would be disrupted by any mention of the Romantic movement."[6] Clayton claims that Postmodern skepticism about reason, objectivity, and universalism, its attitudes towards subjectivity, the sublime, formal fragmentation, science and technology have affinities with positions taken by the Romantics.

In harmony with the above cited approaches, Alan Liu stated as early as 1990 that Modernist aesthetics, had "aggressively sublated" Romanticism,[7] and in the next twenty years he continued to refine our understanding of the nature of the intriguing relationship between the Postmodern and the Romantic. Liu studied such subgenres of science fiction as cyberpunk and steampunk, a topic especially significant in my own research. His examination of popular culture draws, for instance, an exciting parallel between the Romantic sublime and the one depicted in cyberpunk novels such as the *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson, and he also proposes that the "déclassé" status of science fiction (or some of its subgenres) actively adds to the interpretation of Postmodernism and serves

[3]   Dianne F. Sadoff and John Kucich, "Introduction," p. xv.
[4]   Jennifer Green-Lewis, "At Home in the Nineteenth Century: Photography, Nostalgia, and the Will to Authenticity," in Kucich and Sadoff, 29–48, p. 30.
[5]   Jay Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[6]   Clayton, p. 6.
[7]   Alan Liu, "Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism, and the Romanticism of Detail," in *Local Transcendence: Essays on Postmodern Historicism and the Database* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 123.

as a means to mediate meaning. Talking about popular literature, especially about genres of science fiction, he concludes that "(p)erhaps only our vulgate bards match the original banality, the transcendental everydayness, of the poet of *Lyrical Ballads*."[8] In the 1802 "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth states that he intended "to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or to describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way".[9] This view on literature, if we follow Liu's claims, is closer to the works of marginalized pop literature and science fiction writers than usually recognized.

In the focus of this paper is one specific, curious, sometimes even bizarre aspect of the presence of the Romantics in the Postmodern: the various apparitions of Lord Byron as a flesh-and-blood character in modern literature and pop-literature, a phenomenon that may be appropriate to illustrate the Neo-Victorian wave. I intend to study those texts that either choose the Lord as a character in the narrative or mention his person in a relevant way: novels and plays in which Byron is featured "as himself".

I am going to focus on more than two dozen texts in the realms of both high and popular literature, including pulp fiction: novels, plays and short stories composed in the last three decades in which the most elusive historical Byron is defined in a Postmodern context. Byron is the only Romantic who became a legend during his life and appeared in fiction already in 1816.

Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816) and Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) were based upon intimate knowledge of Lord Byron, while Benjamin Disraeli's novel, *Venetia* (1837) was written only thirteen years after Byron's death. In all three Byron appears in disguise but because of the quasi-mythic status of the Lord, the contemporaries did certainly recognize him behind the masks. The operations of these novels are closely related to those used in Romantic poets' biographies of the time. One of the stratagems that biographers used was to place the poets "in a realm of the imagination, the boundaries of which are closed by a definition of the imaginative as the opposite of the real, the factual or the historical".[10] Lady Caroline Lamb, Mary Shelley and Benjamin Disraeli placed Byron's character in confessedly fictitious texts; they used biographical elements, but created an entirely imaginative world. Byron's contemporary biographers, on the other hand, set imagination in motion while

---

[8]   Liu, p. 109.
[9]   William Wordsworth, "*From* Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems* (1802)", in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. Vol. 2. 8th ed. (New York, London: Norton, 2006), p. 264.
[10] Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824–1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 33.

creating a seemingly reliable life-story. Our contemporaries, however, work with a wider palette, while the redefinition of Byron's age after two centuries definitely adds to the variety too.

In the various narratives that I have chosen, Byron is either a protagonist, or a marginal character. The novels, plays and short stories featuring Byron can be the subject of categorization based on their themes; the reason for creating categories is to attempt to detect underlying patterns that may help to analyze the whole of the phenomenon. I propose to use the following four groups: "biography-based" texts, "alternate histories", "lost manuscript" stories, and "supernatural" presentations, although, of course, they tend to overlap with one another.

To our knowledge, Byron's biography is well-supported by facts and data, still, naturally, many of his decisions and many of the bends he had are either unclear or debated. In the case of *biography-based texts*, the biographical and historical data as well as the background are true to fact, the texts attempt to fill in the gaps in the Lord's biography so as to create a narrative by assigning motifs to the characters and building storylines that respond to the ambiguous and the obscure. Derek Marlowe's novel, *A Single Summer with Lord B.* (1970) is focused on the fateful meeting in 1816 when Percy Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (who became Shelley's wife in December 1816) and Mary's half sister, Claire Clairmont spent a summer with Byron and his physician, John Polidori at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland. The same period of time is in the centre of three other works, a speculative novel, the *Haunted Summer* (1989) by Anne Edwards, which reveals how the characters experimented with opium; a play by Brad C. Hodson, *A Year without a Summer* (that is 1816, when severe summer climate abnormalities destroyed crops in Europe) and Howard Brenton's play *Bloody Poetry* (1984), featuring, again, Byron with Polidori, Percy Shelley, Mary, and Claire Clairmont.

There are several episodes in Byron's life that could offer material for longer works, still, all the above mentioned authors chose the mythical events of that summer.[11] The night when the group of writers challenged each other to write a ghost story became the most important literary competition ever, as it resulted in Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the first being one of the significant influences on later vampire-related fiction, the latter became a bestseller in its time and a noteworthy Gothic classic. Victor Frankenstein's home in Mary Shelley's novel is even called Villa Belrive, which is the name of the place the story was conceived at, as only Byron referred to it by the name of

---

[11] The events have been dramatized on film on several occasions as well, clearly, the interest is and has been alive for two centuries. Ken Russell's *Gothic* (1986) is a parody, the *Haunted Summer* by Ivan Passer (1988), the adaptation of the above mentioned novel under the same title concentrates on Byron's relationship with Shelley and Mary Godwin and the nature of evil, while *Rowing with the Wind*, directed by Gonzalo Suárez (1999) puts the actor Hugh Grant in the role of Lord Byron.

the owners, the Diodati family. Mutual artistic influence, creation, an extremely complex system of relationships between the five people present: the texts in this group concentrate on and attempt to understand and depict the tension in the legendary summer of 1816, a truly unique episode of literary history.

The members of the *lost manuscript* category put a fictitious Byron–manuscript in the centre of the story. *The Missolonghi Manuscript* (1968) by Frederic Prokosch is a recollection of the poet's life, a journal written in Greece in the first person. In two novels, *The Secret Manuscript of Lord Byron* (1979) by Christopher Nicole and the *Memoirs of Lord Byron* (1989) by Robert Nye, the lost manuscript is the first person singular memoirs of Byron. Originally, the memoirs had actually been written, but were burnt shortly after Byron's death for fear of the scandal its publication would have caused. The historical memoirs were destroyed by Byron's well-wishers, including John Murray, his publisher and intimate friend who received the journals for publication from Byron himself. It is ironic that it was the John Murray publishing company that in 2002 printed Fiona McCarthy's *Byron: Life and Legend*, a book that reveals more about scandalous events than Byron himself would ever have recorded in his own memoirs.[12]

Another interesting example of the lost manuscript group is John Crowley's *Lord Byron's Novel: The Evening Land at Night* (2005). This novel introduces a new approach to the Byron legend: its central character is Byron's daughter, Ada, who appears in a considerable number of contemporary novels inspired by the Byron myth. Augusta Ada King, Countess of Lovelace (1815–1852) was the only daughter of Byron and his wife, Anne Isabella Milbank. Ada Lovelace never knew his father, as Byron left his family when she was only two months old. A mathematical genius, she has become a legendary figure of the computer age – actually, she may be better-known among computer scientists than her famous father. She was the first person to write what is now considered an algorithm for Charles Babbage's analytical engine, which was a design for a mechanical general-purpose computer, the ancestor of today's computers. Nowadays, Ada Lovelace is regarded as the world's first computer programmer who also envisioned artificial intelligence. The overwhelming interest in her is fairly obvious: since 2009 each year an Ada Lovelace Day has been held to celebrate the achievements of women in science.[13] As for popular culture, her character is also the protagonist of a webcomic,[14] and the list could be continued endlessly. The Postmodern is especially sensitive to oscillating, out–of–time characters and stories and Ada Lovelace can easily be seen as such a figure. A genius ahead of her time, a scientist with proleptic vision, she may be one of the many keys to the Postmodern and popular cultural interest in Byron.

---

[12] Fiona McCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend* (London: John Murray, 2002).
[13] <http://findingada.com/about/> Web. 28 Nov. 2010.
[14] <http://sydneypadua.com/2dgoggles/> Web. 28 Nov. 2010.

John Crowley's book is a novel-within-a-novel and an epistolary e-mail novel woven together to create a fascinating narrative. In the middle of three concentric circles stands a coded novel, the one Byron would have written had he taken the challenge to finish his story that night in the Swiss villa (this is the lost manuscript, a Gothic novel by Byron) and it is encrypted by his daughter so as to preserve it, and hide it from her hostile mother at the same time. The second circle consists of Ada's notes to the novel, a desperate attempt to understand the father she never really had. The third circle is the e-mail novel written by a lesbian couple – a historian and her mathematician partner. The historian is designing a website, and, as it is dedicated to the history of women in science, she is mostly interested in Ada Lovelace; this is the reason why she starts deciphering the coded novel, which unfolds as a lost Byron-manuscript.

The *alternate universe* category contains texts that create alternate histories where Lord Byron can be located, either as the protagonist, or as an "illustration" of the age so as to add a touch of reality to the storyline. The successful literary fantasy novel, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* (2004) by Susanna Clarke tells the story of the revival of magic in England. It is an impressive pastiche, an imitation of Jane Austen, a reinvention of the Byronic hero, and the Gothic tale. Byron appears in the novel as the poet he is, he does not have a central role, but gets acquainted with the title characters, even decides on writing his *Manfred* on a magician, being disappointed by Jonathan Strange, the real-life magician of the novel. *Wall, Stone, Craft* (1993), a novel by Walter Jon William is set in a world where Byron does not have a club foot. The narrator is Mary Shelley and it shows Byron as a hero cavalryman. Probably Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* (1993) belongs to the same category. In the play Byron himself is an off-stage character, all the other personae, however, are closely linked to him. The figure of Thomasina, the young genius is clearly based on Ada Lovelace. Lastly, *The Difference Engine* (1990) by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling: a steampunk novel, the authors created a science fiction subgenre with this work, imagining a world with Victorian setting where steam power is widely used and futuristic innovations and anachronistic technology live in symbiosis. *The Difference Engine* is the rewriting of Disraeli's novel, *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845), it contains alternate versions of characters from *Sybil*. Byron is the Prime Minister in the novel, the leader of the Industrial Radical Party and Ada Lovelace is attributed a central role in this society as a well-known scientist and the leader of the clackers (the steampunk equivalent of hackers).

The *supernatural* category refers to a set of novels of popular culture that depict Byron as a supernatural creature, for instance, as an immortal ghost protecting England, or as a vampire in *The Stress of her Regard* (1989) and *The Anubis Gates* (1983) by Tim Powers. These novels reveal a secret history in which real events have supernatural causes. Byron is a vampire in Tom Holland's *The Vampyre* (1995), a novel that features Polidori as well, and he appears as one in the book of Michael Thomas Ford, *Jane Bites Back* (2009), an amusing parody of the Jane

Austen mania, depicting Byron as Austen's sire, who has turned her into a vampire. Amanda Prantera's novel attempts to bring back Byron from the dead as well: in *Conversations with Lord Byron on Perversion, 163 Years after His Lordship's Death* (1987) it is a computer that makes it possible to converse with the dead poet.

In all the four categories I have applied, there is a uniform approach to cultural heritage. The novels, plays and short stories listed above either utilize the historical facts of Byron's life and create a storyline out of it, or "use" the poet as the Ultimate Romantic, who is so deeply rooted in the collective cultural memory that his presence sets the tone and effectively creates atmosphere. The interest focuses either on the thrilling and stirring life of the poet – i.e. the authors seek answers to enigmas that even the most precise biographers could not solve, alternatively they create a new "story" out of the biography by shifting emphases and replacing old biases –, or Byron's figure is used metonymically; his name is well-known enough to set cultural memory in motion and to evoke the Byronic hero, the Gothic atmosphere and the Romantic era.

The redefinition of our concept of Byron is greatly enriched by the creative interest in Ada Lovelace: due to the dominance of the computer in every field of life her popularity seems to have increased recently. The novels featuring Ada represent a unique and fresh approach to his Lordship, as well as to the Romantic age. Being the epitome of the nineteenth-century inventor and scientist, she first became a subject of interest mostly of science fiction writers. Later, though, as computers became part of everyday life, her growing popularity affected other fields of literature too. This phenomenon went hand in hand with the Neo-Victorian wave, resulting in some of the narratives mentioned above.

Why has there been such a massive interest in Lord Byron, and how could he become the poster child of The Romantic? On the one hand, Byron's personal life has been "rich material" for re-thinking and re-creating, even (or especially) for popular culture, a life full of tensions and tragedies. Accordingly, most often it is not his poetry that is used in these texts, but his life-story, relationships, travels and personality. On the other hand, Byron himself was an artist who deliberately constructed his image as a poet, fashioning his own public image with the passion that goes into the creation of a work of art. As a result, the Byronic hero became a well-known character, not least because of the endeavors of its creator who served as a living illustration of his own work. In the computer age this interest in Byron is complemented and increased by the interest in the intriguing figure of his daughter: the two of them have elicited a great number of Postmodern responses that might eventually rewrite the received image of Lord Byron and his age.

"The pen fell from his fingers. A sudden icy breath seemed to congeal from the air."[15] These words are from a 1904 novel that draws a solemn and senti-

---

[15] Hallie Ermine Rives and Howard Chandler Christy, *The Castaway* (New York: Braunworth & Co., 1904), p. 426.

mental picture of the Lord; a very different interpretation than those of the above-mentioned Postmodern texts. The thorough history of Byron-figures in fiction could definitely be a fruitful branch of Byron studies, being capable of adding rich conclusions to the reception history as well. As the phenomenon started in his own life and has been unbroken ever since and because it is the product of taste, understanding and interpretation, it offers a historical view on the poet's afterlife.

AN OUTLOOK ON THE HUNGARIAN SCENE

Hungarian Postmodern literature is also affected by the nineteenth century in a somewhat similar fashion, although the results prove to be considerably weaker than in the English language scene. Finding the roots of this noteworthy difference brings to light important differences between the two nations approach to the canon, while it raises the question how representative poets exist in the Hungarian cultural memory.

The first noteworthy piece to be listed is from Sándor Weöres (1913–1989), the twentieth century Hungarian poet: *Psyché* (1972), the fictitious poems of a fictitious nineteenth century artist, Erzsébet Lónyay. A masterpiece of pastiche, Lónyay's oeuvre is created around and in symbiosis with the texts of the real-life poet, László Ungvárnémeti-Tóth (1788–1820), who has been rediscovered for contemporary readers by Sándor Weöres. *Psyché* contains poems by these two authors, an imagined and a historical figure, and also their correspondence, a memoir and other pieces written with the intention to strengthen the reality of the central, fictitious character. Many of the prominent Hungarian poets and literary figures are depicted, or mentioned throughout the text, even Byron and Shelley are referred to.

Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849) is probably the most well-known nineteenth century Hungarian poet, the iconic figure of the freedom fight and revolution of 1848–49. He has been the epitome of the young talent and the fiery passion of the artist in the Hungarian cultural memory, therefore, he could be an obvious choice for drawing a parallel with the rewritings and resuscitation of Byron's figure. Petőfi is mentioned several times in the 2009 novel by László Darvasi, *Flower Eaters* (*Virágzabálók)*, set in Szeged, Hungary. The poet is used in these examples as a means to set in motion the readers' collective memory concerning the historical events of the middle of the nineteenth century. This method is similar to the one already mentioned in the case of Byron: the poet and the image he mediates, the experiences, the knowledge waken in the reader presumes a metonymical relationship. Petőfi is also the title character of a short story by Péter Esterházy, "Petőfi, the trapez artist" ("Petőfi, a légtornász", 1988). Steampunk as a subculture does exist in Hungary, although it has not yet produced a literary

re-imagination of the Hungarian nineteenth century. As the subgenre (and sub-culture) has British and American origins, the Hungarian scene is more heavily influenced by the Victorian era than by the Hungarian events and characters of the time. Still, as a closely related example, there is a science fiction novel by Sándor Cs. Szabó, its title is *Pál Pathó from Pannonia*[16] (*Pannoni Pathó Pál*, 2009) that is set in an alternative universe and operates with characters borrowed from the poetry of Petőfi, such as Pál Pató, Petőfi's metaphorical figure used for depicting the impoverished and incapable Hungarian gentry of the time.

The attention towards Petőfi has slightly shifted in the last decades, especially because of the re-reading and reinterpretation of his poetry and the literary cult around his figure that has been palpable in the last 160 years.[17] Due to the changing perspective, Petőfi's wife, Júlia Szendrey (1828–1868) is getting more and more attention too. She was a poet and a translator (of Andersen and George Sand) on her own right, while she also supported the women's rights move-ment. Her "scandalously early" remarriage, just a year after the disappearance of Sándor Petőfi during a battle of the Hungarian freedom fight made a whole nation exclaim in disapproval. Petőfi was an iconic figure in the second half of the nineteenth century for the whole nation, and the "unfaithfulness" of his wife meant that she was one of the first to accept his death. Her reputation was later restored, though the separation from his second husband caused a scandal again, and two years later she died lonely and forgotten. Later, novels and plays attempted to rehabilitate her, but the truth behind her life and sufferings in her second marriage came to light only in 1925, when her letters and journals were published.[18] In the last decades, definitely influenced by feminist criticism and the attempts towards the reworking of the canon, she became the muse of directors and a novelist.

Szendrey Júlia, a novel by Erzsébet Kertész was written in 1969 and was re-printed in 2008, which indicates that the interest in the character is still alive. Kertész wrote a biography-based text, in which she follows Szendrey's life from early childhood, through meeting and marrying Petőfi, till the tragic events after the revolution. Sándor Petőfi is in a supporting role, as the events are depicted and interpreted from Júlia Szendrey's point of view. As for the big screen, Judit Elek's direction, the tense world of *Mary Day* (*Mária-nap*, 1984) focuses on a few hours of Júlia Szendrey's life during her second marriage. *Stammbuch − The Secret Nights of Madame Júlia* (*Stammbuch − Júlia asszony titkos éjszakái*, 2005), di-rected by Péter Mészáros is the dramatization of a short story by Gyula Krúdy ("Night Bird", "Éjjeli madár", 1911). The original short story depicts Szendrey

16 <http://szabosandor.blog.hu/2009/10/13/pannoni_patho_pal> Web. 28 Nov. 2010.
17 István Margócsy, *Égi és földi virágzás tükre: Tanulmányok magyar irodalmi kultuszokról* (Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 2007).
18 *Szendrey Julia ismeretlen naplója, levelei és haláloságyán tett vallomása*, eds. Lajos Mikes and László Dernői Kocsis (1925). <http://mek.oszk.hu/07000/07091/> Web. 28 Nov. 2010.

as a frivolous and superficial young woman in search for her husband's secret affairs, while the film adaptation shows a slightly more complex, emancipated woman, possibly mirroring the changes in the perception of her figure in the last century. Ferenc Kardos's film, *Petőfi '73* (1973) is an attempt to recreate the turning points of the poet's life with young, amateur students from Pápa and Budapest (two significant places in the Petőfi-biography); a daring film with definite contemporary political subtext.

For the researcher, the most blatant difference between the English language and the Hungarian scene is how laborious it is to find nineteenth-century authors as characters in contemporary Hungarian narratives, as opposed to the high number of Byron-characters. Naturally, the results have got, on the one hand, uncomplicated reasons. Byron has been a well-known, iconic figure throughout Europe and the Western world with an eventful life, extreme popularity and a daughter who has become well-known just recently and by her talent very much connected to the computer age. Hungary, however, is a small country with considerably smaller audiences and a more insular literary life. On the other hand, the reasons, apart from the obvious, may lie at least partly in a fundamental difference of cultural memories and the approach towards canonized authors of the past. Hungarian cultural memory, literature and popular literature seems less interested in and capable of reforming the iconic figures of its past in fictional narratives. Is it because authors of the nineteenth century have been approached most often with humble respect and without a vivid rethinking of the past, especially by the audience, the readers? Possibly yes. Interestingly enough, the Hungarian film industry is a step closer to the Neo-Victorian phenomenon palpable in English-speaking countries, and has been faster in producing a different understanding of the nineteenth century, at least concerning the usage of historical figures in reinterpretations of the past.

The complex relationship between the Postmodern and the nineteenth century can be studied from various angles. This research, the appearances of Lord Byron (and Sándor Petőfi) in contemporary texts may seem to come from a marginal perspective. Still, it not only adds to the reception history, but also contributes to the understanding of the currents of contemporary literature and culture. The fact that so many Postmodern authors, even from the world of popular literature, featured a Romantic poet in their works is a symptom in itself: it indicates the contemporary sensitivity towards the nineteenth century, proving the existence of a significant bond that works even outside literature, influencing cultural life as a whole.

ANDREA KIRCHKNOPF

Post-Victorian narratives of the Crystal Palace

The case of Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*

The term post-Victorian denotes postmodern textual and contextual rephrasings of the Victorian age and its conventions. Since these refashionings reread historical processes of the past with specific relevance to the present, they are perceived as inherently critical acts,[1] correcting past narratives according to present needs. By assuming the status of political acts, these adaptations are particularly adept at expressing political alternatives to positions that have proved unsuccessful earlier.[2] Therefore, based on such post-Victorian rewritings, in what follows I shall examine the changing response of national and cultural narratives of the last thirty years to the cultural memento of the Crystal Palace (1851) and its late-twentieth-century re-imagining, the Millennium Dome (2000).

The Australian Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, published in 1988 and adapted for screen in 1997, provides the fictional perspective for the analysis. It is set in mid-nineteenth-century England and Australia and the plot follows the lives of an Anglican priest, Oscar and the owner of a glass factory, Lucinda, who are brought together by their addiction: gambling. They bet on the possibility of transporting a glass church to Bellinger, which grows into a major expedition readdressing Victorian ideologies of industrialisation and colonialism. As Jay Clayton points out, *Oscar and Lucinda* awakens the haunting nineteenth-century presence of the Crystal Palace in the colonial history of Australia on the level of its Victorian plotline at the same time as its legacy in the 1980s.[3]

THE EIGHTIES: HERITAGE AND ENTERPRISE

From the sixties onwards, in parallel with the gradual loss of the empire, the ensuing devolution of British imperial power and the movements of social and

---

[1] John Bryant, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 110.

[2] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 97–98.

[3] Jay Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 17.

sexual liberation, questions related to redefining political power and integrating marginalised members of society became central in British intellectual discourse. In terms of postmodern literature, and within this category post-Victorian fiction, this meant an increasing number of novels resuscitating silenced voices writing back to their oppressors as well as a number of texts admitting to British colonial follies of the past. At the same time, theories of feminism and postcolonialism were diversified and applied to the interpretation of such fiction.

Besides empowering hitherto neglected members of the empire, an additional need to theorise national identity emerged, which was, as Patricia Waugh points out, based on equalling nineteenth-century conceptualisations of the nation-state with contemporary global British power.[4] The political rhetoric of the 80s was dominated by the Thatcher administration's reintroduction of "Victorian values." Amongst others, as John Corner and Sylvia Harvey explain, the concepts of heritage and enterprise were connected and utilised to serve the government's ideologies of national identity-formation. This connection of seemingly contradictory terms worked on different levels. Firstly, the idea of nostalgically constructing the nineteenth-century empire as a successful past triggered a wave of attempts to make the inherited idea of progress into a cultural and industrial enterprise of the present and the future. Secondly, this connection was not only a theoretical image-production, but also an intermingling of terms that implied practical results: the already industrialised promotion of national heritage gradually summoned entrepreneurship as a cultural attitude and practice.[5] As Corner and Harvey argue, "[i]n this sense, heritage and enterprise form together a key mythic couplet for preserving hegemonic equilibrium and momentum during a period of major national reorientation."[6]
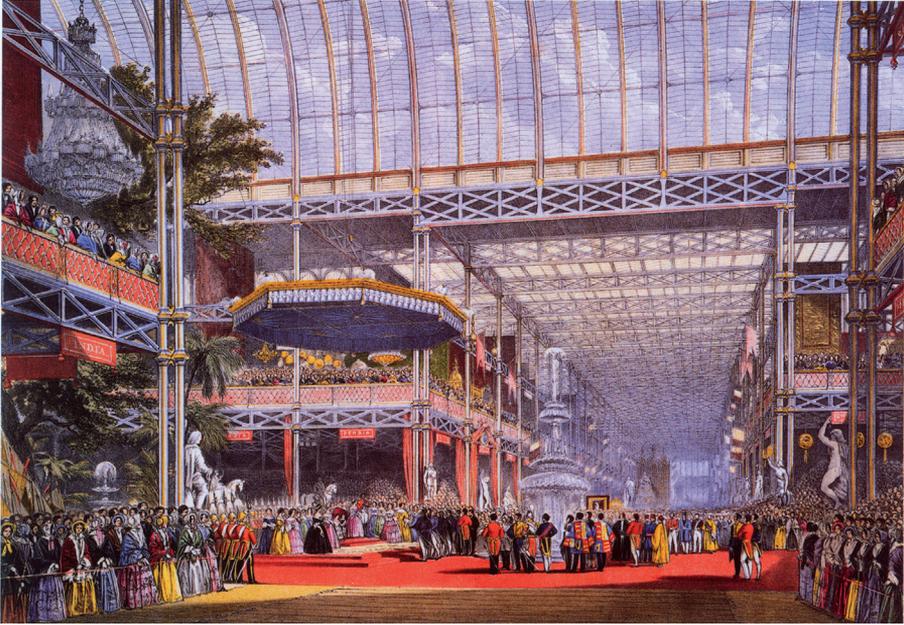
Unfortunately, this political ideology proved problematic in many respects. Most apparently, there was a discrepancy between the theory and practice of the principles advanced. In his essay "Mrs Thatcher and Victorian Values," Raphael Samuel provides an analysis of the Iron Lady's disregard of or outright attack on substantial Victorian legacies despite her rhetoric promoting the same. Samuel characterises Thatcher's application of "Victorian Values" as "double-coded, a programme for the future disguised as a narrative of the past."[7] In addition, as Corner and Harvey maintain, this attempt at homogenising the narratives of various interest groups took place at a time when national narratives were

---

[4]   Patricia Waugh, *Harvest of the Sixties. English Literature and Its Background 1960–1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.161.

[5]   John Corner and Sylvia Harvey, "Mediating Tradition and Modernity: The Heritage/Enterprise Couplet," in *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, eds. John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 45–75, pp. 45–49.

[6]   Corner–Harvey, p. 46.

[7]   Raphael Samuel, *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain. 1998. Theatres of Memory, Vol. II* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 343.

influenced by many factors, from the loss of the empire and the devolution of power to a greater diversity of ethnicity and class, all constituting a threat to the envisioned image of a consensually shared national identity. Marginalised groups who were theoretically included in the common narrative as owners of the "nation's values," actually experienced losses and exclusion.[8]

In their *At Home with the Empire*, Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose give a detailed account of the racial and ethnic dimensions of this exclusion causing the postcolonial crisis in British intellectual discourse.[9] Such tensions also appear in *Oscar and Lucinda*. Lucinda feels guilty about being wealthy at the expense of the colonised: "This money did not belong to them [her parents], or to her either. The money was stolen from the land. The land was stolen from the blacks. She could not have it" (104),[10] still this does not stop her from becoming a gambler and a manufacturer partaking in the colonisation process. The same ambivalence can be observed in the behaviour of the English as colonisers. Mr Jeffris, directing the expedition that delivers the glass church to Australia, gets entangled in conflicts with the natives leading to murder, which he acknowledges as the

---

8   Corner–Harvey, pp. 61–73.
9   Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, "Introduction: Being at Home with the Empire," in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, eds. Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1–31, pp. 8–22.
10 All parenthesised references are to this edition: Peter Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda* (New York: Vintage, 1997, first publ. 1988).

dark side of the colonising mission by statements like "Churches are not carried by choirboys" and "Neither has the Empire been built by angels" (401), yet he maintains his colonising view of the natives, constructing them as the frightening dark "other":

> He was, himself, fearful of the blacks in the Manning and the Macleay. It was likely he would one day have to confront them himself. He attempted to explain their behaviour to Mrs Burrows [a woman whose husband had been murdered by a black], not so much to calm her as to still, through explication, his own anxiety. These blacks, he said, were the most murderous of all, having been dispossessed of their lands and driven into the dense, tumbled country of the 'Falls' [….] She talked of calling out the army, of a final all-out war against the blacks (143).

All this is framed by the narrative of Oscar's descendant in the 1980s attempting to reconstruct and understand the nineteenth-century events, yet the natives are not given space for self-expression throughout the text except for a brief spell. In this section (Chapter 100), probably narrated by one of the natives, the sentences become shorter and the indigenous narrative perspective seems at once to be innocent and ironic, freshly and subtly illustrating the point of view of peoples about to be colonised:

> The white man came out of the clouds of Mount Darling. Our people had not seen white men before. We thought they were spirits. They came through the tea-trees, dragging their boxes and shouting. The birds set up a chatter. What a noise they all made. Like twenty goannas had come at once to raid their nests. Anyway, it was not nesting time (395).

So, as Luke Strongman suggests, instead of an expected revision and correction of colonial discourse, the contrary takes place: "Carey shows in *Oscar and Lucinda* that what seems at first to be a broadening of cultural horizons, a re-addressing of the follies of a barbaric colonialism, is in fact the re-appropriation of the colonial impetus in a postcolonial form."[11] In 1988 the novel received the Booker Prize as an acknowledgement of its attempt to adjust national self-perceptions to the legacies of the empire.[12] However, this effort of admitting the nation's imperial wrongdoings towards its colonised "other", attempting to define itself in the new context of the 1980s produces an ambivalent result, since the novel's narrative lead remains with the coloniser, not allowing these "others" a voice to express

---

[11] Luke Strongman, *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002), p. 95.
[12] Strongman, p. ix.

themselves. Very much like the Booker Prize itself, accorded to authors from the ex-colonies but maintaining the language and location of the imperial centre, *Oscar and Lucinda* exemplifies the controversial revival of Victorianism whereby the redefinition of national, cultural and individual identities take place in the framework of the traditional ethos of the English novel.

In his *Commerce and Culture* Robert Hewison reflects on how the implementation of Thatcherite cultural policies debarred lower classes from sharing cultural narratives with the upper ones. The author argues that similarly to the dominant narratives of the nineteenth-century (the most likely choice of ideological model for this era), Thatcherite policies were based on serving and preserving the assets of the ruling elite. He exemplifies this with the process of privatising museums and integrating them in a free-market economy, which caused the destruction and restructuring of many, entailing the loss of jobs and the rise of entrance fees, making culture an often unaffordable commodity for a considerable percentage of the population.[13] As reflections in post-Victorian novels relate, the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace, the largest cultural event of the nineteenth century, the rhetoric of which the Conservative Party capitalised on, was a similar venture. In Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* the female narrator compares the male narrator's diary to pompous Victorian narratives covering up for less desirable empirical realities, including the exhibition space, in a simile: "To me this book stinks as the interior of a poor woman's crinoline must have stunk after a cheap weekend railway excursion to the Crystal Palace."[14] This image is fictionalised into the experience of the protagonist of Clare Boylan's *Emma Brown*. Emma travels to London by train, a journey on which she spends most of her money. When in London, she quickly becomes the victim of thieves and has to earn her living by begging. Her attire, which has become sweaty and sticks to her, hinders her in this activity as it is too good for a homeless woman. She becomes feverish, faints in a church and is finally transferred to the workhouse infirmary. On her way to London she conversed with a poor Irishman about the Great Exhibition:

He had told her he meant to make his fortune at an exhibition of all the world's wealth and industry, which was to be displayed in a glasshouse. When she asked who would be so foolish as to place treasures in a house of glass to which every thief would have access, he answered that it was the scheme of a foreign gentleman married to a rich little woman who wore her diamonds on her head.[15]

---

[13] Robert Hewison, "Commerce and Culture," in *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, eds. John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 162–177.

[14] Alasdair Gray, *Poor Things*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2002, first publ. 1992), p. 275.

[15] Clare Boylan, *Emma Brown* (London: Abacus, 2004, first publ. 2003), pp. 173–174.

Thus the emblematic structure housing all the exhibits is attached to various qualities as an empty signifier, as the heroine's enthusiasm in Carey's novel also shows: "[t]he Crystal Palace, that building she admired more than any other, was nothing but a fancy of a kind, and there were ideas like this, the philosophical equivalent of great cathedrals of steel and glass, which were her passion" (219–220). Inspired by the Crystal Palace, Lucinda imagines and creates her glass church. Oscar admires the object and calls it a "kennel for God's angels" (318). The church is evaluated differently at its destination: "a miracle, a spider web, a broken thing, a tragedy, a dream like something constructed for George III and then assaulted in a fit of rage" (420). The Crystal Palace has indeed affected many artists and architects ever since its construction, triggering a series of similar projects from the nineteenth century onwards. The Glaswegian Kibble Palace constitutes one such example, whose glass–iron configuration was adapted for buildings of various functions from botanic gardens and sports centres to railway stations. Another creation that shows some similarities with the interior of the Crystal Palace is the GUM in Moscow, which was erected in 1893 and opened as a department store in 1953, anticipating today's shopping malls with similar designs.

THE NINETIES AND THE MILLENNIUM CELEBRATIONS: REPETITION OF THE RHETORIC OF THE EIGHTIES

The movie *Oscar and Lucinda*, a Hollywood blockbuster featuring Ralph Fiennes and Cate Blanchett, came out in 1997 and provides a convincing case in point of how earlier political and cultural narratives were maintained in the 1990s. The film adaptation concentrates mainly on the mission of transporting the glass church to Australia, and accordingly the relevant sections of the novel are transferred into the script. The whole process of its construction is dominated by the aesthetic experience, leaving the economic and social value and future cultural context of this object largely neglected, despite warnings to the contrary: "It is this which makes this church impossible […]. The Australian sun will scorch your congregation as though they were in hell itself" (360); "It will be hot […] as hot as hell. The congregation will fry inside […]. They will curse you. They will curse God's name" (362). The journey of the church is full of risks including transportation difficulties due to its fragility, the fact that it almost falls prey to the gambling addiction of the protagonists, not to mention the warfare and lives it costs on the way. The natives are curiously omitted from the film adaptation, just as they are from the narrative, but for a brief fight scene and as threats to the arriving glass church. The actual and symbolic failure of this mission takes place after the arrival of the church to its destination when Oscar admits the prize paid for it:

> He begged God forgive him for the murder of the blacks which he, through his vanity, had brought about.
> He begged God forgive him for the death of Mr Stratton.
> He begged God forgive him for the murder of Mr Jeffris.
> He begged God forgive him for the seduction of Mrs Chadwick.
> He begged God forgive him for his complacency, his pride, his wilful ignorance.
> But even as he prayed he felt himself polluted almost beyond redemption (431).

So, at the end of the 1990s, political anxieties still seem to circle around social and postcolonial aspects of national identity, which had surfaced again in the rhetoric of the 1980s rhetoric.

There may be various reasons for this apparent conservation and continuation of the rhetoric of earlier years. As Ken Worpole maintains, they can be sought in the general truth that cultural innovation takes place in sub- or counter-cultures, that is political opposition, rather than as a result of official cultural policies.[16] Or,

---

16   Ken Worpole, "Cartels and Lotteries: Heritage and Cultural Policy in Britain," in *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality and Identity*, eds. David Morley and Kevin Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 235–248, p. 246.

as Jay Clayton argues, examining the phenomenon from an ideological angle, the narrative of liberal thinking promoting cultural studies is based on similarly teleological tenets as the neoconservative one it counters. This means that neo-conservativism reads the present compared to Victorian times as a linear narrative of decline, narrating the nineteenth century as an age of bliss, whereas liberal endorsers of the past take the Victorian age to be the beginning of scholarly conceptualisations of culture through which the present can be interpreted. As the critic claims, in the end they overlap since, "[d]espite their opposed agendas, both end up relying on similar conceptions of the historian's task, which they see as that of producing a continuous, unified account of how the present has emerged from the past."[17]

For the commemoration of the turn of the century, a new event was planned: Britain's millennium project. This idea was originally proposed by John Major's conservative government and, contrary to all expectations, Tony Blair adopted the project, converting its focus from the celebration of British private enterprise to symbolise "New Britain." The Millennium Festival is read in parallel to the Great Exhibition, even more so since the architect Richard Rogers made it clear that Joseph Paxton's nineteenth-century creation served as his model. Critics Ken Worpole and Ronald R. Thomas regard the two ventures as political and cultural disasters for their lack of internationalism as well as for the lack of clearly defined social aims or messages the monuments of the respective occasions were to convey, proving the claim that cultural programmes in Britain were created without accompanying cultural policies.[18] The focus of both enterprises was to sell national identity, though in different terms. While the nineteenth-century Crystal Palace in London could still stand for the centre of empire both in spatial and temporal terms, the Millennium Dome in Greenwich represented only time, of which the nation was still master,[19] and therefore history emerged as the main commodity to sell.[20] However, instead of the nineteenth-century ideology of integration, ideas of British devolution were paired with the Millennium Celebrations,[21] and the emphasis was less on a display of commodities to assist in defining the nation than on experiencing diverse identities through spectacle, pleasure and leisure, backed up by high-tech products.[22] This was part

---

17 Clayton, p. 23.
18 Worpole, pp. 243–244, Ronald R. Thomas, "The Legacy of Victorian Spectacle: The Map of Time and the Architecture of Empty Space," in *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time*, ed. Christine L. Krueger (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002), 18–33, p. 31.
19 Ronald R. Thomas, pp. 18–19. Even scientific measurements were subject to political pacts. For example, Greenwich Mean Time was acclaimed as zero point in return for the establishment of the French metric system as the international standard (Thomas, p. 24).
20 Clayton, p. 11.
21 Thomas, p. 27.
22 Thomas, p. 30.

of the process of changing the profiles of museums from purely documentary and educational institutions into theme-parks attracting tourists and money.

These differences highlight how twentieth-century heritage industry transforms into twenty-first-century edutainment, since the growth of heritage centres and the sale of nineteenth-century relics have by now become mainstream examples of commodification. A non-post-Victorian but topically relevant and trend-setting fictional example anticipating this transformation is Julian Barnes's *England, England* (1998). This novel satirises the heritage industry by showing how a business venture of gathering all the national sights and entertainments onto the Isle of Wight leads to neglect on the mainland, which becomes derelict and dangerous. Such a dystopian turn of events unmasks the political narratives of the 1980s and 1990s attempting to define national identity based on the appropriation of Victorian discourses of the country's assumed values:

> You – we – England – my client – is – are a nation of great age, great history, great accumulated wisdom. Social and cultural history – stacks of it, reams of it – eminently marketable, never more so than in the current climate. Shakespeare, Queen Victoria, Industrial Revolution, gardening, that sort of thing. *We are already what others may hope to become.* This isn't self-pity, this is the strength of our position, our glory, our product placement. We are the new pioneers. We must sell our past to other nations as their future![23]

This text proves to be a strong critique of the cultural policy of the 80s and the 90s as its frequent referencing in critical analyses of the same era shows. With explicit connections to the Millennium Celebrations the novel is summoned as a warning that the project creators may have taken into consideration when working on the historical potential of the Millennium Dome[24] as well as a text prognosticating the economic failure of the celebrations.[25] There seems to have been a crisis not only economically but also on the level of ideas, hilariously narrated in another, post-Victorian novelistic example, D. M. Thomas's *Charlotte*, where the person responsible for new ideas in the interior construction of the "giant pin-cushion in Greenwich" invents "a brain-shaped sort of punchbag, in the Body Zone, which would move about and speak jokes in the staccato style of our friend Ben Elton"[26] and later suffers a nervous breakdown from a complete lack of inspiration when he has to create something for the Faith Zone. So the

---

[23] Julian Barnes, *England, England* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), pp. 39–40.
[24] Clayton, p. 11.
[25] Patrick Parrinder, *Nation and Novel. The English Novel from Its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 409.
[26] D. M. Thomas, *Charlotte* (London: Duck, 2000), p. 84.

Millennium Celebrations emerge as a complete failure economically as well as on the level of ideas.

Claiming that New Labour has continued the cultural rhetoric and policy introduced by the Thatcher administration through maintaining the gap between cultural theory and policy, critics perceive the Dome in equally ironic terms: "[t]he Dome is fashioned as a great emblem of what we might call postnational space, the nation as cybermemory of itself. It seemed to be offered as a palimpsestic recollection of the empire upon which the sun never set, of the Great Exhibition, of the Big Ben clock tower, of the prime meridian of the earth, and the place by which the world still sets its clocks."[27] Just as there were of the Crystal Palace, there have been replications of the grand project of the Millennium Dome as well. The planning of the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff started in 1996, and the building complex was opened by the Queen in November 2004. To provide some local examples as well, the Hungarian capital, Budapest has two constructions with corresponding temporal and political frameworks. One is the Millennium Cultural Centre (*Millenniumi Kulturális Központ*) whose different parts housing important national cultural institutions were gradually opened between 2002 and 2005, and the other is the Millennium Park (*Millenáris Park*) whose construction history, inauguration and cultural use can be related to the Millennium Dome, not to mention its iconic political and cultural status. The funding of all these places was closely related to the cultural policies of incumbent governments. Sections of the Crystal Palace and the Kibble Palace reconstructions were financed from (and the Millennium Dome was also supported by) the National/Heritage Lottery Funds. The example of the Kibble Palace, whose reconstruction planning started in 1990 when Glasgow became

---

27   Ronald R. Thomas, p. 31.

the cultural capital of Europe and which was finished in 2006, proves how the cultural policy of the 1980s – making museums part of enterprise culture by the establishment of heritage centres and the introduction of regulations aiming at the conservation of national heritage – has carried on into the new millennium.

THE PRESENT: THE LIBERALISATION OF CULTURAL NARRATIVES

The danger of filling exhibition spaces with ideologically determined images and spectacles instead of objects and monuments has already been pointed out in relation to the 1980s and appears to equally hold for the 1990s and the present. Tangible historical material has been changed into intangible images and theme parks, which reverberates with Baudrillard's concept of simulation prognosticating the difficulty of distinguishing between the original and the copy, or the real and the imagined.[28] The past can be manipulated in a similar way according to predominant ideological interests, which results in the erasure of unwanted individual cultural memories. One example of such an ongoing erasure seems to be the fate of workhouses. As Simon Dentith argues, the fact that workhouses have been transformed into heritage objects or flats for rent "with parking for residents only," slowly diminishes the symbolic legacy their historiography conveys. He proposes to reinsert the workhouse into its historical landscape striving to free it from both neoconservative and neoliberal ideological appropriations moralising the poor as a model for their own projects.[29]

To return to fiction, the readings most likely to provide new interpretive perspectives are those that concentrate on individual narratives and their recovery from and attempt to process cultural traumas. In *Oscar and Lucinda* such effaced memories can be recovered by examining the two protagonists' cultural contexts and their attitude to the glass object to be transported, claims Clayton. The critic describes how the Crystal Palace representing London's imperial power in official narratives meant for Lucinda a number of things from her adoration of engineering instead of high art, her willpower and her preferences and desires not fitting for the proper female behaviour of the age. These were understood by Oscar who was motivated by his passion for her and advanced the idea of transporting the wrong church to the wrong person in the wrong place. The

[28] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra & Simulations,* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1983). <http://www.ee.sun.ac.za/~hgibson/docs/html/Simulacra-and-Simulation.html>.

[29] Simon Dentith, "The Workhouse: The Afterlife of a Victorian Institution," *Neo-Victorianism: The Politics and Aesthetics of Appropriation Conference* (Conference Paper: Exeter, UK, September 10–12, 2007).

traumatic narratives of their experience of being misfits read on many levels as restorations of effaced cultural memories.[30]

The Crystal Palace in its fragile materiality seems a particularly appropriate cultural icon to start the reconstruction of various and even contradictory modes in which history corresponds to the present. Clayton is not alone in referring constantly to the characteristics of glass; the editors of *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace* (2007) also capitalise on the metaphorical qualities of this word. The main aim of their contribution to Victorian studies is to re-examine the "transparency" accorded to the cultural memory of this object by revising narratives that "[s]et this ephemeral Exhibition and the removable Crystal Palace in historical stone, *framing* them as distortion-free *windows* upon the past."[31] (italics mine – A. K.). The title of this collection is likewise saturated with words referential to glass and its diverse effects: "prism" and "refraction" signal many layers and numerous possible views of the same object, emphasising not their collection into a unified account but their dispersion into many different ones. Chapter 100 of *Oscar and Lucinda* (the only place where natives are accorded narrative space), entitled "Glass Cuts," constitutes a novelistic example of providing alternative perspectives on the same object, the glass church inspired by the Crystal Palace. The aesthetic and spiritual qualities of glass highly praised by Lucinda and Oscar remain unnoticed by the indigenous population of Australia that is supposed to admire it. Instead, they reflect on the materiality of the object from a practical point of view:

> You know what they saw? It was glass. Up until that time they had not seen glass. There was glass windows down in Kempsey and Port Macquarie, but these fellows had not been to those places. They saw the glass was sharp. This was the first thing they noticed – that it cuts. Cuts trees. Cuts the skin of the tribes. (397)

One of the tribe members cuts himself with glass and dies of the injuries soon after. As a result the pieces of glass, originally intended to construct a space for the religious communion with the whites' god, are accorded a rather different fate: "That glass was kept a long time by the elders of the Kumbaingiri, but it was not kept with the sacred things. It was kept somewhere else, where it would not be found" (398). Such a complexity of stories illustrates the possibilities raised by the title analysed above and also resonates with "refraction" in another collection of essays titled *Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film* (2004), where the editors define the term as follows: "We have applied the visual metaphor to literature and film in order to designate a double process involving

---

[30]   Clayton, pp. 18–19.

[31]   James Buzard, Joseph W. Childers, and Eileen Gillooly, "Introduction," in *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace*, eds. James Buzard, Joseph W. Childers, and Eileen Gillooly (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 1–19, p. 5.

the ways in which a text exploits and integrates both the reflections of a previous text *and* the new light shed on the original work by its rewriting."[32] Hence we can say that contemporary cultural studies concentrating on the post-Victorian phenomenon define the dissection of cultural material as a crucial methodological tenet, whereby the historical as well as present narratives are reviewed, thus enriching Victorian as well as post-Victorian studies.

Besides the glass church featuring in *Oscar and Lucinda*, memory objects juxtaposed with narratives of individual and collective cultural memories are used as interpretive tools in other post-Victorian novels as well. Gail Jones's *Sixty Lights* (2004) rewrites nineteenth-century imperial identity into a multicultural one based on the travels of an imperial subject. The heroine, Lucy Strange's visual imagination aids this process by approximating traumatic moments into sixty (mental) snapshots. Having lived in Australia, England and India, Lucy searches for a narrative of identification that synthesises her experiences. "Lucy now found her own culture a shock. After eight weeks in England she was still thinking of India and feeling misplaced and dislocated" (184).[33] Therefore, watching a propaganda film about how the British Empire put down the Indian Mutiny does not awaken the reaction her compatriots expect of her: "'I am disgusted,' said Lucy loudly, 'by National Spirit'" (185). Rejecting the binaries in which national and cultural characteristics are commonly perceived, she finally visualises her identity as a tripod when thinking about her journey back to England: "Australia, England and India all held her – upheld her – on a platform of vision, seeking her own focus. These were the zones of her eye, the conditions of her salutary estrangement" (212). These sentences already account for the attitude of the photographer that she has become, zooming in at certain perspectives of vision and always remaining a constructive outsider.

However, photographic images will not do the memory work on their own, so they are supported by characters' mediation of their reading experience of Victorian novels. Lucy and her mother, Honoria share instances of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* with their companions whenever important life-events take place whose detailed account is usually missing from Victorian fiction: Honoria tells her future husband about Jane and Rochester's harmonious relationship before their sexual initiation; then she relates the whole plot of *Jane Eyre* to her housekeeper Molly Minchin on losing her husband; Lucy reads from the "sentimental novel" *Jane Eyre* to Violet after her friend loses her child; and, importantly, this is the memento by which Lucy remembers her mother. As Kate Mitchell points out, Lucy's brother Thomas is finally capable of facing and

---

[32] Susana Onega and Christian Gutleben, "Introduction," in *Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film*, eds. Susana Onega, Christian Gutleben (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004), 7–15, p. 7.

[33] All parenthesised references are to this edition, Gail Jones, *Sixty Lights* (London: Harvill, 2004).

experiencing the loss of his sister by rereading *Great Expectations*, the novel they read together in their childhood,[34] so fictional texts also seem to take up the role of enhancing grief work.

Apart from the role Dickens's text takes in supporting characters' facing death and resuscitating personal memories, the novel assumes additional functions in Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* (2006). One of these is to illustrate how the inheritance of Victorian imperial practices causes warfare among Pacific Islands at the end of the twentieth century, proving that the discourse of (cultural) imperialism is still sustained. The only white man on Bougainville, New Zealand, Mr Watts teaches the native children from a simplified version of Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Trying to enforce a literary product on people of a completely different cultural context causes problems of comprehension to the native readers since they lack matching referents to the phenomena named in the novel. Expressions like "a rimy morning" and "metropolis" or words like "insensibly" in the sentence "As I had grown accustomed to my expectations, I had insensibly begun to notice their effect upon myself and those around me" (195)[35] hinder their understanding and lead them to discard the novel as "fancy nancy English talk" (195). Still, as Mathilda, the indigenous narrator confesses, the text provides a means to keep at bay the fear that is produced by the actual war-context: "Our only consolation was that by reading it a second and a third time we would still have another country to flee to. And that would save our sanity" (80). At the same time, the book also causes anxiety in the warriors for the unknown impact Mr Pip may have on the conflict, so some rioters, not trained to differentiate between fictional and real characters, start searching for him. In the process the only copy of the novel gets burnt, so the teacher and his pupils have to recreate *Great Expectations* out of their memories. The atrocities claim the lives of many natives, among them that of Mathilda's mother, who is first raped and then killed. In order to stop the killings his teaching material has caused, Mr Watt identifies himself as Mr Pip. He relates his story to his capturers mixing *Great Expectations* and his own biography (later referred to as "[Mr Watt's] Pacific version of *Great Expectations*" [149]), but he cannot finish it because he too is killed.

Dickens's text serves not only as an imperial object of diverse interpretations, but also as a source of identification for characters. The book's materiality and fictional content undergo a series of transformations thus resembling the process of the characters' identity formation. Pip's story is doubly rewritten into twentieth-century narratives: it is interwoven with Mr Watts's, who in the course of events identifies himself with both Pip and Charles Dickens, and

---

[34] Kate Mitchell, "Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction in 'Afterimage' and 'Sixty Lights,'" *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1.1 (2008) 80–109, p. 98.

[35] All parenthesised references are to this edition, Lloyd Jones, *Mister Pip* (London: John Murray, 2006).

it becomes Mathilda's means to break away from war-stricken Bougainville, travelling to both Australia and England to finally return as a different person. As Jennifer Gribble maintains, the novel provides a narrative of empowerment through Mathilda who uses it for the creation of her own identity: "She is able to place her story of emergence within a wider history of exploitation, geno-cide and slavery. She discovers that stories are subject to interpretation, bearers of ideology."[36] Knowing the novel by heart and identifying with Pip, Mathilda first perceives the Victorian text as her helper, for instance, she christens the log that saves her in a flood as Mr Jaggers. Later as she visits Mr Watts's first wife and becomes a university lecturer on Dickens in Australia, she develops a more complex understanding of both her previous teacher and the nineteenth-century author. "The man who writes so touchingly and powerfully about orphans can-not wait to turn his own kin out the door" (212) is one of the recognitions that prompt her to turn away from Dickens and instead of writing her dissertation on the Victorian author, she embarks on her own autobiography.

This paper has examined textual and visual responses to the Crystal Palace in the contexts of the 1980s' narrative of heritage and enterprise and the 1990s' cultural policy culminating in the millennium celebrations with a special focus on *Oscar and Lucinda*. It emerges from the above analyses that this survey can be extended to include various memory objects of architecture, photography and fiction that other post-Victorian novels activate offering a range of possible readings. These readings focus on individual and collective cultural memories that the outcast protagonists of the novels activate. These characters often travel between England and its various (ex)-colonies, experience a number of cultural influences and are at pains to integrate those to form their own identities. While Oscar fails in this journey as he sinks with the glass church in *Oscar and Lucinda*, Lucinda makes her way into the labour movement. Lucy in *Sixty Lights* dies of consumption, yet her mode of vision and her photographs survive her and have the power to influence the thinking of those who live on. Mathilda's narrative in *Mister Pip* seems a success story: she is able to emerge as a richer person eventu-ally finding her own voice. Following the current trend of liberalising political attitudes to remembering, all three texts seem to insist on forming new identities that are complex, individual and multiple.

---

[36] Jennifer Gribble, "Portable Property: Postcolonial Appropriations of 'Great Expectations,'" in *Victorian Turns, NeoVictorian Returns: Essays on Fiction and Culture*, eds. Penny Gay, Judith Johnston, and Catherine Waters (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 182–192, pp. 190–191.