

ZSÓFIA **B**ÁRCZI
GABRIELLA **P**ETRES CSIZMADIA (eds)

NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION
OF IDENTITY
IN *Female* WRITING

Zsófia Bárczi – Gabriella Petres Csizmadia (eds)

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FOREWORD

Feminist criticism is not only one of the most important contemporary trends but also one of the most productive methods. The questions of feminism, the feminine and the female appear in numerous literary, sociological, anthropological and political studies and represent a border issue in several fields of study.

The essays collected here are about the role of women in literature, female identity, the female body in the process of writing and “female genres”. However, the two basic questions are centred around the variability of the construction of female identity in the process of writing or how the historical and cultural construction of female identity is mirrored in female writing and how a literary canon is constructed, where and in which literary genres female writers and their works are placed in a literary canon, which is so male-centred, and so is the Hungarian literature of the 20th century.

The first essay introduces the topic of investigation from a theoretical perspective. ‘What is a Woman? – Female Identity in the Mirror of Feminist Criticism’ examines a key issues of feminist theory, such as the faces of identity, its relationship to language and the several factors that play a role in the formation of identity.

Female ghosts project images of erotic attraction and seduction. Three short stories – Auguste Villiers de l’isle-Adam *Vera*, Dezső Kosztolányi *Hrussz Krisztina csodálatos látogatása* [The Wonderful Visit of Krisztina Hrussz], and Géza Szilágyi *Éjjel a fogadóban* [Night at the Inn] – examine the literary representation of the female ghost together with the reasons of post mortem encounter communication between the living and the returned female ghosts.

The following two essays deal with forgotten Hungarian female writers who lived in the same period in minorities. One of them in

Czechoslovakia (Piroska Szenes) and the other one in Transylvania (Maria Berde). The study about Piroska Szenes analyses two novels: *Az utolsó úr* [The Last Lord] (1927) and *Egyszer élünk* [We Only Live Once] (1935). The essay which analyses Maria Berde also investigates two novels: *Tüzes kemence* [Hot Furnace] and *Szent szégyen* [The Sacred Disgrace]. Both authors stress the role of narration in the construction of identity.

The following essay: 'Identity Construction Through Therapeutic Writing: The Interpretation of *Asszony a fronton* [Woman on the Front], an Autobiographical Novel by Alaine Polcz' also tries to focus on the same topic, the role of narration in the construction of identity, but this time from the point of view of the autobiography.

A contemporary Hungarian female crime fiction writer, Katalin Baráth is the topic of the next essay, which analyses the relationship between crime fiction and feminism focusing on the characteristic features of the role of female detectives.

The main aim of the next essay is to point out how the narrative identity of the two novels' narrators is formed, that is, the elements of the protagonists' female identity in the novels of Zsuzsa Rakovszky.

The last essay maps contemporary Hungarian women's literature after 1989 and points out the social, political, cultural, medial and literary processes as well as trends in literary theory that led to the formation of a new female canon.

The eight essays of this volume focus particularly on Hungarian literature and give us a summarized view of the ways of creating female objects, which are constructed through the various processes of narration. They examine several genres and the possible points of view of literary canons and construction processes.

Zsófia Bárczi – Gabriella Petres Csizmadia

ANDREA PUSKÁS

WHAT IS A WOMAN?

Female Identity in the Mirror of Feminist Criticism

Abstract ●●●●● The paper is devoted to the exploration of female identity in the mirror of feminist criticism; its objective is to establish a definition and identify the core components of female identity. Various approaches to defining female identity are introduced and examined, and at the same time grouped according to their primary focus or emphasis. It ties together feminist theories that pay special attention to historical development of female identity, theories that emphasise the social construction of identity, that focus on the female body. The investigation underlines the differences between collective and individual identity, presents, compares and contrasts the different understandings of the sex/gender system and the place of female identity in this system with special attention to the poststructuralist theory in feminism on sex and gender. One of the most frequently discussed issues within feminism is the connection between identity and language. This facet of feminist theory is discussed in a subchapter which focuses on the notion of language acquisition, the relation of language to society, and the links between feminism, deconstruction and psychoanalysis.

The investigation has proved that it is more adequate to identify which factors have an important role in the *formation* of female identity than which factors actually *comprise* that identity. Race, age, class, sexual orientation, nationality, idiosyncratic personal experience (a wholly unique store of experiences), religion, political views and intellectual abilities are among the central categories that always shape the experience of being one sex or another, always contributing to the creation of personal identity.

Key words: identity, construct, sex, gender, language, female body, collective and individual identity

I. Introduction

Female identity is one of the crucial questions of feminist criticism. Perhaps the greatest challenge a feminist critic faces is expunging an image of 'female' that is promulgated by and highly dependent upon male culture, social conventions or other foci of indoctrination, and then exploring the truest and most accurate meaning of female identity. Cheri Register argues that the arts, or more specifically, literary works, are responsible for providing 'role-models' for this identity and that by portraying women whose identities are not dependent on men they are able to create new language, definitions and symbolic orders (REGISTER 2004: 236).

Disclosing the components of female identity is not just one of the crucial tasks of feminist criticism, it is also an integral part of self-discovery for women, a way of exploring the constituents of the mysterious female 'mechanism.' Many feminist theories that elaborate female identity create a list of identity components, e.g. race, class, ethnicity and religion, and they invariably end the list with 'etc.' What does this 'etc.' stand for? Is it possible to measure, materialise and make a numbered list for such a complex phenomenon? Many times these theories have a forceful political background, which raises the issue of 'literary correctness' and whether it is right to talk about philosophical and social categories in terms of influences and underlying intentions.

In carrying out this investigation, I expected feminist criticism to contribute to the comprehension of my own (female) identity, to teach me new ways and modes of comprehension. I attempted to understand what female awareness and consciousness mean, what it simply means to be a woman. The research has shown that the question asked in this paper cannot be responded to with a single answer or definition. The category of woman has been defined from various perspectives and

different approaches highlight different aspects of female identity. At the same time, these different perspectives, when collected and joined into a whole, can create a colourful patchwork embracing all the aspects and standpoints of womanhood.

II. The Historical Perspective

One approach to the understanding of both female identity and the literary canon is a kind of historical perspective, best articulated by Virginia Woolf, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. They stress that women can be on the right path towards comprehending their identity and position only if they go back to the past and have a look at what happened to their mothers and grandmothers. This personal historical analysis can be a tool for self-knowledge and the ability to change one's position in society.

This approach is heavily based on the fact that one important element or constituent of female identity is history, the past; it therefore suggests that all women have internalised certain historical models, past social roles taught and dominated by our fathers and grandfathers. Consequently, this leads to the conclusion that the approach posits certain role models are somehow genetically coded into the social consciousness of women. Other feminist critics consider this revolting and misleading. Hélène Cixous claims that the future must no longer be determined by the past, and therefore she refuses to look back (CIXOUS 2004: 320). On the other hand, she also writes about refusing to strengthen the effects of the past by repeating them, which obviously – whether she likes it or not – takes us down a path directed by the aforementioned past effects, even if that path leads us in the completely opposite direction.

Connecting the exploration of female identity with an analysis of the past and the history of women is very typical of the approaches used by feminist literary history. It is very tempting to identify with the goals articulated in the several stages of feminist activities, ranging from proto-feminism and the suffragettes to the Second and Third Waves of feminism. When studying different characteristics of the historical periods of feminism, starting with its beginnings, the researcher might go through the same stages of development on an individual, private level. Studying history helps in becoming more conscious about feminist issues in general, but also about the more particular elements of female identity, as well as the effects of social changes that feminism has achieved. Moreover, the study of feminist history and highlighting the goals of the particular historical periods of feminism elucidates the political background and political motivation of feminist movements. It draws attention to the link between the public and the private, and the way the feminist movement has developed, which many times resembles the personal, inward developmental stages of an individual – particularly an individual female.

III. Solving the Inferiority Complex

Another feminist approach to defining identity highlights the power of a female sense or feeling of inferiority. Representative of this approach are the Afro-American writers, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, who seem to be involved with analysing the effects and influences of the dominant patriarchal culture and its 'oppression of women', including their exclusion from the 'common land'. Their objectives probably root in their own experience of subordination in society and culture and they presumably aim at changing this unfair condition through a better

understanding of female identity, which leads to the creation of more self-aware, determined and independent women.

They are purposefully looking for the characteristics and determining factors of the so-called 'female subculture' (EAGLETON 2004: 15) and find deep similarities between the experience of being a woman and being Black or being Jewish, while being a (white) male puts one far at the other end of the scale. It also suggests permanence, a deep, basic and inevitable difference between male and female ways of perceiving the world, where the most typical features of the female world – a 'minority group' – are marked by oppression and therefore, female self-expression is always determined by a woman's relationship with the dominant, i.e. male, society. Consequently, self-discovery, the discovery of female identity, can only be realised through liberating women from this inferiority complex, protesting against the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and eventually defeating the dominant standards and values. "The life we save is our own", writes Alice Walker (WALKER 2004: 33). The vocabulary these writers use (e.g. protest, dominate, defeat, save) makes one think of military training, suggesting that tradition is always necessarily bad and persuades women to do things that are unnatural or unfair. This angry and many times even aggressive 'protest' encourages women to take men and traditional values as their lives' reference points and deliberately depart from those values – regardless of whether they are good or bad. This strong desire to challenge conventions and cultural heritage leads to the creation of an alternative to tradition, which many times becomes a kind of intolerant deviation, full of tension and cramp that excludes anybody who thinks differently, who happens to assert that women no longer belong to a 'minority group' and the understanding of female identity should not be carried out by concentrating on oppression and the redefinition of traditions, which should not always be considered to be negative and unfair.

IV. Identity as a Social Construct

A significant approach to defining female identity is offered by Simone de Beauvoir, who penned one of the most remarkable milestones in feminist literary criticism. While she shared the convictions of Virginia Woolf, she also suggested a further, broader approach. Her monumental work, *The Second Sex* was published twenty years after Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. The analysis emphasises the social construction of female identity; by analysing the role of women in literature, she reaches the conclusion that 'woman' is defined in relation to 'man', and not as an independent, separate entity. Beauvoir goes back to Aristotle and St. Thomas, discussing their definitions of woman ('an imperfect man', 'an incidental being' – BEAUVOIR 1990: 307), which reveal an assumption that humanity is male and woman is to be defined not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. Beauvoir writes: "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (BEAUVOIR 1990: 307).

Defining the 'self' in terms of the 'Other' is discussed by Judith Butler as well, who talks about "a strategy of domination that pits the 'I' against an 'Other' and, once that separation is effected, creates an artificial set of questions about the knowability and recoverability of that Other" (BUTLER 1990: 369).

Discussing identity as the outcome of social construction does not originate in feminist criticism. Many sociologists and structuralists emphasise this phenomenon. In their classical text, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann deal with the constituents of identity. They approach 'identity' in the sense used by sociology. It is interesting to compare their understanding of 'identity'

with the point of view of a feminist critic, Zuzana Kiczková, based on her article *Jej inakosť, jej identita?* [Her Difference, Her Identity].

Berger and Luckmann connect the discussion on 'identity' with two key terms, 'reality' and 'knowledge'. They define 'reality' as "a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition" (BERGER-LUCKMANN 1973: 13). This means that 'reality,' as thing, phenomenon or quality, exists independent of whether we are aware of it or not. "Knowledge", they write, is "the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics" (BERGER-LUCKMANN 1973: 13). However, they point out that 'reality' is not a stable concept, it is not permanent, but 'socially constructed,' and both 'reality' and 'knowledge' depend on social contexts.

The observable differences between societies determine the constituent elements of 'reality'. What is 'real' to a Tibetan monk, may not be 'real' to an American businessman; similarly, the 'knowledge' of a criminal differs from that of a criminologist. Therefore, the terms 'reality' and 'knowledge' must be carefully applied; we must always be aware of their subjectivity, which is indicated by the questions of who possesses knowledge, who possesses language, who speaks, when and where do they do so.

Berger and Luckmann argue that identity is a key element of 'subjective reality' and like 'subjective reality,' it also stands in a dialectical relationship with society. They emphasise that identity is formed by social processes and is continuously maintained, modified or even reshaped by social relations and social culture. They define identity as the interplay of "organism", "individual consciousness" and "social structure" (BERGER-LUCKMANN 1973: 194). It means that they concentrate on the relationship of identity and society. They stress that identity is socially, psychologically and biologically determined. Under the term

‘organism’, they write about biological drives; more precisely, sexuality and the drive for food and nutrition. They use the phrase “sociology of the body” (BERGER–LUCKMANN 1973: 194) in order to emphasise that society also determines the ‘activity’ of the body, the functioning of the organism.

Zuzana Kiczková’s assumptions follow the line and perspective of Beauvoir, and are very much connected with the theory of Berger and Luckmann just discussed. When dealing with the quality and the formation of female identity, she returns to some basic definitions of terms, like sex, gender, sexuality and identity in general. She points out that feminist philosophy has to analyse the term of ‘identity’ from a new perspective and redefine it in relation to female existence. Though both theories, of Berger and Luckmann and of Kiczková, point out the social construction of identity and its subjectivity, the basic difference between them is that Kiczková adds the category of gender to the discussion on identity as one of its most important constituent elements.

Kiczková concentrates on the difference between male and female identity. “*She is different from him*” (KICZKOVÁ 1994: 12). She argues that feminist philosophy needs to revise the definition of ‘female,’ which, she writes, was constructed by men. She explains that the discussion on female identity has long been determined by the Platonic idea of ‘woman’ and also, by the biological category of female. Women were connected with nature. Their role was only biological, having a different body with a singular biological function – to produce a child – they were not supposed to be able to think abstractly. Women stood for emotions, body, nature, passivity and the private sphere. By contrast, men were representatives of culture, activity, mind, soul and the public sphere. Kiczková points out that the dualism of the body and spirit that originates with Plato neglects the fact that sexuality is not just a biological notion, but also an historical and political phenomenon. She adds that

this dualism of body and spirit is typical for “phallogentric thinking” (KICZKOVÁ 1994: 13) that continued through Descartes to Sartre.

At this point, there are some evident parallels between the definition of identity made by Berger and Luckmann and Kiczková’s point of view. She argues that the human body – what Berger and Luckmann call “organism” – is not the only constituent of one’s identity. She writes that one is not just an organism that was born, one is also constructed by society and his/her own self. She quotes Simone de Beauvoir to support her argument: “One is not born, one becomes a woman” (quoted in KICZKOVÁ 1994: 13).

Kiczková clearly differentiates between sex and gender; in her definition, which recalls the sex/gender definition of the 1960s, ‘sex’ is a biological category that differentiates between male and female, and ‘gender’ is a political, social and cultural category that determines the social roles men and women play in any given culture. Therefore, the category male/female is neither natural nor biological; to find one’s self, one’s identity is a project, not the fulfillment of biology. With the distinction of sex and gender, Kiczková enlarges Berger’s and Luckmann’s view on identity by overlapping ‘organism,’ ‘social culture’ and ‘individual consciousness.’ The result is that gender becomes another constituent of one’s identity.

The social construction of identity is attached to the assertion that subjectivity is culturally constructed as well. The cultural construction of subjectivity has become one of the central issues for feminism. In her essay, *Constructing the Subject* (BELSEY 1993: 593–610), Catherine Belsey describes and comments on the theory of Louis Althusser, who investigated ideology and ideological apparatuses. She writes that according to Althusser, ideological practices are supported and reproduced in the institutions of society which he calls “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISAs).

“The central ISA is the educational system, which prepares children to act consistently with the values of society by inculcating in them the dominant versions of appropriate behaviour as well as history, social studies and, of course, literature. Among the allies of the educational ISA are the family, the law, the media and the arts, all helping to represent and reproduce the myths and beliefs necessary to enable people to work within the existing social formation” (BELSEY 1993: 594). In her discussion of social construction of identity and subjectivity, Belsey makes the expression ‘social construction’ more concrete, by naming all the tools of society used for controlling and standardising individuals’ lives, tools especially important and influential – for example, education and the media, an establishment which can easily be used for the manipulation, the construction of individuals. Belsey claims that the destination of all ideology is the subject (the individual in society) and it is the role of ideology to *construct people* as subjects. The social construction of identity, thus, becomes an important political question.

V. Collective Identity – “Female Imagination”

Defining identity through the application and close analysis of ‘female imagination’ is one of the most mystified and most complex approaches to female identity. A great number of feminist critics emphasise the importance of a ‘female consciousness’; among them is Elaine Showalter, who claims: “the ‘female imagination’ cannot be treated by literary historians as a romantic or Freudian abstraction. It is the product of a delicate network of influences operating in time, and it must be analyzed as it expresses itself, in language and in a fixed arrangement of words on a page, a form that itself is subject to a network of influences and conventions, including the operations of the marketplace” (SHOWALTER

1987: 15). Showalter argues that woman's identity is not defined solely by her relation to a male world and a male literary tradition. She considers the bonds between women powerful and crucial factors in women's lives (SHOWALTER 1987: 201).

Discussion of what a woman is immediately raises the question of the relationship between the particular and the general. Likewise, it is crucial to distinguish between individual and collective identity. Showalter's idea of 'female imagination' seems to be in favour of the second, suggesting that individual female identity results from the collective common female identity and experience. Imagining women as one or being members of the same community with the same interests, carrying the same imagination fails to recognize the diversity of women or other constituents of their identity, such as culture, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation. The theory of 'common female imagination' continues to seek justice and equality for women and is heavily politically rooted. It suggests that women belong to the same interest group with the same needs and wants. However, the failures of 'sisterhood' and sameness have already turned out in the very beginning of the 'women's movement' and the emergence of feminism. The greatest weakness of the idea of 'common female identity' is that it fails to realise the other constituent parts of female identity such as religion, social background or language. The experience of womanhood of a Tibetan woman is different from that of an upper-class white American lady.

VI. The Body

Female identity has long been defined in terms of the biological differences between men and women. This biological determinism has affected women's places in society and culture, shaping even their own

sense of identity. The body's biology can influence female identity in two ways. Firstly, the workings of the female body, such as menstruation, pregnancy or menopause, can influence female everyday life and reality, just like one's race, ethnicity, cultural background contribute to a person's understanding of the world. This biological factor can make women experience their bodies more actively and face the fact that their bodies have an impact on their identity. Secondly, the body can influence a woman's life and identity in a social context. The social understanding and acceptance of the body and biological differences can control the place of women in society, the tasks they can handle and the opportunities they are given.

The biological determinism of the 19th century set the framework for discussions on women's rights and the character of early feminist activities and struggles. In her collection of essays, *What is a Woman and Other Essays*, Toril Moi describes the theories of biological determinism and its contribution to shaping female identity. She recounts that two basic theories emerged in the 19th century which controlled the social differences between men and women and shaped the understanding of the human body, as well as contributing to the general degradation of women in society. The first came from W. K. Brooks, a professor of biology at Johns Hopkins University, who published a book entitled *The Law of Heredity* in 1883. His starting point was that "among the higher animals (...) the males are more variable than females" (quoted in MOI 1999: 15). For Brooks, it is obvious that social differences between the sexes are caused by their physiological differences. He even emphasises the intellectual differences between men and women, claiming: "men's brains enable them to grasp the unknown: discoveries, science, the highest artistic and philosophical insights are reserved for them. Women's brains can deal with the known, the ordinary, and the everyday, keep track of traditions and social customs; in short, take care of everything

that requires rational action without reflection. Women preserve the old, men discover the new. (...) any attempt to improve the condition of women by ignoring or obliterating the intellectual differences between them and men must result in disaster to the race” (MOI 1999: 16–17).

The extent of scientific negotiation directed towards explaining women’s intellectual inferiority sounds so bizarre to modern ears. Although the very premise has by now been refuted so many times – simply consider the number of female scientists, scholars, and holders of Nobel Prizes to-date – analysis of such theories shows how certain intellectual leanings attempted to use biological facts and most times misleading data to justify inequitable social structures. Though most people in the 21st century would generally disregard such propositions as preposterous, they were nevertheless treated with utmost seriousness in their own day.

The second influential, 19th century text on biological determinism was the work of Scottish researchers Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, entitled *The Evolution of Sex*, first published in Britain in 1889. Geddes’ and Thomson’s central claim is that “males and females exhibit different metabolisms. Females are anabolic, males katabolic; males tend to expend, and females to conserve, energy. (...) It is generally true that the males are more active, energetic, eager, passionate, and variable; the females more passive, conservative, sluggish, and stable” (MOI 1999: 17–18). Just as Brooks predicted the end of the ‘race’ if the position of women were to change, Geddes and Thomson believe that “the ‘species’ will come to a ruinous end unless women are kept out of economic competition with men” (quoted in MOI 1999: 19).

Biological determinism presupposes that social norms are grounded in and justified by biological truths. Toril Moi explains that for writers such as Brooks, Geddes and Thomson, a man is essentially an enormous

sperm cell, a woman a giant ovum. Furthermore, she continues, biological determinism presupposes a pervasive picture of sex.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir states that the body is not a thing, it is a situation. Just like Brooks or Geddes and Thomson, she points out the biological and anatomical differences between men and women and describes the facts of female sexuality and the female role in reproduction. She concludes that women's role in reproduction is more dangerous and time-consuming than men's. A man can father a hundred children without any physical damage to himself, a woman cannot even have ten children without taking the risks of lasting physical injuries or even death. For Beauvoir, such biological facts are extremely important and constitute an essential element in the situation of women. However, unlike Brooks or Geddes and Thomas, she believes that biological facts cannot establish a fixed and inevitable destiny for women, cannot be the basis for setting up a hierarchy of the sexes (BEAUVOIR, quoted in MOI 1999: 62).

In claiming the body is a situation, alongside her assertion that "One is not born a woman; one becomes one" (BEAUVOIR, quoted in CAVALLARO 2003: 12). Beauvoir echoes the premises of Existentialism, especially the assumptions of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose basic conception of it lies in the idea that man is nothing but what he makes of himself. To say that to be a woman is always a project, also means to declare that women are always in the process of making themselves what they are: we give meaning to our lives by our choices and actions. Similarly, declaring that the body is a situation allows us to draw the conclusion that it is capable of change – change that depends on individual choice, a personal project; it is both an integral part and the result of personal experience, not just simply a piece of biological 'matter'. Merleau-Ponty writes that the body is our general medium for having a world (MERLEAU-PONTY, quoted in MOI 1999: 63). The idea of the body as medium generally suggests personal freedom and the power of the individual over social forms and norms.

What does the body mean at the social level? When talking about the influence of the body and its contribution to human identity, along with its contribution to social valuation and expanding social roles, it is not just women who get involved in the debate, but also handicapped people and people of different races and sexual orientation. Discussions on the body on a social level, thus enlarge the group that is concerned, it is not just women who insist on political correctness and social justice.

Questions about the body can never remain limited to the individual, private level. Debate immediately moves into the public realm, raising socio-political issues, such as acceptance of the handicapped and homosexuality, the meaning of the body in human society. Definitely, a woman is not merely a human with a female body. Simplifying female identity, reducing it to sexual and other biological differences is no longer satisfying for feminist criticism; in fact, it would produce a negative, mirror image of sexism and the biological determinism of the 19th century.

VII. Identity in the Sex/Gender System

Toril Moi describes the development of the sex/gender system from the 1950s and 1960s. She emphasises that it was first used by psychiatrists and other medical personnel working with transsexual patients to refer to the transsexuals' dilemma of being 'trapped in the wrong body'. The lack of correspondence between the sex of the body and the sex of the mind led psychiatrists to acknowledge a clear distinction between sex and gender. Initially, sex referred to the body and gender to the mind; they were purely psychological assignments trying to explore one's self and sense of belonging to one sex together with the sense of feeling different. This

schizophrenic condition inspired other researchers and social theorists, as well as feminist thinkers, who together lifted the issue of sex and gender to a more general social and cultural level.

In 1963, the American Robert Stroller first formulated a concept of gender identity, which, he explains, refers to one's self-image of belonging to a specific sex. Stroller developed four different concepts: sex, gender, gender identity and gender role.

"I prefer to restrict the term *sex* to a biological connotation. Thus, with few exceptions, there are two sexes, male and female. (...) *Gender* is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. If the proper terms for sex are 'male' and 'female,' the corresponding terms for gender are 'masculine' and 'feminine'; these latter may be quite independent of (biological) sex. (...) *Gender identity* starts with the knowledge and awareness, whether conscious or unconscious, that one belongs to one sex and not to the other, though as one develops, gender identity becomes much more complicated, so that, for example, one may sense himself as not only a male but a masculine man or an effeminate man or even a man who fantasises being a woman. *Gender role* is the overt behaviour one displays in society, the role which he plays, especially with other people, to establish his position with them insofar as his and their evaluation of his gender is concerned" (STROLLER, quoted in MOI 1999: 22).

One of the most crucial aspects of Stroller's distinction is his differentiation between sex and gender; more importantly, he highlights that sex belongs to the realm of biology, science and medicine, while gender is more psychological and cultural, belonging to the scope of sociology and culture. Stroller's terms were quickly adapted by feminist theory and started to be widely used both in feminist social studies and in feminist criticism, although the term gender role soon disappeared from view in feminist theory.

With the emergence of the sex/gender distinction in the 1960s, feminists intended to react against biological determinism rooted in the end of the 19th century. Responding to biological determinism by clearly distinguishing between nature and social norms meant there was a strong defence for feminist theory. The common terminology used with sex is male and female; the terms used in connection with gender are masculine and feminine.

Gayle Rubin was one of the first feminist critics to appropriate Stroller's categories for her own feminist purposes. In 1975, she published her influential essay, entitled "The Traffic in Women", in which she created her own concepts with the purpose of combating sexism and discrimination. She writes about a sex/gender system in society, which is "the set of arrangements by which society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied." (RUBIN 2006: 93) Furthermore, she claims that the sex/gender system designates a system that oppresses women. She is more interested in the definition and analysis of gender, rather than sex. For her, sex and sexual differences are biological, while gender is social. She writes: "Hunger is hunger, but what counts as food is culturally determined and obtained. (...) Every society also has a sex/gender system – a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be" (RUBIN 2006: 93). For Rubin, the fundamental meaning of gender is oppressive social norms. Gender is the result of oppressive social production, where the active intervention of society and its influence on individuals is emphasised. Rubin uses the sex/gender system to illustrate that women are victims of male power. She dreams of a "genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes

love” (RUBIN 2006: 97). She points out that to expect someone to be masculine just because he is male or to deny someone the right to behave in a masculine way just because she is female is simply reinforcing the sex/gender system and maintaining the discriminatory workings of social norms, since it is social norms that determine what it means to be masculine, what a man (or woman) should be like.

In poststructuralist theory, sex and gender gain a very different and unique understanding. Feminists employing poststructuralist thought are unhappy with the way the 1960s’ understanding of sex and gender influenced the definition of personal identity and the body. Poststructuralists deny the existence of biological facts independent of social and political norms. It means that sex is constructed by social norms and roles, by gender; consequently, there is no difference between sex and gender, for sex has been culturally constructed as well.

One of the principle voices of the poststructuralist approach in feminism is Judith Butler, whose monograph *Gender Trouble*, first published in 1990, represents a milestone in the history of sex and gender theory. She claims that sex is as culturally constructed as gender and is the result of cultural and social production. She writes: “If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “predis-

cursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts” (BUTLER 1999: 10–11). In Butler’s argument, sex is seen as a cultural construct, which undermines the traditional sex/gender distinction, as both sex and gender are now products of the same discursive norms, sex is not the grounds for gender, but the result, the effect of it.

Judith Butler’s analysis of identity is politically motivated; her intention is to examine what further political possibilities and consequences a radical critique of the categories of identity leads to. In the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, she claims that there is very little agreement on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women. She explains that the term, ‘woman’, has become troublesome because of its multiple significations. If one is a woman, she writes, that is surely not all one is and hence, the term fails to be exhaustive. She explains: “(...) gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, (...) gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained.” (BUTLER 1999: 6)

Butler makes the discussion of identity and analysis of gender inseparable from politics and social practices, questioning the necessity of defining the term ‘woman’. The political assumption that there is a universal basis for the definition of ‘woman’ leads to the assumption that there must be one universal basis for feminism and also, to the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form. Feminism is much more diverse than this and the notion of universal femininity and universal patriarchy has been widely criticised. Though there are still ideas about universal patriarchy and structures of domination which have produced theories on women’s common subjugate experience, such ideas no longer enjoy much credibility and popularity. Butler asks a very

important question, one which points to the weaknesses inherent in generalizing definitions and attempts to make female experience universal: “Is there some commonality among “women” that preexists their oppression, or do “women” have a bond by virtue of their oppression alone? Is there a specificity to women’s cultures that is independent of their subordination by hegemonic, masculinist cultures?” (BUTLER 1999: 7)

The investigation of whether women have unique, characteristic features specific only to them, specifically feminine – as differentiated from the masculine – also supports the notion of the universality of femininity. Therefore, some feminist critics question the importance and even the point of analysing the singular notion of identity and underline its limitations. Identity is always contextual, always functioning in a certain discourse, therefore, it is necessary to examine the context in which it operates and by which it is influenced, as well. Butler talks about “the variable construction of identity” (BUTLER 1999: 9) and insists that female identity should not be the foundation of feminist politics, since the formation of identity takes place within a field of power. It is power relations that have to be examined and need to be interrogated first, since these power relations condition and limit dialogic possibilities.

By shifting the discussion of identity onto a political level, Butler enlarges the categories of sex and gender, and states that there are in fact more than two genders. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex and proves the hegemony of compulsory heterosexuality, which she understands as a regime of power. Inevitably, Butler’s theory is in favour of homosexuality and her critiques of heterosexuality and homophobia have inspired a lot of theorists by encouraging them to realise the importance of political motivation.

Toril Moi argues that one of the most famous claims in post-structuralist understanding of sex and gender is Judith Butler’s contention

that gender is performative (MOI 1999: 54). Moi analyses the concept of 'gender performativity' and concludes that when a critic speaks of 'gender performativity' s/he intends to oppose 'gender essentialism', meaning that against the being of sex, s/he is asserting the doing of gender. In Moi's understanding, gender is an act and not a thing. For Moi, 'gender performativity' means speaking of "how we fashion ourselves through our acts and choices" (MOI 1999: 55). For instance, she explains that when a man behaves in ways that are socially acceptable for men, then he feels more convinced than ever that he is a 'real' man. It might also mean that if a man behaves in an idiosyncratic way, it helps to transform our understanding of how men behave. Moi concludes that generally speaking, 'gender performativity' means that when most people behave according to certain gender norms, this ensures that the norms are maintained and reinforced. Further consideration of Moi's idea leads us to the assumption that the contrary can likewise be declared, that 'gender performativity' also means the more men behaving in an idiosyncratic way, i.e. not in accordance with asserted gender norms, will help to upset and transform the norms and social codes. This raises the question of whether social norms are maintained by political authorities and power systems, and pushes the question of individual responsibility and power of change into the foreground.

The discourse on the individual's power to change social norms and the understanding of sexual difference definitely depends on whether we understand gender as something we *do* or something we *are*. The difference between doing and being a certain gender introduces discourses on active and passive participation in the formation and alteration of both personal identity and experience, and social systems and norms. Understanding gender as a cultural construct implies the governing role and effect of society and an impersonal outside influence that guides and forms the individual's life and values. On the other hand,

the interpretation of gender as something personal, a part of one's identity, points to the responsibility of the individual in forming and structuring her/his outside social network, an inward element that is an integral part of human identity and has the power to influence more general, social norms. In this sense, gender becomes inseparable from the question of identity¹ and personal experience.

Unlike Gayle Rubin, poststructuralists do not dream of a society without gender; rather, they wish to achieve greater freedom, justice and happiness by being able to be free to mix and match the social concepts of masculinity and femininity as they like.

Poststructuralism seems to remain on a theoretical level. While discussing the nature and essence of sex and gender, it fails to explain what the implications of defining sex as a cultural construct are and what this theory should do with the image of the body as flesh and blood. It is difficult to see whether the aims and objectives of poststructuralist feminism are different from the aims of Simone de Beauvoir or other feminist theorists of sex and gender.

If we consider the poststructuralist perspective outlined by Butler, her idea on how sex becomes as discursive as gender, it is difficult to imagine how this theory fits into the widespread belief that sex or the body is concrete with concrete biological functions; the body is represented as material, whereas gender and social norms are abstract and immaterial. The relation of power to the social construction of sex also becomes a matter of debate, because Butler's theory operates as if

¹ The analysis of identity is often referred to as identity politics (e.g. by Toril Moi, Judith Butler), a term I shall avoid since it strongly connotes connections with politics and power, whereas I intend to consider the question of identity on a more colourful and variable, both general and personal level, not limiting it to the level of political and social practices and applications.

power was the creator of sex, of matter, an idea that can hardly be acceptable. On the other hand, if we consider that the poststructural theory which shows sex is a social construct also presumes the belief that if something is not constructed, it is natural, the theory's acceptability is modified or at least highlighted from a different point of view. If something is natural, it is common to associate it with stability and fixed essences, impossible to change, something given. As soon as sex becomes as constructed as gender, it becomes a social and cultural construct, it gains changeability, variability and provides an opportunity to be changed through social and political action. Female discrimination and homophobia can be defeated by eliminating theories about fixed and unchanging sexualities and 'born' characteristics.

The poststructuralist view on sex and gender works on a theoretical basis and is similar to the 1960s sex/gender distinction in the way that both attempted to use their theorisation on sex/gender systems with a political aim in mind, determined to achieve political effect.

VIII. Identity through Language

A great number of feminist critics investigate the relation of women to language. This approach goes hand in hand with gynocritics, though its implications necessarily consider the power of language to be of primary importance. They examine whether men and women have different relationships to the languages they speak and write. Language is an important element of self-expression and an organic part of identity. Therefore, it is one of the major and most central concerns of feminist approaches to female identity.

Cora Kaplan explains that to be a woman *and* a poet presents many poetesses with such a profound split between social and sexual identity

(their 'human' identity) and their artistic practice that the split has become an insistent theme of much women's poetry (KAPLAN 2004: 246). This conflict is connected with a deep longing for the use of high language, in both private and public speech. Longing for the extensive use of language and considering this desire a significant part of female identity is, to a certain extent, politically embedded, somehow representing women's desire to gain access to the 'common land', to have an equal share in the written forms of high culture: theology, philosophy, politics, sciences and literature.

Acquisition of language is one of the most important factors in forming personality and shaping one's view of the world, as language is one of the most crucial forms of human communication, a medium between the individual and the outside world. The individual expresses his/her inner processes by means of language, uses it to establish contact with others and it is by means of language that we become social beings and engage with culture. Of course, this is a two-way process: language acquisition and engagement with culture are moulded by the cultural environment that surrounds an individual. The ideological constraints of a given culture, its social conventions, teach us 'acceptable' forms of behaviour, and help constitute our identity. The external world and the language we are provided from childhood have enormous impacts on our understanding of the world as well as our self-awareness. Many feminist critics have analysed the complexity of female language and come to the conclusion that social silence is a part of female identity. Sanctions against female obscenity, against telling jokes and the use of wit by women have had a great impact on choice of language and verbal self-expressing in general.

Understanding the history of silence and exploring social relations through language, balancing silence with speech are crucial parts of female identity and central concerns of both feminist literary theory and

the study of identity. Catherine Belsey examines the role of language in the formation of personal identity, 'the self'. She buttresses her theory with the ideas of Emile Benveniste and other, feminist, theorists, concluding that "(...) it is language which provides the possibility of subjectivity because it is language which enables the speaker to posit himself or herself as 'I', as the subject of a sentence. It is through language that people constitute themselves as subjects" (BELSEY 1993: 595).

Many feminists quote Derrida in explaining the relationship of the individual speaker with his or her social surroundings through the lens of deconstructionism. Belsey asserts that the individual speaker is the origin of the meaning of his or her utterance, since it is language itself which, by differentiating between concepts, offers the possibility of meaning. In this sense, the words we are taught, the linguistic basis by which we undertake communication and establish social relationships, determine both our understanding of the world and the way other speakers perceive and understand us. Stress is applied to the words *contrast* and *differentiation*, since language is based on contrasts and differentiation, the individual constitutes himself/herself through them: 'I' cannot be conceived without the conception 'non-I,' i.e. 'you;' therefore, (as Belsey frames it) "dialogue, the fundamental condition of language, implies a reversible polarity between 'I' and 'you'" (BELSEY 1993: 595). These kinds of feminist assumptions echo Derrida's concept of binary oppositions, which proposes that we are too sure about central categories such as truth, culture, speech, etc. Instead of describing a rigid set of categories, we should concentrate in discourse on binary oppositions, where the opposing terms (e.g. speech versus writing, maleness versus femaleness, homosexuality versus heterosexuality, I versus non-I, nature versus culture, body versus soul, or black versus white) are actually fluid and impossible to separate entirely. They need one another and always imply one another.

The study of language acquisition and its impact on the formation of identity evidently shows that feminist theory shares similar, characteristic features and parallel outcomes with psychoanalyst criticism. Feminist critics relying heavily on the works of Jacques Lacan and the umbrella of psychoanalyst criticism believe that gender – female identity – is primarily constructed through acquisition of language, rather than social or cultural phenomena.

Catherine Belsey summarises Jacques Lacan's theory and concludes that, according to Lacan, entry into the symbolic order, i.e. language, liberates the child into the possibility of social relationships: the child is enabled to articulate his or her needs, desires and demands. However, at the same time a division within the self is constructed. In offering a child the possibility of formulating her/his own desires, the symbolic order also engages in a betrayal, since it cannot aid the child in formulating those elements of desire which remain unconscious. Belsey underscores that the subject is thus the site of contradiction, and is consequently in the process of construction; influenced by changes of language and social formations, therefore, she concludes, the subject is capable of change, it is a "process" carrying the possibility of transformation (BELSEY 1993: 597).

Belsey claims that identity, subjectivity, is "a matrix of subject-positions" (BELSEY 1993: 596). She supports this with the psychoanalytic idea that when learning to speak, children learn to identify with the first person singular pronoun and this constitutes the basis of subjectivity. A child learns to recognize itself in a series of subject-positions ('he' or 'she', 'boy' or 'girl', etc.), which are the positions from which discourse is intelligible to oneself and others.

It is interesting to examine the "matrix of subject-positions", since there is a range of positions as well as discourses. Augmenting this idea that language provides the self with contradictions and makes the subject

an entity of transformation, the number of positions a subject takes also gives that subject a more contradictory character, since multiple positions may be incompatible or contradictory.

IX. Conclusion

The present investigation into what a woman is has shown that different approaches contribute differently to the definition of female identity. The answer to the question of what a woman is has turned out to be that there is more than one. Moreover, it is easier to identify which factors have an important role in the *formation* of female identity than which factors actually *comprise* that identity. Stating that identity is a sum of particular constituents would mean claiming that identity itself is fixed. The exploration of female identity is a long-distance adventure in which one can reach fixed points and milestones, but new gates immediately open, new questions are asked and new issues appear that are in need of examination.

The most common and simplest understanding of what a woman is comes out of the assertion that she is a person with a female body. This assumption highlights the anatomical and physical differences between men and women, but more importantly, points to the importance of the body in a social context. Defining identity in terms of the body has been shown to have certain weaknesses, and the damaging effects of biological determinism have stimulated feminist activities to shift emphasis from biology and anatomy to sociology, culture and politics.

Toril Moi stresses that investigations into the meaning of femininity in specific historical and theoretical contexts are indispensable to the feminist project of understanding and transforming sexist cultural practices and traditions. An historical overview and analysis of the

investigation of female identity is unquestionably useful for highlighting sexual discrimination and undermining unfair social practices and norms.

When it comes to thinking about what a woman is, the sex and gender distinction seems inadequate -- or at least not satisfying. It is misleading to imagine that a human being is made up of the sum of 'sex plus gender'. Race, age, class, sexual orientation, nationality, idiosyncratic personal experience (a wholly unique store of experiences), religion, political views and intellectual abilities are among the central categories that always shape the experience of being one sex or another, always contributing to the creation of personal identity.

It is important to note that the word 'female' encompasses a particular group of people and the word 'feminine' will not necessarily include all or even most of the same group. Therefore, the phenomena of common female identity should be reconsidered. As Wittgenstein puts it, in most cases the meaning of a word is its use. The word 'woman' takes on very different meanings and implications when used by different speakers in different situations. There is even a difference between connotations of 'woman' and 'women'; the plural category of 'women' suggests collectivity and unity, that there is some kind of basis upon which women share the same characteristic features. However, the singular form 'woman' connotes that each woman is an independent entity with particular features, background and personal experiences and each woman contributes to the idea of 'common female identity' in a peculiar, colourful way.

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GYULA RIGÓ

UNTIL DEPARTED BY DEATH?

Female Ghosts in Fantastic Literature

Abstract • • • • The article focuses on the analysis of female ghosts in fantastic literature. The research aims at clarifying the roles of female ghosts and related problems: the literary representation of the female ghost, those fantastic creatures that are exclusively female, images of erotic attraction and seduction connected to female spirits. The article examines the narratives of three short stories – Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam *Vera*, Dezső Kosztolányi *Hrussz Krisztina csodálatos látogatása* [*The Wonderful Visit of Krisztina Hrussz*], and Géza Szilágyi *Éjjel a fogadóban* [*Night at the Inn*]. It points out the causes for the return of dead women and wives in love, their demonic and hypnotic abilities and the problems of post mortem encounter communication between the living and the returned female ghosts: wife, friend and unfamiliar person.

Key words: fantastic literature, ghost stories, real and unreal, female ghosts, demonic, other world

I. Introduction: The Ghost Motif – a Thematic Approach

In 1980 Jean Molino listed three different kinds of approaches to fantastic literature (MOLINO 1980: 12–26). In his study he named the historical-philological, the structuralist and the thematic-semantic approaches. “He also mentions the psychoanalytic and sociological approaches but these are interpreted as a subclass to the first three categories” (MAÁR 2001: 36).

For me the thematic approach will be useful since fantastic literature is mostly characterized by themes. This immediately brings up one of the complicated problems of fantastic literature: is it possible to group fantastic literature according to its subject matter? The response is not so obvious. Theoreticians conducting research of fantastic literature interpret the concept of the fantastic itself differently. Many theoreticians do not distinguish between fantastic and science-fiction therefore we meet various problems when defining the subject matter of fantastic. Often subjective groupings are offered – taking into consideration semantic elements as well. With reference to Molino Judit Maár calls our attention to the complexity of this question. The thematic approach considers the world of the fantastic constituted by two related dimensions: by elements of the fantastic world (space, time, objects) and the first reactions of characters experiencing the fantastic and the psychological reaction of readers (anxiety, hesitation, fear, madness) (MAÁR 2001: 14). According to Judit Maár the experience of the fantastic is a question of interpretation and there is no fantastic subject matter in itself although she admits that it is possible to gather a few motifs often occurring in fantastic literature (MAÁR 2001: 131).

Already in the beginning of the twentieth century a few critical studies analyzing fantastic literature made attempts to define the most frequent themes of fantastic stories. In a blurred manner Hubert Matthey managed to sketch subject matters of the fantastic (dreams, fears, pseudo-scientific theories) (MATTHEY 1915: 94–158). Dorothy Scarborough created a more precise taxonomy: phantoms, devils and their allies, supernatural life (SCARBOROUGH 1917: 81–242). These primitive taxonomies were replaced by more detailed groupings. Peter Penzoldt's grouping included the following categories: witches, vampires, werewolves, invisible beings, spooky ghosts (PENZOLDT 1915). In this taxonomy ghosts are listed as one theme. The list of subject matters by

Louis Vax is imprecise and not unified in many cases. According to Todorov Vax's system is not coherent because it includes both cause and effect, for instance the vampire and the werewolf has personality disorders (MAÁR 2001: 142). Some of his subject matters are replaceable: mistaking the vampire for the werewolf, or the visible for the invisible (ghosts), modifications in the reasons, in time and space developing backwards, personality disorders (madness, fever, projections of the self) giving independent life to human body parts (VAX 1963: 24–34). According to Judit Maár Vax's category on the appearance of the ghost is primarily linked to the shock of reason since what has been destructed, will resurrect and the soul is capable of gaining a visible form (MAÁR 2001: 134). "According to Vax (...) the ghost becoming visible is fantastic only when it is demonic, wicked, if it frightens humans (...) When breaking the laws of nature goes hand in hand with breaking moral laws" (MAÁR 2001: 135). Maár points out the imprecise definition by Vax: wickedness is not an indispensable accessory to being a ghost and if fear appears in the works (not an inevitable condition) then it has to be experienced by the characters or the reader (MAÁR 2001: 135). Roger Callois sets up his own categories of content by referring to Vax, listing those works under his headings he considered to be the most important in fantastic literature. According to Maár Judit Todorov "(...) disapproves of the categories of Callois' system for representing concrete images, objects, living beings and not abstractions" (MAÁR 2001: 142). Pact with the devil, suffering souls (ghosts), spirits confined to eternal wanderings, personified death, invisible things, vampires, statues coming to life, witches, women spirits (the French author thinks of those female ghosts who diffuse misfortune, trouble, fear or fatal attraction), blurred boundaries of dreams and reality, annihilated space, repetitive or still time (CAILLOIS 1968: 19–21). Jean Molino adapted the simplified typology of Callois. He distinguished six groups of subject matters:

devils and witches, the ambivalence of dream and reality (ghosts, vampires, doppelgängers), the relationship between women and love, changes of time and space, animating inanimate things, monsters (MOLINO 1980: 12–13).

In Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic he named two greater themes (TODOROV 1975: 107–139): themes of the self and themes of the other. Under themes of the self he categorized the motives of metamorphoses, the multiplication of supernatural beings (ghosts, phantoms) and personality, disappearance of the border between subject and object and the unusual descriptions of space and of time. The basic idea for the motifs of the theme of the self is the changeability or the blurring of spiritual and material borders. The themes of the other question interpersonal relationships and these motifs are inevitably linked to sexuality (incest, sadism, multipersonal love, homosexuality, necrophilia). Todorov pointed out the significance of the 18th and 19th century, classical fantastic literature often speaks about irresistible desire, intense and devastating emotions, succubus sensuality often represented by figures of female demons, vampires or ghosts or at least they can be connected to these beings. The thematic chapter in Jiří Šrámek's book on the theory of the fantastic contains a typology of characters, analyzing the figure and function of the ghost. The typological definition of the Bohemian author categorized characters according to their functions in relation to the fantastic event. The character's behavior manifested in various functions (ŠRÁMEK 1993: 46–86) (spheres of activity) are key factors in defining the categories. The ghost in the category of fantastic creature is capable of intruding the space of the real world. According to Šrámek due to occultism and spiritism, in 19th century stories ghost appear more often than in previous literary periods. These creatures come to life in an ad hoc manner and are capable of activating a communicative channel between the living and the dead.

Belief in the existence of ghosts is a characteristic feature of men because it makes them believe in the immortality of the soul. Ghosts were recurring figures of literature from antiquity onwards. Their role became more important in the everyday life of the Middle Ages when lacking scientific knowledge people recognized ghosts behind unusual and unfamiliar phenomena. They considered ghosts as returning dead souls; for people they not only represented corpses but various types of demons as well. They gradually became the subject matter in folk beliefs and legends and their role became significant again at the rise of the Gothic novel in the 18th century. Indispensable components of this genre are the old castle, a hidden annex to the building in ruins. Ghost stories evolved through a gradual development. In the beginning of the 20th century Montague Rhodes James defined the basic rules that govern ghost stories: "(...) ghost stories have to take place in a usual setting in order to approach the horizon of experiences of the reader. Apart from this, ghostly, uncanny phenomena should rather be of wicked than of good intent; they need to arouse fear among all emotions. Finally (...), it is necessary to carefully avoid the professional jargon of occultism and pseudo-science; the little if ever convincing bookish approach should not destroy the magic of this unsophisticated fidelity to reality" (LOVECRAFT 2003). At the end of the 19th century the theme of the ghost revived again since people's belief in the unlimited power of science was questioned and an age of deep disillusionment set in (*fin de siècle*). New interest in spiritism, esoteric doctrines and occultism turned up whose influence could be felt in fantastic literature as well. Due to spiritism the communication between the living and the dead became a popular subject and in short stories the return of dead women in love, wives or demonic, hypnotic female ghosts (sometimes vampires) gained a substantial significance. Olga Vodáková took notice of the fact that during spiritist seances almost always women were possessed by ghosts

– in literature as well. According to the Bohemian theoretician it is possible because female mediums give their own selves up more easily and accept somebody's other selves easier than males would do. Vodáková thinks that in European culture the role of surrender and acceptance of the other traditionally stands closer to women than to men (VODÁKOVÁ 2003: 30). According to Šrámek the theme of the ghost could appear in fantastic literature because it partly took over the mission of myths satisfying a deep and unachievable human desire, e.g. meeting the beloved person after her death. According to Maria Janion in fantastic literature there was a crowd of strange, sometimes crazy, sometimes fatally seductive women (in the figures of ghosts or vampires) (JANION 2005). Olga Vodáková analyzed supernatural creatures from a gender perspective and concluded that there are specifically male and specifically female supernatural creatures (VODÁKOVÁ 2003: 21–25). In her opinion classic ghosts (returning ghosts, living dead, vampires) may equally be male or female but a specific form of the ghost, the wraith [lidérc, mûra]¹ is always female who harasses her victims at midnight and similar to vampires they suck life's energy out of humans (VODÁKOVÁ 2003: 22–25). Vampires are essentially ghosts who as returning souls picking their victims. Just as Olga Vodáková, Šrámek also calls attention to the gendered nature of ghosts. Usually they appear for women as fearful men, for men as dangerous and seductive women (ŠRÁMEK 1993: 46–86). Judit Maár arrives to similar conclusions on the double function of vampires: it frightens and exercises an irresistible power of attraction. (...) in this figure a strong erotic meaning is found: it exerts influence on female victims as a seductive satyr, on males as female demons, as irresistible female seduction. Its meaning is therefore double: it expresses death and

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¹ 'Lidérc' is a mythic creature in ancient Hungarian mythology. It may mean different things from a small man (dwarf) to a special phenomenon of light, or even a sexually attractive, "hot" woman, a kind of fairy. (Note by translator)

sexuality and all those ambivalent, aberrant instincts and emotions that can be related to them” (MAAR 2001: 132–133). According to Maria Janion the female vampire goes through huge changes. Her body begins to live a worrisome life of its own, innocent chaste girls turn into fearful but sensual and attractive succubus women. According to the Polish theoretician some interpreted the literary appearance of female ghosts and vampires as a response to the more and more powerful strive towards female emancipation – the new wave of mythologizing the vicious as embodied in females (JANION 2005). I will analyze three short stories that focus on the return of female ghosts (a wife, a friend and a stranger) in order to get into connection with the male protagonist.

II. Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam: Vera

Decadence provided a good basis for fantastic literature as we have mentioned above, in this end of the century atmosphere people began to be interested in occultism and spiritism.² Society was very much interested in necromancy and doctrines on the immortality of soul. The remnants of this evanescent “fashion” appeared in fantastic literature as well. Several short stories were written about the relationship and approaching earthly and otherworldly creatures, creatures living a life after death. Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam was a well-known representative of the age of symbolism and decadence and many of his short stories ghosts return to get into contact with the living (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM

² The predecessor of spiritism was mesmerism applying the methods of magnetism and mesmerism. These methods often appeared in fantastic literature of the Romantic period (A. E. Poe, E. T. A. Hoffmann) as supportive „science” helping to understand the secrets of human consciousness.

2009: 13–27). The subject of his short story, titled *Vera* is also about evoking this other world where the hero's wife returns from.

The short story begins with a sentence borrowed from King Solomon, summarizing the main theme of the story: love is stronger than death. The story wants to make the reader believe that this overarching love may conquer death. In Tzvetan Todorov's opinion it was not a very fortunate choice to begin the story with this thought because this brings about the risk of switching to allegory from the genre of the fantastic (TODOROV 1975: 79); therefore the text may suggest the justification/legitimization and the illustration of an idea (according to Todorov the sentence does offer this reading) (TODOROV 1975: 58–74), due to which the fantastic may disappear altogether. According to Todorov's system of thought the fantastic here does realize the abstract expression because the short story includes the idea quoted word by word "love is stronger than death", e.g. the rhetoric figure is the source of the fantastic, of the supernatural element (*Vera's* ghost) (TODOROV 1975: 80–81). The hero of the story, Count d'Athol is a byronesque figure of the decadent age. He is a withdrawn and melancholic aristocrat who does not really feel good outside his home. His figure shows parallel traits with the hero of another ghost story of the author (*Secret relation*), count Xavier who is absorbed in spleen and "(...) he is more sensitive than ordinary man (...) to the strange phenomena of the supernatural world (...), he is capable of discovering signals that tell of the hidden, secret uncertainties of existence as opposed to the assured earthly existence" (MAÁR 2001: 108). The short story begins with *Vera's* death and funeral. The loss of her wife inflicts unbearable pain on the Count. The hopelessness caused by the death of her loved one weighs heavily on him. Sealing the family grave he casts the key into the mausoleum through the bars of the gate not to let anyone see his wife any more. *Vera* is a woman who thumbs her nose on and ridicules social expectations. A devotedly loving creature who saves her

husband even from the formalities of courtship. After their marriage they withdraw completely from the world. She is a seductive woman whose dominant function is sensuality and since she and her husband are disturbed by the outside world they entirely exclude it. Their relationship is passionate, full of delight until Vera's death. "They became each the very heartbeat of the other" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 18). Following the funeral allusions and prognoses are presented (ŠRÁMEK 1993: 56–61)³ foreshadowing the upcoming fantastic events. Describing their love the narrator uses adjectives (unfinished, inextinguishable) that project the infinite nature of their relationship. In the short story the slogan embroidered in Vera's slippers "Who sees Vera, adores Vera" is realized in a twisted manner since the adornment of the husband makes it possible to see his dead wife. The beginning of the short story is replete with allusions that unambiguously suggest the upcoming fantastic series of events, the resurrection of Vera. In many places the rhetoric figure of comparison-coincidence (according to Todorov the comparison-coincidence is a modalizing formula [*was said, as if, it seemed*] and it is very popular in the discourse of fantastic literature) (TODOROV 1975: 80–82) is present hinting at the immortality of the soul, and the possibility of

³ Šrámek narrative model on the fantastic lists nine functions (foreboding, temptation, initiation, manifestation of the fantastic, doubt, strengthening the fantastic, fight/acceptance, explanation, victory/defeat). When foreboding [znamení] sets in the characters may have such suspicions that foreshadow the upcoming supernatural events. Foreboding should not be mixed with suggestive allusions and hints. The two concepts are different in the sense that foreboding is closely connected to the activities of the characters. Allusions and hints have a function in creating the special atmosphere but they are not connected to the characters' actions. Foreboding is frequently connected to the sensations of characters (vision, hearing) and may provoke surprise, interest or waiting in the heroes. This function of inception forms more or less part of the incipit, however it is not an inevitable part of the fantastic short story.

the wife's return: "In them the spirit flowed so completely into the body that their forms seemed to them to be instruments of comprehension, and that the blazing links of their kisses chained them together in a fusion of the ideal" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 17–18). Or: "is the soul of the violoncello snatched away in the cry of its breaking string?" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 18). Or: "(...)the opal was gleaming as if it had just been left off, as if it were still infused with the rare magnetism of the dead beauty" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 23).

After the funeral the atmosphere in the house is completely changed. The strange feeling is foreshadowed by the narrator: "The objects in the room were lit by some light which till then had been imprecise" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 18). Vera and her memory has an incredible power over her husband. The Count is attached so closely to his wife that he is unable to believe in her death. Arriving home from the funeral he lives on as if Vera was still on his side. Despite the fact of his wife being dead he consequently uses the plural in his rhetoric: "We are worn out of fatigue *the countess and I*, you will serve supper *for us* about ten o'clock" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 18). "(...) *we made up our minds* that from tomorrow *we shall isolate ourselves* here more completely than ever" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 19). Or: "For the future *we shall receive nobody*" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 19). The behavior of D'Athol – after the funeral a strange smile sits on his face as if nothing had happened – and his strange words makes the reader suspicious of the possibility of the count having some convulsions in his mind due to the shock of Vera's death. For the Count moving away from the usual surroundings means a crisis. He tries to keep up the old status quo that might lead to the rigidity of his personality and may cause illuminations. The servant, Raymond, is convinced that tormenting pain distorted the mind of his lord. Raymond fulfils the function of the *helper* (in fantastic stories the helper [pomocník] is a person sympathizing with the

protagonist. The helper function may be fulfilled by the initiator [zasvětitel] who is familiar with the entire or partial cause of the fantastic event or creature, the helper is not familiar with the cause of the fantastic – except when he is an initiator as well, often he is the hero's friend or appears in the form of a woman in love) (ŠRÁMEK 1993: 104–105) in the story who sympathizes with the count but he himself is not familiar with the cause of fantastic events – in the beginning he does not even believe in them either. The story suggests that the Count is possessed, that he is able to believe in Vera's return from the grave and staying next to him. After a while the servant also begins to doubt Vera's death although he struggles to accept it: "However before three weeks had passed he felt at moments that he was himself the dupe of his good-will" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 20). "(...) he felt compelled to assure himself that the Countess was no more, positively dead" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 20). "Before long he needed to reflect more than once to convince and pull himself together" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 20). Hesitation as defined by Todorov (TODOROV 1975: 33) is sustained by the parallel presence of two perspectives (the count's and the servant's) in the story. The reader is also caught by the gradual hesitation of the servant who hesitates between accepting the rational and the irrational explanation. In connection to the strange feelings the narrator's allusions do not stop and they are able to intensify the ghostlike atmosphere: "And strange happenings were now taking place, so that it became hard to distinguish how far the real and the imaginary coincided. A presence floated in the air. A form was struggling to become visible, to weave some pattern of its being upon the space no longer within its measure"⁴ (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-

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⁴ The French author in this reference (waking for life) approaches the discourse of the fantastic defined the Todorov: the realization of the abstract concept. This is a straightforward reference to Vera's resurrection.

ADAM 2009: 21). Or: “(...) a negation of Death exalted finally into an unknown force” (VILLIERS DE L’ISLE-ADAM 2009: 21).

Previous to the fantastic event, characters are subject to a gradual temptation-haunting⁵ process (Temptation [pokušení] is part of the narrative model by Šrámek. Characters become interested in secrets that surround them. This function creates more intensively the secret atmosphere and environment. Protagonists begin to search or look for something or they feel as if someone/something would follow/observe them or is with them invisibly. Temptation is not a compulsory component of fantastic stories but in general it is a part of the work naturally – ŠRÁMEK 1993: 59–61) preparing them for the appearance of the fantastic creature. D’Athol sees black velvet robe in the hallway, he hears a female calling voice in the rooms. “(...) almost as if she was playing with the invisible as if a child might” (VILLIERS DE L’ISLE-ADAM 2009: 22). In the short story both characters are convinced of their own truth, none of them doubts himself although the servant becomes unsure several times due to the count’s stubborn belief who, more or less, manages to make him believe in the presence of a third person in the palace. For the reader neither of them gives the right argument. The count is seen sleeping many times offering an explanation that the count suffers from hallucinatory effects. There are several examples for this in the narration: “The glimpse of a pale and gentle face, caught in a flash, within the twinkling of an eye; a faint chord struck on the piano, suddenly” (VILLIERS DE L’ISLE-ADAM 2009: 21). Raymond gets accustomed to the peculiar impressions of his lord but he does not believe him, however he himself often feels the presence of a third person in the palace.

⁵ The Hungarian word „kísértés” means both „to haunt” and „to tempt” (Note by the translator G. A. Nagy).

On the anniversary of Vera's death the fantastic manifests itself. There are many supernatural things happening that could only be explained by the count's hallucinations. The beads in Vera's bracelet are warm as if they were touched by human skin. A small candle is lit by itself in the room. The blood drops on Vera's lawn kerchief are wet (that she used on the day of her death), and the vase in the room is filled with fresh flowers. The clock also chimes whose spring the count broke into two a year before. The story has its climax at this point whereas in the first half of the story realistic elements dominated, here the predominance of the fantastic follows. Finally, the dead wife appears in the room. "(...) one hand buried in her thick black hair, her lips deliciously parted in a smile that held a voluptuous paradise of rare delights" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 25). The figure of Vera has not changed at all. In general when in fantastic literature characters are happy to see the ghost, they await them, their shapes are human (just as they were buried). In case they return to take revenge or are frightened they are not a pretty sight. Wicked ghosts are frequently frightening and horrid. To intensify the terror they often appear without limbs or carrying their heads under their armpits – they are characteristic figures of fantastic literature. According to László András Magyar the invisible face is in connection with death, who "takes the face away", dissolves personality. Truncated bodies refer to incompleteness, the dead person is unable to rest, s/he needs to return (MAGYAR 1989: 44). Vera initiates interaction with her husband. She calls him by his name then they are kissing arms in arm. Even beyond death, Vera has a strong seductive sexual power. Death does not deprive the wife of the attractive decadent femininity. She is able to fulfill the role of the fatal woman as a ghost as well. Her husband sees her as a perfect ideal woman even in her ghostly existence. The fantastic event is interrupted by the husband when suddenly, after being together for hours, he realizes Vera's death. Uttering this fact loud "But you are dead!" (VILLIERS DE

L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 26) he makes everything stop. All supernatural events cease: The flowers fade and wither away all of a sudden, the clock slows down to stop, drops of blood fade away on the handkerchief: Vera disappears forever. "(...) and the vision, in all its ardent whiteness, effacing itself between those despairing arms which sought in vain to clasp it still, returned into thin air" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 26).

In Judit Maár's opinion after the fantastic event the count himself realizes that he was the victim of his own hallucinations. It was only his imagination that brought Vera back to him, but in reality he has been alone for a year (MAÁR 2001: 28). I do not fully agree with Maár's statement since the count is sure all along that it is his dead wife visiting him. Following the appearance and disappearance of the ghost he is only sure in that Vera will not ever appear for him again. At this point in the short story it is rather the reader who begins to have serious doubts about the existence of the ghost. This is due to the narrator's hints that further intensify the doubt about the existence of the ghost. "His dream had melted away at one single touch; with one single word he had snapped this magnetic thread of his glittering pattern" (VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM 2009: 26). The last sentences of the short story, however, eliminate all doubt from the reader and make him hesitate again since the count finds the key on his bed he himself had thrown into the sepulchral vault. That key could only be accessed by somebody and could place it on the count's bed, somebody who was inside the crypt. Therefore the key becomes the proof of the fantastic (on the return of the dead wife). The husband recognizes a reassuring sign for his beliefs in finding the key, the reader sees the cause of his uncertainty and hesitation between the natural and supernatural explanation.

Judit Maár calls our attention to the fact that many critics interpret the short story as one that was influenced by Hegel's philosophy. Villiers d' Isle Adam was familiar with Hegel's philosophy in depth (MAÁR 2001: 28).

Referring to Caxtes Maár summarizes the influence of Hegel: in Vera's resurrection the French theoretician saw the embodiment of ideas and thoughts. If we ignore the Hegelian explanation and the allegorical reading by Todorov we definitely can conclude that this short story is a representative piece of those fantastic ghost stories where amorous passion is capable of bringing the dead wife back from the grave.

III. Dezső Kosztolányi: *Hrussz Krisztina csodálatos látogatása* [*The Wonderful Visit of Krisztina Hrussz*]

Hungarian literary history does not consider Kosztolányi a writer of fantastic literature, although we can find fantastic short stories among his early writings (even a ghost story as well). The concept of the ghost for Kosztolányi shows similarities with the concept of Viktor Cholnoky, Kosztolányi's contemporary. Cholnoky gives the following definition of the ghost: "(...) ghosts are all those effects that have no cause in the world. That is (...) the word already includes the concept of cause as well, the concept of the ghost a priori requires us to divide the universe into two parts: to the world and to something else that is connected (...) to the world, albeit not belonging to it" (CHOLNOKY 1980: 234). In the figure of the ghost Cholnoky projected the inner fear of humans to the characters and Kosztolányi approached supernatural phenomena from a similar psychological perspective. In the foreword of a collection containing Hungarian fantastic short stories published in 1917 he points out the following: "The external world is clear. But our inner world is full of mysteries even today. (...) The knots of the beginning and of the end have never been untied (...). Today (in the beginning of the 20th century) there is again a stormy ghost visit in literature. (...) We have no secret rooms as in castles of the Middle Ages. But in our souls there are still

these kinds of rooms” (KOSZTOLÁNYI 1917: 5–6). According to the concept of Kosztolányi the belief or disbelief in the fantastic depends on the disposition of the nerves. He thinks the nervous system of humans became so sensitive that in literature there is a need for cunning fright and bewilderment. The ghost featuring in the short story of Kosztolányi is related to the subject matter of death that kept the writer thinking during his entire life. Csaba Károlyi formulates the thought that the subject matter of death deeply influenced Kosztolányi’s writings. “(...) he is unable to conceive of the other world, (...) he is continuously possessed by the thought of what is after death. (...) his understanding of the other world decisively define his works” (KÁROLYI 1994: 9).

The wonderful visit of Krisztina Hrussz tells us about the return of a girl in love to the world of the living. Krisztina returns from the other world to meet her lover the last time. Šrámek noticed that it is generally women who return as ghosts in those types of stories where marriage or an amorous relationship closely links two people to each other and one of them dies.⁶ The returning female ghosts are generally motivated by desire in love, fearing for or missing the other very much. Male ghosts tend to return less frequently to their loved ones or wives and the motivation for their return is generally revenge for infidelity or sinful actions committed during their lives.⁷ The heroine of the short story is

⁶ A few examples for the returning female ghosts in love in fantastic literature: Théophile Gautier: *A kávéfőző* [*The Coffee Maker*], *Angéla visszatérése* [*The Return of Angela*], *Omphalé*, *Halott szerelmes* [*La Morte Amoureuse*]; Guy de Maupassant: *Jelenés* [*Apparition*]; Hanz Heinz Ewers: *A pók* [*The spider*]; Villiers de l’Isle-Adam: *Vera*; id. Alexandre Dumas: *A bársonynyakékes hölgy* [*The Lady of the Camellias*]; Alphonse Karr: *Berthe and Rodolphe*.

⁷ A few examples of the return of the loving man in fantastic literature: Villiers de l’Isle-Adam: *Claire Lenoir*, Marcel Deschamps: *Un bal de nocés*, id. Alexandre Dumas: *Les deux étudiants de Bologne*.

a cabaret singer who dies in pneumonia in three days. The story begins at her funeral ceremony where some instances foreshadow her future resurrection. Vidor Tass, a medical student, the girl's lover is reminded by the grieving crowd to an other worldly march (KOSZTOLÁNYI 2007: 242). The student is not able to and does not want to realize that Krisztina is dead. Generally speaking for people a funeral means the end of life, the decaying of the body. By death the dead person is regarded as one who is deceased and ended forever. Vidor Tass does not believe in the ultimate end of Krisztina's life: "he rather wondered and looked around than grieved. It all seemed so unbelievable. (...) He did not even believe in death really" (KOSZTOLÁNYI 2007: 242).

The second part of the story describes the sufferings of the medical student caused by the absence of Krisztina. Similarly to the short story by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Tass is unable to accept the loss of his lover. The student thinks that his loved one stayed by his side: "At night he put his clothes next to him, his shoes, the yellow scarf he could put on with such an elegance. He imagined her sitting by his side" (KOSZTOLÁNYI 2007: 243). The narrator suggests the thought (and if Kosztolányi would want us to believe the same) that if he was constantly thinking about Krisztina being dead could be conquered and his lover would resurrect. The sentence written four times in the text makes the request almost ridiculous: "I wish she could come back!" (KOSZTOLÁNYI 2007: 243–244) supporting the suggested thought by the narrator. Vidor Tass has hallucinations due to his overflowing imagination. He sees Krisztina several times, he hears her voice, he is suffering in "fatal embraces" (KOSZTOLÁNYI 2007: 243).

Krisztina has strong sexual seductive power and in his imagination the boy sees her as more and more beautiful: Through veils of years passed by her freckles gleamed blond and sweet, these cute and erotic spots. Her mouth as a ruby flashes and he feels the warm wetness of her

silver lips (KOSZTOLÁNYI 2007: 243). His longing for Krisztina makes the medical student possessed. In the short story by Kosztolányi the same thought is formulated as in the short story on Vera. The abstract expression on “love is stronger than death” becomes reality and the upcoming event of the fantastic realizes the referential meaning of the abstract rhetoric figure.

In the next part the fantastic event takes place and Vidor Tass becomes a participant. His dead lover returns from the grave. The ghost of his lover contradicts traditional ghost types. She is not a ghost wanting to take revenge, she does not give any advice and she does not want to defend her lover either. The looks of Krisztina does not change a bit, instead of being an ugly sight in the eighth year of her death, she looks better than when living. The narrator remarks in a funny way: “Death definitely did her good. She was much healthier than living. She even gained a little weight in the coffin. But she was elegant as if she came out of the pages of a fashion magazine” (KOSZTOLÁNYI 2007: 245). The student does not hallucinate, the ghost is seen by the maiden as well, perhaps she has no knowledge of the girl being dead for eight years since she takes her into the boy’s room.

What is conspicuous in this ghost story is the total absence of wonder or doubt. The student is not afraid, he is not surprised by the return of her lover. And this is where the fantastic nature of the story becomes suspicious.

According to Judit Márvány Krisztina’s resurrection may not be regarded a wonderful event because the student does not get surprised by the sight of the corpse – even if she was his lover. According to Márvány it is the lack of marvel and bewilderment that makes the short story special (MÁRVÁNY 1996: 112–113). The dead girl resurrects as if she had only slept for a few years. Krisztina tells him about herself that she is not a ghost, or spirit and she even mentions the name of Viktor

Cholnoky. Kosztolányi consciously uses Cholnoky's name as a pun who wrote several ghost stories as was well known.⁸

Reading the short story the reader has the feeling that he became victim to some kind of a joke. The fantastic event takes place, Krisztina appears, but there are abnormalities in the manifestation of the fantastic. The hero is not afraid at all, he is not marveled by the appearance of the ghost. The spirit may stay for only a short time in the boy's room. She says "I can only stay for thirty minutes. At three thirty I no longer will be here (KOSZTOLÁNYI 2007: 245). According to Vodáková the concept of time is always connected to ghosts and she explains that even in antique mythology goddesses and demons defined the length of life, against which even male gods could not do anything (VODÁKOVÁ 2003: 24). In the short story it is Krisztina who decides upon the length of their encounter. The boy was waiting for his lover for eight years and he would have given his life away just to see Krisztina for a minute. When his wish is fulfilled, neither he, nor Krisztina can use those thirty minutes. After a few minutes both of them began to be bored. As Ferenc Kiss writes the tormenting absence of the girl and daydreaming about her (sometimes not corresponding to reality at all) consumed the intensity of love and as a ghost, Krisztina is no longer so interesting for the student. Jung's concept of the archetype provides a kind of explanation: when a man feels passionately attracted to a woman he sees his own anima, his own unconscious feminine qualities embodied in the woman therefore he sees the woman more beautiful than she is in reality (ANTALFAI 2007: 172). With the death of Krisztina this inner image (idea) becomes even

⁸ Ghost stories by Viktor Cholnoky: *Olivér lovag* [Cavalier Oliver], *A kövér ember* [The Fat Man], *A Bertalan Lajos lelke* [The Spirit of Lajos Bertalan]. In his short stories always male ghost return from the underworld.

more beautiful than when she was still alive. When they meet each other after Krisztina's death, this inner image falls apart. According to Kiss Kosztolányi formulated his idea from his younger years hidden in the form of a fantastic short story – about the problematic nature of the rupture between imagination and reality (Kiss 1998: 107–108). The fantastic, excluding all explanations (mistake, dream, hallucinations, madness) takes place, however when both of them began to yawn the story becomes incredible as a fantastic piece. The effect of the supernatural is eliminated through this yawn, the magical spell of the supernatural breaks. Both characters are very serious and it seems as if their empty questions and responses would twist the genre of the fantastic around. Ferenc Kiss formulates the following thought: “The short story carved seriousness onto the face of the female ghost and the student because he himself did not want to believe in the significance of the fantastic story either” (Kiss 1998: 79).

The non-traditional ghost story written by Kosztolányi, his imitation piece, was also published in a collection of fantastic short stories, *Éjjél [Midnight]*, edited by Aladár Bálint⁹ in 1917. Kosztolányi's short story preceded the famous short story written by his cousin, Géza Csáth, *A varázsló halála [The death of the Magician]*, another ghost story; suggesting a connection between the two stories. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák pointed out the fact that short stories were not published randomly in this volume: In reality, Kosztolányi's short story is very different from the short stories of this volume. We may say it is the reversal, a parody of the others. (...) It is about mocking the unbelievable (fantastic) story: The one returning from the other world leaves after ten minutes since the two characters belonging to two different worlds have nothing to say to

⁹ Aladár Bálint (1881-1924) himself wrote a fantastic short story, he was a well-known Hungarian spiritist together with his wife. They organized several hundred sessions of necromancy.

each other” (SZEGEDY-MASZÁK 2010: 107). The story of Vidor Tass ends in defeat since he is not able to make profit of the fantastic event. The event that he waited for eight years ends in total failure.

Kosztolányi does not take the subject matter of ghost stories seriously, the funny, sometimes ironic highlights also support this idea. We may remember one of his articles where he explains that Hungarian ghost stories are parodies of blood-curdling mystery novels since these characters of the other world are capable of appearing “in sober hours in the light of the day” (KOSZTOLÁNYI 1977: 87). The short story contains the intent of understanding death. By including the ghost he presents the difference between the world of the dead and the living. He introduces the unknowable sphere of thoughts after death. Kosztolányi suggests in this story that the dead speak and act in vain, the world of the living became so distant (and vice versa) that they can no longer be connected. The possibility of the impossible takes place, however, characters are not able to use it, therefore the fantastic is a failure. Kosztolányi offers us the idea that even if literature gets involved in philosophical questions through fantastic narratives, fiction is not science, not philosophy but a game.

IV. Géza Szilágyi: *Éjjel a fogadóban* [*Night at the Inn*]

The story of this fantastic writing is presented by an unnamed narrator speaking in the first person. The story is about events and irrational experiences lived by the narrator-protagonist in an inn. The existence of the ghost seems to be questioned several times. The uncertainty of categorizing the female ghost (fantastic creature, dream, living person) brings about fantastic features in the story. The story begins in a small, dirty city near the border. Getting off the train, the protagonist would like to spend the night in the city in order to continue his journey home rested.

The protagonist is gradually overcome by fear due to the sight he meets. Fear is a definitive element of the story and while in previous stories analyzed, characters had no fear, fright is very much present in the *Éjjel a fogadóban* [*Night at the Inn*]. Fear is a frequent characteristic feature of ghost stories but it is not present necessarily. The hero is dreaded in this small dirty, desolate city. The narrator has an anxious personality (the writer had no trouble depicting the fears of this character since he himself was a neurotic personality as well) walking around the city lonely and abandoned. He feels completely separated from the real normal, secure world. "I passed by the heartbreakingly modest inn – I was frightened by it – I saw a few horridly disgusting pubs, my dismayed eyes were assaulted by the hellishly high chimneys of two factory buildings (...)" (SZILÁGYI 1917: 126). Fear caused by momentary solitude often serves as the grounds for the fantastic experience to be realized.

Vax's concept quoted in Judit Maár's book in the fantastic, seems to be justified in the story. "The solitude of the environment and the solitude of the hero are the same thing. His consciousness is projected into the surrounding space and comes alive by the wicked intentions of the fantastic space, it gets moving and encloses its victim (MAÁR 2001: 152). Due to the fear, the hero's nerves gradually break down and the external threat (not existing in reality) is blurred by internal anxiety. In the beginning of the story the space sensed by the hero foreshadows the happening of fantastic events. The narrator-hero's continuous allusions and hints create the possibility for the upcoming events. His sightline follows the *unquiet* stars with *terror*, the loosened wheels of trains and he perceives factories at the outskirts of the city as cannibals. The description and role of the inn is especially important since the fantastic story is intertextually connected to Gothic narratives. The appearance of the ghost (supernatural event) takes place in the inn similar to Gothic novels. In these blood-curdling novels, besides old castles, the building

of the inn serves as a conventional venue where often the secret and horrible events took place.¹⁰ The inn and its interior terrifies the hero: “I was reluctant to enter this the sick looking, ancient old house with its stained windows and torturingly narrow door, it might have been modeled on a ruined building shivering from the catastrophe of collapse. But this sad house would not ever release me” (SZILÁGYI 1917: 128). The figure of the host with his toothless mouth, thin face and dark eyes intensifies the hero’s terror. Thinking for himself the narrator is reminded by the host to death. “(...) Death looks like this host” (SZILÁGYI 1917: 131). Arriving to his room the hero falls asleep immediately and this is when the fantastic event takes place. A female figure appears by his bed and touches him – in Szilágyi’s short story there is no relationship between the hero and the female ghost either of love or of family.” A hand touched my shoulder, (...) Did I wake up or not, I do not know, but somebody spoke to me” (SZILÁGYI 1917: 134). The ghost wears a white nightgown and white light surrounds her. The phenomenon possesses a very strong sexual attractiveness and the hero is aroused by its sight: “The white nightgown embraced his slim limbs with tender intimacy” (SZILÁGYI 1917: 134). “I liked the girl anyhow” (SZILÁGYI 1917: 135). The narrator is possessed by seductive sensuality fired up by the beauty of the female body. The female ghost is not revolting in this short story, death even provides her with some elegant splendor. “From her longish, suffering face a moving white light shone towards me” (SZILÁGYI 1917: 134). The creature tells the protagonist that she had been waiting for him for thousands of years. This fantastic creature resembles the ghost type of the white lady [bílé pani]. The white woman does not always appear

¹⁰ In the fantastic stories written by Charles Dickens we find inns, in Kosztolányi’s fantastic story titled “Ghost” a strange encounter takes place.

in a white gown, her dress may be green or black as well. In many cases she is a ghost defending her own family, house or some kind of a secret. We may find an example for this in Hungarian literature as well, in the figure of the white lady from Lőcse (VODÁKOVÁ 2003: 25). She is a revisiting soul who guards her own house or place where she died and likes to communicate with the living. White ladies usually have a strong sexual attractiveness similar to the ghost in this short story. The reader is not informed about the sexual power of the ghost since the events continue to take place in the morning. The protagonist is full of doubt in relation to the fantastic. He is not sure whether he was witness to a supernatural phenomenon or not. He tries to find a rational answer. First, he thinks it was a dream, a hallucination: "(...) perhaps it was my imagination only" (SZILÁGYI 1917: 135). Or: "(...) I thought how dreams may be strange and they can imitate the tangible intensity of reality" (SZILÁGYI 1917: 135). Leaving the room he discovers a door opening to another room. It occurs to him that before falling asleep he did not see this door at all. "(...) my eyes looking around suspiciously in the room lingered over another door for a second that was perhaps leading to another room" (SZILÁGYI 1917: 133). The narrator is able to step inside this other room because the door is open. He sees proofs in the room that makes him and the reader doubt the reality of the supernatural phenomenon. From the sight it becomes evident that not long ago somebody was in the room: "the freshly tangled pillows made no secret about the fact that the one that slept there has left not long ago" (SZILÁGYI 1917: 133). He also sees a white nightgown the ghost was wearing at night. The protagonist and reader does not arrive to a point to have the certainty of a natural answer but the dimension of "as if" becomes eligible. It is possible to consider the dream and the living person as potential "unveiling" arguments. The possibility of a potential natural answer is reinforced by the conversation at the train station. The protagonist learns from one of the officers that the host's

wife has a crazy sister who needs constant care and lives in the inn. Moreover the girl is beautiful and is a possessed sexual eroto-maniac. Due to many resemblances (white gown, beauty, adornment for men) both the hero and the reader recognizes the ghost or the dream. Still, the ambiguity of the story lingers on since there are questions left unanswered. If the host knew about the crazy relative sleeping in the next room why did he leave the door open and why did he provide a room for guests next door? Where did the crazy woman disappear in the morning? The hero should have heard the woman leaving from the room next to his and she could only go out through his room. The uncertainty of these different explanations (dream-dream image, reality-crazy relative, fantastic-ghost) ensures the fantastic quality of the short story. Due to these fantastic effects it is difficult to categorize this novel applying the categories listed by Todorov from the uncanny to the fantastic. At the end of the story the reader hesitates between the natural and the supernatural explanations. Neither the protagonist can provide an answer of certainty, he only knows that he leaves this “bedeviled nest” behind with a happy relief (SZILAGYI 1917: 137).

V. Summary

The ghost may be male or female, however in certain cases female ghosts return from this other world. This is the case when the story is about marital or amorous relationships – there are more women returning from the dead. Usually these spirits are not vicious, they cannot rest because of the absence or love of their living partner. A strong erotic attractiveness characterizes them enchanting men. The ghost may be male or female but in certain cases female ghosts revisit the living. These ghosts are usually those who had a relationship to the living either by being in

love or by being a relative; they are most frequently appear as women. Generally these ghosts are not malevolent, rather they cannot rest because of the absence or love of their partner left behind among the living. A strong erotic seductiveness characterizes them bewitching men. Their looks remain the same just as they were buried, they are not an unpleasant sight showing no signs of decay or disintegration. Their depiction is always external. Their looks, behavior and clothes are described. They almost never unveil their thoughts or emotions, the direct quotes referring to their thoughts are completely absent from these ghost stories. This may be explained by the fact that in fantastic literature characters are generally static. The time and place of the narrative is limited, therefore emotions, thoughts and detailed characterization can only be presented at rare occasions. The concept of time (cycles of the day, the time of return and the length of lives) are closely linked to the female ghost deriving from ancient mythological thought. A few ghosts may only be female. These are white ladies, fairies and wraiths.

Translated by Gabriella Ágnes Nagy

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ZSÓFIA BÁRCZI

THE NOVELS OF PIROSKA SZENES

Abstract ●●●●● The paper investigates the possible contemporary readings of two novels written by Piroška Szenes, a Hungarian female writer from the 1920s and 1930s of Czechoslovakia, with special attention to the mode of creating the female subject construction through the various processes of narration. The interpretation of the novel *Az utolsó úr* [*The Last Lord*] (1927) examines primarily the linguistic codes of the protagonist's double sexual identity with special focus on the role of description and dialogue as well as perspective changes in the linguistic codes of double sexual identity. The diary novel *Egyszer élünk* [*We Only Live Once*] (1935) analyses the genre characteristics of a fictive female diary, the narrative processes evoking diary effect and the interrelation of the three determining factors of subject construction (female, Jewish, poor) created in the novel.

Key words: female subject construction, sexual identity, perspective change, narration, female diary

I. Introduction

Piroška Szenes is registered by literary history books and encyclopaedias as the writer of Hungarian literature in Czechoslovakia between the two World Wars. She was The Woman in this literary context. There was no critic who did not devote at least a few lines or paragraphs to the femininity of her writings or at least about the question of being a female author in relation to the works of Piroška Szenes. Her style, use of

language, the femininity of her themes, the relationships of the female author and her female characters were all examined. When writing about the collection of short stories *Jedviga kisasszony* [*Miss Jedviga*], Sándor Antal lifted Szenes from the group of her contemporaries and female colleagues in a way that he formulated judgement about the whole contemporary female literature:

“We have been used to the unnatural ambition of female writers who deny their femaleness and want to see, want to write like men. So far, there has not been any talented great artist among women who would succeed in this fake game. Normally, the result is some distasteful, ambiguous, suspicious, frustratingly average or even worse than average piece of work, which does not please anyone. This is the reason why both the audience and critics accept female works with much distrust.

Piroska Szenes is a heartening, lucky exception. She is such a great talent, such a conscious artist that she dares to be honest, she dares to be a woman. She sees with female eyes and speaks to us with a natural female voice not with the well-known shrill fake tones used by man-dressed masks at masquerades. The style of Piroska Szenes is the sound of a new human stem with new choral accompaniment; the choral accompaniment of nature explored by female eyes.” (ANTAL 1934: 249–250)

Let us examine this heartening exception, who, in the eyes of her enthusiastic critic, seems to somehow restore not only the shattered honour of female authors, but also the curtailed merits of minority writers writing with bad Hungarian.

The literary reputation of Piroska Szenes was established by her short story *Jedviga kisasszony* [*Miss Jedviga*], which received honourable mention in the competition of Nyugat. Out of her later works, the novel

Csillag a homlokán [*Star on the Forehead*] became the most worthy subject of persistent critical attention and was republished in the series Hungarian Writers in Czechoslovakia by the Madách Publishing House. This novel was most frequently praised by her contemporaries including Lajos Kassák, Aladár Schöpflin, Sándor Antal, Dezső Vozári, then also by the authors of summarizing literary works born after the Second World War. Lajos Turczel simply called *Csillag a homlokán* [*Star on the Forehead*] “the most successful work of fiction between the two World Wars” (TURCZEL 1987: 86), and the monograph of Hungarian literature in Czechoslovakia between the Two World Wars titled *Üzenet* [*Message*] emphasises: “It can hardly be a coincidence that out of her works this one is considered to be the most mature and powerful” (FÓNOD 2002: 179). However, her other two novels, *Az utolsó úr* [*The Last Lord*] (1927) then later in 1935 the diary novel titled *Egyszer élünk* [*We Only Live Once*] are practically forgotten today – this is partially the reason for why this paper deals with these two novels.

II. *Az utolsó úr* [*The Last Lord*]

The first novel attempt of Piroska Szenes was published in 1927, and it undoubtedly had the toughest fate out of her three novels. Already at the time of its publication, the only critical review simply declared it as Mikszáth-imitation, and later theoretical works also took over the above conclusion of Béla Illés without paying attention to the novel’s other units that were sharply distinct from the plot and narrative techniques of Mikszáth, not being able to overcome the allusions of the siege of Beszterce in the novel. Yet this work raises questions that appear in the novel of Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, published a year later, though it approaches the complexity of subjective identity not through the parody of positivist

tradition, but partially through the fantastic,¹ and partially through the Romantic Gothic tradition,² also marking – together with Pál Neubauer – another line of Hungarian novels published in Czecho-Slovakia. Presumably, this is the reason why the homogenizing extended Slovakian destiny novel concept ignores this early work of Szenes.

The plot takes place in the court of a landlord(lady) with double identity and anachronistic behaviour, in a hunting castle hiding deep in a forest, a few years after the First World War. The strange figure, who is biologically a woman but socially has chosen a male role and male identity, together with his/her surrounding defy the passage of time and are engaged in a lifestyle, organize their relationship with each other and the outside world as if they have been stuck in an era that vanished hundreds of years earlier. In addition, the landlord(lady) announces war against the uninvited intruders into her estate. A student lost in the forest is captured by one of the landlord(lady)'s hunters and gets into the castle. First, the student is shocked by the prevailing conditions of the castle, but later is more and more affected by the eccentric landlord (lady).

The first chapter of the novel, which takes place in an anonymous little village, where the protagonist visits his godfather, has almost no connection with the following chapters. The discussion after lunch creates a framework for expressing ideas about social problems and their roots, the new Hungarians, the new world and order, but after the details of attitude statement, the novel continues with a world of genuine Gothic atmosphere

¹ The lord(lady)'s possible identification with a dead ancestor encourages a kind of fantasy-based interpretation.

² The ghost-haunted hunting castle hidden deep in the forest, the nightmare drama in the past controlling the life of the characters, the wicked family relationships are all the characteristics of Gothic literature.

crowded with aberrant, deviant, demented and crazy characters and their strange and weird rules.

The literary work includes only a few number of characters, the landlord(lady), the butler, the girl (maid), Count Kazimir, the two hunters, the doll (a little girl of about 10-14 years of age) and the student. The student's village appears only on the margin of this world, also taken literally: in the opening and final chapter of the novel.

Szenes does not give names to her characters, when referring to them the narrator uses their function in the novel, and since the character's function includes all the features of the character that appear in the narrative, the name is manifested in its original sense: it is equal to its wearer. There are three exceptions: Count Kazimir and the two hunters, Jancsi and Tóbiás. However, they belong to the lord(lady)'s world only partially. The daily activities of the two hunters take place outside the castle, in the outside world. One of them, Jancsi is recognized by the student as his childhood playmate. The third named character, Kazimir, the demented count is the only character with fixed identity, even if this identity is unhealthy and deformed. Although Kazimir's role around the lord(lady) is uncertain, the student is comforted by the recognition of familiarity: for him the count represents aristocracy together with all its flaws and elegance.

The lord(lady), the girl and the doll are all undecipherable figures for the student, all of them are biologically women and represent three different types of uncertain sexual identity, all three types are revealed through particular typical procedures of the narration.

The narration's point of view often changes, depending on whether the narrator takes up the perspective of a marginal observer or one of the characters. The alternating perspectives allow the play with the characters' sexual identity, and make it impossible to create any kind of fixed certainties about the characters. The characters' identities are built

up and destroyed again and again according to the changes of the narrator's point of view.

The characters' anonymity opens up a great variety of names for them, which is significant in preventing the stabilization of the continuous reconstruction of identity. The names are distinguished according to whether one of the characters or the narrator uses them or not.

The characters' anonymity directs attention to the narrative and semiotic nature of the characters (CULPEPER 2009: 133), eliminating the possibility of the traditional approach according to which the characters are representations of human beings (FOKKEMA 1991: 18).

The character construction model of Jonathan Culpeper based on cognitive stylistics claims that certain lines, sentences in the narration are closely related to the creation of the character's personality, they determine the basis of the reader's understanding of the character. Through the linguistic strategies offered in the novel, the lines characterising the character are built into the character construction, just like the assumptions arising from the characters' names. From the point of view of the creation of meanings connected with the characters it is important that the available information is organized not only by the knowledge about the genre, but generally by the knowledge about the world. Therefore, it is possible to characterize the characters with their function, within the framework of semantics (CULPEPER 2009: 138).³

³ In connection with fictive, literary characters, Jonathan Culpeper sees one possible interpretation through the usage of the theory of social memory, formulated in the study of Fiske and Taylor, in creating the character-construction model based on cognitive stylistics. Fiske and Taylor examined how people understand.

The answers to the student's questions do not reveal anything about the owner of the castle, only about the owner's function:

“– Who lives here? – asked the student wonderingly.

– The lord – answered the hunter respectfully and mysteriously.

– Which lord?

The boy looked at the questioner, his wide crusted mouth and cunning-stupid grin.

– The lord! – he answered.” (SZENES 1927: 18)

The self-defining sentence of the castle's lord(lady) – “I am a lord” – supports the same functional character scheme. This statement returns frequently, both as a response to the student's questions and as a self-situating linguistic procedure. In the text of Szenes, the function can be identified with the character, because the characters of the novel have only a few, very precisely described features, all of which stem from their function in the plot. Therefore the questions of narration in the character construction of the Szenes novels are even more emphasized. In character description the narrator is largely limited to listing the determining features from the point of view of function. Changes in point of view in the narration direct attention to the linguistic construction of the characters' identities.

The student does not find out anything about the lord's personality until his/her appearance, the only information he possesses about him/her is that s/he is the lord. The lord's appearance is introduced by the narrator with a long description.

“A gloved hand came through the door and threw the hunter aside without sparing. Two huge and beautiful German Shepherds pushed forward, tripping over into each other and

their leads, chasing the smell of the foreigner with wet jaws. Their lead was held by a tall, slim figure, entering the room in a short fur-collared leather coat and buckskin stained breeches. The peak of the leather cap on the head was pulled down so that the whole neck and forehead was covered, and the face was held in a tight frame. The face was quite smooth with thin, dark and straight eyebrows above the cold dark eyes, the lips tightly closed, nice predator lips.

The figure entered and pulled back the running animals strongly. This movement was cold and fierce at the same time, as if the swirling forces under the flesh had been calculated and quenched. These quenched movements stirred up cruel, unintentionally cruel coldness, they included astonishing vehemence; the figure's immensely proud face could not conceal some kind of embarrassing softness, the suntanned, velvet shine of the skin, the light fullness of the lips and the elongated muscled rhythmic body.

The old servant straightened out his bent waist, looked at the student with an empty glance and said with a tired voice:

The lord is here.

The student looked at the person standing in front of him in an astonished way, stunned and surprised. He was almost absorbed by the cold and dark glance. He had to say something, at least to feel himself alive among these strange creatures.

– Sir... – he said in intense embarrassment, and then he stopped.

Because this man was undeniably a lady.” (SZENES 1927: 22–23)

The narrator uses such expressions when describing the entering lord(lady) which do not reveal anything about the sex of the person, and though the items of clothing in the description – short fur-collared leather coat, buckskin stained breeches, the fur cap with a peak – together with the two large German Shepherds preceding the introduction of the figure suggest the appearance of a man, the description of the person's body includes feminine features as well – a completely smooth face, a light and full body. The description is built on opposites, and the uncertainty deriving from the opposing features is intensified by the narrator's comments on the embarrassing overall effect, which in fact prepares the conclusion of the description, where the sex of the coming creature is more concretely manifested in the double mirror of the name/greeting used by the characters participating in the scene and the omniscient narrator's description of the events.

The description of clothes has the function of indicating the characters' sexual or social identity. In Virginia Wolf's *Orlando*, clothes become the only determining feature of sex: "in every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness". In the novel of Szenes the characters' clothes represent a factor not only expressing, but directly shaping identity, and not exclusively in relation to male-female identity. The clothes are used to demonstrate the lack of sexual identity as well.⁴ The novel's fable is untangled in the context of social and sexual identity,

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⁴ The purpose of clothing as a social factor determining female-male identity and the narrator's role in describing clothes is discussed in more details by Christy L. Burns in connection with *Orlando*. Burns calls attention to the importance of the contextualized understanding of identity and by this she moves towards the narrative construction of literary characters from feminist essentialism, where the character appears as a mimetic figure rather than the sum of linguistic signs (BURNS 1994: 351–353).

the creation of personal identity and power relations, and the protagonist's double sexual identity emphasises the connection between power and social identity. The lord(lady) has got male identity whereas his/her biological female sex is never questioned, neither by him/her, neither by his/her surroundings. His/her self-identification as male is directed at gaining male social status and the resulting power; this status is supported by the gestures of behaviour and clothing. S/he exercises physical love as the extension of power both with his/her male and female admirers.

Sexuality is interpreted as the exercise of power by the enticed hunter as well. He identifies the lord(lady) with the folk figure of the witch, who gets the mastery over the victim with the help of love and punishes disobedience with curse. The instability of the lord(lady)'s sex, the difference between his/her biological and social sex and their competition is manifested in his/her relationship with the surrounding characters: the love-struck student sees the woman in her, despite all contradictions, however, the love-struck maid sees the lord and the man.

Masculinity does not only mean a way of behaviour and clothing, and consequently partially also appearance, but also the linguistic strategy of the language used for talking about the character. Both in the language used for describing the lord(lady) and in the language used by him/her, the lord(lady) appears as a man.

At this point it is worth looking at Burns' essay on *Orlando*. Burns concludes that the usage of personal pronouns linked to characters results in the possibility of the plurality of identity (BURNS 1927: 350). In the Szenes novel, the indication of the plurality of gender identity occurs through a very similar device. The character is talked about sometimes as a lord, other times as a lady and even in his/her memories, s/he sometimes appears as a woman, other times as a man.

The instability of the lord(lady)'s biological sex and gender identity is more supported when the apparent truth of the narrator, which is

independent of the characters' speaking activity and is made up of the spectacular elements of the description, is shaken by the narrator himself/herself at certain parts of the text. There is no truth in the text created outside the characters' perspectives, only truth linked to the characters' perspectives created by language. The scheme created in the first half of the novel – biological femaleness and male gender identity – wavers in the second half of the novel. The lord(lady) considers himself/herself identical with the male protagonist of an ancient terrible drama, whose portrait is hanging on the wall of the castle's living room, whose story and suicide is narrated by the lord(lady). However, the sameness of the portrait figure and the lord(lady) is discovered by the student already before the story is narrated.

“And it was the eyes of this young man that the student was enchanted by, that he kept watching with an anxious heart. The young man had a gentle face held rigidly with bitterly sealed lips and straight, thin eyebrows that divided his face from his forehead.”

As if it had been painted of a dead man, this face was so lifeless, it would have been so lifeless, if his eyes had not been looking at the viewer directly and open wide. These eyes were dark, blazing as a bottomless water mirror shining with involuntary cruel coldness, as if intentionally and cruelly decided. These eyes were focusing only on one point with hungry, cold fever, reflecting the light of a suppressed hell, the light of mania.

And these dark eyes were completely the eyes of the lady.

– Oh, such a long time ago... – thought the boy and his heart sank. (...) His heart was clenched in pain, as if the wind had blown the shroud off the dead man's face, which was seen with full of life the day before.

He had to think about the white boyish body holding a rigid pale head, and here it is, this elongated boy's body grew two hostile breasts and became the love-struck body of the lady."
(SZENES 1927: 92-93)

The description of the picture includes the same elements to describe the man's figure as in the description of the lord(lady)'s first appearance. The repeated description of the involuntary cruel coldness, the bitterly sealed lips, the straight, thin eyebrows dividing the face from the forehead is closed by the same rhetoric solution by the narrator, just like the first time. The recognition of the lord(lady) in the old picture's male figure results here in a more powerful contrast, because besides the shocking suggestion of the interchangeability of male-female identity it also offers the possibility of the interchangeability of the live-dead relationship.

The impossible is bridged over by the narration linking the past and the present in the shape of metamorphosis. This part of the text subverts the identity scheme created in the first half of the novel, when it suggests the possibility of changing biological sex. It is not revealed, when it occurs, even more, the identification with the picture hanging on the wall suggests that it might have never occurred or everything is the other way round than it was suggested by the text until the appearance of the picture. Because the picture depicts a young man who looks exactly like the lord(lady), a man, who should be long dead according to the legend, but the student identifies the figure depicted by the picture and the lord(lady). In the case, the character's biological sex was changed; however, his/her identity remained male. This possible interpretation is again supported by the description of clothing. During the dinner that allows confrontation, the lord(lady) emphatically identified as male a few lines before appears in unusual feminine clothes, in fact, extremely feminine clothes.

“S/he was wearing strange clothes.

Dark purple silk sheath clung tightly to his/her tall boyish body from the armpit to the waist and then the ankles where it ended in tight plain trousers. S/he had a floor-length floppy crinoline with red-purple tutu, and his/her dark silky body looked like a butterfly’s behind its stretched wings. S/he was wearing small silky slipper-shoes, his/her arms and shoulders naked, shining in white silk light.” (SZENES 1927: 94)

According to the clothes, the biological and the social sex seem to be identical, however, the lord(lady)’s behaviour manifested during the discussion is emphatically male. The lord(lady)’s identity is indicated in the narration as emphatically female, and becomes unstable when there is a change in point of view and the description intends to convey only what is seen by the student. “He (i.e. the student, Zs. B.) saw the lady’s dark eyes looking at him, the maniac eyes of the long past pale young man (...)” (SZENES 1927: 95).

The fantastic possibility of being identical with an ancestor is finally resolved by the lord(lady) himself/herself with a rational explanation: “The dead haunt in the living, the three of them haunt in me” (SZENES 1927: 95). The lord(lady) explains the complexity of his/her self-identity: “I am the last member of my tribe – clanked the lady’s voice. – Two mutually joined final branches, man and woman, splendid and fruitless. The target of a long road curving back into itself. Perfection.” (SZENES 1927: 101)

In the self-situating speech of the lord(lady) physical descent is preceded by spiritual and male and female branches in his/her origin are indicated as equally powerful, and perfection is found in the unity of the two sexes, in androgyny.

In this chapter, the voice of the narrator that keeps using the ‘lord’ and ‘lady’ denomination alternately is replaced by the consequent usage

of 'lady', which is counteracted by the words of Count Kazimir, who accompanies the lord(lady)'s story with bows and cries of "You are the Lord!". The meaning of the expression used in relation to biological sex, gender and class system permanently loses its complexity, and is fixed as an expression indicating social class role.

The situational game connected with the identity of the lord(lady)'s character is repeated in the constructional processes referring to the doll's character. The doll's figure appears as an object that lacks personal identity even in the speeches of the lord(lady), the maid and the butler, it is only the student's and the narrator's different perspectives that provide opportunity for constructing such elements of this character which enable the possibility of manifesting human identity.

The doll's figure possesses two identities, she is treated as a toy by everybody and she also identifies with being an object, however, instead of a lifeless object, the student and the narrator see a 10-14 year-old frightened little girl who needs help. The information that is revealed from the perspective of the student is anticipated by the narrator's description and later it is even more confirmed. The description of the doll's first appearance definitely depicts a child forced into the role of a doll. "The doll was standing on the top of the stairs. She was an immature little girl wearing white wide panties with wide and thick ruffles on the neck, a long black T-shirt up to the hilt on her long legs and up to the shoulders on her arms, and black silk slippers on her small feet. Her blond hair had been curled into a stack, her white-powdered narrow little face was almost lost beneath, it was only made vital by the two round red-painted stains and red lips. Her very bright, blue-grey eyes were shockingly serious and rejecting." (SZENES 1927: 34)

The description displays the tools of the little girl's objectification, clothing, haircut, and the image of the face hidden under the painted mask, later these are complemented or replaced by the doll-like posture,

“behaviour”, the description of how she stiffens in an inanimate posture after she is dropped onto the floor by one of the characters of the novel.

The doll is deprived of sex already in her name. Whereas the lord(lady)’s names reveal his/her double gender, the doll is objectified and gender-less both in her appearance and in her names. Asexuality is the essential condition of her toy-life. Apart from the narrator, her femaleness is only *seen* by the student, who considers her as a living creature, not as a doll. However, the student is not the part of the micro-culture, which has created a complete dictionary of the representation of complex gender identities through its own language.

The image also reflects the spectator’s horizon and assessment (BAL 1997: 150-154), and while describing the lord(lady)’s appearance, the narrator takes up the perspective of one of the characters, when describing the doll, the narrator leaves the other characters and creates an independent horizon, in which the doll can appear as a living creature, a little girl, which is contrasted by the unified horizon of the castle’s inhabitants, in which each comment and question trying to represent the doll as a child is meaningless.

The common language of the castle’s inhabitants mediates a unified experience, which only has words for the doll as an object. The little girl’s behaviour confirms the common experience, she always becomes motionless and mute when being paid attention to. Her muteness is not only part of the “game” accompanying her role as a doll, but also the consequence of her exclusion from the common language. She starts to speak when the student gives her back the opportunity to speak as a human being – so he treats her as a living creature in possession of an independent identity – of which she had been deprived by the exclusion from language and having been treated as an object. However, creating the opportunity of speaking about herself is not identical with the creating an independent identity, which is different from the identity

given by the castle's inhabitants. The doll sees herself as a doll too. Her function is outlined as emphatically subordinated to the relationships between the characters. For her, being a doll is represented primarily by her relationship with the lord(lady).

“And does the lord know that you are starving? – the boy asked haltingly. – I don't think he would be so evil. Why don't you talk to him?

The little girl opened up her deadly serious gaze.

– I mustn't speak with the lord. – she said between two heavy nibbles. She answered the boy's questioning gaze simply and naturally. – I am a doll and dolls don't speak.

– Who told you that you were a doll?

The little girl swallowed the last bite convulsively.

– Who told me? – she repeated. – Well, I am one.”

(SZENES 1927: 79)

In the novel of Piroska Szenes the characters' gender identity is formed in relation to social roles, and is substituted depending on social relationships in a way appropriate to focalization. The text is eager to maintain the tension resulting from the ambivalent sexual features of the characters through the narrative processes, partially in the fable itself, the descriptions interrupting the fable and through the variety of changing narrative perspectives. This type of complex narrative mode is very distant from the contemporary Hungarian novels in Slovakia; moreover, its subject matter is not contemporary reality or the minority existential situation. Presumably, this also contributed to the fact that the novel's reception is absent from the history of Hungarian literature in Slovakia.

III. *Egyszer élünk [We Only Live Once]*

At the time of its publication (1935) this work attracted much attention mainly because of the open exploration of the girl protagonist's, a student of medicine, love life. Each critic reflecting on the diary novel in fact reacts to the female author, female protagonist and the unusual description of love life in a certain form: Sándor Vájlók claims that the basic subject matter of the work is not the self-novel, "but modern, liberated love" (VÁJLOK 1936: 244). It is worth quoting the writing of Aladár Schöpflin, which was published in *Nyugat*, in more details, because we turn back to it later on:

"The novel was written by a woman about a woman, perhaps that is why it is understandable that during her love, the girl never has moral inhibitions. The narration written in the form of a diary reveals the most hidden thoughts of the writer of the diary, but never deals with one particular question: the question of whether a girl can throw herself so much and so openly to the bodily connections of love. Moreover, at the very beginning of the diary she reveals in an almost provocative way that during the holiday following the school leaving exam, on one occasion, she freed herself from her virginity with a future colleague, who does not get any role in the diary later. It is true, that because of her family circumstances, social morality does not mean a serious obstacle for her; she does not have to be afraid about any position. She is the representative of the new type of girl who – at least in our country – appeared after the war, and who lives with her freedom without any moral scruples and can remain unwounded and healthy at the same time. As far as I know, this new type enters our literature for the first time as fully illustrated in details with the novel of Piroska Szenes." (SCHÖPFLIN 1936: 74–75)

Why is confession written down in a diary provocative? After all, the diary is the genre of self-revelation, even if it has been written for private use, but also if its author expects wider readership (SZÁVAI 1978: 41). Anyhow interpreted: the diary is definitely a personal genre.

It is striking that all contemporary male critics turn to the appearance of bodily love and the pragmatic loss of virginity in the novel in a hypnotic way. They seem to neglect the accurate, almost sociographic depiction of proletarian poverty in Budapest, or the description of the inevitably sharpening social atrocities in the democratization process of the university, or the discussion of how a poor country girl fits into big city life.⁵ Although the novel is very much about these topics as well.

Reception so far emphasised the perspective of a male reader, so all the writings evaluating this book highlighted only those factors that were the most obvious for the (male) reader, the most unusual factors. In the novel's reception, honesty did not appear in connection with the genre of the diary novel, but with the female issue: investigating the female author's – or sometimes less obviously: the female protagonist's – relationship with the physical. The female writing style of the female author writing about women becomes the main focus of attention, and the meaning of the way of writing is explained in relation to the attitude toward the selected topic: this means that honesty connected with the genre is built into the discussion of the female author as a specific feature of female writing style. The novel of Piroska Szenes is one of those texts which emphatically rely on the mobilization of gender-based reading experience.

The diary or the diary novel arouses the urge in the reader to perceive the narrator of the text, so the protagonist not as a linguistic creation,

⁵ With the exception of Fónod's monograph.

but as the identification of an existing person with real experiences. Based on his/her narrated life experiences, the narrator of the diary (diary novel) is constituted as male or female during the reading process, so the reader establishes an intimate relationship not only with the life story of a narrator defined as a general person, but is initiated into the secrets of a concrete man or a woman. Even if – like in a diary novel – this concrete man or woman is a fictive character. The diary novel mobilizes the categories of honesty and authenticity – the protagonist, the narrator and the author are easily identified with each other in the reception process, which greatly contributes to the emergence of authenticity.

From the point of view of the questions arising from the Szenes-text, it is worth starting with the definition of Nóra Séllei regarding the nature of autobiography: “The »self«, the talking subject is definitely the central element of an autobiography, which/who can be approached in several ways: one extreme is that is regarded as a real person, the other extreme is that it is regarded as only a rhetorical trope” (SÉLLEI 2001: 23). In the works of critics who try to place the text in the context of Hungarian literature in Czechoslovakia, certain events and settings of the diary novel of Szenes appear as elements of a story of a talking subject, understood as a real person⁶, Géza Féja even labeled the transfer of the author’s own

⁶ “This novel includes autobiographical references just like *Csillag a homlokán* [*Star on the Forehead*].” – claims Zoltán Fónod about the novel (TURCZEL 1995: 182), also emphasises autobiographical references: “The novel *Egyszer élünk* [*We Only Live Once*] written in the form of a diary is full of autobiographical references, it brings back the world of Hungarian Christian course and numerous clausus in the circles of university youth, and besides the powerful portrayal of a sensual love affair it provides an interesting picture of groups of contemporary young writers and artists in Budapest.” (TURCZEL 1995: 25) Sándor Csanda writes more openly about the writer and the narrator: “It was presumably created according to a living example, like *Csillag a homlokán* [*Star on the Forehead*], but also in the form of a diary according to clearly

life experiences into a Hungarian milieu as a kind of escape (FÉJA 1935: 98–99). In this interpretation, the writer of the fictive diary, Eszti Engel and the figure of diary novel's biography writer, Piroska Szenes are merged leading to the inversion of the genre: the fictive diary novel is read as a biographical novel, in spite of the fact that in a diary novel the relationship between the author, the narrator and the narrated self is implemented differently than in an autobiography or a diary. In the diary novel, the author is separated from the narrator and the narrated self, that is, when the text provides opportunity for the implementation of operations generally allowed by the genres of autobiography, in fact, it is constructed pursuant to fiction, actually, it *only* imitates autobiography (VERES 1993: 46). Lejeune's autobiographical pact is only partially functional: the contract between the writer and the reader is realized differently than in other types of biographical texts. According to the pact, the reader accepts that the autobiography's writer, narrator and the narrated self are identical. The pact guarantees the referentiality and factuality of the autobiography. Lejeune claims that autobiography is "retrospective narration in prose, which is given by a real person about himself/herself emphasising his/her private life, especially the story of his/her personality" (LEJEUNE 2003: 18). The diary novel disrupts the pact, however, the uniqueness and development of the subject imagined as a self that is identical with the writer and the narrator remains the driving force of the diary novel narration indeed.

In terms of literary texts it is a generally discussed issue that out of the two extreme points of textuality and referentiality the diary novel rather meets the aspects of textuality, due to the distance between the

recognizable biographical motifs. (...) here it places the personality of the author to the foreground: enhancing the authenticity and realism of the work." (TURCZEL 1987: 174)

writer and the narrator as well as the narrated self identified with the narrator referentiality does not play a part in this genre unlike in the diary. The self of the diary novel can be treated as a rhetorical trope, the subject is in fact textualized, loses its referentiality, and from the perspective of the receiver it is distinguished from other texts merely by the creation of the text's structure and the method of storytelling fragmented by dates (SÉLLEI 2001: 21–27). However, in the reception process of Szenes' diary novel, its placement in the Hungarian literary context in Czechoslovakia could obviously be carried out through the emphasis of referentiality, the connection of the self of the autobiographer with the diary's subject; the "misreading" of the genre was necessary in favour of the re-contextualization of the novel.

In her work dealing with the autobiographies of female writers in the 20th century, Nóra Séllei outlines the historical development of the theory of female autobiographies and in connection with the seemingly stable category of autobiography and the elimination of unified individual identity she writes about the theoretical image of the subject without a fixed identity, created and existing in language (SÉLLEI 2001: 24).

In the diary novel of Piroska Szenes the narrator and the narrated self is emphatically separated several times, during the pursuit of greater fidelity, the narrator reveals the impossibility of fidelity in the series of continuous self-correction, and directs attention not only to the linguistic creation of the self, but also to the importance of the linguistic mediation of the events happening with the self. At the beginning of the diary novel for example, the narrator formulates certain memories connected with her first university experiences in order to deconstruct their validity immediately: "Generally, I was a bit dizzy from happiness just to be here! Here I can be like everyone else, equally welcome (Oh, naivety!) and equally taken into account (What a mistake)." (SZENES 1935: 3)

The narrator of the novel reflects on the specific situation of diary writing, especially linguistic mediation several times “My notes are a bit chaotic and not chronological. I sat down to tell things as they happened chronologically and precisely, but my hand is hasty and deranged. I am writing about strangers’ affairs, though my heart and days are crowded with my own affairs. But this is why it is hard. Sometimes I almost stopped keeping a diary. What can be fixed from this beautiful only life? Pitiable fragments.

And still, what is survived as the witness of the continuous flow of life? The new that one gives about himself/herself: one’s testimony on oneself, which seems to be examined by life to understand its own rules.” (SZENES 1935: 61–62) Linguistic mediation is the condition not only of the conservation of life events, but also of understanding life.

Novels written by women obviously mediate female experience (too), the female experiences of authors evidently help the creation of female characters. Interpreting the world also takes place through an experienced, and not an imagined, point of view. The (fictive) diary, the diary novel, the memoir, the autobiography or the biography are all particularly in favour of a single-perspective narration, which absolutize their own value system. Phenomena and expectations outside or confronting this value system are constituted as strange or even hostile elements in texts belonging to these genres, when confronted with them, the narrator is able to achieve or preserve the integrity, the unified subject of his/her personal value system. The subject created in the above genres is not interested in rebelling against the world, more in the protection of his/her own integrity, since from his/her set perspective, obviously, the intrinsic values of his/her own world are considered natural and exemplary. These values in the Szenes novel are not necessarily and typically female, but rather represent the generally human.

What is *Egyszer élünk [We Only Live Once]* about after all? The adversities of a Jewish country girl at a medical university in Budapest and simultaneously about her attempts to find her place in the everyday life of the 1920s. Eszti Engel, the narrator of the diary, is poor and Jewish and a girl. All three elements are very important in terms of her own identity, and although it is clear from the self-analysis in the beginning of the diary that Jewishness plays the smallest role in shaping her identity, it stands behind most of the conflicts mentioned in the diary entries. Jewish awareness is forced by external circumstances rather than by internal need.

“...I am that kind of country youth, who is clever and eager; nice, proud and poor; the one who is carrying the sceptre in her haversack. Apart from this, I am a girl, Jewish and I go to university in Budapest in the third year of the counterrevolution.” (SZENES 1935: 3) – the diary’s so far anonymous writer is introduced on the first page. The description of her ambivalent relationship to her own Jewishness is preceded by the description of her first offences suffered due to her Jewishness: university inspection, expulsion from the lecture, reflections upon humiliation suffered at the girls’ convent school in the past. The diary writer Eszti Engel chooses a way of life – a poor Jewish girl tries to succeed as a medical university student in Budapest – which causes internal detachment with her previous natural community, whose lifestyle rules and customs were always difficult for her to identify with. However, the environment that she has chosen for herself does not let her forget about her Jewishness. Therefore, Eszti gets into vacuum space; she is trapped between two cultures and two value systems, with which she cannot completely identify. She is constantly humiliated because of her Jewish origin, not only at the university but also in private life – her the mother of her love, Pista, makes her son promise that he will not marry Eszti, and finally their break-up is also the result of their constant conflicts

generated by racial difference –, and at her temporary workplaces, where she is accepted *in spite of* the active prejudices against the Jews. The typical stereotypes in the novel appear in relation to Jewishness, this is linguistic clichés that are attribute certain characteristic features to a particular social group – the hysterical Jewish woman is the regular linguistic element of the discourse on the subject.

Eszti rejects collective Jewish identity not because of humiliation, but in spite of it, and simultaneously she re-evaluates the consciousness of individual identity. The diary novel is full of questions such as “what am I?”, “who am I?” answered by self-defining attempts based on schemes like “this is me” and “I am like this”. Here are a few examples: “I am so cruelly vain that already in my childhood I stayed away from the one I liked so as to avoid refusal. I think I would die of that” (SZENES 1935: 37). “Yet, I am not part of the crowd, I am a known figure here too; eccentric, just like at convent school” (SZENES 1935: 39). “I am vain” (SZENES 1935: 52).

The writer of the modern diary – János Szávai claims – reveals his/her most secret intentions and deeds, because the writer tries to get to know himself/herself in it, and the human through himself/herself (SZÁVAI 1978: 40). By this, it provides more space for self-definitions than other literary genres. It records not only the events day after day, but also the subject changes of the diary writer, the process of self-definition change and the potential re-formation of identity.

Perhaps one of the most significant questions referring to the novel’s protagonist, the diary writer Eszter and her surroundings is conceptualized from the perspective of the gradual re-formation of female existence. Undertaking collective female destiny is excluded as a factor formulating the collective identity of the subject in the diary, just like Jewishness. It is not only her who does not consider herself a woman in the real sense of the word – someone who belongs to the house, household, the child

(LAKE 2001: 278) –, but also her environment. Even her extravagant friend, Melinda, stands closer to this female model – she embroiders, lives with her family –, but Eszti tries to live up to the contemporary expectations towards men – even if unconsciously. She goes to university, and not to the Faculty of Humanities, but studies medicine, and the fictive diary reveals that there are only about five girls in her year group. She is practically self-sufficient, after school she is working; she is free in her love life and does not follow the patterns of behaviour expected from girls. She lives alone in a rented room, and she does not accept assistance from her love, Pista (or just for a short time and not happily). However, there is literally no space for her in the everyday reality of the 1920s in the world revealed by the diary novel: the desperate search for the rented room, lack of work, and the difficult integration into university life all point in this direction. She does not belong to either type of the independent woman: she is neither an actress, nor an office worker – these two independent female types can be identified in Szenes' novel. Eszti is the representative of the type of woman – as claimed by Schöpflin – who emerges in the 1920s for the first time (LAKE 2001: 279).

The diary writer continuously experiences and reflects on the difficulties of integration. She sees the solution not in conformity but in change: “Somehow we should not take over this world made for men without changes, it should be transformed at least into a mixed world, where we can also enjoy ourselves and the world can also benefit from us” (SZENES 1935: 74).

The value system which the protagonist of the diary novel of Piroska Szenes is confronted with, and which is outlined in Schöpflin's criticism, is not the value system of the novel's inner world. The diary novel is built on the perspectives of the protagonist and the antagonist, and the civic values – in terms of social status – that appear in connection with a girl: virginity, modesty, Christianity are not relevant, respectively appear as

expectations threatening the protagonist's world and the fulfillment of her personal desires.

In the novel, female roles and lifestyle are manifested primarily through the ideas of the love of Pista and Eszti. Pista interprets their relationship according to the Cinderella topos: the ill-fated girl can be saved from her hard living conditions by love, more concretely his love, so that after overcoming hardship their common story can become a success. "From now on, there will be no constraints. We can see each other wherever and whenever we wish. When I have a reasonable amount of money – he keeps on dreaming (what a dreamer today indeed!), I will live in a villa with you, you will have a car, you will be sitting in it silently wrapped in fine furs, the car driving away and your diamond eyes smiling quietly." (SZENES 1935: 142) – quoted the diary Pista's words.

However, Eszti's self-interpretation turns this topos down. For her, a satisfactory end is not necessarily meant by marriage, or at least not by marriage where she would get into a subordinate position. For her, independence is vital, and the road to independence is via education. Pista is unable to place her in his own world as an equal partner, in their common life he always gives her the role of a beautiful but passive ornament: "You aren't a woman yet, you are a girl, a little fairy. Human words should not leave your mouth, you should only be laughing when being talked to. Lying in flowery grass, bathing your little body in dew. Why do you study? It's a shame you deal with such bloodless things. I unfold his arms quite coldly. – And what else would I do if I didn't study?" (SZENES 1935: 80) Pista imagines Eszti in traditional female roles, the quietly laughing eyes and carefree laughter indicate that Pista imagines places the imaginative female subject in such perspective, where it appears as the ornament of the family or the man, not as an independent and equal partner.

The changing structure of femaleness appears as such a problem in the diary novel which questions the comforting constructability of the protagonist's identity. Eszti's self-identity is uncertain already at the beginning of the diary; she tries to place herself in a social, sexual and racial matrix the elements of which are all questioned by the novel from a certain aspect. I am poor, a girl and Jewish – she writes at the beginning of the diary – but none of these qualities make her feel complete.

Sexuality plays the biggest role in Eszti's identity. She primarily defines herself as a young girl, when talking about herself this is the most frequently used point of identification. Youth is connected with being a girl – she cannot even imagine herself as a middle-aged or old woman, she considers youth as her fundamental and unalterable feature. The body is an aesthetic category in her thinking with beauty as a basic feature. She defines beauty in terms of the new understanding of femaleness: thin, attractive, healthy, etc. These features are already the characteristics of the new type of woman that appears in the 1920s and 30s. She is (tries to be) independent, equal and educated. However, she has to fight for being accepted in the public sphere. The novel of Piroska Szenes can also be read as the literary document of this fight. It is a specific female career story, where the emotional-intellectual impacts on personality, identity changes are more emphasised than the actual events of the outside world. The latter are only taken into consideration by the diary writer, when they influence the repeated disintegration and re-creation of her unified identity. Szenes' novel gradually unfolds the female self, who is typical for the age, unsure, unable to identify, constantly asking questions about herself and often giving different answers.

Translated by Andrea Puskás

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LILIANA BOLEMANT

PATCHWORK-GIRLS

or Techniques of Self-Construction in the Novels of Mária Berde

Abstract ●●●●● Mária Berde is one of the most important authors of the Transylvanian literature. Critics of her age have put her to the category of less worthwhile women's literature, today she is almost forgotten. In her works she was dealing with the problems of woman's and man's roles and their possibilities through drafting actual social problems. In my study I try to make an analysis of novels *Tüzes kemence* [*Hot Furnace*] and *Szent szégyen* [*The Sacred Disgrace*] by the tools of feminist literary science. I deal with the process of the subject of the woman, the development of the woman's selfimage and its expressive means. I try to make the following reasoning: the process of construalization of the subject of the woman is problematic, it appears not as a whole but a fragmented identity that cannot be formulated. Due to this fact it tries to express itself through the elements of the woman's life and the private sphere. It means that some objects, plants, the woman's look, dressing, decorative elements that critics characterized as the criteria of the woman's style, the flamboyance of secession, niggling and redundant descriptions. In my study I do present the fact that the above features can be evaluated as the signs of the woman's style but not in the sense of belonging to the original, lower literature but appear as really valuable woman's expressive means to create the subject.

Key words: subject of the woman, woman's identity, dual morality, predestination and free will, the spoken time, subjectivity projected into objects

I. Introduction

“Morality lies in the nature of things.

The morality of art is art, the art of delicate subjects
is writing with taste.”

(BERDE 1920: 852)

Mária Berde was one of the most significant writers of Transylvanian Hungarian literature during the interwar period, she was the inspiration for and founding member of Helikon at Vécse. One of the guiding principles in her works is to depict the possibilities of lives of both men and women. “The soul has no gender” – she writes in one of her letters to her husband referring to her doctoral dissertation on Gabriella Batsányiné Baumberg (BERDE 1913: 6–7). Already in this first published longer piece of hers, in relation to her research subject, she defines those principles according to which she herself lives and which she emphasizes in her later works as most important human virtues, e.g. the indomitable ethical stance. “Gabriella is an independent spirit who does not depend on external influences when following her inner guidance. The conditions of her existence are solidly rooted in herself therefore she finds support, shelter in herself and in everything else she has integrated into her soul.” (BERDE 1920: 6–7)

In her works and public statements she also explains that social expectations would cast men and women in different roles. In her novels she undertakes the unveiling of the two types of morality and various expectations. “Men have kept saying for thousands of years how they see things. Women say these only lately and not even then they would say their own truths” – she writes in connection to Lola Kosáryné Réz’s novel, *Filoména* (BERDE 1920: 938–939). “Women’s natural mission will always be theirs, however, they can only fulfill them when they become equal to men.” (BERDE 1946: 3)

Despite this consciously feminist choice and development of subject matter we may observe the same phenomenon as in relation to Kaffka. Contemporary critics of Margit Kaffka celebrated the par excellence writer in her, however, following her death she was not interpreted from the point of view of women's issues. Even György Bodnár, writing a monograph on Kaffka, shifts the discourse on the problem of gender identity to a neutral description of social tensions (GÁCS 2000: 112). Following this same line of thought Berde's monographer, Szabolcs Molnár also apologizes for and explains the writer's feminism. "Berde believed that the elimination of social prejudices will change women's situation and the old, totally subordinate role of women will be replaced by the happy, symmetric game of subordination" (MOLNÁR 1986: 132). The expression of "happy, symmetric game of subordination" is a self-contradicting statement since a basic feature of subordinate relationships is the acceptance of the other's power. Another stereotype in connection to women may be tackled here, a stereotype according to which women's natural characteristics and accompanying roles are martyrdom and voluntary subordination.

The gender neutral evaluation of Kaffka's works – and especially her female subjects – appears in almost the same form in Berde criticism. In Molter's opinion Berde's novels depicting the pitfalls of women's lives and fates provided fewer possibilities to develop more general arguments (MOLTER 1928: 9). He brings up those counter arguments that were born together with feminism itself and stresses the outworn, antiquated character of the subject matter. Pál Baróti calls her novels, *Tüzes kemence* [*Hot Furnace*]¹ and *Szent szégyen* [*The Sacred Disgrace*] novels of human

¹ In my opinion this title is not easily translatable. The word "tüzes" is derived from the word "fire". "Tüzes" also means "horny, ardent, fiery, impetuous, ardent". "Kemence" is

quality. He reads them as unusual, irregular historical novels and ranks them among the best social novels of the time. He states that these are not lighthearted novels to be forgotten, they do not even belong to the Courts-Mahler type however, they show a certain kind of relationship to their sentimentality. He strengthens his criticism by stating: “their psychologically convincing, socially precise, enchanting, sentimental, passionate depictions of man striving for liberation who can be called no matter what names: a slave, a serf, a proletar, woman or black” (BARÓTI 1967: 2). According to Nicolae Balotă, a Rumanian literary historian the intimate poetry of the writer and the moving show of experiences are subordinated to objective analysis and narration. “She describes various points of crisis of the female psyche, however, she mostly succeeds in avoiding the mistakes committed by this type of literature, the tone of female declamation.” (BALOTA 2007: 85)

II. Female Figures of Berde Mária

In my present study I will analyze the female figures in Berde’s two novels who are presented in environments distant from each other and struggle with different problems, still, the basis of the problem is similar, even overlaps in a certain sense: women’s situation in the world created along the preferences of male structured laws. However, just as the life of Mária Berde was a manifestation of her life as active public life and an independent life unusual for a woman, the protagonists of her novels are not passive characters either. Their strength of mind and faith helps them to disentangle

a traditional Hungarian fireplace having the form of a bell and most often painted white – unless it is decorated with colorful tiles. (Note by the translator, Gabriella Ágnes Nagy)

life's seemingly irresolvable problems and they realize choices partly by resisting to meet social expectations.

Relying on the methods of feminist literary studies I will examine the process and means of expression of constructing a female subjectivity, a feminine self-image. In my argument I will show how the process of constructing a female subject is problematic, it is represented as a non-unified process, fragmentary, straightforwardly unspeakable, unutterable identity therefore it tries to express itself through instances of women's life and the private sphere. These instances are objects, plants, the female looks, dressing, decorative elements that were characterized by contemporary criticism as art nouveau overdecoration, detailed, superfluous descriptions, in short: the criteria for a female style. These features might be in fact valued as characteristic marks of the female style, however, not in their capacity to rank women's literature among lower registers and popular literature since they are really valuable feminine means of expression in order to constitute the subject.

In the beginning of the 20th century and during the interwar period narrative concepts of feminine self-realization correspond to Edit Zsadányi's remarks: we are not witness to self-realizing feminine self-images but the expansion of the narrative; fulfilling female fates seems to be accomplishable only through several generations. Resolution is usually projected into the future, oftentimes in the image of a child born or to be born (ZSADÁNYI 2007: 807–826). In connection to the novels of Mária Berde the same statements are valid. Apart from the pre-described quality of female roles however, she tries to open up an own, viable road in several ways. She connects the acceptance of their own fate taking responsibility while emphasizing moral ethical responsibility as well.

Through the characters' 20th century story in *Szent szégyen* [*The Sacred Disgrace*] and *Tüzes kemence* [*Hot Furnace*] I will analyze the

different modes of role expectations and role responsibilities of men and women. The central theme of the novels is sexual and emotional fidelity and infidelity manifest in various ways and leading to various types of solutions.

The heroine of *Szent szégyen* [*The Sacred Disgrace*] is a young girl who becomes pregnant as a consequence of her love affair and the boy of a higher social rank does not take responsibility for his deed. Instead of choosing abortion or adopting the child – that would save her honorable and respectful status for the community – the girl accepts the consequences of her choice and her love affair and going against all social rules raises her child alone out of wedlock as a single mother.

The heroine of *Tüzes kemence* [*Hot Furnace*] commits an act of infidelity with a man she loves during the troubled war period. After breaking the rules prescribed for women she would have to negotiate with her own conscience without admitting her secret adultery to her husband; whereby she would lose his respect.

II. 1. SACRED SHAME

The “sacred shame” of being a single, unmarried mother was first written about in her short story *Vargabetű* [*Diversion*]. The heroine of sacred shame is Hanna Győrbíró who grows up as a stigmatized member of society in the small city after her father was convicted of embezzeling; as a consequence he commits suicide. Her brother moves to the big city, his costs of schooling are covered by Hanna and her mother by preparing handmade crafts and selling them. Hanna falls in love with the mayor’s son, who after the act of fulfilled love, begins his studies abroad. When Hanna writes him a letter that she is expecting a baby, he becomes unsure, and he would rather follow his father’s advice who offers a doctor and money to perform the abortion. Accepting the advice from her own family, Hanna travels to a hospital abroad where she would place the

child in an orphanage. After a long inner struggle, however, she decides to take responsibility for the child, travels back home and raises it together with the help of her mother.

The characters in the novel partly correspond to the unbalanced relationship between the strong woman – weak man mentioned by Júlia Vallasek. For social thinking however, the exact opposite is accepted: man is the one whose possibilities are far greater and there is no need to make special efforts for taking his position in the world. After Győrbíró's suicide the family without a man is looked down by society, they are excluded; the son, Simeon (another man!) is the one to receive the opportunity to become an honorable member of society by going to the capital city, he studies, may get a good job, therefore the father's mistake may be forgotten. Naturally and according to the most accepted view however, he takes hold onto this goal of his with the help of his mother's and daughter's work and money. When he receives the news about Hanna being pregnant he immediately starts to worry about his own respectful situation. Brotherly love is unable to conquer his prejudices neither the act of becoming conscious of the fact that (of course without Hanna's knowledge) his treatments to cure his sexual diseases in Pest were financed by Hanna's difficultly collected dowry. Critics of the novel, exactly due to this socially embarrassing subject matter, often seemed to reject the heroine and criticized the novel for its structure and antiquated sets of expressions. Obviously many thought the development of the subject matter unacceptable for applying the female point of view, on top of this, written by a woman who is a faithful believer.

Most critics used concepts to describe the heroine such as fallen woman, moral fall, and they do not regard the solution as convincing; there are some who call it a sociological utopia. According to Aladár Bodor guilt remains guilt anyhow, since women are not allowed to make

love freely even when they make their living on their own and take responsibility for the consequences of their love lives. This is the order of God and Berde surely knows this – he declares. So the novel is a nice and good art novel, however, “the message of women in literature are the two most realistic values: love and motherhood”, not at all women’s carnal love (BODOR 1925: 511–512).

Hanna’s strength of mind just as most of Berde’s heroines’ is derived from her faith, from believing in the mercy of God. The story resists similar stories of the age. In Berde’s stories the girl having an extramarital love affair does not fall: she will not commit suicide, society or her family will not exclude her but with the help of her moral strength and faith she finds her peace of mind and is able to make her mother and her brother support her. Women should not be pleaded guilty for having a love affair (realized physically), it should be a natural part of love and the source of the same joy as it is for men – the story concludes. Hanna as a girl gradually grows to be a woman, Berde depicts in sensuous details the development of spiritual and carnal desire, and that of carnal love.

One of the characteristic features of Berde’s style to be noted is her art nouveau overdecoration. Art nouveau or secession had been designated as one of the renewing styles of Nyugat (a periodical from 1908 to 1941) a kind of open style that would recognizably include features of impressionism and symbolism. Art nouveau was grounded in the turn of the century feeling: disillusionment, the desire to escape, revolt, the need to reshape reality, subjectivity, the cult of the self. Its most characteristic feature is the cult of decoration, decorativeness which leads to repletion of mood from gentle melancholy and dreamlike states through narcotic states to nervous anxiety. Elements and phenomena of secondary value gain significance as main features, therefore they become eye catching, and they decorate. The hierarchy guiding the logic of utterances turns upside down. Decorativeness appears in four semantic fields: within the

concept of art (cult of art), in relation to natural phenomena (nature lyricism, nostalgia), in expressions of sensual sensations (words for colors, synesthesia, phenomena of light) and with the help of words creating illusion (dreams, tales, the world of shadows, cult of the groove, the ideal of the Bohemian, the unconventional, elusiveness, volatileness). Stylisation may be structural or semantic. Secession reused the above motifs according to a new principle of textual structure by applying and subordinating them to a new stylistic technique; it simplified its meanings and styles to essential features, natural motifs were stylized into simple, waving, tendril like lines. The meaning of semantic stylization is that besides the primary meaning there is a deeper, more abstract, symbolic meaning, therefore they may become allegories or symbols as well.

Secession is characterized by disillusionment, disappointment, the desire to escape but also indirect and individual revolt, plus the need to reshape reality, all of this is a “complex and true mirror image of the contradictory processes taking place in the era” (PÓK 1972: 52).

Perhaps the attitude towards women in art nouveau literature and art shows best and most spectacularly the path of decadence. Secession movements coincide with the years of struggle for women’s emancipation. Although in art nouveau Nietzsche’s view on women were far more influential (woman is a “beautiful and dangerous cat setting up the trap of sexuality”); in art nouveau literary and fine art works there are more and more great “sinful” women, Salome, Messalina, Cleopatra. They suggest the image of the woman being a force dragging down to whirls, a destructive energy. They are the dangerous priestesses of mystified sexuality and remorse (PÓK 1972: 103–104).

The need to reshape reality is one of the central features in women’s novels of this age. Semantic and structural stylization contains an added surplus value as well: beyond decorativity it includes the problematic

nature of forming a female subject. Colors, smells, objects, music, paintings, female embroidery and needlework gains importance in the great art novels of the first half of the 20th century however, besides these great novels they appear in women's novels as well.

Critics have accused the novel of creating stiff/flat characters: As if all of them would go around with empty heads. (...) Neither character has an intellectual life. The task of characterizing the figures is fulfilled by descriptions of objects, Hanna's tools for painting, her table for embroidery, and the clothes of the characters. The means to express mental states are those images that were called art nouveau decorations: images, similes, visionary dreams. These dreams bring solution to both Hanna and her mother after a long struggle, but they are also the means of expression for desire and love.

Zsolt reveals his feelings of love to Hanna and at this moment the so far secretly felt love and desire awakens:

"She had a strange dream afterwards: in the letter she held folded over her heart the black words came alive as a big ball of spider nest. The bodies of the spiders were soaked in fire and they began to spin golden threads: the golden saliva dried into a golden thread and was spun around Hanna's body. First over her head, eyes and breast then over all her limbs giving unspeakable joy, deadly, wilting gentleness, they went criss-crossing so that Hanna lost her energy to resist. As if sinking down, she helplessly felt the net knotting itself around her. Slowly a dense, unbreakable golden web surrounded her, distant spaces gleamed through only here and there as if diamonds were woven into the golden net... Then an even greater density followed. Hanna darkened into the golden coffin. She felt how she suffocated and she felt it in vain, she tried to knock on her coffin, she wanted to chase away the

spiders, but the golden weaving spiders kept producing their yarn. – Hanna died into gold.

She woke up drunk.” (BERDE 1967: 212–213)

Berde describes carnal, sexual fulfillment as a natural part of love. “And then something happened, that was so far written in our conscience as something impossible to happen, whose arrival though was so simple and so inevitable as walking all immaculate paths of nature” (BERDE 1967: 235). This natural devotion is opposed to the different feelings of the mother who, just because of this, would not discover Hanna’s love, sadness and pregnancy since based on her experiences of her sexuality “she believed to have passed on the inheritance of her own sexuality without any sensations whatsoever, a kind of love which was so close to executing a duty and which is unless woken up under lawful circumstances would sleep on in her whole entire life” (BERDE 1967: 229).

A dream puts an end to the struggles of the mother when she finally realizes her daughter’s problem, discovers her pregnancy she was so afraid to confess her. At that moment she feels that she gave life to her daughter again by standing by her in trouble. The third dream gives relief for Hanna’s inner distress and tormenting feelings by making her realize that she does not want to get rid of her child and she may take responsibility for it by her own will.

Being familiar with the thoughts of the mother we receive information on Hanna’s life; the mother admits that she has deprived Hanna of the possibility to educate herself and to have a better future when she made her work, sent her to a sewing saloon, and it was her son instead who was financially supported in his school years. She comforts herself by saying that this is the current social order. “While she opened a wide road for the other, who is a man, stepping into society, this other one had hopes for twisting, narrow paths” (BERDE 1935: 228).

The final pages of the book are closed in accordance of Berde's system of belief, she does not punish or judge anybody, the heroine feels no anger against the father of her child who betrayed her, not standing by her at all:

"Only forgiveness without words is true. And people cannot be expected to be more than they gave give. Zsolt is a man. A young man – he is not a god, not a mother either. Zsolt's time will only come after. He himself will have to show what he is in reality.

And if dark betrayal comes? ... What can I lose when I have found myself and held closely what is worth more than I myself."
(BERDE 1935: 327)

In the sense of feminine *écriture* coined by Hélène Cixous, in relation to the means of expressions defined as art nouveau overdecoration I may conclude that Berde's is a characteristically feminine style with features of spouting and limitlessness.

"To write. An act which will not only "realize" the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; it will tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being "too hot"; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing and for not nursing ...)" (CIXOUS 1976: 880).

According to Cixous “men reject feminine writing because true feminine texts, texts expressing female sexuality do not delight them, instead they fill them with fear and disgust.”²

Berde’s style corresponds to this concept since descriptions of dreams, decorative elements, objects, clothes, the exact depictions of mental states, characters’ thoughts allow us to draw parallels. Constructing a feminine identity that resist social expectations therefore expresses itself through these means.

II. 2. *TÜZES KEMENCE [HOT FIREPLACE]*

The above considerations may be applied to Berde’s next novel as well. The novel narrates almost a decade’s history through the lives of its characters. The protagonist is Villi whose story is narrated by her friend. Villi is a half-orphan, she lives with her grandmother, father and stepmother. With her nephew they love each other almost as siblings living at his grandmother. Villi enjoys Palkó’s and her grandmother’s love and adoration, on top of it Palkó is in love with Villi. Villi enjoys their company and expects to receive the same love and adoration from the narrator as she received from her grandmother and nephew. The narrator chosen by the heroine, the utterances of her friend introduces us to Villi’s student life, the story of her love and marriage. Villi’s husband, Imre is at the war, when Plakó arrives home whose feelings of love Villi turns down. However, in fear of losing her nephew her gentle feelings towards the boy awaken: while picking pears before Palkó would travel back to the war she creates a situation where they may be together.

² Cixous, op.cit. The English translation in Signs, page 877. misses this very sentence, so the translation is mine from the Hungarian translation that was based on the French original. (Note by the translator, Gabriella Ágnes Nagy)

The boy dies in the war and Villi will have to settle her own conscience since she loves her husband, but she did not wish for the death of Palkó either. Her husband offers her resolution when he declares that he would not judge her if she had cheated on him. This secondary narration turns into a narration controlled by the heroine, since we may only be informed on those that Villi tells the narrator, or what she makes her see when she visits Villi.

In the case of *Tüzes kemence* [*Hot Fireplace*] – that refers to the hot fireplace of the soul and to the real hot fireplace as well where a man, a released prisoner returning from war captivity, would make his wife sit if she committed adultery – besides constructing feminine identity it is moral judgment that has a central significance in the story. Since here, Berde again elaborates on the questions about acts of infidelity of men and of women.

In connection to the novel the same criticism emerged as in the case of *Szent szégyen* [*Sacred Shame*]. It is either designated or questioned as a social novel. The above quoted piece of criticism Pál Baróti ranks the novel, together with *Szent szégyen* [*Sacred Shame*], among the best interwar period social novels. According to Elemér Jancsó “the deep effect of the first world war exercised upon marriage and emotional life and their artistic analyses is the great value of this novel” (JANCÓSÓ 1967: 13).

The writer presents the resolution of the psychological conflict using many arguments while she presents the construction of a kind of feminine self-image that attempts to find a way out of the status of the subordinated subject to construct her own identity from stitching together the elements of a woman’s life. These elements or components are those objects, pieces of furniture, personal or decorative objects, plants, clothes, her own body and the images of feminine lives which she familiarizes herself with in her family.

The fact that Villi is a half-orphan underlines her fragmentary self-image as well, since despite his love for her she cannot truly get close to her father as her stepmother controls family life and she does not favor Villi much. Bella is the type of woman who wants to or is forced to assert herself through the husband/man, whose only possibility to assert herself in marriage and the daughter standing in her way, non-adapting, a stranger endangers her goal. Villi resists the will of her stepmother and finds shelter in her grandmother's house whose life cannot serve as a pattern for her either because grandma is the representative of a slowly fading out group of many-acre landowners strictly controlling the land after the death of her husband, however her main goal is to serve all members of the family visiting her and to subordinate her life to this service.

The heroine, Villi dreams of a different life manifested in her behavior, her looks, her pastimes, and in her choice of renaming herself at the age of fifteen from Vilma to Villi:

“A name not suitable is so fatal as an unsuitable pair of shoes. As we are wearing it, it becomes more and more uncomfortable. I was baptized as Vilma – what do I have in common with Vilmas? If they are beautiful then they are princely, cold, self-conscious. If not, they are like quiet, hardly smelling white flowers that sit in windows without ever being noticed. I have no royal, neither window flower type of inclinations. So in the age of fifteen – I think I had some right – I took upon the name Villi. The age of discretion defines on looks and personality. Everyone has the right to choose a new, final name for herself in these years.”
(BERDE 1967: 27)

Mária Berde would like to compare three generations of women in this novel. During the gradually unfolding lives of the grandmother, the

stepmother and the daughter social events, changes, the historical narrative gain importance as well. Through individual female lives it becomes obvious that historical changes themselves will not bring about changes in life narratives of women.

The hierarchy among women symbolizes the power switch from the older to the younger generation. The grandmother controls the entire farmland after the death of her husband but she is afraid of her daughter in law, she fulfils all her wishes. The stepmother controls the girl through the grandmother just because she has greater power over the grandmother while she – on top of it being a stepmother – is unable to rule over the girl younger than herself.

Villi's stepmother "...belonged to the generation who was seated in the window, bustling around in silk scarves, for whom true elbow pillows were sewn in the end of the last century" (BERDE 1967: 21). A woman's task is man, to live his life, to fulfill her desires through him having no desires herself, she was raised to meet expectations. Therefore she does everything to control the man using her own "feminine" means and to use other members of the family as well. She exercises her power through others and this is similar to one motif in Margit Kaffka's novel *Színek és évek [Colours and Years]*: the heroine, Magda wants to assert herself through her husband but she does not succeed because Vodicska is not able to overcome the defeat he had on county elections and he commits suicide. The wife's life is over at this point, her child is even taken away from her. Berta's case is also similar. When after the war her husband sinks to a lower social status she seems not to understand what had happened. How come that she has to bury herself in this family farm at the age of thirty, while she kept all regulations and rules and did all to support her husband's career. She is not able to overcome the events.

Villi wishes to be an equal partner to her husband, however, this wish of hers is not fulfilled because recognizing the circumstances she has to undertake the traditional role of a wife who is responsible for family hearth and keeping the family members together.

III. Repressed Desires

The narrator comes from those “raised by Puritan strictness to earn they living”, Villi is from the rich who were “shepherded towards a careless life”. Berde characterizes with these few words the social difference between the heroine and the narrator and their predetermined fate dependent on their social ranks.

The episode describing the atmosphere and life in a girls’ boarding school is very close to the world of Kaffka’s novel, *Hangyaboly [Anthill]*, since the relationships formed among the enclosed girls shut up in the school, the hierarchy constructed by each value system, the wonder, adoration they felt for those exceeding them creates a sultry, erotic atmosphere. “Our well disciplined instincts bloomed in a gentle breeze. In this territory of prohibitions by life, although in the constant burning in the yearning for gaining experience and significance, awry ideals were crystallized in us, and in our youngster, natural gifts of abundance we wasted our emotions on such struggles whose psychology we may not even understand today.” (BERDE 1986: 25)

Despite her admiration for Villi, the narrator always looks at her from a distance as if she had tried to draw an objective picture of her passionate life. The intimate relationship between them may be understood as the expression of friendship and love. If we compare this relationship to the one between Villi and Palkó we find many parallels. Trust, psychological intimacy, the evening conversations in the bedroom all

point towards this correspondence. Moreover the relationship between the girls allows more freedom therefore Villi may easily slip under the bedcover of her friend and may console her caressingly.

It is Villi who takes the lead in building the relationship with Mária and the novel presents the various modes of this subtle, moderate and chaste kindness.

“It happened at the grand kiosk where noise and crowd gathered around the military band that Villi unexpectedly threw her blue serpentine roll over to me that curled around me from my neck and waist down to my knees as a naughty enslavement. (...) Her youngish impertinence glowed in that bead necklace where one piece bedevilingly stood apart in the perfect row of the rest. As a most significant move I had to register the scene of her kissing that small ribbon end staying with her and through her fingers as if spun on a reel she slid it into the open part of her school uniform shirt down to her breasts.

An open and passionate confession. (...) In our sultry bedrooms where it was prohibited to open the windows those secretly visiting each other were discussing this all night.” (BERDE 1986: 26)

Sexuality is intensely present in the first chapters of the novel where the story of acquaintance between Villi and the narrator is told. The repression of carnal desires, due to keeping to the strict rules, will burst out from the girls in its transformation into gentle female love. Passion is strongly present in the text.

They can only meet each other in the street on the way to the church and in these moments they send messages to each other through shy but suggestive looks. When they do not meet, Villi, taking up the role of the enchanteur, sends flowers to her friend, Mária, her favorite, white

carnations. After the several month long courtship they spoke the first few words at the end of the next school year, until then they could only correspond in letters, exchanged poems and kept looking at each other.

In one of her studies, Nóra Séllei quotes from Carla Kaplan's book, titled *The Erotics of Talk* which develops the idea that there is an ideal listener who is created in the discursive relationship called the erotics of talk. An essential part of this relationship is the ideal speech situation in which the kind of intimacy may be realized whose main energy derives not from a fight for discursive power and whose result is a kind of transformation taking place between the speakers shifting them away from their original positions. Finding a voice for the speaker is just as important for the evolvement of this speech situation as the presence of a listener able to hear that voice. (SÉLLEI 2002: 327)

This erotics of speech seems to evolve in the relationship of Villi and Mária when the personal relationship is realized after a long and preparatory phase. Villi makes sure that she found the ideal listener who would become the perceptive listener and guardian of her secrets without fearing her judgment.

“Perhaps fantasy’s groundless crampons reached the soil in her; in me, during the ceremony of the attraction of the wildfire, a silent, simple, sisterly emotion moved, an atmosphere preceding those later times when I could set her persistence to its proper value: Villi was searching for a soul in me to whom she could reveal her inner life without the danger of being betrayed, judged or depreciated.” (BERDE 1986: 30)

Villi is aware that in return for trusting the girl and telling her secrets she may call for her at any time. An almost subordinate relationship is formed between them and strengthened by each and every encounter; she no longer plays the role of the same aforementioned ideal listener.

Villi always calls for Mária when she needs her help, her personal presence at the events happening or just to prevent them; maybe she desires a confidant to whom she can confess her sins thereby regaining her balance and tranquility. When she is living the happy episodes of her life she no longer desires her company.

However, it seems Mária takes upon the role of the psychiatrist when she appears at Villi's each and every call, she listens to her helping to resurface her desires, dreams she repressed for herself and others as well; and all those psychological crises that were deriving from these repressions.

IV. Narrative Time

"...everything that may be put on paper and on the mouth of foreigners is only a sketch of our lives, even our confessions formed in words are only paintings, decorations of our internal secret actions" (BERDE 1986: 114). By interjecting these few lines, Berde conveys the idea of the unnarratability of our lives, stories and fates.

According to Ricoeur narrative time is a means to construct an identity because through narratives men can face their own temporality; the conveyors of temporality are stories. At the same time constructing identities through stories has a moral-ethical stance, it can never be morally neutral since it works as a kind of "preparatory/introductory workshop" for moral judgment. (RICOEUR 1999: 140–168)

In this sense the narrative sequences by Villi and Mária vary depending on the situation whether Mária is a listener or herself witness to the events. The structure of the novel is based on repetitive forms, the narrator is unsure whether the events happened the way she remembers. The time concept of the novel connects this work to modern novels of the early

twentieth century. The narrator runs ahead in time, then returns back to the present stating that “these circumstances (...) were forged into one single picture much later for me” (BERDE 1986: 42). At other pages she contemplates over the question whether the night conversation between Villi and Palkó happened or not at all.

Alternating time planes generates curiosity and expectations for the reader. In the beginning of the second part of the novel for instance, the narrator remembers “the clear old days” suggesting upcoming dramatic events. In comparison with the double temporality of the alternating planes, even their periodic overlapping, irregular changes in perspective make the text available to the approach relying on Ricoeur’s concept. The dichotomic concepts of *mêmeté* and *ipseité* carry in themselves both the changing and the unchanging, invariable nature of the individual.

The novel is after all an act of memory performed by the narrator through which she remembers Villi’s story – in the background her own story, social changes and the history of war are also depicted. The episodes of memory follow each other chronologically but the interruptions create a kind of absence as well. The narrator only refers to the number of years passing by and to her own life’s connection to history. Historical and personal narrative (*histoire* and *discourse*) are therefore simultaneously present in the novel: we are witness to the background events of social changes and war to the extent of their having influence on the characters’ and Villi’s lives.

The seemingly objective narrative style is disoriented by short, dense summaries of evaluating certain situations and events, told by the narrator’s perspective, by the infiltration of character perspective in the narrative, and the infiltration of the omniscient narrative-authorial voice into the narration.

The narrated life-story restarts several times, the narrator even applies the figures of anachrony, as well as analepsis and prolepsis. The

life of the narrator, Villi's friend is only presented in short, hurriedly mentioned remarks. Her name only appears at the last pages of the book when Villi narrates the end of the story and calls her by her name.

For this reason Mária, the narrator is a significant complement to the story by presenting another woman's life and identity, albeit in an incomplete, fragmentary way. It is this incompleteness and fragmentary character that manifests the limits of female lives being present in the lives of both girls. We gain insight only into certain periods of Villi's life and we are entrusted only a short summary about the life of the narrator. The prescribed nature of the narratives of female lives surfaces in this calm, unbiased story telling, in the objective statements emerging from time to time. "We have not even taken notice of how we drifted out of our past. (...) After a few days we departed, fell apart, I had to take straining exams, years abroad followed and a long period of disease. Life took me on, drifted me along, usually under black clouds but it kept moving." (BERDE 1986: 140–168)

V. Alterity: Means of Expression

In order to characterize the heroine the author uses various means of description through characterizing the narrator. The woman's body expresses her otherness, her rank in the social order. Looks not conforming to expectations becomes the expression of rebellion, inner strength, and desires.

Villi's otherness is characterized by her looks, hairdo and clothes. She almost brags about her short haircut – cut short because of typhoid fever – and she cuts it again not to let it grow. The short hair, its black color, its curliness all differ from the hairdo fashionable and accepted in the age; having short, curly hair was considered to be a shame in the eyes

of others. Her green eyes also underline her standing apart from the average. The shape and color of her hair is strikingly different from those of others, of those respecting and following social norms, thereby giving her a certain power since she becomes a strange girl in the hierarchical structure of the boarding school provoking other girls' admiration.

Apart from Villi's psychical appearance and behavior those elements have a characterizing function that critics of Berde accused of using too often the style of secession and overdecoration (MOLNÁR 1986: 148), however, in her analysis on women writers Edit Zsadányi values them as feminine identities projected into objects (ZSADÁNYI 2009: 89–106). Berde, in fact, used descriptions characteristic of the art nouveau style, the detailed depiction of objects however, is not without a cause. Among art nouveau decorative elements in her poetry and prose texts she often uses plant and flower motifs. She presents us the girls in the boarding school in sensual images, as “young, well-bred plants whose well-disciplined instincts flourished in boom due to the gentle spring breeze” (BERDE 1986: 23).

When Villi was looking for a confidant and found the narrator “it was the natural stretching out of tendril plants” (BERDE 1986: 30). Together with her nephew, Palkó, “flower plants were born out of the family dreams, the rest were stout fruit bearing trees” (BERDE 1986: 38). With this she foreshadows the lives of those two family members who will be so different from the rest. She emphasizes this image in the novel: “yes, in the midst of flowering bushes, yielding cornfields they almost represent illegitimacy in this garden where life's regulations are sober, useful and simple” (BERDE 1986: 43).

So Villi and Palkó are unable to fit into the family system, the system of expectations, they are not able to orientate themselves according to social norms either. Both of them are more sensitive and live according to different rules than others. Palkó's feminine mentality is in conflict

with the role models expected of men by society. It began in his childhood reacting sensitively to tales, being bullied by girls in school, lagging behind in his studies, his sickness, his psychical weakness and ending in the experience of being crossed in love due to the rejection by his niece. When taking a male decision of signing up as a volunteer he is finally ordained to move to the front line and eventually dies. We may evaluate the end of his life in two ways: either he proved to be weak as a male because he died however, with this act he became a hero therefore he could only meet social expectations by his death. We may even speak of the intermingling or even inversion of characteristics traditionally considered to be male or female.

Villi is an outsider, too, since she is clever, determined, she studies to be a doctor and apart from Palkó in her family there is no other soul mate of hers with whom she can have a common spiritual life. This is how she finds the narrator. The flower similes are important aspects of characterizing Villi, even within her relationships. Her most intimate relationship is with Palkó, they like similar flowers and Palkó is the only one to know which flower is Villi's favorite. The most significant scene in this respect is the one following Villi's wedding ceremony. Palkó watches the ceremony from a distance and he sends a bouquet of pink violets (her favorites) that Villi places in between herself and her husband in the carriage. Her attachment to her nephew is even stronger than the love for her husband. This disproportionate situation is only balanced when it turns out for Villi that her husband would forgive her even if she committed adultery. Villi does not admit that she is guilty and feels absolved by her husband's words and in the course of the entire story this is the first time when the husband becomes part of Villi's life.

So the means of expressing female subjectivity are limited. Villi cannot admit her adultery to her husband since she would lose her chastity – she can only speak about it in allusions.

Villi furnishes her living spaces just as she would like to furnish her own life: simply and honestly. In the grandmother's house, in the city sub-lease and in her new, private home we meet the same pieces of furniture. During the narration embroidery is mentioned several times as an important activity in female life. These represent Villi's conscious preparation for her independent life, her needlework being different from her grandmother's and her stepmother's as well.

By contrasting the heroine and the stepmother through descriptions of their needlework Berde provides a description of changes in feminine identity and new possibilities. The stepmother "took out her lightly sewn frivolous piece throwing the small ivory ship needle around with admirable ease on the thin thread" (BERDE 1986: 48). Villi "was working on a big fluted Hessian, having difficulties with pricking the thick cotton through the raw, resisting material" (BERDE 1986: 49). Berde emphasizes the opposition of women's generation via the words of the narrator: "The beautiful young lady was standing securely on the last stations of that certain feminine order bustling around in silk scarves while Villi was already pushed or escaped through the partition wall in order to grow towards human measurements from below this well-bred femininity" (BERDE 1986: 43).

Women's novels are often criticized for giving too many details about the clothing of their characters. Szabolcs Molnár, Berde's monographer concludes that among other aspects "the (already mentioned) overabundance of art nouveau stylistic features, the trifling descriptions of women's clothing, fashion, highlighting accessories ... were equal to a feminine perspective in the eyes of her critics" (BERDE 1986: 148). In certain episodes clothing is not described as an art for art's sake phenomenon but it plays a significant role in defining the relationships between characters and their states of minds; it contributes to the description of their self-images as well.

The heroine's life may be followed by taking notice of her clothing styles. The refined, elegant clothing of the student girl living in the boarding school is changed to a simple dress at the grandmother's farm since she may become identical with her own self. When she expects her husband home from the war she places special emphasis on her clothing in order to strengthen herself by it as well. A good example of the inadequate modes of female expressions and being forced to use indirect methods is the subjectivity expressed through objects and music. Instead of putting on a swimming suit, Villi takes her clothes off and she swims in the lake in her underwear, a red tricot-shirt recognized by Plakó as "Wow this is not fair" (BERDE 1986: 35). In the meanwhile Villi was singing an aria from Faust known as "I should open it". The aria from Gounaud's Faust is about the opening of a jewel box received as a gift. With the help of the box a door opens up and by stepping through this door Marguerite is lost giving her love to Faust while losing her respectful status and chastity. The red shirt and the singing are tell tale signs about the desires of the young girl that she is unable to fulfill.

The means of expression of feminine alterity may be regarded as one feature of feminine writing since they provide meaning in connection to the otherness of the female body, to women's options and to feminine means of expression. A feminine story was written happening in the foreground of the war events, depending on them, while presenting the true story of those women who experienced the war instead of those standard images of surviving, suffering, grieving mothers and daughters we know too well from literature written by men.

VI. The Balance of Existence

The story offers the illusion of choices by presenting Villi as a self-willed, independently thinking, clever girl who knows what she wants, studies to become a doctor and yearns after a home of hers. However, the narrator, by inserting remarks and depicting the otherness of the girl also questions this option since this image of the independent, female subjectivity having a life of her own does not correspond to the roles prescribed for women in this society.

Finally, the novel reaches a resolution familiar to us in women's novels of the age: instead of the self-realizing image of the feminine the novel offers an image of the woman respecting and accepting her fate, withdrawing from public spheres and accepting the central role of men. There is one exception compared to other novels. In Berde's book the heroine makes herself aware of her choice: the difficulty and sacrifice of giving up a medical career and the weight of the moral resolution of adultery. She consciously accepts the feminine life narrative of her age: being content with the private sphere made acceptable by her belief in the future, in upcoming generations and in children.

The heroine does not plead for God's forgiveness since she cannot ask for it due to the laws of predestination but she is waiting for God's excuse which, for her, is a greater mercy than forgiveness. She awaits a signal that would show her whether she can live with her husband or she is no longer worthy of having a happy life. She understands the conception of their child as a divine sign, the sign of being excused provides a chance to live a happy quiet life. At this point questions of moral responsibility, divine predestination, and social gender roles meet. The heroine accepts her fate consciously, she gives up her independent options for a life of her own, she gives up the possibility to realize herself, and stays within the frames of traditional female existence. Her possibilities

to have a free choice are therefore limited but she is aware of the limits of her female life.

The narrator uses a secret, allusive feminine language to find expressions for the female fate and identity including various corresponding names of objects, plants, clothing, music and songs. These stylistic elements rendered superfluous by contemporary critics may be evaluated as a modern means of expression for a feminine writing, elements of forming the identity of the female subject.

Tűzes kemence [Hot Fireplace] is a not novel about a woman committing adultery but a novel about finding one's balance. How one can find "not happiness and freedom" (BALOTA 2007: 85) – as Mária Berde explains the plot of her novel – but the balance of existence, a peace of mind: this is what the subtly but trenchantly narrated psychological conflicts of the heroine are about.

However, there might be another level of meaning in the novel that can be grasped in relation to the war – and we need to introduce the concepts of "gender carnival" (Bauer, 2005, 190–191) and background narrative (ZSADÁNYI 2007: 807). If we look at the events of war as a carnival of traditional roles subverting male and female roles from their centuries old status conceived as natural, it turns them over, disrupts the hierarchical order therefore showing their untenability. The background narrative forces the events in their own peculiar system and influences characters' actions accordingly. Untold, silenced desires and dreams become readable from this perspective. According to the definition provided by Edit Zsadányi the silenced is a subcase of the unnarratable defined by Gerald Prince. The analysis of these various rhetorical figures of silencing in the text belongs to the territory of narratology. At the same time it serves to integrate reader's consciousness into the narrative. Any form of silencing presupposes an activity on the part of the reader and initiates her to face the emptiness of the silenced. (ZSADÁNYI 2002: 22)

During the war Villi is an equal partner to her husband, however after the war the world has to return to its prevailing conventions never to have the same meanings as they had before. Villi's integration, her renouncing the need to possess a life of her own, the need to live a life as an independent subject is sacrificing this different kind of life. Her identification with the roles of mother and wife is a response to the divine mercy appearing as the state of being blessed by having a child – according to her own words – the thought is present in the novel: the independent female personality deviating from the norms.

VII. Text and Texture: the Patchwork Method

I analyzed the construction of female subjectivity in two novels of Mária Berde. As an outcome a few common features can be grasped that were brought into focus by Edit Zsadányi in relation to women's novels written in the first half of the twentieth century. These are the following: the fragmentary nature of the female subject, modes of construction of the subject for instance projections into objects, self-expressing modes through elements of the environment and nature. Decorativity, detailed descriptions of personal objects, clothing, the looks of characters, everyday activities such as washing clothes, cooking, needlework, embroidery gain significance in these texts defined as feminine (in the pejorative sense), different, and even of lesser literary value by contemporary critics. These feminine modes of self-expressions become means to construct subjects.

In order to characterize almost all female characters writers apply descriptions of the modes and quality of needlework. The significance of needlework in *Tüzes kemence* [*Hot Fireplace*] is presented in connection to the generational and emotional difference between them as well as the different perceptions of the female role. The meaning of needlework is

further elaborated by the Rumanian translator of the novel, Veronica Porumbau, a writer as well: “This is the most feminine work by Mária Berde not in the pejorative sense but in the highest sense of the word. And not only for her heroine being a woman but because the rough base texture of the work is covered by the heavy needlework of the eternal problems of women living in this century of frequent bloodshed and catastrophes. (...) Individual, female desires are fired up by the hot fireplace of war whereby the novel is a statement on humanity and the full recognition of women.” (MOLNÁR 1986: 154)

The surplus meaning of detailed female work, stapling the whole out of parts, home objects, pieces of furniture and other objects, decoration all contribute to the formation of the female subject. Her subject composition is an open one, however, it may be evaluated as a process that would not arrive to a rest. The impossibility of constructing a unified subject is presented by the seeming eligibility, changeability of roles and power relations. This gender carnival is equal to the temporary subversion of the hierarchic power relations, disputing them through laughter and even though it does not bring about change, it questions, doubts their validity, their “naturalness”, displacing their stability. The relationship between men and women may not ever be the same when they experienced the instability believed previously unproblematic.

Translated by Gabriella Ágnes Nagy

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IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH THERAPEUTIC WRITING

The Interpretation of *Asszony a fronton*
[Woman on the Front], an Autobiographical Novel
by Alaine Polcz

Abstract ••••• The life story fragment revealed in the text presents an emphatically important life phase. According to the autobiographer's confession this life period was the time when the events that influenced her whole life and significantly determined her personality formation occurred. The study focuses on narrative processes which intend to outline the mechanisms of identity construction: having lived through a bad marriage and the violence of the war the subject tries to emotionally process her traumatic memories by the procedures of therapeutic writing. The writer is motivated by the desire to tell, since by the verbalization of her memories she attempts to distance herself from the burdens of the past, and by the application of the rhetoric of forgetting she also tries to activate her amnesic memory by using stammering language and struggling with recollection failure. The passages of forgetting and amnesia are often intertwined with the inability to talk, falling into silence, the rhetoric of silence and concealing, so her autobiography turns into the memoir of not remembering. Due to the various traumatic roles enforced upon the writer both by marriage and the war the fragmentation of individual identity is finalised. The wife presented in a subordinate position tries to survive her vulnerable roles by being the source of eroticism and by putting on a servant-identity. The autobiographer tries to speak about the unspeakable as a faithful chronicler with dispassionate modality and the application of distancing mechanisms.

Key words: therapeutic writing, selective memory, forgetting, concealing, silence, trauma, identity, vulnerable female roles, Polcz Alaine

I. Introduction: The Characteristics of Alaine Polcz's Autobiographical Works

The autobiographical works of Alaine Polcz are recorded as a specific field of Hungarian female literature, since she is primarily known as a child psychiatrist and tanatologist, and in literary circles as a writer's wife (the wife of Miklós Mészöly). However, with her autobiographical texts she grows out of the uniform of the secondary role of a writer's wife, she presses apart the framework of a wife's position and with her impersonal narration, linguistic minimalism, factual description of events, and the outright depiction of the world of the female body she becomes one of the leading figures of 20th century Hungarian female fiction.

The modernity of her works is proved by the fact that in her autobiographical texts – out of which the interpretation of *Asszony a fronton* [*Woman on the Front*] (POLCZ 2005) is the focus of this study – reveal heterogeneous subject interpretations based on postmodern theories of identity and the theories of feminist criticism, offering a complex picture of personality, which emphasizes the creation of the self, the exploration of the textual construction of the subject. The texts of Alaine Polcz provide wide space to issues so typical for female autobiographies, such as the problem of the subject's sliding position, the dilemma of personality, comparing the self to others and defining itself within a relationship network, the vulnerability of the forced identification with subordinate roles and positions created by power discourses and the depiction of the desire to break out (MENYHÉRT 2013: 24).

The stories about the self told repeatedly point out the experience that the subject's identity is not created in a single narration, but it is formulated, searched for and (re)interpreted through a network of narrations again and again (BARÁTH 2008). Its final goal is to help self-discovery through narrative identity, therefore, it can be assumed also in

relation to the writer's self-texts that "we get closer to ourselves with the help of our stories" (KOVÁCS 2004). It is no coincidence that the motif of the desire to tell is very strong in the Alaine Polcz's autobiographical texts – the motto of *Asszony a fronton [Woman on the Front]* says: "I try to tell you as it was, because I have to tell it once." (POLCZ 2005: 5) –, however, the specific poetics of her autobiographical world is that text types which require a personal voice are full of muteness, stammering, trying to find words and subsiding into silence. In case of female autobiographies, the exploration and verbalization of female identity becomes even more complicated, because the specific features of female identity are added to the layers of the fundamentally multi-faceted self. The male ego-descriptions known from classical autobiographies (a typical example is *Szent Ágoston vallomásai [Confessions of Saint Augustine]*) mostly present the image of the excellent man, whose intellectual wealth and great deeds are worth preserving as an "eternal example". However, the woman excluded from the public sector for such a long time could not excel with great deeds or intellectual greatness, so she built her identity around a kind of body poetics (SÉLLEI 2007: 15–16), respectively determined herself in relation to a masculine speaking mode – as the carrier of an androgynous discourse that only exists in a latent way (SÉLLEI 2007: 8–9). The procedures of body poetics can be noticed in the autobiographical texts of Alaine Polcz as well, because the depiction of the female body, the physiology and psychosomatic symptoms of the body are their central themes. One of the most typical features of her texts are that she likes stretching the boundaries of taboo, she focuses on the aging of the body, its destruction, illnesses, dying, death and the plastic description of rape. With the help of the depiction of the body she not only reflects her relationship with her own identity and her attempt to explore the complex self-system but also expresses her determinacy by social position and judgement, since the subject

– especially female subject – has multiple layers, both outside and inside (BÓKAY 2008: 43–44). The female self, which suffers from cultural subordination and which changes constantly in time, respectively is manifested in different roles, is surrounded by questions of representation, not only questions of self-representation. The identity construction of the autobiographies of Alaine Polcz raise the issue of the difficulty of self-definition, but even more, the question of “how femaleness *as* sexual difference and *as* a cultural construct affect the concrete subject composition occupied by the given acting subject” (SÉLLEI 2007: 8).

In *Asszony a fronton [Woman on the Front]* we can follow the heterogeneous nature of the subject, its constantly moving identity creation, contradictions, inner and outside determinacy, which can be perceived through the operation of traumatic memory and with the help of the procedures of body poetics. The present analysis tries to prove that the writer tries to face not only the trauma of silence and forgetting after the war, but also contributes to the dissolution of collective amnesia (MENYHÉRT 2013: 14) which applies to female writers.

II. “*The private fresco painted on the wall of world history*” (Polcz 2005: 197) – The History of a War Marriage

The genre characteristic of the analysed text is that it is a life story fragment: it is the fragment of a genre that exists exclusively in a fragmented form, because according to the book’s subtitle – *Egy fejezet az életemből [A Chapter of my Life]* – it reports only on one section of a life story. The text deliberately avoids the illusion of intending to depict a complete life path; however, the highlighted years are organized around such memories that – according to the confession of the writer – include the

questions, problems of female identity affecting the whole life of the narrator. The work is essentially intertwined around the motif of death: in her memories she records a dying marriage falling apart and the terror of physical and spiritual destruction experienced in the war. The two topics that appear in the title – woman, front – refer to the metamorphosis of the narrated self, since marriage and the war create an experienced, apathetic woman from the young and naïve girl. The transformations of the narrated self at the beginning of the text can be interpreted as crossing a border, because becoming a woman and getting stuck on the front line start irreversible processes affecting the whole life of the autobiographer. The narrator also likes playing with interweaving the two concepts (“War is not easy. And neither is marriage.” – POLCZ 2005: 5), she draws a parallel between her bad marriage and the horrors of the war and expresses marriage with the allegory of war: she talks about war marriage (POLCZ 2005: 197), in which herself, which desires an emancipated, equal partner, constantly struggles with the subordinate role of a silent and tolerant wife as required by her husband. The autobiography frequently refers to the irony of this dual role, yet she still takes the role imposed upon her by her husband: “He was always dissatisfied with me. I liked the forest covered in snow and the dog so much, I was happy, that is why I could not listen and walk carefully all the time. You have to walk in a way so that you do not frighten off the animals. You have to step silently when the others step, and stop when the others stop. I can say it was a strange walk. As if it was the parody of my whole marriage.” (POLCZ 2005: 76) According to the memories of the writer, instead of walking to the same beat, being a wife was rather restricted to following the footsteps of the husband as a shadow.

The process of becoming a mature woman is violently interrupted by the war; it transforms the character of the girl presented at the beginning of the autobiography both physically and psychically. In addition to

physical abuse – beating, rape –, the recording of the process of psychical emptiness used as self-defence plays another important role (“The people around me all died, they came and went or were taken – I slowly started to ignore them.” – POLCZ 2005: 135). The condition of surviving the front was to become a woman who is able to struggle for survival from a wife struggling with pre-war ordinary problems. The naïve young wife identity is dissolved on the frontline into a kind of mature woman identity, annexing the writer’s femaleness before the war. The woman who lives on the front is present in the war as a body to be exploited, but on the other hand, she is forced to identify with the identity of the soldier who fights for survival, by which she creates a gender-less, androgynous mode of existence for herself. The expression of ‘woman on the front’ includes the meanings of the expression ‘front man/woman’, which points out the leading role of the writer in her community; she notes several times that (especially while her husband was away) her fate was changed into a new direction due to her own intervention and sang-froid: she prevented taking away János, shooting the women, she rescues the Yugoslavian priest and helps the escape of prisoners as a nurse.

III. The Methods of Therapeutic Writing in the Text

The textualization of the subject that emerges from memories is directed by the mechanisms of traumatic memory, which operate with the tools of selective, distorting, obscure, uncertain, stammering memory and the procedures of forgetting, wanting to forget and the inability to remember. Consequently, a specific type of text is born, in which the writer carries out an activity which is at the same time identical and contradictory with the basic idea of autobiography: confession, the intention to examine her

own life story is combined with the activity of wanting to forget, so autobiography gives birth to the memoir of not remembering. This contradiction creates constant tension in the work, where the effects of trauma experiences are outlined on the horizons of wanting to remember, the intention of telling and forgetting, which can only be partially dissolved by the therapeutic nature of writing.

III. 1. THE DESIRE TO TELL

Before writing an autobiography, the writer starts to feel the desire to face the period of life that was concealed before, to verbalise the experienced memories. Textualization, the act of uttering has the purpose of processing the experienced trauma. However, narrating the past – due to the blocking effect of traumatic experiences – does not go smoothly, so the writer starts to use expressions such as “I try to tell” or “I have to tell it once”, which evoke the procedures of therapeutic writing known from trauma treating techniques. The therapeutic function of wanting to talk/write can be followed in the whole text, it is a tool which helps the subject speaking in the private sphere get closer to speaking in the public sphere, which can be interpreted as an important stage of personality development. Through the textualization of her own self, the female subject of the private sphere steps out of the stereotype of the oppressed woman excluded from history and the stereotype of the Other, shows the reader the female face of marriage, respectively of the war through her writing, the face of the woman (women) who went through the war. It is primarily writing itself that becomes the means of therapy, because “by talking or writing about previously suppressed experiences, people express events linguistically. An event once formulated and expressed is much easier to understand and finally leave behind completely” (PENNEBAKER 2005: 24).

The act of speaking or writing is the first step of facing traumatic experiences, because during this act the speaker forces herself/himself to

organize her/his experiences and thoughts into a coherent context. “Speech itself can change the way we think about traumatic experiences and ourselves” (PENNEBAKER 2005: 44), because during the tension-decreasing effect of writing the writer is forced to formulate his/her thoughts precisely, so s/he has to face them. The stammering nature of the text stems from the fact that with the verbalization of the humiliations of the two sources of trauma, marriage and war, reveals such details which were deeply hidden by the selective mechanisms of concealing and memory in the writer’s subconscious.

III. 2. PLUNDERING TRAUMAS

Autobiographical remembering is a typically unreliable process, because the recollection of subjective experience includes mainly the construction of memories, not the reproduction of events that really happened (LÉNÁRD 2008: 166–167). During the process of remembering our mind rationalizes posteriorly, it notices cause and effect relationships in the constructed narrative. There is no such thing as pure memory; by living through our memories again we can only carry out the interpretation of the past, and consequently the interpretation of ourselves. If these memories are connected with a traumatic experience, memory becomes even more subjective and unreliable (KÓNYA 1996: 335–346). When remembering a traumatic experience, remembering automatically activates selection, which is centred especially around experiences caused by trauma and pushes other memories of the given life period into the background.¹

¹ Note: The present interpretation considers those memories traumatic which are classified as traumatic by the story-telling of the narrating self. We do not deal with the issue of referentiality, but accept the assumption that the autobiography’s truth is always identical with the way the subject experienced reality.

The verbalization of the trauma effect can be detected mainly in the rhetoric of forgetting, because the writer frequently refers to her obscure or uncertain memory. For example “He was angry because of my hair, the suitcases and because of something else I do not remember now” (POLCZ 2005: 11), “Maybe I would like him to carry me in his hands? Or he actually did it – I just don’t remember it now?” (POLCZ 2005: 9), “I cannot recall anything. I simply don’t have any memories about the first night” (POLCZ 2005: 9–10). Forgetting is the natural element of the process of psycho-hygiene; it is a kind of defence mechanism, since without forgetting the experienced events would live in us as intensively as they were created at the time of experience. The remembering – forgetting rate during the emotional processing of the trauma fluctuates, they accompany the recollection of the events of the marriage and the memories of the war, too. The writer tries to overcome traumatic experiences by replacing the events she has lived through with short amnesias and deleted memories, which sometimes results in illogical text structures and chaotic text organisation. Forgotten, hidden or blurred memories are often given a more emphatic role in the text, because the exclusion and absence provide the memory with a more highlighted position.

III. 3. RHETORIC OF SILENCE

The paragraphs of forgetting and amnesia often intertwine with the rhetoric of silence and concealing. The inability to talk and the despair of falling into silence have a central role in the whole autobiography indicating the traumatic effect of the events. Silence is twofold: on one hand it accompanies the failure of marriage; on the other hand it surrounds the horrors of the war. The rhetoric of silence is present not only in a verbal sense, but also as denial, ignorance and endurance, it is also manifested as the lack of movement and will to act. The most intensive example of the inability to act is the description of rape, when

the writer is physically abused by a Russian soldier in a cellar while eighty other people are silent. The writer is deeply shocked both by the traumatic experience of rape and the silence of the others; she is haunted by the paralysis of the inability to act in recurring dreams for many years.

The writer confesses that she did not speak about her marriage problems to anyone for seven years. Falling into silence indicates emotionally unprocessed trauma, the victim is unable to take stock of the events, and she is not able to face the experience she has lived through. The self that speaks in the narrative present remembers the past and has already overcome this silence with writing the autobiography; however, the subject who has a subordinate position in marriage is unable to process the events emotionally, so she ignores the traumatic experiences with her silence. “Even today I just wonder why (I have not talked about my marriage and my problems). I did not think about it then, maybe I did not even notice. I realized last summer, when aunt Róza, the only friend and cousin of my mother told me that Mum once cried to her that she felt: I was unfortunate, but I don’t speak, neither in the family, nor to my confidential friends.” (POLCZ 2005: 25)

The failure of marriage is tightly surrounded by the silence of János, who – unlike his wife’s resigned silence, tolerance and hope – uses silence as the tool of humiliation and ignorance. Their relationship can be characterized with the inability to speak with each other, more precisely the refusal of speaking with each other starting from the wedding day (“I was waiting for him to speak to me or make a movement toward me, but no, he was looking into another direction. I was somehow tired of this inside; I don’t even remember whether we talked to each other or not on the way home.” – POLCZ 2005: 8), during the hardship of their escape (“At about dawn, in Mindszentpuszta they made a bed for us on the floor in the forester’s cottage, we lay on a single mattress with János. He didn’t say a word to me. Everybody wished good night, he didn’t. He didn’t

embrace me, didn't even touch me, he turned his back to me" – POLCZ 2005: 71) until they were separated from each other. János speaks to his wife only when he is ashamed of her or he can put her to shame. He doesn't even like when she speaks with others (POLCZ 2005: 23), a woman involved in an intellectual dispute hardly fits in his patriarchal worldview.

The silence of the two of them is the most striking in the Csákvár castle, where – as opposition to the noise of the war – the silence surrounding the building expresses the pseudo-security of the Esterházy family behind the barricades. This deep and tense silence is interrupted only by the clock ticks indicating a kind of countdown to the approaching end of the peaceful and calm life of the castle. The castle's silence includes the deafness of Mam, the writer's mother-in-law, who likes diving into silence not only because of her deafness, but she can be characterized also by spiritual deafness, since she refuses to acknowledge the war and continues to carry out her tasks precisely – even if they became meaningless during the war. The mother-in-law keeps her silence even on the frontline, however, her deafness toward the war is dissolved: when the writer is taken away by a Russian soldier for the first time to be abused in exchange of the life of János, Mami indicates with her glance that she understands everything ("Mami looked at me. I think she knew exactly what had happened, but we didn't talk about it." – POLCZ 2005: 107). After this, she is wrapped not only in physical, but also in spiritual deafness, because she curses the silent God and is unable to pray anymore or have spiritual any connection with the transcendental. Blaming God for being silent occurs many times in the text, the writer does not understand how the Creator can tolerate the war silently.

However, silence referring to the outside world, the inability to talk about the horrors of the war and the silent agreement about hiding the Jews and helping the refugees connects the husband and the wife into joint silence, joint concealment, which supplements speech to a certain

extent. They do not talk about the food thrown to the Jews taken away in cattle wagons, the circumvention of the Gestapo and helping escaping soldiers ("I knew János and me felt the same way. I was looking forward to Kolozsvár with increasing anxiety, this was far too much for me, but I saw he didn't want me to speak. I was silent. – He didn't say anything either, not even a word." – POLCZ 2005: 22). Later the writer learns to keep her deeds in secret also in front of her husband, deeds fighting against the inhumanity of the war; she rescues the wounded prisoners and helps them escape to the hospital for the poor next to the Esterházy castle in Csákvár risking being shot.

As the war progressed, we encounter not the rejection of speech based on personal decision (the case of János and Mami), but the phenomenon of the inability to speak. Silence, muteness becomes the condition of survival; the writer learns that "supplication and crying do not help. Everybody had enough in the war. The unspoken request is much more. But of course behind that you need to stand with your totally strained spirit and will." (POLCZ 2005: 81) After the war, the rhetoric of silence functions as the condition of living on, the stifling of the survivors' guilty conscience. The people who participated in the war intensively, cannot talk about their experiences – and those who got through the war more easily do not want to acknowledge what has happened, they do not want to hear about the experienced events. Not talking about an event creates the illusion of non-existence making the horrors of the war a taboo. "I have not really talked about what has happened to me to anyone. The world was different here, they were not afraid of Soviet soldiers so much here." (POLCZ 2005: 171) Later, the writer's death experience during a serious illness also becomes a taboo and falls into the mystery of silence, because her environment is unable to face death and also to verbalize death. "I have learned that I mustn't speak about this. I can never say aloud that I know: I will probably die." (POLCZ 2005: 179) Traumatic silence surrounds the writer and

embraces the whole text as a shell, and – according to the writer's references – influences the writer's life events later on as well.

III. 4. TRAUMATIC ROLES

Traumatic experiences give birth to memories which are articulated as events determining the development of the self-story: due to their influence the subject's self-construction is destroyed, and the shattered self can rebuild itself only in pieces. The life story itself focuses only on the construction of the subject created around trauma experiences: it raises the question of how it is possible to overcome such experiences and what kind of personality remains of the writer after all those happenings. As an alternative condition of survival the writer takes on several roles and constantly appears differently in different social situations. Alasdair MacIntyre assumes that during identity creation the self identifies with different roles, which are interwoven and so give the pattern of the life story (MACINTYRE 1999: 274). This does not mean masked identity of the creation of a multiplied self in super- and subordinate position (HANKISS 2005: 217–223), during which the subject deliberately hides his/her "real self" from the outside world, but the specific enforcement of multiple identity manifested in different interactions. The autobiographer defines herself primarily through her own body, with the help of body poetics so typical for female autobiographies, which becomes a major determining factor of her female identity thanks to the roles enforced upon her by her environment. The trauma effects caused by the husband are induced by complete partner dependency; the writer is unable to distance herself from her husband's influence and gives up the satisfaction of her own physical and spiritual needs. Trauma caused by the war is accompanied with the phenomenon of learned helplessness, according to which the writer is unable to intervene in the direction of her own fate (the phenomenon of uncontrollability).

Each event causing injuries to her has got a lifelong effect, which refers to the “trauma of non-recognition” (MITCHELL 1999: 98).

III. 4. 1. The Great Lady of Transylvania

– The Position of a Subordinate Wife

The most determining role of the writer’s identity lies in being a wife; it is the first stage of her self-definition in the autobiography. The story begins with the cultic initiation of the woman, at the moment she becomes a married woman, the description of the wedding – which primarily means sexual initiation for her –, the word *woman* in the title refers to a married woman. Therefore, the writer primarily determines her personal identity with respect to another person, by belonging to her husband. We are informed about the writer’s self before the marriage only indirectly: she refers to her maiden idyll as the opposition of married life, which suggests that she interpreted herself as a separate and independent before the marriage. However, becoming a married woman does not meet her expectations, she cannot preserve her pre-marriage personality in her wife-identity after getting married. “At home I lived as my Father’s and Mother’s favourite, the intimate playmate of my siblings; the servant, the dog, the cat loved me. And friends. (...) I was embraced by love and trust just like in my mother’s lap. Only János did not love me. I could not get used to this. But I could not complain either.” (POLCZ 2005: 24–25) After getting married she is forced to take on the role of a subordinate and vulnerable person, and she voluntarily gives up the validation of her intellectual values: her husband does not allow her to continue her studies; she is given the role of a housewife, and later of the physically abused woman. However, the outside world does not even suspect her subordinate position, because – upon her husband’s request – she takes on the role of the great lady of Transylvania, she dresses up nicely and gives parties, respectively spends her time keeping the household, decorating the house, cooking and waiting

for János who is regularly away. The development of her female identity into the identity of a married woman is therefore determined by the husband, but in fact, the writer herself also contributes to the subordination of her personality with her passivity.

Trauma effects can be derived from the woman's subordinate position, the different perception of the identity of a girl/woman. Forced identity change initiated from the outside and taking place from one day to another is a traumatic experience for the writer, which is articulated as the rhetoric of forgetting, amnesia, concealing and emptiness in the text: "I don't remember if we talked about any intellectual or other issues. He didn't like me talking about my emotions." (POLCZ 2005: 17) Trauma caused by her husband's coldness creates complexes, low self-esteem and insecurity influencing her whole life: "Even today I cannot dance easily and gently, because he warned me laughing scornfully not to dance, since I was moving like an elephant" (POLCZ 2005: 24).

III. 4. 2. The Source of Eroticism

The Role of the Abused Body

In order to live up to her husband's expectations and keep their marriage alive, the writer is willing to compromise herself and fulfil her husband's erotic wishes; she takes part in his games, she accepts the "watched and desired" position. The husband prefers the role of a voyeur, he peeps his wife while undressing and bathing, stripping down her body and soul with pleasure. During sexual act, the writer functions and the source – not the enjoyer – of eroticism, the husband is interested only in his own pleasure. "I always accepted his initiation. When I did not feel anything, it was good, I remained calm. But when I gave myself to his embrace, after a few moments I remained there with stretched nerves and throbbing veins in my head, my heartbeat didn't want to subside, and he turned away to the wall and slept..." (POLCZ 2005: 19) The spiritually

robbed wife-identity is further destroyed by the husband by robbing their sexual life, he does not only cheat on her, but also infects her with sexual disease. He does not accompany her to the doctor; the woman takes the dog with her and is shocked to hear the diagnosis. However, she admits that she is not broken by this, but by all the lies during confrontation. "Which injury cannot be touched? For me, it is that sincere look... when offering everything I face it and I only ask for honesty... – it is like lunacy – I want the truth, I cannot forgive lies" (POLCZ 2005: 27). Cheating is not mentioned anymore, male dominance is restored. Injuries caused by traumatic experience are again treated with the rhetoric of silence. The trauma's sign will be lifelong dependency on truth.

The husband objectifies his wife, which can be detected not only in the fact that he treats her as the source of pleasure. Almost all of their everyday interaction supports the objectification of the narrator, because János understands his wife as his own possession, a body he owns. The objectification of the narrator is many times manifested also verbally; he talks about her using the demonstrative pronoun instead of the personal pronoun. On one occasion, while fleeing, the husband sends a message to his mother in the following way: "Mr Counsellor, please tell my mother I am all right, I have arrived safely to Bicske, I am going home tomorrow." Then there was a question on the other side, to which he responded in a higher tone: "That's here as well..." That unknown man, who had never seen me before, found it strange that he was talking in first person and obviously this was the reason why he asked and obviously I was that "that" (POLCZ 2005: 42).

Stripping down the writer into body-identity culminates during the war, because the subject exposed to the war becomes the victim of a series of rapes. The narrator understands this objectification as the defeat of the weaker sex, chancelessness against the other sex. "And I learned that I cannot stand up against a man, I am weaker, I you cannot

protect myself, I cannot hit, because they hit more strongly, I cannot run away, because they run faster” (POLCZ 2005: 128).

The war destroys and reshapes not only the autobiographer’s subject – but it dismantles and objectifies human beings in general (both men and women). Identity, personality, uniqueness is dissolved in the concept of ‘enemy’ – the war despoils the subject. Women – so the writer too – can only take up the position of the victim. First the several times raped autobiographer undertakes the role of the victim (KRISTEVA 1997: 340–342), when she undertakes being raped in order to save her husband. As time goes by, she experiences these rapes – due to the effect of repeated trauma – in a more and more apathetic and indifferent way. After this, the writer defines herself as a body to be desecrated and abused. “I don’t know how many Russians went through me after this, and not even how many before this... I didn’t feel I was raped, I felt I was physically attacked... I just simply realize it now as I am writing, the meaning of violence.” (POLCZ 2005: 110) After the series of rapes, nothing remains of her body, just sexual disease and sterility. As a result of trauma experiences, the writer is afraid to go to the streets alone during her whole life, even more, when the priest comforting and encouraging her in hospital holds her hand, she suspects sexual desire.

III. 4. 3. The Servant-Identity

The position of the subordinate wife is connected with the creation of the servant-identity as well. The struggling wife is driven by the urge to serve that is why besides fulfilling her husband’s sexual instincts, she also undertakes the role of a servant. János’s desire to control and rule becomes so powerful that the wife – just like a faithful dog – continually wants to please the ‘owner’. When the writer faces her subordinate position, she often compares their hierarchical relationship to the human-animal relationship. She understands and is understood by

animals better than by her husband, so she gladly surrounds herself with them. This goes on to such an extent that for the sake of her husband – as a game (?) – she deliberately gives up her wife-identity and takes up several animal roles: as a housewife she portrays herself as a cat, and she accompanies her husband setting off to hunt in the role of a hunting dog. On one hand, these role plays fill her with pleasure, because her husband likes these games, but on the other hand, they fill her with tension, because she degrades herself from the role of a wife, who is willing to do anything for her husband, to an animal (“I was chasing the animal with my heart beating fast, I was so pleased, it was such a good game, only one half of me was listening anxiously” – POLCZ 2005: 50). The wife hidden in the role of an animal is praised by the husband (“He admitted I was a docile, faithful and obedient dog” – POLCZ 2005: 50), however, when on one occasion the woman feels pity for the hunted animal, the husband questions even her dog-identity scornfully: “He was laughing mockingly that I was not much like a dog. I alerted (the pheasant) once again, it was waiting quite close. Maybe it doesn’t want to die, I thought, and I leaned down very quietly and reached my arm toward it: “– Lovely little bird, if you want to live, I will let you so...” At that very moment it flew up. János shot it.” (POLCZ 2005: 51) The husband’s desire to rule and need for power do not allow the bird to escape. The wife hidden in the role of an animal also has to experience that her fate, her life is in the hands of her husband. Due to this trauma, the autobiographer becomes the obsessed protector of animals, the weak and the vulnerable.

III. 5. THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

Therapeutic writing is connected with the text’s loose structure, its micro-text nature. The writer wanders among her memories from one paragraph to another; she puts several anecdotes next to each other, demonstrating the associative thinking of female writing (MENYHÉRT 2013:

151). She tries to relieve the emotional pressure of memories by different methods of text structuring: story telling can be characterized with language minimalism, many times making short sentence chains. ("It was just a few minutes. They set off. Everybody was scared. Will they take him away or execute him right here?" – POLCZ 2005: 81) A further distancing mechanism is the inclusion of light anecdotes and jokes in the body of the text, which are incompatible with the seriousness of the given event – for example "According to the regulation they could push anyone to the wall. Nobody knew what and who the other person was afraid of. In spite of this, we somehow trusted each other, even strangers. There were more orders than deeds. This reminds me of the following joke: A man in Munich asks another: "Do you think the Führer will win?" Then, the other person looks around carefully... he pulls the questioner under a gate, looks around again, beckons to him, leads him to the end of the garden, he notices a haystack, he beckons, they climb into it, and the man whispers into the other man's ear: "yes, I personally think so." (POLCZ 2005: 84)

The emotional processing of trauma experiences is helped by the dispassionate speaking mode, which – thanks to the verbalization of memories – subdues the intensive recollection of experiences. The writer can protect herself from the trauma she lived through with the technique of distancing: the objective voice of the text prevents the subject from experiencing the trauma again. This stripping is typical for the subject speaking both in the present of writing and in the revived past. Her apathetic voice avoids showing emotions and is cautious with manifestations that would generate compassion or pity.

Conscious structuring and the application of retrospective writing mode typical for autobiographies are witnessed by *flashforwards* wedged into the text and *commentaries* speaking from the present of the writing, which present and also compare the past knowledge of the recalled self and the subsequently gained experiences of the evocative self. Flash-

forwards in the text make the trauma experiences more significant and depict how the writer struggles with her memories, respectively with herself. For example, the bad omen of her unhappy marriage is manifested by her mother's crying fit at the wedding – "I just started to feel better, when I was escorted to my maiden room, János took off my veil and wreath, gave it to my Mother and thanked her for me or for the dinner or for the whole wedding. My Mother asked him to look after me and take care of me, and then we left. I found out only years later that my Mother started to cry and she couldn't stop, she got sick and didn't go back to the guests anymore." (POLCZ 2005: 9)

The interjections that interrupt the writer's recollection are mostly written in brackets and function as the narrator's thoughts told loudly, subsequent comments. These comments are the tools of self-distancing, because the narrating and the narrated self are placed on each other hierarchically resulting in deeper alienation as time passes; on the other hand, these comments reveal the specific operation of memory burdened with uncertain and traumatic forgetting (e.g. when writing about her indulgence in the Esterházy castle she notes: "Were they tidying when I went out for a walk, or was it Mami who tidied up and just kept it in secret?" – POLCZ 2005: 45).

The writer uses four types of interjections: the first group consists of comments that present the neutral or self-ironic voice of the experienced writer, who has subsequent knowledge – e.g. "Whenever I set off to leave Csákvár forever, I was held back by fear, how will I get clean clothes? Where will I have a wash? I wasn't afraid of starving, but being dirty. (Oh, then I got it!)" (POLCZ 2005: 49) Sometimes these interjections gain a metaphorical meaning and are extended to the whole text: in this case it dirt refers to physical and spiritual filth, their flow into the writer's life.

The second group of interjections reveal huge anger, which includes the subsequent evaluation of the behaviour of the narrated self or the

husband in the form of questions, e.g. “Count Matyi said: we shouted, but you didn’t hear it, probably because of the buzz, János didn’t want us to go to you... (He didn’t want to? What? Why didn’t he want it? He didn’t want to take the twenty-meter long road? Or take care of me? What did he think I was going to do? Look after them? Or try to go home through the unknown, dark forest? I didn’t ask him, it would have been in vain, he wouldn’t have answered anyway.)” (POLCZ 2005: 52)

The third type of interjections are comments which were inserted after the whole text was written, comments, where the present of writing becomes past and the present of the writer who re-reads the text adds further information to the text. In this case the narrating self is re-written by the re-reading self in the form of footnotes – e.g. “Once I will have to ask a soldier to explain what is this good for?” (POLCZ 2005: 38) – and the following can be read in the footnote: “I have asked: if a car is hit, immediately two or three others are crashed” (POLCZ 2005: 38).

The fourth type of interjections is represented by comments addressed to a ‘you’: e.g. “I try to tell You...” (POLCZ 2005: 5) The text told to a ‘you’ has a confidential tone, sometimes a letter-like modality, respectively the nature of confession, which can be compared mainly to the act of Catholic confession: with the formulation, loud verbalization, the penitent separates and removes the narrated story from her soul, which results in absolution and relief. However, while the addressee of religious confession is a supernatural God, the addressee of the Polcz text is Miklós (presumably the second husband), who functions as the only person listening to the writer’s confession, so he represents a kind of substitute for God. The name of the addressee can be found only in one part of the text – “Miklós, do you remember when we went back to Transylvania the first time after ten years, how Böske Horváth surrounded us with so much love and that when coming back we wanted to get on the train, Pista Kovács was standing there at midnight” (POLCZ 2005: 24), – though

the narrating self many times refers to a recent memory associated with one of the characters or settings of the past, memories that are already connected with Miklós and their marriage after the front.

IV. Conclusion

It can be concluded that during the constructive operation of memory trauma effects have the power of text organization; this means that they highlight the emphatic points of the autobiography. The subject, which constantly slips apart in the text, tries to define herself along these points with the help of body poetics. She tries to process her roles enforce upon her by the outside world, her trauma experiences with the help of therapeutic writing, indirect voice, forgetting, falling into silence. The writer finds herself in a subordinate, objectified position due to her husband, and because of the war her vulnerability is more deepened. Both in marriage and during the war she is forced to identify with female positions which push her intellectual values into the background and arising from her sexual identity make her the source of eroticism. The husband's coldness and the horrors of the war result in such trauma effects which not only continue to damage but also deprive the objectified, impersonalized self: "trauma makes a wound through which personality is emptied" (MITCHELL 1999: 98). The self, which portrays herself both as a front woman and as a subordinate, destitute wife goes through complicated personality transformations in the text so that in the conclusion of the autobiography she can formulate the programme of her own fate in the future: as a woman who has lived through the front, try to recover, try to live (POLCZ 2005: 196).

Translated by Andrea Puskás

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KRISZTIÁN BENYOVSKY

GENDER AND GENRE IN THE MYSTERY NOVELS OF KATALIN BARÁTH

Abstract

In my article I analyze the relationship between crime fiction and feminism focusing on the characteristic features of the role of female detectives. First I offer possible approaches to the connection between genre and social, biological gender. In connection to the theoretical framework I present the multicolored, varied nature of feminist readings of crime fiction, the hybrid cases of mixing romance and mystery story, the forms of representation in relation to traditional female social roles and I also give a brief account of the characteristic types of female roles present in the genre. Finally, following the theoretical framework, I analyze three detective novels – *A fekete zongora* [*The Black Piano*], *A türkizkék hegedű* [*The Turquoise Violin*], *A borostyán hárfa* [*The Ivy Harp*] – written by a contemporary Hungarian women crime fiction writer, Katalin Baráth.

Key words: gender, feminism, women-centered mystery fiction, Katalin Baráth

I. Introduction

“I really have no problem with the other sex but they are not suitable for detective stories unless they are the victims.” – wrote Karel Čapek (ČAPEK 1960: 37) in his notes in 1932. However before we would label him as a misogynist let us see what made him formulate this thought so harshly.

The famous Czech writer was fundamentally disturbed by the romanticism and sentimentalism of the genre that he connected to the proliferation of women characters tempting or seducing amateur or professional detectives. According to Čapek this endangered the clarity of this essentially masculine, intellectual and almost scientific genre: the love episode only creates unnecessary complications and diverts attention from resolving the criminal riddle demanding intellectual challenge. This leads to “a climax where resolution comes not by the puzzle solved but by the act of kissing and the setting of the time for a wedding ceremony; these stories are no longer about deciphering the mystery but about overcoming erotic obstacles” he writes as a conclusion to his article. According to Čapek the answer lies in the fact that the readers’ gender composition had changed. Writers tended to meet the expectations of women readers consuming more and more crime stories; who were less engaged in the excitement of logical solutions provided by the detective while, with bated breath, they were looking forward to the evolvment of the fate of the young heroine often facing fatal dangers.

We do not need to be insider feminists to recognize the gender stereotype behind Čapek’s train of thought: the intellectual man vs. the emotional woman. Even if we label this statement as simplifying, or even unsubstantiated we can barely challenge the fact that readers of the above mentioned romantic (sentimental, emotional) stories, referred to as a cause of femininisation, were almost exclusively female – and most likely still are today. Čapek addresses the concept of femininity in connection to *certain* female characters and *certain* women readers, however, he does not consider the emergence of female writers. Although, in principle, he could have mentioned those writers who already published several novels or short stories, for instance Anna Katherine Green, Margery Allingham, Dorothy L. Sayers or Agatha Christie whose first story on Poirot (*The Mysterious Affair at Styles*) was published in

1920, her first Miss Marple novel (*The Murder at the Vicarage*) in 1930.¹ The Czech writer is obviously not interested in the gender of the crime story writers and he does not mention those detective stories either in which the function of the detective is fulfilled by a female protagonist. He either did not read Christie's work or he remained captive to the stereotype and he never considered the possibility seriously.

What would he think about the recent scene? Perhaps he would see his worries justified by reading the romantic detective stories imitating 19th century British novels written by Amanda Quick but how he would judge the undiminished popularity of Agatha Christie – despite the dislike of fans of hard-boiled crime stories – or excellent works by other female writers of a similar genre (Mignon G. Eberhart, Ngaio Marsh, P. D. James, Ruth Rendell, Joanne Fluke, Donna Leon), the historical crime story and the classics of unconventional crime novels – how would he judge Ellis Peters and Patricia Highsmith? He would most likely be upset by the hard fisted private women detectives of Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton.

It is beyond doubt that from the 1930s the genres of crime fiction have undergone so many changes that again proved the literary productivity and viability of these types of texts. During this period the genre of crime fiction conquered so far uncharacteristic subject matters calling into life a multitude of subgenres: the medical, the historical, the art historical and the gastronomical crime fiction, crime stories written for children and teenagers. It was subtly integrated into the narratives of other popular genres: sci-fi, horror, fantasy, spy novels.

We may not forget about those cases where due to sequels and rewriting classic stories or sequels were brought to a new light and by

¹ Jane Marple first appeared in 1926 in a short story *The Tuesday Night Club*.

opening up the borders between fictional worlds the greatest detectives were able to meet each other in the genre of the so called crossover fiction – both in films, literature and comics. And we have not yet mentioned those initiatives that by proving their sensitivity to problems of social, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities tried to expand the possibilities of the genre group.²

Therefore, today nothing justifies the apocalyptic tone prevailing in Čapek's article reaching its climax in its very last sentence: "Tales have disappeared, the historical novel faded away, the era of detective stories has come to an end. Only kitsch remained." (ČAPEK 1960: 38) On the contrary, by referring to the above list, we may assert the fact that crime fiction was subject to new impulses partly by the articulated presence of the feminine perspective so harshly condemned by Čapek.

But what does it mean for a popular genre to *become feminine* – in this case the genre of the crime fiction? Under what conditions may we use – and can we use it at all? – the concept of the feminist crime story? The answer is not so obvious as we have already understood from the statement given by the Czech writer, albeit somewhat prejudiced and polarized. Let us say in advance that it is not only about the hybridization of a genre; the phenomenon points beyond the intertwining of characteristic plot elements and characters in the love story and the crime narrative, their more sophisticated exposition requires a wider analysis involving communicational and social contexts. In the first half of my article I will examine the possible approaches to relationships between

² According to John D. Cawelti these two different tendencies are the most characteristic features of recent crime fiction but of popular genres in general. He marks the phenomenon with the concepts of "*regendering*" and "*reethnicizing*" (CAWELTI 2004a: 107–110).

crime fiction genres and the biological/ social gender, in the second half I will analyze three detective novels written by a contemporary Hungarian women writer, Katalin Baráth (*A fekete zongora* [*The Black Piano*], *A türkizkék hegedű* [*The Turquoise Violin*], *A borostyán hárfa* [*The Amber Harp*]) according to those aspects I am about to elaborate on in the first half.

II. From Feminist Crime Fiction to Woman Centered Crime Fiction

The definition of the concept of “feminist crime fiction” is problematic in several respects. The majority of these reasons derive from the – historically defined – internal distinctions and differences of critical discourse inherent in feminism either understood as a social-political movement or a school in literary theory. The private woman detectives of hard-boiled crime fiction may be regarded as positive protagonists due to the *liberal-humanist* conception since they represent the independent female character successful in her profession. However, when we consider *deconstructive feminism* as a starting point interested in deconstructing patriarchal, fallogocentric and political ideologies, the figure of the women detective conceals a contradiction: even if partly, but she is still submissive to the masculine order to be criticized (WALTON–JONES 1999: 99–100).

The dimensions of our examination (and at the same time the scope of reference of the adjective “feminist”) may vary depending on the fact whether we focus on the procedures of picturing authorial image (newspaper interviews, conversations in media, reading tours, personal webpages, design of book covers), on the comprehensive analysis of social and economic indicators of market ambitions, on the reading

habits of women readers or on revealing the poetic-stylistic characteristics of these feminine texts.

The situation is further complicated by the word usage of lay people that, often independently of the discursive background, limits the meaning of “feminist crime fiction” to the gender of the author, of the character or even to the gender of those who consume these texts in greater proportions.

Consequently many critics say that the meaning of the expression “feminist crime fiction” designating an independent subgenre may be different according to our associations – which concept of feminism we activate; what kinds of expectations we want the works to meet, or which participant of the communicational chain we attribute great significance to.

I believe that having a woman author or a female protagonist is not enough in itself to call these works “feminist crime fiction”. This interpretation expands the semantic domain of the concept that becomes misleading easily, especially in those cases where the plot does not reinforce their interest in social criticism from a gender perspective. Another disadvantage is to already exclude those crime fiction stories written by men that reflect on the discrimination of women, on forms of rape against women or generally on the problems of female existence.

Using this concept is much more reasonable when in the given novel or short story certain feminist ideas or perspectives surface in open or more hidden forms. This is not a rare phenomenon because the spreading of feminist movements, feminist literary criticism and women centered crime novels coincidence in time (REDDY 1990: 174). Popular genres, varieties of detective stories among them, are especially suitable for practicing cultural criticism on the level of the discourse of characters or narrator. Several works of women’s hard-boiled crime fiction are “practical applications of political tenets expressed through a popular

form” (WALTON–JONES 1999: 87). In lesbian crime fiction (Barbara Wilson, Katherine V. Forrest, Mary Wings) we may see harsher and more open criticism since the woman detective has to fight misogyny and homophobia as well (MIZEJEWSKI 2004: 24). This situation is further complicated by the protagonist belonging to a racial or ethnic minority.

If the literary work becomes the field for ideological struggles the danger of itemization and didacticism is always a threatening factor. Referring to works written under the influence of the ideology of the so called socialist feminism Sally Munt reminds us to the drawbacks of open politicization. She points out that writers “often sacrifice pleasure for political correctness”, and she adds that “(...) sometimes these texts are just too serious, failing to deliver suspense or resolution satisfactorily degenerating into pedantic political primers” (MUNT 1994: 205). Such or similar cases may provide explanation for the rejecting attitude of or keeping distance by certain women writers to the label of “feminist”. Speaking about the Hungarian translation of her second novel (*Kald mig Prinsesse*, 2005) in an interview Sara Blaedel, a Danish writer, expressed her doubts about the genre of the “femi-crime”. Mainly because “naming is categorization and I do not approve of it. I would like to have my works listed under crime fiction without any other labels just as the works of my male colleagues are listed.” Blaedel does not regard herself a feminist writer, at the same time she thinks “women are worth just as much as men”. As she says she carefully measures out the feminine elements in her novels not to exceed elements of the detective plot. “Since I am a woman and I chose a female protagonist it is inevitable for me to move around in a feminine universe in my novels. However I concentrate on the subject matter of the plot not to be unbalanced by the feminine attitude.” (BLAEDEL 2013)

Therefore to eliminate the connotations of a movement irritating certain authors, to push thesis like expectations to the background and to avoid one sided interpretations blurring the differences among

feminist schools it is more fortunate to use the concept of *women-centered mystery fiction* instead of *feminist crime fiction*. According to my understanding this concept refers to those novels and short stories that – independently from the reader's and author's biological sex – raise issues concerning the social situation of women, their culturally defined gender roles within the frame of a criminal subject matter usually accompanied by critical reflection. This holds for all three key roles of the detective story (the investigator, the culprit and the victim).

Kathleen Gregory Klein proposes the same, partly for similar reasons. Her category is more limiting and therefore more exclusive since she lists works of crime fiction read by “women readers of women writers of women-centered mystery texts” (KLEIN 1995a: 12). deconstructing and rewriting traditional male centered structures of the genre; moreover the protagonists of these works are all women. All three corners, e.g. participants (author, text, reader) and all systems of relations (sides) of the communicational triangle that she sketched have the same significance, there is no hierarchy among them and if “any part of the contract is breached, if any point on the triangle gives way, the whole comes crashing down” (KLEIN 1995a: 13).

III. Female Roles and Stereotypes in Crime Fiction

As I mentioned above, for analysis of a gender perspective among the regular roles of women-centered mystery fiction the analysis of women detectives, women criminals and women victims are all of equal interest. I will focus on the women detective in the next section and I will only comment briefly on the other two due to limitations of length.

In the beginning of my article I quoted Karel Čapek who considered women to be “useful” in crime fiction as victims. Apparently it was true

for a long time. We meet cruelly massacred female victims already in E. A. Poe's first two short stories featuring Dupin. From then on the female body/corpse, showing symptoms of the crime, becomes an articulately important object of solving clues of the crime. The more and more detailed description of the work of the medical experts creates a basis for a more scientific discourse in twentieth century literature and film. For feminism and gender studies crime fiction focusing on themes of various forms of rape against women, mainly from the subgenre of the serial killer story and domestic thriller, is of special interest, they may be touching the chords of social and cultural criticism. In these stories the role of not only real but also potential victims is of great significance; among them are many women who are eye-witnesses or survivors chased by criminals.

It was in the works of Agatha Christie that featured the idea that in a crime story anybody may be a criminal (murderer, trickster, thief, blackmailer), women included. Moreover, in the works of the infamous British writer we very often meet women characters poisoning someone or murdering somebody with a weapon and neither age nor social status or existential situation can be of precluding cause. A publicly respected elderly lady may commit a murderous act just as well as a young governess or the rich inheritor may pull the trigger just as many times as an unwealthy nobody of a low social rank. Women are therefore equal partners of men in committing a criminal act.

American hard-boiled detective fiction established by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Mickey Spillane and Ross McDonald and written basically by men for men is often discussed for the misogynist attitude in critical writings. It is not a coincidence since at many instances these texts tell about the open despise, disdain, social marginalization and demonization of women. The most conspicuous manifestation of this later tendency is the reinterpretation of the role of the *femme fatale*.

At least since the publication of Hammett's novel, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) we may find female characters who due to their irresistible attractive power corrupt or at least tempt man worthy of a better life, among them investigators as well. Therefore directly or indirectly (manipulation) they become the originators of events leading to a tragic ending. They are Janus faced women, oftentimes playing the convincing role of a chased victim needing support who make use of their beauty as a weapon, e.g. as a means for cunning seduction and deceit.³ John D. Cawelti points out that these beautiful and dangerous women characters – as an influence of collective imagination rooted in Puritanism – are surrounded by a witch-like aura and in many crime stories the investigation gains a witch hunt modality (CAWELTI 2004b: 189–190).

IV. Women Investigators in Literature

The brief look cast upon the international scenery of crime fiction today makes it obvious that the group of women investigators is wide and – in respect of age, nationality, sexual orientation, profession – varied. If we only take the first and the last aspects into consideration we may see that age is represented by young girls, teenagers, middle aged women and elderly ladies as well whom may be amateur investigators, private detectives, professional policewomen, attorneys or medical experts (doctors, psychiatrists, trace evidence experts, etc.). The list is even longer and more colorful if we count the film adaptations of novels and short stories and independent movie or television series, too. However, it was not always so.

³ See more details in JABER 2011.

It may be surprising but Miss Marple was not the first woman investigator in crime fiction. She had predecessors in the 19th century but they had not become so popular at all. Miss Amelia Butterworth, Anna Katherine Green (1846–1935) may be considered straightforward examples of the smart, quick-witted middle aged spinsters who participated in all three novels: *That Affair Next Door* (1897), *Lost Man's Lane* (1898), *The Circular Study* (1900).⁴ Maureen T. Reddy mentions two contemporaries of A.C. Conan Doyle, the Louisa Pirkins' and L.T. Meade's works where criminal mysteries are solved by women (REDDY 2003: 196). Kathleen Gregory Klein mentions two earlier examples: the collection of short stories published under the pseudonym of Andrew Forrester, more precisely as a case diary of a certain Mrs. Gladden (*The Female Detective*, 1864) (KLEIN 1995b: 18).

In the interwar period, known as the golden age of detective stories, mystery stories reached the height of their popularity due to the works of female writers (Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh, Mignon G. Eberhart, Josephine Tey). However we need to underline that among the above mentioned representatives of mystery stories only Christie and Eberhart trusted their (amateur) women detectives with the task of solving the criminal puzzle. Eberhart created her memorable, returning protagonist in the figure of a nurse (Sarah Keate) and of a crime fiction writer (Susan Dare), being inspired by Mary Roberts Rinehart's (1876–1958) excellent novels that were similar in character superbly measuring out tension and suggestively creating the atmosphere.

The number of women detectives however only multiplied in the last third of the twentieth century, beginning from the 1970s and 1980s.

⁴ On the author see: Ross 1991.

Compared to the previously prevailing figures of the amateur trace readers this new tendency brought along the appearance of more and more female private detectives, policewomen, agents and crime experts in crime fiction written partly by men but mostly by women. This phenomenon closely corresponded to the spreading of the subgenre of the so called *police procedural* that focused on introducing the teamwork of policemen and experts and we always find women among them. The same holds for films and television series. According to many critics the first volume of the woman detective sequel written by Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky in 1982 and Thomas Harris' novel, *The Silence of the Lambs* in 1988, are turning points in the history of the genre opening up new perspectives in depicting women detectives, or more generally, describing gender roles. The film based on Harris' novel under the same title has the same role in the history of effects (1991, dir by Jonathan Demme).

Referring to the figure of the quick-witted spinster created by Agatha Christie and to the American private women detectives already point to the dividing lines of the genre manifest in gender differences. In most cases the protagonists of *mystery stories*, or *cozy mysteries*, or *soft-boiled detective fiction* are amateur, dilettanti/lay detectives (retired elderly persons, nurses, travel guides, gardeners, book or pet traders or restaurant, bakery or patisserie owners, etc.) who are investigating a case either independently or together with the police. They are characterized by great intuition, insight into character, inventiveness together with curiosity and shrewdness. They are perfectly familiar with the small community (village, small city) where the criminal act took place and where the criminal is hiding, so through their personal connections they can access pieces of information that are not available for officers. In these stories authors usually avoid detailed descriptions of violence and sex, they rather apply the rhetoric of allusions and suggestive concealment. There

is no real need for the first component since basically these novels focus on a criminal puzzle where the investigator solves the puzzle using his/her intellect instead of his/her physical strength. This is the reason why in these types of novels a woman detective may become an equal partner to men.

The situation is different in the concurrent genre of the *hard-boiled detective fiction*. The female protagonists of these action filled criminal stories taking place in American metropolises are private detectives (female dicks), professionals, having experience as policewomen or lawyers who have to do the work in a much more violent environment full of threats and power abuse. Investigation is no fun, not an intellectual exercise for them but a hard, ordinary duty accompanied by situations of life danger. Therefore their behavior and methods follow more closely those masculine roles that the genre tradition (D. Hammett, R. Chandler) has inaugurated.

Despite the above listed differences there are characteristics and behavioral patterns that make amateur and professional women detectives similar. Some of them may be connected to reactions by the (masculine) environment and the common desire to become free from gender restrictions.

Let us begin with the fact that women detectives are not always taken seriously.⁵ Especially men, more precisely policemen disdain or mock them. However, their women partners do not always like them either. For instance, in P. D. James's novel, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, published in 1972, the twenty year old private detective, Cordelia Gray has to listen twice to the following sentence drawn from the title and

⁵ It is similar to the attitude grownups apply when facing kids who play the detective. See: BENYOVSKY 2009.

uttered by a woman: her job is not for women. These and similar sentences are very frequently uttered in these stories and the most efficient weapon to fight them is a sharp tongue. Women detectives attempt to parry and neutralize manifestations of subordination, stigmatization and silencing by using the means of verbal resistance: sharp remarks, ironic, sarcastic wisecracks and vulgar retorts.

Since for a long time investigation was exclusively a male profession done for a living – in reality⁶ as well as in literature – women fulfilling these positions accommodate themselves involuntarily to masculine behavioral patterns. It especially holds for “hard” women private detectives. However we have to add that besides the traditional male virtues (strength, bravery, explicitness) they do not betray their female characters either (empathy, gentleness, coquetry) even though these later are present in the story less emphatically. Many examples prove that a seductive smile, a promising or charming gaze is often more effective in the process of investigation than the tough, masculine presence.

Women investigators often try to avoid the traditional roles of the submissive girl, the self-sacrificing mother, the caring wife – expected by others – therefore they are looked upon as eccentric persons. The clothing of these protagonists do not follow fashion and they do not sacrifice as much time for housework (cooking, cleaning), home furnishing and decoration as would be necessary – sometimes the case is that, *horribile dictu*, they do not even know how to cook.

Women investigators are therefore rarely married. Generally they are widows or divorced or single women. Successful investigation work does

⁶ Up to the beginning of the 1970s federal agents and state police staff of the American United States consisted of women staff to 1%, by the mid 1990s this ratio was close to 10% (MIZEJEWSKI 2004: 18).

not match an ordinary family life, raising children and it does not do much good in terms of having a partner for a longer time. It is worth remembering the great bachelors of crime fiction: Dupin, Holmes, Poirot, Philo Vance and other literary and film colleagues of them have “traditionally” unsatisfying familial relationships. This not only holds for policemen and professional investigators but for amateurs as well. Nevertheless these protagonists do not necessarily regard their status quo, of being alone, an ideal one. Several feminine crime fiction or crime fiction series are exactly about finding the One, while it has almost become a topos that the most probable candidate turns out to be the criminal and if not, even then he is guilty of something – to avoid killing jokes I do not provide examples here. We may consider these stories, that Čapek disliked as well, *crime fiction variations of single lady novels* about the spiritual path searching, love afflictions and social emergence of single middle-aged women.

V. Veronika Dávid's Adventures

The first novels of Katalin Baráth, *A fekete zongora [The Black Piano]* was published in 2009 in a private edition and in small copy numbers and while the book was not introduced to book stores thanks to some positive criticism and the author's blog it became well known in a relatively short time. This might explain why the second, somewhat reedited edition was published by Agave Publishing House specializing in popular literature and made Baráth their “own author”. The novel became the opening work of a series and both sequels were published in a tasteful edition harmonizing with the world of the novels.

In Hungarian literature there has not formed a compiled tradition of detective novels and the aesthetic prejudice against them was much

stronger and more persistent – just as against popular genre literature as well – than in Western literary canons. We have to report on an even greater deficiency in connection to works that follow the genre patterns of English whodunit type mystery stories but taking place in a familiar, national environment. This is why we may say that the novels of Katalin Baráth have filled a great void. Their success may be explained only with their “untraditional” character but with the historical milieu so intimately described, with the narrative style imbued with refined irony and of course the heroine fulfilling the role of the Great Detective, personified in the character of Veronika Dávid. Below I will analyze her personality and method of investigation, focusing especially on the relationship between *gender* and *genre*.

V. 1. A FEKETE ZONGORA [THE BLACK PIANO] (2010)

The opening scene of the novel reminds us of a “genre crash”. The text begins with a love story in costumes printed in parenthesis that suddenly stops at the most exciting moment since the writer – who is a shop-assistant in a stationery and book store of a small city – is disturbed by the arrival of a customer. It turns out that the early morning visitor is about to die and without uttering a single word he does die. Not only the reader but the heroine is dislocated as well from the fantasy world of the historical scenery of this fancy plot where the main focus is on the conflict between marital fidelity and untamable passion and becomes a participant in a bloody series of events full of secrets.

We may even consider this change a symbolical one: where romance ends, crime fiction begins; the later annihilates the previous. Our heroine, Veronika Dávid cannot continue writing her novel and she sacrifices all her time and energy on the case that becomes more and more complicated. She cannot help herself and instead of identifying with the marchioness in love she identifies with the role of the cold

blooded murderers. Her imagination and inventiveness sometimes supports her, sometimes hinders her in her investigation. We have to add that the plot of the crime does not entirely extrude the plot of the love affair since the Man appears in the figure of a young officer who helps her find the murderer. He does not fail to move her, on top of this an ex-admirer of hers also appears...

“She does not flow well with the era’s current” (BARÁTH 2010: 182) characterizes her brother Veron for a friend of his looking for a wife. This characterization means that his sister is unsuitable for becoming a submissive spouse. She does not live and behave the way it is expected by public thought from women of her age. She is already an outsider in the community of the small city in the Great Hungarian Plain, Ókanizsa, since as a young woman she has a teacher’s degree and she works. This refers to the fact that she is an educated, well-read person who is not only interested in literature, especially in works of contemporary poets, but she herself writes as well – novels, poetry, journal articles. Veron is one of the founding members of the local reading club, a good interpreter of modern literature, a fan of Endre Ady,⁷ who is desperate because in her Jewish book store neither *Hét*⁸ nor *Nyugat*⁹ are sold (BARÁTH 2010: 161), “at work she sells cheap picture magazines under the counter that are not suitable for ladies eyes” (BARÁTH 2010: 159). When at one time she

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⁷ Endre Ady (1877–1919): poet, journalist, pioneer of modern Hungarian poetry, representative of Symbolism.

⁸ *Hét* (1890–1924): A political and artistic magazine, one of the most important predecessors of *Nyugat* whose literature section provided possibilities of being published for several poets and writers attempting to bring about changes, on the other hand it published translations of Western (especially French) world literature.

⁹ *Nyugat* (1908–1941): the most definitive magazine of twentieth century Hungarian literature. As its name shows (meaning “west”) it promoted tendencies in modern

receives a gift from one of her admirers, a “slim volume of poetry written by a recently published young poet, Dezső Kosztolányi” (BARÁTH 2010: 167) she is happy at least as much as if she had received some expensive jewelry. She rides the bicycle as well, although very few in this small city would dare to or know how to use this vehicle. And if she has to travel to a poet’s night of her favorite she is not ashamed of traveling alone on the train without male accompaniment!

Veronika Dávid is aware that she is an extravagant woman and that “she is so different from the contemporary female ideal” (BARÁTH 2010: 168). Perhaps this is why she was short of male admirers. However she did not allow, she even consciously fought against her emotions guiding her, so she systematically turned down all serious approaches or marriage proposals. She creates the impression of a self-conscious, talented woman who wishes to have command over her own fate, who attempts to evade expectations raised for her contemporaries. She refuses those possible life models and roles that would frame her existence in this small city. “She could have married someone among the farmland owners who followed her in groups anyway. And now she could have spent her days together with three undisciplined kids from the dough making at dawn to the evening boot pulling ceremony!” – her friend and ex-suitor summarizes somewhat ironically her perspectives (BARÁTH 2010: 57–58). Veron begins to think about becoming a nun and sacrificing her life for helping others.

Western art, social sciences, political and philosophical ideas turning against the Hungarian conservative, national trend. Although it stayed away from or straightforwardly rejected the avant-garde. Instead of political or ethical considerations it focused on publishing talents only.

In reality she is not serious about these possibilities, she rather reviews them as a life option available for single women. She cannot identify with the figure of the hard-working housewife living for her family, neither with the role of the self-sacrificing saint, nor with the role of the spinster; she has not yet given up the hope of finding Him, however new experiences, the desire for variety and adventure is more important for her. Deep in her soul she is romantic which she does not admit to herself either and she tries to counterbalance it with sarcasm irritating most men. Of course there are exceptions...

Therefore the question emerges how much of her work of investigation is supported or hindered by her stance against contemporary social gender norms?

The fact that she is not occupied by family issues provides her larger space. She does not need to adjust to the needs of others, so she may do her job of investigation more freely. True, she works, but her workplace and the character of her job does not give her any problems, it even serves her in some respects: many customers come and go in the shop which means that not only goods exchange owners but pieces of news as well. Due to the conversations she carries on with customers Veron gets to know about those things that would later help police investigation. "Isn't it useful when someone is a woman at work? (BARÁTH 2010: 37) – she says hurriedly at one occasion to the captain accompanied by a victorious smile. Gossip, as in the stories of Miss Marple,¹⁰ proves to be an important source of news in other situations as well.

Her education also contributes to the investigation receiving a new impulse and direction, since she is the one to notice the connection

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¹⁰ See: BÉNYEI 2009. In her article Zsófia Szilágyi also draws parallels between the novel and the Miss Marple stories (SZILÁGYI 2010).

between the murders and the poem written by Endre Ady, *A fekete zongora* [*The Black Piano*]. Afterwards she makes an attempt to interpret the poem in the light of the murder cases and she slowly manages to deflect the insensitive officers', naturally all men, initial doubt towards poetry. For a while the Ady poem becomes a guideline to the criminal clue solving process, therefore, due to the most varied interpretations, its lines or words are understood in a different light. The turn that changes trace reading to text reading should be regarded a significant development even though later we learn that the criminal played with the mysterious poem intentionally in order to deceive.

We have to conclude that as an amateur trace reader – despite all her situational advantages and exceptional knowledge – Veronika Dávid failed, she let the murderer lead her by the nose almost costing her life. On the other hand the temporarily teamed up group of a police captain, a doctor and a few officers would have not been able to solve the case without Veron. All of them investigated in their own way, using their means and methods but only their cooperation (and a little bit of luck) lead to arresting the murderer. One of the peculiarities of the novel is that it has no protagonist who would unconditionally fulfill the role of the Great Detective. In the end – following the dramaturgy of Poirot crime stories – the doctor summarizes the case, the honor is not exclusively his. Without the useful partial observations and false conclusions of others he would not be able to pose in this role. The author consciously avoided focusing the story on one detective, she has divided the responsibilities among several characters. She has not trusted the investigation process and sign interpretation with infallible detective minds but with inventive but at the same time frail heroes who are subject to their own emotions and do commit mistakes.

V. 2. A TÜRKIZKÉK HEGEDŰ [THE TURQUOISE VIOLIN] (2011)

Katalin Baráth's second novel, *A türkizkék hegedű* [*The Turquoise Violin*] is set in a different tradition than *The Black Piano*. While the first one is based in the tradition of mystery centered crime fiction located in a small city (we may mention Agatha Christie's Miss Marple-stories, Caroline Graham's Midsomer murders or M. C. Beaton Agatha's Raisin series as similar works), the second volume is inspired by the adventure and spy stories centered around a crime mystery.

In this second crime story of hers, instead of intellectual trace reading, crimes and political games played to access power positions are intertwined therefore chasing, role games and diplomatic maneuvers are emphasized more than general. Similar to typical works of this mixed genre discrete private detectives have to be involved because of the disappearance of secret writings that, in the possession of unauthorized persons, may lead to international political intrigues and ultimately the unleashing of war conflicts. (Holmes and Poirot help governmental officers in untangling these types of cases.) In these stories traveling has a great significance which provides unlimited space and time – and not just in literature – for novelty, unexpected and surprising events, in one word: adventure. Instead of the transcontinental, quick rhythm of the plot of James Bond stories Baráth's novel takes place in fewer venues and places and in a somewhat narrower geographical frame – we are offered a story unfolding within the contemporary Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. The panoramic view incorporates the city of Zenta, Budapest with its crowds, the bright and dark side of the city, summer cottages of the Lake Balaton, and the coast of the Adriatic-sea, Fiume and Opatija.

The speed is slower – remember, we are in 1911 – however, exotic or romantic elements, and adventurous turns are also part of the story that the author – similarly to her first novel – handles with due irony. This type of mixture of elements of the spy novel, romantic adventure novels,

and mystery stories reminds us to some volumes in the Fandorin series written by Boris Akunin (*Turkish Gambit*, *She Lover of Death*).

Investigation begins because of the disappearance of an orphan child. Veronika Dávid has helpers this time as well, her colleague and friend, Mara, and the boy, her uncle. It is a pity that the criminals are known to the reader from the beginning, only his changing hiding places and future plans are unclear for the team of investigators. We have to note that he is a charismatic criminal – somewhere between Tartuffe and Moriarty professor – whose crookedness and slyness would be increased to other worldly, more precisely, infernal depths by the end of the novel. Therefore he gets close to becoming a comic figure. The two twists placed at the end of the story somewhat compensates the reader for missing the joy that would derive from the unveiling of the criminal under cover.

Katalin Baráth makes very smart and astute references to the first volume, invoking a few characters, places and events worthy of remembering, but she always pays careful attention not to uncover the resolution to the crime. These allusions create a déjà-vu feeling, necessary for building up a series – for the initiated readers and in new readers they evoke a curiosity for the first novel. The connection between the two volumes may be tackled in terms of poetic devices.

The opening of *A türkizkék hegedű* [*The Turquoise Violin*] is very stirring, even if in a different sense than the opening of the first novel. Another popular genre is evoked here as well in the character of an elderly man reading a Western story. There is a motto poem, too, whose meaning may be connected to the plot. The three verse poem, *Óceáni bál* [*Ocean Bal*], written by a fictive poet, Márna Pethényi remains outside of the world of the novel: there is no mention of it in the text by the narrator or by other characters; as opposed to the Ady poem neither does it become the subject of “criminal philological” interpretation aiming at the resolution of the hidden message. In this second volume the

self-appointed investigators obtain the most important pieces of information by interpreting various texts. Continuity is represented by the unchanged, stable character of the protagonist and the subtly ironic narrative style.

The author pays more attention to the description of the era, mainly of fashion, food culture, entertainment and the various events of social life than in her first novel. A significant contribution of these descriptions is that she depicts the developments of contemporary women's movements more openly and in a more detailed way. She reflects on them not only indirectly, through the extravagant character of the heroine, but by inserting conversations and debates on the subject. Veronika Dávid works at the Budapest feminist magazine of *A Nő és Társadalom* [*Woman and Society*] but she cannot always identify with its ideas. She herself belongs to the more progressive, more liberal proponents and she prefers following western developments of the movement. Therefore she necessarily confronts those activists and the narrow-minded editor who represent more moderate feminist ideas. For instance she confronts those who only understand feminism as an expansion of election rights, and clarifying principles of household work. Her taste in literature also opposes her to the more conservative feminist concept of literature. With undisguised mockery, Veronika shares her thoughts on popular didactic works that are published in the magazine, *Magyar Lányok* [*Hungarian Girls*], and set the ideal to be followed in the characters of charming, submissive, withdrawing or even a little bit eccentric, funny protagonists. She is the lover of modern literature and is convinced that the Hungarian public has to keep pace with Western tendencies. For this reason she smuggles a poem – under a pseudonym – by Renée Erdős which understandably triggers a huge scandal.

From the perspective of the connection between gender and investigation the fact becomes of a special significance that the criminal chased

after and finally uncovered elicited large sums of money under the guise of hypocrisy from women, youngsters and elderly ladies in trouble. Due to his excellent skills in rhetorics he charmed these usually unhappy, shattered therefore easy to manipulate, widows, single mothers and spinsters who in return for false religious promises offered him all their money. He even seduced the younger ones and in the name of god he even fornicated with them. So not only Veron's investigation is at stake but the liquidation of a religious sect and preventing a political assassination, as well as stopping a wicked man worthy of disdain who made profit from using the defencelessness of psychologically unstable women.

However not only weak and easily controllable women appear in this novel but spirited ones as well who are able to think independently and critically; in certain respects they surpass men. Besides the protagonist Marietta Árgyelán, e.g. Mara is this type, Veron's educated, wealthy, high-stepper friend who actively participated in resolving the criminal mystery. For helping the investigation she repeatedly and convincingly acts the role of a young man wearing fashionable clothes. However, we find female characters among the criminal bunch, who motivated by adverse intentions, change into young man's clothes with convincing authenticity.

We have mentioned earlier that Veronika Dávid is reluctant to accept social norms inflicted on women. She is disgusted by balls that she equals to the presentation march of women as decorated goods, "careless chatter, flirts and aimless entertainment" (BARÁTH 2011: 141). The role of a mother is equally alien to her: "She was never enthusiastic about women swooning by the sight of a young child" (BARÁTH 2011: 171). However, when seeing the lost boy found again she does smile. And then, for a moment, she plays with the thought of becoming a mother, but she recoils as well dismissing the idea instead.

V. 3. A BOROSTYÁN HÁRFA [THE AMBER HARP] (2012)

The latest, third volume in the series follows however not entirely the textual forming processes of the previous two novels. The title of the book again connects an instrument with a color, this time it not referring to a (poetry) text but to an awkwardly painted picture decorating the frontage of a movie theatre having no special significance in solving the criminal puzzle.

The novel is preceded by a poetry fragment written by Dezső Kosztolányi (*Pipacsos, alföldi út, forró délután* [*Lowland roads with poppy seed flowers, hot afternoon*])¹¹ becoming more organic to the text than the poem introducing *A türkizkék hegedű* [*The Turquoise Violin*].

“I have always known that death would take me away in my young age” (BARÁTH 2012: 17). The novel begins with this strong sentence. The disquieting effect of the chapter printed in cursive letters and unnumbered is increased by the secret identity of the speaker, and of the circumstances of the environment. The reader may only conclude that s/he is reading the last words of a person ready to die or even dying already: “Today I die. Today arrives the minute when I fall out of this world. [...] I will die!” (BARÁTH 2012: 17). It is not clear either whether this person committed suicide, killing himself or it was perhaps someone else causing his death.

The sentence following this scene is not less shocking than the previous one: “I will now kill thee!” The sentence, however, should not be taken literally. It is uttered by a mad servant and is addressed to a mischievous, provocative pub assistant.

The central location for the plot is Ókanizsa, familiar to the reader from the first novel. Veronika Dávid returns home and as is usually the

¹¹ It is a poem about remembering a journey taken on a train in a hot summer afternoon. The Eastern part of Hungary is called the great Hungarian Plain (alföld=lowlands)

case right after her arrival a crime takes place in the small southern city. She is not only involved in solving the case as a detective but she becomes a suspect, too: she even spends a freezing cold night in the local prison. Exciting events do happen on the way and they are significant in reference to the gender codes of the investigation process.

Just as the train to Szabadka leaves Keleti station, Veron takes a book out of her bag and is absorbed in reading it. She only redirects her consciousness and attention at Kecskemét when a man wearing somewhat strange clothes knocks on her compartment, carrying a huge iron-edged traveling case. She begins by looking at him suspiciously and after her initial shyness she addresses him stating that she knows who he really is. The man is perplexed at first but then is waiting eagerly for the girl's explanation. The girl secretly fancying herself as "the first female private detective" (BARÁTH 2012: 109) does not withhold the information for long: she explains in great detail that she has concluded from specific tell-tale signs that her companion was a Northern industrial magnate, a certain Jörg Gunnarson, traveling under disguise. The deductive train of thought ends in screams of laughter from the man's part: it turns out that he is a picture strip agent traveling to Zenta, Szabadka and Ókanizsa to offer local cinema theatres for sale some of the excellent works of "movie", a new fashion. For Veron's disgraceful failure partly the book should be held responsible. The front cover says: A.C. Doyle: *Returne of Sherlock Holmes*.¹² It turns out that the man is also familiar with the

¹² It is a real volume that was published including the Hungarian translation of five stories selected from the volume titled *Returne of Sherlock Holmes* (*The Adventure of the Empty House, The Adventure of the Norwood Builder, The Adventure of the Charles Augustus Milverton, The Adventure of the Six Napoleons, The Adventure of the Black Peter*). The publication date is unknown. The "original" Hungarian title is *A feltámadt detektív* [*The detective resurrected*].

adventures of the English detective and summarizes the conclusion as follows: “there is only one Holmes. We are regular mortals, with our ordinary minds we can only be Watsons.”¹³ (BARÁTH 2012: 36) The distorted pronunciation of the names refers to the failure of applying a literary method realistically and to the limits of following a masculine role pattern by women. When the “failed student of Sherlock Holmes” says goodbye to the man she does not suspect how important a role he will play later in the murder mystery where not only the criminal has to be uncovered but she will have to prove her own innocence as well.

The return home is difficult for Veron not just because of the painful memories and the suspicion and distaste addressed to those returning from the capital but because she learns very fast that her ex-admirer and suitor is about to get married. From one or two little remarks the reader understands that the heroine is lonely, wishes for a partner and is more and more afraid of staying alone. At the same time she is not ready for a stable life in marriage: “[...] almost every day she had an interesting, new or chilling experience and when she imagined herself to be a mother, a spouse giving up all that happen beyond the confined walls of her home she immediately felt the sour taste of defeat” (BARÁTH 2012: 65). There is only one reference to her feminist past: the narrator remarks that following the early awakening she tries to refresh herself a little by doing exercises she has stolen from the Manchester suffragettes” (BARÁTH 2012: 184).

Veron has both male and female helpers, her investigation process should still be regarded as a “feminine” one since she finds out the truth by listening to the not especially important remarks of two local women. Her method is therefore – as I have already mentioned – reminiscent of

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¹³ The Hungarian novel transcribes the names of the two detectives phonetically according to Hungarian spelling as Holmusz and Vadszán.

the methods applied by Miss Marple and less of Dr. Holmes. Her success is grounded in her excellent knowledge of the small city life creating correspondence between psychological types and persons involved in the case and using information of everyday talks and chats. She is also adventurous and daring when helping the investigation process advance better.

And what is it that makes her want to resolve mysteries she meets? The answer is found in the text simultaneously underlining the girl's self-critical abilities providing another reason for taking the readers' fancy. When our detective has to go to prison due to a misunderstanding she begins to reflect on herself and she thinks about her previous investigations: "She realized that truth was only a secondary guide in the investigation processes of Ókanizsa and Pest. She was mainly lead by her curiosity to unveil traces and to find the culprit. Well, her vanity proved to be more important than truth." (BARÁTH 2012: 214)

VI. Conclusion

The three novels belong to the characteristic works of the historical women-centered cozy mystery. The puzzle-oriented plot, casting an amateur women investigator, the definitive role of the chronotope of the small city, the softening of drastic murders, the helplessness and mistakes of the professional police, the reflecting on the genre itself, the balanced elements of romantic and comic style all convince us of this fact. The author followed the genre tradition and had no attempt to radically rewrite it. This may be explained by the fact that in the Hungarian literary scene *A fekete zongora* [*The Black Piano*] is considered a work setting a new genre: in Hungarian literature this is the first series of this kind.

It is important to underline that Katalin Baráth avoids becoming sentimental or didactic. The romantic-sentimental element does not countervail the detective-adventure elements and instead of overcoming the erotic obstacles collaring the culprit and interpreting clues seems to be of importance. Neither volume is a novel specifically written for single people although they include some parts that may make these readers preferring the genre of crime stories interested. Feminist ideology surfaces most explicitly in the second volume but it is not overdone in its extent or not presented for self-contained reasons; feminist ideology is presented in the third volume in the most moderate way. Phenomena belonging to gender criticism basically presented as organic parts of the plot, through the features and behavior of characters and not in thesis like “aside” sentences.

The success of each and every series depends on the returning hero. Katalin Baráth has created a sympathetic heroine in the figure of Veronika Dávid who is unable to make peace with the narrow life space prescribed for her and the perspectives of a monotone life style. Investigation, in every case, means a possibility to break out of these circumstances. Variability, new, exciting events, her desire for adventures make her “move out” of her old, customary situation literally as well as metaphorically in order to gain new experiences. For the moment they are more important for her than family stability. Her environment does not look at her with content as she wants to avoid following those female role patterns approved by contemporary society, neither does she want to be involved in masculine patterns, such as criminal investigation. It is still a question how long would it be possible for her to be a detective, for how long would the longing for an understanding, loving partner be dominated by the investigation of criminals. No matter how things develop later on, being witness to Veronika’s developmental history I do not think we should be worried: even if she married someone in the

meanwhile, she will always have time to solve a new criminal puzzle and send wicked criminals behind the bars.

Translated by Gabriella Ágnes Nagy

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ANIKÓ N. TÓTH

“IF THERE IS NO GIVEN IDENTITY”

About Two Novels by Zsuzsa Rakovszky

Abstract ••••• The paper examines the novels of Zsuzsa Rakovszky: *A hullócsillag éve* [*The Year of the Falling Star*] (2005) and *VS* (2011). The main aim is to point out how the narrative identity of the two novels’ narrators is formed, respectively the constituent elements of the protagonists’ female identity (who are identical with the narrator in most cases). Both novels have a complex narrative structure; they consist mainly of personal genres: autobiographical memoirs, diaries, letters, respectively (in the case of *VS*) medical reports. The passages of intimacy are outlined from sensitive observations and emotional-mood components. The protagonists’ identity formation is influenced by socio-historical circumstances. The protagonist-narrator of *VS* makes a radical decision when as a woman she chooses to live as a man.

Key words: Zsuzsa Rakovszky, narrative identity, gender, female identity, diary, letter

I. Introduction

Zsuzsa Rakovszky is well-known as one of the most prominent representative of contemporary Hungarian poetry. More recently she has got into the forefront of literary interest with her novels. Novels such as *A kígyó árnyéka* [*The Shadow of the Snake*] (2002), *A hullócsillag éve* [*The Year of the Falling Star*] (2005) and *VS* (2011) can be read as a unique stream of female history. The present paper examines the novels of *A hullócsillag éve* [*The Year of the Falling Star*] and *VS*. It investigates how

the narrative identities of the two novels' narrators are shaped and which elements construct the female identity of the story's protagonists (who are identical with the narrator in most cases).

II. *A hullócsillag éve [The Year of the Falling Star]*

II. 1. "... WE HAVE CONSTANT DOUBTS ABOUT THE REALITY OF OURSELVES..." (IMREH 2008)

The narrative structure of Rakovszky's second novel is more complex than *A kigyó árnyéka [The Shadow of the Snake]*, because in the latter the narrative voice of the 17th-century autobiography is completely unified. On the first four pages of *A hullócsillag éve [The Year of the Falling Star]*, there are seven letters.

Six of these are short, confidential, and even intimate private letters addressed to one of the key figures of the novel, Flóra (respectively to her husband) by relatives and close acquaintances, friends (one of them is Flóra's love letter written to her husband before giving birth in hospital), and the seventh is a formal letter from the guardianship authorities also addressed to Flóra. The letters might have been found in the family letter box by somebody investigating the family past. The dates of the short messages indicate the time of the novel (the 1950s), and their content also helps to understand the text of the novel, which conceals and omits a lot of information. The characters of the novel are the representatives of marginal social groups excluded by the authorities in the given historical period, people who are also affected by personal life traumas. Sometimes the letters of supporting characters also appear in the text of the novel (in this case without the exact date) as concrete evidence (documents) of the distant past.

The backbone of the novel is made up by the one-year (referred to in the title!) observations of a six-year old girl, her experiences of the world. The story is not told in a first person singular voice, but by an omniscient narrator. As stated by Orsolya Kolozsi: “it is a child who sees, but it is a mature, omnipotent reporter who speaks. The adult’s language (voice) and the child’s point of view (perspective) are interconnected...” (KOLOZSI 2005). A similar conclusion is made in the critique of Tamás Tarján too: “...the main voice partially arrives through the filter of the knowledge, vocabulary and perceptions of a more mature ego. It is quite risky to identify the narrator with Piroska in her thirties (?), because certain signs indicate that her knowledge is beyond the possible knowledge of the adult protagonist. However, the narrator does not give the impression of an external, omniscient narrator.” (TARJÁN 2009) The limitations of the narrator’s omniscience (and his/her ironic reflections) are exhibited when the contexts, events, human relationships overheard from adult conversations are very often not understood by the little girl, who constantly spends her time with adults, or are not understood precisely or taken literally by her (for example she visualizes the meaning of expressions such as “*fall up*” or “*tears down my waist*”).

László Márton reads *A hullócsillag éve* [*The Year of the Falling Star*] as an autobiographical novel, the self-portrait of a young person, in which “...the narrator’s space is created by the hidden incongruence between the adult mind and the child mind.” However, he claims that with the passionate depiction of Piroska’s character “biographical continuity between the author and the protagonist is destroyed. One of the consequences of this damage is that the »adult«-story in the novel is not started and not finished, and Piroska is provided space not in the story, but in prophetic perceptions and emotional impulses.” (MÁRTON 2006) An interview also emphasises that the interconnection of biography and fiction was only the writer’s dilemma: “...while I was

trying to force remembering, nothing came to my mind, when I decided that it was going to be – at least partially – fiction, I was liberated” (IMREH 2008).

Sándor Bazsányi states that it is a great task for the writer to “find adult language for child experience so that the child does not become an adult. This task: the taming of the whimsical interconversion of the author’s and the character’s mind is solved successfully by the author in most cases.” (BAZSÁNYI 2006) Tamás Tarján points out that Piroska “...as a protagonist is neither the object, nor the subject, but the medium of the description, a kind of mask that does not reveal anything” (TARJÁN 2009). Orsolya Kolozsi has a very similar point of view: “the external observer, mediator of the stories, a medium-like figure...with the function of collecting the stories and creating a meeting point where all the others can be linked” (KOLOZSI 2005). And while making more or less accurate observations about the world, she is learning about its structure and operation, she is looking for her own position in it and makes an attempt to construct herself slowly.

One specific feature of Piroska’s voice is that it narrates a relatively few events, on the other hand, it discloses a lot of visual descriptions and dialogues. Visual descriptions – faces, objects, interiors, forest details – are meticulously precise and passionately suggestive: shaded adjective phrases, prolific similes, long lists, sentences without verbs. As a result, there are frozen moments and still images. As the speaker’s memories are projected, it seems as if the recipient was looking at old family photos. Tamás Tarján suggests reading the novel as a photo album, which enables the suspension of continuous reading, this is the free choice of the order of chapters recording photo-like frozen moments (memories): “The photo album is a type of documentation and reconstruction, in which real life is followed by capturing and selective memory elementarily and hopelessly (hopelessly and elementarily) and the moment is stopped

– organized into a larger whole. The collection of pictures and their combination can be changed, emphasis can be shifted, they can move on their own, too.” (TARJÁN 2009)

Piroska watches the surrounding people with constant interest; she is especially fond of their facial expressions, the signals of emotions. These figures move within invisible concentric circles in relatively tight space (the nuclear family deep inside, then the neighbourhood seen every day, her mother’s colleagues, the less frequently seen relatives, acquaintances, friends). She rarely calls them by names, rather by indicating their family relationship (mother, grandmother, uncle, Nenne), respectively uses constant adjectives to distinguish them, which show their most striking external characteristic features: *woman with a bun, beetle-browed, white-moustached, red woman, red necked, bulldog-faced, chicken-like woman, cold-eyed, giantess, stone idol*. Static visual experience is tipped out by dialogues. Piroska’s own conversations are normally recorded in indirect speech; overheard conversations are in direct speech. Many times the speaker’s identity is unclear, because it is only his/her voice that can be heard, there are no introductory or concluding sentences, the character’s identity is deducible only from the context. Revelation is made even more difficult by the fact that conversations can only be read in shreds, even more, dialogue fragments from different places and times are often layered on each other. Both the description of sensual impressions (memories of sight, smell and sound) and dialogue fragments have a cognitive function.

Piroska starts searching primarily for her own identity and “in this search the dimension of time is at stake” (RICOEUR 1997: 85). No wonder why many parts of the text reflect on this mysterious problem. The flow (course, passing) of time is especially connected with the fragility and corruptibility of things: “...nothing was wrong a minute ago and now everything is irreparable. Again and again she tries to turn back time to

the point where everything was still all right – it seems there are no obstacles, the imagined event is as clear and probable as the real one – and yet, she bumps into an invisible barrier every time, just like a fly into the window pane.” (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 12) The destruction of tiny living creatures, objects (a trodden ant, a broken porcelain doll), the horrible news of human death heard from adults (nobody lives forever) fills her with constant anxiety. Maybe this is the reason why her voice is dominated by the present tense: the otherwise continuously deteriorating world can be perpetuated in the stretched present (“Things disappear and re-appear.” – RAKOVSZKY 2005: 15), while she suspects the illusory nature of her effort of course. (“...just before the moment of separation hung over her head, waiting for it to fall down and cut time in two, into before and after. She would like to, at least somehow, mitigate the difference between have and have not, here and there. ... Bang. The door lock snapped behind her mother. The blade struck, time was split into two by one silent flash of light: her mother was here next to her a moment ago, but now she is not. There is a deep rift between the two moments with hot, salty and colourless blood bubbling out.” – RAKOVSZKY 2005: 236)

The narrative identity of Piroska unfolds in the description of sensual experiences, records of dialogue fragments and reflections on time. She defines herself in relation to others, many times by controversial characteristic features or roles: compared with the “bad” (naughty and messy) neighbour Évike she is the good girl, which is the most important value in her mother’s eyes, but often also a burden and nuisance, she is the defenceless victim of the violent kindergarten teacher, but also the ruling power over the younger and weaker Gabika. The speaker, who desires security and stability, obviously also detects that identity is not stable. It sometimes fills her with terror: “Only one careless step is enough to lose everything, even ourselves: we step out of a door and we are not the ones that we used to be, we are not even recognized by those

who used to love us” (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 72). However, other times it opens the opportunity of freedom for her: “It is her body that gives her over to chance, destruction and death – her soul walks freely here and there in the fragmented world, she can be everything at the same time, every character of every story. But her body attaches her to her name: Piroska, to her age: five years, to her fair hair, to her glasses, and to the fact that one of her front teeth sticks out more than the others and that her shoelaces always come untied (but only when she sees herself in the mirror or a shop window: otherwise she can be whoever and whatever she would like to be)” (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 12). Piroska’s voice carries the features of female writing: the poetics of everyday life, full of emotions and intimacy.

In addition to the short letters, there are four longer diary entries in the main text, which are written in italics, therefore are separated typographically as well. The diary entries are quite rhapsodic, it means they are not written regularly, every day, but many times shorter or longer periods, weeks or even months are left out (or did the implied author, who combines the novel fragments, decide to select so strictly?). The diary is one of the most personal genres, the terrain of self-revelation, self-interpretation and honesty. The diary writer is a forty-year old man, Bartha, a journalist by profession, more precisely a theatre critic, so a man who lives on writing. In the diary, Bartha also asks about identity, just like – indirectly – Piroska’s voice. But while the little girl’s interest is directed at the external, she wonders at the unknown world promising thrilling but also liberating moments with childlike innocence and charm, Bartha’s attention, who is basically disgusted by the operation of the world, is directed at himself: he carries out a merciless self-analysis, in which irony plays a great role: he takes into account the components of his identity from the outside with a cold head, that is a personality falling apart attempts to keep or re-construct itself.

The irregular entries draw the portrait of a forty-year old child, who as an adult is still dependant on his old and almost helpless father still seen as strong and powerful and on his (presumably AVO officer) lover. He is aware of his (newspaper)writer talent, but he cannot really use it. His success is also prevented by the social and historical situation too: as an intellectual he has to work in a factory as unskilled labour for a while. His inability to decide stems from his cowardice, which is proved by the fact that he does not marry his lover, because he is afraid of vulnerability. At the same time, he does not undertake the new relationship with Flóra, either. His biggest problem is that he has to obey rules that absorb his personality: he always has to live up to the expectations of others, he can never experience his own emotions, and he can never be himself. During his self-characterization, he sometimes gives way to his desires: "...in fact I would like the following: being on the way forever, on escape, or just simply in a temporary situation, where the rules are temporarily suspended" (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 295). He is also aware of the fact that ironic analysis is not enough; if he does not want to lose himself forever, he has to act as soon as possible: "...I was caught again by the strong and inexplicable feeling, which emerges sometimes, especially at this time, early in the evening: that this life I live is not mine, it is merely a mistake, an administrative error, and that there is another, a real one, I just need to find it somehow..." (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 326). He also faces existential threat, just like Piroska, however, due to his age and good writing skills he does not only formulate intuitions and suspicions, but exact reports about the conclusion that nothing makes sense: "... soul theft has occurred, irreparably. Terrible fear: as if the universe had collapsed and now black nothing would be falling inside through the hole." (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 149)

Bartha's malleable personality is located also in Piroska's voice, it is normally judged negatively by relatives, acquaintances (gyp, gigolo,

turncoat, liar), especially when it finally turns out that he is not going to become Flóra's partner. It is worth reading simultaneously Bartha's self-description in the diary and Piroška's impression of the man on the occasion of a visit in Pest: "...my face without glasses is soft and foggy, it is not even a face, but rather the possibility of a face, a kind of face I have nothing to do with" (RAKOVŠZKY 2005: 149).

"The man who opened the door to them is like a fog cloud. As if his facial features were not able to make up a whole final face: he is seen differently each time. It is only his glasses that always remain the same." (RAKOVŠZKY 2005: 251) The theme of both quotations is uncertain, blurred identity. The last sign of Bartha's loss of identity is the news that after his emigration in 1956 (the only decision that is his own) he works as a hotel receptionist in Vienna and practically lives a passive life, it means that he gave up the idea of working in journalism, in creativity. Compared with the stretched present of Piroška's voice, the past tense in the diary emphasizes finiteness, which is a typical feature of the episode-like entries quilted with Bartha's self-reflections and daily experiences.

II. 2. "YELLOW, BLUE AND RED BUTTERFLIES ARE FLUTTERING ON A SILLY BROWN SKIRT" (RAKOVŠZKY 2005: 22)

In the essentially matriarchal-structured world of the novel (KALUGYER 2010) Piroška is brought up among women, who give her typically female knowledge: this knowledge is characterized by caring, serving, adaptation, the passivity of acceptance, the unbelievably strong instinct to survive, the ability to organize everyday life and to aestheticize the micro-environment, respectively emphasizing femininity, making the body attractive, the desire to attract and the tendency to exercise power in secret.

The novel's central figure is Piroška's mother, Flóra. As indicated by her name (flower), she is a blossoming pretty young woman; her life events and her slant of life are the focus of the letters, the little girl's

perceptions and even certain parts of Bartha's diary (break-up is revealed here, since Piroska cannot know about these happenings). After a short marriage, Flóra becomes a widow with her one-year old daughter (we are informed by the letter of the guardianship authority). Therefore, she is forced to take over the role of breadwinner in the family: she starts to work in an office. (Since the "story" takes place in the 1950s, this would also happen without the loss of her husband.) Her status was changed due to family trauma and historical-social changes. The husband was probably of noble origin (his name, Kürthy, refers to this), he lived on the profit of his estates during his second marriage too (this fact can be found out in the letters), and Flóra married him as a bourgeois girl in Pest. As one of the consequences of the communist turn, both social classes were impoverished, deprived of their property, thrown to the periphery. Flóra is a sensible, clever woman (according to her older brother, Feri, she was an excellent student at school), presumably, she would have achieved more if she had continued her studies. In the office, where she works as a typist with many other people, she is acknowledged for her precision and workload (they also mention that she might be taken by her boss to his new workplace). As it is expected, she often works overtime, but she seems to do it readily. As far as traditional female roles are concerned, she is a failure: she has difficulties with keeping the household, she is unable to tidy up, she cannot cook and is tired of looking after children. These activities are carried out by Nenne, who is, according to the official version, a distant relative looking after the little girl as Flóra's former nanny. However, practically, she is a servant and represents the lifestyle and habits of an old world.

The modification of Flóra's social status causes changes in her identity as well. Her life is filled with mechanical work and looking after her child. She tries to suppress her female sexuality, which is clearly made evident by the fact that she prefers male clothes, baize trousers and

breeches. Her husband's daughter from his first marriage regularly sends her elegant and fine clothes from Italy, but Flóra prefers to sell these items to wealthier or more demanding women so that she can buy firewood and food, instead of emphasizing her femininity. The people around encourage her to take care of her appearance more, in that case she would also be able to find a supporting partner more easily. However, she keeps a sequined nightdress, a more intimate piece of clothing, which is later used as a tool of seduction. The luxury item of clothing made of unknown material is admired both by Piroska and Nenne, who considers it as a fabulous dress, almost a magical object: “That thing is almost non-existent, it is transparent and thin as a spider's web: just like Cinderella's ball dress, it could fit in a nutshell... Golden glitter on the breast of the nightdress... Fairies might be wearing such a thing; they must have been wearing this kind of thing when they surrounded Iluska raised from her death. The mother shakes the tiny item of clothing and lifts it up high holding its shoulders so that it is lit by lamplight. As if she had caught an almost invisible creature and was holding it by the straps of clothes. Sparks are snapping, the transparent, pleated skirt was rustling in the air: the creature perhaps wanted to escape.” (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 200–201) The quotation comes from the centre of the novel.

Being persuaded, Flóra tries to find a partner. She meets Bartha, an old acquaintance of hers, accidentally; he might have been attracted to her many years before. The time and place of their irregular meetings are determined by the man, who keeps their dates in secret (he has another girlfriend). Flóra is filled with hope that their relationship can become permanent. She is mainly impressed by the man's knowledge and occupation. (The woman has cultural needs: she goes to the theatre and concerts anytime she can.) Fed up with uncertainty, Flóra – for the first and the last time in the story – becomes an acting woman, who definitely takes control of her destiny: she initiates a holiday together

without the child. During the hot and later on suddenly colder days, the idea is formulated that their future would be ensured only by crossing the border: on one hand both of them would have to give up their usual, relatively independent lifestyle, on the other hand, in order to get rid of the shades of the past and the present they would have to leave the country (which had favourable historical circumstances that time). However, the days spent together at the lake Balaton separate them forever: Bartha is frightened of responsibility and is scared away by the vision of a peaceful but boring bourgeois future because of the pressure to comply. The sign of disgust is the ironic description of Flóra's sequined nightdress, which employs the special vocabulary of the theatre critic: "...her nightdress looked like the khyton of a transparent, Greek plaster statue imitation; what is more, it had golden sequins on its chest glittering fantastically and ridiculously in the faint moonlight. She was like a minor character from a light opera in a strange costume, who had mistaken the door and found herself in the scenery of another play, but I also felt as if I had captured an unearthly, woodland creature, a fleeing fairy or a dryad in the slightly musty bed linen." (RAKOVSKY 2005: 327) The transformation of Cinderella is unsuccessful, therefore, her redemption does not occur.

Piroska's voice does not reveal to what extent Flóra is borne by the break up. The little girl is not really interested in the man, who turns up only rarely. With increasing intensity, her sympathy is turning to their tenant, who has represented a certain kind of father substitute for her since he moved in. Due to the man's stronger and stronger adherence, his consistent courtship and the advice of friends and relatives, Flóra agrees to the marriage almost unnoticeably. Again, her decision was manipulated by the need to live up to other people's expectations, respectively putative expediency, because she does not feel passionate affection for the man. Moreover, she is forced to give up her relative independence, because her new husband starts to tell her what to do after a while, even about her

clothes and what to wear. He burns her breeches for example (by this he deprives her of a certain stage of her life). The woman's approval is the sign of complete submission. Flóra's greatest problem is her suppression of emotions, which can be rooted in the trauma of the loss of her husband, carefulness, suspicion, mistrust and lack of self-confidence. Her environment (e.g. relatives, female friends) considers her strong, and her masculine feature as something to be respected. Her early death caused by female disease (uterine cancer) can be the consequence of lack of joy, constant limitations and the permanent inner conflicts with female roles. This fact is revealed from an English dialogue fragment (this is the only time that an event happening twenty years later is included in the voice of Piroška). The function of including a text in a foreign language is alienation. Flóra's greatest effort is the moderation and control of emotions, desires and passion, which she achieves by huge self-discipline and will. This is registered by a minor character as follows: “You look like a volcano that cannot erupt or a genie in a bottle who cannot shoot the cork out...” (RAKOVŠZKY 2005: 244).

The medium-narrator adapts to this female model. Piroška is a semi-orphan child, who does not have any memories about her father who died very early (presumably of a sudden illness). However, both spiritually and physically she looks like her father, therefore, she is the guardian of his memory. She is extremely strongly attached to her mother; she is tormented by constant anxiety that she is going to lose her mother that is why she always wants to be with her. When Flóra does not spend all her time after work with her, she becomes hysterical and starts to blackmail her. The child is very important for her mother, as it is frequently emphasized in front of relatives and friends, at the same time, the mother is also a victim of childcare, because it is because of her daughter that she gives up the opportunity to express herself, to have a social life or find a new partner. (This is demonstrated by suppression, when she

outlines her plan of emigration to Bartha, in the trance of the vision of a better future she almost forgets about her child completely.) Due to the hidden tension and burden of sacrifice she behaves coldly and rigidly with her daughter. In these situations Piroska sees her face as a glass mask and her mother as unapproachable and unreachable: “She was hers for the last time today on the train, but only partially: she was staring with empty eyes, only her body was present. She tried to take possession of that body at least; she sat in her lap and buried her face in the crook of her neck. But her mother continued to be somewhere else, not where she physically was, on the hot, smelly artificial leather seat, but somewhere outside among the pale fields, sparse forests and unexpected little ponds surrounded with red reeds and sand heaps.” (RAKOVSKY 2005: 246)

Physical contact is important for the child, for example she feels comfortable, when during a visit to relatives they have to sleep together on a narrow bed, and the two of them fit only when she curls up in fetal position in her mother’s lap (ideal state: it recalls the memory of the unity and wholeness of the two bodies). However, the rare moments of identification are not reached by physical contact, but music: humming the French chanson learned from her mother brings her security for example in the exile of the kindergarten (even if she does not understand the meaning of the words): “The French words create an invisible bond between her and her mother, maintain her secret dominance over this whole terrible world – over the children running around, screaming, calling her “spectacled snake” and ignoring her, and also over the teachers that she is frightened of and hates” (RAKOVSKY 2005: 182). Piroska often asks her mother to sing. Flóra usually sings folk songs in the intimate moments before sleep. One of her favourites sometimes continues even in her dream with the promise of complete liberation and at the same time the nightmare of total destruction: “In a green forest, a plain field, lives a bird. Stifled, glowing voice. Half asleep, she realizes

that her mother is that bird: she has escaped from somewhere and now she is flying above the shrunk, anthill sized cities with large and calm wing flaps. She is sitting on her back and in her dream she knows with certainty that both of them hold onto the invisible thread of melody, this keeps them up in the air: if the thread is thorn, both of them will tumble into the black shaft of unconsciousness.” (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 361)

The little girl is more mature than her age, for example she can read though she does not go to school yet. Early maturity is also caused by growing up among adults, especially older people. Her highly accurate observations, sensual impressions, imagination and dreams often dissolve the boundaries between the real and the mythical world. One example is the scene of hair washing, when she sees her mother's wet locks as lively bright black snakes (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 21). Many times, she understands the hidden connections of the world through fairy tales: according to Cinderella's tale the dress brings transformation, it assures becoming an amazing woman (sequined nightdress, the bridal ornament made of dog's milk); according to the message of Snow White and Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf (the shadow theatre as Christmas present) the world's threats can be tamed and eliminated (she does not choke when the violent nursery teacher forces her to eat the meat, and when she is stranded, she manages to escape from the man wearing a beret, presumably a paedophile. She learns about the functions of female body (menstruation, sexual act, giving birth) from the little girl next door, not from her mother or nanny (who probably find it too early). Her unfolding femininity is targeted at control and possession as opposed to her mother's submissive acceptance and passive behaviour. She experiments with it with the little boy next door, Gabika. Upon the example of the wedding in the neighbourhood, she is wrestling with her little friend in the meadow, while a certain change of roles also takes place: "...she feels she will take revenge for everything now, though what that everything is,

she cannot tell: maybe it is that plenty of waiting in vain, that Gabika has got a father and a mother, grandmother and a lot of cousins, that he is not only hers. (...) The red sunshine behind her closed eyelids, the flouncing body under her chest, hair and thigh, as if she was sitting on a horse, galloping on a large white horse into the red fog exfoliating in front of her obediently. Some confusing nonsense comes to her mind, something she heard from little Éva: »...man is on top«. Now she is on top, so now she is the Grand Vizier and the groom and Gabika is the bride and the face-veiled Turkish imprisoned woman.” (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 312) In such case she is similar to the demonic E. in Bartha’s diary. She is trying her power also on the tenant: “This man here is hers, her toy; she can do with him whatever she wants” (RAKOVSZKY 2005: 357). The man allows her to do so, because he knows: his way to Flóra in fact leads through the little girl. Therefore, the man and the little girl *circumvent* the woman, who – though without too much conviction and enthusiasm – accepts the rules of the game.

Piroska spends most of her time with Nenne, the small, hunchbacked old woman, who looks after her during the day while her mother is in the office. Nenne represents service and defencelessness in one person: in return for some modest board and lodging she is always available, she helps with the housework, childcare, taking care of the ill, but she cannot make decisions about her own life (when they get the message from Piroska’s uncle, she has to move to him immediately to help his family). One of the most powerful scenes of defencelessness is the one of forced bathing: Nenne does not like bathing, so she is grabbed by Pista and Flóra, is taken to the bathroom and washed despite her vehement protest. Piroska is half asleep when she perceives the event: her surreal vision includes strange creatures with two heads, wreathing and colourful shades, and the image of Nenne sulking because of her lost dignity reminds her of a dead animal. So Nenne is a creature balancing on the

boundary of the human (nanny), the animal (dead animal), the fabulous (elf-like creature) and the transcendental (guardian angel) world.

And what are men like in this world? In the first half of the novel they are mostly dead, only present in objectified memories in the form of letters, portraits, old everyday objects kept as relics. Piroska is averse from live, flesh-and-blood men: the neighbour, Mr. Pászler deprives the world of its magic with his scientific explanations (for example he asserts that there are no angels), her uncle is loud and whimsical, when she has to stay with him, she almost gets physically sick. The diary shows that Bartha dislikes himself, he cannot meet the expectations of masculinity: he does not control his own fate, he is subject to the will of his almost helpless father and dominant girlfriend; he prefers stretching in happy passivity and refuses every kind of responsibility. He understands making love as sacrifice presented to Mother Goddess (he wishes to be both her lover and her son), he is terrified that he is not good enough for the demonic woman (on one hand he is alerted by the outburst of rage, on the other hand he is filled with anxiety because of E.'s occupation and role in power). He cannot accept Flóra (and the lifestyle connected with her) either. The choice between the two women is postponed; he even imagines the three of them living together. Bartha's crisis is the failure of his own masculinity (BALAJTHY 2010: 28). He escapes from this state and goes west, resigns himself to the boredom of being a porter, it is rumoured that he lives on the side of a dominant woman similar to E.

After ten years of total defencelessness, Pista, the tenant comes back home from the Gulag to find out that he has lost everything (wife, flat). That is why he wants to find a new, safe home so desperately as soon as possible. He does not grab the opportunity offered by open borders, he insists on staying in his homeland (as opposed to Flóra, who plays with the idea of emigration). As if he was trying to catch up with lost time: he aims to get back to the place from which he was expelled as soon as

possible. He finds a job, then due to his determination, from a tenant he becomes a family member: a husband and a father. Flóra is persuaded to get married especially by her environment and her daughter, her decision is not driven by emotions, but by practicality. The previously adaptable man, who offered his services, starts to exercise power as the head of the family: controls the life of Flóra, Piroska and Nenne.

The bottom view of everyday life clearly shows how the authoritarian system interferes with the life of ordinary people: men, women, children are all defenceless, both physically and psychologically. The consequence of adaptation ensuring survival is that they often have to give up their identity. Therefore, *A hullócsillag éve* [*The Year of the Falling Star*] is the novel of identity crisis.

III. VS: the Hinterland of a Monogram

III. 1. COUNT SAROLTA/SÁNDOR VAY:

A MAN-DRESSED WOMAN WRITER (NOVELISTIC LIFE)

Sarolta Vay, later (also) publishing under the name Sándor Vay is an unusual figure of Hungarian literature. She was born in a prestigious aristocratic family in 1959 in Gyón, which today belongs to Dabas. The little girl's father, László Vay, the crown guard of Archduke Joseph, made her wear boy's clothes, taught her horse riding, fencing and sent her to university in Budapest, Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig. As the income from family estates declined steadily, and was not enough to live on after a certain time, Vay was forced to change her lifestyle: she earned a living as a journalist. She published in several newspapers, for example in *Vasárnapi Újság*, *Egyetértés*, *Új Idők*, *Pesti Hírlap*, *Képes Családi Lapok*, *Országos Hírlap*, *Debreczeni Hírlap*, as it was fashionable during that time,

usually under a pseudonym (in addition to Sándor Vay she used names such as D’Artagnan, Floridor, Vayk, Celesztin). In her articles, he tried to record the traditions, values and important personalities of the life of declining Hungarian nobility. Vay was a talented, witty author: her book *Régi magyar társasélet* [*Old Hungarian Social Life*] published in 1900 under the pseudonym D’Artagnan was a sensation. Her productivity and popularity is supported by the fact that the 10 volumes of her collected writings were published during her lifetime by the *Országos Monográfia Társaság* [*National Monograph Society*] in 1909 (some volume titles from the series: *Pestvármegyei históriák* [*Stories of Pest County*], *Udvari dámák leveleiből* [*From the Letters of Courtly Ladies*], *A Királyné poetája* [*The Queen’s Poet*], *A palatinus-huszárok* [*The Palatine Hussars*], *Lavotta szerelmei és egyéb elbeszélések* [*Lavotta’s Lovers and Other Short Stories*], *Megfakult írárok* [*Faded Writings*]). The nearly 2000 pages were published in elegant leather binding with black and white illustrations.

However, after her death (1918), both her figure and her work were quite quickly forgotten. Recently, three volumes evoked her memory: in 1986 the Magvető Kiadó published *Régi magyar társasélet* [*Old Hungarian Social Life*] in the *Magyar Hírmondó* series (VAY 1986), and in 2006 the Pont Kiadó published *Európa bál* [*Europe Ball*] (VAY 2006), a collection of articles and short stories indicating Sarolta Vay as the author. In 2009, the 150th birthday anniversary of Vay, in the spirit of cultivating local literary traditions the self-government in Dabas published *Virág borul minden rögre* [*Flowers Bow onto Each Sod*] (VAY 2009), the poems of Sándor Vay and a narrative poem titled *Lea*, which were published in the 1870s and 1880s mostly in *Családi Lapok* edited by Emília Kánya and in other newspapers such as *Magyarország* and *Nagyvilág*.

Countess Sarolta Vay lived in an age which offered quite a narrow life sphere for a woman limited to the wife – mother – housekeeper triangle. She was trying to break through these limits already in her

childhood with her explicitly boyish activities (horse riding, fencing). Her educator, her father's friend, the erudite war veteran from the 1848/49 Hungarian revolution Dániel Kászonyi brought her up in liberal spirit. She escaped from the girls' institute and travelled all over Europe, went to university in a time when girls could hardly attend higher education institutions. She was wearing male clothes, smoking a cigar, swearing, duelling, as a typical feature of freelance intellectual journalists her favourite places were cafés, editorial offices, theatres and brothels. He was also called the Hungarian George Sand, which was only partially valid for Vay's lifestyle and identity, because she did not indicate her need to belong to men only by her clothes, but she also called attention to herself with her scandalous love affairs with women, which report about her sexual orientation, too. Already at the age of 13, she ran away with an English girl from a boarding school for girls, she told her she was in fact a boy in disguise. Later she made court to the actress Mari Hegyesi desperately though hopelessly. In Nyíregyháza, while she was reporting about the Tiszaeszlár Affair, the blood libel and trial of the murder of Eszter Solymosi, she seduced and ran away with actress Emma Eszéki, whom she married in front of a pseudo priest. However, after a while marriage became imprisonment for her, so she left her "wife" and soon fell in love with a teacher from Klagenfurt, Mari Engelhardt, whom she married, again in front of a pseudo priest. Meanwhile, Vay indebted, she borrowed a larger amount of money from her "father-in-law" with the deposit of a non-existing secretarial job. However, the suspicious father-in-law found out the truth and denounced her. Vay was held in prison on remand, where her real sex was revealed. Dr. Birnbacher, forensic doctor, prepared a detailed report about her, based on which she was declared insane, this is mentally ill, and she was acquitted.

Thanks to strengthening feminist and gender studies and research in Hungary during the last one or two decades, Sarolta/Sándor Vay got

into the centre of attention again because of her special biographical figure, rather than because of her literary works. Anna Borgos published an excellent essay on Vay’s violation of gender roles (BORGOS 2009: 123–135). The essay reveals that contemporary psychiatrists and first sexologists were highly concerned with Vay’s case: e.g. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, an Austrian psychiatrist used the forensic report in his work *Psychopathia Sexualis*, and it is also mentioned by the British Havelock Ellis. Borgos calls Vay a ‘passing woman’, a woman changing her sex, but she finds it possible to use expressions such as lesbian or transsexual for the description of her sexual orientation. The essay attributes masculine self-identity to Vay, who was aware of crossing the border, while “she was forced to adapt to social and gender norms and to identify with them” (BORGOS 2009: 132). Deception worked so successfully that her female partners (lovers) accepted her as a man, which might be astonishing and ridiculous for people in the modern age, however, in the last decades of the 19th century the functions of the body and sexuality were taboo topics, and young girls’ moral education did not include any kind of information about sexuality. Vay’s biological sex was probably well-known in her childhood environment, by a few friends; her behaviour was accepted as a fad and extravagance. Others were deceived by her disguise and masculine behaviour. Anna Borgos states: “As a woman attracted to women, heterosexual male lifestyle was the only opportunity for her to preserve her traditional lifestyle without confrontation with her environment – which would be unavoidable as a lesbian woman” (BORGOS 2009: 133).

III. 2. COUNT SÁNDOR/SAROLTA VAY:

THE FEMALE GENTLEMAN (BIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL)

Zsuzsa Rakovszky published her third novel in May 2011 under the title VS, (one of) the narrator(s) and at the same time the central figure is

Count Sándor Vay, born as Sarolta Vay. The title VS is therefore ambiguous: on one hand it refers to the initials of the protagonist-narrator, on the other hand, with the Latin abbreviation of versus meaning inversion, turn, change, it refers to the problematic nature of social and biological sex, as it was highlighted by critical reviews published almost immediately after the publication of the book. János Szegő claims that e.g. the novel draws the portrait of a person “who moved on the unstable borderline between the possible and the impossible, and who found a secure home in otherwise unbearable love desire, malleable fiction and the protecting monogram including both man and woman” (SZEGŐ 2011). Rakovszky uses the well-known events of Vay’s life taken from various sources (memoires, confessions, letters, obituaries, forensic reports, and literary narrations), the places, people, events largely correspond with reality. However, Rakovszky’s work is not an explicitly biographical novel, it is rather a large lyrical portrait (MARGÓCSY 2011), which shows the rhapsodically waving passions and sufferings of a romantic soul.

The portrait – just like a puzzle – is compiled of texts of different genres. The novel’s framework is given by Vay’s prison diary, which starts on 1 November 1889 and finishes on 29 December (more precisely finishes with a text written more than a decade later). There are no daily entries, the texts vary in length, and they usually reflect the prisoner’s state of mind, respectively report on prison encounters (the parts recording dialogues are important: the visits of the lawyer, prison doctor, and the ex-wife mean self-confrontation). The diary includes poems, which are the tools of self-therapy in the process of imprisonment, which guarantee the maintenance of spiritual freedom and the creative-intellectual form of existence in the prison environment. In addition to the poems, the diary also includes unsent letters to the wife. A significant part of the novel is made up by autobiography, which is written by Vay on the request of the prison doctor. Dávid Szolláth claims that “Vay does not have an independent voice and

perspective in any of the discourses. The independency of her own voice is limited by the implicit authorial voice, either by the indication of the author's additional knowledge or by ironical settings. We can easily get the impression that the first person singular narration consists of two voices, and it is difficult to determine whether we hear the voice of the puppet or the voice of the ventriloquist artist, who is holding the puppet in his or her hand. Only relative independency is allowed to the narrators by the implicit author.” (SZOLLÁTH 2012) The personal voice of the diary, the poem, the letter and the autobiography full of passion is interrupted by the official, objective, professional notes of the forensic doctor, which also include conversation with the accused (SCIPIADES 2011). Dr. Birnbacher speaks the language of the 19th-century pre-Freudian psychology and positivist science (SZOLLÁTH 2012), the obsolescence of which is ironically indicated by the implicit author.

The central problem and purpose of autobiography is not really the detailed recollection, inventory and record of life events, but the creation of her subjective identity exposed to her desires, feelings and obsessions, the justification of her/his (male) identity. The narrator eagerly insists that the most important value for her is loyalty to herself, and in this spirit, her manifestations are imbued with the deepest sincerity. Meanwhile, the outside world constantly accuses her of disregarding the order of nature, respectively of the subversion of morality. As Ferenc Takács argues, VS “stands against the worlds of normality as a kind of »abnormal«, i.e. a norm-breaking, transgressive anti-Self, who lives in an anti-world created-imagined by herself, until she can live there: in the *counter-factuality* of desire, imagination and language that exists only in a conditional form” (TAKÁCS 2011). In an interview, Rakovszky said that she was interested in “what kind of life can a person have, whose own picture of himself or herself is the complete opposite of the surrounding objective reality” (SCIPIADES 2011).

Vay in the novel often finds herself in a situation when her imagined world and the real world are sharply distinguished, and her self-deception becomes obvious. Two emphatic passages can be found in the text to illustrate the above. The first passage describes an event in her adolescence, when she arrives home and despite her refusal, her grandmother dresses her in girl's clothes and forces the two of them to look into the mirror together. A strange face is staring at her in the mirror, it is someone she cannot identify with, so in her rage, she smashes her mirror image with her fist. The second passage is about the scene of the medical examination, when the midwife – she calls her hellish woman or hangman – determines her biological sex, after which she responds with nervous fever. The intensity of resistance is demonstrated by anger in the first case and by the abnormal lesion of the physical state in the second.

The narrator is highly attracted to those people who, similarly to her, move between different domains e.g. they create the world of ideas or desires for themselves. Her educator, Dániel Kászonyi is a figure like this; he illustrates the already vanished magical world of his memories of the revolution again and again to the susceptible adolescent (in the literary or artistic sense of the word, filling the bleak present with real historical personalities and allegorical figures). Another determining person is her Mephistophelian mentor, Zarándy, who introduces her to the world of artists and night life, but on the other hand, in order to implement his rather vague political and social ideas he regularly extorts money from her and blackmails her with revealing her identity, and even more, her imprisonment is caused directly by him. Both Kászonyi and Zarándy chase ideas, but they know exactly where the borderline between idea and reality is, therefore they cross it without any problems, but Vay chases illusions.

The theatre is an important, attractive and at the same time symbolic setting in the life of the novel's protagonist. The performances enable

her to escape from the world of realities and emotionally identify with what can be seen on the stage. That is why she is astonished when the adored actress, the unreachable Mari H. says that actors are aware of the fact that what they do is only playing and they never confuse the theatrical world with reality. After this, Vay argues in vain with the famous Shakespearean sentence: if the real world is a stage, why would not Mari accept her frantic love at least for a brief hour. However, Mari does not intend to live according to this rule. The anguish of unfulfilled desire is replaced by the surfeit of fulfilled desire: after Vay runs away with her newest love in an adventurous, romantic way, she finds the theatrical behaviour of her actress “wife” at home in her “false marriage” directly disappointing. As a response to the forensic doctor’s question of whether she ever thought of becoming an actor, Vay, whose whole life was based on imitation, referred to her physical unsuitability and confessed: “...I totally lack the ability to pretend to be someone else, other than me” (RAKOVŠKY 2011: 56). This sentence is found at the beginning of the novel, when the reader unsuspectingly accepts it as a sincere self-confession, and in fact, it this statement seems ironical only during the second reading.

Another place of confrontation is the mental asylum, which is visited by Vay and her actor friends. The actors go there so that they can act out scenes of madness more authentically on the stage, but for Vay it is the projection of her future fate: the person who sticks to his or her misconceptions to the end, even when confronted with contradicting facts, he or she will sooner or later be declared insane and closed into a mental asylum. However, the more experienced do not dissuade or divert the protagonist. She even finds a kindred spirit in the patient who believes he is a dog. Later, paradoxically, she is declared insane because of her insistence on misconception, and as a result, she is acquitted, so she is released from prison.

Vay constantly blurs the borderlines of the imagined (desired) world and the real world. This is supported by the frequently appearing motif of water. She hopes to be able to preserve her greatest value: her self-identity. Self-identity could be secured by the harmony of the body and the soul, but the desired harmony is not reached: her soul believed to be male in her female body regularly fills her with the experience of painful split, which is primarily caused by the feedback of the cruel outside world intruding into the idyll of her imagined world. As for the external, Vay plays male roles; however, she also carries a lot of features that are considered explicitly female: she cannot regulate her feelings, she often has hysterical outbursts, crying fits, unstable nerves, and she often mentions the idea is suicide though she never means it seriously. These are rather negative qualities which are balanced with several positive features: emphasizing the omnipotence of love, commitment to gentle emotions, devotion, unselfishness, readiness to make (sexual) pleasure. In one of her last diary entries she describes her vision caused by morphine that she believes to be poison: the first visual picture is about a joy parade following the defeat of tyranny – this is the male side (politics, public appearance, celebration), the second visual picture takes place in the garden: she is walking with Mari, the nice guest, a distant relative, this time in female clothes!, showing the gentle vibrations of the natural environment – this is the female side (family idyll, private sphere, everyday life). The latter is more powerful, but this is what she cannot undertake openly, because her environment does not accept a woman's physical affection towards another woman.

The language of the novel deserves special attention. When writing the novel, Rakovszky must have studied the language of the periods of Romanticism, Biedermeier and Art Nouveau. When reading Vay's poems and articles, Rakovszky must have noticed what is also declared by Anna Fábri in her studies on female history, that "she imitated the

male storyteller and the old-fashioned gentleman deceptively” (FÁBRI 1996: 169). This means that literature, writing a literary work is a cultural system of codes, which can be learned (TÖRÖK 2011). The language created in VS is considered highly exaggerated or even parodical by some critics (BAZSÁNYI 2011) or a little bit too emotional, sentimental by others (KÁROLYI 2011). The narrator’s voice can evoke the male speakers of sentimental or romantic diary or epistolary novels, but at the same time the novel has a number of other genre-poetical characteristics that are usually counted as typical features of female writing: personal subgenres (letter, diary, lyric poetry, autobiography), pervasive emotions, the unimportant events of everyday life that are spiritually sensational, the fine picture of physical environment, the stations of the search for identity. When the (biographical) author, who considers himself/herself a man, remembers past events and figures through an outsider or a witness narrator, he makes it seem as male, but when s/he writes about himself/herself, inner feelings and soul, during writing s/he cannot hide his/her female voice. Rakovszky’s novel is the scene of this struggle. That is why the prison doctor can declare that “in my imagination I could not unite the person I received the pile of papers from with the other person whose image unfolds from the writings” (RAKOVSZKY 2011: 284).

Translated by Andrea Puskás

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ZOLTÁN NÉMETH

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW CANON IN HUNGARIAN LITERATURE – WOMEN’S LITERATURE

Abstract ●●●● The article summarizes the trends in canon formation of women’s literature in the contemporary Hungarian literary scene. It maps contemporary Hungarian women’s literature after 1989 and points out those social, political, cultural, medial, literary processes as well as trends in literary theory that led to the formation of a new women’s canon. The article also considers the role of feminist literary theory and changes taking place in postmodern literature. It interprets a few texts of the new women’s literature pointing out new ways of applying the feminine code systems.

Key words: gender, postmodern, canon, Hungarian literature

I. Introduction

Contemporary thought and reflection interpreting literature as a continuous present process describes readers’ experience with two concepts: contemporary literature is multicolored and multivoiced; in fact interpretations reflect on the differences between canons manifest in various poetic approaches and in language use. However, all canons of the present, after all, are nothing else but the sensual experience of traditions, the text’s gesture appealing to the future, the text suffering

from and at the same time presenting its own historicity. So it is no coincidence that contemporary literature does not exist in the sense that these texts listed under this category would be separable from their own linguistic system of presuppositions and the prescribing matrix of the past and of tradition.

For the reader contemporary literature however, separates itself from previous past constructions by differentiations along the lines of aesthetic and literary context. Or it places caesuras into the continuity of time projecting past and present constructions into the otherwise inseparable flow of temporality. Therefore due to the effect of the differentiating potential of varieties a body of texts will emerge for us to offer themselves as contemporary literature as opposed to the texts of the past as if to project the imagined literature of the future – justifying our ideas, suppositions and fragile interpretations as being correct.

Consequently it is better to present our interpretations framed by literary theory and literary history as a “possible variation” that can never aspire to be more than offering a kind of reading. This article would like to offer a reading that contextualizes women’s literature, a significant phenomenon of the past two decades, within the territory of literary history.

II. Canonization and Canons

II. 1. POETIC COMPONENTS OF CANONIZATION

So far, in the history of Hungarian literature women’s literature has not yet ever emerged as an independent canon forming element. It may be considered significant that this process takes place within the context of contemporary Hungarian literature. In general, we may accept the theoretical perspective that the major canonizing force is based on

common language use, on the activities of interpreting and text creating communities articulating themselves along poetic systems belonging to the same paradigm. In contemporary Hungarian literature various poetics, language use paradigms and strategies exist parallel to each other. The greatest effect is surely exercised by postmodern literature ever since the 1970's when the so called postmodern turn took place in prose works (Péter Esterházy, Péter Nádas, Miklós Mészöly, Dezső Tandori, later György Petri, Imre Oravecz, Lajos Parti Nagy, András Ferenc Kovács, László Garaczi, Endre Kukorelly, Szilárd Podmaniczky, Ferenc Szijj, István Kemény, and Dániel Varró, János Dénes Orbán, Edit Gergely, Zoltán Csehy, Attila Mizser, Gergely Vida, Attila Havasi). As I will return to this later we may differentiate between three different kinds of strategies in postmodern prose works (NÉMETH 2012). The context of minimalist prose works is significant (Sándor Tar, Attila Hazai), the linguistic space of other texts, however, late Modernist language use dating back to the 1930s, seems to be ever more influential (Zsuzsa Takács, Zsuzsa Rakovszky, Gábor Schein, Krisztina Tóth). In Hungarian literature the language use of late Modernism may be connected to the periodicals of Nyugat (Dezső Kosztolányi, Lőrinc Szabó, Attila József) and Újhold (János Pilinszky, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, György Rába) and is related to the tradition of objective poetry as well.

Neoavantgarde groups and writers (Miklós Erdély, Alpár Bujdosó, Tibor Papp, Pál Nagy, Bálint Szombathy, József Juhász R.) also constitute an important aspect of contemporary Hungarian literature – we specifically have to highlight the significance of the periodical *Magyar Műhely*. National realism and writers and poets basing their system of ideas on the national-folk tradition dating back also to the 1930s (Gyula Illyés, Áron Tamási), from the 1960s onwards situate their texts in relation to the achievements of László Nagy, Ferenc Juhász, later of Gáspár Nagy and Sándor Csoóri.

These parallel forces formed by poetic features generate canonic centers, that oftentimes have debates however, this canon forming activity that is based on a list of poetic considerations are modulated, complemented or overwritten by canon forming possibilities beyond the territory of the textual as well as by considerations in reception.

II. 2. CANON FORMATION POSSIBILITIES

In contemporary Hungarian literature we may distinguish five canon forming groups that replaced the canon formation based on poetic considerations. One is constituted along the categories of center-regionality introducing spatiality as a canon forming force. The central, Budapest canon – being inevitably the strongest canon forming force – is structured around the following publishing houses: Magvető, Palatinus, PRAE.HU, Ulpus-ház, Gondolat, Kijarat, L'Harmattan, Európa Kiadó etc. and the following periodicals: *Élet és Irodalom*, *Holmi*, *litera.hu*, *Vigilia*, *Beszélő*, *2000*, *Kortárs*, *Magyar Napló*, the former *Nappali Ház* and *Sárkányfű* etc. The possible canon forming forces of the regional centers are asserted in two domains. On the one hand groups of authors are gathering around certain regional periodicals or publishing houses: we may refer to the canon forming or even “canon breaking” activities of the North-Serbian (Újvidék) *Új Symposion*, *Jelenkor* in the city of Pécs, *Előretolt Helyőrség* in Transylvania, *Bárka* in the city of Békéscsaba, or Kalligram Publishing House in Bratislava. On the other hand it is not the editorial board and authors of a significant literary magazine that constitute a canonical center but the region itself together with all kinds of its separations, role consciousness, imagined or real specificity – we may provide examples of those literary works that were published outside of Hungary more or less forming their own regional minority literary canons (Transylvanian Hungarian literature, or Slovakian Hungarian literature) on which certain literary critics and authors still insist.

Another type of possibility to structure a canon forming center is constructed along generational role consciousness. In this case it is not regional considerations but interests and values represented by generational community experience that overwrite canon forming possibilities based on peculiar features of their poetics and language use. In contemporary Hungarian literature one of the most successful projects aiming at this goal is the collection of articles *Csípesszel a lángot! [Catch the Flame by Pincers!]* (1994) or recently *Bizarr játékok [Bizarre Games]* (2010) however, it is important to refer to such (no longer published) university periodicals just as *Pompeji*, *Sárkányfű*, *Nappali Ház* – that can also be called a generational periodical – or *Irodalom Visszavág*. Moreover, generational and regional self-consciousness may have also played a role in the canonization of the group of authors in the Transylvanian *Előretolt Helyőrség*. Canonization along the lines of generational consciousness often takes place and is represented by the possibilities provided by the new media, a good example may be Telep group and its introduction to the public.

The third form of canonization is institutionalization, setting up institutional forms: book publishing, publishing periodicals, receiving prizes. The hierarchical relations are also grossly important from the aspects of canonization. The reception history of a text may be already defined by the fact whether it was published by Magvető Publishing House or as a private print; or it was published in the prestigious periodicals of *Alföld*, *Bárka*, *Holmi*, *Jelenkor*, etc, or in a periodical that is marginal from the point of view of literary values, or perhaps in an internet surface created by the author.

The next form of canonization is related to the text itself, the textual presence, that is, to the problems of reception. Literary effect, usage, rewriting and critical acclaim manifest in articles, works of synthesis, monographs, histories of literature forms the canon and are most likely

the final destinations of those possibilities that are available for the text to carve out a space for itself in memory and in the constantly forming tradition.

However, we should not forget about the fact that our subject, the canon of women's literature under formation, represents its characteristic canonical and self-representational possibilities from the aspect of reinterpreting the issue of gender. As it was mentioned above there was never a chance in Hungarian literature for women's literature to appear as an independent canon forming territory. Therefore the following question gains significance: in what ways does contemporary Hungarian literature differ from previous historical constructions, what type of effects and possibilities are available? Later I will be elaborating on the thesis that one of the most exciting territory of contemporary Hungarian literature is the forming canon and self-representation of women's literature.

III. Canon of Women's Literature

The observation that in contemporary Hungarian literature women's literature, more precisely texts offering themselves as women's literature are more and more important is due to those changes that profoundly reshaped the map of Hungarian literature. On the one hand the political-social-cultural changes, on the other hand technical-medial changes, on the third literary theoretical, and finally poetic changes perceptible in literary writing all took part in this process.

III. 1. POLITICAL CHANGES

When defining "contemporary" Hungarian literature the year 1989 is often used as a reference point for a good reason. Free market economy,

the direct influence of values of Western civilization, the agreement to become a European Union member state have exercised profound changes on the social, political and power relations in the region. The open borders, their etherealization, then their disappearance have opened up new possibilities in the cultural and literary exchange as well as within the context of a free world. All these changes have been manifest in the transformed consciousness of the position of this new generation, in the new strategies and possibilities of approaching the question of identity. In 1989 therefore the continuity that was interrupted by a forty year rule of communism has been restored, the turn was ever so successful that the region had received an outstanding opportunity – never ever seen in this form – to reach the level of developed Western democracies.

There were basic changes in literature and in literary life as well. The disappearance of censure, the appearance of democratic game rules freed literary life. Dozens of publishers and periodicals were formed then disappeared in a short time. The division among supported, tolerated and prohibited works in literature came to a halt, just as well as the only party's dictatorial control. As a movement social realism lost its meaning and its grounds. Those works that were based on tricking the censorial control, the so called double coded works, also lack their justification, these works and references became vague and unintelligible for the new generation since language itself has also went under changes after 1989. People living after 1989 missed expressions from their "dictionary" such as "five year plan", "stahanovist", "tovarish/comrade", "pioneer", etc, and they were replaced by new expressions – Russian words have already been washed out of collective memory, instead they were replaced by Anglicisms.

The make-believe unity generated from above before 1989 was shattered by natural interests deriving from the possibility of free speech.

Writers' Unions, authors' workshops were formed and they defined themselves along various canons and political values. The pluralism that broke out characteristically made literary debates free from power control exercised from above, instead they were generated along individual and group interests; due to the debates of the 1990s the multicolored nature of literary life was restored.

III. 2. MEDIA AND CANON

Book publishing becoming free from party state control, the democratization of literary life meant a unique possibility for realizing different canonizational options – therefore it meant a unique possibility for the forming canon of women's literature. However, it did not take advantage of it immediately or naturally in the Hungarian literary context of the 1990s. Lacking poetic (I will return to this problem later) and medial possibilities only in the first decade of the 21st century did a new context form that provided the opportunity. Besides the technical and medial conditions of democratization another very important aspect was the prevalence of internet use, the appearance of community sites and the expansion of networks becoming general.

The culture of literary periodicals however, have gone under basic changes due to the spreading of internet use in the past decade. On the one hand online periodicals and journals were published existing only in digital form, on the other printed literary journals have also felt the need to be represented online as well. The effect of the internet on contemporary literature is huge since it not only expanded its borders but also relativized and democratized literary life.

Namely, in literary life based on printed literature institutional positions held by the literary elite made it impossible for those authors who were excluded the canon to convey their texts for the readers since one of the main task of periodical editors and of publishing houses was

to operate the principle of selection based on hierarchy. However, possibilities offered by the internet made literary relations democratic: spending a minimum price for online publishing texts may be uploaded to the net in the form of authorial blogs or sites, therefore making the texts available for potential readership. Naturally, this process of democratization carries the risk of value relativization, a kind of value relativism revoking the value hierarchy to a great degree, as well as resulting in a basic change in readers' culture which was almost absolutely unimaginable prior to the emergence of the age of the internet.

The canon formation of contemporary women's literature also took advantage of those possibilities that were provided by the internet and the expansion of networks, therefore it is not a coincidence that in recent years women's and literary projects were born that contributed to the reinterpretation of the tradition of women's literature and expanded the framework for the self-interpretation of contemporary women's literature. For this reason *Irodalmi Centrifuga* [*Literary Centrifuge*], an online women's journal launching itself in 2003 as a literary program on radio, the site of *Nőkért.hu* and the Facebook group and critical talk show named *Rózsaszín szemüveg* [*Pink Glasses*] are all aiming at constructing a new women's canon.

III. 3. LITERARY THEORY AS CONTEXT

In relation to all these phenomena it is worth paying attention to the process of the so called boom in literary theory taking place almost simultaneously in the 1990s and partly making up, supplementing for the theoretical fallback caused by the hegemony of socialist realism and Marxist mirror theory – a number of various theoretical languages were put into use in Hungarian literature, such as reception aesthetics, deconstruction, cultural anthropology, postcolonialism or even feminist theory. From the 1990s the possible space for this theoretical discourse

became progressively articulated and it might not be too farfetched to claim that part of women's literature connected itself to this theoretical basis. The close connection between literary theory and literature itself became a general tendency from the 1990s onwards, it became a textual tendency and can mainly be connected to those young scholars who were literary authors and theoretical writers at the same time, often pursuing their doctoral degrees.

As a result of this process beginning in the 1990s and still continuing until today Hungarian postmodern feminist literary theory may present such achievements that can be regarded as equal to other trends in literary theory. In her book titled *Lánnyá válik, s írni kezd [Becoming a Girl, Beginning to Write]* (1999) Nóra Séllei searches for the possibilities of interpreting women's voice in the novels of Jane Austen, Mary Shelly and George Elliot (SÉLLEI 1999). Her other volume titled *Tükröm, tükröm... [Mirror, Mirror...]* (2001) confronts us with women's literature through the patterns of 20th century women's autobiographies (SÉLLEI 2001). Her collection of articles titled *Miért félünk a farkastól? [Why Are We Afraid of the Wolf?]* (2007) is engaged in examining the broadly understood political and interpretational possibilities of feminist literary theory however, she is brave enough to provide discourse analysis on theoretical or even ordinary sexist type of "slips of the tongue" in Hungarian literary and public life in one of her most exciting piece in the volume, *Hallgass a neve? [Her name is Silence?]* (SÉLLEI 2007: 113-139). Györgyi Horváth's collected essays titled *Nőidő [Women's Time]* (2007) is committed to the analysis of the identity formation function of historical narratives in feminist literary studies, more precisely focusing on the chances for women's literary history, on the relationship between feminism and the postmodernism, mainly on the English language tradition of feminist literary studies (HORVÁTH 2007). In her volume of studies, *A nő többször [The Woman Again]* (2002) Edina Szalay focuses on the English language

tradition of literary studies claiming a feminist perspective as well through interpreting works of the Neo-gothic (Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, Gail Godwin, Joy Williams) (SZALAY 2002). Edit Zsadányi's book entitled *A másik nő [The Other Woman]* (2006) – similarly to Nóra Séllei's last two volumes – examines, according to its subtitle, the “narrative figures of women's subjectivity” in English and Hungarian literary context (ZSADÁNYI 2006). Her book is noteworthy for representing several options for feminist literary studies, perspectives and interpretations: a feminist theoretical text is followed by an interpretation on women's literature, then an interpretation of lesbian literature is next, to close the book finally by the last piece which is on revealing patriarchal and sexist prejudices encoded in texts written by men. Therefore four large subjects of feminist literary theory are presented in her book. Three of these subjects are tackled in Anna Gács's book titled *Miért nem elég nekünk a könyv? [Why Books Are not Enough for Us?]* (2002) to make these studies important works of contemporary Hungarian feminism (GÁCS 2002). Ágnes Huszár's book titled *A nő terei [Woman's Spaces]* (2011) approaches and defines problems from aspects of politics, literature, metaphors of the city and of the nation “about the place of women within social spaces and in the virtual world of cultural representations” (HUSZÁR 2011: 13). The works of Anna Borgos may be regarded as basic since she publishes works of women's literature between the two world wars along with commentaries. Her volume written together with Judit Szilágyi *Nőírók és író nők – Irodalmi és női szerepek a Nyugatban [Women Writers and Writer Women – Literary and Female Roles in Nyugat]* (2011) proves to be a landmark work on the analysis of interwar literature (BORGOS–SZILÁGYI 2011). This book attempts to create an alternative – female – tradition in opposition to the male writers being probably the most canonical group formation gathered around the periodical, *Nyugat* (1908–1941). The female canon

set up as a parallel example focuses on the oeuvre of Margit Kaffka, Anna Lesznai, Sarolta Lányi, Sophie Török, Piroska Reichard, Szefi Bohuniczky, Márta Gyulai, Mária Kovács, Lola Kosáryné Réz and Erzsébet Kádár. Anna Menyhért's volume titled *Női Irodalmi Hagyomány [Women's Literary Tradition]* (2013) is motivated by similar considerations and analyzes works by Renée Erdős, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Minka Czóbel, Ilona Kosztolányiné Harmos and Anna Lesznai to make them part of the twentieth century Hungarian literary tradition. Menyhért criticizes the patriarchal tradition of textbook writing and the books on literary history noting that we cannot evade "retro active, restrospective tradition construction, since this is the only guarantee that today's women's literature will not be forgotten: today's writers need predecessors in order to be able to stand against them and become tradition themselves" (MENYHÉRT 2013: 19).

Apart from women's literature the codes of femininity, sexual identity and female sexuality, body culture, aspects of visuality, the contexts of psychoanalysis and trauma theory also play a role in the discourse on femininity. Anna Borgos's volume titled *Nemek között [In Between Sexes]* (2013) wishes to present a kind of "women's history", a "history of sexuality" that approaches its subject matter from many aspects (BORGOS 2013). Vera Mérő's book, *Pornográfia* (2012) interprets the relationship between pornography and female sexuality within a discursive territory of taboo subjects, in texts of "honest sex discourse", in interviews, and texts of "female emancipation" to consider the position of radical feminism a "simple demagog" (MÉRŐ 2012: 12–13).

A characteristically female genre, the tale, has also its female interpretations – works by Andrea Lovász (LOVÁSZ 2007) and Ildikó Boldizsár (BOLDIZSÁR 2013) may be mentioned as an example. Apart from these works – without giving an impression of providing a complete list – we must refer to such essential publications written in Hungarian or in

English as Anna Fábri's history of women's literature (FÁBRI 1996), or Anna Kérchy's article titled *Tapogatózások [Gropings]* (KÉRCZY 2009). We also have to list Kérchy's study on the figures of the theory of the body, Annamárai Hódosy's articles profiting from crossing feminism and deconstruction (an important reference point is the collection of essays in literary theory posted on her website!) (HÓDOSY 2011), Vera Kérchy's study on films (KÉRCZY 2006), Ilona L'Homme's PhD dissertation on *A női írók helye az irodalmi diskurzusban, 1900-1945 [The position of Women's Writers in Literary Discourse 1900-1945]* (L'HOMME 2003) or Judit Kádár *Miért nincs, ha van? A kortárs nyugati feminista irodalomkritika hatása Magyarországon [Why Is It Not, If It Is? The Impact of Contemporary Western Feminist Literary Criticism in Hungary]* (KÁDÁR 2003), the Helikon number edited by her, Anna Valachi's interpretations on the poet Attila József (VALACHI 2006), Márta Várnagy's summary on *A női irodalom és a feminista irodalomkritika Magyarországon [Women's Literature and Feminist Literary Theory in Hungary]* (VÁRNAGYI 2011), further writings by Mária Bajner, Andrea P. Balogh, Zsuzsa Selyem, Noémi Kiss, Orsolya Drozdik, Andrea Virginás and Enikő Darabos.

There are two anthologies to be suggested as remarkable collective achievements that began focusing on aspects of femininity. *Egytucat [One Dozen]* (2003) with its subtitle *Kortárs magyar írók női szemmel [Contemporary Women Writers Through the Eyes of Women]* (DÁNÉL 2003) is not only noteworthy for containing feminist critical texts on contemporary texts by male writers since – as it was noticed by Judit Kádár – the volume published in the spring of 2003, according to its preface published writings authored by young critics representing “contemporary Hungarian feminist literary theory” was in reality a volume containing only “three studies among the twelve that were based on feminist reference books or books representing a feminist perspective” (KÁDÁR 2003). The project resulting in this anthology seems to be significant for

calling attention to the articulated presence of the female perspective, to examine the possibilities of literary theoretical spaces cultivated by women opening them up – and this is a fact, even though Judit Kádár writes that “Perhaps in the entire country today there are no twelve literary critics or literary historians altogether accepting the feminist perspective, rejecting the patriarchal attitude, engaged in Hungarian literature and publishing regularly” (KÁDÁR 2003). Namely, compiling the anthology along the lines of femininity demonstrated that contemporary Hungarian literary criticism was receptive of problems to represent women’s perspective.

Another example is a volume of articles published in 2009, *Nő, tükör, írás* [Woman, Mirror, Writing] (VARGA – ZSÁVOLYA 2009) and this book may be referred to as having a strategy that points beyond the *Egytucat* [One Dozen] project. While in *Egytucat* [One Dozen] female critics interpreted works by male writers and pointed out female presence in literary theory, *Nő, tükör, írás* [Woman, Mirror, Writing] calls for the need to examine women’s texts by others – among them men. Therefore in this case the force behind the project was on analyzing women’s literature giving no excuse for male literary historians to ignore it. So this book of studies may be interpreted as a creative-interpretive force of women’s literature as extension and conquest – a strategy extended to include the group of male interpreters wishing to understand women’s literature as expressively female, as the subtitle of the volume declares: *Értelmezések a 20. század első felének női irodalmáról* [Interpretations of Women’s Literature in the First Half of the Twentieth Century].

III. 4. THE CANON FORMING STRATEGY OF WOMEN’S LITERATURE

Theoretical texts constitute only one segment, even though a significant segment of canonization. It is necessary to refer to literary texts exercising a strong influence on canons. In the case of women’s literature, it is not

only about women appearing in literature since this phenomenon is a standard, regular feature of literary history. The turn may be grasped in the fact that these texts consciously and en masse define and represent themselves as part of the female canon due to authorial intentions, furthermore they wish to be emphatically present as women's literature representing the discourse, perspectives and strategies of women's literature.

A great example of this is the volume published in 2005 by Artizánok group and titled *Éjszakai állatkert [Night Zoo]* – Anthology on Female Sexuality (BÓDIS et al. 2005) – containing 56 writings by 33 authors. The second volume in this series named *Kitakart Psyche [Uncovered Psyche]* was titled *Szomjas oázis [Thirsty Oasis]* (2007) with the subtitle: Anthology on the Female Body (FORGÁCS 2007). In 2010 two further volumes were added to the series, *A szív kutyája – Lányok és apák antológiája [The Heart's Dog – Anthology of Daughters and Fathers]* (FORGÁCS 2010a) and *Dzsungel a szívben – Lányok és anyák antológiája [In the Heart of the Jungle – Anthology of Daughters and Mothers]* (FORGÁCS 2010b).

The series in the Uncovered Psyche project offers itself as a conscious canon forming act by presenting paratextual elements. A recurring slogan of the volumes characterized as “the world of female experience” is the slogan of “this is how we see it” and “the girls are already in the pantry!” which is an exclamation, a guerilla type phrasing of breaking into the canon, or forming the canon.

We may observe several methods for forming the literary canon consciously: apart from preferring the so called typical women's subjects (body, sexuality, motherhood) we may pinpoint two important strategies. One strategy is to appoint predecessors, the ex post facto extension on the canon – this is how writings from the interwar period may be present in the volume, writings of Csinszka, Erzsébet Korzáti or Ilona Harmos.

The other strategy concerns those authors who already have a place in other canons of contemporary literature but their being published in a collective volume beyond the act of legitimizing the anthology legitimizes the project of women's literature itself or forming women's canon. The presence of writings by Alaine Polcz, Zsuzsa Takács or Krisztina Tóth in the anthologies is an example for this legitimizing act.

Namely in the four women's anthologies besides feminist authors (Zsuzsa Bruria Forgács, Agáta Gordon) those authors are also present who cannot be so directly linked to feminist writing (Zsuzsa Takács, Éva Bánki, Ildikó Noémi Nagy). The exceptionally wide group of authors represented in these anthologies refers to the fact that female problems as strategy and writing became part of the most varied authorial self-representations – texts by Virág Erdős, Zsuzsa Csobánka, Krisztina Tóth, Ildikó Lovas, Kriszta Bódis, Ágnes Rapai, Zsófia Bán, Zsuzsa Selyem, Orsolya Karafiáth, Gabriella Nagy, Éva Berniczky, Judit Ágnes Kiss, Éva Bánki, Lidi Kupcsik, etc. are listed together in this project articulated along the lines of femininity. From this point of view despite the absence of certain authors in the anthology (Rakovszky Zsuzsanna, Szécsi Noémi, Jókai Anna, Gergely Ágnes) the possibility to present women's world and poetics manifested in the colorful oeuvres of each writer still seems to be of significance.

III. 5. THE STRATEGY OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL POSTMODERNISM

The fact that from a theoretical and literary perspective in contemporary Hungarian literature we may speak of a potent, well limited women's canon is not only due to social changes after 1989, to the medial-technical prosthesis of the past one or two decades and to the boom in literary theory but it is also due to the general developmental tendencies of literature, more precisely to the inner paradigm shift within postmodern literature; postmodernism is understood as the most potent

canon forming element and center in contemporary literature and has a definitive effect on the entire Hungarian literary scene. What does it mean exactly? From the 1960s onwards basic changes occurred within postmodern literature. The so called first or early postmodernism that was balancing on the border of the late modern and postmodern, confronting existential text forming strategies with metafiction, irony, intertextual reference system¹ was gradually replaced by the so called second or areferential postmodern strategy from the late 1970s and mainly from the 1980s that used neoavantgarde nonconformist subversivity and realized a poetics definitely characterized by language games, areferentiality and parody – however, as opposed to neoavantgarde poetics it integrated the past and traditions in diverse ways.² In the early years of 2000 this type of postmodernity was replaced by the strategy of the so called third or anthropological postmodern bringing alterity, the subaltern, the subordinate and the minority on stage; with its voice and language it brought to the limelight the subjected, marginalized subject

¹ We may list the following works as early or first postmodern works: novels by Géza Ottlik *Iskola a határon* [*School at the Frontier*] (1959) and Péter Nádas *Emlékiratok könyve* [*The Book of Memories*] (1986), the book of verse by Sándor Weöres *Psyché* (1972), from the 1990's poems by Ottó Orbán, Árpád Tőzsér and István Baka, and those prose texts that may be related to magical realism and metafictional history written by Miklós Mészöly, Ádám Bodor, László Márton, Zsolt Láng, János Házy, László Darvasi, Pál Závada, Anikó N. Tóth, Pál Ficsku.

² The so called second or areferential postmodern includes the poetry of Dezső Tandori *Egy talált tárgy megtisztítása* [*Cleansing a Found Object*] (1973), the short stories by Miklós Mészöly *Alakulások* [*Formations*] (1973), Péter Esterházy's prose *Termelési-regény* [*Novel of Production*] (1979), *Bevezetés a szépirodalomba* [*Introduction to Literature*] (1986) and most of his novels, poems, plays and some of the prose work by Lajos Parti Nagy, the poetry of András Ferenc Kovács and Endre Kukorelly, The poems and plays by László Garaczi and his volume titled *Nincs alvás!* [*No sleep!*] (1992), poetry by János Dénes Orbán, Zoltán Csehy and Dániel Varró.

pushed so far to the background. This change went hand in hand with turning to questions of identity, to the political attitude of texts and to the appreciation of autobiographical genres (family history, father novels). By the years of 2000 identity poetry (János Térey), the stations of passion for an individual identity (László Lövétei Lázár), the poetics of giving voice to the subjected (Szilárd Borbély), the textual experience of gay identity (Agáta Gordon, András Gerevich, János Rosmer) and we may also understand the emergence of female identity within this context. It is a postmodern strategy in which female identity reinterprets the positions of alterity and marginality and it confronts a literary and social practice – giving a simultaneous reading on the so called social reality, social world and female identity.³

The appearance of women's literature became part of the process in which the parodistic-ironic-aferential postmodern paradigm had been gradually replaced by a type of language use characterizing anthropological postmodernism. If we take a look at the list of canons in postmodern literature from aspects of gender then it is almost shocking how women writers are missing entirely from postmodern literature using aferentiality,

³ The third or anthropological postmodern is connected to the “cultural turn” in literary theory on the one hand, on the other hand it is interested in questions of politics, the nature of the other of alterity, presenting marginal point of views, bringing them to the surface, addressing political problems, anti-mainstream attitude. All this balances on the border of fiction and referentiality, using both elements at the same time, however the concrete, interworld, transitive tendency is also very strong. The third postmodern expressively opposes power structures, it is often anti-political, stands up against totalizing patriarchal, assimilating, homogenizing and globalizing tendencies in order to guard the multi-colored nature and various traditions. In literary theory interpretations by cultural anthropology, black aesthetics, postcolonialism, postmodern feminism and ethical criticism may be connected to these works, those schools of literary theory that read identity, medium, social forces, and power exercising techniques through the language that creates them.

irony, and language games. What could be the reason? Perhaps the all-relativizing parody of language games, its often aggressive irony is absolutely incompatible with images of feminine writing of the time. With a little bit of exaggeration we may list two areferential postmodern “female” authors from the 1980s and 1990s, Jolán Sárbogárdi and Lili Csokonai – both of them are actually male writers, Lajos Parti Nagy and Péter Esterházy respectively, using pseudonyms. The two volumes written by these male writers that were published under pseudonyms had not been acclaimed at all by critics approaching the texts from a feminist literary perspective.

The novel *Csokonai Lili: Tizenhét hattyúk* [*Lili Csokonai: Seventeen Swans*] (1987) has been crititized by Éva F. Virág in 1987 and again in 1991 by Jolanta Jastrzebska; and they rated the novel as “trifling”, “non-authentic” (HORVÁTH 1998). Ineke Molenkamp-Wiltink examined *Psyche* (1972) by Weöres and *Lili Csokonai* by Esterházy from the point of view of gender switch. She took notice of the phenomenon that “both autobiography writing women are more interested in their own bodies and the bodies belonging to their own sexes, these bodies are looked at anyway with voracious male eyes, they are voyeurs just as men” (MOLENKAMP-WILTINK 1994: 540). Even Bea Hock who wishes to deconstruct criticism of the feminist line agrees and allows that “both figures of Psyché and of Lili are strongly eroticized” and “the heroines are the captives of their love lives, instinctive beings living for their own senses and sensuality; similarly they are captives of the possessive male gaze that makes the female party exclusively visible, it only sees the female in the descriptions of erotic episodes” (HOCK 2006: 14).

Edit Zsadányi formulates her criticism in connection to *A test angyala* [*The Body's Angel*] (1990, 1997) written by Lajos Parti Nagy under the pseudonym of Jolán Sárbogárdi. According to her “this type of textual poetics is the continuation of the linguistic-cultural tradition

which pushes the female figure to the background, as if to become the confidant of this tradition. The novel goes as far as to deconstruct language and pose basic questions about the fixed elements of our culture however, it would not subvert the general strategies of excluding the female” (ZSADÁNYI 2006: 96). So the female texts of both authors – Esterházy: *Lili Csokonai* and Parti Nagy: *A test angyala* [*The Body's Angel*] – written under pseudonyms arrives to the space inhabited by feminist criticism in ways that finally lead to unveiling the patriarchal, sexist, subjective textual strategies.

From the year 2000 onwards in this new, important discourse arising – one that we have named anthropological postmodernism – the areferential postmodern ironic-parodistic language games are no longer used. In anthropological postmodernism we may see the process during which the text attempts to provide language for marginal, traumatized, subordinated/subjected identities – may it be the social, ethnic, religious or sexual subordinate identities. It is no coincidence that female subjects, the codes of femininity, the representability of female experience receives stronger impulses from a kind of language use that wishes to work on questions of solidarity, social equality, altruism, and the identity of minorities. The experience and point of view of a traumatized person becomes more and more important in contemporary Hungarian literature and culture – beginning with such male writers as Péter Esterházy: *Javított kiadás* [*Corrected Edition*] (2002), Szilárd Borbély *A testhez* [*To the Body*] (2010), Dénes Krusovszky *Elromlani milyen* [*What is It Like to Have a Break-Down*] (2009) or János Áfra *Glaukóma* [*Glaucoma*] (2012) and the confessions of personalities of popular culture (Nikolett Szepesi, a professional swimmer).

The fact that in contemporary Hungarian literature experiencing femininity, representing female identity is accepted when appearing together with the subordinate and traumatic experiences, it even has

functions as literary value – in my opinion this may be explained by the paradigm shift in postmodern poetics within literature and the more and more articulated language use of anthropological postmodernism. Such important contemporary Hungarian works became canonic in this strategy as Virág Erdős, Krisztina Tóth, Zsuzsa Csobánka, Éva Bánki, Ágnes Rapai, Zsófia Bán, Noémi Kiss, Zsuzsa Selyem, Judit Ágnes Kiss, Kriszta Bódis, Zsuzsa Bruria Forgács, Zsófia Bárczi, Zsuzsa Takács, Anikó N. Tóth, Edina Szvoren, Kornélia Deres, Anikó Polgár, Tímea Tuti, Zita Izsó, Orsolya Bencsik. This energy of the paradigm shift in the anthropological postmodern is so powerful that it may be grasped in those texts as well that are not characterized by postmodern textuality.

III. 6. FEMINIST POETICS IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL POSTMODERNISM

The gender roles in the texts of Virág Erdős's book, *Másmilyen mesék* [*Other types of Tales*] (2003) undergo such disfiguring procedures that in the one hand, they point out the brutal aspects of identity formation, on the other hand they suppose and unveil them as discursive games. Tales may be considered a female genre just as the genre of the diary, the autobiography, and memoirs (we may think of Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights* for whom tale telling is a means to survival). Questions of femininity appear in almost all texts: either by sustaining the autobiographical code, or by emphasizing aspects of female identity. The hero in the tale of *Roly-poly* may be understood as a woman who is the subject of the discourse present in consumer culture, media and advertisements and emphasizes body maintenance "since her ideal at the moment was Britney Spears who weighed 97 pounds as was well known for everybody" (ERDŐS 2003:19). Suddenly the ascetic body propagated by the media gains an ironic position since the original narration intrudes and begins to devour her own environment and her own daughters. In this text the woman appears as a creature being ironic over

the body concept of discourses on eating, makes the body function as a “metaphor for a machine” (FEATHERSTONE 1997: 87). Femininity in this construction is present as an almost unbearable weight. Only the man providing freedom may bring redemption, the woman alone is not capable of leaving the oppressing network of patriarchal relations.

Anikó Polgár’s book of poetry, *Régésznő körömcipőben [Archeologist in Pumps]* (2009) confronts us with the options and constraints of female experience and fate in connection to the events of birth and nursing (POLGÁR 2009). The human images of giving birth and breast-feeding are transposed into mythological spaces, Greek and Roman goddesses give birth and breast-feed, goddesses suffer and moan on their birth beds, goddesses pump their milk from their breasts. Written as mothers these goddesses – Niobe, Letho, Juno, Alcmene, Amaltheia, Hermione, Andromache, and others – are represented during birth, breast-feeding and wake-ups at night, we find them in birth rooms of the 21st century, or on the balcony of a residential house, or during packing up make-up sets, fitness season tickets, perfumes, or during waiting for a taxi. Therefore the present tense of the birth is filled with the experience of the common female fate, and also it gains divine dimensions, a mythological background. In a perfect symbiosis, humans and gods, compounding the layers of historical and mythical time, grow their babies, give birth to them, nurse them and change their diapers. The poems in the book of *Régésznő körömcipőben [Archeologist in Pumps]* venture into the verges of human existence, to the border between human and animal existence, to the instinctive world before all language, to the animal depth of intuition. The impressively self-confident familiarity with Greek and Roman mythology, the fine and oftentimes hidden texture of reference networks available only for those initiated are combined with the experiences of a 21st century woman and with the world of hospitals and birthing rooms. In a certain way this is hospital

poetry as well, a certain kind of female version of it mobilizing female altruism giving life instead of humans desiring health, having selfish motivations in their vulnerability.

The short stories, fictions, public writings of Krisztina Tóth present the ordinary events of living femininity almost as case studies, from which we may take a glance at the so called present Hungarian reality defined by patriarchal, oftentimes sexist acts and utterances. The almost total lack of social solidarity, the manifestations of male superiority, the representation of behavioral patterns of the traumatizing and traumatized groups provide a mosaic type of image in her book of stories, *Haza-viszlek, jó? [I Will Take you Home, Alright?]* (2009). Language terror is constructed in the monologue of the “blue collar, fiftyish, balding” guy who wears “a red-white and green rubber ribbon bracelet attached to his wrist” attacking the mother on the train traveling with her small child:

“Clean the seat that you have put your dirty feet on! You! What do you think? Will you soil Hungarian trains? With your dirty feet, he? You dirty Jewish, Gypsy Bitch!! Go Back or I will push you off! Go back to Iraq or fuck knows where! Where your mother shitted you out, there!” (TÓTH 2009a: 48–49)

In her short story titled *Nagy vonalakban a női szexualitásról [On Female Sexuality in General]* the ideological outlines of the experience of the female subaltern are presented – in a birthing room. The scientific, objectifying language use in the almost unnoticeable manipulation points out the rhetorical superiority of the male appropriation technique and is presented as a discourse analysis: “When I was about to give birth to my own child, the gynecologist always told me that *we would give birth* shortly. Then: today *we give birth*. In the end it was only he who gave birth and when in the last moment we sat in his office with the father of my child I was completely excluded. My son did not want to be born, he made us wait, all guys do this anyway, he began with it at the start, the

gynecologist spoke to my partner. Look, sir, he said to him, and he started to explain as a man explains things to a man, and then I was sitting there all dumbfounded with my big belly, look, sir, said the gynecologist, and then the thought occurred to me that it would take less time for him to start a conversation with my son in my belly than with me, an unreasonable woman-animal.” (TÓTH 2009b: 60)

The short stories in Edina Szvoren’s book, *Pertu [Cheers]* (2010) build a fictive world out of the unstoppable experience of trauma becoming an ordinary series of events which symbolically replay relations during becoming an adult, of family ties and of sexuality. These texts reviving and at the same time deconstructing the rhetoric figures of psychoanalytic case studies reach into the layers of instinctive, pre-language identity. The ritual texts lead the narrator, similar to a dream narrative, to the possibilities of existence that are compiled from repressions, suspicions, aggressive interpersonal and hierarchical relations, and traumatic experiences; they are constructed into a morbid, unknown, foreign, suffered self, an uncontrollable self concept, unbearable identity, a personality one cannot take responsibility for: “My mother would not release the book from her hands even when drinking. It was good, she sighs. She wipes her mouth, the blackness at the root of her blanched moustache glows. She pulls me down onto the bed. She looks into my eyes. She gives me her glass, I take it. She twitches the décolleté of her nightgown over her shoulder. She pulls her feet back under the bed cover. I let her hold my hand. It comes to my mind about the baby cry that she imagines to have given birth to a baby.” (SZVOREN 2010: 81)

The texts of Zsuzsa Csobánka present the mutual vivisection of man and woman, the interpreted role options in a man-woman relationship. The complicated identity formulas are manifested through the elemental tension of power relations arising to the surface in between them. In her volume titled *Hideg bűnök [Cold Sins]* (2011) the language of love

combines the staged cathartic power of female vulnerability and the brutal emotional mathematics of female self-consciousness; applying a female voice she reverses and deconstructs well-known Hungarian love poems having a strong male centered perspective:

“Because cowardice is a sin.
So I oust it out of you
until the void becomes my altar
until your spine becomes straight
until you are not, *found object*, of mine, so
dead and unintended
I will squeeze your body
the dear one,
I will torture you at night until
you start to feel the craze.”⁴ (CSOBÁNKA 2011: 110–111)

The poem activates a very important, canonic tradition of Hungarian poetry. On the one hand it quotes one of the greatest achievements in Hungarian literary modernity, the legendary lines of Attila József's poem, *Eszmélet [Consciousness]*:

“An adult is someone bereft
of father and mother inside his heart,
who knows that life is a free gift,
something extra thrown in on death's part,
and, like a found object, can be returned
any time (JÓZSEF 1997: 80).

.....
⁴ The translation is mine – Gabriella Ágnes Nagy.

On the other hand she refers to Dezső Tándori's volume of poetry usually regarded as representing the paradigm shift, whose title is: *Egy talált tárgy megtisztítása* [*Cleansing a Found Object*] (1973) and can be interpreted as the first volume of significant areferential Hungarian postmodern poetry having strong neo-avantgarde roots. Third: the entire Csobánka poem is a rewriting of a poem by Lőrinc Szabó, *A semmiért egészen* [*Completely for Nothing*] – this is underlined by the title and the motto but the repetition of the exact phrase: dead and unintended:

“Until you dare to think of yourself
Until you feel sorry for your life
Until you are not like an object, so
Dead and unintended:
Your are not better
Or worse then others
then you can be a foreigner
Then you have nothing to do with me.”⁵

Csobánka's poem is one of the most brutal love poems of Hungarian literature “announcing the end of love poetry” (KULCSÁR SZABÓ 2007: 174) which, on a fourth level turns traditional female vulnerability against the codes of male poetry and thereby becoming a manifesto of female cruelty, a possibility to overcome traumatic female experiences.

III. 7. PROJECTS IN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

Several projects became an important part of contemporary Hungarian literature due to the forming canon of women's literature and its self-representation aiming at canonization that beyond the gender conscious

.....
⁵ The translation is mine – Gabriella Ágnes Nagy

approach of literature aimed at creating and extending women's canonical tradition. The critical conversation series on the tradition of women's writing, *Rózsaszín szemüveg* [*Pink Glasses*] organized by Noémi Kiss and Anna Menyhért therefore is not only of significance from the point of view of literary history but it instructs the strategies of contemporary literature since by interpreting the patriarchal past of Hungarian literature it disqualifies suppressing procedures and interpretations in contemporary literature.⁶ It is possible to understand from this perspective the exemplary procedure of inviting male writers – poets, writers, critics – to participate in these conversations on mostly forgotten female writers who are now worthy of rehabilitation and of providing a space for them in the literary tradition. Therefore writers such as János Térey, Zoltán András Bán, István Margócsy, János Háty, Endre Kukorelly, Balázs Györe, Gergely Péterfy, Imre József Balázs, Gyula Zeke and Gábor Vadera were invited and became guests in conversations on the canonization of Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Renée Erdős, Erzsébet Galgóczi, Magda Szabó, Alaine

.....
⁶ “What types of literary patterns are available for today's women's writers? Are we running around in fog? Where is the place for women writers in the literary canon? How shall we read their old, or not so old books? Are there still (or already) aspects waiting to be discovered? To what extent traditional – male – point of views and system of expectations define the reading of women authors? Is women's literature really a kitsch of chatting and babbling? Are they written by smarty women or bluestockings? Are they popular fiction? Girls' novels? Kitchen housewives' overabundant outpourings? Lesbian ravings? Private pieces by bored housewives waiting for a macho lover, adultery and writing only would bring them therapeutic relief? In our series we attempt to investigate what kinds of sovereign and characteristic discourse these writers tried to formulate in the past century. We would like to approach them from a different point of view, find their virtues and weaknesses, attractive and deterring patterns, construct a female literary tradition, find supportive arguments for ourselves. We take off our pink glasses.” (Kiss 2012)

Polcz, Anna Lesznai, Ilona Harnos, Gizella Hervay, Margit Kaffka and Minka Czóbel.

Another example may be cited of a similar event taking place on March 8–10, 2013, *Mindenütt Nő* [*All Around Women*] that introduced female authors and lives – the event series was joined by the most prominent representatives of Hungarian cultural life. In eleven cities, at sixty venues the three day long event included programs on women, on the problems of women, introducing female authors, from Belvárosi Theatre to the National Széchenyi Library. Connected to these events a women's day reading took place organized by Szépirók Társasága, titled *Mindenütt Nő*: participants were Rita Abody, Eszter Anna Balázs, Zsófia Balla, Zsófia Bán, Ágnes Bárdos Deák, Zsuzsa Csobánka, Anna Gács, Virág Erdős, Mari Falcsik, Judit Fenákel, Zsuzsa Bruria Forgács, Ágnes Gergely, Andrea Harangi, Artemisz Harmath, Zsuzsa Kapecz, Éva Karádi, Orsolya Karafiáth, Judit Ágnes Kiss, Noémi Kiss, Katalin Ladik, Júlia Láng, Anna Menyhért, Mónika Mesterházi, Krisztina Rita Molnár, Gabriella Nagy, Ildikó Noémi Nagy, Éva Pataki, Rita Sebestyén, Anna Szabó T., Edina Tallér, Krisztina Tóth, Anna Valachi, Moderated by Piroska Kéri and Zsófia Szilágyi.

These types of actions (further examples is the conversation in connection to the thematic number of the periodical, Színház, *How Much is a Woman?* or the radio series at Civil Radio under the title *Eve's Daughters* and *All About Women*. These are all examples for the need and possibility to form canons – but (unfortunately) also for the need for further actions on female problems in a male centered culture.

IV. Summary

From the beginning of the 1990s in Hungarian literature attention was called to the presence of a new canon and its continuous formation through self-interpreting gestures. After 1989 the evident presence of democratic social changes, from the 1990s the appearance of various literary theories, new technical-media conditions and the shift of strategies in postmodern literature (the spread of so the called third or anthropological postmodern) together resulted in our being able to discuss women's literary canon from the first decade of the 21st century in Hungarian literature. We think that from now on the question of mobilizing self-legitimizing strategic elements will no longer be significant, instead, in the following decade critical discourse will focus on positioning women's literature and setting it in good dialogue with other canons of Hungarian literature.

Translated by Gabriella Ágnes Nagy

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Who is a woman and how is she mirrored in literature? Even though the above question has been repeated so many times, this volume tries to answer it again. This time from the point of view of some less-known works of Hungarian literature. Feminist theory represents the basic common background of all the papers collected in *Narrative Construction of Identity in Female Writing*. However, the authors combine feminist theory with narrative theory, the cognitive theory of literary character and autobiography theory, which results in the extension of the borders of literary interpretation and thus literary historical essays examine new perspectives of their fields of study. All the papers focus on the variability of female identity construction in the process of writing. They investigate the interrelation of female identity, female language, literary genres and the question of the canonization of women writers.

The goal of this volume is to get the reader acquainted with unknown female writers, forgotten works of male writers, unvalued genres and hidden female literary canons.

Research within feminist studies has achieved new ways of approach to previously unnoticed works which could add new values to the history of 20th century Hungarian literature.

The essays, which fulfill the above task, have been written by the following scholars: Andrea Puskás, Gyula Rigó, Zsófia Bárczi, Liliana Bolemant, Gabriella Petres Csizmadia, Krisztián Benyovszky, Anikó N. Tóth and Zoltán Németh.

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